



**Julia Peres Guimarães**

**Cinema and the official United States discourse on the ‘war  
on drugs’: the film *Miss Bala***

**Dissertação de Mestrado**

Thesis presented to the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Relações Internacionais of the Instituto de Relações Internacionais, PUC-Rio as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Mestre em Relações Internacionais.

Advisor: Prof. Monica Herz

Rio de Janeiro  
September 2012



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À Carminha (in memoriam).  
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## Resumo

Guimarães, Julia Peres; Herz, Monica. **O cinema e o discurso oficial norte-americano sobre a “Guerra às Drogas”: o filme *Miss Bala***. Rio de Janeiro, 2012. 116p. Dissertação de Mestrado – Instituto de Relações Internacionais, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

Esta dissertação parte do estudo da teoria acerca do pós-modernismo a fim de explorar a noção de que as formas de arte permitem ‘interrupções conceituais’ que são capazes de desafiar as hierarquias dominantes de pensamento e de propor soluções alternativas de estruturação da experiência sensorial. As obras de Fredric Jameson e Jacques Derrida - entre outros autores - serão cruciais para examinar noções-chave como a obliteração das fronteiras e diferenças culturais entre as disciplinas e a desconstrução de oposições binárias e suas hierarquias de valores. O argumento fundamental defendido é o de que os gêneros artísticos são capazes de reorientar pensamentos e gerar reflexões a partir de/entre diferentes faculdades intelectuais e sensoriais, revelando as contingências culturais das categorias tradicionais de pensamento tradicionais e permitindo assim o surgimento de interpretações culturais subversivas que desafiam as perspectivas dominantes e significados textuais fixos. Ao focar no trabalho de Jacques Rancière e Michael Shapiro, o cinema será enfatizado como uma forma de arte única devido ao seu potencial de enquadramento e reformulação de realidades políticas embutidas em discursos oficiais de guerra. Assim, o filme *Miss Bala* (México, Gerardo Naranjo, 2011) será investigado, a fim de sugerir críticas diferenciadas ao discurso oficial do governo dos Estados Unidos a respeito das políticas contra o tráfico de drogas ilícitas, especialmente no México. Determinados recursos cinematográficos empregados pelo diretor serão estudados, a saber: o predomínio do "ser centrífugo" (estilo de filmagem onde a câmera segue de perto e por trás o personagem), o foco invisível na imagem do “fora-de-campo”, e, as “materializações de encontros” tanto móveis (a multiplicidade e variedade de cenas em automóveis) quanto fixas (apropriação do corpo da personagem principal através das várias cenas onde ela se despe/ veste/é despida/ vestida). Cada um destes recursos estéticos será estudado com o auxílio de fotografias do cenas do filme em paralelo a temas centrais na discussão sobre o tráfico de drogas no México, a fim de levantar questões críticas e alternativas, e, em última análise,

corroborar a noção de que – como afirma Michael Shapiro – as imagens de fato pensam politicamente.

## **Palavras-chave**

Pós-modernismo; tráfico de drogas; “guerra às drogas”; cinema; estética.

## Abstract

Guimarães, Julia Peres; Herz, Monica (Advisor). **Cinema and the official U.S. discourse on the “war on drugs”: *Miss Bala***. Rio de Janeiro, 2012. 116p. MSc. Dissertation – Instituto de Relações Internacionais, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

This dissertation will explore postmodernist theory and practice in order to establish the notion that art forms allow for conceptual disruptions that are able to challenge dominant hierarchies of thought and propose alternative means of structuring sensory experience. The works of Fredric Jameson and Jacques Derrida – amongst other scholars – will be crucial to examine key notions such as the obliteration of the boundaries between disciplines and cultural distinctions, and the deconstruction of binary oppositions and their hierarchies of values. It will be argued that artistic genres are able to reorient thoughts and generate reflection amongst different faculties, revealing the cultural contingencies of philosophical categories and allowing for the emergence of subversive interpretations that challenge dominant cultural perspectives and fixed textual meanings. By focusing on the work of Jacques Rancière and Michael Shapiro, emphasis will be placed on cinema as an art form due to its unique potential in reframing realities and challenging official discourses embedded in war policies. Hence, the film *Miss Bala* (Gerardo Naranjo, 2011) will be investigated in order to advance differentiated critical insights to the dominant official discourse offered by the United States government regarding its policies towards the illicit drug trade, especially in relation to Mexico. Thus, distinctive cinematic resources employed by the director will be studied, namely: the predominance of the ‘centrifugal being’ (steadicam-driven style camera movements that follow the main character at arm’s length from behind); the invisible focus on the ‘out-of-field’; and, materializations of encounter taking place on mobile sites (the multiplicity and variety of car scenes) and fixed sites (appropriation of the main character’s body through the multiple scenes of (un)dressing and being (un)dressed). Each of these aesthetic resources will be studied in consonance with central themes in debate about the illegal drug trade in Mexico, in order to raise alternative critical



questions and ultimately to endorse the notion that, as Michael Shapiro asserts, images can and do think politically.

## **Keywords**

Postmodernism; illegal drug trade; “war on drugs”; aesthetics; cinema.

# Summary

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*It seems to me nonsense, in a period like our own, to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects. Everyone writes of them in one guise or another. It is simply a question of which side one takes and what approach one follows. And the more one is conscious of one's political bias, the more chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one's aesthetic and intellectual integrity.*

*(...)*

*All writers are vain, selfish, and lazy, and at the very bottom of their motives there lies a mystery. Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven on by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand.*

George Orwell. **Why I Write**. London: Gangrel, 1946.

## Introduction

Is it possible to maintain even a heuristic distinction between image and reality in the context of global security? The readers of *Security Dialogue*'s 2007 'Special Issue on Securitization, Militarization and Visual Culture in the Worlds of Post-9/11' are confronted by the question that emerges on the first page of the Introduction by guest editors David Campbell and Michael Shapiro<sup>1</sup>. With the spiraling development of media technologies, making good news and tragedies alike swiftly and easily available to ever wider audiences through television, film and the internet, scholars in the 'Post-9/11 Worlds' have increasingly sought to acknowledge visual resources such as films, photographs and other artistic manifestations as "legitimate" objects of study in political science agendas. Thus, a fair amount of research has been conducted focusing on the forces at work in a supposedly contemporary visual culture, in which conditions of possibility for global practices of securitization and militarization are inscribed.<sup>2</sup>

It can be argued that the overall aim of this fairly recent research agenda has been to understand and question why the 'visual' is framed as a separate heuristic category and remains outside of the legitimate domain of IR while it is effectively inside daily life.<sup>3</sup> In this way, post-structural, postmodern, gender, media and cultural study specialists, among others, have engaged in a dual task. On the one hand, they have sought to study the processes that have kept visual resources apart from studies of global politics; and, on the other, to move beyond studies of visual media and culture through mimetic and representational practices. Put simply, these specialists have argued for a mode of study that presupposes a complex association between the culture and politics, the ideational and the material, lest

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<sup>1</sup> CAMPBELL, David; SHAPIRO, Michael J. Guest Editor's Introduction. *Security Dialogue*, 38, 131, 2007, p.131.

<sup>2</sup> CAMPBELL, David; SHAPIRO, Michael J. Guest Editor's Introduction. *Security Dialogue*, 38: 131, 2007.132.

<sup>3</sup> WEBER, Cynthia. Popular visual language as global communication: the remediation of United Airlines Flight 93. *Review of International Studies*. N.34, 2008. CAMPBELL, David; SHAPIRO, Michael J. Guest Editor's Introduction. *Security Dialogue*, 38: 131, 2007; CAMPBELL, David. Geopolitics and visibility: Sighting the Darfur conflict. *Political Geography*. 26, 2007, pp.357–382.

political theorists misunderstand contemporary subjectivity, spatiality and temporality.<sup>4</sup>

Revisiting the works of Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Rancière, and Walter Benjamin, to name but a few, these scholars have aimed to “deconstruct or denaturalize through detailed interpretation the inherited language, concepts, and texts that have constituted privileged discourses in international relations through the prominence given to “intellectually and culturally diverse approaches”.”<sup>5</sup>

More specifically, recent scholarly efforts have explored the ways through which, on the one hand, a ‘visual culture’ can at times abet security practices that support the status quo and existing power relations, and on the other, function as a space for critique and resistance. Cynthia Weber, for instance, argues that “popular visual language is increasingly the language that amateurs and experts rely upon in order to claim contemporary literacy”.<sup>6</sup> On a similar path, David Campbell and Michael Shapiro call attention to the power of image in the field of global security. These analysts argue that “the forces at work in contemporary visual culture (...) have affected practices of securitization and militarization”, and the world is now coming to terms with a “new contested terrain of the image” where aspects of visual culture have the potential of “abetting securitization and militarization” but can also serve as a basis for critical practice.<sup>7</sup> The academic field has increasingly been shaken by authors who explore this theme, such as James Der Derian’s and his focus on ‘virtuous reality’, Cynthia Weber’s work on ‘remediation’ and David Campbell’s concepts of ‘visual economy and ‘performativity’.

It is fair to say that the move for taking the visual seriously in political science investigations, as illustrated by the aforementioned approaches, has bombarded the field with intellectually diverse and convincing arguments, thereby enhancing the potential for more comprehensive analyses of global politics.

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<sup>4</sup> WEBER, Cynthia. Popular visual language as global communication: the remediation of United Airlines Flight 93. **Review of International Studies**, n.34, 2008, p.138.

<sup>5</sup> DER DERIAN, James; SHAPIRO, Michael J (Eds.). **International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics**. New York: Lexington Books, 1989. p.4-5.

<sup>6</sup>WEBER, Cynthia. Popular visual language as global communication: the remediation of United Airlines Flight 93. **Review of International Studies**, n.34, 2008, p.138.

<sup>7</sup>CAMPBELL; SHAPIRO, p.133; BIALASIEWICZ, Luiza; CAMPBELL, David; ELDEN, Stuart; GRAHAM, Stephen; JEFFREY, Alex. Performing security: The imaginative geographies of current US strategy. **Political Geography**, 26 (2007), 405-422. p.405.

Although these efforts are undoubtedly praiseworthy, this dissertation argues that a significant amount of research programs that oscillate between the importance of visual culture as a tool for critique or for maintaining and promoting existing power relations, evade a much deeper problem in the scholarship: the reification of a set of arbitrary political choices which uphold a political consensus<sup>8</sup>, limiting critical thinking, popular dialogue and ultimately, restricting political possibilities.

In order to tackle this problem, it becomes necessary to return to the opening and only partly tackled question that opened this introduction: is it possible to maintain even a heuristic distinction between image and reality in the context of global security? Lingering on this question provides less precise answers but more illustrating paths of investigation. How ‘true’ is this distinction, in terms of Foucault’s notion of ‘truth regimes’? What are the conditions of possibility that have allowed and/or allow image and reality to maintain a distance from each other? If, as this question seems to imply, it has been possible to maintain other types of distinction between image and reality other than a heuristic one, have these distinctions faded or ceased to be relevant? How have other types of distinction – historical, academic, virtual – been sustained, and for what purposes? And finally, is there a need for a unique mode of analysis to carry out these investigations?<sup>9</sup>

Clear questions provide simple answers, but difficult, implicit and virtual questions incite a “series of scattered, impatient, and indignant responses”<sup>10</sup>. These types of questions and responses are precisely what and where this dissertation dwells on, as a means exploring the potential of the visual, not just as a means of cultural expression, but also as sets of practices which “think politically”.<sup>11</sup>

Distinctions between image and reality, experience and representation, fact and fiction are ultimately variations of the underlying political choice between what counts and what does not count, what is in and what is out, what can or cannot be taken seriously by political science scholarship and scholarship in

<sup>8</sup> Rancière’s term, to be specified hereafter.

<sup>9</sup> JAY, M. **Downcast eyes**: The denigration of vision in twentieth century French thought. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993; MITCHELL, W. J. T. *Picture theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994 apud CAMPBELL, David. Geopolitics and visuality: Sighting the Darfur conflict. **Political Geography**, 26, 2007, p.360

<sup>10</sup> CASARINO, Cesare. Philopoesis: A Theoretico-Methodological Manifesto. **Boundary 2**, Volume 29, Number 1, Spring 2002, p.67.

<sup>11</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael J. **The Time of the City**, London: Routledge, 2010.

general. These forms of discrimination, compartmentalization and binary seclusion between modes of thought, are precisely the trampoline<sup>12</sup> from which this dissertation orchestrates its reasoning. By arguing for the inclusion of the image and the aesthetic in political science literature, approaches that depart from the differences between the real/ideal, the inside/outside,<sup>13</sup> remain locked in dual structures that imprison and limit political thinking. If the history of the twentieth century can be seen as based on the investigation of alterity (through themes of identity, difference, boundaries, domestic vs. international), as argue Cesare Casarino and others<sup>14</sup>, the problem political thinkers must confront is not that of merely deconstructing binaries, but of displacing and reversing conceptual orders within which they are articulated – in the Derridean sense –,<sup>15</sup> incessantly rethinking foundations.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, the discussion surrounding art vs. politics, and representation vs. truth can be seen as the echo of a much messier and profound ontological and methodological debate. Therefore, the focus of radical critique should not necessarily be on either end of the spectrum but on the incontestable edifice in which the dialogue between those who acknowledge visual culture and those who do not is fixed. This move has important methodological and ontological consequences as well as serious implications for thinking the political and formulating political action.

This dissertation is divided in three chapters a final concluding section. The first chapter will focus on political theory. It will study the complex ontological and methodological debate aforementioned, namely the way that discussions between fact/fiction, inside/outside and other binary categorizations have been elevated as political truths. The main argument is that these “truths” are in fact variations of an underlying political choice between what counts and what does

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<sup>12</sup>See CASARINO, Cesare, *Philopoesis: A Theoretico-Methodological Manifesto*. **Boundary 2**, Volume 29, Number 1, Spring 2002. Author uses the metaphor of a spring board in order to argue that these binaries are often the framework of reasoning but should actually be points from which to begin an analysis and not end them.

<sup>13</sup>The discussion is vast. Please see WALKER, R.B.J. **Inside/Outside: international relations as political theory**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, as a starting point.

<sup>14</sup>For example, R.B.J. Walker, Richard Ashley, Naeem Inayatullah, David Blaney, etc.

<sup>15</sup>Jacques Derrida, **Signature Event Context**. Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1993, p. 21 apud CASARINO, Cesare, *Philopoesis: A Theoretico-Methodological Manifesto*. **Boundary 2**, Volume 29, Number 1, Spring 2002, p.85.

<sup>16</sup>CASARINO, Cesare. *Philopoesis: A Theoretico-Methodological Manifesto*. **Boundary 2**, Volume 29, Number 1, Spring 2002, p.93-96.



not count, what is in and what is out, what can or cannot be taken seriously by political science scholarship and scholarship in general. Thus, the discussion will turn to “postmodern” theories and modes of thought and will encompass the crucial aspects of the debate regarding the postmodern, its strong points, inconsistencies and criticisms.

The chapter will be divided as follows. First, a historical account of the emergence of this concept/movement/mode of thought will be given, followed by a study of the main themes that characterize it, such as: a supposed ‘crisis of representation’, the ‘aesthetic turn’, the ‘demise of the individual subject’ and oppositional structuring of binaries/hierarchy of values. Second, Fredric Jameson’s notion of a postmodern condition and Jacques Derrida’s work on deconstruction and ‘différance’ will be central to this discussion. The objective of this chapter is to argue that political issues have been to a large degree framed and analyzed according to reified settings of theoretical binaries that constrain thought, a process that is perpetuated by dominant political theory. In this way, this chapter will attempt to show that analyzing the political through the aesthetics – in itself a form of deconstructionism – can bring into visibility aspects of the political that have traditionally and often been depoliticized, removed from the sphere of political questioning.

Building on from the argument of acknowledging the political in the aesthetic and the aesthetic in the political – focusing on the intersections and interferences between, within and around these concepts and not in the divisions or polarizations between them – the second chapter will attempt to pursue a deeper investigation into the “politics of aesthetics”. This chapter will explore the work of Jacques Rancière and Michael Shapiro in order to suggest that artistic genres are able to frame issues differently, reframing the realm of the possible, both for understanding and thinking about politics but also for generating means of political resistance. Cesare Casarino’s interplay between ‘philopoesis’, ‘interference’ will be crucial concepts in this discussion. This theoretical discussion will establish the baseline for the argument that cinema is an extremely powerful tool for disrupting dominant configurations of experience and inciting alternative forms of political analysis, where Gilles Deleuze and Michael Shapiro’s work will be explored at length.

The third chapter aims to put into practice the theoretical arguments discussed in the first two chapters, carrying out a political analysis with the aid of cinema in order to deconstruct political binaries that constrain thought, and reveal that visual resources and artistic practices can matter more than words and narratives when it comes to thinking critically. Mexican director Gerardo Naranjo's film *Miss Bala* (2011) will be analyzed in terms of its potential to reframe the realm of the possible, reveal the unsayable and legitimize thinking space for the unthinkable. The film will be used to discuss issues that have been depoliticized and constrained within a reified political debate involving the illegal drug trade and the United States government's official discourse regarding this issue and its counterdrug policies. Therefore, the context of the illegal drug trade in Mexico, official policies and discourses and its violent consequences will be analyzed through the visual resources and cinematic techniques employed by the director in *Miss Bala*. It is important to note that the subject of the illegal drug trade has been chosen because as it is considered a particularly fertile field of study due to its social (in)visibility and of the fog of passionate official and unofficial rhetoric that surrounds it.<sup>17</sup> The justification for the choice of Mexico as the region in focus and the film *Miss Bala* will be explained in detail in Chapter 3.

The main aesthetic elements explored in this discussion – and fully explained in Chapter 3 – will be: the character as a 'centrifugal being' (steadicam-driven style camera movements that follow the main character at arm's length from behind their backs); the invisible focus on the 'out-of-field'; and, materializations of encounter taking place on mobile sites (the multiplicity and variety of car scenes) and fixed sites (appropriation of the main character's body through the multiple scenes of dressing and undressing). Each of these elements will be explored in consonance with themes discussed in the literature regarding the illegal drug trade in Mexico with the intent of opening up spaces for alternative critical thinking and arguing that, as suggested by Michael Shapiro, images can and do think politically.

The concluding chapter will wrap up the debates regarding the concepts, authors and works explored throughout the dissertation. The final objective will be to point out how the modes of thought discussed – based on practices

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<sup>17</sup>GOOTENBERG, Paul. Talking about the flow: Drugs, Borders and the Discourse of Drug Control. *Cultural Critique*, N.71, Winter 2009, p.31.

suggested by Cesare Casarino and Michael Shapiro – allow for a “cinematic” and “philopoetic” analysis of the film *Miss Bala*, opening up space for the formulation of critical insightful questions that may have otherwise been ignored or suppressed by traditional modes of study.

## 1

**Political theory and practice: postmodernism in focus**

The term ‘postmodern’ has become one of the most (mis)used terms in academic, political and every-day life language. Strikingly, many specialists, students and laymen cannot specify what it actually means. A reasonably safe point of departure from which to start this debate is firstly to acknowledge that it is necessary to move beyond thinking of the postmodern as a concept and regard it as a fluid subject: as a movement, approach, stance or sets of theories and modes of thought. Therefore, many scholars both in favor of, undecided about and critical of postmodernism argue it is useful to approach it as a rejection of “cultural certainties on which life in the West has been structures” over the last two centuries.<sup>18</sup> Where postmodern thought is seen as a reaction to a particular political and historical context, perhaps the only unity amongst the various strands and approaches that compose this impulse is that they all stem from a reaction to an established intellectual, cultural and political order and seek means to displace it.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, it must be observed that *displacing* refers to disrupting dominant modes of thought and questioning their status and concepts which are taken by granted, rather than *replacing* them.

Scholars who work within or speak of the postmodern – or even poststructural – approaches refer to the works of Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Richard Rorty, Fredric Jameson, amongst many others, and to intellectual practices such as genealogy, deconstruction, semiotics and intertextualization.<sup>20</sup> In the social sciences, postmodern positions attest to the inability of traditional empirical sciences to explore the vast range of human experiences and suggest a “radical heterogeneity characterized by a proliferation of creative discoveries in the arts and sciences and a corresponding decline of

<sup>18</sup> SIM, Stuart (Ed.). **The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism**. London: Routledge, 2001, p.vii.

<sup>19</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **The Cultural Turn**. London: Verso, 1998, p.2.

<sup>20</sup> DER DERIAN, James; SHAPIRO, Michael. **International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics**. New York: Lexington Books, 1989, p.ix.

ideological hegemony in politics and social life”.<sup>21</sup> Although these approaches cannot be grouped into a single ‘theoretical category’ – and in fact they resist the notion of knowledge categories in itself – they tend to address questions of how knowledge, truth and meaning are constituted; they display a generalized discontent with the Enlightenment project and they seek to challenge not only its intellectual foundations but also the very possibility and concept of the existence of foundations.<sup>22</sup> According to David Dickens, for example, social life should not be seen as a fixed reality but as a constantly shifting process of signification.<sup>23</sup> Thus, postmodern approaches emphasize difference over identity, plurality over uniformity, relativism over foundationalism, nominalism over universality, perspectivism over systematicity, and instability of meaning and signification over semiotic stability, exploring these dualities but not locking thought processes within these poles, hence abolishing boundaries between life and art.<sup>24</sup>

Traditional political approaches that mostly focus on mimetic representation aim to portray their objects of study as realistically as possible, through “valid inferences by the systematic use of well-established procedures of inquiry”.<sup>25</sup> However, studies that problematize traditional forms of representation assume at the outset that there is an inevitable gap between forms of representation and the issues and events being represented and that politics resides in this very gap.<sup>26</sup> Representation always poses the question of what sets of ‘true’ statements are preferred to others, so that any representation of the political is always incomplete and inevitably embedded in the values of the perceiver’s understanding of reality.<sup>27</sup> Most importantly, representation is always an act of power. Whereas traditional theory has relied on a mimetic form of representation, attempting to

<sup>21</sup> DICKENS, David, R.; FONTANA, Andrea. **Postmodernism and Social Inquiry**. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.4.

<sup>22</sup> DER DERIAN, James; SHAPIRO, Michael. **International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics**. New York: Lexington Books, 1989, p.xiii.

<sup>23</sup> DICKENS, David, R.; FONTANA, Andrea. **Postmodernism and Social Inquiry**. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.7.

<sup>24</sup> BEST, Steven. Foucault, Postmodernism, and Social Theory in DICKENS, David R., FONTANA, Andrea. **Postmodernism and Social Inquiry**. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.30; DICKENS, David, R. North American Theories of Postmodern Culture. In: \_\_\_\_\_. **Postmodernism and Social Inquiry**. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.84.

<sup>25</sup> KING, Gary et.a. **Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Interference in Qualitative Research**. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, p.6.

<sup>26</sup> BLEIKER, Roland. The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory. **Millennium - Journal of International Studies**, 2001, p.510.

<sup>27</sup> Bleiker, Roland. ‘The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory’. **Millennium - Journal of International Studies**, 2001, p.512.

portray ‘reality’ as authentically as possible, aesthetic styles concentrate in the analysis of representational practices themselves and how they have come to shape, constitute and lend meaning to political events, acknowledging that signification is in itself a very problematic and imperfect process.<sup>28</sup>

The breaking down of temporality and historicity are key themes explored by approaches that aim to counter traditional approaches that rely on a teleological understanding of a supposedly objective reality. Michel Foucault’s genealogy and archeology are crucial examples of the first. Foucault’s methods examine the social from a micropolitical perspective in order to identify discursive discontinuities and dispersion, attempting to undo the great teleological tales of historical continuity.<sup>29</sup> His archaeologies and genealogies analyze how discursive practices shape subjectivity, identity, processes of differentiation, marginalization and domination, where discursive practices are necessarily embedded in power relations.<sup>30</sup>

### 1.1.

#### Poststructuralism and the ‘crisis of representation’

Moreover, discussions about postmodernism often start out from and refer to the term ‘poststructuralism’ which loosely refers to a broad cultural movement encompassing criticisms to a wide range of structuralist paradigms against which philosophical responses such as anti-foundationalist and deconstructionist approaches, archaeologies and genealogies have struggled.<sup>31</sup> In other words, poststructuralism speaks and acts against structural methodologies and the ideologies behind them.<sup>32</sup> Jacques Derrida’s study of meaning and grammar and his deconstructionist strategies, Foucauldean emphasis on difference and marginalized groups, Nietzsche’s rejection of the coherent self and belief in the

<sup>28</sup> Bleiker, Roland. ‘The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory’. *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 2001, p.520.

<sup>29</sup> BEST, Steven. ‘Foucault, Postmodernism, and Social Theory’ in Dickens, David R., Fontana, Andrea. *Postmodernism and Social Inquiry*. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.35. MORE REF

<sup>30</sup> DER DERIAN, James; SHAPIRO, Michael. **International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics**. New York: Lexington Books, 1989, p.xxi.

<sup>31</sup> SIM, Stuart (Ed.). **The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism**. London: Routledge, 2001, p.ix.

<sup>32</sup> SIM, Stuart (Ed.). **The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism**. London: Routledge, 2001, p.ix.

death of the subject and feminist inquiries into patriarchal societies and institutions are prime examples of poststructuralist thought.

The term postmodernism is seen to encompass and go beyond poststructuralist efforts. At this point, it is important to historically contextualize the way in which the term postmodernism came to be incorporated into the political studies debate. The term was first used academically in the world of arts and architecture, to group reactions against the established forms of high modernism that dominated universities, museums and art galleries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>33</sup> Once postmodernism incited heated debates and gained the attention of the academic community of the political sciences, it was drawn in from the arts to political debates, incorporating mainly themes of French philosophers such as Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.

Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* outlines some of the core themes in the debate surrounding postmodernism, for instance: the rejection of 'meta' or 'grand narratives' such as the Enlightenment or Marxist narratives that "have played a crucial role in anchoring knowledge and politics in modernity",<sup>34</sup> legitimating itself with reference to meta-discourses, such as the emancipation of the rational working subject or the creation of wealth.<sup>35</sup> As the industrial capitalist economy with its faith in rationality, market capitalism, individualism and technological efficiency failed to bring all the progress it anticipated, its progressive grand narratives began to be questioned. In what some academics have dubbed as 'post-industrial society' or 'late capitalism' (terms popularized by Ernest Mandel and Fredric Jameson), the dissatisfaction with the teleological tales of modernity gave rise to the celebration of difference and the emphasis on ethnicity, class, gender and other dimensions of thought that focused on the oppression of peoples and communities.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Lyotard asserts that knowledge

<sup>33</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **The Cultural Turn**. London: Verso, 1998, p.1-2; SIM, Stuart (Ed.). **The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism**. London: Routledge, 2001, p.28.

<sup>34</sup> GRANT, Ian H. Postmodernism and Politics. In: SIM, Stuart (Ed.). **The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism**. London: Routledge, 2001, p.29.

<sup>35</sup> LYOTARD, Jean-François. **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**. Translated by Geoff Bennington; Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. xxiii

<sup>36</sup> GRANT, Ian H. Postmodernism and Politics. In: SIM, Stuart (Ed.). **The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism**. London: Routledge, 2001, p. 30-31.

has become the “world’s most significant commodity”, for those who control the production and dissemination of knowledge hold political power.

Moreover, whether indicating a rupture or continuation from modernity, the term postmodernism has diverse conceptual and temporal origins and an interdisciplinary quality, which renders it difficult to trace it as a movement, time period, concept, or even aesthetic style. In general, scholars who speak of postmodernism point to a ‘crisis of representation’, where traditional modern standards for thinking, writing and producing knowledge are exhausted and no longer applicable due to the emergence of an epistemological and existential problematic.<sup>37</sup> This crisis erupts from the denial of the main tenets of modernity: the existence of a rationality that heralds modern values as universal; the belief that science and reason result in progress, that theory can provide an objective representation of the world which can be grasped through systematizing schemes that reveal laws governing society and that knowledge is anchored in a rational consciousness where a unified subject is the source of meaning and action.<sup>38</sup>

This crisis of representation disrupts the ontological and epistemological certainties at the center of Western thought. It is the result of attempts to displace the idea that reason can grasp a totalizing reality through rational conceptual frameworks and structures; the modernist faith in human reason vanishes. Many scholars argue that standards and norms must have their legitimacy questioned and that social relations and institutions are of an arbitrary nature, which must be subject to constant inquiry. In other words, these scholars – such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Fredric Jameson, Jacques Rancière and Michael Shapiro, amongst many others – argue that there can be no stable referents upon which the notion of an underlying structure for building knowledge and theory exist.

The crisis of representation has crucial effects upon the way through which the subject who experiences the world is conceived. If there are no longer any stable reference points from which to grasp reality or produce knowledge, the individual subject can no longer be thought of as a bounded and integrated whole,

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<sup>37</sup> Dickens, David R., Fontana, Andrea. *Postmodernism and Social Inquiry*. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.2; JAMESON, Fredric. JAMESON, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism*. **New Left Review**, 146, July/August 1984, p.54.

<sup>38</sup> Best, Steven. Foucault, Postmodernism, and Social Theory. In: DICKENS, David, R.; FONTANA, Andrea. **Postmodernism and Social Inquiry**. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.28.



but as a locus of discontinuous experiences of fragmentation, alienation, and repression, taking into account historical, social and cultural contexts that determine its conditions of possibility.<sup>39</sup>

However, as Fredric Jameson and many other intellectuals have argued, it remains open to debate whether postmodernism as a concept is of any use, whether it is just another label, paradox, provocation<sup>40</sup>, or even, whether it actually exists. The postmodernity versus modernity debate rests on a particular initial premise about our social system, that is, the supposed historical originality of a postmodern culture that affirms a “radical difference between what is sometimes called consumer society and earlier movements of the capitalism from which it emerged”.<sup>41</sup> As Jameson argues, the attempt to develop any kind of postmodern theory is like “the effort to take the temperature of the age without instruments and in a situation in which we are not even sure there is so coherent a thing as an ‘age,’ or zeitgeist or ‘system’ or ‘current situation’ any longer”.<sup>42</sup> Is the decline of meta-narratives an overstatement and has postmodern thought turned back on itself, trying to legitimize itself as another grand narrative seeking to displace the modern one?<sup>43</sup> Is it feasible, useful or even possible to adopt a postmodern approach that contradicts “virtually every central principle that has guided international relations scholarship since its inception as an academic principle”?<sup>44</sup>

According to Fredric Jameson, possible answers to these inquiries should be aligned to the idea that postmodernism as a term should be used only if driven by the “obligation to rehearse those inner contradictions and to stage those representational inconsistencies and dilemmas”<sup>45</sup> that constitute the debate surrounding a supposed postmodern condition.

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<sup>39</sup> BRYSON, Reclaiming the self: transcending the fragmentation of the individual subject in literature from the Bhagavad gita to Wise blood. Masters Dissertation.

<sup>40</sup> LOYD, Spencer. In: \_\_\_\_\_. **The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism**. London: Routledge, 2001, p. 158.

<sup>41</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **The Cultural Turn**. London: Verso, 1998, p.21.

<sup>42</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism**. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.x.

<sup>43</sup> SIM, Stuart (Ed.). **The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism**. London: Routledge, 2001, p.14.

<sup>44</sup> BLEIKER, Roland. The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory. **Millennium: Journal of International Studies** 2001; 30, p.520.

<sup>45</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism**. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.xxi.

On the one hand, the question of whether or not a postmodern approach has validity in theoretical and practical terms still stands. On the other hand, many scholars have argued that studies that follow a representational approach and scientific modes of inquiry practical have not fully achieved their declared objectives: to tackle pressing international issues and provide practical knowledge and policy recommendations.<sup>46</sup> For instance, based on reliable empirical research, one can somewhat confidently argue that approximately thirty-three deadly conflicts still plague all regions of the globe<sup>47</sup>, approximately 1600 children die from hunger every year, roughly 800 million suffer from extreme poverty<sup>48</sup> and the environmental issues such as degradation of ecosystems and lack of natural resources<sup>49</sup> represent grave threats to the well being of peoples around the globe. However, asking why these issues have plagued humanity for generations, what the conflicting interests and political practices underlying these problems are require moving beyond traditional and scientific methods. It does not seem unreasonable that intellectuals, dissatisfied with the instruments available to them to grasp these perplexing situations, beyond their empirical dimensions, have searched for different ways to make sense of world politics.

## 1.2.

### The ‘aesthetic turn’

This move has been of such great significance that some analysts speak of an ‘aesthetic turn’, generated through two inter-related shifts in knowledge production.<sup>50</sup> The first shift occurred when international scholars began to question positivist foundations of international relations theory and the

<sup>46</sup> BLEIKER, Roland. The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory. **Millennium: Journal of International Studies** 2001; 30, p.509.

<sup>47</sup> FARZANEH, Kavyan. Planet War. **Foreign Policy**. February 22 2012. Available at: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/02/22/planet\\_war](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/02/22/planet_war). Obtained on: 11 May 2012.

<sup>48</sup> BREAD FOR THE WORLD INSTITUTE. **Hunger and Poverty Facts**. 2010. Available at: <http://www.bread.org/hunger/global/>. Obtained on 11 May 2012.

<sup>49</sup> UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME. Disasters and conflicts. Available at: <http://www.unep.org/disastersandconflicts/Introduction/tabid/51921/Default.aspx>. Obtained on 11 May 2012.

<sup>50</sup> BLEIKER, Roland. The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory. **Millennium: Journal of International Studies** 2001; 30, p.510.

ontological and epistemological certainties of western thought,<sup>51</sup> hence contemplating gender, racial and cultural inputs to the production of knowledge. The second shift took place in the past two or three decades, when scholars of diverse disciplines began to explore different areas from which to draw insights for analyzing world politics, such as the arts, literature, music and cinema, ranging from the extremes of ‘high art’ to popular culture.<sup>52</sup> In this way, the reflections produced within an aesthetic turn would have seen to reorient the very understanding of the political, engendering

“a significant shift away from a model of thought that equates knowledge with the mimetic recognition of external appearances towards an approach that generates a more diverse but also more direct encounter with the political”.<sup>53</sup>

In this sense, an aesthetic approach departs from the idea that the representation of ‘truths’ and political facts and events is an incomplete process and is always influenced by the values and context of the perceiver; political reality does not exist *a priori*, it does not exist independently of interpretation. An aesthetic approach moves beyond the analysis of art, taking into account a wide range of forms of human perception and not just the practices of reason heralded by the Enlightenment in the West.<sup>54</sup>

The aesthetic turn sprung from an intellectual and political will to critically analyze world politics making “fuller use of various faculties and to challenge the mimetic and exclusive conventions of Realist international politics”.<sup>55</sup> An aesthetic approach would, in this case, allow analysis to move “back and forth between imagination and reason, thought and sensibility, memory and understanding”, freeing thought from the modern “compulsion to equate knowledge with the rational recognition of external appearances”.<sup>56</sup> In short,

<sup>51</sup> BLEIKER, Roland. The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory. **Millennium: Journal of International Studies** 2001; 30, p.521.

<sup>52</sup> Bleiker, Roland. ‘The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory’. **Millennium - Journal of International Studies**, 2001, p.510. JAMESON, Fredric. ‘Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism’. **New Left Review**, 146, July/August 1984, p.54.

<sup>53</sup> BLEIKER, Roland. The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory. **Millennium: Journal of International Studies** 2001; 30, p.511.

<sup>54</sup> BLEIKER, Roland. The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory. **Millennium: Journal of International Studies** 2001; 30, p.511-12.

<sup>55</sup> BLEIKER, Roland. The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory. **Millennium: Journal of International Studies** 2001; 30, p.515.

<sup>56</sup> BLEIKER, Roland. The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory. **Millennium: Journal of International Studies** 2001; 30, p.520.

scholars that speak of the aesthetic turn argue in favor of the recognition that art constitutes politics, as argues Michael Shapiro for instance. Paraphrasing Jacques Rancière, Shapiro affirms that the aesthetic experience is a multiplication of connections that reframe relations between bodies, allowing for alternative modes of political construction of objects and thus new possibilities of expressing the political collectively.<sup>57</sup>

### 1.3.

#### **Fredric Jameson and the ‘postmodern condition’**

Within this context, Fredric Jameson provides an extensive analysis on what has been named the ‘postmodern condition’ of the subject, within his work on postmodernism as the cultural logic of capitalism. According to Jameson, postmodernism is a cultural dominant: “every position on postmodernism in culture – whether apologia or stigmatization – is also at one and the same time, and necessarily, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today.”<sup>58</sup> Jameson holds that today’s aesthetic production is fully integrated to capitalist commodity production and that the fundamental feature of postmodernism is the erasure between “high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture and the emergence of new kinds of texts infused with form, categories and contents” which are precisely the issues that this cultural dominant itself criticizes and attacks.<sup>59</sup>

Jameson outlines two basic features of postmodernism: first, the fact that there are many forms of postmodernism, sharing if but one key characteristic, the desire to displace modernism; and, second, the effacement of boundaries and separations amongst disciplines and cultural distinctions (e.g. mass or popular culture vs. high culture). Postmodernism is not just a concept but also the expression of a style, of an experience of time and space that signals a new emerging order in cultural, economic and social life, the post-industrial or

<sup>57</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art. **Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods** Summer, 2008, apud SHAPIRO, Michael, J. **Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method: After the Aesthetic Turn**. Routledge, 2012, p.51-52.

<sup>58</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism. **New Left Review**, 146, July/August 1984, p.55.

<sup>59</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism. **New Left Review**, 146, July/August 1984, p.54.

consumer society in multinational capitalism, that emerged roughly in the post-Second World War context and consolidated itself in the 1960s through the postcolonial movements and cultural movements (e.g. the May 1968 revolutions)<sup>60</sup>.

Jameson departs from the notion that

“‘culture’ has become a product in its own right; the market has become a substitute for itself and fully as much a commodity as any of the items it includes within itself: modernism was still minimally and tendentially the critique of the commodity and the effort to make it transcend itself. Postmodernism is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process”.<sup>61</sup>

In other words, Jameson believes that new forms of economic production and organization brought about by the modification of capitalism in recent years have generated new forms of practice and social and mental habits.<sup>62</sup> Jameson utilizes the concept of ‘late capitalism’ originally conceived by the Frankfurt School, but adapts it in order to express the advent of new forms of transnational business organizations, a new international division of labor, and novel dynamic in international banking and the stock exchanges, new forms of media interrelationship, computer technology, the flight of production to advanced Third World areas, and all socio-economic crises resulting from these changes, which occur on a global scale.<sup>63</sup>

The concept of late capitalism is crucial for Jameson’s analysis of the crisis of representation believed to accompany the so-called ‘aesthetic turn’; it is the background for the consolidation of a ‘postindustrial’ society, or what is so often called a consumer society, media society, and information society.<sup>64</sup> The aesthetic production today, Jameson argues, has become fully integrated into the overall commodity production, so that

“the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (...) at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an

<sup>60</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **The Cultural Turn**. London: Verso, 1998, p.3.

<sup>61</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism**. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.ix.

<sup>62</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism**. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.xiii.

<sup>63</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism**. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.xvii.

<sup>64</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **The cultural turn**. London: Verso, 1998, p.3.

increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.”<sup>65</sup>

Hence, Jameson argues, even if all aesthetic features of the postmodern were equal to the modern style, there would still be reason to differentiate these two moments, as in the former the transformation of the sphere of culture in contemporary society is utterly distinct from latter.<sup>66</sup> The author points to four constitutive features of the postmodern: a new ‘depthlessness’, the weakening of historicity; the ‘waning of affect’; and, the deep constitutive relationships of these two previous elements to new modes of technology. These features, which will be explained below, constitute the scenario for the emergence of what Jameson and others call the fragmented subject, or the demise of the individual subject.<sup>67</sup>

Jameson begins his detailed analysis of the postmodern with a reading of Van Gogh’s world-renowned painting *Peasant Shoes*. Jameson asserts that where a modernist and hermeneutical reading of this work of art is undertaken, it can be grasped as the transformation of raw materials and the stereotype of poor villages into an Utopian explosion of colors and textures. Within this reading, Jameson argues, the object portrayed is taken as a clue or symptom for a vaster reality that replaces it as its ultimate truth.<sup>68</sup> The author counterposes this work of art to Andy Warhol’s – a central figure in contemporary visual art – *Diamond Dust Shoes*. Jameson affirms that Warhol’s piece, instead of speaking to the viewer of alienation or materialization of an ‘absent world’, suggests instead a fetish, a random collection of drab objects centered in commodification.<sup>69</sup>

In this light, Jameson speaks of a new depthlessness or flatness, where modernist utopianization is replaced by superficiality in the work of art. The ‘waning of affect’, signals the significant shrinking of subjectivity and emotion in postmodern works of art, the commodification of human subjects into their own

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<sup>65</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism**. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.3.

<sup>66</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism**. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.4.

<sup>67</sup> CONSTABLE, Catherine. ‘Postmodernism and Film’. **The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.48; JAMESON, Fredric. **Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism**. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.5.

<sup>68</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. ‘Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism’. **New Left Review**, 146, July/August 1984, p.59.

<sup>69</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism**. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.7-8.

images (e.g. Marilyn Monroe pop art prints).<sup>70</sup> The canonical experiences of isolation, solitude, anxiety and alienation, which were the dominant themes in modern art, Jameson asserts, are no longer pivotal concerns in the world of the postmodern. The dynamics of cultural pathologies is shifted as the subject is no longer alienated but fragmented.<sup>71</sup> The bourgeois individual is no longer available as the centered subject of the work of art, because the feelings that inspire postmodern products are “free-floating and impersonal and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria.”<sup>72</sup> Because experience in the postmodern period is dominated by categories of space rather than of time, the subject loses its capacity to organize past and future into coherent experience, causing the breakdown of temporality and the waning of historicity.<sup>73</sup> In this way, the disappearance of the centered subject brings about the increasing unavailability of personal style, where unique individuality is reduced to a neutral and objectifying form of communication.”<sup>74</sup>

In this scenario, Jameson introduces the concept of pastiche, a dominant feature of the postmodern style. Pastiche is the imitation of a work of art, which capitalizes the uniqueness of previous styles in order to mock the original. It is, however, a ‘neutral’ form of mimicry, in that it does not imitate the original with the satirical impulse of parody. It does not suggest the “latent feeling” that something normal against that which is being imitated exist; therefore, the work of art becomes “comic”.<sup>75</sup> Pastiche differs from the modernist aesthetic in which the artist’s invention of a personal, private style, as unique as a fingerprint, was of crucial importance for the value of the work of art. In this sense, the notion of a unique self, with a unique vision of the world fades away.<sup>76</sup> In a yet bolder statement, Jameson affirms that because there is no longer a unique private world to be expressed through a singular personal style, the postmodern world is one in

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<sup>70</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism**. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.10.

<sup>71</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism**. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.13.

<sup>72</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism**. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.15.

<sup>73</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. ‘Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism’. **New Left Review**, 146, July/August 1984, p.73.

<sup>74</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. ‘Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism’. **New Left Review**, 146, July/August 1984, p.63.

<sup>75</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **The cultural turn**. London: Verso, 1998, p.5.

<sup>76</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **The cultural turn**. London: Verso, 1998, p.6.

which it is no longer possible to innovate and contemporary art can only imitate dead styles.<sup>77</sup>

#### 1.4.

#### Derrida and deconstruction

The death of the subject and the predominance of pastiche speak closely to the postmodern criticism of binary oppositions as the fundamental pillar of the structuralist project. The modern acts of representation and parody depend on the stability of the object which they seek to imitate. Pastiche, however, denies the existence of a ‘normal’ object or reference point to which it exists against, hence destabilizing the notion that identities are fixed and categorizable.

Resisting the interpretive closure of meaning, the possibility of objective and ‘realistic’ descriptions and the instability of subjects as well as objects, Jacques Derrida introduces the widely acknowledged concepts of the deconstruction of binary oppositions and their hierarchy of values, which are core concepts in the unfolding of the argument central to this dissertation.<sup>78</sup>

According to Derrida, deconstruction is an interventionist tactic as its main objective is to investigate the inconsistencies, inequalities and hierarchies of value that are veiled by texts, discourses and belief systems. The coherence of texts is structured upon hierarchical structures of meaning, where terms are opposed to one another and one is always valued over the other.<sup>79</sup> Hierarchical structures of meaning, according to Derrida, are the product of the play between differences, which, in Saussurean terms, is the condition for the possibility and functioning of every sign. However, Derrida argues that a concept is never present in itself; it never only refers to itself, as “every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences”.<sup>80</sup> Derrida refers to this systematic play of differences as *différance*, which does not indicate a concept or word, but the possibility of a conceptual process. Paraphrasing Derrida, *différance* is a

<sup>77</sup> JAMESON, Fredric. **The cultural turn**. London: Verso, 1998, p.7.

<sup>78</sup> DERRIDA, Jacques. **Of Grammatology**. p.lvii.

<sup>79</sup> SIM, Stuart (Ed.). **The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism**. London: Routledge, 2001, p.222.

<sup>80</sup> DERRIDA, Jacques. **Margins of Philosophy**. Translated by Alan Bass. Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982, p.11.



“movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general, is constituted ‘historically’ as a weave of differences. ‘Is constituted’, ‘is produced’, ‘is created’, ‘movement’, ‘historically’, etc., necessarily being understood beyond the metaphysical language in which they are retained, along with all their implications”.<sup>81</sup>

This modern need for balanced equations is the target of Derrida’s deconstructionist and grammatological approach. The concept of difference intervenes in all conceptual oppositions of metaphysics, as each term in an opposition is necessarily an accomplice of the other.<sup>82</sup>

At the outset of his essay *Différance*, Derrida makes explicit that his choice for an ‘a’ instead of an ‘e’ in the spelling of this word (in the French word for the term ‘difference’ spelt the same as in English) is intentional: while in French there is no actual difference in the pronunciation of the words ‘différence’ and ‘différance’, the distinction in its meaning remains purely graphic because it cannot be heard, it must be apprehended through reading/writing<sup>83</sup>. This graphic difference that eludes vision and hearing suggests an invisible relationship and the existence of an order that does not belong to sensibility or to intelligibility, a space between speech and writing. The distinction between these two terms of a binary opposition is very much present in Western thought. The boundary between sensibility and intelligibility is thus blurred and the hierarchy between them overturned. Derrida refers to this notion as ‘différance’, a way of referring to how materiality itself disrupts identity, by showing that the ‘same’ in our ideas contains difference.”<sup>84</sup> Meanings are never absolutely fixed because things only exist in relation to the context of other things.<sup>85</sup> Therefore *différance* marks the existence of an order that resists the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible, which is one of the founding oppositions of Western philosophy.<sup>86</sup>

Derrida’s criticism of the founding oppositions of dominant Western philosophy departs from his analysis of language. The author asserts that the facts

<sup>81</sup> DERRIDA, Jacques. **Margins of Philosophy**. Translated by Alan Bass. Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982, p.12.

<sup>82</sup> DERRIDA, Jacques. **Of Grammatology**. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, p.lxx.

<sup>83</sup> DERRIDA, Jacques. **Margins of Philosophy**. Translated by Alan Bass. Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982, p.3.

<sup>84</sup> STOCKER, Barry. **Derrida on Deconstruction**. London: Routledge, 2006, p. 173, 178.

<sup>85</sup> STOCKER, Barry. **Derrida on Deconstruction**. London: Routledge, 2006, p.186.

<sup>86</sup> DERRIDA, Jacques. **Margins of Philosophy**. Translated by Alan Bass. Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982, p.5.

of history are conditioned by language, so that historical discourse and individual facts that make up history cannot be distinguished from one another. In this way, any historical discourse must be empirical yet it must abstract from this empirical context in order to formulate general ideas, descriptions and analogies. This enables empirical material to be configured into identifiable events and constitute comprehensible discourses.<sup>87</sup> In other words, Derrida introduces the notion that there is no transcendental law or idea that exists separately from force and from empirical experience. Thus, although historical experience is necessarily expressed through language, language itself is an abstraction that is decontextualized in order to classify ‘things’ as examples of a same ‘thing’.

Derrida refers to this intellectual move as ‘doubling’, ‘repetition’ or ‘iterability’. Iterability stands for the possibility of repetition that inevitably contains the possibility of difference and of sameness, as every repetition creates something different but simultaneously, something that is the same.<sup>88</sup> Pure and infinite ideas, when applied to experience, always run into contradictions. However, it is not possible to rely solely on pure metaphysics or on just empiricism. Based on Kantian thought, Derrida argues that “reason is needed for there to be understanding”<sup>89</sup>, but the transcendental and pure ideas are never able to harmonize with experience, so that there will always be a gap between the two. In his words, “the empirical excludes the transcendental, but makes it necessary for language and consciousness to transcend the diversity of the empirical in order to cope with it in thought and language.”<sup>90</sup>

Thus, Derrida proposes the movement and process of deconstruction, which is not necessarily just a philosophical or methodological approach, but a practice that aims to reveal the radical contextuality of systems of thought, where both social institutions and practices within any historical period are structured along the lines of privileged discourses about their objects.<sup>91</sup>

Deconstruction emerges from the basic thought that all texts necessarily rely on oppositional structuring. Meanings in texts are grounded on the metaphysical opposition of terms, located in opposing poles and in this way do not

<sup>87</sup> STOCKER, Barry. **Derrida on Deconstruction**. London: Routledge, 2006, p. 170.

<sup>88</sup> STOCKER, Barry. **Derrida on Deconstruction**. London: Routledge, 2006, p. 170.

<sup>89</sup> STOCKER, Barry. **Derrida on Deconstruction**. London: Routledge, 2006, p.39.

<sup>90</sup> STOCKER, Barry. **Derrida on Deconstruction**. London: Routledge, 2006, p. 173.

<sup>91</sup> DICKENS, David R., FONTANA, Andrea. **Postmodernism and Social Inquiry**. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.8.

acknowledge the infinite range of categories or meanings found in between and around them. The fundamental issue imposed by oppositional structuring is that these oppositional terms have served as the basis for all philosophical thinking and have instilled a historical process of naturalization of binaries such as rational/irrational, a priori/empirical, general/particular, self/other, etc.<sup>92</sup> According to Derrida, more often than not these binaries fall into a deceiving true/false or rational/irrational distinction, where a term is subordinated to the other.<sup>93</sup>

Hence, all concepts are contradictory because “they both mean and do not mean, according to a distinct meaning content within the sentence that shapes it”.<sup>94</sup> In other words, sentences are always indeterminate. Because a sentence can never be isolated from its context, it does not exist in a ‘stable self-identical way’; a sentence may have different meanings depending on when, where and how it is uttered. Thus, language consists of “a system of relations among arbitrary signs whose meanings are defined by the differences that set them apart from one another”.<sup>95</sup>

In this manner, Derrida’s deconstruction aims to disrupt the structuring of paired concepts, interrogating and taking apart the structural logic of texts in order to expose underlying meanings and assumptions that are taken as given. Through the inversion of hierarchies of meaning, it is possible to disrupt the foundations of metaphysical assumptions.<sup>96</sup> Thus, deconstructive moves can “disclose how every social order rests on a forgetting of the exclusion practices through which one set of meanings has been institutionalized and various other possibilities have been marginalized”.<sup>97</sup> Deconstruction reads from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, universal showing that all textual elements, events, concepts, have their history, and reasons for being what they are.<sup>98</sup> Because writers and speakers alike

<sup>92</sup> DER DERIAN, James; SHAPIRO, Michael. **International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics**. New York: Lexington Books, 1989, p. xv.

<sup>93</sup> DERRIDA, Jacques. **Dissemination**. Translated by Barbara Johnson. London: Athlone Press, 1981, p.xi-xix.

<sup>94</sup> STOCKER, Barry. **Derrida on Deconstruction**. London: Routledge, 2006, p. 68.

<sup>95</sup> Dickens, David R., Fontana, Andrea. **Postmodernism and Social Inquiry**. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.8.

<sup>96</sup> STOCKER, Barry. **Derrida on Deconstruction**. London: Routledge, 2006, p.124.

<sup>97</sup> DER DERIAN, James; SHAPIRO, Michael. **International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics**. New York: Lexington Books, 1989, p.15.

<sup>98</sup> DERRIDA, Jacques. **Dissemination**. Translated by Barbara Johnson. London: Athlone Press, 1981, p.xv.

never have full access to the meanings they attempt to communicate, both speech and writing are never direct representations of thoughts; speakers are never fully present and texts are never pure. Texts always carry the traces of other texts and contexts within which speakers dwell, so that texts must be studied through the strategies that writers use both consciously and unconsciously.<sup>99</sup>

Uncovering the cultural contingency of philosophical categories allows for the emergence of subversive interpretations that challenge dominant cultural perspectives and fixed textual meanings.<sup>100</sup> Norman Denzin, for instance, suggests that deconstructionism relies on some key strategies: the disruption between the equivalence between written and spoken word as well as spoken word and mental experience; the infinitely indefinite character of meaning; the textual production of the subject as a system of differences; the rejection of mimesis or the possibility of representing the real.<sup>101</sup>

It is essential to note that a deconstructionist approach/practice does not aim to establish itself as a standard against which other interpretations and types of analyses need to be judged. Deconstructionism simply aims to open up possibilities for thinking. The intention is to expose underlying preconceptions that suppress conditions for freedom, by asking important questions such as: How does any given text address the problems of presence and lived experience? How does a text produce the intentional meanings that are ascribed to subjects? How does it center and anchor the subject and his or her experiences in a narrative? How does it represent the “real” experiences of interacting individuals?<sup>102</sup> In Derrida’s own words,

“Deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to a neutralization: it must by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, practice an overturning of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system. It is only on the condition that deconstruction will provide itself the means with which to intervene in the field of oppositions that it criticizes, which is also a field of non-discursive

<sup>99</sup> DENZIN, Norman, K. Postmodernism and Deconstructionism. In: DICKENS, David R.; FONTANA, Andrea. **Postmodernism and Social Inquiry**. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.189.

<sup>100</sup> DENZIN, Norman, K. Postmodernism and Deconstructionism. In: DICKENS, David R.; FONTANA, Andrea. **Postmodernism and Social Inquiry**. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.192. DER DERIAN, James; SHAPIRO, Michael. **International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics**. New York: Lexington Books, 1989, p.xiv.

<sup>101</sup> DENZIN, Norman, K. Postmodernism and Deconstructionism. In: DICKENS, David R.; FONTANA, Andrea. **Postmodernism and Social Inquiry**. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.186.

<sup>102</sup> DENZIN, Norman, K. Postmodernism and Deconstructionism. In: DICKENS, David R.; FONTANA, Andrea. **Postmodernism and Social Inquiry**. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.197.

forces. Each concept, moreover, belongs to a systematic change and itself constitutes a system of predicates. There is no metaphysical concept in and of itself. There is a work – metaphysical or not – on conceptual systems. Deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the non-conceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated.”<sup>103</sup>

## 1.5.

### Conclusion

Having examined these theoretical notions at length has been crucial to support the idea that political issues are in their majority framed and analyzed according to reified settings of theoretical binaries that constrain thought, which is the baseline of the argument offered in this dissertation. With the intent of offering different forms of insights into world politics, this dissertation proposes a form of analysis that departs from the visual arts. The analysis of the political through the aesthetics, in itself a form of deconstructionism – as will be thoroughly explained in the next sections – brings into visibility aspects of the political that have traditionally and often been depoliticized, removed from the sphere of political questioning. According to the notions and processes suggested by postmodern approaches, it becomes possible to argue that artistic genres are able to frame issues differently, reframing the realm of the possible, both for understanding and thinking about politics but also for generating means of political resistance. The possibilities offered by aesthetic approaches as means of carrying out critically-oriented investigations is the subject of the next section.

<sup>103</sup>

DERRIDA, Jacques. ‘Signature Event Context’, **Limited Inc.** Translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988, p.21.

## 2

**Politics, aesthetics, cinema: interference and philopoesis**

*We are the children of an epoch,  
the epoch is political.*

*Everything of yours, ours, theirs,  
daytime affairs, night-time affairs,  
are political affairs.*

*Like it or not,  
your genes have a political past,  
your skin has a political hue,  
and your eyes a political aspect.  
(...)*

*Apolitical verses are also political,  
and the moon above is shining a thing no longer moonly.  
To be or not to be, that is the question.  
What kind of question? answer, my dear.  
A political question.<sup>104</sup>*

Dominant representational scholarship in international relations has for decades held the power to raise subjective interpretations to a level of objectivity. Certain political views of the world based on metaphors (e.g. the primacy the ‘national interest’ and sovereignty, built upon the metaphor of the sovereign state) are not referred to as metaphors but as basic lenses through which boundaries between the rational and the irrational are perceived.<sup>105</sup>

However, departing from the notion that any political statement necessarily poses the question of power and therefore is always the object of a political struggle, scholars following postmodern and post-structural thinking have attempted to unbind these metaphors and investigate the contradictions which lie

<sup>104</sup> SZYMBORSKA, Wislawa. Children of an Epoch. Translated by Walter Whipple.

<sup>105</sup> BLEIKER, Roland. ‘The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory’. Millennium - Journal of International Studies, 2001, p.516

underneath them, guided by key questions such as: what is the currently dominant way of formulating problems? What are the forces at work that allow those formulations to persist? Whose perspectives on problem(s) gain recognition and whose perspectives fail to rise above the threshold of recognition? What conceptions, juxtapositions, and soliciting of alternative subjects and thought worlds will disrupt the dominant modes of intelligibility and open up spaces for new political thinking with empowering implications for new forms of subjectivization, for the welcoming of new kinds of (in-process or becoming) subjects into politically relevant space?<sup>106</sup>

## 2.1.

### **Rancière: dissensus and the politics of aesthetics**

In order to address these very difficult questions, Jacques Rancière provides the notion of the politics of aesthetics as part of a process of ‘artistic’ resistance. In two important steps presented in his book *Dissensus*, Rancière claims that politics is not the exercise of power, but a “specific mode of action that is enacted by a specific subject and that has its own proper rationality. It is the political relationship that makes it possible to conceive of the subject of politics, not the other way round.”<sup>107</sup>

This radical account of what is politics thus becomes the investigation of when and where is politics and how subjects experience political life. Consequently, Rancière affirms that there is no opposition between life and art. But what is art? Art, appreciated through the aesthetic experience – bearing in mind the complexity of this term, which Rancière explores in depth and which will be unfolded throughout this text – is a living form insofar as its the character of the political is “reversed and incapsulated” into the piece of art.<sup>108</sup> Hence Rancière’s denies the separation between art and politics that characterizes traditional political thought, through counter-posing the notions of consensus and dissensus.

<sup>106</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael J. **Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method: After the Aesthetic Turn**, p.54.

<sup>107</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. CORCORAN, Stephen (Ed., transl.). London: Continuum, 2010, 2010, p.27.

<sup>108</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. CORCORAN, Stephen (Ed., transl.). London: Continuum, 2010, p.123.

According to Rancière, the logic of consensus in society is the seemingly spontaneous logic that separates ideas about what is and what is not proper. Consensus is the logic that delineates the boundary between political and social, art and culture, culture and economy. However, as Rancière's argues, consensus is unnatural and a result of very specific political choices.<sup>109</sup> In his *Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière argues that, in consensual states "the management of insecurity is the most appropriate mode of functioning", as consensus is cemented by fear as it accomplishes a sense of "identification between individual and collective interests and between interests and values".<sup>110</sup> Thus, the suspension of the political occurs as certain issues such as excessive fundamentalism and outbursts of violence are 'unthinkable' within traditional political categories and are placed outside of the sphere of the political. For instance, historical episodes of extreme violence such as the Holocaust and other forms of genocide, not fully explainable through traditional political theories end up being 'classified' as 'evil', 'inhuman' and 'immoral' and are subordinated to a regime of ethical assumptions which precedes politics, removing them from the sphere of political analysis as such.<sup>111</sup>

In this sense, the logic of dissensus interferes as a process of disruption and transgression of the limits that consensus as thought and practice sets upon identities. Through their own techniques, art and politics share a common goal, that of creating not only objects and modes of expression through which communities account for themselves, but also conditions of possibility for redistributing the sensible and repartitioning the perceptible. In this way, both politics and art are forms of dissensus.<sup>112</sup>

The notions of dissensus and consensus are entrenched in the western philosophical hierarchical binaries such as authority/submission, chaos/order, rational/emotional, inside/outside, legitimate/illegitimate,

<sup>109</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. CORCORAN, Stephen (Ed., transl.). London: Continuum, 2010, p. 116.

<sup>110</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus*. London: Continuum, 2010, p.107.

<sup>111</sup> ŽIŽEK, Slavoj. 'The lesson of Rancière'. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *The politics of aesthetics*. London: Continuum, 2000, p.73.

<sup>112</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. London: Continuum, 2010, p. 1-3, 122.



sovereignty/subordination, amongst many others<sup>113</sup>. The dominance of these hierarchies of meaning in socio-political formations follow an exclusionary logic, as they determine which parties have the right to participate in politics and which parties are marginalized and thus stripped from the right to speak. The author believes that in the traditional social sciences that which is discussed as politics is mostly “the smooth managing of the social order, premised on unquestioned social hierarchies”.<sup>114</sup>

Therefore, Rancière rejects the Habermasian politics of consensus that presupposes a “form of political rationality from a supposed essence of language or activity of communication”. Rancière asserts that political struggle is not a matter of rational debate between multiple interests, it is precisely the struggle to have one’s voice recognized as a legitimate partner in a debate.<sup>115</sup> Political conflict resides in the “tension between the structured social body where each part has its place” and the ‘part with no part’, the part of society with no properly defined place within it and whose existence is more often than not ignored.<sup>116</sup> The emphasis on political consensus has served to depoliticize matters of power and repression, where issues that do not qualify as rational are set apart “in a sphere of exceptionality that is no longer political, in an anthropological sphere of sacrality situated beyond the reach of political dissensus”.<sup>117</sup>

Therefore, in order to counter political moves that foster consensus and reify exclusionary practices, Rancière offers art as a means to abolish hierarchies as it proposes alternative means of structuring sensory experience.<sup>118</sup> Opposing ‘theoreticist elitism’ Rancière is concerned with the gap that separates the universe of scientific cognition from the sphere of ‘misrecognition’ in which the masses are immersed. This gap, according to Rancière, is precisely what allows scholars and politicians to speak for the masses, claiming to know the truth about

<sup>113</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **Disagreement**: politics and philosophy. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p.76.

<sup>114</sup> DERANTY, Jean-Philippe. **Jacques Rancière**: Key concepts. Durham: Acumen, 2010, p.10.

<sup>115</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **Dissensus**. Translated by Steven Corcoran. London: Continuum, 2010, p.9.

<sup>116</sup> ŽIŽEK, Slavoj. The lesson of Rancière. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **The politics of aesthetics**. London: Continuum, 2000, p.70.

<sup>117</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. Who is the subject of the Rights of Man. **South Atlantic Quarterly**. 103.2/3, 2004, p.299.

<sup>118</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **Dissensus**, p.176.

them; choosing what can and what cannot be politicized.<sup>119</sup> Rancière argues that genuine political and artistic activities involve forms of innovation that remove bodies from their assigned places in society, disrupting the structure of power relations between groups.

Thus, dissensus is an activity that cuts across forms of culture and identification, hierarchies, discourses and genres, as it reintroduces subjects into the field of perception and reveals the “arbitrariness of the distribution [of social activities] for political participation and artistic practice.”<sup>120</sup> Therefore, art and politics cannot and should not be set apart: politics is inherently aesthetic and aesthetic is inherently political.<sup>121</sup> Although others have made this claim, the uniqueness of Rancière’s argument lies in the fact that he aims to introduce the effects of political and artistic practice into the core of theory.<sup>122</sup> As a consequence, the move that decides between what counts as ‘knowledge’ and what is dismissed as ‘art’<sup>123</sup> is the result of a deliberate, yet inconspicuous, political choice. In other words, “political thought is not that which is performed in transcendent fashion by the intellectual who reads culture for its signs of truth, but as that which is produced immanently by the collective of those engaged in political action.”<sup>124</sup>

## 2.2.

### Art and deconstruction

Rancière develops an approach that aims to revert the logic of depoliticization and explore the possibilities of aesthetic experience. According to Rancière, art produces its own politics as it rearranges space and renders ideas perceptible by turning them into living images and ultimately locates “the political

<sup>119</sup> ŽIŽEK, Slavoj. ‘The lesson of Rancière’. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **The politics of aesthetics**. London: Continuum, 2000, p.69.

<sup>120</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Translated by Stephen Corcoran. London: Continuum, 2010, p. 5.

<sup>121</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Translated by Stephen Corcoran. London: Continuum, 2010, p. 2.

<sup>122</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Translated by Stephen Corcoran. London: Continuum, 2010p. 3.

<sup>123</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) Vol. 3, Oxford: Clarendon Press. Art: the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional.

<sup>124</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Translated by Stephen Corcoran. London: Continuum, 2010, p.8

and the transnational in spheres that had hitherto been invisible”.<sup>125</sup> In this way, Rancière offers his version of a deconstructionist practice: just as intertextual readings explore the vast range of meanings revealed by the unpairing of concepts and disrupting hierarchies, the various artistic manifestations are capable of redistributing the sensible and repartitioning the perceptible and in this way ultimately reframing the realm of the possible. Art provokes dissensus as it produces an ‘aesthetics of resistance’; it resists determined concepts and temporal contexts, thus withstanding forms of power. As the implementation of ideas through the transformation of matter, art is the manifestation of thought torn from the ordinary conditions of sensory experience. It takes as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic state, pointing to “a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political” spheres.<sup>126</sup> Thus, art resists because it enacts “a perpetual game of hide-and-seek between the power of sensible manifestation of works and their power of signification”.<sup>127</sup>

The core of Rancière’s argument is that the aesthetic dimension is inherent to all forms of politics and especially in politics aiming at dissensus: artistic displacements – the conceptual disruptions present in painting, sculpture, poetry, etc. – are not simply “secondary illustrations of an underlying ideological struggle but the very terrain of this struggle”.<sup>128</sup> There is a hierarchical organization in which the world of the arts is divided from the world of ‘vital concerns’ and of legitimate political issues of grandeur, where speech as written/spoken word is given primacy over images<sup>129</sup> – as also argued Derrida. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, and mostly around those who have “the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time”. The rational administration of the state controls social processes through the clear categorization of individuals and social units. Artistic

<sup>125</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **The politics of aesthetics**. London: Continuum, 2000, p.122.

<sup>126</sup> BORRIAUD, Nicholas. **Relational Aesthetics**. Translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p.14.

<sup>127</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **Dissensus**. London: Continuum, 2010, p.174.

<sup>128</sup> ŽIŽEK, Slavoj. ‘The lesson of Rancière’. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **The politics of aesthetics**. London: Continuum, 2000, p.77.

<sup>129</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **The politics of aesthetics**. London: Continuum, 2000, p.17.

practice is able to disturb these visible orders and categories, proposing different reframings of ‘reality’.<sup>130</sup> Paraphrasing Slavoj Žižek, Rancière endeavors to

“elaborate the contours of those magic, violently poetic moments of political subjectivization in which the excluded ("lower classes") put forward their claim to speak for themselves, to effectuate a change in the global perception of social space, so that their claims would have a legitimate place in it.”<sup>131</sup>

Building onto Rancière’s work, scholars such as Michael Shapiro suggest turning away from technically-oriented inquiry and moving towards a critically-oriented investigation that seeks to identify the political privileges that emerge over time and establish what is licit and what is illicit, what is visible and worthy of political concern and what is not. The overall aim of this process would be to promote self-reflection and disruption of prevailing power arrangements, so as to provide people with an alternative to their day-to-day surrender to authority.<sup>132</sup> Michael Shapiro departs from the Kantian legacy that values “the conditions of possibility for the emergence of what is perceived, encourages a recognition of multiplicity, of alternative worlds (containing differently implicated subjects) within which things can emerge as objects of knowledge”.<sup>133</sup> Shapiro conceives of political thinking as a creative process and philosophy as a conceptual invention rather than sets of norms for testing and validation, so that it becomes possible to assess the epistemological contributions derived not just from academic works but also from artistic genres such as literature and painting, which “challenge hierarchies of sense-making and entrenched models of intelligibility”.<sup>134</sup>

As mentioned above, development of Western political thinking has traced the establishment of a system of divisions and boundaries that defines communities, social positions and functions. These forms of thinking establish a division between the visible and the invisible, the audible and inaudible, the sayable and unsayable and in this sense artistic genres are able to reorient

<sup>130</sup> ŽIŽEK, Slavoj. ‘The lesson of Rancière’. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **The politics of aesthetics**. London: Continuum, 2000, p.79.

<sup>131</sup> ŽIŽEK, Slavoj. ‘The lesson of Rancière’. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **The politics of aesthetics**. London: Continuum, 2000, p.69.

<sup>132</sup> Shapiro, Michael. **Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method: After the Aesthetic Turn**, p.13-14.

<sup>133</sup> Shapiro, Michael. **Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method: After the Aesthetic Turn**, p.3.

<sup>134</sup> Michael. **Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method: After the Aesthetic Turn**, p.34-35.

thoughts and generate reflection amongst different faculties, in a way that traditional representation cannot. Therefore, aesthetic practices are able to dismantle the correlation between subject matter and modes of representation, where art forms such as pictures, paintings, poems, photography and films rearrange the rules of the game by blurring the borders between the logic of facts and the logic of fiction<sup>135</sup>.

According to Foucault, for instance, art is the primary locus of transgression, because it is the expression of actions that test “the limits of its regularity, transgressing and reversing an order that it accepts and manipulates”. Transgression in this sense would not be the denial of the existing values, nor the affirmation of a new system of values, but the blunt realization that there is no transcendent meaning upon which reality is founded.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, Foucault suggests that the creation of concepts about history, politics and accounts of social relations in general, within a given time period and space, unfolds within a structure defined by a system of rules and a disciplinary context more fundamental than the assertion of individual thought.

According to Foucault, the concept of “truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power”, for “it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint”. Each society has its “regime of truth”, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.<sup>137</sup> Each regime of truth is thus historically contingent and has specific spatio-temporal implications: they are expressed by scientific discourse and the organizations which supply it; they function within economic and political motivations; they are diffused and consumed in multiple forms (discursive, non-discursive, language and visual practices) through information and education apparatuses; and are “produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not

<sup>135</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **The politics of aesthetics**. London: Continuum, 2000, p.32.

<sup>136</sup> CUTTING, Gary. **Foucault: A Very Short Introduction**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.22

<sup>137</sup> FOUCAULT, Michel, Colin Gordon (Ed.) **Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings**, Brighton: Harvester, 1980, p.131.

exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses” – e.g. the university, army, literature, the media.<sup>138</sup>

The issue at stake is that most of international political science scholarship does not acknowledge how cultural expression in general participates in framing the political because, while the linguistic and discursive fields are seen as the mediums through which ‘real’ politics is expressed, the visual is often disregarded and taken for granted as popular culture.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, certain discourses serve as ‘a general principle and as premises accepted by a reasoning’ and “function as a higher authority”, so that a “body of truth or a domain of validity” structures and restricts, not only knowledge production but also political action.<sup>140</sup> These constraints are exercised and naturalized by social institutions and, and untangling the structures of this interplay of forces is the basic aim of this research.

In this way, aesthetics in the Kantian and Foucauldian sense, do not stand as art theory in general but refer instead to “a specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts: as a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility and possible ways of thinking about their relationships”.<sup>141</sup> Thus, through aesthetic means it is possible to conceive of different configurations of experience that create new modes of perception and encourage new forms of political subjectivity. According to Kant, aesthetic judgment is a judgment without concepts, without the submission of the intuitive to conceptual determination. Therefore, a work of art is in fact can disrupt the relationship between the visible, the sayable and the thinkable without having to use the terms of the message as a vehicle.<sup>142</sup> Because aesthetic dimensions offer the possibility for thinking the unthinkable, there is no restriction of content because different faculties are reached through the non-textual aesthetic message.

### 2.3.

#### Cesare Casarino and ‘philopoesis’

<sup>138</sup> FOUCAULT, Michel, Colin Gordon (Ed.) **Power/Knowledge**: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, Brighton: Harvester, 1980.p.132.

<sup>139</sup> WEBER, Cynthia. Popular visual language as global communication: the remediation of United Airlines Flight 93. **Review of International Studies**, n.34, 2008, p.138.

<sup>140</sup> FOUCAULT, Michel. **The archeology of knowledge**. London: Routledge, 2002, p.64-65.

<sup>141</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **The politics of aesthetics**. New York: Continuum, 2000, p.10.

<sup>142</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **The politics of aesthetics**. New York: Continuum, 2000, p.50.

Exploring Foucauldian and Derridean thoughts on the disruption of conceptual orders and hierarchies of value, Cesare Casarino's interplay between 'philopoesis', 'interference' and 'sameness' situates and further develops the role of art and politics in opening space for critical thinking and enabling political dissensus.

Paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, Cesare Casarino, asserts that 'method is a digression'<sup>143</sup>. The epigraph used by Casarino in his Manifesto suggests, at its source, resistance, deliberation and lingering.<sup>144</sup> In *Philopoesis: A Theoretico-Methodological Manifesto*, through the study of a Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick* and a Karl Marx's *Grundrisse*, as well as Deleuze's essay on What is philosophy?, the scholar articulates "an argument regarding the nineteenth-century sea narrative understood as a crucial chapter in the history of the representational forms of modernity", aided by a

heuristic postulate for a series of literary-philosophical investigations whose ultimate concern is that which is not narrative in sea narratives, that which is not representational in representational forms, and that which is not modern in modernity.<sup>145</sup>

Through Melville's literary and Marx's philosophical texts, Casarino investigates the uniqueness of each work but at the same the politico-philosophical elements which are indiscernible between them and make them 'the same'. The author ultimately advocates an urgent historical-political task: to produce the concept and the affect of a 'sameness'.<sup>146</sup> The weapon of choice is philopoesis, a historical-material practice, which allows for and demands 'a certain discontinuous and refractive interference between philosophy and literature'<sup>147</sup>. Interference is the basic principle for Casarino's political enterprise: it does not treat practices as distinguishable, but locates them precisely in the zones where they are indiscernible from each other, because interference and practices are always tied together at their 'forms of being'. Existing, is being in

<sup>143</sup> CASARINO, Cesare; *Philopoesis: A Theoretico-Methodological Manifesto*. Boundary 2, Volume 29, Number 1, Spring 2002, p.65.

<sup>144</sup> Inspired in Naeem Inayatullah's use of the verb to linger; lectures given at PUC-Rio in the first semester of 2010, course "Inequalities of World Politics" in the MA/PhD International Relations program at PUC-Rio.

<sup>145</sup> CASARINO, Cesare; *Philopoesis: A Theoretico-Methodological Manifesto*. Boundary 2, Volume 29, Number 1, Spring 2002, p.66.

<sup>146</sup> CASARINO, *ibid.*, 2002, p. 82-83.

<sup>147</sup> CASARINO, *ibid.*, 2002, p.66.

interference; and being is only and always rooted in practice. Thus, this philopoetic interference or ‘interferential ontology’ suggested by Casarino is not just an ontological basis for investigation but a praxis, and therefore, it is political. In other words, philopoesis as an investigative method cannot be reduced to scientific and bureaucratic procedures, because only when engaging with the intersections between theory and practice, between philosophy and literature, it becomes possible to analyze a text’s political intentions.<sup>148</sup>

Although Casarino introduces three types of interference,<sup>149</sup> he focuses on ‘immanent interference’, which occurs when “a practice confronts its own thought”, when it lingers on what cannot and yet must be thought.<sup>150</sup> Inspired by Foucault, Casarino believes that all practices and modes of thought produce forms exterior to each other, such as concepts, sensations, and functions. Thus, interference occurs when and where the zones of contact between these forms and modes of thought – originated within and through practices – become blurry.<sup>151</sup>

In this way, it is crucial to ask: how does a practice think its own unthought? Casarino explains that every mode of thought has an outside, which is by no means related to an interior or exterior, but to a “plane of immanence”, located ‘without’<sup>152</sup>. Also, each mode of thought has a “porous threshold” which separates it from this ‘outside’ but also filters in the outside’s undeniable demands, forces it cannot explain but which nonetheless inscribe themselves into the mode of thought in question. In the case of philosophy, for example, the plane of immanence would be a “non-conceptual space” which is “non-philosophical”, perpetually bordering on the outside chaos it cannot grasp but does not cease to try. In other words, the outer plane of immanence is “a sort of groping experimentation” where “measures that are not traditionally ‘respectable’, rational, or reasonable” are applied. Casarino believes that these ‘measures’ can be dreams, religious or substance-induced experiences; transcendental experiences in general. Interference lies precisely where philosophy, or any other mode of

<sup>148</sup> CASARINO, *Ibid.*, 2002, p.66-67.

<sup>149</sup> See CASARINO, *ibid.*, 2002, p.68-69.

<sup>150</sup> CASARINO, 2002, *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>151</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles; GUATTARI, Félix. *What Is Philosophy?*. TOMLINSON, H.; BURCHELL, G. (Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, apud Casarino. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>152</sup> In reference to Herbert Marcuse’s notion of without as per MARCUSE, Herbert. *One Dimensional Man*. London: Routledge, 1964.



thought, touches this outside and recoils back into its ‘consciousness’, when it thinks its unthought, attempts to unveil what it cannot represent.<sup>153</sup>

What Casarino calls the ‘outside’ can be understood as the world in its multiple intelligible dimensions, a spatio-temporal field common to all forms of thinking and being. Thus, art, literature and science – as the three basic expressions of thought – all struggle with and against the same forces. In synchrony with Rancière but building onto his claims, Casarino argues that this scenario, wrought by interference, renders academic, literary, artistic and scientific texts absolutely distinct from each other but, concomitantly, the same.<sup>154</sup>

For illustration purposes, a musical analogy may be helpful. Consider Casarino’s outside, or plane of immanence, as the universe of music. Each mode of thought could be seen as a musical genre. While every mode of thought is constituted by ‘practices, concepts, sensations and functions’, every music genre can be defined by its rhythms, melodies, harmonies, specific musical arrangements and instruments, etc. Therefore, while hardcore punk, samba, jazz, folk, classical music, salsa, pop rock, amongst many others, are undoubtedly distinct genres, they are all expressions of affects, ideas and thoughts through the play between sound and silence. Each of them has a specific spatio-temporal and cultural insertion; yet, each cannot be thought of as independent from the interferences with one another, which cross-fertilize styles and blurs the boundaries between them. A clear example is the composition ‘Nem um Talvez’ written and arranged by traditional Brazilian composer Hermeto Pascoal and recorded with Miles Davis. While ‘Nem um Talvez’ is a jazz standard played big-band style, it came into being through the hands of a man who wrote his first pieces of music as a child, strumming clotheslines for harmony and tapping lake water for percussion<sup>155</sup>. In this way, a song can be seen as a text, limited yet infinite in its own (im)perfection; a microcosm of interference.

When modes of thought dare to come to terms with their outside, with what cannot and yet must be thought – each through its own means that are never

<sup>153</sup> CASARINO, Cesare; *Philopoesis: A Theoretico-Methodological Manifesto*. **Boundary 2**, Volume 29, Number 1, Spring 2002, p.71-73.

<sup>154</sup> CASARINO. *Ibid.*, 2002, p.74

<sup>155</sup> For more information please see [www.hermetopascoal.com.br](http://www.hermetopascoal.com.br).

identical – they share an identical goal that binds them together, displaying what Casarino calls a ‘sameness’: they come into being as works of resistance.<sup>156</sup>

What kind of resistance does Casarino refer to? Where, when and how does it come about? According to the author, resistance starts with existence. Any and every text, for the simple fact of being, is inevitably questioning its own existence. In his own words:

all writing is always murmuring with virtual questions, and above all with the question of itself, that is, the question of what it is and of what it is that it is doing there on the page, as well as with the question of what it is that you and I become when reading it in the first place—for it is always the realm of the virtual that puts us and the whole world into question.<sup>157</sup>

In this sense, resistance comes about through ‘philopoesis’ – the method/activity constituted by the interference between philosophy and literature as modes of thought – giving rise to virtual questions that cannot be avoided and yet cannot be exhausted.<sup>158</sup> This ‘silent threefold questioning’ of a practice – the questioning of itself, its practitioners and of all practices exterior to it – is precisely an inquiry into the “history of forms, a questioning of history as status quo. (...); in questioning each other, “philosophy and literature put the whole world into question.”<sup>159</sup> Therefore it is possible to conceive of philopoetic investigation as an ontological and a political enterprise. As Casarino illustrates concisely yet comprehensively,

One can articulate the potential interference between Marx and Melville precisely to the extent to which they are both thinkers who found it necessary to depart one from the practice of philosophy and the other from the practice of literature in order to experiment with whole new worlds of writing and thought, and who, in doing so, embarked in far-reaching investigations into the political nature of being that are virtually indiscernible from each other. It is in this sense that philopoesis attempts to make Marx a problem for literature and Melville a problem for philosophy as well as to make both a problem for any thought of resistance.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>156</sup> CASARINO. *Ibid.*, 2002, p.74. Casarino exemplifies with capitalism: he argues that Melville and Marx think outside modernity and if modernity is the history of capitalism, daring to think outside the history of modernity is an act of resistance to capitalism.

<sup>157</sup> CASARINO. *Ibid.*, 2002, p.77

<sup>158</sup> CASARINO, *Ibid.* 2002, p.78

<sup>159</sup> CASARINO, *Ibid.*, 2002, p. 77.

<sup>160</sup> CASARINO, *ibid.*, p.79.; (SHAPIRO, p.5) Illustrating this rationale, Michael Shapiro discusses a fiction detective novel by Sciascia, as opposed to an academic account of civic life produced by Robert Putnam, as an example the workings of a philopoetic ‘double reading’. Sciascia, he argues, “in the process of inventing his detective story, (...) offers a more nuanced mafia-implicated political account of Italian civic life than one can derive from Putnam’s brief and

## 2.4.

### Cinema and ‘philopoesis’

Amongst the artistic genres, it will be argued that the cinema has a particularly relevant role as means of carrying out philopoesis. The following section will focus on establishing the idea that cinema has crucial role to play in disrupting dominant configurations of experience and providing means of political resistance.

Much theory has been written about cinema as a political tool, as this debate has been firmly characterized by its interdisciplinarity; films are often analyzed from the points of view of linguistics, psychoanalysis, political economy, philosophy and gender studies, amongst many others disciplines.<sup>161</sup> The present study in particular, pertains to theories of the aesthetics of cinema that are concerned with the study of cinema as an art and the study of films as artistic messages<sup>162</sup> such as the work developed by Michael Shapiro, Jacques Rancière and Gilles Deleuze’s, as well as other scholars explored below, who account for cinema production as a means of reframing the sensible and repartitioning the possible.

André Bazin, for instance, argues that photography and cinema operate through mechanical systems of reproduction within a sociological perspective in which these plastic arts have both aesthetic ambitions – expressing spiritual realities where a symbol transcends its model – and psychological ambitions – the duplication of the world outside. Cinema is an idealistic phenomenon, which emerged primarily from men’s desire to reproduce reality as faithfully as possible, as did painting, and at first glance it is inherently realistic because of the mechanic mediation of the camera. However, human satisfaction of the appetite for illusion and realism through cinema outgrew painting as it only solved the problem of form and not movement.<sup>163</sup> The importance of cinema for political analysis relies on the fact that “production by automatic means has radically affected our

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dismissive inference that the mafia operates outside of civic culture rather than constituting part of it.”

<sup>161</sup> AUMONT, Jacques et. al. **Aesthetics of film**. Translated by Richard Neupert. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992, p.5.

<sup>162</sup> AUMONT, Jacques et. al. **Aesthetics of film**. Translated by Richard Neupert. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992, p.6.

<sup>163</sup> BAZIN, André. **What Is Cinema?** Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, p.11.

psychology of the image”.<sup>164</sup> The objective nature of the photographic or cinematic image confers on it a quality of credibility absent from other artistic means of ‘picture-making’. The photographic image is the object itself, it is the model of the represented object; in this way, according to Bazin, cinema represents objectivity in time.<sup>165</sup>

This cinematographic automatism, according to Rancière, settles the quarrel between art and technique because it changes the very status of the ‘real’. Cinema does not reproduce things as they offer themselves to the natural gaze but it records them “as the human eye cannot see them, as they come into being, in a state of waves and vibrations, before they can be qualified as intelligible objects, people, or events due to their descriptive and narrative properties”.<sup>166</sup> Cinema restores to events “the power they had been deprived of by the opaque screen of the human brain”<sup>167</sup> bringing forth the possibility of anything and everything in the world being available to art, “as pure presences, as naked realities brought to light by the new-found splendor of the insignificant”.<sup>168</sup>

In order to be thought, the ‘real’ is invariably transformed into narratives, which are in turn embedded into hierarchies of meaning. For Rancière, this translates into the idea that the ‘real’ must be fictionalized in order to be thought. Rancière does not claim that everything can be considered fiction, but that fiction of the aesthetic age defines models for connecting the presentation of facts and forms of intelligibility that blurs the borders between the logic of facts and the logic of fiction. Rancière argues that “politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct 'fictions', that is to say, material arrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done”.<sup>169</sup>

Jacques Rancière derives much of his insight on cinema and the politics of aesthetics from the works of Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze offers a radically different approach both to the aesthetics and politics of cinema and to philosophy itself. Deleuzian philosophy is the creation of concepts and concepts are the images of

<sup>164</sup> BAZIN, André. **What Is Cinema?** Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, p.13.

<sup>165</sup> BAZIN, André. **What Is Cinema?** Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, p.14.

<sup>166</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **Film Fables**. Oxford: Berg, 2006, p.2.

<sup>167</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **Film Fables**. Oxford: Berg, 2006, p.5.

<sup>168</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **Film Fables**. Oxford: Berg, 2006, p.9.

<sup>169</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **The politics of aesthetics**. New York: Continuum, 2000, p.39.

thought.<sup>170</sup> From this assertion Deleuze argues that philosophical concepts are in resonance with pictorial and cinematographic images. Deleuze's approach to cinema is based on a very specific conception of time, space, movement and image. Deleuze traces his most well-known theses on cinema inspired by works of world-renowned master filmmakers and schools such as Luis Buñuel, Serguei Eisenstein, Alfred Hitchcock, Jean-Luc Godard and Yasujiro Ozu, amongst others.

The author explores the elements of space, time, movement and image in two main volumes, Cinema I and II. Deleuze asserts that space covered is past, while movement is present; pace is divisible and movement is indivisible, as it changes qualitatively each time it is divided. Spaces all belong to a single homogeneous space, while movements are heterogeneous and irreducible amongst themselves.<sup>171</sup> Through images, which are instantaneous sections of movements in space, cinema reconstitutes movements, giving the viewer a movement-image and thus reconstructs natural perception.<sup>172</sup> The cinematographic image is always dividable as it is composed by a consecutive montage of frames. Through montage, using techniques such as close-ups, landscape views, and zoomed shots of details often invisible to the naked eye, amongst others techniques, framing ensures a deterritorialization of the image and expands the number of possible points of view.<sup>173</sup> Therefore, frames are capable of contemplating the range of possibilities for thought between two poles, between the paired concepts Derrida tries so hard to disrupt. Cinema's movement-image extracts from moving bodies their mobility in the sense that it is able to produce its own perspective of time: because it can contract, dilate, slow-down or accelerate movement, it becomes not just an intelligible form but also a sensible form that organizes the perceptive field as a function of an intentional consciousness.<sup>174</sup> Thus, cinema goes beyond the limits of representation. Films disrupt optics, perspective and logic, enabling the

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<sup>170</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.xi.

<sup>171</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.1.

<sup>172</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.2-3.

<sup>173</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.14-15.

<sup>174</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.23, 57.

reversal of values and producing a direct thinking effect on the audience, consciously or not.<sup>175</sup>

Deleuze describes films in which time is subordinate to movement by introducing the notions of three types of movement-images: perception, affection and action-images. He begins by asserting that movement organizes the perceptive field as a function of a situated intentional consciousness, and in this way, cinema can “bring us close to things or take us away from them and revolve around them”, suppressing the “anchoring of the subject and the horizon of the world”.<sup>176</sup> Unlike other forms of art, in cinema the world becomes its own image. Image is movement, because every image is indistinguishable from its actions and reactions.<sup>177</sup> Deleuze argues that a ‘thing’ and its perception are one and the same and that subjectivity is subtractive, as the subject perceives something minus what does not interest him/her. In this way, cinema does not have natural subjective perception as its model, because the mobility of its centres and framings lead it to restore acentred and deframed zones. Thus, the perception-image emerges like the movement-image, as a centre of indetermination.<sup>178</sup> Cinema’s perpetual function is to make the viewer constantly move between poles, from objective to subjective perception; revealing a correlation between perception and the ‘camera consciousness’.<sup>179</sup>

The three types of movement image liberate shots from a strictly spatial configuration, as they are able to translate into different readings of sections of the whole film.<sup>180</sup> The action-image marks the segment of an action in space and time (which is given a duration different from the actual the duration of the action, e.g. a car journey, a night’s sleep); the perception-image characterizes the cinematic vision of content: the viewer can absorb the point of view of a character, of an anonymous viewpoint or any point of view in between; and the affection-image,

<sup>175</sup> FRAMPTON, Daniel. **Filmosophy**. London: Wallflower Press, 2006, p.62.

<sup>176</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.60.

<sup>177</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.58.

<sup>178</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.64.

<sup>179</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.74.

<sup>180</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.70.

mostly close-up images, which ascribe as much significance to an image as it would to a face, so that it has the direct power of transmitting affect.<sup>181</sup>

Although there are many types of movement-images that can constitute a film, the essential notion arising from this analysis is that of the idea of montage of images that produce mental images. Mental images qualitatively transform the nature and status of perception, takes images as “objects of thought, objects which have their existence outside thought, just as the objects of perception have their own existence outside perception”<sup>182</sup> The mental image does not only make a “distinction between the subjective and the objective, the real and the imaginary, it is on the contrary their indiscernibility which will endow the camera with a rich array of functions, and entail a new conception of the frame and reframings”.<sup>183</sup>

Furthermore, Deleuze asserts that philosophy and cinema are equally valuable as conceptual practices and neither stands in advantage or superiority to the other. At the level of interference, where modes of thought intersect and attempt to come to terms with their outsides, cinema brings to light intelligible content through which language constructs its objects.<sup>184</sup> Everything that the camera does not frame constitutes a larger set of unlimited content, which Deleuze calls the ‘out-of-field’, that which is “neither seen nor understood, but is nevertheless perfectly present”.<sup>185</sup>

Furthermore, in a study of Deleuzian cinematic thought, Daniel Frampton affirms that films achieve a blurring between subjective and objective, real and imaginary because of their accounts of movements and reframing of time and space. The shock effect of false movement and irrational cuts, or what Deleuze calls the time-image, has the power to replace, obliterate and re-create objects, and in this way trigger mental connections different from those present in daily lived experience.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.68-70.

<sup>182</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.192.

<sup>183</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Cinema 2: The time-image**. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London: Athlone Press, 1989, p.23.

<sup>184</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Cinema 2: The time-image**. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London: Athlone Press, 1989, p.262.

<sup>185</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.16.

<sup>186</sup> Daniel. **Filosofy**. London: Wallflower Press, 2006, p.75.

In this way, exploring the arguments presented by Rancière and Deleuze, it is possible to argue that cinema has the power of recreating the concepts of modern philosophy in a novel way: “the cinematic reversal of the subordination of time to movement repeats a philosophical revolution which took place over several centuries”.<sup>187</sup> The classical concept of image, necessarily defined in relation to the external world, is shattered. From this results “confrontational thought”, as the cinema explores thoughts outside of itself, brings the unthought into thinking.<sup>188</sup> Krzysztof Ziarek, for instance, argues that films have their own “poetic rhythm”, characterized by the “progressively unfolding interaction between image, movement, and sound, on the one hand, and temporal planes, both actual and possible, on the other.”<sup>189</sup>

In this light, Michael Shapiro investigates the way in which the cinema, “when viewed critically, can be used to challenge episodes of violence deployed in official war policy and other modes of coercion and abjection” and can thus provide “superior access to empirical veracity than other forms of managed perception”, restoring what scientific abstractions remove.<sup>190</sup> Films derive ethico-political implications from the way they display images of pain and suffering, articulating aesthetic modes of comprehension with ethico-political ones; they are a form of representation that challenges discursive denial because they transcend the limits of perception.<sup>191</sup> Due to their form, films allow ‘slow looking’ and extended reflection, as they provoke sensation and criticism, encouraging public consideration and negotiation of meanings and concepts that are taken as settled.<sup>192</sup> In this way, film in particular has the effect of encouraging reflection and negotiation of fixed moral codes, because it functions without a dominant center. According to Shapiro, film is a form of mechanism that makes the real

<sup>187</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Cinema 2: The time-image**. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London: Athlone Press, 1989, p.xvi.

<sup>188</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Cinema 2: The time-image**. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London: Athlone Press, 1989, p.xvi.

<sup>189</sup> ZIAREK, Krzysztof. Carlos Saura: Cinematic Poiesis. In: \_\_\_\_\_. **Cinematic thinking: Philosophical Approaches to the New Cinema**. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008, p.68.

<sup>190</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael J. **Cinematic Geopolitics: Global Horizons**, New York: Routledge, 2009, p.4-5.

<sup>191</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael J., Slow Looking: The Ethics and Politics of Aesthetics, **Millennium Journal of International Studies**, V.37, No.1, p.185.

<sup>192</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael J., Slow Looking: The Ethics and Politics of Aesthetics, **Millennium Journal of International Studies**, V.37, No.1, p.182-183.



more apparent than vision, allowing the audience to take the position of a critic because it takes the position of the camera.<sup>193</sup>

In this sense, Shapiro does not concentrate his analysis solely on film narratives in order to reveal political fixities and create possibilities for criticism. He calls attention to the aesthetic dimension rather than the psychological drama and storyline, placing the emphasis more on images and film techniques and less on the film narrative, so that the reflection provided by the film is driven by the changing “historico-political frame within which the drama takes place”.<sup>194</sup> Michael Shapiro develops the notion of aesthetic subjects, which incorporate this critical attitude towards political thought. A film’s characters standing for aesthetic subjects are “the personae through which artistic genres articulate and mobilize thinking”.<sup>195</sup> The storyline and narrative in which they are situated are less important than what their trajectories and moments of encounter reveal about their multiple spatio-temporal realities and types of social roles they play.<sup>196</sup> The focus of political analysis should be on “the multiplicity of subject positions historically created within those spaces” and on the dynamics surrounding these aesthetic subjects, which cannot be gathered in mathematical terms because they are a representation of the “complex political habitus.”<sup>197</sup>

Moreover, Shapiro affirms that the impact of a critical film is “its ability to disturb that already initiated interpretive work” put forward by the spatiotemporal models of identity-difference, “so that viewers can apprehend the extent to which they have labored within an anachronistic imaginary, an officially promoted illusion, or a merely partial mapping of a sinister world.”<sup>198</sup> Also, through films the “constructed nature of the (represented) reality” is “repeatedly challenged,

<sup>193</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael, J. **Cinematic Geopolitics**: Global Horizons, New York: Routledge, 2009, p.31.

<sup>194</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael, J. **Cinematic Geopolitics**: Global Horizons, New York: Routledge, 2009, p.4, 8-11.

<sup>195</sup> Shapiro, Michael. **Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method: After the Aesthetic Turn**, p.18.

<sup>196</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael J. **Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method: After the Aesthetic Turn**, p.22.

<sup>197</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael J. **The Time of the City**, London: Routledge, 2010, p.7

<sup>198</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael, J. **Cinematic Geopolitics**: Global Horizons, New York: Routledge, 2009, p.48.

revised, and opened up to future possibilities and modifications” disrupting a supposed stable and "essential" nature of reality.<sup>199</sup>

In other words, cinema’s perception-transcending capacity is reached through the way that aesthetic subject movements and map the spatiotemporality of worlds, “as cameras afford perspectives other than the characters”, enabling the viewer to recognize the way the film thinks and opens up conditions of possibility for alternative imaginaries to emerge.<sup>200</sup> The author provides plenty of examples to illustrate his theses, such as the analysis of Dano Tanovic’s *No Man’s Land* (2001), Michael Cimino’s *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1956). These films engage with traditional visions of heroic accounts of violence. Concentrating on the aesthetic subject and the juxtaposition of images rather than the story line per se, the films suggest untangling the macropolitics of war strategy through the exploration of the micropolitics of individual and community confrontation with danger and loss.<sup>201</sup> In Sum, Shapiro offers cinema as a powerful tool with which to investigate moral and political, invisible and physical boundaries in order to “understand the conditions under which modern claims to sovereignty and subjectivity have been sustained and articulated.”<sup>202</sup>

Furthermore, the author claims that urban city politics has traditionally been framed in a Tocqueville-inspired, government-oriented model of politics in which there is little space for the analysis of the struggle of marginalized bodies, who are not attributed political relevance or recognition.<sup>203</sup> However, as argue Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, the urban world is constituted by moments of encounter, not enduring sites with fixed temporal and spatial locations but variable events, “fluxes of interrelation.”<sup>204</sup> The authors conceive of the city as a type of ‘kaleidoscopic world’, where hybrid networks are constantly in collision

<sup>199</sup> ZIAREK, Krzysztof. Carlos Saura: Cinematic Poiesis. In: \_\_\_\_\_. **Cinematic thinking: Philosophical Approaches to the New Cinema**. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008, p.71.

<sup>200</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael, J. **Cinematic Geopolitics: Global Horizons**, New York: Routledge, 2009, p.153.

<sup>201</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael J. **The Time of the City**, London: Routledge, 2010, p.133.

<sup>202</sup> WALKER, R.B.J., *After the Globe, Before the World*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p.3.

<sup>203</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael J. *The Time of the City*, London: Routledge, 2010. p.4.

<sup>204</sup> AMIN, Ash; THRIFT, Nigel. *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002, p.30-31.

“touching, fighting, engaging, cooperating, parasitizing, ignoring.”<sup>205</sup>. In this sense, the ‘materialism of the encounter’ is the spring board from which to begin a study of the urban world.

Consequently, Shapiro’s chooses to focus on “urban micropolitics” in order to be able capture the multiplicity and complexity of the politics of the city. The author believes that the new technologies such as film and photography have important re-spatializing implications, which alter the assemblage of social agency as they “ambiguate traditional territorialities and subjectivities.”<sup>206</sup> Thus, the focus on an ‘urban micropolitics’, in which “some bodies are engaged (...) in merely conforming to the postures and routes officially prescribed, while some are (...) involved in ‘lines of flight’ as they seek to escape the authoritatively prescribed modes of urban subjectivity” enables the dynamics inscribed on marginalized bodies to become visible, intelligible and thus, subject to contestation.<sup>207</sup>

Therefore, Shapiro aims to uncover the philopoesis of film by giving special attention to the materialism of encounter and the configuration of bodies that take place in and through the city.<sup>208</sup> Recognizing cities as ‘distinct spatial formations and imaginaries’, allows for the analysis of the city as an object, but its variety and complexity, go beyond spatialization, as urban spaces ‘gather, mix, separate, conceal, display’ hence juxtaposing people, things and nature in a number of ways.<sup>209</sup>

## 2.5.

### Conclusion

This section aimed to show that films have the ability of registering the experiences of micropolitics and reveal unapparent trajectories of movement

<sup>205</sup> AMIN, Ash; THRIFT, Nigel. *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002, p.30.

<sup>206</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael, J. Bowling Blind: Post Liberal Civil Society and the Worlds of Neo-Tocquevillean Social Theory. *Theory & Event*, 1.1, 1997, paragraph 22.

<sup>207</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael J. *The Time of the City*, London: Routledge, 2010. p.10

<sup>208</sup> AMIN, Ash; THRIFT, Nigel, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*, Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002,, 84, apud SHAPIRO, Michael J. *The Time of the City*, London: Routledge, 2010.

<sup>209</sup> AMIN, Ash; THRIFT, Nigel, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*, Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002, p.2-3.

through the way they cut between spaces and the multiplicity of life worlds, as well as flows of people and things.<sup>210</sup> As argues Michael Shapiro, when frontiers are articulated cinematically rather than thematically, they are re articulated “as a series of racial fault-lines”, prejudices and social inconsistencies which inflect the characters’ bodies and are not necessarily expressed through discursive representations; for example, ‘bodily comportments’ such as hand movements, walking or conversational contexts, e.g. speaking styles and intonations.<sup>211</sup> The cinematic form of framing of urban encounters turn out to be poetic operations that establish the visibility of certain forces, as if they were flashlights that, by illuminating beings, images, concepts and events, were actually shedding light on zones of interference between all kinds of political practices, hence inviting imaginative political thinking and possibilities.

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<sup>210</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael J. **The Time of the City**, London: Routledge, 2010, p.15.

<sup>211</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael J. *The Time of the City*, London: Routledge, 2010. p. 23

### 3 *Miss Bala*

*It is difficult to photograph silence.  
Nonetheless I tried. I'll tell you  
about it.  
(...)  
I saw a slug clinging onto its  
existence more than onto a rock.  
I photographed the existence.  
(...)  
I looked at an old landscape  
crumbling over a house.  
I photographed the over.  
It was difficult to photograph  
the over.”<sup>212</sup>*

The previous section attempted to establish the theoretical background for the study of political issues through artistic genres in order to question dominant metaphors that have been used over time to legitimate certain political views of the world. According to Deleuze, Rancière and Shapiro, through a critical analysis carried out with the aid of cinema it is possible to question the boundaries between what is licit and illicit, what is visible and worthy of political concern and what is not. The next section will concentrate on Gerardo Naranjo's film *Miss Bala* (2011) to put in practice the forms of analysis suggested by the previous section. The main objective in this section is to explore the aesthetic resources used in the film *Miss Bala* in order to advance differentiated critical insights in relation to the dominant discourse offered by the United States government regarding its policies towards the illicit drug trade, especially in relation to Mexico.

<sup>212</sup> BARROS, Manuel de. **Poesia Completa**. São Paulo: Leya, 2012, p.377. My translation. Original in Portuguese: Dificil fotografar o silêncio./Entretanto tentei. Eu conto:/(...)/ Vi uma lesma pregada na existência mais do que na pedra./Fotografei a existência dela./ Olhei uma paisagem velha a desabar sobre uma casa./Fotografei o sobre./Foi dificil fotografar o sobre.”

It is important to emphasize that this dissertation will focus not on the narrative of the film *Miss Bala* but on the aesthetic patrimony and aesthetic subjects as defined by Michael Shapiro. In other words, instead of the storyline built around characters, the focus of the dissertation is on the spaces they occupy and the interplay between forces within which they move that constitute the core of the analysis. However, for practical reasons, the analysis in this dissertation will be woven in parallel to the story line – but not always chronologically – so that the reader may follow the argument even if she or he has not had a chance to watch the film. Some screenshots will also be provided in order to illustrate the aesthetic properties chosen for the analyses in question. More importantly, the reader may approach this dissertation with some skepticism, because although it invokes the audiovisual medium as an invaluable means for inciting thought, it is – by definition and in full compliance with academic rigor – a written text. For this reason, it is highly recommended that the reader watches the film in order for her or him to emulate the conditions that enable the experience suggested by the author and perhaps grasp a fuller understanding of the arguments presented.

In order to pursue this investigation, this section will be outlined according to some key questions outlined previously: How does a text address the problems of presence and lived experience? How does a text produce the intentional meanings that are ascribed to subjects? How does it center and anchor the subject and his or her experiences in a narrative? How does a text represent the so-called “real” experiences?

In this case, the text in focus is the film *Miss Bala*; its language, audiovisual. It is precisely this text’s format that makes it ripe for deeper, more complex and revealing reflections – as this dissertation attempts to indicate – than those enabled by traditional literature on the subject of the illicit drug trade. Similar to other types of art, the medium of film operates through a “poetics of knowledge”, a practice through which discourses are revealed “specifiable, not by forms of self-legitimation” based on their object of study, but by “poetic operations with which they establish the visibility of objects” and leaves them out in the open to be devoured by thought.<sup>213</sup> By triggering alternative sensory experiences other than rational thought, cinematic readings proposed attempt to

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<sup>213</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **Dissensus**. Translated by Steven Corcoran. London: Continuum, 2010. p. 22.

illuminate some aspects of drug trade dynamic, striving “to achieve modest connections, open up (one or two) obstructed passages, and connect levels of reality kept apart from one another”.<sup>214</sup> The analyses offered through the study of *Miss Bala* will focus on three principal aesthetic resources used by the director Gerardo Naranjo, which will guide the analysis hereafter: a ‘centrifugal being’ (steadicam-driven style camera movements that follow the main character at arm’s length from the back); the invisible focus on the ‘out-of-field’; and, materializations of encounter taking place on mobile sites (the multiplicity and variety of car scenes) and fixed sites (appropriation of the main character’s body through the multiple scenes of dressing and undressing). Each of these aesthetic techniques will be analyzed in terms of their potential to reframe the realm of the possible, reveal the unsayable and legitimize thinking space for the unthinkable, for issues that have been depoliticized and shut out from political debate. Each one of these elements will be contextualized in terms of the drug-trade and relate to a specific political aspect of the ‘war on drugs’.

### 3.1.

#### **War on drugs**

The film *Miss Bala* takes place in the Mexican state of Baja California, one of the most afflicted regions by the illicit drug trade. The illicit drug trade, as argued by many specialists, governments and international media, is one of the fastest growing and most profitable industries worldwide, with approximately 210 million consumers and worth approximately three hundred billion dollars per year – the cocaine industry is responsible for one third of the sales profits.<sup>215</sup> This study focuses on the illicit drug trade between the United States and Mexico for two main reasons. First, because Mexico is the United States’ single largest port of entry of illegal drugs<sup>216</sup>; and, second, due to the fact that the film chosen for analysis, Gerardo Naranjo’s *Miss Bala* (2011), whose story takes place in Mexico,

<sup>214</sup> BORRIAUD, Nicholas. **Relational Aesthetics**. Translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p.8.

<sup>215</sup> UNITED NATIONS. **UNODC World Drug Report 2011**. United Nations Publication. Sales No. E.11.XI.10, 2011; STOP THE DRUG WAR NGO. Global World Drug Trade Worth \$320 Billion Annually, UN Says. Stop the Drug War. January 2005. Available at: <http://stopthedrugwar.org/chronicle-old/393/320billion.shtml>. Obtained on 12 December 2011.

<sup>216</sup> UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE. **International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2012**, p.317.

can be considered one of the most insightful films of its time in terms of obliterating and reframing realities, triggering mental connections different from those in daily lived experience – according to the concepts and notions discussed in the previous section.

The United States is the world's largest illicit drug market, accounting for thirty-seven percent of all cocaine users globally<sup>217</sup> and majority of Latin American and Andean production is destined to the United States, with Mexico as its major transit and source country for illicit drugs: all opiate production in the North American continent takes place in Mexico<sup>218</sup> and approximately ninety-five percent of all cocaine flow to the country flows in through Mexico.<sup>219</sup> Although the country's population represents less than five percent of the world's total population, Americans consume two-thirds of the world's illegal drugs and the US incarcerates almost a quarter of the world's prisoners, of whom more than more eighty percent have at some point had involvement with illegal drugs and/or alcohol.<sup>220</sup> Thus, in an estimated three hundred billion dollar industry<sup>221</sup>, the United States spends approximately ten billion combatting the illegal trade through policies set out by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP).<sup>222</sup>

An overview of the illicit drug trade and counter-drug policies that take place between the United States and Mexico is necessary in order to pursue the investigation. Some crucial questions must be kept in mind throughout this review, in order to pave the way for the critical analysis purported by the film *Miss Bala* as the argument unfolds. These questions are: why do mind-altering drugs spark such intensely ambivalent passions and heated debates, and why is an irrational and dysfunctional global prohibitionist system in place despite decades

<sup>217</sup> UNODC. **World Drug Report 2011**. United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.11.XI.10, p.35-36.

<sup>218</sup> UNODC. **World Drug Report 2011**. United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.11.XI.10, p.35.

<sup>219</sup> UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE. **International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2012**, p.317.

<sup>220</sup> AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION. Report finds most U.S. inmates suffer from substance abuse or addiction. **The Nation's Health**. April 2010 vol. 40 no. 3 Available at: <http://thenationshealth.aphapublications.org/content/40/3/E11.full>. Obtained on 11 March 2012.

<sup>221</sup> GOOTENBERG, Paul. Talking about the flow: Drugs, Borders and the Discourse of Drug Control. **Cultural Critique**, N.71, Winter 2009, p.14.

<sup>222</sup> Estimate for FY2011. UNITED STATES DEPARTEMNT OF STATE. **International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2012**, p.14.



of unsuccessful ventures?<sup>223</sup> How have traditional political accounts attempted to grasp the multiple factors that constitute the political debates surrounding the drug trade? What have these discourses meant for the hardening of interstate borders and strengthening of national economies and political authorities?

Many scholars argue that statist languages of control underlie the construction and maintenance of the drug trade as an illicit and criminalized flow.<sup>224</sup> It is very difficult to define ‘drugs’, psychoactive substances that for social, religious, economic, psychological and a variety of other reasons have historically been construed as health and social dangers and have had their production, distribution and sale prohibited throughout the world. There is no absolute scientific proof to distinguish between the illegal drugs and other mind/body-altering substances such as coffee, tobacco, or alcohol for example. Hence the need to secure “legal and discursive borders between illicit drugs and analogous commodities, pleasures and medicines and the need for now-huge international bureaucracies (from DEA to Interpol), devoted to the day-to-day dirty work of policing and fighting drug-flows.”<sup>225</sup> Illicit drugs are amongst the world’s largest traded commodities, amounting to roughly three to five hundred billion U.S. dollars in sales per year.<sup>226</sup> Trends in drug consumption have remained stable at the global level for the past few years, approximately 210 billion people use illicit drugs every year.<sup>227</sup> Therefore, many argue that the study of illicit drug flows calls for a mix of critical approaches, to illuminate the unapparent realities and trajectories of movement, which are simplified through overheated representations and government vocabulary.<sup>228</sup>

Since former President Nixon declared an all-out ‘war on drugs’ in 1971, United States counter-drug policy and foreign assistance has involved collaboration with international partners “to disrupt trafficking organizations as

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<sup>223</sup> GOOTENBERG, Paul. Talking about the flow: Drugs, Borders and the Discourse of Drug Control. **Cultural Critique**, N.71, Winter 2009, p.18.

<sup>224</sup> GOOTENBERG, Paul. Talking about the flow: Drugs, Borders and the Discourse of Drug Control. **Cultural Critique**, N.71, Winter 2009, p.13.

<sup>225</sup> GOOTENBERG, Paul. Talking about the flow: Drugs, Borders and the Discourse of Drug Control. **Cultural Critique**, N.71, Winter 2009, p.14.

<sup>226</sup> GOOTENBERG, Paul. Talking about the flow: Drugs, Borders and the Discourse of Drug Control. **Cultural Critique**, N.71, Winter 2009, p.14.

<sup>227</sup> UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME. **World Drug Report 2011**. United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.11.XI.10, p.25.

<sup>228</sup> GOOTENBERG, Paul. Talking about the flow: Drugs, Borders and the Discourse of Drug Control. **Cultural Critique**, N.71, Winter 2009, p.40.

well as the production and movement of drugs”.<sup>229</sup> These partnerships have materialized, most notably, in Colombia, as the National Consolidation Plan – the successor to Plan Colombia, created in 1999 – and in Mexico, through the Mérida Initiative, announced in late 2007.

A significant part of the literature on the ‘war on drugs’ deems it ‘America’s new war’ and asserts that, since the end of the Cold War, the so-called communist threat that largely guided U.S. policies to Latin America left an ideological vacuum. In this context, the ‘war on drugs’ would be a convincing substitute to justify the security rationale underlining Latin American policy. Many argue that as the Andean region remains fraught with paramilitary and insurgency conflicts, ‘the war on drugs’ is the result of an overarching U.S. foreign policy guided by the ‘war on terrorism’ and the need to promote U.S. business and strategic interests, ‘free market’ and democracy.<sup>230</sup>

Few analysts of the so-called ‘war on drugs’ would dispute the view that that the escalation of U.S. pressure over security concerns in Latin America happens at the cost of multilateral efforts to strengthen human rights, development, democracy and trade.<sup>231</sup> Gian Carlo Delgado-Ramos and Silvina M. Romano, for instance, assert that the “current economic, political, and security model implemented by the United States establishes the conditions for indirect but substantial interference on behalf of U.S. interests” in Mexico and Latin America.<sup>232</sup> The authors state that militarized U.S. policy initiatives are not only directed at ensuring “more secure environments for investment” and combating drug trafficking but also at annihilating “‘terrorism’ and narco-funded insurgency”.<sup>233</sup> The authors also state that ‘the regionalization of the war against “narco-terrorism” has taken place under pressure from the United States, which

<sup>229</sup> UNITED STATES DEPARTEMENT OF STATE. **International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2012**, p.15-16.

<sup>230</sup> NORTH AMERICAN CONGRESS ON LATIN AMERICA. **After the Cold War: In the Wake of Terror - Bush II in the Americas**. US Policy Report 35, N.3, 2001, p.13; MCGOVERN, James P. **Latin America Policy in the Next Two Years**, March 2011, p.2.

<sup>231</sup> DELGADO-RAMOS, Gian C.; ROMANO, Silvina M. Political-Economic Factors in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Colombia Plan, the Mérida Initiative, and the Obama Administration. **Latin American Perspectives**. 38:93, 2011, p.93.

<sup>232</sup> DELGADO-RAMOS, Gian C.; ROMANO, Silvina M. Political-Economic Factors in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Colombia Plan, the Mérida Initiative, and the Obama Administration. **Latin American Perspectives**. 38:93, 2011, p.94.

<sup>233</sup> DELGADO-RAMOS, Gian C.; ROMANO, Silvina M. Political-Economic Factors in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Colombia Plan, the Mérida Initiative, and the Obama Administration. **Latin American Perspectives**. 38:93, 2011, p.95.

has sought to maintain bilateral economic and security relations in order to neutralize the possibility of a genuinely multilateral agenda.<sup>234</sup>

Even though the post-Cold War context translated into readjustment and a decrease in military aid worldwide, U.S. military presence in terms of training, weapons transfers and resources has been steady in Latin America.<sup>235</sup> Colombia is amongst the largest recipients of U.S. military aid, and the region continues to receive aid at unprecedented levels. For example, the amount assigned by the United States to counterdrug programs in the region is estimated at nearly US\$2.8 billion for the Colombia Plan/Patriot Plan between 2002 and 2008 and at US\$1.3 billion since 2008 for the Mérida Initiative.<sup>236</sup>

It is possible to identify three main sets of criticisms to the ‘drug war’ conducted by the United States in Latin America. Some critics express concerns in regards to resource distribution amongst private contractors hired to implement policies such as training and policing, to the distribution of aid amongst countries and to the costs to human rights and liberties as well as the lack of transparency and accountability in these processes.<sup>237</sup> Overall, critics agree that the primary danger in the militarization of U.S. initiatives is that “priorities and policies in the region may increasingly be determined according to strategic, not political, criteria”, as U.S. decision-makers are likely to have greater access to information from Latin American military and police officers than from the civilian leaders themselves<sup>238</sup>, revealing a deep rift between U.S. priorities and Latin American priorities. Although the United States insists on collaborative policies based on shared objectives, crime and insecurity, unemployment and economic issues are the region’s top concerns while Washington’s alleged priorities are terrorism, drug trafficking and illegal immigration.<sup>239</sup>

<sup>234</sup> DELGADO-RAMOS, Gian C.; ROMANO, Silvina M. Political-Economic Factors in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Colombia Plan, the Mérida Initiative, and the Obama Administration. **Latin American Perspectives**. 38:93, 2011, p.100.

<sup>235</sup> ROSIN, E.; YOUNGERS, C.(eds). **Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of US Policy**. London: Lynne Rienner, 2005, p.39.

<sup>236</sup> BEITTEL, June et. Al. **Latin America and the Caribbean: Illicit Drug Trafficking and U.S. Counterdrug Programs**. Congressional Research Service. Washington, DC: 2010, p.6. GET MORE OF THESE reports

<sup>237</sup> NORTH AMERICAN CONGRESS ON LATIN AMERICA. **After the Cold War: In the Wake of Terror - Bush II in the Americas**. US Policy Report 35, N.3, 2001, p.18.

<sup>238</sup> NORTH AMERICAN CONGRESS ON LATIN AMERICA. **After the Cold War: In the Wake of Terror - Bush II in the Americas**. US Policy Report 35, N.3, 2001, p.20.

<sup>239</sup> MCGOVERN, James P. **Latin America Policy in the Next Two Years**, March 2011, p.2.

In regards to most recent U.S. counterdrug policy, while the Clinton and Bush administrations public discourse accompanied their increasing commitment to this “war”, the prevailing view about the Obama administration’s stance is that it has “maintained important continuities in relation to policies of previous governments while couching them in a discourse that suggests a contrary position, one that stresses the importance of dialogue and peaceful interaction.”<sup>240</sup> As per the 2011 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, President Obama states that “combating international criminal trafficking networks requires a multidimensional strategy that safeguards citizens, breaks the financial strength of criminal and terrorist networks, disrupts illicit trafficking networks, defeats international criminal organizations, fights government corruption, strengthens the rule of law, bolsters judicial systems and improves transparency”.<sup>241</sup>

According to the US Justice Department, Mexican drug cartels represent “the biggest organized crime threat to the United States” operating in approximately two hundred and thirty American cities.<sup>242</sup> The escalation of violence as a policy has been part of Mexican counterdrug policy since the 1980s, and this type of policy has always found support in the United States, who has funded, provided capacity-building, equipment and training; however, many argue that these approaches will neither stem the violence nor provide real border security.<sup>243</sup>

Moreover, in recent studies conducted by the international organs such as the Global Commission on Drug Policy, it has been shown that “most of the illicit drugs consumed in the United States come through or from Mexico, and virtually all the revenue of Mexican drug-trafficking organizations comes from sales to the

<sup>240</sup> DELGADO-RAMOS, Gian C.; ROMANO, Silvina M. Political-Economic Factors in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Colombia Plan, the Mérida Initiative, and the Obama Administration. **Latin American Perspectives**. 38:93, 2011, p.104.

<sup>241</sup> UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE. **International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2011**, p.13.

<sup>242</sup> O’NEILL, Shannon. The Real War in Mexico: How Democracy Can Defeat the Drug Cartels. **Foreign Affairs**. July/August 2009, Vol.88, N.4, p.3. Please note that this text was obtained at <http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~kmcm/Articles/The%20Real%20War%20in%20Mexico.pdf> on 10 January 2010 and thus all the page references from this article contained in this dissertation refer to this particular online version of the article which may differ from the page references of the hard copy of the article in the journal *Foreign Affairs*.

<sup>243</sup> O’NEILL, Shannon. The Real War in Mexico: How Democracy Can Defeat the Drug Cartels. **Foreign Affairs**. July/August 2009, Vol.88, N.4, p.4.

United States”.<sup>244</sup> Tackling this this issue from the perspective of a problem that affects both countries would suggest a shared responsibility: while in Mexico the counter-drug policies are centered mainly on domestic production and illicit exports (and the ensuing violence and organized crime) in the U.S. policies attempt to shrink demand for these imports, and in this way to curtail consumption.<sup>245</sup> Thus, the supposed critical view to the ‘drug wars’ holds that a possible solution to this problem would be to increase legal availability of drugs – such as medicinal marijuana or and focusing on prevention and treatment of drug addiction, for instance the Global Commission on Drug Policy and former UN-Secretary General Kofi Annan<sup>246</sup>.

However, it can be argued that this perspective overestimates the power of law enforcement.<sup>247</sup> Mark Kleiman argues a more adequate policy could be deployed taking into account “the capacity of the conventional drug-control triad and the enormous power of markets—licit and illicit” to change incentives drug dealers and users face, thereby reducing violence, disorder and decreasing the American prison population.<sup>248</sup> Many analysts affirm that current drug enforcement policies cannot be seen as successful as in the United States there are five times the number of dealers to prison than thirty years ago and cocaine and heroin prices have decreased eighty to ninety percent over this period of time.<sup>249</sup>

Mexico is the most important trading partner and largest export market for all US Southern border states and ranks among the top five export destinations for 36 US states.<sup>250</sup> Thus, some analysts argue that the United States has spent too little in its military initiatives in Mexico – compared to U.S. budgets for the Colombia Plan and with the estimated twelve to twenty-five billion dollars acquired yearly by Mexican cartels across the U.S. border – and argue that to

<sup>244</sup> KLEIMAN, Mark. Surgical Strikes in the Drug Wars. **Foreign Affairs**. September/October 2011, Vol. 90, Issue 5, p. 89.

<sup>245</sup> KLEIMAN, Mark. Surgical Strikes in the Drug Wars. **Foreign Affairs**. September/October 2011, Vol. 90, Issue 5, p.91.

<sup>246</sup> KLEIMAN, Mark. Surgical Strikes in the Drug Wars. **Foreign Affairs**. September/October 2011, Vol. 90, Issue 5, p.90.

<sup>247</sup> KLEIMAN, Mark. Surgical Strikes in the Drug Wars. **Foreign Affairs**. September/October 2011, Vol. 90, Issue 5, p.90.

<sup>248</sup> KLEIMAN, Mark. Surgical Strikes in the Drug Wars. **Foreign Affairs**. September/October 2011, Vol. 90, Issue 5, p.92.

<sup>249</sup> COUNCIL OF AMERICAN AMBASSADORS. Mexico and the United States: A Strategic Relationship. **The Ambassadors Review**. Spring 2012. Available at: <http://www.americanambassadors.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Publications.article&articleid=249>. Obtained on 21 May 2012.

“really overcome Mexico's security challenges, the United States must move beyond a short-term threat-based mentality to one that considers all these elements in the strategic relationship with its southern neighbor”.<sup>251</sup>

The United States and Mexico both regard the drug trafficking issue as a threat to each country's national security.<sup>252</sup> The United States conceives its policy framework towards illegal drugs and transnational organized through bilateral, regional or multilateral strategies, such as the main United Nations drug, crime and corruption conventions. The United States Department of State affirms that U.S. drug and crime control policy is integrated with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States, which aims to reduce drug consumption in order to improve overall public health and safety and deprive violent international criminal organizations of income<sup>253</sup>. In 2011, for instance, the U.S. Administration dedicated approximately ten billion U.S. dollars in federal funds to support drug demand reduction.<sup>254</sup> The reports states clearly that recent studies show that in the United States, “with the exception of marijuana, use of most illegal drugs – due in large measure to the effectiveness of drug awareness and treatment programs – has dropped dramatically” and that current illicit drug use in has dropped by approximately one-third since the 1970s.<sup>255</sup>

More recently, the Obama Administration has declared an increase in collaborative efforts with local coalitions in countries like Mexico in order to prevent drug use and share national drug court experiences as model alternatives to drug-offense incarcerations, supported by the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) of the Organization of American States (OAS). These organizations are in favor of such international and regional collaboration for alternatives to incarceration,

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<sup>251</sup> O'NEILL, Shannon. The Real War in Mexico: How Democracy Can Defeat the Drug Cartels. **Foreign Affairs**. July/August 2009, Vol.88, N.4, p.5-6.

<sup>252</sup> UNITED STATES SENATE CAUCUS ON INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL. **U.S. and Mexican Responses to Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations**. May 2011, p. 29.

<sup>253</sup> UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE. **International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2012**, p.14.

<sup>254</sup> UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE. **International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2012**, p.14.

<sup>255</sup> UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE. **International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2012**, p.14.

especially in the Caribbean and Central America.<sup>256</sup>

The tone of the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, the main government document produced by the U.S. government on the subject, is sober yet maintains its stride on a high note. Mexico, it states,

“with support from the United States under the Mérida Initiative, has demonstrated its resolve to thwart brutal drug criminal enterprises operating within its borders. While the country is suffering from drug-related violence, Mexico in 2011 apprehended 22 high-profile drug traffickers. Mexico’s federal law enforcement has demonstrated a commitment and increasing capacity to strike all levels of sophisticated criminal entities to break down their ability to operate. Mexican bilateral law enforcement cooperation with the United States continues to strengthen”.<sup>257</sup>

Furthermore, the report affirms that “government successes continue to affect the transnational crime organizations’ narcotics-driven profits and drain their resources.”<sup>258</sup>

However, official discourse is countered in many ways by various strands of criticism regarding counter-drug policies content, means and objectives. Most critics argue that the ‘drug war’ could instead be referred to as a ‘drug deadlock’<sup>259</sup> and many analysts refer to it as a complete failure; in over forty-years of struggle, no major structural change has been reached. Outside and even inside some government circles, the argument that the ‘War on Drugs’ has been a failure is recurrent<sup>260</sup>: “anyone with half an eye on the news knows that Mexico is in the midst of a drugs war, with rival cartels battling for control of a \$30 billion trade

<sup>256</sup> UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE. **International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2012**, p.14.

<sup>257</sup> UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE. **International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2012**, p.15.

<sup>258</sup> UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE. **International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2012**, p.317.

<sup>259</sup> GLOBAL COMMISSION ON DRUG POLICY. **Report of the global commission on drug policy**. June 2011.

<sup>260</sup> Some examples of authors and organizations who share this view are: BENETT, Brian. US can’t justify its drug war spending. LA Times Online. 9 June 2011; BOWDEN, Charles. U.S.-Mexico “war on drugs” a failure. CNN. 31 March 2010; LOVEMAN, Brian (Ed.). **Addicted to Failure: U.S. Security Policy in Latin America and the Andean Region**. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006; NADELMANN, Ethan. Commonsense Drug Policy. **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. 77, 1998; LATIN AMERICAN COMMISSION ON DRUGS AND DEMOCRACY. **Drugs and Democracy: Toward a Paradigm Shift**. 2009; GLOBAL COMMISSION ON DRUG POLICY. **Report of the global commission on drug policy**. June 2011; GRILLO, Ioan. Mexico’s drug war has brought terrifying violence to the streets and taken a dreadful toll of lives. **The Telegraph**. 29 January 2012; GOOTENBERG, Paul. Talking about the flow: Drugs, Borders and the Discourse of Drug Control. **Cultural Critique**, N.71, Winter 2009, p13-46.

with the United States”<sup>261</sup>. Although some improvement has been achieved in terms of coca crop reduction<sup>262</sup>, for instance, a genuine decrease in consumption and production has not occurred, neither in terms of the violence of the drug trade. Despite increase in apprehensions and imprisonment of cartel leaders, once spotted trafficking routes and cultivation areas are quick to redistribute and reassemble into new smuggling patterns, in what is termed a ‘balloon effect’.(Global Commission Report. 2010).

Failure in the ‘war on drugs’ in Mexico can be measured in numbers and facts: 27 ‘narco-deaths’ per day, 819 per month and e 9,830 per year, totalizing a shocking 47,000 homicides since the start of President Felipe Calderón’s administration in 2006 until September, according to the Attorney General in Mexico (PGR – Procuraduría General de la República)<sup>263</sup>. While statistics concentrate on effects rather than on causes of the issue, it may contribute to diverting attention from the North American responsibility in the violence of the drug trade. According to government studies, there are seven major drug cartels: Sinaloa Cartel, the Tijuana Cartel; Juárez Cartel; Gulf Cartel; La Familia Michoacana; Los Zetas; and Beltran Levya Organization.<sup>264</sup>

The statistical data presented by government sources and the media regarding the illicit drug trade between the United States and Mexico – total production, consumption, profits, billions of dollars spent in counter-drug policies and homicides related to the drug trade, amongst other numbers – are in themselves, in the most naked form, appalling. Departing from these statistics that reveal ‘objective’ problems that need an urgent solution: adult and youth substance abuse, drug-related crimes and incarcerations, gang violence, corruption, against various others. Due to this wide range of issues stemming from the drug trade, various kinds of approaches have been raised to tackle it, such as political economy perspectives, legal, environmental and development approaches, military and health-oriented approaches, amongst many others, all of

<sup>261</sup> GRILLO, Ioan. Mexico's drug war has brought terrifying violence to the streets and taken a dreadful toll of lives. **The Telegraph**. 29 January 2012.

<sup>262</sup> UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME. **World Drug Report 2011**. United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.11.XI.10, p.14-15.

<sup>263</sup> MEXICO INSTITUTE. **Considering new strategies for confronting organized crime in Mexico**. March 2012.

<sup>264</sup> UNITED STATES SENATE CAUCUS ON INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL. **U.S. and Mexican Responses to Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations**. May 2011, p.18-19.



which contribute to the debates and attempts to curb the global drug trade.

However, the vast majority of these approaches – circulating United States and international media, government circles, intellectuals and academics as well as civil society group discourses – that have been represented above, refer to the complex context of the illegal drug trade context as a ‘war on drugs’, in a manner which is automatic, swift and inconspicuously natural. At this point, perhaps even the careful reader will have been following this discussion without questioning the expression that has branded the entire intricate dynamics surrounding the illegal drug trade. To claim successes or to indicate failures in the ‘drug war’ is to perpetuate the convincing metaphor that has framed the prevailing discourse on drug trafficking and counter-drug policies. This metaphor has shaped political and academic debates, and can be seen to have constrained thought, discussions and arguments on the politics and violence that constitute this issue. The majority of conventional literature, the media and critical texts alike have departed from the idea of an existing ‘war on drugs’. This move is a clear example of the way in which a subjective interpretation that is promoted to the level of objectivity – a notion explored at length in chapter 2 – becomes the basic filter through which an issue is perceived.

### 3.2.

#### The ‘philopoetics’ of *Miss Bala*

In this sense, departing from a deconstructionist approach aided by insights suggested by viewing the film *Miss Bala*, this section seeks to disrupt these textual elements and reified concepts that frame the ‘war on drugs’, historicizing the context of its emergence and pervasiveness and thus unveiling the exclusionist practices that have institutionalized these meanings and marginalized other possibilities for analysis.<sup>265</sup>

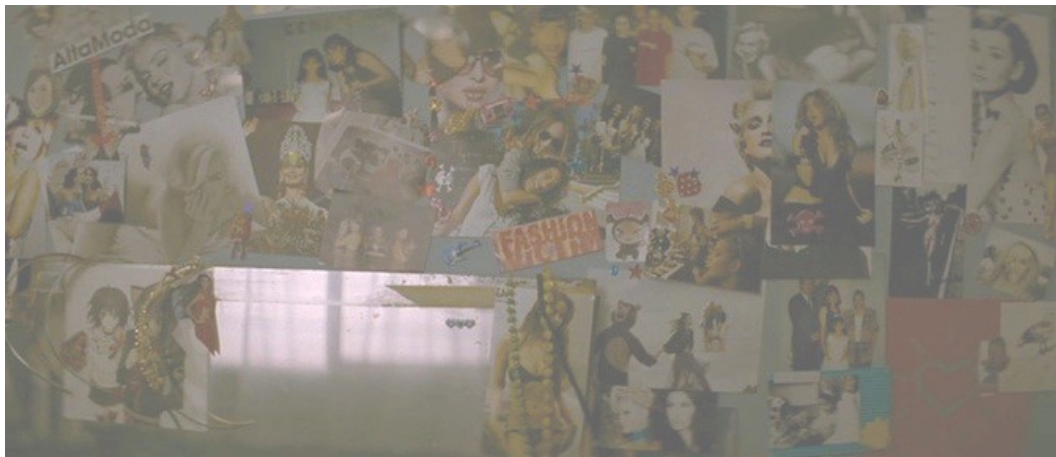
In itself, the term war is extremely misleading in this context as it is historically packed with meanings such as violence, belligerence, confrontation, combat; in sum, suggests a state of armed conflict. The discussion on the meaning

<sup>265</sup>

It is important to note that this dissertation is by no means advocating a single possible way to study any film or *Miss Bala* in particular; the choice for an approach based on Casarino’s philopoesis and Shapiro’s materializations of encounter is a conscious, intellectual and political choice.

and history of war is gigantic and has been the subject of uncountable works in anthropology, sociology, social science, cultural studies, feminist studies, economics, etc. For hundreds of years, this subject has been studied by thinkers from Thucydides, Machiavelli, Kant, Hobbes, Rousseau, Clausewitz, Hans Morgenthau, Hedley Bull, Edward H. Carr, John Keegan, Michael Shapiro, amongst many others, who have greatly influenced the discipline of international relations as a whole. The subject is so vast and complex that it becomes unfeasible to explore it with the time and space it requires in the context of this paper. This fact in itself, however, attests to the argument that branding an intricate and complex international political dynamics such as the illegal drug trade as a war could be deceptive, thought-constraining and, most importantly, legitimize the use of force to counter it.

#### Still N.1.



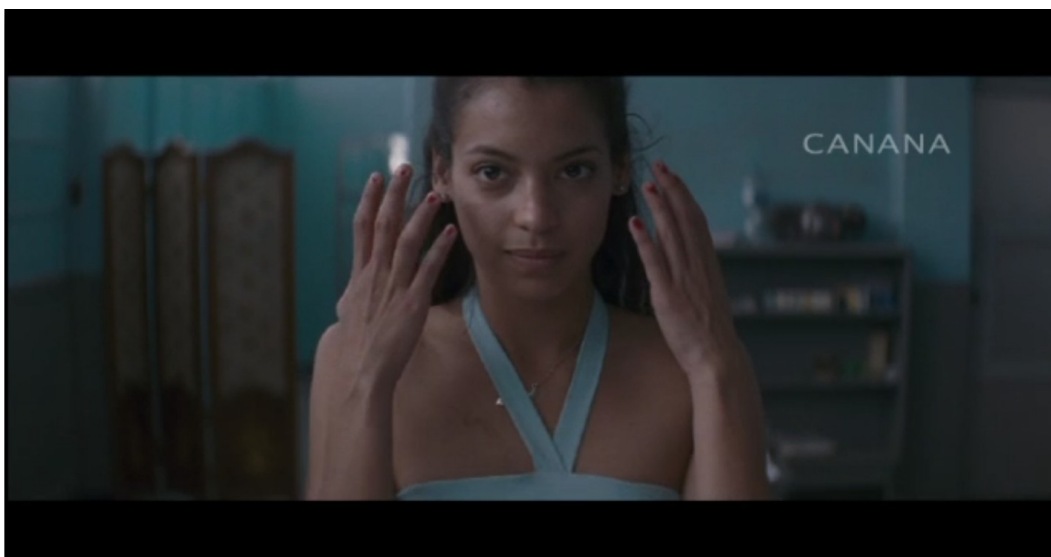
*Miss Bala's* opening scene begins as the day begins, before the spectator has had a chance to wake up his mind and his senses to the film. For the entire first minute of the movie the viewer stare at a wall; a wall covered in collages of fashion magazines and pictures of iconic actresses, where a small dirty mirror hangs. At the break of dawn, when darkness still reminisces enough to cloud viewing, a young woman is getting ready to leave her home for the day. The spectator's first contact with Laura is through her reflection She kisses her younger brother goodbye and sets out for the city.

### Still N.2



Laura, the protagonist, stops and leans over a wall and contemplates the sea. Soft colors and the sunshine glistening on her hair form an unlikely frame for the title of the film as it appears in bold red letters on the screen, with the speed and intensity of fired ammunition. Already the viewer is confronted with the asynchrony between the pretty picture of a beautiful young woman who dreams of a brighter future and the stark hostility suggested by the name given to her by Naranjo, *Miss Bala* (*Miss Bullet*).

### Still N.3



The viewer accompanies Laura as she meets a friend who takes her to an audition for a beauty contest, where she has a long shot at winning the title of

Miss Baja California. Laura is shy, clumsy, poorly dressed and has “manos de serviente,”<sup>266</sup> as remarks the event’s organizer. *Miss Bala* is not a film about the military confrontation between government forces and drug cartels in Mexico. It does not explicitly address the United States participation in the conflict. The storyline is not focused on the drug trade. The film unfolds primarily as the struggle of a young woman who wishes to pursue a dream as a way out of her dismal everyday life but gets tangled in a network of criminal activity. It is, however, precisely the imprint left on Laura’s body by the forces at work in the spaces within which she moves – “complex political habitus” – and the multiplicity of subject positions created within those spaces that make Laura an aesthetic subject – as defined by Michael Shapiro – that enables deep reflections about the “the complex political habitus” in which she, as the main aesthetic subject in the film, is embedded.<sup>267</sup> These subject positions and spaces will enable alternative criticisms to the United States counterdrug policies, which will be examined hereafter.

As explored in the previous section, traditional modern distinctions between image and reality, experience and representation, fact and fiction have determined what counts and what does not count, and what can or cannot be taken seriously by political science scholarship. Resisting the compartmentalization of thought and binary seclusion between modes of thought,<sup>268</sup> that constrains certain themes from political debates and determines who has legitimacy to speak about what, following the materializations of encounter offered by the political aesthetics of *Miss Bala* can perform the deconstruction and displacement of conceptual orders within which the discourse that insists on treating the illegal drug trade as a ‘war on drugs’ rests and perhaps enable the emergence of suggestions for alternative modes of inquiry with which to tackle this set of issues.

Therefore, this dissertation does not ask what politics is but instead – as suggested by Jacques Rancière – when and where is politics and how subjects

<sup>266</sup> In English, “hands of a house servant”.

<sup>267</sup> SHAPIRO, Michael J. **The Time of the City**, London: Routledge, 2010, p.7.

<sup>268</sup> See CASARINO, Cesare, *Philopoesis: A Theoretico-Methodological Manifesto*. **Boundary 2**, Volume 29, Number 1, Spring 2002. Author uses the metaphor of a spring board in order to argue that these binaries are often the framework of reasoning but should actually be points from which to begin an analysis and not end them.

experience political life.<sup>269</sup> In other words, the analysis will focus on the moments and places where the drug-trafficking occurs and how these dynamics affect subjects bodies and livelihoods. Departing from this deeper ontological debate will allow for the disruption of the dominant political consensus that delineates the boundaries between life and art, politics and life, and public and private domains. In other words, the arts, and in this case, films, are not mere illustrations of ideological struggles but the very playing field of this struggle.<sup>270</sup> Rejecting premises that structure knowledge and divide visual art from the world of ‘vital concerns’ and of legitimate political issues of grandeur<sup>271</sup> it is possible to pluralize what can come into view and be included in political agendas.

### 3.2.1.

#### The secret life of panic: the ‘centrifugal being’

As explored previously, Cesare Casarino’s brings forth the notion of interference between modes of thought, the practice through which modes of thought confront themselves and their own unthought.<sup>272</sup> *Miss Bala* performs a practice of interference as it investigates that which cannot be grasped through narrative and cannot be represented by representational forms.<sup>273</sup> Through “discontinuous and refractive interference,”<sup>274</sup> by confronting its own thought and lingering when on what cannot and yet must be thought,<sup>275</sup> the can be seen to blur the zones of contact between image and reality, silence and dialogue, fact and fiction, attempting to unveil what it cannot represent.<sup>276</sup>

The argument here is that the director and director of photography in the film *Miss Bala* provide a visual account of the practice of interference suggested by Cesare Casarino, which in this case has special implications for thinking the

<sup>269</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Translated by: Stephen Corcoran. London: Continuum, 2010, p.27.

<sup>270</sup> ŽIŽEK, Slavoj. ‘The lesson of Rancière’. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **The politics of aesthetics**. London: Continuum, 2000, p.77.

<sup>271</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. **The politics of aesthetics**. London: Continuum, 2000, p.17.

<sup>272</sup> CASARINO, 2002, *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>273</sup> CASARINO, Cesare; *Philopoesis: A Theoretico-Methodological Manifesto*. **Boundary 2**, Volume 29, Number 1, Spring 2002, p.66.

<sup>274</sup> CASARINO, *ibid.*, 2002, p.66.

<sup>275</sup> CASARINO, 2002, *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>276</sup> CASARINO, Cesare; *Philopoesis: A Theoretico-Methodological Manifesto*. **Boundary 2**, Volume 29, Number 1, Spring 2002, p.71-73.

issue of the drug trade in Mexico as it is presented by the United States government discourse.

Naranjo's style has been greatly debated by the media and general public. The film is shot, almost entirely, through a "steadicam-driven style that nearly always maintains a level-headed distance from the action."<sup>277</sup> *Miss Bala* leads the viewer to think the unthought as it speaks the unspoken and shows what cannot be seen, both through minimal use of dialogue and by placing the action outside the frame. In films, the framed image captures a portion of reality and space, making a statement about what is left out, the invisible prolongation of the visible, or what is commonly called the 'out of field'. Both the 'in field' and 'out of field' are equally important for the definition of the filmic space in narrative and representative cinema – cinema which tells a story situated in an imaginary universe materialized by representation.<sup>278</sup> The 'in field' is where montage takes place, or the organization of film planes in certain conditions of order and duration.<sup>279</sup> In this way, the basis of cinematographic language are the framings, camera movements, lighting and montage.<sup>280</sup> In *Miss Bala* these four very basic resources are explored to their fullest, in a way that the film 'feels' as if it were almost bare: there are no amazing visual effects, the scenery is not particularly striking, the dialogue has no special place and is almost always obstructed by outside noise.

It can be argued that Gerardo Naranjo's framing, camera movements, lighting and montage are in style what Jacques Aumont calls expressionist. According to Aumont, expressionism in cinema is composed of three key features. First, the refusal to imitate: representation is an invitation to understand what is represented; it emphasizes what goes beyond representation. The represented image is a device that allows the 'reality' that is being represented to go further, to "achieve the representation of the invisible, the indescribable, the transcendent."<sup>281</sup> The second feature is the exacerbation of subjectivity, or the necessity to ascribe limitless value to a certain subjective affect in the film. The third feature is the importance placed on the material, the emphasis on colors,

<sup>277</sup> DEBRUGE, Peter. *Miss Bala*. **Variety**. 13 May 2011.

<sup>278</sup> AUMONT, Jacques et.al. **A estética do filme**. Translated by Marina Appenzeller. Campinas: Papyrus, 1995, p.24.

<sup>279</sup> AUMONT, Jacques. **A imagem**. Campinas: Papyrus, 1993, p.54.

<sup>280</sup> AUMONT, Jacques. **A imagem**. Campinas: Papyrus, 1993, p.191.

<sup>281</sup> AUMONT, Jacques. **A imagem**. Campinas: Papyrus, 1993, p.294-295.

lines, contrast and other material expressions of the visual.<sup>282</sup> Naranjo's expressionism can be outlined according to these three characteristics. His framing goes beyond representation as, his choice of subjects to include in the frame only make it more painful for the viewer to feel, imagine, attempt to grasp what is left out. His camera movements exacerbate the affects of anxiety and claustrophobia, as the spectator sees Laura and the universe she is in throughout the majority of the film as if she or he were literally following her. This particular move has a dual function: at the same time that the viewer is invited to emulate Laura's spatio-temporal experiences, because the focus is mostly on her, the viewer never has a clear idea about what exactly is going on around her. This affect is compounded by Naranjo's choice of color and lighting: throughout most of the film browns and greys predominate, so that the audience can never see clearly as shapes and lines become blurred. As a blogger notes, in *Miss Bala*,

“the frame becomes so claustrophobic, almost like the time you are sitting on the rear seat of a bike holding something big, say a carrom board, which's basically obstructing your vision. It is a classic moment of anxiety. Here in *Miss Bala* almost everything is happening off-screen, literally and figuratively, and the resultant tension is almost unbearable. I watched the film over a good 4 hours. Trust me, I needed that time.”<sup>283</sup>

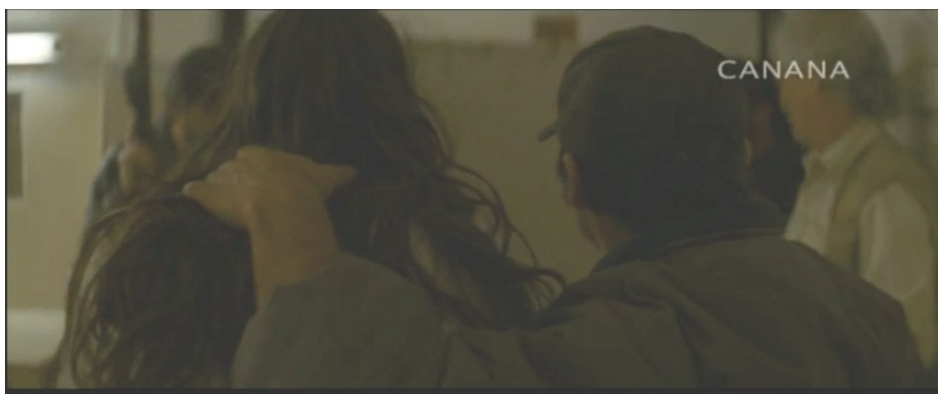
Montage symbolism introduces to the spectator an abstract concept without having to use explicit resources.<sup>284</sup> In *Miss Bala*, montage symbolism parallels a recurring technique used by Naranjo: the camera looks at other characters and to their environments through the eye of a character. Through such framings it is possible to “see the space of action from within, through the eyes of the *dramatis personae*, and know how they feel in it,” and in this way, frames that changes constantly provide the spectator with the feeling that he himself is moving.”<sup>285</sup>

<sup>282</sup> AUMONT, Jacques. **A imagem**. Campinas: Papirus, 1993, p.295.

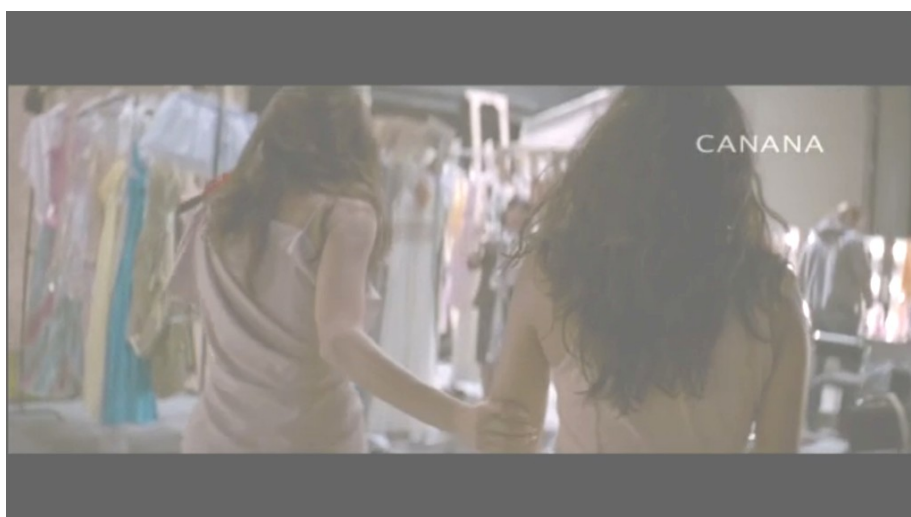
<sup>283</sup> NAIDU, Satish. Comment to post Miss Bala, 12 March 2012. **Scribbles and ramblings:** book/film reviews blog. Obtained on: 23 March 2012. Available at: <http://likhna.blogspot.com.br/2012/03/miss-bala.html>.

<sup>284</sup> XAVIER, Ismail (Ed.). **A experiência do cinema**. Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal Ltda., 1983, p.64.

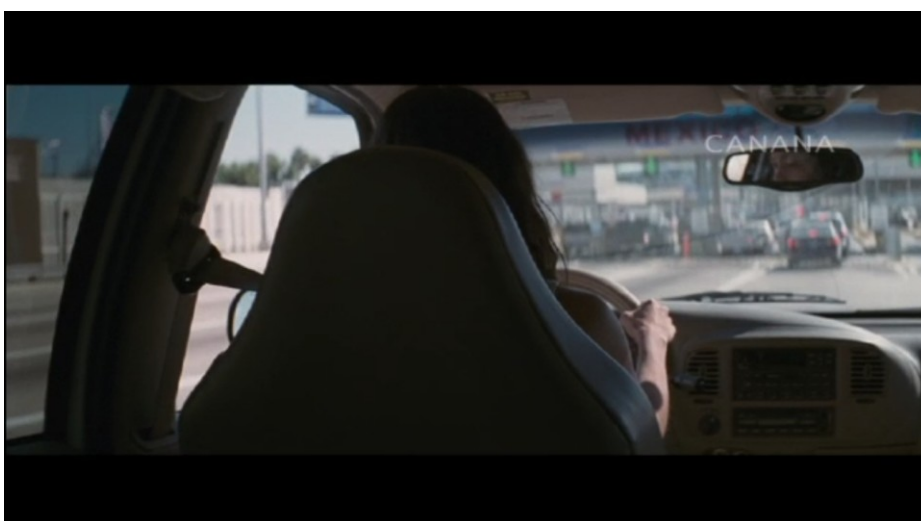
<sup>285</sup> BALÁZS, Béla. In: \_\_\_\_\_. **A experiência do cinema**. Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal Ltda., 1983, p. 97-98.

**Still N.4**

Scene where Laura first meets Lino, the drug cartel leader.

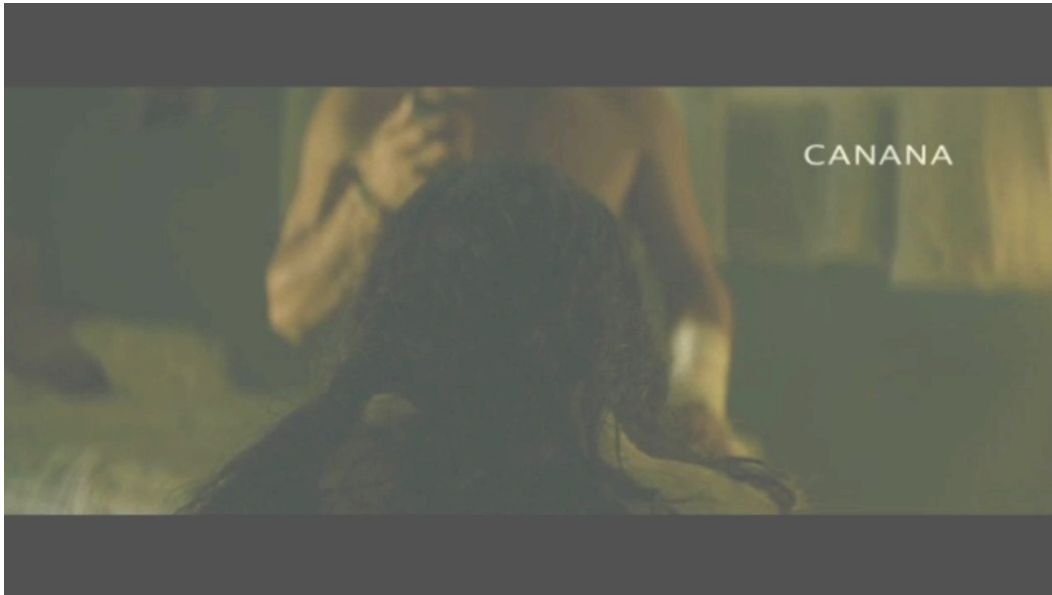
**Still N.5**

Laura, as she arrives in the pageant and being taken by the event's organizer to where she will need to change and prepare to appear in public.

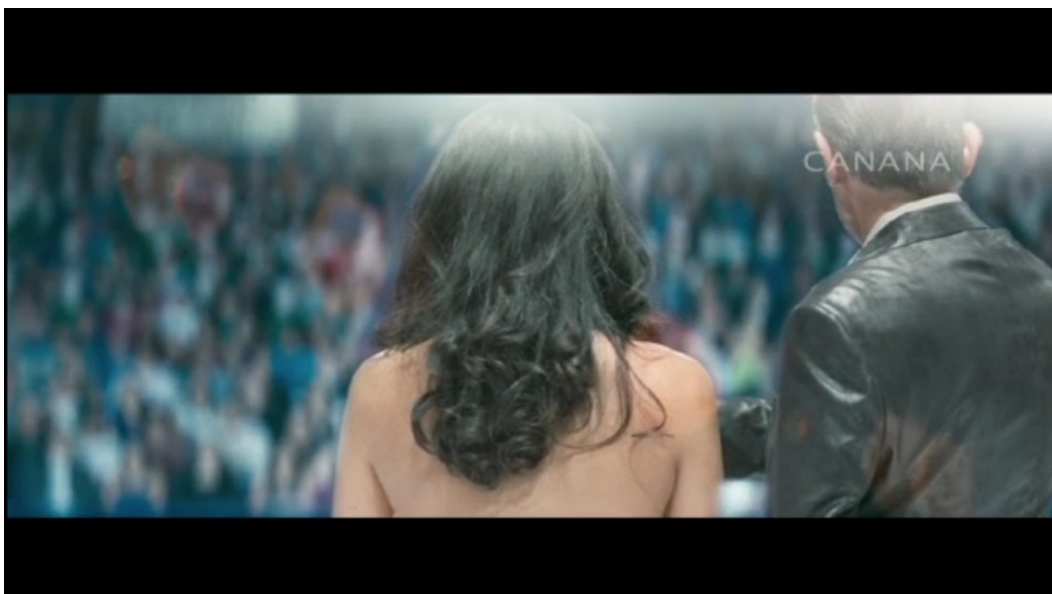
**Still N.6**

Laura driving a car following orders given by “Lino” back into Mexico after smuggling money into the United States to buy weapons.



**Still N.7**

Laura in her room, undressing Lino's wounds.

**Still N.8**

Laura onstage, waiting for the result of Miss Baja California's pageant.

The character thus becomes the “centrifugal being”: the movement of the camera reinforces the tendency to expansion, it transforms what is out of the frame, the out of field, into a space directly encompassed by the camera through the metaphor of the camera movement. This resource establishes the idea that there is a world independent to the camera.<sup>286</sup>

#### Still N.9



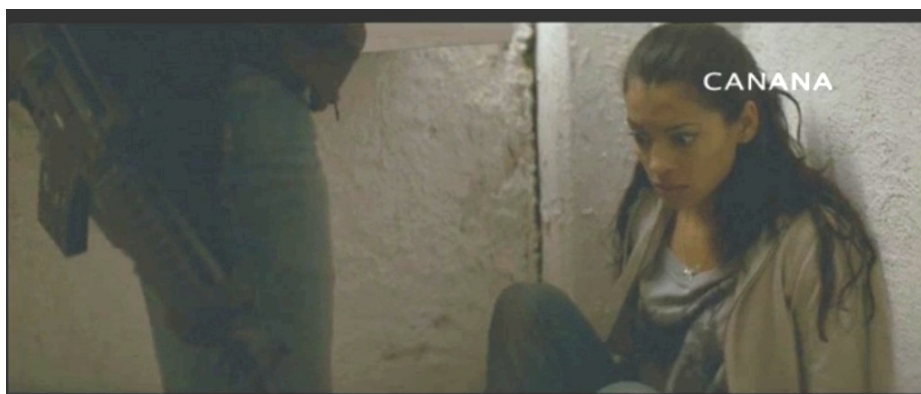
While in the back of a truck, the camera offers a 360-degree angle showing the viewer exactly and only what Laura can see. Laura becomes the centrifugal being, allowing the audience to experience what the character is feeling from within and troubling her/his sense of space and time as she/he can no longer be separated from the scene; the line between subject (spectator) and object (film and its characters) is blurred.

The anxiety and tension produced by the aesthetic qualities in *Miss Bala* provide the backdrop for the most invisible and at the same time naked form of acquiescence about all victims in the film, especially Laura. From the very first few minutes into the story when Laura encounters the thugs that will force her around for the entire picture, she maintains a type of posture that remains surprisingly steady throughout. She is ordered in and out of houses, cars, clothes, she smuggles money and arms, yet she does not question any orders, she does not protest, or scream out. Laura silently and complacently acquiesces. Although

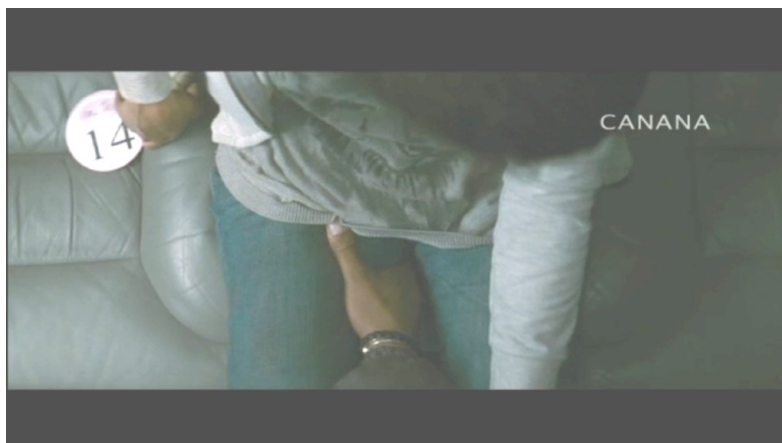
<sup>286</sup> XAVIER, Ismail. **O discurso cinematográfico: a opacidade e a transparência.** Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2005, p.22.

despair lingers like a heavy cloud suffocating Laura and her surroundings, it is barely seen on her face or heard in her voice. Invoking the unseen and provoking the unconscious is what the film's language attempts to do in order to emphasize that "in Mexico", as argues Naranjo, "the bad things are already in our hardrive."<sup>287</sup>

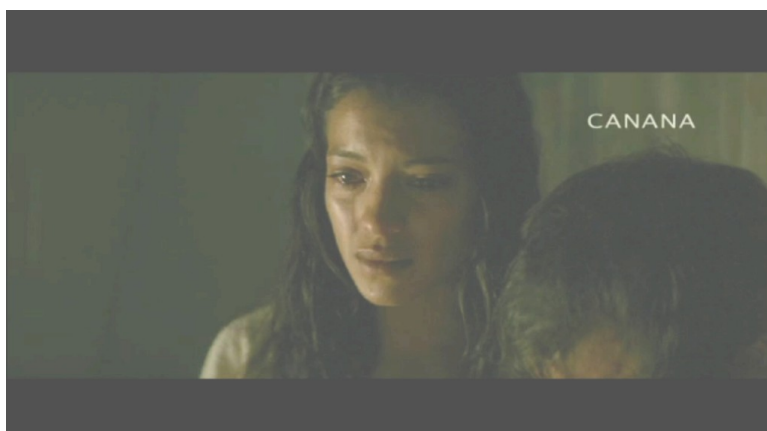
#### Still N.10



#### Still N.11



#### Still N.12



<sup>287</sup> MALKIN, Elizabeth. In the Crossfire of the Mexican War on Drugs: Gerardo Naranjo's Miss Bala reflects Mexican drug war. **New York Times**. 13 January 2012.

The three stills above attest to the permanent acquiescence suggested by the camera's focus on the out-of-field – strongly referring to what cannot be seen or heard – which defines Laura's personality puts the viewer uncomfortably in Laura's place, inside the context of millions of people who suffer the processes and consequences of the 'war on drugs', gang violence, military relations between the Mexican and U.S. armed forces. This defining feature of Laura's character when analyzed as an aesthetic subject is a glaring reminder that "what feeds despair here more than the daily violence, though, is the suspicion that nobody in charge has the ability, the will or the integrity to defeat the criminals and the corruption that supports them."<sup>288</sup> As argued by Dickens and Fontana, the stereotyped image of the 'war on drugs', serves to "disguise individuals' total lack of control over the external forces that have invaded, penetrated, and dispersed their bodies".<sup>289</sup>

However, drawing viewers into the daily occurrences where this lack of control can be felt calls attention to often-disregarded aspects of the situation in Mexico. While the official U.S. discourse claims that increased cooperation between the Mexican and American governments has resulted in increased successes in thwarting illicit drug exports and Mexican cartels' activities, Laura as a "centrifugal being" and the out-of-field anxiety imposed on the viewer may suggest fault lines within this discourse. In Mexico, most of the violence is invisible, as it is invisible in the audience's grasp of Laura's experience. As it can be seen on the previous stills, in still N.10 Laura is hidden underneath a bathroom counter and the criminal's face cannot be seen. In stills 11 and 12 Naranjo strongly suggests Laura is being molested but the spectator cannot see – in the first scene – her suffering – or in the second – the degree of violence being imprinted onto her body.

This 'invisibility' becomes unbearable as it is penetrated by Laura's patient lack of protest and attest to a major aspect of the appalling situation in Mexico: civilian lack of faith in authorities to provide public security. Illegal activities

<sup>288</sup> Gerardo Naranjo's comment in MALKIN, Elizabeth. In the Crossfire of the Mexican War on Drugs: Gerardo Naranjo's Miss Bala reflects Mexican drug war. **New York Times**. 13 January 2012.

<sup>289</sup> DICKENS, David R.; FONTANA, Andrea. **Postmodernism and Social Inquiry**. London: UCL Press, 1994, p.54.

carried out by drug cartels have touched virtually every sphere of public life in Mexican cities most affected by the drug trade, from extortions of small businesses to blockades of major highways.<sup>290</sup> The policies deployed to counter this violence are extremely violent in themselves: more than 50,000 soldiers are currently involved in large-scale counter-narcotics operations across Mexico. Where they are deployed, these soldiers have been given many of the responsibilities of both police and prosecutors, such as patrolling neighborhoods, responding to shootouts, investigating individual crimes to gathering intelligence on criminal groups, amongst other functions. However, civilian oversight of the military's operations has been reduced and public security has not succeeded in reducing violence, but has resulted in a dramatic increase in grave human rights violations.<sup>291</sup>

As the Human Rights Watch Report on Mexico's dramatic situation asserts, "not only do human rights violations in themselves undermine the rule of law, but they also can be counterproductive in reducing violence, dismantling criminal networks, and building the public confidence in institutions that is critical to effective counternarcotic efforts. Since the outset of Calderón's "war on drugs," violent crime has skyrocketed; abusive policing has undermined the investigation and prosecution of criminal suspects; and widespread abuse and corruption has antagonized civilians who otherwise could provide security forces with crucial information."<sup>292</sup>

Moreover, Mexican President Felipe Calderón has repeatedly argued that concerns over the scale of violence in Mexico are overblown, affirming that the country's homicide rate is reasonably lower than several countries in Latin America – such as Brazil and Colombia.<sup>293</sup> However, the overall homicide rate provides an incomplete picture of violence in Mexico, because drug-related violence produces disproportionate effects on different regions. For example, roughly a third of all homicides tied to organized crime in Mexico in 2010 occurred in just five cities, by the government's own figures<sup>294</sup>. Therefore, a more adequate reading of the graveness of the situation can be found when examining

<sup>290</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. **Neither Rights, Nor Security**: Killings, Torture and Disappearances in Mexico's "War on Drugs". 9 November 2011, p.4.

<sup>291</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. **Neither Rights, Nor Security**: Killings, Torture and Disappearances in Mexico's "War on Drugs". 9 November 2011, p.5.

<sup>292</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. **Neither Rights, Nor Security**: Killings, Torture and Disappearances in Mexico's "War on Drugs". 9 November 2011, p.14.

<sup>293</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. **Neither Rights, Nor Security**: Killings, Torture and Disappearances in Mexico's "War on Drugs". 9 November 2011, p.15.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p.15.

homicide rates in specific states and cities, which have all increased in the last few years. For example, in Ciudad Juárez the rate of killings per 100,000 inhabitants increased from 14.4 in 2007, to 75.2 in 2008, and to 108.5 in 2009. With this information it becomes clear that Ciudad Juárez's homicide rate in 2009 was approximately seven times that of Mexico's national rate, but also that it is one of the highest in the world, greatly exceeding rates such as Rio de Janeiro's and Medellín's.<sup>295</sup>

Furthermore, President Calderón has recurrently appealed to citizens for their collaboration with the government by reporting crimes. However, most Mexicans citizens are not confident that crimes reported will be in fact investigated, or, worse still, fear that local law enforcement and justice departments may be infiltrated by organized crime and that they will suffer direct violence from reporting criminals. Distrust in authorities and widespread abuses by security forces, only serve to the consolidate public's lack of faith in Mexican and U.S. policies deployed throughout in the country.<sup>296</sup>

### 3.2.2

#### Materialization of encounters

##### Still N.13



<sup>295</sup> Ibid. p.15.

<sup>296</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. **Neither Rights, Nor Security**: Killings, Torture and Disappearances in Mexico's "War on Drugs". 9 November 2011, p.16.



Still N.14



Still N.15



One of the main constant features of *Miss Bala* is a pervasive feeling of tension that muddles the spectator's sense of time. Even though scenes unfold chronologically, day and night clearly identified – the story takes place in no more than a couple of days – the lack of clear dialogues, the subdued lighting and sound effects that produce a sense of discomfort (muffled car sounds, shooting, engines running, etc.) the audience never has a clear sense of what is happening exactly with Laura. A clear example of this argument is set out in the three stills above, in a sequence in which the viewer sees Lino's (the gang leader) car park outside what is suggested to be a bus station. As Lino leaves the car and comes back

holding Laura, the camera remains in the car so that the spectator cannot be sure of what is taking place. This scene is characterized by what film scholars call ‘découpage’. Découpage refers to the way through which sequences in the film are grouped into sequences. Where découpage renounces continuity, totality and systematization, the film is oriented by an ambiguous reference point, or rather does not follow a single referent object, and the notion of sense-making is replaced by critical discourse. It disrupts illusions of the possibility of consciousness, teleology and representation from perception: critical deconstruction of the system of representation.<sup>297</sup>

Découpage disrupts senses of identification, established hierarchies, discourses and genres, as it reintroduces subjects into the field of perception and reveals the “arbitrariness of the distribution [of social activities] for political participation and artistic practice.”<sup>298</sup> In *Miss Bala*, découpage is a frequent resource used by Naranjo, which strongly suggests that the film is more focused on processes than on substance. For instance, it is never very clear what is going on exactly as the film is not structured through the unfolding of dialogue; when characters do speak their voices are muffled by the sounds going around them. Subdued lighting and blurry images contribute to the film’s lack of systematization of reality and maintenance of an ambiguous reference point – even though in many scenes the viewer follows Laura’s back, in just as many the focus of the camera is not on character’s faces but also parts of their bodies and objects such as cars, walls and mirrors. This deconstruction of a system of representation strongly emphasizes the importance of processes versus substance in *Miss Bala*: the film is not about US-Mexico military relations, per se, as information about the violence caused by the drug trade and military measures deployed to counter it are received in the same disjointed way as the audience understands what is going on.

The concept of the deconstruction of the system of representation is essential to unmask a critical aspect of what is deemed by the American government as the ‘war on drugs’. Both the governments of Mexico and the United States have demonstrated a need to justify military actions and to portray

<sup>297</sup> XAVIER, Ismail. **O discurso cinematográfico: a opacidade e a transparência**. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2005, p.146-147.

<sup>298</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. CORCORAN, Stephen (Ed., transl.). London: Continuum, 2010, p. 5.



the ‘war on drugs’ as a battle between good and evil with no gray areas in between.<sup>299</sup> In order to make the rhetoric effective it has been necessary to villainize certain actors, characterizing them as the perpetrators of ‘evil’. However, evil and good are moral categories, wholly dependent on judgment and therefore not subject to political contestation. From the moment this issue is spoken of in moral terms, it is driven out of political debate and it becomes more difficult to speak of causes and consequences. For instance, as argues Laura Carlsen, this situation is clearly exemplified by the actions of the Armed Forces in Mexico: acting within a war framework that points as the main objective the annihilation of an identifiable enemy. This translates into the fact that civilians are defined as suspected enemies, soldiers and officers carry out arbitrary arrests within personal agendas and corruption and where extrajudicial executions, the use of torture, and excessive use of force are almost the norm.<sup>300</sup>

Because *Miss Bala* offers scenes that disrupt the spectator’s sense of understanding of a teleological storyline and emphasizes the disjointed processes that pervade the film, it enables the emergence of critical investigations. Where is the focus of the camera – in the main characters, in their surroundings, in Laura or the gangsters? At the same time that Laura is victimized – she suffers molestation, violence and is forced to carry out criminal actions – she is also complacent in terms of what is happening around her – she accepts the money and the help in the pageant from the gang leader. How does this relate to the role of citizens experiencing the conflict and to the audience, also experiencing the conflict through the media, the news, and other personal accounts? If gangsters, Mexican and U.S. authorities are villainized, can there really be a distinction between good and evil, between clear adversaries in a supposed ‘drug war’? How does the concept of a ‘drug war’ depoliticize the debate and evade the questions of responsibility of all those involved – directly or indirectly – in this conflict, such as drug dealers, police, government officials, citizens and drug users?

At this point it is necessary to bring back into the debate some of Gilles Deleuze’s concepts outlined in his *Cinema 1*. Deleuze third type of movement-image, the affection-image, is crucial to this section. According to the author, the

<sup>299</sup> STOUT, Robert J. Do the United States and Mexico really want the Drug War to Succeed? *Monthly Review*. January 2012, Vol.63, Issue 8, p.42.

<sup>300</sup> CARLSEN, Laura. Mexico’s False Dilemma: Human Rights or Security. *Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights*. Vol. 10, N.3, Spring 2012, p.147.

affection-image is comprised by the close-up, the magnification of the face, which gives an affective reading of the whole film. The close-up provides the magnification of the subject, forming an intensive series that mark the ascent to a critical instant. Its principal feature is to focus on the micro-movements of the subject of the close-up, to show that the moving body loses its movement and this immobile unity constitutes the affect;<sup>301</sup> in *Miss Bala*, this takes place with the direct interference of Gerardo Naranjo, telling actress Stephanie Sigman to “show everything with the eyes.”<sup>302</sup>

Close-ups on Laura’s face are less frequent in *Miss Bala* than scenes that either focus on the out of field or follow the character in order to give the viewer a sense of direct experience. However, when close ups are indeed performed they emphasize the magnification of Laura’s agony and despair, always subdued by her acquiescence and passivity. As suggested by Deleuze, these moments of magnification of the subject mark the ascent of critical instances, examples of the ‘materialism of encounter’ that define and suggest deep reflections into the U.S.–Mexico situation. The instances of materialism of encounter are, as suggested by Michael Shapiro, moments in which the multiplicity of spatio-temporal realities and positions of the aesthetic subject reveal their “complex political habitus”. Because such instances of materialism of encounter reveal sites without fixed temporal and spatial locations but instead variable events and “fluxes of interrelation”, they reflect social inconsistencies inflecting the characters’ bodies that cannot be expressed adequately through discursive representations; for example, ‘bodily comportments’ such as hand movements, walking or conversational contexts, e.g. speaking styles and intonations. The cinematic form of framing these types of encounters turn are poetic operations that establish the visibility of certain forces that illuminate beings, images, concepts and events, shedding light on zones of thought previously obscured by discursively represented realities.

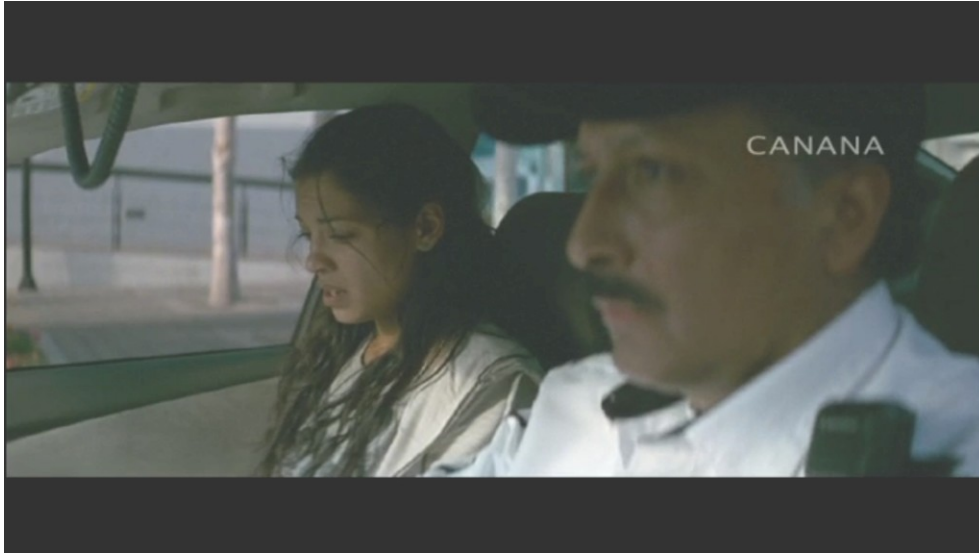
There are two particular types of materialism of encounters in *Miss Bala* that are relevant to this study: mobile car scenes and dynamics of

<sup>301</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles. **Cinema 1: the movement-image**. Translated by Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson. London: Athlone Press, 1986, p.87.

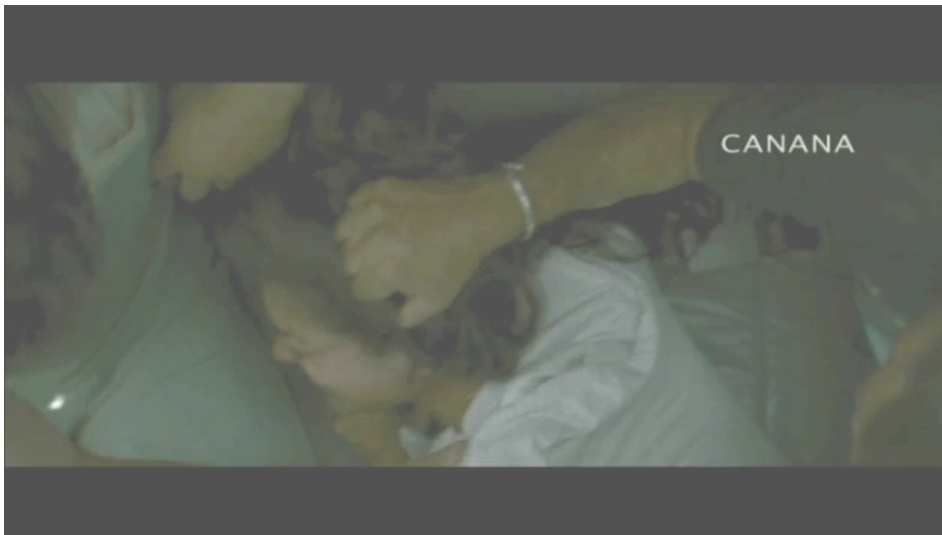
<sup>302</sup> GANOZA, Daniela. Miss Bala Interview with Gerardo Naranjo, Diego Luna and Stephanie Sigman. **Univision News**. Available at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFXqWIB7\\_RM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFXqWIB7_RM). Obtained on: 22 January 2012. Interview.

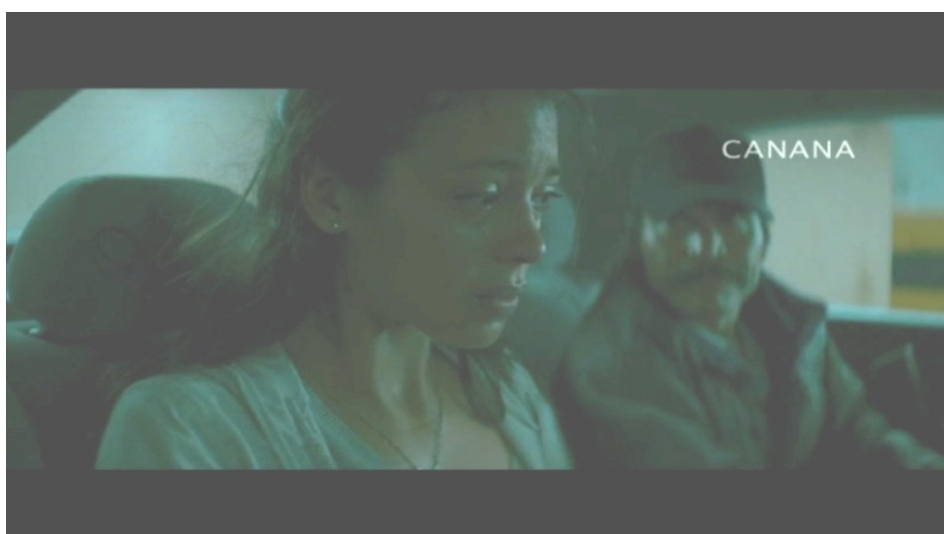
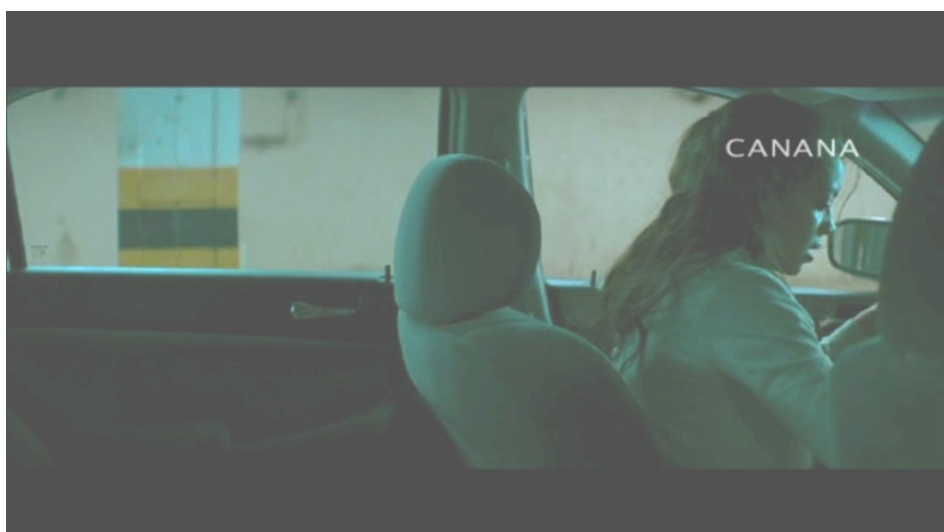
dressing/undressing, both of which will be explored hereafter. There are at eleven main scenes in cars and nine where Laura is being told do undress and/or dress, as will be shown below.

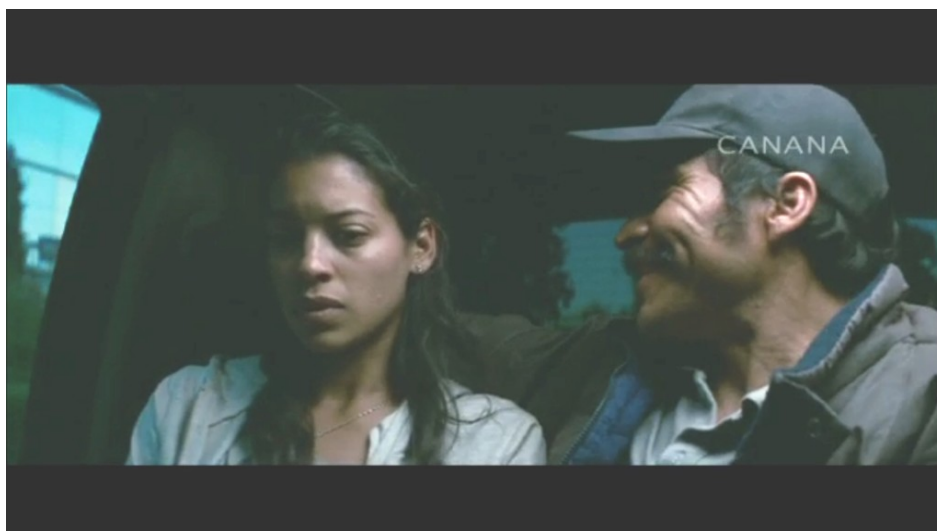
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#### Still N.17



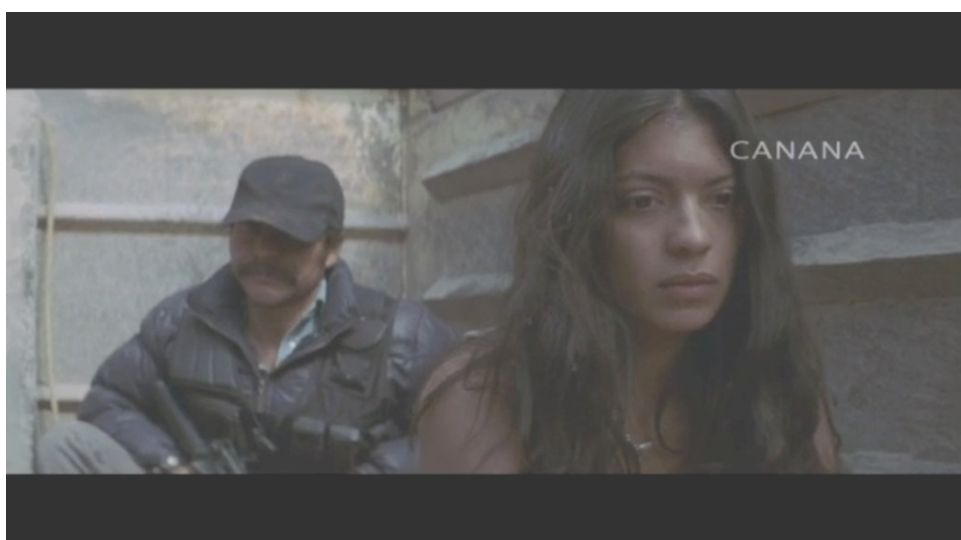
**Still N.18****Still N.19****Still N.20**

**Still. N.21****Still N.22****Still N.23**

Still N.24



Still N.25



Still N.26



Laura is forced in and out of cars, where she stands in different positions: at times she is taken as kidnapped, at others she sits in the back seat as a regular passenger, and even has to drive in some situations. The multiplicity of these mobile sites where Laura is situated throughout the film can be seen to illuminate the fluxes of interrelations between herself and the police, authorities and cartel members. While suggesting the blurry and changeable boundaries between the roles of passenger, victim, driver and pointing to the unreliability of fixed hierarchies of meaning such as passive/active, causes and effects. The dynamic interplay between social roles, whose fluidity is emphasized by the fact that all of Laura's encounters in cars are mobile, can be considered a symbol of the "erosion of the rule of law and the systematic violation of human rights in the context of the armed conflict caused by the drug war" which has created a bottomless crisis in Mexican society, "one whose causes and effects are not only ill-defined but often purposely obscured."<sup>303</sup>

In this way, analyzing the drug trafficking situation beyond the US-Mexico border focusing on subjects rather than on war adversary dichotomies and attempting to place blame on either side of the conflict may lead to different conclusions.

The mobility of the encounters provided by the various car scenes suggests a significant rift in the element of cooperation strongly emphasized by the U.S. government regarding its interaction with Mexico in the fight against drugs. A multi-dimensional cooperative strategy integrating the Mexican and American foreign policies suggests that at the borders, the United States controls the passage of drugs and that Mexico aims to stop them from leaving the country. However, the irregularity, unpredictability and inconsistency offered by the many car scenes in *Miss Bala* breaks up this inside/outside duality, suggesting that the discourse of cooperation and protection of borders cannot account for the relationships and dynamics between drug cartels and government forces.

For instance, some analysts have suggested that the 'war' on drugs is not a war between states or between government and civil forces, but actually a 'war' on minorities. For instance, out of the 260,000 prisoners in the United States on

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<sup>303</sup> CARLSEN, Laura. Mexico's False Dilemma: Human Rights or Security. **Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights**. Vol. 10, N.3, Spring 2012, p.146.

non-violent drug charges, more than seventy percent are of black or Latino backgrounds.<sup>304</sup> Also, almost 80 percent of those sentenced for the possession of crack are African-Americans, even though most users and sellers of crack are not of African-American descent.<sup>305</sup> Ciudad Juarez is the deadliest in the world, with 190 murders per 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>306</sup> Approximately ten times more non-white people are in jail for drug related crimes, although whites use drugs at a much higher rate.<sup>307</sup> After forty years of raging a supposed war on drugs, the United States has spent over one trillion dollars; and, even though the Obama administration has publicly announced a '21<sup>st</sup> Century approach to drug policy' and sworn to treat drug use more as a public health than a security issue, it has increased spending on interdiction and law enforcement since 2010.<sup>308</sup> According to Ethan Nadellman, in the Obama administration, "law enforcement and futile interdiction programs make up the large majority of drug war expenditures, as they have since the Reagan era".<sup>309</sup>

Also, the dichotomy present in the U.S. discourse on cooperation implies the idea of control by the governments over the chaotic situation posed by the illicit drug trade. This dichotomy is shaken by the director's astounding control of the camera, as it portrays to the main character's lack of control or fixed agency within her surroundings. Laura's body is constantly appropriated in space and time: she is forced in and out of cars, houses and clothes, she has money strapped on to her waist, she is used as a mule for transporting guns and as a sexual gift to a high Mexican authority in a surprise ambush orchestrated by the drug cartel. Laura's body is appropriated in multiple ways. Although at times Laura is told to drive the cars she also rides as a regular passenger in the front and backseats, or even taken by force in backseats, trunks and even in trucks' dumpcarts.

<sup>304</sup> HUFFINGTON, Arianna. The War on Drugs Is Really a War on Minorities. **Alternet**. 27 March 2007.

<sup>305</sup> NADELMANN, Ethan. Obama Takes a Crack at Drug Reform. **The Nation**. 13 September 2010.

<sup>306</sup> TUCKMAN, Jo. VULLIAMY, Ed. Mexico's drug wars rage out of control. **The Guardian**. 24 March 2010.

<sup>307</sup> AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION. **ACLU & Elon James White: Just Say NO to the War On Drugs**. June 2011. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UqDunp0JTE>. Obtained on: 5 September 2011.

<sup>308</sup> OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY. **The 2012 National Drug Control Strategy**: Building on a Record of Reform. 17 April 2012, p.1; ASSOCIATED PRESS. AP IMPACT: After 40 years, \$1 trillion, US War on Drugs has failed to meet any of its goals. **Fox News**. 13 May 2012.

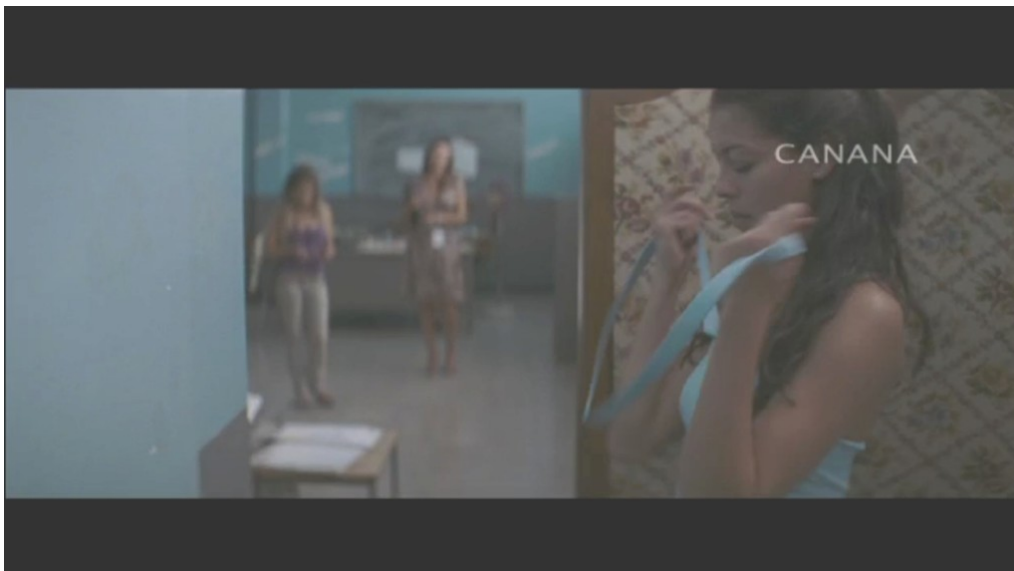
<sup>309</sup> NADELMANN, Ethan. Obama Takes a Crack at Drug Reform. **The Nation**. 13 September 2010.



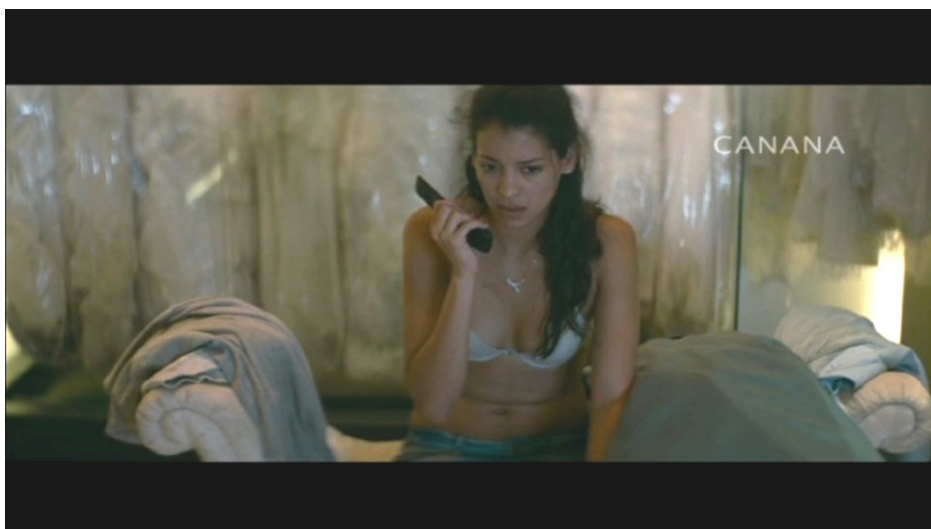
Furthermore, Laura undresses at least nine times throughout the film. Similar to the mobile car scenes, Laura at times dresses and undresses willingly and at other times is coerced into doing it. While she undresses repeatedly the viewer gets a glimpse of the violence that is imprinted directly onto her body.

Laura's body transits between the United States and Mexico: she crosses the border from and to Tijuana smuggling money and drugs, but she also zig-zags across her home and the streets of Mexico into the superficial world of beauty pageants and socialite parties. Laura first undresses in front of the viewer at the pageant, which she sees as a way out of her dull and simple lifestyle. The dream of beauty and fame, strongly associated to an American tradition, is transported swiftly onto this Mexican reality.

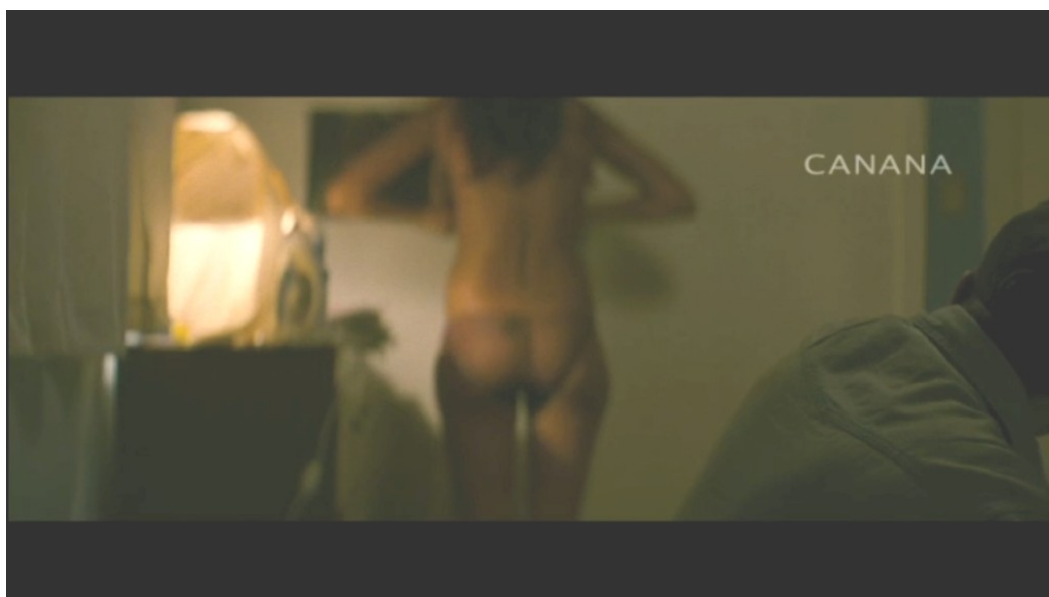
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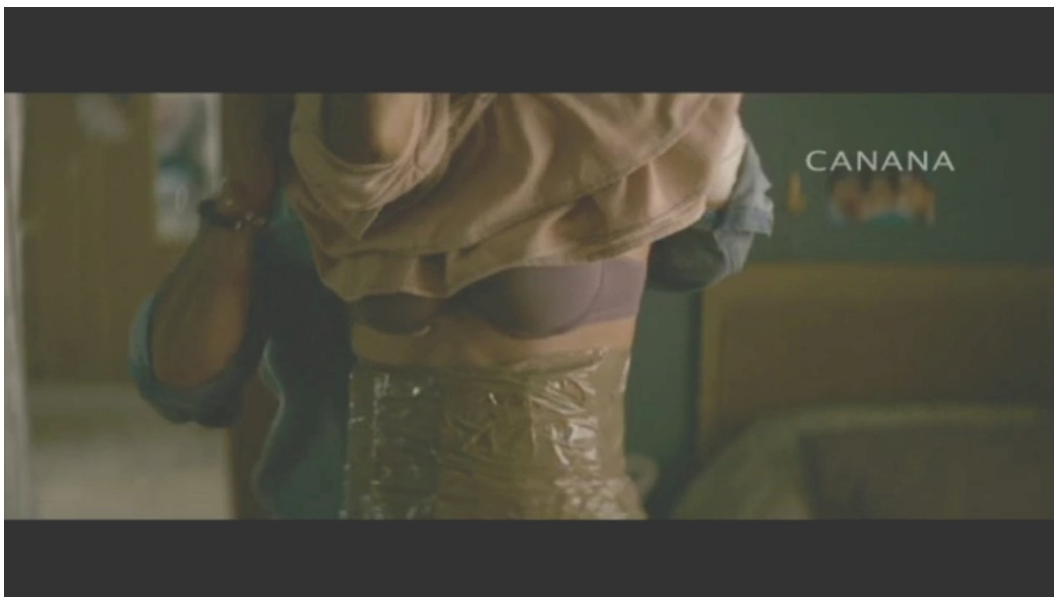
She then undresses at an expensive store, where she has been given money by Lino to buy a new dress for the pageant.

**Still N.28**

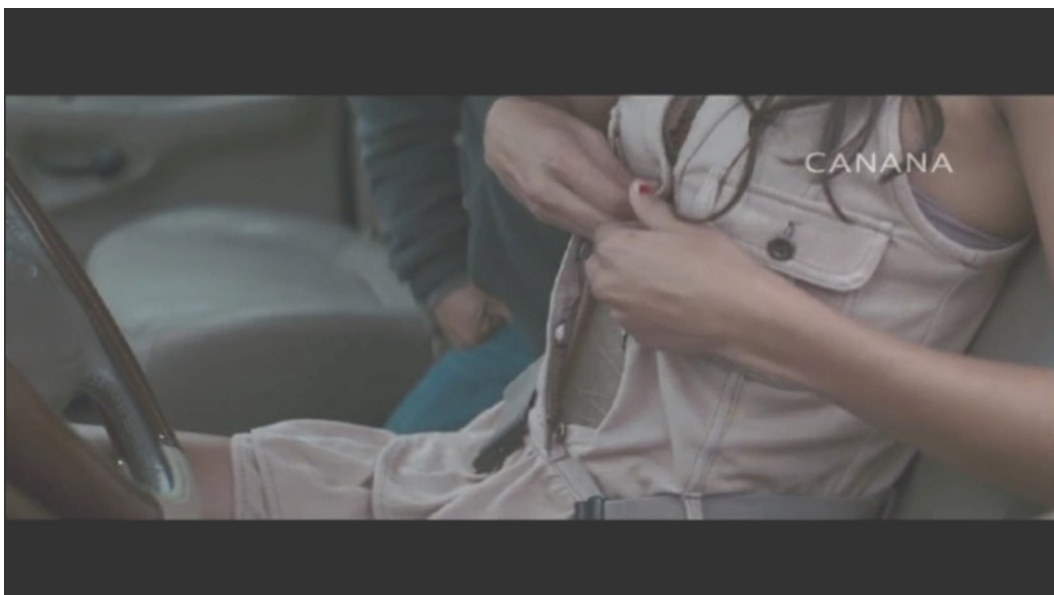
The third scene where Laura's semi-naked body comes to view is at her home, where she showers and is ordered to put on lingerie by Lino. Although Laura is not seen completely naked, the viewer is shocked by the vulnerability and helplessness suggested by the scene.

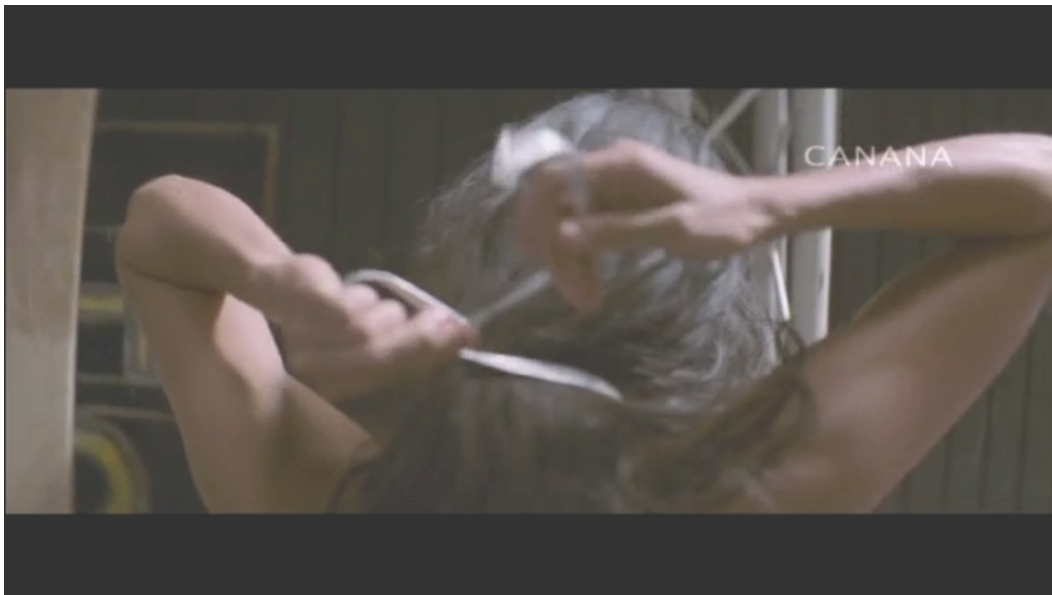
**Still N.29**

The next morning Laura is covered in grease and dollars, and then dressed up by Lino.

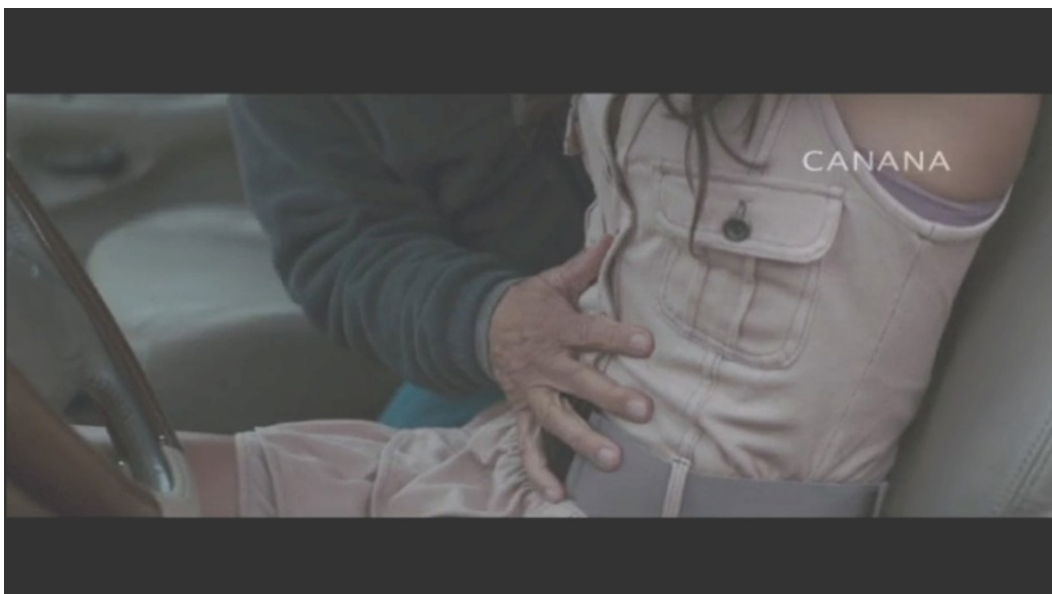
**Still N.30**

Her body is once again checked by the American official who takes the money from her and delivers the weapons she is to take back to Tijuana. After accomplishing her mission, Laura is taken back to the pageant where she puts on her special outfit to participate in the contest.

**Still N.31**

**Still N.32**

After winning – to everybody’s surprise including herself – the title of Miss Baja California, Laura is taken by Lino who rapes her in the front seat of a car. Next morning, Lino takes her to have breakfast with the Mexican General as a prize, in order to stage an ambush. Once again Laura’s body is the stage upon which drug cartels and authorities clash.

**Still N.33**

The appropriation of Laura’s body throughout *Miss Bala* inspires deep reflections regarding the United State and Mexico’s political and military relations. Both American and Mexican policy makers have based their decisions

on the premise that drug trafficking cartels present the gravest threat to Mexican security and would therefore be a security top priority. The counterdrug strategies carried out since President Calderón came into power were modeled on former U.S. President Richard Nixon in 1971, prioritizing the enforcement of laws prohibiting drug sale and consumption, ensuring harsh punitive measures for consumers and vendors and putting firmly in place interdiction strategies.<sup>310</sup>

However, many analysts argue that Mexican and American policies mimic the model of the “war on terror”, as it is “being mounted on the back of hype, half-truths, omissions and outright falsehoods.”<sup>311</sup> The federal government ensures a semi-permanent role for the Armed Forces despite the absence of a declared state of emergency, which threatens civil liberties and individual human rights.<sup>312</sup> The lack of transparency and accountability on arbitrary security policies is compounded by the fact that the U.S. has a dominant role in the training of Mexican troops and provision of weapons, but Mexican society has no control over the content of these U.S. policies devised especially for Mexican forces. Mark Kleiman asserts that although Mexico’s current drug-trafficking problems relate almost entirely to exports to the United States, unfortunately, “the United States is central to Mexico’s drug problem, whereas Mexico is incidental to that of the United States.”<sup>313</sup>

### 3.3.

#### Conclusion

The constant appropriation of Laura’s body signals the inconsistencies in the official discourse which aims to assure funding and public support for the military model of combating illegal drug trafficking instead of eliminating the violence that devastates Mexican society, despite the losses and overwhelming evidence of the failure of current strategies; “the language of exaggerated threats infantilizes society with fear as it clears the way for militaristic, patriarchal

<sup>310</sup> CARLSEN, Laura. Mexico’s False Dilemma: Human Rights or Security. **Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights**. Vol. 10, N.3, Spring 2012, p.146.

<sup>311</sup> STOUT, Robert J. Do the United States and Mexico really want the Drug War to Succeed? **Monthly Review**. January 2012, Vol.63, Issue 8, p.43.

<sup>312</sup> CARLSEN, Laura. Mexico’s False Dilemma: Human Rights or Security. **Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights**. Vol. 10, N.3, Spring 2012, p.148.

<sup>313</sup> KLEIMAN, Mark. Surgical Strikes in the Drug Wars. **Foreign Affairs**. September/October 2011, Vol. 90, Issue 5, p.91.

measures.”<sup>314</sup> Focusing on the materialization of encounter on Laura’s body allows for the type of reflection suggested by Jacques Rancière. For a deeper grasp on the complex security situation that assails Mexico requires going beyond the investigation of *what* politics to the questions of when and where politics takes place, and how subjects experience political life.<sup>315</sup> Because Laura, gang members and authorities are always in motion and changing trajectories, the viewer is invited to look everywhere and nowhere for causes and effects, perpetrators and victims of the violent counter drug policies and the processes of the illegal drug trafficking itself: “although the story unfolds in Tijuana, the license plates are from California, the currency is dollars, the guns are imported from across the border, and the principal drug market is the United States. The carnage, however, remains in Mexico.”<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> CARLSEN, Laura. Sorting Reality From Hype: Drug War Doublespeak. **Counterpunch**. 13 March 2009.

<sup>315</sup> RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Translated by Stephen Corcoran. London: Continuum, 2010, 2010, p.27.

<sup>316</sup> SHEIKEN, Harley. Holding a Mirror to Mexico. **Berkley Review of Latin American Studies**. Fall 2011, Winter 2012, p.32.

## 4

### Conclusion

This dissertation departed from the notion that the socio-political historical separation between life and art is one of the facets of the exclusionary practices that have established hierarchical divisions between hierarchies of value that have structured modern Western political thought. These opposing binaries – such as rational/irrational, inside/outside, chaos/order, self/other, amongst many others – have been promoted – not accidentally but as a result of specific political choices – from metaphors to ‘legitimate’ frameworks through which the political can be observed, grasped, expressed. In order to make this first statement, this dissertation explored the debates surrounding postmodern theories, approaches and modes of thought: moves such as the ‘crisis of representation’, the ‘aesthetic turn’, and notions such as Fredric Jameson’s postmodern condition and the fragmented subject, and Derrida’s deconstruction and *différance*. These complex notions – by no means exhausted in this dissertation – paved the way for the second main argument made here: that artistic genres are able to reframe issues, repoliticizing aspects that have been cast as irrelevant, thus widening – and complexifying – the universe of possibilities for understanding and thinking about politics but also for generating means of political resistance.

Jacques Rancière’s discussion regarding dissensus and the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics was fundamental for the unfolding of this argument. Rancière asserts that genuine political and artistic activities produce forms of innovation that remove bodies from their assigned places in society, disrupting the structure of power relations and opening up space for reconceptualizations of political debates. Thus, it was argued that artistic manifestations are able to redistribute the sensible and repartition the perceptible, creating dissensus within established political ‘truths’. As argued Rancière, Deleuze and Derrida, the world of the arts is not divided from the world of ‘vital concerns’, and it is precisely within the plane of interference between them that one is able to find conditions of possibility for radical political thinking.

In this context, cinema as an art form has much to offer. The third main argument brought forward in this dissertation was based on Gilles Deleuze's notion that films are just as philosophical as philosophy itself, as they produce concepts and forms of intelligibility that move beyond the limits of mimetic representation. Analyzing Gilles Deleuze, André Bazin, Jacques Aumont and other prominent thinkers in the area of cinema, this thesis aimed to show that films have a way of triggering mental connections different from those present in daily lived experienced or obtained through textual practices. In this way, the work of Michael Shapiro was crucial to investigate the way in which films can transcend the limits of perception and, through their aesthetic properties, disrupt a supposed stable and 'essential' nature of reality.<sup>317</sup>

Departing from this theoretical standpoint, this dissertation aimed to relate specific cinematic resources present in the film *Miss Bala* to elements of the United States discourse on its 'war on drugs' policies towards Mexico. The objective was to provide critical insights that illuminate this problematic in a way that the traditional literature does not do. The intent here was not to criticize the literature itself but to provide new forms of analysis with which to examine the dominant discourse.

In this way, the third chapter analyzed Gerardo Naranjo's framing techniques. Naranjo's framing is characterized by two main moves: steadicam-driven filming that follows the main character at an arm's length; and the emphasis placed on the out-of-field scenes. These mechanisms allow the audience to be dragged into the film, to experience the character's reality from within, as the interplay between these two resources allows the audience to see and hear what cannot be seen or heard, and therefore coerces it to feel and imagine. Both of these elements were crucial to show at length and with great intensity the anguish and anxiety that drive the entire film. Laura's agony is further magnified through her incessant consent to all that surrounds her. The agony reflects a deep internalization of the rules and dynamics of the world of illicit drug trading and violence. However, Laura's pain becomes the viewer's pain and her consent and passivity are laid upon the viewer as well. This has important consequences for

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<sup>317</sup> ZIAREK, Krzysztof. Carlos Saura: Cinematic Poiesis. In: \_\_\_\_\_. **Cinematic thinking: Philosophical Approaches to the New Cinema**. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008, p.71.



the way through which the audience copes with the fragments of reality presented in *Miss Bala*.

First, the framing of United States counterdrug policies as a ‘war on drugs’, as previously explored, is misguided and deceptive, and most importantly, a depoliticizing move. Tackling the drug trade from a warring perspective implies the existence of clear adversaries, the dichotomy between good (“us”) and evil (“them”), legitimizes the use of force to counter problems and a state of emergency that justify the gravest and most violent measures. The erasure of the boundary between the audience and the main character expressed in the agony that haunts the viewer throughout the film, however, enables the re-politization of the illegal drug trade issue, which involves a great deal more than just military counterdrug policies. Whereas this issue is always treated from the perspective of the public sphere – national and international security, public health – when Laura’s torment becomes the viewers’ torment the division between public and private is effaced. This suggests that the violent warlike U.S. policies should not be taken as natural and inevitable and that their content and form should always be at the forefront of the political debate. Laura’s body experiences drug cartels and government officials’ actions on a daily basis on the streets, in public spaces, in hotel rooms, in her own home. She suffers their consequences in a variety of forms: her mobility is restricted, her rights as a citizen are usurped, her freedom as a woman is stolen, her emotional and psychological health is shattered. In other words, when the audience experiences this destruction, it also discovers that the problematic of the illegal drug trade is already inside her/him; that politicizing this issue means acknowledging that debate starts within.

Second, emphasis was given to two types of materialization of encounters found in *Miss Bala*: the extensive use of mobile car scenes and of Laura dressing and undressing, or being dressed and undressed. Laura’s lack of control over her body – both through the way it is forced in and out of cars and clothes – attests to her vulnerability and to the multiplicity of roles she plays in the plot. These encounters serve to deconstruct fundamental dichotomies that form the basis of the United States discourse on its counterdrug policies. As explored in chapter 3, the United States affirms that drug cartels are a major threat to its national security, that a multifaceted policy of cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico and their agencies is paramount and that these military efforts have been effecting

gradual positive change. The discourse on cooperation cannot, however, cope with the situation; the division between states, state departments, criminals and law enforcers are put into question by Miss Bala's aesthetic elements. When Laura at times is forcefully transported in backseats and at other times assumes the position of driver and crosses the border into the United States, delivering money to U.S. officials and bringing back arms to the drug cartel; when she is assaulted by D.E.A. (U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency) agents who throw her on the ground and leave her unprotected, the categories used to frame the violence of the drug trade are broken and become irrelevant. Laura can be the victim and the perpetrator; the police can assume the roles of the law and the criminal and everything in between and around these supposedly fixed categories. These cinematic framings are able to deconstruct the hierarchical binaries that serve to depoliticize this issue and bring into visibility forces, images and concepts that have previously been ignored or obscured by realities represented by dominant discourse.

In sum, this thesis has argued that acknowledging Miss Bala as a powerful and legitimate tool through which one can approach the multiple realities of the United States counterdrug policies in Mexico allows for alternative insights and criticisms to the official discourse on the issue. The film's aesthetic elements analyzed in the previous chapter are offered as fresh mechanisms with which to re-politicize questions that have been kept outside of the political debate and break dichotomies that limit political thought.

These kinds of questions were suggested in the beginning of this dissertation, and can be recovered in this concluding section with greater precision: what is the current dominant way of formulating the problems that surround the illegal drug trade and the ensuing violence that plague Mexico and the United States? What are the forces at work, namely, governmental discourses and policies, that allow those formulations to persist? Whose perspectives on problems gain recognition in the media and amongst specialists and laymen alike, and whose perspectives fail to be recognized? How do the conceptions, juxtapositions, and alternative subjects and their thought worlds – such as the universes of many 'Lauras' and 'Linos' that physically experience the violence of the drug trade daily, materialized onto their bodies – carry the power to disrupt the dominant modes of intelligibility? How can the study of these alternative subjects and thought worlds – whose

perspectives are empowered once the ‘world of the arts’ is recognized as ‘the world of vital concerns’ – open up politically relevant spaces for these subjects? There are no easy answers to these questions, but lingering on them may allow for a modest step towards understanding these extremely complex issues through a fresh perspective; it may encourage approaching these issues in a manner that seeks primarily to protect the individuals whose bodies are implicated daily by official U.S. policies.

Finally, inspired by Michael Shapiro’s own words, images can and do think politically. Photographs, art works and other visual arts such as films have the ability to provoke the senses and mental faculties, poking wounds in a way that textual expression does not, with crucial consequences for thinking and acting politically. Therefore, consumers, public officials and all those who experience the problems associated with the illegal drug trade – directly or indirectly – are able to reclaim their roles as political subjects. While the reader may interact with the questions posed by this text throughout its pages, the dark and painful cinematic realities present in *Miss Bala* will certainly torment viewers long after the movie has ended.

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