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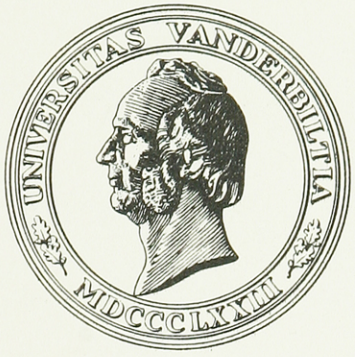

MEXICAN ART OF THE 1970s
IMAGES OF DISPLACEMENT

edited and with an introduction by
Leonard Folgarait

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Nashville, Tennessee 37235

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Editorial and Business Address
Enrique Pupo-Walker, Director
Center for Latin American and Iberian Studies
018 Furman Hall
Box 1806, Station B
Vanderbilt University
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INTRODUCTION

by

Leonard Folgarait
Vanderbilt University

Why "displacement" as the keynote for this collection of essays? The term does not suggest a simple absence or disappearance, nor the phenomenon of a resulting void. Rather, I mean it as do the natural scientists when, for instance, they describe the physical displacement of a gas by a liquid. One material's action on another is not that of mere removal but also of moving into its space. This new occupant of the same space assumes the same shape and volume as that of the previous material because the container or field of the action of displacement remains the same—only the content changes. I do not mean to enter into the sort of commentary that a phenomenologist or a semiologist might apply to this issue. The point is to suggest that historical methodology and art historical methodology might benefit by considering this model of behavior from the natural sciences as a manner by which to approach aspects of historical and artistic change. In the study and research of Mexican art production of this century, the theoretical metaphor of displacement produces a useful working definition of the historical dynamics of such an art.

These propositions about art making cannot be separated from a consideration of history proper. It no longer has to be argued that Mexico provides numerous case studies of the intimate and binding relations between cultural and historical events, between art and politics. From the Revolution of 1910 until the present, this structure of binding obligations has produced art forms which characteristically and purposefully "hold" historical content. This content may not always be explicit, but under scrutiny presents itself in a straightforward manner. Part of the reason for this sort of determination has to do with the extraordinary agreement between Mexican art and politics that they are bound by a common context; that being the overpowering onrush of the Revolution itself.

The Mexican nation has lived with historical displacement since well before modern times. The Pre-Columbian empire prophecized that pale-skinned, bearded gods would someday rule them and replace one civilization with another; displace one content for another. In the early nineteenth century, Mexico suffered the loss of half its territory during the war with the United States and was briefly occupied by a French Imperial government. Toward the end of the reign of President Porfirio Díaz, in the first decade of this century, the nation was almost entirely Europeanized in outward appearance and in the manners and values of its ruling class. As its political and cultural attributes were willingly modeled upon Europe, Mexico's industry and business concerns were largely in the control of foreign entrepreneurs, with North Americans in great evidence. The issue of Mexicanism was purposefully repressed at this time as an embarrassment to the cosmopolitan aspirations of the nation's leaders.

The Revolution of 1910 marked yet another major movement in this series of displacements. This violent upheaval was in many ways a search for a national identity which had been denied by centuries of foreign domination. Mexicanism made a forceful entrance into Revolutionary consciousness, raiding every aspect of the new Mexico as an ideology of displacement: Mexican instead of European or North American, brown skin over white, *machismo* over delicate refinement, violence rather than diplomacy. Popular heroes such as Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa embodied the ruthless yet legitimate movement toward absolute liberation from non-Mexican forces and ideas.

As a highly ironic consequence, the Revolution also effected another sort of displacement, one which left a deeply felt rupture between the various Revolutionary factions themselves. Whereas the ambitious Mexican bourgeoisie saw the removal of Díaz as an opportunity to move the nation forcefully into the future of capitalist industrialism and away from retrograde nineteenth century notions and practices of production, the great masses of *campesinos* wished to model their agrarian production upon Pre-Columbian collective farming practices. This rift produced by one force pointing to the future and another to the past left any sense of the immediate present undefined, insecure and abstract. It left Mexico without an arena for a productive historical and political process. As the present

was displaced by both past and future, no useful definition of national identity could arise which would accommodate the demands of factions so separated by opposing ideologies.

Since the stabilization of the Revolutionary period in the early 1920s, there has been no success and no apparent attempt to close the distance between the poles of this rift of both class-determined temporal and political dimensions, in spite of the apparent proletarianization of the peasantry. Thus, the displacement of a meaningful knowledge and sense of the present and its due political attributes is a highly qualified one, in that no recognizable substitute has been put in place and into action. In this case, displacement does not occur in the technical sense. It accounts for only half of this process and necessarily remains silent on its resolution, as there is none to see.

The rhetoric of the ruling Mexican political party, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucionál* (PRI), has recognized this dilemma, and in doing so, has perpetuated it. Once into the 1930s and 1940s, the government (read the PRI) could point back to the slogans of 1910 as the still legitimate premises of their own contemporary political structure while at the same time withholding the fulfillment of Revolutionary programs of great promise until some distant and undefined future. By this maneuver, the PRI continued the purposeful lack of attention to the respective immediate present, a strategy which still characterizes the regime. The nation has followed this historical vacuum as it would the calm center of a violent storm, sapped of effective energy put also protected from uncontrollable change.

Studies of modern Mexican history make repeated references to a general lack of confidence in the Revolution peaking at around 1940. Since then, the regime has sought to legitimize its claim as a truly Revolutionary power but has had difficulties in measuring up to the later and more ideologically explicit Latin American revolutions, especially those of Cuba and Nicaragua. In spite of great energies directed toward the improvement of its image, the PRI continues to move away from an authentic Revolutionary profile. This movement has left another gap in Mexican politics. The PRI has lately been accused of behaving very closely to the model of the Díaz government. This suggestion of formal and ideological continuity between the Porfiriato and the current regime leads to a brutal and definite displacement of the Revolutionary process by an apparent return to the pre-Revolutionary status guo. One implication is that the Revolution might just as well have never happened, as it made no appreciable difference in the long run—maybe, it did not occur at all.

Of all these various machinations within Mexican politics of the near past, especially during the 1970s, art production has taken account. Not an account of an always coherent subject, nor resulting in its own formal and thematic coherence—image making at this time was subject to a highly fluctuating and heterogeneous condition. Neither was it an especially self-conscious sort of accounting. Nothing, for instance, like the art makers "targeting" their subject and applying judgment from a premeditated position. The structures of cause and effect function in ways which are subconscious and automatic, not predetermined or known in any explicit sense. The images discussed in the present collection of essays were not only allowed and made possible by the historical matrix, but also made necessary.

In such a manner, the art of the 1970s in Mexico received as subject matter the various sorts of displacement I have discussed above. Because this cluster of subjects was the major concern of the Mexican experience, it was present for imaging. By art "imaging" social life, I do not mean to suggest that anything close to accurate reflection happens. We have long been aware of the fallacies of the "art mirrors life" reflection theory. By imaging, I mean the ideological work done on social raw material by the very fact and act of producing an image "of" such material. I would remove the optics metaphor altogether were it not for the sense of refraction. The value of this term is that it means that information experiences a change as it travels the distance between sender and receiver and through its medium. Put simply, to refract a subject by representing or describing it is to no longer have the original subject itself in its full integrity. The critical consumption of art treats and further changes a profoundly reshaped subject. To realize that art work does not innocently communicate as much as transform content saves us from falling victim to the false products of reflection theory. The only sense in which art can be said to "communicate" is that it mediates a shift from transmitted to received information, in the process changing the ratio between the two.

This book does not attempt to uncover the "real" Mexico of the 1970s. It seeks to reveal the means by which images of it were produced; out of which needs, from what sets of expectations. Our subjects are those highly determined representations and commentaries upon Mexican reality. In such a case, the concept of art as part of ideology in formation is useful. One can apply this notion because ideology is present and active in the form of signifying practices, such as art, and is able to reproduce itself, to perpetuate its naturalizing explanations of socially oppressive historical formations. Art coordinates with other ideological structures, working within shared parameters in order to "normalize" real social rupture. Against real history, art production in the context of declining political systems demonstrates a need (self- or unconscious) to deny real experience its own "nonideological" language, its own forms. In the end, however, that very need, if extreme, can fissure under strain and reveal the outlines of the ideology which controls the substance of the very history which produced it.

This sense of denial through "normalization" leads to a final instance of displacement. Because ideology masks its processes so well, because it denies its denials, the issue of the displacement of reality becomes complex beyond the first order. The goal operates at several removes and is worthy of ever more assertive scrutiny. This assertiveness may reduce the toll taken by the action of ideology on an entire people's sense of historical identity and on their ability to improve their social lives. In the case of Mexico, the price has been a high one.

The 1970s was a unique period in Mexican history. Fol-

lowing upon the heels of the 1968 student protest movement and the Mexico City Olympic Games of the same year, 1970 can be said to mark a watershed in Mexican development, a moment calling for a re-evaluation and taking-stock of the contradictory forces which led to the trauma and the glory of 1968. In the visual arts, 1971 marked the end of the Mexican mural movement with the completion of David Alfaro Siqueiros' last mural. The 1970s became for Mexico that decade in which to determine what directions the national political, economic, social and cultural forces would take. A graph line of this process would display erratic cycles of high optimism dropping to frustrated pessimism and swooping back up again. This bouncing ball effect was most closely tied to the alternately promising and defeating fortunes of the discoveries of huge oil reserves during this decade, producing at first great exhilaration, followed by a sobering accounting that the oil revenues were already spoken for to cover a tremendous national debt. It was a time of defining positions and planning development. 1968 had not only produced dramatic evidence of a peak of a certain kind of development, but had also, in its aftermath, produced critical thinking in all sections of intellectural activity, the sort of thinking that at times took on visual form.

In selecting the essays which follow, the attempt was made to treat as many different media as possible and to cover a wide range of method and approach. The first essay treats the 1970s in Mexico from a political science and economic perspective in order to set the context for what follows. Due to the strict time frame which is the subject of this monograph, important events occurring at the end of the López Portillo administration, such as the nationalization of the banks and the debt crisis, are intentionally omitted. The important economic and social crisis resulting from the end of the López Portillo period is left for analysis by future studies. The art work produced by the Mexican presence in Los Angeles is presented from a cultural history point of view, incorporating oral historical and journalistic methods. It is the only example of such methodology for its subject and will serve subsequent work as a groundbreaking investigation. The essay on sculpture is a study in focus. The subject is the work of one sculptor, who also is the author. The one-to-one correspondence between writer and subject allows for an intimate linkage between verbal and visual literacy.

The other three pieces cluster more closely around shared art historical methods, although distinct enough in their own right. The question of Mexican architecture receives a provocative and challenging essay which proposes a reformulation of theory and practice. Urban formations as well as individual structures are forced to answer to this well considered critical evaluation. Film production during this period is analyzed with an awareness of motion pictures as an art form especially motivated by commercial factors. The form and content of Mexican film is seen as determined by contributions from film theory, politics, and social history. Popular and folk art is treated in an essay of rigorous methodology and research techniques. The results of this piece encourage investigation of this subject for periods preceding and following the 1970s.

The obvious lack of the subjects of easel and mural painting is due to the unavailability of experts in these categories. The absence of such essays qualifies the comprehensive ambition of the book, but also reflects the vacuum of scholarly production in these areas, as an exhaustive search turned up no work which qualified for inclusion.

It is intended that this book encourage and provoke more work in this area. Mexico in the 1970s needs archaeological and historical attention in many and large servings. To be properly served by this scholarly attention, we need it promptly. The immediate need is signaled by the rapid and profound changes in today's Mexico. In order to understand and to cope with Mexico's growing impact upon international concerns, we must measure its past but also trace the contours of its present while it remains the present.

MEXICO IN THE AGE OF PETRO-PESOS

by
Judith Adler Hellman
York University

From the time that the extent of Mexico's oil reserves became known to people beyond high Mexican government circles and the CIA, President José López Portillo asserted that Mexico would not repeat the mistakes—indeed, the tragic errors—which have occurred in other oilrich nations. Venezuela was most often cited by Mexican leaders, as by countless North American and European analysts, as a negative example of the gross mismanagement of oil wealth which results in the exacerbation of virtually every economic and social problem existing at the moment that petrodollars start to flow into an economy. Some analysts of the Mexican situation went so far as to draw hope from comparisons between the probable course of events in Mexico and the bizarre and tragic happenings then unfolding in Iran. If comparisons with Iran, or with Saudi Arabia or the Arab Emirates, seemed far-fetched, the parallels with Venezuela were numerous enough to lend an air of seriousness to such discussions. One key point, however, was lost, or at least obscured, in almost every analysis of Mexico's future couched in these comparative terms. Mexican leaders were not free—as Rosa Luxemburg would have put it—to pick and choose development strategies from the counter of history, just as one chooses hot or cold sausages. The Mexicans inherited a form of development which sharply circumscribed the range of alternatives available to them in the oil boom years of the seventies.

The logic of the development process which had unfolded in Mexico since the Revolution of 1910 dictated a limited set of options for the utilization of petroleum wealth. Summarily put, this process was a form of late capitalist development characterized by heavy state participation in key sectors of the economy, massive public spending on infrastructure, and generous concessions to foreign and domestic capitalists designed to make Mexico both a secure and highly profitable country in which to invest. Directed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the organ through which the national bourgeoisie exercises control, the strategy was based on a "trickle-down" model of development. This model poses that Mexico, as a poor, underdeveloped country, must necessarily focus on the long-term aspects of growth. Accordingly, the distribution of the fruits of development is postponed for an indefinite period during which profits are reinvested to build a base for future development.

In line with this development policy, the rate of growth of domestic savings and investment far surpassed wage increases, while real wages declined steadily in the period since World War II. The state placed almost no limits on profits or on the concentration of capital in private hands. In addition to tax exemptions of up to ten years for new enterprises, a variety of investment incentives were provided for both domestic and foreign capitalists; Nacional Financiera, a government bank, offered credit at low rates of interest and guaranteed loans to Mexican-owned enterprises from national banking agencies and private investors. Import licensing, protective tariffs, generous management contracts, and rebates on duties paid for merchandise purchased abroad were all programed to encourage private investors and attract foreign capital.

Government spending on infrastructure, like other aspects of the Mexican strategy, was specifically designed to create the optimum conditions for profitable private investment. Public funds were channeled into improvements in transportation, electric power and distribution networks for gas and petroleum, while, throughout the 1940s and 1950s less than fifteen percent of Mexican government spending was allocated to social welfare; since 1960, just over a fifth of the federal budget has been assigned to social services.[1]

Policy on agricultural development was consistent with the program for the industrial sector. Land reform was, of course, one of the central goals of the Mexican Revolution, and the incorporation of agrarian reform legislation into the Constitution of 1917 represented a great victory for peasants, paving the way for a series of agrarian laws promulgated during the 1920s and 1930s. However, land was distributed on only a token basis during this period and it was not until the reformist president Lázaro Cárdenas came to power in 1934 that large-scale distribution began in ear-

nest; forty-five million acres were distributed in five years and a complex apparatus of banks, agricultural schools, machine centrals, and crop storage and marketing facilities were created to sustain the collective enterprises *(ejidos)* which had been established on the distributed land.

After a period of success under Cárdenas, the collective *ejidos* went into economic and social decline. The post-1940s period of rapid industrialization and economic consolidation for large commercial farmers marked a dramatic shift away from the *agrarista* priorities of the Cárdenas years. The administrations which succeeded Cárdenas continued to repeat the slogans of the past, asserting the government's commitment to land reform as a "major goal of the Mexican Revolution" while pursuing policies which reflected the interests of the dominant bourgeoisie. This has meant expanding the limits on possession of large estates, turning a blind eye to illegally oversized landholdings (neo-*latifundia*), reducing the amount and quality of land distributed to peasant petitioners, suppressing militant peasant organizations, promoting the break-up of ejidal collectives into tiny minifundia, and shifting government spending from ejidal agriculture to loans and infrastructural development for private commercial agricultural enterprises.

The political context for the implementation of this development strategy has been a one-party system which features the trappings of a liberal democracy while a combination of repressive techniques and skillful cooptation are employed to maintain social control over a population of wretchedly poor peasants and workers. Small concessions or favors are traded to individuals or mobilized popular movements in exchange for the moderation of their demands and the reduction of the challenge they pose to the ruling party. Those individuals or organizations which resist cooptation are harassed, repressed, decapitated through the imprisonment or assassination of their leaders, or in rural areas at least, are wiped out altogether through the use of violence on a massive scale. Meanwhile, rigged elections, government sponsorship of "opposition" parties and obligatory membership in the PRI for most peasant and trade unionists historically have been used to maintain the democratic facade while reinforcing official party domination.[2]

This, then, was the pattern of political and economic development which was introduced in the post-revolutionary period of reconstruction in the 1920s; it has been pursued with remarkable consistency from that time through the 1970s by a national bourgeoisie which emerged with power from the struggles of 1910-1917. It is within the framework of this form of capitalist development and this system of political and social control that foreign earnings from oil were introduced. In this article I examine the effects that the massive infusion of petro-dollars has had on Mexican economic development and on the delicate balance of political and social forces at play in the Mexican system.

"Shared Development": The Echeverría Reforms

When the news of the coming oil bonanza broke on the Mexican scene, it caught the pendulum of presidential style in mid-swing. For, if the development policy pursued in Mexico over the last seven decades has been an essentially consistent strategy, the regimes in power during that period have each had their own character, shaped by the incumbent president's ordering of development priorities, or at least his professed dedication to one or another development goal above all others. The general pattern has been a president of the "left" alternating with a president of the "right." In practice this has meant that a series of politicians who have followed a strikingly similar course on the road to the presidency, upon reaching that office will make either a populist appeal, stressing the need for greater social justice, land for the landless, jobs for the unemployed, and social services all around; or will make a direct pitch to big capital, arguing that the needs of peasants and workers can best be met when economic growth has produced a "larger pie to be divided."

The 1970s witnessed precisely this shifting pattern of priorities within the general framework of Mexican capitalist development. Luis Echeverría Alvarez assumed office in January 1970 after a stint as Secretary of the Interior. In that role he had played a prominent and active part in the suppression of left wing dissent—including the pre-Olympic "Massacre of Tlatelolco" in which hundreds of student protesters were killed—a tragedy for which he was widely regarded as personally responsible. In one of those turnabouts so frequent in Mexican political life, once in office he dedicated his administration to a program of reform designed to attenuate the most brutal contradictions of capitalist development in Mexico. The inequalities and imbalances of economic growth were to be redressed. Income redistribution would be emphasized, even at the cost of slowing the rate of growth. There would be a shift from further industrialization and concentration of infrastructure in the urban centers in favor of industrial decentralization and rural development. Ejidal agriculture was to be revitalized with huge injections of public funds. The purchasing power of the poor would be raised with the creation of new jobs in both city and countryside. And further concentration of wealth in the hands of the bourgeoisie would be halted by raising both personal income and corporate taxes, and imposing new taxes on capital gains, luxury goods, and income from bonds and securities.

In the first year of his administration one progressive piece of legislation followed another as it became apparent that Echeverría was operating on the assumption that his regime represented the ruling elite's last opportunity to reform itself from within. He went after neo-*latifundistas*, expropriating and distributing the mammoth estates of a number of old political families. He rewrote the Agrarian Code, improving the credit, marketing and technical facilities available to peasants. Subsidies and tax waivers formerly given as a matter of course to expanding Mexican industries were now limited. Only those Mexican industries producing low-priced goods for a popular market would receive help in expanding their productive capacity. Business was told that it could no longer regard government loans as outright grants. Echeverría attempted to tighten controls on foreign investors to bring their activities into line with Mexican development goals. Foreign-owned

industry would have to generate export earnings equal to the profits taken out of the country. Limitations would be imposed on the import of foreign technology. Foreign capitalists would have to locate their factories in new underindustrialized regions and put their money into industries that create jobs rather than those featuring higher rates of profit.

These programs, promoted by Echeverría as a basic reorientation of Mexican development policy, found their way into legislation, duly ratified by a Senate and Chamber of Deputies controlled by the President's own party. Furthermore, the state sector expanded at an unprecedented rate as state controlled enterprises increased tenfold, and a vast galaxy of state corporations, research institutions, development funds, and welfare agencies were created to provide the framework for the new reform activities.[3]

But implementation of the reforms was successfully blocked by the opposition of the conservative sector of the bourgeoisie. Echeverría's efforts to modernize and rationalize Mexican capitalism and particularly his attempts to safeguard the long-term future of Mexican capitalism by spreading the fruits of development more widely met with the intractable opposition of the most influential and conservative members of that class—the group whose interests were most intricately intertwined with American capital. This opposition was expressed in the Right's provocation of violent confrontations throughout the country. It was also expressed by the withdrawal of investment funds and the export of capital. Conservative Mexican capitalists exchanged their pesos for dollars and shipped them to banks in the United States and unnumbered accounts in Switzerland. The exact figures on capital flight during the full six year period will never be known. But Mexican economists estimate that in 1976 alone, somewhere between 4 and 6 billion dollars were sent abroad.[4] Furthermore, given the international economic recession, foreign investment also declined in this period.

As a result of the fall in investment the economy went into serious decline. The annual rate of growth for GNP fell from 7.1 percent to 5.9 percent along with a sharp drop in agricultural and industrial productivity. As industry did not expand at its normal rate, the crisis of unemployment heightened. Exacerbated by food shortages brought on by droughts and floods, plus the impact of a worldwide inflationary trend, the rate of inflation climbed, until, by 1974, the official statistic had reached twenty-five percent—the highest in twenty years—and the true figure was probably much higher. Real wages fell precipitously as prices of popular staples like beans and tortillas rose by as much as fifty percent, leaving the working class and peasantry worse off in both relative and absolute terms than when Echeverría took office.

In addition to these economic reversals, the highly touted tax reform proved impossible to implement as the honest and efficient bureaucratic apparatus it required was lacking. Thus taxation policy not only failed as a redistributive measure, but it left the President without the increased public funds he needed to carry forward his ambitious program. To cover the costs of his extensive reforms and the expansion of the state sector, the Echeverría regime increasingly turned to foreign sources, especially private banks, to raise the funds to underwrite public expenditures. The public deficit grew from 4.8 billion pesos in 1970 to 42 billion in 1976 as the government borrowed abroad to finance its spending and to support the peso—then pegged at 12.5 to the U.S. dollar.[5]

Echeverría's insistence upon maintaining a stable exchange rate with the dollar, whatever the cost, meant that the peso came to be regarded as over valued in international money markets. The artificially high value of the peso, in turn, made Mexican manufactured goods more costly for prospective buyers when compared with goods produced elsewhere. Since Mexican products were now far less competitive in the world market, sales fell and this decline in export revenues increased Mexico's negative balance of trade.

Because production of basic manufactured goods had declined with the withdrawal of foreign and domestic investment funds, and food production was now running well below demand, Mexico was forced to import both food and manufactured products. This situation led, logically enough, to a further deterioration in the balance of trade. By 1975, the external debt was reaching critical levels, and confidence in the ability of the regime to manage the economy was gone. This loss of confidence created a mood of panic among those holding substantial amounts of pesos. Moreover, given the relatively open border with the United States, it was impractical for the government to impose currency export controls. As pesos were freely and rapidly converted to dollars by nervous capitalists both large and small, and state turned abroad to borrow more to support the peso at the old rate of 12.5 to the dollar. But the effort was futile. Foreign borrowing to sustain the peso only resulted in raising the domestic rate of inflation. The inflationary spiral, naturally, brought about a decline in the real standard of living of the majority of Mexicans as prices of basic goods rose day by day. Furthermore, the fruitless effort to maintain the peso against an unavoidable devaluation heightened the mood of uncertainty. This generalized sense of insecurity gave rise to the usual desperate pattern which characterizes such historical moments: further capital flight, hoarding of goods, speculation, blackmarket sales of currency and, of course, the inevitable rumors of coup, military takeover, and American invasion. At last, in late 1976, pressure to devaluate the peso became overriding. After 22 years of stability, the Bank of Mexico floated the currency to permit market forces to determine its true value. Immediately it dropped by 39 percent and a month later it declined in value by over half.[6] A process of devaluation had begun which would not be concluded even six years later at the close of the succeeding president's term. Thus, not only did Echeverría leave office without achieving anything like the reconstruction or rejuvenation of the socioeconomic and political system that he had proposed, indeed, his *sexenio* ended with the collapse of the economy—a collapse so complete that only the announcement that Mexico was awash in oil would, in the next few years, revive confidence and temporarily halt the crisis cycle.[7]

Economic Recovery and the Promise of Petroleum

Given the record of his administration, when Echeverría's six-year term came to a close in 1976 a sigh of relief ran through Mexican and international business circles that could be heard from Monterrey to New York and back. To Echeverría's successor, former finance Minister José López Portillo, fell the task of "restoring the confidence" of domestic and foreign capitalists and getting the Mexican economy "back on track." The new President was, in fact, an immediate hit with the international business press who praised his "realism" and awarded him their highest accolade; they referred to him as a "pragmatist." [8] The *Economist,* having described Echeverría as "a man whose political instinct far outran his political abilities, whose economic ambitions outran his economics, and whose populism outran his popularity," [9] had nothing but praise for López Portillo whom it saw as short on rhetoric and long on competence and common sense.

Economic recovery under López Portillo was signalled by the International Monetary Fund's removal of the severe restrictions it had imposed on Mexico in 1975. Now the IMF was prepared to help Mexico out with $600 million and the promise of more than $1 billion over three years on the condition that Mexico follow a "stabilization" program. This austerity policy called for limits on external borrowing, curbs on "nonproductive expenditures," that is, welfare spending, and a monetary policy which would float the peso until it reached it own stable rate of exchange with world currencies. Central to the new regime's effort to bring Mexico out of the 1976 crisis were López Portillo's promised cuts in public spending of all kinds, a scaling down of development projects, and a commitment to freeze wage increases at a level below the rate of inflation.

The reason for the IMF's new attitude toward Mexico, however, had less to do with its confidence in López Portillo's leadership and managerial skills than with the hundreds of billions of barrels of oil by now reliably rumored to lie beneath the luxuriant vegetation or off the coast of Tabasco, Verecruz, Chiapas, Campeche and Tamaulipas States. Each new estimate of known and potential reserves was higher, but by 1978-1979, Mexican resources were widely understood to run to two hundred billion barrels with only fifteen percent of the country surveyed. By 1980 proven reserves had reached 60 billion barrels and many experts believed that Petroleos Mexicanos (or Pemex, the state oil monopoly) would soon uncover oil reserves to exceed those of Saudi Arabia, making Mexico the number one oil power in the world.[10]

But exuberance over this news has been tempered from the start by some sobering considerations concerning the role of petroleum in national development. From the day in March 1938 when Lázaro Cárdenas expropriated seventeen foreign oil companies, the national oil enterprise has stood as a central symbol of Mexican sovereignty. Poor in expertise and equipment, the Mexicans struggled to run their own petroleum industry, attempting to overcome the obstacles posed by decrepit installations, inadequate transport and pipeline facilities, chronic shortages of skilled personnel, dwindling reserves, and low commodity prices.[11] Only in the mid-seventies, with the news that great riches lay beneath the earth and the coastal waters of the Gulf, did it become clear that what had been strictly a symbol of dignity, national unity and pride could now become a real source of funds for national development.

The New Development Plan: "Export-led Growth"

A plan for development, based on projected reserves and production was soon formulated. The central tenet of the program was that oil would be pumped out of the ground not in response to demand on the international market, but at a pace consistent with the slow steady expansion of the Mexican economy. To avoid the "financial indigestion" or inflation brought on by sudden and massive accumulation of foreign currency earnings from oil, a policy of slow exploitation of petroleum wealth was announced by López Portillo. Official policy called for Pemex to draw only 1.1 million barrels per day, rather than the estimated 10 million potentially available. Furthermore Mexico was to move away from dependency on the United States by selling this oil to a diverse range of customers with no single country taking more than half the available supply. Sales to Japan and western European clients were foreseen, along with purchases on favorable credit terms by energy-poor third world nations in Latin America and the Caribbean.

To escape what it termed the "petrolization" of the economy, that is, the creating of a lopsided economy excessively reliant on oil revenues, the López Portillo regime sought to promote slow growth of the industrial sector through "export-led development." The export-led growth policy promised to resolve the contradictions of import substitution which proved unworkable in Mexico, as elsewhere in the third world, because of the high and ever rising cost of imported components, technology and capital equipment. An export substitution program, in contrast, proposed gradual replacement of primary exports—in this case, crude oil—with processed and manufactured exports. Thus refined oil, petrochemical products, and manufactured goods of every description would gradually take the place of crude as Mexico's chief export. By 1990, it was projected, Mexico would earn 85 percent of all foreign exchange from the sale of industrial products and only 15 percent from crude oil.[12] They key to this transformation lay in utilizing oil revenue in the short run to establish the long-term basis for a modern, internationally competitive industrial capacity.[13]

The plan for development foresaw a gradual expansion of Mexican industry with particular emphasis on steel, petrochemicals, capital goods and machinery such as pumps, turbines, electric motors and forged metal products—all goods which had formed the bulk of expensive inputs during the import substitution attempt. The assumption was that the internal market for Mexican products would grow as oil revenue "trickled down" to the masses, while cheap energy and cheap labor for both private and state owned enterprises would give Mexican producers an advantage over North American, European and Japanese competitors in the international market. Finally, oil revenue would be directed to support a "Global Development Plan" designed to create

2.2 million new jobs in all sectors of the economy between 1980 and 1982. Thirty percent of these jobs were expected to open in industry; the rest would come in agriculture and the service sector. By 1990 a total of 12.6 million new jobs would be available to absorb the 800,000 annual entrants into the labor market.

To its ideators, it seemed impossible that such a program could fail to bring prosperity—first to the industrial bourgeoisie and the financial risk takers, and eventually even to the mass of peasants and workers, as the wealth generated through exports trickled down to them. Instead, as we shall see, within the context of an international system in which Mexico was bound by strong and multiplex ties of dependency to the United States, and within the framework of the development policy which had been pursued in Mexico since the Cárdenas years, export substitution development proved no more successful than the import substitution schemes of the 1960s. Why did the export-led development strategy turn out to be so difficult to implement?

"Petrolization"

The most immediate obstacle to realizing an oil based development schemes was, very simply, that petrodollars could not be expected to flow into Mexico unless and until petroleum flowed out. Finding and drilling the wells to produce at a rate which would earn Mexico the foreign exchange to underwrite ambitious development plans required heavy investments—as always—in technology and capital equipment. Although Pemex had been in operation since 1938, and oil had been produced in Mexico since early in the twentieth century, in 1979 three-quarters of all capital goods utilized by Pemex were still imported, almost entirely from the United States where Texas-based oil companies like Brown and Root of Houston offered the specialized equipment and expertise geared to off-shore drilling along the Gulf Coast. In the development of the rich oil fields in Campeche Sound, Brown and Root was hired as project manager to oversee engineering and construction.[14] For Pemex, such assistance has been crucial. The Chicontepec basin in Campeche Bay may turn out to contain as much as 100 billion barrels. But low porosity and permeability of the oil bearing rock have necessitated the drilling of 16,000 separate wells—as many as Pemex had sunk in all its history.[15] In addition, the development of each new oil field has required the construction of gathering lines, roads, railroad spur lines and other support facilities. Moreover, the blowout of the oil well "Ixtoc I" in June 1979, which spilled a total of 134 million gallons into the Bay of Campeche before it could be capped nine months later, dramatically demonstrated the need for human skills and equipment of the most sophisticated kind.

Because it lacked technical personnel as well as adequate research facilities, Pemex, already the largest single employer in Mexico, expanded its payroll from 80 to 120 thousand employees over the five year period from 1976 to 1981. But still foreign specialists were required. Furthermore, balance of payments problems grew worse as Pemex was forced to import capital goods with price tags that rose about twice as fast as the value of crude oil on the international market.[16]

Other countries peddling advanced technology tried eagerly in these years to sell their goods on the Mexican market. But for all the enthusiasm of Canadian, western European and Japanese suppliers to break into this market, American companies remained the primary source of both equipment and skilled technical inputs. Thus, the hope that oil wealth would provide the lever with which Mexico could pry itself free from U.S. domination proved ill founded as Mexico turned to the United States for the bulk of purchases necessary to build an infrastructure for oil and gas production. And as for the hope of diversifying petroleum sales, 80 percent of Mexican oil was sold to American buyers in 1978-79,[17] and by 1980 the figure was still 77 percent.[18] Furthermore, 99.3 percent of natural gas sold went to American customers, shipped directly to the United States through a pipeline constructed for that purpose.[19]

Another hope which had been expressed in the Global Development Plan was that Mexico would escape the kind of unhealthy reliance on oil earnings which would distort the economy and the society as a whole. Yet from 16 percent in 1976, the share of hydrocarbons in Mexico's export earnings rose to 40 percent in 1979, 65 percent in 1980, and reached 75 percent in 1981.[20] By that same year, one-third of all government revenue came from the sale of petroleum. This tendency to rely more and more on petroleum revenue was the inevitable, if unfortunate consequence of the lag in the growth rate of all sectors of the Mexican economy other than oil. In the face of rising prices for manufactured imports, increasing foreign borrowing to support the free-spending government programs already in place, plus the growing need to import food, given declining productivity in the agricultural sector, only oil earnings could plug the gap. Thus by the end of the 1970s, pressure had mounted to export ever greater quantities of oil to meet the interest payments on the external debt and pay for the expanding quantity of goods and services purchased abroad.[21]

Social Costs of Oil Production

It is often said that, given the steady concentration of wealth they have witnessed since the Mexican Revolution, the peasants and workers did not expect to see great improvements in their lives as a result of the discovery of this new "national treasure." On the other hand, it seems doubtful that they anticipated that oil bring greater misery. Yet for many, if not most of them, it has. Among other negative consequences, the rate of inflation which accompanied the oil boom has confirmed economic planners' worst fears. Officially 30 percent in 1980, the annual rate of inflation was estimated at over 100 percent by the end of 1982. Notwithstanding the imposition of price controls and heavy state subsidies for staple foods, cost of living rises in the "boom" period have far outstripped the real income of the lower half of the Mexican population.

The challenge of job creation for the growing masses of unemployed and underemployed has certainly not been met by the oil boom, notwithstanding the optimistic projections of the Global Development Plan. The capital intensive nature of petroleum and petrochemical production means that thousands of dollars of capital must be invested for each position opened. In some phases of recent development at

Pemex, an astounding $250,000 had to be invested before a job was added to the payroll. The problem indicated by this statistic is not simply that more workers do not find employment in Pemex, but that every peso invested in Pemex and other capital intensive sectors is investment foregone in areas which feature a more favorable ratio of labor to capital. Furthermore, even the government's policy of selling petrochemicals domestically at well below the world market price, as well as the special discount rates provided to industrial firms, tend to increase unemployment. Randall explains, "the subsidies are a factor in cheap energy prices which make it more profitable to hire machines than people."[22]

If oil-fueled development does little to create jobs or directly improve the lives of poor people, nowhere has this inadequacy been felt more intensely than in the gulf coast states which have been the scene of the exploration, drilling and construction associated with petroleum production. "Pemex crews have spurred the flight from land- and water-related work by destroying large tracts of fertile terrain and contaminating productive rivers and estuaries."[23] As one biologist reported: "With their dredges they can make and remake rivers. They have cut grooves across the entire state . . . [turning] the hydrological system upside down."[24] The hostility of peasants and peasant organizations toward Pemex is an indication of the degree to which the state oil company has wreaked havoc on the precarious rural economy of these tropical zones.[25] The destruction of rich agricultural land and coastal fishing grounds by oil seepage and the wholesale expropriation of farmland which is used for exploratory ventures and then abandoned in ruined condition have been responsible for the decline in productivity in what was once a key agricultural region. Tabasco state has been particularly hard hit. "Amid the shrinking acreage of cultivable land," one expert writes, "petroleum development has eaten away at resources, ecologically and economically destroying much of the richest farmland in Tabasco state."[26]

Particularly bitter are those peasants who raise crops which are subject to government imposed price ceilings. These people have lived since the earliest years of the current boom with a local rate of inflation which hovers around 300 percent.[27] Although few jobs have opened for local people, their villages and towns have quadrupled or quintupled in size with the influx of Pemex personnel, foreign technicians, equipment salesmen, their dependents and hangers-on.[28] Shantytowns have developed at the margins of the new industrial ports and oil installations as hundreds of thousands of untrained men and women pour into the development zones in search of work which in the end goes to more skilled or specialized workers, or to those who can afford to pay the requisite bribes. The social infrastructure of schools, hospitals and other services is inadequate to meet even the planned population increases, not to speak of unplanned migration. The social disintegration of the previously existing communities is all but complete as the search for oil has brought in the prostitutes, and petty and major criminals characteristic of boom towns. In essence, the corruption rampant in Mexican government and society at all times has, in these last years, reached epic dimensions in the coastal zone.

At the center of the decline in public and private morality is Pemex itself. Notorious for its corrupt practices, even in a society distinguished neither for efficiency nor honesty in public administration, the Pemex bureaucracy has been charged with raking off public funds through crooked maneuvers and raising the price of imported machinery to include "kickback" payments of as much as 45 percent.[29] Ironically, the same oil industry which is often posed as offering a cure for Mexico's economic, social, and political ills is itself riddled with corruption, bureaucratism and "labor problems" which consist largely of mafia-like control over an oil workers' union run, literally, by a mob of gangsters.

> Since its foundation, the company has been characterized by a wasteful and inefficient use of resources, with administrators, technical staff and union leaders all involved in the sale of contracts to private companies, and of jobs to the vast number of people seeking them.[30]

Only 40 percent of workers employed by Pemex hold regular contracts. The rest buy their jobs each month with payments amounting to hundreds of thousands of pesos to the bosses of Sindicato de Trabajadores Petroleros de la República Mexicana, or STPRM, the oil workers' union. And so closely interwoven are the private financial affairs of Pemex managers and oil union leaders—all of whom serve freely on the boards of directors of companies which receive Pemex contracts—that the directors of the government enterprise are hardly in a position to expose corrupt union officials.[31]

Thus the operations of the state oil company are shot through with corrupt practices at every level. In general it is the poor and powerless who have been the victims of this bureaucratic system built on corruption. The would-be oil workers who must pay bribes for jobs exemplify only one form of victimization. Pemex has paid generous compensation to wealthy ranchers and plantation owners for land expropriated for oil operations. However, when powerless peasants are expropriated they receive compensatory payments so low that they are effectively left with nothing with which to make a new start. But the biggest losers in this system of corruption, the real victims of government malfeasance, mismanagement and collusion, are the Mexican people as a whole. This is because the cost of developing the petroleum exporting potential of the country, as we have suggested, has been borne in every other sector of the economy. And that cost would not have been so high had the price tags on equipment and technology not included bribes and kickbacks to Pemex administrators and union bosses.

Rural Development and Agrarian Reform

The central social issue in Mexico has always been the agrarian question. Forty percent of the population—some twenty-nine million people—still live on the land, most of them in great poverty. And the most aggravated social problem of the cities, that of the unemployed and homeless urban masses, is a direct outgrowth of the inadequacy of the

land to support the rural population. Given the complexity of the problems which have forced millions of Mexicans off the land and into the stream of city-bound migrants or "undocumented workers" who cross into the United States, the López Portillo administration's policy for rural development came as a shock. In no other area was López Portillo's "pragmatism" more evident. His agrarian program constituted an undisguised move away from land distribution as a means of bringing "social justice" to the peasantry. Stating bluntly that agrarian reform had been a failure, the new regime made "efficiency" and higher productivity its first priority in agriculture. In a country with forty percent of the population on the land, but only ten percent of the GNP coming from agriculture, López Portillo chose to channel public funds into private commercial agriculture where investment is supposed to have the best chance of increasing efficiency and raising productivity. In reality, clear evidence exists that, given the same inputs, ejidal agriculture is equally, and in some cases more, productive than the private sector.[32] However, the basic premises of López Portillo's policy are that further distribution of land cannot solve Mexico's food problems, and, in any case, "there is no more land to distribute." Thus, according to this logic, Mexico's urgent food needs dictate a policy of "betting on the strong."

The first step in the process which promised to alter irrevocably the face of rural Mexico was the seemingly innocent—indeed, well-meaning—dedication of López Portillo to resolve all outstanding land claims during his term in office. This effort, it was asserted, would then bring to a close "the first stage" of the Mexican land reform, that of distribution of land. However, the procedure through which land distribution was to be "concluded" was that the state governors (political appointees all) were empowered to settle all claims within their domains including questions of water rights, forest and pasture rights, and tenure conflicts. Thus enormous discretionary powers came to rest in the hands of the state governors, the vast majority of whom were major *latifundistas*, as was López Portillo's Minister of Agrarian Reform. The rationale for this policy which called an official halt to land distribution was that it would inspire confidence in private commercial landowners, calming their fears of expropriation and stimulating them to reinvest their profits in agriculture.

To further encourage private investment, including foreign investment, agro-industry was promoted. To this end, transnational corporations already active in Mexico—Anderson Clayton, Carnation, Del Monte, Nestlé, Ralston Purina and United Brands—were urged to expand their operations so that eventually every stage of food production from cultivation to processing, distribution and marketing would concentate largely in the hands of these giants.

A reorganization of the land reform bureaucracy, carried out in the name of efficiency, reinforced the anti-agrarian tendencies of the López Portillo program. This reorganization turned over to the Ministry of Agriculture, or the Ministry of Water Resources—bureaucratic structures which are dedicated to serving all agricultural interests, both public and private—powers and responsibilities which had previously come under the auspices of the Agrarian Reform Ministry. Thus government agencies explicitly designed to defend the peasantry in the face of competing claims from private agricultural enterprise were either dismantled or their powers subsumed by other ministries which have no special responsibility to the ejidal sector.

Additional changes in agrarian reform legislation further undercut the peasantry. Restrictions on rental and control of ejidal lands were lifted. These restrictions were originally imposed to prevent large landowners from buying out impoverished *ejidatarios* who without credit and other inputs, were unable to make a go of their land parcels. Under López Portillo's agrarian policy even foreign corporations as well as large Mexican *latifundistas* were able to pursue openly and legally the practices that for decades they had to conceal; they were able to lease ejidal lands and employ the *ejidatarios* as peons on their own soil.

Finally, new legislation—a *latifundista*'s dream—removed virtually all remaining restrictions on the concentration of productive land in the hands of the few. Previous agrarian reform law had limited, according to a precise formula, the number of hectares of land which could be legally held by an individual: 100 hectares of irrigated land, 200 of seasonal rainfall land, and 800-1600 hectares of land suitable only for the grazing of cattle. Thus *latifundistas* were forced to pretend to graze cattle on prime land or they were obliged to employ the services of *prestanombres*, or namelenders, who served as the owners of record for various portions of what was actually one individual's large estate. Now the need for such subterfuge was removed, as large landowners were free to shift from cattle ranching to cash crop cultivation without giving up any of the extra land that they were permitted to hold on the grounds that it was too arid or mountainous to plant with crops. Under the new Law for Agricultural and Livestock Production only land defined by the Secretary of Agriculture as "underutilized" was subject to expropriation. With this legislation in place we cannot wonder that López Portillo was able to proclaim that no further land was "available" for distribution to landless petitioners.

Beyond its role in bringing land distribution to a halt, this legislation undermined the already weakened ejidal system by removing the inviolable status of ejidal holdings. The Law created "production units" in which *ejidatarios* and private landholders could join together in "free credit." This alteration in agrarian law opened the *ejido* to private investment, legalizing the *de facto* arrangements which had prevailed for decades.[33] The overall effect of the Law, then, was to speed the takeover of ejidal lands by private commercial farmers and multinational agri-business conglomerates. In essence, the "associated agricultural enterprise" created by López Portillo's legislation has meant that ejidal lands are turned over to private capitalists for exploitation, effectively destroying the *ejido* as a system of common peasant production, and completing the process by which *ejidatarios* become a cheap labor force working their own lands for their capitalist "associates."[34]

If López Portillo's policy on industrial development, private investment, wage restraints, and the rest was simply a return to pre-1970 patterns, his agrarian program, in certain

significant respects, represented a genuine break with the past. The tendencies had all been present since 1940: the withdrawal of funds from ejidal agriculture; the support of large-scale private farming in the name of higher productivity; the increase in the legal limits on landholdings. But the López Portillo administration introduced a new, "realistic" note. In essence, López Portillo only articulated what everyone—the peasants included—has always known: that land distribution had not been a viable rural policy for more than four decades. But in so saying, López Portillo entered new territory. For a key technique of social control has been to stimulate and sustain among the peasants the expectation of eventually receiving a plot of land under agrarian law. This ploy served as a manipulative tool of the ruling class for so long that the abandonment of the rhetorical commitment to land reform would inevitably alter the relationship between the peasants and the Mexican state. The fact that huge, illegally held *latifundia* sat under the noses of landless peasants certainly outraged them and occasionally stimulated land invasions and other forms of peasant militancy: strikes, mass caravans and even armed insurgency. But more often the existence of neo-*latifundia* as the open secret of the countryside helped sustain hopes that one day a president strong, decent, and *agrarista* enough would come along to see that justice would finally be done. Under these circumstances, López Portillo was working at cross-purposes with himself when he presented the swift resolution of all outstanding land claims as a stabilizing element in the countryside. In fact, what "saved" the regime in this regard was that the peasants did not take these proclamations nor the proposed dismantling of the agrarian reform bureacracy very seriously. This was not because they believed that the President and his party were too committed to the ideals of the Mexican Revolution to ignore agrarian reform. Rather, the peasants were aware that a mammoth bureaucratic apparatus had grown up around the ejidal sector providing credit, technical advice, agricultural inputs, equipment, and, most significantly, endless opportunities for private enrichment at public, specifically, peasant expense. In short, too many vested political interests stood in the way of eliminating or even streamling this sector without a serious and protracted fight.

Thus tendencies implicit in the agricultural programs of the previous six administrations became explicit under López Portillo, who addressed these problems with striking candor. Yet, stating boldly that Mexico cannot or must not rely on the productivity of a rural peasant sector did not, in itself, create viable urban options. And the alternative to land distribution that López Portillo did propose, namely the conversion of surplus peasant labor into a rural proletariat employed in agro-industry, was unlikely to produce greater political stability in the countryside once the symbols of "social justice" and "revolution" had been cast aside.

The Politics of Development in the Seventies

López Portillo came to office in 1976 dedicated to using petroleum wealth to generate autonomous development. He expected that oil wealth could be utilized to provide Mexico with a margin of economic independence so that the future development would not turn on the price of oil or the rate of interest prevailing at any given moment in the world economy. In fact, the years of his administration marked a steady, inexorable move toward greater reliance on oil revenue. Therefore the fall in the world oil prices in the 1980s, a consequence of economic forces completely beyond Mexican influence or control, constituted a crushing blow to an economy in which oil had in fact come to supply three fourths of all export earnings and a third of government revenues. Indeed, only with the oil glut did the degree of Mexico's petrolization become fully apparent. At this stage only by borrowing abroad could the regime maintain even the illusion of independent policy formation. In the end, however, the full dimensions of Mexico's lack of autonomy in the face of world economic forces became clear.

The irony of the situation which prevailed as López Portillo turned power over to his successor was that this President had been no more successful than Echeverría in shaping economic policy to meet the development priorities he had established for his regime. To be sure, he had dispensed with many of the free spending "populist gestures", the services to the poor, which had been the hallmark of Echeverría's administration. But López Portillo could not dismantle entirely the social welfare structure established by Echeverría because the desperate needs that had prompted its creation persisted through the decade. Population had increased by more than twenty million in the seventies. Furthermore, pressure from organized labor heightened during López Portillo *sexenio*. The struggle for democratization of the state controlled labor unions—a fight to replace coopted leaders with union executives more responsive to the demands of the base—had begun at the grass roots in 1971, encouraged by Echeverría's policy of tolerence toward "democratizing currents" within the official party's peasant and labor organizations. By the time López Portillo came to office, the "democratic tendencies" within the official labor movement had stimulated a general insurgent movement among organized workers which was expressed in the formation of new, independent unions, the organization of previously nonunionized sectors of the work force, and greater militancy among once quiescent and well-controlled official unions. Moreover, a Political Reform had been promoted by López Portillo in 1977-78 as a means to liberalize the generally discredited electoral system without fundamentally altering the policial system of the power relationships between the dominant offical party and other contenders. The Reform legalized a number of small opposition parties and made it somewhat easier for these minority formations to gain a few seats in the Chamber of Deputies. However, the Reform had the unintended result of stimulating genuine mobilization of previously disorganized and dispirited forces on the left. What was more, those few leftist Deputies who gained seats in the legislature—particularly the Communist Party and its electoral allies—managed to articulate a clear demand for the utilization of oil revenues to meet the most pressing needs of the peasantry and working class.

Thus political pressures from the mass of the population, and, in particular, the increased clout of militant labor

organizations, undermined López Portillo's determination to cut social spending to a minimum. To keep a lid on political unrest, López Portillo soon found that, like Echeverría, he had to pursue a policy of selective distribution of government goods and services to those popular groups best able to press their demands. His only alternative to this form of cooptation would have been the application of repressive measures against increasingly mobilized and militant opposition from peasants and workers whose economic condition had deteriorated so markedly from the time Mexico had "struck it rich."

In general, then, López Portillo had hoped to reverse Echeverría's reformist program for distributive justice, holding down demands for the application of petroleum revenues to satisfy popular needs. Instead, he planned to stimulate the economy by providing every assurance that could induce private Mexican investors to bring their capital back into the country and invest it once more in Mexican industry and agri-business. López Portillo's Global Development Plan was comprised of policies designed to raise productivity in both agriculture and industry while guaranteeing that Mexico would avoid the pitfalls of "petrolizatio-n," the inflationary course of overly rapid growth based on rising petroleum exports. But, within the framework of the model of capitalist development which was in place, and under the pressure of the international economic forces at play through the late 1970s, it proved impossible for López Portillo to control or reduce the inflationary pressures within the economy. Nor was he able—given the alignment of political and economic forces in Mexico—to check the tendency to pump oil at an ever greater rate to meet the rising costs of imported goods and the rising expectations of Mexicans themselves.

Thus the record of the López Portillo administration provides an indication of the parameters of the Mexican political system. The Echeverría administration had demonstrated the limits of reform. It indicated that a basic reorientation of the course of Mexican development in the direction of greater redistributive justice could not be carried out because of the intransigence of bourgeois interests. The López Portillo years, on the other hand, demonstrated the limits of a system of cooptation based on ad hoc "handouts" to groups mobilized to press their demands. These constraints became clear in the course of his six years in office as the financial resources necessary to buy off the most militant demands of the better organized sectors of the society began to dry up with the decline of an oil based economy. A period of profound political crisis was reached as López Portillo's term drew to a close because the capacity of the regime to satisfy material demands had diminished, but there had been no corresponding reduction in the need of those who were genuinely needy, nor in the expectations of any sector of Mexican society.

NOTES

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1. Roger Hansen, *The Politics of Mexican Development,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), p. 85.
2. A detailed discussion of this process can be found in Judith Adler Hellman, *Mexico in Crisis,* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983) chapter 5. For an analysis of the relative importance of coercive and persuasive techniques in the maintenance of order, see Hellman, "Social Control in Mexico," *Comparative Politics,* Vol. 12, No. 2, January 1980.
3. E.V.K. FitzGerald, "The State and Capital Accumulation in Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies,* Vol. 10, No. 1, November 1978, p. 279.
4. Francisco José Paoli Bolio, "Petroleum and Political Change in Mexico," *Latin American Perspectives,* Vol. IX, No. 1, winter 1982, p. 37.
5. Robert E. Looney, *Mexico's Economy: A Policy Analysis with Forecasts to 1990,* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1978), p. 65.
6. Ibid. pp. 118-119.
7. On the fiscal crisis of 1976 see FitzGerald, op. cit. pp. 268-269, Looney, op. cit., chapter 8, and Lawrence Whitehead, "La Politica Económica del Sexenio de Echeverría: ¿Qué Salió Mal y Por Que?" *Foro International,* Vol. XX, No. 3, enero/marzo 1980.
8. See, for example, Donald D. Holt, "Why the Bankers Suddenly Love Mexico," *Fortune* 16 July 1979, pp. 138-45.
9. David Gordon, "Mexico: A Survey," *The Economist,* London, 22 April 1978, p. 18. It is interesting to note that during his administration, Echeverría's programs for reform were discussed with great solemnity, if not without hostility, in the financial press. In particular, his apparently sincere efforts to clean up corruption and increase bureaucratic efficiency (his own prodigious example of the eighteen-hour work day was indeed impressive) won him approval from the business journals. Once out of office, however, he was lambasted for the corrupt practices that occurred under his own regime. Both foreign reporters and Mexicans courting favor with the succeeding President tended to portray Echeverría as a wild demagogue who, with arms flailing and eyes bulging, was given to making the most preposterous attacks on capitalists and on the capitalist system. It seems a serious mistake to view the Echeverría regime in terms of the personal quirks of a would-be populist hero because in so doing one loses the opportunity to study what almost amounts to a laboratory experiment in reformist capitalism.
10. George W. Grayson, "The Mexican Oil Boom," in Susan Kaufman Purcell, ed., *Mexico-United States Relations,* (New York: Praeger, 1981), pp 146-147.
11. George W. Grayson, *The Politics of Mexican Oil,* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), p. 24.
12. James Flanigan, "Why Won't the Mexicans Sell Us More Oil?" *Forbes,* October 29, 1979, p. 42.
13. On export substitution see Réne Villarreal and Rocio de Villarreal, "Mexico's Development Strategy," in Purcell, op. cit., pp. 98-100; and Sam Lanfranco, "Mexican Oil, Export-led Development and Agricultural Neglect," *Journal of Economic Development,* Vol. 6, No. 1, July 1981, pp. 125-151; Also see Ignacio Cabrera, Crisis Económica y Estrategia Petrolera en México," *Cuadernos Políticos,* No. 28, abril/junio, 1981, pp. 43-58.
14. James Flanigan, "Pemex to Brown & Root: Yankee Come In," *Forbes,* August 15, 1977. Flanigan noted that even British Petroleum had to turn to Brown and Root for know-how adequate to meet the challenges of North Sea drilling and exploration.
15. George W. Grayson, "Oil and U.S.-Mexican Relations," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs,* Vol. 21, No. 4, November 1979, p. 430.
16. Laura Randall, "The Political Economy of Mexican Oil," paper presented to the Santiago Conference on International Factors in Energy, November 1979, p. 18.
17. George W. Grayson, "Oil and Politics in Mexico," *Current History,* Vol. 80, No. 469, November 1981, p. 379.
18. *Latin America Weekly Report,* Vol. 80, No. 47, 28 November 1980, p. 1.
19. Sofía Méndez Villarreal, *South,* July 1981, p. 45. Actual earnings from oil came to $311 million in 1976, $1 billion in 1978, $2.48 billion in 1979, $10.4 billion in 1980 and $18 billion in 1981. Oil enabled an economy which was floundering in the mid-seventies to increase GNP by 8 percent in 1979 and 7.4 percent in 1980. Grayson, op. cit., 1980, pp. 379-380.
20. In 1980 the value of manufactured imports from the U.S. was 12.6 billion while the value of Mexico's exported manufactures was only $3.4 billion. Grayson, op. cit., 1981b, p. 380.
21. Ibid.
22. Randall, op. cit., p. 20.
23. Grayson, op. cit., 1980, p. 79.
24. Francisco Iracheta, World Bank biologist, quoted in Ibid. Citing *Excelsior* and *Proceso,* Grayson notes that while Pemex spends less than 1 percent of its development budget on environmental projects, irreparable damage has been done to marine spawning grounds, and the shrimp population of Campeche, once an important source of livelihood in that poor region, is all but extinct.
25. Since the mid-1970s Indians in Tabasco have resisted the intrusion of exploration and drilling crews. Chontales Indians have taken up arms against oil workers and construction crews and have blocked the access roads to wells near Villahermosa in protest against Pemex's failure to pay indemnities for

damages to arable land and other property. Grayson, 1980, p. 75.

26. John G. Corbett, "Agricultural Modernization and Rural Employment in Mexico, 1980-1985: Implications for Mexican Migration to the United States," paper presented to the XLIII International Congress of Americanists, Vancouver, August 1979, p. 9.
27. Randall, op. cit., p. 12. Edward J. Williams, "Petroleum and Policial Change in Mexico," in Jorge I. Domínguez, ed. *Mexico's Policial Economy,* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publication, 1982), p. 47.
28. The population of Villahermosa, Tabasco grew from 50,000 to 300,000 between 1976 and 1979. Randall, op. cit., pp. 12-13.
29. William A. Orme, Jr., "Ex-Pemex Chief's Ouster from Senate Sought," *Journal of Commerce,* October 20, 1982.
30. *Latin America Economic Report,* Vol. VI, No. 45, 17 November 1978, p. 354. On the "pervasive corruption and ineffective bureaucracy of Pemex," see Grayson, 1980, XVII; Grayson, 1981a p. 155; Randall, op. cit., p. 16.
31. Union leaders engage openly in the game of *vendeplazas,* or job selling. The *sub rosa* system of payoffs has its own graded scale: in the late seventies a general worker's job sold for 40,000 pesos while a mechanical engineer could secure work for 150,000 pesos. The kickback required for temporary jobs was based on the length of the contract with a 2,000 peso payment needed for 28 days, 4,000 for a 60-day job, and so on. See Grayson, op. cit., 1980, pp. 93-94.
32. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "Social Aspects of Agrarian Structure in Mexico," in Stavenhagen, ed., *Agrarian Problems and Peasant Movements in Latin America,* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 249-251.
33. John J. Bailey, "Agrarian Reform in Mexico: The quest for Self Sufficiency," *Current History,* Vol. 80, No. 469, November 1981, p. 360.
34. See Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara, "Land Reform, Livelihood, and Power in Rural Mexico," in D. A. Preston, ed., *Environment, Society and Rural Change in Latin America,* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 1980), p. 35; and Richard L. Harris and David Barkin, "The Political Economy of Mexico in the Eighties," *Latin American Perspectives,* Vol. IX, No. 1, winter 1982, pp. 4-7.

LA ARQUITECTURA EN MEXICO EN LA DECADA 1970-1980

by
Alberto Pérez-Gómez
Carleton University

"El sentido común nos dice que las cosas de la tierra apenas existen, que la verdadera realidad no está sino en los sueños."

Charles Baudelaire, *Los Paraisos Artificiales*.

Durante cientos de años la región de América que hoy constituye la nación mexicana fue escenario de las civilizaciones más sofisticadas que han aparecido de este lado del Atlántico. Las culturas Maya, Tolteca, Azteca y Mixteco-Zapoteca poseían complejas mitologías que aseguraban su trascendencia, profundas raíces que constituían una coherente visión del mundo en función de la cual cada individuo encontraba su lugar y su razón de ser, por encima de sus inherentes limitaciones espaciales y temporales.[1] Parte *fundamental* de ese dar razón de la circunstancia era el arte, claramente percibido como una "metafísica encarnada", un acto de reconciliación que revelaba esa "razón" en el propio universo del discurso artístico, el poema o la arquitectura.

Hacia 1490 tuvo lugar una reunión de sabios aztecas en la casa del Señor Tecayehuatzin, rey de Huexotzinco. En ella se pretendía aclarar el profundo significado de *Flor y Canto*, el concepto Náhuatl para la poesía y el arte. Tecayehuatzin pregunta sí es *Flor y Canto* lo único verdadero:

¿Allá lo aprueba tal vez el Dador de la Vida?
¿Es ésto quizás lo único verdadero en la tierra?

Y Ayocuan responde, no sin angustia, que las flores y los cantos del poeta hablan en efecto del Dador de la vida y permiten al hombre trascender las miserias de su vida finita:

Vuestro hermoso canto:
un dorado pájaro cascabel,
lo eleváis muy hermoso.
Estáis en un cercado de flores.
Sobre las ramas floridas cantáis.
¿Eres tú acaso un ave preciosa del Dador de la vida?
¿Acaso tú al dios has hablado?
Habéis visto la aurora,
y os habéis puesto a cantar.
Esfuércese, quiera las flores del escudo,
las flores del Dador de la vida.
¿Qué podrá hacer mi corazón?
En vano hemos llegado,
en vano hemos brotado de la tierra.
¿Sólo así he de irme
como las flores que perecieron?
¿Nada quedará en mi nombre?
¿Nada de mi fama aquí en la tierra?
¡Al menos flores, al menos cantos!
¿Qué podrá hacer mi corazón?
En vano hemos llegado,
en vano hemos brotado de la tierra.
Gocemos, oh amigos,
haya abrazos aquí.
Ahora andamos sobre la tierra florida.
Nadie hará terminar aquí
las flores y los cantos,
ellos perduran en la casa del Dador de la vida.!

La creación artística no era pues, gratuita; ni la imaginación y el juego la provincia de niños o dementes.[2] El hombre moderno es sordo y ciego ante la trascendencia del mito y el arte de las culturas precolombinas. Los historiadores más populares de nuestro siglo sólo reconocen como valiosos los descubrimientos y hazañas que pueden interpretarse como presagio del mundo tecnológico.[3] La construcción del templo, la pirámide y el santuario constituía, ante todo, un *ritual*, la encarnación de un mito, donde la manifestación física del orden geométrico garantizaba la supervivencia del hombre, su relación con los dioses. El arte y la arquitectura eran, consecuentemente, la base de la gran coherencia cultural de las antiguas civilizaciones mexicanas: Su papel era dar forma física a un *orden* intersubjectivo donde el hombre, a diferencia del hombre moderno, se hallaba auténticamente orientado.

Desde la llegada de Cortés en 1519 hasta 1810, cuando México declaró su Independencia de España, es posible apreciar como se mantuvo el interés por el arte en un sentido simbólico tradicional. Curiosas síntesis entre los rituales paganos de los indios y los rituales cristianos aún pueden hoy ser observados en varias regiones de México. Las más

inmediatas expresiones populares que no han sufrido transformaciones a raíz de la asimilación en México de los ideales del mundo moderno, como la música, la comida y el vestido, son aún intensas y vitales expresiones de esta síntesis entre lo indígena y lo europeo tradicional. Es obvio que, a pesar de tratarse de mitologías diversas, los españoles siempre intentaron dominar para reconciliar y nunca les movió una simple pragmática o utópica obsesión sin objetivos. Se trataba de reconciliar dos distantes visiones del mundo y los españoles sin duda cometieron crímenes atroces. Pero el Barroco Mexicano, incuestionable culminación del Barroco Ibérico, y las ciudades más ricas, profundamente humanas y significativas del Continente Americano, son testigos de la síntesis de dos voluntades formales en pos de valores enraizados en la *percepción* del mundo. Es claro que para ambos, indios y españoles, el significado no se inventa, sino que se *descubre* en el mundo creado. El orden simbólico, responsabilidad del artista, sigue manifestándose en el lugar público, ya sea este el espacio sagrado, el templo o la iglesia, o el espacio profano, el palacio del cacique o el del virrey.

Debajo de las grandes diferencias, siempre enfatizadas, entre indios y españoles, existía una profunda continuidad de *intenciones*. Basta con recordar que el mundo de Cristobal Colón era también un mundo mítico, no el mundo moderno (meramente material) de la geografía científica.[4] La responsabilidad del arquitecto como ordenador del mundo intersubjetivo del hombre, esto es, de la dimensión pública de la ciudad, era lugar común tanto en la Europa tradicional como en las culturas precolombinas. El arquitecto era, fundamentalmente, el artista por excelencia, un engregio individuo de visión amplísima, y nunca un mero "profesionista" o especialista técnico.

Las transformaciones ocurridas en la cultura europea con el advenimiento del Cartesianismo y el método científico, tuvieron poco impacto en la arquitectura mexicana antes del siglo XX. Aún después de la guerra de independencia, consumada en 1821, México conservó su dependencia cultural. Los artistas y arquitectos mexicanos, originalmente discípulos de los españoles, generalmente se mantuvieron al margen de la vanguardia. Es bien sabido que España durante el siglo XVIII estuvo siempre aislada del fermento intelectual que se había apoderado del resto de Europa. En España y América Latina no hubo, desde luego, reforma religiosa: Los problemas fundamentales que emergían del divorcio entre fe y razón nunca se manifestaron en la consciencia mexicana. No hubo, pues, solución de continuidad intelectual entre el mundo tradicional y el mundo moderno. El problema básico del mundo y el arte contemporáneos se manifestó desde principios del siglo XIX en las polémicas y contradictorias expresiones del positivismo y del romanticismo en Francia e Inglaterra: Víctor Hugo intuía en 1830 la falta de capacidad expresiva de la arquitectura en el mundo moderno una vez que el cosmos tradicional se había desintegrado. El libro sustituía a la arquitectura como pre-eminente vehículo del conocimiento, una vez que aquella se había reducido a prosaica construcción, cuando mucho adicionada de ornamento, pero incapaz de constituirse ya en imagen del orden cósmico, en *mimesis* de la naturaleza. México ha sido simplemente espectador en los debates intelectuales que han permitido al mundo Occidental articular los paradigmas del arte y la arquitectura modernos: Esta falta de participación y consciencia profunda es el motivo de las contradictorias expresiones culturales de las últimas décadas.

La revolución de 1910, motivada por la crueldad de hacendados identificados con el govierno de Porfirio Díaz y por las ambiciones siempre incoherentes de los líderes de diversas facciones, tuvo como consecuencia la mayor justicia social y un reparto más equitativo de las tierras de cultivo. Paradójicamente, sin embargo, la revolución condenó finalmente todos los valores tradicionales, ya fuesen estos paganos o cristianos, y cortó la relación con Francia que habí permitido a los artistas mexicanos, durante algunos años hacia finales del siglo XIX, vislumbrar más de cerca la complejidad de la vanguardia del pensamiento y el arte Occidentales. La Revolución Mexicana, eminentemente materialista, predicó (y predica aún a través de la retórica vacía del Partido Revolucionario Institucional) un nacionalismo furibundo y "oficialmente" ateo, con resultados críticos para el México del siglo XX. México es hoy, en efecto, un lugar de profundas contradicciones culturales: México no es, desde luego, ninguna de sus culturas precolombinas, pero un gran porcentaje de la población no habla español, es fanáticamente católico y rechaza en la medida de lo posible los valores materialistas del mundo Occidental. La elite de técnicos y burócratas que manejan el gobierno y la industria han tratado de asimilar su nacionalismo a las premisas del mundo tecnológico. Es difícil cuestionar (como lo ha hecho admirablemente Ivan Illich) el bien intencionado slogan de "higiene y escuela primaria para todos".[5] Pero el mexicano se revela: el macho, el holgazán, el orgulloso agricultor despreocupado de la "productividad" o el padre de familia igualmente despreocupado de los problemas demográficos. No es que el mexicano sea "irracional" o esté "mal educado" Los mexicanos no poseen la ética del trabajo del sajón ni la mente lógica del inglés. La incoherencia entre cultura y tecnología tiene raíces mucho más profundas de lo que se supone, y es obvia hoy dondequiera que se mira. El mexicano no es feliz simplemente produciendo más con el menor esfuerzo. La economía y la eficiencia, los parámetros de la visión del mundo propiciada por la tecnología, no son *sus* propios valores.

Tal aseveración no puede parecer exagerada sino a quien no haya vivido recientemente en la Ciudad de México. En los últimos diez años la Ciudad de México se ha convertido en una megalópolis inhumana y absurda. Es difícil imaginar un lugar en el pasado o el futuro donde la libertad humana en el hacer de la vida cotidiana se halle *efectivamente* más restringida: La selva o el desierto son insuficientes como metáforas del caos urbano. Los mexicanos poseen un carácter único que les permite adecuarse a lo inevitable, y aceptar resignadamente la fatalidad ecológica, política y económica. Esa apertura a lo contradictorio es quizá la que les permite sobrevivir en ese contexto absurdo, donde todo lo humano se debe sacrificar por un utópico futuro dorado, plenamente equitativo y racional. Así el nacionalismo revolucionario, encarnado en programas sexenales sin continuidad, se ha convertido en un miope pragmatismo, abierto a la

influencia de los Estados Unidos aún cuando rechaza superficialmente esa alineación. El desarrollo tecnológico *no* es neutro, sino que constituye una visión del mundo cuyos valores se reducen a la eficiencia de los procesos, perdiendo de vista los objetivos esenciales del hacer y el pensar humanos: el dar razón de nuestra vida, de nuestra siempre ambigua realidad personal. En México, el desarrollo se ha transformado en una obsesión vacía que quizás lleve al país a su total aniquilamiento cultural.

No sabemos, desde luego, qué tan lejos podemos llegar. La utopia del progreso tecnológico ha sido cuestionado por los más eminentes filósofos de nuestro siglo y sabemos, al menos, que el proceso tiene límites.[6] Esta es, obviamente, una condición general en el mundo. Pero en México la obsesión por el desarrollo es aún inmesurada, haciendo aún más agudo el problema de incoherencia cultural.

Esta condición se vió agravada en la década de los setentas a raíz de la crísis política de 1968, nunca superada. Después de los enfrentamientos entre la masa y el ejército durante la presidencia de Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, el régimen de Luis Echeverría (1970-1976) apareció como la posibilidad para reivindicar los ideales de la revolución.[7] Pero Echeverría fracasó rotundamente. El mexicano ha perdido totalmente su fé en la posibilidad de una "democracia revolucionaria" El país sufrió bajo Echeverría un rápido deterioro de su economía y una polarización sociológica, resultado de una falsa retórica socialista y de un materialismo absoluto.

Hoy, después de las recientes devaluaciones del peso, la "clase media" ha prácticamente desaparecido. El "milagro" del petróleo no produjo la recuperación económica que se esperaba. El mexicano tiene un alma sensible: la gran riqueza de su comida, su expresividad, su música folklórica y su estilo de vida, todo habla de un enorme tesoro cultural. Es capaz de intuir que el consumo de los productos que se venden en países industrializados (o de imitaciones baratas) no debe ser el propósito de su existencia. Pero el medio le indica que las prioridades son un abstracto progreso económico y la satisfacción de falsas necesidades. Su ser quizás se rebela pero, al final de cuentas, el mexicano se resigna: Al perder su voluntad de trascendencia, al aceptar que la cultura es pura explotación y que no tiene más duración que la propia vida del individuo, el mexicano ha perdido asimismo el *auténtico* interés por el arte.

La situación de la arquitectura y el arte mexicano puede, por consiguiente, diagnosticarse como crítica. Existe, desde luego, producción; frecuentemente dirigida a una reducida elite. Los artistas son individualistas y atesoran su capacidad expresiva. Pero una auténtica arquitectura, esto es, el orden simbólico del mundo intersubjetivo del hombre, tiene poco interés. Los arquitectos mexicanos generalmente han evadido el problema del significado y las polémicas, cuando ocurren, carecen de contenido por su falta de sentido histórico. El interés en proyectos teóricos que han ocupado a muchos arquitectos europeos y norteamericanos desde finales del siglo XVIII, permitiéndoles explorar el contenido simbólico de la arquitectura y hacer una crítica, a través del diseño, de un mundo adverso, nunca ha aparecido en México. El arquitecto en México es, simplemente, un profesionista especializado que construye edificios, y construye sólamente quien adecúa su proyecto a los parámetros de la tecnología y a los deseos del cliente.

Durante los últimos diez años ha prevalecido una ilusoria división entre arquitectos que fué creada, en última instancia, a raíz de las transformaciones políticas de la revolución, pero que se vió acentuada por la demagogia de izquierda del régimen de Echeverría. Un gran número de arquitectos (y educadores) mexicanos creen en una arquitectura que resulte en forma inmediata de una ideología política. En algunas escuelas se adopta la noción simplista (recientemente popularizada por críticos y arquitectos italianos) de que el análisis tipológico es equivalente al diseño.[8] El arquitecto no es un creador, el artista es un artesano: la función social de su actividad debe derivar de un racionalismo absoluto. Esta utópica "arquitectura social" no es muy distinta de la actividad que Hannes Meyer predicara hace cerca de medio siglo en el Instituto Politécnico Nacional. El resultado debería ser una arquitectura estrictamente esencial, y racional, por y para las masas, que resolviera eficientemente las necesidades materiales del hombre entendido como el simio evolucionado de Darwin.

Este reduccionismo es cuestionado por la otra gran facción de arquitectos mexicanos, generalmente identificados con los grupos socio-económicos de clase acomodada. Este grupo profesa un formalismo o estetismo banales que difícilmente tienen más justificación que la "expresión de su personalidad" o la creación de una "imagen" para un cliente o una corporación. Basta con recorrer las famosas zonas residenciales de la Ciudad de México, Monterrey o Guadalajara para encontrar una total anarquía formal, imaginación sin control, frecuentemente epitomizando lo *kitsch*. Nada parece tener sentido en los mundos "sobre-diseñados" de las Lomas, El Pedregal o Tecamachalco donde cada residencia grita pidiendo atención. Este formalismo incoherente aplicado en casas privadas es totalmente intrascendente: Se trata de un acto de consumo por parte de los clientes, generalmente equivalente a la adquisición de cualquier otro signo de *status*. El producto nada tiene que ver con el arte o la arquitectura. Recuérdese que la casa privada, históricamente, sólo fué de interés al arquitecto cuando poseía una dimensión pública, como en el caso de las fachadas de los palacios florentinos que fungían como escenario para la vida de los ciudadanos.

La misma retórica formal se aplica en México para crear imágenes corporativas. Múltiples edificios se proyectaron y construyeron durante la última década cuya intención es análoga a la de un acto publicitario: Crear una imagen original e identificable con la compañía. Véase, por ejemplo, la casi literal traducción de la tarjeta perforada para la fachada de la I.B.M. en Guadalajara por Ricardo Legorreta (1977).

La polémica entre arquitectura social y arquitectura plástica es, desde luego, absurda y totalmente superficial. Ambas posturas han perdido de vista el ancestral papel de la arquitectura en la historia de la humanidad. Esa falta de sentido histórico se manifiesta, por ejemplo, en las discusiones sobre el uso de los elementos de la arquitectura colonial en la arquitectura moderna mexicana.[9] Nunca se logra una

verdadera asimilación entre historia y teoría: Sólo se niega la posibilidad de usar elementos tradicionales desde una postura netamente modernista, o se usan ciertos elementos de los estilos históricos en forma superficial y literal. Desde el punto de vista de la fenomenología, no existe forma aparte del contenido, estructura aparte del significado. La separación de estos términos es un prejuicio racionalista o asociacionista. El significado es percibido por el hombre en su inmediatez, se *da* en su realidad, en su existencia. Pretender, como los racionalistas, que un arquitecto no crea, que su hacer no es necesariamente personal, es tan absurdo como suponer, con los formalistas, que la expresión formal es un mero acto irracional, reducible a un acto de gusto, decoración o selección de materiales.

El argumento en favor de la arquitectura social, frecuentemente invocado, es superficial. Ni las necesidades humanas, ni los estilos arquitectónicos, ni los tipos formales se comportan con la certidumbre de las matemáticas. Las "necesidades" del hombre no son reducibles a un esquema funcional. Gottfried Semper se equivocó al afirmar, a mediados del siglo pasado, que la arquitectura es el resultado, la *función* de una combinación de variables de todo género.[10] Todos los racionalismos de la arquitectura moderna mexicana, sofisticados o simplistas, tienen su origen en ese prejuicio positivista. Y la arquitectura social, incluso en sus más "avanzadas" elaboraciones marxistas, no es sino una transformación de los mismos prejuicios fundamentales: el hombre no es el ser dual que imaginó Descartes; mucho menos es simplemente materia. Su percepción y su conducta no son reducibles a las ciencias del conductismo o la sicología.[11] Ya en el siglo XVIII el gran filósofo G.B. Vico apuntaba claramente que la verdadera ciencia del hombre es la historia. Y la arquitectura social reciente manifestada en la "planificación racional" y en edificios habitacionales para gente de escasos recursos, hospitales y escuelas, es totalmente ahistórica, pretende ser "pura estructura": Difícilmente se pueden imaginar contextos físicos más hostiles a la presencia humana.

Incluso arquitectos destacados y sin duda talentosos como Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, Francisco Artigas y Juan Sordo Magdaleno profesan el credo de un simple funcionalismo y entienden la arquitectura moderna como una válida "refutación" de lo tradicional.[12] En un cuestionario reproducido en la revista *Arquitectura/México,* Ramírez Vázquez afirma que la característica fundamental de la arquitectura durante los últimos cincuenta años es "la búusqueda constante de nuevas formas ante los múltiples y constantes adelantos técnicos". Ignorando los problemas que la tecnología como visión del mundo presenta para la creación arquitectónica, Ramírez Vázquez afirma aún la fé del funcionalismo temprano, indicando que "no hay por que temer que la técnica domine a la arquitectura". La técnica siempre fué un medio para la expresión de una intención simbólica en las arquitecturas tradicionales, pero la tecnología, posterior a la Revolución Industrial ha creado un fenómeno de muy distinta índole, donde el simple matrimonio de significado y técnica no puede postularse sin polémica.[13] La tecnología es un *proceso* que enfatiza la economía y la eficiencia como únicos valores, sin consideración de objetivos trascendentes, haciendo aparecer la *intención simbólica* como "subjetiva" o "especulativa" *Una arquitectura carente de esa intención es muda y estéril:* Este fenómeno es mucho más evidente en edificios con una gran tradición histórica, como la nueva Basílica de Guadalupe en la Ciudad de México. Para ir más allá de una arquitectura que revela sólamente los impersonales valores del proceso tecnológico es menester una ubicación filosófica y crítica auténtica. Faltos de sentido histórico los arquitectos del "funcionalismo" mexicano, nunca han percibido su profesión más allá de los límites de la especialización.

En una categoría semejante están los arquitectos Abraham Zabludovsky y Teodoro González de León. Trabajando en equipo, ambos arquitectos han construído mucho en la Ciudad de México en le decenio que nos ocupa. Ramírez Vázquez ha descrito su obra como "verdaderamente contemporánea, porque no ignora ninguna de las innovaciones técnicas de nuestro tiempo y porque utiliza los sistemas de construcción y los materiales disponibles conforme a su potencialidad máxima."[14] El prejuicio de la historia como progreso, derivado en primera instancia de los escritos de Francis Bacon durante el siglo XVII, y la creencia en nuestro tiempo como culminación de experiencias fallidas no puede ser más evidente. ¡Cómo si una arquitectura humana y significativa dependiese de su utilización de los métodos técnicos más avanzados!

El problema es, desde luego, la generación de la forma arquitectónica, la intención que la genera. En el caso de Zabludovsky y González de León, a pesar de su indiscutible sensibilidad formal, las decisiones aún no van más allá de la ideología de Le Corbusier y de las sintaxis estilísticas de Mies en sus primeras obras o de Paul Rudolph, los metabolistas japoneses o Louis Kahn al pasar el tiempo. Y debemos recordar que en el caso del gran arquitecto franco-suizo hay una gran distancia entre la intencionalidad tecnológica expresada en sus escritos y la poética de Ronchamp o La Tourette.

La incapacidad de los mejores arquitectos mexicanos para dar razón de esa característica esquizofrenia de la arquitectura moderna ha exacerbado considerablemente la problemática que he descrito. Los parámetros, insisto, son la economía y la eficiencia funcional y estructural, el énfasis en una utópica industrialización, la normalización de elementos y la reducción de los costos. Los valores estéticos son siempre eclécticos y concebidos como añadidos e independientes, o bien se refieren a un contextualismo urbano meramente formalista que nada tiene que ver con el significado del edificio como institución pública. Zabludovsky y González de León saben bien que la forma no sigue, simplemente, a la función. Pero a la pregunta sobre la génesis de la forma responden sinceramente que se trata de una "síntesis" de orden más amplio que incluye un "concepto formal de todas las funciones, las condiciones urbanas y locales, los materiales y su mantenimiento, así como los factores económicos pertinentes."[15] Es imporante recordar una vez más que el funcionalismo, originalmente no se refinó a la resolución de necesidades utilitarias sino precisamente a la "funcionalización" o "matematización" de todo género de "factores" y su reducción a una ecuación racional que gene-

rase la forma.[16] La postura de Zabludovsky y González de León no es sino la misma fórmula racional, vuelta supuestamente más general y adicionada de "ornamento". Tal actitud no permite trascender las limitaciones del funcionalismo moderno. Su arquitectura es aún, intencionalmente prosa y sólo fragmentariamente poesía.

Esta última cualidad es clara en sus tres obras recientes más destacadas: El INFONAVIT (1973), el Colegio de México (1975) y la Embajada de México en Brasilia. En estas obras Zabludovsky y González de León parecen haber descubierto el potencial de las esencias arquitectónicas y sus profundas raíces históricas y geográficas: El uso del patio como metáfora, el concreto monolítico y la integración no sólo formal sino existencial con el paisaje, han sido muy afortunados, resultando en edificios que parecen más auténticamente mexicanos, quizás apelando a la tradición inaugurada por Luis Barragán. Su significado deriva de lo explícito de la geometría arquitectónica, del casi primordial manejo de las estructuras trabeadas, en desafío retórico de la gravedad.

Durante un breve período, al final de la década de 1930, ciertos contactos con el movimiento surrealista francés crearon una polémica teórica suficientemente densa para propiciar una re-evaluación de las raíces culturales mexicanas en relación al arte contemporáneo. Pero este movimiento fué de breve duración. En la década que nos ocupa todo interés genuino por el arte y las humanidades ha sido postergado. En términos generales, el país parece preparado para sacrificar lo poco que le queda de valores culturales genuinos en pos de una más rápida modernización o incluso de una superficial aculturación. No existe la voluntad de percibir la vida como significativa y, por consiguiente, la necesidad de simbolización encarnada en la arquitectura se considera superflua.

Y nuestras "ciudades modernas" palidecen y mueren. Quizás el mejor ejemplo de esta tendencia es la gigantesca unidad habitacional Nonoalco-Tlatelolco de Mario Pani (1960-64). Su interpretación literal del temprano estilo internacional y de las nociones sobre planificación de Le Corbusier lo llevaron a crear una inmensa "zona neutral", un espacio cartesiano meramente cuantitativo, sin orientación ni cualidades, cerca del centro de la Ciudad de México. En los años treinta la imitación inconsiderada del "estilo internacional" fué quizás justificada. En los años sesenta lo fué mucho menos. Pani nunca consideró la posibilidad de reconocer el significado histórico de las inmensas áreas que demolió. Aún más atroz, sin embargo, es la frecuente repetición de los mismos modelos en la década de los setentas. Esta situación es el resultado de una total falta de sentido crítico en la enseñanza de la arquitectura. Las ciudades mexicanas se han poblado de muchas estructuras que no hacen sino exponer un sistema estructural y repetir *ad infinitum* soluciones de vivienda mínima, que no responden ni a los auténticos valores de la vida íntima (recuérdese la complejidad de la vivienda tradicional como microcosmos antropomórfico descrito por los antropólogos) ni a aquellos valores históricos de la vida pública (compárese simplemente Nonoalco-Tlatelolco con el centro de Guanajuato).

Los dos más eminentes arquitectos mexicanos que pueden considerarse como contribuyentes originales en la vanguardia de la tradición arquitectónica Occidental son Juan O'Gorman y Luis Barragán. Ninguno de los dos produjo obras significativas en la década que nos ocupa, pero su obra ha tenido eco, si bien frecuentemente superficial, en la producción de otros arquitectos como Fernando González Gortazar[17], Agustín Hernández[18] y Ricardo Legorreta. Al igual que el arte y la filosofía modernas, la arquitectura ha tratado de recuperar su significado a través de dos posturas, aparentemente polémicas, pero cuyas raíces en el dilema de la crísis de la cultura Occidental son profundas y auténticas. Una trata de recuperar el sentido de la arquitectura como *poesis* o construcción, rechazando la distancia entre proyecto y edificio exacerbada por los medios tecnológicos de producción. Esa distancia tiene, desde luego, sus orígenes en el Renacimiento Italiano. Pero no es sino hasta principios del siglo XIX que el arquitecto se reduce a proyectista, implementando los métodos de la geometría descriptiva que permitieron una verdadera y precisa reducción del edificio en sus proyecciones geométricas bidimensionales. A partir de ese momento se crea la ilusión de que el dibujo arquitectónico es un simple medio de representación, no ya el símbolo de una intención significativa, análoga a la del edificio pero que no constituye la reducción de su realidad. Con la nueva especialización propiciada por la industrialización, tal ilusión trajo consigo confusiones constantes en cuanto a la relación del arquitecto con la propia construcción. La arquitectura tardía de O'Gorman, en el mismo espíritu que la obra del catalán Gaudí, con raíces en la fenomenología existencial y en las experiencias surrealistas, es un excelente ejemplo de este hacer poético donde el significado deriva de una yuxtaposición de elementos encontrados y de vivencias del mundo cotidiano. En su propia casa (1958), O'Gorman exploró hasta sus límites esta postura, tratando de rebelar el sentido físico de la poética del espacio, hasta percibir sus limitaciones en el mundo moderno.[19] O'Gorman ha sido quizás el único arquitecto mexicano conscientemente preocupado por el *significado*. Su sentido crítico fué único, revisando su postura desde el funcionalismo radical de su escuela en Tolsá y Tresguerras, hasta su considerado abandono de la arquitectura por la pintura.

La segunda posibilidad es una arquitectura de esencias, con raíces en la fenomenología eidética. No se trata, desde luego, de una nueva elaboración del reduccionismo o del "menos es más" de la tecnología, sino de recapturar significados primordiales o arquetipos, siempre en relación con la riqueza de un contexto cultural. Esto es lo que han logrado Rossi en Italia y Barragán en México.[20] En un sentido radical, sin embargo, ambas posturas sólo se realizan cabalmente en *proyectos teóricos,* como los de arquitectos desde Piranesi, Boullée y Ledoux hasta John Hejduk y Daniel Libeskind.[21] Este último ha producido recientemente una arquitectura de esencias geométricas encarnada en dibujos y maquetas que *no representan* una arquitectura ajena a ellos sino que *constituyen* la propia arquitectura. No reconocer esa dimensión de inadecuación entre la arquitectura y el mundo contemporáneo después de 1800 equivale a rechazar la creencia de que la arquitectura es un arte indispensable

para la supervivencia cultural. Ambas posturas se ven necesitadas de una auténtica fundamentación teórica, entendiendo teoría no como una metodología autosuficiente, un recetario o formulario; sino como una postura filosófica que oriente el hacer del arquitecto en relación a una visión del mundo actual.

Cabe aquí mencionar los interesantes ensayos de Octavio Paz quien ha puesto de manifiesto, desde hace ya varias décadas, el carácter único del arte y la poesía del siglo XX.[22] Paz es uno de los pocos latinoamericanos que ha hecho crítica artística y literaria a la altura de los tiempos, entendiendo cabalmente la condición del arte como *reconciliación,* con profundas raíces existenciales. Una vez que el racionalismo positivista hubo cuestionado toda mitología y cosmología tradicionales, el mundo ha tenido que confrontar el vacío de la tecnología. En esas condiciones el arte se vuelve sobre si mismo y se torna *crítica.* El arte no puede ser ya, simplemente, el reflejo de un orden cósmico, dado que el hombre contemporáneo carece de ser, vive en constante devenir, proyectado hacia un futuro *u-tópico* (que no está en ningún lado), distendido, parafraseando a Alfred Jarry, entre el cero y el infinito.

Tal posición nunca ha sido tomada en serio por los arquitectos mexicanos, preocupados siempre por los más banales problemas de producción, desarrollo y crecimiento. El arquitecto mexicano de la década de los setentas ha eludido el problema de la auténtica especificidad de la arquitectura como arte y pretende simplemente "responder a las necesidades del medio." Desorientado, justifica la anonimidad atroz de sus edificios y sus ciudades invocando las presiones de clientes, políticos y planificadores. Aún cuando las presiones son, en efecto, reales; el problema es más radical y atañe la falta de comprensión de la misión del arquitecto como artista: *Techné* y *poesis* en griego denotaban actividades semejantes, acciones humanas con objetivos reconciliatorios. Es tristemente significativo que incluso el destacado escultor Mathias Goeritz, cuya obra plástica y esporádica arquitectura (recuérdese el cabaret "El Eco" y las torres de "Ciudad Satélite") son por demás interesantes, emite opiniones poco consistentes sobre el particular. Sus escritos en la *Sección de Arte* de la revista *Arquitectura/México* son provocativos. La inclusión de esa "sección" en la propia revista es de por si una insinuación. Pero Goeritz acepta simplemente la "diferencia" entre la arquitectura y las demás artes, en su opinión mucho menos comprometidas. Esta falta de claridad y sentido crítico ha perpetuado los viejos preceptos racionalistas.

El problema fundamental de la arquitectura mexicana reciente es, pues, la falta de discusión teórica seria. Aún los arquitectos sensibles y talentosos no parecen comprender la verdadera importancia de la teoría y la historia para crear una arquitectura significativa, auténticamente crítica o poética. Un buen ejemplo es el arquitecto Agustín Hernández quien, de buena fé ha rechazado "el funcionalismo, el constructivismo y el formalismo".[23] Hernández ha buscado un primitivismo consciente inspirado por Levy-Bruhl y por una ideosincrática comprensión de las geometrías reveladas por la biología. Así Hernández rechaza el empleo de la retícula calificándola de inhumana y adopta la geometría del círculo y el triángulo, pertenecientes "a la naturaleza y a la vida" Es obvio que la retícula de la arquitectura tecnológica, la retícula del "mecanismo de la composición" de Durand, es inhumana. Pero hacer de esa aseveración un postulado universal es absurdo. Hernández ignora precisamente las orientaciones míticas primordiales del hombre: arriba-abajo, izquierda-derecha, delante-atrás; determinando lugares cualitativamente distintos, permitieron al hombre encarnado desde sus primeros pasos en el mundo, establecer un orden simbólico a su imagen y semejanza.[24] La percepción humana se da, *a priori,* en un marco de categorias. Cada objecto en nuestra vida se abre hacia su esencia geométrica y hacia su especificidad. El problema aparece cuando la geometría se funcionaliza y se torna en un instrumento para reducir la riqueza del mundo percibido y dominar la naturaleza. Pero la *geo-metría* Euclideana primoridial, recordémoslo, depende de la intuición.

Hernández postula una arquitectura donde, en vez de fachadismo, el proyecto recuperase la perdida síntesis entre valores estéticos, la estática y la economía. Sin embargo Hernández rechaza la teoría, siendo su opinión que ésta simplemente transforma la consciencia de las cosas y no las cosas mismas. Aún cuando reconoce los problemas que tráe consigo la distancia entre el proyecto y el edificio, su pragmatismo y su falta de comprensión histórica del problema le impiden trascenderlo. La teorí, entendida como filosofía, "transforma las cosas mismas". Baste con recordar que precisamente el mundo que sin ningún sentido crítico aceptan como el resultado natural del progreso los arquitectos contemporáneos, tuvo que ser primero imaginado por Descartes y Galileo.[25]

La arquitectura de Agustín Hernández es, sin duda, original. En algunos casos Hernández ha tratado de interpretar la herencia cultural de México. Particularmente su edificio para el Ballet Folklórico y el nuevo Colegio Militar (1971-1976) hacen alusión a las formas piramidales del México precolombino. Es alentador su interés por una arquitectura significativa, no meramente funcional o placentera. Pero sus alusiones son demasiado literales. Su obra no capta la esencia y los valores humanos de las culturas mexicanas, sino meramente un monumentalismo frío y con frecuencia alienante. Su propia oficina construída recientemente en Tecamachalco es un árbol de concreto que habla, también literalmente, del comportamiento estructural del material, recordándonos las contradicciones del Romanticismo Frances o *Neo-Grèc* (1845-1855) de Labrouste, Viollet-le-Duc y sus discípulos, obsesionados por añadir a una estructura racional ornamento "legible" que diera significado al edificio.[26] La obra de Hernández es un valeroso testimonio de la incoherencia y angustia expresiva de la arquitectura mexicana de los últimos años. Su inconsistencia revela precisamente la ausencia de una verdadera teoría.

Octavio Paz ha escrito: "una civilización es ante todo un urbanismo; quiero decir, más que una visión del mundo y de los hombres, una civilización es una visión de los hombres en el mundo y de los hombres como un mundo: un orden, una arquitectura".[27] Y la visión de los arquitectos mexicanos, debido en parte, pero no únicamente, a su inherente inconsistencia, nunca es tomada en serio por los políticos y

planificadores encargados de la toma de decisiones en lo que se refiere al entorno físico del ciudadano. Se considera que la postura racionalista no es aún suficientemente racional mientras el formalismo "intuitivo" no merece, desde luego, tomarse en cuenta. Las decisiones sobre la forma y el desarrollo de las ciudades son necesariamente consideradas como la provincia de una planificación "ultra-racional" con base en metodologías cientificistas. Así, el arquitecto mismo no logra definir claramente su papel como profesionista. ¿Se trata de un decorador meramente intuitivo? ¿De un coordinador? ¿De un administrador de materiales lujosos para crear la imagen de la casa de un magnate o una corporación? ¿Se trata de un organizador de funciones en planta? ¿De un fachadista? ¿De un constructor? Cualquier especialista, ama de casa o ingeniero parecería estar mejor calificado para desempeñar estos papeles. O bien las funciones del arquitecto carecen totalmente de importancia. En el contexto cultural mexicano el arquitecto mismo es culpable por haber rehuído estas cuestiones, hoy examinadas con pasión en Europa y los Estados Unidos. No se trata de definir la construcción, sino la *arquitectura*. Ya Etienne-Louis Boullée se llenaba de angustia a finales del siglo XVIII pensando que quizá había dedicado su vida "a un arte quimérico", carente de una razón de ser en el horizonte e la cultura. El arquitecto mexicano prefiere no discutir su papel secundario en un mundo governado por los intereses tecnócratas y burócratas. Se presenta la profesión generalmente rodeada de un absurdo esoterismo y se trata de dar por su lado al cliente para obtener máximas ventajas económicas. Ni aún la tragedia de la "planificada" Ciudad de México lleva a la reflexión. ¿Será menester un cataclismo?

Un paseo por México es revelador. Al nivel elemental de la sensibilidad popular, la arquitectura mexicana es mágica. Su colorido, el uso de los materiales, la variedad en la unidad, son características que constituyen los conjuntos urbanos más ricos de todo el continente. La casa mexicana tradicional posee una dimensión pública inusitada, creando en las ciudades espacios públicos capaces de seducir a cualquier espíritu sensible. ¡Cuántas historias maravillosas aún reverberan en las calles y plazas de Oaxaca y Querétaro! La arquitectura mexicana, generalmente construidad aún *a mano,* posee la riqueza de los gestos del mexicano, la poética del albañil aún no convertido en un factor cuantitativo del proceso de producción. Los arquitectos mexicanos comparten, desde luego, la inmensa sensibilidad de sus compatriotas. Por algo Andre Breton describió a México como el más surrealista de todos los países. Pero la falta de discusión teórica y de comprensión histórica de su arte, ha llevado a los arquitectos en los últimos años a enajenar su espíritu poético y a perderse en el caos desorientador de las aparentes necesidades pragmáticas del México "en desarrollo". Mientras algunos arquitectos formalistas han creado imágenes que imitan superficialmente los estilos de moda en el mundo Occidental, los racionalistas pretenden una mejor adecuación al contexto social mexicano, pero ignoran todo contenido espiritual, inadmisible para el pensamiento materialista. La arquitectura y las estructuras urbanas que precedieron a la revolución, hablan al hombre de si mismo; de sus sueños, de su erotismo, de sus dimensiones mágicas y místicas, y de sus dilemas más íntimos, de su finitud carnal y su infinitud espiritual. Es por demás trágico el contraste con la mayoría de la producción reciente: una tragedia que, dicho sea de paso, no atañe únicamente a México, sino que posee magnitud universal.

La dimensión poética del hombre no es, enfaticemos, ni irracional ni accesoria. Recordemos las palabras de Martín Heidegger quien escribe: "Cuando el poeta habla de habitar, tiene ante sus ojos el carácter básico de la existencia humana . " Lo poético no es un "añadido" al habitar. La frase "el hombre habita poéticamente" significa más bien que la *poesía* es condición del habitar. La poesía nos permite vivir, nos permite habitar este mundo. Y sólo a través de la construcción el hombre se hace *su* lugar para habitar. La creación poética, que nos permite habitar, es un género de construcción, *la arquitectura.*

NOTAS

1. Véase, por ejemplo, Jacques Soustelle, *La Vida Cotidiana de los Aztecas* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1977).
2. Ms. *Cantares Mexicanos*, fol. qv. Reproducido por Miguel León-Portilla, *Los Antiguos Mexicanos* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1970).
3. Véase, por ejemplo, la popular obra de J. Bronowsky, *The Ascent of Man*..
4. Georges Gusdorf, *Les Origines des Sciences Humaines* (París: Payot, 1967).
5. Ivan Illich, *Energía y Equidad* (México: Editorial Posada, 1978).
6. Véase, entre otros, José Ortega y Gasset, *En Torno a Galileo* (Madrid: El Arquero, 1967) y Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965).
7. Véase Carlos Fuentes, *Tiempo Mexicano* (México: Cuadernos de Joaquín Mortiz, 1972).
8. Véase Giorgio Grassi, *La Arquitectura como Oficio y otros Escritos* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, S. A., 1980).
9. *Arquitectura/México* 101 (1969).
10. Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *La Génesis y Superación del Funcionalismo* (México: Editorial Limusa, 1980).
11. Véase Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenología de la Percepción* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1962).
12. *Arquitectura/México* 107 (1972).
13. Véase, por ejemplo, Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964).
14. Paul Heyer, *Mexican Architecture* (New York: Walker and Co., 1978). p. 14.
15. Ibid. p. 47.
16. Véanse, por ejemplo, Jacques Nicolas-Louis Durand, *Précis de Lecons d'Architecture* (París, 1819) y las obras de Gottfried Semper.
17. *Arquitectura/México* 108 (1973).
18. Véase Alfonso de Neuvillate-Ortíz, *Diez Arquitectos Mexicanos* (México: Misrachi, 1977).
19. Véase G. Bachelard, *La Poética del Espacio* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965).
20. Véase Emilio Ambasz, *The Architecture of Luis Barragán* (New York: 1978).
21. Véase Daniel Libeskind, *Between Zero and Infinity* (New York: Rizzoli, 1981) y *Lotus* 27 (1980) pp. 82 y sigs.
22. Octavio Paz, *Los Signos en Rotación* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1977) pp. 307-340.
23. *Arquitectura/México* 115 (1977).
24. Véase Ernst Cassirer, *Antropología Filosófica* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1971) y Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971).
25. Véase Alexandre Koyré, *Metaphysics and Measurement* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1968) capítulos 1-3.
26. Arthur Drexler, *The Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux Arts* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971). pp. 375 y sigs.
27. Paul Heyer, *Mexican Architecture*, epígrafe, p. XIII.

REFLECTIONS ON MY WORK IN MEXICO

by
Helen Escobedo
Museum of Modern Art, Mexico City

In order to describe my work as an environmental site sculptor in Mexico today, I must first attempt a brief history of the influence of both the Pre-Hispanic cultures and the various facets of 20th-century Mexican sculpture today. I first became deeply conscious of these two currents in the early 1950s, when, as a sculpture student at the Royal College of Art in London, I proudly led a group of fellow students to a comprehensive exhibition of Mexican Art at the Tate Gallery. The Main room, with its major display of Pre-Hispanic works, was magnificent. Some of the greatest carvings ever transported to a foreign country were on view: gods of death, of birth, skulls—presences that were so awe-inspiring that the room echoed only the sounds of silently shuffling feet as the visitors, struck by the magic of the pieces, moved silently past.

The feeling of wonder continued well into the second room, which featured aspects of colonial Mexico: its churches, parts of altars, paintings and sculptures taken from some of the convents and museums of religious art of this country. The lighting and installation of these two great rooms was superb, and full credit for this exhibition must go to Fernando Gamboa, the well-known museum director and curator of exhibitions.

The third room held the most representative works of our three great muralists: José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros—(please note the order of preference). Well-represented too, were the followers of the muralists and the so-called "Mexican School" of painting with a final, breath-taking selection of works by Rufino Tamayo and a smaller collection of paintings by artists born in the late 1920s or the early 1930s. Of contemporary sculpture, however, not a piece was to be seen. This is what dumbfounded my fellow students. They had just witnessed the great cultural heritage of our ancestors and had also been confronted with the undeniable vigor of the muralist paintings. A school of contemporary art obviously existed; the paintings were clearly visible. Where then, was contemporary Mexican sculpture? Where and why had the link been lost with our past? This is what I will attempt to explain.

Throughout the first three decades of the 20th century, most of the sculpture commissioned by the State was to be seen in its monuments and statues. Both in sculpture and in painting, this close relationship with the State showed the advantages and disadvantages of what the Mexican School had attempted symbolically. It was only an artist like Germán Cueto—later to become my teacher—who rebelled against this school of thought, and introduced modern trends into his work. But it wasn't until the 1950s that sculpture in its abstract form appeared on the horizon, and this was greatly due to both Germán Cueto and very particularly, to Mathias Goeritz.

Public sculpture was to be seen everywhere. The official sculpture commissioned by the government consisted, for the most part, of monuments to national heroes: Benito Juárez, Miguel Hidalgo, José María Morelos, Emiliano Zapata and Lázaro Cárdenas. These figures seemed to turn up in every provincial city in Mexico and were eminently visible throughout the main avenues in Mexico City as well. Also to be found, and still being commissioned today, are monuments to such symbols as the Revolution of 1910, Our Race, Motherhood, and to the Expropriation of Oil of 1938, which usually consist of larger-than-lifesize figures surrounded by monolithic stands to make them look even taller and greater. Added to these, and still very much in evidence in the form of commissions, are monuments to living people—prominent personalities such as past presidents, political figures, famous movie stars and some popular singers.

The sudden breakthrough in 1968, during the Olympic Games held in Mexico City, must be attributed once again to Mathias Goeritz, who, together with the architect Pedro Ramírez Vásquez, then in charge of the Olympic installations, implemented what was later to be known as the "Olympic Highway" or "Route of Friendship." Along one of the main avenues surrounding part of the city, 17 monumental sculptures, all abstract, all commissioned in concrete, represented almost as many countries: Alexander Calder, with his great red sun in front of the Aztec Stadium; Constantino Nivola from Italy; Herbert Bayer, Austrian-

American; Germán Cueto from Mexico; Kiyoshi Takahashi from Japan and many other well-known sculptors were given the opportunity of designing a large piece and executing it. These were finally painted and inagurated in time for the Olympics.

This was my first opportunity, as one of the invited sculptors for Mexico, to do my first major piece in an outdoor environment. It changed the whole trend of what up to then had been studio sculpture; that is, works that had been born within my studio, were of gallery size and to be sold as unique pieces. The fever of contemporary Mexican sculpture in urban situations began to spread and soon there were such outstanding figures as Fernando González Cortazar in Guadalajara, Mathias Goeritz, Manuel Felguérez and even well-known painters such as Vicente Rojo, Gunther Gerzso and especially Rufino Tamayo, who were commissioned works in sculpture of great dimensions for the city of Monterrey. (Tamayo's has been the only one to be executed full-scale.) Finally, in the late 1970s, the University of Mexico commissioned a group of six sculptors to do a large environmental piece known as the "Espacio Escultórico." Here once again Mathias Goeritz, Manuel Felguérez, Federico Silva, Sebastián, Hersúa and myself are the authors of this tremendous and finally successful venture.

As background to my own work as a sculptor, I must begin with a brief history of my education. At a very early age—as a child, in fact, I suffered greatly from excruciating ear infections. Since I had to spend weeks at a time in bed, my mother provided me with Plasticine, clay and a three-quarter violin to keep me busy. My first creations were a result of the pain in my recurrent nightmares. My earliest memories in this respect are of the little figures I used to set out on my breakfast tray—dragon-maids, elephants, and strange, surrealistic animals in which I would put toothpicks and bent forks to somehow get it all out of my system, to get back at the dreaded creatures who seemed to be causing the unbelievable pain in my head. My mother, aware of a certain naïve talent, arranged for a drawing teacher to take me on quiet walks where we would sketch the streets and bridges in the neighborhood.

Finally, at the age of 15 when I was in school and in good health again, I was excused from the afternoon lessons and attended instead the Art School at the Mexico City College, an institution set up for older people and military personnel to continue their education. There, I met Germán Cueto, who, delighted with his first young Mexican student, was able, for two years, to teach me the techniques of modelling and carving in the freest way possible. Since we were unable to buy great blocks of stone, wood or marble, we used rather unconventional materials which put my teacher's inventiveness to the test. By mixing different substances such as sawdust, vynelite, piroxiline, asbestos and cement, he produced a maleable substance which enabled me to model and have a permanent piece once it set.

Just before my 17th birthday, I met John Skeaping, R.A. (Royal Academy), a professor at the Royal College of Art in London who was in Mexico writing a book about the black pottery of Oaxaca. He visited me in my studio, and perceiving a certain budding talent, although still unchannelled and extremely untrained, he proposed I spend one year at the Royal College of Art with a view to possible admission to the full three-year course. I was, of course, the youngest student there, and the most unlikely to be admitted, due to my lack of training in the various techniques. Nevertheless, at the end of the first year, I was finally granted a full scholarship. There, outstanding sculptors such as Zadkine, Sir Jacob Epstein, Henry Moore, Leon Underwood and Frank Dobson were to walk through my life in the studios and leave a deep impression upon me.

My extended stay at the Sculpture School in London and Germán Cueto's teachings had prepared me to appreciate the values of space in modelling, as well as the expressionistic treatment of form. I was greatly influenced by the works of Giacometti and Henry Moore; two very opposing influences, since it was not so much the elongated figures of Giacometti, but the space, the electrifying emptiness between the figures, that so struck me, while Moore's organic, beautifully modelled volumes invariably reminded me, even at the time, of the impressive Pre-Hispanic figures of Mexico.

I returned to my country in 1954, and two years later had a show at the gallery of Inés Amor, the *doyenne* of art galleries in Mexico. During three subsequent shows every year at the same gallery, my work turned from a form of abstract expressionism into a search for space within the forms I was enclosing. In 1967, I was invited by the Uluv Gallery in Prague, Czechoslovakia, to exhibit my recent pieces, which by then consisted of a series called "Dynamic" walls. While two years previously I had been enclosing human figures by giving them a sense of belonging and environment with spaces limited by such walls, by 1967 the figures had disappeared entirely, and the walls became environmental, causing the public to take the role of my previously modelled figures. This then, was the beginning of the search and the quest I have laid out for myself: the meaning of Art in Space—in urban space, in enclosed spaces, in interiors—but always taking into consideration that man is the mediator between his dimension and that of the world that surrounds us—its buildings, its streets, its bridges, its parks and trees.

By 1968, and in view of my interest in environmental sculpture, I was invited to participate in the Olympic Highway project. For this, I did a concrete sculpture, entitled "Gateway to the Wind," one of my "Dynamic" walls, 17 meters high, painted green and blue (Plate 1). It was my first monumental sculpture commission, and designed to be placed frontally on the highway. In 1971, the City Council for the Golden Jubilee of Auckland in New Zealand, asked me to do a sculpture 15 meters high which I entitled "Signals" (Plate 2). Located on a highway overlooking the Bay of Auckland, it consists of four aluminium structures resembling ladders. The design permits the space to pass through the metal bars which are painted in various bright colours, thus affording the possibility of appreciating the landscape beyond: the ships anchored in the port, the cranes in constant movement and the effect of light upon the water. Rather than interrupt the view with a massive structure, I

wanted to produce a piece that was light—a see-through piece, a transparent work.

My iconography, if it can be described as such, derives as much from Euclidean geometry and vernacular architecture as from repetitive elements in nature such as tree trunks, rows of cacti and bamboo fences. All this is highly apparent in the home I built for my family which is sort of a multiple dwelling house. In itself, it is a potpourri of Mexican, Italian and Greek vernacular architecture whereas the designs on the doors, windows and such, are painted in hard-edged designs. The house reflects my artistic concerns, not only for my family, but as a practical, personal solution to the adaptation of both buildings and outdoor sculpture to their surroundings. Therefore, in my house, doors serve as windows, windows are convex and transparent Plexiglas with a repetitive pattern and the spaces are free in the sense that they may be used in many ways.

As a site-oriented sculptor, I run up against the problems of most sculptors and architects working on a large scale in given situations, since I can honestly state that barely 10 percent of all the sculptural solutions I have proposed for specific commissions have actually been executed. The other 90 percent remain in their model form, although the creative effort they represent is, of course, full-scale. In order to overcome the frustration of not seeing many of these works executed, I have devised a system which involves a series of photographs taken from several different directions of the actual sites proposed. I then choose a view that will take a proper setting for one of my sculptures—the one that was indeed selected for full-scale manufacture. Working closely with Paolo Gori, an excellent photographer, we place the model in front of the photographed building or area for which it was commissioned. By setting the camera very close to the *maquette,* and by using a wide-angle lens, the model appears full-scale in its setting, thus giving a good rendering of what it would look like if it were, in fact, executed.

Another approach I use when I have no commissions on hand, yet wish to design an outdoor sculpture in my studio without a determined site in mind, is the following: I start by inventing a landscape, either by sketches or by cut-outs from glossy magazines pasted on to heavy paper. These are my college drawings which give me an environment to work from. I design and make the little sculpture in aluminum sheet, then glue it on to the invented landscape. They are, in fact, sculpture-collages. Sometimes, instead of an invented landscape I may choose a building or a public square, photograph the site, and then glue the sculpture directly on to the photograph. I must point out that I have not used these sculpture-collages to obtain commissions. They are, in themselves, my art works produced in the studio.

Ephemeral, or non-permanent environments in various situations are another form of self-expression that I often use on a short-term basis when given a chance. The most important example of this was seen at the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico when I gave my one-woman show in 1971 (Plate 3). It consisted of a white corridor of plywood slats permitting the light to shift as the sun changed its direction. At the end of this corridor, a mylar mirror was placed to extend the visual effects into infinity. A similar environment was designed and constructed in a public park in New Orleans during the 9th International Sculpture Conference in 1976. Here, together with a team of students from Tulane University, I made a colonnade of vertical white hardboard tubes placed in an alley of pine trees which turned into a corridor for visitors to wander through. I felt that the columns harmonized successfully with the natural environment of the park. In 1977, during my stay at the University of Salinas in California as a sculptor in-residence, I installed an environment—again ephemeral—in the Hartnell College Gallery. Entitled "Total Environment," it consisted of two corridors and a central spiral column made from wooden frames 2 meters by 2 meters, painted bright red. The first and second-year students at Hartnell College assisted me in this project and also gave suggestions regarding what could be done with the wooden frames which, when taken down, went to the College to be reused in any way the students wished.

In most of my works, perhaps due to my Mexican heritage, color plays an essential part, except in very special cases when pure white is used to contrast the shadows in natural light conditions. One of my latest pieces, the one I am most fond of perhaps because it is recent, is entitled "Coatl," the Náhuatl word for serpent (Plate 4). It is located within the Cultural Complex of the National University of Mexico, and consists of twenty "I" beams in the form of frames; rather resembling my Salinas attempt, but since this is a permanent piece, it is in steel, 15 meters long and 6 meters high. Basically, it depicts a serpent whose habitat is the *pedregal,* or the stone area in which it is built, modulated and painted in colors ranging from deep yellow through orange into tones of red. Basically, it is a corridor that snakes its way across the lava rock, framing the magnificent nature which in turn surrounds it.

The work I mentioned earlier, entitled the "Espacio Escultórico"—by now one of the outstanding open-air sculptures and the largest in scale in Mexico, has been my greatest collaborative effort to date (Plate 5). Commissioned by the National University in 1978, it was designed by a team of six sculptors. It proved to be a unique experience and the result was this extraordinary work which fused the creative excitement of its six authors. This is the key to its magic and mystery: it is neither a monument nor a stage, but rather an open, enigmatic work which has become one of the most rewarding of my group work experiences. Rita Eder, an art historian who has written a book on my work, describes the "Espacio Escultórico" as follows:

> In its form and sense of modernity, the 'Espacio Escultórico' is in the direct line of the ancient sculptural and architectural traditions of Mexico. The difficulty in defining this work augments to the degree in which social and aesthetic implications multiply. Let us begin by saying that it consists of an enormous circle of 64 modular elements in concrete. The exterior diameter, calculated to seat 3,000 people, is approximately 130 metres. Inside the circle, like great teeth rearing up, the lava of volcanic rock is contained. All greenery has been removed, and the impact of the solid, dramatic stone

contained within this geometric circle of pyramidal shapes, give it a great sense of majesty.

By some fluke, by some form of magic, the acoustics are extraordinary. Various open-air performances, such as contemporary music, dance, poetry readings and other events have taken place within the "Space", much to the delight of the weekend crowds.

A final phase of my work that is directly related to what I have described in this article, soon to be published by the University of Mexico, is a book on Mexican monuments of all kinds throughout the Republic, with photographs by Paolo Gori and which took over two years to compile. Through photographic renderings, it will best exemplify the artistic evolution of the country during the 20th century regarding the art of sculpture in its public manifestations—whether privately commissioned, state-commissioned, or from the desire of the people in little towns to have such monuments on view.

A PROPÓSITO DE ESA OLLA CONVERTIDA EN "ARTE POPULAR"

Esther Acevedo
Universidad Iberoamericana

La invitación para exponer mis ideas sobre arte mexicano en la década de los setentas, hizo que mi atención se centrara en un tema que los editores de la Universidad de Vanderbilt proponían en principio como folklore. Esta oportunidad me permitiría aclarar, entre otras cosas, lo que se ha escrito y entendido sobre esa modalidad de la expresión creativa, que a su vez ha generado un gran número de confusiones, controversias y desinformación sobre el tema que ahora me ocupa.

Me interesa en particular hacer un estudio que permitirá, por un lado, dar lineamientos para formular una definición y aclarar los usos que se han hecho del "arte popular" y mostrar, a la vez, manipulación ideológica del término o de los términos usados.

Caos y contradicción en la labor definitoria

Múltiples y diversos han sido los enfoques utilizados para definir el "arte popular" Cabe replantearse ¿qué es el "arte popular"? y ver cómo surge este concepto, para ver si ese cuestionamiento nos aclara algunos prejuicios suscitados en torno a la comprensión de este fenómeno expresivo. La producción artesanal como modalidad de vida cotidiana estuvo asimilada a la mayoría de la población mexicana a lo largo de su historia. Este producción empezó a desvirtuarse por condiciones estructurales; sobre todo como consecuencia del crecimiento industrial y por condiciones ideológicas inherentes a la cultura occidental. Durante el siglo XIX, y muy paulatinamente, las expresiones populares empezaron a ser asimiladas, dentro del horizonte de la cultura occidental. Algunas características formales de producción plástica fueron asimilándose a movimientos modernos y muchas "tradiciones primitivas" producidas por sociedades diferentes se aglutinaron en un solo término "arte popular". A esta occidentalización del concepto habría que sumarle la ideología postrevolucionara mexicana, la cual rescató al "arte popular" como la herencia indígena asimilada en la época colonial y que por su pureza y refinamiento constituía, para los ideólogos postrevolucionarios, una de las esencias de lo nacional. Fue en esta época cuando lo popular pasó a ser un indicador más de lo mexicano.

El estado tomó como función a partir del movimiento revolucionario de 1910 la regeneración del país a través de la exaltación de este reformado espíritu nacional. Uno de sus premisas fue la promoción del "arte popular", lo cual para muchos de ellos significaba forjar una nacionalidad, hacer patria.[1]

Esta asunción de ser objeto de uso a objeto de cambio ha alejado a la creación artesanal de su comunidad y ha aislado lo creativo, lo manual, la belleza, la imaginación, el sentimiento, el simbolismo y el uso de los objetos creados por cada una de las culturas y los ha convertido en objetos históricos globalizándolos en un término común "arte popular" que permite su uso y manipulación por diferentes grupos (Plates 6 and 7).

El simposio sobre arte culto y arte popular, efectuado en Zacatecas en 1973, puso sobre la mesa términos con los cuales se suscitaron más dudas y en verdad no se llegó a una comprensión efectiva del tema que entonces nos ocupaba. Sin embargo, dos condiciones debían reunir la creación popular para ser incluídas dentro del gran denominador de "arte popular": se necesitaba que ellos fueran producidos por sociedades subalternas y que su sistema de valores y formas les confiera una peculiaridad distintiva. Por otra parte, los editores del *Handbook of Latin American Art* han hecho tres grandes clasificaciones con la finalidad de agrupar las publicaciones sobre lo popular, agrupándolas por el estilo, la tradición o por devenir de estudios etnográficos.

De esta forma las definiciones del llamado "arte popular" toman al objeto como algo en sí terminado, y no como un proceso social que debe ser comprendido más ampliamente, y que habría que tener en cuenta; me refiero al proceso productivo, la circulación de la obra y su consumo. Es en el análisis de estas tres etapas de donde se pueden sacar indicadores, para una clara definición de los diferentes fenómenos que se generan según las diversas articulaciones que existen entre ellas.

Es relevante identificar la interrelación entre las etapas del proceso productivo del objeto ya que unas se encuentran insertas en un desarrollo social subalterno y estructuradas

con una lógica propia que las separa del sistema capitalista. No obstante otras se encuentran dentro de la lógica dominante: la capitalista. Estas realidades nos llevan pues, a hacer diferenciaciones de denominación entre una entidad cultural que se produce, distribuye y consume en el mismo lugar y otras que se le saca de su comunidad, refuncionalizando su uso. Otra diferencia importante se observa cuando el trabajador es un artesano que no toma decisiones en la producción del objeto sino que éstas son guiadas por el mercado; del mismo modo otra variable podría ser aquella en la que al artesano se le impone un modo de producción y parte del proceso se industrializa. Se podría proponer entonces una terminología diferente que podría ser útil si se usara en congruencias con las diversas etapas del proceso productivo del objeto, designando arte del pueblo al primero, arte popular al segundo, artesanía al tercero e industria artesanal al cuarto.

Obviamente, la confusión de términos que he delineado se ha extendido y no hay pues una concepción coherente de lo que se entiende hoy por "arte popular". Partiendo de esta situación confusa de este caos, decidí hacer un estudio de un caso específico en el que se percibe la confusión que se da en torno al término, así como sus usos y manipulaciones.

Para ello seleccioné un emisor que estuviera incidiendo sobre un público al que se le pretendía comunicar lo que era el "arte popular" y una fecha que es 1971; fecha en la que se determinarían políticas a seguir durante todo el sexenio definido por la presidencia de Luis Echeverría (diciembre 1970–diciembre 1976).

Se escogió el periódico *El día* y año de 1971 para exponer una muestra exhaustiva del material que el periódico publicó en torno al tema, se recogieron artículos de ferias, mercados, asociaciones, legislación, programas gubernamentales, turismo, concursos y subsecuentes premiaciones, en fin la fuente nos acercaba a un mundo de objetos creados por una variedad de individuos y comunidades lanzados a la publicidad por el periódico y respaldados por una amplia gama de instituciones.

El objetivo de este trabajo es entonces articular los elementos económicos, políticos y sociales que se registrarán a lo largo de un año en torno al objeto de mi estudio—el "arte popular". De ese modo se podrá entender como este arte ha sido definido, usado o manipulado por las instituciones que lo promovieron durante el tiempo estudiado según un programa de gobierno.

El público que recibió el periódico *El día* podía leer un promedio de diez artículos por mes de lo que debía saber sobre "arte popular".[2]

El día es una publicación diaria que es edita en la Ciudad de México y se distribuye en toda la República. La opinión que el periódico vierte es la del discurso del sector avanzado del Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), sector vinculado a los lineamientos discursivos de lo que supone una práctica "revolucionaria" e identificada con las valores nacionalistas.

La implementación de una política de sancamiento

El año de 1971 se eligió por ser el primer año de gobierno del presidente Echeverría y en el que se fijarían los primeros lineamientos como respuesta a los problemas detectados durante la campaña electoral.

Entre los problemas que se reiteraban estaban la crisis agrícola que en el campo se había liberado un gran número de población económicamente activa, el endeudamiento externo—que se hacía notorio—a más de un desequilibrio en relación con la inversión extranjera, y que había afectado ya entre otros sectores al turismo. Por otro lado, las violentas tensiones de 1968 habían creado una crisis de legitimidad en el Estado. Con estas condiciones la promoción de las artesanías desde variados organismos estatales se veía como una solución parcial a estos tres problemas. Por una parte se renenía a la población económicamente activa a través de la promoción de artesanías en sus lugares de origen. Se comercializaría con vistas al exterior, vía organizaciones estatales—evitando así los intermediarios—con lo que se recuperaría parte del mercado externo. Por último y no menos importante se exaltaría lo genuino, la tradición como un producto ideológico que uniría al campo con la ciudad. La tradición artesanal rescatable discursivamente desde la época prehispánica, hasta nuestros días, exhibiría la legitimidad que le otorga la continuidad de la tradición apropiada ahora por el régimen que la promovía.

La información captada a través de la fuente hemerográfica nos daba la oportunidad de manejarla desde diferentes perspectivas: como tomar la producción por estados y hacer un estudio sobre sus propuestas, hacer una ubicación geográfica actual de donde se producen artesanías, ir al material para detectar si los puntos de vista de los escritores fueron informativos o críticos. En fin, el modo de abordar el material presentaba múltiples variables. En función del objetivo del artículo escogí hacer el análisis de las instituciones que el gobierno federal creó y usó para cohensionar una imagen a través de la difusión del "arte popular". En particular se verán las diversas concepciones expresadas por cada uno de los grupos involucrados en las instituciones, así como las contradicciones internas del Estado que, además, no puede ser tratado como un bloque homogéneo.[3]

Instituciones que intervinieron en el proceso

Si bien fueron 24 instituciones o dependencias oficiales las que se vieron involucradas en la difusión del "arte popular", fueron seis las que mayoritariamente asumieron esta tarea; la función de las demás fue efímera o colateral dentro de sus prioridades. En primer plano estuvieron el Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) con su área de difusión y comercialización, el Museo Nacional de Arte e Industrias Populares, la Dirección General de Arte Popular (DGAP), dependiente de la Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP); el Fideicomiso para el Fomento de las Artesanías del Banco de Fomento Cooperativo (BANFOCO); la Unión Progresista de Artesanías Venustiano Carranza adherida a la Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (CNOP); integradas a su vez en la Secretaría de Trabajadores no asalariados, la Comisión de Artesanías de la Cámara de Diputados, y el recién creado Instituto Mexicano de Comercio Exterior (IMCE).

El Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) se fundó por recomendación del Primer Congreso Indigenista Interamericano celebrado en México en 1940. La ley que lo creó en 1948, lo concibió como un organismo descentralizado del gobierno

federal, con personalidad jurídica propia. Se creó con la finalidad de proteger a las comunidades indígenas, para llevar a ellas los elementos culturales que se consideraban positivos. La agencia oficial tendría la capacidad de discernir lo que se consideraba positivo para ese sector de la población, ya que el plan era integrarla a la nacionalidad a través de lo que los antropólogos han llamado aculturación dirigida.[4]

Desde su inicio esta institución contempló un programa de protección de las artesanías y la comercialización de las mismas. Se creó para ello el patronato de las Artes e Industrias Populares y se fundó en 1951 el Museo Nacional de Artes e Industrias Populares,[5] situado en Avenida Juárez en la Ciudad de México.

A lo largo de los artículos hemerográficos comentados en el año de 1971, la política del INI, y del Museo, queda clara, en el sentido de que la producción, "estética" de los artesanos no debe de ser cambiada y que toda intromisión en este sentido lo único que logra es hacer perder el carácter genuino a los objetos elaborados. Se insistió, por ello, en la calidad, lo genuino, el contacto directo con los productores y la conservación de la tradición. Todos estos valores se rescataron de la mayoría de los eventos patrocinados por esta institución, con ello se ve una congruencia con los postulados propuestos en su creación. En este sentido el INI cubrió la necesidad de difundir entre toda la población aquello que el indigenismo postulaba como valores de la mexicanidad y que debían ser aceptados. Sin embargo, y de acuerdo a nuestra definición, mayoritariamente el INI en su labor proyectada en el periódico no dio apoyo de difusión al arte del pueblo sino al arte popular.

El Fideicomiso para el Fomento de las Artesanías del Banco de Fomento Cooperativo (BANFOCO) fue fundado en 1961 para dar asistencia técnica, crediticia y de comercialización a los artesanos tanto urbanos como rurales. Su función principal fue la de otorgar créditos y en segundo lugar promover la comercialización,[6] la política de compras del BANFOCO coincidió, en este sentido, con las propuestas del INI. Los estatutos del BANFOCO instituían un comité técnico, al que asistían representantes del INI y de la Dirección General de Arte Popular, de la Secretaría de Educación Pública creada en 1970. En 1961 cuando se creó el BANFOCO la SEP tenía tan solo un consejero en el comité técnico de la institución.

El 13 de abril de 1971 se anunció que "de acuerdo a los lineamientos aprobados por el presidente Echevarría la Dirección de Arte Popular de la SEP, el BANFOCO y el INI podrían poner en marcha el programa por medio del cual por primera vez se otorgaría financiamiento, ayuda técnica y compra directa a los artesanos indígenas: La intención del programa recomendado por el presidente Echeverría abarcaba fundamentalmente las zonas donde están los grupos indígenas, ya que se considera que sus obras son la más pura expresión del arte popular mexicano. Así, el programa permitiría crear en los artesanos conciencia del valor de sus trabajos y evitaría que los intermediarios manejaran a su arbitrio las cotizaciones". En el mismo artículo se indicó que fue para los indígenas una sorpresa la forma en que fueron establecidos los precios a sus trabajos de acuerdo con los materiales y el tiempo de labor empleados. Como consecuencia de esta experiencia se proporcionaría "la ayuda técnica para aumentar la demanda, sin que desmerezca de calidad" [7] En este artículo se marcaron los principios que estas tres instituciones en su conjunto emplearían en lo relacionado a sus operaciones.

Las tres instituciones tomaron acciones conjuntas para promover las artesanías y el arte popular, no así el arte del pueblo. Una de las actividades que más se menciona en el diario fue la promoción de exposiciones tanto nacionales como internacionales. En el campo de las nacionales una modalidad consistió en organizar concursos cuyos premios fueran entregados por la Sra. Echevarría en la residencia oficial del Presidente de México, Los Pinos.[8] Las exposiciones promovían lo más puro del arte producido y a los artesanos ganadores se les transportaba de lugar de origen y se les premiaría con cantidades de 500 a 1000 pesos. Pero el gasto de transporte de los artesanos rebasaba al que ellos recibían en efectivo.

Podemos leer el 13 de mayo que se distribuyeron los premios del Primer Concurso Regional de Tejido del Valle del Mezquital. La entrega de ellos fue en el Salón Mexicano de Los Pinos y en la ceremonia la Sra. Echevarría dijo, "Ojalá que los mexicanos cuando compremos algo en el exterior pensemos que estamos fortaleciendo intereses ajenos y que, cuando compremos estos trabajos tan finos de artesanía mexicana, pensemos que estamos dando de comer a un niño mexicano". En otra premiación ella se refirió a como esta producción debe tanto embellecer las casas mexicanas como exportarse.[9] Una de las políticas del BANFOCO fue de la de "comprar la totalidad de las artesanías que participaran en el concurso. Algunas se enviarían a las embajadas de México en el extranjero, otras a colecciones particulares y otras más a museos" [10]

La migración de los productos de las culturas indígenas a la ciudad causó una refuncionalización del objeto, creada por la circulación en una sociedad capitalista en la que el objeto perdió su calidad simbólica de cohesión para convertirse en un artículo suntuario. La justificación que reiteradamente hizo el gobierno es que la acción permanente de compra de artesanía procuraba un mayor ingreso a la requítica economía de los pobladores marginados de la vida social, evitando así a los intermediarios. Para julio de 1971 se anunciaba que el Fideicomiso pagaba tres veces más de lo que pagaban los comerciantes.

En el plano nacional, múltiples exposiciones fueron hechas en combinación con los diferentes gobiernos estatales. Pero la información que de ellas obtuvimos es reiterativa en cuanto a las demandas que hicieron al Estado los productores (créditos, mejor comercialización para elevar el nivel del artesano) y las exigencias de las instituciones para promoverlas (tradición, autenticidad, pureza).

El discurso oficial a través de las diferentes exposiciones elude a lo específico de cada etnia a favor de lo nacional: Es constante por parte de las instituciones la necesidad de homogeneizar al país en búsqueda de una unidad política con lo cual se borren las diferencias de los orígenes para que todas ellas pasen a ser parte de lo nacional.

Al concibir las instituciones la producción de artesanías

como una alternativa al trabajo del campo, se sacó a los artesanos de un sistema social en el que la producción y el intercambio eran regulados por una organización comunal a veces ritual y se les reubicó en un regimen de competencia comercial. Así el Estado de México convertió en pequeñas industrias la producción de cerámica y la elaboración de tapetes con lo cual resultó que lo único indígena era el trabajo empleado, pues en el primer caso se trajo al ceramista Akihiko Nagata quien mejoró la técnica alfarera para producir cerámica de alta temperatura, que a su vez tendría una mejor comercialización entre la burgesía mexicana. En Temoaya, en el mismo estado, el Banco de México hizo un estudio e implementó la infraestructura para que las mujeres otomíes trabajaran en los telares, para producir tapetes con la técnica de anudado persa y sobre diseños "inspirados en dibujos indígenas de distintas zonas del país. El tapete (logrado con motivos huicholes nos dicen), es una verdadera preciosidad y lo mejor del caso es que con la producción que se está obentiendo apenas se puede atenderse la demanda". [11] Con estas políticas la toma de decisión acerca de las formas que debían tener los objetos fue transferida de los productores a los encargados de la circulación y distribución. De esta manera la industria artesanal dejó de depender de la cultura indígena y se incorporó el gusto por lo "popular" a los sistemas capitalista nacionales y transnacionales.

Los precios de los tapetes de Temoaya en diciembre de 1971 fluctuaban entre dos a diez mil pesos. Una obrera dedicada a su manufactura ganaba lo que el periódico calificaba como "salario decoroso entre 20 y 35 pesos diarios",[12] lo cual suponía un ingreso mensual de 600 a 1005 pesos. El sueldo percibido por el artesano estaba en relación con lo que el trabajador campesino percibía mensualmente. Según el censo de 1970, 65% de la población económicamente activa en el campo percibía mensualmente entre 99 y 499 pesos.[13] Cifra baja si se ve en relación al salario mínimo.

La creación de estos empleos fue un freno relativo a la inmigración; por otro lado, significó un crecimiento de los grupos sociales ligados a la comercialización monopólica de la artesanías.

El Fideicomiso en el plano internacional promovió tres exposiciones: una en Sidney, la segunda en París y la tercera en Madrid.[14] El criterio de valor que manejaron los articulistas al reportar estas exposiciones fue "el gran éxito sin precedente que el arte popular mexicano ha tenido" El éxito alcanzado en Europa parecería justificar toda acción del gobierno, pues lo que es reconocido por europeos es y ha sido digno de toda promoción. Se enunció abiertamente por parte del administrador del Fideicomiso que era un deber dar conocer la "gama de arte popular mexicano y abrir nuevos mercados extranjeros a la exportación artesanal, con lo que se benefician directamente los indígenas del medio rural";[15] la muestra era "una promoción cultural y de apertura de nuevos mercados a las artesanías mexicanas".[16] Sin embargo, el arte del pueblo no se da a conocer como tal sino que por la falta de información la distorción del sentido de la obra llega a su máximo en el extranjero. En París la muestra es calificada por los franceses como "arte fantástico". O sea que la producción cultural de esta etnia se convirtió por desconocimiento del consumidor y manipulación del difusor en arte fantástico. El extranjero al no ser guiado por una lectura apropiada para juzgar la obra por parte del emisor, le da la significación adecuada, muchas veces a sus prejuicios, pues ésta se encuentra descontextualizada. El colmo es que el mexicano lo tome como cierto y lo regrese al país como una explicación y caracterización de su cultura. En evidencia se ponen también los resultados prácticos y el discurso; en el discurso oficial los beneficiarios son los indígenas del medio rural, en la práctica resulta que es el aparato burocrático armado por el gobierno, el que se beneficia al tener un empleo ampliamente remunerado, mejor pagado que el de la otomí tejedora de tapetes o el productor de "arte fantástico"

La exposición que hace el BANFOCO en Sidney presenta un resumen de los mitos convertidos en verdad. Para los lectores que reciben la información se da como un hecho que es necesario dar "a conocer mundialmente las verdaderas artes populares de nuestro país a fin de impulsar su exportación y alentar a las auténticas artesanías . . de la más alta calidad en las artes de toda la República. En Iowa (E.E.U.U.) se presentará un calificado inventario se asegura una asistencia de más de medio millón de personas, esperando así encontrar un importante mercado para estos productos. Sobre todo considerando que son los habitantes con el más alto promedio de ingreso familiar" [17] En el mismo artículo se anuncia una exposición en el Empire Hall Olympia de Londres en la que se considera que reune "a todos los mayoristas de artesanías en el mundo" [18] Las tres variables que le dieron origen al impulso de las artesanías en el régimen del presidente Echeverría se hacen patente en el discurso de las exposiciones internacionales, a saber: beneficio de los campesinos (retenimiento de mano de obras en el campo), búsqueda de un mercado internacional (búsqueda del equilibrio de la deuda externa), fomento de lo más genuino y representativo de México (valor ideológico de homogeneización de lo nacional).

La Dirección General de Arte Popular fue creada en 1970, a ella le competía pues, estudiar lo relativo al "arte popular en todas sus formas de expresión, entre ellas: artesanías, danza, música, vestimenta, arquitectura y costumbres así como formar el archivo general de las tradiciones y arte popular. De este modo se pretendía asesorar técnicamente a los artesanos populares, a fin de que cuenten con el auxilio necesario y sus obras conserven sus valores y aumentan su estimación comercial. Divulgar el arte popular por medio de publicaciones, conferencias, exposiciones temporales y permanentes así como los museos. Se establecían de hecho acciones coordinadas con las instituciones que están abocadas a las artes populares a fin de conseguir los objetos previstos. Formar maestros de diseño para la docencia y fomento de las artesanías".[19]

La Dirección General de Arte Popular, cumpliendo con sus lineamientos, se unió al INI y al BANFOCO para promover las artesanías y se puso gran énfasis en lo genuino, la tradición, la conservación, todo ello enmarcado en un impulso de la comercialización del producto ¿pero la difusión del arte del pueblo dónde quedó?

El Director General de Arte Popular fue en 1971 Alberto

Beltrán,[20] quien a su vez trabajaba en el periódico *El día*. Esta doble tarea llevada por Beltrán puede ser una de las justificaciones del elevado número de artículos sobre el tema. No he dedicado un apartado especial al tratar las otras instituciones con respecto a las personas que las dirigieron: Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán el INI y Tonatiuh Gutiérrez en el Fideicomiso de BANFOCO. En el primer caso considero que las acciones de Aguirre Beltrán desde el INI fueron más amplias y que su acción descrita en los artículos recopilados aparece esporádicamente en algunas inauguraciones o premiaciones. El 28 de noviembre se publicaron unas declaraciones suyas en torno a la *Identidad india del mexicano*, en la cual Aguirre Beltrán hizo referencia al pensamiento de Alfonso Caso, quien había sido director del INI durante 22 años. Aguirre Beltrán en esta semblanza se refirió al papel que tuvo Caso en la revoloración del arte popular como un quehacer comunal, haciendo al indígena heredero del pasado, reconoció que fue Caso quien dio los pasos concretos para la protección y conservación; todo ello enmarcado en un impulso de la comercialización de la artesanía. Gutiérrez junto con Beltrán y un representante del INI fueron los constantes jurados de todos los concursos efectuados durante 1971 y patrocinados por ellos. En diciembre Gutiérrez escribía junto con su esposa Elektra y Beltrán una página completa llamada *Perfiles de México*, sección sabatina de *El día* la cual muchas veces estaba destinada a la promoción biográfica de los creadores de artesanía o arte popular y las páginas fueron ilustradas por el grabador Beltrán.

Alberto Beltrán estuvo ligado a la escuela mexicana postrevolucionaria; por su práctica como grabador revaloró el "arte popular" como parte de lo mexicano lo cual se dio a partir de los diversos programas impulsados por Vasconcelos desde la SEP. Ante la confusión de términos que se daban el torno al "arte popular" el 29 de noviembre, Beltrán publicó su definición sobre los siguientes conceptos. *"Arte popular tradicional"* es el conjunto de manifestaciones estéticas de carácter plástico, que proceden de estratos sociales económicamente débiles y cuyos usos, función, forma, diseño y signficado obedecen a pautas de una cultura tradicional. Cuando la producción de arte popular tradicional se comercializa, da lugar a la conversión en *artesanía*. Esto es, cuando se desarrolla la organización de un taller con jerarquía y salarios. Por *industrias artesanales* debe entenderse a las artesanías que corresponden al tipo económico de la producción en serie y en los cuales se utiliza una maquinaria más complicada que requiere la presencia de obreros especializados quienes perciben un salario fijo y tienden a estar organizadas dentro del sistema de la gran industria.[21] Las definiciones de Beltrán son útiles pues manejan los diferentes aspectos de producción, distribución y consumo. Según estas definiciones ninguno de los artículos tratados en el periódico se refiere a lo llamado arte popular tradicional, pues la información que se publica es una difusión para una mejor comercialización como una protección de los valores culturales que a la postre colaborarán en la formación de una identidad nacional. No hay ningún artículo en el que se difunda el uso, función, forma y significado de las obras en el contexto de cada una de las culturas, es decir de lo que he llamado arte del pueblo y el arte popular tradicional. Los artículos, en cambio, justifican para el lector la necesidad de promover las artesanías, el arte popular o las industrias artesanales. Los artículos destinados a publicar las biografías de los artesanos los hacen sentir artistas orgullosos de su obra que aunque no sea remunerada convenientemente, siempre y cuando alcance las alturas del arte.

En la definición de Beltrán se habla de estratos sociales económicamente débiles, sin embargo, el hecho de homogeneizarlos a través de la marginación económica oculta la diferencia étnica que los enriquece y que enriquece al país con la pluralidad de sus producciones culturales.

La Unión de Artesanos Venustiano Carranza adherido a la Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (CNOP) a través de la Secretaría de Trabajadores no asalariados inició sus actividades en 1971. La nota periodística nos dice "ayer quedó constituida una nueva unión de artesanos en la cual se han consagrado personas que realizan la manufactura de variados objetos".[22] Su director fue el Sr. Faustino García Vigueras quien se fijó como meta "llevar a cabo concursos artesanales en diferentes zonas del Distrito Federal como estímulo al trabajo progresivo de este gremio".[23]

Para llevar a cabo estas exposiciones los organizadores del sector se vincularon a los delegados del Departamento del Distrito Federal quienes asistían a las inauguraciones que tenían lugar en los parques de las diferentes delegaciones, participando en ocasiones los diputados del distrito.[24] Estos actos tenían pues una proyección política en tanto se hacía un intercambio de favores entre funcionarios que necesitaban del voto popular y los afiliados al partido que solicitaban los permisos para la comercialización del producto artesanal.

Los criterios expuestos por los colaboradores de la CNOP para promover las artesanías fueron "para que la artesanía mexicana subsista, necesita industrializarse. Frente a la tecnificación de nuestra era, el artesano mexicano debe responder con mejoría y aumento de su producción renovando diseños y formas de elaboración del producto".[25]

Como se puede ver, los criterios valorativos son diferentes a los promovidos por el otro sector gubernamental ya estudiado. Lo que en realidad le interesó a la CNOP fue agrupar al artesano, para vincularlo organizadamente a los sectores del PRI. La CNOP, debemos recordar, es el tercero en la estructura del Partido Revolucionario Institucional, pilar de apoyo político, ya que articula a los sectores independientes no afiliados a los otros dos sectores: obreros y campesinos. La afiliación de 25,000 artesanos agremiados a través del secretariado de la CNOP representaban votos nada despreciables para el PRI.[26]

La mejor manera que encontraron los dirigentes de la CNOP para organizar políticamente a los artesanos fue precisamente la concesión de facilidades para la comercialización de sus productos en las zonas urbanas. Estas exposiciones fueron visitadas por una amplia población. Para la feria en Tlanepantla se habla de 200,000 visitantes. El éxito de estos eventos hizo que la Ciudad de México se viera invadida por los puestos efímeros de los afiliados.

Los promotores de la CNOP se distinguen del otro sector gubernamental ya que su atención se centra más en el productor urbano tanto de la Ciudad de México como de otras ciudades. Se trata del artesano de la manufactura casera o en pequeñas industrias y no se interesaron para nada en la promoción del arte del pueblo o del arte popular generado en el área rural.

Los dos sectores gubernamentales tuvieron una meta en común en la búsqueda de un incremento de consumo con la creación de nuevos mercados, evitando los "nefastos" intermediarios al mismo tiempo que se beneficiaba la economía familiar.

Si bien hemos aglutinado en dos sectores la información que el periódico captó sobre el manejo del "arte popular", también se detectó la creación de una Comisión en la Cámara de Diputados para estudiar el problema. Dicha comisión rápidamente planteó "una reestructuración integral de sus sistemas de financiamiento y distribución para impulsar la industria artesanal" Así mismo solicitaron reglamentaciones jurídicas para proteger y desarrollar la artesanía mexicana. La Comisión de Diputados fue encabezada por Alejandro Peraza.[27]

Los criterios de valoración que usó la Comisión de la Cámara de Diputados aglutinaron a los dos sectores descritos, ya que rescataron la artesanía rural y urbana pues su problema era solucionar el desempleo que se estaba generando en todo el país y como cuerpo colegiado de la federación su interés era todo el país. Sus primeras estimaciones estadísticas calculaban a la población artesanal entre cuatro y diez millones de personas.[28] Para un control de normas sobre las que debían regir a la industria artesanal se necesitaba levantar un censo que les aclarara la dimensión del problema. Para ellos "la carencia de una ley sobre la materia ha motivado que la industria de las artesanías cuyo valor de producción fue de cinco mil millones de pesos en 1968, se desarrolle anárquicamente en detrimento de los intereses de quienes trabajan en esa actividad de la economía nacional. En cuanto a los perjuicios que resienten los artesanos por falta de una ley que los proteja es el bajo salario que reciben por su trabajo".[29]

En el artículo que da cuenta de la labor de la Comisión, se hace referencia al año 1968 como año exitoso en la venta de artesanías y hay que recordar que fue el año de las Olimpiadas. Debido pues al evento deportativo, el turismo y la exportación de artesanías crecieron, mas fue un año excepcional en muchos órdenes. Los diputados señalan que por falta de control llegaron a venderse en México artesanías "mexicanas" hechas en Japón.

Para ellos el problema era muy simple—legislar. Con ello homogeneizarían todo el trabajo artesanal borrando sus orígenes y diferencias étnicas. El problema se reducía a ubicarlos en el espacio geográfico, saber quienes las producen y con ellos lograr la unidad.

La presencia de los diputados en los estados de México, Michoacán y Guerrero durante sus recorridos de trabajo fue acogida por los respectivos gobernadores, quienes ofrecieron su apoyo para la realización de sus objetivos, hecho que nos habla del apoyo que por parte de todos los sectores tuvo el programa auspiciado de manera notoria por el presidente Echevarría.

La última institución involucrada en la promoción de las artesanías, que trataremos aquí, fue el Instituto Mexicano del Comercio Exterior (IMCE). Este se fundó el 30 de diciembre de 1970 y entró en funciones en febrero de 1971. Uno de sus objectivos planteados en el inciso XVII del artículo 2 fue "específicamente promover la exportación de artesanías".[30]

Las artesanías vuelven a ser para el IMCE objetos con los cuales se puede comerciar. Los productos que el IMCE llama artesanales no son los mismos considerados por el primer sector—INI, BANFOCO, DGAP—pues para ellos lo importante y valioso resulta la exportación de objetos suntuarios de manufactura industrial apegadas a diseños artesanales, pero lo que se pretendía, en verdad, no era dar un impulso al pequeño artesano sino más bien a la industria mediana.

El periódico nos dice que lo que vende el país en artesanías se ha elevado en fechas recientes, tomando el año 1968 como hito para indicar que las artesanías exportadas ese año aportaron "un 4% al equilibrio de la balanza de pagos".[31] Como se ha indicado, ese año fue muy especial y anómalo debido a los acontecimientos culturales realizados y al turismo en torno a la Olimpiada.

Es claro que el IMCE trató con una clientela muy diversa a la de otras instituciones; sin embargo, guarda un discurso en común—"No debemos negar que nuestras artesanías han llegado a ser una fuente de ocupación para un sector muy importante de la población".[32]

Es claro que con las gestiones del IMCE se refuncionaliza el objeto artesanal de acuerdo a la política prefijada, pues de objeto simbólico pasa a ser un objeto decorativo y por otra parte ideologiza el producto como muestra de lo nacional en el extranjero.

Contradicciones entre la práctica y el discurso

Los móviles discursivos que tuvo el Estado para promover justificadamente las artesanías eran: evitar el desarraigo del campesino, equilibrar la deuda externa y adquirir una mayor legitimidad. Pero como se ha visto, quedaron en el vacío esas gestiones pues las políticas implementadas no resolvieron los problemas básicos. No se evitó el desplazamiento del campesino pues el monto pagado por sus productos fue insuficiente para mantenerlo arraigado. La deuda externa no disminuyó pues el amplio aparato burocrático implementado hizo que los gastos de gestión fueran mayores que los generados por la comercialización de las artesanías, a pesar de que los precios pagados a los artesanos dejaban un amplio margen de utilidades. El problema de la legitimidad tampoco fue resuelto pues no fue el arte del pueblo el que se manejó para proveer de un enriquecimiento cultural a través de la producción de las diversas etnias que conforman el mosaico cultural del país. Lo que se hizo fue dar impulso a la artesanía que como producto descontextualizado se va transformando, perdiendo su origen simbólico y su fuerza de cohesión. La hegemonización vía para legitimar una posición ideológica del Estado empo-

breció el patrimonio cultural en vez de enriquecerlo a través de la aceptación de las diversas propuestas culturales de cada uno de las etnias que siguen produciendo el arte del pueblo.

Apéndice 1

Número de artículos sobre cultura en *El Día*

	TOTAL	Artículos relativos a "arte popular"
Enero	152	6
Febrero	132	5
Marzo	135	6
Abril	167	12
Mayo	140	18
Junio	110	19
Julio	93	9
Agosto	119	10
Septiembre	82	4
Octubre	127	21
Noviembre	109	18
Diciembre	88	16
Total	1,454	134

Apéndice 2

Instituciones que aparecen en el diario como promotoras del "arte popular"

—Dirección de Promoción Industrial y Artesanal (DPICA).
—Consejo Nacional de Artesanías.
—Cámara Nacional de Comercio de la Ciudad de México.
—Artesanía de Fomento Cooperativo.
—Asociación de Corresponsales en México, A. C. .
—Escuela de Diseño y Artesanía.
—Dirección General de Arte Popular. SEP (DGAP).
—Galería Universitaria Aristo, UNAM.
—Museo Universitario, UNAM.
—Unión de Artesanos de la República Mexicana.
—Fideicomiso para el fomento de las artesanías del Banco de Fomento Cooperativo, S. A. (Bancofo).
—Instituto Nacional de Artes e Industrias.
—Consejo Nacional de Turismo.
—Departamento de Turismo.
—Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA).
—Unión Progresista de Artesanos Venustiano Carranza. Consejo Nacional de Organizadores Populares (CNOP).
—Dirección Estatal de Artesanía.
—Unión de Artesanos de la Repúbulica Mexicana.
—Comisión de Artesanías de la Cámara de Diputados.
—Palacio de las Artesanías.
—Instituto Mexicano de Comercio Exterior (IMCE).
—Comisión Fomento de Exportación.
—Departamento del Distrito Federal.
—Sociedad de Adornos de medio pueblo de Ixtapalapa.
—Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI).

Apéndice 3

Premiación en el Salón Mexicano de los Pinos a los concursos organizados por el INI, Bancofo y DGAP.

Otomi	13 mayo
Metepec	10 junio
Chiapas	27 julio
Santa Clara de los Cobres	25 agosto
Olinalá	16 octubre

Apéndice 4

Exposiciones patrocinadas por un sector de la CNOP.

Ixtacalco	20 mayo 1971.
Tlanepantla	29 mayo 1971.
	4 junio 1971
	4 julio 1971.
Coyoacán	7 julio 1971.
Villa Gustavo A. Madero	4 agosto 1971.
	7 agosto 1971.
Villa Alvaro Obregón	31 octubre 1971
	8 noviembre 1971.
Tacubaya	8 noviembre 1971.
Parque de las Américas	9 diciembre 1971.

NOTAS

1. Francisco Reyes Palmas, *Historia social de la educación artística en México* (México: Coordinación General de Educación Artística, INBA-SEP, 1982), pp. 15-19.
2. Ver Apéndice 1, "Tabla de distribución de artículos en el año"; nótese como éstos aumentan en el transcurso del año.
3. Fueron 24 instituciones las que se destacaron a lo largo del año. Ver Apéndice 2. Martínex Peñaloza para 1972 cita 50 instituciones que tienen alguna intervención en el fomento de las artesanías. Porfirio Martínex Peñaloza, *Arte popular y artesanías artísticas en México* (México, D.F.: Boletín bibliográfico de la Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público).
4. Victoria Novelo, *Artesanías y capitalismo en México* (México, D.F.: SEP-INAH, Centro de Investigaciones Superiores del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1976), pp. 50-51.
5. A partir de 1968 el Museo fue económicamente autosuficiente, *Ibid.*, p. 54.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
7. *El día,* 13 de abril, 1971.
8. Ver Apéndice 3. Las exposiciones donde no participó la Sra. Echeverría no se listan.
9. *El día,* 27 de agosto, 1971.
10. *El día,* 10 de junio, 1971.
11. *El día,* 6 de diciembre, 1971. Otros diseños eran: Colonial, Guanajuato; Tocate, Artesanías (inspirado en figuras prehispánicas); Chiapas, Chinanteco, Oaxaca, Otomí, etc. (*El día,* 16 de diciembre, 1971).
12. *El día,* 16 de diciembre, 1971.
13. Novelo, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
14. Se llevan cinco exposiciones más por diferentes instituciones a Sevilla, París, Canadá, Guatemala y Estados Unidos de América.
15. *El día,* 1ro de octubre, 1971.
16. *El día,* 4 de octubre, 1971.
17. *El día,* 18 de agosto, 1971.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Novelo, *op. cit.*, p. 245.
20. Conocido grabador de la Escuela Mexicana de Pintura.
21. *El día,* 29 de noviembre, 1971.
22. *El día,* 7 de julio, 1971.
23. Ver Apéndice 4.
24. Ver Apéndice 4.
25. *El día,* 7 de julio, 1971.
26. *El día,* 4 de agosto, 1971. En el mismo artículo se anuncia que serán 60,000 los agremiados para fin de año.
27. *El día,* 30 de marzo, 1971.
28. *El día,* 17 de julio, 1971.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Novelo, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
31. *El día,* 15 de junio, 1971.
32. *El día,* 27 de septiembre, 1971.

MEXICAN CINEMA IN THE 1970s

by
Carl J. Mora

On August 6, 1896, two Frenchmen, C.J. Bon Bernard and Gabriel Vayre, were received in Chapultepec Castle by President Porfirio Díaz. The two agents of the Lumiére Brothers firm of Paris proceeded to demonstrate the new Lumiére movie projector to the Mexican *caudillo* and his retinue. Reportedly, Díaz was so taken with the new invention that the Lumiére agents showed films until late in the day. General Díaz and his family agreed to be filmed and a second session was set up on August 25 to project the movies of the presidential family. These were the first motion pictures filmed in Mexico.[1]

It is impossible to understand the brief "new wave" experienced by Mexican cinema in the 1970s without a realization of the important role that the film industry has played in the history of 20th century Mexico. Born shortly before the Revolution of 1910, filmmaking developed along with and reflected the fitful growth of revolutionary Mexico.

The cinema has had a long, fascinating, and uneven history in Mexico. From those modest beginnings in Chapultepec Castle in 1896, Mexican filmmaking grew to become, by the 1950s, the most important in the Spanish-speaking world, producing on the average of 100 films a year.

The very first commercial moving pictures in Mexico were provided by Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope in January 1895. This is what we know as a nickelodeon: the customer would look through an eyepiece and see a series of rapidly flipping photographs giving the illusion of movement, usually a clown or an acrobat going through his paces. In August 1896, a Lumiére agent announced the arrival of the *cinematographe*—the Lumiére projector. This caused a sensation in Mexico city and crowds lined up to see such one-minute films as *The Card Players, Arrival of a Train,* and *The Magic Hat*. The following year more varied programs were offered, and newsreels of Spanish troops embarking for Cuba and tigers in the Paris zoo enthralled the residents of Mexico City.

The film pioneer in Mexico was Salvador Toscano Barragán (1872–1947), a young engineering student. He was the first Mexican to open a movie salon, make films of real-life events, and produce in 1898 the first Mexican "fiction" film—the one-reeler *Don Juan Tenorio*. During the Revolution, Toscano was to record many of the important events and people that shaped modern Mexico, footage that years later would be compiled by his daughter, Carmen Toscano, into a full-length documentary, *Memorias de un mexicano (Memories of a Mexican)* (1950).

By 1900 the cinema's popularity was solidly established. The fare consisted mostly of short comedy routines and acrobatics, in addition to scenes of dignitaries and events in foreign countries. Late that year the first full-length feature was shown, a French import called *The Passion of Jesus Christ*. The first American film in Mexico was the Fitzsimmons-Corbett fight, screened around 1898.[2]

Porfirio Díaz did not fail to see the propaganda value of motion pictures and accordingly used the new medium to glorify himself. Films were made of official journeys—to Manzanillo, to Yucatán, and of the meeting in 1909 between Díaz and President William Taft in Ciudad, Juárez. Such films were also educational because they enabled Mexicans to become familiar with other parts of their own country.[3]

From 1917 on there was an upswing in film production reflecting the return to Mexico of at least some political if not economic stability. From a peak output of fourteen films in 1919, including a newsreel series that reached seventy editions, Mexican production gradually declined until by 1923 only two films were made, in 1924 apparently none, and in 1925, seven. This sporadic production reflected the popularity of Hollywood films and their monopolization of world moviemaking with five hundred to seven hundred

films a year. World War I had ended French cinematic supremacy and Italian costume spectacles, and the United States quickly filled the gap. In Europe, German expressionism in film expressed the anxieties of German society after the country's defeat in World War I and its challenge of a Marxist revolution. The Bolsheviks in Russia quickly realized the enormous propaganda potential of the cinema and directors like Sergei Eisenstein raised expressive realism to an art, which was to have important repercussions in Mexico in the 1930s and 1940s.

American dominance of world cinema was not to be challenged until the advent of sound in the late 1920s. The popularity of Holywood films would not diminish but forces would be brought into play that were to revitalize the movie industries of many countries and initiate them in others.

Nationalists in Mexico and the rest of Latin America were alarmed about English-language movies, fearing that they would cause the Spanish language to die out, since Latin Americans would have to learn English in order to understand the movies. They considered sound films a powerful weapon in the American cultural and economic encroachment on their countries. A Mexican newspaper even launched a campaign to convince all Latin American governments to prohibit the showing of English-language films.

American film companies were undoubtedly concerned over these campaigns and also wished to retain and widen their lucrative markets in Latin America. Thus Hollywood initiated "Hispanic" filmmaking, importing stage actors and directors from Spain and Latin America. Initially the films were simply Spanish-language versions of English-language originals or sound remakes of silent originals. Toward the end of Hollywood's Hispanic movie production in the late 1930s some films were original productions. Americans also produced some features in French and in German but found that European audiences much preferred seeing the original versons starring popular American stars. Latin American audiences reacted the same way but Spanish-language production continued nonetheless. Between 1930 and 1938 over 113 Hispanic features were made.[4]

With very few exceptions, these films were unpopular with Latin American and Spanish audiences. First, because they preferred American stars; secondly, due to the jumble of accents of the international casts. It should be kept in mind that for the first time, through the medium of sound films, the average person of one country came to realize how his or her language was spoken in another. The cinema exposed mass audiences to a sort of collective culture shock. Argentina, for instance, declared that multiaccented films or those in "Castilian" would be prohibited. Spain stated that its moviegoers could not bear to listen to the irritating Latin American accents and that if the "c" or "z" were not "orthographically" pronounced, then Hollywood need not bother sending their films. (British audiences at this time reacted similarly to movies spoken in "American.")

This linguistic controversy was a manifestation of the virulent nationalism spreading throughout the world in the 1920s and 1930s. More important, the nonacceptance by the Latin American publics of Hollywood's Hispanic films was a crucial factor in the growth of the Mexican film industry. Many directors and performers, both Mexican and of other nationalities, received valuable experience in Hollywood (including Luis Buñuel who arrived in the United States in 1938, worked for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and made Army training films).

The Revolution had replaced the old Porfirian aristocracy with a new entrepreneurial class consisting mostly of revolutionary officers and their ideologues, lawyers, and assorted cronies. A number of early film producers came from these ranks, especially Miguel Contreras Torres, a prolific director and producer from the 1920s to the 1960s. The emerging middle sectors were ambitious but socially unsure of themselves. There was in the 1930s and 1940s an undercurrent of nostalgia for the *belle époque* or *porfirismo,* resulting in a number of motion pictures set back in that period, portraying a presumably simpler, more genteel age. There was also a sense of unease among the middle classes at the radical nature of Lázaro Cárdenas's reformist administration of 1934–1940.

What seemed to be the auspicious beginnings of a serious national cinema were soon to be overwhelmed by a commercialist trend given impetus by events beyond Mexico's borders. Fernando de Fuentes was to powerfully influence this development of Mexican cinema with his film *Allá en el Rancho Grande (Out at Big Ranch)* (1936). The movie was a huge success throughout Latin America and demonstrated to Mexican filmmakers that the Latin American publics wanted "Mexican" movies—that is, films that were vehicles for the unique national color of Mexico. They were not interested in Mexican movies that were simply duplications of Hollywood Hispanic films, such as family melodramas, which while doing well in Mexico were not popular enough to establish a firm foothold for the Mexican cinema in other countries. Mexican producers, encouraged by the success of *Allá en el Rancho Grande,* went on to make a great number of folklore films which amply utilized mariachis, music, charros, and a distorted rural culture that was to become an official folklore.[5]

By 1937, 38 films were produced in Mexico and more than half of those were based on folkloric or nationalistic themes. This year also saw the film debut of Mario Moreno, "Cantinflas," playing a minor role in an otherwise undistinguished movie. Although Lupe Vélez had gone down from Hollywood to make a movie for Fernando de Fuentes, the other great Mexicanborn Hollywood actress, Dolores del Río, was reluctant to appear in one of her country's pictures because the national industry lacked, in her words, "sufficient solidity."[6]

Although her attitude did not endear her to her com-

patriots, Dolores del Río's assessment was certainly accurate, especially since she was viewing it from the perspective of the huge American film industry. Put in the simplest terms, the moguls of Hollywood were not only hard-nosed businessmen but also dedicated filmmakers; they reinvested their profits back into the movie business. In Mexico, on the other hand, producers generally were out to make a quick profit and they had little interest in building up a solidly based production company. Thus shooting schedules were extemely short—two to three weeks on the average—and budgets as small as possible. The possibilities of a state-supported cinema were demonstrated by the success of De Fuentes's *Vámonos con Pancho Villa (Let's Go With Pancho Villa)* (1935), which had enjoyed the Cárdenas government's generous support as well as being made in the modern and largely government-financed CLASA studios. Yet the specter of socialism thoroughly frightened both petite bourgeois investors and filmmakers even though the administration's measures stopped far short of nationalization. In fact, the most radical actions taken by the government were in its encouragement of unionization in the film industry and in requiring that all theaters show a minimum number of Mexican films along with foreign—mostly American—ones.[7]

The success of *Allá en el Rancho Grande* throughout Latin America did not result automatically in profitable foreign markets for Mexican pictures. De Fuentes's film had demonstrated the potential and the need for markets abroad. But most Mexican producers were still unable to rise above commercialism and a lack of creativity. In 1939 only thirty-seven films were made, twenty less than in 1938. Another indication of this latest crisis in Mexican cinema was that for the first time Argentina's production surpassed Mexico's. Fifty Argentine films were made in 1939, making that country the world's largest producer of Spanish-language films. Spain's motion picture industry was hard hit by the Civil War and dropped off drastically.

The conditions that led to the so-called Golden Age of Mexican cinema were created principally by events outside of Mexico. The outbreak of World War II created an opportunity in the Latin American film market because Hollywood dedicated itself to producing war propaganda movies which Latin American audiences found uninteresting. Argentina's pro-Axis governments during most of the war caused strained relations with the United States, which reacted by placing economic sanctions on that country. Raw film was one of the commodities denied to Argentina, thereby severely affecting film production. Mexico, on the other hand, had declared war on the Axis powers and went on to reap tremendous economic benefits from its newfound friendship with the United States. The Mexican film industry benefited greatly, especially since it now had an ample supply of raw film.

In order to start organizing the film industry on a more rational financial basis, the Banco Cinematográfico, or Cinematic Bank, was founded on April 4, 1942, on the initiative of the National Bank of Mexico and President Miguel Avila Camacho's blessing. The Cinematic Bank began as a private institution although the government's interest in it was no secret. Even though Avila Camacho did not think it opportune to give the Banco an official subsidy because he wished private enterprise to develop by its own efforts, the Cinematic Bank was backed by official agencies like the Bank of Mexico and Financiera National which held 10 percent of its stock.[8]

In part due to the creation of this centralized credit institution for production and distribution, in the following year, 1943, the Mexican cinema showed promise of fulfilling its potential and becoming a true industry. Seventy films were produced while Argentina's output declined sharply to thirty-six and Spain made fifty-three.

The late 1950s and 1960s saw a steady growth of the Mexican movie industry but a drastic decrease in quality. Luis Buñuel was the only director in Mexico who was making films of interest: *Viridiana* (1961), *El ángel exterminador* (*Exterminating Angel*) (1962), and *Simón del desierto* (*Simon of the Desert*) (1965). Buñuel later transferred his filmmaking activities to Europe.[9] Still another crisis was upon Mexican cinema, and the government, especially that of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, was decidedly uninterested in its welfare. The Cinematic Bank had become a source of free credit from which producers borrowed 80 percent of the cost of a film and then cut expenses so that the movie was made for less than the amount borrowed.

Quality plummeted and a negative reaction set in among most middle-class Mexicans for their film industry. Most people would never even admit to seeing Mexican movies; worse still, moviegoers in other Latin American countries were feeling the same way. Besides, the Cinema Novo in Brazil, the revolutionary Cuban cinema, and the activities of independent, leftist filmmakers in Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile were attracting international attention while Mexican cinema was all but forgotten.[10]

The administration of Luis Echeverría (1970–1976) initiated a revival of the industry and a Mexican "new wave." The State all but took control of production, distribution, and exhibition; more important, it encouraged new directors and urged them to take a critical approach to the problems of Mexican life. This was in part a reaction to the traumatic student movement of 1968 which had served to politicize many sectors of Mexican society.[11]

The Echeverria *sexenio*'s new directors, who had previously been kept out of the Director's Guild and therefore were prevented from making films, came mainly from a generation of leftist intellectuals shaped by the universities in the 1960s. They made films independently but were unable to have them distributed. A dramatic example of this was Jomí García Ascot's *En el balcón vacío* (*On the Empty*

Balcony) (1961). He and a group of friends, including one of Mexico's leading film scholars, Emilio García Riera, made this film on weekends while working at full-time jobs. The film was based on the childhood memories of García Ascot's wife who had been driven from her native Spain by the Civil War. The trauma of her family's secret flight from home remains vividly in her memory and the film skillfully portrays these shattering events through the sensitive eyes of a woman projecting herself back to her childhood and recreating the little girl's sense of fear and wonder as she observes the concerned adults about her making secretive preparations to flee. *En el balcón vacío* was invited to be shown at the Locarno Film Festival in 1962 where it was awarded the International Film Critics' Prize and won universal and enthusiastic praise while the official Mexican entries were all but ignored.[12]

García Ascot's success at Locarno did not gain him admittance to the film industry, which, in any case, was bitterly divided. Producers claimed that the unions had made it too costly to film in Mexico and accused them of seeking the nationalization of the industry. More and more Mexican producers were going to Cuba, Puerto Rico, Central America, and South America to make movies at lower costs. This caused a serious unemployment problem in Mexico which could not entirely be taken up by American filming in the country. The principal union, the STPC (Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica), in an effort to renovate the film industry, organized the first Contest of Experimental Cinema in 1964.

Twelve full-length 35 mm motion pictures were entered in the STPC contest. First prize was awarded to *La fórmula secreta* (*The Secret Formula*) by Rubén Gámez—a cruelly humorous probing of the Mexican's lack of identity. Second prize went to *En este pueblo no hay ladrones* (*In This Town There are no Thieves*) by Alberto Isaac and adapted from a story by Gabriel García Márquez. The STPC contest pointed to the possibilities inherent in the future and a number of its participants were to become part of the industry during the Echeverría *sexenio*.[13]

Mexican cinema in the 1970s experienced not only an artistic resurgence (if not a financial one) but also dramatically reflected the deep-rooted conflicts of the nation's political and economic life. Echeverría launched his "democratic opening" (*apertura democrática*), seen by him as an effort to give disaffected intellectuals (and the middle class in general) an opportunity to speak out on critical national issues. Skeptics saw the *apertura* simply as an attempt to orchestrate opposition groups into supporting government programs: ". . . the *apertura*, planted as a gift from the State and not as a right of the people, is the most successful action taken by Echeverría."[14] They dismissed Echeverría's policies as demagoguery, and it is true that he in effect appointed himself as spokesman for the "Third World":

> Echeverría created an interbourgeois confrontation that was often demagogically presented as the struggle of a progressive State against the bourgeoisie. . . . All the efforts to increase capitalist exploitation by modernizing it were realized in a political process overrun with populist exhortations, sporadic confrontationswith the oligarchy and its allies in the State apparatus, and repressions of popular opposition movements.[15]

Even though many of the left refused to be taken in by Echeverría's blandishments, the situation was even worse for him on the right. The business community was incensed by official pronouncements which to their ears sounded alarmingly as if the administration was planning to shift Mexico's "mixed economy" dangerously leftward.

All these political currents were reflected in the cinema of the first half of the 1970s. President Echeverría appointed his brother Rodolfo to head the Cinematic Bank. Rodolfo had been a movie actor for many years under the name Rodolfo Landa. Perhaps because his brother was so active in the industry, President Echeverría took a personal interest in the ailing film industry and made it possible for young, mostly leftist, directors to make films. Suddenly after years of stagnation, a number of Mexican films appeared that were provocative, imaginative, and controversial. Under Rodolfo Echeverría, the State took over all cinematic activities even to owning theater chains. The private producers all but droppped out of movie-making and most films were made by one of the three official production companies: CONACINE, CONACITE I, and CONACITE II.[16] While one might expect that such an arrangement would result in heavily censored, propagandistic films, such did not turn out to be the case.

For the above stated reasons, the Echeverría administration allowed the new directors a degree of freedom to deal with sensitive and social issues. The most dramatic example of the new Mexican cinema was Felipe Cazals' *Canoa* (1975) based on an actual incident—the attack on five young men in the village of Canoa in the state of Puebla in 1968. A powerful, violent film with the intensity of Costa Gavras' *Z*, *Canoa* tackled the touchy subjects of the repression of 1968 and economic inequality. The superstitious people of Canoa, influenced by an obscurantist priest, believe that the five young men, employees of the University of Puebla on a weekend outing, are Communist agitators; the villagers set upon them, kill two and savagely beat the other three (Plate 8). *Canoa* is even more interesting if we remember that Echeverría was Minister of *Gobernación* in 1968 when he was widely blamed for ordering the army to attack student demonstrators. To his credit, Echeverría did not hinder a project that could not help but rekindle bitter memories.[17]

However, while film quality showed a dramatic improvement in the Echevarría *sexenio*, overall production dropped as private producers practically stopped making films. In 1971, seventy-five films were made—of these, sixty-three were financed by the Cinematic Bank in partnership with private producers, seven were wholly privately produced, and five were state-financed. By 1976, the total number was only forty-two—none were financed by the Banco with

private producers, five were privately made, and thirty-seven were entirely state-financed.

If Mexican cinema of the 1970s can in any way be characterized, it is by stating that new directors such as Alberto Isaac, Jorge Fons, Arturo Ripstein, Rafael Corkidi, Paul Leduc, and many others were allowed the freedom to deal with controversial political and social themes. Some established directors like Alejandro Galindo and Luis Alcoriza took advantage of this more open climate to also make their own statements. In this they were assured by President Echeverría that they were "at liberty to bring whatever theme they wished to the screen, be it social or political."[18]

Mecánica nacional (*National Mechanics*) (1971) was one of Luis Alcoriza's most popular films, and his most outspoken. Focusing on the urban lower middle class and its uncertain suspension between traditional rural values and the anomie of a rapidly growing metropolis, Alcoriza aimed devastating barbs at this group. He employed a number of well-known performers in roles that were veritable antitheses of their popular images.

A garage-owner and his family set out in a holiday mood to catch the end of an Acapulco-to-Mexico City automobile race. They make their way through massive traffic jams until they reach an open spot just off the highway, already jammed with cars. All these people await the dawn by eating, drinking, and engaging in sex. The garage owner's mother gorges herself until she is stricken by a massive attack of indigestion. Granny dies before a doctor can make his way through the traffic. She is laid out as if at a wake with her grieving family surrounding her (Plate 9). However, the announcement that the race cars are nearing the finish line draws the mourners away, including her family. Her corpse is left alone in the midst of a sea of autos and refuse, with just a lone dog picking at the garbage for company.

Alcoriza, who worked with Buñuel in the 1950s, has a Buñuelian disdain for bourgeois society in general, and in *Mecánica nacional* he ruthlessly satirizes the new Mexican middle class—those people who recently had begun to share in the country's prosperity but in the process lost whatever cultural integrity they once possessed. Alcoriza sees the children of the *lumpenproletariat* of the 1940s as being completely coopted by the worst of petite bourgeois values. He seems to be saying that no new revolution is possible from the shallow, sybaritic people of *Mecánica nacional*. Perhaps it was people like these that quickly shrugged off the Tlatelolco massacre of students in 1968.[19]

Alfredo Joscowics's independent production of *El cambio* (*The Change*) (1971) continued with the theme of disillusion with Mexican society in the wake of Tlatelolco. Its two young protagonists, an artist and a photographer, disgusted by the materialism of urban life, escape to an unspecified seacoast. They build a shack on the beach and, joined by their girlfriends, for a while enjoy a simple, bucolic existence. But waste from a local factory is poisoning the fish in the surrounding waters, threatening the native fishermen's livelihood. Deciding to take up the local people's fight, the two young men collect sludge from the factory and, at a banquet in honor of the company representative, hurl the liquid all over him and the local dignitaries. The youths naïvely see their act as no more harmful than a prank, albeit politically significant. The local lawman takes quite a different view of the incident—he hunts down the two city youths and shoots them down in cold blood. Clearly an allegory of Tlatelolco, *El cambio* is also a bitter commentary on the futility of meaningful change in Mexico.[20]

By the 1970s, Alejandro Galindo was the most respected of the old generation of cineasts. His populist films of the 1940s and 1950s were still admired by younger critics and filmmakers as being the most socially relevant cinema of the "old" Mexican film industry. In 1973 Galindo made an unusual film, *El juicio de Martín Cortés* (*The Trial of Martín Cortés*), in which he tackles racism—not the blatant discrimination against Indians but the subtler tensions existing between mestizos and creoles (whites) in a middle-class ambience.

To dramatize what he sees as a racial conflict in contemporary Mexican society, Galindo focuses on the story of Martín Cortés, the mestizo son of Hernando Cortés by Malinche aka Marina, the Indian woman who was his invaluable interpreter as well as mistress. In Martín's story, Galindo sees the fundamental dilemma of Mexican society: half Indian and half European, Martín was suspended between two worlds, neither belonging fully to nor being accepted by either. To relate all this to contemporary problems, Galindo sets his film in a Mexico City theater where a play based on the story of Martín Cortés is being presented. In this manner, Galindo speculates as to how modern Mexicans might react to the mestizo-creole dichotomy.[21]

These films, *Canoa, Mecánica nacional,* and *El juicio de Martín Cortés*, are just three of the interesting motion pictures produced in the 1971–1976 period that can be said to represent a break with Mexico's traditional cinema. There were, of course, many others about which Mexican critics and film scholars vehemently disagree. Some, the more leftist, denounce Mexican moviemaking of this period as being subject to a "strategy of Hollywoodization"—including not only *Tintorera* (1976), a blatant imitation of *Jaws*, but also *Actas de Marusia* (*Letters from Marusia*) (1975) which recounts the story of a 1907 strike in Chile against a European-owned mine. One writer characterizes the latter film as employing the "Hollywoodian narrative technique" of a disaster movie applied to a seemingly controversial subject (the "disaster" in *Actas de Marusia* being the massacre of the strikers by the army).[22] In effect, those on the extreme left denied the existence of a new Mexican cinema. Others, however, felt that it was "totally irresponsible of supposedly leftist movie critics . who deny the difference between the 1971–76 cinema and the old industry."

> Naturally, compared to an ideal cinema, with a cinema that serves revolutionary causes, of course there is no change. The cinema maintains itself in the order of the existing situation, undoubtedly a bourgeois cinema. But from the cinema of private enterprise to the *auteur* cinema, there clearly is a difference. The auteur cinema does not get to attack basically the social structure as in the case of Buñuel, but it isn't as vile and corrupting as the conventional movies made by private enterprise.[23]

Another writer scans the 438 films made between 1971 and 1976 "on which were spent billions [of pesos] of the national budget" and finds only five motion pictures that he feels can be termed "good." These are Archibaldo Burns' *Juan Pérez Jolote* (197?), a documentary; *De todos modos Juan to llemas* (*After all, Juan is Your Name*) (197?), a semidocumentary; Alfredo Joscowic's *El cambio,* discussed above; Jaime Humberto Hermosillo's *La pasión según Berenice* (*The Passion According to Bernice*) (1975); and Paul Leduc's *Etnocidio: Notas sobre el Mezquital* (*Ethnocide: Notes on El Mezquital*) (197?), a Mexican-Canadian coproduction. All except *La pasión* were independent productions. "So what is left? *Berenice* which is at most a good melodrama."[24]

Obviously, in such cases the critic is setting his standards much too narrowly, or simply limiting them to out-and-out Marxist themes. Mexican films of this period were hardly "revolutionary"—since they were, after all, being produced within a capitalist system. The most leftist is *Actas de Marusia* "which more than any other film of this period, expresses unequivocally a Marxist ideology."[25]

Most other films combined various forms of social criticism with a new drive and creativity on the part of new directors, writers, and actors. Among such films are Arturo Ripstein's *El castillo de la pureza* (*The Castle of Purity*) (1972), Alberto Isaac's *El rincón de las vírgenes* (*The Corner of the Virgins*) (1972), Alfonso Arau's *Calzonzín inspector* (*The Inspector Calzonzín*) (1970), Sergio Olhovich's *Coronación* (*Coronation*) (1976), and Paul Leduc's *Reed: México insurgente* (*Reed: Insurgent Mexico*) (1971). These and many other distinguished films, flawed though they may have been in certain respects, attest to the new vitality among Mexican cineasts during the Echeverría years. According to one observer:

> It would be incorrect to think that none of the social criticism films . would have been made without Echeverría's support. The drive and creativity of the new directors and new writers, the impetus of new actors, the demands for new themes by Mexican audiences, and the film industry's own impatience with the *churros* [low-quality potboilers] would certainly have been felt in some way. But it is equally unlikely that the superb quality achieved in many of these films—their *auteur*-selected themes, and their commercial success—would have been possible without the support and artistic freedom conferred on the new directors by the Echeverría government.[26]

Under the administration of José López Portillo (1976–1982), film production again came under the aegis of the old private producers. In 1976, the new government established the Directorate of Radio, Television, and Cinema (DRTC)—similar to a ministry of communications—to take the place of the Cinematic Bank (although the latter continued functioning another two years). The president appointed his sister, Margarita López Portillo, to head the new bureaucratic structure. On assuming her office, she stated her goal was "more high-quality, cultural, and historical films to give the Mexican public a greater sense of national identity."[27]

At the end of 1978, the Cinematic Bank was absorbed by the DRTC; for many years it had been at the head of Mexican cinema, becoming a sort of ministry of cinema, controlling film production and also managing other branches of the industry such as distribution, exhibition, and promotion.[28]

In keeping with López Portillo's general policy of taking the State out of many economic activities (especially financially inefficient ones), State film producers sided with businessmen in private production. The latter group always felt that "cinema is meant to give healthy entertainment and make money, since if you want to be thought-provoking, educational or cultural, that's what schools and universities are for."[29]

Another significant development of the late 1970s has been the entrance into filmmaking of Televisa, S.A., the huge and powerful television monopoly that already controls Mexican commercial television. It has embarked on film production "of the very worst quality"[30] that exploits personalities and themes from television. Televisa also controls SIN (Spanish International Network), the American Spanish-language television network with some 190 outlets in the United States.[31] In spite of the above impediments to making quality cinema—to which must be added increased censorship and exhibition policies that favor low-quality Mexican-made features and foreign (mostly U.S.) movies—a number of interesting films were nonetheless produced in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Ariel Zuñiga's *Anacrusa* (*Anacrusis*) was "perhaps the most important Mexican film made in 1978."[32] A simple, linear tale, it tells the story of a middle-class woman who, struggling to find personal fulfillment and security, is forced to confront her political and social milieu when her daughter is kidnapped by the political police.[33]

Also in 1978, Miguel Littín, the exiled Chilean filmmaker, made *El recurso del método* (*The Recourse of the Method*). Based on a novel by the late Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, the film covers forty years in the life of a fictional Latin American dictator. The film switches back and forth between his luxurious exile in Paris and incidents during his tyrannical rule over his tropical homeland.[34]

In 1979 Felipe Cazals made *El año de la peste* (*The Year of the Plague*), adapted by Gabriel García Márquez from Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year.* A mysterious affliction causes havoc in a Latin American capital (never identified but obviously Mexico City). Modern trucks collect the dead from the streets in the style of the traditional medieval wagon. Cazals removes plague from its customary historical context and places it in the present. "He invites us to consider whether plague is a mysterious epidemic from the past or something we live with from day to day—in industrial pollution, in the criminal degradation of the atmosphere, in the epidemics among children and adults in the suburbs [of Mexico City] with its dreadful sanitary conditions, and in the way that Power, its bureaucracy and the media at its service manipulate, hide, and exploit informa-

tion. The Year of the Plague is a fable on the present and future of our society."[35]

Arturo Ripstein, returning to one of his favorite themes, examines in *La tía Alejandra* (*Aunt Alexandra*) (1981) how people trapped in claustrophobic circumstances relate to each other, a topic he had skillfully dealt with in his excellent 1972 film, *El castillo de la pureza*.[36]

Mexican cinema has been an important industry, yet always a troubled one. It has been given up for lost a number of times but always has managed to come back in varying degrees of quality. The severe economic crisis that arose at the end of López Portillo's administration cannot but have a deleterious effect on the country's filmmakers, especially those who wish to make thoughtful political and social statements. In such economically insecure times, the tendency is to emphasize escapist commercial movies directed at the lowest common denominator.

Yet new cineasts like Felipe Cazals and Arturo Ripstein, who were given an opportunity to make films during Echeverría's *apertura*, are now established directors who display an impressive cinematic intelligence and sensitivity. If the Mexican filmmaking bureaucracy does not attempt to stifle the creativity of many of these cineasts, as it has done with so many others in the last forty years, their work should become better known beyond Mexico's borders in the 1980s.

NOTES

1. Aurelio de los Reyes, "El cine en México hace 75 años: vicios y virtudes," *Revista de la Universidad de México* 26, no. 10 (June 1972): 2.
2. Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896–1980* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 6-7.
3. Ibid., pp. 9, 13.
4. Ibid., pp. 32-34. See also Alfonso Pintó, "Hollywood's Spanish-Language Films," *Films in Review* 24 (October 1973): 474-83 and idem, "Cuando Hollywood Habló en Español," *Américas*, October 1980, pp. 3-8.
5. Mora, *Mexican Cinema*, pp. 45-48.
6. Emilio García Riera, *Historia documental del cine mexicano*, 10 vols. to date (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1969–): 1: 172; hereafter referred to as *Historia*.
7. Mora, *Mexican Cinema*, pp. 48-49.
8. Carlos Perea in *México Cinema*, 1 July 1942 as quoted in *Historia* 2: 53.
9. Mora, *Mexican Cinema*, pp. 90-96.
10. For a brief synopsis of the New Latin American Cinema, see ibid., pp. 1-3. See also Julianne Burton, "The Hour of the Embers: On the Current Situation of Latin American Cinema," *Film Quarterly* 30 (Fall 1976): 33-44; Peter Biskind, "In Latin America They Shoot Filmmakers," *Sight and Sound* (Summer 1976), pp. 160-61.
11. Mora, *Mexican Cinema*, pp. 113-37.
12. *Historia*, 8: 114-36. See also Jomí García Ascot, "El cine y el escritor," *Cine cubano*, no. 31/32/33, p. 104.
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THE WALL: IMAGE AND BOUNDARY CHICANO ART IN THE 1970s

by

Max Benavídez and Kate Vozoff

Any careful historical analysis should place its focus in the proper context. It must be said in a retrospective such as this that artists and the events that shape their work are inseparably bound to the society from which they come. Art does not exist in a vacuum. It carries with it the language and conceptual underpinning of all that came before it, just as it bridges toward what will follow. Still, framing the proper context for Chicano Art in Los Angeles during the 1970s is an almost herculean task because its roots stretch back millenia, to a multiplicity of peoples and cultures.

It can be argued that the history of Los Angeles is, in large part, a Mexican history. El Pueblo de La Reina de Los Angeles was founded in 1781 by a small group of *pobladores,* primarily people from the northern areas of Mexico; Durango and Sonora. For more than seventy years the enormous basin that they settled remained a Mexican territory and its economy, political structure, and culture were stamped with the mark of Mexican values. Their neighbors were the Indian tribes of California who had lived there for centuries and whose culture was incorporated into the early California lifestyle. The years between the pueblo's founding and its war with the United States constitute a period of ongoing racial mixture and transformation. The Mexican American community that resides in Los Angeles today is the physical embodiment of generations of intermarriage and changing ethnic identity.

Today, more Mexicans live in Los Angeles than in any other city on earth—with the sole exception of Mexico City. Yet, undeniably, the sprawling city is an Anglo-dominated metropolis. It has not elected a Mexican mayor since 1846, and Mexican residents constitute its largest underclass. On the average, they are poorer and less educated than their Anglo American counterparts. And in the city that their ancestors founded and built, they hold the lowest-paying jobs and live in the city's less developed neighborhoods.

In this way, Los Angeles is a city inhabited by millions of disenfranchised and displaced Mexicans. Not Indian, yet of the Indian; not Spanish, yet of Europe; not even Mexican in the strictest sense of the term, Mexican Americans and their politicized "Chicano" kin are, at once, the heirs to a rich, evolving tradition and the target of a prejudiced Anglo mainstream.

One result of such an identity is a complex set of internal contradictions. Chicanos are bound to more than one cultural tradition, and their blood links them as much to the colonizer as to the colonized. In their efforts to unite as a single cultural entity, they must balance that internal contradition, even while they struggle to survive in a post-industrial, high-technology society. Their moves toward self-expression involve a careful process of cultural selection: they must decide which elements of their background they will cast away and which ones they will keep. In essence, Chicanos must be as diligent to determine what they are not as to proclaim emphatically who they are.

The artists among them must, therefore, reach toward forms and content which accurately register a people transformed by generations of racial and cultural mixture. To show the most veritable image of their complex condition, Chicano artists of the Los Angeles area had to create an entirely new visual language—a language capable of expressing what their community has become even while it comments on the myriad traditions which have contributed to its development.

It should probably be said outright that this dilemma is not altogether unique to Chicano artists of Los Angeles. Writers, musicians and painters from the underclasses of other countries have confronted the issue of self-expression within the confines of oppression. In literature, for example, Franz Kafka departed from the accepted aesthetic of his time and place. As a Polish Jew, he was acutely aware of Germanic society's rampant anti-Semitism. To avoid enriching the language of his oppressors and, yet, to comment on their role within his subculture, Kafka invented an original, pared-down German. He reached back into his religious tradition, to the literary forms of Hasidic parables, and

adapted their classic style to explore his personal alienation as a Jew. In essence, Kafka's "German" allowed him to encompass his oppressors even while it took a position against them.

In a similar fashion, Chicano artists who worked in Los Angeles during the 1970s had to compose their own visual language. They had to reach back into their various traditions and search for the remnants of older visual forms that might allow them to communicate a new cultural content. In this way, the Chicano artists of the period were not simply Chicanos who made art. They were artists who made a very particular kind of art—one that recreated the modern Chicano experience.

A Historical Framework

In 1932, David Alfaro Siqueiros came to Los Angeles. An accomplished and controversial Mexican muralist, he apparently arrived with hopes of escaping, at least for awhile, the political pressures of his own country. Although he ostensibly came with plans to teach a mural class at the Chouinard School of Art, the trip immersed him in a series of artistic controversies which, in a fundamental way, prefigured much of the Chicano art that would follow.

During his stay in Los Angeles, Siqueiros painted two murals. The first, entitled "Mitin en la calle," was a fairly straightforward rendering of black and white people listening to a union organizer in the streets of Los Angeles. His figures stood comfortably close together in a way that belied the racial tensions that, in actuality, characterized the city. Perhaps for this very reason, local response to the work was quick in coming. City residents were outraged, and the artist's patron was forced to scrape off and destroy the piece only a short time after its unveiling.

The second Siqueiros mural was commissioned by a Los Angeles gallery owner who, in the effort to avoid another round of local debate, insisted on the right to preselect the mural's theme. As the patron envisioned it, "Tropical America" would be a lush and placid expression of Latin America's natural beauty. Evidently, Siqueiros interpreted the project in a different way. Dedicated by the artist to the Mexican people of Los Angeles, the completed mural measured 80 x 16 feet and was painted on a wall near the old plaza area of Los Angeles now known as Olvera Street. It depicted an Indian strapped to a wooden cross with the rapacious talons of an American bald eagle perched above his head. The plaintive image of "Tropical America" caused an immediate reaction. The mural was whitewashed by the city. Soon afterward, Siqueiros was expelled from the United States.

In terms of the Chicano art movement that would follow, both Siqueiros murals served an important function. They proposed relevant content for art: racial oppression and the possibility of integration. They depicted images that were not superficially present in the city but which, nevertheless, struck at the subconscious reality of its residents. Put simply, Los Angeles did not hang Mexicans from wooden crosses nor did local residents travel comfortably down racially mixed streets, but both these images were strong graphic comments on a multi-cultural metropolis. The first work examined what might have been the cityscape—had local residents been capable of true integration. The second, with its crucifix image and obvious implication of holy suffering, laid bare the social status of Mexican Americans, who were essentially viewed as nothing more than low-level labor for local industry.

In addition to the expulsion of a great artist who hailed from their *madre patria* (motherland), Mexicans in Los Angeles suffered other affronts throughout the 1930s and 1940s. During the Depression, thousands of them were systematically rounded-up and driven back to Mexico, the economic castaways of a society that could not even employ all its Anglo workers. More and more, Mexicans were segregated in certain areas of town and their *barrios* were neighborhoods characterized by cheap housing, overcrowding and high unemployment.

Yet even within the context of economic crisis and racial oppression, some members of the community sought forms of self expression. Most notably, the *pachuco* emerged as a walking symbol of a people reacting to their cultural displacement. In the most basic sense, the pachuco—with his zoot suit and exaggerated pompadour—served as the visual embodiment of a subculture replete with its own unique language, dress and code of behavior. Above all, the pachuco's attitudes and behavior signaled a clear rejection of and negation to the culture-at-large. He was not visually understated; he was not mainstream.

Covertly, of course, the pachuco's behavior symbolized the utter disregard in which some Mexicans held Anglo Americans and their expectations. Until his flamboyant emergence, Los Angeles residents, both white and brown, had been accustomed to a more accommodating Mexican posture, to men and women who lived—quietly—on the eastside of town. But once the pachuco came upon the scene, prevailing modes of behavior were disrupted. With his sartorial exaggerations and almost ritualized deviance, the pachuco did not allow for condescension, only for fear and disdain.

In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style,* Dick Hebdige writes that style is:

> pregnant with significance. Its transformations go 'against nature,' interrupting the process of 'normalization.' As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends 'the silent majority,' which challenges the principles of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus (Page 18).

In a very real way, Anglos had no frame of reference for the pachuco's deviant mannerisms. And because mainstream values could not integrate notions of self-determination with social expectations of the Mexican community, pachucos were automatically suspect. In this way, their style—indeed, their very presence—created a disorientation in the people and institutions that had, only a decade before, felt it necessary to whitewash Siqueiros' "Tropical America."

Coming as they did, in the early 1940s, when war fever was at its height, pachucos rubbed against the grain of a society already on edge. Although considered by many people in their own community to be emblems of cultural

pride, pachucos were thought, by the Anglo mainstream, to be acting in clear defiance of authority and, ultimately, out of its control. Again, Hebdige writes that, "the emergence of a spectacular subculture is invariably accompanied by a wave of hysteria in the press" (Page 92). Precisely such hysteria followed on the heels of pachuco expression.

According to an article in *201* (a magazine about the Mexican experience in Los Angeles):

> Throughout the year of 1942, the press had been reporting that East Los Angeles had been experiencing a crime wave involving juvenile gangs. . The hysteria the newspapers whipped up was so bad that the soldiers stationed in the area decided it was time to take matters into their own hands.

Soldiers beat pachucos, stripped them naked, sheared them of all their hair and left them bloodied on the street to face public humiliation. According to *Time* magazine (June 21, 1942), the attacks were condoned by local authorities:

> The police practice was to accompany the caravans (of soldiers and sailors) in police cars, watch the beatings and arrest the victims. The press, with the exception of the *Daily News* and the *Hollywood Citizen News*, helped whip up the mob spirit. And Los Angeles, apparently unaware that it was spawning the ugliest brand of mob action since the coolie riots of the 1870's, gave its tacit approval.

Just as Siqueiros' work was hidden from public view because it mounted a critique of American racism, the pachuco was handled firmly and with violent discipline. On an obvious and superficial level, of course, the pachuco beatings served to teach local "desperados" a necessary lesson. But much more important, they validated the dominant culture's ideology: Mexican insurgence was not to be expected, much less condoned. Once again, the Anglo American community could rest assured that its accustomed frames of reference would be maintained.

Analyzed in terms of its artistic significance, the pachuco style established a primary criterion for all subsequent Mexican American self-expression: it clearly stated what it was not; it was not mainstream. Moreover, it suggested what it was; it was angry and flamboyantly proud. It stood apart and, as Hebdige writes in relation to comparable subcultural statements, was "a visual construction, a loaded choice. It directed attention to itself; it gave itself to be read" (Page 101). In this sense, the pachuco served as a sign for his community, a visual production of their anger, pride and self-definition. But he also functioned as a wall between the mainstream and Mexican communities, and his strutting gestures of defiance were the equivalent of coded messages, full of cultural content.

As pachuco expression flourished, Mexican graffiti emerged as yet another strident visual expression of cultural identity. Although the literature is too thin to document the form's initial development, many current critics suggest that the first graffiti insignias were visible in Los Angeles as early as the 1930's, when summer heat liquified black asphalt and Mexicans scooped it onto sticks to sign their "tag" on downtown walls.

Like the pachuco style, graffiti was a visual statement filled with apparent contradiction. It was, on the one hand, blatant defacement, public disorder, the expression of people without genuine respect for the mainstream aesthetic. On the other hand, it was bold community imagery, a private language that could be used to convey community-oriented information. What's more, graffiti took visual expression a step further than the pachuco style. While individual pachucos could be beaten, stripped and then jailed for their purported crimes, graffiti offered an indelible visual mark. Once applied to walls, the asphalt paint hardened and could not be removed. It could be painted over, but beneath innumerable layers of camoflage it would always remain, a permanent statement of nonconformity.

As a comment projected outward, graffiti communicated a blatant rejection of the private property rights of store owners, business corporations, home owners and government agencies. Through vandalism, it shouted that imposed boundaries and lines of social distinction could not be maintained. Most important for our purposes, and as art critic Richard Goldstein has written, it functioned "like conceptual art and pop" in the sense that it "questioned the context in which art was appreciated."

Still, for the "writers" who made it, graffiti was far more than a negative statement about the society that burgeoned outside their grasp. It was a positive and powerful statement of ethnic presence aimed at its own community. For people who had watched their earlier visual expressions blocked, whitewashed; their creators beaten into submission or jailed, graffiti offered a sense of artistic power and freedom. As clinical psychologist Dr. Ruben Leon, has said, "For Chicano youth, (graffiti) is a theatre marquee of pride."

Gilbert Lujan, a Los Angeles artist who has followed the graffiti movement, maintains that the apparently awkward stylistic expression has always served as a form of "guerrilla art" because "it terrorized people. That flat little millimeter of paint upset a middle-class, gallery-oriented aesthetic. It said to people 'I am here. I am everywhere.' " Los Angeles painter Judithe Hernandez agrees. She sees much of the local graffiti as indicative of startling visual intelligence. "It's full of sophisticated form and beauty. If some of those guys were designers in New York, they'd be making $100,000 a year."

Like all artistic style, graffiti eventually took on its own unique standards of quality. In a report prepared for Pacific News Service, Al Goodman points to the complex criteria that have, for some time, shaped the best of this Chicano imagery. He writes that "by looking a little deeper, the inscriptions can be seen as an important cultural force, an intricate system of codes and symbols passed on from generation to generation of Chicanos." By the 1950s, asphalt had given way to spray paint, and stilted lines moved toward more delicate, oftentimes elaborate curves. Just as the pachuco style had once offered cultural sustenance to the Los Angeles Mexican community, graffiti became its most notorious form of anonymous art.

By the very nature of their visual display, pachucos and graffiti served to short-circuit traditional lines of commu-

nication between the Los Angeles Mexican community and the city's Anglo majority. Both expressed displacement from the larger urban population, and defiantly discarded mainstream values in favor of a claim to their own unique subculture. They commented on the world around them by overtly refusing to bow to its standards of acceptability. Most important, by establishing their own private, community-oriented art aesthetic, the pachuco style and graffiti drew a bold line between the Mexicans of Los Angeles and the rest of the city. They erected a visual wall that effectively blocked "outsiders" from entering the world of Chicano imagery. They simultaneously insulated their community from the outside, and boldly displayed a cultural confidence that Mexicans in Los Angeles had almost lost a century before.

On all these levels, the early Mexican "artists" laid a firm foundation for the Chicano art movement which would follow them. By the end of the 1940s, they had suggested two essential criteria upon which to evaluate all subsequent Chicano art statements. First, they made it clear that self-expression must embody both defiance and pride. Second, they implied that meaningful cultural proclamations would be accompanied by struggle and social hostility. This position of stylistic rejection took on new contours during the late 1960s and the stage was fully set for an art movement that would burst upon the 1970s with a fury.

Before the Flowering

The 1950s were years of political disillusionment for much of the Los Angeles Mexican community. World War II had called hundreds of thousands of young men to battle and Mexicans were extremely visible at the fronts and on the casualty lists. In part, their wartime participation reflected a community that still believed it could reap the benefits of American society if only it were willing to pay the price. The assumption proved to be ill-founded.

In reality, the 1950s was an especially difficult period for Mexicans. In *Occupied America,* Rudy Acuna writes, "To Chicanos, the 1950s represented a 'decade of defense.' " The worst effects came in Operation Wetback. According to Acuna, "In the fiscal year 1953, the formal campaign got under way, with 875,000 Mexicans deported; in 1954, 1,035,282 were deported, after which the operation was considered a success. " Then, McCarthyism, and the chilling effects of the Cold War, made it nearly impossible for anyone with an alternate vision to risk self-expression. It was, in short, a time of brutal ideological hegemony.

But by the early 1960s, Americans were breaking out of the rigid confines of the 1950s' ethic. The election of a young, liberal Democrat to the White House and the civil rights activities of Black Americans helped bolster the confidence of Mexican Americans, and they made initial moves toward their own brand of political activism. Cesar Chavez was perhaps the first community figure to symbolize political determination. By successfully organizing Mexican farmworkers in California, Chavez signaled the start of a new era.

After years of dispossession and beatings, deportations and utter disregard, Mexicans in Los Angeles were awakening to a new reality. And for Chicano artists, the political spark was ignited. Many critics agree with Maureen Orth who wrote for *New West* magazine in 1978 that:

> The contemporary movement in Chicano art, rooted in *la causa,* was likely born the day in 1965 when Cesar Chavez and El Teatro Campesino founder Luis Valdez first took off together for the Delano fields on the back of a flatbed truck. Both knew that in the Chicano's struggle for social justice and self-expression, art and politics would serve each other. The picket lines, the barricades, would give 'the cause' its thrust. The arts would, in turn, explain and enlarge it.

Los Angeles artist Carlos Almaraz maintains that the conjunction of art and politics, exemplified most clearly by *El Teatro Campesino* (The Farmworkers' Theatre), offered new role models for many young Mexican Americans during the mid and late 1960s. And he feels that the first artists to gain community recognition were those who strongly identified with the overlap of social change and creative expression. By the mid 1960s, a new term had come to signify their social awakening: *Chicano.* Santos Martinez, former Chief Curator of the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, Texas, believes that "to call oneself Chicano is an overt political act." And, above all else, the late 1960s and early 1970s were political.

For Chicano artists in Los Angeles, 1968, 1969 and 1970 were furious years, brimming with inspiration. In the spring of 1968, emboldened by the agitated activism around them—farmworker boycotts and strikes, race riots and anti-Vietnam demonstrations—several hundred Chicano students walked out of their public high schools to protest the community's imposed poverty, high drop-out rates and substandard educational facilities. The "Blow-Outs," as the protests were later called, stood as a public manifestation of the community's displacement.

By defiantly walking out on the educational system that, in theory, offered them their only escape from an underclass status, young Los Angeles Chicanos lifted the shroud of mainstream ideology. They ripped away the "common-sense" of the world in which they lived. Like the pachucos and graffiti artists who had preceded them, these young people displayed their disaffection by revolting against society's unconscious acceptance of a dominant ideology. The Blow-Outs cast this ideology into clear relief and exposed its lie. Young Chicanos saw what mainstream society had left for them, and they literally turned their back on it.

In 1970, still another event—this one imbued with violence and bloodshed—further elevated Chicano consciousness. In August, the Chicano National Moratorium was organized to protest U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and to publicize the high rate of Chicano war casualties. Between 20,000 and 30,000 people participated and by dusk, three people were dead, several others injured and 1,200 police officers occupied East Los Angeles.

Later, when artists Willie Herron and Gronk collaborated on a mural for the Estrada Courts (a federal housing project in East Los Angeles), they used images of the Moratorium riot to reflect life in the barrio. Known as "The Black and White" or "Moratorium" mural, the work was intended to be newsreel on a wall (Plate 10). Since Chicanos had little, if

any, access to news cameras or TV stations, Herron and Gronk created their own version of a network news report. One scene depicts a squad of police officers, night sticks in hand, walking toward a group of demonstrators. It tells a multi-layered story and shows advancing officers as they might appear on a television screen.

Thus, murals became the initial means to a political end. They were spontaneously produced to tell a side of the story that major media never covered. As muralist Beta de la Rocha said in 1975, "Chicanos do not have the press to communicate; consequently, they write on walls." One of the early progenitors of Chicano muralism, the enigmatic Cat Felix, lived out of a van during the early 1970s, organizing mural teams and raising funds for materials. Individuals simply went out into the streets, so to speak, and created the work on any available wall space. Carlos Almaraz estimates that by the end of the 1970s over 600 murals had been painted. And he guesses that "about two-thirds of them are gone."

In choosing wall space as their canvas, Chicano artists in Los Angeles were registering their cultural tradition and their immediate background. Gronk, who first gained attention through his mural work has said, "I didn't go to galleries or museums. They weren't a part of my childhood. But all I had to do was walk outside my front door to see visual images all around me. Graffiti was everywhere and it helped me develop a sense of what I wanted to do." As Orth wrote of the early movement:

> it was colorful, collective and militant. It exalted tradition and self-worth. It sought to clarify an identity for the Chicano people by signaling aspirations and exploring roots, particularly those intertwined in ancient Indian myth. Eager to establish their cultural lineage, the young artists turned to the bright bold style of the master Mexican muralists, Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros.

The blank wall became the pre-eminent space for Chicano art in Los Angeles during the 1970s. Like giant territorial markers, Eastside murals drew physical boundaries around the areas of the city in which Mexicans lived and worked. With their giant images of the Virgin of Guadalupe and brightly colored Aztec icons, the enormous paintings enveloped Mexican Los Angeles and in a symbolic sense, sheltered it from the outside. They "spoke" Chicano and served as community billboards of pride. In the tradition of reknowned Mexican muralists like Siqueiros and Orozco, their makers were experimenting with a spatial expanse that mainstream artists of the period would not have touched. In flagrant, if unconscious, opposition to a gallery-oriented "art for artists" aesthetic, Chicano muralists were interested in talking to their own community, to the people who gave East Los Angeles its humanity. Judithe Hernandez explains that Chicano artists of the period were, above all else, concerned with the community's relationship to the murals. "Before beginning work, we would interview people who lived and worked in the area," she said, "to learn what sorts of images they would like to see."

Thus, in every possible way, East Los Angeles muralists diverged from the standards of acknowledged Anglo American art. In style, form, and content, Chicano artists of the period worked toward culturally relevant statements of community concern. And it is only with an understanding of their artistic vantage point that the work can be accurately explained.

Art sometimes serves to communicate an idea. Other times it aims to elicit emotion. At its best, it does both. And in their own way, the Chicano murals of the 1970s offered art at just this zenith point. On the one hand, the outdoor frescoes conveyed information. As Judithe Hernandez explains, "We tried to make murals into cultural billboards. We tried to make them informative like newspapers." On another level, they reached deep into the Chicano consciousness to render an interior reality that could not be expressed verbally. As muralists Willie Herron revealed when he talked about his untitled mural which depicts a figure which is half skeleton and half throbbing heart, "It is the tear of two cultures, the feeling of violence and the feeling of being ripped apart by them." On both levels, the murals of the early 1970s were comments directed by Chicanos to their own community.

During a recent interview, Herron explained the genesis of his mural work. As he spoke, he went back to one night in 1972 when he found his brother lying in an alley. "He had been stabbed maybe 12 times the tissue and stuff was coming out of him." Seeing his younger brother so badly hurt by gang violence, and riding with him in the ambulance to the hospital, Herron experienced a rush of thought and feeling. The next morning he walked into a shop, on the street where he had found his brother, and asked if he could paint a picture on the alley wall. By the end of the day, he had finished "The Wall that Cracked Open"—a stylized rendering of muscular arms bursting up and through a cement street (Plate 11).

This was Herron's first non-portable mural and for him, it expressed the totality of what had happened to his brother the night before. "When I saw him like that, laying there in a pool of blood, I saw every victim that has suffered because of the gang situation, not just my brother who almost died." Incorporating the textures of brick wall and its graffiti writing into the work, Herron's purpose was not to achieve artistic sophistication in any technical sense. ("Most of it's just outlined. If you look at it you'll see that it's not even colored in.") He wanted to communicate the totality of a situation he knew very well—with its concept and emotional content conveyed as one inseparable reality.

"The Wall that Cracked Open" stands as an appropriate representative for the murals of its time. Painted in 1972, it was among the earlier works done in East Los Angeles, and the money for it came from the artist's own pocket. Herron, like most of his contemporaries, was not prepared to command a budget for his work. Alleyways and store fronts were simply covered with community-oriented visual displays. Some reached back to Indian roots and in their sun-stained remains, stand as proud statements of all that Chicano culture might have been and all that it might again become. Most, like this one by Herron, follow in the tradition of Siqueiros, who painted not just for the sake of expression, but for the power of visual communication.

In as much as the early murals by Herron, Almaraz,

Valadez, Gronk, Lujan and so many others blend proud images of cultural heritage with defiant political resistance, they fall in line with the basic tenets of Chicano art. And they certainly stayed true to the final dictate of the community's art: they were—at least initially—ill-received by the outside community. With condescension, the Los Angeles art establishment saw murals as little more than naive art: elementary, immature and essentially irrelevant. Those that were painted for any money at all were usually executed through one or more of the city's social service programs designed to keep juvenile gang members occupied.

Carlos Almaraz remembers that the first community-based project with which he was involved worked with a total budget of $149.50, 6½ gallons of paint for each muralist, and "the entire group shared one gallon of red paint." The money had come from city budgets allocated to fight street crime and local authorities thought the murals a fairly innocuous and inexpensive way to curb gang activity.

The Whip of the Whirlwind

By the very early 1970s, Chicano artists in Los Angeles were the conscious and unconscious inheritors of a particular tradition: Siqueiros and artistic freedom, pachucos and officially sanctioned violence, the ubiquitous anonymity of graffiti—all held together by the nexus of politics and culture. As members of American society, albeit with second-class status, they were also caught in the Vietnam and Watergate hysteria of the period. As well, they were on the receiving end of American pop culture with its television, film, music and sterile art images. Rarely, if at all, were Chicanos or Mexicans a part of these mainstream images. In terms of the artistic statements of the time, it was as though U.S. Mexicans did not exist.

Chicano artists were not oblivious to the events swirling around them. For artists so estranged from the mainstream, art collectives offered a small-scale community and a way to alleviate their mutual isolation. Most artists of the period describe the early art groups not as an aberration but as the only possible forum for self-expression and survival. Others say that, "it was counter-revolutionary to be a star." For many reasons, artists joined forces. In Sacramento, the Royal Chicano Air Force was established. A group of women in San Francisco banded together as Las Mujeres Muralistas. Con Safo, one of the largest confederations of Chicano artists, was formed in San Antonio, Texas. The Mechicano art gallery in East Los Angeles served as a meeting place for local artists. And *centros de arte* (art centers) were established throughout the entire Southwest. In these spaces and as groups, artists created a bond of shared cultural experience that saw them through a period of social and personal upheaval.

In Los Angeles, two Chicano art groups typified the community perspectives of the decade. Los Four was one of the first major groups to form in the city, and although members still argue over who initiated the collective, the original members included Carlos Almaraz, Gilbert Lujan, Roberto (Beto) de la Rocha and Frank Romero. The group was organized in 1973. Later, John Valadez and Judithe Hernandez joined the collective.

The second major art group of the period was ASCO (the Spanish word for repulsion and nausea). One ASCO member says that, "I always felt the people gave us the name." And another explains that "People would see our stuff and say 'It gives me asco.' Pretty soon, that's just what we were called." Gronk, Willie Herron, Patssi Valdez and Harry Gamboa, Jr. started working together in late 1972 and until 1975, pursued most of their activity within the group dynamic. Along with Los Four, ASCO aimed to represent the Los Angeles Chicano community. Both groups worked toward self-expression within a cultural context, but fundamental differences divided them. To delineate their differences is to illustrate the complex passions of the period.

In some sense, ASCO and Los Four were inversions of one another. ASCO symbolized the street and barrio youth who were often angry and filled with brilliant strategems for survival. Los Four represented the academy, with its cool approach and theoretical inclinations. Most of its members were schooled in the arts, held advanced degrees and shared a vision based on a combination of cultural celebration and Marxism. Yet, each group was a product of the emerging Chicano.

Gilbert Lujan has described the early 1970s as a time of fury. "We just couldn't do things fast enough . . . In one year, I put 100,000 miles on my car—just driving around talking to anyone who would listen to me about what it was to be Chicano." Not only were murals dotting Eastside architecture; magazines were suddenly published. Lujan was one of the original founders of *Con Safos*—a political/cultural quarterly of Chicano art. As he sees it, *Con Safos* (which means "whatever you say to us will be turned back on you," and when used in graffiti, as C/S, stands as a talisman or mark to ward off evil) was an influence in its time because it suggested that Chicano art statements were everywhere, that to look around Los Angeles was to see Chicano art.

When Lujan and Almaraz first joined forces, they were confronted with "hard design decisions." As Lujan expresses it, "We had to find new ways to express what was happening to us." What was their visual world to look like? In the effort to visually recover a culture that had been lost to them, the artists felt that Los Four would need to construct a visual language that could express the Chicano experience without accepting the dominant, mainstream ideology. They saw the need for self-expression which would celebrate their own achievements without relying on the visual forms of a people who blatantly despised them. Lujan believed that "the images had to reflect cultural transformation." For him, the community had just begun to recognize its "slavehood" and out of the anger that had resulted, artists had to find ways of celebrating the nature of the "new" Chicano.

Luis Valdez once said of Chicano popular art, that "it should be close at hand—we can make art out of anything." In this spirit of cultural "folk art," Lujan reflects the most conscious effort to elevate everyday objects to the status of cultural artifact. In the tradition of Marcel Duchamp, he played with notions of contextual significance. In a series of found objects, Lujan presented soup bones, tortillas and

pastry dough as artistic display. "I wanted to legitimize the culture," he explains, "and so I elevated menudo (stew) bones to art."

Almaraz was somewhat less interested in everyday Chicano artifacts and more intrigued by the visual presentation of the Los Angeles Chicano community. Born in Mexico and raised outside of California, Almaraz had a unique perspective to bring to the 1970s movement. When he speaks now of Chicanos, his words suggest that he is, at once, with them and yet apart from them. Almost like an objective observer, he remembers the early 1970s as a time when "Chicanos wanted self-determination and self-definition from their art." As he puts it, "We were opening up the definition of what Chicano was and could be." Alamaraz relates the story of an out-of-town friend who commented that "Los Angeles would be a really boring place if it weren't for Mexicans." In his own way, Almaraz would appear to share those sentiments. As a Los Angeles artist of the 1970s, he was concerned with asserting the vibrance and cultural pride of being Chicano.

John Valadez, a painter and photographer, was a second-generation member of Los Four. Valadez remembers that in the very early 1970s, "We didn't know anything about who we were or about our culture. And the seventies was a time of awakening." As he says, "We were so starved for any kind of positive identity that any recognition of who were were, any acknowledgment that we were even there, precipitated a well of response." In this vein, Valadez simply wanted to paint Latins. Through whatever medium—murals, canvas, photography—he wanted to "begin developing a Latino visual language." He also wanted to represent death. Initially, his work was painted from slides he had taken of dead animals found along the sides of Los Angeles freeways. But gradually, the focus shifted and he began a series of paintings which depicted dead Mexicans. "It was sort of to explore religion," he recalls, and "to make a comment about Vietnam." But primarily, the work was a way of "taking on the racist—it was like giving him what he wanted but not doing it the way he wanted." In all the work, dead Mexicans lie placid and at peace. Their death is strangely like sleep and one is left with the keen sense of a coming resurrection.

ASCO's focus was far less placid. Willie Herron had already established a name for himself as a local muralist. So had Gronk. Harry Gamboa Jr. had come out of a publishing experience much like Lujan's. Along with several other activists, Gamboa had helped to resurrect *Regeneración*—a newspaper first published during the early 1900s by the Mexican anarchist, Ricardo Flores Magon. Eventually, the publication ended up in Los Angeles, where it appeared on an irregular basis until 1918. Flores Magon had used the newspaper to advocate violent revolution, an end to capitalism and complete political liberty. To revive a newspaper with such a history was itself a political statement. Gamboa remembers that in 1972 he got his first camera and became ASCO's resident "documenteur." Patssi Valdez also worked with the group, often as a model and participant in the other members' art projects.

Gronk, Gamboa and Herron all recall the desire to offer some true definition of the Chicano condition. And that definition, they believed, had to show the ugliness and utter absurdity of life in the barrio, of life as a Mexican in the United States. Herron argues that ASCO was "the true representative of the street, the real Chicanos who were taking it all the way. We weren't romanticizing and glorifying what the streets were like. We saw the problem, and we saw it as a problem because we were right in the middle of it. We wanted to change it. We wanted to reach inside and pull people's guts out."

Gamboa agrees. "We were trying to reflect the violence around us," he says, "and we were breaking people's preconceptions of what Chicano artists should do." Along with other members of the group, Gamboa found the work of most other so-called Chicano artists to be "voyeuristic." He asserts that he actually lived the Chicano experience and it had little to do with glory or cultural renaissance. It had to do with gang violence, unemployment and poverty. Like Los Four member Valadez, he refers to the cultural invisibility and displacement that Chicanos felt, and he maintains that even now, "Chicanos are essentially viewed as a phantom culture. We're like a rumor in this country. . . " For Gamboa, ASCO was the defiant reaction of a community that was coming apart at the seams.

Although Herron and Gronk both painted murals, they wanted ASCO to move toward public performance and spectacle. Appropriately, then, their first impact on the Los Angeles art world was part-performance, part-mural and it played on their cultural tradition of graffiti art. Even into the early 1970s, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art had not exhibited the work of Chicano artists. To protest their exclusion, ASCO members went to the Museum one night and spray-painted their names on the outside of the building. "We felt that if we couldn't get inside, we would just sign the Museum and it would be our piece." Like all graffiti makers, ASCO was eager to defy the power of imposed barriers.

By late 1972, the group had grown tired of murals. And, as yet another protest statement, it staged a Christmas Eve parade down Whitier Boulevard. Their "Walking Mural" included all four members dressed in costume, and it represented mural figures that had literally been ripped off the wall to become ambulant. They aimed to make animate comments on a mural movement that was being polluted by its growing acceptance among mainstream art critics and its appearance on nearly every wall.

But much of the extravaganza that came to typify ASCO was not premeditated. Herron remembers that they spent most of their time encouraging each other in whatever projects came to mind. Unlike Los Four, whose Marxist orientation was integral to their art, the Dadaistic ASCO was uninterested in theoretical manifestoes. "We just did it," Herron explains, "and we defined it afterward."

Fading Fury

It is in the nature of all "movements" that they must wind down and, ultimately, die. For Gamboa, "1975 was the year that the Chicano movement died," and in semi-jest he remembers that "it was the year we all cut our hair."

It was also in 1975, that the Comite Chicanarte, in cooperation with the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, organized an exhibit of Chicano art. In its preface to the catalog, the Comite wrote:

> The Chicano Art Movement has no single birth date, no central leader, certainly no dominant financial patron and no written manifesto. Yet it is with us: we see it, feel it, rejoice in it, and we can recount its history. Chicano Art has flourished since this synthezied reality we call 'Chicano' became understood and affirmed by those who were living it—some would claim since 1848, others prefer the year 1968, and there are those who would say this movement evolved during the prophetic twilight of the fifth sun.

Ironically, the Chicanarte Exhibit was, in some sense, the death knell of a movement that had already begun to wane. In exalting the work of local artists, in recognizing their contributions to the world of visual imagery, Chicanarte robbed the movement of its prime directive: it nullified its ability to protest and defy. If Los Four had attempted to reflect the romantic heritage of Chicanos, and if ASCO had tried to balance that view with visual nausea and conceptual violence, both groups had stood proud in the face of a mainstream aesthetic that denied them equal participation. The Chicanarte show symbolized a change. And, in the process, the movement itself was changed forever.

With Vietnam over, and having established themselves—at least to some extent—within the Los Angeles art community, Chicano art collectives became factionalized and group members began to go their own way. Lujan remembers that "there was an abandonment at that time . many of us were burnt out." But he sees the mid-1970s as "just another part of the cycle that keeps on going." Other artists from the period refer to a level of "inner dissension" that eventually split people apart. Judithe Hernandez says that she "always knew it would end. I guess I knew it wasn't real life. And when it was over, real life would begin."

A level of resentment and disillusionment accompanied the mid-1970s. John Valadez describes it most intensely in a work he never titled. In 1976, he took a 20-year old Encyclopedia Brittanica and re-did it with found objects so as to impose his sense of the 1976 Bicentennial onto an object created by the dominant Anglo American culture. Filled with brutal images of death, sex and internal dis-ease, the Brittanica project was his attempt to "capture hostility and self-destruction." He explains that, "at a certain point, I became very bitter and angry. The book was a reaction to all that hadn't happened in the 1970s. It was a kind of exorcism. And it worked." It had been ten years since Luis Valdez had merged art and politics in the fields of California. Valadez was preparing to exorcise the demons that remained behind.

Most artists continued to work through the second half of the decade. Many of them, like Valadez, moved toward more "subliminal" images that might convey yet another phase of Chicano history. He feels that he tried to "develop a way of presenting subversive images with subtlety," and maintains that even now, "we are still working on a Latino visual language." With a 1981 mural, "The Broadway Mural," Valadez put behind him overt images of death and urban decay. While his earlier projects mixed the faces of Latin American revolutionaries with elements from the streets of East Los Angeles, this mural simply depicts people walking through the downtown busy shopping center, engrossed in the business at hand. With their everyday dress and casual stance, Valadez conveys the reality of Mexican Los Angeles without the need for layers of mythical significance (Plates 12, 13, 14). In this way, "The Broadway Mural" brought its artist full circle—from the streets, through a period of political activism and then disillusionment, and back again to the streets, where his community continued to evolve and transform. By capturing the Hispanic essence of Broadway—with its Latin, Indian and Third World visages—Valadez hopes that he has, at least partially, reclaimed the city for his community.

Still, Harry Gamboa has reflected on the subliminal value of the mural and concludes that "It's threatening. If you hang around Broadway long enough, you're going to see some bad things happen. It's all there when you look at that mural." So, even while the giant indoor mural succeeds as an ultra-realistic, detailed "snapshot" of the street, it brings the formidability of a Latin presence to bear on the very city streets where Mexicans were once savagely brutalized.

Chicano artists of the 1970s, particularly the muralists of the period, invented and used a unique visual language—complete with its own code of imagery and culturally relevant content. Their symbols spoke to poeple within the community in terms that they could understand. With allusions to Aztec mythology, everyday cultural artifact, police brutality and gang violence, the murals covered the streets of East Los Angeles with enormous marquees that conveyed important information. Whether their message was one of cultural pride or social oppression, they addressed the internal displacement that Mexican Americans had grown to expect from life in the urban metropolis. They drew upon the traditions of their colonized ancestors to comment on the tradition of their colonizer. Most important, they proclaimed the power behind self-definition and political autonomy. As such, their makers assumed the role of educator, prophet and activist. And they transformed their community's dreams and fears into concrete reference points for social change.

If one walks through the housing projects of East Los Angeles today, to study the murals that remain, it can seem something of a walk through the past, a gleam from a moment that no longer exists. Yet the fact remains that these giant paintings served a vital function in their time. Like enormous billboard advertisements, they stood out amidst skyline images of Salem cigarettes and Jose Cuervo tequila. And while many of them lack the obvious imagery of defiance, the community continues to renovate them on a regular basis. That maintenance can viewed, in and of itself, as critical acclaim for their relevance and as proof that they achieved their most important intent. Like graffiti tags and the pachuco's ritualized style, the murals of the 1970s have become part of an ongoing Chicano struggle, one of many protests against cultural hegemony. As such, they remain valuable cultural art.

On one level, the dynamic between Chicano artists and mainstream society is eerily similar to the relationship between Siqueiros and Los Angeles residents over half a century ago. John Valadez remembers the day—in early 1980—when he and a group of other artists went to photograph their "Zoot Suit" mural before it was sand-blasted off the outside wall of the Aquarius Theater in Hollywood. "By the time we got there, it was already gone," he said. "We thought it was a mural but to them it was just a commercial billboard."

It is oddly appropriate that the Zoot Zuit Mural was not a permanent visual statement in Los Angeles. With its single image of a pachuco, dressed in the culturally specific elegance of his time, the work pointed back to a period in which most proclamations of Mexican-American pride were, if possible, destroyed, and in all cases condemned by the dominant society. It is nonetheless unfortunate that this more contemporary Chicano message was so misunderstood by the Anglo mainstream. If the artistic imagery of Los Angeles Mexicans has traditionally stood as a boundary line between the community and the outside urban society, it poses the challenge of appropriate critique. Its language is complete, its content fully in line with the reality of Chicano experience. As such, it can serve as a privileged reading into a culture that gives itself to be read.

Every critical analysis carries with it the burden of excessively analyzing its subject. In over examining any spontaneous cultural expression, in dissecting it for critical consumption, a critique risks the possibility of distorting the reality and integrity of a movement. Yet, the murals of East Los Angeles are not indoor art objects nor privately owned visual displays. In fact, most muralists contend that Chicano art does not translate well to the gallery wall. "Imagine how Chicano art would sit in a gallery," John Valadez remarked. And his comment touched on the core critera upon which the work must be assessed. Murals and ASCO-esque performance fundamentally belong to the streets. That is where they came from. That is where they have meaning. To expect that galleries should embrace these forms is to imagine that the mainstream art aesthetic could possess them, transpose them into an image of something that they defied being. Chicano art of the 1970s will not come to the mainstream. And if outside critics hope to understand or appreciate that art, then they must go to it.

This retrospective has attempted to establish that Chicano art in Los Angeles during the 1970s functioned as a vehicle for community revitalization. As such, the art drew upon older, established visual statements and styles, and adapted them to convey new cultural information. Only by moving toward the culturally-defined values of the community from which it came, can Chicano art of the period be accurately understood.

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Plates

Plate 1 — Helen Escobedo, *Gateway to the Wind,* 1968. Concrete, painted blue and green, 17 meters high. Located on the Friendship Route, Mexico City. Photograph: Mexican Olympic Committee.

Plate 2 — Helen Escobedo, *Signals,* 1971. Steel 'I' beams, tubular aluminum, 15 meters high. Auckland, New Zealand. Photograph: Bob Ellis.

Plate 3 — Helen Escobedo, *White Corridor,* 1971. Temporary installation in Museum of Modern Art, Mexico City. Photograph: Lourdes Grobet.

Plate 4 — Helen Escobedo, *Coatl,* 1980. Steel painted in tones of yellow and red, 6 meters high, 15 meters long. Centro Cultural Universitario, Mexico City. Photograph: Helen Escobedo.

Plate 5 — Helen Escobedo, M. Goeritz, M. Felguerez, Sebastián F. Silva, Hersua; *El Espacio Escultórico,* 1981. Concrete, 130 meters in diameter. Ciudad Universitaria, Mexico City. Photograph: Paolo Gori.

Plates 6 & 7 — Mexican Indian woman selling handcrafted Indian dolls on the streets of Mexico City. Photograph: Alvaro Zavaleta.

Plate 8 — Felipe Cazals, director. Scene from *Canoa,* 1975. Photograph: Conacine/STPC.

Plate 9 — Luis Alcoriza, director. Scene from *Mecánica Nacional,* 1971. Photograph: Producciones Escorpión.

Plate 10 — Gronk and Willie Herron, *The Black and White* or *Moratorium,* 1970. Estrada Courts, Los Angeles. Willie Herron (left), Gronk (right). Photograph: Harry Gamboa Jr.

Plate 11 — Willie Herron, *The Wall that Cracked Open,* 1972. Los Angeles. Photograph: Willie Herron.

Plate 12 — John Valadez, *The Broadway Mural,* 1981. Oil on canvas, eight panels totaling 8x48 feet. 242 South Broadway, Los Angeles. Photograph: John Valadez.

Plate 13 — Detail of Plate 12.

Plate 14 — Detail of Plate 12.

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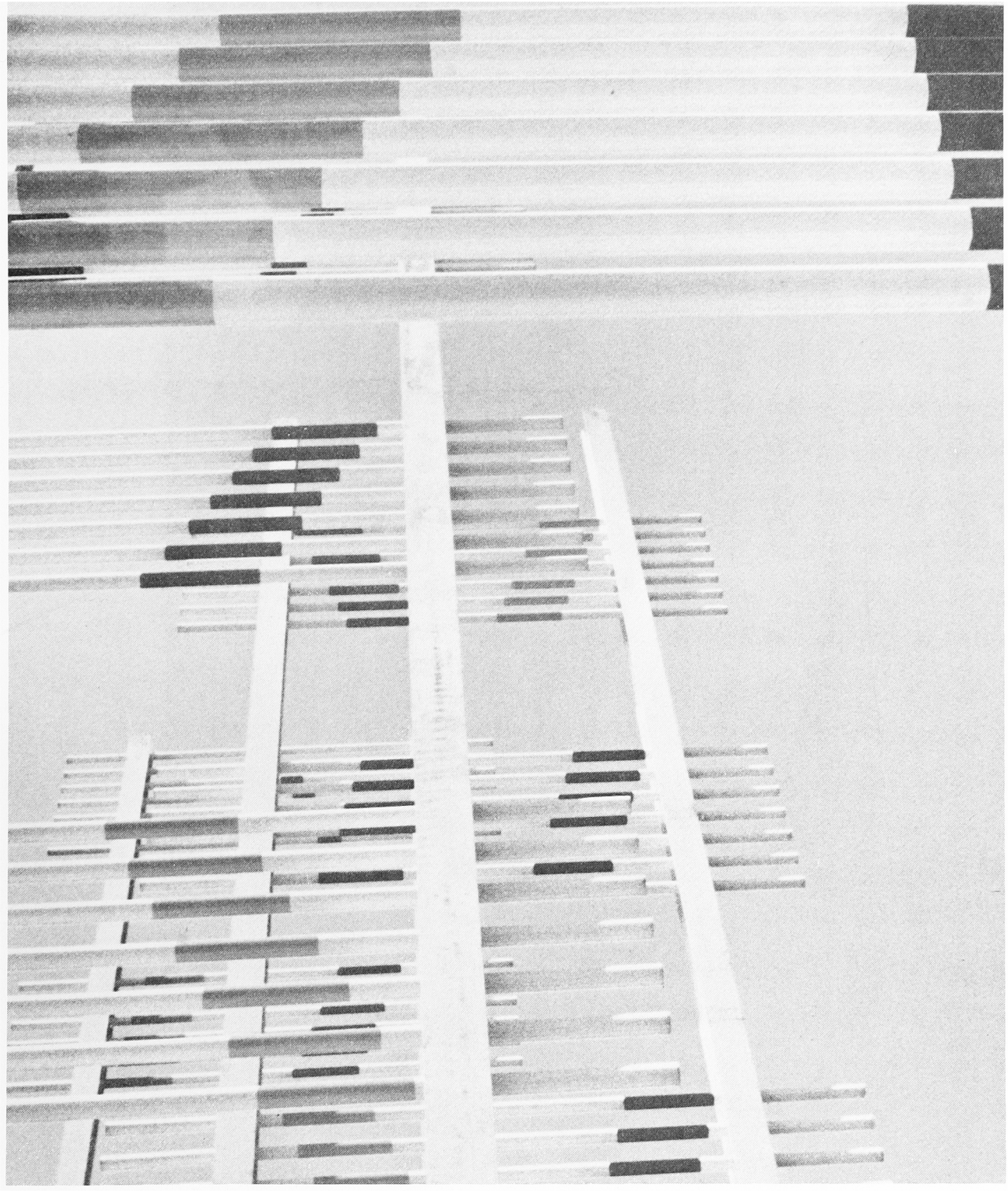

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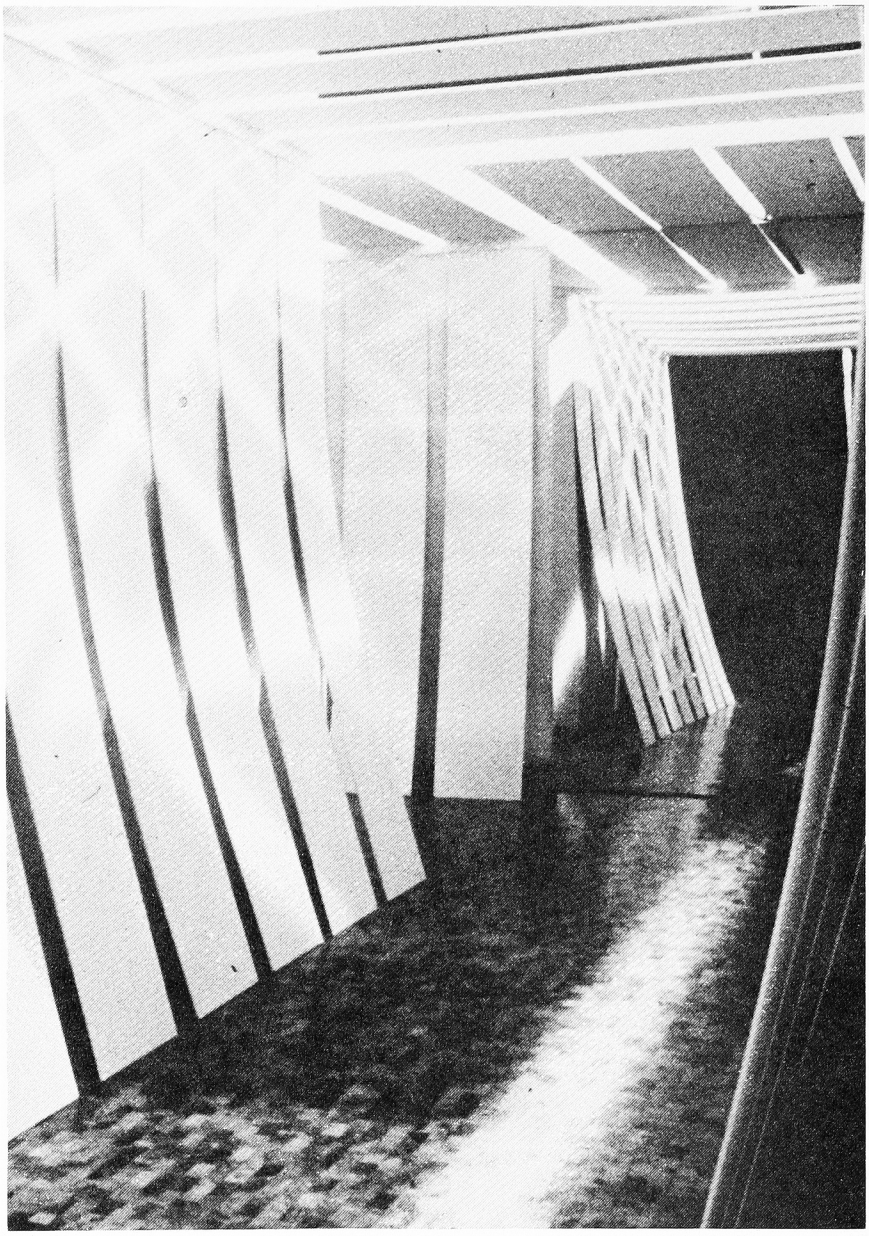
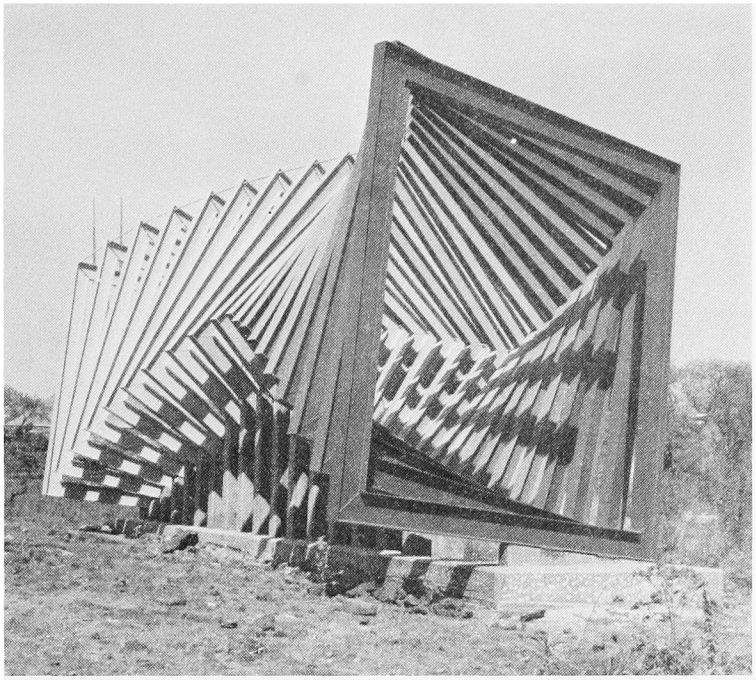


Plate 3 Helen Escobedo, *White Corridor,* 1971. Temporary installation in Museum of Modern Art, Mexico City. Photograph: Lourdes Grobet.



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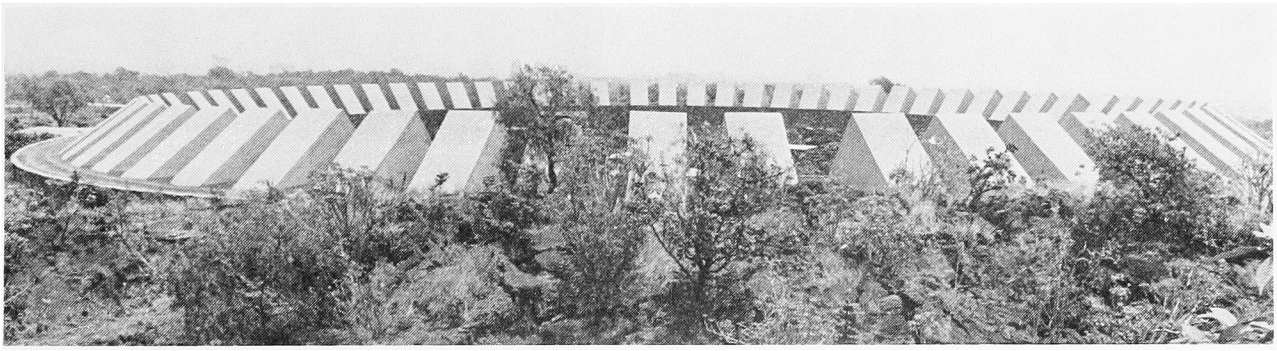

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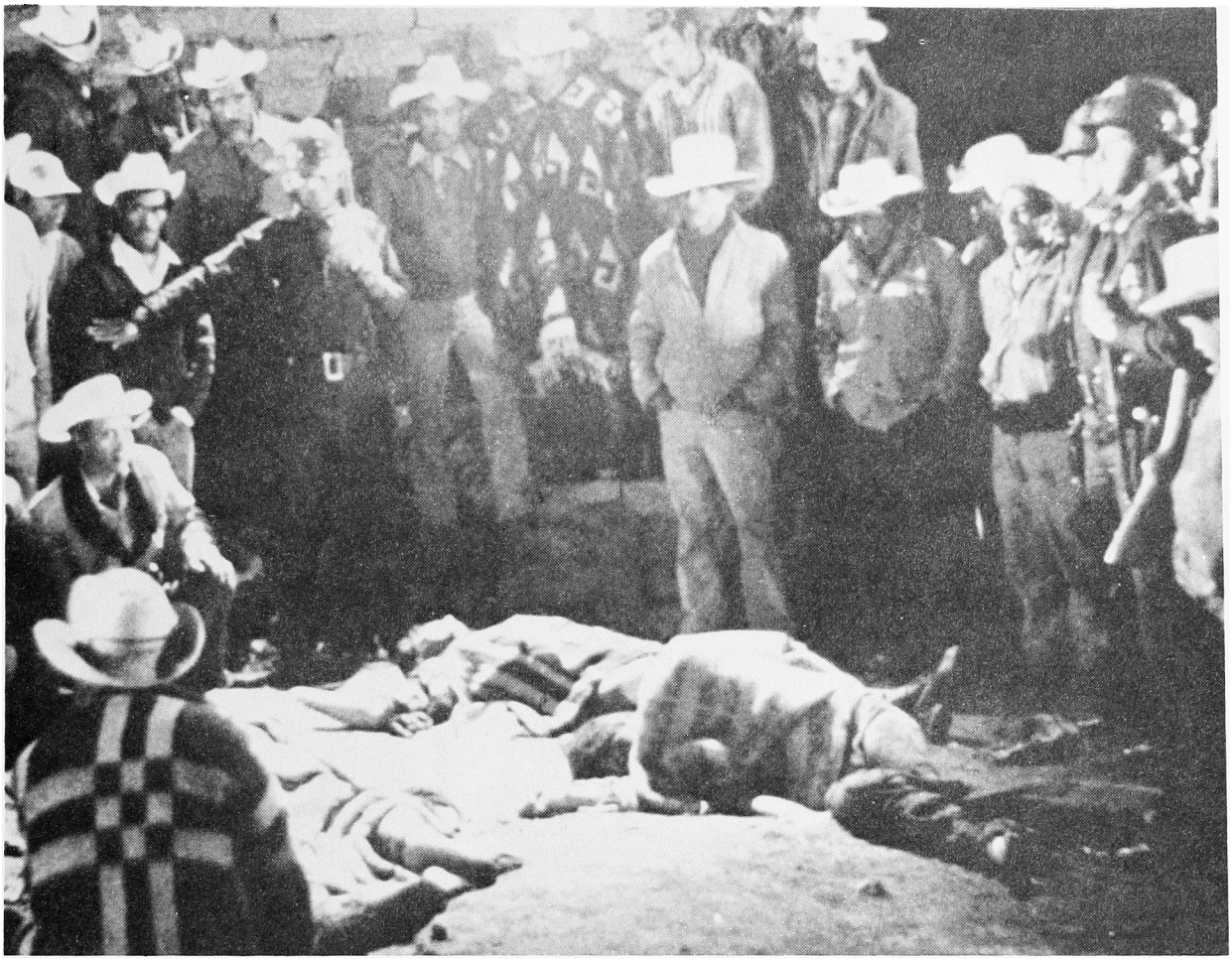

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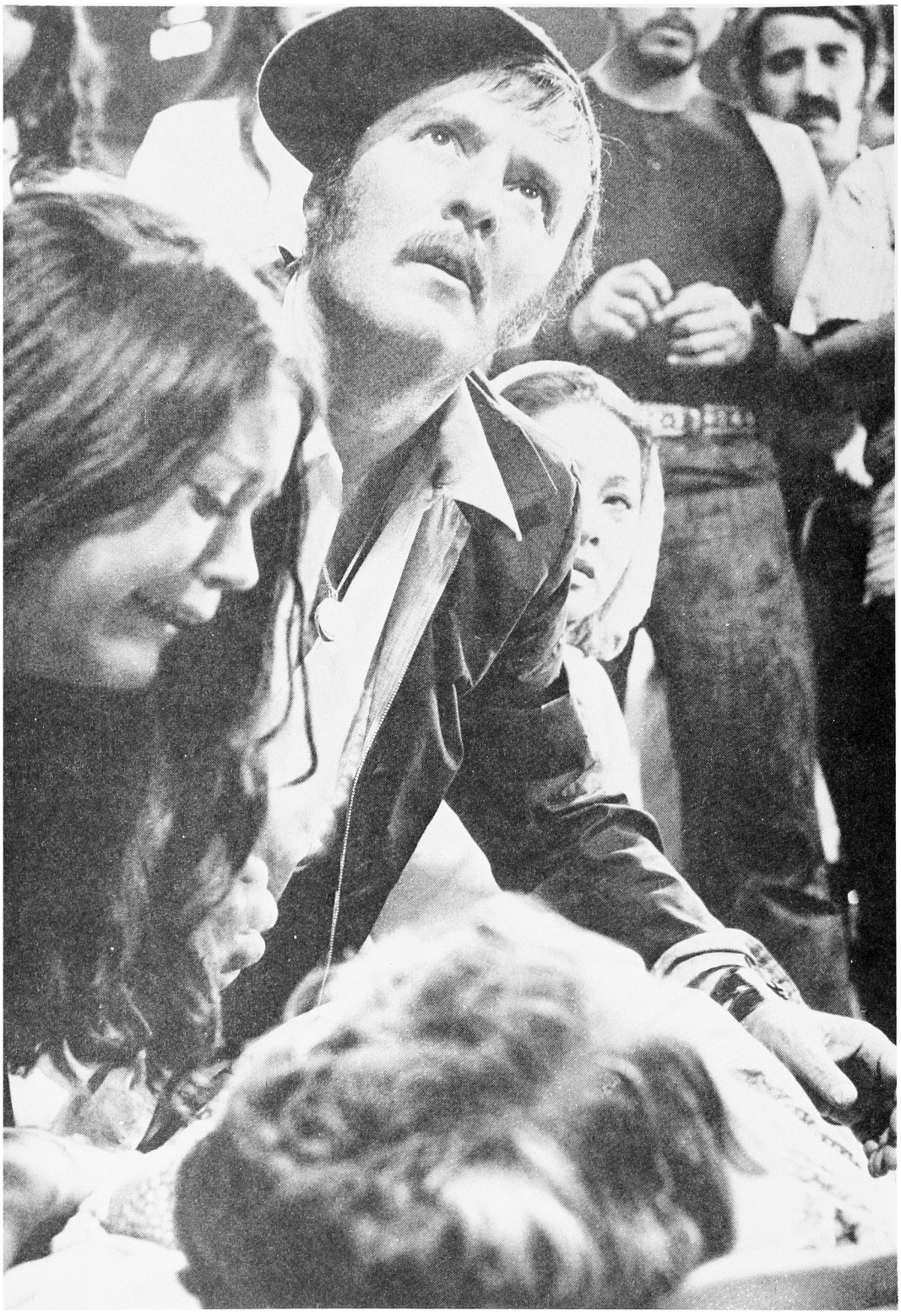

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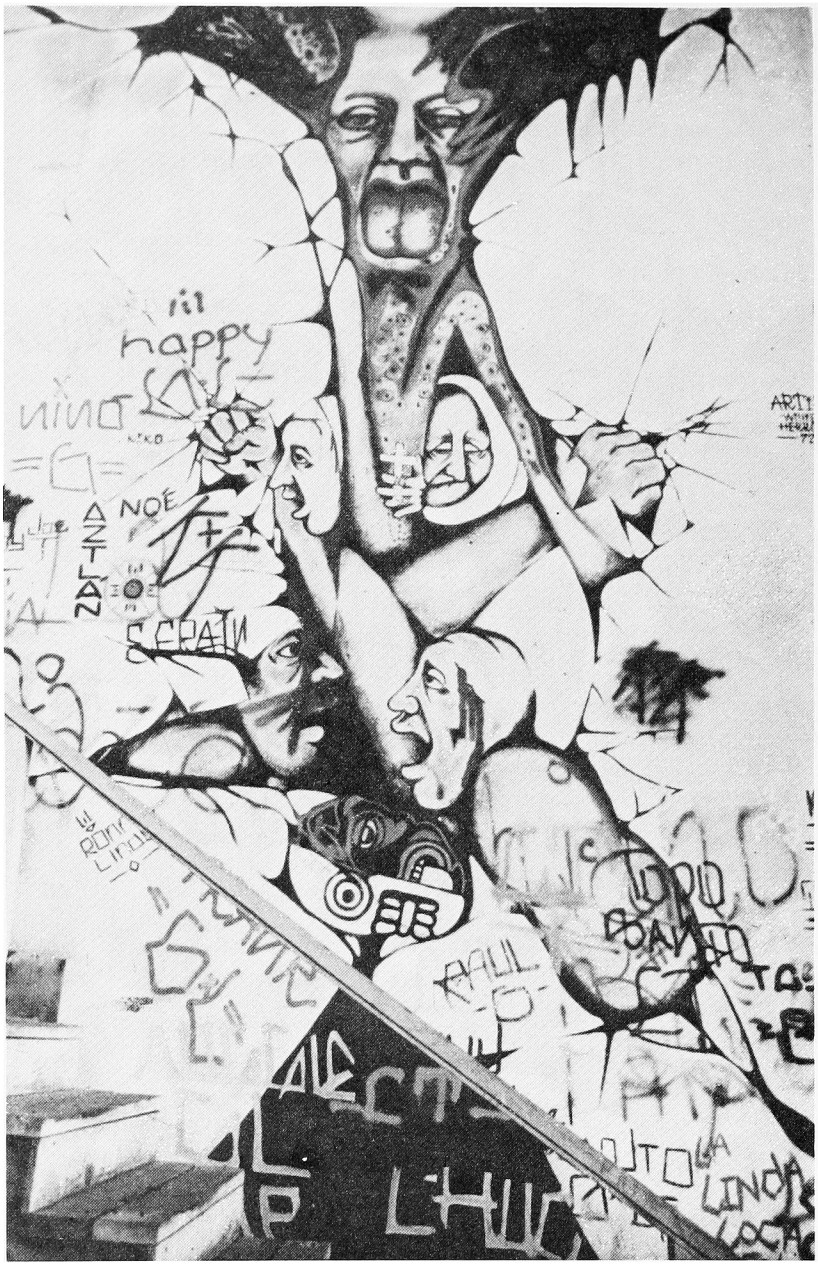

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Plate 13 Detail of Plate 12.

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