

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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ARM IN ARM, DOWN THE STREET (1956)

Del Brazo y Por La Calle

Juan Bustillo Oro

Genre : Drama

Link to film: <https://youtu.be/LEGGXZFo9NM>

OVERVIEW

Juan Bustillo Oro's film, *Arm in Arm Down the Street (Del brazo y por la calle)* (1956) is the story of a young married couple, María and Alberto, who have great dreams, but who live in grinding poverty in the harsh, noisy, industrial neighborhood of Nonoalco / Tlatelolco, which is slowly robbing both of their human dignity and, in the case of María, her sanity. What makes this film unique is the fact that Bustillo Oro uses the Expressionistic techniques he employed in his earlier works of Mexican Expressionism and film noir, to create the sensory conditions of the experience of the living in an industrial part of Mexico City (Tlatelolco) near a huge train terminal and the Nonoalco bridge, and the psychological consequences. María, who hails from a family from the wealthy (and snobbish) Mexican elite, married the impecunious but ambitious artist, Alberto. They are intensely in love, and both have the best of intentions to make their marriage a success. However, the grinding monotony of poverty, the bill collectors, and the invasiveness of the city with its noise, heat, smoke and grime are pushing María into a state of anxiety, despair, and paranoia.

Trapped at home, she comments that "Every day I must endure the only view I have: the terrible human misery that surrounds me: naked children, totally insensate women, men turned into beasts by alcohol, and in all, everyone is hungry" (from *Del brazo y por la calle*). Alberto's pride and ambition push him to make rash and ultimately selfish decisions, and above all, make him blind to the consequences of his selfish point of view. The film is emotionally difficult to watch, but as opposed to the films based on plays by Eugene O'Neill or Tennessee Williams, Bustillo Oro's film, like most of the great films from Mexico's Epoca de Oro del Cinema Mexicano, has a life-affirming ending with a message of hope, strength, and salvation.

While many of Mexican Cinema's Golden Age films are melodramas, comedies, film noir, or westerns, *Arm in Arm Down the Street* is an example of Naturalism. In a literary sense, the film is in a direct line of descent from the novels and novellas of the naturalist writers, Emile Zola, Gustave Flaubert, and George Gissing in that it shows the inner workings, dreams, contradictions and vulnerabilities of people in a state of relative powerlessness. In the case of George Gissing, his female protagonists are often ones driven by poverty to degrading behaviors; but it shows (as Jane Austen was at pains to always point out), that women had to muzzle themselves with respect to frankness and honesty in order to have any chance whatsoever at survival (aka, a "good match"). Mary Elizabeth Braddon's female characters also tend to fall to that level as well. Without a "good match," there was essentially nothing to keep you from falling into a pit; a veritable hell on earth. In that sense, many of the naturalists and sensationalists (Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Mrs. Ellen Wood), are in essence writing cautionary tales about what fate will be befall you if you marry badly. Although they write to question and undermine the practice of "The Season," there is a sense that they can't change reality, and so the novels become normative in the sense that they simply equip people with knowledge and a cold-eyed stare at the practice to arm themselves to play the game to win.

Del brazo y por la calle is really no different. While its super-realism / naturalism engenders comprehension and sympathy (and perhaps even self-knowledge) in the viewer, in the end, most viewers will look at María and think, "Look what you could have avoided if you had not been dumb enough to marry an artist!" In terms of the clichés surrounding "artistic temperament," one can argue that María is even more temperamental than Alberto. He is unflappable. However, that is primarily because he has learned to insulate himself a bit from reality. It is only when reality intrudes does he face his own part in the drama that resulted in such profound alienation and emotional agony for his wife.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Maria	Beautiful young woman from a wealthy family in the Mexican elite
Alberto	Poor, idealistic painter who is passionately in love with María
Mexico City	Credited in the credits as the third main actor

SYNOPSIS

María and Alberto marry against her wealthy parents' wishes. Alberto is a poor artist who dreams aloud with María about fame and success, but who has to work as a commercial artist for an ad agency to make ends meet. They live in Tlatelolco, an industrial part of Mexico City marked by noise, pollution, and poverty. Maria tries to make a home for Alberto, but the noise, glaring lights, and poverty push her to the point of mental breakdown. One night, enticed by a female neighbor to attend a party, María drinks too much and passes out. When she wakes up, she thinks she may have been assaulted and is horrified. In the meantime, Alberto is at the point of jumping from the Nonoalco Bridge, on which the noisy elevated train passes, when he is stopped from suicide by the thought of the deep love he holds for María. Back home, María confesses what happened and they decide, with God as their guide, to make a fresh start.

THE STORY

Mexico City: A varied landscape. The film begins with a narrated voice-over that takes the viewer on a guided tour of Mexico City, from the elite Polanco area to University City, to Chapultepec Park, other locations, and finally to the grimy and almost overwhelming train terminal at Tlatelolco and the highway bridge near Nonoalco. In this, it is similar to many openings of film noir and other Expressionist films. *Arm in Arm Down the Street (Del brazo y por la calle)* marks a crossover from Expressionism to Naturalism, and employed in the service of a psychological drama. Film noir was still popular in 1956 when this film was released and films exploring people reaching the tipping point were popular. Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) and *Vertigo* (1958), and then there was *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957). Of course, the exploration of the mind of a madman was already well-trodden ground in the world of German Expressionism with *M* by Fritz Lang in 1931. What is particularly engaging about the Mexican "Golden Cinema" is that it seems to be very interested in probing the psychological pressures that occur to people who are in vulnerable situations. Perhaps one of the most famous instances of that is *María Candelaria* which traces the experiences of a young indigenous woman who sells flowers in Lake Xochimilco near Mexico City, and what happens to her when a powerful business person has lecherous intent. She becomes a martyr and at times the movie is very painful to watch, but it does explore injustice and personal despair. It has a happy ending, and values of decency, loyalty and fidelity are reinforced, which gave it redeeming qualities, whereas *Los Olvidados (The Forgotten)* filmed in 1950 in the same neighborhood by the naturalized Mexican citizen and filmmaker, Luis Buñuel, did not. *Los Olvidados* is more of an actualization of existentialist philosophy, whereas *Del brazo y por la calle* is, at heart, a normative melodrama, although it, like all of Bustillo Oro's work, has subversive qualities that probe the nature of the human spirit and explores the margins between madness and sanity.

Wedding scene. The plot is very straight-forward. María and Alberto marry in spite of the objections of her family. She happily gives up a gorgeous spectacle of a wedding to kneel in a

down-at-the-heels local church and be united in holy matrimony by a kindly priest. Despite her insistence that she would LOVE to live in poverty with the love of her life, the realities of deafening traffic and train noises, circular saw construction day and night, hifi record player music playing next door at night, the drip-drip-dripping of the faucet that cannot be turned completely off, María is slowly going mad. On top of that, the house is never completely dark – there is the light pollution from outside that can never be fully blocked out, and it consists of flashing lights, not just a single, steady light (as a security light might be).

The city engulfs the apartment. The city intrudes into her space – it's dusty and hot during the winter, cold and damp in the winter – and she is constantly exhausted by the city itself. The apartment has no labor-saving devices, and she must cook all her meals on a small gas cookstove in a tiny kitchen that has just one poorly functioning faucet. She takes her washing, mending, and sewing to the rooftop terrace where she sits, with needle and thread, waiting for her husband to come home, and tell her of more failed attempts to sell his art.

A special gift. They're behind on the bills, and she feels pressure and humiliation on all sides. She's used to a different life, and when Alberto brings her a boxed gift, she is disappointed to see that it contains a blouse – it's hard to see what she saw wrong with it, except that it's very simple and looks like something one would wear at home to do work.

Dinner in an elegant restaurant. The night Alberto surprises María with a gift (the simple blouse), he also takes her out to eat. They go by taxi to an upscale restaurant where all the elite go to dine. As they start to approach the entrance, María grabs Alberto by the hand and hisses, "We can't eat here! My nieces just walked by in their furs and jewels – I can't be seen in the restaurant looking like this and wearing this cheap dress!"

Alberto is offended, but goes along with it. As they walk down the sidewalk, he stops for a moment and pulls out a wad of bills (Mexican pesos). "Do you see this money? I had intended it for us – to have a wonderful evening and to enjoy ourselves. That's what money is for. For enjoyment. But, we're not enjoying ourselves, so I might as well give it to someone who will." He then throws the money onto the pavement.

María is shocked. "Alberto! What are you thinking? We're behind on our bills and we need the money!" She does not chase after the money, though. She just stares at it on the ground. Back home, in the apartment, not too surprisingly, she has a complete breakdown, sobbing with frustration and expressing her sense of humiliation.

Dancing cheek to cheek: On a different evening, or perhaps the same one, María and Alberto take advantage of the fact that the music from the radio next door is so loud that they can hear it in their apartment and on the roof. They dance on the rooftop, and the camera cut to a scene of the couple dancing in elegant ballroom outfits, in a dancefloor of a stunningly beautiful grand hotel. Their dancing is joyous and free, but cut short when the shriek of metal on metal brings her back to earth.

A disagreeable dinner. In the meantime, their bills mount up. María prepares Alberto's meals each day on a two-burner cookstove. One day, as Alberto sits down to eat, María announces to him that the light will be cut off tomorrow. Alberto snaps angrily that she could have waited to tell him. She tells him how frustrated she is and she can't eat. Alberto holds her spoon and patronizingly asks her if he needs to feed her like a baby. He discounts her panic which only makes her feel more panicked.

Defacing her portrait. He does, however, land a job in designing the outside of a packet of LUXE-brand cigarettes. Unfortunately, though, he is quite blocked, principally because he considers the job to be completely beneath him. He is using his beautiful portrait of María as a model for the art. However, in frustration and anger with the job itself, he takes oil pastel and marks writes "She smokes LUXE!" on the canvas. María sees it and is devastated. She tries to

clean off the pastel, but only smears it. Metaphorically, this is a great act of violence toward María – if not physical, it is existential, as he mars the representation of her beingness.

Rejection at the ad agency. María and Alberto have a conversation in which he shows her the latest design for the cigarette packet. He describes how the client did not like it, and they commiserate over the poor taste of the client. It is a vision of a couple that is communicating and connecting. However, the peace does not last. He must redo the art in order to meet the deadline. He prepares to go back to the office to work on it, and she snaps. María begs him to stay home and with her, and threatens that if he leaves, he will be sorry. He said he must make the deadline and that she was being ridiculous for pressuring him to earn money, but then when he does so, she threatens to leave him.

Alberto goes to the office. He does not succumb to her entreaties and goes to the office. He works at the office and notices that it is midnight. In the meantime, At María snaps and ends up in the party where there is so much music and dancing. María is served drinks, gets drunk, passes out, and is carried off to a bedroom, completely passed out. In a masterful touch, Alberto tips over the inkwell and ink drips onto María's photo at precisely the time she is being carried into the bedroom. When she comes to, her blouse has been ripped. She has no idea what happened. She drags herself home, but instead of entering, she is overcome by shame and remorse. At the tracks with an approaching train, she intends to run in front of it and be killed. At the last moment, she changes her mind and goes home.

No one is home. Alberto finishes the sketch and walks home, but no one is there. He is surprised, but then remembers that María had said she would go home. So, he goes to the home of María's parents. The lights are out and he does not want to wake them up. He comes to terms to the fact that he has lost María and he realizes he cannot live without her. He is filled with despair and regret as he realizes how his behavior contributed to her emotional collapse. He is on the point of killing himself, but decides to go home. María comes in a bit later, and Alberto sees her just as Alberto is coming home. He asks what has happened, and she says she does not know but confesses what she does know, which totally outrages Alfredo. María also confesses she was about to jump in front of an oncoming train, but decided to die in a more just way: she wanted Alberto to kill her. A long discussion ensues. He says he is filled with shame that he cannot keep her happy. What happened to her assertion that she would love to live with a poor artist in poverty? She asks, what happened to your claim you'd be rich and famous as an artist, and then teach at the university?

A recommitment: They both talk about the desire to end it all. Then, they start reminiscing about their lives before and after they married; their time together paddling boats, picnics, walks in the park, and then their wedding – and the church. The memory of the church gives them courage to say that they need to trust God and start down a path of hope and togetherness. They also affirm their intense love for each other, and that life together means more than anything else in the world.

Arm in arm: As they kiss each other in a moment of recommitment, the alarm goes off and it is 8 am, time for Alberto to go to the office for a meeting at the ad agency. The film ends as María runs down the sidewalk to bring Alberto his canvas to take to the client (he had forgotten it). And, they walk, hand in hand, down the street.

THEMES

Naturalism in cinema. As perhaps one of the most innovative and daring films of the entire Epoca de Oro del Cine Mexicano (Golden Age of Mexican Cinema), *Del brazo y por la calle*. Its subtlety and relative obscurity have resulted in the fact that it seems to be an underappreciated film. And yet, there are aspects of the film that make it unique, not only for being an intensely innovative example of Naturalism in cinema that brings in the city itself as perhaps the main protagonist, but for functioning as a time capsule. The film was shot in the Mexico City industrial

areas of Nonoalco and Tlatelolco, which, at the time of the filming in 1955, was an industrial area criss-crossed by train tracks and busy elevated bridges and highways. It was an ugly agglomeration of Bauhaus-appearing multi-story stucco buildings, plazas with low-rent businesses (pool halls, etc.), cheap hotels, incessant construction, and pockets of grinding poverty where poor children did not get the nutrition or medical attention they needed. There were also vestiges of the past – a small church dating back to colonial times, constructed over the old Tlatelolco city-state that once rivaled Tenochtitlán. There was also a charming lake, Lake Texcoco, which rivaled Xichimilco, but unlike Xochimilco, Lake Texcoco was drained. It is interesting to note that Bustillo Oro filmed in Nonoalco, the same location as Buñuel's classic (but immediately banned) film, *Los Olvidados* (1950) which incorporated the story of juvenile delinquents. The scenes of the trains and the tracks upon which María trips as she returns from the market are reminiscent of Juan Rulfo's stunning photographs of the trains of Mexico City which he published in 1955. In Rulfo's photographs, the trains simultaneously evoke the rapid leap to modernity of Porfirio Díaz's presidency, along with a sense of its impact on people's ways of surviving against all odds.

Costumbrismo urbano: One can consider Bustillo Oro's film an example of "costumbrismo urbano" (to coin a term), because the Tlatelolco of 1956 (as in the case of the pre-Conquest Tlatelolco) no longer exists. Much was demolished in order to make way for utopian urban projects – a utopia that never arrived, given that Tlatelolco was the site of a massacre of students by the military in 1968, and then the site of mass death in 1985 when the relatively new buildings collapsed during the 1985 massacre.

Conflicting and Contradictory Traditions: The Tlatelolco of the 1956 *Del brazo y por la calle* seethes with contradictory energies: on the one hand there is the charming and perfectly preserved colonial church with its stations of the cross, colonial carvings, statues of saints and religious effigies of Christ and also the Virgin Mary. On the other hand, there is the overwhelming cacophony of the burgeoning city with its relentless trains, automobiles, construction equipment, which exerts a devastating impact fragile, idealist dreamers whose love is tested by poverty and all its attendant conditions.

The industrial city: At the heart of where María and Alberto live is a massive train terminal built during the boom of railroad construction in all of Mexico. All tracks led to Mexico City, and all tracks converged in Tlatelolco, where María and Alberto live. Although it is necessary for modern growth, the resulting noise of trains, trucks, highways, along with the air pollution, are inescapable. When María sits on her azotea, the bit of roof that serves as a patio, she places herself in the middle of the unzoned chaos. She sits in a chair attempting to mend her husband's fraying shirts, a metaphor for how she tries to keep the cloth of her psyche intact, but ultimately is unsuccessful as it tears away.

The noise of the city: Bustillo Oro's soundtrack contains the invasive sounds of the city: the trains, truck horns, cars honking, piercing circular saw sounds, dripping faucet, loud radio next door – strangely faceless, as though the people have turned into machines, or faceless agents of one's own destruction (serving alcohol, taking advantage of helplessness). To live in this part of the city grinds down and extinguishes the human spirit (hot, pavement and hard buildings, the only plants or gardens are on the roof) – constant sounds of industry and construction (which ultimately destroy and disassemble the humans living in it). The penetrating screech of metal on metal is enough to shock María out of even her most pleasant daydreams. For example, she dances with Alberto in the rooftop and she transports herself through her imagination to an elegant ballroom in a magical part of Mexico City. It is a vivid excursion which is shattered by the train sounds, and she startles and begins to weep as she realizes where she is.

Art turned to commercial purposes destroys the artists (and their loved ones): Alberto wants to become a famous artist through his own paintings and effort in the art world. However, he is not successful in selling paintings, so he finds work developing graphics for an ad agency. Alberto is blocked and angry as he attempts to develop art for LUXE cigarettes, and in the

process he engages in destructive acts such as defacing María's portrait, inadvertently knocking his ink well over and dropping ink onto María's photograph.

Poverty and anxiety: When Alberto proposes to her, María enthusiastically embraces the idea of living with him in the poor, industrial area of town where he scratches out a living as an artist. However, María's idea of what her life would be like is romantic in the extreme, and it is only a few months later that the wedding vows in the small church, the exhilaration of the new, "exotic" apartment are a distant memory. As María attempts to turn off the tap in the kitchen that creates the constant dripping sound that she cannot escape in any part her home, she starts to tremble and weep in a state of intense anxiety and despair. Likewise, Alberto starts to harbor negative thoughts. His approach is to try to disregard reality and hang on to fantasies about fabulous success and wealth by selling paintings. Finally, he finds work in an advertising agency, but he dislikes what he is doing, and he, too, feels tremendous anxiety.

Shame: Both María and Alberto suffer from deep-seated shame after they are married and making a life in the poor industrial zone of Nonoalco. First, María feels deep shame about her lower socio-economic status. Her family has rejected her and will not visit her. Further, when she sees two mink-draped nieces entering the elegant restaurant where Alberto has decided to take her, she begs Alberto to go home rather than face the humiliation of being seen in her plain cotton dress. Alberto feels shame that he has not been able to be recognized as a great artist with gallery shows and great sales. He is ashamed to be working on designing a cigarette package, and his feelings of humiliation block his creativity.

Disappointment and alienation: Emotions of disappointment and shattered dreams are evoked through the cinematography. The barren urban landscape engulfs María as she walks across the train tracks and trip. The night is equally barren, with no natural beauty. Instead, the blinking neon light across the street, HOTEL, reinforces the sense that life is precarious and provisional. In a sense, this is the dark side of the Porfiriano dream, the idyllic and utopian progress that President Porfirio Díaz had ushered in a half a century earlier have turned into an alienating wasteland of nothing but harsh industry and blighted nature.

Love: At the heart of the film is the love of María and Alberto. Although their love is tested as María descends into anxiety, fear, and suspicion, and Alberto would rather deny reality than face it with practical steps toward his goals, it prevails in the end. The scenes in which María makes baseless accusations that Alberto is having an affair and has fallen in love with someone who is still fresh and attractive are made more intense with Bustillo Oro's use of chiaroscuro for the close-ups. Alberto's attempts to comfort María are depicted in medium two-shots directly to the camera, which suggests stability.

Social Class. *Del brazo y por la calle* the story of María and Alberto, who marry in spite of María's parents' exhortations to the contrary. Wealthy parents never want to see their daughters marry impecunious artists, and it is even more the case in highly stratified Mexico where social hierarchy has been so rigidly enforced it amounts to a caste system. But, love will be love, and all it takes is a little bit of Puck's pansy juice in the eyes, and the beautiful society debutante falls in love with the penniless artist who lives in a noisy apartment that is falling apart at the seams and inhabited by carousing neighbors and sexual predators. The film is about the how the once utopian part of the city that housed the hub of President Porfirio Díaz's immense railway network evolved into a dystopian, Hephaestian inferno around the Nonoalco Bridge, and how that environment slowly chipped away the sanity of the residents. In the end, the strength of their love prevails, but it is not without deep challenges and introspection. The clanging, shrieking, hoarse-throated city breaks down, but in doing so, it reveals the gold within.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

MARIA Born into a wealthy family in the Mexican elite, María falls in love with the passionate artist, Alberto, and she believes his optimistic assertions that he will become famous as an artist, and will sell his paintings for stunning amounts of money and they will live a magical life of art and luxury.

Naïve: María is a bit naïve about the life she is going to face as she falls in love and accepts the offer of marriage from a romantic, passionate artist. Alberto is a decent man and very kind-hearted. However, like the stereotypical artist, he is not practical, nor is he very interested in using his skills for commercial purposes. María embraces his fantasy about their future life and does not question it.

Disappointed: From a wealthy family, María is used to a life of luxury and indolence. It is clear that she does not really have the skills that she needs in her new life – she hardly knows how to cook, sew, or shop for groceries. Thus, she is disappointed that after a year, none of Alberto's promises of a gorgeous house in the city and a little beach house on the coast have come true.

Stressed to the breaking point: Isolation and invasive noise have stressed María. In one scene she explains that she is not able to talk to anyone or have friends – that anyone who knocks on the door is there to collect on their many bills, and that they are always being faced with having their electricity cut off. The shadowy interiors of the house are portrayed in a claustrophobic way, and the noises of the band saw next door, the trains, the honking horns, and the drip of the faucet engulf her.

ALBERTO A talented and idealistic artist who has a dream of becoming famous, selling his paintings for large sums of money, and becoming a professor (like a guru) at a prestigious institute or university. He resents having to “lower himself” in the service of commercial advertising, and his anger and shame about not achieving his original goal make him angry and creatively blocked. He has an enormous level of pride and hates the idea of being humiliated in any way; that makes him refuse any sort of help, but it also makes it hard for him function effectively.

Idealistic: Alberto believes that they will be wealthy soon and that he will be able to sell his paintings, attending openings, and have a post in a university. His ideas about marriage are equally idealistic. He does not understand that change, isolation, and harsh living conditions have had a profound emotional effect on María. He dismisses her threats and accusations in a way that he should, except that he never has a real conversation with her.

Romantic: Alberto embodies the romantic artist who confuses fantasy for reality, and seems to think that just saying something will happen will make it occur. He is able to dance with María on the rooftop and pretend they are in an elegant ballroom, and it does not bother him that they are not. He is not as bothered by the harsh realities of life. However, he does need María's love, and it is only when he realizes that he could lose it forever that he begins to see the world through María's eyes and have compassion for her.

Proud: Alberto's pride keeps him in his fantasies rather than confronting the reality. What appears to be an easy-going demeanor actually masks an extreme pride and desire to protect his honor. For Alberto, honor means painting for art (and not commerce), and having a beautiful wife who fulfills all the traditional gender roles that he expects.

Patient: Alberto is patient with María and does not respond in an aggressive way as she becomes increasingly paranoid and stressed due to the noise, heat, poverty, and uncertainty of life. He realizes that her family has rejected her for having married him, and he tries to compensate. However, his patience and unwillingness to respond to her accusations and threats

are an example of how trying to sweep something under the rug does not actually mean the problem has gone away. His denial of reality makes it worse rather than better.

Core Values: Both María and Alberto believe in the core values of the Catholic Church, and at the end, they return to their initial marriage vows with the renewed belief that they need to restore their faith in the Church and actually work together. The final scene, where they are walking arm in arm down the street is a wonderful ending because it suggests that they are walking together, eyes open, as a team.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. It has been observed that the city of Mexico City could be considered as one of the main protagonists of the film. How could this be true? What are the aspects of the city that drive the narrative, which is to say the behaviors or mental state of María and Alberto?
2. Social class figures prominently in the film. Select two or three scenes in the film that illustrate the difficulties that María faced due to her parents' refusal to condone the marriage because of the disparities of social class.
3. Select four or five scenes that help illustrate why María suffers an emotional collapse. What happens in them? Why might they be stressful? How do they contrast with her life before her marriage?
4. Alberto is an artist, and as such, his primary goal is to create worlds, illusions, dreams, and emotionally compelling works. Explain why being a commercial artist, whose main job is to produce art for marketing, could be painful to an artists whose goals are to produce high art that would be shown in a gallery (and not on a cigarette packet, for example).

ILLUSTRATIVE SCENES



In the opening scenes, the narrator takes the viewer on a tour of Mexico City and its wide and diverse array of neighborhoods and communities. This is a few of the Polanco district, renowned for its leafy trees, wide avenues, and prosperous businesses.



This is a view of an outdoor street market where individuals in working class neighborhoods throng together to purchase goods. Bustillo Oro places the camera at an angle to increase the dynamism.



As we progress through Mexico City, the camera angles become more pronounced and the views of Mexico City are askew, suggesting that the city itself can cause disorientation and alienation.



Alberto and María kneel inside the small, colonial-era church located in the poor, industrial Tlotelolco District of Mexico City, where Alberto lives.



Alberto, a painter, has high hopes for his art. He is standing in studio, the light at his back, and his stretched canvases and art supplies around him. He has a painting on the easel – intended for fine art galleries (and not commercial art).



María discovers another tear in a shirt which she must mend. She is standing on the azotea (rooftop patio) where she spends much of her time hand-sewing clothes. The disintegration of the fabric echoes her own mental disintegration.



Working by the light from below, María huddles near the skylight, still mending clothing. She is still on the azotea (rooftop patio), and in the distance one can see the neon lights, demonstrating that artifice and human constructions have completely overwhelmed / negated nature.



Alfredo playfully claps for his dinner. María responds, seriously concerned that perhaps she has displeased him. He does not quite grasp that her failure to play along is an early symptom of her anxiety and depression.



Outside the elegant restaurant Alberto selected for their evening of fine dining, María catches sight of two nieces, both wearing mink stoles. She is ashamed to be seen by them.



Alberto comfort María who is distressed and nervous after noise, bills, and other stressors. She is crying for help.



María observes poor children playing in the dirt and trash in her neighborhood of Nonoalco, just past the train tracks and under the elevated highway bridge. She notices one boy is disabled. All seem to be hungry. She leaves her paper bag containing bread for them. *“Every day I must endure the only view I have: the terrible human misery that surrounds me: naked children, totally insensate women, men turned into beasts by alcohol, and in all, everyone is hungry.”*



Alberto and María on the banks of a river as they talk about their hopes and dreams.



María tries to block out the sound of the dripping faucet, the steam engines, the cars, and the screamingly loud circular saw from construction next door.



Bustillo Oro's chiaroscuro rendering of the rapidly moving trains that crossed by on several tracks at the same time in the nearby train terminal.



María is served drinks at the neighbor's party, and she collapses.



At the very same time, Alberto is inking his drawing for the meeting the next morning. The bottle tips and ink falls onto the photo of María he was using as a model.



The bridge at Nonoalco where Alberto considers suicide. The chiaroscuro treatment by Bustillo Oro gives it a feeling of being in an inferno.



María implores Alberto to kill her. The chiaroscuro in this shot illustrates the dark turbulence in her mind as well as her words.



Alberto and María reflect on their own emotional and logical errors. They are depicted as separated as each reflects on his or her individual errors. There are shadows on the wall that add to a sense of confusion.



María and Alberto recommit themselves to each other. Morning has broken, and the light of day is shining into their home and their hearts. Bustillo Oro uses light to represent calm optimism and a transformation. The cross-beams are clearly visible, also connoting stability.



The camera pans over the interior of the church where María and Alberto married. The view of the crucifix reinforces the notion of sacrifice for a higher cause, while the Virgin of Guadalupe suggests unconditional love and deliverance from suffering.



Alberto and María walk hand in hand down the street. They are together, and the sky is clear. There is very little traffic, and the weather is calm. The viewer has a sense of optimism and restored balance.