

VOICESTM *of Mexico*

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Mexico and the United States At the End of the Millenium

Jesús Reyes Heróles, Mexican Ambassador to the United States

Will Mexican Society Modernize?

René Millán

Comets in Pre-Hispanic Mexico

Jesús Galindo and Arcadio Poveda

“Inner Castle”

Paintings by Alberto Castro Leñero

Articles by Luis Rius and José Manuel Springer



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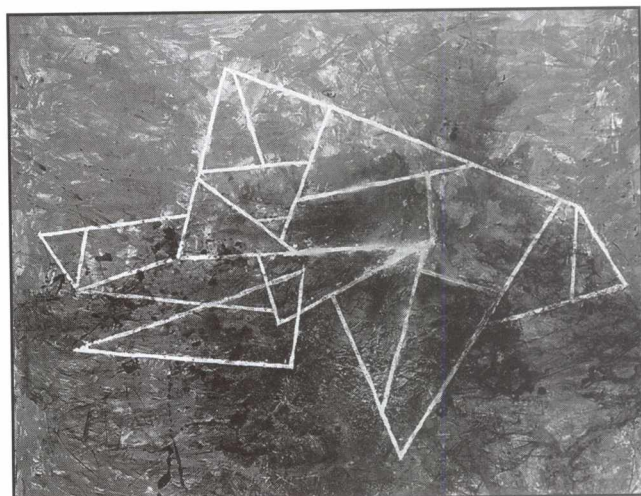
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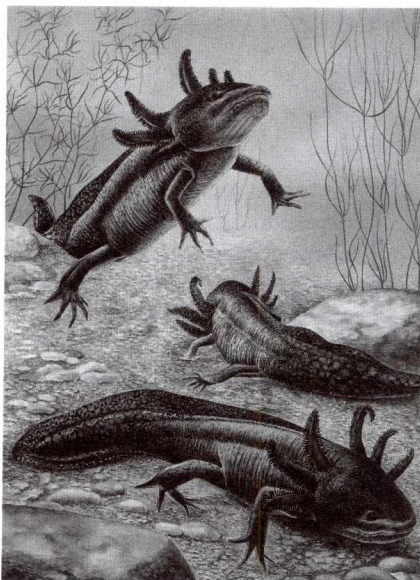
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Cover: Alberto Castro Leñero, *Fortunes*, 147.5 x 142 cm
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OUR VOICE

In recent decades, bilateral relations between Mexico and the United States have reached unprecedented depth and intensity. Meetings between both countries' heads of state are more and more frequent, and high-level groups of officials, academics and experts from both sides of the border have proliferated to study and propose lines of action about the different issues on the bilateral agenda. This may well be due to the recent processes of political modernization, economic globalization and stepped-up regional trade.

Drug trafficking, the migration of Mexicans to the United States and regional trade in the framework of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have been the central items on the agenda. The fact, however, that they are not the only questions under consideration is shown by President Zedillo's recent visit to his U.S. counterpart, a trip assessed in an article in this issue of *Voices of Mexico*.

Some of the topics which are beginning to push to the fore are the protection of Mexican nationals in the United States; the extradition of individuals sought by law enforcement officials in both countries; the solution to trade, environmental or labor disputes in the framework of NAFTA; the establishment of maritime boundaries for territorial waters in the Gulf of Mexico; the fight against arms trafficking in the hemisphere; and respect for immigrants' human rights. All these questions must be discussed in the framework of respectful, productive bilateral relations.

For this very reason, *Voices of Mexico* has decided to include in this issue a summary of the presentation made to the Senate by Mexico's new ambassador to the United States, Jesús Reyes Heróles, on the occasion of the ratification of his appointment. The new Mexican diplomat expounds his view of the bilateral relationship as well as the Mexican government's position on both the new and old points on the agenda. His interest in presenting a program that will include the creation of bilateral and multilateral mechanisms for solving problems, as well as the consolidation of already existing mechanisms, is clear. This objective is situated in the framework of the idea that the most productive way of moving forward is the recognition that the issues which affect one or more nations, like drug trafficking, immigration, international trade or human rights, require bilateral and multilateral solutions and that implementing unilateral measures, such as the U.S. certification process, will only hurt relations among countries without having proven their effectiveness. Undoubtedly, the two problems in Mexico-U.S. bilateral relations which have captured the attention of the press, the media and the public in both countries are illegal immigration of Mexican citizens into the United States and the fight against drug trafficking. This issue of the magazine has given over its "Society" section to two articles by Mexican experts on these questions. Researcher Remedios Gómez Arnau explains the advances and conclusions of the document presented by the Working Group on Migration and Consular Affairs of the Bilateral Mexico-U.S. Commission. In this first Mexico-U.S. Study on Migration, perhaps the most significant step forward, according to Gómez Arnau, is the willingness on both parts to analyze the problem from the neutral perspective of the social sciences, in an attempt to obliterate its irremedia-

ble political content. In this sense, the author asks herself the question: Is conceptualization of the issue by both countries' moving from understanding migration to cooperation? Silvia Vélez Quero, also a researcher at the UNAM Center for Research on North America (CISAN), analyzes the struggle against narcotics from a geostrategic perspective. Without disdaining the importance of the problem for the Americas, Vélez maintains that the U.S. strategy for fighting drugs has magnified it out of proportion in order to design mechanisms which guarantee U.S. military and economic geostrategic control over the nations of Latin America. This would explain not only the U.S. Congress' insistence on continuing to "certify" other countries, but also the constant and sometimes excessive presence of the topic in the U.S. media. It may be that, as the article suggests, the United States has found the great new enemy it needs to replace communism.

Another challenge of the era of globalization is the modernization of political systems and the resulting consolidation of democracies in the world. In the "Politics" section, we have included three articles dealing with the consolidation of democracy in Mexico. Carlos Elizondo shares his reflections on the dilemmas faced by the National Action Party (PAN) in the new context of Mexican politics. While the PAN is the opposition party with the longest and most profound tradition, its new-found strength and occupation of governor's mansions and city halls in several states nationwide mean, on the one hand, it must subject itself to the judgement of the ballot box as a government and, on the other, reformulate its alliances in a scenario in which, according to Elizondo, almost any decision could be counterproductive. In his article, political scholar René Millán asks whether Mexican society will modernize and, with that as his starting point, analyzes recent political changes in the country in terms of processes of social differentiation. He maintains that it is only very recently that the role of the state has become differentiated from the characteristics of the nation, in a process in which the different components of the state (the three branches of government, political parties, social actors, etc.) have begun to situate themselves functionally and autonomously within the new institutions and rules of the game, as a result of the political transformations which have led to a more democratic system than the previous one. The question is whether these changes can really be consolidated into institutions and laws that make them last. Finally, jurist Emilio O. Rabasa reviews the July 6, 1997 elections and the divided federal government that was their result (the president from one party and a Chamber of Deputies with an opposition majority). Rabasa warns of the consequences for governability that could arise from not adapting the Constitution to the new situation.

Our "Economic Issues" section deals with a topic linked to globalization and economic integration. Alejandro Mercado Celis presents an analysis of the development of maquiladora plants on Mexico's northern border. He specifically looks at the case of Tijuana and presents an interesting hypothesis about the role of specialization in industrial processes which, technological modernization aside, force companies to develop more sophisticated management systems in order to survive in increasingly competitive surroundings.

"From time immemorial, the peoples of Mesoamerica were captivated by the heavens," write Jesús Galindo Trejo and Arcadio Poveda Ricalde in their article "Comets in Pre-Hispanic Mexico." Theirs is a profound, rigorous and well documented article about pre-Columbian cosmology, in which comets were interpreted by priest-astronomers as signs of catastrophe and devastation. Galindo and Poveda tell of comets observed by the peoples of Mesoamerica, particularly the Mexicas, and are so precise that, by comparing their records with those of other cultures, they are able to pinpoint sightings of the famous Halley's Comet.

"Science, Art and Culture" includes two contributions on the work of the young Mexican painter Alberto Castro Leñero. Luis Rius writes him a letter presenting a panorama of his painting and discussing some ideas about Mexican contemporary plastic arts. For his part, another critic, Juan Manuel Springer, describes the artist's themes, the motivations and the contributions to the plastic arts by reviewing for our readers his mobile exhibition, "Inner Castle," which toured the United States and Canada. Both articles clearly show that Castro Leñero has become one of the most important young exponents of Mexican art because of his original approach to the theme that most obsesses him: the human body, concretely

women's bodies. His conceptual treatment of his topic is more related to the unconscious, which he dilutes in textures and colors and molds in unusual materials and formats, like the shape of a "T" or a cross, which fills his work with clearly Christian allusions. At the same time, his allusions to eroticism are also worth noting, not as a discourse but as an emotional, sensitive charge which manages to transmit to the viewer the idea that the desire for possession can also be visual, that it is possible to love with the eyes and not only with the touch.

The section continues with an article about the celebration of Fourteenth Festival of Mexico City's Historic Center in March 1998. The festival, similar to the ones in almost all of Europe's ancient cities, will include artistic and cultural events from Mexico and abroad of outstanding quality and variety.

Mexico City's Historic Center is rich in architecture. In our "History" section, we have included an interesting article by historian Gisela von Wobeser about Mexico City housing and realty in the eighteenth century. She explains the way the inhabitants lived and their customs shortly before the end of New Spain's colonial period. José Reyes Méndez also contributes an article about one of the buildings that most incorporate the history of Mexico, the Alhóndiga de Granaditas. In the city of Guanajuato in central Mexico, it was the scene of the first battle during the independence movement of 1810.

In "The Splendor of Mexico," we offer our readers an article by James Olsen about one of Mexico's most widely recognized and original art forms: feather art from the Amanteca area, famous internationally for its craftsmen's masterful, imaginative, colorful work with tropical bird feathers. One of the Mexican people's most cherished, well preserved traditions is the fiesta of the Day of the Dead celebrated each year on November 1 and 2. Its typical altars and offerings are testimony to Mexicans' great ability to translate their emotions and beliefs into art. We therefore include in this issue an article about an altar to the dead erected in the National University to honor and express respect for that tradition. This year's university offering was dedicated to the state of Oaxaca and the *Niño Pa* (Child Pa), an image venerated for the last 400 years by the inhabitants of Xochimilco, in southern Mexico City. The section closes with the reproduction of the winning drawings in the contest sponsored by the Foreign Relations Ministry for children of Mexican descent, from 7 to 13 years of age, residing in the United States. The contest's theme was "This Is My Mexico." The size of the response and the quality and imagination displayed in the children's work were surprising, and *Voices of Mexico* decided to support it and its aim of fostering patriotic values beyond our borders.

In this issue, "Museums" is dedicated to the La Bola House Museum, one of the few buildings in Mexico which can boast of having preserved not only its original four-century-old structure, but also the spirit of its residents through its furniture, art work and everyday items. Despite the march of time, they retain the pride passed down to them from their days of glory.

The axolote is an animal of Mexico which has surprised natives and foreigners alike with its biological and nutritive properties, which have even been studied in the most important biology labs in the world. A survivor of the remote past, it has been kept as a pet in aquariums and attributed mystical and healing properties, among them —according to the renowned historian of the colonial period, Friar Bernardino de Sahagún— that of being a very potent aphrodisiac. An article about the axolote by Edgar Anaya Rangel begins our "Ecology" section. Also in this section is an article by Sol Ortíz García and Daniel Piñero about Mexico's enormous biodiversity, particularly the pine; as the authors say, the great variety of pines is a gift from Mexico to the world which should be preserved through rational and sustainable forest management.

Rosario Castellanos is perhaps the most important and most widely recognized woman writer in twentieth century Mexican letters. *Voices of Mexico* pays homage to her here with the translation and publication of a chapter of the recent Alfaguara edition of her previously unpublished novel *Rito de iniciación* (Initiation Rite), 23 years after her death. We hope in this way to bring the English-speaking public closer to one of the most profound and transcendental writers in the Spanish language.

The Dilemmas Facing the PAN¹

Carlos Elizondo Meyer-Serra*



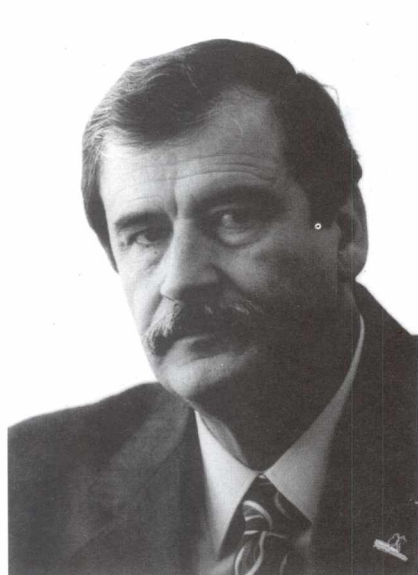
Gustavo Garar / Imaginatina

Carlos Medina Plascencia (PAN), Arturo Nuñez Jiménez (PRI) y Porfirio Muñoz Ledo (PRD), party caucus leaders in the Chamber of Deputies.

The National Action Party (PAN), apparent beneficiary of the crisis of Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), is facing an important dilemma. How the party deals with that challenge will decide whether it consolidates its gains or not. Not a small matter. Today, the PAN occupies 6 of Mexico's 31 governor's mansions and 296 city halls, including 15 state capitals.²

PAN leaders should be asking themselves the question, "Which of the two parties of the Revolution is more dangerous to the PAN, the 'Institutional' party, or PRI, or the 'Democratic' party, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD)?" The PAN worked productively with the PRI during the last presidential administration, pushing through part of its legislative agenda, increasing its vote count and broadening out its positions of power. In an alliance with the PRD in September 1997, it was able to wrest control of the lower house from the PRI, occupy the chair of several important leg-

* Professor-researcher at the Center for Economic Research and Teaching (CIDE).



Tomás Bravo / Imagenlatina



Javier García / Imagenlatina



Tomás Bravo / Imagenlatina

Possible PAN nominees for the year 2000 presidential campaign. Left: Vicente Fox Quezada, PAN governor of Guanajuato. Center: Carlos Medina Plascencia, leader of the PAN caucus in the Chamber of Deputies. Right: Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, national leader of the PAN.

islative commissions that had never been in the hands of the opposition before and foster changes in fiscal policy.

Relations with either party rooted in the Mexican Revolution are a highly risky proposition for a party like the PAN. In fact, the very existence of two parties of the Revolution has made it difficult, if not impossible, for the PAN to achieve its goal of becoming a great national party in opposition to the PRI. A bipartisan scenario that would give the anti-PRI struggle a winning banner was ideal for a party like the PAN. However, the emergence of the PRD has eroded the PAN vote among those dissatisfied with the PRI and made bipartisanship of the kind that exists in the states where the PAN has achieved its most important victories impossible. The PAN did not win the governorship of Sonora because of PRD strength in the region. To the extent that the PRI is weakened by desertions to the PRD, the PRD will be strengthened in states where the PAN had been the second force, which is what happened in the October 1997 elections in Veracruz.

The PAN faced its first major setback during the 1988 presidential elections. In July 1988, although it had previously been the main opposition party, far from reaping the results of the economic crisis of the Miguel de la Madrid administration (1982-1988), the PAN was pushed into third place at the polls. Why? The emergence of a group of *ex-priistas* led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and supported by the Mexican left changed the electoral map. The Cárdenas group left the PRI because it was dissatisfied with the nomination process for the

candidate to the presidency as well as the economic program of Carlos Salinas, the candidate finally chosen. Fighting against the PRI apparatus seemed like an uphill battle, but in the end they were much more effective than the PAN in channeling large segments of the public's dissatisfaction and nostalgia.

For the PAN, drawing closer to the PRI means running the risk of being tainted by the stigma of the old regime, the weight of the crisis, the discredit of former President Salinas. Some members of the PAN see the reasons for their bad showing at the polls on July 6, 1997, in their support for many of Salinas' bills in the legislature.

In the last federal elections, the PAN dream of becoming the country's leading electoral force, a dream they publicized widely, fell apart. They ended up very far from their goal, barely tying with the PRD for second place nationwide. They were also pushed back to third place in Mexico City, which at the beginning of the electoral campaign looked like they would take.

However, the failure of July 6 is not only —nor indeed, basically— due to having coincided with a part of Salinas' legislative agenda. This is a simplistic reading that the PRD has helped promote in order to not have to again confront a united PRI and PAN. In fact, in 1995, the first year of the economic crisis, the PAN was the big winner in the local elections.

A series of factors lie behind the PAN missing the victories it had hoped for in July 1997: first, it lacked a strong candi-

A bipartisan scenario that would give the anti-PRI struggle a winning banner was ideal for a party like the PAN. However, the emergence of the PRD has eroded the PAN vote among those dissatisfied with the PRI and made bipartisanship of the kind that exists in the states where the PAN has achieved its most important victories impossible.

date in Mexico City that would have helped its campaign nationally. Second, its media campaign was poor. Third, the market economic policy it had always defended—which though the PAN itself had not implemented it, differed little from Salinas'—had fallen into disrepute. Fourth, the successes and failures of PAN state administrations have not led to radical changes in the situation, though they had no reason to, even if people expected it of them. These administrations have not done badly in the public's estimation and some have even been re-elected, but they have sent a message of a certain amount of disillusionment which has been capitalized on by the PRD. Fifth, the PAN has found it very difficult to be convincing to the great mass of poor Mexicans identified with the discourse of the Revolution, and particularly the political practices it gave rise to. Success depends to a great degree on a party's ability to be the intermediary for public sector assistance to marginalized sectors, and the PRD is much better at this than the PAN.

While an alliance with the PRI means the PAN would run the risk of being accused of becoming its confederate, proximity to the PRD means another risk: being overwhelmed by a party with stronger, more able leaderships, more able to mobilize the public, better management of the written media, more support among intellectuals and capable of using the lowest tactics in confrontations with the PAN locally. Emulating them, as some PAN leaders who have revived populist rhetoric suggest, brings with it an even greater risk: being

identified with a national project to a great extent opposed to PAN ideology, competing with the PRD on its home ground, which would end up cutting into the base of support the PAN does have without much hope of making any significant inroads into PRD supporters. What a cruel paradox for the PAN if the "democratic transition" culminated in the year 2000, with or without its support, in an electoral victory of the son of General Lázaro Cárdenas, whose "socialist" policies during his presidential administration (1934-1940) were the origin of the dissatisfaction of broad sectors of the middle class that led to the birth of the PAN.

Can the PAN find a place for itself between the two parties of the Revolution? Apparently, the PAN leadership has this dilemma clear. That is the root of the violent critique that PAN President Felipe Calderón has more than once directed against PRD parliamentary leader Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, the frequent insistence that there is no such thing as an "opposition bloc"³ and the fact that the PAN has not ceded its Chamber of Deputies' leadership to the PRD.

However, this need to distance itself from the PRD does not mean there is no possibility of coming to agreements with it. There is no opposition bloc, but there certainly are a great many factors to base agreements on. Clearly, one area is always open to agreement: everything that contributes to eroding PRI mechanisms of control.

This is unavoidable, though paradoxical. Without the mechanisms of patronage characteristic of the PRI to win over the poorer classes, the big winner would be the PRD, not the PAN. The PRD has the leadership and the discourse needed to mobilize the poor sectors of the population linked to the nationalist, revolutionary rhetoric of the PRI and a political practice capable of channeling the demands of the neediest sectors of society. The PAN, even when it controls a governorship, has difficulty getting the poor to recognize the achievements in social policy it has been able to make.

The historic PAN tradition of denouncing misuse of public funds makes it probable that it will vote jointly with the PRD in the Congress' investigative commissions.⁴ The two parties will also vote together, of course, on questions of the internal functioning of the Chamber of Deputies. The PRI is very mistaken if it thinks it can change that. The relationship between the PAN and the PRD (and the support of its minor allies, the Labor Party [PT] and the Mexican Green Ecologist



Gustavo Graf / Imagenlatina

Deputies Marco Antonio Fernández (PRI), left, and César Jáuregui (PAN) at loggerheads. Politics on the chamber floor are different now that the PRI no longer dominates the scene.

Party [PVEM]) will tense up occasionally, but it is highly unlikely that it will break down completely around the question of keeping the PRI from controlling the Chamber of Deputies.

However, the PAN and the PRD cannot go much further together. First, because it would imply grave risks for the PAN itself if it allowed its agenda to be confused with the PRD's. In the final analysis, the PAN's economic policy is much more similar to the one the executive branch has been promoting, with a fortiori PRI support, for more than 10 years, than the PRD's, regardless of the latter's recent efforts to temper some of its old proposals. The PAN would advance its agenda more if it maintained its independence, acting as the fulcrum of the scales of power, than if it accepts being a part of a PRD-controlled bloc or a simple PRI ally.

In the second place, the so-called opposition bloc cannot constitutionally promote a reform of the state, or even approve ordinary legislation without the concurrence of the PRI. The PRI controls the Senate and the president has a veto in most cases. Except in the specific case of the budget, approved annually as the exclusive prerogative of the Chamber of Deputies, all legislation will have to be negotiated among the three main parties.

If part of the PAN's plans is to merely establish an alliance with the PRD, it risks not only seeing its own star wane as a political party, but it would be weakening its effectiveness for pushing its legislative agenda. The PAN's dilemma is how to turn its two dangerous competitors into assets in the defense of its platform and at the same time work to improve the living standards of the populace it already governs. **MM**

NOTES

¹This article was originally published in the Mexico City daily *Reforma* on October 17, 1997.

²These figures include the results of the October 1997 Tabasco and Veracruz state elections, but do not allow for possible changes in contested races due to any future decisions by state electoral tribunals. The state capitals are Aguascalientes, Cuernavaca, Culiacán, Guadalajara, Hermosillo, Mexicali, Mérida, Monterrey, Morelia, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, Saltillo, San Luis Potosí and Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

³The alliance of the PAN, PRD, Mexican Green Ecologist Party (PVEM) and Labor Party (PT) in the Chamber of Deputies to control the internal workings of the legislature and its main decisions has been dubbed "the opposition bloc." [Editor's Note.]

⁴The congressional investigative commissions are ad hoc bodies set up to investigate assassinations and the most explicit cases of corruption in the public administration. The best known are the Colosio and Ruiz Massieu Commissions (assigned to investigating the assassinations of political figures Luis Donaldo Colosio and José Francisco Ruiz Massieu) and the Conasupo Commission, set up to look into corruption in the National Company for Community Subsistence (Conasupo), a government food-stuffs and provisions distribution agency.

Will Mexican Society Modernize?

Political and Social Rationales

*René Millán**

Modernization in Mexico can be analyzed using a central category: social differentiation. The concept of differentiation allows us to maintain a more neutral perspective about modernization, less charged with value judgements. However, in and of itself, the notion is insufficient to reconstruct what we might call the “syntax” of the Mexican social system or the modernizing moment. It is therefore necessary to introduce other elements into the discussion which should be made clear in the course of the exposition. Institutionalization is one of these central items. By institutionalization I mean —and here I recall Huntington— the process whereby organizations and procedures achieve value and stability. I want to refer briefly to three dimensions in which clear processes of differentiation can be discerned in Mexican society, although not without their contradictions: a) in the state sphere; b) in the political system; c) in what I will generically call the dimension of the state-nation-society. The ideas expressed hereafter must be understood as a series of hypotheses.

THE STATE SPHERE

Schematically, we can say that the reform of the state is above all a different way of ordering the relations among the state, the economy and politics. This is why it presupposes a new form of social coordination and integration. One of the central features of this new mode is that it allows for and fosters greater operational differentiation between the economic and political sys-

tems. That is, it encourages autonomous rules of operation for each system. No one can help but notice that this requirement changes one of the traditional tasks politically, socially and culturally assigned to the state by Mexican postrevolutionary society: giving coherence and unity to the dynamics whereby the economic and political systems operated. The possibility of firmly maintaining the enormous direct influence of the state and the political system on the economy was seen as the central means for reducing social risk and crystallizing “the historic interests of the nation.” A society whose administrative, political and economic systems were little differentiated was the key for maintaining an extremely high degree of penetration and control over the social sphere as a whole and therefore for graduating the levels of complexity of society itself.

The reform of the state, although still unfinished and partial, is a means for shifting the traditional function of the postrevolutionary state. The decline of the state as the driving force behind economic activity and the sole agent for social compensation introduces three related problems: a) coordination between the economy and the political system, since the processes of differentiation give rise to a situation wherein the functions of distribution and generalized construction of consensus cannot be carried out on the basis of the weight of the state alone; b) a different role for the political system and its influence on social demand; and c) the efficiency of the process of socialization of new rules for actors. The resolution of these three facets of the situation has been very contradictory, despite undoubted steps forward, and is not yet a sufficiently solid foundation.

With regard to the coordination of the economy and politics, two things are needed, the links and coherence of which

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are difficult to achieve: administrative-decisional efficiency and political democratization. In addition to administrative and financial rationalization, efficiency is crucial because it has an impact on the behavior of actors and the status of the norm. In postrevolutionary Mexico, "influence" became the fundamental axis of social coordination to the extent that it guaranteed a specific link (of a corporatist nature) between authorities and social actors. In today's conditions, the reform of the state basically requires administrative efficiency.

In the new conditions, the political system can be neither a state controlled entity nor a means for "tying together" organizations and the state. In fact, the new regulation of the economy can only fully develop in the framework of the differentiation of the state and the political system. This separation is part of the new role of politics. In the postrevolutionary model, influence and the political nature of demand were not only two factors of coordination, but determining reference points for the behavior of agents. The possibility of turning a political demand into social demand was determined by the high degree of [state] intervention. In this dynamic, technical, economic and normative aspects were subordinate and politics became highly distributive. Representation and distribution appeared as one. This politization of the market established parameters for making social calculations that, in principle, are changing today, or are in contradiction with the rationality of the reform of the state. In its social dimension, that reform fosters less tutelage on the part of the state.

Not a few agents have been disarmed by this change in the role of politics and its effects on the system of social coordination, finding themselves confronted with a break-up of institutional contexts that generates ambiguous dynamics which simultaneously modernize and reaffirm traditional practices. This ambiguity increases due to the absence of a new institutional framework that jibes with the modeling of the reform of the state. This is an obstacle to the process of political and normative socialization.

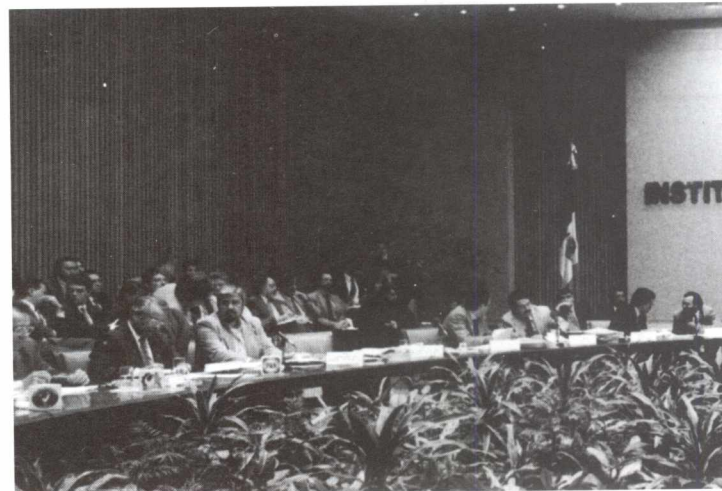
There are at least two moments in which the institutional framework breaks down: democracy and the rule of law. Both are central for coordination, but they are also part of the context needed in order for the state to become professional in the framework of a process of social differentiation. The rule of law is inconceivable, particularly in Mexico, without a sharp process of differentiation among the branches of government. A society

centralized by the state and therefore with a low degree of differentiation generates an institutional framework in which the operational codes of the systems overlap, and consequently, influence overrides almost everything else as the regulatory code par excellence. This inhibits the play of the agents.

In this way, the absence of an institutional framework is added to the lack of both political secularization and the assimilation of new rules. Both elements are counterposed to the dynamics of differentiation. The weak links among the institutional framework, systems for action and differentiation introduce oblique and contradictory lines of thought between two poles: governability and innovation, that is, between the continued existence of and the transition from postrevolutionary society.

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Processes of social differentiation are also discernable in the political system. The political system may be generically understood as the formal and informal rules that regulate the distribution of power, the construction of authority and the distribution of values. It is made up of three basic elements: the political community, the regimen and forms of authority. The political community is made up of people, groups and institutions which can have an impact on the political system and decision-making. Structures for processing demands—without official standing, unlike political parties—may emerge within the political community. Political communities hold dominant



The establishment of the Federal Electoral Institute in 1990 is one indicator of Mexico's political modernization.

or competing ideologies, values or beliefs. The regimen is made up of ideologies, norms or rules of the game and decision-making bodies or authorities. "Forms of authority" refers to the mode of constituting (legitimizing) and carrying out roles.

While it has been put forward with other perspectives in mind, the demand for democracy in Mexico has basically been channeled into achieving full rational institutionalization of the electoral sphere and function. This dynamic is related to other dimensions and has had an impact in a variety of areas, but particularly in the levels of differentiation among the state, the political system, regimen and political community characteristic of postrevolutionary Mexico. To illustrate this process I will make the following specific observations.

The political community has expanded and diversified. Given the centrality of the state, the political community had three basic characteristics: a) it was highly concentrated ideologically with horizons determined by revolutionary nationalism and those in office at any given moment. This could be seen in the weakness of public opinion and political alternatives, but also in the enormous coherence between the political community's values and those of the regimen. This ideological concentration was, undoubtedly, a factor which contributed to discipline and legitimacy; b) there was a relative plurality of groups, but they were absolutely invisible publicly. The large number of groups (unions, peasants, administrators, communications experts, etc.) was in effect a functional requirement and did not constitute an open market in the political sense; c) the political community depended on the will of the state

and consequently was not functionally differentiated from it nor from the regimen. It had a pale autonomy in the programmatic sphere and in its expression and discourse. Today, by contrast, the community has expanded and gained a not inappreciable autonomy with both party and civic structures to shore it up. In fact, today there is not only a greater distance but also less coherence between the values of the regimen and those of the community: there is competition between ideologies. With this has come an enriched discourse, the construction of leaderships and a break-up of the monopolies of political socialization. The diversification of the community also produces a favorable environment for individual freedom: personal dissidence can now find other roads and modes of participation. Its costs tend to drop.

The political system has also become differentiated: internally in the political community and externally from the state. The classical indicator of that unity was the role of the government party and corporatist dynamics. In principle, the dynamic of the institutionalization of the political-electoral sphere changes the framework for the actors: parties and government are privileged agents. With that, the spectrum of political activity expands to go beyond the corporatist sphere. But, above all, the dynamic of institutionalization strives for a differentiated construction, functionally speaking, of the party system: the degree of consolidation of this system is a clear indicator of the degree of differentiation of the political system and, of course, of the separation of the state and the government party. Naturally, the establishment of the full rule of law, with its normative aspects and full separation and balance of powers once again presents itself as an input and a context for moving forward in this differentiation. But there is also another indicator of differentiation: the concentration on the electoral plane, and its very centrality (because of its democratizing effects or due to the imperative of consolidating the parties) produces a strong self-referencing logic in the party system itself, in the electoral system as such.

Internally, the dynamic of institutionalization of the political-electoral sphere also introduces some differentiations: the establishment of structures specialized in electoral regulation (the Federal Electoral Institute). This process of specialization structurally fosters the full use of all procedures and making the law into positive law (specifically writing rules into law). These two elements are part of the very fiber of the dynamic of insti-



Tomás Bravo / Imageniátria

tutionalization and have several implications. First of all, they introduce the perspective of the law as a regulatory and not only a prescriptive factor. In the second place, they introduce a socially irradiated urgency for authority to be exercised according to explicit functions and not preferences or loyalties. In the third place, they have socialized the actors in a game of formulating the rules and agreements that are impossible to fulfill without regulatory techniques. Procedural and normative features have been definitively incorporated to regulate pluralism and guarantee the autonomy of the functioning of structures or systems.

In other words, the rational institutionalization of the political-electoral sphere depends on the differentiation of the political structures and bodies and the inputs of the actors in that process. The diversification and autonomy of the political community, as well as the internal and external differentiation of the political system, with the elements we have pointed out, are two structural variables of the dynamic of modernization. However, the rationales that arise along with it are neither unidirectional nor totally coherent. Undoubtedly, there are rationales of a different order which are obstacles to the dynamic of differentiation.

The close link between the state and the governing party is undoubtedly a limitation for the functional differentiation of society as a whole. The still incomplete autonomy of the judicial branch is another such limitation. The Latin American-type strategies of "overthrowing the regime" have a substantive impact on the different actors' behavior, holding back the country's modernization process. The paradox of the parties being concentrated on the electoral plane with very little exercise of governability encourages differentiation, on the one hand, but on the other, reduces their impact. The non-existent responsibility that the parties show before the public is not a minor matter. The interaction among parties still reproduces today a marked lag between normatively oriented forms of behavior and the rules of the game, understood as non-formalized procedures and practices. In interaction, it is the latter which are very often emphasized. The gap between norms and the rules of the game is particularly grave because there is no correlation between the codes of the two dimensions. This is expressed in permanent tension between public positions and real agreements. The same is true of the public, state sphere, where, as with the elections, we in effect lack an appropriate link between the dynamic of change and institutionalization.

THE STATE-NATION-SOCIETY DIMENSION

The discernible processes of differentiation in this sphere should be understood not only as political, but also as cultural since we are confronted here with dynamics that introduce distinctions into the community's and the political culture's frames of reference, as well as into the foundational or legitimizing factors. As is well known, postrevolutionary Mexican society understood the Constitution as a "historical project," since it concretized the meaning of the founding action, the Mexican Revolution. This "historical concretion" generated two pillars of support, one ideological (revolutionary nationalism) and the other political (the social pact). In this way, a high degree of coherence was achieved between the plane of social organization, community values and the regimen. And for that reason, a unifying, transmitting link was also established between organizations-executive-state and the nation itself.

This political and symbolic merger of bodies had at least two results that should be pointed out. The national project was understood at one and the same time as both a historical horizon and as the key for maintaining the state and the nation undifferentiated. The entire nation fit within the confines of social organization and, therefore, of the state; but, at the same time, the meaning of what was national was pointed to as the central criterium for regulating and channeling public affairs. This merger set the limits on the kind of political orientations and practices considered legitimate. In these conditions, and given the historical reading of the Constitution, the strictly regulatory function of the law was drastically diminished in favor of its prescriptive function. This was also an obstacle to the process of making law into positive law (making the rules explicit in law) with two consequences: the norm did not fulfill the function of regulating differences, which on the one hand deactivated the possibilities of social plurality and, on the other, in reality expressed a not particularly plural political context. To the extent that law becoming positive law leads to processes of cultural secularization by differentiating between norms and emotions, its absence led to actions of consensual adherence based mainly on empathy and not on reflection.

All these elements strengthened the official ideology, lending it significant legitimacy. To the extent that this ideology prescribed long-term goals, the effective meaning of the regimen's and the state's efficacy was always considered perfectible

and not immediately accountable. To a great degree, legitimacy was based on "symbolic efficacy" which was, therefore, independent of the real effectiveness of decisions. In other words, and following the thinking of Easton —as Morlino does— the political system was capable of generating an enormous, diffused legitimacy, which is a generic form of support not traceable to particular reasons. Specific legitimacy refers to support for concrete political decisions. Diffused legitimacy was functional not only in general consensual terms, but also to modulate (and invalidate) conflicts on the level of specific legitimacy.

This was possible thanks to the low level of cultural secularism and law as positive law; the unity between the regimen and the political community. In effect, legitimacy is a function of the articulation between the regimen and the community. Given the characteristics of Mexico, this link also translated into the non-differentiation between state and nation.

Today several processes of differentiation can explain the break-up of these units, even though, as is obvious, tendencies to the contrary continue to exist. Among these processes are the reform of the state, with the implications we have pointed out; the struggle for the institutionalization of the electoral sphere,

with its effects on the preeminence of procedures; the plurality of the political community with its ideological concurrence and the necessary adjustments through rules for coexisting; and, with all of these, the differentiation between the political system and the state. A good indicator of this break can be built with reference to a dimension that is related to several factors, among them the weakening of revolutionary nationalism. As a axiological system, it is insufficient for processing today's social, ideological and political complexities and the spectrum of demands that arise from those complexities, among them two: plurality and democracy. This ideology is functional for non-plural systems and for that reason, it cannot become a horizon for aggregation in the country's new conditions. That is why recent presidents need to both be with and not be with the party in order to govern. But there is also another clear indicator: the persistent recurrence of civil society as an actor, autonomous vis-à-vis the state and even the political parties. Today, the nation does not fit in a political organization. And this accentuates the differentiation between state and nation, but also between the state and society: they are distinct systems for action and communication. ■■■

METAPOLÍTICA
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Número 4, Octubre de 1997

DAVID MILLER
El resurgimiento de la teoría política

◆

LA CUESTIÓN DEMOCRÁTICA
Rödel, Frankenberg y Dubiel ◆ Serrano
Maestre ◆ Cansino ◆ Sermeño

◆

Claude Lefort *vida y obra*

◆

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The Mexican Democratic Tide

Emilio Rabasa*

Transition to democracy theory has not gained full acceptance in Mexico. Intellectuals and politicians are divided about it. This skepticism is explicable.

Mexico's democratization process does not fit any of the transition models from other countries. A pact (Spain) or reform (former Czechoslovakia), imposition (Grenada) or revolution (Nicaragua) are all ill-suited to describe Mexico's political transition.

* Mexican lawyer and political analyst.

None of these provide sufficient insight into the peculiarities of Mexican politics. Additional ingredients must be added. I found such ingredients in Alexis de Tocqueville's democratic theory as explained in his famous *Democracy in America*, book 1. He strongly believed that equal conditions constituted the driving force behind an underground democratic revolution sweeping and shaping the world. "Among us," said Tocqueville, "a grand democratic revolution is taking place. Everyone sees it, but not everyone judges it in the same way. Some consider it as a new thing, and thinking it acci-



Guillermo Graf / Imaginallina

dental, hope they can still stop it; while others judge it irresistible because it seems to them the most continuous fact, the most ancient and permanent one that history has known.”¹

Beyond Tocqueville’s deterministic historicism, the dynamic element of his theory, i.e., the specific way the democratic revolution moved along, is theoretically valuable. To describe democracy’s peculiar dynamism he used a metaphor, which I shall call “the democratic tide.” It is my basic tenet that Mexico’s transition to democracy can be understood using Tocqueville’s democratic tide theory.

Democratization of the Mexican political system during the last third of this century has become an ambiguous process. Steps forward are followed by steps back. Far from a linear advance toward a democratic target, it has moved sinusously through adverse social conditions.

The best way to describe Mexico’s democratization process would be in Alexis de Tocqueville’s metaphorical terms: “Democracy is like a rising tide; it only ebbs to flood back with greater force, and soon one sees that for all its fluctuation it is always gaining ground.” Since the 1968 student movement crisis, when the process started, that is exactly what has happened in Mexico: a series of political fluctuations toward democracy and away from it into authoritarianism. Nevertheless some democratic ground has been gained.

There have been two main floods of Mexico’s democratic tide: the 1977 and 1996 electoral reforms and the elections that followed them. In the intervening 20 years, the tide has mainly been at an ebb, although some small leaps forward have occurred.

The 1977 electoral reform opened up the political system and allowed opposition parties to play a role, albeit a small one, in the Chamber of Deputies. Out of 400 seats, 100 were “reserved” for them through the system of both majority and proportional representation that the reform established. On the other hand, the government controlled the organization of the elections: impartiality was unknown and election results were to some extent predetermined. This arrangement was known as “directed democracy,” a euphemistic term which hid the simple fact that elections were not completely fair and free.

The 1986 electoral reform and the years that followed it were a step backward. The Mexican democratic tide ebbed. Government feared that opening the political system more in

the midst of the oil/economic-shock crisis could result in “a domino effect:” all chips would start to fall to the opposition. The regime of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) tightened electoral control in the National Electoral Commission, the government body in charge of elections. It was no surprise, then, that under such unequal conditions the victory of the opposition National Action Party (PAN) in the northern state of Chihuahua went unrecognized, and that the governorship was awarded to the PRI, the government party. Resistance movements against unfair elections and electoral fraud became common practice in the aftermath of local elections.

During Salinas’ first years in office the democratic tide started to move forward in local elections. The northern state of Baja California was swept by the PAN vote and for the first time in Mexico’s history an opposition governorship was officially recognized in 1989. It looked as if society’s demands for free and fair elections were finally accepted and the tide would move forward. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

The tide ebbed again when local elections took place in the central part of Mexico, known as El Bajío. In San Luis Potosí, a very charismatic figure, Dr. Salvador Nava, challenged and defeated the PRI’s hand-picked candidate, Fausto Zapata. The Electoral Commission declared Zapata the winner. Dr. Nava headed a walk to Mexico City known as “The March of Dignity” and created a wave of public opinion in his favor. Zapata was forced to resign and the local Congress named a substitute governor, appointed by Salinas but acceptable to the Navistas.

This began a political practice called *concertaciones*, that is, negotiated, pre-arranged political hand-overs from the PRI to the opposition parties, mostly the PAN. The same thing was done in other state elections like those of Guanajuato and Michoacán.

All of these political fluctuations deepened society’s demand for a profound electoral reform. Salinas accepted a third one in his administration early in 1994, mainly because he was pressed to do so by the Zapatista revolt in the southern state of Chiapas.

With this reform, the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), since 1991 the country’s highest electoral authority, became majority-led by non-partisan citizens elected by Congress. Domestic and foreign electoral observers were also officially accepted.

During 1994, Mexico's "anus horribilis,"² two unprecedented events in the country's political history took place and gave the democratic tide further ground: the May 12 televised debate among the three main presidential candidates, Zedillo (PRI), Cárdenas (Party of the Democratic Revolution [PRD]) and Fernández de Cevallos (PAN), with a viewing audience of 40 million, was a completely new political experience; and the August 21 election, which resulted in record high voter participation (almost 80 percent of registered voters). Contrary to the case of the Salinas election, Zedillo's victory was unquestionable. On the basis of this outcome, he offered a new and "definitive" electoral reform.

The 1996 Zedillo reform had two main achievements: a) total government withdrawal from the electoral apparatus, which meant the Minister of the Interior no longer headed the electoral body and the IFE would now be run by nine citizens, all appointed by a two-thirds vote of the Chamber of Deputies, thus requiring the consensus of all political parties and, b) Mexico City's mayor would be elected by direct vote, a long-standing demand of many social organizations and opposition political parties.

The July 6 election was certainly the Mexican democratic tide's biggest flood forward since the 1977 electoral reform. Although it was an intermediate, or mid-presidential-term election, people's concern and expectations ran very high.

THE JULY 6 RESULTS

At 8 p.m., Sunday, July 6, the media announced exit poll results. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (PRD) won the first capital mayor's race by a wide margin (48 percent) over the PRI's Alfredo del Mazo (25 percent) and the big loser, the PAN's Carlos Castillo Peraza, who came in third (16 percent). Cárdenas' party also made an almost clean sweep of Mexico City's local Congress with 38 out of 40 district-majority seats and 29 out of 30 seats in the federal Chamber of Deputies elected in the capital. In both cases the PRI came up completely empty-handed.

In the Chamber of Deputies, the PRI lost its absolute majority for the first time in history, taking 239 out of 500 seats. The PRD came in second with 124; the PAN, 122, the Labor Party (PT), nine; and the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico (PVEM), six.

Of the 32 senatorial seats out of 128 up for election, the PRI won only 13 and lost 19; nine went to the PRD, seven to the PAN, two to the PT and one to the Greens. In local elections, the PRI won four out of six governorships and lost two, Nuevo León and Querétaro, to the PAN.

At 10 p.m., electoral authorities officially confirmed the exit poll results. President Zedillo appeared on television, accepting the outcome and sending congratulations to Cárdenas, his 1994 presidential election opponent. Around 60 percent of all registered electors had gone to the polls.

THE NEW SCENARIO

Where does democracy stand in Mexico after so many ebbs and flows of the tide, and, most importantly, after the July 6 elections and their aftermath? How much ground has it gained as a result of the tide's ebbs and flows? Is it possible to say that Mexico is now a democratic country included in the "third democratic wave" of the twentieth century which started in the 1970s?

Election results provided Mexico with a new political experience: shared government, where the presidency or governorships are in the hands of one party and the congressional majority in the hands of the opposition.

The experience of shared government is quite common in other countries. Not so in Mexico. In the United States, for the 160 years between 1832 and 1992, 40 percent of the time the country had shared governments.

In Latin America, for 59 percent of the time between 1958 and 1994, 101 elections gave nine countries shared governments (Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, Uruguay, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador).

In Mexico, this kind of experience just began in 1989. Eight states, one-fourth of the total, had shared governments: Baja California, Guanajuato, Southern Baja California, Chihuahua, Aguascalientes, the State of Mexico, Coahuila and Morelos.³ Nevertheless, the novelty was at the federal level, where Mexico had only two such experiences in its history. One was in the last century, when President Benito Juárez had to share power in the one-chamber Congress. The other was in 1911, under President Francisco I. Madero.

Political reform has changed the Mexican electoral system for good. The electoral authorities' impartiality and effectiveness has given credibility to the election process. Electoral democracy is therefore being consolidated in Mexico after almost 30 years of building and rebuilding the electoral system.

A multi-party system (PAN, PRI, PRD and some smaller ones) has definitively taken the place of a quasi-one-party system.

Political pluralism in both chambers of Congress is another element of the new scenario. This is true at both federal and local levels. Beginning with the 1979 political reform which limited opposition representation in the Chamber of Deputies to a small part of it (100 out of 400 seats), it has evolved to such a degree that now the opposition parties have an absolute majority.

Looking ahead, a good deal of political engineering will be needed for Mexico's political system in the near future. Political imagination is required to accommodate old structures to new realities and frame the appropriate institutions to suit them. In nineteenth century Mexico, the liberal and advanced political institutions framed in the 1857 Constitution were ill-suited for the society's backwardness. At the end of the twentieth century, society's advances makes the 1917 Con-

stitution's political institutions unsuitable. It must be adjusted to a society which has undergone profound change throughout the century.

Almost nothing of what the Mexican political system is today, i.e. electoral democracy, a multi-party system, a mixed majority and proportional representation mechanism in both chambers of Congress, election of the capital city mayor, and most of all, the possibility of peacefully alternating in office at local and federal levels existed just 30 years ago, in 1968, when the democratization process began in Mexico.

The country's democratic tide has moved a long way since then. But, as Tocqueville predicted, after so many fluctuations, it has gained ground. ■■■

NOTES

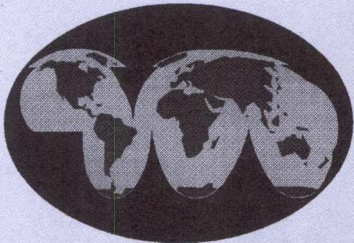
¹Alexis de Toqueville, *Journey to England and Ireland*, quoted in John Dunn, *Democracy, The Unfinished Journey: 508 B.C. to A.D. 1993*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 8-9.

²The author is referring to a set of events that took place that year, shocking Mexican society. The three most important were the January Zapatista revolt in Chiapas and the assassinations of PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio in March and PRI General Secretary José Francisco Ruiz Massieu in September. [Editor's Note.]

³Jalisco became the ninth with its November 1997 congressional and municipal elections. The governor is a member of the PAN and the local Congress will have 20 PAN deputies and 20 opposition deputies. [Editor's Note.]

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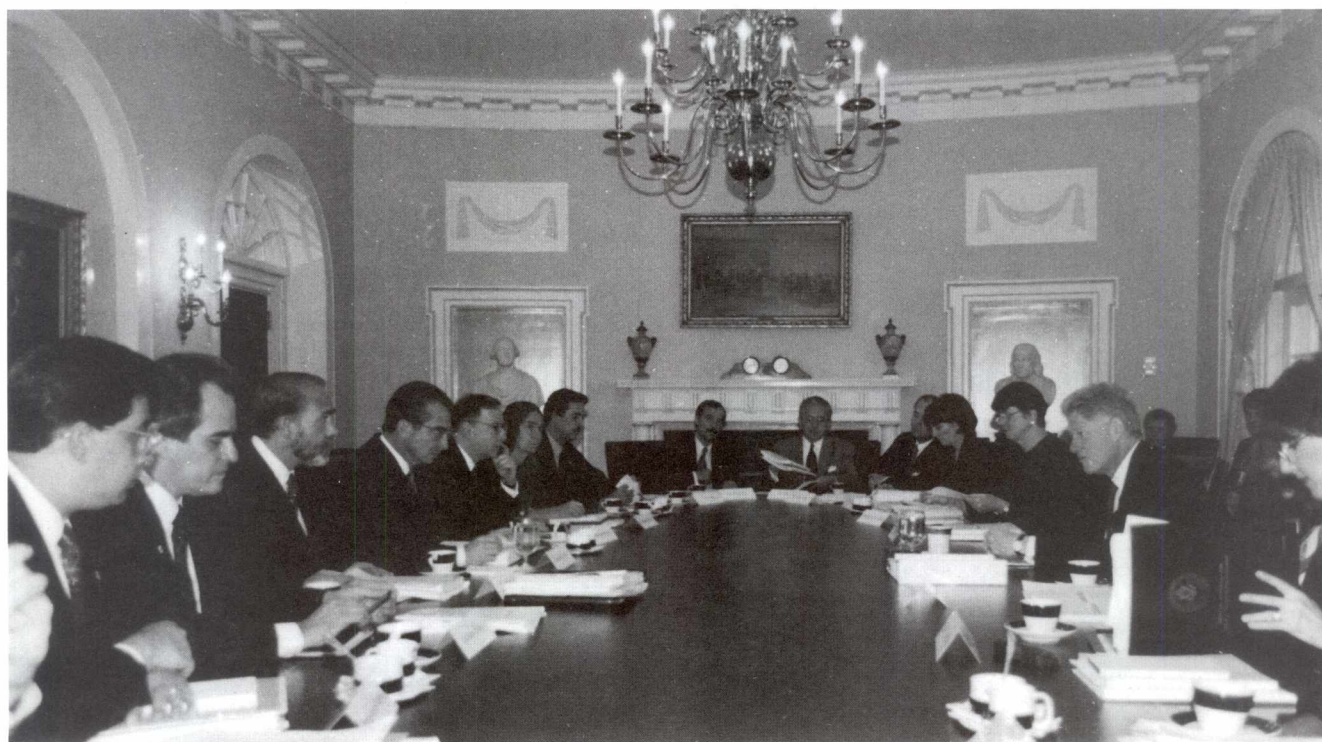
President Zedillo's U.S. Visit Yields Three Accords

Mexico's President Ernesto Zedillo visited his U.S. counterpart Bill Clinton November 13 and 14, 1997. Partially because of economic globalization and the regionalization of trade in North America, bilateral relations between the two countries have become deeper and more intense: this trip was the fifth meeting between the two heads of state in the three years of the Zedillo administration.

Usually the two main topics on the bilateral agenda are immigration and drug trafficking. But on this occasion, other topics were included and three important agreements signed:

a convention on fighting illicit arms traffic, which affects the whole hemisphere, and two protocols, one on maritime boundaries and another on temporary extradition.

Although President Zedillo's visit did not fill the U.S. printed and broadcast media like other visits in the past, its results were satisfactory. For the new Mexican ambassador to the United States, Jesús Reyes Heróles, one of the main objectives of the meeting was to review the advances of the Binational Commission and its 16 working groups, among them the High-Level Group on Drug Trafficking and the Binational Commission on Migration Studies.



President of Mexico's Press Office

The most noteworthy of the agreements signed is the Interamerican Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Illicit Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials, a Mexican initiative before the Organization of American States approved unanimously with the decided support of the U.S. president. Given that the majority of the conventional firearms confiscated in Latin America from drug traffickers, organized crime and armed rebel groups are of U.S. manufacture, the Mexican proposal and the support from its neighboring northern power are a decided step forward in the struggle against the crime devastating the region. In addition, given the undoubted link between drug and arms trafficking, President Clinton's attitude could be interpreted as a positive change in the traditional U.S. slant on the drug issue. In that sense, the presidents' joint statement points out that "the reduction of the demand and confronting the drug infrastructure within the United States must be a key part of bilateral strategy on this issue." This is explicit—and novel—recognition that the drug problem is a bilateral or multilateral issue and that, therefore, multilateral solutions must also be sought. President Zedillo himself referred to the need not to review, but to transcend, the certification process in favor of greater and improved cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking. That is why the ratification of the hemisphere-wide convention on the arms trade was important; among other things, it will compel countries to ensure that arms not enter, leave or pass through their territory unless marked with individual serial numbers and whoever carries them is licensed to do so.

The Treaty on Maritime Boundaries is important in the context of the definition of sovereignty over territorial waters in the Gulf of Mexico. The concrete terms of the agreement have not been made public yet, which in Mexico has caused some discontentment, above all because of the economic importance of the decision: ostensibly the agreement will contain specifications on the area of the gulf known as Doma's Hole which has proven to harbor enormous oil reserves. The area has been claimed by both nations and, seemingly, the majority belongs to Mexico according to current international and maritime law. The concrete agreements stemming from the negotiations will be important to look at since the area could even be deemed international waters. The gas and oil deposits in the area have been estimated as the fourth largest in the world.

In the last place, the Protocol to the Extradition Treaty is part of the fight against drug trafficking and other kinds of organized crime and formalizes the procedure for extraditing citizens of either country who commit crimes in the other, as well as the return of citizens who, having broken the law and fled from justice in their own country, take refuge in the neighboring country, in an attempt to protect themselves using its laws. The Mexican delegation emphasized that this was a general agreement, not directed at any group in particular, when the press inquired about the extradition proceedings pending against politician Mario Ruiz Massieu, arrested by U.S. law enforcement agencies and whose return has been demanded by Mexico for the last three years.

The Mexican government made the visit having prepared firm positions on many other issues on the bilateral agenda. On the question of immigration, then, the joint presidential statement emphasizes "the establishment of appropriate procedures on the border and in the interior of the United States for safe, orderly repatriation of Mexican nationals, fully respecting their dignity, human rights and the principle of family unity." Zedillo and Clinton also agreed to hold a series of conferences to analyze immigration strategies with a new focus linking the question to economic development. Clinton committed his government to design informational campaigns about the right of Mexican citizens to obtain consular assistance, as the Convention of Vienna stipulates.

Other important issues like trade and cultural and technological cooperation were also touched on. Through President Zedillo, the U.S. president sent a message to all the Latin American presidents about the Free Trade Area of the Americas saying he would continue to push for it despite the U.S. Congress' refusal to grant him the fast track status he had proposed.

President Zedillo also took advantage of the trip to meet with Mexico's 42 consuls in the United States about the protection of Mexican nationals north of the border. He also addressed meetings of businessmen and representatives of Canadian and U.S. chambers of commerce about the political and economic changes in Mexico over the last three years, emphasizing the consolidation of the democratic system and the end of the period of economic recovery, which has given way to one of sustained growth. **NM**

ENERO-JULIO 1997

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Educación e investigación en México, problemas y exigencias

VIRGINIA CABRERA BECERRA

Competencias intelectuales, creatividad y neuropsicología

AYRTON DUTRA CORREA

*La cooperación entre el sector productivo y
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South of California

Industrialization Without Entrepreneurs

*Alejandro Mercado**
*Alfredo Hualde***

Towns on Mexico's northern border have been of interest to scholars since the late 1970s due to the enormous growth of foreign investment in for-export assembly plants. To the Mexican government this kind of investment was initially a palliative for regional unemployment. However, in the mid-1980s, the maquiladora plants became an important source of hard currency and jobs nationally.¹ In the last 10 years, of all the northern border cities, Tijuana has had the lowest unemployment and the highest rate of job creation. Though its growth is based on maquiladora development, the expansion is full of paradoxes. The positive figures for overall employment contrast sharply with low wages in the maquiladora industry.² At the same time, the consolidation of a prosperous middle class tied to retail trade, services and real estate, including rented industrial parks, has been crucial.

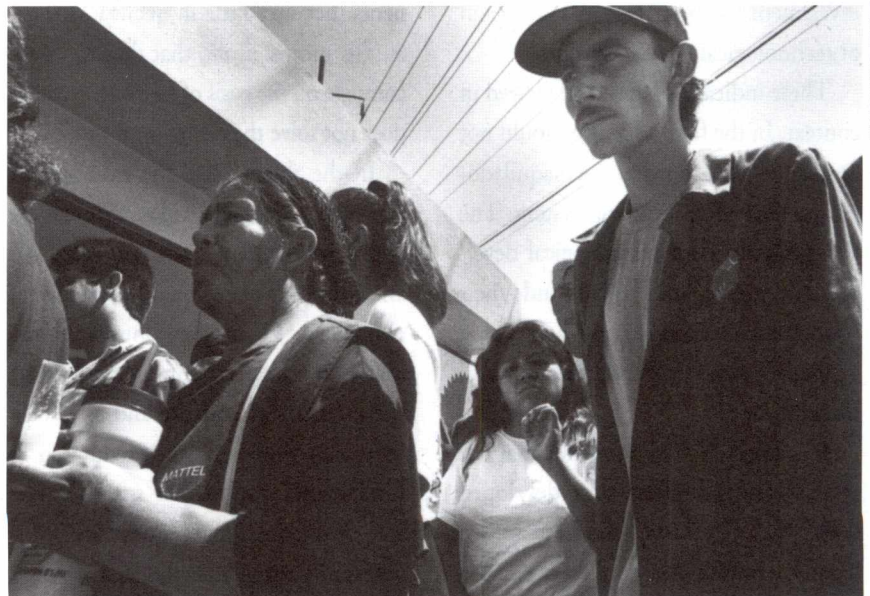
This border area has no networks for innovation or learning processes that could close the technological gaps inher-

ent to regional actors. Naturally, some maquiladoras are components of broader systems that are part of innovative technological networks, but since they are located outside the area, it is other workers and economies that enjoy the extraordinary profits they generate.

Without belittling Tijuana's economic transformation in recent decades, we must understand the concrete dimensions of its expansion. This analytical exercise is important at a time when Latin American countries are seeking new formulas for regional development in which

working conditions are an important indicator of social welfare. It is also useful for Mexico, where over a decade of trade opening, privatization and policies encouraging exports seem to have sharpened regional inequalities, relegated traditionally backward areas and impoverished great numbers of workers.

The concern we wish to express is whether it is possible to generate endogenous growth that will put a region on a path to technological learning that could sustain better living standards. We ask whether it is possible to change



Photos by Elisa Medina

Over the last 10 years maquiladoras have been an important source of jobs in Mexico's northern border cities.

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an industrial structure in which plants are basically unconnected to each other and vertically dependent on other regions. What is more, after decades of certain kinds of economic relationships, we ask ourselves how viable it is to change the behavior of economic actors and the dynamic of their participation.

STRUCTURAL LIMITS IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE MAQUILADORA

Maquiladoras are now entering their fourth decade. Even today, their integration into the local economy is minimal and the majority of the jobs they provide are either totally unskilled or only slightly skilled. However, they have also gone through important transformations, including their increasing use of automation and, in some cases, the flexible organization of production. Greater organizational and technological complexity have, in turn, demanded the hiring of more local engineers and administrative personnel. In addition, Asian investment has been seen as a clear sign of technological transformation.

These indicators have to be viewed in context. In the first place, we should not lose sight of the fact that the maquiladoras are part of an evolving system. The first stages of their technological development are behind them and their processes and products are now going through a stage of standardization and maturation.

It is important to point out that the regions and countries that developed this kind of industry continue to see technical innovations coming out of the very technological paradigm that origi-

nally gave rise to them, which does not happen in the peripheral countries where plants simply relocate.³ This is due to the fact that innovative know-how is not easily transmitted. This kind of know-how is embodied in concrete actors and their relationships. For that reason, when these actors are geographically concentrated, technological evolution is circumscribed to a "winner" region. Therefore, some industries directly connected to the maquiladoras, like Japanese microelectronics, California's computer industry and San Diego's medical industry, belong to locked-in regions and technologies.

In the second place, the ability to supply border maquiladora plants is limited since they have consolidated manufacturing systems. The main obstacle to local integration is that their supplier network has long been consolidated, complete with experience and trust, especially with regard to very specialized components. However, local agents can compete by offering lower prices for the most standardized parts and components that vary little in quality. However, this means, again, that they can only compete on the basis of low wages, which does not solve the central problem.

In the third place, the existence of "new technologies," like automation and flexibility is not in and of itself an indication of regional technological dynamism. Quite the contrary. Automated processes reinforce the idea that the products are mature and at a stage in which time and cost reduction is fundamental for market survival. The use of flexible techniques does not necessarily mean that the area is going through a process of technological

learning. In these sectors, competition continues to be based on economies of scale and cost reduction.⁴

Lastly, we think that the prolonged existence of the maquiladoras, as well as their particular geographical location, have created a form of behavior and a way of interpreting and transferring information that reproduces and ensures continuity of a certain economic trend. Therefore, the logic of competition on the basis of cutting costs, a high degree of standardization and mass production technologies will continue to predominate in the area.

Structurally, the development of Mexico's northern border economy is subordinate and dependent on the U.S. economy. From this standpoint, the subordination is a consequence of the dependency: the economic decisions are made on the U.S. side, capital is managed from the United States and technology is at the service of the U.S. economy. Therefore, innovation would exclusively be concentrated "on the other side of the border."

It is true that the proximity of California favors vertical economic relations, both geographically and socially. However, it is simplistic to reduce economic activity to relations in which U.S. actors and activities dominate and impose specific dynamics on the Mexican side of the border.

It is certainly true that the proximity of California favors vertical economic relations, both geographically and socially.⁵ However, we think it is simplistic to reduce economic activity to relations in which U.S. actors and activities dominate and impose specific dynamics on the Mexican side of the border.

Our idea is that, although this type of relationship does exist from the macro-social perspective, day-to-day dealings are more complex and also develop through negotiation processes which include cooperation and complementary relationships involving the interests, norms and values of the actors on the border themselves.⁶

On the other hand, the economic dependence and interdependence of cities like Tijuana cannot be reduced exclusively to their relations with their northern neighbor. As Tijuana has become an industrial city and an important consumer market, its relations with Mexican economic centers like Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey have also increased.

Tijuana has undergone an extraordinary change: from a town of brothels, bars and a few shops, it has become the headquarters of important companies and the source of many jobs. Today, it is Mexico's sixth largest city in terms of population, and is undoubtedly very important to the national economy. Now, do these two Tijuanas have anything in common? A few brief historical references would be useful in attempting to answer this question.

Tijuana was practically invented in response to the Puritanical attitudes of turn-of-the-century California which tried to ban gambling and prostitution. Prohibition itself finally sent these activities south of the border. All this is widely documented. What has not been explained in any great detail has been the Mexicanization of its economy. As different historical accounts have reported, the first demand made to U.S. proprietors was that 50 percent of their employees be Mexican.⁷ At the same time, some smaller businessmen, the owners of bars and brothels,

accumulated enough capital to invest later in the retail trade, services and tourism.

On the other hand, though, there were no serious attempts at industrialization. The dynamic of participating and operating in the economy was limited to capturing part of what our northern neighbors spent in Mexico and exploiting the legal restrictions of both countries. The evolution of federal policies toward the area in general as demanded more or less by local businessmen supports this argument. The 1933 creation of the Customs Systems for the Ensenada and Tijuana Free Zones is part of this dynamic. The system allowed for "tax exemption on imported goods for use and consumption within the zone itself."

This program and its later modifications created an institutional framework for augmenting the local vocation for retail and wholesale trade, putting any idea of industrialization firmly in second place.

Local businessmen can be grouped in the following way: a) those who took advantage of the free zone (or "hook" items) and mainly sold tax-free imports; b) service providers for visitors (bars, prostitution, gambling, restaurants); and c) those who supplied what the city itself needed, first selling goods imported from California and later domestically made consumer goods. Two other groups would develop later: local businessmen directly and indirectly linked to maquiladora plants and those dealing in real estate.⁸

The emergence of these groups of businessmen had two lasting effects: one is seeing the border area as a place



to profit from exports. The other is the creation of an economic identity wherein local businessmen are intermediaries.

It is into this context that the maquiladora industry was introduced without substantially changing local entrepreneurial behavior. Those who get involved in the maquiladoras, as owners or managers, also act as intermediaries. Their specific function is to mediate between foreign companies and the local work force. They do not produce technology and machinery; they receive them and take care of the management side of the operation, complying with quality norms and production quotas. The general pattern of intermediation is not broken; it simply continues in other economic spheres.

Existing literature has generally played down the direct participation of local businessmen in promoting and managing maquiladora plants. However, according to a 1988 survey, about 50 percent of the electronics and plastics maquiladoras were 100 percent owned by Mexican capital. A recent ECLAC study found that almost 60 percent of the maquiladora industry has participating domestic capital. In other words, the way in which these businessmen have become integrated into the industry has considerably influenced the general process of its expansion.

The conventional form of organization of these maquiladoras can be seen when they are compared with plants operating in countries like Korea. Initially, the Korean maquiladora plants were just like the Tijuana plants: not integrated into the local economy, simple assembly processes, etc. With time,

however, the Koreans developed local systems and took over the production processes, changing their orientation directly toward the large consumers, like big stores. Gereffi has documented this evolution from “producer-driven productive chains” to “market-driven productive chains”. Mexico’s maquiladora industry has not evolved like this and nothing clearly indicates any change in the future.

The induced industrial development was based on the logic of trade, not a logic of innovative production. This commercial dynamic has not remained static; it has been spurred by practices and collective behavior that are not always clear and are sometimes contradictory. Traditional practices can be an inducement to or an obstacle for regional endogenous development and for learning the knowledge-based forms of action. In the Tijuana case, we have assumed that intermediation as a traditional practice dominates, thus propitiating heteronomous, induced regional development.

IS INNOVATION HAPPENING SOMEWHERE ELSE?

On the border, discussions about technology have been limited to that applied in the maquiladora industry. Automated processes inaugurated in the mid-1980s have given rise to optimism about “technology transfer.”⁹ Our point of view is that there has been no real transfer of technology as long as there are no economic bodies which completely dominate the technological processes. This impedes the creation of absolute advantages, that is, producing goods on the basis of know-how exclusive to their producers or of characteristics intrinsic to traditional goods.

However, we should emphasize that local engineers have learned a great deal about the use of equipment, quality standards, the design of manufacturing processes and pieces and adapting equipment, as well as about making minor innovations. This learning process is today limited to the maquiladora industry, which offers them the possibility of



a career, even if it be restricted to the maquiladoras. That is to say, there is no spin-off process like those in California documented by Stoper and other researchers. Identity in Californian production is based on a heavy emphasis on professionalization. That, together with individualist values and a tendency to take the risk of start-ups means many engineers become entrepreneurs. Today, the most important professional identity reference point for Tijuana engineers is becoming salary earners in the maquiladora industry, even if it be at management level.¹⁰

Ciudad Juárez, on Mexico's Texas border, does offer interesting examples of technicians and engineers who previously worked in the maquiladora industry and now own workshops that supply parts to the maquiladoras. An important professional learning process took place when Delphi, a General Motors company, set up a large auto design center there. These are two examples of technological learning processes in different parts of production.

Our point of view is that there has been no real transfer of technology as long as there are no economic bodies which completely dominate the technological processes.

Some innovations by workers have been documented in the maquila industry, but it is really not possible to argue that they increase competitiveness. Some authors, like Godínez and Mercado, point out that maquila competitiveness is based above all on achieving economies of scale and quality control. In any case, in no way can these innovations be compared, for example, with the Italian districts in California where researchers have documented a "diffuse innovative capacity" both in the product and in the process. Neither are they comparable with experiments with new materials and the strong links among companies in the textile industry.

INNOVATION AS A TECHNOLOGICAL POLICY

On the Baja California border, the maquiladora industry seems to be the forefront of technology, especially in recent years when Mexico has practically had no industrial policy. However, 100 kilometers away, in Ensenada, several public institutions sponsored a company incubator.¹¹ Initially, the projects had a high technology content related to the specialties offered by the Ensenada Center for Scientific Research and Higher Education (CICESE): marine sciences, oceanography and physical sciences. The idea was to "transfer" scientists to the entrepreneurial sphere and make good use of Ensenada's marine resources. However, the incubator lacked a strategy for linking it up with existing industry in the state. Therefore, and aside from a few isolated successes, it has had no important impact on production.

Innovative efforts through the construction of networks and the establishment of specialized service centers—like company incubators—are limited by their initial conditions. Therefore, the logic of production and current conditions of manufacturing processes should jibe with technological development efforts. In the following section, we will go a little more into the existing dynamics and their possible utilization.

In order to be internally coherent, each logic of production requires different kinds of innovation. In Tijuana, two logics of production dominate. Storper and Salais would conceive of them as the world of industry and the world of commerce.

The world of industry—basically mass production with some variations—is the largest. All branches include companies which are part of this logic of production. The idea is to aim for large-scale production, using simple, automated processes that require low skilled or unskilled workers. On the northern border, as we have already pointed out, goods are completely mature and therefore could be significantly improved only with great difficulty. Effort is seemingly concentrated on bettering assembly processes. A relatively important number of engineers design "mixes," assembling processes and even some complete products. They also adapt products to the technological capabilities of local plants.

The possibility of generating extraordinary profits is linked to innovation centered on product standardization and/or recently created processes. However, this is not possible in maquiladoras because

innovating efforts are only made where corporations operate logistically. New standardized products are introduced in their home production areas and only when extraordinary profits drop because of competition do they relocate to low-wage areas.

Neither can we expect maquiladoras to innovate by introducing standardized products. Given that their framework is limited to managing the goods they work with, their improvements are oriented to perfecting the product itself or the production process.

The world of commerce, called “market-driven productive chains” by Gereffi, is characterized by meeting the changing demands of the market. The relationship with the market is unlike the one in the world of industry which has a consolidated demand and the consumer is an abstraction. In the world of commerce, the producer-market relationship is direct, even though it is expressed in the creation of standardized goods from products which respond to variations in demand. Contracting out tends to dominate in these sectors and workers tend to play a more active role.

Innovation in these sectors is based on the innovation of processes: the opportunities for innovation are generally part of new kinds of equipment and intermediate inputs, originating with firms whose main activity is outside these sectors. Rapid responses and the firms’ ability to assimilate new technology and to move the product to higher price and quality curves are the essential elements of innovation. In this kind of sector, which is often design-intensive, scale or research and development costs are not an obstacle since the problem is

not creating new machinery but rapidly incorporating available machinery and using it differently. In Tijuana and other parts of the border area, a great many small Mexican-owned maquiladoras work as sub-contractors. These companies operate in the logic of the “world of commerce,” but their potential is limited by the way they interact with their clients. Building a coherent world of commerce should be the aim of a technological development policy for the region.

For the logic of commerce to develop its potential, the interaction between subcontractor and consumer should be direct, unlike in Tijuana, where subcontractors relate directly to and depend upon producers who, in turn, relate to consumers. In Gereffi’s words, in the first case we have market-driven chains and in the second, producer-driven; in the first case, they are independent and create their own networks and the second they are subordinate and lose control over their linkages.

Taking into account these observations, we can formulate some strategic proposals for the region with an eye to developing innovation networks in production.

The first objective would be to establish direct links among commercial establishments, for example, between Tijuana’s large retail stores and the subcontractors, without going through the U.S. producers. This requires the generation of know-how and the ability to relate directly to market. Conditions for this do not exist today because local businessmen have kept away from any direct market contact.

Secondly, centers for monitoring technology and efficient productive practices should be set up and local producers rapidly made aware of their existence.

A third objective would be to create design centers that would also monitor products in target markets. This would aid in keeping products within changing tastes and filling specific market niches when detected.



The majority of maquiladora jobs in Tijuana are low-skilled.

A fourth objective would be to set up joint offices to represent producers and create common brand names to identify the product and aid in distribution.

Lastly, the most important objective is to create a more highly skilled work force that would get involved in the production process and whose technical skills and knowledge of the product increase value added and reduce the possibility of substituting it for another work force elsewhere.

A skilled work force plus specialized service centers would create the conditions for keeping products on an ascendent quality and price curve. To maintain that curve, you would also have to avoid succumbing to the temptation of totally standardizing products.

It is important to point out that the traditional practice of being interme-

diaries should be dealt with in order to generate direct and active links between subcontractors and consumers. To do this, "experimental" relations would have to be set up and publicized among all possible participants. Precedents would have to be set among businessmen themselves and between the business community and government agencies involved.

We also propose that the construction of a coherent world of commerce is based on specific products like wood or textiles and not in abstract categories like "small companies." Doing this means working on what has already been built and trying to move these producers toward better conditions of production.

That way, objectives are not divorced from local conditions or impossible to achieve. We already have a group of

local producers in these sectors, producers who work these goods and are familiar with the details of their organization.

The task would be to create relationships with them, initiating collaborative efforts and building trust. This would make it possible to make the productive chains more independent and more profitable.

Collaborative efforts, as we have said, should aim for creating specialized design and market and technology monitoring services. The idea is not to set up centers or incubators to service the whole maquiladora industry, but highly specialized centers which only monitor, for instance, the furniture industry. All this requires an ad hoc funding policy as well, but that would have to be dealt with in another article. **NVM**

NOTES

¹Just in Tijuana, Baja California, maquiladora jobs rose from 89,625 to 106,766, or about 15 percent a month, between October 1994 and October 1995.

²Industry figures put total worker income (including benefits) at between Mex\$250 and Mex\$270 a week, or between U.S.\$30 and U.S.\$35 (Industrial Relations Association). Also, real income in pesos dropped after December 1993, in 1994 and in 1995 (INEGI, January 1996).

³Here, "relocation" means moving industries to areas where they are more profitable than where they were operating before. [Editor's Note.]

⁴Despite the fact that certain technologies permit downsizing production, this is relative because it is necessary to distinguish between the scale of production of the product, the plant and the company as a whole.

⁵From the economic point of view, "vertical" means there is "subordination" in the productive chain, seen in the hierarchy and power relations in economic negotiations. This is a complex point which requires much more thought since it is a differentiated phe-

nomenon. It is not the case of large supermarkets, for example, which are all the same company. "Vertical" is applied more to the relationship of small Mexican companies with the United States.

⁶The process of cooperation, negotiation and complementing each other is not necessarily positive in and of itself. To set up a subcontracting maquiladora plant, the parties to the agreement, both local and foreign, have to negotiate the relationship and overcome the uncertainties inherent in any economic transaction. Collaboration and complementing each other has, then, a conventional character built upon this negotiation between the two parties. What it is important to emphasize here is that the functioning and evolution of maquiladoras cannot be explained exclusively as an imposition of foreign capital on local actors.

⁷This was not the case exclusively of Tijuana. The birth of Mexican unionism is fraught with Mexican workers' protests about the privileges given to foreign workers, particularly from the United States.

⁸The difference between local activities and those linked to interaction with the United States has been

at the root of different conceptualizations such as those proposed by Margulis and Tuirán, who classified economic activities in the area as border activities and non-border activities. Another classification talks about three categories: domestic processes, transnational processes and transborder processes.

⁹Storper has called the idea of installing equipment in an attempt to substitute for "the laborious social and intellectual side of the development process" the "modernist illusion." M. Storper, "Desarrollo territorial en la economía global de aprendizaje: el desafío para los países en desarrollo," *EURE* 20 (no. 60) Santiago de Chile (August 1994).

¹⁰This does not mean that Tijuana engineers have not tried to become independent. However, the ones who have not met with success or have kept to non-innovative products. In any case, neither the number nor the quality of the new companies is competitive in the local economy.

¹¹A company incubator is a specialized service center that services several companies from different branches of industry. [Editor's Note.]



Mexico City's Metropolitan Cathedral by night.

XIV Festival of Mexico City's Historic Center

Like old European cities, every year Mexico City celebrates its own Festival of the Historic Center. For 13 consecutive years, this festival has lit up old palaces, colonial mansions and churches, pre-Columbian temples, plazas and streets with its performances. These are the venues where the city's most demanding audiences enjoy

More than 1,421 monuments make up the pre-Hispanic and colonial legacy of the Historic Center.

music, dance, theater, art exhibits and good food.

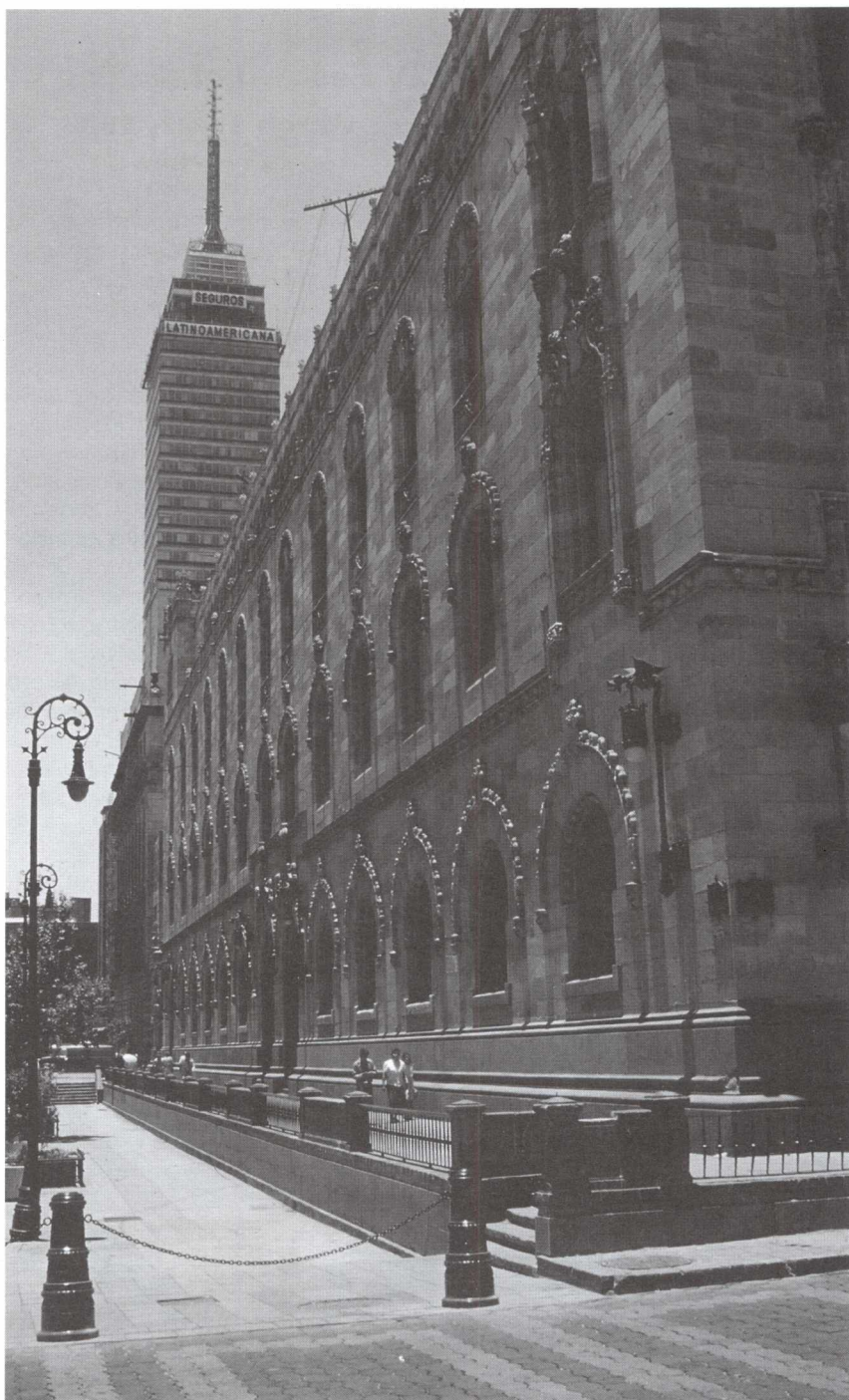
Some 26 museums present vast exhibits to make the festival shine. Lined up in two visual-arts corridors, one in the environs of Moneda Street and the other around the Alameda Park, the museums are an invitation to visit the pavestoned streets of the old city, to wander from a

palace to a colonial mansion, from a renovated cloister to an old college. They are a call to ramble from the past to the present, to admire the pre-Hispanic art of the Great Temple, to be fascinated by a baroque painting in the Viceroyal Picture Gallery and, later, to be surprised by a contemporary canvas in the José Luis Cuevas Museum. They are a call to roam through the thousand-year-old time of our visual arts and stop, perhaps a bit tired, to try one of the delicious snacks available in both corridors that remind us that gastronomy is also an art.

What today we call the Historic Center was originally Tenochtitlan, the great indigenous city. In the sixteenth century, the Spaniards built a colonial city on top of it, creating what may well have been the cultural capital of the Americas. On a single street, Moneda Street, three buildings testify to its greatness: the Americas' first print shop, first university and first academy of fine arts. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the town of the conquistadors become a baroque city; and the nineteenth century gave rise to neoclassical architecture.

Today, 1,421 historical monuments make up the pre-Hispanic and colonial legacy of the Historic Center. Among them are the Great Temple (the ruins of Tenochtitlan's ceremonial center), the Plaza of the Constitution (or Zócalo), the National Palace, the Metropolitan Cathedral, many colonial palaces built for people of high birth and innumerable churches that still hold paintings and sculpture of considerable artistic value.

The festival was born in 1985, set up as a private civic organization to join



The Palace of Mining.

with other institutions and individuals interested in helping the economy and the dissemination of information about Mexico City's downtown area. As a result of these efforts, in recent years the festival has been supported by the Mex-

ico City government and the National Council for Culture and the Arts. The group's activities have fostered the recovery and dignity of the Historic Center, which the UNESCO declared a World Heritage Treasure in 1987. **MM**

Highlights of the XIV Festival of Mexico City's Historic Center March 9 - 27, 1998

The theme of the fourteenth annual festival will be "nationalism and universality."

The inaugural gala performance in the Palace of Fine Arts is to feature soprano June Anderson from the United States and baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky from Russia, accompanied by La Camerata under the baton of Enrique Diemecke from Mexico.

The festival program will include "A New Geography of the Novel," a series of lectures given at the National College by Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes; Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia); José Saramago (Portugal); Antonio Tabucchi (Italy); Juan Goytisolo (Spain); Nélida Piñón (Brazil); J.M. Coetzee (South Africa); and Edna O'Brien (Ireland).

In the Palace of Fine Arts, George Steiner will make a presentation on nationalism and Rem Koolhaas on architecture. At the Old College of San Ildefonso, Richard Rogers (Great Britain), Charles Correa (India) and Ricardo Legorreta (Mexico) will participate in the round table "Roots and Universality in Architecture."

The International Book Fair at the Palace of Mining deserves special mention, as does the International Art Book Week at the National Museum of Art, both of which will be part of the festival for the first time.

The visual arts will contribute with 26 exhibitions in the two art corridors. The Moneda Street corridor will also host the performance "Five Continents," in which a group of embassies in Mexico will participate in accordance with the 1998 festival theme.

Dance will be represented by the Rambert Dance Company from Great Britain; Marie-Claude Pietragalla, prima ballerina of the Paris National Opera company; Amalia Hernández' Folklore Ballet and the Monterrey Ballet company from Mexico; and "African Night," with Youssou N'Dour.

Music will be plentiful, with performances by the Cappella Cervantina in the Regina Coelli church; German tenor Peter Schreier at the Palace of Fine Arts; the Prieto Quartet in the Saint Inés church; the Chamber Orchestra from Bologna, featuring flautist Andrea Griminelli; the National Symphony Orchestra in the Palace of Fine Arts; and pianist Silvia Navarrete and actress Emoé de la Parra in the Franz Mayer Auditorium. The downtown area's plazas will host

music by the percussion group Tambuco and military bands, as well as the performances "Rock in the Afternoon," "Evening of Boleros" and "Evening of Mariachis," among others.

For those with a taste for theater, there will be performances of Zero Hour, or The Art of Service from Germany in the Jiménez Rueda Theater and by the Malpaso Group from Spain in the Lyric Theater.

The festival's gastronomical fare particularly emphasizes the creativity of Mexican food and its links with international cuisine. The 1998 festival will feature, among others, the following events: the "Exclusively for the Republic of Mexico" Dinner in the Old Palace of the Archbishopric; a dinner concert featuring pianist Silvia Navarrete in the Franz Mayer Museum, which will also show an important collection of works by Toulouse Lautrec; and the closing dinner, in the central patio of the National Palace on the last evening of the festival.

Avant-garde designer clothes have occupied a special place in the last three festivals. In the fourteenth festival, "alternative fashions" will have their runway at the Chopo Museum.

Guided tours are a tradition at the festival. The large numbers of people anxious to see our cultural heritage has prompted the organizers to keep up this tradition in the spirit of the idea that "you only love what you know."

Children have a very special place in the festival. In the 1998 celebration, the Historic Center museums join together in the project "Explorers to the Center," an invitation to visit them and have fun at the same time. In addition, just like in the past, the festival will present theater, puppets and food for children, as well as a special children's closing ceremony in the Alameda Park, complete with parade, costumes, balloons and lots of surprises.

The super-production "Hymn" is scheduled to close the festival on a circular stage built around the flagpole in the middle of Mexico City's Plaza of the Constitution.

This overview of the programming for the 1998 Festival of Mexico City's Historic Center explains why it has become the city's most significant festival and one of the most important in the whole country.



Left: The Old San Ildefonso College.

Comets

In Pre-Hispanic Mexico

Jesús Galindo Trejo* Arcadio Poveda Ricalde**



Water color by Jesús Galindo Trejo

Motecuhzoma observing the comet that appeared the year 10 *caña*.

From time immemorial, the peoples of Mesoamerica were captivated by the heavens. Mesoamerican mythology abounds in passages and descriptions about the identities and activities of different celestial beings.

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Astronomers —*ilhuicatlamatinime* in Nahuatl— were part of the ruling strata of Mesoamerican societies; the emperors themselves were required to watch the night sky to try to establish a direct link to the gods. At his coronation, Mexica emperor Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin (1466-1520) was explicitly urged to observe different specific constellations at midnight and Venus at dawn. While the pre-Hispanic astronomers certain-

ly had religious motives, their observation techniques and precision also developed to a great degree. The astronomer-priest was in charge of bringing the heavenly order to his own society. One materialization of this was the development of the calendar, which regulated religious rites, agricultural activities and people's daily lives. The meaning of this very practical instrument, the result of astronomical obser-

vation, conferred great prestige and influence on the *ilhuicatlamatinime* in pre-Hispanic society.

Most of the Mesoamerican peoples conceived of the area above the Earth as divided into different levels or heavens. For example, the nineteenth century document known as *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* (History of the Mexicans Through Their Paintings) informs us that the Fifth Heaven, situated above the heaven which holds the Sun, was occupied by fire snakes made by the fire god, and that from there emanated comets and other heavenly signs.¹

Comets have an important place among heavenly bodies. In many of ancient Mexico's languages, comets are called "the smoking star": *citlalin popoca* in Nahuatl, *budz ek* in Yucatan Maya and *ifuo'nganotzo'* in Otomí or Nāñhu.

The appearance of a comet was traditionally taken as the portent of a coming catastrophe. Sixteenth century chroniclers tell us as much. One of them, Friar Bernardino de Sahagún says, "These people called the comet *citlalin popoca*, meaning 'smoking star.' They took it as the prophesy of the death of a prince or king, or of war or hunger. Common people would say, 'This is our hunger.' These people called the blaze of the comet *citlalin tlamina*, which means "arrow-hurling star." And they said that whenever that arrow fell upon a living thing, a hare or rabbit or another animal, and wounded it, a worm would grow and make that animal unfit for eating. For that reason, these people made sure they were well covered up at night, to make

sure the blaze of the comet did not fall upon them."² By "arrow-hurling star" Sahagún may mean here a shooting star, a small meteorite that upon entering the Earth's outer atmosphere at considerable speed becomes incandescent. In this same work by Sahagún, it is clear how the pictorial representation of the comet evolves, changing from a clearly indigenous image to a frankly Western one.

Despite their fatalistic connotation, the word for "comet" was very often given as a proper name. The best known case is that of Citlalpopocatzin (the suffix *tzin* is honorific), one of the four Lords of Tlaxcala upon the arrival of the Spaniards. Mestizo chronicler Diego Muñoz Camargo, from Tlaxcala, says that this lord had been named that "because when he was born, a great, horrific comet with a great tail was seen



The comet in Michoacán which predicted the Spanish conquest. Friar Jerónimo de Alcalá, *The Michoacán Account*, sixteenth century.

in the sky spewing smoke.”³ Carlos María Bustamante, a nineteenth century historian, says that his name alludes to the fact that Citlalpopocatzin trusted his military enterprises to the Sun, symbolizing them with the star which received its courage from the Sun, infused into it when the star exhaled smoke.⁴ In the so-called *Tlaxcala Canvas*, which describes events related to the Spanish conquest, the representation of this per-

sonage appears often with his name glyph.

Part of the history of the Mesoamerican peoples has come down to us through the different kinds of documents they made themselves, from the pictographs in the form of codices, to writing, done just before the European conquest. These sources also give us clues to many occurrences in the heavens, including many examples of co-

met sightings. The noble chronicler of Amecameca, Chimalpahin, tells us in the year 1 *técpatl*, or 1064, “Twenty-five years have passed since the great settlement of Tullan was lost, since the *Tultecas* dispersed when a smoking star passed over them.”⁵ This comet could be the same one which was observed in December 1063 in Korea⁶ and in 1064 in Europe.⁷

The *Mexicanus Codex*, a pictographic chronology illustrating different events year by year, says that the appearance of two comets in the years 1 *ácatl* and 2 *técpatl* (1363 and 1364) was associated with the death of a personage called Chimalli.⁸ Chinese observers reported a comet sighting on the first day of the Moon, March 16, 1363.⁹ On March 30 of the following year, the Koreans observed a reddish colored comet with a tail that spanned over one degree in longitude.¹⁰

The chronicler who wrote the so-called *Telleriano-Remensis Codex*, an ear-



Representation of a comet observed in the year 10 *calli*, or 1489, depicted here as *xihuitli* in the form of a multicolored serpent with barbs. *Telleriano-Remensis Codex*, Paris, sixteenth century.

The Fifth Heaven, situated above the heaven which holds the Sun, was occupied by fire snakes made by the fire god, and that from there emanated comets and other heavenly signs.



Mixpamilt, a bank of clouds, a nocturnal radiance observed in Mexico in 1509 and 1510. Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, sixteenth century.

ly colonial document now in Paris, reports, “Year of Ten Houses and 1489, a very large comet crossed the skies that they called *xihuitli*.”¹¹ In this case, the pictorial representation of the comet is a multicolored serpent with barbs. It should be noted that *xihuitli* is another way of saying “comet” in Náhuatl; it also means “turquoise,” “grass” and “year”. Chinese observers recorded a comet in the constellations of Hercules, Aquila (the Eagle), Serpens (the Serpent) and Ophiuchus (the Serpent Holder) from November to December 1489.¹²

This tradition of recording events in the heavens in historical documents continued for some years during the colonial period. A remarkable case is illustrated beautifully in the *Telleriano-Remensis Codex*: the double phenomenon of an eclipse of the Sun and the appearance of a comet in 1531. Without a doubt this celestial spectacle impressed the *tlacuilo*,¹³ who took it down on paper in a way which was already culturally hybrid. Next to the Sun, still partially darkened in the pre-Hispanic

style, a star—clearly represented in a Westernized fashion—is shown with curls of smoke emanating from it. On March 18, 1531, a partial eclipse of the Sun was visible from Mexico’s high central plain. In addition, many comet catalogues in Europe and Asia record sightings of Halley’s Comet from the end of July until the end of September of the same year, in the constellations of Gemini, Leo and Virgo, with a tail as long as 15 degrees.¹⁴ Only one Japanese source, on the other hand, reported a comet seen from February 5, 1531, on.¹⁵

One of the most famous comets of pre-Hispanic Mexico is Motecuhzoma’s Comet, mainly because of a drawing depicting the Mexica emperor observing a long-tailed comet. The drawing is by Dominican Friar Diego Durán who describes its appearance as one of the events foretelling the coming of the Spaniards. In fact, in different parts of the high central plain, different phenomena were interpreted as predictions of a major catastrophe. For exam-

ple, then, Friar Jerónimo de Alcalá, the Franciscan who gathered the *Relación de Michoacán* (The Michoacán Account), tells us, “They also say that they saw two great comets in the sky and thought that their gods needed to conquer or destroy another people and they should go to destroy it.”¹⁶

According to Friar Durán, the first sighting was by a youth serving as the living representation of the god Huitzilopochtli in his temple. One night the young man awoke and, as he watched the sky, saw a great comet in the East that left a long shining tail in its wake. His attendants and guards continued to observe the comet until dawn, when it reached its zenith. The next morning the youth went to see the Emperor Motecuhzoma to tell him what he had seen in the sky. The frightened and incredulous emperor asked if it might not have been a dream, but the witnesses confirmed the youth’s story. That night Motecuhzoma went up to an observation platform on a rooftop and very attentively watched the heavens.



Motecuhzoma’s comet. The emperor on the roof of his palace watches in wonder the comet that foretells the end of his reign. Friar Diego Durán, *History of the Indies of New Spain*, sixteenth century.

The appearance
of a comet was traditionally
taken as the portent
of a coming catastrophe:
the death
of a prince or king,
or war or hunger.

At midnight, he saw the comet with that beautiful, glittering train; it filled him with amazement and he sank into a profound melancholy. The next day, he called the youth and asked him what the meaning of this comet could be. The youth, the image of Huitzilopochtli, ignorant of heavenly things, suggested only that the emperor send for the astrologers since things of the night were their affair. When the astrologers came before Motecuhzoma, he asked them if they had seen the new sign that had appeared in the heavens. When they answered that they had not, the emperor became enraged, reproaching them the scant care they were giving to the things of the night; he ordered they be locked up in cages without food so that they might die of hunger. The astrologers wept and pleaded to be put to death instead.

Motecuhzoma summoned Nezahualpilli, the king of Texcoco, famous as a dedicated astrologer. Nezahualpilli had been observing the sign in the skies for many nights, but, thinking that the

emperor's astrologers would already have explained its meaning, had not been concerned. The king of Texcoco said, "And you should know that its prophesy comes down upon the head of our kingdoms, throughout which there are to be astounding and wondrous things; in all our lands and domains there are to be great calamities and misfortune; nothing will remain untouched; there will be deaths without number; our domains will lose everything and so it shall be by permission of the lord of the heights, of the day and of the night and of the air. Of all of this you will be a witness, and you shall see it; it shall come to pass in your time. Because I, taking leave of you, shall go to die, and I know for certain that you shall see me no more and this will be the last time we shall behold each other in this life, because I want to run and hide, to flee the labors and afflictions that await you. Do not falter nor grieve nor despair. Make your heart broad and show spirit and a virile breast to the labors of fortune." Motecuhzoma began to weep bitterly, lamenting that his should be the destiny to be the one dispossessed of all that the Mexicas had won with their powerful arm.

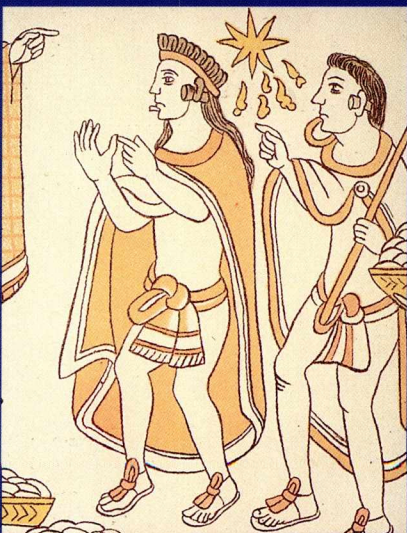
He did not know what to do: hide, become a stone or a staff, perhaps become a bird to fly toward the most rugged of all the mountains. After they bid farewell, Motecuhzoma called upon the dispensers of justice and the Principal Lords to admonish the priests and the astrologers who had been careless in their vigilance. He ordered the astrologers be slain, their houses sacked and razed to the ground so no memory would remain of them. He also con-

demned the astrologers' women and children to perpetual slavery.

A cruel punishment, ordained for those who had mocked him, for the scant care they had put into the occupation entrusted to them. Motecuhzoma visited this retribution on the traitors who had pretended to be astrologers, deceiving with their falsehoods and lies, so that others would not dare to pretend to be what they were not. Then, he sent for new astrologers who took up the task of the judged and exhorted them repeatedly to take care in observing the night stars and prophesy about the comet. It is said that when the news reached other kingdoms, the people, filled with fear, came together to cry out to the heavens, because they believed that the world would soon end.¹⁷

The noble chronicler Hernando Alvarado Tezozómoc describes the same events, adding that the comet could be seen coming out of the East and that it was of a great whitish brilliance that increased in length during the night.¹⁸

A particularly important piece of information in this narrative is the reference to the death of Nezahualpilli. Although the same Friar Durán establishes that the king of Texcoco died ten years before the Spaniards arrived, placing their arrival in 1519, several authors have associated Motecuhzoma's comet with the observation of a *mixpamiltl* or banner of clouds mentioned by several chronicles between 1509 and 1510. Father Sahagún left us one such report, where he says, "Ten years before the Spaniards came to this land a marvelous and wondrous thing appeared in the sky which seemed to be a very large and



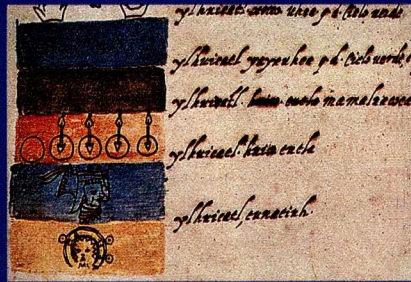
The Tlaxcalan lord Cittalpopocatzin with his birthday glyph representing a comet as a smoking star. *Tlaxcalan Canvas*, sixteenth century.

brilliant flame. It seemed to lie in the heavens themselves. It was wide in its nether regions and sharp in its upper parts, as when a fire burns. It seemed that its point reached to the mid-heavens. It rose in the East after midnight and came out with such brilliance that it seemed like day. It lasted until morning and then it was lost from sight.”¹⁹

It was a great nocturnal brilliance that seemed to surge upward from the earth and become more and more slender as it rose; it had the form of a pyramid of fire. Apparently, this celestial flame could be seen for a year. Judging by its form —though not by the length of time it was observed— it may have been what is called the zodiacal light, caused by the reflection of the Sun’s rays on the dust particles that surround the Sun.

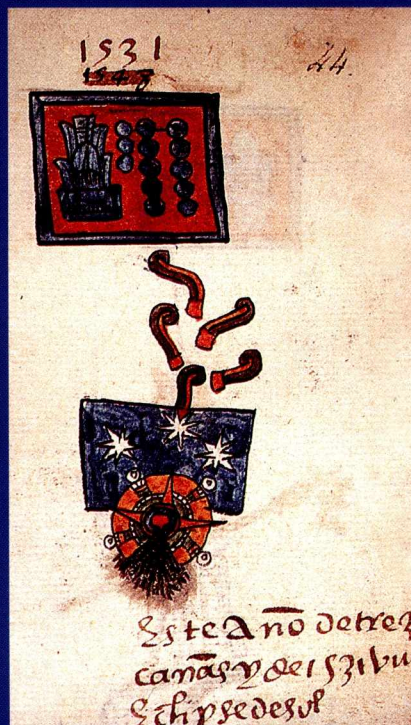
Another possibility is that it was an aurora borealis, light from atoms in the Earth’s outer atmosphere when they are excited by the particles of energy given off by the sun in periods of heavy activity. This brightly colored phenomenon usually looks like the continual movement of huge curtains. However, its time variation and form bears little resemblance to the description of the *mixpamitl*. Aurora boreales appear in the northern part of the sky and last only a few hours.

Several authors think that the luminous intensity of the zodiacal light increases as solar activity decreases.²⁰ Accordingly, the greatest intensity of zodiacal light occurs a couple of years before the lowest levels of solar activity. According to Letfus,²¹ the lowest level of solar activity in the period of the appearance of the *mixpamitl*, recorded



Comets crossing the sky: the *Ilhuicatl Mamalualoca* or sky of fire, perhaps an allusion to the constellation Mamalhuaztli, a tool for making fire. *Rios Codex*, sixteenth century.

Below: Eclipse of the Sun and a comet observed in Mexico in 1531. *Telleriano-Remensis Codex*, Paris, sixteenth century.



“They also say that they saw two great comets in the sky and thought that their gods needed to conquer or destroy another people and they should go to destroy it.”

so insistently by the chronicles, was in August 1513. It is also well known that in the past, solar activity has gone through periods of severe decline.²²

There was a notable decline in activity between 1460 and 1540, a period known as Spörer’s Minimum. Through historical sources that report an almost total absence of aurora boreales and an abundance of radioactive carbon in the rings of thousand-year-old trees, it has been possible to prove the existence of Spörer’s Minimum. Therefore, we might propose the hypothesis that the *mixpamitl* seen in the first decade of the sixteenth century was an extraordinarily intense zodiacal light associated with Spörer’s Minimum.

The zodiacal light as an alternative explanation of what some have identified as Motecuhzoma’s comet is consistent with any date given for the death of Nezahualpilli, taking into account the chronicles’ uncertainty. This gives the zodiacal light explanation an advantage over the comet hypothesis, which is tied to a particular date for Nezahualpilli’s death.

The association of Motecuhzoma’s comet with the *mixpamitl* has led some authors to doubt the feasibility of the phenomenon illustrated by Friar Durán since it little resembles the triangular form reported for the celestial glow so insistently described in the chronicles for the years 1509 and 1510. However, numerous indigenous chroniclers say that Nezahualpilli died in the year 10 *ácatl* (1515),²³ which would make it necessary to reconsider the identification of the comet. Although Asian sources report no comet in that year, after studying the numerous cata-

logues of comets observed in Europe, French astronomer M. Pingré reports that a comet burned for many days during 1516 in Europe and was considered the portent of the death of King Ferdinand the Catholic on January 23 of that year.²⁴

Although this comet also appeared during the period of Spörer's Minimum, the low intensity of the relative maximum around that year was sufficient to allow the comet to develop a tail visible from the Earth. So, Wittmann²⁵ determined the maximum for

June 1515 and Letfus for September 1517.²⁶ Therefore, both dates are consistent with the fact that the 1516 comet was perceptible to the Earth-bound observer.

It should be pointed out that the pre-Hispanic year was not synchronized with the Western year given that, depending on local tradition, the beginning of the new year might vary.²⁷ However, in most cases, by January 23, it was still the year 10 *ácatl*, thus making it highly probable that the Motecuhzoma comet and the comet reported

by Mather and Pingré were one and the same.

The apocalyptic prophesy was inevitably fulfilled for Motecuhzoma and his people. The implacable wave of destruction generated by the ambition of the Spanish conquistadors swept away the great cultural achievements of the Mesoamerican civilization. The observers of the heavens, enthralled by the captivating beauty of the night tried to cheat fate. That firmament—part of their gods—had to help them untangle the mysteries of time. ■■■

NOTES

¹J. García Icazbalceta, ed., "Historias de los mexicanos por sus pinturas," *Anales del Museo Nacional* 2 (1882): pp. 83-106.

²Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, eds. Alfredo López Austin and Josefina García Quintana (Mexico City: Ministry of Public Education, 1989), pp. 483.

³Diego Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, annotator Alfredo Chavero (Mexico City: Innovación, 1978), p. 90.

⁴Carlos María Bustamante, *Historia de la República de Tlaxcallan* (Mexico City, Imprenta del Aguila, 1826), pp.15-16.

⁵Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin, *Memorial breve acerca de la fundación de la ciudad de Culhuacan*, trans., paleographer and study by Víctor Manuel Castillo Farreras (Mexico City: UNAM, 1991), p.35.

⁶Ichiro Hasegawa, "Catalogue of Ancient and Naked-eye Comets," *Vistas in Astronomy* 24 (1980): pp.59-102.

⁷M. Pingré, *Cométographie ou Traité Historique et Théorique des Comètes* (Paris: n.p., 1783), p. 373.

⁸"Mexicanus Codex," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 41 (Paris: n.p., 1952): plate LI.

⁹Ho-Peng Yoke, "Ancient and Medieval Observations of Comets and Novae in Chinese Sources," *Vistas in Astronomy* 5 (1982): p. 198.

¹⁰Ho-Peng Yoke, op.cit. p. 198.

¹¹"Códice Telleriano-Remensis," *Antigüedades de México*, vol. 1, researcher José Corona Núñez (Mexico City: Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, 1964), p. 299.

¹²Donald K. Yeomans, *Comets: A Chronological History of Observation. Science, Myth and Folklore* (New York: John Wiley, 1991), p. 410.

¹³The word *tlacuilo* comes from the Nahuatl verb *tlacuiloa*, meaning "to paint" or "to write." *Tlacuilos* were Indian scribes who wrote about history, religion, mythology, etc. [Editor's Note.]

¹⁴Ho-Peng Yoke, op.cit., p. 209.

¹⁵Ho-Peng Yoke, op.cit., p. 209.

¹⁶Friar Jerónimo de Alcalá, *La Relación de Michoacán [1538]* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1988), p. 281.

¹⁷Friar Diego Durán, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España, 1570-1581*, ed. Angel Ma. Garibay (Mexico City: Porrúa Editores, 1976), pp. 467-471.

¹⁸Hernando Alvarado Tezozómoc, *Crónica Mexicana*, annotator M. Orozco y Berra (Mexico City: Porrúa Editores, 1980), p. 653.

¹⁹Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, op.cit., pp. 817-818.

²⁰A. S. Asaad, "Decrease of the Zodiacal Light with Increasing Solar Activity," *The Observatory* 957

(1967): pp. 83-87; G. Weill, "Variation de la brillance de la lumière zodiacale au cours d'un cycle d'activité solaire," *Compt. Rend. Acad. Sci.* 263 (1966): pp. 943-946; R. Robley, "Change in the Zodiacal Light with Solar Activity," *Solid Particles in the Solar System*, Nintieth International Astronomical Union Symposium (Dordrecht, Holland: Reydell Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 33-36.

²¹V. Letfus, "Solar activity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," *Solar Physics* 145 (1993): pp. 377-378.

²²R. Kippenhahn, *Discovering the Secrets of the Sun* (New York: John Wiley, 1994), pp. 30-32.

²³Rafael García Granados, *Diccionario Biográfico de Historia Antigua de México*, vol.2 (Mexico City: UNAM, 1952), pp. 51-64.

²⁴M. Pingré, op.cit., pp. 483-484, and I. Mather, *Kometografía or A Discourse Concerning Comets* (Boston: S.G. for S.S. and fold by F. Browning, 1683), p. 95.

²⁵A. Wittmann, "The Sunspot Cycle Before the Maunder Minimum," *Astronomy and Astrophysics* 66 (1978): pp. 93-97.

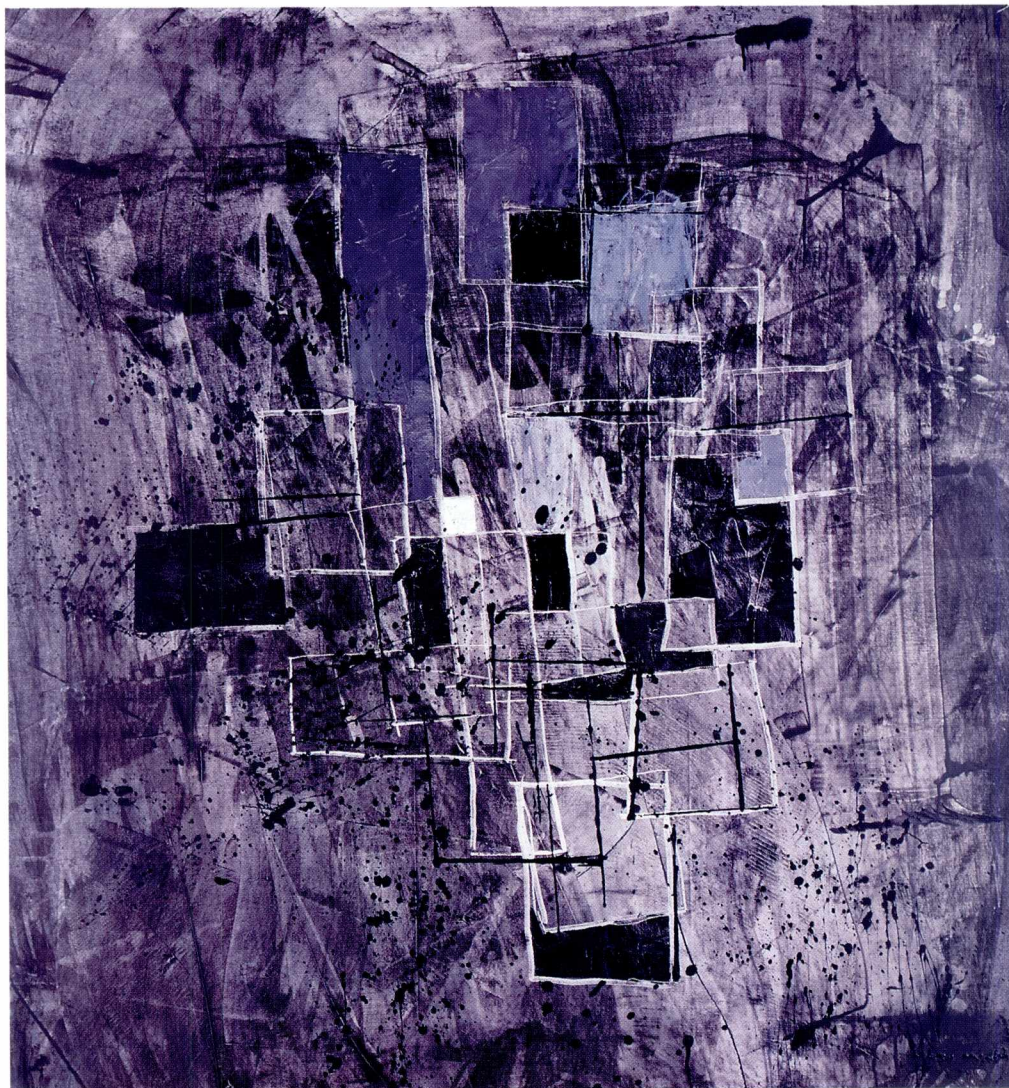
²⁶V. Letfus, op.cit., p. 382.

²⁷J. Tudela de la Orden, *Códice Tudela* (Madrid: Cultura Hispánica, 1980), p. 62.

“Inner Castle”

Paintings by Alberto Castro Leñero

*José Manuel Springer**



Photos reprinted courtesy of Alberto Castro Leñero

Grey Rectangles, 147.5 x 142 cm, 1996 (acrylic on canvas).

Alberto Castro Leñero (Mexico City, 1951) uses images to condense a series of sensual, mystical moments, encounters with nature,

* Painter and cultural attaché at the Mexican consulate in Toronto.
Translated by Jacqueline Buswell.

moments of the act of painting, fragments that pass unnoticed. Together these images express the evolution of painting at the end of the century. Castro Leñero’s most recent traveling exhibit,¹ “Inner Castle,” reveals the state of contemporary visual arts concerns.

Through the images of his work, we see the connections between the representation of the body and corporeal sensation, living in a body. “Inner Castle” reminds me of the intense sensation of the Gnostic poets, who tried to approach the notion of the divine

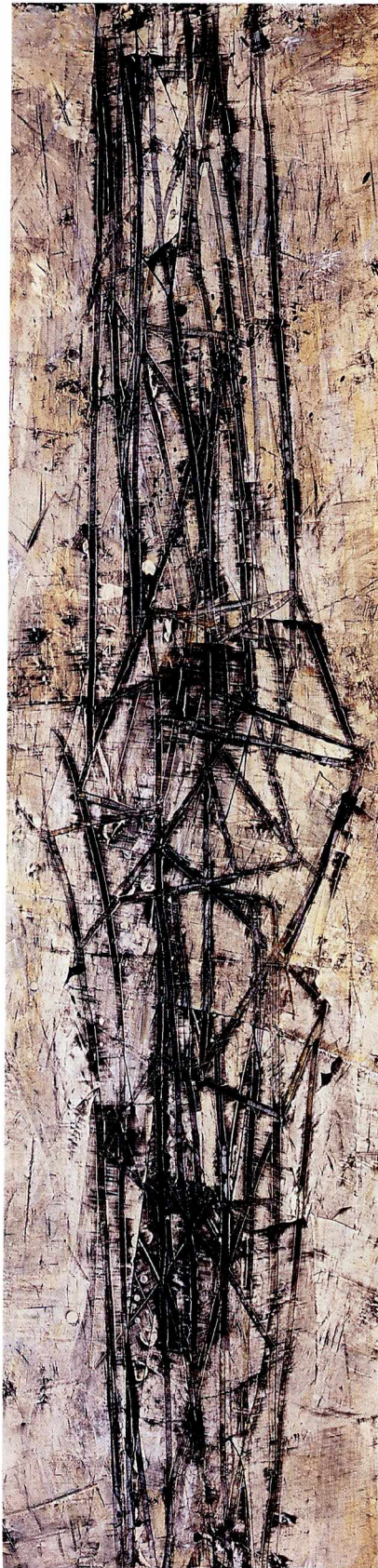
through the exaltation of the body. While for some the body was the prison of the soul, for others, like Alberto, the body is the altar of the sublime, a place where the infinite is invoked.

I have always thought that one of art's main purposes, perhaps its most important, is to put us in touch with immediate reality. This is achieved through the presentation of an anomalous space, one we are not used to seeing or experiencing. In painting this place, the artist goes outside himself to make his introspection evident. But that space is seldom very convincing. Perhaps I should say that it does not speak to us all in the same way. I do not think that this is exactly or exclusively due to the artist's talent, but to our own capacity or incapacity to connect what we see with our inner selves.

I suppose that this problem of connection—to put a name to it—can be found in the mind of every artist and every attentive observer. And, given that all explanations of art are mere speculation subject to constant review, I imagine that Alberto Castro asks himself this same question about connecting.

Like every artist, Alberto creates images to give a name to deeds and thoughts. The exhibit "Inner Castle" presents what the artist thought would serve as a connecting bridge. To a great extent I agree with his intention and the result.

I was lucky enough to have the opportunity of hanging the 16 works of art in this exhibition in the Queen's Quay Gallery in Toronto. To help myself plan the display, I decided to study the works as a continuum. It began with the work *Composition in the Form of an Arch*, a triptych with a female figure as the center piece, with the shoul-

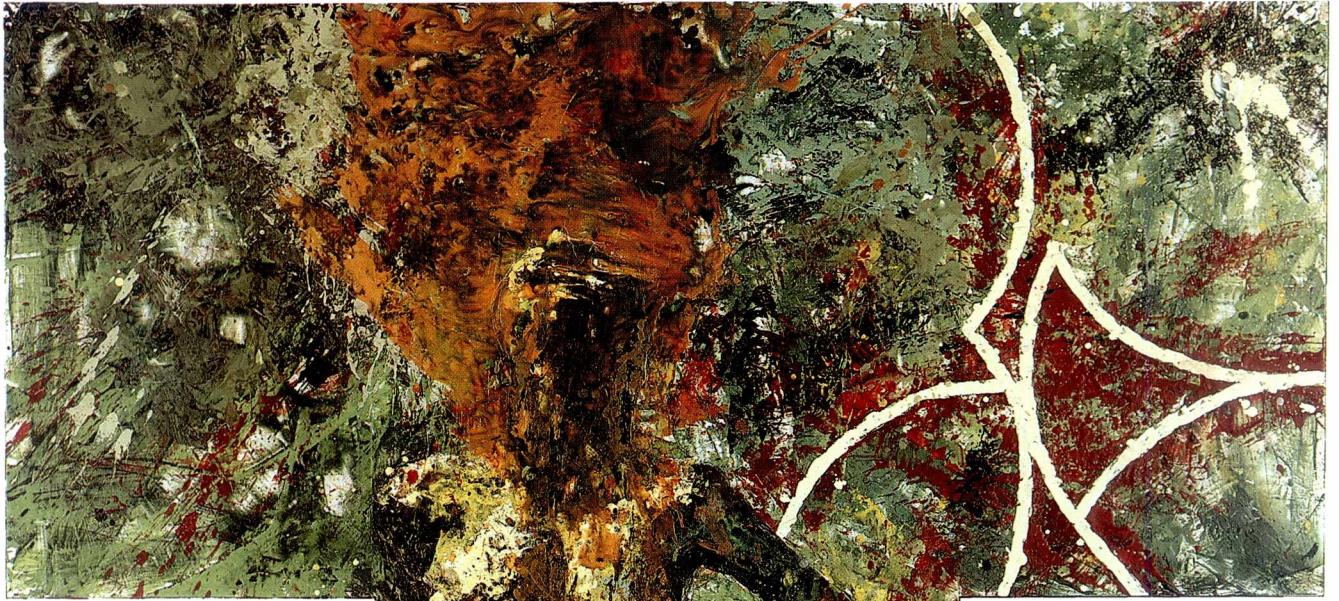


Interaction, 157.5 x 46 cm, 1996 (acrylic on canvas).

der arching backward and the face looking out of the painting. The left side panel shows part of the naked body of another woman, her legs and buttocks. In both cases the bodies appear to be young and strong, a constant in this painter's work. They are pictures of elegant sensuality, emphasized with the rough lines of the drawing and the application of the paint. A semi-circle extends from the right panel across the entire triptych. The work takes on a predominantly orange tone suggesting heavenly illumination. I thought this work could be the hors d'oeuvre for the exhibit, given that the light is what gives strength to the composition and reveals the exteriority of the body, a statement telling the viewer that this is a figure surrounded by light. But since the arch echoes the curves of a woman's body, it is also a metaphor for the crescent moon, a desire to represent the feminine by referring to the semicircle.

Of all the paintings, each done in encaustic (wax with pigments), three works stand out for their reference to the female body. The rest slowly move toward abstraction with the use of geometrical shapes or splashes of color. Two paintings, *Form* and *Figure*, made me think that Castro Leñero plays with balance in his pictures. He goes back and forth between the form and the background, between definition and indefinición.

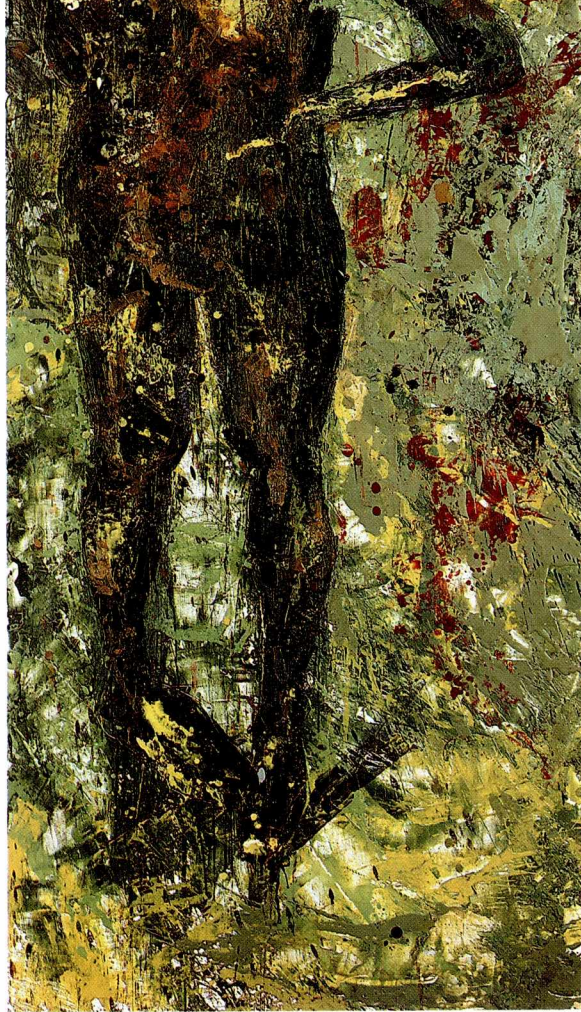
This gave me the key to ordering the rest of the paintings in the exhibition. *Form* refers to that internal space surrounded by matter on all sides. *Figure* openly represents something we can give meaning to because it refers to a real body. We understand the form as something abstract and open, while the fig-



ure has a concrete meaning.

Illumination is a work that marks the transition between the body and the form. This and the three subsequent works all have the uneven shape of a broken cross. Here the female body dissolves from the waist upwards and becomes part of the green and yellow background. At this point of the exhibition the observer can experience the transition from figurative sensual painting toward greater abstraction.

If, up to this point, the exhibition has managed to express the transition between the physical and the mental, it requires a qualitative and perceptive jump to introduce the concept of time in a two-dimensional space. To make this leap, I next chose to hang the work where Alberto uses objects in the shapes of forged steel swords that



Illumination, 220 x 180 cm, 1996 (encaustic on wood).

stick to the surface of the painting like the hands of a clock.

Time is a painting where the pictorial space becomes a real space. The hands move over the center of a silhouette of a male head. Next to it, another painting with an ellipsoid spiral in the middle, *Labyrinth*, suggests the course of the meditation the entire work is subject to. These two paintings together give us the idea of time as a spiral, of a repetitive mantra that enables us to focus our energy.

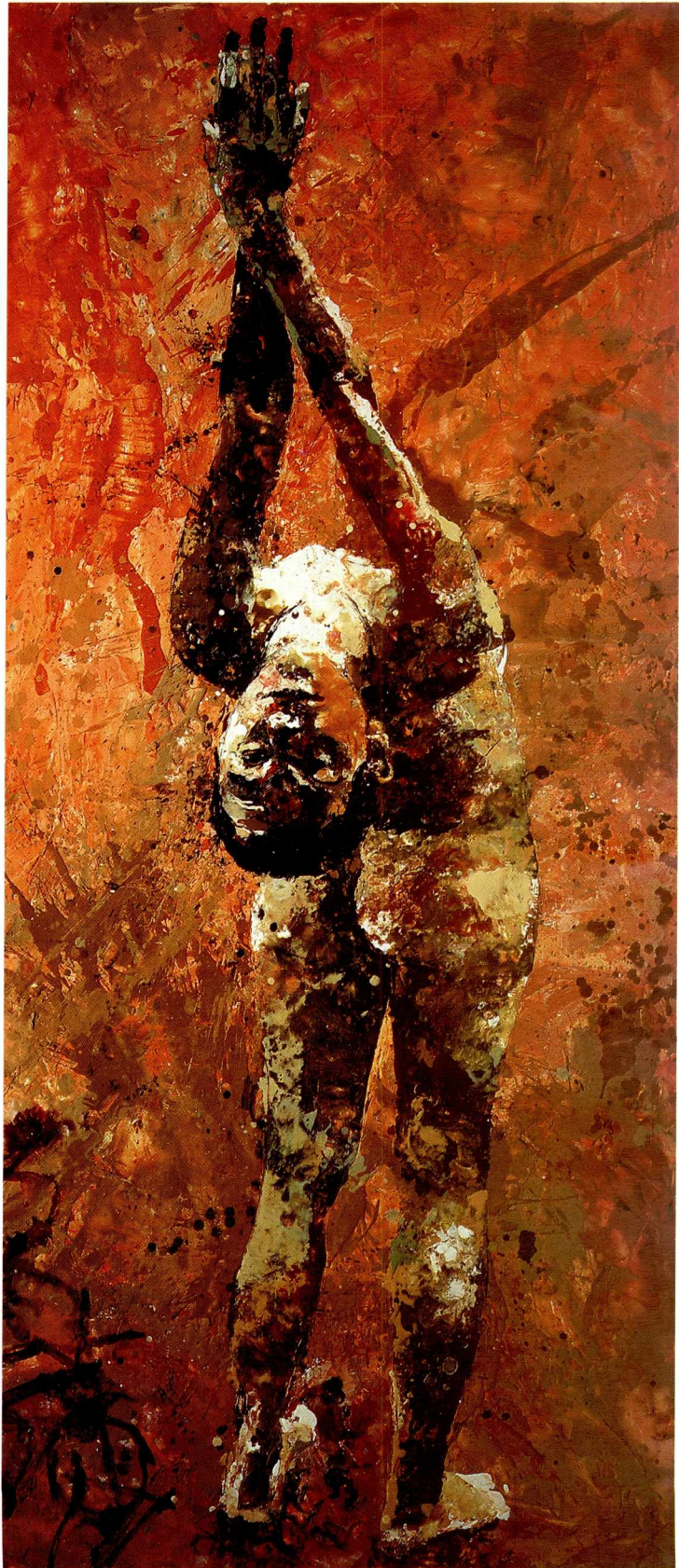
Inner Castle is the name of the work that unifies the conjunction of the artist's intentions and synthesizes a series of themes that hover in the artistic imagination of our times. It contains painted lines that obey a primitive geometric order, like the foundations of a building or a construction raised with rudimen-

“Inner Castle”

reminds me of the intense sensation of the Gnostic poets, who tried to approach the notion of the divine through the exaltation of the body. While for some, the body was the prison of the soul, for others, like Alberto, the body is the altar of the sublime.

tary elements. This is another work in the shape of a T; in the center a female body stands on one leg while the other leg moves in the air. The color is violent. The work makes me think of purgatory full of flames. Religiosity and sensuality come together under the guidance of an impassioned reasoning, themes that I find are common among contemporary painters who use symbolism and metaphors to make a call to the spiritual.

Opinions obviously vary on the relevance of this theme in this day and age. The approaching end of the millennium, a temporal concept that makes us think something old is coming to an end and something new is about to begin, forces us to take a stand. And of course the notion of change acquires diverse shades of meaning. Even so, I think that modern painting has been trying for years to find a philosophical handhold that justifies its survival in the flow of virtual images that make up our culture today.



Composition in the Form of an Arch 2 (detail), 200 x 100 cm, 1996 (encaustic on wood).



Composition in the Form of an Arch 1, 200 x 100 cm, 1995-96 (encaustic on wood).

They are pictures of elegant sensuality, emphasized with the rough lines of the drawing and the application of the paint.

If *Inner Castle* is an affirmation of values about sensibility guided by reason, the rest of the exhibit sets out to show where this sensibility can be anchored. And here I think is a good moment to mention another contemporary tendency in art and culture: ecology, the awareness of a physical environment that sustains our very existence.

The last two paintings suggest to me a return to a physical environment: the ocean. Water, the oceans and marine life have always been part of the spiritual kingdom, opposite to the earth, where human materiality resides. The final paintings, two works entitled *Metaphysical Landscape* and *Mouth* are both studies of reflection and purification.

The metaphor that Castro Leñero's paintings offer is not an exhaustive one. It does not present something as perfect but rather, some point halfway between what we see and what we desire. It is just a moment in that sinuous path that takes us back to the beginning, to what is inside us. **VM**

NOTES

¹This article reviews the Canadian segment of Alberto Castro Leñero's itinerant exhibition, "Inner Castle," in different galleries in the U.S. and Canada in 1996 and 1997. The author refers specifically to the exhibit in Toronto, the last place it was shown, which closed on November 7.

Opposite page:

Above: *Nut*, 24 x 14 x 13 cm, 1996 (bronze).

Below: *World of Worlds*, 147.5 x 142 cm (acrylic on canvas).



Letter Without Envelope

For Alberto Castro Leñero

*Luis Rius Caso**

Dear Alberto,

I was very glad and a great feeling of tranquility came over me as I once again confirmed the forcefulness of your work. I am referring to the undoubted authority that it projects to the viewer—in this case, myself—when he or she perceives in it the guarantee that it exists purely on the basis of its sheer artistic aplomb, the obsessive rigor with which the craft is exercised and, in doing so, technically and conceptually can assert itself with arguments exclusive to painting.

I consider myself a good visual consumer who suddenly becomes saturat-

ed. For professional reasons, I have recently been exposed to not a few artistic proposals intended for a wide public, akin, from an aesthetic point of view, to publicity or different passing events whose main concern is motivating spon-



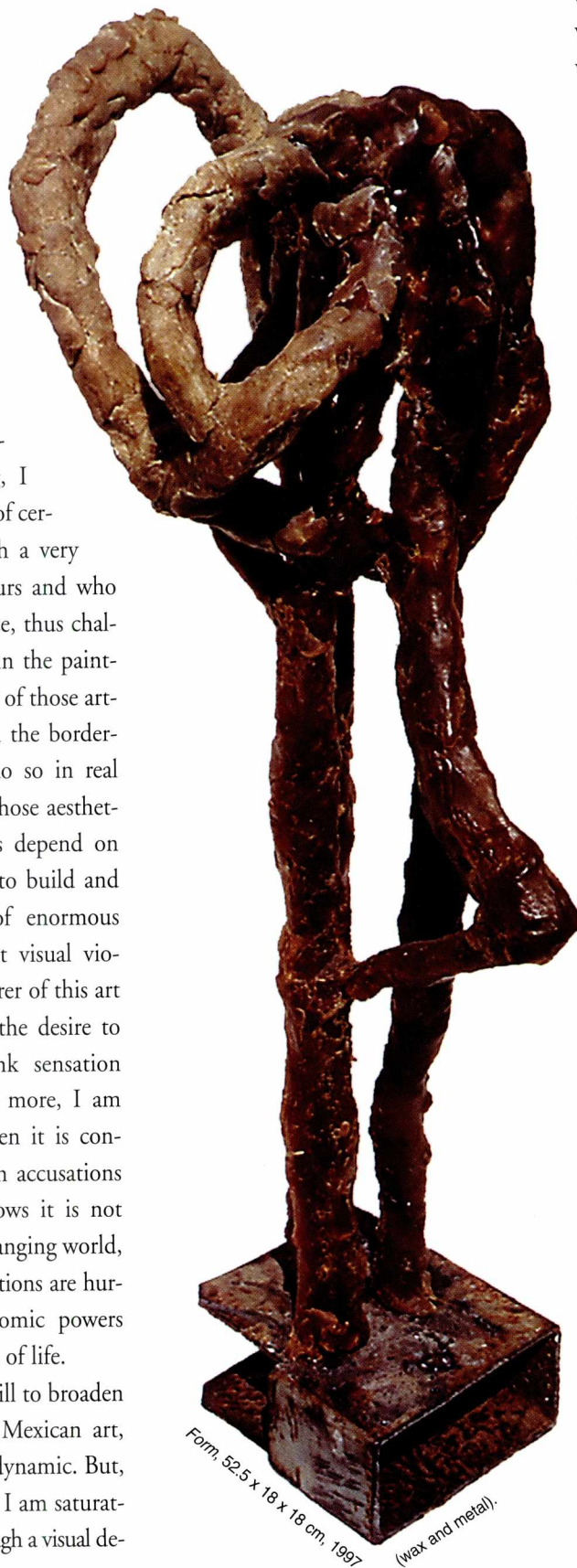
taneous reflection; or to many tridimensional productions that seek in different ways, like those passing events, to expand art to dilute it in day-to-day life; or to an infinite universe of pictorial work by artists born in the 1960s, eager to go through aesthetic categories other than beauty and so be up-to-date in our eclectic scene.

In general, I believe that this kind of phenomena concentrate on confronting one of the imperatives of art in our time, here and elsewhere: redefining the space that belongs to art in today's vast visual culture. Therefore, what is artistic is sometimes more doubt than certainty, more provocation than convention. Some contemporary exponents play on that boundary: on the dividing line

* Director of the National Center for Research, Documentation and Information About Plastic Arts, National Institute of Fine Arts.
Photos of sculptures by Dante Barrera.

between the defined and the undefined, betting on transgression and risk to expand the boundaries of what is known. The challenge is there and perhaps some artists have as their ultimate intention letting the doubt persist, establishing the indeterminate nature of the boundary. Applied to painting, I am thinking, for example, of certain artists who work with a very sparing palette and contours and who fragment the pictorial space, thus challenging the idea of unity in the painting. Or, I am also thinking of those artists who, besides living on the borderline in symbolic terms, do so in real geographical terms, and whose aesthetic and artistic dimensions depend on the vital space they need to build and therefore are possessed of enormous dramatism and even great visual violence. I am a fervent admirer of this art of our time impelled by the desire to experiment and the frank sensation of transgression. What is more, I am particularly interested when it is condemned by doubt or open accusations of fraud because that shows it is not unlike today's dynamic changing world, where the same condemnations are hurled at politics, the economic powers and, in general, all aspects of life.

I celebrate, then, the will to broaden out and redefine today's Mexican art, which is so vigorous and dynamic. But, as I said at the beginning, I am saturated. In fact, I am going through a visual de-



Form. 52.5 x 18 x 18 cm, 1997
(wax and metal).

toxication process in which I identify with a Julio Cortázar character who vomits images to clean his eyes. And it is precisely in that process in which your painting has let me recover a clear, spontaneous perception guided by personal taste. When I look at it, I value its rigorousness and the undoubted hierarchy from which it reveals itself. To a great degree I believe that this hierarchy exists because your work puts the viewer at a healthy distance, and he/she registers this on the basis of —and despite— the immediate impact of what catches his/her eye, reminding us of the idea of the auratic value of art coined by Walter Benjamin. That feeling is also the effect of the self-sufficiency you have doggedly forged in dominating your craft and in your ability to affirm a personal poetic the signs of which remit us to the work itself rather than any reference points of immediate visual reality, even though your work often contains them.

Speaking of those reference points, the clearly recognizable figures that often populate your paintings —nudes, geometric structures, or your own face, among others— I would like to say the following: I agree with the critiques that have so often and so positively referred to your work saying that these figures constitute a kind of pretext of supporting elements to give way to the main protagonists, the colors, brush strokes, transparencies, textures, veils and the whole spectrum of resources that give your artistic discourse a declaredly pictorial character. I agree, but I also think that these recognizable

shapes are a cross between the artistic and the aesthetic dimensions that have always predominated in your work. I will admit as visual pretexts the woman viewed from above in *Fortunes*, the human figures in the paintings *Illumination 1996* and *Composition in the Form of an Arch 1* and *2*, or the bronze shark jaw which is the theme of the admirable piece *Mouth*, for example. But my gaze cannot avoid the fascination that they project as shapes nor the "landing" in the world of visual reality that as a viewer they force me to make. It seems to me that your painting puts forward an up-to-date re-assignment of meaning to beauty and other aesthetic categories which many artistic discourses have dealt with, but almost always without that healthy distance I mentioned.

Among the disquieting efforts to revalue painting as an artistic genre, carried out in different fora throughout the world with what in Europe was called the trans-avant-garde as their starting point, I think the Mexican experience has been important. I also believe that you have contributed decisively to that experience, to a great degree because of the vocation that distinguishes your career. I recall round table discussions in which we emphasized the difficulties confronted by artists of your generation who grew up without the founding myths so typical of the avant-garde (like the Mexican Renaissance which gave birth to muralism or the rupture of the 1960s which projected a group of young artists), or the extra-artistic support of all kinds that in their time opened up insuperable showcases.

I would like to talk to you now about those difficulties that at a distance seem to have brought about very positive results in terms of artistic quality. They established routes with no more handholds than those of the craft itself and, as was your case, they served to set early on original poetics whose solidity made them immune to both the folklore, old-fashioned manias and the crazes on the other extreme of the spectrum that have accompanied globalization.

Please forgive the disorderly presentation of my ideas that I have just jotted down in this letter but that I have begun to develop after looking at your painting, which I have fortunately had the opportunity to enjoy again.

I hope to see you soon. Meanwhile, I send you my most affectionate embrace.

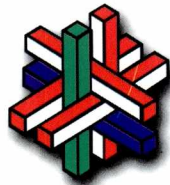
Luis Rius Caso

Alberto Castro Leñero

Born in Mexico City in 1951, Alberto Castro Leñero studied graphic communications and visual arts at the National School of Plastic Arts from 1971 to 1978. In 1978 he received a scholarship to study painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna, Italy. Castro Leñero has illustrated different cultural and educational publications for institutions like the Public Education Ministry, the National Institute of Fine Arts and the Fondo de Cultura Económica publishing house. From 1982 to 1987, he taught visual experimentation in the UNAM National School of Plastic Arts.

Since 1974, Castro Leñero has participated in seven group exhibitions and has had nine of his own, in Mexico, different European countries, Japan, the United States and Canada. Some of the group exhibitions he has participated in have been Mexico City's Modern Art Museum "On the Other Side of Time" in 1983; "Mexican Art," a mobile exhibit that toured several countries of Europe and Japan in 1992; and "The Compound Future" at the House of Latin America in Paris. Of his individual shows, "No Turn Allowed" (1982) in the Modern Art Museum and "Symbols" (1990) at the Modern Art Gallery, both in Mexico City; "Ex-temple" (1995-1996), a show of painting and sculpture in the city of Zacatecas, Mexico; and "Inner Castle" (1996-1997), his last mobile exhibit that toured the United States and Canada.

Alberto Castro Leñero has been a member of Mexico's National System of Creators since 1993. In 1995 he was selected to participate in the National Fund for Culture and the Arts Exchange Program that involves artists from Mexico, the United States and Canada, enabling him to visit New York for two months to meet other artists and see their work.



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50 años de relaciones México-Canadá: Encuentros y coincidencias

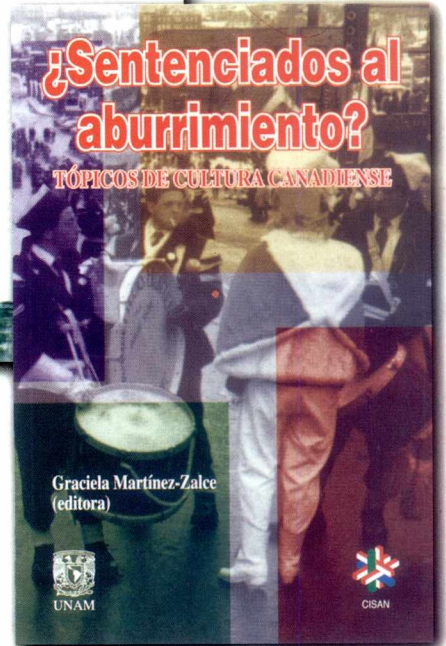
Mónica Verea Campos
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Centro de Investigaciones Sobre América del Norte
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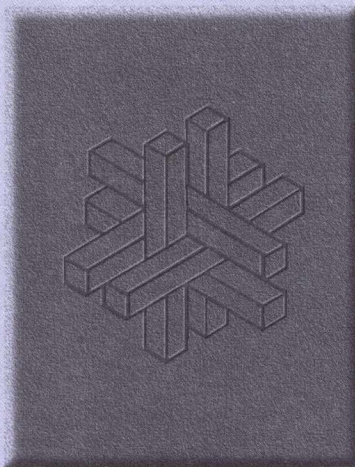
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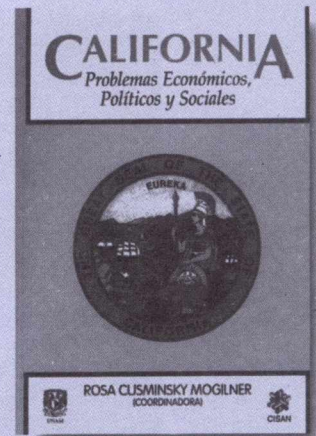




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California: Problemas económicos, políticos y sociales

Rosa Cusminski (coord). 291pp.

Despite its recent crisis, California is still one of the strongest economies in the world. Moreover, because it is a heterogeneous society, which concentrates immigrants from all over the world, especially Hispanics and the fact that it shares a border with Mexico, makes it of special interest to Mexico.

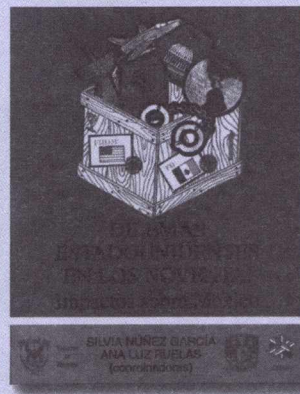
Specialists from Mexico and the United States analyze different aspects of its social, legal, historical, economic, and political life.



Elecciones en Canadá

Julián Castro Rea (coord). 152pp.
On November 4, 13, Liberal Party leader Jean Chrétien took office as Canada's twentieth prime minister.

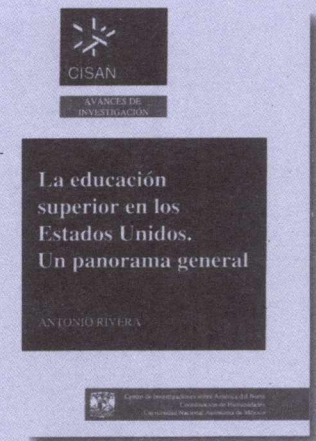
CISAN asked seven academic and journalistic specialists from Canada's key provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec to analyze the changes expected from the new Liberal government. This publication is one of the few works in Spanish on Canadian politics and repercussions for Mexico.



Dilemas estadounidenses en los noventas. Impactos sobre México

Silvia Núñez and Ana Luz Ruelas (coords), 155pp.

Reflections on our inevitable integration offers the reader a more horizontal look at current U.S. problems and their impact on Mexico: among others, the crisis of the welfare state, antiimmigrant paranoia, the changeover from a war economy to a more competitive civilian economy.



La educación superior en los Estados Unidos. Un panorama general

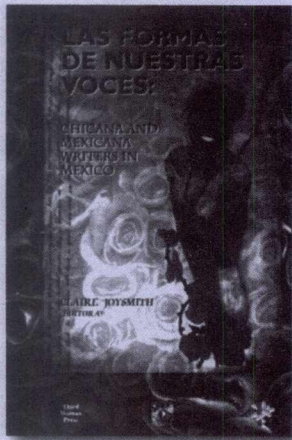
ANTONIO RIVERA

La educación superior en los Estados Unidos. Un panorama general

Antonio Rivera
Avances de Investigación

series.73pp.

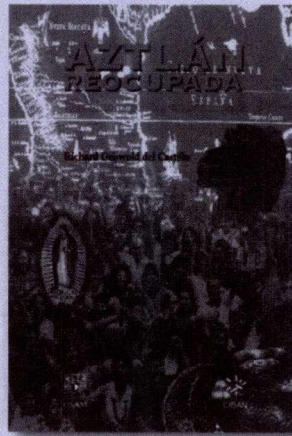
A general perspective on higher education in the United States. It covers its history, structure, and contemporary panorama.



**Las formas de nuestras voces.
Chicana and Mexicana Writers
in Mexico**

Claire Joysmith (ed). 350pp.

"The chicanas...crossed the 3,000-mile border that separates us from the most powerful country in the world with the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Malinche, the Llorona and Coatlicue on their backs, and they gave them new meaning and an identity they hadn't had before." Elena Poniatowska.



**Aztlán Reocupada
A Political and Cultural History
since 1945. The Influence of
Mexico on Mexican American
Society in Post War America.**

Richard Griswold. (bilingual edition). 106pp.

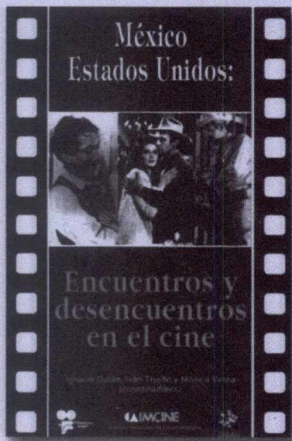
Historic overview of Chicano society from 1945 to the nineties. A retrospective analysis of political, economic, social and cultural elements that have determined Chicano cultural heritage and its present situation.



**Me voy pa' Pensilvania
por no andar en la vagancia.
Los ferrocarrileros mexicanos
en Estados Unidos durante la
Segunda Guerra Mundial**

Bárbara Driscoll. 278pp.

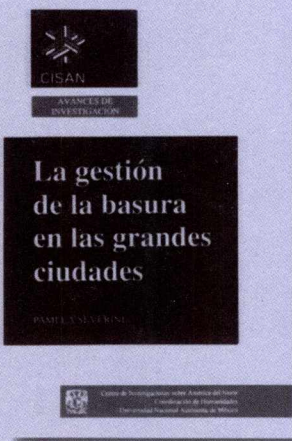
A look at the little known story of nonagricultural Mexican migrant workers in the United States under the Railroad Bracero Program instituted during the Second World War by both the Mexican and U.S. governments.



**México - Estados Unidos:
Encuentros y desencuentros
en el cine**

Ignacio Durán, Iván Trujillo y
Mónica Vereá (coords.). 196pp.

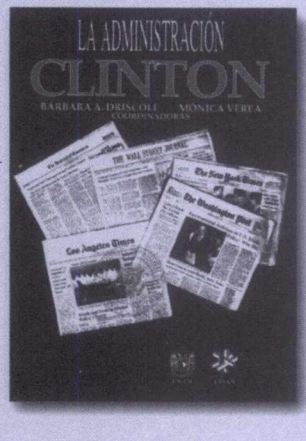
Twelve Mexican and American specialists on art and cinema look into sociocultural problems such as migration, racism and Chicano issues throughout history, from the perspective of American and Mexican films. They analyze the influence of distorted images on both sides and how these stereotypes effect mutual conceptions and misconceptions.



**La gestión de la basura
en las grandes ciudades**

Pamela Severini. Avances de
Investigación Series. 61pp.

This book compares Canadian and Mexican programs on the treatment of solid wastes in Mexico City and Montreal. Severini states that the problem can only be explained by institutional, demographical and economic reasons and could soon result in some serious conflicts.



La administración Clinton
Bárbara Driscoll, Mónica Vereá
(coords.). 404pp.

An analysis of the beginnings of the Clinton administration. A basic sourcebook to explain the transition to a Democratic Administration and to evaluate current political events.

Mexico and United States

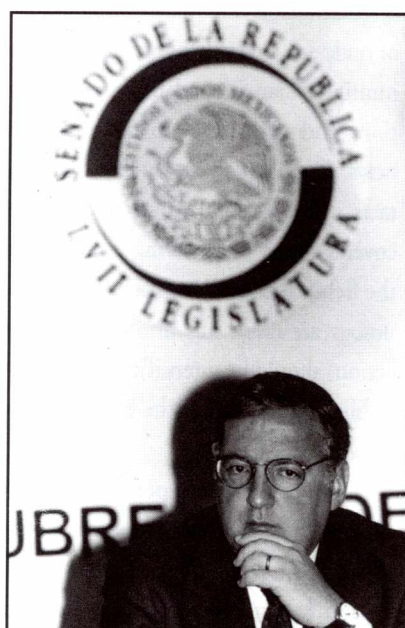
At the End of the Millenium¹

*Jesús Reyes Heroles G.G.**

Bilateral relations with the United States are central in the strategy of Mexico's foreign policy. The United States is a determining factor in Mexico's development, since it shares our country's most important border, because of the size of its population and economy, as well as due to its specific weight in the family of nations.

Mexico's relations with the United States are among the most diverse, intense and complex in the world. For Mexico, the asymmetry of resources with its neighbor poses a double challenge. On the one hand, commercial, political and cultural ties should be strengthened to Mexicans' advantage; on the other hand, sovereignty must be maintained within this context of interdependency. Therefore, Mexico's main challenge in the field of foreign policy remains the defense of its sovereignty in an international panorama that has substantially changed in recent years.

Mexican efforts to achieve a stable and beneficial relationship center on



Photos by Gustavo Graf / Imagenlatina

Ambassador Jesús Reyes Heroles.

Mexico's adherence to the fundamental principles that are the basis for the conceptual framework of Mexico's foreign policy: the right of nations to self-determination, non-intervention, the peaceful solution to controversies, barring the threat or use of force in international relations, legal equality between states, international cooperation for development and the struggle for peace and international security.

These principles, enshrined in the Constitution, are the defining points of a state's true foreign policy and reflect the spirit of respect and dignity that is a constant in Mexico's history of international relations. During the country's almost two centuries of independence, such illustrious Mexicans as Benito Juárez, Venustiano Carranza, Genaro Estrada and Lázaro Cárdenas, just to mention a few, have reaffirmed Mexico's foreign policy with their doctrines and their actions.

MEXICO-U.S. POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Five central characteristics can be pinpointed in the political relations between Mexico and the United States. First, ours is an indissoluble relationship; being neighbors is the dominant element. The second determining aspect is the existence of major differences between the living standards of the inhabitants of the two countries, an asymmetry that is one of the main challenges to be tackled. In third place, a history

* Mexican ambassador to the United States.
Translated by Peter Gellert.

full of vicissitudes marks the relations between the two peoples, whose cultures are very different. Fourth, we occupy adjoining areas in the region—North America—, where for reasons related to markets, cultures, demographics and tradition, migration flows are continual, within each of the three countries and among them. In fifth place, the relationship is based on an agenda encompassing multiple themes, which in turn reflect practically all aspects of the internal life of the two countries.

Three hundred ninety million people live in the three countries of North America; the region is the world's largest market, with 8.6 trillion dollars in 1996 gross domestic product; trade between the three countries is growing rapidly. The region's financial markets are an example of one of the world's most thorough integration processes. Some of the world's most massive and transcendental migratory movements can be observed among the three countries and the territories they cover.

Perhaps what makes North America's reality more complex is that, unlike any other neighboring countries, three countries coexist within this region with enormous differences in the living standards of their inhabitants. Per capita income in Canada is five times greater than in Mexico; in the case of the United States, the difference is six-fold. The implications of these differences in terms of basic services, schooling, health and welfare, among other aspects, are immediate and have major effects.

With the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the three countries have decided, despite

the complexity of these differences, to initiate a course of action of great scope and vision for the region's future development.

It is important to mention that parallel to and coexisting with the enormous mutual benefits in the relations between Mexico and the United States is an unbalanced and even distorted appreciation concerning the characteristics of the other country.

In general, attention is focused on the most conflictive issues, for example, drug trafficking and immigration. The unquestionable achievements in the fields of trade and investment are slighted. The multiple financial and business associations and operations do not make the news. Cooperation and intensified contacts in the cultural world receive scant coverage, and the growing exchanges in the fields of education, science and technology are rarely mentioned. Therefore, actions should be intensified to make the public's perception of the bilateral agenda realistic.

One of the most important aspects of bilateral relations concerns energy resources. The United States is the world's second largest natural gas and coal-producing country. It produces 11 percent of the world's crude, but consumes 25 percent of total oil production.

Perhaps as a result of this imbalance, for several years now, different sectors in the United States have requested that Mexico open up oil exploration, production and refining. The Mexican government's response has always been clear and forceful: the Constitution grants the state exclusive rights in these strategic areas and in this field no modifications will be introduced to its article 27.

MECHANISMS OF DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION

To deal with the issues that arise from this intense and complex relationship, different policies and diplomatic courses of action have been employed over the years. Among them are the Bilateral Commission, which has met periodically since 1993; NAFTA, which since 1994 is the main framework for establishing the standards regulating commercial and investment relations between the two countries; the interparliamentary meetings, whose characteristics and organization have been evolving as mutual comprehension between the two legislative powers with respect to the strengths, interests and representativity of their counterpart matures.

In addition to these diplomatic channels, it is also worthwhile to consider other areas of cooperation independently.

Education. The multiplication of exchanges and programs in this field is of great value in bettering understanding between the two nations. In recent years, cooperation programs between the two countries' educational systems have been reconsidered, and new programs have been established in the fields of information and technology, education for migrant workers, special education, bilingual education, schooling via radio and television, vocational education, and finally, cooperation in educational statistics. These programs will have to be intensified in coming years; they are of invaluable benefit in the long term.

Disseminating Mexican culture abroad. In its artistic, historical, anthropologi-

cal and literary aspects, among others. To disseminate the culture of Mexico in the United States is a priority instrument for achieving a better knowledge of both countries' idiosyncrasies. From this flows the value of the 20 cultural centers and institutions that operate in the United States, whose activities should be increased among the Hispanic community, U.S. citizens and the media.

Hispanic community. In the third place, it would be worthwhile to briefly review the activities designed to increase the close ties and trust in relations with the Hispanic community in the United States, particularly among those of Mexican origin, as a factor that contributes to achieving other objectives in the country's foreign policy. The Hispanic community is made up of almost 27 million people, 10 percent of the total U.S. population; it is estimated that the

Hispanic population will reach 32 million by the year 2025. In addition, this community has been boosting its political influence. At present, three Hispanics belong to the presidential cabinet, and there are 17 Hispanic congressmen and 5,400 elected officials on a state, local and municipal level. More than 800 political organizations operate in the Hispanic community.

The key challenge is to promote existing programs with a more intense and regular presence of Mexicans, both from the public sector and individuals, in the activities organized by the communities of Mexican origin. It is essential to consolidate and update a data bank with information concerning the principal Mexican and Hispanic organizations.

Administration of justice. These fields of cooperation are accompanied by other issues where conflicts have been present,

and should now be turned into areas of cooperation and understanding. The new face of crime in both nations has sparked differences: arms trafficking, the trafficking in people, the drug trade and related crimes, such as money laundering, are transnational in scope. As a result, cooperation in legal affairs and administration of justice is a field of the utmost importance.

Drug trafficking. Drug trafficking is one of organized crime's most damaging activities, for both public health and government institutions. On the one hand, it is necessary to generalize the recognition that drug trafficking responds to the existence of a corresponding demand. After a long period in which Mexico has been sustaining this view in different forums, in May, President Clinton recognized for the first time that the United States, with five percent of the world's population, consumes 50



José Murat, Ambassador Jesús Reyes Heróles and Israel Soberanis giving a press conference.

percent of the drugs used worldwide. On the other hand, it is also essential to undertake actions against supply. Mexico has been particularly energetic on this flank, since it fights against the cultivation, processing, shipping and introduction of drugs, both into Mexico as well as other countries.

Therefore, Mexico does not accept that, in the context of multilateral relations where as a result of an individual initiative the efforts of several countries come together in the fight against drug trafficking, any particular country attempting to assess, much less certify, actions whose evaluation corresponds exclusively to each sovereign nation.

Migration. On this issue it is essential to reiterate the explanations concerning its principal causes, including its demographic and manpower-related origins, its deep historical and cultural roots, as well as its connection with the tremendous asymmetry between family incomes in the two economies. Even though the United States has the right to adopt its own internal decisions aimed at controlling immigration, clearly the operations derived from new dispositions have multiplied and exacerbated both frictions on this issue and human rights violations.

The anti-immigrant wave of sentiment has fed on fears—very often exaggerated by certain interest groups—that dwell on the negative consequences of immigration without taking into account the enormous contribution it makes to the U.S. economy.

The Mexican government, its legislative branch, non-governmental organizations and the political parties, should together wage an intense communications effort to diminish fears surround-

The new face of crime
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importance.

ing the issue and seek just treatment for those men and women whose only aim is to improve their standard of living and offer their families a more promising future.

PERSPECTIVES AND WORK PROGRAM OF THE MEXICAN EMBASSY IN THE UNITED STATES

Given the complexity of bilateral relations, the Mexican Embassy faces enormous challenges. Firstly, it is essential to improve communication with the U.S. Congress and executive branch. Different existing channels and working groups have demonstrated their usefulness in finding solutions to common problems and formulating projects that translate into benefits for both countries. Adherence to the law and the principles of Mexican foreign policy will continue being the mainstay of such diplomatic actions.

For Mexico to have an appropriate presence in the United States requires the

maximum utilization of its consulates. Based on an increasing and more effective coordination around common objectives, the activities of consular officials will be valuable instruments for Mexico's diplomatic activity in our neighboring country.

In addition to these activities, we must add new orientations and programs for Mexican cultural institutes, which will allow them to become more active centers for thinking about Mexico, promoting our cultural values, and publicizing our contemporary situation.

It is also essential to intensify informational tasks and dialogue with the media and non-governmental organizations, so that the public can understand more precisely the complexity and diversity of the bilateral agenda, with a greater balance between accomplishments and frictions.

The work will be conducted in agreement with the political orientations contained in the National Development Plan and the Foreign Policy Program. The daily activities will strictly comply with the principles of Mexican foreign policy, as stipulated in the Constitution. The daily tasks will always be undertaken based on the motivation of helping to achieve our country's highest aims. In this honorable task, we will never lose sight of our central objective of building a fairer and freer nation, a more democratic, sovereign and prosperous Mexico. ■■■

NOTES

¹Synthesis of the testimony presented by Jesús Reyes Heróles G.G., Mexican ambassador to the United States, before the Foreign Relations Commission of the Mexican Senate, October 23, 1997.

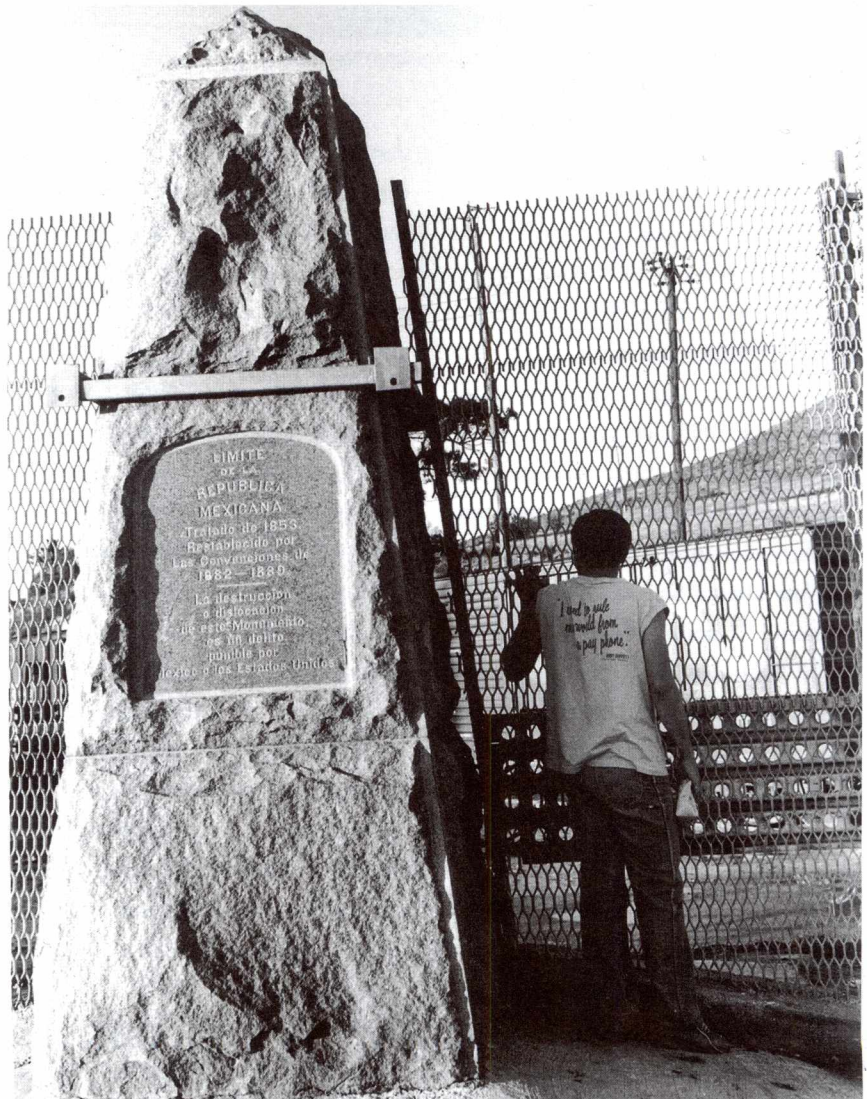
U.S.-Mexican Relations

From Understanding to Collaboration on Migration?

Remedios Gómez Arnau*

Last October 21, the Working Group on Migration and Consular Affairs, a body of the Mexico-U.S. Binational Commission, released the first U.S.-Mexico Binational Study on Migration. In March 1994, Mexico proposed this unique study to the United States so that respected, independent academics from both countries could review Mexican labor migration to the U.S. and attempt to build a data base and a common perspective on the question. Mexico made the proposal on the basis of the understanding that government positions on the question on both sides of the border would be unlikely to coincide if they were not situated in a more objective, serene framework. Therefore, the participation of scientists from both countries was not only indispensable, but also opportune, given civil society's growing input on international topics, previously the exclusive province of government representatives.

The study was done from 1995 to 1997. Its Mexican coordinators were the Foreign Relations Ministry and the



Photos by Marco Antonio Cruz / Imagenlatina

Mexican migration to the U.S. is deeply rooted in history, going back to the establishment of the U.S.-Mexico border in 1848.

* CISAN Secretary of Academic Affairs.



Emigration has been a systematic drain on the population in Mexico since 1960.

Ministry of the Interior, as well as the National Autonomous University of Mexico, represented by the author of this article. For the U.S., the coordinator was the Commission for Immigration Reform, created in 1990 by the U.S. Congress, with a mandate until the end of 1997. The 20 researchers (10 from each country) who did the study work in different disciplines and academic institutions all over Mexico and the United States. A plural representation of points of view and thorough familiarity with the topic was consciously sought when picking the researchers to ensure that migration would be broadly and profoundly examined without any one focus dominating.

The study has five chapters: "Quantification of Migration," "The Characteristics of Migrants," "Causes of Migration," "Economic and Social Effects in Both Countries" and "Responses to Migration." It also includes a conclusion dealing with policy implications. The

researchers reviewed the existing literature, developed new analyses, visited the migrants' different places of origin and destinations and talked to them and their families and neighbors. They also commissioned other experts from both countries to do research projects on specific aspects of migration. Therefore, a good deal of the information in the study was already familiar to specialists in the topic. Its main contribution is bringing together scattered information about Mexican migration to the United States and integrating a bilateral view of the whole phenomenon.

The development of this binational perspective is, therefore, one of the main merits of this study, which allows for more reliable estimates since they are based on both Mexican and U.S. sources, which both contrast with and complement each other. The study also facilitated a greater understanding of the problem as a whole because it incorporated the points of view of both countries about the kinds of migrants

to take into consideration, the reasons behind their move, the costs and benefits implied for both countries and the motives behind the responses both governments and societies have made to migration. In addition, the study incorporates new contributions in interpretation culled from the bilateral information and elements of analysis; these contributions should not only enrich the academic debate, but, mainly, facilitate political dialogue between both countries.

The study's main conclusions are the following:

1. Mexican migration to the United States is a complex, dynamic phenomenon, with deep roots in history that go back to the establishment of the U.S.-Mexico border in 1848, and particularly the 1870s, when the first considerable flows of Mexican workers were attracted by work in U.S. agriculture and railroads.

2. Today, a considerable part of migration continues to be economically motivated due to wage differentials that affect the supply and demand of labor; it is also sustained by family and social networks that link the two nations.

3. There are three basic kinds of Mexican migrants: temporary (authorized or unauthorized), whose main place of residence is in Mexico; permanent (authorized or unauthorized), who habitually reside in the United States; and naturalized citizens of the United States, who have legally resided there for five years or more and fulfilled other prerequisites.

4. In 1996, the total estimated number of U.S. residents who were born in Mexico was the following:

- Total population born in Mexico: 7.0 to 7.3 million;
- Authorized residents: 4.7 to 4.9 million;
- Unauthorized residents: 2.3 to 2.4 million.

This represents approximately 3 percent of the total U.S. population and about 40 percent of the U.S. population of Mexican descent; it is equivalent to 8 percent of the population of Mexico. These figures include 500,000 people who have become naturalized U.S. citizens. In addition, in 1996 there were about 11 million native born U.S. citizens of Mexican descent, or Mexican-Americans.

5. The 1980s brought a massive increase in authorized Mexican migration, to a great degree due to the legalization program approved in 1986. In the 1990s, authorized migration from Mexico continues to be considerable given that the relatives of Mexicans with legal status could become permanent residents. It is estimated that at least a million relatives of persons who achieved legal status will comply with the prerequisites to be able to request authorized entry into the United States.

6. Data from Mexican censuses and indirect means of measurement show that emigration has been a systematic drain on the population in Mexico since 1960. The net emigration from Mexico from 1990 to 1996 was approximately 1.9 million people, or about 315,000 per year. Of these, approximately 510,000 are authorized migrants; 210,000 are relatives of migrants given legal status by the 1986 law; 550,000 are migrants given legal status by the Special Agricultural Workers Program; and 630,000 are unauthorized migrants.



The violation of unauthorized migrants' human rights is a constant source of bilateral tension.

7. The exact number of unauthorized entries of Mexicans to the United States is unknown, but in the fiscal year of 1995, more than 1.3 million people were detained attempting to enter the United States without going through the regular border inspection. However, that figure registers the number of thwarted entries, not of individuals who made the attempts.

8. Studies on the Mexican border about temporary migrants show that the number of persons going back and forth between 1993 and 1995 declined (the flow going south to north dropped from 790,000 to 540,000, and north to south, from 624,000 to 433,000). This drop in the rate of circulation could have different explanations, the most plausible of which is that many people are deciding either to establish residency in the United States or prolong their stays. This, in turn, may be due to the fact that crossing the border is being made more difficult by greater controls, that whole families

are migrating and that migrants increasingly work in less seasonal, urban jobs.

9. More than half of temporary migrants work in agriculture: 13 percent of the permanent residents work in this sector, while less than 10 percent of Mexicans who have become naturalized U.S. citizens do. Thus, migrants are increasingly urban and have diversified employment, moving into manufacturing and service jobs and with different destinations from the traditional ones in the states of California, Texas and Illinois.

10. Today, the new employers and labor brokers and agents, together with the social networks of relatives and friends, match up a growing list of industries, jobs and geographical areas in the United States with a likewise growing list of Mexican communities which send migrants north.

11. There is reason to believe that today's high levels of Mexico-U.S. migrants could be at their peak. In the



Seeking a better future, regardless of the obstacles.

next decade, the changes in Mexican demographics—which will mean a lower number of individuals in the age group that tends to migrate—and other structural changes in both Mexico and the United States—like the creation of more jobs due to the growth of the Mexican economy and a greater supply of low skilled U.S. workers due to their exclusion from social assistance programs—could begin to decrease both migratory pressure and opportunities.

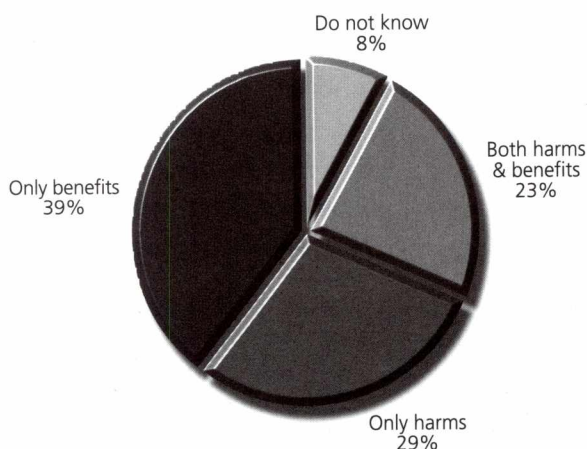
12. A balanced evaluation of the impact of migration is difficult to make because of the lack of data. However, it may be stated that migration has diverse effects and produces both benefits and costs to both countries.

Today, a considerable part of migration continues to be economically motivated due to wage differentials that affect the supply and demand of labor; it is also sustained by family and social networks that link the two nations.

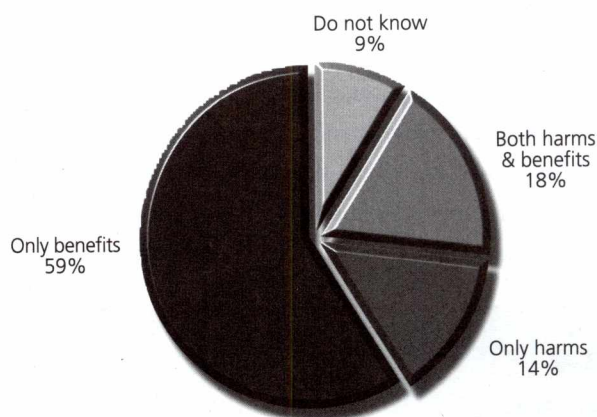
13. The money migrants send home plays an important role in many Mexican communities, but migration also creates costs because of the loss of human capital and social disintegration. Also, these transfers of funds differ greatly from one migrant to another, depending on his or her earnings in the U.S. and the costs of his/her trips back and forth. In addition, most of migrants' earnings do not accrue to the Mexican economy but are spent in the United States. All monies sent by migrants from the U.S. to Mexico in 1995 were the equivalent of 57 percent of the hard currency put into direct investment in the same year and to 5 percent of the total earnings from Mexican exports.

Perceptions About the Effects of Migration

On the Mexican Economy



On the U.S. Economy



Source: Mori de México 1997. Sample size is 1,150.

Taken from: *Estudio Binacional México-Estados Unidos sobre Migración, 1997*. (Mexico City: Foreign Relations Ministry [SRE]-U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, 1997), p. 59.

14. Those who most benefit in the United States from Mexican migration are the migrants themselves, companies, consumers and the economy. The highest costs are incurred by state and local governments and low-skilled workers. In the labor market, the costs arising from migration are above all for the “substitutes” for that labor: that is to say, the new Mexican migrants compete mainly with other low-skilled workers, above all, earlier Mexican migrants who are now residents. From the fiscal point of view, Mexican are no more likely to use social services than are comparable U.S. citizens. Temporary migrants and recent residents depend very little on governmental services because they are young and often their very unauthorized status means that they do not fulfill the requirements to have access to them. When the research into residents shows that U.S. state and local governments pay more in services to families born in Mexico than they receive in taxes, this is to a great extent due to the

fact that their low incomes imply lower taxes. The greatest cost is linked to education, which may be seen as a drain on public funds, but it also may be seen as an investment in the future.

15. Unauthorized migrants are sometimes victims of abuses and violations of their human rights, both by government officials and people who traffic in migrants on both sides of the border. This is a source of binational tension.

16. Mexico’s and the United States’ political response to migration have been episodic and, given the influence of pressure groups, migration policies have often been contradictory and have had unexpected results.

17. The policy of opening up the border to trade and investment but not to labor generates a situation in which bilateral tensions tend to continue.

18. The study points to the advantageousness of greater dialogue and more mechanisms for consultation, with an eye toward the future, to facilitate bilateral cooperation in finding mutually be-

neficial solutions to unauthorized migration between Mexico and the United States.

19. The demand, supply and networks for migration are all contributing factors to migratory flow and therefore, all solutions must take these three factors into consideration, be multifaceted and be applied in both countries.

20. The economic and social integration of Mexico and the United States implies a greater need to accommodate, and even facilitate, the mobility of individuals between the two countries. Both nations should facilitate authorized movement and reduce barriers to the authorized entry of migrants.

21. The two countries should explore ways of optimizing the benefits and minimizing the costs of migration, for example, by lowering the costs of money transfers and helping families to use them for production. They should also continue to do research and collect binational data.

22. The United States and Mexico should carefully study the idea of setting up a bilateral foreign worker program. However, it must be taken into account that a program of this type could stimulate the creation of new migratory networks which would add to the flow of new migrants and not substitute unauthorized migrant workers.

23. Attention should be given to ways of alleviating the distress and difficulties caused by migration in Mexican communities, particularly the separation and break-up of families.

Clearly, the binational study deals with Mexican migration northward from different angles, thus providing a substantially complete panorama of the phe-

nomenon. Its results are expected to be useful to promote new research into little studied topics and to propitiate more effective dialogue between the two countries, with the aim of managing migration better. However, the question remains open as to whether a more complete comprehension of the phenomenon will also lead us to mutual collaboration. **MM**

Major Historical Periods In Mexico-to-United States Migration

- 1870-1890 U.S. recruitment for southwestern railroad construction and agriculture; Mexican Consular Law of 1871 provides for protection of Mexicans abroad with respect for local sovereignty;
- 1891-1917 U.S. laws restrict Mexican (and Canadian) land admissions; U.S. World War I recruitment (including some Canadians and Bahamians); Mexican consular report of wage abuses of Mexican workers in the U.S.
- 1920s U.S. Border Patrol considers undocumented entry a misdemeanor with penalties attached and expulsion of Mexicans on "public charge provisions" are common;
- 1929-1933 Depression in the U.S.; repatriation of Mexicans partly funded by Mexican and private aid groups with frequent promotion by Mexican consulates;
- 1940s World War II; Bracero Agricultural Workers Program begins, jointly negotiated by both governments (also a smaller railroad program from 1943-1946);
- 1951-1952 Upon third renewal of the bracero program, Mexico suggests U.S. measures against the employment of unauthorized workers, but U.S. adopts "Texas Proviso" making it a felony to import "illegal aliens" while exempting employers from culpability;
- 1954 Negotiations for a new bracero agreement break down though U.S. continues recruitment; Mexican government attempts unsuccessfully to stop emigration; massive U.S. deportations of unauthorized workers under "Operation Wetback;"
- 1964 End of the bracero program;
- 1980s U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) imposes sanctions on employers who knowingly hire unauthorized workers and legalizes 2 million unauthorized residents; U.S. Asencio Commission recommends economic development to address unauthorized flow; Mexico reinforces and expands its consular protection of Mexicans abroad;
- 1990s Bilateral dialogue on migration increases; North American Free Trade Agreement signed; U.S. strengthens border control; new U.S. laws on expeditious removal of unauthorized migrants and to restrict welfare benefits to legal immigrants; the Mexico/U.S. Binational Study on Migration is carried out.

Taken from: *Estudio Binacional México-Estados Unidos sobre Migración, 1997.*

(Mexico City: Foreign Relations Ministry [SRE]-U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, 1997), p. 2.

Drug Trafficking and Continental Geoeconomic Control

*Silvia Elena Vélez Quero**

In these times of transition toward a different world order, one of the givens in our daily life is the existence of drug trafficking in the world, the region and our country. Media stories about the increasing audacity of organized crime, the discovery of tons of illicit drugs, the destruction of crops and the arrest of traffickers constantly remind us of it.

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As if this were not enough, we also know today that drug trafficking is linked to and corrupts parts of society and what used to be thought of as the “clean” economy, such as financial and stock market operations, direct investment, trade, electoral campaign financing and even alms to the Church. All of this increases and complicates the challenges that governments and societies must face.

For all these reasons, some governments, including those of the United States and Mexico, have classified drug trafficking as a problem of national security, making its solution a priority. By contrast, other Latin American governments view it as related to the lack of economic development, to which they attach more importance.

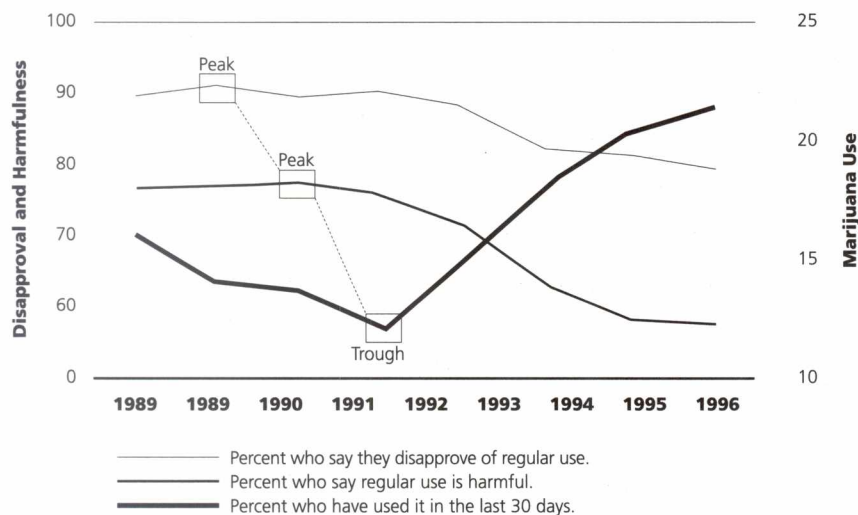
If to this difference in views we add the clear ineffectiveness of policies de-



Tomás Bravo / Imageniattina

Availability of drugs has not been reduced despite long-standing efforts and billions of dollars spent.

Marijuana: Disapproval and Perceived Harmfulness of Regular Use Compared with Past 30 Day Use Among 12th Graders, 1996



Source: Monitoring the Future Study, University of Michigan, 1996.
 Taken from: *The National Drug Control Strategy, 1997*.
 (Washington, D.C.: Office of National Drug Control Policy, Executive Office of the President, 1997), p. 23.

signed to fight drug trafficking,¹ the censorious suggestions published in the U.S. magazine *Science*² and made by the Geopolitical Drug Observer,³ as well as the constant accusations of corruption in Mexico, its “Colombianization”⁴ and the growing strength of Mexican crime syndicates, we have the complete picture behind the thinking in this article about the reasons for the proliferation of arguments exaggerating the importance of drug trafficking. With that objective in mind, we should look at the phenomenon from different angles with a geopolitical perspective.

THE ECONOMIC ANGLE

Three factors are fundamental in this field:

1. *U.S. efforts to broaden out free trade to all of the Americas.* Despite the clear indifference of U.S. voters, the

Clinton government is eminently interested in broadening out the free trade agreement to include all of the Americas. The essential reason for this is the concrete results of NAFTA for the United States, particularly its flourishing exports, “responsible for one-third of U.S. economic growth since 1993, which has helped to create 13 million new jobs.”⁵

With that aim, more than three years ago President Clinton requested that the U.S. Congress grant him authorization to negotiate free trade on the “fast track,” but the request has been held up by the reluctance of some members of congress, fearful, among other things, of the possibility of engendering run-away shops, job losses, environmental damage and the endemic corruption and chain-reaction financial crises in Latin American countries. Nonetheless, Clinton is convinced of the importance of his country’s leadership in hemisphere-wide

free trade since, as Thomas McLarty, special envoy to the president for Latin America, said in an interview published October 20 in *Time* magazine, “By the year 2010, our exports in this hemisphere are expected to be greater than to the European Union and Japan combined.” For that reason, the United States is making efforts toward creating a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Many Latin Americans are anxious to accompany the United States in this endeavor, be it through NAFTA or a hemisphere-wide agreement. For example, faced with the delay in the approval of the fast track, Chile even seems willing to sign a bilateral treaty. On the other end of the spectrum, Brazil has expressed indifference; it seems to be satisfied with the progress on the Mercosur pact⁶ and the possibilities its strong European ties offer.

2. *The dispute between the European Union and the United States for the Mercosur.* This confrontation became clear at the Third Economic Summit of Mercosur last September, when Brazil and Argentina were faced with a dilemma: improve the structures of the regional common market, closing ranks with the European Union (EU) or open the door to the Free Trade Area of the Americas. Both countries would do well to think about the fact that “the EU produces bigger profits: U.S.\$1.2 billion a year compared to U.S.\$910 million in NAFTA.”⁷

3. *The authorization of high-tech U.S. arms sales to Latin America.* The powerful corporations Lockheed-Martin and McDonnell Douglas/Boeing lobbied intensely for six years for the U.S. Congress to lift the ban on this kind of trade.⁸ They manufacture F-16 and F-18

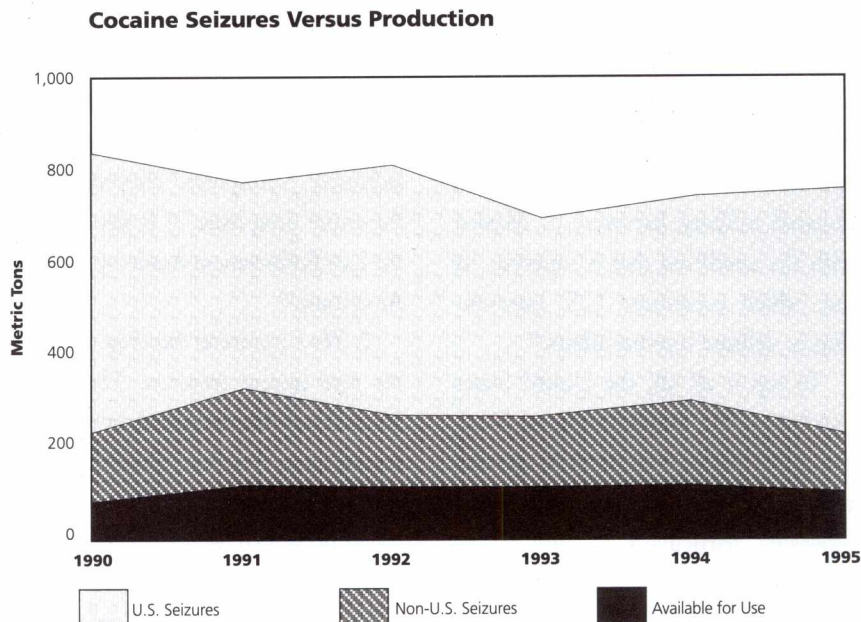
fighters of which Chile, for example, plans to buy 24. Another example is Brazil, which has already announced its purchase of U.S.\$1 billion in equipment to modernize its air fleet. Very probably these purchases will break the delicate current military equilibrium and create pressure in the region to rearm.

This proves that economic interests take precedence and that other very pressing social needs are set aside. To justify lifting the ban on arms sales, U.S. officials argue that aging Latin American air forces need modernizing and that, in addition "the United States risked losing influence if it did not offer its planes, leaving the turf to European companies."⁹ To avert possible destabilization and any cause for an arms race, Clinton has offered to analyze and select his buyers, as though the United States still had a monopoly in the field and were not facing ferocious European competitors who also urgently need markets.¹⁰ For some analysts, this decision "invites governments to invert priorities and encourages military establishments to grab a larger slice of the pie for expensive and unnecessary weapons systems."¹¹

THE ANGLE OF MILITARY AND POLITICAL CONTROL

From the military and policing perspective, three things must be taken into consideration for our analysis of drug trafficking:

1. *The illegal arms trade.* An issue of the first order for Mexico is the copious north-south flow of the illegal conventional arms trade which supplies not only drug traffickers but also organized



Source: National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee, Drug Enforcement Administration, 1996.

Taken from: *The National Drug Control Strategy, 1997.*

(Washington, D.C.: Office of National Drug Control Policy, Executive Office of the President, 1997), p. 53.

and unorganized crime, guerrilla organizations, rural "white guards" or vigilante committees and ordinary citizens concerned with the insecurity and violence that reigns today in the country. Despite this, the topic has been relegated to a long list of others at the negotiating tables of the High-Level Contact Group on Drug Trafficking¹² because, in my opinion, in this way the United States is able to disguise its responsibility as the main arms supplier. "Of more than 25,000 illegal guns seized in Mexico since 1994, 90 percent came from the U.S. Many are Army-surplus rifles and bazookas, and some of the choicest hardware ends up in the Arellano stockpiles."¹³ This has a boomerang effect, since it also affects the United States. We have only to recall the drug king's threat of firing a missile at McCaffrey during his visit to the southern U.S. border area, or the attacks on U.S. agents from the Mexican side of the border.¹⁴

2. *The training of military and police personnel in the United States by the Pentagon, the DEA and the FBI.* For a long time now, and increasingly today, thousands of Mexicans have been trained in different military and police tasks in the United States, despite the distrust of U.S. agents, who are reluctant to share information with them.¹⁵ We have thus adopted their logic, strategies and combat techniques, in addition to using their arms. It is worth mentioning that, today, the drug traffickers, with their immense reserves of cash, buy the know-how of U.S. and Israeli mercenaries.¹⁶

3. *The assignment of increasing numbers of military personnel to the antidrug war.* The United States has fostered the incorporation of Latin American military personnel¹⁷ and the creation of elite forces for the fight against drugs. In the case of Mexico, it supported the creation of the Special Airborne Forces Group (GAFE) supervised by U.S. agen-

cies, as well as other binational border units with limited tasks. In this way, it fosters corruption of the military,¹⁸ and conflicts of interests and jurisdiction. In addition, the United States has sold or donated military hardware to Mexico with the condition that it supervise its use, which constitutes U.S. intervention in delicate internal affairs.¹⁹

To top it all off, the United States encourages the militarization of Mexican police forces,²⁰ in order to support military control over any future social blow-ups, particularly because of the great importance it attaches to stability.

THE ANGLE OF CONTINENTAL
GEOSTRATEGIC CONTROL

Lastly, from the geostrategic perspective, there are three important items to consider:

1. *The Multinational Antinarcotics Center in Panama.* This project has gone

forward because “Washington is behind the idea...not only as a way to keep its interdiction antennas extended into South America, but as a way to galvanize lackluster hemispheric cooperation on the entire drug issue.”²¹ It also includes the Law Enforcement Academy for Latin Americans.²²

2. *The Continental Antidrug Army and the fight against terrorism.* The United States already has the virtual acceptance of several Latin American governments for creating it. However, it still lacks the approval of Mexico, which has traditionally been suspicious of similar measures that it has considered interventionist and a threat to its sovereignty.

3. *The U.S. offer to Argentina of privileged treatment in national security matters.* The United States has offered to give Argentina preferential status on security questions as a “main U.S. ally” in NATO, the status of external member like that of Israel, South Korea and

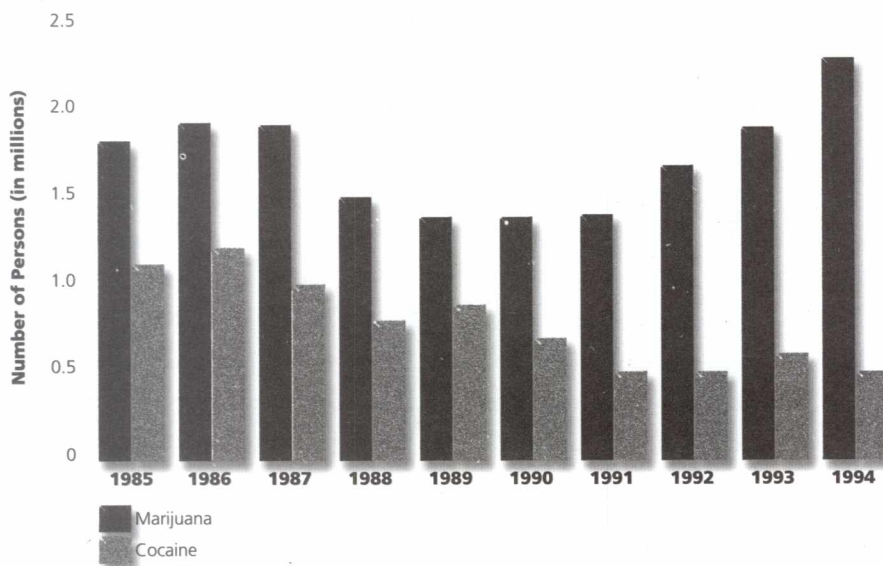
Japan, something which creates disquiet particularly in Brazil and Chile.²³ This is a strategy to create mistrust between the two strong members of Mercosur.²⁴

CONCLUSION

The breadth, ubiquity and very nature of U.S. policy against drug trafficking, including its myriad consequences, with its stress on punishment over prevention, make for an exceptional vehicle for intervention. It has all the ingredients of war: arms, military personnel, air, land and sea movement throughout the continent, militarization of police forces, control of the population for the “strategic needs” of national security, etc., with a dynamic, slithery, well-heeled enemy.

It is far from this author’s intention to belittle drug trafficking. However, I have shown here that there is also economic, military and geopolitical data that reveal other, parallel intentions that are perhaps of greater transcendence. These intentions suggest that great caution must be exercised when deciding to participate in U.S. programs against drugs and more creativity put into the negotiations with the U.S. on this issue. This is particularly the case considering that the failure of antidrug policies from the Nixon administration on has been clear for some time. Despite the considerable human and economic resources invested in them, their achievements have been meager. A suspicious mind would tend to think that the insistence on continuing to implement failed measures stems from

Cocaine and Marijuana First Time Users, 1985-1994



Source: National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 1996.
Taken from: *The National Drug Control Strategy, 1997.* (Washington, D.C.: Office of National Drug Control Policy, Executive Office of the President, 1997), p. 11.

these policies' having real objectives quite different from their explicit ones.

This author is convinced that the omnipresence of drug trafficking, magnified by the media, is an attempt to create a bogeyman similar to the U.S.'s old enemy, communism, to justify disguised interventionist strategies, to convince us of Latin American impotence,

corruption and incapacity vis-à-vis the size of the challenge and to present the acceptance of U.S. aid, strategic leadership and aims as the only possible alternative.

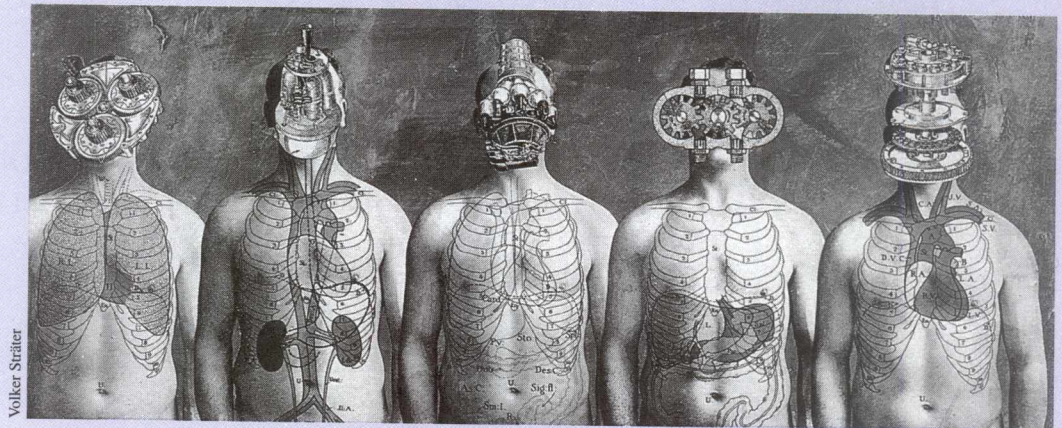
The United States has its own objectives which, I believe, are linked to the challenges to its hegemony stemming from globalization. On that depends

the need to consolidate its economic and geostrategic power over the bloc of the Western Hemisphere in order to confront its European and Asian rivals. Then, perhaps it will be able to maintain its currently challenged global leadership. We must recognize that the United States is addicted, but addicted to power. ■■■

NOTES

- ¹Despite long-standing efforts and expenditures of billions of dollars, illegal drugs still flood the United States....They have not materially reduced the availability of drugs." *Drug Control. Long-standing Problems Hinder International U.S. Efforts*, General Accounting Office, GAO/NSIAD-A7-75 Drug Control (Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office, February 1997), p. 3.
- ²Mexico City's *La Jornada* daily quoted *Science* magazine's October 1997 issue as saying "The U.S.\$34 billion the U.S. invests annually on drug control strategies have failed to reduce the supply and the politicians in charge ignore the scientific evidence that show that prevention and treatment are cost-effective ways of controlling narcotics abuse." See "La evidencia científica no está determinando la política pública sobre drogas," *La Jornada* (Mexico City), 8 October 1997, p. 67.
- ³This international nongovernmental organization, with its more than 300 scholars and correspondents, denounced "Washington's plans to militarize and control its southern neighbor through a media war that has used leaks to journalists to prefabricate the image of a country in need of permanent legal and military tutelage." *Excelsior* (Mexico City), 26 September 1997, p. 5.
- ⁴This expression is used to put an equal sign between Mexico and Colombia today in terms of violence, political and social instability, crime rates, guerrilla actions, drug trafficker cartel activity, the production and trafficking of drugs, etc. In a recent interview with *Time* magazine, Brian McCaffrey voiced his disagreement with the expression, saying that Mexico did not exhibit Colombia's levels of violence nor its lack of governmental control over large parts of the country, nor was Mexico's economy fundamentally bound up with drugs like Colombia's. *Time*, 20 October 1997, p. 62.
- ⁵"Traveling on the Fast Track," *Time*, 20 October 1997, p. 35.
- ⁶Trade among the members of Mercosur has increased from U.S.\$5 billion in 1990 to U.S.\$20 billion in 1996. See *Time*, *ibid.*, p. 35.
- ⁷See "Inicia la 'guerra' por el Mercosur," *Reforma* (Mexico City), 17 October 1997, p. 11A.
- ⁸The ban dates from the James Carter administration and was motivated by Latin American social instability and dictatorships in the southern part of the hemisphere.
- ⁹See *La Jornada* (Mexico City), 2 August 1997, p. 1.
- ¹⁰See "Industries d'armement: Jospin ouvre le feu," in *Le Nouvelle Observateur* 1703 (Paris) 26 June to 2 July 1997, p. 64, and "L'Europe peut-elle faire capoter Boeing?" in *Le Nouvelle Observateur* 1705, 10-16 July 1997, p. 44. Also, "Clinton Reverses 20-year Ban on Arms Sale," in *Washington Report on the Hemisphere* 17 (no. 15) (27 August 1997): p. 7.
- ¹¹"Clinton's Bad Call in Reassuring Arms Sales," *The Journal of Commerce* (10 October 1997): p. 9a.
- ¹²This group is a bilateral mechanism created on Mexico's suggestion in 1996 to discuss questions of drug trafficking.
- ¹³"Fresh Battalions," *Time* (22 September 1997): p. 18. The Arellano brothers are the bosses of the Tijuana cartel, one of the most powerful and aggressive in the world. [Editor's Note.]
- ¹⁴"To put out hits on us is a nightmare we never imagined," says a veteran U.S. border agent." *ibid.*, p. 17.
- ¹⁵"How do you know you're not training a bunch of crooks?" *ibid.*, p. 16.
- ¹⁶See *La Jornada* (Mexico City) 19 August 1997, p. 41 and *El Paso Times*, 19 August 1997.
- ¹⁷In Mexico, 21,000 members of the armed forces, recently joined by 600 more, already take part in these programs. *Reforma* (Mexico City), 24 September 1997, p. 25A.
- ¹⁸The army has been investigating dozens of officers for their links with drug trafficking since the 1980s. See "Drugshocked," in *The Economist* 344 (no. 8029) (9 August 1997): p. 28.
- ¹⁹The U.S. has sold Mexico, among other pieces of hardware, 72 helicopters.
- ²⁰Office of National Drug Control Policy, *U.S.-Mexico Counterdrug Cooperation. Report to Congress* (September 1997): p. 29.
- ²¹See "Panama Drugbusters Welcome," *Time*, *op.cit.*, p. 18. The same article states, "U.S. agents and technology—everything from radar to AWACS surveillance aircraft—would bear much of the burden, with an estimated 2,500 U.S. troops kept on to run and protect the center."
- ²²Mexico offered to support the project but pointed out the need to make it more specific. See *El Financiero* (Mexico City), 21 October 1997, p. 40.
- ²³See *Excelsior* (Mexico City), 13 October 1997, p. 2A.
- ²⁴This offer to Argentina ratifies what has been said about the incorporation of Eastern European countries: "NATO expansion is a cheap gesture, the perfect policy centerpiece for an Administration sadly lacking in meaningful strategic vision." Sherle R. Schwenninger, "The Case Against NATO. Enlargement: Clinton's Fateful Gamble," *The Nation* 265 (no. 12) (20 October 1997): p. 22. It also clears up who the direct beneficiaries of NATO expansion in Eastern Europe and South America are. "Expansion would only benefit American defense contractors, at the expense of the new members." Daniel T. Plesh and Alistair Millar, "The Marshall Plan Helped People, Not an Industry," *Los Angeles Times* (2 July 1997), p. 7B.

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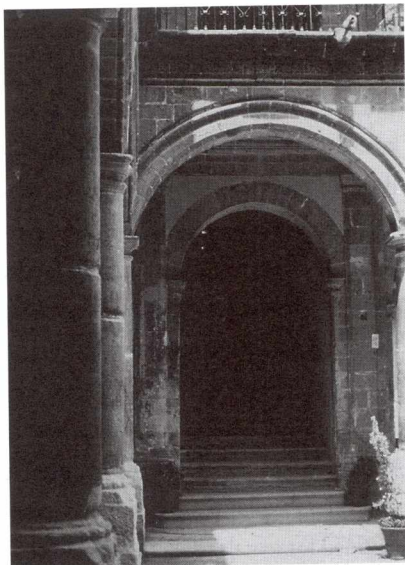
Housing and Realty

In Eighteenth Century Mexico City

*Gisela von Wobeser**

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Mexico City was both one of the world's largest and most beautiful cities. Its environs were magnificent, set as it was amidst a great high plateau surrounded by mountains and lakes.

* Researcher at the UNAM Institute for Historical Research.



The center of the city was situated on the so-called *traza*, the piece of land given to the Spaniards in the sixteenth century to live on, set apart from the indigenous neighborhoods that surrounded it.¹ The district was set up according to both pre-Hispanic settlement patterns and the Renaissance concept of urban areas, and, as a result, it



The House of the Count of Miravalle at 20 Isabel la Católica Street. **Above:** The Heras and Soto House.

became one of the world's first modern cities from the point of view of city planning. The blocks were drawn like a chessboard with wide streets.

The architecture was superb. Most of the structures were great stone houses taking up entire blocks. Almost all the buildings were two stories tall, giving the area a feeling of unity, with the many church atria and spires to break the monotony.

The size and magnificence of the houses were such that Baron Alexander von Humboldt later baptized Mexico City "The City of Palaces." The buildings' harmonious facades testified to the quality and creativity of the architects of New Spain.

These buildings were not only dwellings, but also host to political and cultural institutions, as well as workshops and shops of all kinds. We must remember that Mexico City was the most important political, financial, cultural and economic center of New Spain.

In contrast with today, the buildings were utilized to their complete capacity. They included areas for owners or officials to live in, and the rest was rented out for family dwellings, trade, workshops, small manufacturing and institutions.

For example, the Viceroy's Palace accommodated offices, apartments for the Viceroy and members of the court, as well as jails. In addition, on what is today Moneda Street, storefronts were rented out. Space in the Casa del Cabildo, or town hall, was similarly distributed: there were rooms for the *corregidor*, or chief magistrate, and his family and for a few other officials, and rented dwellings and storefronts on the ground floor.

Convents, schools and hospitals, as well as other religious and charitable institutions' buildings, also included rooms destined for rentals when they began construction.

Owners lived on the second floor and used the rest of the building for



Patio of the Heras and Soto House. **Right:** House at 23 Vizcaínas Street.





their businesses or made some other profitable use of it. Therefore, people who belonged to different social classes and had very different kinds of occupations worked and lived under the same roof.

Although rented dwellings and commercial property were created mainly for the owners' profit, they also contributed to solving the housing problem in the city and fostered the establishment of commerce in the downtown area.

The buildings were rectangular and their outer walls extended to the sidewalks. Between the street and the buildings, then, there was no space, as is often the case today. Almost all the buildings were two stories high and many also had an entresol or mezzanine, a low, extra story between the first and second floors. Space was utilized to the maximum, and, with the exception of the patios which were both sources of light and means of access from one part of the building to another, the entire surface was covered with construction.

The buildings were generally made of stone, although some were brick. The roofs were flat, held up by timber-work. The patios almost always had stone columns that made beautiful corridors and galleries on the second floor. Doorways and windows were made of wood protected by beautiful wrought iron.

The outside walls of the buildings had recesses built into them called *accesorias*, rooms used as stores, workshops or dwellings that the owners rented out. These rooms usually had no direct access to the inside of the building and could only be entered from the street.

The *accesorias* used for dwellings had one or two rooms with a door and sometimes a window onto the street. It was common for them to be built on the ground floor (in Spanish, the *planta baja*) of ecclesiastic buildings and often the streets were named after them, like, for example, *Calle de los bajos de San Agustín* (Street of the low part of Saint Augustine), or *Calle de los bajos de la*

House of the Count of Miravalle.



Profesa (Street of the low part of The Avowed). The *acesorias* rented as shops were rooms of variable size, some of which had a second room on the top floor, often used as a dwelling. This kind of *acesoria* surrounded the Terceros Hospital, for example, the Royal Pontifical University and the Royal Native Hospital.

When buildings were on a plaza, the owners were allowed to occupy 21 feet of it on the condition that they build a portico used for commerce with housing on the second floor. In the Santo Domingo Plaza, for example, each unit had a portico, a storefront and a back room on the ground floor and a dwelling on the second floor.

Acesorias de taza y plato (cup and saucer rooms) were very common: they had a single room divided in two by a wooden loft reached by a steep ladder or stairway. The name was derived from the fact that the two areas created by the loft were stacked on top of each other. These shops were rented by artisans or

merchants who had their workshop or store on the ground floor and lived in the loft. For example, the Royal College of Saint Ignatius of Loyola had 60 *acesorias* of this kind on three of its sides, forming a kind of wall that isolated it from the outside. Many private homes also had them, like that of the Count of Santiago of Calimaya which today houses the Museum of Mexico City.

Access to the interior of the buildings was through the large front door. Workrooms, servants quarters, offices, storerooms for wood and coal, carriage houses, stables for horses and mules, pig sties and chicken coops were distributed around one or several of the interior patios.

In the middle of each patio was a well or fountain that provided water for the inhabitants. Laundry sheds and toilets were common areas usually situated in one of the back patios.

Some buildings had patios the owners did not use that they rented to the

poor at very low prices. The tenants lived in huts they made of whatever materials they could find. The Mexican expression “*vivir en quinto patio*” (literally, “living in the fifth patio,” meaning to live very poorly) originated with this practice.

The stairs to the entresol, or mezzanine, and the second floor were in the patios. The large buildings used to have independent staircases to the owner’s rooms and separate stairs for the servants.

The mezzanines were usually rented out to people of middle income, and the number of medium-sized family dwellings in each building depended on the size of the construction. Each apartment had a kitchen, dining room, drawing room, bedrooms, indoor patio and, sometimes, a bathroom, sewing room, office or other extra room.

The top floor was for the upper classes, including government officials like the viceroy, the rector of the university and the director of the mint, as well as wealthy families. These apartments were often very spacious, with many rooms: reception rooms, sitting rooms, bathrooms with tubs and heaters and the others required for refined living according to the customs of the time. They also had the privilege of having private toilets, laundry sheds and drying rooms. In many cases, this part of the house was more luxurious architecturally and better finished than the rest.

In addition, whole buildings, called *vecindades*, were built to rent to people of middle and low income. Most of these had wide corridors from one end of the building to the other with the rooms on either side. The most modest accommodations had a single room; others had, in

Interior of a house on 5 de febrero Street.



addition to the one room, a small yard. The laundry sheds, kitchens and toilets were shared. Some of the *vecindades* had more spacious living quarters on the top floor.

On the outskirts of the city in the old indigenous neighborhoods, beyond the original area reserved for the Spanish, land was used very differently. In these areas, much of the land still belonged to the indigenous people themselves and was worth much less. The constructions were of adobe and thatched with palm leaves. There was no public lighting, water or clean-up services. The huts were surrounded by small vegetable gardens and fenced yards for domestic animals.

The inhabitants of Mexico City lived in whatever kind of housing they could afford. High government officials and the well-to-do lived in spacious apartments on the upper floors that kept away the noise and stench of the street and put them out of the reach of thieves and beggars. They could enjoy the roofs with their beautiful views that gave them fresh air on hot summer days and sun in the winter. They also had carriage houses, stables, servants' quarters and storehouses on the ground floor.

People of more modest means had to make do with a mezzanine or a *vecindad*. They had several rooms and a kitchen and most probably their own bathrooms, but lacked the other facilities of the wealthy.

The poor lived in one or two rooms, in the *acesorias*, in a *vecindad* or in one of the inside patios, sharing the kitchen and other conveniences. To bathe, they went to the public baths.

But even these families were fortunate compared to the great number of

people who were homeless and slept under the open sky. During the day, they formed bands of beggars who accosted passers-by, making the city very unsafe. They lived off rubbish, alms and food distributed by some of the convents.

Overpopulation was one of the city's biggest problems. At the end of the eighteenth century, Mexico City was the largest urban area in the Americas and one of the largest in the world. According to the census ordered by Viceroy Revillagigedo in 1790, the city had 112,296 inhabitants. In addition, a considerable transient population poured into Mexico City, the commercial and political center of the colony, from the rest of the country.

Not only was it a problem that there was insufficient housing for the size of the population, but also that those families that did have a roof over their heads lived in very cramped conditions, fostering promiscuity, a lack of hygiene and violence.

On the other hand, it was very difficult to have a house of one's own. Most families of all social classes lived in rented accommodations because construction was very expensive and very few empty lots were available except in marginalized areas. Buying a home was more viable because many people went bankrupt and houses changed hands frequently. Auctions offered attractive terms of payment: the buyer only had to put down a small sum and the rest could be paid off by taking on the mortgages on the buildings, usually held by ecclesiastical institutions. However, the difficult part was keeping the house, because the owner had to pay the interest on the mortgage, which came to 5 percent annually. Many owners could not make these payments and ended up losing the property to their creditors.

Most buildings belonged to different church institutions, which rented the dwellings, storefronts and workshops to private individuals or other institutions.

House of the Count of Calimaya.



Urban rental property was one of the best capital investments, so institutions bought as many pieces of property as possible. They also acquired them through donations or after being attached for debt. It has been calculated that toward the end of the colonial period, about 45 percent of all the buildings in the city, among them the very best, belonged to these institutions. For example, by 1785 the Convent of the Conception alone owned 55 pieces of property which encompassed 86 houses, 48 dwellings and mezzanines, 86 *accesorias*, 134 rooms in different *vecindades*, 17 stores and 11 smaller stalls, called “merchant’s boxes.” In this way, through paying rent on their real estate, civil society contributed to the maintenance of the clergy.

Until today, no specific comparative studies of rents and tenant income have been made, but apparently rents were high for most people and owners had difficulty collecting. Some convents hired bill collectors, but even in those cases they always had renters who left their bills unpaid.

A constant complaint from tenants was the lack of maintenance done on the buildings. On the other hand, the owners seem to have had problems with tenants who damaged the installations. Some tenants were so poor that they unscrewed the locks on their little rented rooms to pawn them.

Another enormous problem was the bad sanitary conditions caused by crowding, the absence of toilets and drainage



Mayorazgo de Guerrero House.

or running water and people living together with animals. The beautiful patios we admire today in the colonial buildings were not covered with flowered hedges as some people romantically imagine. Quite the contrary, they were full of refuse and filth because they were the pathway for carts in and out and the animals who lived there. And all the rooms and storehouses faced them. In the back patios were the laundry sheds and toilets that were used by the many inhabitants of the lower floor. Given the way the buildings were laid out, the foul air circulated little and

many dwellings had no ventilation at all.

Personal cleanliness must have been precarious. Only very few fortunes were able to bathe in their own homes. The rest had to go to public baths, but since they were not free, many went without bathing. Hygiene in food preparation and drinking water were also bad. The lack of hygiene was the source of many diseases and caused the epidemics that periodically besieged the city causing innumerable deaths.

Lastly, it is important to point out that the city had very few green areas. The borders of the original tract of land that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries made it necessary to concentrate the buildings in a small area impeded the creation of parks and gardens inside the houses. The only ones which existed were in the atria of the churches and the convent orchards. To enjoy nature, one had to go to the Alameda Park and

the La Viga Promenade. In the afternoons, wealthy women would go out for a drive in their carriages to these areas, accompanied by their menfolk on horseback. Longer drives could be taken to Chapultepec, Tacubaya or San Antonio de las Cuevas, today known as Tlalpan. ■■■

NOTES

¹The tract of land went from what is now José María Izazaga street on the south to Belisario Domínguez, República de Venezuela, Perú and Apartado on the north, and from today's Jesús María street on the east to San Juan de Letrán, Ruiz de Alarcón and Aquiles Serdán streets on the west.



The Alhóndiga de Granaditas

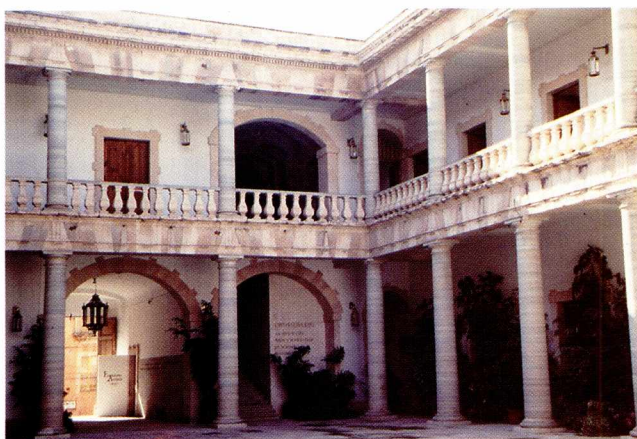
In Mexico's War of Independence

José Reyes Méndez*

The Alhóndiga de Granaditas is undoubtedly one of the most famous buildings in Mexican history because it was there that the first battle took place between the Spanish Viceroy's forces and the insurgents in their 1810 movement for independence.

The word *alhóndiga*, from the Arabic, means a public storehouse where grain is bought and sold. The *alhóndigas* the Spaniards built in many cities of New Spain, then, were grain warehouses that supplied the population's needs. The name *Granaditas* comes from the Spanish word for pomegranate, *granada*, and was given to the building because one of the houses torn down to put up the storehouse had a garden with pomegranate trees.

Construction began on the Alhóndiga de Granaditas in Guanajuato, the



Photos by Dante Barrera

capital of the Intendancy of Guanajuato¹ in early 1798 and the building was inaugurated in 1809 under the supervision of the intendente, Juan Antonio de Riaño y Bárcena.

The building not only ensured grain supply in the capital of the province he governed,² but also testified to his knowledge and good taste in architecture, since it was a spectacular example of the neoclassical style. It began to operate as a warehouse almost immediately.

However, a few months later, the uprising led by Miguel Hidalgo, the parish priest of the neighboring town of Dolores, and his sweeping march to demand

the unconditional surrender of the Guanajuato Intendancy conferred on it an entirely different significance.

When Hidalgo heard the news that the plans for an armed uprising for independence from Spain had been discovered and the conspirators identified, he decided to move up the date for the insurrection. He was supported

by Ignacio Allende and Juan Aldama, both trained soldiers who until then had served as officers to the Spanish Crown.

Hidalgo rose up in arms on September 16, 1810, and made his first goal the occupation of Guanajuato, the provincial capital. On September 18, the intendente received word of the events in Dolores and organized the defense of the city believing that Hidalgo and his men would march directly there without delay. However, the insurgents decided to make a sweep through the countryside before dealing with the capital; during the march, their ranks swelled with recruits, though many were not very well

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armed. On September 20, a false alarm rang through the city and Intendente Riaño y Bárcena feared the townspeople would join Hidalgo's forces. He then decided to entrench, and on September 24 he had all archives and public monies moved to the Alhóndiga; in addition to the corn stored there, great quantities of flour and other supplies were brought in. Some Spaniards and criollos joined the intendente, bringing their families, property and jewels with them. Approximately 500 men and women took shelter in the Alhóndiga bringing with them three million pesos in valuables. (By way of comparison, the warehouse, which had been finished less than a year before, had cost under 220,000 pesos to build.) Three ditches were dug to close the main streets leading to the Alhóndiga and the east door was bricked up with adobe, leaving only the main entrance in use.

The intendente published a decree September 26 abolishing the payment of tribute and requested aid in a letter to the commander of the brigade at San Luis, Félix María Calleja.

[The population] voluntarily joins the insurgents. They already have in Dolores, San Miguel, Celaya, Salamanca,

Irapuato....Here, seduction is winning the day; security has been wanting; confidence has been wanting. I have fortified myself in the best possible place and will fight to the death...come to my aid; I fear an attack at any moment. I will not write any more because I have had no rest nor have I undressed since the seventeenth, and for the last three days I have not slept an hour through.

THE TAKING OF THE ALHÓNDIGA DE GRANADITAS

On Friday, September 28, before nine in the morning, insurgents Mariano Abasolo and Ignacio Camargo presented themselves at the ditch on Belén Street and sent two documents from Don Miguel Hidalgo to the defenders of the Alhóndiga demanding their surrender, one official and another private. In the first document, Hidalgo wrote:

General Headquarters, Burras Hacienda, September 28, 1810. The large army I command has elected me its Captain General and protector of the Nation in the fields of Celaya...whereby Your Excellency is duly informed that I am legitimately authorized by my Nation to carry out those beneficial projects which I deem necessary in its

favor. Said projects are equally useful and favorable to both Americans and Europeans who have decided to reside in this Kingdom....I do not see the Europeans as enemies, but only as an obstacle which encumbers the good offices of our enterprise. Your Excellency will be so good as to manifest these ideas to the Europeans who have sequestered themselves in the Alhóndiga so they may decide if they declare themselves enemies or they prefer to be made prisoner, in which case they will receive benign and humane treatment...If they do not accede to this request, I will apply all the forces and stratagems at my disposal to destroy them...God keep Your Excellency for many years, as is the desire of your faithful servant, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla. Captain General of America.

But the intendente, after consulting the occupants of the fortress, decided to reject the offer and wrote:

I recognize no other authority, nor to my knowledge has any other been established, nor do I recognize that any other Captain General in the Kingdom of New Spain exists, than His Excellency Don Francisco Xavier de Venegas, Viceroy of this land, nor do I recognize any other legitimate reforms than those agreed upon by the entire Nation in the

session of its Cortes Generales [still] to be held. My duty is to fight like a soldier and that noble sentiment motivates all those around me. Juan Antonio de Riaño.

The second letter was confidential and addressed to the intendente personally, for whom Hidalgo felt great respect and friendship:

My dear Sir, the regard in which I have always held you is sincere and I believe it due to the great virtues of which you are possessed. The difference in our ways of thinking should not diminish that. You will do what you think most just and prudent without prejudice to your family. We will fight like enemies if that is decided. This offer is not born of fear, but of the sensibility of which I cannot divest myself....Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla.

And the intendente answered, “My dear Sir: The exercise of arms is not incompatible with sensibility, which demands of my heart the due gratitude to your expressions in benefit to my family, whose fate does not perturb me on this occasion. Juan Antonio de Riaño.”

Riaño also sent his last communication to Calleja, saying, “I am going to fight because I am to be attacked at this very instant; I will resist as much as possible because I am an honorable man. May Your Excellency fly to my aid...to my aid (Guanajuato, September 28, 11 o'clock of the a.m.)”

The intendente distributed his troops to meet the enemy, with one part of the battalion and countrymen on the roof of the Alhóndiga and the rest in the trenches. Near noon, the small organized force and the confused, unarmed crowd that made up Hidalgo’s army

—about 20,000 men— presented itself. The soldiers from Celaya occupied the houses near Granadas and the crowd climbed the hills that dominated the building. The intendente, noting that the largest enemy force was striking the northeast trench, thought he should go out to reinforce it with 20 men. As he returned, walking up the steps to the Alhóndiga entrance he was struck by a rifle shot in the eye and died instantaneously. The death of the intendente sowed confusion among the building’s defenders; they all wanted to command and, except the soldiers, who continued to follow their superiors’ orders, no one wanted to obey. The crowd on Cuarto Hill began to hand throw and sling stones down on the Alhóndiga, a rain of rocks heavier than any hailstorm. So heavy was the barrage that the Alhón-



Replica of the Dolores churchbell used by Father Hidalgo to call the people to insurrection.

diga roof rose a full hand more than its normal height.

With the intendente dead, the cavalry outside the building pushed back and the defenders driven off the roof, the garrison began to weaken. Meanwhile, an avalanche of people surrounded the building right up to its walls, even though they were countered by a rain of improvised missiles. Gilberto, the intendente’s son, a lieutenant, used mercury containers to make grenades³ and inflicted grave losses to the insurgent army. Those closest to the door headed by a miner nicknamed “Pípila”⁴ brought great pieces of torch-pine and set fire to them, rapidly burning down the door. Pushed by those behind them, the crowd surged forward through the flames and, though it was met by firing at point-blank range, rushed into the Alhóndiga patio. It was five in the afternoon. The battle was over.

This was the first encounter between insurgents and royalists; the first blood had been shed in the fight for independence.

FINAL COMMENTS

On November 25, 1810, royalist forces commanded by Félix María Calleja retook the city of Guanajuato. The next day, Calleja ordered that the upper class prisoners be put to death. They were shot in the back like traitors in the Alhóndiga patio, facing the east entrance that had been walled up.

In the first months of 1811, the insurgent commanders were taken prisoner in Acatita de Baján, Coahuila. Transported to Chihuahua for trial,

they were condemned to death. Calleja ordered that the heads of Hidalgo, Allende, Aldama and Jiménez be taken to Guanajuato, where they arrived in October 1811. Put in cages, they were hung on the corners of the Alhóndiga with the following inscription:

The heads of Miguel Hidalgo, Ignacio Allende, Juan Aldama and Mariano Jiménez, famous criminals and leaders of the revolution, who pillaged and stole goods from God and the royal treasury. Nailed here by order of the King's Brigadier Félix María Calleja.

The heads of the four patriots were displayed there until March 28, 1821, when, after independence, Anastasio Bustamante and Luis de Cortázar ordered they be brought down and interred.

Over the years, the Alhóndiga served different purposes: it was a warehouse and a school, a dwelling and a barracks. Not until 1864 was it again given a lasting function when Maximilian of Hapsburg visited the city as emperor and



ordered that it be made a jail. Several of the building's columns and railings still bear the inscriptions carved into them during the 84 years it was used to house prisoners. Almost 100 years later, in 1958, the Alhóndiga finally became a regional museum. **MM**

NOTES

- ¹Between 1786 and 1812, new Spain was divided into 12 intendancies, an administrative district or province; each intendancy was headed up by an intendente, the chief administrative official, like a governor, who also controlled the district treasury. [Editor's Note.]
- ²Because the city of Guanajuato suffered from constant flooding, grain kept in warehouses built on low ground was often lost.
- ³The vials were iron cylinders about one foot high and six inches in diameter with a narrow neck that screwed shut; they were filled with grapeshot and gunpowder through a small hole in which a fuse was then inserted.
- ⁴Pípila is a controversial figure about whom there are conflicting accounts. The best known story makes him a hero who set fire to the door single-handed. Several historians, however, question this version, given their doubt that he acted alone. Despite this, the great statue of Pípila on the heights of Guanajuato is one of the city's emblems.

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The Alhóndiga de Granaditas Regional Museum

In 1958 the Alhóndiga de Granaditas became a regional museum where the visitor can roam through our history and admire two murals by Guanajuato-born painter José Chávez Morado, *The Abolition of Slavery* (1955) and *Song to Guanajuato* (1966). The museum's collections are organized into four basic sections:

Archeology: Collections of pre-Hispanic seals, Mesoamerican art and ceramics from Chupícuaro.

History: This section covers from 1750, the approximate date when the Viceroyalty divided the country into regions, to 1917, when Mexico's current Constitution was written, establishing the contemporary state of Guanajuato.

Art: The Hermenegildo Bustos Room offers the visitor paintings and the Romualdo García Room exhibits photography.

Ethnography: The Guanajuato Arts and Traditions Room covers this topic.

Museum Hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The Art of *Amanteca* Or Feather Craftspeople

James Olsen*

The first feather I remember stuck out of my mother's hat which she had put on to go out one evening. It was at a jaunty angle and certainly added a degree of panache to what was really a rather straightforward woman's style hat tidily perched on the top of her head with a short veil flowing down over her eyes. Little did I realize, some half a century ago, that while feathers were regularly used as adornment and decoration in Europe and in North America, there was a rich and sophisticated craft of feathers where the color saturated plumes of birds like the hummingbird, Guatemalan quetzal, toucan, macaw, Honduran parakeet and others now extinct were used like an artist's palette. That craft was essentially Mexican and had been brought to the level of art in Amantla, the neighborhood in Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztecs, where the *amanteca*, or feather craftspeople, worked.

Since featherwork was seen as a form of wealth, fertility, power and status, feathers were kept in the storerooms of the aristocracy.

Indeed among the Aztecs, featherwork was regarded as perhaps their greatest art form. The shields and capes of the Aztec warriors were decorated in resplendent figurative designs with feathers attached by a paste or with needle and thread. The cloth favored by the nobility was thread wound with feathers. The designs themselves indicated the social status of the citizen. Feathers were also objects of tribute or booty and often used as currency just as the cacao bean was. Since featherwork was seen as a form of wealth, fertility, power and status, feathers were kept in the storerooms of the aristocracy; they were also used to lavishly decorate palaces, thrones, idols at festival time and dancers performing religious ceremonies. Cortés was so taken with the featherwork of the Aztecs that in his second letter to Charles V of Spain, he described some of the feathered gifts he was sending to him. King Charles was impressed and shared some with his Hapsburg relatives which is why some arti-



Saint Rita of Casia, seventeenth century, 22 x 15 cm. National Museum of Anthropology Collection.

Photos reprinted courtesy of Fomento Cultural Banamex, A.C.

* Freelance writer.



facts are found in European museums today.

There are eight surviving pieces of Aztec featherwork in the twentieth century and five are shields. There are two very famous shields in the Stuttgart Museum. But the most famous one of all which was discovered in the eighteenth century is currently in the Vienna Museum für Volkerkunde. In the Museum of Ethnography in Vienna, even after 500 years one can see Montezuma's vivid green headdress, a ceremonial coat of arms and a great fan which was probably used by an aristocrat's servant to keep the flies off him. There is also a shield in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. It is circular with the blue face of a

Above: Replica of the Ambras Headdress, National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City. (The original is in Vienna's Museum of Ethnography.)

Using feathers like pigment, indigenous artists managed to integrate thousands upon thousands of feather wisps, many smaller than the size of a pinhead, into representations of hair, flowers, skies and landscapes in subtly differentiated tonalties.

god with goggle eyes and fangs. It's scary and it was meant to be, as if it communicated to the viewer the ferocity of the Aztec gods and the ignominious death to come to the loser in battle who would later be sacrificed to those gods.

After the Conquest the Franciscans and Augustinians sustained the featherwork tradition by displacing it from Aztec paganism to liturgical clothing, church altars and feather mosaics of saintly images. Contrary to what some scholars thought years ago, the art of featherwork was alive and vital throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Christian missionaries provided both German and Dutch woodcuts, metal engravings and Spanish liturgical books which served as inspira-

tion for native artists by providing new devotional images like the ones of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Throughout the world there are famous surviving masterpieces of this period. In Mexico, in the Archbishopric of the Puebla Cathedral in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit, often called the Octagonal Chapel, there is a well-known mosaic of St. John the Baptist, St. Peter, St. Francis of Assisi and of the Holy Family. The Holy Family mosaic has hummingbird feathers in the background with gold leaf around the edges of the vestments and the haloes and wings of the angels who are holding small gold crowns over the heads of the central figures in the style of some Flemish paintings. Another brilliant example is the work *Shrine of Our Lady of Remedies* in the National History Museum in Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City. Also in the capital, there is a 40 cm by 31 cm seventeenth century Pietá of the Virgin holding her dead Son in her lap in the Franz Mayer Museum. Finally, there is the Virgin of Sorrow often referred to as "The Doll's House" in the Puebla University Museum.

Examples of this compelling and vibrant colonial art form are scattered throughout the world in Italy, Spain, France, Austria, Germany and the United States. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, there is a triptych of enameled gold with the scene of the crucifixion in carved wood on a background of iridescent feathers. In the Los Angeles County Museum there is a chalice made of gold plated silver and rock cristal decorated with wooden sculptures of the apostles placed in niches lined with feathers. Of course, the

Vatican has a number of works which were sent to the Pope by the religious authorities in New Spain for storage and display.

Since the Indians used hieroglyphics in their codices, they were accustomed to doing extraordinarily detailed work in miniscule enclosed spaces. Using feathers like pigment, they managed to integrate thousands upon thousands of feather wisps, many smaller than the size of a pinhead, into representations of hair, flowers, skies and landscapes in subtly differentiated tonalities.

The work of the great French impressionists comes to mind as one looks at this art. Feathers have a minute complex structure. Their brilliant pigments are deposited in the protein or keratin which constitutes the feather. When sunlight shines on and through them, the light is prismatically dispersed with the visual effect of a sheen. It is a pyrotechnical display of concentrated color with suggestions of subtle dramatic energy. More

A number
of feather artists
use *amate* paper
as their canvas
or backing.
This paper comes
from the Mexican fig tree
or what the Aztecs
called *amacuahuitl*,
the paper tree.

than any other characteristic perhaps, it is the energy of the gradations of color that define this work.

Unfortunately, by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this great art form became moribund as it was displaced by oil painting. Perhaps this is one of the great tragedies of Mexican art. In spite of the continuing cultural adaptations that indigenous artists made to European art forms, the technology of oils and finally the modern printing process almost destroyed one of the most sophisticated art forms humankind has ever invented.

But the *amantecas* continued to show their aesthetic flexibility. After 1830, for example, some feather artists began to use colored lithograph prints as a base, covering them with feathers and extending the image on a backing of sheet metal like the *retablo*. At other times, they used colored cutout figures taken from popular lithographs of the day. But these newer machine manufactured technologies were undermining the old methods and these newer ersatz creations lack the concentrated visual power of great featherwork craft.

The story of the *amantecas* should rightly end with the tyranny and triumph of the modern mass produced image over an old and honored crafted art form. But it doesn't. While featherwork, even when defined simply as a craft, is not currently practiced on a large scale in Mexico, the tradition remains alive in the hands of some contemporary Mexican craftspeople. The Tzotzils of Zinacantán, for example, adorn garments with feathers as do the other Mayas in the Highlands of Chiapas, particularly for their wedding *huipils*.

Today, certainly, the craft of featherworking continues in two regions of Mexico: the Toluca Valley and in Tlaxcala, Puebla. Clearly, the quality of the yarn, the weaving and the feather ornamentation are not what they were in pre-Hispanic times. Using a backstrap loom, the cotton thread is spun together with down. After lengths of cloth are produced, they are used as the base for appliqué. There are decorative motifs of various dyed feathered braids which have been tinted blue, red and yellow which are placed into the background of overall white down.

Traditional featherworking also continues in some communities like the Huicholes of Nayarit, who, because of their social and physical isolation in the mountains, have retained the integrity of many aspects of their culture. In the Huichol mythology natural phenomena are personified as divine beings who in turn are related to specific colors and plumages. Votive arrows are made and used in religious ceremonies because they are seen as spiritual messengers to the gods who grant protection.

In their culture, feathers retain their pre-Hispanic cultural meaning and some wonderful arrows made of eagle feathers can be seen in the National Museum of Anthropology. The contemporary performers in the Dance of the Shells also still make feathered shields and use them as part of their headpieces.

If one had to date the “renaissance” of featherworking in this century in

terms of a resurgence of the form as a fine art, it would probably begin in 1920 when Manuel Gamio, the great Mexican historian and archaeologist, designed and supervised the construction of two mural patterns, one with an Aztec serpent design and the other with



José Rodríguez, *Coat-of-Arms with Emblems*, 118 x 91 cm, 1829, National Museum of Anthropology Collection.

a Mayan serpent. Joaquín Villasana carried out Gamio’s design on black silk with quetzal feathers on gold, silver and colored silks. Subsequently other contemporary Mexican artists like the weaver Carmen Podín became interested in the medium. In the late 1970s and early 1980s she exhibited feathered robes, capes, shields and collages in the capital but stopped producing in the late 1980s because of the difficulty of finding feathers.

The process of preparing the feathers when they can be found is painstaking because they are first boiled in water to remove all of the impurities like grease, next rinsed, and then submerged again in dyed water with salt or sometimes Campeche wax used as a fixative to

bind them. A number of feather artists use *amate* paper as their canvas or backing. This paper comes from the Mexican fig tree or what the Aztecs called *amacuahuitl*, the paper tree. From the Mendoza Codex, we know that during the reign of Montezuma the Aztecs were using about half a million sheets of paper per year for legal documents, tribute records, civil archives, poetry, etc. Paper making continues in towns such as the small Otomí village of San Pablito near Chicontepec in Veracruz. As you approach the village, you can hear the sound of clapping caused by the women beating on a soft substance, wood fibers, with wooden boards. Using the mulberry and wild fig tree, the Otomís make the paper by pulling the bark off the trees, separating the inner bark from

the outer one, boiling the bark in ash water or lime, and finally rinsing the fibers which are then spread on a wooden board and beaten until they are felted together.

The Aztecs used a glue they called *amatzantli*. This glue was made from orchid bulbs. They sliced fresh bulbs, dried them in the sun and then ground them up. These particles were carefully sifted and the resultant powder mixed with cold water, five parts water to one

part powder. Naturally other kinds of fixatives and materials for backing are used today. Jorge Castillo, for example, a feather artist from Taxco, makes a design by punching holes into a thick sheet of silver and then by inserting into the sheet feathers of various colors which have been coated with a polyester resin.

Artists like Juan Carlos Ortiz from Puebla have solved the feather problem by having their own aviaries. He traces the figure he wants to represent and then glues the feathers onto it from the birds he raises. Gabriel Olay Olay, who lives in Tlalpujaura, Michoacán, works in a similar fashion. Many of his compositions are in the Morelia Cultural Center. In 1980 Carmen Padín had a major show of 32 feather pieces in the Modern Art Museum in Mexico City for which an interesting catalogue was published, *Carmen Padín: Thirty-two Works of Feather Art of Today Using Different Techniques*.

If we think of some of the works of contemporary U.S. artists like Frank Stela and Robert Rauschenberg who have incorporated physical objects like part of an automobile hood right onto the canvas itself, featherworking in this sense is quite modern because it allows the artist to play with space, perspective, tactility, collage and color in strikingly innovative ways.

Some other contemporary Mexican artists, like Aurelio Franco Obregón from San Andrés, Tuxtla, use feathers as part of their sculptures. He makes sculptures of clay and wax and then covers the sculpted objects with feathers. In 1990 he had a major exhibit of 26 of his pieces in Mexico City. In that same year,



The Immaculate Conception, 19 x 12 cm, nineteenth century, National Museum of Anthropology Collection.

Unless otherwise specified, all photos by Michel Zabé

After the Conquest the Franciscans and Augustinians sustained the featherwork tradition by displacing it from Aztec paganism to liturgical clothing, church altars and feather mosaics of saintly images.

Olay Ramos exhibited in the National Museum of Anthropology. In the town of San Francisco del Rincón in the state of Guanajuato, Josefina Ortega Salcedo has developed her own method of placing a base of light-colored feathers on paper and then cutting sections of drawings out of Chinese tissue paper of various colors and covering these drawings with feathers of the same color. Everything is glued together, and she outlines her forms with a dark line made of feathers to conceal the seams. She recently stopped working in the medium, however, because of the time and expense.

There is still a good deal of featherworking in places like Michoacán but it is increasingly difficult today to find artists of stature working in this medium. What has happened is that an art related to, but really quite different from featherwork, *popote*, has emerged. *Popote* is like featherwork because craftspeople construct a complex mosaic of aniline colored straws analogous to feathers which are pressed down on wax covered boards. The visual effect is not nearly as dramatically striking, of course, but many of the techniques employed are identical. These *popote* products can be found for sale in towns near the capital but they are more like a minor and interesting craft variant on the art of the great feathered works Mexico has produced in the past.

An excellent book, *El Arte Plumaria en México* (The Art of Featherwork in Mexico) (1993) has been published by the Fomento Cultural Banamex. Edited by Teresa Castelló Yturbe and written by a group of gifted scholars, it is a comprehensive historic study of the craft

Vienna's Museum of Ethnography has several surviving pieces of Aztec featherwork: Montezuma's vivid green headdress, a ceremonial coat of arms and a great fan, probably used by an aristocrat's servant to keep the flies off him.



Red macaw (Ara Macao).

Fulvio Eceardi

from the time of the Aztecs to the present. The full color photographic illustrations are striking, and hopefully this study will motivate and inspire others to continue a tradition that is uniquely Mexican.¹

Indeed, this publication might be an important step in having a major national retrospective and international traveling exhibition on the art of featherwork through the last 500 years to the present day. The important masterpieces of this genre which, like the work of some great female artists have been basically unrecognized and totally ignored in the history of Western art, could be collected from both Mexico and the other countries where they can be found.² Then the public could celebrate them for the works of genius they truly are.

If we wish to believe the great ethnographer Bernardino de Sahagun's account in *The Florentine Codex* of the warrior's soul's progress through the underworld, then nothing could make Mexico's great Aztec forebears happier:

Those killed in battle go to heaven... and after four years, the souls of these dead were transformed into all sorts of birds with gorgeous radiant plumage. They fed from the flowers in heaven as they had done on earth, like hummingbirds. **MM**

NOTES

¹While Mexico was not the only country involved in featherwork, it certainly brought this art form to its highest level.

²It is interesting to note that *amanteca* is feminine suggesting that perhaps many, if not most, of these artists, might have been women.



Photos by Dante Barrera

Offerings On the Day of the Dead

The veneration of the dead is a custom common to the majority of great civilizations and is carried out differently by different cultures and countries. In Mexico, November 1 and 2 (All Saint's Day and All Soul's Day, respectively) are real fiestas dedicated to the dead: they are wor-

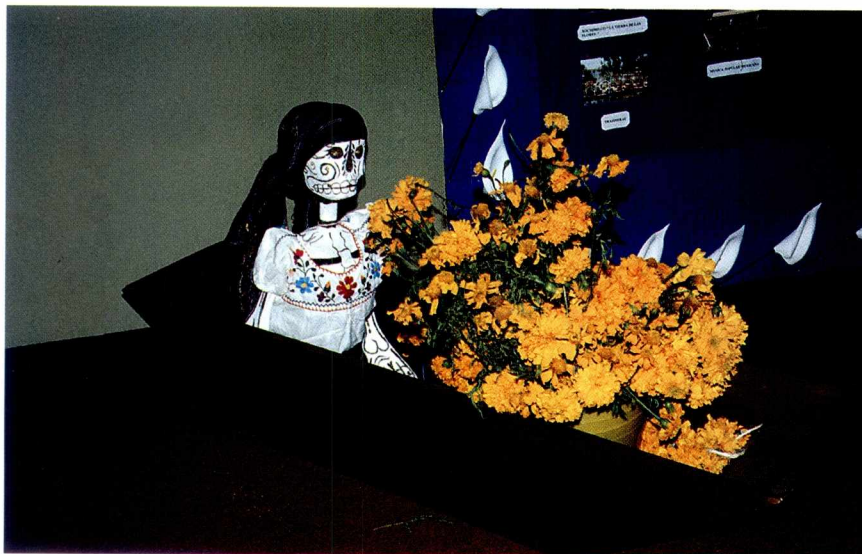
shipped, remembered, visited in cemeteries, invoked and presented with offerings.

Offerings the Day of the Dead have become an important popular Mexican custom combining religion, the recovery of traditions, art, ingenuity and even humor. The veneration or worship of

the dead encompasses a characteristic peculiar to the Mexican collective unconscious and its relationship with death: ambivalence vis-à-vis the fear and respect for the beyond on the one hand, and scornful mocking as a defense mechanism against the unknown on the other.



The offering was designed in the style of the southern state of Oaxaca.



The National Autonomous University of Mexico has concerned itself with preserving this custom and familiarizing the student community with the history of its cultural traditions so it may participate in strengthening our national identity.

The tradition of putting out offerings on the Day of the Dead has preserved elements from its pre-Hispanic origins. It both incorporates and is enhanced by religious and cultural components from the different forms of sincretism Mexico has seen throughout its history, from the colonial period, through modernity and globalization.

Day of the Dead festivities combine sadness and joy, mix mysticism and reflection, enriched by both the magical and the profane. The offerings and altars set up to honor the dead combine all of this with an artistic creativity and popular ingenuity that pay tribute to the dear departed who, according to pre-Columbian tradition, reside in Mictlán, a Nahuatl word meaning “place of the dead.”

The National Autonomous University of Mexico has concerned itself with preserving this custom and familiarizing the student community with the history of its cultural traditions so it may participate in strengthening our national identity. For the last three years the Youth for Humanities and Sciences Research Program, a part of the UNAM Humanities Coordinating Department, has made its own offering on the Day of the Dead. Every year, the program has picked a different state and presented its particular local tradition among the many nationwide, each of which has its own legends and special rituals.

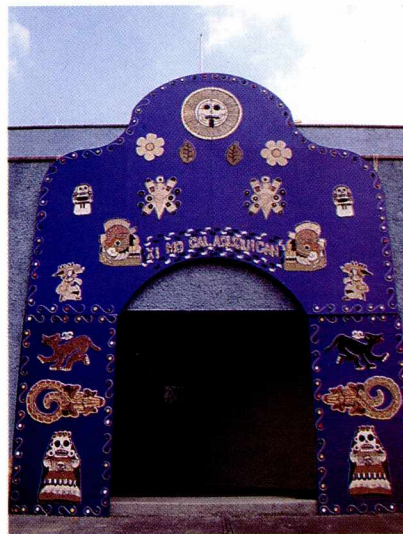
In 1997 the students from UNAM High School No.1 designed an offering in the style of the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, which has strong indigenous roots, even today, as well as the recreation of the tradition of the *Niño*

Pa (Child *Pa*), an important part of community lore in the Xochimilco district of Mexico City.

The offering has three basic parts: the portal, the Oaxacan offering and the altar to the *Niño Pa*.

The portal is a monumental facade put up in the vestibule of the Humanities Coordinating Department building, using representations of pre-Hispanic rock carvings which join together aesthetic elements of old Mexico showing the vision of death that existed in the pre-Hispanic world. Made with beans, amaranth, French beans, lentils, millet, rice and corn, the facade's main subject is Mictlantecuhtli, the lord of the dead, in charge of welcoming souls to Mictlán. Blazoned across the portal is the Nahuatl phrase "*Xi mo cal aququi can,*" which means "Enter here," a clear invitation to the living to pass into the world of the dead.

The second part of the display is the Oaxacan offering, which reproduces that locality's tradition of erecting funeral monuments to the dead. Like in other parts of the country, one of the main components is flowers, the *cem-poxóchitl* in particular, or "flower of 20 petals" or "golden blossom," arranged in the Oaxacan manner in a chain. The offering preserves the pre-Hispanic/Christian tradition and reflects perfectly both the seriousness and the enthusiasm with which the residents of Oaxaca prepare to receive their dead; its characteristic colors and smells guide the spirits to the place where their relatives await them. The offering is an altar where gifts for the dead are placed: bread, wine, water, salt, thick wax tapers, toys, fruit, sweets and votive candles.



Above: Detail from the portal depicting Mictlantecuhtli, the Lord of Death.

Below: The portal at the entrance welcomes the living into the world of dead.

Special mention should be made of the food and drink typical of Oaxacan cuisine: grasshoppers, *tlayudas*,¹ *totopos*,² *cecina*,³ *quesillo*,⁴ black mole sauce and, of course, the famous mescal. The altar also holds photos or other images of the honored dead and, next to them, *retablos*, or little altars, with images of saints

and virgins who protect the faithful; Our Lady of Soledad, the patron saint of Oaxacans, occupies a special, prominent place in this arrangement. At the foot of the little altar a funeral urn is placed.

Each part of the offering has its own symbolic religious significance. For example, the water symbolizes the principle of life. When a person dies, his or her soul must travel through mountains and deserts before arriving in paradise; to make the trip, the soul needs to quench its thirst. Salt is the symbol of wisdom and also preserves the body from corruption. The wax tapers are used by the souls on their trip to eternity; the copal, food and flowers are all gifts inviting the dead to reunite with their living loved ones on the Day of the Dead.

The third part of the celebratory display, erected in the auditorium of the same building by the students, is the lovely, original altar honoring the *Niño Pa*, "the pilgrim child" of the town of Xochimilco, who, according to popular legend, brings luck and protection to those who give him shelter. "The pilgrim child" has traveled Xochimilco for the last 400 years, a wooden carving of the baby Jesus whose cheeks, it is believed, change color according to his mood, and who at night, unobserved, plays with his toys and eats the sweets offered him. The residents of Xochimilco are enormously devoted to the *Niño Pa*. Every February 2, the day Mexico celebrates the Festival of Candelaria, the figure is handed over to the region's new steward, designated as such because he will be responsible for caring for and giving refuge to the child for the



Scale model of Xochimilco's San Bernardino Cathedral, made of amaranth and other seeds.

entire year. It is such a great honor to be steward of the *Niño Pa* that the post has been reserved in advance until the year 2035. Whomever has been honored with the post must prepare because it requires practically his undivided attention, not to mention enormous expense. When the steward's family is poor, it may have to save for up to 25 years to meet the obligations of hosting and feeding all the visitors to the *Niño Pa* for a year.

The students' altar to the *Niño Pa* included a scale model of Xochimilco's San Bernardino Cathedral made of amaranth and other seeds. The offering table displayed the customary gifts to the child from the people of Xochimilco: bread, wine, water, food, salt, tapers,

copal, votive candles, fruit and plentiful amounts of sweets and toys.

Tradition dictates that any local resident may invite the child to his or her home for a day. The visit begins with a procession to the church, where the child hears mass and is then taken to the home of his host, who must give him back to the steward without fail at 8 o'clock in the evening at the latest. In this case, the host was Dr. Humberto Muñoz, the humanities coordinator, who accompanied the child until 4 p.m. in the Humanities Coordination Department building. The child was also accompanied, naturally, by his nannies and *chinelos* dancers to amuse him.

The UNAM's Day of the Dead celebration respected tradition, and, in addi-

tion to the offerings, was the occasion for dances and prayers in honor of holy Death. The university community contributed in this way to preserving and valuing one of Mexico's most important traditions. ■■■

Diego Bugeda Bernal
Senior Editor

NOTES

¹A *tlayuda* is a pizza-sized tortilla typical of the region. [Translator's Note.]

²*Totopos* are large, crispy tortillas made from white corn. [Translator's Note.]

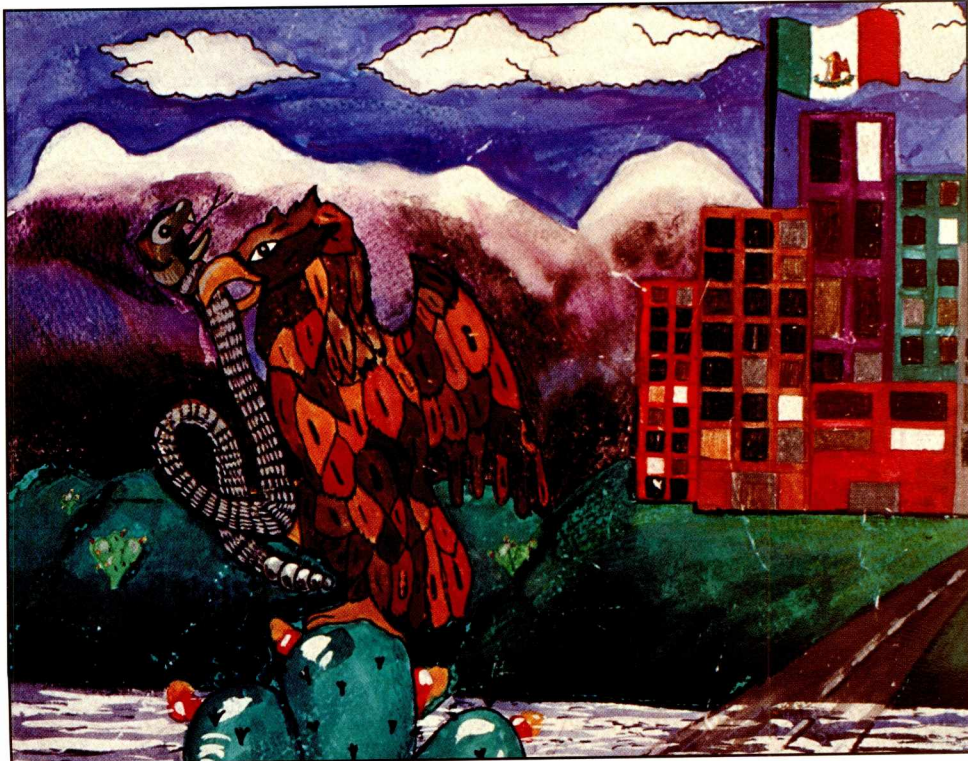
³*Cecina* is salted, dried meat, usually beef or venison, that is fried for eating. [Translator's Note.]

⁴*Quesillo*, known in the rest of the country as Oaxaca cheese, is a local, mild cheese produced in long strips and then wrapped into a ball. [Translator's Note.]

This Is My Mexico

Mexican Children's Painting in the United States

Art is one of the most effective vehicles for reinforcing national identity. Its individual manifestations often express the vision, feelings, ideas and beliefs of a people, the intimate characteristics and popular traditions that make up a nationality. This is the case of the drawings done by more than 3,000 children from Mexico and of Mexican descent living in the United States who participated in the drawing contest "This Is My Mexico," sponsored by Mexico's Foreign Relations Ministry (SRE).



My City and My Symbols, Fabiola Alvarez, 13 years old, New York, New York.

Photos reprinted courtesy of Foreign Relations Ministry



The Fair, Julio Gallardo, 8 years old, San Francisco, California.

Organized by the SRE Program for Mexican Communities Abroad and carried out through the consulates in the most important U.S. cities where Mexicans reside, the contest was significant for two main reasons: first, it contributed to strengthening the ties between both our nations and, second, it fosters links between communities of Mexican origin in the United States and their culture of origin.



Face with Pyramid, Luis Ordaz, 11 years old, Austin, Texas.



Breaking the Piñata, Phillip Delage, 8 years old, New Orleans, Louisiana.



Fiesta in the Church, Angélica Fernández, 7 years old, Oxnard, California.

The contest judges included three of Mexico's most internationally renowned artists: painter José Luis Cuevas, painter and muralist Felipe Ehrenberg and engraver Carla Rippey. In addition, representing the director of the National Center for the Conservation and Registration of Non-architectural Art, of the National Institute of Fine Arts, Walther Boelsterly rounded out the judges' panel.



Mexican Fun, Elisabeth Rose Tarnof, 10 years old, San Diego, California.



My Mexican Flag, Mathew Reyna, 8 years old, San Antonio, Texas.



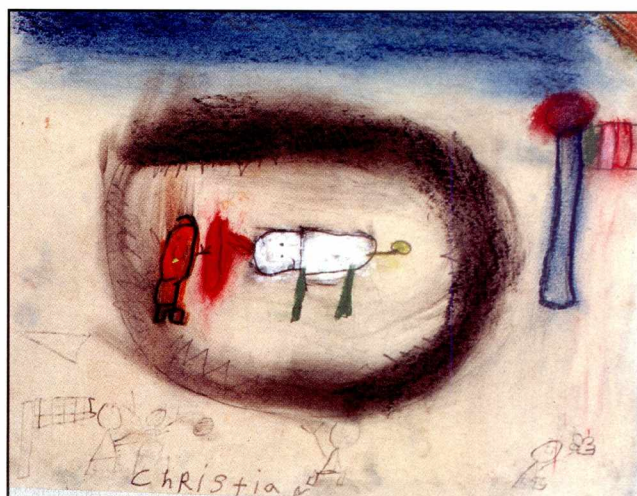
Pyramid with Clouds, Lydia Plascencia, 11 years old, McAllen, Texas.

The judges reviewed 3,758 drawings submitted by 3,281 children between the ages of 7 and 13 from 37 cities around the United States. The 10 winners were awarded an all-expenses-paid trip to Mexico City from October 10 to 13.

The drawings show a truly exceptional ability to express feelings and Mexican traditions simply. This kind of projects are a fundamental contribution to ensuring that Mexican children preserve a love of their homeland and interest in their history even though for different reasons they may need to live abroad.



Mexico Has Everything, Carlos Von Rettig, 11 years old, Austin, Texas.



Bullfight, Christian Zúñiga, 8 years old, Nogales, Arizona.



Unless otherwise specified photos: © Casas & Gentile/S.Toledano

The Red Room's magnificent stone fireplace and lavish Russian nineteenth-century chandelier.

La Bola House Museum

Few buildings in Mexico City can boast of having kept their original structure over four full centuries, or of preserving their residents' spirit and way of life through furniture, objets d'art and everyday items that, despite the passing of time, retain traces of the pride inherited from their golden age. But that is exactly what the La Bola House Museum does.



Dante Barrera

One of the few modifications to the buildings was the addition of this terrace overlooking the garden.

FOUR CENTURIES

The *La Bola* House is a colonial mansion built at the beginning of the seventeenth century on a hill in San José de Tacubaya, today part of Mexico City. A mute witness to the lives and tribulations of its 19 owners, its walls survived almost intact the turbulent years that led to the demise of the Viceroyalty, the beginning and consolidation of independence and the coming of modern Mexico.

Its first owner was Dr. Francisco Bazán y Alborno, apostolic inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition. Upon his death, the house was inherited by his nephew Lope Diez and, in turn, to his son. They were succeeded by others, always well-born, rich and powerful. When one of them, José Gómez Campos, lost most of what he had invested in mining, he was forced to ask the Royal Lottery to raffle off the property.

The detailed inventory done in 1801 for that purpose shows that the structure has remained practically unchanged

from that time until today. It was then a country residence, surrounded by two large gardens with all kinds of fruit trees, agaves and olive trees. The ground floor was used for producing olive oil which was kept in two large earthen jars in the main patio.

The house was raffled off September 24, 1802, and Antonio Torres Torrija, a lawyer and member of the Royal Audience of New Spain¹ was the winner. Upon Torres' death, the house was acquired by a well-known scholar and politician, José Gómez de la Cortina, Count of La Cortina. In 1849, the main house and part of the grounds were purchased by Don José María Rincón Gallardo, Marquis of Guadalupe. By that time, it was known by the neighbors as the *La Bola* House, although no one knows exactly why it was called that. The Rincón Gallardo family kept the property until it was purchased October 19, 1942, by Don Antonio Hagenbeck y de la Lama, its last owner, for Mex\$95,000. It is said that he paid this sum out in five peso bills



Master bedroom. The nineteenth century crown of the canopy is done in silk embroidery.

that he brought with him wrapped in newspaper.

BETWEEN THE MYSTIC AND THE PROFANE

Don Antonio moved into the *La Bola* House, restored it, consolidated its structure and made additions like the beautiful terrace on the top floor. Access to the terrace, built with materials salvaged from the demolition of what



Dante Barrera



In its heyday the garden had a variety of fruit trees, agaves and olive trees.

had been his childhood home on Juárez Avenue, is through the dining room.

A confirmed bachelor, Don Antonio spent most of his fortune collecting art work and antiques, transforming his home into a lavish mansion in the eclectic style of the mid-nineteenth century: ornate decoration, works of art from different periods, silk-covered walls and magnificent chandeliers and mirrors. Going through the house, the visitor cannot but wonder at its opulence, but also sense a certain singularity

given the intense combination of worldly riches and the many religious objects—images, altars, prie-dieu and crucifixes—distributed in the different rooms. Eccentricity or true religious faith? What inspired the life of its owner? It is said that Don Antonio made a vow of poverty for his person, and for that reason his clothing and shoes were totally unostentatious. However, he did not consider surrounding himself with beautiful, expensive things contrary to his faith.

Many fantastic stories were spun around this figure of an eccentric millionaire who loved animals and concerned himself with supporting the needy. His will caused sharp polemics because he left his immense fortune to a foundation he had set up for the protection of the fauna of Mexico. He donated the *La Bola* House and two haciendas he owned in the State of Mexico and Puebla to another foundation to be turned into private museums. However, he left no funds for their maintenance and restoration. Despite

this, his artistic bequest is particularly important since it includes not only a collection of works of great quality, but three complete museums which reveal a great love of art and refinement.

A TRIP THROUGH LEGEND, HISTORY AND ART

A brick facade, stout wrought-iron balconies and a great wooden door receive the visitor at the *La Bola* House. The first thing you see inside is the beautiful colonial patio with the elegant columns surrounding it and an iron railing at the bottom of the patio leading to the garden.

To the left, a magnificent stone staircase leads to the top floor whose high walls are hung with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings. At the top of the stairs is a corridor which contains three European suits of armor and a collection of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century stiff-backed, leather *friero* armchairs, two large nineteenth-



Among the pieces in the chapel is a cabinet encrusted with semi-precious gems in the seventeenth-century *pietra* style.

century Satzuma jars and drapes in yellow moiré worthy of a palace. The corridor leads into the dining room with its oak table and glass cabinets displaying East India Company plates, Limoges porcelain and Baccarat crystal.

The first of the two libraries, or the Red Room, has a colonial beamed ceiling and nineteenth-century French wooden doors; its magnificent stone fireplace dominates the room, along with an exquisite nineteenth-century Russian crystal chandelier. The second library is decorated with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century tapestries, furniture and chairs, illuminated by a central nineteenth-century Bohemian crystal lamp.

The house has two bedrooms: the summer bedroom, decorated in a more sober style, is watched over by an oil painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe done in the style of the nineteenth-century Puebla school; the master—or winter—



The dining room's place settings, candelabra and pitchers are nineteenth century chiseled silver. The painting over the fireplace is of the Christ of the Column.

bedroom boasts a splendid nineteenth-century silk embroidered canopy bed. The bed's crown is covered with velvet embroidered in gold, topped with a nineteenth-century gilt wood crucifix.

The house has three salons. The Green Salon, or music room, offers the visitor a view of an outstanding eighteenth-century Mazarin boulevark desk.

The San Román Salon, furnished in Napoleon III pieces, was named after the sisters Juliana and Josefa San Román, Don Antonio's grandmother and great-aunt respectively, both excellent painters whose canvases grace the walls. Lastly, the Versailles Room, reminiscent of a palatial ballroom, is hung with six immense nineteenth-century French mirrors.



The Green Salon, with its magnificent Louis XIV boulework desk.

The drawing room is hung with paintings of Marie Antoinette, Louis XVI, Maximilian and Carlotta. Don Antonio baptized this collection the Altar to Sacrificial Kings. From here, the visitor has direct access to the so-called smoking room where corner sofas and a beautiful Murano chandelier catch the eye.

The last place remaining to visit in the house is the chapel, whose altar and magnificent religious figures shut out all things profane, making it a perfect place for reflection and silent prayer. Here ends the tour of the interior of the house. Going back through the corridor, you have the sensation that you have been accompanied by Don Antonio. Your visit

concludes with a walk through the spacious gardens that prepares you for taking leave of this place, seemingly suspended in time. **MM**

Elsie Montiel
Managing Editor

LA BOLA HOUSE MUSEUM
PARQUE LIRA 136
COLONIA TACUBAYA
MEXICO CITY

SINCE THE MUSEUM
IS A PRIVATE INSTITUTION,
VISITS ARE PERMITTED,
BUT BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.

PHONE: 515-5582

NOTES

¹In Spain's colonies in the Americas, the *Audiencias Reales*, or Royal Audiences, were tribunals as well as basic pillars of metropolitan administration together with the Viceroyalty, which acted as government councils. [Translator's Note.]



The Mythical Mexican Axolotl

Edgar Anaya*

Few animals are as representative of Mexico's fauna as the strange and mythical batrachian, the axolotl, and the "X" in its name shows just how Mexican it is.

An ambassador for our country, it has been famous worldwide for a very long time and has always left a polemic in its wake: Is it interesting and attractive, or ugly and repulsive? Simply remarkable. Its black hue, aerodynamic shape and the curious feather-like gills on its neck make its appearance unique.

Throughout Mexico's history, it has been a source of nourishment, a medication and even a laboratory animal for experiments. Early in this century, it was an eccentric pet in the aquariums of wealthy Mexico City families.

Masters of Mexican painting like Diego Rivera and José María Velasco immortalized it in their art. Rivera included this

curious animal in his murals, such as the one in Mexico City's National Palace, which depicts a panorama of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, where the axolotl was among the most frequently sold products in the marketplaces of the time. It also figures prominently in Rivera's mural *Water, the Source of Life*, painted in Chapultepec Forest in Mexico City.

José María Velasco went even further: he made what were probably the first descriptive sketches of the axolotl, done for a scientific association he belonged to.

THE MONSTER OF THE WATERS

This batrachian's very name, from the Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, takes us immediately back to the pre-Hispanic world where the axolotl was not only important; it was fundamental.

The name has been translated in different ways: "water game", "water dog", "master of the waters" among others. But the most commonly accepted translation is "monster of the waters." The Aztecs believed that the axolotl was the transfiguration of the famous god Quetzalcóatl's twin, Xólotl, who, to avoid being sacri-

ficed by men, threw himself into the water to metamorphose into an aquatic animal.

It is said that when the Aztecs came to the Valley of Mexico, after several attempts at settling on the banks of the great lake system that then existed there, they were finally forced to settle on the water, on islands. According to the chronicles, they suffered great hardships as they began to gather the building materials they needed, exchanging them for products they collected in the lagoon, among them the axolotl. No one could have imagined that we would owe the founding of Mexico City, even if only figuratively and partially, to the axolotl.

A nutritious, easy to obtain, tasty food, a delicacy for powerful and commoner alike, it became indispensable in the diet of the inhabitants of the Mexico basin, based on aquatic agricultural products.

When the Spaniards arrived in the sixteenth century, they also took note of the axolotl. Missionary Friar Bernardino de Sahagún said of it, "There are some little animals in the water called axolotl. They have feet and hands like lizards, a tail and body like an eel; they have a very wide mouth and barbs on the neck. They are very good eating, food for lords."¹

* Contributor to several tourism and cultural publications; author of the Reader's Digest book *Maravillas Naturales de México*, (Natural Marvels of Mexico) (Mexico City: 1997).

Opposite page: *Axolotl*, taken from Elvia Esparza's original dossier *Species in Extinction in the Valley of Mexico*, Introduction by José Sarukhán (Mexico City: UNAM, 1989).
Photo: Arturo Píera.

Myths and fantasies have surrounded it always. Francisco Hernández, the celebrated Spanish naturalist from colonial times wrote that the axolotl “is shaped like a catfish and gets its period every month like a woman; it is healthy eating, although it provokes lechery.”²

Recent discoveries about the axolotl are more astonishing than these stories, causing surprise even among scientists.

ALWAYS YOUTHFUL

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, German naturalist Friedrich Alexander von Humboldt forwarded a shipment of axolotl to Europe where they were studied scientifically for the first time in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1863, 34 axolotl were sent to the Museum of Natural History in Paris during the French occupation of Mexico. France's Auguste Dumeril, a disciple of the famous french naturalist Georges Cuvier, began research into neoteny, the achievement of sexual maturity during the larval stage, one of the curious characteristics of the Valley of Mexico axolotl, the most interesting of all the species in the country.

While the salamander and the triturus, relatives of the axolotl, change their appearance completely at one point in their life cycle (this transformation is called metamorphosis and is well known in frogs), the axolotl reaches sexual maturity without losing the traits of its youth. For example, it never loses the gills of its infant stage. Only with experimental hormonal treatments does the Valley of Mexico axolotl go through the characteristic transformation that other amphibians do.

Even more surprising is that it is able to regenerate its brain cells. For that reason, the axolotl is greatly sought after by institutions which do research into the human brain.

Despite its appearance —unpleasant to many— the axolotl is completely harmless. It reaches 25 cm in length, and its characteristic gills lengthen or shorten according to the amount of oxygen in its watery habitat. When small, it feeds mainly on plankton, the microorganisms in the water. Later in its life cycle, it eats water fleas, small crustaceans, worms and insect larva. It always lives in the water, but many mysteries about its behavior, reproduction and classification are still to be unraveled.

Of all the species of axolotl in the lakes of Mexico's central high plateau, in states like Michoacán, Puebla and the state of Mexico, the most interesting is the *Ambystoma mexicanum*, the one described in this article, originally native to the Valley of Mexico, and which today survives only in the canals of Xochimilco's famous floating gardens.

TAMALES AND AXOLOTL SYRUP

From the pre-Hispanic period until today, the axolotl has been a source of food for Mexico's waterfront communities.

One of the most popular ways of preparing it is in tamales. A traditional recipe from the Xochimilco market says to first cut off the gills and gut, wash and salt the axolotl. After adding dried chili peppers and fresh tomatoes, they are wrapped two at a time in corn husks and steamed. These “tamales” are still prepared this way, but are rarer and rarer, just like the axolotl itself.

The axolotl is attributed with curative and recuperative powers for both children and the ill, although up to now no scientific evidence has come to light validating these beliefs. The famous axolotl syrup for respiratory ailments is an old, traditional medicine still sold on the streets of Mexico.

These supposed curative powers, its utilization in lab work, its sale for food in markets and as pets in aquariums, and particularly the drying up and pollution of the country's last great central lakes have brought the Valley of Mexico axolotl to the brink of extinction. Since 1950 it has bred only in the canals of Xochimilco in southern Mexico City, and even there only a few are to be found. Other species that have been introduced into the canals have harmed it: the carp devours its young and eggs and the tiger axolotl degenerates it with inter-breeding.

Some institutions have made isolated efforts to rescue it, but the problems it faces become graver and graver every day, while most inhabitants of Mexico City are completely unaware of the wonders contained in this species exclusive to this habitat. The city that the axolotl saw born and develop in all its splendor is now ousting it, even if symbolically, but that eviction will make it disappear from the entire world. Logic dictates that its future should be no different from other species which have already disappeared forever from the Valley of Mexico. **NM**

NOTES

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Pines

A Mexican Gift to the World

Sol Ortiz-García*
Daniel Piñero*

Mexico is recognized as one of the five countries with the highest biological diversity in the world. Of all the known species on our planet around 10 percent can be found in Mexico. This is partially the result of a very complex geological history, together with a broad climate gradient, which have created many different environmental conditions. Also, its geographical position as a land bridge connecting North and South America has contributed to its diversity.

The world's coniferous forests are characterized by the presence of tall woody trees, among these are such familiar trees as *Tsuga* (hemlock), *Abies* (fir), *Picea* (spruce), *Juniperus* (juniper, red cedar), *Sequoiadendron* (Sierra redwood) from the Northern Hemisphere and *Araucaria* and *Podocarpus* from the Southern Hemisphere. Most of these produce their ovules in a compound conelet (*strobili* is the technical name for conifer "flowers"). Maturation of the seeds occurs in cones which constitute the "fruits."

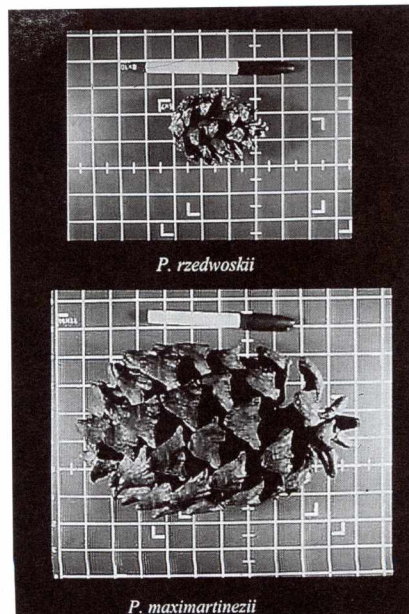
Mexico is predominantly highland, with more than half of its territory over

About 21 million of Mexico's estimated 30 million hectares of forest or woodland are coniferous forest, with pine as the dominant species.

1,000 meters high. This mountain landscape is mainly covered by forest. The National Institute for Forestry, Agricultural and Animal Husbandry Research (INIFAP) estimates that there are about 30 million hectares of forest or wooded land in Mexico, of which 21 million are coniferous forest, with pine as the dominant species.

WHAT IS A PINE?

Common names sometimes cause confusion. To many people "pines" include not only the genus *Pinus*, but *Abies* (fir), *Picea* (spruce) and *Pseudotsuga* (pseudo-hemlock) as well. These genera are included in the family *Pinaceae*, one of the 8 conifer families. Pines are distinguished from other conifers by their needle-like leaves, born singly or more commonly in fascicles of two to six on short shoots, with a sheath of bud scales at the base when young. They have woody cone scales with specialized apical regions. Many cones of different pine species are used for decoration at Christmas time. The genus *Pinus* is the largest in the family *Pinaceae* and is more diverse than any other conifer.



Above: *Pinus rzedwoskii*.
Below: *Pinus maximartinezii*.

* Researchers at the UNAM Institute of Ecology.

Pines are native only to the Northern Hemisphere, with the exception of a single species, *Pinus merkusii*, found below the equator in Sumatra. Pine species are distributed throughout the boreal region, but species diversity is low. On the other hand, in the tropical mountains, the range of species distribution is low while species diversity is greater.

Also species diversity of pines is higher in North America than in Eurasia. For example *Pinus sylvestris*, the Scott pine, is very widely distributed, covering enormous forest inland areas of Europe and Asia, whereas the mountains and coastal ranges of northwestern Mexico and California boast almost 25 different species.

Lively debate continues about the exact number of species in the genus. Some botanists have recognized around 90 species while others have totaled 120. This is partially due to the fact that widespread taxa often show geographical variation that may or may not be worthy of infraspecific rank. Mexico is a center of pine diversity. From 43 to 51 species (depending on the author) and many infraspecific taxa are found in Mexico. This accounts for almost half of the total number of pine species in the world.

Photos by Volkhard Seifels



Immature cone of *Pinus nelsonii* with a long penduncle.

CLASSIFICATION

Pines are an old group of plants: their ancestors lived at the same time as the dinosaurs, more than 100 million years ago. It is widely accepted that there are two natural groups within the genus *Pinus*; they are often called “hard” and “soft” pines. This distinction corresponds to subgenus *Pinus* and subgenus *Strobus* respectively. Both of these subgenera are present in Mexican forests. Maximino Martínez, a Mexican botanist, published a very detailed monograph of the pines in Mexico 50 years ago. At that time, he recognized 39 species and several subspecies and varieties.

Within the two main groups, pines are classified into subgroups named sections and subsections. Accepted classifications of the genus include 17 subsections, nine of which include Mexican pines. New revisions of this group of trees have led botanists and taxonomists to consider the creation of new subsections for some of the Mexican species. This is a result of the very peculiar or

intermediate morphology that they present. A Mexican species with its own subsections is *P. rzedowskii*. This pine, which grows in a few places in Michoacán state, exhibits many features of soft pines but also some characteristics of the cone and seeds found in hard pines, making it somewhat intermediate between the two major groups. Their study provides us with incomparable information about pine evolution.

PINE DIVERSITY

The origin of species remains one of the most important questions in evolutionary biology. We know that biological diversity is generated by the differentiation of populations and their further consolidation by speciation. One of the factors associated with these processes is environmental conditions that promote fragmentation of populations and concomitant divergence.

In Mexico there are two important north-south mountain ranges, the Sierra Madre Occidental in the West and the Sierra Madre Oriental in the East. The Eje Neovolcánico Transversal joins these western and eastern ranges with a chain of volcanic mountains reaching altitudes of 3,000 to 4,000 meters, along the states of Michoacán, Mexico, Morelos and Puebla. To the southwest, the Sierra Madre del Sur continues along the Pacific coast as a narrow range of mountains that jut almost straight up from the sea. The Sierra Madre Oriental, after joining with the Eje Neovolcánico Transversal in Puebla, continues southeastward and merges with the Sierra Madre del Sur around the Valley of

Oaxaca. At this point the mountain ranges extend eastward to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. East of the isthmus the mountains rise again to more than 2,000 meters and divide into two principal ranges, the Sierra Madre de Chiapas and the Mesa de Chiapas.

The elevation of these mountains was a monumental change that had equally important effects on the pine populations over a vast area. Many species disappeared entirely while others were reduced to relict populations. Furthermore, fragmented populations were probably the origin of new species. The mountain ranges in Mexico have risen in different geological periods. The oldest is the Sierra Madre Occidental, dating from about 85 million years ago, while others are more recent. This exerted a profound influence on the region's vegetation. The two main north-south ranges undoubtedly contributed as routes for the spread of pines. Two centers of pine diversity and evolution are associated with the topology of the country: the Eje Neovolcánico Transversal, with extensions along the Sierra Madre Occidental and the Sierra Madre del Sur. The other center is northeastern Mexico. Here we find 14 to 18 taxa in most states. The species of the first area are almost all Mexican taxa non-existent in any other part of the world. In addition, this region constitutes the main area for three species complexes that have very high levels of morphological and genetic variation: *P. devoniana*, *P. montezumae* and *P. pseudostrobus*.

Virtually all the environments in which pines grow throughout the world exist in Mexico. The country's extraordinarily varied topography and climate

range from wet, lowland tropical rain forests and montane tropical cloud forest, to hot shrub land and deserts and snow-capped mountains, often in close proximity to each other. Due to the great elevation of some of the mountains and their latitude, climatic zonation is pronounced within short distances, and isolated populations and taxa are commonplace. The northeastern center of pine diversity apparently corresponds to pine species that had adapted to warmer, dryer conditions, and this had led to the spread of taxa and colonization of environments where few other trees can survive. The isolation accounts for another important characteristic of Mexican pines: local endemism, with species like *P. culminicola*, *P. nelsonii*, *P. rzedowskii* and *P. pinceana*, presenting very narrow and localized distribution.

Pine forests are significant because of their ability to produce food (such as pinyons) and oxygen; they also provide shelter for birds, mammals and insects. Various epiphytes, especially lichen and mosses, grow in their bark and branches. Also a very intricate net of mycorrhizal fungi grow associated with the pine roots. Pine forests play a very important role in maintaining an efficient ecological cycle of nutrients. A correct strategy for maintaining the forest will prevent soil erosion, a common consequence of indiscriminate clear cutting on mountain slopes.

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

The great value of pine trees in paper and lumber production and for ship building and other commercial purposes

es has markedly reduced the extent of natural stands in areas readily accessible to transportation. Mexico still has some of these areas, which represent a reservoir of genetic pine resources for the world.

Mexican pines as a forest resource are of great significance and importance to the economy of the country. There are

resin exploitation is the basis for the turpentine industry, which is a major job provider in several states, particularly Oaxaca, Chiapas, Jalisco, Nuevo León, Durango and Michoacán. The pinyon pines are also an important source of local revenue in northern Mexico, producing edible nuts that may be eaten or used as decoration.



Pinus nelsonii at Peña Nevada, Nuevo León.

two main types of pine products. The primary, or direct, products are wood, resins and seed, while secondary, or indirect, products are charcoal, turpentine, pitch, tar, etc.

The timber of many species is used for industrial and commercial purposes as well as for the local population. It is also one of the best sources of pulp for craft paper and cardboard. Its importance lies in the fact that the xylem of most hard pine species produces long fibers, giving extra strength to the final product. Among the pines currently being heavily exploited are *P. patula*, *P. oocarpa*, *P. pseudostrobus* and *P. herrerae*. Tree branches are also locally collected for fuel, although the resin often causes a great deal of smoke. Pine

When the pinyons are ripe, whole communities move to forest areas to harvest them. Actually, one of the most recently described species, *P. maximartinezii*, was discovered by the great botanist, Jerzy Rzedowski. In a local market in Zacatecas, he noticed that the seeds on sale were much larger than the well-known seeds of the *P. cembroides*, the Mexican pinyon pine.

Timber exploitation is increasing at an amazing rate, and in many areas it is indiscriminate. Pines subject to it suffer from genetic erosion, decreasing their ability to change and adapt to different conditions and in some cases even to sustain viable populations. Obviously this has a very negative influence on reforestation efforts.

ECOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND POTENTIAL USES

Despite their economic and ecological importance, the ecological diversity of pines is amazing. Variation among species in morphology and life history is rich. There appears to be a striking recurrence of ecologically similar sets of species in different geographic areas. For example, one group of pines is distinguished by characteristics increasing the likelihood of mature trees surviving fire: most are tall, with thick bark, long needles, and thick twigs. In addition, they tend to have large, heavily armed cones (with stout, sharp spines), large seeds with long wings, and be slow in initiation of seed production. Some Mexican species in this group are *Pinus duranguensis*, *P. montezumae*, *P. engelmanni* and *P. hartwegii*.

Another ecological group of pines includes species with higher shade tolerance than others: thin twigs, unarmed cone scales, mesic sites, fast growth, tall habit, short needle retention and precocious reproduction. This group is represented by the Mexican soft pine *P. ayacahuite* and its close relatives, *P. strobiformis* and *P. chiapensis*.

Pines considered stress-tolerant comprise another ecological group. They are short trees or shrubs, with long leaf persistence; they produce large seeds that generally lack wings. Their bark is very thin and they grow slowly. They grow mainly in dry or cold sites, or both. Many of the pines that comprise this group are known as pinyon pines; their seeds are spread by birds.

Cone serotiny (late opening) is the main characteristic shared by another

ecological group of pines whose cones require very high temperatures to open and release their seeds. Populations of the species in this group tend to survive as seeds when they go through infrequent though catastrophic fires. Some of the species in this group with different levels of serotiny are *P. eiophylla*, *P. patula*, *P. attenuata* (knobcone pine) and *P. contorta* (lodgepole pine); the latter two also grow in the western United States.

The characterization of these groups gives us an idea of the potential uses of different species. Pine conservation strategies may lead us, for example, to select resistant trees for different purposes. Trees well adapted to dry conditions may be selected for planting in dry areas. Also,

if a new blight develops, trees resistant to it may be chosen to regenerate affected regions. In this sense, Mexican pine forests are an important source of natural resources. Unfortunately, *P. patula* is the only Mexican species widely planted with a high demand for its seed. Other Mexican species are not known commercially outside the country.

Finally, endangered and beautiful pines like *P. nelsonii* and *P. rzedowskii*, with an exceptional morphology, are excellent candidates for use as ornamental species, and we should also foster their survival. Pines, like corn and chocolate, are another gift from Mexico to the world that should be appreciated and wisely used. **NM**

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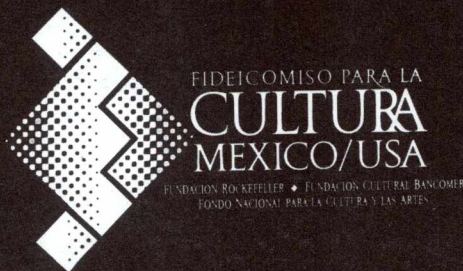
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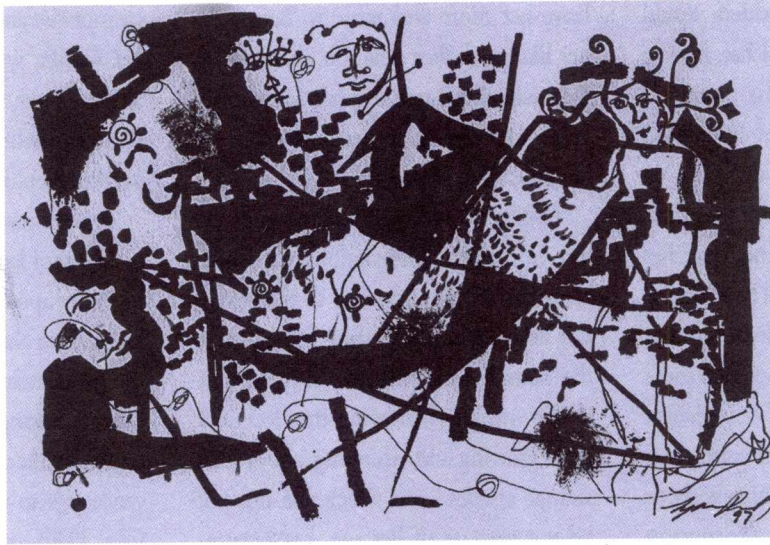
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Constellations And Collapses¹

Rosario Castellanos

Cecilia was an only child. At least, as far back as she could remember, because farther back there was an atmosphere of which she retained the dark sensation of mourning for some dead sibling, of longing for some unborn creature. Something of that atmosphere still pervaded her mother's actions—unexpected, brusque, pained—and her words, that used to sort of pause on the parapet of a blinded well.

Cecilia became accustomed to this sensation without looking for adjectives for it, when she was able to reconcile it with her solitude. As a child, she had at

her disposal what parents—in whom scruples and negligence are allies—give their children: toys in such abundance that were deprived of any meaning and luxuries she was incapable of appreciating; exaggerated and variable pampering as well as sudden bouts of severity which never quite developed into punishment, into a precisely formulated reprimand, into the temporary interruption or the permanent suspension of some privilege.

A provincial child, Cecilia had at her mercy small servants over which it was customary to exercise fancy, power and cruelty with all the exaggeration these attributes possess when they are infantile. She inflicted and contemplated the humiliation of others with the same indif-

ference of someone who contemplates an object of ordinary quality and everyday use. Without remorse but also without pleasure. As soon as she had the sense to become a bit her own master, Cecilia decided on that sort of atrophied organ being extirpated from her that other little girls of her class kept until puberty and even until maturity. But she did not substitute for this amputation any involvement of a more equitable kind nor any relationship fairer in its dealings with others. She also stored her toys so they would not get in her way, got rid of the luxuries, avoided parental effusion and frowns and assumed—without any palliative—her condition as a marginal being.

Translated by Francisco Fenton.
Drawings by Lydia Peña.

From this margin her elders would periodically attempt to wrest her, forcing her to amusements that she could no more understand than enjoy. She would endure (her eyes widened in disbelief, in horror, in uneasiness) while the multitudes at the fairs and the churches dragged her through ebb and flow of the tide. Only when a timely elbow signaled did she know it was time to applaud some demonstration of skill by the pianist, who, only after starting three times, had been able to play the whole thing without making a single mistake; by the soprano who only barely reached the high note in the score; by the ballerina who defied the laws of equilibrium and gravity; by the trapeze artist and the bullfighter who risked their lives as if they did not matter. She applauded, then, with discipline, and she stopped applauding at the same time as the others. But it was obvious—and her mother remarked upon it with thinly veiled bitterness and irritated disappointment—that she had not gotten any joy from the show. On the way home she would be shouted at, branded an ingrate because she did not appreciate the efforts made by the others to entertain her, and to make her, somehow, occupy a place in society.

Cecilia bore this venting of rage, almost always maternal, with the same indifferent calm with which she had borne the outing. When she dared reply that everyone would be more contented if en masse they gave up making those efforts which she neither requested nor thanked because they were superfluous, she got a smack across the face as punishment for her impertinence. She kept quiet and dropped her eyes to stop the tears. But, ever since then, they started to

leave her more and more to herself, to her likings, to her isolation, from which even school did not save her because her father had wanted to personally take on her education himself.

Cecilia would watch him while he lost himself in dissertations on inefficient lessons, not listening to the words, not understanding, getting drowsy with the sound, following the sinuous line of the wrinkles furrowing that face of a man growing old, thinking about that strange species—to which she did not belong because of her age, her circumstances—but to which she forever refused to belong, that of older people.

Older people had always appeared to her surrounded by a halo of reserve. They avoided, at least in public (and Cecilia could not imagine them acting differently in private) the touching of their bodies. They would sit at a prudent distance; they barely brushed each other's hands when greeting, firmly pushing the children away, who would always try to hang onto their skirts, pull themselves up by their pants, smear the well made-up face with honey or saliva, in a caress; communicate that animal warmth that emanates from childhood, that palpitation of playfulness that beats in every puppy artery, that imminence of mischief that appears briefly and is halted, only just, at the tips of childish fingers.

But reserve was not only an attitude. It was also a language. Words which flew so high that they were unreachable for Cecilia at her present height. Words whose meaning was comprehended but could be undone instantly with a wink, a glance, a half-smile. What were they talking about that created such close ties of complicity, that they erected with

each phrase an impenetrable wall of secrecy? Cecilia would have liked to know, although she balked a little at the idea that the matter would be filthy, bloody perhaps, repulsive.

Sometimes this motionless scene, made up of ladies sitting on sofas, reclining lazily upon hammocks in the corridor, kneeling at the prie-dieu in church; and the gentlemen presiding the great family dinners, taking a fat watch out of a vest pocket to check the time whose only relevance was to coincide with the clock at City Hall; pacing thoughtfully, hands behind their backs, glancing furtively at the reckoning the hacienda manager was rendering. This scene, perfected by routine, broke up into a thousand incoherent figures when a large gust of passion or catastrophe blew. Then all those faces reappeared flayed by anger, by avarice, by hatred, by jealousy, by anguish.

Suddenly the doors would open with a great racket to let in women with hair flying and clothing in disarray, howling, they came through parting the atmosphere—just as swimmers part resistant water—who were contained, incited and held up by some sort of chorus divided into peacemakers and instigators, who maintained the temperature of tragedy for a period determined by an esoteric ritual only the well-versed knew and practiced, a ritual handed down jealously for generations.

And then, as if the one possessed had been abandoned by her spirits, she would lie there, prostrate on the floor. The chorus would help her, erase with a rag the rictus of the howling, close her mouth like a cadaver's, wipe her tears, comb her hair back, button up her breast, to return her to her original image of a beach after

the immense bursting of the ocean, without a scar, amnesic, knitting ably and with containment the daily, unimportant facts, sheared of that aura of the protagonist which had ennobled her but moments before.

Why, Cecilia asked herself, did they not cling to this grand gesture? Why did they not become eternal statues? Because they have the consistency of sand, because they are easily discouraged by fatigue, by boredom; because they surrender—without resistance—to weariness, to minor sentiments like sadness, joy, conformity, routine. Because those stricken by tragedy are consoled with a cup of tea, with a toy, with a lie. Because the choleric are placated with an endlessly rehearsed apology and a place is made in their souls for benevolence; because the avaricious tire of counting and open their hands so pillage can take its fill; and the rancorous one day happen upon him who had inflicted harm and take him in their arms because they no longer see in him an enemy, because they cannot decipher with their touch the name of the wound; and the jealous, how can they still feel jealousy if they no longer love? And the anguished have let themselves be anointed with balsam and bandaged with fine linen.

Oh, Cecilia refused to turn into one of those frail creatures, so unpredictable, arbitrary and evasive; that cast off their skins, like the snake; that could be poured from one recipient to another painlessly, and accommodate to the new shape without longing for the previous one, with no loyalty to the present form and no premonition of the next; that could be found under a name like a bird sits on a branch, with the intention of aban-



doning it; that betrayed themselves, time after time, as if they had no more purpose than to practice for that last and greatest betrayal that is death.

And in the same way that Cecilia felt the stuff of which the others were made and found it harsh, coarse to the touch, senseless to the eyes, incomprehensible, so she perceived that what she was made of was seen by others as repulsive, dangerous, different. Was it because her mere presence (What was it like? The mirror never answered these questions.) brought on a prolonged state of alarm, of surprise, an uneasiness, an irrational impulse to flee or an obstinate resistance, a hypocritical or honest hostility, an irritation that could find no outlet but harsh criticism, but gestures of rejection, but icy silences.

Cecilia circled in vain that small, intermittent fire that is human sympathy, until she was defeated by the certainty that it was forever denied her. When this certainty lacked new nourishment with which to grow and threatened to decline, pride or laziness or scorn took its watchman's post to keep Cecilia from making

false starts—such as with Enrique, for instance—or disorderly retreats.

But just as during the time in which the pain of heartbreak was the greatest she never stopped thinking it was worth it, so during the time their alliance was established she could never consider it either licit or permanent. And the final outcome reaffirmed her intention of never making another effort to be like other people or pretend to be like them.

But what choice was left to her? The conversations with her father made a more solid, consistent, perhaps more livable level of reality available to her: that of historical figures.

When the two of them bent to examine a document which told of the deeds of a lifetime, they got them without all the failed attempts, all the forgotten plans, all the imposed withdrawals, all the useless actions, all the evil adherences, and saw only the lineal continuity of one will, the consecutive steps, exact, precise, in a fulfillment that in the end shone represented in the gesture of a statue or made into an epitaph.



Don José María would show Cecilia the figures adorning his museum and those figures would execute a finite theory of actions—specific, not random nor gratuitous, important, gravid with consequences and always identical. The rapacious talon of conquest would raise itself and fall upon its prey with mechanical infallibility. The unarmed hand of the missionary opened to spill its gifts; the matron offered up her maternity and the nun hid herself behind her modesty. And, if they had had voices, every ancestor would have repeated his name, enumerated his titles, retold his adventures. Always with the same words, always brought together within the same linking of the words, always with the same recitative intonation, unwavering in a single syllable nor rising in any other than what had already been foreseen and sanctioned.

Just as primitive peoples delight in psalmody, so Cecilia was entertained long years in the contemplation of these figures, a contemplation from which surprise was excluded, as well as any possibility of involvement. Because the dis-

tance between spectator and spectacle always remained undisturbed.

At first, when Cecilia was still unaware of this law and its infallibility, she had wanted to get inside, to enter somehow, the glass displays. But she could not take a step without tearing some cobweb, she could not advance but in the midst of a hullabaloo of broken fragilities. And her steps, as careful as they might be, had another rhythm to them, another weight; they did not conform to accepted standards, they awoke multiple echoes that did not meld melodiously, but alternated in a capricious counterpoint that made silence flee from those unviolated chambers. And, after all of this, the distance remained undisturbed.

On another note, Cecilia was aware that the never-changing quality those historical figures had did not make them any easier to emulate. Because history lies when it brags that repetition is its norm, and Cecilia still stood before an infinite forking of possibilities to which the tiniest variation, the finest detail, a degree more or less in perspective could

change events radically. And on new ground it was necessary to operate with no more aid than what could be improvised on the run, with no more resources than those of inventiveness, with no more quarter than unrehearsed behavior and a gift of sudden inspiration. It was, all in all, the kingdom of freedom, to whose threshold Cecilia would arrive like a vigorous horse that stops at the bank of river, wide-eyed with horror and gasping from anxiety with angry muscles that will not advance into that strange and mortal element.

Because the historical figure was a trap. It showed itself as a finished statue, as time that has frozen completely; as movement coagulated into rigidity.

But there was nothing in the deed consummated by it that could fill up Cecilia's present, and even less, something that could conjure up her future. A future that was still open, waiting for Cecilia, precisely Cecilia and no one else (because the historical figure had done with its task and now rested for all eternity) to give it the form that it still lacked.

And Cecilia had to find that form and flesh it out and no one could take her place in the search or the discovery or the fulfillment. She felt irreplaceable but she also knew herself impotent and both poles exercised their pull over her reducing her to a state of paralysis or, when she was able to evade that magnetic field, it was to throw herself into an unknown action with which she found herself obscurely committed and to which, in some manner she did not quite understand, she was always betraying. And she didn't know any other attitude than willingness, than being alert and so being able to respond to a summons that could come someday, from

who knows where, who knows when, but fatally.

The labor of an insomniac. While she carried it out Cecilia went over her resources. Who was she? The last, unfounded, deceiving hope of a father unable to take hold with his hands of anything other than failure and old age; the sore of an unhappy and disenchanting mother; the irritating splinter of a godmother too scrupulous about her spiritual obligations. And nothing more. Because Cecilia, in an instinctive act of self-preservation, refused to see herself as what she had been to Enrique, as what she could be to any man: the prize surrendered to their pride or a regret in their pusillanimous conscience. The only place appropriate for her was oblivion. Erased, dead, non-existent, where, before, the least amorous concession would have been enough to inflame her image to incandescence, to transform her limbo into a zenith.

She would not be rescued by a heroic destiny from this limbo. Her path was not one which led to suffering nor to glorification with that paroxysmic intensity that she admired and envied in those paradigms which had been presented to her ever since childhood. Her catastrophes would never be greater than a run in a nylon, a ruined date, a shred of an idea wasted for lack of opportunity. There would be one solemn instant only: death. But death, besides its vulgarity—who doesn't die?—would come, in her particular case, punctually and at its proper time. First, to take her parents, for whom Cecilia had prepared sensible mourning. Then her. But she would die from illness, not from shame; from asphyxia, not from tedium; from consumption, not from anxiety.

As for the unforeseen, Cecilia had not noticed, in the great wall erected by her habits and those of her elders, any crack through which it could filter more than a drop at a time and so imperceptibly that it would be diluted without dying with its color the matter it would become part of.

And she did not have the consolation of inertia either. Of all the phrases that she had heard the one that had gotten to her very center was one that others used frequently, as if they ignored its power: "At your age I'd already had a wedding dress on..." "At your age my cousin had already taken her vows..." "At your age..."

Yes, it was true that Cecilia was as old as her papers said she was and that she had not taken any precaution whatsoever to veil it or hide it. But her years, despite their succeeding each other with the same slowness or speed with which the years succeeded themselves outside, had not allowed her to discover, as had the others, her own way. Overwhelmed by the tense expectations of her family, she once tried to make a decision, and did she ever regret it. Enrique. Cecilia wanted to stop being the stray and exhibit her master's brand. And she found herself, suddenly, spinning in a whirlpool of pain, of humiliation, abandoned. The culmination of it all was ridiculous: that of the maddened waters that never lie still in their riverbed and overflow onto the floor—not just uselessly but also causing upheaval and irritation.

Her failure only made the urgency of the others worse. They pricked her with many and contradictory stings. Hurry! Hurry! And she wanted only what the seed wants: the warmth of the earth to germinate in. Even there those who

picked at her found her: hurry! hurry! What's that, at home reading? What do you mean you want to go to school? Excuses. Deferrals. You have to do something, because life is over quick and youth even quicker. Cecilia was distressed as much by her mother's exasperated sermons as by Don Jose María's melancholic silences, but neither one ever forced her into action. She continued to stay home, shut up in the library, reading. And since her encounter with Sergio, she read nothing but novels.

What an amazing discovery, this world inhabited by imaginary beings!

Necessary beings ever since the day they were created. In the beginning, they had been chosen, among all possible beings, by their maker. And this preference for them was maintained—focusing the efforts of the imagination, the labor of crystallization of language—for as long as was needed to reach the category of being evident, visible, understandable. Ever since they were made, from the beginning, they had been chosen to serve as the flawless receptacle for a substance only fulfilled and culminated when poured into it.

But Cecilia's need was rooted in what had become an unstoppable longing for the company of a sibling.

She, too, was born of desire, of hope, of the urgent, undeferrable, tenacious invocation of another will that made her come all the way through from the sphere of possibility to the limits of action; and in this she was no more than passive, docile stuff. At the call of paternal love, Cecilia abandoned that limbo of the unborn and came to inhabit a body and occupy space and was made in the image and likeness of her creator. Later she was

held up as she took her first steps, cheered on as she first started to babble, a thousand times made and unmade by demanding hands, loving, and, oh, so unwieldy. She grew to obedience and did not insist on remaining in any of those provisional molds that she was —she knew— provisionally deposited in.

With a gesture issuing from nameless springs, Cecilia clung to this protection as the ivy clings to the tree that is its mainstay. She could have stayed that way forever if her father had not let the years eat away at him nor been disheartened by who knows what unknown set-backs of which Cecilia had not been cause, witness nor accomplice, and which, therefore she did not know how to forgive.

She then had to start letting go of her handholds, painfully, one by one. She sought around her, in the uncertain manner of plants, the solidity, the verticality that were essential to her. She found Enrique, a branch that without supporting her at all, gasped in asphyxia. From that point on she had no alternative but to change her species.

It was a transformation that went no further than the biological. Cecilia did not yet know what definition she should adhere to nor what conduct she would submit to in order to expand legitimately, to define herself by her similarity to or difference from the creatures around her, to assert or deny herself with regard to a conscience that tended to grow more and more, at the expense of the other organs, vital and of cognition.

And now, in reading these books, Cecilia discovered that her mutation had made her belong to that genre of people who were real, and that, like all of them, she had been haphazardly thrown into

In the same way
that Cecilia felt the stuff
of which the others
were made and found it
harsh, coarse to the touch,
senseless to the eyes,
incomprehensible,
so she perceived that
what she was made of
was seen by others
as repulsive, dangerous,
different.

the world by an anonymous gesture and that on her —body, name, destiny— would never fall an all-comprehending gaze, even if it were disapproving, even if it were incredibly brief. That no one was ever going to stop her on the threshold of apparitions to straighten her clothes or to help her memorize her lines or to rehearse the appropriate reverence or to prevent that common error. She walked, as did the others, erratically, tripping on obstacles whose mediocrity was insufficient to make them clumsy; she joined the others, like when you play blindman's bluff, and she separated from them with anguish. Eventually, she would come, as she had seen those who went before her do, into ignoble old age, into a solitude without wisdom, and into death with a gut terror that no amount of introspection could hope to minimize.

But if from this vantage point the novel-reading —and the revelation that she was substantially nothing but what she had so much hated and feared becoming— excited in Cecilia rebellion against the elements she was made from or the laws that sharply checked her, on the other hand, this habit exercised upon

her a calming effect, placating the real source of her anguish: the urgency, which could not be postponed, of making a choice.

Rebellious, irresponsible, Cecilia shook her shoulders to cast far away from her that burden that they would impose upon her from outside and give herself respite and pact, temporarily, with herself. Yes, of course, she would end up giving in to the others' demands.

But meanwhile she was her own master. This taking charge had been possible thanks to the novels. With one in her lap, like a talisman, she could remain in her room for days on end without anyone daring, for some reason, to accuse her of indolence, to confront her with idleness. And, more importantly, without the equilibrium of the universe being upset by the lack of cooperation of one of its parts, even if that part were as insignificant as she was. Because as long as Cecilia abstained, "another" would take that place of privilege —and also of punishment— (in any case, of reality) where the action takes place.

To that "other" Cecilia delegated all the hopes she would never dare to harbor; the fears that would not give in to exorcism; the desires that went beyond her; the abysses that call to us and admit no entreaty; in all, the life that only then ceased jumping into the emptiness of extinction, like an unstoppable, irreversible cataract, to maintain itself as a visible whole, the same as the host upon the altar, in a perpetual present. ■■■

NOTES

¹Chapter 5 of Rosario Castellanos' *Rito de Iniciación* (Initiation Rite) (Mexico City: Alfaguara, 1997). Reprinted and translated by permission of Alfaguara Publishing House.

Rosario Castellanos

Novelist, short story writer and poet Rosario Castellanos (born, Mexico City, 1925; died Tel Aviv, 1974) is considered by most critics and specialists in Mexican literature one of this century's most important Mexican writers and without a doubt, the greatest woman writer. And this gender distinction is not gratuitous since feminism is precisely one of Castellanos' most constant concerns. The theme of the submissive or subjected woman is masterfully dealt with in two books of short stories *Los convidados de agosto* (The Guests in August) (1964) and *Album de familia* (Family Album) (1971). Her incisive, often ironic, and sometimes hurtful narrative seems to be a profound game in which men and women lose and reencounter each other as enemies or as accomplices.

She delves deeply into the topic, given her ability to distance herself as a writer and the bitterness caused by her own condition as a woman in a sexist society; this profundity also makes itself felt in the story "El eterno femenino" (The Eternal Feminine Being) and in the majority of her poetry. This is particularly the case in the volume of poems *Poesía no eres tú* (You Are Not Poetry), which includes among other books *Trayectoria de polvo* (Trail of Dust) (1948), *De la vigilia estéril* (On Sterile Watchfulness) (1950) and *El rescate del mundo* (The Rescue of the World) (1952).

Castellanos' other great contribution to Mexican literature is her participation in the "indigenist" current with works like the volume of short stories *Ciudad Real* (1960) and the novels *Balún Canán* and *Oficio de tinieblas* (Sinister Craft), in which she transcends folk literature and the denunciation of social ills to penetrate indigenous life particularly in her native state of Chiapas, with a new attitude and a sharp critical sense, not disdaining denunciation but going beyond it. She shares kudos in this current with other Latin American writers: Alejo Carpentier, José Revueltas, Juan Rulfo, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa and Gabriel García Márquez.

Rosario Castellanos was given several important literary prizes, among them the Chiapas Prize (1958), the Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Prize (1962), the Carlos Trouyet Award in Letters (1967) and the Elías Sourasky Award in Letters (1972). She was a professor of literature at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and general director of the UNAM press office. From 1971 to 1974, Castellanos was Mexico's ambassador to Israel in Tel Aviv, where she died August 7, 1974.

Reviews

Rito de iniciación

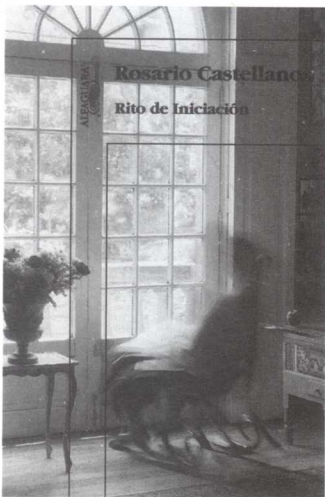
(Initiation Rite)

Rosario Castellanos

Alfaguara, Mexico City, 1997, 383 pp.

*But Matilde begins by going beyond any bounds
of good or evil thanks to a little detail: sex.
An intellectual woman is a contradiction in terms.
Therefore there is no such thing.*

ROSARIO CASTELLANOS



To the image we had of the life and work of Rosario Castellanos (born, Mexico City, 1925; died, Tel-Aviv, 1974), a new, perturbing element has been added that could change our opinion. Alfaguara's felicitous decision to publish *Rito de iniciación*, a novel that went unpublished for almost 30 years, once again allows us to get close to a writer who in life

was already beginning to be a legend. Reading it, however, will not confirm what for so long we supposed was the definitive portrait of one of the central figures in Mexican culture in the second half of the twentieth century.

We should say it once and for all: reading *Rito de iniciación* only revs up the myth about its author—and that is what myths are for, for unleashing whatever was fixed in the imagination by custom or sloth.

But, the new “possible image” that we may create of Rosario Castellanos will belong only to the sphere of literature and fiction. Thinking anything else would be a betrayal of an aspect of her biography which is, indeed, unquestionable: her intimate relationship with the craft of writing.

The figure of Castellanos is partially analogous to that of two other Mexican women who also created and recreated their own personalities as they confronted the challenges of their craft. None of the three, neither Frida Kahlo nor Nahuí Ollín, both painters, nor Castellanos, was lucky enough to live in a Mexico where women interested in looking at the world “outside their homes” did not immediately become suspect as possibly committing irreverent acts against their own femininity; women were applauded more for moral reasons than for their contributions to culture or the quality of their work.

From a woman born into a conservative family, who spent her childhood and first youth in a small, provincial town (Comitán, Chiapas), the best that could be expected was literature spanning limited topics or confined to the circumference of nostalgia, longing always for that “subverted Eden” that Ramón López Velarde, Mexico's first real modern poet, speaks of. However, the universe that this native of Chiapas managed to create in her prose is truly vast. We should remember that in the 1960s, Latin American literature had already given signs of a new outlook and a sharp critical sense. In Mexico, specifically, Juan Rulfo and Juan José Arreola were outstanding examples of the new writer, and would be looked up to as masters a decade later. So, when Castellanos dared to touch on the problem of indigenous people in Chiapas in, for example, *Balún Canán* and *Oficio de Tinieblas* (Sinister Craft), she perceives it not only as the fatal result of the 500 years of oppression since the conquest, but is also able to expand her interests to include the religious, economic, political and

sexual spheres, and with all these elements sparks a dialogue of unprecedented intensity.

In this very same way, the first few pages of *Rito de iniciación* reveal to us a Cecilia, the main character of the novel, whose talents as a polemicist begin with the desire to decipher some "family papers," of more of a personal than historical interest to her. All in all, her curiosity provides her with a lesson on the history of one of the regions of Mexico where the presence of criollos and their relationship with the first settlers of those lands are more complex and painful, just as her relationship with those of her forebears who will not restore to her a clear, tranquil image of herself will be complicated and painful.

When you read *Rito de iniciación* you cannot help but think of what the English poet W.H. Auden said about novelists: they must jealously accumulate, if they are able, all the errors of Man. This recognition has implications both for the psychological characterization of Cecilia and other characters in the novel and for the many-edged or "cubist" structure that Castellanos picks for constructing a story, with multiple foci, with the center everywhere and nowhere.

If, before leaving her small provincial city, in moments of sleepless introspection, Cecilia was already implacable to the point of cruelty, her lucidity grew in Mexico City upon coming into contact with her fellow students at the School of Philosophy and Letters, some of whom were avidly seeking political prestige, others laurels as writers and still others simply to shock the new members of a circle of friends. The young student goes to live with her aunt Beatriz, whose spiritual ambiguity troubles the younger woman; she participates in social evenings with the poet Manuel Solís, the pride of the nation with a distrustful disposition; later she witnesses the erratic behavior of the tortured poet Matilde Casanova. In a word, Cecilia is a pole of attraction, the being absorbed in thought who hears fragments of conversation, agile verbal fencing matches, boasting of genius or humiliations that damage her erotic experience. We, together with her, come to contemplate a series of images drawn from myriad perspectives, but we also see, thanks to the intense use of irony in Rosario Castellanos' prose, the constant destruction of the images displayed.

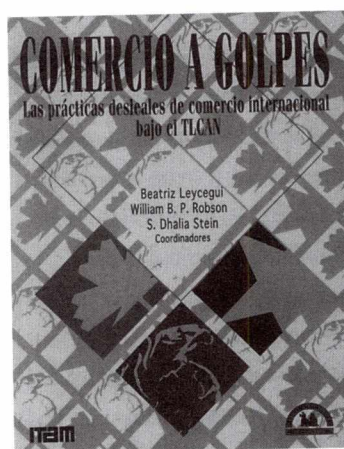
Cecilia calls herself "nobody" and, like "nobody," she represents the sum total of all the errors of which Auden spoke, and which, of course, make possible the emergence of a new, more intense, more profound look at the drama that is the condition of women who are trying to find themselves. In this way, one by one, the suppositions, the most dearly held convictions crumble before a look which contemplates everything under the sign of sensitivity and intelligence, or what Mexican poet José Gorostiza called "solitude in flames."

One of the chapters of the novel, "Family Album," is representative of Rosario Castellanos' narrative technique: her ability to make the image of Matilde Casanova disappear and to question the outlook that her followers had on marriage, maternity, fame and the writer's craft. But the chapter also offers up to us the most fertile obsessions that Castellanos developed through that handful of characters during the period she spent writing. For that reason, it is not at all clear as Eduardo Mejía says it is—he was who rescued the book from obscurity and wrote an essay published as an appendix to the first edition—that the novelist intended to simply mock Matilde Casanova. Quite the contrary: the portrait that emerges from these pages is moving in its psychological depth and the expressive strength of the character, in the compassion with which the author draws her defining traits, even though they are contradictory. And this is because the novelist herself was also plagued by many, very contradictory demons.

Mauricio Grobet Vallarta
Mexican writer and editor

Comercio a golpes

Las prácticas desleales de comercio internacional bajo el TLCAN
(Cutthroat Trade. Disloyal International Trade Practices Under NAFTA)
Beatriz Leycegui, William B.P. Robson, S. Dhalla Stein, compilers
ITAM-Miguel Angel Porrúa, Mexico City, 1997, 295 pp.



Competition in international trade is often distorted by what are called unfair trade practices, among them, dumping and subsidies. Through dumping, exporters often try to win markets by lowering their prices below those on their domestic markets to displace suppliers or place production surpluses. Govern-

ment subsidies, on the other hand, artificially lower the price of exports and are sometimes granted to increase competitiveness in foreign trade. Of course, both practices are prejudicial for domestic producers in the target country, which suddenly finds its natural market invaded by very low-priced products, not because they are manufac-

tured at a higher rate of productivity or with more sophisticated technology, but because they are supported by unfair trade practices.

While other unfair international trade practices exist, such as disregard for international intellectual property rights, *Comercio a golpes* zeroes in on dumping and subsidies.

To defend domestic producers from the impact of these practices, governments usually establish legal measures imposing compensatory quotas (like import taxes) which raise the prices of imports whose original prices were artificially lowered. However, governments also sometimes use defending their economy as a pretext, following spurious procedures to impose compensatory quotas to unduly raise the cost of certain imports which are not actually subsidized or part of a dumping operation. The aim of this kind of government operation is to protect domestic producers from more efficient foreign producers. The United States is one of the countries most famous for resorting to this kind of protectionist measure against foreign exporters. The problem becomes even sharper when exporters try to seek legal recourse against illegal quotas because then they come up against specialized tribunals little prone to nullify inappropriately established quotas.

Since the Canadian and Mexican economies depend to a great extent on their exports to the United States, both have attempted to fight the frequent bias of this kind on the part of U.S. officials. To that end, as well as for other reasons related to foreign trade and investment, Canada sought and signed a Free Trade Agreement with the United States in 1987. Later, in 1993, Mexico became part of that regional trade bloc with the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA's Chapter XIX deals precisely with a way to review the administrative procedures used for setting compensatory quotas for dumping or subsidies through impartial bilateral panels. The procedure seeks to avoid the authorities who set the quotas being the same ones to review their legality; instead, it creates a legal body, a panel, composed of citizens of each of the two countries involved.

Comercio a golpes presents a series of articles divided into five parts, all written by specialists, who look at antidumping and antisubsidy quotas in North America from different angles.

The first part attempts to put conflicts over dumping and subsidies in their context. For that reason, the title, "General Panorama of Trade Controversies in North America," is somewhat ambitious.

The second section explains the origins and functioning of NAFTA's Chapter XIX in a language accessible to professionals from different disciplines. It does not attempt a profound legal analysis that would look in detail, for example, into the concrete cases that have been tried under this chapter.

The third part of the book presents the reader with three articles written by experts in the field who explain the essentials of the legal procedures for setting antidumping and antisubsidy quotas in each one of the three signatories to NAFTA. It is commendable to try to compare the three national governments. However, each of the articles is about a different country, written by a different author, each using a different methodology, instead of looking at each country's legal procedures, point by point, comparing them and pointing out the similarities or the nature and effects of the differences, then, it is sometimes difficult for the reader to determine the commonalities and divergences of the three systems. From another angle, the explanations do not refer to the practical problems that applying the procedures in each country actually creates, thereby underutilizing the unquestionably long experience of the authors themselves.

The fourth part of the book in principle offers the reader an economic analysis of the application of antidumping and antisubsidy laws from 1987 to 1995. It is a mainly quantitative analysis of the kind of goods subject to investigation, their relative importance among imports, their origin, etc. Some of the significant data in this section includes the fact that the success rate of applicants is lower than 50 percent, and this drops to 30 percent when the goods come from countries with market economies. The section does not analyze what significance rejected applications had in Mexico's national economy. This would have been interesting for evaluating whether any of the domestic companies that went bankrupt—particularly small and medium-sized firms—did so because, under the pretext of fighting inflation, dumping practices were not sufficiently combatted. Also included in this part of the book is a quantitative study of the use of legislation against unfair trade practices between Canada and the United States, as well as a general overview of the impact of relevant U.S. laws on international trade, both of which are important contributions for the study of the topic.

The fifth and final part of the book is an article exploring alternatives to antidumping and antisubsidy legislation with regard to NAFTA. It proposes worthwhile lines of research which will undoubtedly be opened up and explored.

Overall, this book is an important and useful contribution to a topic new to our country, even though in Canada it has already existed for almost a century. The analysis is illustrative and should serve as the basis for encouraging more and more specialized studies that will in turn foster the training of Mexican experts. ■■■

Eduardo F. Ramírez García
Researcher at CISAN



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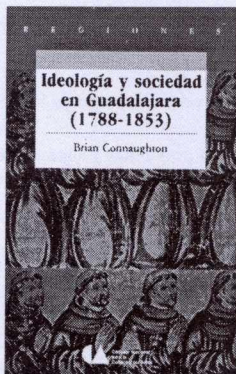


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