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SOPHIA McCLENNEN

(De)Signing Women: Mexican Women Directors and Feminist Film

Women accounted for nearly one-third of feature film directors in Mexico during the 1990s, and women directors were behind the commercial release of 20 films from 1989–1999. In one decade women directed the same number of films as from 1917–1988. The case of women directors in Mexico is unusual and virtually unprecedented both within the Mexican film industry and within the history of women's filmmaking. Within Mexico the rise in female participation in almost all areas of the film industry signifies a substantial shift from women's traditional roles as on-screen spectacles. From the perspective of women's film history, the case of women directors in Mexico marks a departure from the customary venues of non-commercial documentary and avant-garde, experimental films. This boom of women directors in Mexico's commercial film industry provides feminist film scholars with an opportunity to investigate the relationship between women directors, Mexican commercial cinema and feminist gender representation. The situation also allows us to test whether there is an essential connection between women filmmakers and feminist cinema. The following analysis will show, though, that this situation is both exciting and vexing for feminism. Even though women are breaking down barriers of gender inequality and moving behind the camera, their films display uneven and inconsistent challenges to gender paradigms. Work by these directors, in fact, comprises a full spectrum of gender dynamics from sexist to ambivalent to feminist, which suggests that women directors, or de-signing women, should be de-signed as uncomplicated sources of feminist filmmaking. Investigation into the context of these films' production demonstrates that there are a number of considerable obstacles, both ideological and material, which trouble a reading of these films as feminist. After describing the complex arena in which these women work, with its implications for feminist film, my analysis turns to two prominent examples of films by women directors, Danzón (María Novaro,
and Angel de fuego (Dana Rotberg, 1991), which, due to their ambivalent feminism, provide for a nuanced study of the ties between feminist film and this new generation of Mexican women directors.

Broadly speaking, there are three central issues that put pressure on the feminist possibilities for women directors working in the Mexican commercial film industry. First, feminism, in general and especially in the context of Mexico, is multiple and complex making it extremely difficult to define criteria for feminist films. Second, even though we may find that certain films represent a feminist aesthetic, women in Mexico’s film industry have a highly ambivalent relationship to feminism and generally reject the term “feminist.” Third, it is problematic to assume that these directors have the type of creative agency associated with the modern notion of an author. Not only are the films the product of multiple subjects, they are also products of the material conditions of the Mexican film industry. So, even if a director sets out to make a feminist film, the final product is likely to represent a compromise between the director, the film crew, the filmmaking process (from conception to distribution) and the market. These three issues intersect and intertwine and constitute a real challenge to reading these women directors and their work as feminist. The following section delves into the ways these three factors bear on the feminist potential for work by contemporary Mexican women filmmakers.

Despite the difficulties of equating women directors with feminist filmmaking in Mexico, the work of these women is often assumed to be feminist. Almost every interview with a woman director in the Mexican media broaches the issue of feminism and many scholarly works also make this connection. For instance, David R. Maciel and Joanne Hershfield, in an article dedicated to the role of women directors in contemporary Mexican cinema, outline six key characteristics shared by these filmmakers. Their second point is that: “Collectively, these women directors characterize their films as cine de mujer, or woman’s cinema. These films offer a feminist viewpoint that intervenes not only in the themes of the films but also in the construction of the image, the spatial-temporal priorities, the feelings and relations” (254–55). In part, Maciel and Hershfield are right: many of the commercially released films directed by women in Mexico are concerned with women’s identity, and many are shot from a woman’s perspective. These qualities, though, provide a fairly weak definition of feminist film, and they do not exclude genres generally associated with sexist gender codes, like women’s melodrama. The definition of what makes a “feminist” film has been the subject of much scholarly debate, both within and outside of Mexico, and one can find a broad assortment of possibilities provided by critics. Anneke Smelik has what I consider to be a very solid working definition: “By ‘feminist’ film I mean a film which represents sexual difference from a woman’s point of view, displaying a critical awareness of the asymmetrical power relation between the sexes. While this open definition implies that not every film made by a woman can be called feminist, it allows for certain films made by men to fall into this category” (1–2). Smelik’s definition moves beyond essentialism to an assessment of film based on its critical attitude toward dominant gender codes. It adds the notion of gendered power relations, a category fundamental to any feminist project, to the characterization of feminist film by Maciel and Hershfield.

Feminism in Mexico has a long history of challenging gendered power relations, and the women’s movements during the Revolution, for suffrage and for equal rights, find global parallels (Salas, Miller). In 1988, after the transparently manipulated presidential elections resulting in Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s presidency, there was an upsurge of women’s organizations. Feminist activity in politics and other social issues became more public and intense. One key example of a public forum for women’s issues and feminist theory is the journal debate feminista founded in 1990 by Marta Lamas. In an editorial in the first issue Lamas explains the anti-essentialist convictions of the journal and the diversity of feminist perspectives in Mexico:

At best, the different feminist tendencies in Mexico are enmeshed in social and economic issues and at worst are stuck in a mujer-is debate. By mujerismo...we mean the perception that women possess certain characteristics which make them better than men, simply because they belong to the female sex...We fundamentally disagree with this view. It is only because women as a social group—because of the gender to which they belong—find themselves in specific conditions of discrimination, repression and exploitation, that it is valid to do specific work on their behalf. (161)

Another significant voice for women’s issues, La Correa Feminista, was founded a year after debate feminista (1991) by the Centro de Investigación y Capacitación de la Mujer. In contrast to debate feminista’s target audience of university-educated feminists, La Correa Feminista is
aimed at a broader audience of feminist activists. As Rebecca E. Biron explains, *debate feminista* provides complex insights into feminist theory, whereas *La Corriente Feminista* engages in a "gritty consideration of concrete struggle for basic rights" (165). Prior to the founding of these two journals, *fem* was the central source of Mexican feminist media. At its inception in 1976 *fem* was a cutting edge source of feminism, but changes in the directorship and advisory board have tempered its profile and mainstreamed its commentary: now the journal defends only "mild reforms in cooperation with government programs" (Biron 155).

The variety of feminist approaches represented by these different journals indicates the multiplicity of Mexican feminisms and women's organizations in Mexico cover a diverse range of activities, from church-related groups to radical lesbians to feminist deconstructionists. Biron cautions that there is no "center which could speak for all those efforts or claim to represent a Mexican feminism" (151). According to Lamas, who also still serves on the advisory board of *fem*, "[f]eminism in our country is divided and disorganized" (162). In Mexico, then, as in most parts of the world, feminism is multiple, diverse and contestatory.

These three journals, despite their differences of opinion, all self-identify as feminist. But Elizabeth Maier explains that many women avoid the terms "feminism" or "feminist" because the words have very negative connotations in the Mexican lexicon (42). In fact most of the women in Mexico's film industry reject the term "feminist." Many women, though, explain that they don't use the term because of the negative stereotype of feminists, even though they consider their work to be connected to feminism (Maier 42). The fact that many women who actually advocate feminist practice are uncomfortable identifying themselves as feminist makes the application of the term extremely difficult. So, in addition to the multiple and conflicting feminisms found in Mexico, the repudiation of the term "feminist" muddies the situation further. How does one read the seemingly feminist acts of a woman who denies any connection to feminism?

The complexity of feminist practice in Mexico may lack a "center" but this has not lead to feminist inaction and women's groups in Mexico work hard to combat negative images of women in the media (Hernández Carballido). Berta Hitiart, former director of *fem* who now writes for *Femprem*, explains that the Chilean based journal, which covers women's issues across Latin America, tries to provide an alternative to the mainstream media. One of their main concerns is "to present women in the mainstream media as active subjects, in charge of their own affairs, and not always simply as caricatures of themselves, as little women" (164). These concerns also merge with those of Marta Lamas, editor of *debate feminista*, who characterizes the journal as an important medium for feminist critique (160). Whether gynocentric, i.e., *mujerista*, or deconstructionist in principle, the different approaches to feminist media advocacy in Mexico share common concerns. Most critics agree that feminist media production should engage in issues of male power like patriarchy and machismo, critiquing the unequal power relations between the sexes. Feminist media should confront gender ideology and the constraints to women's agency by drawing attention to the way women's identity is often constructed in relation to traditional family roles. With specific regard for filmmaking, feminist films should display a woman's point of view (or at least problematize the hegemony of the man's point of view) and should attempt to construct a woman's gaze for the audience. There is, though, a difference of opinion as to whether feminist film should distance the audience from screen images or "entertain" a broad audience: the more radical feminist perspectives tend to favor a disruption of the typical film experience and the more moderate wish to reach a wider audience.

If the feminist scene in Mexico is complicated, then women working in the film industry may present us with even more complex attitudes towards feminism and gender representation. The history of women's involvement in filmmaking dates back to the film production company founded by Dolores y Adriana Ehlers and the films they made during the Mexican Revolution (Rashkin 35). Their work was followed by a few key women directors, especially Adela Sequeyro and Matilde Landeta who both worked during Mexican cinema's Golden Age (mid 1930s to 1950s) and who dealt with women's issues in their films. Landeta explains that she tried to create female characters that went beyond the traditional mother/whore dichotomy, and her film *Troncalles* (1951) presents the viewer with a complex vision of a prostitute. Regarding her relationship to feminism, she states: "No me considero una feminista militante, pero siempre he buscado la reivindicación de la mujer a través de mis películas. En este México machista he tratado de limpiar y aclarar la imagen femenina creando heroínas de la vida diaria y no grandes heroínas patrióticas" (48). When Landeta eschews the term "militant feminist," we should read that geo-
ture as a distancing from the Mexican media’s conservative depiction of feminism, since her film philosophy coincides with a feminist agenda. According to Landeta, film images should deal with gender imbalance, Mexican patriarchy, and provide a challenge to women’s social stereotypes.

The next prominent woman director is Marcela Fernández Violante whose first feature premiered in 1974 twenty-three years after Landeta’s third feature Trescalés (1951), and who continues to make films (Piel de oliva [2000] is her seventh feature). Fernández Violante has also occupied an extremely important position in the film industry as secretary of the filmmakers’ union (Secretaria General del Comité Central del Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica) and as director of a major film school, the Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC). Regarding her interest in feminist film, Fernández Violante explained in an interview that her approach to filmmaking “...lies in not showing that I am a woman when I direct. If it happens, it’s sort of unconscious, but certainly my films aren’t about the lady who’s forsaken, and they’re not about women” (Mosier 185). So, in contrast to Landeta, Fernández Violante distances herself from feminism of any variety.

The latest generation of women directors has been influenced by the legacy of these pioneers. Another major factor in their formation has been their education and training. Unlike previous generations, the new wave of women directors is the first to gradeate in significant numbers from formal film schools. The CUEC was founded in 1963 as a state-funded film school to promote national cinema. The only female graduates of the school before 1970 were Esther Morales and Marcela Fernández Violante who later became its director in 1985 (Rashkin 68). The 1970s brought an influx of women students to CUEC, and these were accompanied by graduates from a second film school founded in 1975, the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC). Perhaps one of the most influential groups to have an impact on contemporary women directors was the Cine-Mujer collective founded in 1975 by students associated with CUEC (Rashkin 68-74). The group was focused on making films that documented women’s oppression from a feminist and Marxist perspective, and most of the films were documentaries with non-commercial distribution. Even though many of the women working in commercial film today had their origins in Cine-Mujer, today’s mainstreamed narrative feature films shot on 35mm depart from the gritty feminism of Cine-Mujer’s 16mm films. Elissa Rashkin points to this divergence when she warns: “In analyzing the women-produced films of recent years, we do well to remember their militant origins, even when, in some cases, those origins have since been repudiated” (73).

In 1990, as women entered the industry in unprecedented numbers, directors of film and video from Mexico and the United States came together for the Encontro de Mujeres Cineastas y Videoastas Latinas: Mexico—Estados Unidos. During this conference women spoke about the difficulties they have producing and distributing their films and they described their concerns about female image production. For the most part the participants avoided associating themselves with feminism, but instead used terms like: “cine de mujer,” “estética femenina,” and “imágenes femeninas.” Márbara Millan Moncayo, a film scholar, described her vision of a feminine aesthetic: “[el cine de mujer] se proponga ser un cine no feminista sino femenino. O sea, un cine que canalice la peculiar manera del ser femenino, más que un cine que se entienda como divulgador del feminismo” (“Hacia” 123). In her book, Derivas de un cine en femenino, Millán explains that the move away from feminist towards feminine film, which one can note in many women directors’ recent commercial releases, is a consequence of the director’s interest in appealing to a broader audience and providing an accessible film experience. Militant feminist filmmaking like that associated with Cine-Mujer is considered by Millán to be elitist and too aesthetically alienating in its experimentalism. Nevertheless, Millán’s position is only one of a multiplicity of voices. Rosa Linda Fregoso explains that, despite the “profound differences” of opinion among the conference participants, all shared a concern “about the position of women in patriarchy,” the ways that patriarchy has used “women as objects of cinematic discourse,” and women’s marginalization from cinema history (14).

The division between feminine and feminist film as drawn by Millán and others complicates a feminist reading of these films. If the difference between feminine film and feminist film is understood as the difference between a film which celebrates women and reaches a wide audience and a film which calls for significant gender transformation and is less “entertaining,” then it is clear that a number of films will fall in the middle of this spectrum or will overlap both. Add to this blurry distinction the fact that many directors and critics conscientiously re-
have absolute power over the final product. Consequently, the gender of the director has less impact on a feature film than it has in the production of single-authored cultural materials. What this means is that in the case of the collaborative aspect of filmmaking, the gender of the director is only one part of a complicated cultural equation that yields a commercial film. Designing women directors may be more myth than revolution. Even though Hershfield and Maciel emphasize the fact that women directors in Mexico today work in an auteur cinema where they are able to express their own personal narrative style and where women directors have more control over their films because they are more active in seeking financial backing (254–55), I would caution that the economic conditions for filmmaking in Mexico constrain more than liberate the director as auteur. Directors of commercial narrative film, regardless of gender, do not have absolute control over the films they make. They may have greater or lesser degrees of influence, but the collaborative nature of cinema, the difficulty in controlling the communicative potential of visual signification and the nature of market pressures make it impossible for films to be the direct expression of a director's will.

Moreover, these women directors are working within the system, often receiving funding from IMCINE, the Mexican Film Institute; they are directly limited by the arena in which they are making films. When films receive state funding, they are restricted, whether by overt censorship or by more subtle forms of state-supporting, dominant ideology. In addition to receiving state funding for their films, many of the women directors working in the industry today were trained in state funded schools. Unlike directors who work outside commercial film, making documentaries or low-budget, avant-garde films, these women are working in the belly of the beast that is within a social structure hostile to the subversion of gender norms.

Not only do women face limited creative license because they are making state-supported films for theatrical release; they also have to confront the material constraints of the Mexican film industry. Mexican films compete in a market heavily saturated with Hollywood. In 1997, for example, only 5% of all films screened in Mexico were Mexican (Ravelo n.p.). Because the film industry in Mexico is under siege from Hollywood, it is extremely difficult for filmmakers to get their projects made and screened. This marginalization of Mexican national cinema has an impact for feminist film because, in order to get funding for films, filmmakers must present scripts that will appeal to a broad audience,
generally accustomed to limited gender stereotypes. Before deeming the work of these filmmakers as feminist, we must consider not only the difficulty of applying the term “feminist,” but also the limited power of the director who is working in a commercial film industry. Unlike the militant projects shot on the much less expensive 16mm stock of the Cine-Mujer collective, the women being heralded today are working in 35mm for commercial release. This signals a vast difference from traditional women’s film movements. E. Deidre Prizbam explains that most feminist filmmakers in the US have decided not to participate in dominant cultural forms. “Except in rare instances women have not been involved as directors, producers, technicians, or in any other capacity of significant decision-making in the production of mainstream film” (4).

So, on the one hand, the role of women in the Mexican film industry is encouraging and shows signs of real progress towards equal representation. On the other, because these women are working in commercial filmmaking, there are a number of embedded obstacles to creating radically rearticulated gender roles.

The Small Steps of Danzón

_Danzón_, directed by María Novaro with a screenplay by the director and her sister, Beatriz Novaro, is a light-hearted film about a woman’s search for a man, and also herself. Julia is a single mother of a teenage daughter and a telephone operator in Mexico City whose main social diversion is dancing, especially the traditional _danzón_. She has danced with the same partner for years, and when he fails to show up at the dance hall, she decides to search for him in Veracruz. The trip unleashes a search for identity. Julia realizes that she has led a very controlled and limited life, where she has kept her sexuality and desires locked away. Unable to find her dance partner, Carmelo, Julia has a brief affair with a much younger man, befriends a transvestite, spends money she can’t afford and risks losing her job—all acts which represent real transgressions for her. Upon her eventual return to Mexico City, she sees Carmelo again, but the film suggests that Julia has discovered needs and desires she will no longer ignore. _Danzón_ presents the viewer with practical, but restricted, ways that women might be able to move beyond the social limits placed on women’s identity.

The opening sequence focuses on the feet of dancing couples as they take the small steps of the _danzón_. The published script describes the camera movement in this way: “Aparece la imagen de una mujer de quien sólo vemos las pantorrillas y los pies, calzados con zapatos de tacón muy alto. Afloja suavemente la pierna derecha preparándose para iniciar el baile. La cámara se desliza al ras del suelo y nos descubre otro par de piernas, y otro y otro” (Novaro and Novaro 13). Claudia Säefner analyzes this sequence as central to the film’s representation of women and especially the fetish of the legs of María Rojo, the lead actress who plays Julia Solórzano: “this part of the woman’s body is fetishized in the controlled erotic ritual of the dance, emphasized by the medium shots of Julia from the waist down…” (305). The focus on Julia’s legs and that of the other dancers establishes the primacy of the female body in social relations between women and men, especially in the dance hall. And this sexualized female body is not challenged by the film’s development. The role of the woman shifts as Julia becomes more inclined to seek what she wants as opposed to passively waiting, but her desire to be with Carmelo never wavers.

Camera technique reinforces the tight world in which Julia lives. Beginning with the opening sequence the camera favors medium shots with very few long shots given the setting of a dance hall. Later, in conversations with her friends as Julia worries over Carmelo’s disappearance, the shots are tightly framed. This camera work merges with the film’s implication that Julia’s life is limited and that she restricts her sexuality. Her friend, Silvia, suggests to Julia’s daughter, Míriam, that maybe Julia is so anxious over Carmelo’s disappearance because Julia is experiencing menopause, and later, as Julia is practicing _danzón_ with her daughter, Míriam tells her mother she should exercise because her arms are getting flabby. These observations that Julia is aging and maybe losing her sexual allure reinforce the idea that Julia is far too restrained and traditional and that she needs to modernize—before it is too late. Prior to her trip to Veracruz, Julia refuses to accept an invitation to dance from a younger man because it would be inappropriate, whereas her friend Silvia has no such limitations. In this way Julia’s repressed sexuality and passive nature are presented as an anomaly and not as the norm for Mexican women. When she breaks her habits and questions her identity, she can be viewed as a woman “modernizing,” which arguably undercuts her potential to serve as a role model for gender transgression.

Julia’s love of the _danzón_ is symbolic of her restrained sexuality. The dance, unlike merengue or sals, is especially controlled. The dance favors skill over speed, and the couple dances very close and moves in a
small area of the dance floor. The feet move in a square, or two squares, and the couple turns slowly. In an interview María Novaro confirms her use of the dance as a metaphor for social relations. She explains that danzón represents traditional Mexican sexuality: “Los hombres y las mujeres se mezclan de una manera muy contenida, muy disfrazada, muy propia, muy llena de reglas, la coquetería de la mujer; ella seduce, el hombre manda, todo eso refleja perfectamente mi educación sentimental como mexicana” (Medrano Platas 262).

The fact that the film opens and closes with Julia dancing danzón with Carmelo underscores the small steps the film takes in feminist critique. This film is not about radical transformation or consciousness-raising. Despite befriending a transvestite, Julia does not question her heterosexuality, and despite the fact that she spends a significant amount of her retirement in order to go to Veracruz, she remains oblivious to class struggle. Moreover, she meets and comes to know prostitutes who live in the hotel where she stays, but she never links the commodification of these women’s bodies with a combination of capitalism and patriarchy. Serving as the viewer’s guide, Julia’s brush with feminism is light and unthreatening. Nissa Torrents asks whether the film is the “acceptable face of feminism for the 1990s,” and Schaefer explains Julia’s limited role: “She struggles but makes the ‘right’ choices in the end: the confirmation of motherhood and home that is presented is still the icon of a tradition-oriented Mexican culture” (226, 303).

Even though Julia returns at the end of the film to her earlier behavior, the viewer notes certain visible differences: she is wearing the “daring” color black, and when dancing, she looks into Carmelo’s eyes. Since danzón functions as a metaphor for sexual relations, Julia’s breaking of the dance’s rules is symbolic of her actual change and suggests the ways the film reaches towards a subtle feminism. Throughout the film the viewer learns of Julia’s dogmatic attitude towards danzón, but this becomes especially clear in interaction with Susy, the transvestite she meets in Veracruz. Susy meets Julia, hears of her search for Carmelo and immediately becomes involved in helping Julia, giving Julia advice and spreading the word of her search. Julia is thankful for Susy’s help, but she remains somewhat confused about her friend’s sexual identity and refers to Susy as an arista. In a scene where Julia is teaching the danzón to Susy, she is forced to recognize the extent of her conservative attitude. As they prepare to practice, Susy assumes the position of the woman. Julia is dumbfounded and states that the taller person must be the man or else “se pierde la armonía” (Novaro and Novaro 65). Julia avoids questioning her friend’s social role as a transvestite and takes refuge in danzón’s aesthetic code. She further chastises Susy for making eye contact, explaining that the woman must flirt with the man’s eyes, focusing her gaze far away. But Susy will not conform, and this scene pushes Julia to reconsider her strict rules of social conduct. Interestingly, it is through the exaggerated sexuality of Susy that Julia comes to affirm her own, accepting her first dance with a partner other than Carmelo while out in public with Susy. After Julia begins to unravel her strict code of behavior, as a consequence of her desire to protect and reaffirm her sexuality, she begins to transgress other norms, and in the end of the film it is clear that her new sense of self owes a debt to Susy’s advice.17

A second key step in her transformation is her willingness to go out with Rubén, a man who is significantly younger than she. She tries to dance with him, but can’t because he moves his hips too much. Her decision to have sex with Rubén signifies a testing of her limits and an exploration of her sexual desire. Her open objectification of him allows her to experience a shift in the balance of gender power and provides a contrast to her former passive role with Carmelo. But in the end, especially after a hair cut that makes Rubén look even younger and an encounter with his mother who seems close to her in age, Julia is no longer comfortable with her sexual adventure and returns to Mexico City.

The feminist potential of the film resides in its small steps.18 Julia’s changes are not threatening in any major way to the current gender politics of Mexico. Upon return, Julia is actively Carmelo’s partner, and her gaze into his eyes suggests that she may try to push their relationship further beyond the dance floor. Most importantly, the film’s protagonist moves beyond the standard female archetypes in Mexican film as either virgin mother or sinful whore. Julia is sexual without being fallen, and she is a mother but not a virgin. These changes may seem to offer such tame feminist critique as to be inconsequential, but I would offer that this subtle critique is highly significant given the context of the film’s production as a commercial release. Gabriela Yanes Gómez concurs that the film’s gender politics should be read in the context of its production: “podemos decir que María Novaro se atreve mucho considerando la difícil mojigatería del público mexicano” (63).
The Flames of Hell in Angel de fuego

Angel de fuego, directed by Dana Rotberg with a screenplay by Rotberg and Omar A. Rodrigo, is a complex film that aggressively questions the impact of social ideology on identity. The protagonist, Alma, is a flamethrower in a circus, which converts nightly into a brothel after the circus performance. After her father dies and the circus/brothel learns that she is pregnant by him, she is forced to choose between abortion and expulsion. She chooses to leave and soon joins with a traveling puppet show that presents biblical stories. The group is led by a woman who acts as a religious mystic, Refugio, and her son, Sacramento, whom they believe is a prophet. They are accompanied by Noé, a homeless boy who performs menial tasks in order to have shelter and food. When Refugio notices that her son is becoming attracted to the pregnant Alma, she convinces Alma that she needs to be purified and eventually causes a miscarriage. Alma awakens, abandoned, at the circus/brothel and later returns to extract revenge on Refugio by seducing Sacramento, who then commits suicide. Realizing that her options are limited to prostitution or religious oppression and feeling trapped socially, Alma sets fire to the circus and kills herself. Angel de fuego is a dystopic film that suggests that both men and women are brutally and tragically trapped by the limits of society. Alma cannot survive in a world that offers her only two possible identities, virginity or prostitution. Her only acts of agency are her final revenge and suicide.

In almost total contrast to Danzón's dance hall, Angel de fuego opens with the sounds—dogs barking, sirens, voices and circus music—of the lower classes on the outskirts of Mexico City. Where Danzón is light, Angel de fuego is dark, and the film's cinematography has been compared to the paintings of El Greco and the style of Luis Buñuel (Carro 9, Pérez Turrent n.p.). Describing the setting, Nelson Carro states: "Todo se siente feo, sórdido, deslavado, miserable. Todo sucede en la periferia de la ciudad" (8). Also unlike Danzón, Angel de fuego abandons realism and employs a gloomy surreal, expressionism in its allegorical study of Mexican society. Its use of symbolism, though, does not distract the viewer from the harsh realities of Mexico's poor, but rather forces the audience to gaze on social sectors typically unseen and unheard. Rashkin considers the film to be highly critical of Mexico under Salinas: "although benefiting fully from the cinematic renaissance encouraged by the Salinas government, Rotberg does not use 'surreal' imagery to sell exotic visions of Mexico but rather to undermine the illusory pretensions of salinismo, by showing the results of its modernization strategies" (215).

The individual personalities of characters are subsumed to their allegorical functions; Alma is the innocent soul, and Sacramento is religious faith. Refugio, though, provides a false refuge, and Noé leads Alma to danger instead of safety. The film uses allegory and biblical reference to present Alma and Sacramento as two victims of social manipulation, who are principally controlled and abused by their parents, who are symbols of the social order. Josefa, a circus worker, signals the leitmotiv of sin when she comments on Alma's pregnant state: "Lo que hicieron fue un pecado muy grande... Dios no te va a perdonar nunca" (Rotberg and Rodrigo 26). In contrast to Danzón's straightforward narrative of a woman searching for herself, Angel de fuego presents a complicated world where innocence and faith combat manipulation, abuse and greed for power.

From a feminist perspective Angel de fuego is far more critical of prevailing society than Danzón. This critique, though, does not focus on women's identity as it does, however lightly, in Danzón. Instead, Angel de fuego turns its critique on social institutions, like religious faith, the family, prostitution, child labor and the class system, in order to suggest that men and women born into the lower classes of Mexican society face insurmountable obstacles to freedom. Both Alma and Sacramento are equally trapped in this structure, which is why they both commit suicide when they realize the limited options they have in this world. Each of their parents uses their children for monetary gain and attempts to control their children's sexuality. Alma's father trains her in the physically dangerous and unhealthy practice of flame throwing in order to make money for the circus, and he also trains her to be his sexual partner after his wife abandons him. Sacramento's mother uses his skills for the religious puppet show, and she markets her son as a prophet. As part of his training, she cuts his back with a knife in gestures overt with sexuality. When he winces in pain, she tells him: "Cuando yo esté muerta, me lo vas a agradecer todos los días, así como yo se lo agradecgo a mi padre" (47). Both Alma and Sacramento are contained in a cycle, which has also contained their parents. Renato, Alma's father, explains the applause she receives as genealogical destiny: "es mi hija, lo trae en la sangre" (18). Once these characters recognize the traps of life, it appears so overwhelming that they choose suicide.
The sacrifice of the young in this film parallels the puppet production by Refugio's group of the Biblical tale of Abraham. The tale fascinates the pregnant Alma, who questions whether it was right for God to make Abraham choose between his son and his love for God. While performing the penitence prescribed by Refugio of fasting, Alma further suspects the path to God since she feels that fasting can't be good for her unborn baby. She remarks to Noé, "A mí me hace que todo esto es puro cuento ..."). (45). But her desire for an alternative family and a system of belief overrides her suspicions, and she continues to follow Refugio's advice. She yearns to be free of sin and to ensure that her father and unborn child are also free of sin. Her naiveté and eagerness to please her an easy target for the jealous and manipulative Refugio, who decides to sacrifice Alma's unborn child in order to help Sacramento become a prophet. The camera work during the sequence of Alma's "purification" leaves her alone in frame and emphasizes her solitude as she undergoes a series of physical hardships and eventually sleeps in a circle of flames, naked.

Back at the circus after her miscarriage, Alma has begun to lose her innocence and sees the world differently. She remarks that she is not even fit to be a mother. She enters the tent to see a new part of the act, the "Spider Girl," and she seems to reflect for the first time about the use of the female body for entertainment and spectacle. Next she performs her first night as a prostitute, which, in keeping with the film's ties to tragedy, leads to her character's anagnorisis: Alma finally discovers her true identity and passes from ignorance to knowledge. The script describes the scene while Alma is in bed with a sleeping man: "La luz que se filtra por la única ventana se refleja en un espejo roto que Alma tiene en las manos. Alma manipula el espejo haciendo que el reflejo recorra su cuerpo desnudo, fijándose finalmente en su vientre. Después de unos segundos avienta el espejo lejos de sí." (69). The revelation and recognition of her identity as merely a body for others to use forces Alma to take action. She will not risk becoming pregnant again, nor will she allow Refugio's actions to go unpunished. Following the film's biblical motif, she will now seek "an eye for an eye." She moves from innocence to bitterness. The next day she visits Sacramento and seduces him knowing that it will destroy him. As she returns to the circus, she frees the animals, douses the circus tent with gasoline, sets it on fire and then mounts her trapeze. In hell the final shots of her are through the flames of the blaze.

With unusual intensity for a filmmaker of her generation, Rotberg's film is deeply disturbing. Alma's character wavers between a woman and a child, but the adults in her world always understand her as a sexed female body. Once she sees herself though their eyes, she truly becomes a woman spitting fire in her attempt to destroy the cycle of oppression she has inherited. The film suggests that within this world there are very few options for either men or women and that redemption through religion is contaminated by greed and desire for power over others. The circus and the religious group are not different; they offer fantasy and illusion as distractions from the horror of everyday life. In its biting critique Angel de fuego shows gender inequity to be tied to the restrictive ideology of Mexican social institutions.

* * *

Rotberg's Angel de fuego and Novaro's Danzón are films made for theatrical release and commercial distribution. Both films, having received funding from IMCINE, allow for a study of the ways that a message critical of women's role in society has been tempered by the circumstances of commercial film production in Mexico. Moreover, these are the only films directed by women included in a selection of the top 100 Mexican films, Angel de fuego at 78 and Danzón at 45.20 As films with a fair measure of success, they provide an interesting opportunity to assess different approaches by women directors to gender representation.

The context of each film's production affects the aesthetic options to both filmmakers: Rotberg pushes her film to the avant-garde limit for a commercial film, whereas Novaro modifies melodrama. Not surprisingly, Novaro's film was a box office hit both nationally and internationally. She used a standard form and reached a broader audience than Rotberg. Despite their differences, though, both women's films depart from standard arenas of women's film production. Traditionally, feminist filmmakers have moved their work in two aesthetic directions: the documentary and the experimental film. The first allows for a direct attack on patriarchy and dominant ideology through the transmission of images that challenge such a view of the world. The documentary form has played a major role in Latin American cinema and has been a mode used by many political filmmakers, including the Cine-Mujer Collectives in Mexico and Colombia.21 Experimental feminist
films enjoy an even smaller potential audience, since their primary function is a critique of dominant representational practice. As Michelle Citron points out: “Many feminist avant-garde films are inaccessible in that they strain the tenuous relationship of communication which binds the film-maker, through the film, to the audience” (53). Citron argues that it is important for feminist filmmakers to work in the realm of mainstream narrative films because they are aesthetically accessible to a broad audience and provide useful opportunities for criticism of mainstream conventions. But she cautions that working in the mainstream requires compromise (59). While subversion in commercial cinema is more difficult, it is possible. The possibilities for feminist subversion and critique of patriarchy are directly linked to the degree to which the film either replicates or challenges typical aesthetic codes for mainstream films, which correlate with traditional gender roles.

Danzon with its adaptation of melodrama is only capable of small threats to patriarchy as opposed to all our battle, because melodrama is so firmly rooted in the social, patriarchal consciousness. Lopez explains that: “The melodramatic is deeply embedded in Mexican and Hispanic culture and intersects with the three master narratives of Mexican society: religion, nationalism, and modernization” (256). Burton-Carvajal identifies a particularly patriarchal structure to Mexican melodrama, which would limit its potential for feminist images (186–234).

The melodramatic code in Danzon does not follow the standard Mexican forms of “family melodramas that focused on the problems of love, sexuality, and parenting, and epic melodramas that reworked national history, especially the events of the Mexican revolution” because Danzon also borrows from the cabareteras melodrama, which “typically told the tragic story of a hard-working and long-suffering B-girl” (Lopez 256, Ramirez Berg 125). Novaro begins to break down traditional gender codes by setting her film in much the same locations (dance halls, bars, seedy hotels, the port of Veracruz) as the classic melodramas of fallen women, meanwhile using a protagonist who is portrayed as a good (but not virginal) mother. While closer to family melodrama than cabareteras, Julia’s conflict does not threaten to break up her family, nor does her reunion with Carmelo suggest the birth of a new family. So, even though Danzon borrows from the melodramatic tradition, it moves beyond it.

By subverting the standard melodramatic subgenres, Novaro complicates the viewer’s expectations of Julia and her destiny. While subtle, the film suggests advantages to manipulating mainstream conventions in order to challenge public perceptions of women’s roles.

Angel del fuego’s highly allegorical critique of society presents the viewer with a far more complicated attack on existing ideological structures. Yet that same symbolism risks being lost on the viewer who is unwilling to engage actively with the film’s dystopic images. As mentioned, the film’s style is often related to the surrealism of Buñuel, and Angel de fuego has been compared to Los olvidados (1950). Her work might also be compared to that of Paul Leduc, especially films like Frida, naturaleza viva (1984) and Latino Bar (1991), since each shares a critical exploration of the female body, uses sparse dialogue and has protagonists who are simultaneously social victims and rebels. Rothenberg’s film adapts the classical tragedy, with allegorical characters and a tragic hero who experiences anagnorisis, exacts revenge and commits suicide. But the pivotal scene of transformation might be hard for the unskilled viewer to catch. In contrast, the parallel scene in Danzon, marked when Julia buys an ice cream from “Nieves La Anagnorisis,” gives the viewer more clues to the transformation. Rubén has cut his hair making him look even younger, and Julia makes a visible sign of displeasure, which leads to her return to Mexico City. Angel de fuego does not give the viewer nearly as many clues to Alma’s character, and the dialogue is so sparse that the viewer rarely learns any of the character’s thoughts. The style of these films has a direct impact on their connection with a Mexican audience. Danzon was created to be a crowd pleaser, whereas Angel de fuego falls within the tradition of the New Latin American Cinema of using film to create a sense of unrest and social dis-ease in the viewer.

These films fall in the middle of the spectrum of feminist to sexist films directed by this generation, and they present us with a complex and partial feminism. Other films from this generation provide more blatant examples of why we should de-sign women directors as implicitly feminist. Similarly, a number of films directed by Mexican men suggest that feminist possibilities are not tied to the sex of the director. Perhaps the most extreme example of a sexist woman-directed film is Maryse Sistach’s Anoche soñe contigo (1992), her second feature. David Maciel, in an article on contemporary Mexican cinema, draws attention to the film as an example of women directors making films with themes typically reserved for men: “Women directors have also branched out in themes traditionally addressed by men. Such is very
much the case of Anoche soñé contigo (Last night I dreamed of you, 1992), she focuses on the sexual awakening of a teenage boy in the tradition of The Summer of ’42 (“Serpientes y Escaleras” 109). This film represents a feminist loss from Sistach’s previous film Los pasos de Ana (1988) featuring a divorced woman who decides to become a movie director. In her second film Sistach does not simply enter the male world of movie themes by focusing on a boy’s budding adolescent sexuality; she films a sexist and offensive story about a boy, Toto, learning to objectify women thoroughly. When his cousin, Azucena, comes to visit because she is avoiding her married boyfriend, Toto finds the perfect object of his desire. He steals her underwear, spies on her and gropes her body under the dinner table. When he finally ends up having sex with her, any chance that the film had to make a critical statement about gender roles vanishes. As Nissa Torrents explains, the scene is “acceptable soft porn,” and Sistach’s “handling of the theme and her chosen camera placements are indistinguishable from those of male directors” (226). I would further clarify that her sexist objectification of the female body in the film is indistinguishable from those of sexist male directors. At no point does the film waver from a replication of the dominant sexist social structure. The sex scene in this film contrasts directly with screening sex in Angel de fuego and Danzón, both of which allude to sex without actually screening it. In Angel de fuego Alma approaches her father, and they begin to kiss as he caresses her when the shot fades. In Danzón Julia and Rubén board the boat where he lives and works, obviously preparing for sex. They enter the boat, and the camera pans to the bow holding the shot where the boat lulls against the water for a few seconds. Unlike Sistach, Novaro and Rotberg both shoot sex scenes that avoid objectifying the female body.

There are other less extreme examples of women in the industry who have not advanced feminism. Laura Esquivel, the screenwriter for Como agua para chocolate (1992), based on her homonymous novel, created a sexist story where women’s destinies are bound up in their emotions and desires to be with a man. An international success, the film is often associated with the rebirth of Mexican cinema, and critics have described it as a film with feminist characters different from the stereotypes of the past (Maciel, “Serpientes y Escaleras” 108 and Stavans 846). But, as Juliann Burton-Carvajal explains, in an article on patriarchy and Mexican melodrama: “Beneath this film’s captivating charm clings a misogynistic, sometimes racially inflected residue” (226). Claudine Potvin also finds the film lacking in feminist potential: “Al final, toda posibilidad de un lenguage auténtico de resistencia o de transgresión formal desaparece bajo una visión convencional de una cultura de mujer presentada como estática y unidimensional” (65). So what some have heralded as a film that celebrates women, others have critically examined and found as a source of patriarchal reaffirmation. Added to the ambivalently feminist work of Esquivel is the work of filmmakers like Marcela Fernández Vielante, who as mentioned above, consciously position themselves outside of a feminist agenda and who are proud to have made films that do not represent women’s issues. These examples underscore the variety of gender roles—from liberating to oppressive—created by women directors.

Arguably the Mexican male directors who began to investigate female image production in their films helped create an audience for films that focus on female identity. Charles Ramírez Berg, in Cinema of Solitude, devotes an entire chapter to films from the 1970s directed by men that transgress traditional women’s images: “[t]hese films represent an ideological shift in which women were not stereotypically portrayed as victimas del pecado (victims of sin, a title of a 1950 fallen-woman film), but as victims of an oppressive system” (72). Directors like Jaime Humberto Hermosillo have released a number of films that question dominant gender codes, and especially those of women and homosexuals. His La tarea (1992), shot on video using a few extremely long takes, is a thoughtful and complex meditation on issues of objectification and sexual manipulation. Virginia has to shoot a final video project for class so she invites an old boyfriend, Marcelo, over to make a video of them having sex, hiding the camera. After he discovers it and angrily threatens to leave, Virginia is forced to admit that she was using him. But Marcelo changes his mind and decides to help her finish the project anyway. Then, in a complete shock to the spectator, we learn that both characters are actually a married couple. The twists on representation, voyeurism and objectification make the film an incisive critique of middle-class gender roles. More recently, Hermosillo’s De noche vienes, Esmeralda (1997) treats a woman married simultaneously to five men who is arrested for bigamy. The sensitive treatment of the main character and the depiction of men who are willing to share a woman that they love present the viewer with an interesting critique of machismo.
and patriarchy. In addition to the films by Hermosillo, Paul Leduc's *Frida, naturaleza viva* (1984) intricately exposes the complicated life of Frida Kahlo and her personal investigation of identity.29 Also, Alberto Isaac's *Mujeres insomnias* (1995) is a direct attack on patriarchy and the confines of women's identity as wives and mothers. In this film three women leave their children and their husbands in order to find their own destinies. These examples are only a sample of films by male Mexican directors that investigate and critique the traditional role of women in society. Many other films are critical of *machismo* and standard gender codes for men, which I would argue contributes to the feminist project.

The contemporary Mexican film industry continues to hold exciting opportunities for women directors and for feminist films. While neither *Danzón* nor *Ángel de fuego* are examples of radical feminist filmmaking, they both move beyond the reductive virgin-whore dichotomy which has marked much of Mexico's film history. *Danzón* questions little in a very subtle suggestion that women should break from tradition, whereas *Ángel de fuego* is intense and highly critical of the social constraints placed on Mexico's lower classes. These films allow us to (de)sign women directors by calling our attention to the multiple factors that contribute to a film's feminist potential. Moreover, the feminist films directed by male directors and the sexist images filmed by women directors further suggest that our study of the rebirth of Mexican film must be sensitive to the variety and diversity of these films.

**NOTES**

1 Research funding for this article came, in part, from the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University. Thanks to Henry Morello and to Christina Tourino for comments on an earlier version.

2 Maciel and Hetshfield state: "Unique in the history of Mexico's cinema is the fact that over one-third of the directors of the generation of the 1990s are women, including María Novaro, Busi Cortés, Dana Rotberg, Sabina Berman, Guita Schyfter, Maryse Sistach, and..."

3 Access to the media files for directors like María Novaro, Dana Rotberg, Guita Schyfter, Busi Cortés and Maryse Sistach housed at the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Cinematográficos affiliated with the University of Guadalajara revealed an overwhelming tendency to bring up the issue of feminism in interviews with these directors appearing in newspapers and magazines such as *Díctate, El Universal, Escéptico* and *El Nacional*.

4 Francesca Miller finds that one particular defining feature of Latin American feminism, present in Mexico and throughout the region, is that women's movements tend to consider the fight for women's rights to be integrally connected to social reform.

5 An exception to this common practice, María Rojo, an actress who has worked with Jaime Humberto Hermosillo and who starred in *Danzón*, does not consider the term "feminist" to be negative and has applied the term to herself and her work (Rashkin 183).

6 The widespread disavowal of the term "feminist" and the various feminist positions argued by Mexican women's groups frustrate any use of the word, and the term can only be applied heuristically. I use the word to describe a position intent on changing the role of women in society by disrupting patriarchy and gender inequality.

7 Two excellent analyses of traditional women's roles in Mexico and women's resistance to them can be found in Franco and Castillo. Even after the Mexican Revolution and campaigns for women's suffrage, the role of women in Mexico remained limited to positions vis-à-vis the family. Jean Franco, in *Plucking Women*, explains that despite the progress of women's movements "official ideology would once again turn to the idealized patriarchal family which the mass media and cinema were now able to represent and transmit to a population that literature had never reached" (60). She further clarifies, though, that there was a vast difference between the actual structure of family and that represented in the media. "And it was this that once again involved women in bitter struggles for the space in which to record their story" (ibid.). Castillo's *Easy Women* looks specifically at the roles of women prostitutes in Mexican culture.

8 Landeta made a comeback to directing with *Nocturno a Rosario* in 1991, her fourth feature released after a forty year hiatus. See Rashkin for an overview of these directors and Patricia Torres San Martin on the difficulties of doing research on women directors from this period.

9 A complete text of the proceedings can be found in Norma Iglesias and Rosa Linda Fraguas' *Miradas de mujer*.

10 This position contrasts with that of Marta Lamas from *debate feminista*, who would consider such an attitude *mujerista* and essentialist.
Many have critiqued debate feminista's feminist agenda as elitist as well, which contributes to the notion that Mexican feminism is complex.

Given that many directors disavow the feminista project, their audiences may be lead to interpret the images on screen in a less confrontational way, opting to read the images as supportive of the status quo. Norma Iglesias conducted an audience study of Damash and found that audience reaction was mixed and that few spectators changed their perspective on gender relations after seeing the film.

One of the most significant contributions of recent Mexican films that deal with the construction of women's identity is the subtle transformation of gender stereotypes. There is a substantial body of films, by both men and women, which refuse to cast women merely as virgin mothers or sinful whores. Ángel de fuego, Damash, Jaime Humberto Hermosillo's De noche viene, Lomendola, and Alberto Isaac's Mujeres inusitadas, to name only a few, offer feminist potential because they problematize this traditional dichotomy, and they expose the social limitations placed on women's identity. While this may seem to be rather inconsequential or limited for a feminist revision of gender roles in film, it is important to bear in mind the overdetermined emphasis on this binary throughout the history of Mexican cinema. Carl J. Mora explains this past: "The 'bad vis-à-vis good woman' dichotomy has perpetuated the traditional, subservient status of women in Latin Catholic societies by assigning them well-defined social roles...[In a specifically Mexican style, the] 'good woman was personified in the saintly mother of the family melodrama film genre, while her disreputable sister, the prostitute, formed the basis of another durable genre featuring libidinous rumberas'" (228). Hershfield points out that the polarity of good versus bad woman is not unique to Mexican cinema, but that these female archetypes do take on a specific form of gender mapping in Mexican film (13–14). The uniquely national configuration of the good versus bad woman in Mexico is coded in the country's colonial past. According to Ana López: "The Mexican nation is defined, on the one hand, by Catholicism and the Virgin Guadalupe, the Virgin Mother and patron saint, and, on the other, by the Chingona, the national betrayal of Doña Marina—also known as La Malinche or Malintzin Tenepal—the Aztec princess who submitted to Cortés and handed her people over to the conquistadores" (256–57). The role of these figures in shaping national gender consciousness has been well documented by a number of scholars. Critical studies of these figures can be found in Franco and Castillo, with Hershfield, Ramirez Berg and López relating these images directly to the cinema.

IMCINE stands for Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía. It was founded in 1982 in order to oversee production, distribution and exhibition of Mexican films (Maciel, "Cinema and the State" 211).

A recent example of the overt censorship of the Mexican state in film production occurred when Luis Estrada's La ley de Herodes (1999) was held from release. The film had been funded in part by IMCINE, who later tried to hold the film from release due to a controversial ending. An all-out critique of PRI, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the film was ostensibly held back for "technical reasons." The outcry was so tremendous that it did eventually screen and actually won 10 Ariel (the equivalent of an Oscar in Mexico). Nevertheless, the case of La ley must remind us that IMCINE exercises control over the films it funds. For an article on the censorship of the film, see Simeon Tegel.

For a brief history of the dance, see Daniel García Blanco. The dance originated in Cuba in 1791, and it was introduced to Mexico in the early 20th-century through the port town of Veracruz.

Gabriela Yanes Gómez confirms that Susy creates a crisis for Julia's sexuality (48).

Rashkin covers the debate over whether Damash is feminist or feminine (178–84). Norma Iglesias conducted an audience study of the film and found that the viewer's reaction to the film's gender politics was mixed.

Rashkin points out that in contrast to the work of other women directors the "question of feminism" never arose in relation to Rosberg's film (211).

The selection is available on the web through the Dirección de Carrera de Licenciado en Ciencias de la Comunicación at the Tecnológico de Monterrey (http://www.myitfom.mx/dilecarreraslice/lecin_1inf.php). It is noteworthy that this list includes two films directed by women, whereas the AFI list of the top 100 films does not include a single film directed by a woman.

For a study of documentary in Latin America, see Burton.

Much detailed and insightful scholarship exists on the role of melodrama in Mexican cinema, and Burton-Carvajal's article gives a good overview of the various scholarly works on the topic see especially her section on "Cross Cultural Naming" (190–207).

Carol Donelan has an opposing view on this film; she considers Leduc's Frida as anti-feminist, where Frida's sexuality is depicted as decadent and monstrous (7).

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José Vasconcelos, Compromised Utopianism and the Necessity of Failure

Navegaré por las olas civiles con remos que no pesan.
—Ramón López Velarde, “La suave patria” (1916)

José Vasconcelos is best known on two counts: the racial theories set forth in his influential essay *La raza cósmica* (1925) and his patronage of the Mexican Muralist movement. Vasconcelos effected the latter patronage when he was official arbiter of culture—a “caudillo cultural,” as Enrique Krauze describes him in the title of his book, *Caudillos culturales en la revolución mexicana*—during the euphoric years immediately following the Mexican Revolution. During that period Vasconcelos held several important posts, first as Rector of the National University and later as Minister of Public Education under the presidency of Alvaro Obregón (1921–25).

Vasconcelos proved to be both an outstanding administrator and a clever institutional visionary, and he exerted tremendous sway over the shifting sands of the Mexican intellectual landscape. President Alvaro Obregón’s was the first stable government since the end of the Revolution, and it operated without the disadvantages, or the benefits, of an ingrained bureaucracy, which had been purged by the war. Because of this bureaucratic vacuum, Vasconcelos found himself with an unprecedented *carte blanche*: he managed to turn the Ministry of Education, which before the Revolution had been an underfunded, civil service backwater, into the centerpiece of the new government. Roberto González Echevarría has pointed out that the strategies of the educator and of the dictator have much in common, and Vasconcelos is an interesting case in point (González Echevarría 14–15). Through the power of the Revolutionary dictator Obregón, Vasconcelos became an educational dictator.

Taking his cue from his nearest model, the Soviet post-revolutionary government, Vasconcelos patterned his educational project and his administrative persona after Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, the