Will Straw

Pulling Back From Apocalypse

In two recent works of audiovisual documentary we see Mexican newspaper crime photographers rushing to scenes of violence. John Dicke’s 2008 film El Diablo y la nota roja, set in a southern Mexican city, focuses on the routines through which a small local newspaper covers violent crime. Its central character is an amiable, methodical reporter-photographer, followed as he drives from one crime scene to another during bright sunny days. Alarma! (2010), Vice Media’s 3-part online documentary about Mexico City’s longest-lasting crime news periodical, is noisier and more sensational, as its source might lead one to expect. Filmed mostly at night, it is filled with the sounds of police sirens and footage of photographers on motorcycles speeding along city streets.

Both of these documentaries are from the very recent past, but each, in minor and slightly sinister ways, prompts a sense of nostalgia. For viewers from the Anglophone North, this same nostalgia is often fueled by the discovery that a morbidly sensational press, delivered to consumers by an underclass of news-hawkers circulating precariously amidst the movement of cars and people, still exists somewhere on the North American continent. As they have for decades, and with virtually unbroken consistency, daily tabloid newspapers like El Gráfico and La Prensa fill their front pages with images of one or more corpses lying on city streets. Perversely, this daily death imagery functions as reassuring proof that, somewhere, newspapers still have the capacity to interrupt everyday life with novel, startling content.

Increasingly, however, the heroic photожournalism documented in El diablo y la nota roja is signalled by intense competition among newspapers, front-page photographs of dead bodies, and the mythologized bravado or ingenuity of news photographers. For visitors to Mexico City, this same nostalgia is often fueled by the discovery that a morbidly sensational press, delivered to consumers by an underclass of news-hawkers circulating precariously amidst the movement of cars and people, still exists somewhere on the North American continent. As they have for decades, and with virtually unbroken consistency, daily tabloid newspapers like El Gráfico and La Prensa fill their front pages with images of one or more corpses lying on city streets. Perversely, this daily death imagery functions as reassuring proof that, somewhere, newspapers still have the capacity to interrupt everyday life with novel, startling content.

Increasingly, however, the heroic photожournalism documented in El diablo y la nota roja is signalled by intense competition among newspapers, front-page photographs of dead bodies, and the mythologized bravado or ingenuity of news photographers. For visitors to Mexico City, this same nostalgia is often fueled by the discovery that a morbidly sensational press, delivered to consumers by an underclass of news-hawkers circulating precariously amidst the movement of cars and people, still exists somewhere on the North American continent. As they have for decades, and with virtually unbroken consistency, daily tabloid newspapers like El Gráfico and La Prensa fill their front pages with images of one or more corpses lying on city streets. Perversely, this daily death imagery functions as reassuring proof that, somewhere, newspapers still have the capacity to interrupt everyday life with novel, startling content.

Increasingly, however, the heroic photожournalism documented in El diablo y la nota roja is signalled by intense competition among newspapers, front-page photographs of dead bodies, and the mythologized bravado or ingenuity of news photographers. For visitors to Mexico City, this same nostalgia is often fueled by the discovery that a morbidly sensational press, delivered to consumers by an underclass of news-hawkers circulating precariously amidst the movement of cars and people, still exists somewhere on the North American continent. As they have for decades, and with virtually unbroken consistency, daily tabloid newspapers like El Gráfico and La Prensa fill their front pages with images of one or more corpses lying on city streets. Perversely, this daily death imagery functions as reassuring proof that, somewhere, newspapers still have the capacity to interrupt everyday life with novel, startling content.

Increasingly, however, the heroic photожournalism documented in El diablo y la nota roja is signalled by intense competition among newspapers, front-page photographs of dead bodies, and the mythologized bravado or ingenuity of news photographers. For visitors to Mexico City, this same nostalgia is often fueled by the discovery that a morbidly sensational press, delivered to consumers by an underclass of news-hawkers circulating precariously amidst the movement of cars and people, still exists somewhere on the North American continent. As they have for decades, and with virtually unbroken consistency, daily tabloid newspapers like El Gráfico and La Prensa fill their front pages with images of one or more corpses lying on city streets. Perversely, this daily death imagery functions as reassuring proof that, somewhere, newspapers still have the capacity to interrupt everyday life with novel, startling content.

Increasingly, however, the heroic photожournalism documented in El diablo y la nota roja is signalled by intense competition among newspapers, front-page photographs of dead bodies, and the mythologized bravado or ingenuity of news photographers. For visitors to Mexico City, this same nostalgia is often fueled by the discovery that a morbidly sensational press, delivered to consumers by an underclass of news-hawkers circulating precariously amidst the movement of cars and people, still exists somewhere on the North American continent. As they have for decades, and with virtually unbroken consistency, daily tabloid newspapers like El Gráfico and La Prensa fill their front pages with images of one or more corpses lying on city streets. Perversely, this daily death imagery functions as reassuring proof that, somewhere, newspapers still have the capacity to interrupt everyday life with novel, startling content.
The dilemma just described is captured astutely in a chapter title from a recent book by Marco Lara Klahr and Francesc Barata: “A concept in crisis: From the obsolete ‘nota roja’ to a journalism of public security and criminal justice.” The term nota roja (literally, “red note”) has been used for many years to designate sensational varieties of crime-oriented media in Mexico, from tabloid newspapers specializing in criminal violence through book-length compilations of true-crime narratives. Scholarly and fannish studies of nota roja have enumerated several of its key formal characteristics and traced their development through twentieth-century Mexican print culture: the interweaving of documentary realism and the fantastic within the popular crime-oriented press, the common juxtaposition of photographs and comic-book-like drawings, and the play of language in headlines and titles. If the pertinence of nota roja as a term is in crisis, as Klahr and Barata suggest, it is perhaps because it designates elements of genre and style rather than a socio-political referent. As such, the label risks appearing trivializing and inadequate, at least since the expansion of drug-related violence that marked the presidency of Felipe Calderón (2006–2012). The notion of a “journalism of public security and criminal justice” directs those studying Mexico’s crime-oriented press to focus on the country’s current political and economic challenges rather than on longer histories of media form.

On a trip to Mexico City in June 2013, I attended a public discussion at the Museo de Arte Moderno featuring Mexican news photographer Enrique Metinides (b. 1934). The occasion was the launch of a book titled, for its English edition, The 101 Tragedies of Enrique Metinides. The photographs gathered in the book, most of them well-known and previously anthologized, are from several decades in Metinides’ career. They show us the victims of car accidents and street murders, the devastation left by Mexico City’s 1985 earthquake, plane crash wrecks, and other vestiges of violence and disaster. While the older, black-and-white photographs included in the book carry forward some of the humanist dignity of mid-twentieth-century Mexico City street photography, later images, shot in the colour processes of the 1960s and 1970s, look more like Jeff Wall tableaux or snapshots of urban life run through Instagram. As Museo de Arte Moderno employees distributed cappuccinos to those in the audience, Metinides offered the sorts of anecdotal reflections on his work one expects in interviews with photojournalists. He discussed several of his most renowned photographs in terms of the manoeuvering or serendipity that made them possible. Ethical or political constraints were discussed as the focus of struggles pitting Metinides against interfering editors or publishers.

Alexis Salas has traced the sequence of events and consecrations which took Metinides from peer respect among photojournalists to art-world success. Like the Mexican news photographer Nacho López (and, to a slightly lesser extent, Héctor García), Metinides has found a place within two distinct regimes of aesthetic value. One, of which I will say more shortly, is the rich body of curatorial and art-historical work on Mexican photojournalism. This work has painstakingly reconstructed the careers, patterns of influence, and institutional contexts of news photography in the country, with a special emphasis on those photographers known for their documentation of urban crime and violence. The other locus of value, more recent and scattered, is that hazy cluster of tastes shared by Vice Media, hipster T-shirt makers, and the publishers of picture books or magazines filled with lurid imagery from Mexican popular culture. This taste formation finds in Mexican tabloid crime photography, Santo films, 1970s Mexican porn, and Day of the Dead tourist paraphernalia evidence of a punkish and profane challenge to cultural propriety. Vice Media, unsurprisingly, called Metinides “our new favourite photographer,” and asked “How did we not know about this guy until now?” Both of these aesthetic regimes continue to flourish, materialized in ever-proliferating artefacts for
More than any other nation I know, Mexico has set urban news photography near the centre of its officially consecrated visual culture. This may seem counter-intuitive, given the global circulation, in both touristic and connoisseuristic circles, of Mesoamerican artefacts, 1930s muralism, and present-day arsenația as the defining tokens of Mexican visuality. It is the case, nevertheless, that the historiography of photojournalism remains one of the great achievements of Mexican cultural scholarship. News photography in Mexico is the focus of rigorous, interesting writing and research, whose central venue for many years has been the journal and book series Luna Córnea. Serious writing on photography—journalistic, artistic, and vernacular—continues in semi-scholarly magazines like Alquimia and CuartoSuro; exhibits of work by canonical photographers like Manuel Álvarez Bravo often fill outdoor walls in cultural or historic districts of Mexico City. In the capital, the gravitational centre for curatorial activity around photography is the Centro del Imagen, the main currents of image production and circulation in early- and mid-twentieth-century Mexico City: the post-Revolutionary arsenația and current-day arsenația. In the capital, news photography is the key vehicle for Mexican photojournalism in the mid-twentieth century. Present-day Mexican interest in these photographers may acknowledge their importance as observers of the everyday, but in Anglophone countries interest is fueled above all by the expanding taste for noirish photographic images of criminality and violence. This taste has also led to the gallery success of the American Weegee, book after book collecting police agency mugs shots, and volumes devoted to the photographic archives of luridly sensational newspapers like the New York Daily News. Mexican crime photography slides neatly into this taste formation, but inevitably prompts two broad frameworks of understanding common within Anglophone responses to violent Mexican imagery. One such framework is the pop-anthropological notion of a Mexican obsession with death, used as journalistic shorthand to explain everything from the baroque iconography of Mexican cathedrals to the frequency of car-crash imagery in daily newspapers. The other is the vision of Mexican public life as irredeemably tragic and brutal, a vision that draws lines of continuity between the Revolution of the early-twentieth century, the mid-twentieth-century urban fait divers, and the militarized violence of the twenty-first-century drug wars. The first of these responses provides the essentializing foundation for the second, though both serve to simultaneously underpin and haunt the economic order installed by NAFTA and global neoliberal doctrine. Violence is invoked as that which makes necessary the limits on immigration and the imposition of visa requirements, which have trampled over the modest hopes for broader social and cultural exchanges raised twenty years ago by the signing of NAFTA. At the same time, and to the extent that they enshrine narco-war violence as the dominant feature of contemporary Mexican life, the governments of the United States and Canada open the door to a reading of such violence that recognizes their own complicity in the drug trade and in the economic relations which have ensured its viability.

Images of Atrocity and Apocalypse

I started writing this article in order to work through my feelings about the curious relationship of Mexican photographic criticism to that being published elsewhere, mostly in Anglophone regions of the world (and in the United States in particular.) What marks this relationship are the different ways in which Mexican and non-Mexican criticism speak of violence. For a decade or more, English-language writing on news photography has been dominated by an interest in images of tragedy and atrocity: the Holocaust, 9/11, López, whose work moved from the observation of street-level social rituals in Mexico City to the documentation of more isolated instances of violence or victimization. This shift in their work, never complete, corresponds partly to the rise of the illustrated tabloid newspaper as a key vehicle for Mexican photojournalism in the 1950s and 1960s. Present-day Mexican interest in these photographers may acknowledge their importance as observers of the everyday, but in Anglophone countries interest is fueled above all by the expanding taste for noirish photographic images of criminality and violence. This taste has also led to the gallery success of the American Weegee, book after book collecting police agency mugs shots, and volumes devoted to the photographic archives of luridly sensational newspapers like the New York Daily News. Mexican crime photography slides neatly into this taste formation, but inevitably prompts two broad frameworks of understanding common within Anglophone responses to violent Mexican imagery. One such framework is the pop-anthropological notion of a Mexican obsession with death, used as journalistic shorthand to explain everything from the baroque iconography of Mexican cathedrals to the frequency of car-crash imagery in daily newspapers. The other is the vision of Mexican public life as irredeemably tragic and brutal, a vision that draws lines of continuity between the Revolution of the early-twentieth century, the mid-twentieth-century urban fait divers, and the militarized violence of the twenty-first-century drug wars. The first of these responses provides the essentializing foundation for the second, though both serve to simultaneously underpin and haunt the economic order installed by NAFTA and global neoliberal doctrine. Violence is invoked as that which makes necessary the limits on immigration and the imposition of visa requirements, which have trampled over the modest hopes for broader social and cultural exchanges raised twenty years ago by the signing of NAFTA. At the same time, and to the extent that they enshrine narco-war violence as the dominant feature of contemporary Mexican life, the governments of the United States and Canada open the door to a reading of such violence that recognizes their own complicity in the drug trade and in the economic relations which have ensured its viability.

Images of Atrocity and Apocalypse

I started writing this article in order to work through my feelings about the curious relationship of Mexican photographic criticism to that being published elsewhere, mostly in Anglophone regions of the world (and in the United States in particular.) What marks this relationship are the different ways in which Mexican and non-Mexican criticism speak of violence. For a decade or more, English-language writing on news photography has been dominated by an interest in images of tragedy and atrocity: the Holocaust, 9/11, López, whose work moved from the observation of street-level social rituals in Mexico City to the documentation of more isolated instances of violence or victimization. This shift in their work, never complete, corresponds partly to the rise of the illustrated tabloid newspaper as a key vehicle for Mexican photojournalism in the 1950s and 1960s. Present-day Mexican interest in these photographers may acknowledge their importance as observers of the everyday, but in Anglophone countries interest is fueled above all by the expanding taste for noirish photographic images of criminality and violence. This taste has also led to the gallery success of the American Weegee, book after book collecting police agency mugs shots, and volumes devoted to the photographic archives of luridly sensational newspapers like the New York Daily News. Mexican crime photography slides neatly into this taste formation, but inevitably prompts two broad frameworks of understanding common within Anglophone responses to violent Mexican imagery. One such framework is the pop-anthropological notion of a Mexican obsession with death, used as journalistic shorthand to explain everything from the baroque iconography of Mexican cathedrals to the frequency of car-crash imagery in daily newspapers. The other is the vision of Mexican public life as irredeemably tragic and brutal, a vision that draws lines of continuity between the Revolution of the early-twentieth century, the mid-twentieth-century urban fait divers, and the militarized violence of the twenty-first-century drug wars. The first of these responses provides the essentializing foundation for the second, though both serve to simultaneously underpin and haunt the economic order installed by NAFTA and global neoliberal doctrine. Violence is invoked as that which makes necessary the limits on immigration and the imposition of visa requirements, which have trampled over the modest hopes for broader social and cultural exchanges raised twenty years ago by the signing of NAFTA. At the same time, and to the extent that they enshrine narco-war violence as the dominant feature of contemporary Mexican life, the governments of the United States and Canada open the door to a reading of such violence that recognizes their own complicity in the drug trade and in the economic relations which have ensured its viability.
The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence

Fordgarit's treatment of death imagery from the Mexican Revolution similarly uses images of atrocity as limit cases in which photography comes close to its pure form as a medium. Here, photographs of immobile corpses simultaneously represent photography at its least self-reflexive (inasmuch as marks of the photographer's presence, like blurring or other indices of movement, are absent) and most self-vaulting (insofar as such photographs offer themselves up as the most heroically perfect examples of the medium's capacity to capture the immobility of death.) In the stillness of the photographed dead body, Folgarait suggests, “the photograph hides its presence as a medium by removing any suggestion that it is a medium, it exposes a closeness of fit between its workings and the stillness of this subject which draws us into a recognition that only a photograph could cause this effect.”

As speculation about various end-games for photography itself becomes more widespread, so too does an interest in the furthest reaches of photography's engagement with the horrific. The horrific is offered up as the characteristic state of the modern or late-modern world, but also as that condition under which photography reveals its constituent tensions and essences with the greatest clarity.

The Longues Durées of Mexican Photography Criticism

In Mexico, where estimates of those killed between 2006 and 2012 in the so-called “Mexico Drug War” have reached 100,000, the scholarly and critical discussion of photography is flourishing, as already noted. Much of that discussion now, as in decades past, is concerned with images of violence and criminality. Within that discourse, however, there is a noticeable reluctance on the part of critics, curators, and scholars in Mexico to exploit the “usefulness” of violent Mexican imagery for the sorts of transnational paradigms of analysis, like those just discussed, in which images of atrocity have become central. Put simply, discussions of present-day violent photography in Mexico seem determined to set that photography within longer, more local and finely textured histories of the photographic medium. These histories are, in large measure, those of the development of national photographic styles and of a social role for photography in Mexico. Implicit in this work, I would argue, is a resistance to letting the present-day climate of horrific violence serve as the only prism through

10
11
12
13
which Mexican news photography might be studied and understood. This is not to overlook the many important treatments of narco-war violence and its visual dimensions, like Sergio González Rodríguez’s astonishing book El hombre sin cabeza (2000), which examines the cultural meanings of the decapitated body. Nevertheless, Mexican writing on the photography of violence typically sidesteps the conviction, present in so much English-language work, that a critical engagement with violent photography must move quickly to confront its most horrific outer edges. To put it crudely, this writing resists the opportunity to set violent Mexican photography within a transnational canon of images and attendant ideas which would inflate its critical value, while also squandering those understandings of photography and its social meanings that have been carefully developed over a long time.

Underlying this resistance, I suggest, are several impulses. One is the desire to counter the judgement that the narco war is all that defines Mexico, as if any interest in violent imagery that sidesteps that war would be somehow trivializing or the result of a willful obliviousness. In this respect, the steady production over the last few years of studiously methodical books and exhibitions devoted to the history of violent photography in Mexico stands as a rebuke to any claim that, amidst the ongoing, reciprocal relationship between news photography as a form or practice and Mexico City as a space of constant transformation. Historically, this relationship has been seen as one of mutual constitution: while the city generated the intersecting practices of image production that defined Mexican photography throughout the twentieth century, those practices, in turn, mapped the spatial and social diversity of the city. As Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo suggests, in his recent study of Mexico City, Mexican news photography developed its characteristic forms during the rapid expansion of the Distrito Federal following the Revolution. Mexico’s post-revolutionary period coincided almost exactly with the technological and commercial expansion of the illustrated press around the world. In this coincidence, Tenorio-Trillo argues, “the city and photos were born together.”

The “lateness” of Mexico’s post-Revolutionary consolidation as a nation, he suggests, set Mexico City’s growth as a capital and cultural centre more neatly within the canonical photography of García, López, Metínides, Moya and others, images of violence were intelligible within a broader mapping of mostly urban misery and poverty. This embedding of violence within a textured account of the social would mark even the most luridly sensational of mid-twentieth-century crime tabloids, like Prensa Roja and Nota Roja. This was less because journalists were committed to social explanations for violence, arguably, than because criminality was part of the broader moral and economic ecology of cities—Mexico City in particular—and was described as such.

Today, the violent crimes whose victims are shown on the front pages of La Prensa and El Gráfico each day are given little social context, but they are for the most part offered up as isolated crimes of opportunity or impulse rather than as symptoms of an apocalyptic social collapse. Even today, implicitly, the crimes featured on these front pages are framed as “city stories,” evidence of the logics or inequities of urban life, rather than of a late-modern condition of national disintegration. We may regret the lurid sensationalism that detaches these crimes from broader frameworks of political legibility, but the same sensationalist insistence on the singularity of each crime pushes back against the reduction of Mexico to little more than a war zone.

dissolve Mexico City within constructions of a war-torn, failed, or tragic state. Clearly, cartel-related violence has reached the edges of the city, and wealth from trafficking and associated corruption runs throughout the city’s economy. Nevertheless, Mexico City’s contemporary art scene and richly layered art-historical communities have negotiated ways of acknowledging this condition while resisting any compulsion to operate as if in a state of emergency. In photographic criticism and scholarship, this refusal of the apocalyptic manifests itself in an interest in the ongoing, reciprocal relationship between news photography as a form or practice and Mexico City as a space of constant transformation. Historically, this relationship has been seen as one of mutual constitution: while the city generated the intersecting practices of image production that defined Mexican photography throughout the twentieth century, those practices, in turn, mapped the spatial and
In 2011, the photography magazine Cuartoscuro organized a group discussion by Mexican photojournalists on the ethics of publishing extremely violent imagery. The photographic situations referenced by the participating photographers—massacres and executions—were among the most horrific of those attributable to narco-war violence. Arguments among the participants in this discussion set the need to inform the public against the ethical requirement that newspapers not pander to the voyeurism of readers/viewers for base commercial motives. This same duty to inform was cast against the ethical requirement that reader/viewers for base commercial motives. Nevertheless, I take the normalizing, intensifying a sense of public insecurity from which the perpetrators of violence would benefit. Unpectedly, to me, the tone and substance of this discussion differed little from those which might characterize a debate over similar issues in a Canadian journalism class. The strongest sense that photojournalism in contemporary Mexico might be different from elsewhere or from an earlier time comes from books, most of them in English, which offer themselves as dispatches from a war zone, or from places like Ciudad Juárez. Some of these dispatches celebrate the heroic efforts of news photographers working under extraordinary risks. The more common impression conveyed, however, is of a practice and a profession rendered all but impossible. Charles Bowden’s Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy’s New Killing Fields is not principally about photojournalism, but the blocked or corrupted ambitions of news photographers is a recurrent theme. His description of Ciudad Juárez as a place where “the dead are counted but not photographed” captures the gradual disappearance of news photographs from the city: from news archives (because they are removed), from cameras (because they are confiscated), and from newspapers themselves (which are increasingly afraid to publish them).

In John Gibler’s To Die in Mexico, we encounter a profession whose sense of time and achievement inverts that of the photographers referred to earlier in the two films with which I began this essay. While the photojournalists in those documentaries rushed to be first at a crime scene, those in the most violence-ridden parts of northern Mexico have learned to arrive last. To reach a murder scene first is to face the risk that killers will return, to confirm the deaths or retrieve clues left behind. Photographers who are already there face execution. Gibler quotes a photojournalist named Pepis: “Trying to get the exclusive shot is a thing of the past here for us. We’ve had to put a stop to that, to self-censor. Now when there is an event, we’ll go, but we try not to get there before the authorities.” Mexican photojournalism, in these examples, has not grown more extreme in those contexts in which violence is most prevalent; rather, it has retreated and shrunk.

Notes
2 My translation. The Spanish title for this chapter is “Un concepto en crisis: De la chabola a ‘nota roja’ al periodismo de seguridad pública y justicia penal.”
3 Marco Lara Khahir and Francisco Estela, Nota[ Roja: La vibración de una historia de un género nuevo hacia una nueva manera de informar,” Cuartoscuro (Mexico City: Random House Mondadori, 2009), 49.
6 See, for example, William J. Hannigan, New York Noir: Crime Photos from the Daily News Archive (New York: Rizzoli, 1999).
9 See, for example, in addition to those discussed here, Geoff Batche…la, and Jay Prosser, eds., The Image and Atrocity: Photography in Crisis (London: Reaktion Books, 2012); Ariella Azoulay, Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography (London, Oxford University Press, 2010).


14 Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, I Speak of the City: Mexico City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 266.

15 See, for one example among many others,


18 John Gibler, To Die in Mexico: Dispatches from Inside the Drug War (San Francisco: City Lights, 2011), 69.

The Time After NAFTA Within any other likely chronology of the Americas, and decidedly refusing to concede ‘what’s done is done,’ the film rubs at the simultaneities of pasts and futures within the great fabric of creation itself, that original and inventive enterprise of imagining the world ‘made flesh.’ Within and beyond Mexico, NAFTA economies have realigned capital flows and social relations between country and city, imploding old social contracts between urban, cosmopolitan elites and the persistent coloniality of the local, still imagined as a pastoral site for home and “help.” Yet in the time after NAFTA, narcocapitalism is the only local factory that’s still hiring. 1 Reygadas examines the time after NAFTA in works that trace the elite, creative classes of Mexico City’s privileged urban milieu as it comes into contact with those who have historically been consigned to serve them. Each playing distinctive parts in the post-NAFTA service economy (including its narcocapitalist spectrum), the conflicts between them recall the dynamics of Rancière’s reading of the time after as “the time of pure material events, against which belief will be measured for as long as life will sustain it.” Rather than simply oppose the culpability of the state and markets as developmental stages in nation-making projects (and filmmaking ones, too, as Ranciere suggests), Reygadas wrestles with cinematic strategies of performing the ethnographic present in a feature film, and with the challenges of mediating the coevalness that was never only “before” or “after” NAFTA, but rather illuminates an intensification of the persistence of coloniality in the context of Mexico City’s “borderlands,” 50 miles to the south. Aligning Mexico DF with other global cities, the film incorporates shots from the periphery of major metropolises in the UK, Spain, and Belgium.

In interviews, Reygadas has made it clear that although critics tend to view Post Tenebras Lux as his most personal film and call it autobiographic, he is interested instead in “fictionalizing with documentary.”22 Billed as “a... DF’s Border Time (and the Other) in Post Tenebras Lux