AESTHETICS: BEAUTY AND THE SUBLIME IN THE REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY FILM AND NOVEL IN SPAIN AND LATIN AMERICA

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the aesthetic concepts of beauty and the sublime in the representation of violence, in several Latin American novels and films (Fernando Vallejo's La virgen de los sicarios (1994); Jorge Franco Ramos's Rosario Tijeras (1999); La virgen de los sicarios (2000), directed by Barbet Schoeder, and Rodrigo-D No Futuro (1990) directed by Víctor Gaviria, and Amores Perros (2000) directed by Alejandro González Irarritu); as well as in Spanish novels and films (Juan Marsé's, Si te dicen que caí (1973); Si te dicen que caí (1989), Amantes (1991) and Libertarias (1996), directed by Vicente Aranda).

In the above-mentioned works, violence is a central theme. Through close analysis of these films and novels I explain how the violence depicted in them clearly serves an aesthetic purpose. To explain the aesthetic value of these films, I analyze them by means of classical definitions of the concepts of beauty and the sublime. I argue that these concepts relate to the aesthetics of pleasure, which are used by the authors and filmmakers to suture their readers and viewers into the text. I explain how the violence, cruelty, and brutality of war remain in the collective memory of the people of Colombia, Mexico and Spain and permeate their cultural representations. I also explain that cruelty is
necessary for artistic creation and finally, I argue that this aesthetic creation serves a political purpose for a specific cultural identity.

The works of Longinus, Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant provide a theoretical framework to understand the identification of art and violence. Sigmund Freud’s theory of the libido and Jacques Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage, are examined to explain how film narratives and novels of violence can work at the unconscious level to suture the viewer to the text, providing a pleasurable experience closely tied to the sublime. Finally, Friederich Nietzsche's postulates on the need of the true artist to devoid himself of morality to be able to create serves to understand the task of these filmmakers and novelists who want to portray the crude reality of their countries.
I dedicate this dissertation to my daughter
Manuela

And in loving memory of
my father and sister
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PREFACE

Pain is the precursor of change
The Passion of the Christ (Mel Gibson)

I am a pacifist. I have always been an ardent defender of peace and peace movements. Consequently, this dissertation is certainly not meant to be an apology for violence, but an analysis of the aesthetic value of the representation of violence in fiction. I feel compelled to explain the reason for the above statement because in my many years as teacher of literature, and as a passionate scholar of film and literature, I have found that the films and novels that have become not only my own favorite, but those that belong to the canon, contain extreme amounts of violence. This dichotomy has led me in my pursuit to discover wherein lies the aesthetic appeal to violence. People of all walks of life seem to be fascinated by real and fictional spectacles of violence and violent death.

One day, on February 3, 2004, while reading “The Lantern,” the Ohio State University (OSU) student newspaper, an article on the front page caught my attention. The title read: “Execution process continuing to change: Cameras, time of day just some of the new policies.” The article read as follows:
Since Ohio resumed executions of capital offenders in 1999, the dignity of the inmate and the professionalism of the staff have been a top priority. Today’s execution of John Glenn Roe, 41, which will take place at 10 a.m. at the southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville, is no exception. The staff expects the process to be carried out with the precision and professionalism executions require […] Roe will be the 10th person to die by lethal injection since Berry’s execution. Berry experienced a somewhat different execution process than Roe will face today. The main differences the two processes are the time of day and the introduction of cameras into the preparation room. The American Civil Liberties Union filed a suit with the ODRC to allow the press access to the entire process of the execution. The result of the suit was the introduction of cameras into the preparation room…during the execution this morning only Warden Haviland and the execution team leader will be in the death chamber. The rest of the witnesses will look through large glass windows.” (1-2)

The expression “with the precision and professionalism that executions require,” bewildered me. One question that jumped to my mind was: How does one execute someone “with precision and professionalism” and make a public spectacle of killing that person? The fact that there were cameras and large glass windows to provide the medium through which the witnesses could observe the “professional spectacle” also distressed me.

Watching someone’s execution is not something new, of course. As explained by Alan Sheridan, the translator of Michel Foucault’s Discipline and Punish, supplice or the public torture and execution of criminals provided one of the most popular spectacles of eighteenth-century France (i). The spectacle then, was more gruesome than “the professional spectacle” offered to the press in Ohio in 2004. In France on March 2, 1757, Damiens, the regicide was condemned to death. Foucault describes Damien’s death in detail: “the regicide was ... to be
taken and conveyed in a cart ... in the said cart, to the Place de Greve, where, on a scaffold that will be erected there, the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pinchers ... and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire...” (3)

The spectacle of death, which is also commonly found in works of fiction, brought to my mind Joel Black’s comment in his book The Aesthetics of Murder. In the introduction Black reminds us of Ibsen’s 1890 play Hedda, where the heroine tells her lover to take his life, but she wants him to “do it beautifully.” Apparently, she wanted him to shoot himself in the head. However, as Black explains very well, we all know that a shot in the head is one of the most gruesome spectacles of violent deaths. So what can be so beautiful about suicide or about taking someone’s life? (2) Where lies the aesthetic appeal of violent death? In his comments, the author makes reference to the fact that in A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful Edmund Burke had addressed the issue of the spectacle of an execution as something that would compete with a theatrical spectacle. Burke had expressed his bewilderment when he heard about the excitement expressed by the public upon the possibility of being able to observe the execution of Lord Lovat. He said:

Chuse a day, in which to represent the most sublime and affecting tragedy we have; appoint the most favourite actors; spare no cost upon the scenes and decorations; unite the greatest efforts of poetry, painting and music; and when you have collected your audience, just at the moment when
their minds are erect with expectation, let it be reported that a state criminal of high rank is on the point of being executed in the adjoining square; in a moment the emptiness of the theatre would demonstrate the comparative weakness of the imitative arts, and proclaim the triumph of the real sympathy. (47)

Burke explains how the spectacle of a real life killing, in this case an execution, is a more sublime experience than watching a performance, no matter how remarkably similar to a real killing it is. He says, "I am convinced we have a degree of delight and no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others..." (45).

In either case, the real, as in a public execution, or the fictional, as in Ibsen's play, the fact is that people seem to be fascinated by the spectacle of death and especially violent death. In our time we experience spectacles of death daily thanks to the mass media. The media informs us of violent everyday occurrences, and lately massive deaths, if we take into account the numerous instances of terrorist attacks around the world, the many massacres that occur in different parts of the planet and the individual murders and suicides that take place in remote and apparently tranquil cities, towns and villages.

The media tries to manipulate the images and information in an aesthetically pleasing manner, in order to either not offend or shock the public, or on the contrary to shock, manipulate and lure the public in any way possible, while at the same time trying to comply with certain implicit and explicit rules of publication. Despite the fact that the images and information are presented
“artistically” or, as mentioned above, in the analysis of the manner in which an execution is carried out nowadays, “professionally”, the public is still shocked, perturbed but unconsciously or consciously provoked. As Mel Gibson said in an interview on Feb 15, 2004, with Diane Sawyer on ABC News Primetime about the controversy that his movie The Passion of the Christ was generating: “It’s very violent. I wanted it to be shocking, to push the viewer over the edge.” Thus, it seems that the purpose of the filmmaker, when showing scenes of violence, as well as that of the media, when doing the same, is to elicit a response from the viewer.

Although some areas of the world have historically been considered violent because of religious, ethnic and political conflicts, violence is taking other magnitudes, as an effect of globalization, open-market economies, and the influence of the mass media. Considering all of the above, violence is a topic that again has begun to call the attention of sociologists, anthropologists and historians around the world.

In Civilization and its Discontents (1930) Sigmund Freud concludes that the aggressive nature of man is something primary and instinctual. Man is a “savage beast” who when provoked will have no consideration for others of his own kind. He further adds: “As a rule this cruel aggressiveness waits for some provocation or puts itself at the service of some other purpose, whose goal might also have been reached by milder measures...” The escalating violence and the
new divisions in the world nowadays could easily be explained if we consider Freud’s assertion and even more if we consider his further statement, citing Thomas Hobbes: Homo homini lupus (man is a wolf to man) (69). The division between the Muslim world and the USA and its allies, and their “war on terrorism,” could be an example of this escalating violence. It is a very complex problem, which is not the topic of this research and thus won’t be analyzed here, but it has profound economic, political and religious historical roots, which were not resolved in a timely manner and thus, have escalated without proportion. This is one of the many violent spectacles the mass media invites the public to witness everyday, as expressed above, in aesthetically pleasing ways.

In literature and/or film, violence is not a new topic, either. It is currently a central topic in the contemporary cultural aesthetic. The postmodern condition with its skepticism on the ideals of progress, reason, and science and the death of ideology are reflected in the works of the recent decades, both in the Humanities and the Arts. Postmodernism continues with the pessimism characteristic of Modernism and at the same time, as a pluralistic, anti-essentialist trend it connects all the new features of the capitalist world in a type of bricolage.

This dissertation addresses the questions: Where lies the grandeur of the contemporary violent movie and novel? Is it a gratuitous depiction of violence and ultraviolence in film and narrative fiction, which lures the post-modern viewer/reader and thus sells well? Are the great contemporary Spanish and
Latin American novels and films in any way aesthetic? Have the great contemporary film directors and novelists lost their perspective in their eagerness to sell? Does art lie in the eye of the beholder? Or does it lie in the art form itself? Are these authors and directors trying to propose a new kind of aesthetic proper to their own culture but which also maintains a coherent dialogue with the cinema of the rest of the world?

To answer the above questions this dissertation specifically examines contemporary Latin American novels and films (the Colombian Jorge Franco Ramos's *Rosario Tijeras* (1999); Fernando Vallejo's *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994); *La virgen de los sicarios* (2000), directed by Barbet Schœder, *Rodrigo-D No Futuro* (1990) directed by Víctor Gaviria, and the Mexican, *Amores Perros* (2000) directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu); as well as in Spanish novels and films (Juan Marsés's *Si te dicen que caí* (1973); *Si te dicen que caí* (1989), *Amantes* (1991) and *Libertarias* (1996), directed by Vicente Aranda. In the above-mentioned works, violence is a central theme.

Through close analysis of these films and novels I explain how the violence depicted in them clearly serves an aesthetic purpose. To explicate their aesthetic value, I examine them in terms of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant's classical concepts of beauty and the sublime, and more modern and contemporary psychoanalytic interpretations in literary and film theory which rely on the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, and which closely
speak about the sublime. I assert that these concepts relate to the aesthetics of pleasure, which are used by the authors and filmmakers to suture, or stitch, their readers and viewers into the text\textsuperscript{1}. I explain how the violence, cruelty, and brutality of war remain in the collective memory of the people of these nations and permeate their cultural representations; I argue that cruelty is necessary for artistic creation; and finally I contend that this aesthetic creation serves a political purpose and proposes a new form of art which is specific to a nation and culture.

The concept of violence that I am interested in studying deals mostly with violence as a result of social, economic and political changes. For example, the Colombian novels and films deal with the sicario, which is a socio-economic and political phenomenon of the 80’s and 90’s in Colombia, but which has historical roots. The violence of the Spanish films and novels that I am analyzing relate directly or indirectly to the effects of the Civil War (1936-1939). Amores Perros, the Mexican film, is not about the Mexican Revolution but it does make allusion, through the character of “El Chivo,” to the political movements and student revolts and student massacres of the 60’s and 70’s, that occurred in Mexico and shook the world. Amores Perros basically depicts with cruel realism urban...
violence, and I contend that it is a direct consequence of huge migrations and the
displacement of population of peasants into the big cities, in this case, Mexico
City. In his essay “Melodrama and Social Comedy in the Cinema of the Golden
Age,” Rafael Hernández Rodríguez explains that even though the Mexican
Revolution had been largely concerned with the injustices the peasants and
farmers had to endure, it was directly responsible for the transformation of the
city. He adds:

During the first decades of this century, Mexico City became the
privileged space where the contradictions of a country struggling for its
modernization became evident. No one failed to recognize the
contradictions of life in the big city and its repercussions on Mexican
cinema, although not everyone interpreted them in the same way...The
city thus became an ideal space for artists, intellectuals, and filmmakers to
explore and question both the obsession with progress and the sacrifices
that such obsession could imply for a traditional society. (101)

One of the directors that presented the drama of life in the big city was Luis
Buñuel in Los Olvidados (1956); however, to avoid censure he opened the film
with the observation that what the audience was going to see was a consequence
of life in any big city, like London, Paris or New York. The violence presented in
Amores Perros is contemporary urban violence, which like Buñuel’s film could
represent the violence in any big city.

In this dissertation, I argue that much of the violence found in
contemporary Mexican, Colombian and Spanish cultural productions reflects the
“collective memory” of the people in these countries who have suffered centuries
of violence. The collective memory I am talking about refers to the "historical memory." As Maurice Halwachs explains, "historical memory" is not what a person remembers directly, but what is stimulated in indirect ways through reading or listening, or through commemorating festive occasions, when people assemble to remember the actions and accomplishments of other members of the group who have already died. That is, the past is "stored and interpreted by social institutions" (24).

Violence is something difficult to explain in a simple manner, as J. David Slocum explains in his book *Violence and American Cinema* (2), but from the onset it is necessary to clarify that the purpose of this study is not to make any moral judgments about artistic creation or to find justifications, or to make a distinction between "legitimate" or "illegitimate" forms of violence. In this dissertation, I will be analyzing how violence is used aesthetically in film and novel, and the manner in which it is done in contemporary Spanish and Latin American productions for a specific political and ideological purpose.

I have divided my work into six chapters, including the conclusion. I devote Chapter One to the theoretical foundations of aesthetics and to a brief exposition of psychoanalytic theory as it relates to the experience of the sublime. In my opinion, it is essential to have a thorough understanding of the concepts of beauty and the sublime from their first application in art, to be able to
understand how they are related to contemporary psychoanalytic theories of film
and novel.

First, Longinus provides a basic theoretical framework for understanding
the origins of the concept of the sublime. In his book *Peri Hupsous*, better known
as *On the Sublime*, Longinus examines the concept of the sublime in “great
writing.” In his study, he explains how the writer needs to go beyond the best
rules of rhetoric, beyond the powerful, the charming and persuasive, to carry the
reader away and “sweep him off his feet”. Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical
Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), which
has become one of the most influential eighteenth century treatises on aesthetics,
will also be useful in understanding the modern use of the terms sublime and
beautiful. Burke goes beyond the rules of rhetoric to study beauty and the
sublime in nature and art. Immanuel Kant’s *Observations on the Feeling of the
Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764) and *Critique of Judgment* (1790) also examines
beauty and the sublime in art and nature, but concentrates mainly on nature. For
both of these philosophers, beauty and the sublime are related to the passions.
For Kant “the sublime moves but the beautiful charms” (*Observations* 47). The
sublime can stir feelings of terror but because we are superior beings,
intellectually and morally, and capable of reasoning, we can overcome feelings of
fear when confronted with natural objects that are fearful (48). The two
philosophers agree that what is sublime is not a manifestation of the beautiful.
To understand how the viewer/spectator is sutured to the text, to experience beauty and/or the sublime, I use psychoanalytic theory as it has been introduced and developed in Literary and Film Theory. I specifically rely on Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan’s studies on the construction of subjectivity. Freud’s studies on sexuality and his studies on the violent nature of man are discussed, but more importantly his theory of Eros vs. Thanatos, that speak of man’s innate instinct for self-preservation and sexual pleasure, on the one hand, and on his destructive and death instinct, on the other hand. In terms of Lacan’s theory, I also concentrate on his theories of the mirror-stage and his concept of the Real, as they relate to the experience of beauty and particularly the sublime.

Friederich Nietzsche contends that to be able to create, the true artist has to liberate himself of all morality. I have included his argument in this chapter, as I believe that to be able to portray the crude reality of the countries, subject of my dissertation, the novelists and filmmakers have to free themselves from moral and societal constraints.

In Chapter Two, I establish the context of this study. My argument is that one cannot fully comprehend the violence depicted in these novels and films and appreciate their aesthetic value unless one is fully aware of the circumstances in which this violence occurs. Even though beauty and the sublime are transcendental values, i.e. they are universal in their application, understanding the specificity of the violence shown makes the experience of the viewer/reader
even more intense and meaningful. Thus, I include a very short account of the violence that has been part of the history of Colombia, Mexico and Spain, to explain why such violence continues to be a pervasive topic in films and narratives of these countries.

In Chapter Three I examine the Colombian novels and films. I have chosen Vallejo's *La virgen de los sicarios*, and the corresponding film version by Schoeder, Franco's *Rosario Tijeras*, and Gaviria's *Rodrigo D- No futuro*. In this chapter, I explain how beauty and the sublime are experienced by the viewer/reader through the characters and situations created by the filmmakers and writers in Latin America. This is most easily seen in the characters of Rosario of *Rosario Tijeras*, and Alexis and Wilmar in the novel *La virgen de los sicarios*. Franco and Vallejo have sought to elevate their characters to a higher echelon in order to redeem them. The sicario needs to be understood and forgiven. I also contend that Vallejo's prose contains some of the elements of the sublime, which Longinus analyzed in his essay on the sublime, *Peri Hupsous*.

In Chapter Four, I concentrate on the Spanish films and novels to study the aesthetization of violence in the terms proposed in my theoretical framework (see Marsé's *Si te dicen que caí*, Vicente Aranda's films, *Libertarias*, *Si te dicen que caí* and *Amantes*). In this chapter I propose that beauty and the sublime are found not in the narrative of the films and novels, or in the general structure, i.e., the audiovisual design of the film, but in the very extreme situations presented.
The sublime is experienced by the viewers/readers in the scenes of excessive violence, masoquism and sadism. We, akin to the characters or the story, become voyeurs and delight in the intensity of what we are watching. However, it is important to understand that the violence of these films has a political purpose. As Mel Gibson had said about his recent film The Passion of the Christ, in his interview with Diana Sawyer, mentioned above: “It is a violent movie against violence.” In the same manner as Gibson, Vicente Aranda’s films are excessively violent, but they are clearly against violence. He is undoubtedly exposing and denouncing a political system where crime, torture, lies, and cruelty were an everyday occurrence. In this chapter I also draw a parallel between Vallejo and Marsé, in terms of what Longinus considered “great writing.”

I dedicate Chapter Five to the analysis of a Mexican film, Alejandro González Iñárritu’s film Amores Perros (2000) as another example in Latin America of the extreme depiction of urban violence, in an excellent experiment of postmodern filmmaking. In the case of Amores Perros the sublimity and the beauty of the film can be found in the structural design and creative choices of the filmmaker. As opposed to the other Latin American films, it is not in the characters that we find beauty and sublimity, because in this case there is no forgiveness. The characters are to be condemned. The filmmaker does not seek to redeem them or to apologize for their actions.
In the final chapter, Chapter Six, I conclude, by exploring what has already been written about the representation of violence in film and novel in Spain and in Latin America (specifically Colombia and Mexico). I express the urgent need for further research and I explain that the violence in fiction of each different country corresponds to a completely different cultural aesthetic very specific to each country.

Post-modern contemporary authors and filmmakers have adopted different modes of artistic representation, such as pastiche, parody and ironization. In the movies, these forms are represented in scenes of violence, which seem excessive and could be interpreted as gratuitous. Descriptions of torture and terror could also be interpreted as lacking any reason, beyond that of the pleasure some derive from inflicting pain or watching others inflict pain. Nonetheless, as a result of this study it is possible to conclude that: a) the post-modern representation of violence in these contemporary films and novels serves an aesthetic purpose; b) the violence, cruelty, and brutality of war remain in the collective memory of the people of the nations analyzed and it permeates in their cultural representations up to this date; c) cruelty is necessary for artistic creation and the brutality with which violence is presented lies at the heart of the author and director's aesthetic theory; and d) this aesthetic creation serves a political purpose to expose a reality, to denounce a system and to propose a new form of art which is specific to a nation, a culture and an historical moment.
CHAPTER 1

THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF AESTHETICS: BEAUTY, THE
SUBLIME AND CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS IN FILM AND
LITERARY THEORY

Nothing contributes to greatness
as much as noble passion in the right place
Longinus

I am all that is, and that was, and that ever shall be,
and no mortal hath raised the veil from my face
Temple of Isis (Mother Nature)

To fully understand the concept of beauty and the sublime, as it relates to
aesthetic representation and appreciation, in its modern and/ or postmodern use,
it is necessary to examine its origins. Longinus first introduced the concept of
the sublime in his essay Peri Hipsous, written in the third century A.D. or earlier,
as some critiques claim. This book had a great influence on Edmund Burke, one
of the classic theorists of the sublime, during his college years in Trinity College
in Dublin. Burke spent almost seven years formulating his theory and
consequently published his findings in 1757 in an essay titled A Philosophical
Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. Immanuel
Kant subsequently was influenced by Burke's study and in 1764 published *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* and later, in 1790, *The Critique of Judgment*. Despite the fact that these aesthetic interpretations might be considered outmoded by some, my intention in this chapter is to show how their theories relate to more contemporary concepts used in Film and Literary Theory, which are grounded in the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.

The aesthetic concept that I will be exploring in this dissertation has to do with the “aesthetics of pleasure” and the above-mentioned concepts relate to my study in that they all speak of pain and pleasure. Beauty or the beautiful and the sublime, as we will see later, have to do with the intense feelings and emotions—or “passions” as Burke and Kant referred to them—a person feels when confronted with certain objects or situations. As these theorists contend, and we will see later through my analysis, we many times have access to pleasure through pain. As viewers and readers we are confronted with cinematic and literary images that arouse very intense emotions of terror, fear, horror and pain, yet we delight in them. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud had referred to this as “the dramatic and imitative art of adults, directed towards the spectator, like performances in tragedy, to make him feel pleasure through painful impressions” (16). We delight in images of the outmost beauty or of
outrageous savagery and brutality presented by the camera and the text, or in reality.

I also contend that, despite the fact that the directors and writers that are the subjects of my study, play with this desire for pain/pleasure of the viewer/reader, they also have a hidden political agenda, which radically subverts cultural ideology. They know how to lure the viewer into looking because as Jacqueline Rose, quoted by Judith Mayne in *Cinema and Spectatorship*, states: “the power of film as an ideological apparatus rests on the mechanisms of identification and sexual fantasy which we all seem to participate in, but which – outside the cinema – are, for the most part, only ever admitted on the couch” (22). The portrayal of brutality, in many cases totally devoid of morality, by memorable characters, is a way to induce a reaction in the spectator to make him feel pleasure, which can be sexual pleasure, or to make him think, reflect or take a stand against or in favor of something.

It is necessary to add, before proceeding, that I am aware that in this time and age, the experience and meaning of sublimity has been dislocated and has shifted to encompass other experiences. I am talking about the innovations in film and the new technologies used in the media in general, such as digital imaging, a revolution that impacts our everyday present life. These new

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2 The theorists to whom I refer, especially Burke and Kant, use the concepts "beautiful" and "beauty" interchangeably. I will do the same in this dissertation.
technologies have aided in providing scenes in films that give a sense of
overpowering enormity, which overwhelm our imagination. There are spectacles
of war, of enormous armies, of destruction, of unimaginable worlds etc., in
fiction and reality, that play on the minds of the spectator to shock, empower,
terrorize, move, question, and in general terms, brainwash into the present day
system, especially when we think of Hollywood. As Crowther says:

This displacement of the sublime has carried over into the twentieth
century albeit with a change of emphasis. The burden of the aesthetic
spectacle has shifted somewhat from revolutionary politics to the
products and epiphenomena bound up with technological innovation in
the capitalist and state capitalist systems. Military parades and
mechanized warfare exert renewed fascination, the image of the
twentieth-century city as a vast anonymous domain of mysterious and
violent multitudes figures large in the subject-matter of literature, painting
and the cinema. Images of space travel and science fiction likewise enjoy
enormous popularity. In all these examples we find a fascination with
vastness and power that transcends any immediate practical relevance for
us. We experience the sublime” (165).

Nevertheless, I contend that the Latin American and Spanish movies analyzed in
this dissertation, made by independent filmmakers, and the novels written by
authors, who are counter-mainstream, have a particular message to convey and
thus they present a different kind of aesthetics. They lure the viewer/ reader by
interpellating him, by presenting a different kind of aesthetics, equally terrible
and overpowering, which contains an ideological message and which seeks to
promote a sense of cultural and national identity.

3 I think this is especially true in science fiction and fantasy films such as the trilogy of
world of the Middle-Earth, the army of Orcs, overwhelm the imagination of children and adults.
The beautiful and the sublime in Longinus, Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant

Aesthetics, from the Greek aesthetes or “perceptible things,” had become an important concept in German philosophy in the 18th and 19th centuries. Thomas de Quincey had used the term in his essay of 1827 “On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts” to evaluate acts of murder. He wanted to examine murder, not in terms of a moral perspective, but aesthetically. He, like other romantic writers, wanted to examine the German preoccupation for the field of aesthetics, so much in vogue since Immanuel Kant had written about it in Observations on the Feeling of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1764) and his Critique of Judgment, (1790) based on Edmund Burke’s essay a Philosophical Enquiry into The Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757).

In the preface to the first edition Burke explained the difficulties he was having with formulating an exact theory of our “passions,” or of knowing their exact source. He couldn’t find any consistent principles and he thought that others were confronted with the same type of confusion. He argued that, for example, the concepts of the sublime and the beautiful were often confounded and that they were indiscriminately applied, even to things that were opposites. He remarked that even Longinus in his remarkable study On The Sublime had classified things totally opposed to each other under the common name of the Sublime.
Longinus had already had an influence on English criticism for 100 years thanks to John Hall’s translation in 1652, but his concept of the sublime did not become known in most of Europe until the translation by the Frenchman Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux in 1674. Boileau was the first to introduce the concept of the sublime for *Peri Hupsous*. The word “sublime” had been used extensively, but not until Boileau’s translation did it begin to have the literary significance it acquired then. Boileau wielded a powerful influence both on the general conception of the sublime and on the vocabulary used in writings about it, with terms such as “extraordinary”, “surprising”, and “marvelous” (Longinus 8).

Longinus had begun to examine the concept of the sublime in terms of what was at his time considered great writing, but he wanted to go beyond the rules and techniques that were the norm throughout the Greco-Roman centuries. He was interested in finding out what made the supreme passages great. He had examined a text by Caecilius about great writing, which basically concentrated his attention on the correct use of rhetorical rules and techniques: on sentence structure, rhythm, figures, and the rest, and dwelled almost exclusively upon particular phrases figures, sentences, and expressions, but lost sight of the more general excellences (xv).

For Longinus, great writing had to do more with the capacity to select vital details and to put them together in an artistic whole rather than with following word-by-word rules and norms. He believed that great writing had a
high distinction of thought and expression to which great writers owed their supremacy. He expressed it in these terms:

Great writing does not persuade; it takes the reader out of himself. The startling and amazing is more powerful than the charming and persuasive, if it is indeed true that to be convinced is usually within our control whereas amazement is the result of an irresistible force beyond the control of any audience... but greatness appears suddenly; like a thunderbolt it carries all before it and reveals the writer’s full power in a flash. (4)

Thus, for Longinus, great writing had more to do with the capacity to express emotion, with such power as to carry the reader away. The effect on the reader is intense: “it is not to persuasion but to ecstasy that passages of extraordinary genius carry the hearer, and the effect is intense pleasure.” Lowly emotions as pity, grief and fear had nothing to do with great writing, according to him. Therefore, in his view Homer, Demosthenes and Plato were the demigods of literature. In his opinion, Homer, had “magnified the divine” (11).

In the Iliad, says Longinus, the grandeur of the gods is magnified with superlative imagery. Let’s look at one of the example he provides: “In terror Hades, Lord of all the dead/ Leapt screaming from his throne, for fear of Poseidon, / The god of earthquake, cleave the earth apart...” For Longinus, hence, Homer had torn the earth apart, laid the underworld bare, and had made heaven and hell, and all that is mortal and immortal share the perils. He, in sum, had made everything terrifying. Thus, Homer was capable of achieving greatness
because of the way he effectively and harmoniously joined all significant elements and sifted out the irrelevant, the frivolous and the artificial (19).

Demosthenes, on the other hand, according to Longinus, was “forceful, rapid, powerful, and intense.” He was capable of moments of extreme passion, which “swept the audience off its feet.” Longinus compared him with “lightning or thunderbolt, which burns and ravages.” He described Plato's prose as a smooth and copious stream, which nevertheless achieved greatness, because he had emulated and imitated the great prose writers and poets before him. For Longinus the genius of the ancients is an inspiration and something worth imitating (21).

Other important elements that Longinus considered necessary to achieve greatness and produce a total effect, was the emotional tone with which prose needed to be embedded, word arrangement and composition. Word arrangement had to do with rhythm and with the purpose of producing a musical effect, because: “Beautiful language, we are told, is music, but music which expresses thought and which therefore appeals not only to man’s emotions but to his mind as well” (xvi). Because the choice of words, whether grand or commonplace, said Longinus, needed to endow a discourse with grandeur, beauty, passion and power, among others, in such a manner as to endow the discourse with a “speaking soul” (41).
Longinus’s study on the sublime was derived from his interest on examining the sublimity on the great works, however Edmund Burke carried his study further to include beauty and the sublime in art and nature. Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry* became one of the most influential eighteenth century treatises on aesthetics dealing with both of these concepts. In his study he defines the sublime as:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror is a source of the sublime: that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure. (39)

Burke’s analysis was extremely meticulous and he proceeded with care to examine one by one the elements of the great and the sublime in nature that caused passion. First, he named twenty-two different passions caused by the sublime, such as: terror, obscurity, power, privation (vacuity, darkness, solitude, silence), vastness, infinity, magnificence, colour, smells (bitters, stenches), and pain, to name a few. The most powerful passion for him was astonishment: “that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.” He said that once the mind is so filled with this passion it could not consider any other or even reason about the great power that caused it. That element in nature is so great that it takes over the mind with irresistible force, says Burke. To him astonishment is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree.
Admiration, reverence and respect are other qualities, but of an inferior degree (53).

But to Burke, terror is the passion that robs the mind of all its powers of reasoning and acting. To him, anything in nature that causes terror to our sight is sublime. Indeed, he says “terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime.” And later he adds, “... but if the sublime in art is productive of delight, the sublime in nature is a form of paralysis, a literally stunning invasion.” Thus, the sight of the ocean or of a vast landscape can produce feelings of terror given their dimensions and their possibility of danger. For him fear which is dread of pain or death, works in the same manner as actual pain (57).

One of the main aspects of Burke’s theory of the sublime is his argument that when a person confronted with an object or an experience in nature, which might produces great fear or terror, is at a sufficient distance that he will not be harmed, his feelings are appeased. This feeling of being safe, which is related to self-preservation, produces relief and pleasure, which he termed delight. He expressed this in the following manner:

…if the pain and terror are so modified as not to be actually noxious; if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person, as these emotions clear the parts, whether fine, or gross, of a dangerous and troublesome incumbrance, they are capable of producing delight; not pleasure, but a sort of delightful horro, a sort of tranquility tinged with terror; which as it belongs to self-preservation is one of the strongest of all passions. Its object is the
sublime. Its highest degree I call astonishment; the subordinate degrees are awe, reverence and respect... (136)

Thus, the feeling of delight or pleasure is related to the fact that the person realizes that he won’t be harmed, that he is still alive and this sensation of relief is what causes delight. Here, we can relate it to Freud’s theory of Eros vs. Thanatos, the life instinct and the death instinct, which are in constant turmoil. Throughout our lives we are in full pursuit of the “pleasure principle” despite danger or threat of our lives and even if the pleasure sought involves pain.4

For Burke, beauty and the sublime were of a very different nature, “one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure” (113). Beauty refers to objects that cause feelings of passion and love: “By beauty I mean, that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it” (91). Furthermore, he adds, “beauty demands no assistance from our reasoning; even the will is unconcerned; the appearance of beauty as effectually causes some degree of love in us, as the application of ice or fire produces the ideas of heat or cold” (92). With respect to the feelings of the beautiful and to determine where beauty lies and Burke proceeded in a similar manner as he had done with respect to his study on the sublime. In his inquiry on the feelings of beautiful he included a series of qualities such as proportion, fitness, delicacy, smoothness, grace, elegance, feeling and sounds, among others: “For sublime objects are vast

4 Current popularity of “extreme sports” e.g. bungee-jumping, car-racing, etc. support this notion.
in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be small... beauty should not be obscure, the great ought to be dark and gloomy, beauty should be light and delicate…” (113). He claimed that beauty is not to be found in perfection and not necessarily dependent on positive qualities.

Burke’s study is based solely on observation and on his own personal experience and thus it has no scientific basis. However, later theorists formulated their own theories based on Burke’s findings. Immanuel Kant was one of them. Kant’s Critique of Judgment (1790) contains elements of Burke’s Enquiry, although he points to the limitations of Burke’s theoretical analysis, mainly because this analysis was based on subjective sensory experience and thus its lack of universal application. For example, in his analysis, Burke ignores the differences between life and art, the changes that occur when reality is transformed into art and also the question of “aesthetic” significance (Boulton xii).

The fundamentals of Kant’s aesthetic theory are contained in the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and in Part I of The Critique of Aesthetic Judgment - entitled the Analytic of the Beautiful. In Observations Kant had begun by saying that when a person feels enjoyment or displeasure upon being confronted with something external to him, these feelings had more to do with the person’s own disposition to feel these feelings of pain or pleasure. This, he said, explained why some people might feel joy over
somethings that might cause aversion on others or vice-versa. In The Critique, Kant defines aesthetic judgment as one whose foundation is entirely subjective. This judgment "denotes nothing in the object, but it is a feeling which the Subject has of itself and of the manner in which it is affected by the representation" (42).

Kant also proceeded by method of observation. Like Burke he claims that beauty and the sublime causes feelings of pleasure, but in different ways. To Kant the sight of a snow-capped mountain which rises above the clouds, the description of a violent storm, Milton's portrayal of hell, causes in the viewer/reader enjoyment but great horror too; on the other hand, the sight of meadows full of flowers, or Homer's description of Venus, provides also pleasant sensations which produce smiles and joy. The former emotions are considered feelings of the sublime whereas the latter correspond to feelings of the beautiful. Kant further adds that the sublime moves but the beautiful charms. (Observations 47).

Kant's analysis of the sublime focused mainly on nature. For him the idea of nature was the major object of aesthetic sensibility and it is related to the rise of Romanticism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, the sublime in Kant also encompasses other areas of human creation. Paul Crowther examines the Kantian sublime in terms of his theory of art and comes up with the following definition: "the sublime is an item or set of items which, through the possession or suggestion of perceptually, imaginatively, or emotionally
overwhelming properties, succeeds in rendering the scope of some human capacity vivid to the senses” (162). In general terms, for Kant anything that is of great magnitude that the mind at first has difficulty comprehending or grasping is sublime. Paul Crowther examines how Kant’s theory applies to the postmodern sublime in art and explains how Kant defines what is sublime as “that which is absolutely and beyond all comparison great.” According to Kant what belongs beyond the measurable world of nature can be said to be beyond comparison, and the mind or our rational capabilities belong to this standing, because they are beyond nature and they are capable of understanding the idea of infinity. The ability to comprehend and understand in rational terms the vastness of things is what makes humans capable of overcoming feelings of fear and terror when confronted with terrifying situations, and this reassurance is what provides us with pleasure (The Postmodern 11).

An important feature of Kant’s sublime, related to what Burke had explained in his theory, is the necessity of distance in the sublime experience. However, for Kant the need for distance between the individual and the object of the sublime is so that the mind can contemplate and thus understand and conceptualize the magnitude of what it is contemplating. In the appendix to the Second Book of The Analytic of the Beautiful, Kant reminds us again that the sublime is that greatness which arouses reverence (magnitudo reverenda), and which invites us to approach while at the same time dissuades us from
approaching because of the magnitude of its power and the danger. The realization of the overwhelming supremacy of nature helps us to understand that we are nothing in comparison to its power. However, he says, because we want to cognitively grasp its magnitude, we stop and try to apprehend the whole experience. If we are safe and protected then we feel amazement, which is pleasure produced by continually overcoming pain (Analytic 68).

Thus far we have studied how for both Burke and Kant, the experience of beauty and the sublime have the capacity of carrying us away. Neither beauty nor the sublime are subject to any type of formal classification, they are not creatures of reason, and they go beyond our capacity to comprehend. It is as Adam Philips says in his introduction to Burke’s analysis “The sublime is a rape. Beauty is a lure. They both induce a state of submission that is often combined with the possibility of getting lost.” However, the sublime is stronger in its power. Two hundred years later, Freud would describe it as the war between Eros vs. Thanatos (xxiii).

Sigmund Freud on violence: Eros and Thanatos and the Oedipus Complex

I have included in this chapter a short exegesis of some of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theories because I believe, in line with Adam Phillips, that there is a close connection between our feelings of beauty and the sublime and our life and death instincts, which Freud denominated Eros and Thanatos. I
will attempt to show the connections by explaining how the individual, according to Freud, and in my view, is constantly seeking pleasure, throughout his life, beginning at the moment of birth. Individuals seek to obtain pleasure in several manners, and one way is by exposing themselves to sublime experiences, that as we have seen above, provide pleasure and delight, albeit through pain.

Another very important aspect of Freud’s theory, that is necessary to explore for the purpose of this project - and especially to explain the pleasure of the voyeur in *Si te dicen que caí* in Chapter 4 of this dissertation- is the sexual development of the individual. As we know, for Freud, sexual life does not begin only at puberty, but starts with plain manifestation soon after birth. Sexual life includes the function of obtaining pleasure from zones of the body - a function that is subsequently brought into the service of reproduction. For Freud the chief interest of Psychoanalysis is focused on the first assertion, since in early childhood there are signs of "sexual" bodily activity, which is linked to psychical phenomena that manifests itself later in adult life. During his/her development (psychic and sexual development) an individual goes through four stages described by Freud as a) the oral phase, when the child derives pleasure from the mouth, an erotogenic zone; during this phase sadistic impulses develop; b) the sadistic-anal phase, when the child derives pleasure from aggression and the excretory functions; c) the phallic, which is the forerunner of the last refers to the
moment when the boy child enters the Oedipus phase. In this phase he fantasizes a relationship with his mother. Because of fear of castration, coming from threats by the father, he enters a period of latency. The girl child on the other hand realizes her lack of penis and suffers from penis-envy and turns away from a sexual life at this point and also enters a period of latency; d) in the genital phase, which is achieved at puberty, the individual either retains the earlier libidinal cathexes, or satisfies his sexual instincts in other satisfactory forms, called fore-pleasure by Freud, or elevates them through sublimation (transforming repressed libido impulses into socially productive accomplishments) or represses them. As Freud explains these stages do not happen in each individual flawlessly and inhibitions during each of these stages may later manifest themselves in futures disturbances in sexual life (An Outline 26). What is basic to Freud’s theory, though, is that during each of these phases the main goal is the pursuit of pleasure.

In the Oedipus Complex we find an explanation to the violence of man. For Freud, the relationship of the child with his parents is crucial in the achievement of his sexual identity. The attachment to the mother during the early years and perception of father as rival in this love is what Freud called the Oedipus Complex. The child becomes afraid of being castrated by the father, who is the figure of

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5 My thesis in this chapter is that we, as audience, become voyeurs, and along with the voyeurs in the film, delight in the same pleasures. We share the same sublime experience as the characters in the story.
authority, but this Castration Complex later helps the boy move away from the mother and start to identify more with the father. Violence originates in the Oedipus Complex with the son's desire to displace the father. He explains it as one of the causes of neurotic illness and the raison d'etre of psychoanalysis: "the nucleus of desire, repression and sexual identity..." (An Outline 14).

The importance of the Oedipus Complex in Freud's work must be emphasized because it signals the transition from the pleasure principle to the reality principle. Moreover, for Freud the Oedipus Complex is the beginning of morality, conscience, law and all forms of social and religious authority, "the father's real or imagined prohibition of incest is symbolic of all the higher authority to be later encountered; and, in "introjecting" this patriarchal law, the child begins to form the "superego", the awesome, punitive voice of conscience within it. The boy has now developed an ego or individual reality, but it can only do this by repressing into the unconscious the guilty desires (Eagleton 156).

When studying the phenomena of the sicario in Colombia, it is possible to consider how the absent father and the powerful mother figure help shape the excessively violent behaviour of these young boys. Similarly, in the Spanish novel Si te dicen que caí, most of the children are orphans, there is no father figure. The fathers have either fled the country or have been killed during the war. The children have grown up fatherless and some of the mothers (like Luisito’s) have had to become prostitutes to be able to bring bread to the table.
In her study of contemporary Spanish Cinema, Marsha Kinder employs the Oedipal Complex to analyze some classical "cine negro español" which she defines as a discourse on fathers and sons. She argues that some films can be analyzed using the classical Freudian Oedipal Complex - the son who sees the father as someone who needs to be eliminated - or using other interpretations. She suggests René Girard’s in Violence and the Sacred who explains the myth as the son’s desire to imitate the father rather than follow his obsessive love for the mother. Girard’s interpretation of the myth has been useful for Kinder to explain the patricidal impulse against a symbolic father in Tras el cristal by Agustín Villaronga and Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón’s El corazón del bosque (218).

In Film Theory, Jean-Louis Baudry and Robert Eberwein applied Freud’s theory of the different phases of development of the child, as explained above, and associated the pleasure of the cinematic apparatus as dream screen to the oral phase pleasure. The phallic phase and the fear of castration have also been associated with the pleasure the male feels when viewing the female image in film. Laura Mulvey explained how in classical film narrative the woman becomes made for male pleasure. The male spectator possesses the woman through the look aided by the camera which commonly focuses on the woman’s body. In their theory, the woman evokes the fear of castration and the male spectator escapes the anxiety he feels through sadistic voyeurism or through fetishistic scopophilia (Kaplan 213).
Another important aspect of Freud’s theory that concerns us is his theory on the two instincts that dominate man’s life: Eros, the life or love instinct and Thanatos the death instinct. The main goal of the life instinct is to preserve life by procreation. These two instincts, says Freud, never appear in isolation from each other. Eros is constant turmoil with Thanatos, an instinct of aggressiveness and destructiveness, because as Freud explains “...besides the instinct to preserve living substance and to join into ever larger units, there must exist another, contrary instinct seeking to dissolve those units and to bring them back to their primateal, inorganic state” (Civilization 77). Sadism, for example, which is one component instinct of sexuality, is one manifestation of the death or destructive instinct, and it is directed outwards. Masochism, another one of the components of sexuality, is part of the destructive instinct and is directed inwards.

This violent nature of man was also later developed in Civilization and its Discontents (1930) where Freud also refers to the violent nature of man when he argues that:

men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. Homo homini lupus (Freud 69).
Thus, for Freud the aggressive nature of man is something primary and instinctual. Man is a "savage beast" who, when provoked, will have no consideration for others of his own kind. In all the movies and novels analyzed, the "savage beast," either in the figure of the sicario, the obsessive lover, the freedom fighter, the jealous brother, is out to kill and destroy. His or her reasons will later be explained. The point is, we, as readers and viewers, participate in the violence and feel pleasure in what we see, because we delight in the sublime experience.

Jacques Lacan: The Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real

Jacques Lacan advanced Freud’s theories on the conscious and the unconscious drives in the individual’s subjectivity through structuralism, particularly using Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of the signifier. Freud explained the development of the subjectivity of the child in sexual terms, and Lacan did his explanation in terms of language.

In the essay "The Mirror Stage" (1936) Lacan refers to his conception of the mirror-stage, when the child, from the age of six months and up to the age of eighteen months, recognizes his own image in a mirror as identification, that is, it is the transformation when the subject assumes an image of his Ideal “I.” It is what Lacan calls the Imaginary stage. Before the mirror stage, the child cannot recognize himself as separate from the mother. When he recognizes his own
image as a separate entity, he enters into the Symbolic Order, or the order of Language, equivalent to the Law of the Father. When the child enters the Symbolic Order, or the Law of the Father, he enters the world of the laws of society, the laws of the Other, the laws of patriarchal authority and culture. At the moment of the mirror-stage, he feels a sense of jubilation, or of jouissance at seeing himself. Lacan described it as narcissistic joy. He, at the same time, is aware of the loss of the mother. At this moment he begins to repress this desire for the mother, that is, the desire to become one with the mother again. The Subject will continually search for that lost object (the mother), which Lacan refers to as l’object petite-a. The loss of the mother, or of the other, will become a continual search even when the child has already reached adulthood.

The big “O” represents the Symbolic, and the little “o” represents the Imaginary. The two orders are co-present and are sutured together. The Symbolic represents the world of fantasies and images associated with the mirror-stage, and is always present, because it involves self-identification through another. The Imaginary represents the field of social and cultural symbols, which allows the individual to articulate his desires and feelings.

This element of Lacan’s theory became crucial in psychoanalytic Film and Literary theory, to explain how the spectator becomes sutured into the text. First, because when the individual watches a film he feels the same jouissance he felt as a child in the mirror phase. Lacan’s theories of the dialectic of the eye and the
gaze, that "the eyes is not merely an organ of perception, but also an organ of pleasure" (108) have also been used in a critique of the cinema by Christian Metz to understand the peculiar fascination of the spectator for what he sees on the screen. Metz says: "The cinema lures the ego through being an image of its mirror-self, the screen is ready for narcissistic looking, a mirror for mirroring, thus a double of its double" (Wright 110). Second, because the subject throughout his life seeks to stitch the Symbolic and the Imaginary orders together. This becomes possible when he becomes a spectator in film, especially, but not exclusively, in the shot/reverse-angle shot. According to Jean-Pierre Oudart (1977), one of the theorist of suture, the viewer adopts first the point of view of one of the characters in the film, say in a conversation, and then the other character point of view. Thus, in the shot/reverse-shot the spectator becomes both subject and object of the look.

In Lacan's construction of subjectivity, there is a third order, which is what he calls the Real Order. The Real represents that which is outside the subject, the unspeakable: jouissance and death, which violate the Law of the Father because they are beyond desire and thus must always, remain unspoken. It is also in this order that we can speak of the sublime and the sublime experience. In the jouissance or jubilation that the spectator feels when encountering the image on the screen because he feels secure with the imaginary relationship with the image. Because the image is an idealized image he lives a fantasy, which
might be threatened when the spectator realizes the image frame. When it becomes obvious to the spectator that the image he is watching is just and illusion, a system of signs and codes, the reverse angle shot will suture him back into the earlier stage of the imaginary unit. The spectator continues to be reinscribed into the filmic discourse throughout the film in each shot-reverse-shot image.

However, there are other theorists of suture who believe that the whole filmic narrative, with all its implications, of continuing editing, sound, lighting etc., suture the spectator to the film. Daniel Dayan (1974) for example, examines the concept of suture in terms of ideology. In his opinion, the ideological effects of films go by unnoticed by the spectator, who absorbs their underlying meanings unconsciously. Ann E. Kaplan, on the other hand, explains how Hollywood has become the dream factory, which presents to the spectator an absolute idea of the idealness of the American way of life, by smoothing over any notion of conflict or inconsistency (Hayward 383).

The act of watching a film means subjecting one's self to the power of another vision, means assuming certain positions of viewing and hearing that have strong cultural ramifications. If, as Guy Debord argued in his influential study of the power of the image in Western capitalist countries, we live in a society of the spectacle, then the cinema is, quite literally, a training ground for acculturation to the spectacle form (28). The spectacle offered through its
narrative entices the spectator to watch; he/ she becomes sutured into the
text/ film. Given the voyeuristic tendencies human beings possess the spectator
identifies with one of the characters in film, as already explained.

In a nutshell, in the analysis of the films and novels, and relating back to
Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories, we as readers and spectators become sutured
into the texts, either because we experience the jouissance of the mirror stage,
because we are ideologically interpellated, or simply because we identify with
the pleasure of the voyeur when watching scenes of extreme violence and sex.
The fact is we experience the sublime.

**Nietzsche on the aesthetic representation of violence and morality**

Before closing this chapter on the main issues of beauty and the sublime it
is important to dedicate a few paragraphs to Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy on
the representation of violence. For Nietzsche, morality was not an issue that
should be considered by the true artist. For him, the true artist needs to be cruel
in order to be creative. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), he had affirmed:
"this problem of the value of compassion and of the morality of compassion (- I
am an opponent of the shameful modern weakening of sensibility-) ...Let us
articulate this new demand: we stand in need of the critique of moral values, the
value of these values itself should first of all be called into question." (8).

Nietzsche thus believed that sensibility, compassion and morality stood in the
path of true creativity. For him, morality was the “danger of dangers” because of the generalized assumption that the “good man” was of greater value than the “evil man.” People truly believed that the former was the best for the progress of humankind. Nietzsche harshly criticized this generalized belief. With respect to this, he added in the *The Will to Power* (1901): “The moral man is a lower species than the immoral, a weaker species; indeed - he is a type in regard to morality, but not a type in himself; a copy, a good copy at best- the measure of his value lies outside him” (35).

In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Friedrich Nietzsche also explored the issue of morality in works of art. In this book Nietzsche referred to the conflict between art or artistic creation and morality. His study stemmed from the birth and death of the Greek Tragedy. The conflict of morality with creation and art, he said, originated with the beginning of Christianity, which was against life itself, against beauty and sensuality, and against the passions: because it feared them, it condemned them:

> Already in the preface addressed to Richard Wagner, art, and not morality, is presented as the truly metaphysical activity of man. In the book itself the suggestive sentence is repeated several times, that the existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon[...] Christianity as the most prodigal elaboration of the moral theme to which

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6 In "Attempt at a self-criticism" in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and in an attempt to understand the “value of existence” Nietzsche asked himself: "What is the significance of the tragic myth among the Greeks of the best, the strongest, the most courageous period? And the tremendous phenomenon of the Dionysian - and born from it, tragedy- what might they signify?- And again: that of which tragedy died, the Socratism of morality, the dialectics, frugality, and cheerfulness of the theoretical man- how now? might not this very Socratism be a sign of decline, of weariness, of infection, of the anarchical dissolution of the instincts?” (18)
humanity has ever been subjected. In truth, nothing could be more opposed to the purely aesthetic interpretation and justification of the world which are taught in this book than the Christian teaching, which is, and wants to be, only moral and which relegates art, every art, to the realm of lies, with its absolute standards, beginning with the truthfulness of God, it negates, judges and dams art. (22-23)

So, for Nietzsche life is essentially amoral, thus morality negates life, it annihilates it and is a danger to life itself. As Edward Andrew explains in the Genealogy of Values, originality and cruelty are akin, for Nietzsche and also for writers like Marcel Proust. Innovation involves rupture and pain. The inflexibility of the creator is necessary to be able to break free from dominant ethical practices and to the subordination of recurrent moral claims. And quoting Nietzsche he added that all higher culture is "based on the spiritualization of cruelty" (107).

Conclusion

Upon having examined the different theories of beauty and the sublime, and having examined Nietzsche’s ideas on morality, we can come to several conclusions. First, it is evident that to be able to truly create and freely express his ideas, the artist has to rid himself of any moral or ethical ties, even if his purpose is precisely to question the immorality of society. In an interview with Jorge Franco, the author of Rosario Tijeras, when asked about the morality of the
artist in his literary creation he said:

Y sí, estoy de acuerdo que hay que ser cruel y brutal en lo literario, la moral tiene connotaciones muy subjetivas, pero el moralismo sí debe de ser desterrado de la literatura. Si hay que contar la realidad hay que tratar de contarla como es, aunque me atrevo a decir que es una intención utópica. La realidad siempre superará la ficción y el talento del escritor sólo logra acercar al lector un poco, a la realidad, la realidad siempre será más contundente.

(I agree with the fact that one must be cruel and brutal in literary creation; morality has very subjective connotations, but morality must be cast out from literature. If one is going to talk about reality one needs to talk about it the way it is, even though I can say that it can be a utopic intention. Reality will always overcome fiction, and the talent of the writer can only get the reader closer to reality, but reality will always be more ruthless. ) (My translation).

Second, based on the theories analyzed above, we see that the spectator/reader feels attracted to the images on the text or screen. Thus, the spectator/reader is somehow sutured into the text. He feels either pleasure or displeasure for what he is viewing on screen or for the images described in the book. The spectator/reader identifies with one of the characters in the film and/or with the situations lived by this character. This happens, as explained above, because the spectator/reader goes back to his childhood, to the time he felt the overwhelming feeling of pleasure, this jouissance, that Lacan described, when he saw his image on the mirror, or because he feels pleasure in watching violent spectacles of death and sex, or because he has become ideologically interpellated.

As we also examined above, Longinus had said that great writing, “takes the reader out of himself.” The writer does so by creating texts that are powerful
and that go beyond being fascinating or persuasive. In *Rosario Tijeras* by Jorge Franco Ramos, *Si te dicen que caí* by Juan Marsé and *La virgen de los sicarios*, by Fernando Vallejo, the reader is carried away by intense feelings of repulsion by what is being described, but intense delight too, and thus, he wants to continue reading, because of the connection with the text, his identification with it.

Quoting Longinus: “it is indeed true that to be convinced is usually within our control whereas amazement is the result of an irresistible force beyond the control of any audience” (19).

On the other hand, if we go back to Edmund Burke’s study, we recall that he carried his study further to include not only the sublime in writing, but also about beauty and the sublime in art and nature. He described the sublime as “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror” (39). He also describes beauty as those objects that cause feelings of passion and love. Kant’s theory spoke of beauty and the sublime in terms of passions. In the films and novels of this study, the passion, love, terror and delight is felt by the characters, i.e, Antonio for Rosario, in *Rosario Tijeras*, Trini and Luisa for Paco in *Amantes*, and by the audience/ readers who identify with these characters, that is, we become Antonio, Trini and Luisa.
In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), Freud explained the antagonism between the two drives or instincts that dominate man: Eros, the love instinct and Thanatos, the death instinct. These two instincts, says Freud, never appear in isolation from each other. Sadism, for example, which is one component instinct of sexuality, is one manifestation of the death or destructive instinct, masochism, another one of the components of sexuality, is part of the destructive instinct. He writes:

It is in sadism, where the death instinct twists the erotic aim in its own sense and yet at the same time fully satisfies the erotic urge, that we succeed in obtaining the clearest insight into its nature and its relation to Eros. But even where it emerges without any sexual purpose, in the blindest fury of destructiveness, we cannot fail to recognize that the satisfaction of the instinct is accompanied by an extraordinarily high degree of narcissistic enjoyment, owing to its presenting the ego with a fulfillment of the latter’s old wishes (81).

This need of man to satisfy this death instinct through any type of sexual enjoyment, be it masochism or sadism, provides him with narcissistic enjoyment, the same type of jouissance that Lacan spoke about when the child sees his image on the mirror, when he sees himself projected on screen or reflected in one of the characters of the books.
CHAPTER 2

A BACKGROUND TO VIOLENCE

Tragedy reduces the soul's emotions of pity and terror by means of compassion and dread. It wishes to have a due proportion of terror. It has pain as its mother.

Aristotle, the tractaus coislinianus

The film Apocalypse Now (1979), directed by Francis Ford Coppola, generated significant controversy when it was first released. It was both hated and loved.\textit{Apocalypse} had been Coppola's project for years. The film, based on Joseph Conrad's novel \textit{Heart of Darkness}, explored the dark side of man's soul: his struggle between good and evil. Thus, throughout the film viewers were confronted with both horrifying visions of extreme cruelty, like Colonel Kurtz's Underworld, his Land of the Dead: Dantesque visions, visions of hell, but also with beautiful visual displays of photography - a wonderful exhibit of cinematographic composition by Vittorio Storaro, who in this film plays brilliantly with light effects to add to the film's dramatics. Equally powerful was the sound design by Walter Murch, who manipulated 160 tracks of recorded sound to produce one of the most memorable musical montages in film history. The emotional impact of the opening scene, and other equally powerful scenes,
were in part supplied by the soundtrack: The Doors’ “The End”, which opens and ends the film, the Rolling Stones’ “Paint it Black,” and Richard Wagner’s “The Valkyries.”

One of the most powerful and terrifying sequences was that of the cowardly and cruel attack led by Col. Kilgore (Robert Duvall) on innocent villagers to clear the beach for surfing: “Charlie don’t surf,” was the cynical excuse. The sequence begins with helicopters flying in perfect coordination over the beach in preparation for the attack, while the soldiers’ and the viewers’ adrenaline starts to pump, and tension builds, to the music of “Ride of the Valkyries.” The brilliance of this sequence lies, in my opinion, in the contrast between the beauty and peace of the village before the attack, represented in the white colors of the clothes worn by the villagers, the uniforms of the children, the peasants working in the fields, and the background of the sound of nature, and then the yellow and orange of napalm and the black of the burning village and forest during the massacre. “I love the smell of napalm in the morning” says Kilgore, while he is undressing to go surfing and his men are killing the villagers. Because of the underlying malice, this particular sequence was very powerful, and was clearly making a political statement.

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7 Stephen Prince examines Murch’s contributions to the film total artistic effect and gives as example the shot of the spinning ceiling fan in the hotel in Saigon, to which Murch added the sound of a helicopter propeller, a memorable image-sound juxtaposition. This combination is key to understanding the drama of this opening scene. The shot by itself would not have had the same impact on the audience.
The contrast between beauty and sublime, in the extreme violence offered, is a constant throughout the movie. I, like most film spectators, was completely awestruck by a mixture of extreme horror and fascination. Seeing the remastered version of the film several more times, has left me with the same feelings of astonishment and terror that overcame me the first time seeing the film.

After watching this film and others, that show such sharp contrasts of extreme violence and beauty, of wonderful brilliance on the part of the filmmaker, the question that always comes to my mind is how can we come to terms with two seemingly contradictory concepts. That is, how can we bind violence with art, when art has generally been equated with beauty, that which provides pleasure, and violence, with all that is despicable and shameful and thus, unpleasant?

In the introduction to Aesthetics: The Big Questions, Carolyn Korsmeyer explains that the basic questions in the philosophy of art concern the concept of art itself. There are numerous definitions, which I won’t be exploring in this study. However, I am interested in the approaches to aesthetic value. As Korsmeyer explains, the approaches fall into two categories: those that conceive aesthetic value as a type of delight or pleasure, and those that think of it as

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8 This scene brings to mind the 1968 My Lai massacre, during the Vietnam War, when a platoon of marines massacred 500 Vietnamese peasants.
something that provides insight or cognition (1-4). In my study of the representation of violence as art, I am interested in the first approach, that which provides pleasure and pain, hence my interest in beauty and the sublime.

So, where do we draw the line to be able to declare that something is truly art and something else isn't, especially when movies, different literary genres and other forms of art openly depict the most heinous forms of violence and seem to be glorifying it? What happened to beauty, compassion, morality and ethical values? Where lies the aesthetic in the classical Greek tragedies, like Sophocles’ Oedipus, or Aeschylus’ Oresteia, which are full of crime, bloodshed, pain and so much sorrow. The same can be asked of novels like Crime and Punishment by Fedor Dostoevsky, or plays like Macbeth or Hamlet, by William Shakespeare, the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Sam Peckinpah’s film The Wild Bunch (1969), Martin Scorsese’s Taxi Driver (1976), Quentin Tarantino’s Pulp Fiction (1994) or the excessively shocking surrealist film, L’Age D’Or (1930), directed by Luis Buñuel, which broke away from all types of societal and art conventions, to become one of the most controversial films of all times, or if we analyze works of art such as "The Murder" by Paul Cézanne or "Saturn Devouring One of his Children" by Francisco de Goya.

Contemporary Latin American, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, New Zealander films and others from different regions of the world contain scenes of what some would qualify as despicable violence. Not long ago, the Brazilian
film, *Cidade de Deus* or *City of God* (2002) directed by Fernando Meirelles presented despicable violence taking place in the favelas or slums of Rio de Janeiro, and confronted the spectator with one of the most extreme forms of brutality, that of children killing other children. In the United States, very recently we have witnessed Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill*, Vol. I (2003) and *Kill Bill: Vol. II* (2004), and other films accused by viewers and critics of excessive gore and brutality.

Violence is a topic that has been explored for decades by many writers and filmmakers. One of the statements that best summarizes the eternal conflict between art and violence was what Joseph Morgenstern said referring to one of the crudest and goriest scenes in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967): "... that violence begets violence in life and engenders confusion in art." In his article, titled "The Thin Red Line", which appeared in *Newsweek* on August 28, 1967, he argued:

> When we talk about movies, we are not talking about urban renewal programs, nuclear nonproliferation treaties, or rat control bills. Art cannot dictate to life and movies cannot transform life, unless we can retool the entire industry for the production of propaganda. But art can certainly reflect life, clarify and improve life; and since most of humanity teeters on the edge of violence everyday, there is no earthly reason why art should not turn violence to its own good ends, showing us what we do and why. The clear danger, of course, is that violence begets violence in life and engenders confusion in art. It is a potent weapon, but it tends to aim the marksman. (50)

In a previous commentary that Morgenstern had written about this movie, he had referred to it as "a squalid shoot-'em for the moron trade" but he regretted his own words and reconsidered his first impression of the film. When he saw
the movie again he said the film knew what to make of violence and that it made a cogent statement with it. Thus, for him, "a thin red line exists between the precisely appropriate and the imprecisely offensive". It is for the director to decide what is the appropriate, in other words, for film to be art it needs to know where that red line lays and has to know not to cross it (50). So, the question is: where do we draw the line?

To draw the line there are some problematic issues that need to be considered. That is, to fully understand and objectively analyze any form of art production or cultural manifestation, i.e., painting, sculpture, film, novel, etc., we need to look at the socio-political, historical, economic national and international context in which it was produced. Accordingly, in the case of the novels and films I have chosen, it is essential to look at the “larger” picture.

I will begin by answering the questions: Why write about Spanish, Colombian and Mexican films and novels? What do they have in common? The answer is: Violence. Historically all three countries have lived through extremely vicious periods of war and destruction. Thus, throughout their history there has been massive bloodshed, torture, massacres, and violation of human rights.

I would like to begin by mentioning one of the darkest periods in History, referred to as the “black legend,” the Spanish Conquest and the Spanish
colonization of the Americas. As Tzevan Todorov explains in *The Conquest of America*:

If the word genocide has ever been applied to a situation with some accuracy, this is here the case. It constitutes a record not only in relative terms (a destruction on the order of 90 percent or more), but also in absolute terms, since we are speaking of a population diminution estimated at 70 million human lives. None of the great massacres of the twentieth century can be compared to this hecatomb. It will be understood how vain are the efforts made by certain authors to dissipate what has been called the “black legend” of Spain’s responsibility for this genocide. (133).

Besides the massacre and death of the colonized Indians, the subsequent wars of independence and multiple civil wars that followed have been extremely bloody and brutal enterprises, which involved extermination massacres, torture, persecution, and betrayal. Additionally, in Mexico, during the Mexican Revolution (1910) and the “dirty war” of the 60’s and 70’s; in Colombia in the War of the Thousand Days (1899-1902) and La Violencia (1946-1958), the more contemporary guerilla warfare between the government, the military, the paramilitary and the narcotraffickers; and finally, in Spain the Napoleonic Wars (1808-1814) and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), have implied extreme destruction and pain.

The horrors of these wars and the violence of modern and contemporary times have been reflected in numerous works of artists, writers and filmmakers. The names that promptly come to our minds are the works of Spanish artists such as Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828), who was able to paint with
vivid realism the horrors and suffering of people during the rising against Napoleon in the famous prints known as “Los desastres de la Guerra”, or in his famous painting of the execution of the patriots on the third of May of 1808, and Pablo Picasso and his world renown painting, “Guernica” (1937), an anti-war statement. In Mexico the murals of Diego Rivera (1886-1957) depict the horrors of the Spanish conquest. In Colombia the “Massacre 10 April ” (1948) by artist Alejandro Obregón (1920-1992) and Fernando Botero’s “La Guerra” (1973) which were both painted as a statement against repression in Latin America.

Madness, torture, human pain and suffering are vividly portrayed not only in painting but also in novels and films. To mention only very few examples of films and novels: in Spain Las bicicletas son para el verano (Jaime Chávarri, 1994), ¡Ay, Carmela! (José Sanchis Sinisterra, 1990), Libertarias (Vicente Aranda, 1993), the novel and film Si te dicen que caí (1989) have to do with the consequences of the Spanish Civil War, the people involved and the dire consequences; in Mexico the Revolutionary series by Fernando de Fuentes El prisionero número 13 (1933), El compadre Mendoza (1933), and Vámonos con Pancho Villa (1933), and all the novels of the Revolution Los de abajo (1960) by Mariano Azuela or La muerte de Artemio Cruz (1966), by Carlos Fuentes; in Colombia, the novels Cóndores no entierran todos los días (Gustavo Alvarez Gardeazábal, 1971), La mala hora (1960) and Cien años de soledad (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez or El día señalado (1964) by Jorge Zalamea (1964) make
reference to La Violencia, the War of the Thousand Days, and other conflicts
Colombia has been involved in are only very few examples.

Violence in Colombia: La Violencia, guerrilla warfare, narcotraffic

La Violencia, as historians know it, is one of the bloodiest periods in
Colombian history, which has had unprecedented effects on the country. The
violence initiated during La Violencia has continued its spiral effects in the social,
economic and political life of Colombia. Gonzalo Sánchez describes this violence
in his essay “The Violence: An Interpretative Synthesis“:

The first and most visible process of the Violence, which left the greatest
impact upon the collective memory, was a mixture of official terror,
partisan sectarianism, and scorched-earth policy. This aspect of the
Violence affected the lives, physical safety, psychology, and possessions of
hundreds of thousands of Colombians. Its images are unerasable and in
good measure have given the Violence its distinctive seal. The extreme
modality of this process, was, of course, murder. Extreme not only for the
number of victims but also because of the indescribable torture that
surrounded these murders and marked for life the entire generation that
witnessed them... Atrocities involving mutilation, sexual violation, and
the desecration of victims corpses, in other words, the ritual of terror,
were a pathological component that accompanied most intimidation. (89)

The period of La Violencia occurred between 1946-1958, leaving approximately
200,000 dead from both parties. In the aftermath of Gaitan’s death, a period of
extreme partisan violence erupted. The main causes were that the two main
parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals, started fighting for power. The
repression of a Conservative government and the aspirations of the poorer for
economic and social betterment were other factors that contributed to the violence that erupted. After almost 10 years of violence, the National Front was signed (1958-1974) which allowed the two parties to share power and alternate the presidency. However, two of the Marxist-inspired guerrilla groups, the FARC and ELN, formed during these years continue to fight the government and terrorize the population. The guerrilla phenomenon plus the violence of the paramilitary right wing-groups fighting them, the war against drugs, financed by the USA and the military fighting all of these groups has escalated the violence and made the situation in Colombia unbearable and tragic. They began as small-armed peasant movements that were fighting for their land but later emerged into the FARC (The Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia), the ELN (The National Liberation Army) and the EPL (The Popular Liberation Army). Other shorter-lived groups emerged, which had other political motivations, such as the M-19 and the Quintin Lame. They, however, negotiated peace agreements with the government. The FARC is nowadays one of the longer living guerrilla groups in the world and their power has extended throughout the country. The two more powerful guerrilla groups, whose power has escalated to cover almost 93% of the Colombian territory, continue to be the FARC and the ELN.

In 1995 estimates revealed that the guerrillas expanded from 7,673 members and 80 fronts in 1991 to 10,483 members and 105 fronts throughout the
country. If their motives were self-defense when they were originally formed, now their motives have changed: they have established political power in many regions, through extortion, kidnappings and participation in the drug trade. The failure of the government to understand the nature of the guerrilla movements in the 1960’s and also its failure to accomplish the necessary tasks of economic, social and political reconstruction in the regions most affected by La Violencia, are responsible for the continuation, growth and intensification of this armed struggle (Berquist 15-16).

Colombia’s tortured past and present have constantly preoccupied its filmmakers and writers. In the narrative of feature-films of the 80’s and early 90’s the historical political and social violence is reflected. For example, in the film Condores no entierran todos los días (1984), directed by Francisco Norden, and based on the novel by Gustavo Alvarez Gardeázabal, the political killings of the pájaros is fictionalized. The pájaros were hired killers, who were found especially in southwest Colombia, during La Violencia. The Conservative party and some government members mostly supported them. Don León María Lozano, El Cóndor was the most notorious pájaro and the novel by Gardeázabal tells the story of this simple store-clerk who became one of the most feared assassins of his time. Confesión a Laura (1990), directed by Jaime Osorio is based on the assassination of the Liberal Party leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, on April 9, 1948, which sparked the “Bogotazo,” one of the bloodiest days in the history of
the country in which approximately 2,585 were killed in one day. The
destruction of the symbols of Conservative power in downtown Bogotá, the
looting and the bloodbath, placed the Colombian society in a state of crisis.
Canaguaro, (Dunav Kusmanch, 1981) also shows the violence in the eastern
plains, sparked by Gaitán’s death. María Cano (Camila Loboguerrero, 1989) tells
the story of the union leader María Cano and the violent struggles of the
workers. Rodrigo-D, No Futuro (Víctor Gaviria, 1991), displays the violence in
Medellín as a consequence of drug trafficking. In Rosario Tijeras, the narrator
explains the situation of violence in Colombia, especially in Medellín, in very
poignant terms:

Rosario’s fight isn’t so simple, it has very deep roots, from long ago, from
earlier generations. Life weighs on her with the weight of this country, her
genes drag a long a race of sons of plenty and sons of bitches who with the
blade of a machete cleared the pathways of life. They’re still doing it. They
ate with the machete, they worked, shaved, killed, and settled differences
with their wives with a machete. Today the machete is a shotgun, a nine-
millimeter, a chopper. The weapon has changed but not its use. The story
has changed too, has become terrifying. Once proud, we are not ashamed,
without understanding how, why and when it all happened. We don’t
know how long our history is, but we can feel its weight. And Rosario has
borne it since time immemorial, for that reason, when she was born, she
didn’t come bearing bread under her arm, but misfortune (32-33).

In other novels, the situation is similar, and the list long. Most Colombian novels,
in some manner or another, deal with the topic of violence, massacres, deaths,
tortures, injustice and the violation of human rights. The reality of the historical
violence permeates throughout the country’s literary and cinematic production.
Violence in Spain: The Spanish Civil War

In Spain, as in Colombia, there have been several political and social events that have affected the country in the course of its history. The effects on the country and its people have also been a constant topic in literature and film. Of all the violence in Spanish history none has affected contemporary Spanish lives more than the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). It was an internal war that lasted only three years, the international and national repercussions continued for many years and are still felt in the lives of the Spanish people because of the many scars it left. It was a war that left around 500,000 dead.

The Spanish Civil War has been thought of as war of passionate ideals and cruel fanaticism, a fierce ideological fight between Republicans and Nationalists:

“For more than anywhere else this was a war of ideologies- communism against fascism, regionalism against central government, totalitarianism against liberalism the poor against the rich, anti-clericals against the church” (Besas 14).

After the fall of the monarchy in 1931 and great discontent with four years of Republican rule, the country had become polarized. The conservative forces had initiated a movement that led to a military revolt in Morocco on the 18th of July, 1936, headed by General Francisco Franco, who took command of the army in Morocco. The assassination of right-wing political leader Jose Calvo Sotelo also served the army as signal for the coup that had already been in the planning
for weeks and was successful not only in Morocco but also in Seville, Navarre, Galicia, Old Castile, the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands, to mention only a few places, but was frustrated in the key cities of Barcelona and Madrid.

By the end of 1936 the Nationalist troops controlled a great part of the country, including Extremadura, Andalucía, Galicia, León, Asturias, Navarra and Aragón, as well as the Canary and Balearic Islands with the exception of Menorca. Castilla la Nueva, Catalunya, Valencia, Murcia, Almería, Gijón and Bilbao remained in Republican hands. The Republicans formed a coalition Cabinet and brought in the CNT (Confederación Nacional de Trabajo, the anarcho-syndicalist union), armed their militia, formed a Popular Army, and got international support from the International Brigades, with volunteers from different countries all over the world, to be able to counteract the power of the Junta de Defensa Nacional, who had named General Franco head of the government and of the armed forces, and who were receiving help from Adolf Hitler in Germany and Benito Mussolini in Italy.

In the year of 1937, there was heavy fighting in the north and it was a year of many defeats for the Republican army. In April, Guernica was bombed. The Republicans lost Bilbao, Santander and Gijón in that year. Thus, they decided to open fronts in Guadalajara, Brunete and Belchite. However, the Battle of Teruel, which lasted from December 15, 1937 - February 22, 1938, will always be remembered as one of the most dramatic and was the beginning of the end of the
war. In 1938, the Republicans suffered another great loss when the Nationalists divided the Republican zone into two parts. The Battle of the Ebro ended with the Republican defeat and 70,000 casualties. Catalonia fell on February 10, 1939. Madrid resisted and finally fell on March 28, 1939, despite several proposals to negotiate by the Junta de Defensa. On April 1, 1939, Franco declared the war over. (Spanish)

The war had left approximately 500,000 dead and if a poll were taken today, 73% of the population would say that, “the civil war was a shameful period of Spanish history that is better to forget” (Deveny 6).

A few days before the war ended many Republicans had already fled to exile through the border with France and some continued to live in exile in different parts of the world until Franco’s death in 1975. Franco remained in power from 1939 to 1975 having established one of the most severe dictatorships in the history of humanity. Censorship was instituted and political persecution was the norm.

The post-war period was a dismal period for Spanish culture. Up to 1965, film production, for example, was very poor, reflecting the deprived economic and social conditions of the country. The two main cultural centers, Barcelona and Madrid, had been Republican and thus suffered very hard times under Franco. The use of Catalán was prohibited in Barcelona. In Madrid many families were ruined, because the money issued during Republican times was considered
worthless. General cultural production was subdued, considering that the new regime had imposed one language, one religion, one political party, and there was very strict censorship on the film industry. Unfortunately, the war had already stifled the magnificent literary production of the previous years. Several important literary figures, such as Federico García Lorca, Miguel Hernández were assassinated, and other poets, writers, artists, filmmakers were either killed or died during the war or were forced into exile (Deveny 7).

Fortunately in the 1950’s the cultural situation began to change thanks to two film directors: Luis García Berlanga and Juan Antonio Bardem. The films Bienvenido, Mr. Marshall, directed by Berlanga, and Muerte de un Ciclista, directed by Bardem, both won international prizes. The former won the 1953 Honorable Mention at the Cannes Festival and the latter, the International Critics award in 1955. Another important critical event that helped in making things change was the film Conference in 1955 at the University of Salamanca. The document from this conference titled “Cinematographic Conversations” accused Spanish cinema of being dead, and thus proposed changes. These changes slowly started to take place and led to the founding of magazines dedicated to the topic of film, such as “Film Ideal” which began being published in 1956 (Deveny 7).

Nonetheless, what I intend to do in this project is to show, that the Spanish Civil War is not a period of Spanish history that has been forgotten, or
that will ever be forgotten. On the contrary, the war and its effects continue to this day to be reflected in Spanish culture, in film and in literature. The films and novels of my study reflect this situation in great part. In *Si te dicen que caí* (1973) the effects of the war--desolation, destruction, and the dark side of survival--are the main topics. In *Libertarias* (1996), the political idealism and commitment of a group of women who fought in the war, and who were literally slaughtered by Franco’s troops, are presented. In *Amantes* (1991) the war and post-war serve as cultural referent and the “excuse” for a controversial plot.

**The Spanish Conquest, The Mexican Revolution**

Just like Colombia and Spain, Mexico has lived several extremely violent periods in its history. As mentioned above, the Spanish Conquest was one of the bloodiest in the whole history of humanity. We speak of over 70 million dead⁹. Later a more contemporary bloodshed was the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). The Revolution had its roots in the discontent of the majority of people, especially peasants and Indians, who had always lived in a situation of extreme poverty. Land distribution was uneven, and most of the land and the wealth

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⁹. In the *Conquest of America*, Todorov gives us the following figures by saying: “Without going into detail, and merely to give a general idea (even if we do not feel entirely justified in rounding off figures when it is a question of human lives), it will be recalled that in 1500 the world population is approximately 400 million, of whom 80 million inhabit the Americas. By the middle of the sixteenth century, out of these 80 million, there remain ten. Or limiting ourselves to Mexico: on the eve of the conquest, its population is about 25 million; in 1600, it is one million (133)”
belonged to a few of the privileged, who wanted to keep it this way. Since its independence in 1821, until the rise of Porfirio Díaz to the presidency in 1877, Mexico had had great political instability, with 75 presidents in 55 years.

The gap continued to grow under the dictatorship of General Porfirio Díaz, who had been in power for thirty years (1877–1880 and 1884–1911). Although there was social stability, there was also growing discontent. Francisco I. Madero, who had been educated in Europe and the United States, started to demand changes in the elections and soon became a leader. When in 1910, Díaz was forced to hold elections, Madero won a great number of votes, and Díaz who supposedly favoured one-term presidencies, had him imprisoned. Madero was eventually released from prison when Díaz secured his reelection and he fled to San Antonio, Texas to plot an uprising.

On November 20th of 1910, Madero officially launched the Revolution, which led to numerous uprisings in the rest of the country. In the meantime other regional leaders had surfaced, among them Emiliano Zapata in the South and Francisco “Pancho” Villa in the North. Both of these leaders came from the peasant class and eventually became the heroes of what later came to be considered an Agrarian Revolution.

Both Zapata and Villa were successful in controlling their regions and subduing the army. When Díaz realized he couldn’t control the uprising he resigned under the Treaty of Júarez in May 1911 and went into exile in Europe.
Francisco Madero became president. However, Emiliano Zapata was not happy with the way in which Madero was handling land reform. Thus, he took control of the State of Morelos and started his own land reform under the Plan de Ayala, by driving out the landowners from their land and giving it to the poor peasants. In 1919 Zapata was assassinated and Madero was imprisoned again and later executed. His attempt to revive the 19th century liberal program had failed.

Eventually the Revolution was out of control. Pancho Villa continued to control the North and there were many guerrilla factions fighting for control. Finally, Venustiano Carranza took power in 1920 and was able to institute order. He organized an important convention, which produced the Constitution of 1917. The constitution incorporated the fundamental goals of the revolution that are still in place. The most important goal of the Constitution was to establish land reforms through the “ejidos,” a farm cooperative program, which took land from large land holders and gave it to the peasants, nearly half of the total farmland of the country. Other presidents followed President Carranza’s political and social reforms.

According to a study by Robert McCaa of the University of Minnesota Population Center, over one-and-a-half million people died as a consequence of the Mexican Revolution. He is not talking about casualties only, but people who
fled, people that died from diseases, and massive mortality:

Nearly one-and-one-half million excess deaths occurred in the period 1910-1921, according to their analysis and mine. Our interpretations differ, however, on the matter of causes. While we agree that famine, disease, and epidemic were the proximate causes for the large number of excess deaths, I single out war as the root cause. Even in the case of the infamous Spanish Flu epidemic, which medical historians think was more devastating in Mexico than almost any other country in the world, its severity, in my view, is explained precisely by the disorder and weakened condition of the Mexican population vexed by years of unremitting violence, civil war and banditry. (3)

The war, destruction, torture and loss of lives during the Revolution as well as in later revolts, like the Cristeros Rebellion (1926-1929), are reflected in the cultural representations of Mexico, as expressed above, in the films of the Revolution, in its literary production and in the paintings and murals of Diego Rivera and other artists.

The Dirty War in Mexico- The Tlatelolco Massacre and the Revolutionary Movements

After the Mexican Revolution, the PNR or Partido Revolucionario, dominated by revolutionary and reformist politicians from Northern Mexico, governed Mexico. In 1946, the PNR was renamed PRI or Partido Revolucionario Institucional and continued to govern the country until the elections of July 2, 2000, when Vicente Fox Quesada of the conservative National Action Party (PAN) won the elections, thus ending 71 years of one-
party rule. Fox promised to reform, the tax and legal system, and to reduce the power of the central government (Mexico).

During the 71 years of PRI political power, the party was frequently accused of corruption, violence, and acts of persecution against members of other political parties. Indeed, the PRI created a highly effective corporate structure to channel and manipulate social groups, made certain political organizations illegal, and co-opted officially recognized trade union organizations by turning them into “clients” of the regime (Varela Moreno 1).

In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, as revolutionary movements and social dissent started to increase worldwide to protest government corruption, political persecution and social injustices, Mexico was deeply affected. The year 1968 was especially important because that year saw the unrest of student movements all over the world for instance in France and Germany, Latin America and the United States. Students became increasingly active in politics to show their nonconformity with their governments: in general their protests focused on important events in the world, such as the Vietnam War and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

The massacre of students and others, including women and children, in La Plaza de las Tres Culturas, in Tlatelolco, Mexico, on October 2, 1968 had grave

\[10\] McCaa is talking about a study by Ordorica and Lezama (1993).
consequences not only in Mexico but abroad\textsuperscript{11}. The official figures state that 28 people were killed at Tlatelolco while other sources calculate over 300 deaths and others who simply “disappeared” at the hands of DFS, the military judicial police. The students, and others who wanted to support them, had gathered in a peaceful manifestation to protest against the government. There were several issues they wanted the government to address but the two main ones were, firstly, their discontent with the fact the Olympic Games were going to be held in Mexico, at great expense to the country, when there was so much poverty and unresolved social problems\textsuperscript{12}, and secondly, the intervention of the government and the “granaderos” or riot police at the schools and universities.

Given the magnitude of the crime by the government and the relentless persecution against students who were considered as enemies of the state, the country started to witness the rise of different urban guerrilla groups. There were approximately 29 guerrilla groups between 1965 and 1980, with a total of approximately 2,000 militants (Olivar Zúñiga 1). Some of the most dominant

\textsuperscript{11} The causes and consequences of Tlatelolco Massacre, were very well portrayed in the 1989 film \textit{Rojo Amanecer}, directed by Jorge Fons.

\textsuperscript{12} Professor Donald J. Mabry, of Mississippi State University explains the implications of holding the games in Mexico: “For Mexico, 1968 was a special year, one in which it would host the Olympics during October 5-27, to demonstrate to the world how modernized and civilized it was. The Mexican economy had been booming for years and was to be displayed so the world would know (...) President Díaz Ordaz and other government officials believed, no doubt, that hosting the Olympics was the most important act of the year, if not of decades, and nothing could be allowed to interfere with this great enterprise. Believing this, they assumed that all other Mexicans were equally concerned with the Olympics, that the consuming passion of the organizers and promoters was shared by students, peasants, and provincials. Thus, all acts were seen through the filter of the Olympic Games; all words and events were linked to this celebration of youth.” (2)
were the Frente Urbano Zapatista (Zapatista Urban Front- FUZ), the Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario (Student Revolutionary Front- FER) and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias del Pueblo (Popular Armed Revolutionary Forces- FARP).

A member of the FARP, Jesús Morales, explained his involvement by saying, “Ninguno pensaba ser guerrillero, nuestra demanda inicial era democratizar la universidad (...) pero el gobierno no dio otra opción” (None of us wanted to become guerrilla members, our initial demand was to democratize the university (...) but the government did not give us an option) (Olivar Zúñiga 2).

Of all the guerrilla groups in Mexico the one that survived the longest was the Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre (Communist League of 23 September-LC23S) or the Liga as it became known. The name came from an event that happened on September 23, 1965 when a group of 18 men died while attacking the military barracks of Madera, in Chihuahua, Mexico. The founding members of the Liga admired this action because the people who died were fighting for the fair distribution of land (Varela Moreno 3).

Members of various guerrilla groups that had already been dismantled by the government founded the Liga on September 23, 1973. “We were fighting for change, for education,” said Mario Cartagena, a guerrilla member in an interview. “We kidnapped politicians and businessman to help finance our programs. We never meant to harm anyone...” (Olivar Zúñiga 2). In a different interview, Benjamín Palacios Hernández, another member of the Liga, accuses
the PRI of betraying the ideals of the Revolution: “The PRI was a symbol of a revolution that never succeeded in changing, let alone resolving, the real problems of the country—poverty, economic crisis, unfair distribution of wealth, incessant corruption, and so on” (6).

The National Commission of Human Rights in Mexico said that during the “dirty war” (1968-1980), when the guerrilla groups were persecuted and disbanded, 532 people “disappeared” at the hands of security forces. Of those 275 were executed. However, some former members of these groups, many of them imprisoned for years and years without trials, have said that there were many more people who “disappeared” and who never belonged to any guerrilla groups (Olivar Zúñiga 2).

In the film *Amores Perros*, the character of “El Chivo” portrays one of these former guerrilla fighters. “El Chivo,” a former Marxist guerrilla member, turned hitman, used to be a successful college professor who thought he could make a difference in the world and thus, abandoned the comforts of a nice home, a loving wife and child to fight for his ideals. He, like all the members of the guerrilla groups in Mexico, failed and was captured, tortured and imprisoned. Thus, in the movie he is a symbol of the broken dreams and ideals of the young people of Mexico (and the world) of the late 60’s and 70’s, who thought they could change the world. One of the most moving moments in the film is El
Chivo’s telephone confession to his now grown daughter about his reasons for having abandoned her when she was just a baby.

Conclusion
To summarize there is evidence to support the notion that the violence, cruelty, and brutality of historical wars remain in the collective memory\textsuperscript{13} of the people of these nations and permeate their cultural representations. Such a history of war is constantly relived, retold, and represented in diverse cultural genres, as a sort of catharsis. Aristotle contends in his \textit{Poetics} that tragedy arises from causes natural to man for an end, specifically the catharsis of human emotions:

If it is properly constructed, he says, tragedy reduces the soul's emotions of pity and terror by means of compassion and dread, which are aroused by the representation pitiable, and terrible events. By "reduces" I mean that tragedy aims to make the spectator have a due proportion, i.e. the mean of emotions of terror and the like, by arousing these emotions

\textsuperscript{13} Although the purpose of this paper is not to analyze the contemporary representation of memory, it is important to acknowledge this recurring topic, given the fact that violence is embedded in the collective memory of many who recall, for instance, centuries of violence against their people. I would like to include the following concept of collective memory by Mary-Claire Lavabre: “While the concept of memory is largely polysemous, or even metaphoric in its principle when it covers all forms of the presence of the past, collective memory is perhaps less equivocal in its definition. Collective memory can be defined as an interaction between the memory policies - also referred to as "historical memory" - and the recollections - “common memory,” of what has been experienced in common. It lies at the point where individual meets collective, and psychic meets social.” (1)
through the representation. Tragedy, like epic, has as its end the catharsis of these emotions, which gives rise to the pleasure proper to tragedy. (48)

According to Aristotle, thus, the representation of violence has a specific purpose: to purge the audience of feelings of fear, terror and pity by the representation of terrible events.

Clearly, the number of people killed by brutal wars, conflicts, and rebellions continue to be mirrored in the cultural expressions of Colombia, Mexico and Spain. In the aesthetics analyzed it will become evident how these conflicts continue to permeate the collective memory of people.
CHAPTER 3

ROSARIO, RODRIGO, WILMER AND ALEXIS- THE CHILDREN OF VIOLENCE

This whole world is wild at heart
and weird on top
*Wild at heart*- David Lynch

Blood so hot and so full of poison.
Rosario had been formed out of something else,
God had nothing to do with her creation
*Rosario Tijeras*- Jorge Franco Ramos

At twelve years of age, a child from the slums is like an old man:
he will die soon-
he will have killed someone
and someone will kill him
*La virgen de los sicarios*- Fernando Vallejo

*La virgen Tijeras* (2000), *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994)\(^{14}\), and *Rodrigo-D*:

*No Futuro* (1996), the Colombian books and films I have chosen to analyze in this dissertation, share various characteristics in common. They all have a similar central theme: the senselessness of living in a world with "no future" and the brazenness with which one can kill. Secondly, they are set in the 80's and 90's in

\(^{14}\) *La virgen de los sicarios*, the novel, was written by Fernando Vallejo in 1994 and was later adapted into a movie by Barbet Schoeder in the year 2000. In this dissertation, I will be referring to both as, *La virgen*, the novel, and *La virgen*, the film.
Medellín, Colombia, one of the most dangerous cities in the world.\textsuperscript{15} Finally, all make reference to the urban violence generated by drug trafficking. In terms of beauty and the sublime, the topics of this dissertation, I find that the characters, specifically those of Rosario, Alexis and Wilmer, regardless of the violence, or maybe because of the violence they symbolize, are themselves fundamentally beautiful and sublime. These children of violence could be judged as morally despicable, but instead they are “coersive, irresistible, and a species of seduction,” using Adam Phillip’s words in the introduction of Edmund Burke’s \textit{Enquiry}. Phillip later added, “Both the Sublime and the Beautiful induce a state of submission, that is often combined with the possibility of getting lost. They disorientate and undermine purpose” (xxiii). This is exactly what happens to those characters who become involved with them, and to the reader. These characters seduce the reader. This is particularly evident in the case of the character of Rosario in \textit{Rosario Tijeras}.

The stories deal mainly with the lives of young boys,\textsuperscript{16} almost children, called sicarios who were hired by the drug mafia to “settle accounts” and “to punish attempts to subvert established trade monopolies and hierarchies” (Bergquist 1). These children, easily lured by the money (sometimes only $100 dollars per kill), resorted to killing as “a way of life,” because it was the only

\textsuperscript{15} Charles Bergquist explains that in 1988 Medellín had a homicide rate twice that of Detroit, making it one of the most violent cities in the world. The trade in cocaíne, most of it destined for the US market, is the main cause for the astronomical homicide rate in Medellín(1).
means of making their daily living. Besides, there seemed to be no other options in sight for them or any motivating future, hence, for example, the No-Future in the title of the film Rodrigo-D. -No Future.

In different testimonies, they describe their lives as “ephemeral” and “without meaning” and for this reason they decide to live their short existences at a fast pace and as eagerly and passionately as they can. Most of them don’t live past their 16th birthday, and they die as violently as they have lived. For them living a full life means getting money fast and spending it fast, before death catches up with them.

Alonso Salazar (1960- ), a Colombian journalist, and former Jesuit priest, has dedicated much of his professional life to studying the “cultura del narcotráfico” or “drug-trafficking culture,” which, besides terrorism, gun trade, kidnappings and betrayals, among other matters, includes the involvement of these very young killers. In Violence in Colombia 1990-2000, Charles Berquist, quotes Alonso Salazar’s definition of sicario:

The sicario has absorbed the ephemeral sense of time particular to our epoch. Life is an instant. Neither the past nor the future exists. Sicarios take consumer society to an extreme: they convert life, their own lives and those of their victims, into objects of economic transactions, into

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16 Most of the sicarios are boys, not girls. However, in the novel by Jorge Franco, Rosario, the main character is a woman who has been hired to kill: she is a sicario.
disposable objects. The sicario transforms death into a daily occurrence. To kill and to die is normal. (Berquist 9)

This ephemeral sense of time is analyzed by Néstor García Canclini in “Los estudios culturales de los 80 a los 90: perspectivas antropológicas y sociológicas en América Latina” (Cultural Studies in the 80’s and 90’s: Antropol ogical and Sociological Perspectives. The Case of Latin America), where he explains that modernization was one of the main contributors to this drama. Modernization brought important changes, such as industrialization, technology, and world wars. Societies had to adapt to changes, and a great number of people began massive migrations, especially from the country to the city. These massive migrations brought with them unemployment, pollution and the disproportionate growth of cities, especially in the case of Latin America, where there was a candid identification of progress with modernization and backwardness with tradition (43).

To understand the phenomena that led to this situation of social chaos and violent death, characteristic of the Medellín of the 80’s and 90’s, we need to understand the “crisis of modernity,” also known as post-modernity, which had a huge influence on all the rapid changes that started to take place in the world in the second half of this past century.

In his essay "Modernity-An Incomplete Project", Jurgen Habermas explains how modernity began with The Illustration, at a time when it was
thought that only reason would improve human society. This could be seen particularly in the writings by Immanuel Kant, Voltaire, John Locke, David Hume:

The so-called Enlightenment project is the fostering of this belief that a break with tradition, blind habit and slavish obedience to religious precepts and prohibitions, coupled with the application of reason and logic by the disinterested individual can bring about a solution to the problems of society. (Barry 85)

In the 1970’s, French post-structuralists, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derridá, discredited this type of thinking and attacked the ideals of reason, clarity, truth and progress. François Lyotard had already used the term, post-modernity, in The Postmodern condition: A Report on Knowledge (1979). In his essay Lyotard wanted to answer the question: What is modernity? (1982), and attacked Habermas by saying: "I have read a thinker of repute who defends modernity against those he calls the neo-conservatives..." For Lyotard, the project of modernity that Habermas wanted to continue was an authoritarian system with a totalitarian explanation of things, such as Christianity, Marxism and the myth of scientific progress. These “metanarratives”, which had the intention of explaining and giving confidence, were in reality illusions that tried to get rid of differences, opposition and plurality. Thus, Lyotard’s famous definition of post-modernism when he said: “the grand narrative has lost its credibility” (37), referring to modernism. The great narratives about progress and human perfectibility could not be sustained anymore and the best that could be expected
were provisional “mininarratives,” contingent, temporal and relative, that would provide a basis for the action of small groups in very particular local circumstances.

The "loss of the real" is another important notion in postmodernism relevant to this study, especially when we analyze the alienation of Rodrigo in the film Rodrigo-D. The only thing that makes sense for Rodrigo is heavy metal and/or punk music. His thinking is occupied by the idea of forming a heavy metal band. Rodrigo is not interested in pursuing an education or a job, or forming a family, or helping his family who is struggling to make ends meet.

Jean Baudillard, in this book Simulations (1981), speaks of the culture of “hyperreality”, that is, the penetrating influence of TV images, movies and publicity, in contemporary life that has led to the loss of a distinction between what is real and what is imaginary, reality and illusion, the superficial and the profound. Baudillard asserts that this culture of “hyperreality has invaded homes and generated a sense of confusion: cable TV and parabolic antennas contributed especially, because, TV sets have ceased to be a luxury, and are part of the essential furniture of any home, including slum areas and ghettos (Barry 86-87).

In Medellín las subculturas del narcotráfico (Medellín the Subcultures of Drugtrafficking), Alonso Salazar and Ana Maria Jaramillo explain how these changes, taking place in the world, have influenced the phenomenon of drug
trading that began to flourish in Colombia and specifically, Medellín. Between 1951 and 1964 migrations to Medellín increased. The new settlers that came to populate the city slums were poor peasants, who had been forced to leave the countryside, in many cases because they were escaping from La Violencia, (see Chapter 1). They settled on the city margins, in what came to be called barrios piratas or barrios de invasion (literally “bandit neighborhoods” or “neighborhoods of invaders”), slum areas with no legal status. In these neighborhoods, where most people lacked an education and a job, and where there was a family background of incipient violence, the drug lords found a large pool of young men willing to work for them. In the novel, Rosario Tijeras, Rosario explains to her friend Antonio the reasons why her brother, her former boyfriend, and eventually she herself got involved in the business of killing:

“Johnefe and Ferney were able to place themselves within the Cartel,” she told me. “That’s what every boy wants. That’s how you stopped being a scrounger and had a chance at becoming a tough guy. In those days there was great demand because things were out of control, and they were looking for gang leaders to arm their forces.”

“Translate, please,” I told her.

“War, my friend, war. You had to defend yourself. They were paying big money to anyone who could bring down a cop. They hired Ferney and Johnefe. Ferney didn’t have good aim, but he was good with a motorcycle; Johnefe, on the other hand, was eagle-eyed. The bullet hit where he trained his eye. After they proved their skills, they were promoted. Things began going good for them. They got new motorcycles and guns, and we added a second story to the house. With that kind of money, who wouldn’t want to work? We all wanted to be hired. Later, I was also recruited. (61)
Alonso Salazar points out that the media, especially film, had entered the slums of Medellín, and other cities, to create a new “war mythology”, a “mythology of the super-heroes.” For young people, this mythology contained the ideals of behavior. The influence of mass media was another reason for this ephemeral attitude towards life that the sicarios had. Having the power of any of the superheroes of TV and film, made available through the weapons distributed by the Cartels, gave Rosario, Ferney and Johnefe the possibility of becoming tough “guys”, and to stop being the scum of society.

On the other hand, the mass media also contributed to the creation of a consumer society in which money and power became the most important values for the new generation. Jewelry, expensive clothes, luxury cars, alcohol, parties became the essentials of a happy existence. Upon entering the world of drug trade these new commodities were easily obtained by the sicarios of the ghettos of Medellín. Most of these young boys were easily lured by the possibility of buying material things, which they would never have otherwise.

In the 1960’s, there was a major economic recession, an increase in “informal economy”\(^\text{17}\), the loss of authority of the Catholic Church, the traditional political parties, and neighborhood unions. While the government and authorities were busy trying to solve the economic crisis, the solution to

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\(^{17}\) “Informal economy” or “economia informal” refers to the manner in which people try to survive or make a living by selling all sorts of products on the streets, such as, cigarettes, books, records, homemade bread, cookies. Sometimes this is done, door to door, on the sidewalks, or in the middle of traffic. Whole families participate in the endeavor.
urban problems was seen as “technical” and did not consider the new “marginal city” which was starting to form (Salazar, Jaramillo 11).

In Medellín, when the city started its transformation, no one thought anything was wrong with this increasing phenomenon of los nuevos ricos or “newly rich”, with their huge mansions, big cars, loud music, and extravagant lifestyles. But before long it started to become a complicated social problem, when it became evident from where the money was coming. The war between the “cartels” and, the intimidation and the assassination of prominent public figures such as: senators, presidential candidates, journalists, became a threat to the whole society.

However, at the end of the 1970’s, the government and society, aware of the problem, decided to close their eyes, ignore the situation, and pretend it was someone else’s problem. When two young boys on a motorcycle assassinated Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, the Minister of Justice, on April 30, 1984, the new phenomena of the sicarios became more evident. In Rosario Tijeras, Johnfe and Ferney, represent this new style of homicide. In Rodrigo D and La virgen de los sicarios the pair of sicarios on a motorcycle, preparing to kill, are also well depicted in several distressing scenes.

In 1981, MAS (Muerte a Secuestradores or “Death to Kidnappers”) appeared and death, vendetta style became something common. In 1983, in Medellín, the organized mafia was a reality and many people were already
involved in the benefits of drug trafficking. The first gangs appeared in the Manrique, Guayabal and Aranjuez neighborhoods, already attracted by how easy it had become to be involved in the illicit business. In the beginning, only the traitors were killed. Then anyone who opposed the drug business could be murdered. Soon the demand for young people who wanted to perform the killings began to increase. These children, as mentioned above, had nothing to lose, for they had nothing to begin with, and they were very easily attracted by the amount of money they could earn in a few minutes. Killing became another type of business transaction, subject to the laws of the market (Salazar, Jaramillo 13).

Guerrilla warfare was another phenomena that cropped up again in Colombia between 1985-1990, to make the situation worse. Violence became fragmented into small and numerous “wars” everywhere: the army fought the guerrilla, the paramilitary fought the guerrilla, the army fought the paramilitary, one guerrilla group fought another, and the police also got involved. All these factors contributed to the deterioration of the basic unity of society, but especially in Antioquia (14).

Another important phenomenon was the crumbling of the traditional family with an increase in “single motherhood” and the conformation of a hybrid society, which mixed the traditional values with the new values. The mother became the central figure in the lives of the children of the slums, and, thus in the
lives of the sicarios. If the mother died, the family crumbled. In Rodrigo-D this is an important issue which director Víctor Gaviria deals with in depth. Rodrigo’s mother had died and his sense of abandonment eventually leads to his death. In Rosario Tijeras, the mother, Doña Rubi, is an important figure in the life of Rosario. Doña Rubi is an example of the typical mother of the comunas who ends up raising several children, from different men, all of whom have abandoned her. She is left to struggle alone. It is suggested that besides her job as a seamstress, and maid, she has had to become a prostitute to survive. Antonio explains how Rosario viewed her own mother: “(...) the lady didn’t have the moral authority to judge her and less so now that she wasn’t living with her, and even lesser now that she was going about looking very suspicious with her hair dyed blonde and wearing miniskirts Rosario’s size” (55). In Rosario’s case, the person closest to her was her brother, Johnefe”. When Johnefe is killed, Rosario exclaims: “They’ve killed the love of my life, my friend (...) The only one who ever loved me” (41). The fact is that the only people sicarios feel any loyalty towards is the members of their families.

Despite the death of Pablo Escobar and the imprisonment or extradition of other mafia heads, the violence with which the sicarios had learned to live, did not stop. They had been influenced by the characters in the films that they had
seen all the time that many “Rambos” and “Terminators” appeared. Fernando Vallejo explains with great sarcasm in *La virgen de los sicarios*:

> With the death of the alleged big boss drug-trafficker our head of state spoke of above, the profession of sicario ended to all intents and purposes here. The saint dead, the miracle was over. Without a fixed job, they dispersed throughout the city and set to kidnapping, hijacking, robbing. And a sicario who works for himself at his own risk isn’t a sicario: that’s free enterprise, private initiative. Another institution of ours, then, that’s gone. In the shipwreck of Colombia, this further loss of our identity means we’ll soon have nothing left. (34)

It is in this context that the story of Rosario Tijeras develops. Jorge Franco, however, presents to us a beautiful woman, who is born into a world without of opportunity and full of crime and despair. Rosario tries to rise above her poverty by getting involved with the people who have power and the money: the druglords. At the same time, she tries to enter the world of the privileged through her lover, Emilio, and her soul mate, Antonio, who both come from “la crème de la crème” of the society of Medellín. Nonetheless all fails for her, and eventually she is shot to death. This is where the story begins.

In the story of Rosario Tijeras, and very specifically in the character of Rosario, we find many of the elements of the sublime and beautiful, (discussed in Chapter 1) which so fascinated Longinus, Burke and Kant. On the one hand,

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18 I was able to locate the English versions of Rosario Tijeras, *La virgen de los sicarios* (Our Lady of the Assassins) and *Si te dicen que caí* (The Fallen). So, in most instances I am quoting directly from these translations. However, if I feel that the translation is not as faithful as I expect it to be, I will translate myself. In all instances, I use the word “sicario” instead of the word “hitman” that appears in the English translation of *La virgen*.
when Antonio and Emilio become involved with Rosario's world of crime and violence, they experience an overriding sense of horror and fear. But at the same time they are drawn and fascinated by this unknown and dangerous world. Despite the terror they feel at moments, they surprisingly and inexplicably do not try to get away; quite the opposite, they get become more involved until they hit the bottom. This attraction to Rosario and her world transcends all reason. Throughout his story, Antonio, the narrator, explains how he could not rationally understand his and his friends' sense of subjection and inability to get away.

On the other hand, Rosario herself, who represents the epitome of violence, has taken over their lives. This is also suggestive of the overwhelming fascination with the power of being carried away that overtakes Antonio and Emilio's lives, and anyone involved with Rosario. As Burke and Kant explained in their theories about the experience with beauty and the sublime, beauty and the sublime “are not subject to any type of formal classification, they are not creatures of reason, and they go beyond our capacity to comprehend”. Adam Philips wrote: “The sublime is a rape. Beauty is a lure. They both induce a state of submission that is often combined with the possibility of getting lost” (xxiii). This is what happened to these two young men of the high society of Medellín, Antonio and Emilio: they were induced to a state of submission through their relationship with Rosario and her underworld of drugs and crime. This
relationship overcomes them, and although each survives, the journey has been terrifying.

**The Sublime and Beautiful Rosario Tijeras**

Published by Jorge Franco in 2000, the novel *Rosario Tijeras* became an immediate bestseller in Colombia. Gregory Rabassa, who has translated the works of Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Jorge Luis Borges, and other well-known Latin American authors, recently translated Rosario Tijeras into English. The new English version explains on the cover of this new edition, how Franco, “with gritty realism balanced by humor and warmth for his tragic heroine and would-be-heroes, (...) paints an intense, beautiful and bizarre portrait”

Jorge Franco was born in 1962 in Medellín, Colombia. He studied film at the London International Film School and Literature at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá. He began writing in 1991 and in 1996 won the national literary contest “Pedro Gómez Valderrama” for *Maldito Amor* (1996), a collection of short stories. *Mala Noche* (1997), his first novel, won the Ciudad de Pereira National Novel Contest and was a finalist in the Colcultura National Contest (novel category). Franco won the National Scholarship Novel and the Dashiel Hammet prize for *Rosario Tijeras* (1999). His most recent novel *Paráíso Travel* (2001) has already received excellent reviews. Franco Ramos is currently working on his sixth novel. Franco, one of the youngest and well-recognized
writers in Latin America, has already won a place of reputation in Colombia, alongside well-known authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Laura Restrepo, Alvaro Mutis, and Fernando Vallejo.

In an interview with me Jorge Franco said, “Rosario Tijeras is a love story, not a novel of violence.” However, it is a love-story set in an environment of violence, hatred, gangs, death, and brutality. Rosario Tijeras is the story of a young woman, Rosario “Tijeras,” a hired killer, from the comunas or slums of Medellín. Rosario Tijeras is fiction, but is a true portrait of the harshness of life in Medellín. Fernando Vallejo’s, La virgen de los sicarios, on the other hand, is a semi-autobiographical story, but contains the same elements as Franco’s novel, except that the sicarios, the heroes of the story, are two young men. Nonetheless, Fernando’s experience of the sublime, when getting involved in this world of extreme violence, is presented at a different level. He is not completely overwhelmed, he just lets himself get carried away, and does not try to question his experience. Only once, at the end, when he has decided to kill his lover, does he stop to reflect, and concludes: “I was infinitely tired… I didn’t give a shit about honour… impunity and punishment were all the same to me...(126). Rodrigo-D tells a similar story, and although the story of violent death is central, it does not contain the same elements of the sublime or beauty that we see in the other two stories. However, it is true that if we look at the character through the
eyes of the director, it is evident that he was trying to do the same as Franco Ramos and Vallejo, that is, to beg forgiveness for these “children of violence.”

In Rosario Tijeras, Antonio has become Rosario’s best friend and confidant. When the story begins Rosario is dying at a hospital from a gunshot wound to her stomach. She has been shot while being kissed: “Since Rosario had been shot at point-blank range while she was being kissed, she confuses the pain of death with that of love” (5). The killer had used the same method Rosario used when she killed: “an eye for an eye,” is the motto of these young killers.

From the corridors of the hospital where Rosario is fighting for her life, Antonio, the narrator, waits to learn if she will recover. Through him, the reader reconstructs the friendship between the two, her love story with Emilio, and her life as a hitwoman or sicario. With great nostalgia and sadness he narrates meaningful moments during their friendship. It is through Antonio’s stream of consciousness that the reader learns about Rosario’s life and her relationship with him, his best friend, Emilio, her gang of killers and the “tough guys.”

Her full name, Rosario Tijeras, symbolizes the contradiction of her character, the conflict of this woman who is torn, because the world in which she lives is torn. Rosario, meaning rosary, evokes the chain of beads used to represent the series of prayers dedicated to the Virgin Mary by those who belong to the Roman Catholic Church. Her last name Tijeras, meaning scissors,
represents the scissors she used, when she had just turned thirteen years old, and was raped by one of the men in the neighborhood. He became her first victim:

"Where'd “Tijeras” come from? I asked her one night, with drink in hand.

“From a guy I castrated,” she answered, looking at the glass which she then emptied into her mouth” (11). With this incident began a life of unrelenting murders committed by Rosario.

Both Antonio and Emilio came from very well to do families in Medellín, Colombia; that Emilio had fought for Rosario, with her previous boyfriend, Ferney, a member of Rosario’s gang of killers, meant that their lives were in constant danger. Antonio reminisces about different moments during their friendship, such as the moment when they met; when he learned she was a hired killer, her demonstrated lack of remorse over her crimes; his discovery that she was romantically involved with one of the big drug lords and that she was a drug dealer. Antonio recalled the innumerable times during their relationship when he thought to himself that he would ultimately gain nothing from his involvement with Rosario, except to get lost: “I didn’t care about her brazenness in using me nor did I care about the false love of those hands, those eyes, and that tongue. Since I was already lost I wouldn’t lose anything in losing myself” (107)
In the hospital, while waiting for the news of Rosario, Antonio tells us that Rosario’s life has been a wave of death and misery. He feels bitter towards the world and society, whom he blames for Rosario’s wretched life:

In the darkness of the corridors I felt Rosario’s anguished solitude in this world, with no identity to fall back on, so different from us, who can dig up our past even in the farthest corners of the worlds with surnames that produce grins of acceptance and forgiveness for our crimes. Life didn’t forgive Rosario even the smallest offense, which is why she defended herself so much, creating around herself a wall of bullets and scissors, of sex and punishment, of pleasure and pain. Her body deceived us, we thought that in it you could find the delights of pleasure. That’s what her cinnamon body inspired, provoking the desire to taste her, to feel the tenderness of her clean flesh- you always wanted to get inside Rosario. (9)

Antonio explains that because she has been denied the opportunities others have had, she deserves understanding and forgiveness, but not condemnation. He himself is trying to understand the complexities of her existence and, in understanding, redeem her. In no way does he condemn her behavior.

Unfortunately for Rosario, she was beautiful, and this quality made all men fall for her. If we recall Burke’s study, he had explained that beauty causes desire and love in others: "beauty demands no assistance from our reasoning; even the will is unconcerned; the appearance of beauty as effectually causes some degree of love in us, as the application of ice or fire produces the ideas of heat or cold" (92). It was precisely this quality, and the life of violence that she had inherited, that became Rosario’s perdition.

The “tough guy” Rosario is involved with is never mentioned, but Antonio explains that he is extremely powerful and that Rosario is under his
power and control. The name of Pablo Escobar immediately pops into the reader’s mind, especially considering the context in which the story is told. Rosario gets involved with the drug lords almost by accident, when she goes with Ferney and Johnefe, her brother, to a party to celebrate an important murder they had both been hired to carry out. The big guy fell immediately in for her: “As soon as they’d seen Rosario, what happened to everyone happened to them: they wanted her for themselves. And since the one with the most money is the one who gets to choose, they got her (61).” Rosario had no choice but to let herself be owned by “them,” as she refers to the Cartel people. It is at this moment that her life takes a huge turn for the worst. Antonio expresses his rage when he thinks about the way it happened, about the desire Rosario provoked in men, knowing how he himself felt when he was with her. “I could picture them. I could see them circling like vultures over their dead victim, and it wasn’t that Rosario was anything like that, but it enraged me to know that they looked at her with desire…” (136).

Here we can resort to Lacan to find an explanation to this overwhelming desire that overtook all the men with whom Rosario came in contact. Her beauty had obviously lured them, and, unknowingly, she had become the object of desire of all the men in her life. As Lacan made clear, “desire is the essence of man”(107). Desire is what moves man, who is in a constant search for the lost
Other. The problem is not the desire itself but the need to possess that provokes the disaster.

Antonio was obviously jealous of the tough guys, because like him, they had made Rosario the object of their desire. The fact is that Rosario, having become every man’s object of desire, turns out to cause her own downfall. The first man who desired her raped her. She castrated him with a pair of scissors. Other men who forced themselves on her were shot in the stomach, while she kissed them goodbye. She protected herself by becoming an assassin. Later, being an assassin became a way of life.

Medellín is a city where the rich clash with the poor: the rich despise the poor, but they mingle with them. It is a city where morality is important but immorality predominates. Antonio explains the context where he and his friend Emilio first meet Rosario.

I’ve had to struggle with my memory to remember when and where we’d seen each other for the first time. I can’t place the exact date, maybe six years ago, but I do know where. It was at Aquarius, Friday or Saturday, the days we never missed. The club was one of those places that attracted the lower classes who were beginning to rise and those of us among the upper classes who were beginning to fall. They already had enough money now to spend in the places where we paid on credit, and they were

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19. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, we find a recopilation of Jacques Lacan’s seminars which contains the basis of his psychoanalytic theory. In one of the seminars about the gaze, titled: “The Gaze as Objet Petit a”, Lacan had talked about desire and lure. It is worth quoting to clarify his concepts: “The lure plays an essential function therefore. It is not something else that seizes us at the very level of clinical experience, when, in relation to what one might imagine of the attraction to the other pole as conjoining masculine and feminine, we apprehend the prevalence of that which is presented astravesty. It is no doubt through the mediation of masks that the masculine and the feminine meet in the most acute, most intense way. Only the subject- the human subject, the subject of the desire that is the essence of man – is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture...” (107)
already doing business with people of our class. Economically, we were not equals. They wore the same clothing we did, went around in better cars, and had more drugs, which they shared with us—that was their biggest hold on us. They took risks, were bold, and made themselves respected, they were what we weren’t but underneath it all had always wanted to be. We would watch them with their weapons cased in their flies, increasing the bulge, showing us in a hundred ways that they were bigger men than we, bigger hell-raisers. They flirted with our women and showed theirs off to us. Uninhibited women, as determined as their men, unreserved in their lovemaking, hot mestizo women with firm legs from so much climbing up the hills in their neighborhoods, belonging more to this land than our women, more agreeable, and less snotty. Among them was Rosario. (24)

Both Emilio and Antonio fell in love with Rosario immediately, but she chose Emilio. Antonio was devastated but continued to spend time with both. The question we ask ourselves is why do two young men, “proper upright people,” with a bright future ahead of them, who have money and an excellent economic situation, get involved with a woman who represents all that is wicked, evil, and wrong in society? Rosario is a cold-blooded killer and seems not to feel any remorse. She is a drug dealer and a drug addict. Also, she once belonged to a satanic sect. When they met her she had already killed a few men.

The first time Emilio and Antonio found out about a man she killed, practically under their noses, for insulting her in the club where they were partying, they went crazy. It was at that moment that they could have walked away, but neither did:

We couldn’t believe it. We cried from the scare and the shock. Emilio became desperate, as if he were the murderer, kicking the furniture, crying, and pounding on the doors with his fists. More than being affected
by the crime, what was driving out of his mind was the realization that
Rosario wasn’t a dream but something real. He, of course, wasn’t the only
one who had been deceived.
“I’ve had it!” she told us. “Hanging out with a pair of faggots like
you two.”
That night I thought that that was as far as we would go with
Rosario. I was wrong. I don’t know how she managed it, but she wasn’t
charged with the murder, and we never knew at what moment we put
aside the dream and became part of the nightmare. (37-38)

Emilio and Antonio continued their relationship with Rosario despite the
“nightmare,” as Antonio described it. What lures them, and keeps them mixed
up in this “nightmare”? At the beginning they seemed to have been attracted by
her beauty: “Rosario emerged like a futuristic Venus, with her knee-high black
platform boots that raised her even higher than her dancer’s pedestal…She had
cinnamon skin, dark hair, white teeth, full lips…”(10) Rosario does not possess
the conventional beauty, or the beauty of the women of Emilio and Antonio’s
social class. Later the reasons for getting involved with her do not make sense:

“How did you fall in love with her?” I asked Emilio.
“The minute I saw her, I was done for”
“I know that when you saw her you liked her, but I’m talking about
something different, about falling in love. You know what I mean.
Emilio was thoughtful…
“Now I remember,” he said. One night after partying, Rosario told me she
was hungry, and we went to have some hot dogs at one of those street
carts, and you know what she ordered? A hot dog with no sausage.”
“So?” I couldn’t thin of anything else to say.
“What do you mean, ‘so’? Anybody would have to fall in love with that.”
I don’t know if a hot dog with no sausage can make a person lose
himself…. (25)
Antonio’s bewilderment seems totally justified. He cannot fully understand, in a rational manner, why his friend would fall for someone with Rosario’s criminal record. What is more bewildering, however, is that he himself, cannot find a justification for his own sense of abandonment, especially when there are moments in which he is terrified about the whole situation but totally fascinated, because as he himself had expressed before: “… because with her it wasn’t a matter of taste, of love, or of luck, with her it was a matter of courage. You had to have plenty of balls to get involved with Rosario Tijeras” (16).

If we again bring to mind Burke’s definition of beauty, he writes that “It is not to be found in perfection and not necessarily dependent on positive qualities, because “beauty is not a creature of reason,” but on the contrary, “it strikes us mechanically and produces in us the passion of love” (102). This definition helps us to understand Emilio and Antonio’s attraction for her. This attraction for Rosario has nothing to do with the norms prescribed by society, since she did not have the qualities determined to be positive by society: she was tougher than any man, she carried a gun, she killed in an instant and without hesitation, she participated in drug orgies with criminals, she was romantically involved with one of the important drug lords in the world, and the people in her crowd were all drug-dealers, and criminals like herself: “And if you feel sorry for them, why do you kill them? - I asked, not minding my own business—“Because I have to. You know that” (Franco Ramos 44). If reason were
something to be taken into consideration, Emilio and Antonio would not have gotten involved with her in the first place.

Even Antonio expresses his sense of bewilderment and loss in his own words when he is trying to understand Ferney’s reaction to Rosario’s new relationship with Emilio: “I couldn’t understand why he was so obsessed until I began to get to know her, until she began to work her way into my heart, until I saw that I was lost, with Rosario inside me, destroying my heart” (81).

What seems to be even more fascinating to Antonio and Emilio than Rosario herself, and her eccentricity and non-conventionality, is the violence, the danger, the breaking of rules, the fear, and the getting submerged in the deep and dangerous waters of the underworld which Rosario and her people represent. Both Emilio and Antonio are experiencing the sublime. If we recall Burke’s definition of the sublime, he said: “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror is a source of the sublime that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (39). Both Emilio and Antonio seem to be unreasonably attracted to the catastrophic danger of Rosario’s world. It produces uncontrollable fear in them but at the same time indescribable pleasure. They are
lured by the danger. Once when the three of them are together, they kill a man
and they all hit bottom:

We became like three suicidal people racing to reach death first, three
frenzied zombies cutting ourselves with our razor-sharp rages, with our
stabbing resentments, wounding ourselves with the spear of silence,
numbing our feelings with drugs, just looking at each other and taking
hits. Later, I can’t remember how much later, Rosario cried, Emilio cried,
and when I couldn’t stand it anymore I cried, too, without knowing
precisely why or if there was a reason. You could say it was because of
everything, because it’s when everything overflows your soul that you cry
(…) I went home (…) Emilio greeted me like a mad man, hugging me,
giving me a series of inexplicable pats on the back, even though there was
no joy in his face at seeing me but rather horror, I didn’t know whether it
was because of me or because of what they were going through. Fear had
disfigured him, as well, making him unrecognizable. (104-105)

Rosario, Antonio and Emilio, but especially the last two are experiencing the
horror of violence, of death, of pain. However, they do not walk away, but they
loyal to Rosario, despite knowing that this relationship will be their demise.

This scheme brings to mind the film Blue Velvet (1991), David Lynch’s
tour-de-force. In this work the protagonist, Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan),
becomes involved in a deviant, almost perverse, relationship with Dorothy
Vallens (Isabella Rosellini), a woman who is brutally abused by Frank Booth
(Dennis Hopper), the man who kidnapped her husband and cut off one of his
ears. As the story develops it seems that Jeffrey becomes increasingly fascinated
by Vallens and is drawn to an underworld of crime, drugs, and nightmarish evil,
which will surely bring about more violence, brutality and with all likelihood,
his own death:

The apparently gratuitous nature of Jeffrey’s disobedience—there seems to be nothing at stake for him but idle curiosity—quickly plunges him into great danger. What is hidden may be fatal. His discoveries about the ear are made at the price of his involvement with criminals who are part of its mystery—Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper), a vicious drug dealer; Frank’s deranged henchmen; and especially Frank’s girlfriend, Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rosellini), a singer in a seedy nightspot. But once known, Frank is clearly not the mystery Jeffrey craves. Jeffrey’s attention veers away from the original case, virtually solved now by his knowledge that Frank has cut the ear off Dorothy’s husband (Dick Green) and is no holding him and her little son hostage in order to extract perverse carnal favors from her. He too becomes interested in Dorothy’s favors, the price of which is Frank’s not inconsiderable wrath. (Nochimson 100)

There are many similarities between the story that Lynch presents to us in Blue Velvet and the story of Franco in Rosario Tijeras. Unintentionally these mysterious women, Dorothy and Rosario lure these “clean-cut” young men, into the wicked and deviant world which they themselves are involved. These men are free to walk away, but, they choose to pursue greater involvement.

Although Emilio’s relationship with Rosario lacks the perversity and nastiness of Jeffrey’s situation it nevertheless contains elements of violence, drugs and the underworld crime. Emilio comes from a well to do family who can provide him with a good education, comfort, and a future. He chooses to live in Rosario’s world, because it is simultaneously seductive, terrifying and fascinating. For Jeffrey it is the same; as Nochimson explains: Jeffrey’s quest is possible because he lets forces beyond his reason possess him” (100). The “nasty”
pleasure, the “sublimity” of it all, is more alluring than the fear of getting killed.

About Antonio’s excruciating experience, this feeling of being at loss, not understanding what is happening to him, is best described in his own words:

With my tail between my legs, feeling like an animal, I went back home. I didn’t have to say anything, it could all be read on my face. The reading must have been a pathetic one because instead of reproaches I received numb smiles and little pats on the back, although none of it alleviated the anxiety I felt. It was the feeling of having crashed into a wall at high speed, leaving me so bewildered that I couldn’t define my feelings nor could I understand the situation that had led me to experience that frightful collision. I would try to order my thoughts so that I could diagnose my illness, but it was somebody in my family, not me, that got it right when they decided to lay the matter out on the table. “You’re not addicted to drugs, you’re addicted to shit,” that somebody said (121).

Antonio’s bafflement and desperation about his situation can also be explained in Lacanian terms. The “shit” that he was addicted to, is the “Real” Lacan described. When Lacan talked about the Real he was referring to that which is outside the subject, that which the subject runs into but cannot make sense of, because he does not recognize it. The Real subsists outside of symbolization because it has been shut out by the subject. If it exists outside of the Symbolic, it is because it has been excluded by the subject and appears in the Real. It is what the subject is unable to speak of, it is the unspeakable, and it is like a hole in the Symbolic Order:

The Real Order is not repression but foreclosure- it is disaffirmation (rejection) that something exists for the subject. The Real is often
experienced as an hallucination and, unsurprisingly, is linked with death and sexuality - what is the beyond of desire. The Real is the impossible. (Hayward 304)

For Antonio, his relationship with Rosario, and Rosario herself, represent this experience of the Real, which Lacan theorizes. As explained above, the Real implies a nightmare, which is linked to death and sexuality. In the example of David Lynch’s Blue Velvet, and in the case that occupies this study, it is surely something that would explain Antonio and Jeffrey’s transgressive behavior.

Rosario too tries to get out and start a new life away from all the violence, but her lifestyle and her beauty are her demise:

“Look guys,” she began to get agitated, “what I mean is that I’m not willing to go on living this way, but I’ve got to rely on you two to do it. I’ve got no one else, no one who’s ready to go along with me in the plans I have (...) “It’s very easy,” she explained. “It’s money-making deal. I’ve already got all the connections, here and in Miami.” (157)

The money-making deal to get away leads her deeper into trouble, because it implies that she would have continued being involved with drug dealers. When Emilio explains to her that he and Antonio “are decent people” and “that she picked the wrong partners,” she reminds him where all the coke and smack he’s been doing comes from (158). The implication of this statement is that there is simply no way out, at least for Rosario. Antonio and Emilio obviously have other options in their lives; they come from wealthy families, who are able to get them out of trouble and are willing to pay any amount of money, to avoid scandal.
Upon being rejected by her friends, Rosario disappears. Emilio continues with his life of comfort, and puts everything behind him. He goes back to the university, marries a woman acceptable to his parents, and becomes a businessman like his father. On the other hand, Antonio is left with a sense of loss and despair. The night before Rosario disappears, Antonio irrationally decides to follow her because he realizes, that despite her rejection, he can’t live without her:

That night I couldn’t sleep, thinking about an absence that seemed final. I was overtaken by an anguish that grew along with my insomnia as I imagined life without Rosario. I thought that it was practically impossible to go on without her, and incited by memories, I clung to that idea. Hugging the pillow I felt the feelings she inspired come over me again, one by one, and with them the butterflies in my stomach returned, the coldness in my heart, the weakness in my legs, the nausea, the trembling of my hands, the emptiness, the desire to cry, to vomit, and all the symptoms that treacherously attack people in love. Every minute of that night was transformed into one more link in the chain that bound me to Rosario Tijeras, one step more on the stairway that was leading me down into the depths, minutes that instead of coinciding with the light of dawn, were submerging me in a dark tunnel, just like hers and from which I had asked her to emerge so many times. I was only able to get a little sleep when the sun was already beating down through the curtains, and the idea of following Rosario in her mad career had overcome me. (161)

Antonio’s determination, despite the implications he himself describes: “the chain that bound me,” “the stairway that was leading me down into the depths,” “the submerging me into a dark tunne, l” and in general, the madness of Rosario’s enterprise, is cut short when her house is raided and they are both taken away by soldiers, investigating their involvement with the drug-lords. He doesn’t see her again, until three years later, “when her memory had been worn
smooth,” and he must take her to the hospital because she has been fatally shot. When the doctor leaves the operating room to talk to him, Antonio already knows the outcome.

In his despair he reflects: “Even death becomes you, Rosario Tijeras.” Antonio has experienced the sublime through his relationship with Rosario. If we look back to Blue Velvet, Jeffrey’s experience with Dorothy and the underworld of crime was as intense as Antonio’s, however, it was short lived and he was rationally able to overcome it. But Antonio remains forever attached to his desire for Rosario.

Alexis and Wilmar - Two sublime objects of desire - La virgen de los sicarios

La virgen de los sicarios tells a similar story to that of Rosario Tijeras. It is a story of love and passion, of beauty and sublimity, of violence and chaos, but in this case the person who loses himself in a relationship with sicarios is an older man. The story, written by Fernando Vallejo, a Colombian author, contains many elements of an autobiography as he has expressed in several interviews.

Vallejo, born in Medellín in 1946 lived in that city until 1971 when he moved to Mexico City, where he still lives. He graduated with a degree in philosophy from the U. de los Andes in Bogota. He studied music and music composition also in Bogota, and then moved to Rome to study film. In Mexico he made three films that were censored in Colombia, because they supposedly
incited violence. The first one, *En la tormenta* (1977), which takes place during the time of *La Violencia*, is about two peasant families who end up killing each others’ family members until only one child of each family is left alive. Vallejo attempts to show the futility of excessive violence and resentment. His next film, *Crónica Roja* (1977), portrays the legendary Efraín González, a type of Colombian Robin Hood, who was persecuted for many years by the government. His rebellion filled the imagination of many Colombians for years. His third and last film, *Barrio de campeones* (1981) portrays the false illusions boxing generates among the poor, who believe this sport will help them out of poverty (Jaramillo 412).

para recobrar las figuras de Silva y Barba Jacob con todo el prodigio de sus
versos y lo humano de su quehacer existencial. Al recuperar lo sublime y lo
grotesco, lo bueno y lo malo se pueden comprender sus actitudes, sus decisiones
y sus conflictos” (he put together a fine network of data to recover the figures of
Silva and Barba Jacob which contained the prodigy of their poems, and the
human side of their everyday existence. Upon recovering the sublime and the
grotesque, the good and the bad, it is easy to understand their attitudes, their
decisions and their conflicts) (416, my translation).

In both biographies he is irreverent and critical. The fact is in most of his
work, Vallejo uses the same technique: he laughs at humanity, mocks the rich
and the poor, ridicules society’s conservative traditions and norms, and he is
especially critical of the governing class: the church, the government, the army,
the family - including his own family - because he blames these institutions for
the disaster in Colombia. He accuses politicians of abuse, lies and corruption.
He points fingers, he insults, he is irreverent, he ridicules, he uses profane
language, and nobody is safe from his sharp tongue, or pen, in this case. He
strongly accuses his fellow citizens: “my fellow citizens suffer from congenial,
chronic vileness. This is an unscrupulous, envious, rancorous, deceitful,
treachorous, thieving race: human vermin in its lowest form” (25). When
interviewed about the manner in which he writes, with so much hate against
Colombia, he explains he writes with hate, because he loves Colombia, and he
loves it so much, he wishes it would disappear, so as not to suffer anymore. In *La virgen*, he expresses with pain and passion: “I was dying all alone in my furnitureless and soulless apartment, praying that the polyclinic people would stitch together, as best they could, albeit with ordinary thread, the heart of my poor Colombia” (96).

In his essay about *La virgen*, Héctor D. Fernández explains that Medellín is literally hell, inhabited by an army of “dead-alive.” He believes that the structure of the text, on a lesser scale, is a reproduction of the structure of Dante’s novel *The Divine Comedy*. He asserts that the visits to churches and the places the narrator loved as a child represent the circles of hell. Thus, for him, Vallejo has taken the reader to the depths of hell.

According to María Mercedes Jaramillo, Fernando Vallejo has inherited the wit, black humor and irreverence of his predecessors, the poets and novelists of his Antioqueño land: Tomás Carrasquilla, Porfirio Barba Jacob, Fernando González and the “nadaista poets.” He inherited the sarcasm of the first chronicle writer in Colombia, Juan Rodríguez Freyle (1566-1640), who in his *El Carnero*, revealed the deceit, lies and scandals of the most important people of

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20 Antioqueno or “paisa” is the name given to the people from Antioquia, one of the Departments of Colombia. Medellín is the capital of Antioquia.

21 The “nadaistas” were a group of poets “hippielike, nihilistic, countrywide” founded in Envigado, Pablo Escobar’s city, by Fernando Gonzales. His manifesto was called “The Right to Disobey” (Bowden 9)
the society of his times. His writings do not present important formulas or theories, or moral speeches, or any solution to the problems of society, but he identifies, by first name, presidents, former presidents, church leaders, generals and disqualifies them for their inability, their ambition and their dishonesty (410).

Vallejo also talks negatively about marriage, and about pregnant women who he believes are an irresponsible bunch for bringing more and more children into this world to suffer. He attacks the poor who, in his opinion, are inconsiderate: when multiplying, they multiply poverty, disorder and crime. Thus, in Vallejo’s opinion, the Catholic Church, Amnesty International and Human Rights activists and Communism are even more guilty for teaching the poor to protest. Thus, homosexuality is presented as an alternative to human relations, and because straight men with their “machismo” have persecuted gays, Vallejo, a homosexual, defends homosexuality and his sicarios, who are homosexual, but are “machos” too (411).

Fernando, the narrator of La virgen de los sicarios "se mueve en una Medellín de pesadilla, sinécdoque delirante de la sociedad colombiana contemporánea" (moves in a nightmarish Medellín, delirious sinecdoque of the Colombian society) (Cardona López 391, my translation). Because his novels are autobiographical, they are usually set in Medellín, and in the small towns of
Antioquia, like Sabaneta, Envigado and Rionegro. In La Virgen, Fernando has just returned to find that the region of his dreams, the beautiful place where he was born and where he grew up has become a region of chaos and uncertainty. The only certainty is death, because the city has been overtaken by the mafia and the young killers who work for them. He expresses his bewilderment when he finds his city transformed:

> The comunas didn’t exist when I was born. Nor even in my youth, when I left. I found them on my return in full spate, flourishing, weighing down on the city like a curse. Barrio after barrio of hovels piled one on top of the other with their music, poisoning each other with love for their fellow man, the yearning to kill competing with the rage to reproduce. Wanting so much to find out which of the two is stronger. As I write, the conflict still isn’t settled: they go on killing and being born. At twelve a kid from the comunas is, as they say, an old man: so little life remains in him... He’ll already have killed someone and so he’ll be next in line. (26)

Besides his bewilderment at the transformation of the city, he is confronted with the crudest reality: children are being hired to kill, to do the work grown up men are too cowardly to do themselves. The first night of his arrival, he visits his childhood friend, José Antonio Vásquez, who gives him as a present a beautiful young boy. Fernando establishes a sexual and passionate relationship with the young boy, Alexis, who turns out to be a sicario, one of the kids of the comunas he was describing. Later, when Alexis is murdered, he meets Wilmar, another sicario, with whom he falls in love with, too. Both boys are very young and beautiful, according to the narrator’s description, but they both have a “rotten heart.” They are both “unemployed” sicarios, because, as Fernando explains, the
big Cartel lord has been killed. For this reason, he says, they busy themselves by killing to “settle old accounts,” or killing for the mere pleasure of doing so, or because they believe it is their duty. Fernando says, Alexis, the “Angel of Death” came to Medellín to finish off this perverse human race, and Wilmar is "...the special envoy of Satan who’d come to create order in a world with which God couldn’t cope” (108). The irony of the story that Fernando narrates is that Wílmar, his second lover, has killed Alexis, his first real love, but when he finds out it is too late, because he has already fallen in love with Wilmar: "’Why did you kill Alexis? –Because he killed my brother’, he replied, waking and rubbing his eyes. Ah! I commented like an idiot” (126). Wílmar is later killed too. Thus, Fernando’s two young sicario lovers die in the hands of sicarios. That is the new law in Medellín: “an eye for an eye.”

There are many paradoxes in the story. One is that Medellín, an excessively vicious city torn by violence is also a city of extreme religious faith. In fact, the story does not contain a complex storyline, but a description of a series of murders by Fernando’s young lovers, and their almost daily visits to the unusually large number of churches in the city. This is a city where the Catholic religion clashes yet intermingles with violence. This strange relationship and contradiction between faith in God and crime, is portrayed in the characters of Johnefe, Ferney and Emilio, but even more vividly in the sicarios of La virgen de los sicarios. All the killers wear images of María Auxiliadora, in three different
parts of their bodies, around their neck, around their wrist and around ankle.

On the cover of the book, *La virgen de los sicarios* we see the image of the scapulars of María Auxiliadora that the sicarios wear. This image speaks a thousand words because it is being worn by a young man, who seems to be praying faithfully, while holding a gun. The sicarios are very religious, and have great faith in God and María Auxiliadora, the virgin of the assassins.

Sicarios visit churches often, and pray that the victim not suffer, before they leave to kill him/ her. They do a special ceremony with the bullets. They bring blessed water from the church to make sure they don’t miss their target. Fernando describes the ceremony in great detail, and again, in a mocking and arrogant manner:

Consecrated bullets are prepared like this: place six bullets in a casserole previously heated red hot on the electric grill. Next sprinkle these with holy water obtained from the stoup of some chapel, or supplied, under guarantee, by the parish church of San Judas Tadeo, barrio of La Castilla, north-west comuna. The water, blessed or not, evaporates in the fierce heat, and in the meantime the man who is praying over them, prays with the simplest faith: ‘By the grace of San Judas Tadeo (or the Girardote Fallen Christ or Padre Arcila or the saint of your choice) may the destiny of these consecrated bullets be to hit their mark without fail, and may the victim not suffer. Amen’ Why do I say ‘with the simplest of faith?’ Oh, I don’t know, I don’t understand such things, I’ve never consecrated a bullet... (Vallejo 67).

Fernando knows what his lovers do, and he accompanies them in their daily killings, but he is too dignified to kill himself, much in the same manner Emilio and Antonio in *Rosario Tijeras* believe they are “decent people” because they don’t kill. Alexis knows he will die soon. He has killed so many people at his
young age and all his gang has been exterminated: eighteen boys have been killed already. Twice, “The Dead Man”, another very young sicario, has announced to him that he better “beat it” because “they” are coming to get him and this time with blessed bullets, so it’s serious.

Alexis is not afraid. Because he knows that he has been sentenced, he tries to find happiness in his simple existence, wearing new clothes, listening to music, and watching TV are the only options he has since he’s illiterate. In the movie and the novel, La virgen de los sicarios, it becomes immediately evident that the two young sicarios find pleasure in clothes and tangible materials that Fernando gladly buys for them. Because it is the only time in their life when they have had someone care for and about them, they become involved with Fernando.

Fernando begins his story as if he were speaking directly to his readers, in very non-conventional, colloquial language. From the first page, he addresses the reader with questions such as”But what was I saying about the balloon, about Sabaneta? Yeah,...”; ” Do you know what they are?”; “As I was telling you..”; “you, of course, do not need an definition of a sicario, but maybe my grandfather would... the poor man died without having seen the metro, or the sicarios, smoking Victoria cigarette, that you, I bet, have never off...” (9); “me and you, my doubting readers” (44). At the end of the story, he says goodbye to the reader who has been with him throughout this journey into hell, addressing
the reader as “parcero”, which is slightly equivalent to “my pal” or “my buddy,” an affectionate form of addressing a friend in the comunas.

Any discussion of beauty and the sublime in Fernando Vallejo’s work should begin with an analysis of his prose. Vallejo is a linguist, or grammarian, as he calls himself in the story, and he is a master of words. He literally lures his readers to continue reading despite the terrible story he tells of unrelenting and totally unjustifiable crimes. In the story, eighteen cold blooded murders are described. The gut reaction of the readers should be to stop reading. However, through his marvelous prose, Vallejo involves the reader in the story. It is the journey into the sublime as defined by Longinus’ study. Of course, Fernando Vallejo is not Homer or Plato, the “greatest,” in Longinus’ words. Nevertheless, the effect of Vallejo’s prose is “intense pleasure.”

When Longinus expresses his views of the sublime, he refers to them in terms of the prose, or rhetorical elements of speech. The sublimity of great prose he says, lies in the total effect it produces; prose needs to be embedded with emotional tone; the word arrangement and composition play an important role in the total effect; word arrangement has to do with rhythm and with the purpose of producing a musical effect. Also the choice of words is of paramount importance because whether grand or commonplace, said Longinus writes needs to endow a discourse with grandeur, beauty, passion and power, in such a manner as to endow the discourse with a “speaking soul” (41). In La virgen, the
narrator, a highly educated and cultured man, who constantly remarks about the correct use of language and who brags about knowing how to speak correctly, uses colloquial language in his story and mixes it with the jargon of the street and the sicario talk. However, the combination of words, despite their acidity and their corrosive nature create excessively cruel but humorous situations. He describes the manner in which Alexis speaks by explaining his background:

Knowing no English or French or Japanese or whatever, he does understand the universal language of the punch in the face. That’s all part of his unblemished purity. All the rest is empty words rattling around his brainpan. He doesn’t speak Spanish, he speaks in slang or jargon. In the jargon or street slang of the comunas, which mainly consists of an ancient fund of Antioquia’s local parlance, which was the one I spoke when all excited (as Christ with Aramaic), plus this or that survival of the ancient jive talk spoken in the barrio of Guayaquil, since demolished, by its troublemakers, since dead; and lastly, of a series of vowels and new, ugly expressions for designating certain old concepts: to kill, to die, death, revolver, the police... An example: ‘What then, parcero, concrete boots or a wooden overcoat?’ And what did the say? He said: ‘Hi, you sonofabitch.’ It’s a greeting between thugs. (20)

What Fernando does is intertwine “proper Spanish with street Spanish” in the manner of the sicarios, but later he is talking exactly the same as Alexis: “...I later told Alexis, speaking in jargon with my polyglot mania”(21).

Another remarkable aspect in the of Vallejo’s prose is that the language used is itself violent, that is, it not only reflects the absurd and grotesque violence, but it is violent language: “gonorrhea”, which is the biggest insult in the comunas, is used throughout the novel to express the hate the narrator and his
boys feel towards others and to justify killing. For example, when Alexis kills the neighbor boy for playing music in the middle of the night: “A single shot, dry, ineluctable, rotund, that sent the gonorrhea and his racket to the depths of hell” (24). When people run to see the spectacle of death—another sublime experience as discussed in the previous Chapter in reference to Burke—Fernando expresses his hate again:

   And don’t come running to me, you blabbermouths, saying they killed an innocent man for playing music too loud. Here nobody’s innocent, you pigs. We killed him for being chichipato, scum, shit, for existing. Because he was contamination the air and the river water. In the comunas, chichipato means a petty thief, a small-timer. (26)

The expressions the narrator uses to describe hate for others, as we analyzed above, include, human vermin, pigs, scum, shit, vile creature. The hate for others reaches incredible proportions when Wilmar kills a man for whistling: “I hate, and I mean hate, people whistling. I can’t abide it. I consider it a personal affront, a greater insult even than a radio blaring out in a taxi...and I commented this to Wilmar... I should have kept my mouth shut! Overtaking the creep in turn, Wilmar took out his revolver and treated him to a slug in the heart...” (107).

Besides finding sublimity in the prose, it is possible to find other elements of the sublime in the relationship and attraction that Fernando has for the boys. When referring to Alexis, Fernando says: “To see my baby boy naked with his three scapulars gave me the shakes. That little angel had the power to set all my inner demons off...” (23). Again the question in the mind of the reader: Why does
a middle-aged, educated and highly-cultured, intelligent man, let himself be carried away, into a relationship with a young assassin, who has no remorse about killing? So what lures Fernando? Why is his desire so powerful? Apparently, when he least expects it he has fallen in love with Alexis. Alexis, who represents the antithesis of what he is, has carried him away in the same manner Antonio and Emilio were carried away by Rosario, in the novel Rosario Tijeras. Fernando has also been lured by the beauty and the terror of the situation; he has become rationally incapable of getting away.

Not only is he incapable of getting away, but he ends up applauding every new kill of his “baby boy.” For instance, when Alexis kills the neighbor boy for listening to punk music in the middle of the night, and also when he kills the homeless kid, the pregnant woman, the waitress and the passerby, Fernando believes he is doing the right thing, because he is ridding humankind of scum. Instead of condemning him he says: “Was this last ‘kiss off’ of Alexis’s, killing the foul mouthed passerby, a good thing? Indeed it was, I approve wholeheartedly. You have to teach such stuck-up people tolerance, you have to eradicate this kind of hatred” (42). This, of course, is a highly contradictory statement, as he himself is full of hatred.

There are other extremely paradoxical situations. Fernando despises the poor and yet he says he loves Alexis and Wilmer. Most of the people he despises live in the comunas and Alexis and Wilmer are children of the comunas.
Throughout the story, Fernando spews out his negative feelings about the comunas. These extremely poor neighborhoods have no paved roads and some homes lack water and electricity. There seems to be no hope for a job or education for the children and it seems that the hours go by senselessly. All of this is very well depicted in the film Rodrigo-D. As explained in Chapter 2, most of the settlers in these slums are peasants who had to leave their farms to escape La Violencia. Despite their poverty and the severe ugliness of the place: “house, houses and more houses, each one uglier than the last, perched obscenely one on top of the other,” in Vallejo’s terms, the comunas represent a way of life and a culture for a whole community of people. The inhabitants of this severely oppressed part of the city, escape from other harsh realities by listening to loud music all day long. It is a way of being; it is the way the poor deal with life in Colombia. This, is very clearly depicted in the film Rodrigo D. In La virgen, it is evident the narrator has no respect or consideration. His description is extremely crude and cruel, because Vallejo has no time for pity:

Precipices, rubbish tips, ravines, gullies, gorges, that’s the comunas. And the maze of dead-end streets with chaotic buildings, eloquent proof of how they grew up: as jerry built barrios, resulting from ‘encroachment’ and without urban planning, the houses put up fast on stolen bits of land, and bloodily defended so that those who stole them don’t get robbed in their turn. A robber robbed? God preserve and protect us from such an aberration, better death than that. Here the thief doesn’t let it happen, he kills so it doesn’t happen or is killed in turn. The truth is that in Colombia possession of stolen property and the expiry time of the offence determine the law. It’s a question of patience. Afterwards, little by little, brick by brick, a person builds the second storey of the house on top of the first, just as today’s hatred is built on top of yesterday’s hatred. Hanging
around on a street corner in the comunas, the survivors of the gangs wait to see who’s coming to hire them, or to see what’s going down. Nobody comes and nothing happens: that was before, in the good old days, when drug-trafficking fired people’s dreams. Forget the dreams, guys, those days are dead and gone. Or what! You too believed you were eternal because you were dying fast? Banged up on a street corner in the comunas, watching the hours go by from a crossroads in time, the young members of the old gangs are today the ghosts of what they once were. No past, no present, no future, reality is not reality in the slums of the mountains that surround Medellín: that’s a basuco dream. Meanwhile, Death goes on tirelessly ascending and descending those steep streets. Only our Catholic faith plus our reproductive vocation can help counteract her a little. (63)

Despite the cruelty, the sarcasm and the excessive insolence in his writing, in phrases like: “A robber robbed? God preserve and protect us from such an aberration...”; “The truth is that in Colombia possession of stolen property and the expiry time of the offence determine the law. It’s a question of patience...” the reader can not help but delight. There is, hidden deep within the excessive irreverence, lots of black humour and self-mocking. In the manner in which Vallejo writes is imbedded the culture of the Colombian, who survives chaos and madness by making fun of himself and others.

**La virgen de los sicarios: the movie a spectacle of death**

The film *La virgen de los sicarios* (1999) was directed by Barbet Schroeder, an Iranian-born filmmaker. Schroeder, who lived in Colombia during a large part of his childhood had always wanted to film in this country. He had already worked on two projects which had failed. One was a story titled
Machete, about La Violencia in Colombia, and the other was a movie about Pablo Escobar. When he read the novel La virgen de los sicarios, written by Fernando Vallejo, he became very interested, but was concerned about many technical and adaptation problems. However, when Fernando Vallejo agreed to write the script, he decided to go ahead with the project. Vallejo had agreed on reducing the amount of violent deaths to be shown on screen, which was one of Schroeder’s concerns.

The movie was filmed in Medellín, and most of the places Fernando described in the novel, like Sabaneta, Envigado, las comunas, and some of the churches, are shown. For example, the Church of María Auxiliadora in Sabaneta is shown outside and inside and the fervor with which the sicarios pray is very well depicted. Schroeder has directed some documentaries, and this film could almost be classified as a documentary (considering that it is filmed on location and that the camera dwells on exploring every corner of the city with people who are going about their business in Medellín unaware of it) except for the fact that it is based on fictional characters, who are performing for the camera. The actors, however, are not professional actors. They are mostly children from the comunas (which of course gives it a touch of realism) except for German Jaramillo, who is a professional actor playing the part of Fernando.

One critic said about the film: “If the films of Godard are post-modern fantasy, then this film is post-modern reality. Call it nihilistic, homoerotic
fatalish... call it misanthropic, misogynist, mystically challenged... call it bullshit, call it genius” (Russell). Another commentator said that the film was about the dehumanizing effects of violence: “The film confronts the viewers directly with the banalization of violence through repetition, the moral desensitization that it causes.” As Schroeder explains: “I wanted the violence to become ... I wanted the viewers to feel, like the characters, a kind of progressive anaesthesia towards violence, like anyone who wants to continue living in Medellín” (Kantaris 1).

In the film we find the exact same violence we encounter in the novel, except for the fact that there are less deaths and that the violence is obviously more graphic. Nonetheless, there are enough to make the film excessively violent. The two young sicarios are shown, exactly as in the novel, as two cold-blooded killers who feel no remorse for their crimes and who believe that they did what was right. Despite the great amount of assassinations, in the film there is no gore. That is, the director does not seem to dwell on showing the gory details of each murder. The killings are done quickly and effectively and then the camera moves on. The same thing is true of the sex scenes. Schroeder and Vallejo are not interested in this aspect of film. The voyeur spectator will not derive visual pleasure from these scenes. The sublimity of the spectacle is at a different level. In this film none of the characters seem to be acting, they seem very real. Also, the film lacks the extravagant and spectacular special effects of the Hollywood films. Thus, the spectator is confronted with the “real” spectacle
of death and not with the “performance” of this spectacle. If we go back to Burke’s explanation of the sublimity of an execution, he says that the spectacle of a real life killing, in this case an execution, is a more sublime experience than watching a performance, no matter how remarkably similar to a real killing it is, because he says “we delight in seeing things, which so far from doing, our heartiest wishes would be to see redressed.” Thus, we seem to be witnessing several real life executions.

In general terms, the sublimity of the novel, as discussed above, has not been transferred effectively into the film. In the novel, we had discussed how the prose of Vallejo contained many elements of the sublime. The language used by the narrator in the novel, highly charged with hate, sarcasm, irreverence, irony, humor, etc. and the intertwining of ‘street language’ and ‘proper language’ to create and incredibly luring prose, just cannot be found in the dialogues between the characters in the film. The desire and love of Fernando for his young lovers is barely perceptible to the viewer. This aspect, which also made the novel sublime, cannot be felt by the viewer.

Despite the above, the sublime spectacle of death, is nevertheless present for the pleasure of the viewer. There are some particularly shocking scenes that may upset and cause disgust which suture the viewer into the story. The first spectacle of death occurs when Fernando and Alexis go the Church of Maria Auxiliadora to pray, like all sicarios do, for the well-being of the person who will
die. There, they witness the shoot-out between two gangs who kill each other on the front steps of the church. Fernando and Alexis, discuss the event and just walk away, while Fernando makes a sarcastic comment:” People have become more civilized... before we settled scores with machetes...”

When Fernando complains about not being able to sleep because of the noisy neighbor who plays his drums all night, Alexis promises to kill him and he does one day when they are walking down the street. He simply stands in front of him and fires several times. Fernando does not seem to be excessively shocked and simply reprimends him: “My God, what did you do? Can’t you distinguish between thought and action? What separates the two is called civilization” In a later scene in the film, when they have an argument with a taxi driver and the driver pulls out a machete, Alexis shoots him too. Fernando seems to be upset, but again not excessively. He simply remarks: “Let’s get out of here...” and as they are leaving the scene of the crime he says: “This city is poisoned, possessed by hate” to which Alexis responds: “No, that bastard deserved to die.”

Seeing the reactions of the people in the film can be extremely appalling to the viewer. While the shoot out is happening, people are hiding in order not to get shot, but once it is over they seem to rush to get close to the bodies, los muñecos or “dummies.” They seem to observe and examine them with great curiosity, and then they just simply move on about their business. No one is
concerned about calling for help or calling the police. For them, it is like witnessing a performance in a theatre. The spectacle of death is there before their eyes and they don’t seem to be shocked or disgusted. As spectators of the film we watch and then “walk away” too. Our reaction begins to be similar to Fernando’s: we are desensitized and we feel what Shroeder wanted the viewers to feel, “like the characters, a kind of progressive anesthesia towards violence, like anyone who wants to continue living in Medellín.”

The only time Fernando is upset is when Alexis is killed. His despair is reflected in the recurring nightmares, where he sees himself walking inside a dark hall into a cemetery filled with tombstones and hundreds and hundreds of skulls piled on top of each other. The camera stops in front of the tombstone that shows Fernando’s name engraved on it. As the camera follows him we find that the cemetery eventually turns into a church full of homeless people smoking crack. All the people seem to be hypnotized and wanting to surround him. Later, still as part of the nightmare, we see Fernando laying on the cold floor of the church while all these people are watching. There is a cut and we find him at home in the same position with his head on top of the cold glass table crying. These sequences are particularly effective, as the nightmares are extremely shocking and horrific. We seem to have been transported to the doors of hell (not to heaven, as the inscription reads.) What a terrible and sublime experience for
all! The viewer is distraught over what he has just seen and over Fernando’s pain and fear.

The movie comes to an end when Fernando meets Wílmar and life seems to start over for him. But, the story will repeat itself, because his new young lover also turns out to be a sicario: a cold-blooded killer who shoots people on the street for a very slight provocation, in the same manner as Alexis. Fernando falls in love with him anyway. He forgives him when he finds out he has killed Alexis. Fearing the same turn-out, Fernando invites his new lover to move away to another city, but before they move away Fernando buys Wílmar the refrigerator he so much desires for his mother. Wílmar insists on going with the delivery people to make sure the refrigerator arrives safely. He also wants to say good-bye to his mother. Late that same night, while Fernando anxiously waits for Wílmar so they can leave, he receives a phone call. Next we see him entering the morgue to identify Wilmar’s body. The doctor explains to him that two people on a motorcycle have shot Wílmar. This scene in the morgue is particularly shocking too. The camera dwells on the many corpses of these young boys.

Although Schroeder’s film is not as emotionally charged as the novel, and the love story between Fernando and the two young sicarios is not portrayed as effectively as it is in the book, and the spectator has been invited to witness a terrifying spectacle of death. Just as Fernandez writes in his article mentioned
above, Schroeder has taken the spectator to the “depths of hell.” The spectator has been invited to witness the spectacle of death; bodies after bodies pile up, but not in the conscience of Alexis or Wilmar, Fernando, or the spectator.

**Rodrigo D - No Futuro - When the only thing that makes sense is to kill**

The Colombian filmmaker Víctor Gaviria became well known for his very controversial film *Rodrigo-D. No Futuro*. Released in 1990, the film was acclaimed worldwide immediately. The attention was due not only to the realism with which it showed the situation of the young gangs in Medellín, Colombia, but also to the style in which it was filmed, reminiscent of Italian neorealism. That is, the film was made in a documentary style, location, and with non-professional actors. As the title, *No Future*, explains, Rodrigo lives a meaningless existence, with no hope for the future. Elia Kantaris has explained that the title “No Future,” became famous as part of the song “God Save the Queen” by the rock group “Sex Pistols.” This song suggests a link between a society of disposal and no-future (6).

The plot of the film is non-linear. It is a series of episodes in the life of Rodrigo and his friends, a group of punks who

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22 Elia Kantaris included the words of the song in his paper “Allegorical Cities: Bodies and Visions in Colombian Urban Cinema”, which I would like to transcribe also, because it defines a generalized attitude of the youth of the time: “God save the Queen/ The fascist regime/ They made you a moron/ Potential H bomb/ God save the Queen/ She ain’t no human being/ There is no future? In England’s dreaming [...]/ When there’s no future/ How can there be sin/ We’re the flowers in the dustbin/ We’re the poison in your human machine/ We’re the future, your [...] No future, no future/ No future for you./ No future, no future/ No future for me

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wander the streets of Medellín dealing drugs, getting high, and stealing motorcycles. This is Rodrigo’s life, but his main interest is listening to Punk and Heavy Metal music, and dreaming of being part of a rock band. In the film, Rodrigo wanders from one place to another trying to find a pair of drums. We see him in different parts of the city searching, but with each refusal and every closed door, his despair and discontent become more obvious. While Rodrigo roams desperately looking for the set of drums, the viewer witnesses the violent deaths of some of his friends.

Considering the type of story, and the manner in which it is told, Rodrigo D has been compared to Luis Buñuel’s film, *Los Olvidados* (1950) and Héctor Babenco’s *Pixote* (1981). In Gaviria’s film, Rodrigo, the protagonist, has communication problems with his family, and his family ties deteriorate further as the days go by. Mired in a life of poverty, with no opportunities and no motivation to try to improve his life, Rodrigo has lost all hope and finally decides that the only solution is to commit suicide. With Rodrigo’s suicide, the film ends; a splendid ending for Gaviria’s message: that there is no hope, or solution, in sight for these young boys.

Gaviria’s film has been harshly criticized because of the appalling images of violence in his film; he has been accused of exploiting what some critics have termed *pornomiseria*, or “porno-poverty.” He has also been accused of a morbid delight in abjection and images that show desolation and rubbish.
Colombian film-critic Julio Luzardo, says, for example, that this type of film shows a distorted image of the country because many outside viewers might consider this type of film a national allegory (Jáuregui and Suárez 7). To these accusations, Gaviria responded by saying that his “testimonies” act upon what he terms a “realist will”:

Sé que es problemático hablar de realismo. Digamos que en películas como Rodrigo D o La vendedora lo que tenemos es una voluntad realista y un imperativo ético respecto a la representación, que dan lugar a una construcción colectiva de relatos fílmicos. El realismo de mis películas no es la narración costumbrista o truculenta, ni el documental. El realismo ha sido mal entendido como objetividad, como voluntad de calco, como simplificación y falta de complejidad. Creo por el contrario que no hay nada más complicado y ambiguo, nada menos aprehensible y más difícil de representar que la realidad, y que el realismo como yo lo entiendo, es decir como voluntad de realismo- asume que esa realidad no es manipulable, que es fragmentaria, que no tiene un significado estable ni abarcable, pero que sin embargo tiene cosas que decir. (Gaviria en "Violencia, representación y voluntad realista")

I know that it is very problematic to talk about realism. Let’s say that in films like Rodrigo D or La vendedora what we have is a realist will and an ethical imperative with respect to representation, which produce a collective construction of film narratives. The realism in my films is not the costumbrista, truculent story, nor the documentary. Realism has been poorly understood as objectivity, the determination to copy, or simplification, or lack of complexity. I believe that there is nothing more complicated and ambiguous, nothing more difficult to apprehend and more difficult to represent than reality, and the way I understand realism, is as a determination for realism- which assumes that reality can not be manipulated, that it is fragmented, that it does not have a stable meaning, or one easy to reach, but that it has something to say. (Gaviria in "Violencia, representación y voluntad realista," my translation)

In Rodrigo D-No futuro we see in greater detail most of the elements analyzed in Rosario Tijeras and La virgen de los sicarios: the language used, the music,
the culture of the comunas, the relationship between sicarios and the "eye for an eye" motto. The actors that Gaviria chose for his film came from the comunas, and some of them were sicarios. Of the eleven boys who participated in the film, only one has survived: Ramiro Meneses, the protagonist, who has become an important actor in Colombia. The rest of the boys were killed shortly after the film was made. In this film we see clearly that the only solution to all problems is death. In a testimonial written by Gaviria titled El pelaíto que no duró nada (The little boy who didn't last too long) the family of the boy explains how he was killed in his neighborhood because of problems between gangs. The testimony shows how the only solution to conflicts, whether they are territorial, have to do with loyalty to the group or transparency in business transactions, is death. There is no dialogue, no second opportunity or ostracism, "the person who fails the group in any manner, 'El faltón'- is eliminated" (Jaramillo 431). Even though Rodrigo-D is a similar story as Rosario Tijeras and La virgen de los sicarios it lacks the romantic elements of these two novels. It is not a love story as Rodrigo does not give nor receive affection. The only love-stories are in the background, and they are not depicted by any means as sublime, but instead as secondary and insignificant.

What elements of the sublime can be found in this film? Rather than show "state of submission that is often combined with the possibility of getting lost" (Burke xxiii) as viewed in the earlier works, Gaviria invites the spectator to view
the spectacle of death. Similar to the film, La virgen, the viewer is invited to observe the dead bodies of a woman who has been hit by a bus and lies in the middle of the road, the battered body of a prostitute, and the mutilated body of John who has been left in a garbage dump near his house. The viewer sees the murder of one of the neighborhood boys, a faltón, who must thus be eliminated.

Geoffrey Kantaris wonders, “Can a film which in one sense comes perilously close to that horrendous conflation of life and spectacle which we find in the ‘genre’ of the snuff movie, possibly make any positive bid, as Gaviria hopes, to reclaim and annihilated future” (12). I propose that the spectacle of death, which Gaviria invites his spectators to see, serves a very specific political purpose. The sublime experience, the horror of the spectator upon witnessing such crude reality, helps Gaviria with his mission: to make the invisible visible.

In Gaviria’s film, the spectator is ideologically interpellated in the manner proposed by the film critics of the New Latin American Cinema who suggested the creation of a cinema to better reflect the reality of Latin America, as well as in response to the social and political crisis of that time. This Cinema had its roots in the Documentary Film School of Santa Fe, Argentina in the late 50’s, in Cinema Novo, which started in Rio de Janeiro in the early 60’s, and in Cuban Film, which was at the same time laying its foundations. Young directors of several Latin American countries wanted to get away from Hollywood and mainstream

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23 A faltón is someone who has betrayed his friends.
cinema and create films that were unique and representative of the continent. They wanted a cinema “that was devoted to the denunciation of misery and the celebration of protest” (Chanan 2).

The directors of the Documentary School of Santa Fe, Argentina, the Ukamau Group of Bolivia, the Cinema Novo of Brasil, as well as other independent directors from Cuba, Colombia, Chile, Uruguay y Venezuela put together their projects and constituted what was later called the New Latin American Cinema during a historical meeting in 1967 in Viña del Mar, Chile. In the decades that followed, many films, critical essays and political manifestos were produced and written by these filmmakers who had a commitment to fight for political and cultural autonomy, freedom of expression, and social change. These young directors felt that their cinema had a mission-to protest against modernization, and the state of neglect in which marginal groups survived, a state which generated continuous poverty, illiteracy, hunger and violence. Their views were expressed in manifestos: Glauber Rocha wrote “The Aesthetics of Hunger” in 1965 which also became known as “The Aesthetics of Violence”, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino wrote “Towards a Third Cinema- Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World” in 1968 and Julio Garcia Espinosa wrote his manifesto "For an Imperfect Cinema" in 1969, to establish the foundations of this new project.
In general, each of the manifestos spoke about their own reality, the Brazilian, the Cuban, the Argentineans. For example, García Espinosa’s manifesto emphasized the importance of a revolution in art to make a change. He was convinced that cinema had to be utilized by those who struggled as a combat weapon to denounce an oppressive system. Through cinema, those who cared but were not involved in the struggle could also be made aware of the struggles of others. He alleged in his manifesto:

A new poetics for the cinema will, above all, be a ‘partisan’ and committed poetics, a ‘committed art’, a consciously and resolutely ‘committed’ cinema – that is to say, an ‘imperfect cinema’... Imperfect cinema finds its audience in those who struggle, and it finds its themes in their problems. For imperfect cinema, ‘lucid’ people are the ones who think and feel and exist in a world, which they can change; in spite of all the problems and difficulties, they are convinced that they can transform it in a revolutionary way. Imperfect cinema therefore has no need to struggle to create an ‘audience” (Chanan 32).

The imperfect cinema needed a new public, a “healthy public” who was willing to take a stand, to engage in dialogue with the film and not sit complacently and contemplate, which García Espinosa referred to as the “neurotic audience” who went to the cinema to sublimate their neurosis.

On the other hand, Glauber Rocha’s manifesto was talking about a new aesthetics, the aesthetics of hunger. From Rocha’s point of view, the foreign viewer sees the misery of Latin America as part of its reality. He observes the spectacle of poverty and misery with curiosity and is only interested in it in terms of the “nostalgia” for primitivism. The problems lies, says Rocha, in the
fact that Brazil has become interested in a false interpretation of reality. It is a hybrid reality, a result of colonization, because Latin America continues to be colonized. The colonizer assumes a paternal position before the problems of Latin America, which are basically social poverty and hunger. Rocha proposes a new film aesthetics that reflects the reality of hunger because for him “hunger in Latin America is not simply an alarming symptom; it is the essence of our society” and hunger, says he generates violence. Cinema Novo will reveal that violence is normal behavior for the starving. Even though the violence portrayed is brutal, it won’t be a violence of hatred, because it is proposing something new, different from the cinema of other parts of the world, “our originality is our hunger and our greatest misery is that this hunger is felt but not intellectually understood” (Chanan 13).

In “Towards a Third Cinema” Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino put forward the idea of a cinema that refutes Hollywood-style cinema. For them a “spectacle” cinema destined for masses all over the world, with a set standard show time, and hermetic structures serves only to satisfy the market and commercial interests; such cinema made to satisfy the bourgeois conception of life and to help embrace certain forms of North American ideology. They conclude in their manifesto that:

The man of the third cinema, be it guerilla cinema or a film act, with the infinite categories that they contain (film letter, film poem, film essay, film pamphlet, film report, etc.) above all counters the film industry of a cinema of characters with one of themes, that of individuals with that of
masses, that of the author with that of the operative group, one of neocolonial misinformation with one of information, one of escape with one that recaptures the truth, that of passivity with that of aggressions. To an institutionalized cinema, it counterposes a guerrilla cinema; to movies as shows, it opposes a film act or action; to cinema of destruction, one that is both destructive and constructive; to a cinema made for the old kind of human being, for them, it opposes a cinema first for a new kind of human being, for what each one of us has the possibility of becoming (in Chanan 27).

Thus, it is within these revolutionary proposals that the new cinema of Latin America began to take shape in the 60’s and 70’s. The filmmakers who participated were politically and socially committed and wanted to make a statement with their films. They didn’t want the public to be merely entertained. They wanted to open their eyes to the realities of the continent. They wanted viewers to see that people go hungry; they wanted to show them why people go hungry, and why this generates violence. Some of their innovations were influenced by Post-War European cinema, such as Italian neorealism, which focused on social reality, poverty and unemployment, using non-professional actors, and shooting on location, documentary style, with hand held cameras, and using observation and analysis, and by French New-Wave, Free British Cinema and New German Cinema, each very political and counter-mainstream.

The cinema produced in the 80’s and 90’s however, maintained the revolutionary spirit of the 60’s and 70’s, but became more international and less radical in the face of competition with commercial TV and the larger market. (Hayward 432). Colombia was deeply influenced by these political and
revolutionary movements in Latin American cinema. Given the constant turmoil in which the country has lived, most filmmakers have tried to reflect this reality in their art; Gaviria’s film is an example of this.

When I interviewed Gaviria (Spring, 2002) I specifically asked him about the outrageous violence depicted in all his films, especially in Rodrigo D, and La vendedora de Rosas. My questions dealt with the “aesthetics of violence” because I was interested in finding out if this aesthetics was the same or different from the “aesthetics of violence” of other contemporary Latin American and American filmmakers. I specifically made reference to the American filmmakers Quentin Tarantino and the Cohen Brothers, who were so much in vogue then. Gaviria explained how Latin American films could only be defined through an understanding of both European and American films. Latin American films have a debt to each, he said, and “one can only study Latin American films by forming a triangle, which integrates the three.” He explained how he himself owed a lot to European and American filmmakers. He added that for example when Ethan and Joel Coen talk about an “aesthetics of violence”, they talk about it with humor, they make a joke of violence, and he gave as an example the “machine-gun dance.” Nonetheless, he commented that from the point of view of a Colombian, of any Colombian, this type of violence creates a conflict, because in Colombia there is certain wariness surrounding the topic of violence. We as Colombians, cannot joke about violence. We could not possibly include a
“machine-gun dance” in a Colombian film. For Americans, violence is not a constitutive element of their daily lives. In Colombia we coexist with the enemy, thus our reality obligates us to make very real films: films that make reference to the violent nature of the country. For this reason, he said:

I believe, that if we are discussing our aesthetics of violence in film, we must talk about an “aesthetics of our violent reality.” Our art has a referent in our reality. Our films are films of violence, but they are not fascinated with violence, they are manifestations of that violence. There is a before and an after in each incident of violence. We are constantly confronted with our history of violence. When I think of violence in my filmmaking, I think of violence not as incidents but as language, I am interested in the language of violence.

When I asked him what he expected from spectators, for example, by making a film like Rodrigo-D he explained that it was a response to the daily killings in Medellín. He was interested in finding out why these young men who live in the comunas kill. He found out that they were hiding in the comunas because they had no other place in the world. The sicarios were “non-existent” in a kind of philosophical psychopathy. They were “bored” with life, thus, this was the “before” of violence: “Vos sos un botado, un traído” (“you are just waste,” my translation), therefore death was a gift. When the sicarios kill “the other” they are recovering what they have been denied. “The acts of violence,” says Gaviria “are a very profound socio-cultural problem and our whole society is involved.”

Thus, he added, “violence must be studied.” The violence of the paisa youth is a rebellion. If it had not been for this violence, the barrios would have continued to be pirate barrios or illegal slum-neighborhoods. In his opinion, when the young
men of women of the comunas decided to kill important politicians and others, they became “visible.” It was their way of making themselves noticeable. This violence became a kind of language; they were making statements through this violence.

During this time (1980-1998), approximately 50,000 young men and women died, according to Gaviria. It has meant great suffering for their families, but there is no chance to grieve, and no one to share the grief with. These kids deserve a monument, he adds, because through their actions their neighborhoods became legal and part of the city. To understand delinquency we must understand that the city is the co-existence of simultaneous events, all visible.

The sublime experience, the horror of the spectator upon witnessing such crude reality, does help Gaviria with his mission: to make the invisible, visible. This is Gaviria’s political agenda. Because, Gaviria, like the directors of the New Latin American Cinema, wanted to make a revolutionary cinema, a cinema where the public is not simply entertained, but participates, reacts and questions the hunger, the violence, and the reality of their environment. The fact that the viewer sees that people go hungry and understands why people go hungry and why this hunger generates violence helps the spectator acquire a new conscience. The violence portrayed in Gaviria’s films is brutal and in line with the ‘aesthetics of violence,’” also known as the “aesthetics of garbage,” proposed by Rocha.
However, this violence is not a violence of hatred, but instead, proposes something new, a cinema different from the cinema of other parts of the world. This cinema is what Victor Gaviria has termed “an aesthetics of our violent reality.”

It is my belief that the sublime I have been analyzing --the alluring spectacle of death, which produces both horror and fascination--shows the crude reality of these children without making a senseless or sensational spectacle. Gaviria, like Franco Ramos and Vallejo, manages to elevate the sicarios to a higher plane, through his “aesthetics of violence.” Furthermore, he redeems them, because, as he said, his violence in film is not violence as incidents, but as language, the “language of violence.”
CHAPTER 4
THE PLEASURE OF THE VOYEUR

By the pleasurable is meant that which
the senses find pleasing in sensation
Immanuel Kant, *Analytic of the Beautiful*

I have based my analysis of the sublime and the beautiful in Spanish film and novel on Juan Marsé's novel *Si te dicen que caí* (1973), and the films by Vicente Aranda *Si te dicen que caí* (1989), *Amantes* (1991), and *Libertarias* (1996).

Spanish films and novels in general are considered to be excessively violent. As I already analyzed in Chapter Two, I believe it is in part due to the history of violence that the Spanish people have endured, and which remains in their collective memory. As quoted in *Behind the Spanish Lens*, by Peter Besas, Manuel Gutierrez Aragón says: “Indeed, our films are violent- because this is a violent country” (183). In the introduction to her book *Blood Cinema*, Marsha Kinder refers to violence in this manner:

*...* 

A national cinema that is frequently described as excessive in its graphic depiction of violence and excessive in its treatment of incestuous relations. And beyond the cinematic context, a nation whose history is marked by a fratricidal civil war with bloody repercussions, by a long period of Francoism that glamorized death, by a deep immersion in the conventions of the Counter-Reformation that fetishized the bleeding wounds of Christ and other martyrs, and by a “Black Legend” of cruelty and violence dating

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back to the Inquisition and the Conquest which Spaniards have tried to overcome for the past five hundred years. And beyond this Spanish specificity, the question of whether the cinema of any nation carries distinguishing traces of its own unique history, culture, race, or blood and the correlative issues of how these ‘fictional’ concepts of national identity are constructed through cinema and other forms of popular culture. (1)

In line with Kinder’s assertion, I have contended in Chapter Two, that the fact that Spanish people have endured wars and lived centuries of bloodshed has permeated into the cultural manifestations of their country. What I intend to do in this Chapter is analyze in which manner the sublime and beautiful are contained in the aesthetics of Spanish cultural manifestations. In the preface, I explained that it is not done in the same manner as in the Colombian films and novels, already analyzed, where the beautiful and the sublime are mostly found in the characters of the stories and films of this study.

As a matter of fact, I believe that there is little, if any, beauty in the Spanish films and novels, but there is sublimity. The spectator and reader are subjected to sublime experiences. The films and novels suture the viewer from the start and make him/her experience the same delight the voyeur feels when watching scenes of degrading sex, torture, and extreme cruelty. As I have mentioned in Chapter One, cinema constructs the viewer as subject who is positioned voyeuristically by the camera. The spectator is forced to see through the eye of the camera scenes of excessive cruelty and degradation. In the dark room of the theatre, the spectator, hidden from the rest of the world, is free to
derive pleasure in seeing. The spectator relives the experiences of the jouissance of Lacan’s mirror stage, and Freud’s Oedipus stage.

As we will see further ahead, Marsé’s novel is about voyeurs. Conrado is the “main voyeur.” He derives intense pleasure in watching scenes of extreme cruelty and torture, which he pays others to perform for him. Java imitates Conrado and becomes a voyeur too, the children are voyeurs, and everyone in the story somehow becomes a voyeur. In reading the novel and watching the film, we become voyeurs too and experience the horror of the sublime.

**Si te dicen que caí - when everyone becomes a voyeur**

Juan Marsé was born in Barcelona in the year 1933. His adoptive parents had moved from Tarragona to Barcelona in 1931, and when the war started, his father Pep Marsé, who belonged to the Esquerra Republicana during the war, joined the PSUC. Juan Marsé was only six years old when the war broke out and nine when the war ended. He lived his childhood during the war and post-war years, and because he has such vivid memories of those years of suffering, scarcity, harshness, torture, and persecution, most of his novels are written about this period of time in his native Catalonia. Because his father had fought on the Republican side, he was persecuted during the post-war years and spent long periods of time in jail. Given this situation both Marsé and his mother were forced to find jobs (Amell 10). Marsé began working at a jewelry workshop

Marsé's narrative has very singular characteristics: all his stories take place in Barcelona, most of his main characters and protagonists come from marginal populations, principally from the working class neighborhoods (Can Tunis, La Torrasa, Hospitalet), and the antagonists are from the bourgeoisie classes and neighborhoods (el Tibidabo, la Bonanova, San Gervasio, el Ensanche). Another important characteristic is that he always makes reference in some manner or another to the Civil War, and its dreadful consequences. The different factions, political groups and all others that were involved in the war (La Falange, the anarquists, General Francisco Franco) appear in his stories. The structure of most of his novels deals with the limits between reality and fiction:
truths and lies, myths, hearsay, movie plots and characters and comic book characters are all intertwined in his stories. The reader is sometimes confused and has to sort out what is happening, who is narrating, how much time has elapsed etc. It is like finding ones way through a maze. This is especially true of the novel I will be analyzing, Si te dicen que caí. The title itself casts doubts on the reader: “si te dicen,” meaning, “if they tell you,” already implies someone saying something that might not necessarily be true.

Si te dicen que caí takes its title from the Falangist Hymn "Cara al Sol," but Marsé subverts its meaning; it is not about the heroic fall of the Nationalists in battle, but it is about their fall into corruption (Labanyi 137). The novel was first published in México in 1973 where it won the International Prize “Novela México.” When Francisco Franco died the novel was finally published in Spain in 1976. In this version of the novel Marsé wrote:

Escribí esta novela convencido de que no se iba a publicar jamás. Corrían los años 1968-1970, el régimen franquista parecía que iba a ser eterno y una idea obsesiva y fatalista se había apoderado de mí: la de que la Censura, que aún gozaba de muy buena salud, nos iba a sobrevivir a todos, no solamente al régimen fascista que la había engendrado sino incluso a la tan anhelada transición (o ruptura, según el frustrado deseo de muchos), instalándose ya para siempre, como una maldición gitana del Caudillo, en el mismo corazón de la España futura. Tal era de negra y pesimista la perspectiva después de más de treinta años de represión y mordaza. Así pues, sumergido en esa desesperanza océánica, me lié la manta a la cabeza y por vez primera en mi vida empecé a escribir una novela sin pensar en la reacción de la Censura ni en los editores ni en los lectores, ni mucho menos en conseguir anticipos, premios o halagos. Desembarazado por fin del pálido fantasma de la autocensura, pensaba solamente en los anónimos vecinos de un barrio pobre que ya no existe en Barcelona, en los furiosos muchachos de la posguerra que compartieron
conmigo las calles leprosas y los juegos atroces, el miedo, el hambre y el frío; pensaba en cierto compromiso contraído conmigo mismo, con mi propia niñez y mi adolescencia, y en nada más (5).

(When I wrote this novel I was convinced it was never going to be published. It was around the years 1968-1970, and the Franco regime seemed eternal. A fatalistic and obsessive idea overtook me: that the Censura or censorship, which was still strong, was going to survive not only us but also the fascist regime that had produced it and the transition to power, wished by many. It felt like a gypsy curse by the Caudillo, in the heart of the future Spain. This is how black and pessimistic the perspective seemed. So, submerged in my huge despair, I put a blanket over my head and for the first time in my life I began to write a novel without thinking much about the reaction of the Censors, nor the editors, nor the readers, nor about winning prizes or honors. Having rid myself of the pale ghost of censorship, I thought only about the anonymous neighbors of a poor neighborhood, that does not exist anymore in Barcelona, and the angry young men that shared with me the streets of lepers and the horrible games, the fear, the hunger and the cold; I thought about the compromise I had acquired with myself and with my own childhood and my teenage years and in nothing else. (5, my translation)

Clearly what Marsé wanted to do when he wrote this novel was to denounce a repressive dictatorial regime; he wanted the world to know about the cruel, terrible and sordid social situation lived by many, which did not offer opportunities to make it ahead in life, especially for the marginal groups who were continuously struggling to survive and for a better future.

As expressed above, Marsé’s novel is very difficult to comprehend, given the complexity of the narration. This complexity is found at different levels because it not only presents a story with different narrators and points of view, but also the story itself is a mixture or myth, fantasy, film, the official story and
collective memory. The narrators are youngsters who tell stories they have made up, which they call aventis (short for aventuras or adventures) as a way of subverting the established order and to fight against a regime. It is also a pastime and a way to forget the hunger and make up for scarcity:

I wanted to tell you about that fondness of theirs for inventing tall tales, Sister, a game that didn’t cost anything and was doubtless a consequence of the fact that they had no toys to play with, but was also a reflection of their memories of disaster, a muffled echo of the deafening sound of battle… (Marsé 28)

Java’s aventis were the best, says Ñito, when he thinks back about his childhood. He would exaggerate the number of real people and reduce the number of the fictional, he would introduce real settings, the streets, the roof tops, the shelters, the sewer, and mix all the events in the newspapers with the rumors that were circulating in the neighborhood about denunciations, warrants, detentions, and people who had disappeared without a trace, or those who were in jail and those who had been sentenced to death and shot:

But the best stories were the ones that Java told on rainy days, when he didn’t go out looking for junk with his sack and his balance-scale. It was on a day like that that it occurred to him for the first time to introduce, Juanity, “Wheaty,” and orphan girl who’d been taken in at the Casa de Familia on the Calle Verdi. At that precise moment, Java’s audience held its breath, not knowing what to think, their eyes staring, their mouths open, their hands held dead still on their knees. In time, he perfected the method: he put all of us into his stories, including himself, and then it got really exciting because there was always the possibility that one of the gang would find himself playing a starring and decisive role in the action when he was least expecting it. Each of us felt like someone who is about to have something terrible important happen to him. As time went by, he increased the number of real persons and decreased the number of
fictitious characters, and what’s more his stories started having settings and plots involving events that had happened in the city, incidents reported in the newspapers, and even the mysterious rumors going the rounds in the neighborhood concerning denunciations, detentions and people who had disappeared without a trace... (29)

The aventis are told by Java and the others, Sarnita, Luis, Tetas, and Martín and all the neighborhood boys; they tell stories about Juanita and Fueguiña, the little orphan girls victims of the games/ torture of the boys: “shut up if you don’t want to die burned by fire” (112); they also tell stories about Marcos, Fusam, Palau, "Taylor", Navarro, Jaime, Guillén, y Sendra, and all the maquis "masked and holding guns and conspiring, almost consumed in the heat of clandestinity" (Marsé 122). Ramona/ Aurora and Menchú who have been forced to become prostitutes given the circumstances of the war and postwar, are also subjects of their stories. The central character of the stories is Conrado, the injured Falangist, who spends his time watching functions of paid sex, to compensate for this physical and emotional limitations.

The story, or better, the narrated stories of the novel takes place from the beginning of the Civil War (1936-1939) to the beginning of the 70’s, when there is an “economic boom” that is seen by the neighborhood boys as a possibility of some change. The greater part of the plot takes place in the top part of the Gracia neighborhood in Barcelona, in Guinardó, in the orphanage of the Verdi Street and in the Animas Church where there was an underground shelter. There the boys used to meet to tell their aventis and to "torture" the orphan girls to get “the
truth out of them.” Part of the story is based on historical facts, like Menchu’s
death, which is based on the death of Carmen Broto in 1949. Also, some of the
characters in the novel like Artemi Nin, are also taken based on historical figures.
Nonetheless, the boundaries between fact and fiction are always blurry.

In the need to understand a reality that was escaping from their hands,
and in an effort to get ahead and to survive physically and emotionally, the hope
to tell the truth and to be listened to is the basis of the story. Marsé intertwined
many elements of the tragic history of his country, but he is clearly not taking
sides. Both the Falangists and the Republicans are guilty of misinforming, lying,
persecution and violence. As Samuel Amell has said in La narrativa de Juan
Marsé, the criticism is mostly directed towards the Right, the regime in power in
the forties. It was a regime that “ransacked and falsified” the childhood and
teenage years of Marsé and his friends. However, Marsé demystifies the image of
the urban guerrilla, because in the postwar years they spent their time robbing
banks and killing, not for political purposes but for personal benefit (130).

To narrate the tragedy of war and its consequences, the novel is written in
what Amell and Mangini have called the perspectivist structure. This narrative
structure is full of reiterations, silences, ambiguities, and multiple versions of one
fact, to express and try to reflect a world in which nothing seems real, or true or
solid, a world threatened by changes, ruptures and suspicions (Deveny 238).
Even though the events told in the novel are violent given the context of the story, Marsé’s novel would not classify as a novel of violence. In *The Modern American Novel of Violence*, Patrick W. Shaw explains a theory of the novel of violence. Based on different definitions, for example the one by Michael Kowalewski who says that: "Violence is thus popularly understood as an act of aggression that is usually destructive, antisocial, and degrading in its consequences and that usually seems deliberate," or Benjamin B. Wolman’s definition for whom violence is "a physical or verbal behavior that aims at harming and/ or destroying someone or something" Shaw defines the novels of violence saying that: "for my purposes, a novel of violence has violence as its central narrative focus and as the conflict that energizes the plot" (1).

The main focus of *Si te dicen que caí* is not violence, but many critics, like Martínez Cachero, cited by Samuel Amell in his book *Narrativa de Juan Marsé, contador de aventuras*, have said that Marsé’s novel is “un soñado mundo de alucinante pesadilla, cuestionable réplica del mundo real de entonces [...] catálogo de anormalidades: situaciones y personajes repugnantes, negrura moral excluyente, claro maniqueísmo político" (a dreamt world, a hallucinating nightmare, a questionable replica of the real world of that time... a record of abnormalities: repulsive situations and characters, apart from black morality, and political maniqueism) (111, my translation). However, Marsé had confessed to Amell in an interview “quería que reflejase de una forma bastante dura, lo más
dura, sórdida y siniestra posible, lo que había sido mi infancia en esos años” (...I wanted it to reflect in the hardest, most sordid, and most sinister way possible what my childhood years had been like” (my translation, 110).

In terms of the sublime, I believe that Marsé is a master story-teller like Fernando Vallejo. As I analyzed in Chapter 3, Vallejo’s writing qualified as sublime given the characteristics of his prose. Marsé also manages to lure his readers to continue reading despite the ins and outs of his story, and the sordid and sinister elements. Reading this story is also a journey into the sublime.

Marsé’s writing does not contain the sarcasm, or corrosive humor of Vallejo, but it does contain all the magic of oral storytelling. As Marla Williams expresses in her work:

... he interweaves content with both overt and masked references to textual construction, the texts become self-conscious, ironic and ultimately unstable. The stories, in turn, appear chaotic as they mimic the art of oral storytelling with their disgressions, repetitions and variations. The fusion of content and form uses the reader’s knowledge of traditional narrative to extend the possibilities of textual experimentation. (7)

Thus, Marsé’s narrative experimentation gets the reader involved, because the reader needs to actively participate in making sense of the story that is evolving before his eyes. With Marsé, as a reader, you need to put the story together as you try to separate” fact” from fiction. It is very easy to get lost in this narrative maze. For example, there are times when two characters blend into one, as is the case of Ramona/ Aurora, or there are several versions of one story. This, of course, is done on purpose, to reflect this chaotic reality of the post-war year.
Marsé very effectively incorporates “hearsay” into the text, as mentioned above, beginning with the title\(^{24}\) “Si te dicen”, “If they tell you...”, and with the first line of the novel “Cuenta que...”, “He tells...”\(^{25}\). There are many examples to include, as most of the narrative is constructed in this manner, but there is one very meaningful episode that expresses well how the hearsay was incorporated into the story to make the stories of each character even more confusing. In this episode, Sarnita (his name has been translated as Itchy) is reading Java’s lips, as Jave is betraying and turning in his brother to the guardia civil:

> I see you talked with Itchy, that big-mouth. What can I tell you, comrade? Stuff like in the movies. What can you say of one of Itchy’s stories that begins what can you say of a Red whore who begins by saying what can you say of the man...and who says I won’t ever see the sun again. What to say of a rosary of lies that the touch of so many fingers and lips might end up turning into a rosary of truths, or the other way around?(268)

The magic of Marsé’s narrative lies in the mystery surrounding all the events and characters, especially the character of Ramona (the prostitute)/Aurora (the revolutionary) which in a way is at the core of the story. The reader is left wondering if they are really the same person, and if Aurora was really a spy, or just a simple woman, a maid, caught in the middle of all the chaos of the war and its repercussions.

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\(^{24}\) The title of the book in English is *The Fallen*. The translator unfortunately has left out the “Si te dicen” of the Spanish title. Actually “If they tell you...” is a very important part of the title. By leaving it out the reader misses the essence of the novel.

\(^{25}\) The first line of the novel in Spanish does not mention who is “telling.” Unfortunately, in the English version the translator has added “Itchy tell...” which also ruins the mystery for the reader.
Again, if we bring to mind Longinus’s theories on the sublime in writing, we find that Marsé is a great writer, given that his prose is “embedded with emotional tone,” “the choice of words.. grand or commonplace have endowed his discourse with grandeur, beauty, passion and power” and finally it has a “speaking soul” (41). Marsé’s work, as he expressed in the introduction, was written under great pain and despair considering the circumstances of post-war. He wanted to transmit this message to his readers and he is able to do so well in this magnificent and well-constructed narrative.

Vicente Aranda’s look: Voyeurism, corruption, sexual degradation and torture in 

Si te dicen que caí

Vicente Aranda is one of the best-known directors in present-day Spain, mainly because of his very polemic, and risqué films. He was born in Barcelona in the working-class neighborhood of Monte Carmelo in 1926. His family had moved to Peñalba during the war but returned in 1938 to Barcelona. Aranda’s father belonged to the CNT (Central Nacional de Trabajadores), a workers union, and after the war his family lived a very difficult situation because of the father’s affiliation with the Republicans. Aranda left for Venezuela in 1949, but returned to Barcelona in 1959 to start the intellectual movement “La Escuela de Barcelona” or Barcelona School. With the support of his friends he started to direct films. His first project, Brillante povernir (1964), a neorrealist experiment
was not very successful. His film *Fata Morgana* (1965) became an important symbol for the Barcelona School. Considering the harsh censorship at the time the film was made, this project combined “uncompromising political reflection, formal advances from the nouvelle vague, and censor-evading techniques best summarized as a resort to diffusion” as a way of distracting attention from covert political implications (Hopewell 69). His next films, *Las crueles* (The Cruel Women) 1969, *La novia ensangrentada*, 1972 (The Blood-Spattered Bride) and *Clara es el precio*, 1974 (Clara is the Price) were not very commercially successful. In 1977 he directed *Cambio de sexo*, 1977 (Change of Sex) with Victoria Abril, who was still a teenager. Critics or the audiences did not acclaim the film but it introduced Abril to the public. Abril has since become one of the best actresses in Spain and with Aranda she has already made eleven films. The film was very controversial because it was done in view of the newly acquired freedom, after Franco’s death. Many topics, which were considered taboo before, were introduced in this film and others.

I would like to elaborate a bit on this film because it marks a transition, and is a reflection of the type of controversial films that Aranda likes to direct. This film in particular, *Cambio de sexo*, is about a very effeminate young boy (played by Abril) who lives with very conservative and traditionalist parents. The boy’s father, concerned about his son’s behavior takes him to a brothel to make him a man, but fails. The child rebels, and, at the end of the film he goes
through a change of sex operation, which is graphically recorded. Despite its sensationalist title, the movie is a reflection on family life in Spain. Aranda explains how it was censored during Franco, and even after Franco many changes had to be made on the script (Besas 174-175).


The three films that I will analyze in this chapter are: Si te dicen que caí (1989), Amantes (1991) and Libertarias (1996). I have chosen to analyze Vicente Aranda's films in particular, because I consider them audacious, bold and creative, and very representative of Spanish filmmaking. Aranda is not afraid to say what he has to say, and he is true to himself. He has said that what he is most interested in doing in his films is to reflect life. Thus, his best films are those that contain "blood and flesh," films that make the heart beat and that move the audience, films in which his characters show with all their might their feelings and passions (Canovas 135).
In line with the above, we can refer to Nietzsche, who believed that the true artist needs to rid himself of all social conventions and morality to create. Nietzsche believed that sensibility, compassion and morality stood in the path of true creativity. For him morality was the “danger of dangers” because of the generalized assumption that the “good man” was of greater value than ‘the “evil man.” People truly believed that the former was the best for the progress of humankind. In terms of film, and in this case, Aranda’s film, it is important to note that Aranda has been severely criticized for the types of films he directs and specific crude scenes, but he is also interested in making a statement about life and thus must rid himself of all conventions and morality.

I would like to start by looking at the filmic representation of violence in Si te dicen que caí (1989) directed by Vicente Aranda. Aranda focuses mainly on the intense moments of perversion, corruption and sexual degradation that the novel describes. The camera specifically dwells on the scenes in the novel where there is torture and sadism. Thus, the film has been described as "a harsh, brutal, negative, ambiguous film that reflects a reality of equal qualities" (Deveny 238). It has also been thought of as excessively sadistic (Abad 100). According to Deveny the film critics of the Spanish film journal Dirigido voted it as one of the best films of the decade, but they have added that "the controversial brutality of the film together with its decidedly confusing narrative detract from the film’s positive qualities" (238). Juan Marsé also commented that the film resulted in
“scenes that were brutal in and of themselves being even more brutal, and that
the film version was overly sadistic” (Deveny 232).

Even though Marsé’s novel does contain many of the elements described
above, which appear in the film version, it seems that he had a different purpose
in mind. As expressed by Deveny, Marsé was interested in capturing the
ambiguous and confusing aspect of postwar reality: “One day they would tell
you one thing, and the next day they would tell you the opposite” (238). The
violence in the novel is continuous, but Marsé tried to focus on certain important
events in the history of Spain. He wanted to show, for political reasons, the harsh
reality, without disguising it or covering anything up. Nonetheless, the novel
itself is not specifically political, and it is not about the Civil War. It is not
against the Falange, as the author himself has confessed. It is more a reflection of
an extremely difficult time and about a tragic moment in the history of Spain.

To adapt a novel into film, like *Si te dicen que caí* it is impossible to leave
aside all the elements described above. Vicente Aranda has adapted three of
Marsé’s novels: *La muchacha de las bragas de oro* (1980), *Si te dicen que caí*
actual* the director said that the biggest risk when he made the novel *Si te dicen
que caí* into a film was that the novel was: "... un pequeño crucigrama, pero en
todo caso venía de un libro que era un gran crucigrama y yo no podía prescindir
de eso" (a little crossword puzzle, coming from a book which was a huge
crossword puzzle and I could not get rid of that) (57, my translation). In an interview with Marie-Lise Guazarín, Marsé had said that: "las películas que han hecho de mis libros son simplemente horribles" (all the films about my novels are simply horrible). To be loyal to Marsé's novels you almost have to betray him (Amell 61).

A randa tries to be as true as possible to the novel and to present the core of Marsé's narrative. In an article “Juan Marsé y el cine,” Amell quotes Angel Fernández Santos who refers to the final version of A randa's film as:

La densa y complicada historia que construye en su novela Marsé se vuelve en la pantalla no densa sino espesa: no compleja sino embarullada; no profunda sino dificultosa. A randa intenta componer- de manera suicida a nuestro juicio- un guión sólo con puntos altos que pasa de una escena de cumbre a otra escena de cumber. (63)

(The density and complexity of Marsé's novel becomes not dense, but thick, in the film; not complex, but confusing; not profound, but difficult to understand. A randa tries to film- in an almost suicidal way, in our opinion- a script with only the most intense moments, and thus jumps from one intense scene to another.) (My translation)

Despite the fact that he is determined to be faithful to the novel, A randa mainly concentrates on all the violent moments of the novel. For example, in both the novel and the film it is difficult to understand why the maquis, urban guerrillas who fought on the Republican side, are fighting. Their ideological struggle seems to have ended and they seem only interested in robbing fascists. There are scenes of violence in which the maquis are involved. In a flashback, we
see Republican soldiers dragging Conrado’s father to the front of a car with its lights on. Apparently they believed he has been the one spying on Aurora Nin and Marcos during their lovemaking. Despite the fact that he denies the accusations, and begs on his knees not to be shot, they go ahead and do it. Aurora, who has been watching the whole time, also explains that they have the wrong man, but their reply is “he’s probably as much a son of a bitch as the other.” On the other hand, in the Roxy cinema, when the guardia civil requests to see some identification, the maquis just pull out a gun and shoot him in cold blood. This death seems to have no justification. The cruelty and excessive degradation of the maquis can be more clearly seen when they kill Menchú by beating her head with a hammer. The sound of the hammer on the woman’s head makes the stunned spectator writhe with horror, especially because she doesn’t die right away. Menchú manages to get out of the car, full of blood and badly hurt, she begs a woman for help, but the maquis put her back in the car and continue to beat her relentlessly, in one of the most horrifying scenes on film. Her death does not seem to have any logical justification, except the fact that she sleeps with rich men. It is very clear that the ideological fight of the maquis has changed into something contrary to their beliefs.

As I have already mentioned, Spanish cinema is violent. Any person who watches Spanish cinema would probably begin by saying that it is excessively violent. However, it is not necessarily “more” violent than the cinema of Japan or
the United States, says Marsha Kinder. Nonetheless, there is a difference, and it
lies in different modes of violent representation and of the cultural implications,
determinants and reception. There are certain patterns that are constant in the
images of some movies. For example, in *Pascual Duarte* (1975), Pascual
relentlessly hacks his mule to death. In *Furtivos* (1977) (*Poachers*) by Manuel
Gutiérrez Aragón, the “devouring” mother beats a chained she-wolf to death. In
*Los ojos vendados* (1978) (*Blindfolded*) by Carlos Saura a teenage Fascist crushes
the head of his lover with a stone, while chanting “España, España! In *El crimen
de Cuenca* (1979) (*Murder in Cuenca*) by Pilar Miró, a guardia civil drives a spike
through a prisoner’s tongue. In *Matador* (1986) by Pedro Almodóvar a former
bullfighter becomes a serial-killer by imitating the killing, raping and impaling of
women, he has seen on screen (Kinder 137). The list could go on. Kinder
explains it in this manner:

> We can already note certain patterns emerging in the violent images just
described: the eroticisation of violence, by targeting the genitals and by
using fetishizing close-ups, ellipses, and long takes; the specularization of
violence for spectators both within the film and in the movie theatre; the
displacement of violence onto surrogate victims, especially animals,
children and women; and the displacement of violence from one sphere of
power to another, between sex and politics, between private and public
space, and between the body, the family and the state (138).

Most of Vicente Aranda’s films contain the elements that Kinder
describes. Aranda not only concentrates on excessive and degrading sex scenes,
but on atrocious torture and murder scenes. We will see this later in the analysis
of *Libertarias* (1996), where he presents to us in gory detail the brutal murder of
the women freedom fighters. Enrique Colmena, who has written a book on
Vicente Aranda's film production says that in most of his films you find incest,
trans-sexuality, homosexuality, necrophilia, impotence, lesbianism, sodomy,
sadism, masochism, rapes, torture, castration, emotional and psychological
deviances, etc. (25), but Aranda defends himself by saying that he has been
misinterpreted because he has tried to be creative when it comes to sex scenes.
He doesn't want to film the standard sex scene of two people making love in the
conventional manner. He says that filming sex scenes is not easy, because he has
to be careful to respect the natural bashfulness of this actors and the public.

Sex and cruelty, however, are two fundamental themes in Aranda's films.
Sex is presented as an element of pleasure and power. This of course is extremely
well depicted in Amantes in the character of Luisa. Cruelty has an element of
pain, but also of pleasure. In Sí te dicen que caí, Colmena explains how Aranda
explores evet further this turbulent mixture of pleasure and pain, generally
among teenagers (31). There are scenes in the movies in which all the above-
mentioned elements are present.

A very important scene is when Java first arrives to Señorito Conrado’s
apartment. Java has been paid through a third person to perform sexual acts for
Conrado, the voyeur. Java in desperate need for money had accepted and this is
when he sees Ramona/ Aurora for the first time. He becomes obsessed with her,
although he later finds out that she was her brother Marcos’ lover. Because they
had both fought on the Republican side during the war, Marcos has gone into hiding. However, Aurora has become a prostitute in order to survive and is out of hiding. After the one-hour performance, which includes all sorts of sado-masoquist acts, Java develops a fixation for her left breast, which has a big scar. The story that goes around, and the children repeat in their aventis, is that she is hiding a microfilm with important information, probably something they had seen in the movies or heard someone talk about.

The sexual performance Aurora and Java present for Conrado is excessively brutal especially because, in the film, Aurora/ Ramona is very pregnant and she must perform all sorts of degrading acts, following instructions, which she can not refuse to do, if she wants to get paid. The final act she must perform for Conrado’s pleasure and delight is to walk on all fours while Java urinates over her, and she cries: “Kill me, Kill me!” Smelling of urine and still drenched they must walk out on the street and salute a Falangist in the Fascist manner.

During the whole performance by Ramona/ Aurora and Java, Conrado has been watching hidden behind a red curtain. At the same time, as he is observing the whole performance he becomes sexually excited and fondles a round cane and licks his lips. As we watch Conrado, watching the sexual performance from behind the curtains, we ourselves become voyeurs and accomplices in the situation.
The above scene is also very important because it introduces a further element of death, cruelty, violence and betrayal, and it is represented in the carpet over which Aurora and Java are having sex in Conrado’s room. The carpet depicts “The Execution of General Torrijos and his Comrades,” by Antonio Gisbert (1835-1905). Jo Labanyi explains that it introduces the theme of betrayal, which is central to the novel. There are two manners in which betrayal happens: in the sense of moral betrayal and betrayal of the truth. The replacement of fact for fiction is not only because of censorship or propaganda, but also of the political witch-hunts of the postwar government that induced people to betray their own. It is in this context that Java betrays his brother Marcos and turns him in (141).  

Probably one of the most excessive scenes in the film is that of Juanita’s torture by other children. Juanita is forced to sit on a bidet with open legs, if she wants to get the two comic books that she has requested from the other children. While she is sitting in this position, with hands tied behind, the children start to move a burning candle closer and closer to her genitals, and meanwhile they are threatening her if she doesn’t “Confess!” This scene, with a great mixture of sadism and masoquism is just a game, but a very dangerous game, that the

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26 The theme of betrayal, specifically that of brother against brother, is essential also when we analyze the film Amores Perros, because in this film Octavio turns against Ramiro and Gustavo against his brother Luis to the point that he hires someone to have him killed. This betrayal shows with greater dramatism the extreme dislocation of the family in the urban context, that Iñárritu and Arriaga Jordán were interested in showing.
children play to entertain themselves. Although not mentioned, it seems they are imitating one of the many tortures inflicted on political prisoners that they have probably heard the adults talk about. Despite the fact that it is supposed to be a game, it is an obviously excessive game for children to be “playing.”

The more complex sequence is in a crosscut of shots in which Fuegüiña is tied to a wooden board, simulating a crucifix, while the children begin to torture her by twisting her leg, to make her confess what she knows about Aurora Nin. The culminating act of this terrible torture sequence is when Java, who has been watching the whole scene hidden behind a red cloak (simulating the red curtain Conrado hides behind during the sex shows others perform for him for his voyeur pleasure), gets closer to her and puts a blade in her mouth while he kisses her. The blood of both their cut lips, and/or tongues in the blade, stimulate and excites him.

This sequence includes a flashback about Conrado’s past, when he used to hide in a closet and became sexually aroused while watching Aurora and Marcos make love in his bed. Later, we find him smelling the sheets where Marco and Aurora have just had sex. This sequence also includes another voyeur, a little girl, who is watching horrified, but sexually excited, the scene where Fueguiña is being tortured. At that moment Sarnita, who is a young boy at the time, has started to take away her underwear to penetrate her with a rudimentary phallic object. The little girl in this scene is now a grown-up woman, a nun, who in the
opening scene is talking to the medical assistant about the corpse that has been 
brought in a few minutes before. They both start reminiscing about their 
childhood and all the different bloody events that took place then. The nun is 
trying to forget those moments, which she recalls with fright and pain. She is not 
aware that the little boy in the scene that she is so frightened to remember is the 
grown man she is now talking to.

In Myth and History in the Contemporary Spanish Novel, Jo Labanyi 
analyzes Marsé's work and comments that voyeurism, mixed with sex and 
cruelty is important in Marsé's novel. All the novel's characters are either 
prostitutes or voyeurs. But for Labanyi the voyeurs in the novel are not only 
voyeurs of kinky sex and torture, they are also memory voyeurs, like Marcos, or 
fantasy voyeurs like Sarnita, the main aventi teller. Aurora also became a voyeur 
when she is forced to witness the execution of Conrado's father. This event 
becomes a major trauma in her life.

According to Labanyi's argument, even though the novel contains many 
elements of affliction, cruelty, pornography and sexual torture, and although we 
encounter numerous voyeurs, including the reader who participates also as 
voyeur, it all has a political ending. All of this is present in the novel to shame 
power relations, says Labany. For example, the fact that señorito Conrado, a 
sexual pervert, belongs to the Nationalist party, helps to subvert the power 
relations. When the children make Conrado a character of their made up stories,
they become voyeurs, and he becomes one of the characters that performs in pornographic scenes: "The fact that the reader is made aware that the performance is not for real makes him reflect on the artificial nature of the power relations that create the pornographic scenario" (177).

In the film all the characters are voyeurs, not only Conrado, who as explained above is the main voyeur, but also Java, who begins to imitate his mentor and the children who fascinated and admiringly contemplate Java’s clandestine theatrical representations in the subterranean shelter, underneath the church. Paulina, terrified watches the children’s games, which always include tortures. The political function of pornography, as explained by Labanyi, is found in the film, but also the pornography for the purpose of making the spectator become a voyeur and satisfy his desire to look.

According to Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," film offers many possible pleasures. Among them is the pleasure of watching, or scopophilia. Scopophilia also refers to the pleasure of being looked at. In Three Essays on Sexuality, Sigmund Freud defined scopophilia as a sexual impulse and he associated it to the need of making people the object of our look, and to subject them to a controlling and curious gaze. During childhood, children feel the need to look at what has been prohibited: the sexual organs. In Instincts and other Vicissitudes, Freud explains that once children have overcome their curiosity of looking at their genitals, they want to see how the
human body works. This instinct is modified with the constitution of the ego, but if it does not happen, this is when we find extreme perversions, as with obsessive voyeurs, whose sexual impulses are only satisfied when they can see others as objects, in a controlling manner. This seems to be case with Conrado. By paying others to perform for him, and directing the performance he has the ideal situation of control.

Cinema also creates the ideal situation for this situation to occur. The conditions of the movie theatre, where films are shown, the darkness, the isolation of spectators are ideal to create the illusion that the spectator is entering a private world (37). The eye of the camera is the principal voyeur and it directs and controls the eye of the spectator. The camera will force the spectator to see what it sees. The pleasure of looking makes us become participants and accomplices. Aranda makes us become active voyeurs, like Conrado, when we participate in the scenes of sadism, torture and cruelty.

Aranda says that when he was just a boy he had an obsession for the movies, but he did not like to watch scenes in which there was any cruelty shown. Nevertheless, it is one of his favorite topics, which he likes to explore in depth. He wants to show what real life is like, and he wants to show how humans behave. In terms of providing a sublime experience for his viewers, Aranda manages to carry us away, by having us experience extremes of violence.
and sex, and thus activate our libidinal drive to pleasurable viewing (closely aligned to the mirror phase).

If we recall what Freud said about the two instincts that dominate man’s life: the love instinct (Eros) and the death instinct (Thanatos). These two instincts, says Freud, never appear in isolation from each other. Sadism, for example, which is one component instinct of sexuality, is one manifestation of the death or destructive instinct, and it is directed outwards. Masochism, another one of the components of sexuality, is part of the destructive instinct and is directed inwards. Although, says Freud the first inclination is to think that the two instincts are opposite to each other, they manifest themselves together. In the scenes of excessive cruelty and violence that I just analyzed, Java and Aurora performing for Conrado, Fueguiña being tortured by Java and the other children, Juanita sitting on the bidet these sado-masochistic tendencies are evident. Aranda explores in his film the sado-masochistic tendencies of the individual through Conrado, Java and the children, and makes the viewers participants in this experience, as we have seen.

It has been said by some film theorists, that cinematic pleasure is much closer to masochistic scopic pleasure than to sadistic. Jean Laplanche showed how the spectatorial gaze is aligned with masochism, because this is the “fundamental fantasy.” In “The Imaginary Signifier,” however, Metz says that
“the voyeuristic separation of subject/screen object is used to align the spectator with sadism...Metz believes that all voyeurism is sadistic to a degree and compares cinematic voyeurism to ‘unauthorized scopophilia’ and its prototype, the child viewing the primal scene” (Kaplan 214). Either way, whether the spectator is experiencing masochistic or sadistic pleasure, Aranda aware of the power of film on the viewers, subjects them to the sublime experience of these extreme pleasures.

**Amantes - The sublime experience of love, passion and death**

*Amantes* (1991) was initially part of a project for TV, titled *La huella del crimen*. The idea was to film for TV different episodes based on real life crimes. Aranda had already participated in the project with *El crimen del Capitán Sanchez*, (1985) which was very successful. His next project was based on a well-known crime of passion called “El crimen de Tetuan” which had occurred in 1940, immediately after the end of the Civil War. The crime was notorious but had received very little press coverage. Because of this, the people involved in the project, who were helping Aranda write the script, had to make up a lot of information to fill gaps. As the project developed Aranda became more interested in making this a full-length film. When he decided to make it into a film, he decided to shift the action from 1940 to 1950, due to budgetary concerns. It was more viable and less expensive to recreate this decade (D’Lugo 292).
The plot of the story is not very complex and the story is told in linear style. The film opens with the intertitle “Madrid, años cincuenta,” (Madrid; the 50's) and a slow camera panning, which shows the backs of soldiers singing at a church. Then the sequence is shifted to a close-up of Trini (Maribel Verdu) who turns around to smile at one of the soldiers, Paco (Jorge Sanz). Paco smiles almost imperceptibly to acknowledge her. Later on, once they have left the church service, we see them walking hand in hand in the park, with her boss’s children and apparently very much in love. Trini is a servant at Paco’s commander’s home. Paco has just finished his military service and will remain in the city until he finds a job. Meanwhile, he needs a place to live. His fiancée suggests a room at a widow’s apartment in the same neighborhood. Paco goes to the place Trini has suggested and meets the widow. The widow, who turns out to be a very attractive woman, Luisa (Victoria Abril), quickly seduces Paco, and between the two a very passionate, obsessive and dangerous love affair develops.

Trini meanwhile begins to suspect something strange is going on, when Paco’s visits become more and more sporadic. Paco, full of guilt, decides to spend Christmas with her. He begs for forgiveness and tries to have a good time by enjoying the wonderful meal Trini spent money and time preparing for him. Nevertheless, his mind is occupied the whole time thinking about Luisa. He tries
to seduce Trini while he is visiting her that night but she is too shy and too set in her conservative ways to give in. Paco, thus, frustrated, returns to Luisa’s arms.

Paco thinks he can continue his relationship with both women, but the situation becomes very complicated when Luisa gets involved with some low-life people, who make a living out of swindling people of their savings. Luisa owes them fifteen thousand pesetas, and they have threatened to kill her if she does not pay quickly. When Paco finds out he swears to help her and conjures a plan to take Trini’s life-long savings. Luisa suggests that he kill Trini too.

Accordingly, Paco convinces Trini to go with him to Murcia, to buy a bar that they can both operate, once they get married. Trini gladly quits her job in Madrid and takes her lifetime savings with her. However, upon arriving and while waiting for Paco at the hotel she realizes he has taken her money. When he confesses his plan, and his love for Luisa, Trini attempts to kill herself by cutting her throat with his razor. Later, after they leave the hotel, they go for a walk. On a bench in front of the Cathedral, Trini begs him to end her suffering and guides his hand to her death.

When the deed is done, Paco runs to the train station to stop Luisa from leaving by showing her his bloody hands, to signal his love for her. The two embrace passionately, but almost simultaneously an addendum appears at the end of the film which says:

This picture is based on a true story. Three days later, Paco and Luisa were arrested in Valladolid. They were tried and condemned to death.
General Franco commuted their sentence to 30 years in prison. They spent between 10 and 12 years in prison but they never saw each other again. Luisa is dead now. Paco lives in Zaragoza, and is known to have a considerable fortune.

In this film we find a similar story to what Jorge Franco Ramos presents to us in Rosario Tijeras. In the same manner in which Emilio becomes inexplicably attached to Rosario, Paco becomes obsessively involved with Luisa in a situation that will only bring chaos and confusion to his life. The attraction Paco feels for Luisa will make him do things that apparently his upbringing would not allow. We must remember that in this film, the church and the military are presented as strong moral referents right from the onset of the film.

Paco is presented as a nice clean-cut young man, who has just finished his military service and is coming home to marry his young, beautiful, hard-working girlfriend. Trini is also presented in the same light, as the young woman who has been brought up with strong moral and ethical precepts, who will marry a virgin, following her very strong Catholic and conservative education. This however, seems to be precisely Trini’s demise. If she had been more sexually responsive to Paco’s advances she might not have lost him. She of course realizes this, but when she finally seduces him, it is too late. She even promises she will learn, to be able to compete with her rival, but Paco has already fallen for Luisa.

In "Jorge Sanz: El galán sumiso. Problematising Masculinities in Mainstream Cinema in Spain," Chris Perriam explains how in the film Paco is
positioned between the two women who represent opposites: Luisa, sexy and sexually manipulative and Trini, naïve and pure, and family-oriented. Marsha Kinder also analyzed these opposites and argued that Trini is associated with the Madonna and Luisa to the “profane alternative of the Madonna.” (28).

This love-obsession that Paco has for Luisa, however, is totally different from the relationship that develops between Emilio and Rosario. While it was a terribly excruciating experience for Emilio, who could not understand, rationally why he was letting himself be carried away, Paco lets himself be drawn to a world of crime, seemingly without any remorse or pain. He does not try to understand or reflect on his situation. In the film he is portrayed as a passive man who eventually lets the two women who love him manipulate him to do what they want. Luisa asks him to kill Trini. Trini begs him to kill her. He carries out the two deeds.

Marsha Kinder has made a very interesting analysis of this film in terms of female power relations:

What most distinguishes Amantes ... and what positions it in the 1990s is the forceful way it depicts the subversive power of Luisa’s sexuality...not only is she the sexual object who actively pursues her own desire and who first seduces Paco but she continues to control the lovemaking-determining how and when they make love. There are some extraordinarily graphic sex scenes...despite this display of phallic power; she remains loving and emotionally vulnerable. I cannot think of any other film from any cultures that represents female sexuality in this way. And what is equally subversive is Paco’s responsiveness to this kind of aggressive female sexuality, which comes to obsess him. (210)
However, the obsession also works on the part of the two women. Neither of them is willing to lose Paco. Luisa even refuses to accept the money Paco has taken from his girlfriend if it means losing him. She prefers to see Trini dead. When they meet in the park and Paco gives Luisa the money, she asks him for the second time to kill Trini.

Luisa seems to be a stronger woman, and even though she loves Paco, she will not sacrifice herself for him. Trini, on the other hand, prefers to die than to see him gone from her side. In a moving monologue she convinces herself and Paco why she should die:

You don’t love me... I’ll break my legs; I’ll tear my eyes out. I’ll cut my hands and breasts. When I am a wreck at your feet, you’ll never forget that you didn’t know how to love Trini, Trini who only wanted to offer you her love, give you children, care for you. That’s all that’s left between us from now on. Happy now? Answer me. Are you happy now? I’d like to kill that woman but God won’t allow it. Deep inside I feel the need to end all this. I want to die, Paco. I know you want me to die. Do it Paco, Kill me. Free me from this torture, please.

After she finishes her monologue, she reaches into his pocket and pulls the razor out. She puts it into his hand and slowly guides his hand towards her. The camera does not show where she is guiding his hand, all we see, in a very famous minimalist violent death, are two feet in the snow, without shoes and some drops of blood on the white snow. In the background we hear a Christmas carol, which speaks about good times coming. Trini’s love and death and her obsession for Paco, coupled with her “non-violent”, and desired death, expresses well the notion of the sublime as expressed by Burke: “the possibility of getting
carried away” (xxiii). She was probably the only one who really let herself go completely and lost control of her life.

Libertarias, the sublimity of dying for freedom

Libertarias (1996) was a project that Vicente Aranda had had in mind for over fifteen years. He had written the script with Antonio Rabinad and Jose Luis Guarner, but he had to wait for the right time, considering censorship and financial constraints. For this film, Aranda chose the most well known actresses in Spain at that time: Ana Belén, Victoria Abril, Ariadna Gil, Loles León. His film is made in the same tradition as Malraux’s Sierra de Teruel (1939) and Land and Freedom (1995) by Ken Loach, based on George Orwell’s Homage to Catalonia.

The story is set at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Near Aragón, a group of revolutionary fighters have joined forces with the purpose of marching into Zaragoza to free the city of the Nationalist troops. A group of women, who call themselves “Freedom Fighters” have joined the forces with the purpose of assuming a direct and active role by taking arms and fighting in the front with the men. They find all sorts of opposition from other comrades and women, who believe they should stay behind and support the troops in other ways.

The “freedom fighters” or “Libertarias” are led by Pilar (Ana Belén), who is determined and passionate about her duty to fight in the Front with the troops.
The other women who join her are Mariana (Ariadna Gil), a nun who is forced to leave the convent upon the arrival of the revolutionary troops, and who is allured into joining the fighters, because of the passion she sees in the other women and her own religious convictions; Florén (Victoria Abril) a cripple who can tell the future and who is in charge of obtaining the weapons; Charo (Loles León) a prostitute, who also decides it is her duty to join the other women fighters, when she realizes how committed they are to their political cause. There are others who are also totally convinced that the war can only be won if everyone participates actively.

These women have refused to stay home in the passive and traditional roles of women. During a meeting of the union of “Mujeres Libres,” (Free Women) in Barcelona, when one of the leaders has instigated the women to stay home and support the troops at home ‘with maternal love.’ Pilar, frustrated with the attitude of the women, gives a memorable speech to all those gathered at the meeting:

¿Qué pasa? ¿ Parece que estemos locas porque queremos ir al frente? Pues yo te lo voy a decir bien claro, ¡óyelo! No entendemos por qué la revolución tiene que correr a cargo de la mitad de la población solamente. Somos anarquistas, somos libertarias pero también somos mujeres y queremos hacer nuestra revolución. No queremos que nos la hagan ellos. No queremos que la lucha se organice a la medida del elemento masculino porque si dejamos que sea así, estaremos como siempre, jodidas! Queremos pegar tiros para poder exigir nuestra parte a la hora del reparto, y sobre todo queremos dejar bien claro que el corazón no nos cabe en el pecho y sería un desatino quedarnos en casa haciendo calceta. Queremos morir, pero queremos morir como hombres, no vivir como criadas…
What’s wrong? Do you think we are crazy because we want to fight in the Front? Well, I am going to say something very clearly, so listen up! We don’t understand why the revolution has to be fought only by half of the population. We are anarchists, we are freedom fighters, but we are also women and we want to do our own revolution. We don’t want them to do it for us. We don’t want the fight to be organized according to the masculine element, because if we allow this to happen, we will continue the same way we have always lived, fucked! We want to be able to fire shots, so we can get our share, when the time for distribution arrives. We want to make it clear that our hearts don’t fit in our chests anymore and that it would be a terrible choice to stay home fixing socks. We want to die, but we want to die like men, not live like servants… (My translation).

This memorable speech given by Pilar gives the film the strength necessary to make the viewer understand the passion, willingness and conviction with which the women participated in the war.

“Mujeres Libres” was an anarchist entity that had over 20,000 members and in the 1930’s organized literacy campaigns, conferences and cultural activities. During the Civil War, this organization and other women’s organizations decided to participate actively in the war, but were rejected by the Republican government who preferred that women help in the rear guard. The “First Conference of Antifascist Women” was held in Barcelona on November 6-8, 1937 to ratify this desire (Crussels 250). Aranda is able to show, however, the fervor with which a few courageous women decided to defy their own people to fight for their ideals.
In terms of the sublime, this film dwells on the spectacle of the armed revolution: the marches, the speeches, the euphoria of the people, the passion for the cause, the profound belief in what one is doing, are all extremely well depicted, and make the spectator feel the sublime, this overwhelming feeling of horror mixed with delight. There are two very memorable sequences: the troops gathering in the Plaza Real in Barcelona to leave for the Aragón Front, the euphoria of the people, in the balconies and on the streets, cheering them; and, the burning of all the religious objects in the Plaza de Vic- among them the religious paintings that Josep Maria Sert had painted for the cathedral. While the spectator contemplates in awe the fervor and enthusiasm of the people who supported the cause, the voice of the anarchist leader, Buenaventura Durruti voice is heard on the loudspeaker saying:

En estos momentos históricos, en estas horas decisivas, multiplicados por el furor y el entusiasmo, los bravos hombres del pueblo, que han reducido al ejército en Barcelona, se disponen a marchar sobre Zaragoza en auxilio de sus hermanos aragoneses. La voluntad soberana de unas masas que todo lo pueden, cuando van unidas y agigantadas por la decisión de triunfar, influirá en los destinos del mundo. El 19 de julio marcará el comienzo de una nueva era. La faz del pasado ya no existe. Estamos gestando, entre ríos de sangre, una España nueva. (Crusells 250)

In these historical moments, during these decisive hours, multiplied by the commotion and enthusiasm, the brave men of the common people, have defeated the army in Barcelona, and are getting ready to march to Zaragoza to help their Aragon brothers and sisters. The sovereign will of the masses, capable of everything, when they join forces and when they become even greater by the decision to triumph, will have a great influence on the destiny of the world. The 19th of July will mark the beginning of a new era. The face of the past does not exist anymore. We are starting, a new Spain, amidst rivers of blood. (my translation)
Another very important, politically and emotionally charged scene is when Durruti orders the women to go back home, because he does not want them in the Front. When the priest comes to get them to take them back to Barcelona, he is told there are no women, because those who are standing there in front of him: “Esas, tienen más huevos que yo!” (These women have more balls than a man). When the women are told that they can join others in washing and ironing the soldiers’ clothes, they ironically ask what is wrong with the men that they cannot wash and iron.

I believe part of the sublime representation of violence lies here. The spectator cannot help but feel moved and carried away by the pride of the fighters and the passion with which they fought. Some critics believe that this is the downfall of the movie:

There is also the difficulty that Aranda’s celebration of his women’s indomitable spirit, his defense of their utopianism and blind commitment, become an emotional glorification of the losing side in the Civil War, a clichéd sentimental expression of solidarity with a noble, heroic defeat... such schematic approaches arguably obscure rather than seriously elucidate the female contribution to the Republican cause and, more widely, their role in the Civil War as a whole. (Jordan, et al 178)

Despite the feelings of critiques like Jordan, I believe that the strength of the film lies precisely in Aranda’s capacity to show the fervor and enthusiasm with which the women fought. The women and men fighting the war are portrayed as real fighters who were truly convinced that they were going to win.
The most dramatic, horrific and gruesome scene of violence in film, is the slaughter of the “Freedom Frighters,” the women, who a few minutes before had decided to stay and fight. They are sitting outside a farm chatting when two of their comrades bring a lamb to be slaughtered. This, of course foreshadows what is about to happen. In a few minutes, while Mariana is hiding in the barn, because she does not want to witness the lamb being slaughtered, the cries of the lamb are mixed with the cries of the women whose bodies are cut and chopped, in the same manner as the lamb’s, by the Franco’s Moorish troops. While Charo’s hands and throat are slit, Floren is trying to defend herself by holding the knife that is trying to stab her. Her hands are cut and her body mutilated. Mariana meanwhile is watching in extreme horror. When she comes out of her hiding she is brutally raped. She is saved by the commander of the troops who realizes she is somehow affiliated to the church.

With this scene, Aranda shows once more his fascination for violence and cruelty. However, it is clear that there is a purpose. The experience of watching this slaughter is definitely not one which produces pleasure or delight, but extreme horror and terror. If we recall Burke’s definition of the the sublime he had said that “terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime’ (53).
By subjecting his audience to a sublime experience of terror, Aranda is definitely making a very strong statement about the contribution of the libertarias to the Republican cause and to the Civil War as a whole.
CHAPTER 5

AMORES PERROS: THE POST-MODERN CINEMATIC EXPERIENCE OF THE SUBLIME

The sublime is a rape.
Beauty is a lure.
They both induce a state of submission
that is often combined with the possibility of getting lost.
Adam Phillips

If we are going to talk about the aesthetization of violence in film and novel in Latin America, we cannot exclude Mexico, an important contributor to this genre for decades. For the purpose of this dissertation I have chosen the film Amores Perros (2000), directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, as one of the best examples of the post-modern cinematic experience of the sublime. As expressed in the preface and analyzed in the chapter “A Background to Violence,” Mexico, like Colombia and Spain, has lived through centuries of wars and bloodshed. Although Amores Perros in itself does not deal with the topic of the Mexican Revolution, it depicts, with cruel realism, contemporary urban violence, a direct consequence of huge migrations and the displacement of population of peasants into the big cities, and a result of civil wars and modernization. The film also
presents, with irony and a certain degree of sadness and nostalgia, the failure of the revolutionary movements of the 60's and 70's in Latin America.

Amores Perros (2000), Alejandro González Iñárritu's tour-de-force film, was considered one of the best films of that year, despite the controversy that it generated due to its depiction of extreme violence. The title of the film, which is a pun, or play on words, speaks of two situations: a) a love for dogs, and b) love that is wicked or mean, or love that turns sour. This is presented in the film within the context of extreme human conflicts (such as brothers turning against brothers, contract killings, incestuous relationships, class struggle), in the contemporary urban world—in this case in the most populated city in the world, Mexico City.

Amores Perros was an immediate success when it first came out. It won over thirty awards, including the most successful film in Mexico in the year 2000. In his critical study of this film, Paul Julian Smith explains how it's success stems not only from the excellent marketing strategies launched for its promotion, both nationally and internationally, but also from the fact that it came out at the “right time.” Before it was shown in Mexico, it was well promoted in Cannes as cinema

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27The most amazing reaction was that the public was more shocked about the violence against dogs, than the violence against humans. Apparently people have become so anesthetized, and so insensitive, when it comes to the violence humans inflict on each other, that this violence was of little concern to the public in general. Even Iñárritu, himself, commented: “[w]e can see a homeless man and a homeless dog, and we care first for the dog... an indication that man is losing his humanity” (Ghonaim). Geoffrey Kantaris says, “the film’s distribution was delayed in Britain due to concerns not about the violence enacted on human beings in the film but about the portrayasl of dog-fighting and the occasional animal smeared with stage blood.” (1)
de la “mexicanidad.” Mexican cinema, which had always been one of the best, was “in ruins” (10). González Iñarritu spoke about his film in this Festival saying that he wanted “…to show the complex mosaic of an enormous city such as Mexico and make it live like and anthropological experiment.” He also added that his film “reflected the rottenesses to be found” in Mexican Society (14). When the film opened in Mexico, after its recognition at the Cannes and other festivals, Mexico was going through very important political changes, two weeks before the presidential elections. It was the moment when the PRI, the dominating political party, was defeated after 71 years in power. Mexicans were ready for a change and this movie served also as a symbol for this critical transition (16).

Many attribute the inspiration of the film to Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction* because of the way the story is constructed. The film was actually inspired by William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*. Guillermo Arriaga Jordán, a Mexican writer and the film’s screenwriter, explained in an interview to Peter N. Chumo that when he was twenty years old he read this novel and became inspired to one day make a film like it. He said: “What Faulkner taught me as a writer is that every story has a particular way to be told” (10).

The complex plot is actually three different stories with different characters who all end up connecting via a deadly car crash. This is something the spectator does not know right away and must wait as the three stories start to develop to find out their interconnectness. Part of what makes the film so
innovative and exciting is precisely that it engages the spectator to try to put the puzzle together\textsuperscript{28}, while at the same time involving him emotionally through excellent close-up photography and an exciting soundtrack. The manner that the story is constructed and told causes the viewer to experience the sublime: there are several scenes in which the viewer is confronted with extreme violence that might produce intense feelings of horror, mixed with pleasure and delight.

Nonetheless, and surprisingly, it is difficult for the spectator to ultimately identify with any of the characters, because as mentioned before, the director is not trying to vindicate the main characters or ask for forgiveness, as I believe the directors and writers who present the character of the sicario in the Colombian films and novels analyzed do. In the case of \textit{Amores Perros}, the spectator becomes more sympathetic to the main characters’ personal circumstances, because despite their obvious life choices, a degree of fatality appears to control their lives, similar to what is reflected in the Greek Tragedies. Thus, I disagree with Paul Julian Smith when he states that: “Arguably, at a further level of abstraction, the episodes are united by poetic justice: the ambitions of Octavio, Daniel and Gustavo which elicit variable degrees of sympathy in the audience...” (31).

The film opens with a frantic car chase. At first the viewers are not aware

\footnote{28 This is similar to the effects of Juan Marsé’s novel \textit{Si te dicen que caí}. The reader must get involved in objectively trying to put the puzzle together while at the same time experiencing emotional engagement.}
of what is happening; we hear the sound of very heavy breathing, of cars rapidly passing, and then the feeling that we are being driven at extremely high speeds on a road. Then, we hear the anguished voice of man crying out, “¿qué hiciste güey, qué hiciste?” (What did you do, man, what did you do?). Immediately we find ourselves inside a Grand Marquis with two young men driving at extremely high-speed as they are being followed by two threatening-looking men in a bright red and yellow truck. The men in the truck are firing their guns at the two young men as they chase the car through the streets of Mexico City. By the frenzied and panicked look on the faces of the two young men, it becomes evident that they are terrified. The feeling of panic rises as they become more aware of the fact that the dog in the back seat is bleeding to death. The spectator is confronted with the shocking scene of the bleeding dog in a spectacular close-up of one of the young men frantically trying to cover the dog’s bullet-wound, first with his finger and then with his own T-shirt, to keep the blood from gushing out, while at the same time he is trying to avoid being hit by the bullets. The adrenaline rush of the young men is felt by the audience who shares their panicked feeling as it becomes more and more obvious that the dog is dying and that the enemy is rapidly approaching. The sounds of the noises and the commotion of the city, added to this sequence, is particularly effective in building the tension and making the audience feel the adrenaline-rush. When the two young men seem to have lost their pursuers, they appear again, ominously.
This scene is brought to a very well accomplished climax, when the driver in a split-second decides to go through a red light. His decision proves to be a horrible mistake, and he causes a tragic accident. This climatic moment brings most of the characters of the story together, but we are unaware of this until the other stories begin to develop. What the screenwriter and director have done very cleverly is to slowly and carefully connect all the characters, by making them appear for a few seconds in the other stories. The experience lived by the spectators in this opening scene is clearly sublime: we are experiencing intense and ineffable feelings of terror and delight.

After having presented the first sequence of the car chase, there is a cut and an intertitle, which reads: “Susana (Vanessa Bauche) and Octavio (Gael Garcia).” After having been introduced to the gruesome underworld of dogfighting, the viewer is invited to see Octavio and Susana’s home. Octavio, the young man who was driving the car being chased in the opening sequence, lives in a low-class neighborhood with his mother, his brother Ramiro (Marco Perez), Ramiro’s wife, Susana, and their baby. Their social class is well depicted when we are invited inside their run-down home. We first see the family together when they sit to eat in a cluttered kitchen: we immediately witness the poor family relations: two brothers who hate each other, a mother who is not respected, a husband who abuses his wife. The clothes they wear, the manner in which they speak, and their general surroundings also speak of their social class.
From the start we see that Octavio is deeply in love (or maybe obsessed) with his sister-in-law and wants to convince her to run away with him. The feelings of complicity and love are very well depicted in the film in the very beautiful close-up of both of these characters. The camera usually focuses on their eyes as they gaze at each other with tenderness. Despite her feelings for her brother-in-law, Susana seems to be torn between being faithful to Ramiro, a criminal who verbally and physically abuses her, and her brother-in-law, who will do anything for her. Octavio knows that to lure Susana away from her husband he has to make money. By chance, this occasion presents itself when Cofi, the family dog, runs away and is made to fight another dog on the street: Jarocho, a criminal involved in illegal dogfighting, has set his dog against Cofi. Cofi, a much stronger and fiercer dog, has killed Jarocho’s dog. At this moment Octavio gets the idea that to get fast and easy money he must enter his dog into the underworld of dogfights. Cofi wins all the fights and Octavio starts making good money. In this manner, he and Susana start saving to run away.

Two other situations, however, complicate their already awkward situation. Susana is pregnant with Ramiro’s second child, and she has become Octavio’s lover. Both of these situations make things easier for Octavio, but more complicated for Susana. Meanwhile, Ramiro, a drug store and bank robber,

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29 Paul Julian also examines this feature of the film and explains how: “As so often in Amores Perros, the narrative force and emotional charge are carried not by the profanity – spattered dialogue, but by the pregnant looks of the young actors. Susana may turn up her nose at Octavio’s smutty jokes, but her eyes say otherwise” (43).
wants a share in the dog deals. Octavio decides not to share the money with him and to scare him away hires Gordo and his thugs to beat his brother up. The, first story reaches a climax when Jarocho, in a fit of anger because his dog has lost another fight, shoots Cofi. Octavio retaliates by stabbing him in the stomach. While Octavio is trying to get away, to save his dog and himself, Jarocho’s buddies start a violent chase. This culminating event in this first story turns out to be the exhilarating opening sequence of the film.

The second story, titled “Daniel (Alvaro Guerrero) and Valeria (Goya Toledo),” tells the story of Valeria, a beautiful Spanish supermodel, who is having a love affair with a very successful businessman. Valeria, who apparently is a very famous person in Mexico, appears on TV and in very glamorized billboards advertising a perfume called “Enchant,” which are all over the city. One day, she is surprised to find out that her lover has left his wife and daughters and has bought her an apartment, across the street from one of her billboards. When they are getting ready to celebrate, Valeria realizes there is no wine to go with the meal or to toast with, and she tells Daniel she’ll be back in a few minutes. She never comes back because she gets into a very serious car accident when a car crashes into hers. This takes us again to the opening sequence of the car chase and the car crash. We had seen glimpses of Valeria already in the first story, when she appeared on TV, and also when Octavio’s car
crashes into hers in the opening sequence, but her character had not yet been introduced.

The third story is called “El Chivo and Maru.” It is the story of a homeless man in his 60’s who runs around the city with a pack of dogs. We have met him twice already: once, in the first story, when Jarocho is looking for a dog on the street to fight his own dog, and tries to set his dog “Pancho” against “Chivo’s”. Later, we meet him again, after the car crash, in the second story, when he gets close to “help” but instead robs Octavio and takes Cofi away. His idea is to take care of Cofi while his wounds heal and make him part of his pack. Ironically, he does not know that Cofi is a trained killer -dog, who will eventually kill all the other dogs in the pack.

“Chivo” is a doomed man. He had been a prominent college professor but in his young years decided to leave it all: his family and friends, to fight a revolution, and “change the world.” He becomes a guerrilla fighter and is eventually imprisoned for twenty years. When he comes out of prison he is a ruined, angry and frustrated man who becomes a hired killer. He lives in squalor in one of the poorest slums of Mexico. We see him in two different assignments. In the first story we get glimpses of him when he kills an industrialist who is dining in a Japanese restaurant. In a later assignment a young executive, Gustavo, hires him to kill his half-brother Luis, because he is cheating him of company money. At the end of the film, however, “El Chivo” experiences a
drastic change. The horrific experience of seeing all his dogs dead is a turning-
point in his life. He sees himself reflected in Cofi, the dog he has saved which
has turned around and “betrayed” him (much in the same way he betrayed his
family, and the revolution betrayed him). This experience turns out to be a harsh
lesson for “El Chivo.” He spares Cofi’s life and gives up contract killing by
sparing Luis, too. He wants to teach the brothers a lesson too, and thus, leaves
them at his home to settle their differences, or kill each other. The film closes
with “El Chivo,” a renewed man, walking off into the distance with Cofi, who he
has renamed “Black.”

There are many sub-plots, within the main plot of each story, and many
secondary characters that are affected by the narrated circumstances. In the first
story, Octavio and Ramiro’s mother is caught in the middle of their hate. She is
aware of what is happening but is emotionally incapable of dealing with the
situation. In the second story, Daniel’s abandoned wife and children are also in a
situation of impotence, as the film does not show any attempts on their part to
recover their husband and father. In the last story Maru, “El Chivo’s” daughter,
has just lost her mother and is totally unaware of the fact that the homeless man
that roams her house is actually her father. Maru, however, is a character who is
never developed and we are left to wonder what kind of a person she turns out
to be.
All these seemingly “secondary” stories are intermingled with the principal story; they are also a reflection of the same tragic story: the story of people living in the big cities. Cities that have grown so large and out of proportion that human relationships have began to crumble. It seems that González Iñárritu’s aim was to shock the viewers to make them reflect about harsh situations: dislocated families, dislocated love and affection, dislocated social goals as the result of new global market tendencies, and in general, dislocated lives. It is much the same phenomena presented in Chapter 3, when I analyzed the problem of Medellín in the 1980 and 1990’s. So, we can draw a parallel and make reference again to Néstor Canclini, who explains that modernization was one of the main contributors of the drama of the big cities. He explained how modernization brought changes such as industrialization, technology, and world wars, and that considering the new circumstances in the world, great number of people started massive migrations, especially from the country to the city. These massive migrations resulted in unemployment, pollution, and the disproportionate growth of cities, especially in Latin America.

Other secondary characters in the story are the dogs, as is implicit in the title. In this film, the love for dogs and the dogfighting, both serve as a metaphor and an allegory of human relations. The love for dogs is shown as the displacement of love for others. As mentioned above, people have become so emotionally isolated from each other because of the rapid pace of life, principally
in the big cities, that the only true love they can express is to their animals.

George Kantaris expresses it in this manner: “Yet the dog-fighting is clearly acting as a displaced metaphor, an allegory even, for human violence in the film and indeed dog-fetishism generally in the film takes the form of a displaced and dislocated cipher and substitute for impeded human relationships” (1).

The dislocation of family relationships and emotional ties with others is also well analyzed by Laura Podalsky in her essay: “Affecting Legacies: Historical memory and Contemporary Structures of Feeling in Madascar and Amores Perros.” In this essay Podalsky asserts that:

The interior spaces of homes—whether Octavio’s modest, working-class home or El Chivo’s broken-down hovel—are depicted as dark, hermetic, seemingly airless places rather than tranquil locations protected from the hustle and bustle of city streets. This is true even of Valeria’s luxury apartment, located in a high-rise far above street level and adorned with modern art and a lavish photo spread of Valeria herself [...] Yet during her recuperation from the accident, her home turns into a claustrophobic jail cell where she must come to terms with her changed situation in the world. In these stories, the home is not an escape from the violence of the outside world, but rather the very site in which hostile actions and petty cruelties are carried out with excruciating familiarity. (282)

The bizarre man-dog relationship, which develops as a consequence of broken family and personal ties, is clearly seen first in the story of Octavio and Susana. Although Octavio exploits his dog for his own financial benefit, it is obvious that he loves his dog. It almost seems that his love for the dog is stronger than the love for his brother and mother. There seems to be no emotional connection between Octavio and his family. The relationship with his
mother is more at the nurturing level. She feeds him. The relationship with his brother is strong rivalry and hatred.

Reviewing once more our concepts of beauty and the sublime, it becomes clear that what is beautiful and sublime in this film is the manner in which González Iñárritu put together his stories. Through extremely well integrated cinematic techniques – editing, sound, camera movement – the film takes the spectator for an exhilarating but terrifying journey – of which the opening scene is a brilliant metaphor - a world of confusion, love and hate, love-hate relationships, and the underworld of crime and criminal enterprise into the depths and darkness of the human heart. Let’s review some important examples of this exhilarating experience of the sublime.

The above-mentioned opening scene, repeated four times throughout the film but from different points of view, is one the most important features of the film. Every time we see this scene we are again confronted with the same initial adrenaline-rush experience. We are overtaken by the same overwhelming feelings, despite the fact that we are aware of what is going to happen and we dread the moment, but as we flinch in terror, we somehow delight and look forward to watching the well-accomplished scene again. The first time we experience this scene, we are totally unaware of the motives of the chase, but the second time it is presented we have already met the two young men and their chasers and we have learned the reasons why the two thugs are in hot pursuit of
the car. The third time we view the scene, we view it from Valeria's point of view. We, as viewers know what is going to happen, but as she stops to put her lipstick on, before the lights change, she is totally unaware of her fate. This guides the viewer to greater involvement as we wish somehow to be able to stop the unavoidable from happening. The last version of this scene is viewed from the point of view of “El Chivo.” At the moment the accident occurs, “El Chivo” is stalking Luis. He is the perfect first-hand witness of the whole accident. The viewer, at the same time, witnesses the accident in all its magnitude and horror and sees in detail the gory consequences: we see the blood, the destruction, the wounded and the dead.

Another mesmerizing montage sequence is the crosscutting shots in which we see on the one hand Octavio making fierce love to Susana at home, on top of the washing machine, while his brother is being savagely beaten by thugs paid by him. We are horrified by what are seeing, not only because of the underlying moral implications of the situations, but also because of the brutality of the scenes, yet we delight (we are at the optimal distance required for experiencing the sublime), because of the manner in which the scene is filmed. Very quick extreme close-ups of Octavio and Susana’s faces as they make love, interspersed with the horrible beating, all skillfully accompanied by Nacha Pop’s song “Lucha de Gigantes” playing extradiegetically, provide a brutal yet delightful spectacle.
It definitely shows a dog-eat-dog world. The viewer experiences an overwhelming blend of emotions: horror, delight, and moral questioning.

Another very powerful scene is when Ramiro threatens to shoot Cofi, if Octavio does not share the profits made with him. This scene is foreshadowing another fascinating yet horrifying scene: towards the end of the film “El Chivo” returns to his home to be greeted by Cofi. The camera focuses on the dog in an extreme close-up. When “El Chivo” bends down to caress him he finds that he is covered with blood. “El Chivo” walks inside and in a slow pan from his point of view he discovers a gruesome spectacle. All his dogs lie dead or dying on the floor of the dilapidated living room. “El Chivo” draws his gun to shoot the dog. However, it seems that the look the dog gives him of sincere gratitude for having saved his life, makes “El Chivo” reconsider his decision. Again, this emotionally charged scene makes the viewer live extreme emotions of terror mixed with delight.

With respect to Valeria, the spectator has the feeling that she is a cold, superficial woman, only interested in her career as a model, and that she loves her dog more than Daniel or anyone else. When Richie falls inside the hole in wooden floor of their new apartment, she becomes frantic and obsessed. Of course, there is the possibility that rats are eating the dog, but the whole situation is pretty pathetic and almost comic. It almost seems to be put there as a way to make fun of the people whose lives have become, like Valeria’s, a show for TV, a
big lie. The viewer, however, cringes in horror at the thought that rats are eating
the dog, and even though this is never shown, we are left thinking, throughout a
great part of the film, that it actually happens. The viewer seems to feel greater
sorrow for the dog than for Valeria, despite the fact that she eventually has to
have one of her legs amputated.

Just as Víctor Gaviria did in the Colombian film, Rodrigo-D, González
Iñárritu seems to be following the same ideological proposals of the New Latin
American Cinema. González Iñárritu is not presenting an “aesthetics of violence”
or “aesthetics of garbage” as Gaviria did, and his film is not the neorealist type,
but he is definitely trying to get the audience involved in questioning, in taking a
stand, in engaging in dialog with the film. Although it seems that Guillermo
Arraiga Jordán is interested in presenting the everyday lives of people and how
they deal with personal and tragic circumstances that either break them or make
them stronger, it is clear that there are underlying political implications, in terms
of failed revolutions—which is well represented in the character of “El Chivo”-
and in terms of the failings of the neoliberal system which has brought chaos,
anarchy, and confusion to the urban metropolis.
CONCLUSION

“An artist is above all a human being, profoundly human to the core. If the artist can’t feel everything that humanity feels, if the artist isn’t capable of loving until he forgets himself and sacrifices himself if necessary if he won’t put down his magic brush and head the fight against the oppressor, then he isn’t a great artist”
Diego Rivera

The main purpose of this dissertation has been to analyze the contemporary depiction of violence in Latin American and Spanish films and novels. Through close analysis of these films and novels I explicated how the violence depicted in them clearly served an aesthetic purpose. I based my analysis on the classical theories of beauty and the sublime of Longinus, Edmund Burke, and Immanuel Kant. According to these aesthetes the concept of the sublime refers to the intense feelings of terror and/or pain aroused by extreme experiences. These feelings of terror are usually accompanied by intense feelings of pleasure. This is the paradoxical attribute of the sublime. Beauty, on the other hand, refers to intense feelings of love and passion, aroused by other objects,
persons and/or experiences. Even though the above-mentioned philosophers applied their theories to experiences of natural phenomena and art, I consider that they can also be applied to fictional experiences of violence, such as violent deaths. Edmund Burke had already expressed his bewilderment when he heard about the excitement expressed by the public upon the possibility of being able to observe in real-life, the execution of Lord Lovat, which was to be carried out on April 9, 1947. He remarked: “I am convinced we have a degree of delight and no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others...” (45). We are also familiar with the fact that in our age and time, the media subjects us to spectacles of violence, and that sometimes people are invited to witness the execution of criminals.

In my analysis I used classical concepts of beauty and the sublime to explain the aesthetic purpose of violence in modern and postmodern fiction, despite the fact that I am aware that the experience of sublimity nowadays, might not be the same experience as the experience of the above-mentioned theorists. Sublimity has been dislocated and has shifted to encompass other experiences. In “The Sublime and the Avant-garde,” Francois Lyotard affirms, “It’s still the sublime in the sense that Burke and Kant described and yet it isn’t their sublime anymore” (199). I myself believe that the essence of the concept continues to be the same: an intense and almost ineffable feeling of terror combined with extreme pleasure.
Because feelings of beauty and the sublime are grounded in intense feelings of pain and pleasure, I contend that the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud on the “pleasure principle” and Jacques Lacan’s theories on subjectivity and the mirror stage, which also speak of pain and pleasure, relate closely to the sublime. It is my main claim that filmmakers and novelists suture their viewers/readers to the text/film to make us experience these intense feelings of pain and pleasure.

In this study I also established a context for the violence. In my opinion, understanding where and why the violence generates, and its consequences, helps the viewer to engage emotionally and intellectually in the story. Both Burke and Kant expressed the need for an optimal distance for experiencing sublimity. This distance allows us the possibility of rational reflexivity about what we are viewing, and this is what provides the delight or pleasure characteristic of the sublime. For example, understanding the sicario, a socio-economic and political phenomenon of the 80’s and 90’s in Colombia with historical roots in La Violencia, or the violence found in contemporary Mexican cultural productions as a reflection of centuries of bloodshed, or the violence present in the Spanish novel as a direct consequence of the Spanish Civil War, helps the viewer to fully appreciate the aesthetic purpose of the violence.

However, in this dissertation the intention has not been to make moral judgments, or to make distinctions between “legitimate” or “illegitimate” forms
of violence. My main interest has been to closely examine contemporary Spanish and Latin American literature and film in which violence is a central theme, to try to understand wherein lies the aesthetic grandeur of the contemporary violent movie and novel; to understand why people are fascinated by the spectacle of violence and violent deaths and why or how the depiction or representation of a violent death can be beautiful and generate feelings of pleasure and delight.

Much has been written about violence and art, not only violence in film and violence in literature, but innumerable philosophical, sociological and psychological studies on the topic. Several contemporary dissertations have also been written on aesthetics and violence, however, the ones I have found deal mostly with Russian and German literature, Russian films and American novels and films.  

For example, there have been several studies on the screening of violence in the United States. Stephen Prince's research on violence on screen can be found in both his books *Savage Cinema* (1998), and *Screening Violence* (2000). These two studies were extremely enlightening to me. Although his studies specifically deal with American films, I have found that he carried out a

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30 Searching through dissertation abstracts, I found 76 dissertations in *Digital Dissertations* dealing with the topic of violence and aesthetics in film and novel, dating back to 1980. Of those only one is related to Latin America: “Ethics and Aesthetics of Latin American narrative by contemporary women writers”, 2000 by Borrachero, Aranzazu, and one dealing with Spain: “The representation of rape and the rape of representation: Sexual/textual violence in Italy and Spain”, 1998 by Zecchi, Barbara. There are some on violence in American film and novel. However, none of them are interested in a purely aesthetic study of the representation of violence.
thoughtful examination of the rise of explicit violence in American cinema, explaining its history, merits and effects. But for the purposes of my own study, he devoted a whole section in one of his books to the aesthetics of ultraviolence. American cinema has influenced the cinema of other nations and has been influenced by them. For example, Prince explains that Sam Peckinpah was greatly influenced by Akira Kurosawa's films: Seven Samurai (1954) and Rashomon (1950). As he puts it: "...it was Kurosawa who first showed filmmakers how to intercut slow motion and normal-speed footage in scenes of violence" (Screening... 178). Kurosawa himself had been influenced by Sergei Eisenstein. Thus, Peckinpah is also indebted to Eisenstein.

In the same way as Sam Peckinpah was influenced by others, Víctor Gaviria explained to me during an interview that he was indebted to American filmmakers. For him American cinema is crucial in understanding his own filmmaking. Gaviria argued that to be able to do a thorough analysis of violence in film in Latin America and Spain, it was important to integrate it into a kind of triangle with American cinema. In his filmmaking the Coen Brothers and Quentin Tarantino filmmaking have been extremely influential.

With respect to violence in the novel The Modern American Novel of Violence by Patrick W. Shaw also proved helpful in understanding the aesthetics of violence. In this book Shaw defines the novel of violence by saying that: "for my purposes, a novel of violence has violence as its central narrative focus and as
the conflict that energizes the plot" (10). Novels of violence have a vocabulary that is specifically violent so that the reader knows that violence is intentional. In these novels we find words such as: agony, fury, attack, blows, blood, cut, die, hurt, scream, destroy, break, etc. This vocabulary has to appear in a specific context to have the desired impact. There are novels, which contain the rhetoric of violence, and others in which violence is the central focus. In these, many times, violence is gratuitous and is the central purpose, but he adds: "the distinction between gratuitous violence and violence that directs a narrative to intellectual or aesthetic purposefulness is obviously a difficult line to draw" (6).

Reviewing the existing literature, not much has been written on film and violence in Spain and Latin America, although it is fair to say that it is possible to find many excellent reviews of some contemporary films and novels, which were the subjects of my dissertation, in current magazines and newspapers.

To give a few examples of the literature found on violence in fiction in the context of Spain, Marsha Kinder's study on Spanish Cinema is an excellent overview of the historical depiction of violence in Spanish Film. Her excellent book Blood Cinema (1993) examines Spanish filmmaking from 1950 to 1990, especially those films which she considers central to establishing a notion of a national cinema. She concentrates on topics such as transcultural reinscription, which she equates with a new aesthetic language, specifically the films of the 50's; there is also a section on cultural specificity in the representation of violence.
in the Oedipal master narrative and the themes of exile and diaspora. But her book and Thomas G. Deveny’s *Cain on Screen* (1993) on Spanish cinema, both take a completely different approach from the one I propose.

There have been many studies on violence in Colombia, especially lately with the creation of a new group of academicians and intellectuals called violentólogos who have spent the last decades studying this phenomenon of Colombian society. It would be extremely lengthy to make a list on everything that has been written on this topic in Colombia and in other countries, but two studies are worth mentioning because they put into historical perspective the contemporary crisis. The two books are *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000. Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (2001) and *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (1992).

In the literature regarding Colombian films and violence, the book *Cine de la Violencia* (1987) edited by Isabel Sánchez contains six scripts of different “violent films” made between 1990-2000 in Colombia. However, Sánchez does not provide any serious analysis or study on the meaning of the representation of this violence, significance, aesthetics, effects, motivations or transcendence.

On the other hand, much more has been written about the literature of violence in Colombia. Augusto Escobar Mejía says that it is a product of the reflection about the historical-political events that occurred before April 9, 1948, following the assassination of the political Liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitán,
throughout the military operations against what was then called the "Independent Republics" and the consequent formation of the guerrilla groups which continue to fight the government up to the present time. All the literature that has been written about this phenomenon has been called "literature of La Violencia" (324). However, Escobar Mejía explains how this classification has not taken into account the aesthetic qualities or the way upon which La Violencia has been reflected. Most of the novels that were written before 1958, around the time of El coronel no tiene quien le escriba, by Gabriel García Márquez can be classified as testimony, or testimony novels of La Violencia. The novels written after this period examine the problem in a more critical manner.

In novels written during the first period, mentioned above, there is very little care taken to develop language, characters, narrative structure; the events are more important than the causes. What these authors are mostly concerned about is defending a thesis. That is, there is aesthetic carelessness because the main purpose is to denounce. In this category we find novels such as Ciudad enloquecida (1951), Sangre (1953), Las memorias del odio (1953), Los cuervos tienen hambre (1954), Tierra sin Dios (1954), Raza de Caín (1954), Los días del terror (1955), La sombra del sayón (1964), Sangre campesina (1965). It is evident that all of these novels want to divulge a historical fact, thus, they are all written in linear sequence, following the same sequence as the historical events they depict (327).
The novels written after this period (1958) are of a different style. They are more aesthetic. They are more concerned about the narrative than about the events. Language, character development, grammatical and narrative structures, temporal-spatial structures are deliberately carefully chosen. This is evident in novels such as *La mala hora* (1960) and *Cien años de soledad* (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez or *El día señalado* (1964) by Jorge Zalamea (1964). As García Márquez says in his essay "Dos o tres cosas sobre la novela de la Violencia:"

"The interest lies not on the event itself or the drama of the moment, but on the intensity of the event, the consequences of the violation (the torture, the cruelty) and the resentfulness that grows with time" (327). So, for Escobar Mejía, it is the writers who come after the generation of *La Violencia*, the ones who are better equipped to write about this period in a more critical manner. The young writers of *La Violencia* were seduced by the bloody events, and this remained fixed in exhaustive and sadistic descriptions of the massacres and the dead bodies (328).

However, the treatment of violence changes drastically in 1986 when Gustavo Alvarez Gardeazabal published his novel *El divino* (1986) about a very poor man who suddenly becomes rich because of his involvement in drug trafficking. This novel might be considered the pioneer of this kind of new genre. In the 1990s Laura Restrepo published *El leopardo al sol* (1993), Fernando Vallejo published *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994), Darío Jaramillo Agudelo published *Cartas cruzadas* (1995) and Oscar Collazos published *Morir con papá*.
(1997). In all of these, the phenomenon of narcotraffic, and the related violence are central.

Much has been written over the years about Mexican film. For example, an excellent historical overview of Mexico's cinema is *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers*, edited by Joanne Hershfield and David R. Maciel. This work deals with films from the Silent Era, through the Golden Age of Mexican cinema all the way to the Contemporary Era. However, this excellent book does not specifically deal with ultraviolence in film. The book does provide the reader with an excellent set of essays about different themes and issues of Mexican Cinema. According to the editors, Mexico's cinema has the most advanced film industry of the entire Spanish-speaking world, not only in terms of economic resources, but also in the number of films produced, importance of filmmakers, and international distribution. There are classical films, which have received international recognition, and in general terms Mexican filmmaking is appreciated and well known. Mexican films represent national identity and have recorded the historical transformation of Mexico. These essays analyze this important industry in terms of its cinematic tradition, its stars, its crises and its relations with Hollywood. However, this book and the essays I have analyzed so far, do not specifically deal with the representation of violence in aesthetic terms, as I propose in my project.
In my opinion, Colombia, Mexico and Spain (especially the last two countries) have long histories of excellent filmmaking, which have not received deserved academic attention. It is time to put the films and novels of these countries in the forefront considering their international dimensions and aesthetic importance. Besides, and most importantly, the majority of critics tend to put Latin American Cinema in a category together with the filmmaking of other third world countries. Hence, for most critics, countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America are all the same: third world countries and their films fall under the simple category of Third World Cinema. For example, in *Film and Theory* edited by Robert Stam and Toby Miller, there is a section titled: "Alternative Aesthetics" and within this section there is a very interesting 16-page article by Teshome H. Gabriel titled "Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films" where he does a quick analysis of some films, representative of each of the above mentioned continents, before he concludes: "Film is a new language to the Third World and its grammar is only recently being charted. Its direction, however, seems to be a discursive view of the medium and an appeal for intellectual appreciation" (Stam 315). I find that this commentary is superficial and says little about obvious differences and specificities when it comes to studying films of the different regions of the world.

For all the above stated reasons, I believe future research should explore Latin American films within their own contexts and as separate pieces of art,
which belong to a specific culture, social, and political environment and to a specific group of people living specific circumstances in particular contexts. This dissertation hopes to contribute to a good start.

The novels and films I analyzed have each made an important impact worldwide. Since the topics they deal with are so contemporary and of international interest, given their post-modern condition, and the problems they theorize, they need to be explored in greater depth. It is my objective to continue my research on the aesthetics of violence in other contexts of Latin America and Spain. I am interested in going back to the beginning of the twentieth century to examine how the representation of violence has evolved, and also to try to understand it from the perspective of other aesthetic theories.
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