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Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies,
Volume 34.1 (2004), pp. 66-72 (Article)

Published by Center for the Study of Film and History

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/flm.2004.0030>



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A Conversation with Lorde Portillo

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[Mesilla, New Mexico, April 5th, 2003]

H.T. We're here, celebrating the Border Book Festival, brain-child of Chicana author Denise Chávez.

L.P. Right.

H.T. We're here to talk a little bit with Lourdes Portillo, filmmaker. What other kinds of works do you do – do you do any other kind of work besides film?

L.P. No, I don't actually. I mean, I do video and installations, like museum installations and that sort of thing. But, you mean like writing? No, no, no.

H.T. Film is your focus.

L.P. Film has been my career since I was twenty-one years old.

H.T. Okay, then, why film, how film, from where film?

L.P. You know I was an immigrant to Los Angeles with my family when I was a teenager. And Los Angeles is for film like the way Detroit is for cars. So there's a lot of film jobs and there were a lot of film jobs even then when I was twenty-one. And some friends of mine asked me if I wanted to work on making an educational film. I did and it was the first time. Up until that moment I didn't know what I was going to do with my life, so I worked in this film as a production assistant. I felt like it was the most natural and wonderful thing that I had ever really done up to that point. I just took to it immediately and felt that it probably was the only way that I was going to be able to have a voice in the culture because I felt like I needed to say some things. But, I didn't even realize that I had that desire until I saw what it was like to be in film production.

H.T. So the coming to film production was a real transformation in your sense of self?

L.P. I think so. It was like finding my voice. That's what it was, even though it's a very complex undertaking. It's not a simple thing. It's easier to paint and easier, perhaps,

to write. I don't know. I mean, I'm not a writer, but I imagine it's cheaper, in any case. Writing doesn't cost as much as filmmaking.

H.T. The technical side of film seems overwhelming and daunting and you seem to have mastered the craft.

L.P. Well, I don't know if I've mastered the craft; I've mastered mastering the craftsman. You know? I've mastered working with people and trying to have those people have the same vision—share the vision with me, and have the inspiration and the desire to fulfill that vision. I think I've accomplished that because I've been surrounded by wonderful artists.

H.T. In your work with the films that you've produced, does the question of origins interest you? Chicano and Chicana literary production is very much concerned with the question of origins, the question of recovering history. How does this question affect you, if it does?

L.P. Oh, yes, it does. Totally. I mean I feel like even though I'm not a writer, my best friends are writers, my son is a writer, my niece is a writer. You know literature is a thing that is very close to me. I feel it deeply in my heart. I don't have the skill. You know, I wasn't born in this country. English is not my first language. Spanish is my first language so I always felt insecure about language. But the question of origins, I think that I've expressed it very much in my work. It definitely is a preoccupation of mine in a visual way.

H.T. You talked about you being an immigrant, English being a second language . . . can I ask...?

L.P. . . .Sure, ask anything.

H.T. What were the tracks you made? Where was the point of origin and how did you end up in L.A.?

L.P. Okay. My family comes from Chihuahua, Chihuahua City for many, many generations, as far as I



Lorde Portillo

Courtesy of the author.

can see. I mean as far as I've investigated from the 1700s, you know. My family has been in Chihuahua, and, my father's family hasn't been.

My father's family was an immigrant from Zacatecas. He came into Chihuahua, met my mother, and married her. He decided that he wanted to immigrate into the United States, otherwise we would have remained in Chihuahua, I'm sure. And from there, we moved first to Mexicali, so I've lived in the border for many years. And from Mexicali, we then moved to Los Angeles, and then I moved to San Francisco.

H.T. Back to film a little bit.

L.P. Sure.

H.T. How does film help an audience, a general audience, come to grips with history, with culture, with language?

L.P. Well, I think it's a shorthand; it's a kind of unconscious, artistic, visual shorthand for feelings and for information. It's almost subliminal, if it's actually done that way, a subliminal kind of suggestion that is implanted inside of you when you watch film. I think that's what it is because it's not so obvious as a painting or literature. I mean literature can also be extraordinarily complex, but film and video have the advantage of being a visual medium, which you know can convey a variety of messages. As you just saw right now with Ray's film.

H.T. Yes. Ray Santisteban's film, *Texas Voices*. At the scene of editing where the various parts have to come together, how do you handle that portion?

L.P. Well, I technically don't do the editing. You know I have an editor. I work very closely with a person who shares my vision and who shares my sense of justice, also my sense of aesthetics and humor and everything. I actually have always surrounded myself with people who share a lot of the way that I look at the world, and they are not necessarily Chicanos, which is interesting. You know? They're from every race; we have similar affinities. So the editor and I sit down and look at all the footage. I go into the film, when I shoot the film with kind of a story, like a paragraph. The film is about this, basically; that paragraph gets translated little by little into this kind of portrait.

H.T. So this sharing of visions strikes me as there need not be any Chicano or Chicana essence to be shared and communicated to a general audience.

L.P. No, of course, the vision has to exist. Someone has to be the director.

H.T. And that's you.

L.P. That's me. I mean I'm the director, the one with the original vision. Now to implement your vision you just need other visionaries that share your vision. They don't necessarily have to be your same race, because you're the main person who's driving this thing toward a goal.

H.T. Do issues of the postmodern interest you at all?

L.P. I think postmodernity kind of really captured my imagination a few years back. You know the whole notion of layering of different experiences, particularly in film. And you see that in *The Devil Never Sleeps*.

H.T. Early in your career?

L.P. Like in the 90s. I'm not so involved in that concept now. I'm kind of trying to go in a different direction. That was kind of my more intellectual period. Now, I'm trying to just really focus on the more intuitive, really, really intuitive, true sense of what I'm feeling in terms of portraying those things in film. What were you thinking about postmodernity?

H.T. Well, I'm just thinking you know that the issues that are confronting *chicanidad* in our days are issues concerning fragmentation, concerning the lack of a unified subject. All these things. And I'm wondering, how do they make their way into your sensibility, into your crafting of the film, the actual putting together of the film. For instance, with *Señorita Extraviada*, roughly how much footage was involved in a film like that. How much of it ended up on the floor, how much of it ended up as the visual medium that you endorsed.

L.P. A lot. A lot. I mean we had a lot of footage, I don't remember exactly how much we had, but we had a lot of footage. Well, you know in film as in any work of art, you just have to get to its essential, to the essential vision of the person who conceived it. But that's different than what you're talking about.

H.T. Let me ask you a thematic question: Why is the devil so important for *chicanidad*?

L.P. I think what happened is that there was a whole movement of romanticization—is that how you say it? There's this romanticization with the idea of the essential Chicano. You know? *Familia*. *La Raza*. *Aztlán*. All that stuff. You see one of the things that happens with my filmmaking which is in a sense probably the same philosophy that Sandra [Cisneros] has: we have to go into the deepest, darkest inner self. And really look at it. And really investigate it. And make it a work of art since we're artists and turn it into something good. She says that in Ray's film *Texas Voices*, and I feel the same way. I have the same feeling. And I felt I had to look at the Mexican family and all its secrets and its darkness and use it as a work of art to kind of reflect the fact that a lot of us have a dark side. I think that's why *The Devil* is important, because it's probably one of the few kind of large documentaries that looks at the dark side of the Mexican's family. It's not *Mi Familia*, you know?

H.T. *Claro*. What about the devil and late capitalism? José Limón has written about the devil and late capitalism and its effects in South Texas, especially, particularly among women, and it seems to me that *Señorita Extraviada* has the devil at

work there, too.

L.P. Interesting. What did José Limón say? I don't know about this.

H.T. José Limón has a text, *Dancing With the Devil*, in which the notion, the metaphysical entity is used to control young women in South Texas at a particular point in history, right? The point in history in which late capitalism is penetrating into that cultural space.

L.P. So it's being used as a manipulation. Yes. But then you can't entirely discount the fact that it's true. Right?

H.T. Yes.

L.P. That it's true. That the devil, evil—since we are like good and evil—is used. In *Señorita Extraviada*, it's really . . . how can I say? It fulfills itself. It fulfills that prophecy. That is exactly what is happening. That evil has been allowed to thrive from there if we look at it in a more metaphorical way. That, I think, is what is happening. Evil has been fostered and allowed to thrive in late capitalism. It is a decay of capitalism. Right there, you see it at the same time. You're seeing both things.

H.T. You took about approximately how many feet of film on *Señorita Extraviada*?

L.P. That's hard to say. I couldn't tell you. Really.

H.T. Your camera person? What role did he/she play?

L.P. My camera person and I have been working together for more than twelve years, so he and I are like brother and sister. We share, you know, an artistic kind of sensibility so that it's very easy for us to communicate. I was looking at Goya and some of the dark, very dark, paintings from Goya that I adore. I love them. I think they're just brilliant. We shared that, and I said, "Kyle, this is somewhat what I would like to do." But knowing that, I had a film that had to have a chronology, that had to have stock footage that we did not shoot. It had a lot of elements that were beyond our control, but some of the visuals do suggest Goya. We have that kind of relationship. And then, we also talk about what does it mean? What is labor? Who works? I mean, there's the theme of hands and feet in the film. The hands of the hands that were. The feet have to do with one of the serial killers that was very obsessed with shoes, but that's not ever told in the film, but it's kind of alluded to. There is a lot of that sort of thing that we discuss before.

H.T. That was some of the layering that you were wanting to get into your film?

L.P. Yes, yes, yes. I think there's quite a bit of layering. There's also the absence of the destroyed bodies of the girls, which was a very important point for me because I had seen some of the photographers' works that took pictures. They took pictures of the girls when they were destroyed and found, and it was very gory and very degrading. And the girls just became numbers, and it was very upsetting for most women

to see these bodies. So I made a point of never showing a dead body. You see bones, you see things, but what I wanted to do was create a feeling of love for the girls. It was a requiem. The music suggests a requiem – that was another thing I wanted to do. I wanted to do all this different layering that works in a subliminal level for all of us.

H.T. So, as the director, you have to hold all these variable at once.

L.P. That's right.

H.T. And what other variables? Themes?

L.P. Themes, the dramatic arc, your characters, who your characters are going to be, rhythm. There's so much. There's really, really so much to worry about.

H.T. Amazing. That's an amazing talent you learned. Tell us, what projects do you have coming up or are working on right now?

L.P. I'm trying to make another experimental documentary. The thing is, I'm of a certain age. I'm almost sixty years-old, so I need to be challenged once again. So I want to make a film that's based on a real story that I heard, but I want to do it how that story created a rift between myself and a friend of mine. And the locus of the story of greed so it's how it evoked – how even the story, which is a true story evoked greed in us. It's kind of a complicated thing.

H.T. You don't have a title for it yet?

L.P. No, no, no.

H.T. It's still incubating?

L.P. It's still cooking there with the menudo.

H.T. *Andale pues*. So I just want to thank you once again for granting me this interview.

L.P. Sure.

The Camera under Erasure: A Coda

The career of filmmaker Lourdes Portillo spans some difficult decades in the American cultural landscape. That the 1970s were a decade of economic crisis for the United States is not difficult to recall if we remember the long gas lines. If we then further recall that the closing of the 1980s are punctuated by the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the Gulf War crisis, we get a sense of the magnitude of what Lourdes Portillo accomplishes when *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* receives an Academy Award nomination for Best Documentary in 1986. Neither those decades nor those thereafter have been exactly congenial to politics that have anything to say but the most laudatory things about American liberalism and the free market. And yet beginning with her 1979 *After the Earthquake/ Después del Terromoto*, Portillo has not ceased to project a critical vision of postmodern American culture and society. Her most thorough critic to date, Rosa Linda Fregoso notes this persever-

ing persistence of a critical political position in her work throughout her career: “Portillo is a filmmaker who first made films during the early 1970s as a member of the Marxist collective Cine Manifest, first working as Stephen Lighthill’s assistant in the collective’s feature, *Over, Under, Sideways, Down* (1972). Nearly thirty years later, she remains motivated by the political ideals of the early formative period” (Introduction 5).

With this succinct introduction my aim is not to supply anything like a comprehensive overview of the work of Lourdes Portillo. The reader can best benefit from that project through the critical and cultural work of Rosa Linda Fregoso. Rather, in this short essay I want to pursue the hypothesis that in Lourdes’ Portillo’s *oeuvre* the camera is under erasure, a term I hope to define as much by ostensive as expository means. Erasure forms a complex network of historical linkages within Western epistemological and ontological discursive formations reaching back to Plato inasmuch as mimesis lies at its core. The crisis of representation that erasure represents signals a massive turn in the history of European modernity.¹ The death of the author as Roland Barthes enunciated it and the author function as Michel Foucault elaborated it are only two articulations of this massive critical turn. Jacques Derrida describes this massive critical turn within the Western *epistémè* as that historical moment in European modernity “...in which language invaded the universal problematic; that in which, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse” (249). The semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure in the early 20th century circulates throughout the revaluation of Western epistemology and ontology. The cultural awareness that the play of differences in language and indeed in the life of signs in general befuddles any straightforward belief in the theory of representation—the mimetic mode as such—calls for a constant vigilance concerning the myriad ways that language always already represents and misrepresents, and not as some accident or fall from transparency to opacity. The cultural production of Chicanas and Chicanos registers this revaluation in a variety of ways.

Fregoso’s introduction to her superb study of Portillo’s work takes us a long way into the effect of erasure at work in the aesthetic and political concerns of Lourdes Portillo’s *oeuvre*; the politics of love is the expression Portillo adduces to work within today’s fragmented cultural field (1-23). It is this practice that one sees at work behind and in front of Portillo’s camera and that proposes that the author never existed in the first place. Things falter behind the camera as much as they do in front of it. As such, a different approach is required, one that does not proceed business-as-usual, privileging the authority of reason as objectivity. Just as Anzaldúa turns to a politics of the body that compromises the authority of Enlightenment Reason, so Portillo devises a theoretical practice in her filmmaking that allows emotion to enter as a necessary partner in the business of producing a film. Fregoso names this dimension of Portillo’s work “the vulnerable

observer” who produces “vulnerable’ filmmaking” (Introduction 4). My readings of Portillo’s films agree with this general assessment as well as hope to clarify briefly the ways these vulnerabilities of the camera operate under an economy of representation that no longer banks on the funds of essentialism. The politics of identity that appear across the screen in Portillo’s work, I maintain, are the ironic counterparts of her politics of love. In sum, because, like the devil, the camera never sleeps; it is always out and about wreaking havoc and mischief throughout the realm of aesthetic realism and identity politics.

To say that the camera never sleeps is to say that its authority to represent anything like a verisimilitude of events is under erasure. Erasure as such is an abbreviation for the loss of the transcendental ego, specifically, the authority it draws to itself under the name of Enlightenment Reason. It is a hallmark of this age we call postmodernism to exploit this historical awareness that European Enlightenment is as much an incomplete project as a failed one. Horkheimer and Adorno have not been the only ones to point to the frailty of modern Western epistemology, referring to Enlightenment Reason as epistemology that does not know it is mythology: “The principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition, that the Enlightenment upholds against mythic imagination, is the principle of myth itself” (11). Portillo negotiates the loss of authority with insight through the practice of the politics of love. Her early experience with Cine Manifest gives her among her first opportunities to practice this form of productive insight. Working with the collective Cine Manifest, Portillo commits herself, as she says, “to a strict way of looking at film. First of all, there was an ideology behind why we did everything that we did, the way we did it. I saw that there was a lot of room for experimentation” (“Interview” 50). Here we find straightaway a tension between the ideology of content—what should a work of art represent—and form—how should it do it. Portillo acknowledges with gratitude the lessons learned from working with Cine Manifest at the same time that she acknowledges a lacuna in that experience. Portillo leaves Cine Manifest to go to San Francisco Art Institute to earn a Master of Arts in Film, largely it seems, because she recognizes that gap in her filmmaking experience: “After Cine Manifest, I decided that I didn’t know very much about film and that I wanted to know a lot” (“Interview” 49). At the SF Art Institute Portillo practices the lessons she learns with Cine Manifest concerning experimentation, including breaking out ideology as a form of the politics of love. Parting ways with Cine Manifest proves less traumatic than putting into practice the politics of love when she starts her filmmaking career.

Her first film—*After the Earthquake/Después del Terromoto*—forms part of her studies at SFAI and furnishes unequivocal evidence that the politics of love are full of risk and danger. Portillo co-directs this short narrative film about Nicaragua and the Sandinista struggles with Nina Serrano. The experi-

ence with this film grants Portillo a strong sense of her talent but also leaves her with an alienated subject. Portillo sees the potential for film to inform through the documentation of events but she also comes up against resistance when she tries to enhance that potential with the aid of a dramatic style of representation. The Sandinista movement in the United States, on whose support Portillo and Serrano counted, breaks with their project: “there was a break with them because they wanted us to do a documentary that they had been used to seeing—very factual, very political, very one-sided. Since we got an AFI grant, I figured in a certain way it was my film, so that I had control and could do what I wanted. So we broke with them and did the narrative film” (“Interview” 51). Not only should we notice the move from impersonal subject to first person singular and plural in the grammar, we should also notice the conditions under which the project moves forward without Sandinista support. It is the AFI grant that persuades Portillo in a certain way to make *After the Earthquake/Después del Terremoto* as she and Serrano want to. The realism of documentation bows to the innovations that a dramatic style of representation introduces into the politics of filmmaking. Not so much in defiance of realism but as their own re-invention of it, Portillo and Serrano proceed. The re-invention of the protocols of documentary filmmaking is here a form of mythological thinking that does not submit to the binary of truth and falsity.

Before it has a name, *La Madres* begins in an engaged conversation with her co-director Susana Blaustein Muñoz, a friend and colleague from Argentina also attending the Art Institute. Portillo and Muñoz go to Washington D.C. to visit a friend and while there find out that there is to be a luncheon for all the mothers of the disappeared. They attend the luncheon where the opportunity opens to meet one of the mothers of the disappeared, René (sic) Epelbaum. Responding to a question from an interviewer concerning the origin of *Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo* (1986), Portillo puts its origin inside and outside the politics of love. “So you’re saying that *Las Madres* came about originally by chance,” asks the interviewer, and Portillo responds with a principle of charity that withholds nothing: “*Las Madres* came about...well, not exactly by chance...yes, yeah kind of...yes” (“Interview” 60). The time spent in producing the film underscores the contingency of the politics of love under which Portillo, Muñoz and their crew labor. Everything about the process speaks of contingency, from its origin, to the search for financial backing, to the conflicts at the scene of editing. Portillo has to largely absent herself from the scene of editing, allowing Blaustein and another associate to do the selections and combinations composing the film: “I would come in,” she says, “see the work that had been done, and we would talk about it, and then basically I wouldn’t spend a lot of time in the editing room because of this incredible conflict. I participated in a lot of the decision making, but I couldn’t be there making little cuts and just the everyday editing” (“Interview” 65). How Portillo’s ab-

sence in the editing room contributes to the ultimate composition of the film is an effect that erasure theory is bound to explain. One thing that is clear about her absence is her awareness of the necessity to let the pretensions of the transcendental ego slide under the power of the film’s subjects(s): “I felt like we couldn’t go wrong with that film. Whatever we did, it was right, because the mothers just carried it” (“Interview” 66). Portillo’s dislocation from the scene of editing is at once a displacement of auteur theory and an affirmation of the difficulty of practicing the politics of love.

Reading *La Ofrenda: The Days of the Dead* (1988) through the lens of erasure, one gets the distinct impression that, despite their name, identity politics are much more about the dislocations of identity and the need to keep re-inventing the politics which the category of identity sanctions. Fregoso condenses this point in her reading of *La Ofrenda* under the binary of the continuity/discontinuity of cultural traditions such *Día de los Muertos*: “While the Day of the Dead celebration unifies the documentary’s narrative, the meaning and rituals associated with the celebration differ in each context” (“Devils” 88). The differences evoked by the celebration of *Día de los Muertos* on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border serve to show that identity solicits identity without ceasing to be a category useful for sanctioning identity politics. In Oaxaca, the celebration of *Día de los Muertos* is at once a sign of a cultural tradition that brings the local community together and a sign of libidinal forces unleashed throughout the community. Portillo’s camera focuses on how the unloosening of libido disturbs traditional gender roles with her portrayal of a cross-dresser. In San Francisco too, Portillo’s camera focuses on the way the celebration of the Day of the Dead is put to political use by the gay Latino community. As the gay Latino community celebrates the Day of the Dead, the issue of AIDS becomes the focal point. While Fregoso puts the continuity/discontinuity trope to good use in her reading of *La Ofrenda*, the trope does falter, paradoxically, on the terrain of authenticity identity. No doubt Fregoso is aware of the trope’s frailty, inasmuch she states in an earlier study of *La Ofrenda*: “The film’s departure from the cultural politics of nationalism resides in its concern with the ‘production’ of cultural identity, as opposed to the ‘archaeology’ of an identity politics” (*Bronze* 116). Here, the signifier “production” displaces the signifier “archaeology,” an operation that effectively calls into question any notion of authentic identity based on origins. The fact that the celebration of the Day of the Dead stretches back to pre-Columbian times and that by contrast its celebration in San Francisco is of recent invention—that each is a production in its own local space—implies that each version of this cultural tradition has its own singular history; if these singular histories intersect, historical linearity is broken. Perhaps the production of cultural identity and politics in singular spaces such as Oaxaca and San Francisco can be better grasped by the appellation “greater Mexico,” which the folklorist and ethnographer Américo Paredes

invented to designate anyplace where Mexicans are present. The appellation resonates with an ironic logic that both defies the national boundary between the U.S. and Mexico as well as affirms the transformations that identity suffers under the political and economic forces that give rise to the diaspora of human populations.

In *The Devil Never Sleeps/El diablo nunca duerme* (1994) and *Corpus: A Home Movie for Selena* (1999) Portillo turns the camera toward the family. An appeal to deconstruction makes sense of *The Devil* as well as her entire *oeuvre* becomes explicit in the critical work of Norma Iglesias Prieto, who asserts: “[f]rom a Mexican audience’s point of view, the cinematic works of Lourdes Portillo, especially her documentary *The Devil Never Sleeps*, plays an important role in the deconstruction of Mexican culture” (144). Fregoso too seems intent on understanding the cultural work these films perform through the perspective of deconstruction. Speaking of *The Devil* in particular, she states: “Portillo breaks the silence around family unity and the family mythmaking enterprise so central to Mexican and Chicano/a nationalism and deconstructs the values associated with Chicana/o (and Mexican) families” (“Devils” 91). What is remarkable about this deconstruction of the societal unit called the family is that Portillo performs them while her camera is under erasure. In *The Devil* Portillo places herself on the other side of the camera, giving a performance that demonstrates a critical insight of deconstruction often enunciated in the phrase, “the inside is the outside” or “*il n’y a pas de hors texte*.” As she and her crew work to solve/represent the mysterious death of Portillo’s uncle Oscar, they turn to his widow Ofelia Torres with the hopes that she will give them a crucial piece of the puzzle. Portillo directs herself to Ofelia on the phone, asking for an interview with her, even as the phone call functions as just that sought after interview. Both, her conversation in Spanish with Ofelia and the English subtitles use the verb “*prestar*”/“to borrow” with the insistent tone of an appeal. “*Prestame algo*,” “Lend me something,” pleads Portillo with Ofelia, the widow of her uncle. How much Ofelia lends Portillo in her search to discover the truths of her uncle’s life is left suspended, as the camera moves and cuts around the room to reveal the members of the crew in the experience of that suspense. Repeatedly, Portillo takes a close shot of herself wearing reflective sunglasses that act as a frame for Mexican soap opera, suggesting that with respect to the truth of her uncle’s death, the *mise-en-scène* is also a kind of *mise-en-abîme*. *The Devil* was the recipient of several awards in the United States, Puerto Rico, and Barcelona, Spain. If *The Devil* deconstructs the family on the Mexican side of the border, *Corpus* does something similar for the family on the U.S. side. Portillo’s camera deconstructs the Chicana family in this home movie of the celebrated *Tejana* singer with a variety of techniques. Among the most potent are those in which she frames Selena’s father, Abe Quintanilla. In those scenes, Quintanilla’s own words testify to the role he plays in bringing

tragedy into his family—a linguistic self-reflexivity quite reminiscent of the way Oedipus condemns himself with this own language.

Portillo’s most recent work *Señorita Extraviada* (2001) provides copious evidence that the erasure of the camera and the politics of love go hand and in hand. In slightly more than the decade, 1993–2003, the murders of young Mexican women coming to the border *maquiladoras* to work now easily exceeds 300 in number. Rita González situates her account of this film within the categories of the said and unsaid, following Portillo’s language: “According to the filmmaker, *Señorita Extraviada* deals with the ‘two different languages’ of Mexican society, ‘the said’ and the ‘unsaid’.” Portillo’s interest was to tell the stories based on a culturally specific way of telling stories, one that stresses the eloquence of *the unsaid*” (236). Between these two categories we might also splice still a third, the category of the unspeakable. The politics of love that Portillo puts to practice behind the camera shatters the silence that has enveloped the gruesome character of this event taking place in the gap between Mexico and United States under the sanction of capitalist sovereignty. In her account of the process of filming *Señorita Extraviada*, Portillo recounts: “When I decided to make a documentary about the girls, I went to Juárez and found a deafening wall of silence: most people were too terrorized to speak out. The authorities, when questioned, gave only cavalier and confused responses. There was no way to make a documentary in which any approximation to journalistic objectivity could be claimed” (“Filming” 229). Behind the deafening wall of silence resides a gruesome terror as unspeakable as the horror that the ghost of Hamlet’s father could not speak of during his wanderings in the night. However, this horrible terror is not a function of the literary imagination but of the fact that the murders have gone unsolved for so long. Reporting for the *New York Times*, Mireya Navarro states: “each time, as the officials have declared the problem solved, the murders have continued” (E3). Closer to the eloquence of the unsaid is the way Portillo affirms folk knowledge. González takes note of the eloquence the politics of love articulate through the agency of Portillo’s camera and her subject: “In one segment of the film, the mother of a murdered woman Sagrario González recounts the moment when her daughter’s parakeet gave her a sign that the young girl’s body would be found. The incident is presented with all the filmmaker’s attention to validate this form of cultural knowledge” (236). Not being a function of an epistemology that aligns with the empirical methods of criminology, the truth of the omen remains unspeakable, yet weighing heavily in the land of the living.

I have left Portillo’s *Vida* (1989), *Columbus on Trial* (1992), *Mirrors of the Heart* (1993), and *Sometimes my Feet Go Numb* (1997), unread due to consideration of space. Therefore, not only is my hypothesis that the camera is under erasure with Lourdes Portillo left radically incomplete on this count, the hypothesis also requires further testing in terms of the specific historical ter-

rain that each film occupies. That is, many more historical links have to be made between the appearance of deconstruction in America, the disappearance of the author in postmodernity, Portillo's solicitude with the auteur theory, and her philosophy of film production as the practice of the politics of love. Until these links are made (stronger), the hypothesis I offer here remains hypothetical.

Filmography

- 2001 Producer/Director/Writer: *Señorita Extraviada*
- 1999 Producer/Director/Writer: *Corpus: A Home Movie for Selena*.
- 1997 Producer/Director: *Sometimes My Feet Go Numb*
- 1994 Producer/Director: *The Devil Never Sleeps/El diablo nunca duerme*.
- 1993 Producer/Director/Writer: *Mirrors of the Heart*
- 1992 Producer/Director: *Columbus on Trial*
- 1988 Producer/Codirector/Writer: *La Ofrenda: The Days of the Dead*
- 1986 Producer/Codirector/Writer: *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*
- 1979 Producer/Codirector/Cowriter: *After the Earthquake/Después del Terremoto*

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Notes

- 1 Robert Young provides a philosophical overview of what I am here dramatically calling a massive turn. While a little too dichotomous, his statement of the problem is useful for its succinctness: "If one had to answer, therefore, the general question of what is deconstruction a deconstruction of, the answer would be, of the concept, the authority, and assumed primacy of, the category of 'the West'... Postmodernism can best be defined as the European culture's awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world" (19). I say that the assessment is a little too dichotomous because ten years after, the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri shifts further the binary of center/margin under the rubric of Global Empire (*Empire*). The on-going cultural production of Chicanas and Chicanos continues to explore the implications of the massive critical turn that Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Gayatri Spivak, et al have pushed forward.



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