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**Haptic Visuality in Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada*:
Towards an Affective Activism**

Abstract

This essay investigates Lourdes Portillo's 2001 documentary, *Señorita Extraviada / Missing Young Woman*, as a cinematic medium that functions through impressions, much like skin does, with an aim to create an affective, inter-embodied contact between the perceiver(s) and the object projected on the screen. I call this tactile form of cinematic expression, following film theorist Laura Marks "haptic visuality." In my analysis, I suggest that, like other diasporan filmmakers, Portillo draws on the proximal sense of touch in order to directly and empathically involve the viewer's body as a site for intercultural knowledge and political action. She thus aims to facilitate viewers' bodily affective capacity in the double sense of undergoing new somatic experiences and registering those changes subjectively (the body's capacity to be affected), which can lead to political feeling or action (its capacity to affect). Haptic visuality, I further suggest, counters a neo-colonial Euro-American hegemony of knowledge that is mediated through the visual, one that, within normative representation and discourses, is bent on mastery and possession of the object represented. It also offers the spectator a transformed, decolonial form of seeing, knowing and interacting, both intimate and embodied, that places the viewer nearby the object, yielding to it.

Keywords: affect, agency, feminicides, haptic visuality, Lourdes Portillo

Introduction

In her internationally acclaimed documentary, *Señorita Extraviada*, Mexican-American filmmaker Lourdes Portillo investigates as well as unveils the silence surrounding the murder, torture and disappearances of girls and women in the border town of Juárez (Portillo 2001). This early documentary, perhaps more than any other, helped raise consciousness of the crimes around the world (Gaspar de Alba 3; Sandell 456). At the time of its first screening, over three hundred women and girls, many of whom worked in the *maquiladoras* and who had migrated to Juárez from the south in search of work, had been murdered. At least a third of the victims had been found in similar conditions: they were kidnapped and held in captivity. They were subsequently subjected to rape, sexual torture and mutilation, and then burned and dumped in remote places.

In her dual role as artist and political activist in human rights work, Portillo's purpose in making the film was to create a form of artistic expression that would raise world awareness regarding the myriad causes of the feminicides (Driver 216). She selected and arranged the material included so as to help the viewer grasp the complex amalgamation of interconnected systemic conditions underpinning the violence as well as causing it to continue with impunity. In the film, she addresses the problem of the precarity of citizenship in the global city in the context of the maquiladora industry, resulting in the feminization of labor or what Alicia Schmidt Camacho refers to as 'denationalized subjectivity,' whereby neoliberal policy converts "poor migrants into a population with little purchase on rights or representation within either the nation-state or new global politics" (276). She exposes the complicity of the Mexican state, which remained indifferent to the health and security of the women and girls working in the maquiladoras. She also signals the city's notoriety in terms of its history of illicit activity, providing inexpensive sex, drugs and leisure to tourists.

Portillo revealed in several published interviews some of the challenges she faced in achieving her goal of heightening audience awareness and empathic engagement. The first was how to use the artistic medium of the documentary without falling back onto the representational and discursive systems that are in their own right laden with hegemonic ideologies of gender, race and class that caused the violence in the first place. A second challenge entailed the complexity of embedding within the documentary a structure of expression capable of engendering empathy in national and international audiences as a countering to the apathy of the Mexican state. The remote audiences in the United States and Europe would be composed of people whose every day lives and concerns are disconnected from the atrocities, and additionally, whose own identity statuses as citizens of countries who benefit from a neoliberal logic might lead them to be more susceptible to believing the causes supplied by state officials within the media footage. Even the incorporation of

the personal testimonies provided by those closest to the victims that she sought to integrate into the documentary might not be sufficient to allow her audiences to think and feel outside of these entrenched hegemonic systems.

In a 2012 interview, Portillo shared her concern about the ubiquitous problem of sensationalism and voyeurism within creative non-fictional representations of the crimes. She cited as an example Charles Bowden's depiction of the feminicides in Juárez in his 1998 book, *The Laboratory of our Future*. Bowden represented the female victims, Portillo claimed, in a manner that reinforced the degradation of the victims and of women in general, making violence against women more normalized: "By showing the photographs without the permission of the family members, your aim cannot be to give value to the lives of the victims but to produce a shock effect, that is, to sensationalize and hence, capitalize on the violence" (Driver 217).

Portillo's concern about the violence of representation is echoed in the perspectives of other feminicide scholars. In her essay, "The Victims of the Ciudad Juárez feminicides," Julia Monárrez analyzes the sensationalistic media's depictions of the victims, arguing that the specific labor of the media's representation of the victims, in their portrayal of the bodies as nude, abandoned, and neglected, is to "other" or dehumanize them, which they accomplish by failing to discuss their "historical, citizenship, and territorial specificity" (Monárrez 59). In another article, "The Suffering of the Other," Monárrez shows how representation and discourse are linked in such a way so as to reinforce a hegemonic way of seeing and knowing. Symbolic violence is enacted, she asserts, when official discourses that render intelligible the discourse of pain deployed by the survivors is taken up in the media: "Their words (referring to the words of the family members), which are 'an attempt to restore justice in a societal structure of violence,' frequently become contaminated or lost within the ideology of symbolic violence that their representatives, or 'guardians of the law' generate" (186).

Rosa-Linda Fregoso further exposes how women are portrayed as abject in discourse and representation, thereby creating an environment that makes feminicide possible:

Women's visibility as abject is a subject-effect produced by the intersections of experiential violence and symbolic violence: the violence of racist misogynists, the violence of state-sanctioned terrorism, the violence of discursive frameworks of interpretation but also the violence of representation. ("Toward a Planetary Civil Society" 54) [1]

Portillo also notes the challenge of creating audience empathy. In a recent retrospective on Portillo's films, Fregoso relates the content of an interview with the filmmaker, in which the latter revealed her goal to instill empathy for the survivors in her viewers, for through empathy, the viewer would be motivated to gain political awareness and engage in activism. In noting that her

audiences consistently were moved to activism, she stated that this was her intention, to “[c]rear una especie de conciencia, incitar a la gente a actuar, y éso es lo que hizo” (“to create a consciousness, incite people to act, and that is what it did” (Fregoso, “Retrospectiva” 166). Fregoso further underscores Portillo’s observations, adding that the documentary “va más allá del nivel informativo. Incita la imaginación e inspira la participación creativa” (goes beyond the level of providing information to actually incite the imagination and inspire creative participation) (165).

In a recent article on the film, Jillian Sandell analyzes in some detail the mechanisms by which Portillo engenders an empathic response in viewers. She cites the juxtaposition of the aesthetic and the historical as one such mechanism. By pushing the pervasive repetition of poetic images such as the painting of the pink crosses, and the haunting requiem music that serves as an elegy honoring the victims against the media footage, Portillo, she asserts, humanizes the murdered women and invites in the spectator “an affective and humanitarian response” (462). Sandell further notes that Portillo refuses the traditional documentary format, one that, by emphasizing empirical data and leaving out subjective interpretations/testimonies, might (re)objectify the victims. Sandell finally points to Portillo’s deployment of some avant-garde cinematic techniques, such as the use of slow motion, aimed at giving the viewer time to reflect on the suffering of the survivors or the speeding up of motion, when portraying the exacerbated development of Juárez into a global city (457-58). [2]

Building on the important critical insights of the aforementioned critics, I want to explore here the ways in which Portillo embeds cinematic affect as a mechanism for countering neocolonial representational and discursive violence. Portillo’s film, I suggest, is structured around scenes that highlight the body’s potential to create force encounters or kinetic interconnections between the viewer, the filmmaker and the objects in the film, thereby triggering the viewer’s empathy at a visceral level, and her capacity to (re)act. In the section that follows, I provide a brief overview of contemporary affect theory. I then narrow my critical focus to cinematic affect, based on the works of Laura Marks, Jennifer Barker and Vivian Sobchack, all of whom elaborate on the conceptualization of cinema, and in the case of Marks, with a particular attention to diasporan cinema, as deeply embodied and tactile. In the final and longest section, I analyze in detail three particular tactile strategies that Portillo employs in the film: the turning crystal, the close up and the tactile event.

1. Affect Theory, Cinematic Affect and Haptic Visuality

Interest in affect and emotions has intensified in the last decade across the disciplines. The so called 'affective turn' is closely linked to other conceptual shifts, such as 'the ontological turn' and 'the new materialism,' modes of inquiry and meaning making that appeal to feminist, race and postcolonial scholars insofar as an analysis of materiality in relation to ontological existence offers possibilities for circumventing disciplinary and regulating regimes produced in discourse as well as the suppressive and othering mechanisms of representational systems. According to Deleuze and Guattari, affect is a material intensity that emerges via the 'in-between' spaces of embodied encounters, circulating power not primarily as a mode of discursive regulation or representational negation but rather as the potential to become otherwise (Deleuze and Guattari).

Although there is no one given meaning, definition or theoretical approach to affect, a starting point for contemporary theorists is the materialist philosophy of the 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza. In his *Ethics*, Spinoza offers a basic definition of affect: "I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained" (70). Offering a materialist conception of existence, Spinoza considers bodies as always in relation. Affects are the material forces of the encounter of bodies that traverse and transform those bodies, triggering and augmenting or diminishing the subject's capacity for acting within its world. Affective encounters both constitute subjects and orient them, and in the process reveal possibilities for obliging the world to matter—viscerally and cognitively. As Spinoza states: "the human mind does not know itself, except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the body" (49).

In contemporary theory, as suggested by Melissa Greg and Gregory J. Seigworth, editors of *The Affect Theory Reader*, affect describes "visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion" (1). There is, moreover, a concern for and emphasis on what bodies can do, their potential activity, "a body's capacity to affect and be affected" (2). What is tracked and questioned is how a body "comes to shift its affections (its being-affected) into action (capacity to affect)" (ibid.). There is an emphasis on acting more than thinking or reflecting. Nonetheless, these types of shifts transpire in close connection to passages of thought. Thought is conceived not as separate from the body, but rather itself embodied (2-3). Affect, moreover, is incremental, picking up force as it moves through bodies in their encounter with one another: "At once intimate and impersonal, affect accumulates across both relatedness and interruptions in relatedness, becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between 'bodies' (bodies defined not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect)" (2).

Affect theory resonates with feminists' and postcolonial theorists' calls to bring serious attention (back) to the material substance and significance of matter, materiality and the body. Theorists such as Sarah Ahmed (2004) and Lauren Berlant (2011) have shown how power works through affect to shape individual and collective bodies in such a way as to make certain bodies move into a state of un-belonging, or attaching us to the very conditions of subordination and social norms that we should eschew for their ability to reproduce normative hierarchies and exclusions. Others have emphasized affect's transformative potential. For example, in *Touching Feeling* (2003), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls for a re-privileging of ontology through a critical focus on affect, which she understands as integral to accessing a form of life that pushes beyond the social regulation of our existence. Still others have highlighted the ambivalence of affective registers. Susan McManus, for instance, analyzes the political polyvalence of the affective register in terms of producing hope and fear, both of which are ambivalent and both of which are used within the public sphere, she demonstrates, to diminish or enhance potentially transformative agency (McManus). But it is this very ambivalence, she claims, that creates an opening or threshold for cultural workers and political actors to disrupt what appears to be an affective determinism (McManus).

The work of cinema theorists Laura Marks, Vivian Sobchack and Jennifer Barker fits within the first of eight main approaches to affect that Gregg and Seigworth list in their introduction under the heading of phenomenologies of embodiment and inter-embodiment. They define the approach as characterized by "investigations into a body's incorporative capacities for scaffolding and extension" (6). The editors thus highlight a particular orientation, one that emphasizes embodiment as mediated or affected by interactions with other bodies, human and non-human.

For postcolonial cinema theorist Laura Marks, as alluded to in the title of her work, *The Skin of the Film*, cinema, like skin, expresses meaning to the viewer through materiality, that is, through impressions of feeling, with the goal of transforming the spectator in her embodied existence (xi-xii). Marks draws on Deleuzian theory and phenomenology to contribute to theories of haptic visuality. I define haptic visuality, following Marks, as the subjective perception of touch on the surface of and inside our bodies. The dominant mode of optic visuality obliges the viewer to see things from a distance, obliging her to perceive them as distinct forms in deep space. It further depends on a separation or boundary between the viewing subject and the object. Haptic visuality, by contrast, refers to "the way in which the eyes themselves function like organs of touch. Rather than plunging to the depth of the object, haptic looking moves over the surface, not to distinguish form but to discern texture" (Marks 162). Haptic cinema encourages an embodied encounter between viewer and image, a dynamic subjectivity (164).

Cinematic affect theory also draws upon Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, one that views the relationship between the self and the world as symbiotic. As Marks affirms, the time and space of the world is, according to Merleau-Ponty's account, thick and viscous with experience. Our perceptions fold us into this thick world, merging us with it and demarcating us as well from it (148). Film theorist Vivian Sobchack suggests that cinema replicates the phenomenological relationship between the self and the world, extending the viewer's embodied existence through its staging of the interactive encounter between two bodies—that of the viewer and that of the film/world—with the viewer coming to actively participate in the cinematic experience and even inhabit the same space of the film/world (Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye* 10-15). Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological encounter, Marks notes, stands in contrast to Deleuzian philosophy of affect insofar as it acknowledges a primordial subjectivity. It posits the presence of the embodied subject in the act of perceiving while also relinquishing the belief of the unity of the self (150).

Intercultural cinema, a genre to which, I argue, Portillo's documentary corresponds, pivots crucially on the subjectivities and bodies of women in conflictive encounters that result from neo-colonial, capitalist patriarchal systems. Far from being politically neutral, the rubric 'intercultural' introduces the concept of the often fraught and conflictive encounters between and within different cultural systems of knowledge that result as people migrate across or within national borders (Marks 7). Indeed, Marks argues, while haptic visuality can be found across cinematic genres, it is more widely cultivated by non-Western diasporan filmmakers, who, by necessity, are drawn to systems of knowledge derived from the senses. Such systems offer the means for structuring sense perception differently from those pertaining to Euro-American societies "where optical visuality has been accorded a unique supremacy (xiii). Intercultural cinema is also unique inasmuch as it emphasizes the social character of embodied experience. The body in intercultural cinema is a repository not just of individual but also of collective cultural experience, memory and meaning making. Herein, Marks distinguishes herself from the individualist approaches to the body of avant-garde cinema (xiii). An emphasis on diasporan cinema as a site for making visible and reclaiming a buried repository of cultural memory and meaning, as well as a resource for the recovery of an embodied subjectivity, aids me in establishing a theoretical ground for an analysis of tactile technologies in Portillo's documentary in the following sections.

2. Tactile Technologies in Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada*

Portillo uses the genre of documentary in two different, almost opposing ways. She seems at first to follow the prescribed genre of the documentary. She offers a critical context for the feminicidal

violence through her own voice-over narration. Herein, she portrays Juárez as a city that had spun out of control as a result of Mexico's overly rapid industrialization and integration into the global economy. She then adds to this analysis a linear account of the murders, documented in photographs, newspaper clippings, and media footage of reports made by media anchormen, local and state authorities, including police, prosecutors, mayors, governors and forensic specialists. As an overlay to this critical profiling of the known facts and observable landscape, Portillo then integrates that which is not officially known or disseminated through her inclusion of pieces of interviews with local activists as well as the testimonies of those closest to the victims, family members and co-workers, whose narrations are discrepant with those of local and State officials. Finally, she creates and integrates with the aforementioned components an oppositional travelogue, taking the viewer with her as she walks the streets of Juárez, tracking not just the dead but also living young girls and women. She follows some in the streets and shops or as they paint pink crosses on telephone poles to bring back into visibility the dead and disappeared, others as they go out on the *rastreos* or search parties for dead bodies in the desert, and still others as they ride the bus that transports them to the assembly plant where they work—possibly to meet the same fate as the victims.

In this brief overview, it is possible to see how Portillo complicates the traditional documentary rather than displacing it completely. She does so in order to engage an affective aesthetics to reveal its distorted logic and at the same time encourage the spectator to 'be with' or be in greater proximity to affective experiences of the victims and their family members. In the section that follows, I provide a critical overview and analysis of two tactile strategies that Portillo deploys in the film—the turning crystal and the close-up—as these appear in the film. Following that, I define and analyze the third technology, the tactile event.

2.1 The 'Turning Crystal' and the 'Close-up'

In her work, *The Tactile Eye*, Jennifer Barker, following Gilles Deleuze, argues that film complicates the viewer's empathic, embodied identification with the character(s) and objective observations by "taking us to the edge, without collapsing, the boundaries between the 'here' and 'there' the 'us' and the 'them'" (7). This sensual/structural ambivalence is Deleuze's notion of the "turning crystal," a technique that positions different actors spatially and temporally around an event. In the case of the film, these could include the filmmaker or camera's embodied subjectivity, the protagonist's and the film viewer's (9). As film viewers, we perceive the imaginary/artistic expression of the object in the film. At the same time, we experience the real world's significance through it and we in turn express the significance through our lived body's reaction. In the

existence of our lived bodies, we are always perceiving and expressing in an inter-dynamic relation of reversibility. Each side of the crystal ball is necessary to the other in a relation of reciprocal presupposition or reversibility (ibid.). As Barker notes, Merleau-Ponty also articulated the notion of reversibility by using the image of a person's hand touching the other: each hand both touches and is touched. This structure of reversibility involves a shift of attention and of intentionality from one aspect of the encounter to another (19). This structure is the archetype of subject/object relations. Herein, the self and the world are irreducible to one another in a relation of reversibility that the film and viewer are performing in a very concentrated manner (ibid.).

Integral to the tactile register of reversibility is that of the close-up. When the camera zooms in for a close-up, it causes the film viewer to focus on the skin as a site of exchange and traversal, connecting the inside and outside of the self as well as the self with the other (Barker 27). Merleau-Ponty's concept of "flesh" helps to define the film's skin, which indicates an evocation of body and things that are really not completely separate but rather of each other. This reciprocity and reversibility between body and world is best captured in the skin, which covers and displays the body's secrets (29).

In intercultural cinema, viewers perceive, by means of the close-up, how objects gain a biography as well as how that biography tells us at once as much about the subject as about the social world in which they, she or he is emplaced. In essence, the close-up puts a face on the/our world. Marks defines faciality, following Deleuze, as the intensification of affect in an image whose motor extension is limited (94). As such, the face contains a wealth of knowledge. The camera in intercultural cinema will follow an object to trace the intensification of affect as transmitted through faciality in an attempt to elicit the cultural biography it tells and excavate memories of objects, developing more thoroughly the stories they retain.

In *Señorita Extraviada*, Portillo implements the visual technology of the turning crystal in connection with the close-up in two testimonies that are given central cinematic attention, the testimony of María and the testimony of Eva Arce.

The testimony of a woman, who, for the sake of anonymity, calls herself María, is dispersed throughout the film. It is broken up into seven segments, each of which sheds light on Portillo's chronological recording of the feminicides but from the perspective of the lived experience of a victim/survivor as well as provides the spectator access to the various institutional sites of violence in which María finds herself: the criminal justice system, the media and the *maquila* industry.

A central analytic in the first testimony is the corruption of local police. María calls the police to report that a neighbor has assaulted her husband. Rather than assist her, the police give her and

her husband an exorbitantly large fine. Unable to pay it, they are held in custody for twenty-four hours. Once separated, a female police orders María into the bathroom, and assaults and attempts to rape her. Although she screams, no other guard comes to her assistance. In a second segment, María reveals that drugs are distributed to the inmates and the guards themselves are heavily drugged. A guard called El Diablo raped her later that night. He then took her to a room filled with women's clothing—panties, bras and dresses. He told her that the clothes belonged to women that he and other guards had taken. In a third segment, María states that the guards took many photos of her. In a fourth segment, María explains that though she ultimately went to the police and the media to report the arrests and the perpetration, the perpetrators were never charged with any crime. In a fifth segment, María recounts how she heard two shots fired in the middle of the night, a month after being released. When she looked out the window, she saw El Diablo, parked outside of her house. She took it as a reminder that she should remain silent. In a sixth segment, María adds additional information to her original testimony on what occurred the night she was in jail. El Diablo grabbed María by her hair. Then, pushing her head down while screaming 'bitch,' he forced her to look at a photo album. The photos told a story in sequence: there were images of men grabbing young women by the hair and dragging them in the desert; of women being raped and sodomized, surrounded by male onlookers; of men laughing as they looked at the women's faces contorted in pain and crying out; and of men dousing the bodies with gasoline and setting them on fire. In a final segment, María tells how some time later, while in a *maquiladora* looking for work, she felt herself being stared at. When she turned around, she saw "El Diablo." Upon returning the following day, she was told that he did not work there although he had applied for the position of security guard.

As spectators of these various segments, we witness the reversibility of the image. The sixth segment in particular integrates the close-up with the turning crystal. With the oil in her skin glistening as it mixes with sweat, her voice faltering and her lips dry, María tells us that she was raped just as these women were raped. She was grabbed by the hair as they were. She was called bitch as they were. Photos were taken of her in jail and in the *maquiladora* just as photos were taken of them.

Our gaze follows the camera, our looking becoming self-conscious. Preceding the close-up, in which we see María's face as she tells us what she saw in the photos, we see images of María looking out at the desert, as if she were actually seeing the violence take place. Her back is to us, her long, dark hair blowing in the breeze. We look at her looking. We see the women who are not there through her material presence at the site of the crimes. In creating an image of María looking out over the desert, Portillo asks the spectator to reflect on the idea that María understands that

she could have been or still can be a victim of feminicide. She is looked at (in jail) but she also looks.

In the close up, each fold of her narrative picks up the affect of the memories of the events she experienced through time (several months) and institutionalized space, (home, jail, court, media exposure and maquiladora). The viewer watches María in the act of perceiving and potentially becomes aware of her own felt understandings. At the same time, the spectator witnesses how María expresses what she has perceived. Portillo zooms in for a close-up to grasp her perception. The viewer sees that her skin sweats, her voice breaks, her eyes look down, her pores open. Her skin's response becomes a contact zone.

Faciality, as demonstrated here in María's expression, can be characterized as reversibility, a facial expression that returns the look (Marks 94). María is affected by an impersonal force, (having undergone a somatic change as a result of her perception). She is also affecting, (re)acting or expressing on her face her sadness and anguish/fear. Her (re)action now serves as a material context for bringing history into contact with the viewer, who can in turn undergo and react somatically to the history of violence that has remained invisible to us. Those visceral engagements will be different and even unpredictable. Some will respond with fear if they find themselves currently in a situation similar to María. Others will respond with empathy and still others with shame for not having previous knowledge of these events or as they gain awareness of their social position within the web of power relations, one that make them feel in part responsible for the violence. The differently engendered feelings result from the ambivalence of affect, one that registers at the surface or in the skin of shared historical and contemporary social-structural relations.

Faciality, expressed as a return of the look, is also found in the fifth segment, when María narrates the scene in which El Diablo parks outside of her house, fires some shots and then drives away. In the first part of the narrated segment, María is simply sitting in front of the camera. In the close-up of María, we see her face as she explains how the occurrence served as a tactile reminder of her powerlessness to act in the public sphere and of her relegation to the private one. The viewer witnesses María swept up by forces from outside of herself, e.g. of fear. But then in the final scene in this segment, we witness not just what María perceives and expresses from the outside, but another somatic change that comes from the inside and moves outside to show on the skin of her face, drawing the viewer's body into its force field.

In the scene, María appears to be sitting in a chair or couch in her own home, looking at an image of herself in the mirror. The viewer and camera are situated behind María. We are looking at María looking at herself and looking back at us through the mirror. The viewer, in effect, is drawn into the

turning crystal, not seeing, but imagining how María sees the camera and the viewer positioned alongside the camera in the mirror, bringing us into contact with María and into the same space and time in which she is inserted. As an object that has moved through the time and space of various institutions within the social structure, she has become invested with a value that Marks calls “auratic,” that is, as containing the power to distill and make visible the hidden history of those sites (104). In bringing us into the material presence or aura that María generates, Portillo creates a scaffolding that joins the object on the screen and the spectator, encouraging cognitive and embodied understanding of the historical-spatial reality in which she lives, impelling the spectator/subject to (re)act.

Another set of images that Portillo transmits by means of the technology of the turning crystal in tandem with the close-up can be found in the testimony of Eva Arce, who tells of the 1998 disappearance and murder of her daughter Silvia. Here, the image of the turning crystal encompasses two visible figures/objects: the mother of the missing woman and a little boy of approximately two years of age, who is sitting on her lap, perhaps a grandson. As the camera zooms in, Eva tells of how she was kidnapped when pregnant with Silvia. Once in the car of her kidnapper, she was taken to a hotel and later to various abandoned sites, eventually ending up in the desert. She tried to run away several times during the night but her kidnapper caught her and put back in the car. He repeatedly raped her throughout the course of the night. She tells how she cried, fearful that she would lose her child. In the morning, when he drove her home, he reminded her of how merciful he was. Another man would have killed her. As Eva narrates these final scenes, the spectator sees images of a woman running in the desert.

The reversibility of the turning crystal here is portrayed as occurring through time as well as space. The testimony and images tell an inter-generational history of violence, kidnapping and murder. Portillo creates a visceral imaginary of the violence by showing how the violence visited upon the daughter has been part of the felt, embodied experience of the mother (and even the child in utero) and therefore is something that can be known through the materiality of the body. In this scene the spectator grasps that the feminicides are not exclusively a consequence of the contemporary State or of global politics alone but rather embedded within a longer history of structural patriarchy.

The close-up also appears as double in these scenes in the intergenerational embodied contact between grandmother and grandson. As Eva tells her story, the camera zooms in to capture her faciality. Her voice breaks and she begins to cry. At the same time the camera tracks the faciality

of the little boy, who looks at his grandmother as she tells of her fear and how she cried when the man kidnapped her and “did with me what he wanted.” The boy’s eyes get large from fear. His cheeks tighten, his lips open in fear and close downward as he starts to cry. The boy’s facial

expression bears witness to and brings into the viewer's embodied consciousness the horror of the violence, materializing and making its occurrence visible by putting a face on it.

2.2 The 'Tactile Event'

Let me turn, finally, to the technology of the tactile event. In haptic cinema, the tactile may be conveyed in the film's theme (Marks 44). I call this haptic technology "the tactile event" insofar as it encourages the viewer to feel the (inter)action at the surface of her fingertips. In Lourdes Portillo's film, the tactile event is expressed in the thematics of feminicide. In the hegemonic necropolitical media representations of feminicides, the original violence is exacerbated. The decomposing and mutilated bodies of the victims are re-presented as fetishized objects. The image as fetish object takes on value insofar as it has the capacity to be consumable and exploitable by the viewer, constructed as a white, heterosexual male. As fetish object, the feminicidal body serves as a tactile reminder of an illusory citizenship, as Monárrez underscores, "a citizenship for girls and women whose sexual nature has been instrumentalized as non-normative; whose racial heritage is a crack in the difference of the white social body; and whose poverty represents exclusion from material progress" ("Victims" 66).

To counteract the transformation of women into a hegemonic fetish object, Portillo elaborates on the caressing gaze as a central theme, capable of transforming the fetish object, imbuing it with a positive valence and allowing the viewer to know it differently. The caressing gaze is, as Marks observes, one that does not, like the optic gaze, imply that it knows or has mastery over the object it observes, but rather suggests that it does not even know what it seeks. The caressing gaze is thus able to yield to the image, its capacity to evoke pleasure or new knowledge of the self in relation (184). As Barker further notes, the caressing gaze asks the viewer to engage the erotic encounter as a way of redressing the problem of the abject or the assaulting image of the object. The erotic encounter between the viewer and viewed expresses the need for and pleasure in proximity, for the viewer to feel the other against herself, which implies a mutuality. This erotic relationship between two bodies, while expressive of adult sexuality, notes Barker, may also be expressive of an eros of parenthood (39).

As viewers of Portillo's film, we witness the erotic relationships in the memory images of the survivors, both lovers and parents, who remember the loved one's body as the source of joy, pleasure and love. I provide three examples, two entailing memory images provided through image and testimony and another, marked by anonymity, entailing the relationship of an unnamed mother

and daughter, and unaccompanied by testimony. Let me begin with Silvia Arce, in order to complete the discussion of the segment narrating the history of feminicidal violence in her family.

In the final scene of the segment, Eva tells of her daughter's disappearance. As if to alert the viewer to the reversibility of the embodied space of the filmic object and the viewer's, the camera shifts from the close-up to a view of Eva sitting at a window looking out, her back to the camera as if witnessing the perpetration against her daughter. The viewer is aware that her visual perception is accompanied by a visceral imaginary. The camera then zooms out and we see a sort of unidentified filmy kind of texture, a pale pink covering the screen, separating us from Eva so that we must see her image through it. As the camera zooms out further, we see that it is a pink veil that her daughter is wearing and we become aware that what we are seeing is a framed photo of Silvia Arce. In the photograph, she is wearing a pink dress and matching veil, typically worn in a *quinceañera*, a ceremony held on a young girl's fifteenth birthday celebrating her entrance into adulthood.

The viewer is recruited into the film through the tactility of this image. The veil, superimposed on the mother's image, seems to be touching it/her, as well as the histories she has narrated. Standing on the other side of the veil, the filmmaker's and/or the camera's body and the spectator's body are enjoined to touch the daughter, the pink filmy texture acting as a sort of second skin. This cinematic tactility encourages an embodied awareness of and reflection on the historic and contemporary interconnections binding the spectator and the object on the screen. When we as spectators experience the loving, caressing touch and engage it, we are also asked to remember the violence of touch that produced the disappearance. We are further asked to ponder the broader hemispheric racial-ethnic and gendered power relations in which we are entangled as hemispheric subjects, or as citizens of nations that have participated in analogous neo-imperialist or global projects framing the violence.

In the segment marked by anonymity, the viewer sees a set of slow motion images of a mother laying her missing daughter's dress on the bed. All we see are the mother's hands. The dress appears to be like one that a young girl would wear for a communion. It is a white gown, made of a sheer, satin material, suggesting the purity of the girl for whom the dress was destined. Its softness invites a caress. The mother passes her hand over the soft material, smoothing it down, as though she were caressing her daughter's body while at the same time remembering her daughter's body in it and perhaps the event itself. The Communion marks through ritual the special union of the communicant's soul with Christ. In taking the Eucharist, the daughter receives God's grace. The image of the dress functions as both a time image and a recollection image. In the time image the object is not connected to the world to which it corresponds but is shown alone, as if stranded in

time. The viewer is unable to draw objective connections, or use common sense to make sense of the object perceived, and is therefore obliged to question how this particular image got to be constructed from a particular perspective (Marks 27-28).

In the scene, the image is shown in slow motion, giving the viewer the opportunity to slow down her thoughts long enough to question the meaning of the image in its own right, for example, as one imbued with the value of virtue or deserving of a mother's love, as well as weigh this image against the so-called objective representation of the victims as loose, and therefore deserving of their violent fate. The incompleteness of the image forces the viewer to depend upon a relation of mutuality. The filmmaker provides an image and the viewer must complete it. By critically engaging the image, she must work to sort out the public image and the private rendition of the event. For example, the viewer might reflect on the range and intensities of the mother-daughter relationship, the mother's feelings of hope for the daughter's future and for their future relationship as two adult women. Here the incomplete image of the skin's touch leaves traces of unofficial or private memories that capaciously confront official history.

The testimony of María Sagrario Gonzalez's mother is a final example of the tactile event. It focalizes on a recollection object, defined by Marks as an object that encodes history and memory. In excavating such objects, it is possible to bring their violent contents into the present where memories associated with the objects, covered over by dominant histories, can be re-membered and reclaimed (Marks 77-78). Such objects may be considered fetishes. In intercultural works, the focus on the image object or fetishized object, one that moves within and between cultures and societies along with the dislocated, diasporan subject, serves to trace how value and meaning come to be encoded in objects as they move through space and in time, as well as how the filmic event itself, in its materiality, proposes a non-fetishizing form of looking.

The non-fetishizing look functions to contest neocolonial fetishism, which seizes objects to control and/or exploit them from a distance (Marks 77-78). Portillo exposes the neocolonial processes of production of the Mexican feminicidal victim as fetish, ones that, as Julia Monárrez claims, convert her into "a sensual object for death" ("Victims" 67). Her murder comes to symbolize, as Monárrez further asserts, "the exploitation of the female other in the sphere of exotic difference, in a discourse of racial superiority and economic development that legitimizes the consumption of things and people as a civilizing force" ("Victims" 67-78). But Portillo also illuminates the ways in which fetish objects associated with the victims of feminicidal violence, in condensing hidden histories, gain force and intensity in their movement, transforming the value and meaning of the embodied subjectivities of the victims.

Portillo invites the viewer to experience the non-fetishized object not so much visually as through bodily contact in the testimony of María Sagrario's mother, encouraging a caressing gaze. The mother states that her daughter had migrated to Juárez to help provide income for the family and subsequently disappeared. The testimony of the activist Judith Galarza overlaps with that of María Sagrario's mother. Galarza advises that photographs were taken of the girls and women every Friday in the *maquiladoras*. They were asked to pose, as if they were models. Numerous photographs were taken of Sagrario. This suggests, Galarza asserts, that perhaps it is through such photos that the girls that went missing were selected. They could be commoditized as models, perhaps for pornography. The camera then zooms in on María Sagrario's mother, who is holding a photo of her daughter taken in the *maquiladora*. In the photo, one widely disseminated by the media, she is standing in an objectified pose wearing a sundress. The mother then counters this public image with her testimony.

She portrays her daughter as a 'good girl' who taught catechism every Sunday, sung in the church choir and was deeply loved in the community. The camera shifts from the mother's face to images of birdcages, somewhere outside the family's home. The mother then explains that Mari's boyfriend, Andrés, had given her daughter a gift of two parakeets, Clint and Luis. The mother goes on to describe, her voice shaking as if she were about to cry, how one morning when she went to put the cages out in the sun, she found Clint dead. Only her daughter could touch Luis without being bitten, she relates; yet on that day she was not afraid to pick Luis up. Her instinct was right, for Luis allowed the mother to touch and caress it. The mother believes this was because he knew that something was wrong with her daughter. She then relates how she talked to the bird, asking him if he knew Mari's whereabouts, whereupon the bird nodded as if he understood. And the mother nods in front of the camera as she tells how Luis nodded. She then states that the parakeet flew away. It was a Tuesday. On Wednesday the authorities found her daughter and on Thursday the family received the news.

The parakeet, a material artifact linked to María Sagrario, a gift from a loved one and therefore symbolizing the loving relationship between Andrés and Mari, speaks and understands what she cannot. This counterhegemonic fetish object contests the objectifying gaze as portrayed in the photo of Mari in the sundress, serving a tactile memory of what has been concealed. María Sagrario's mother thus redeems the fetishized object of the woman in the photo by revealing values unrecognized in her and in the dislocated context in which she finds herself—the *maquiladora*. She thus allows the viewer to experience her daughter not visually but through the objects that Mari touched and were touched by her.

Conclusion

The body is something more than just an effect of discourse or a representation. In my examination of technologies of embodiment and interembodiment I have suggested that the body is a source of subjectivity and knowledge of the world. The conceptualization of knowledge as developing potentially in the relationality of interembodied contact between diverse subjectivities rather than through individual rational consciousness and action alone runs parallel, Marks affirms, to the recuperative history projects undertaken in the last decades of the 20th century under the rubric of identity politics, ones that take identity to be viewed as always in process, and historically and culturally shaped (Marks 4). Portillo's documentary would seem to suggest how such projects work in tandem with one another even though they might at first glance appear to be contradictory. Portillo's film shows its roots in the productive projects of identity politics in that it shows how human subjectivities, shaped in connection to given bodies, seek historical identity by deconstructing official histories while also excavating the past and recording it differently, even when realizing the improbability of retrieving the meaning of historical events with any certainty or recovering the loved ones lost. But Portillo's work also exemplifies the projects of the intercultural diasporan film insofar as she moves beyond the mourning of lost objects that results from the interrogation of history through personal and family memories to use the cinematic medium to stage the knowledges of the body, ones that transmit meaning without recourse to visual representation or words. The skin of this film translates meaning more densely, beyond the visual and the audible, through affective registers.

I have also suggested in this paper that Portillo reflects a vision of embodied subjectivity as a source of agency. As film theorist Vivian Sobchack states, and I concur, the emergence of an ethics depends upon "the lived sense and feeling of the human body not merely as a material object one possesses and analyzes among other objects but a material subject that experiences and feels its own subjectivity (*Carnal Thoughts*, 178). The important point here is that viewers as embodied subjects are enjoined to empathize with the pleasures and pains of other embodied subjects on the screen insofar as they share the same affective capacities. Portillo's affective aesthetics reminds us, for example, of our own dual status as agents of vision and as visible objects, one that allow us to experience bodily affects through the reversibility of the crystal ball.

The affective space that Portillo constructs serves as a template for the reconceptualization of an ethically conceived public space. Rather than distancing the spectator from ethical responsibility to others, potentially leading to objectification of the object viewed, this reconceived space narrows the distance between viewer and viewed, in effect, as Fregoso has noted, "perturba[ndo] el

espacio del espectador distanciado" ("Retrospectiva" 166). By attending to the political polyvalence of the affective register within Portillo's documentary, I hope to have effectively suggested how cinematic affect can orient agential possibilities for (re)acting politically within the context of relationality and contact that intercultural cinema provides.

As an exemplar of intercultural cinema, moreover, Portillo's film uses the affective register to encourage the spectator, from whatever social-spatial context, to undergo and register somatically, and hence, cognitively, her/his constitutive co-implications in the maintenance of neo-colonial, racist and heteropatriarchal boundaries that allow for the separateness between and within cultures. In doing so, the film offers the spectator a means for negotiating new ways of being and thinking, potentially capable of disrupting and transforming the logic of fear that dominates Juárez' political present.

Endnotes

[1] For further analysis of the problem of the representation of the feminicides, see also Steven Volk and Marian Schotterbeck "Gender, Order, and Femicide: Reading the Popular Culture of Murder in Ciudad Juárez." (2010)

[2] For an analysis of negative affects in relation to the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez, see Ana Del Sarto "Los afectos en los estudios culturales. Cuerpos y subjetividades latinoamericanos en Ciudad Juárez." (2012).

[3] For a thorough review of the ways in which feminist and queer theorists have analyzed the polyvalent registers of affect, see Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead "Introduction. Affecting Feminism: Questions of Feeling in Feminist Theory." (2012)

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