

VOICES *of Mexico*

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U.S. Midterm Elections Views from Mexico

Articles by
José Luis Valdés-Ugalde,
Silvia Nuñez, Paz Consuelo
Márquez-Padilla
and Alejandro Anaya

President Calderón and the United States

J. Jesús Esquivel

Governability and Multilateral Bodies

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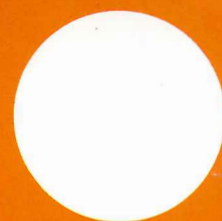
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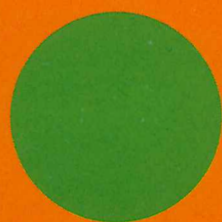


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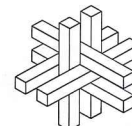
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Mauricio Degollado

Cover

Monumental sculpture at Federico Silva's workshop in Tlaxcala.

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Elsie Montiel

OUR VOICE

The Mexican government's recent measures to fight organized crime are of the utmost importance. Both the campaigns against drug trafficking and the extradition of outstanding drug kingpins and heads of very powerful gangs like the Juárez and Gulf cartels have made headline news all over the world, but mainly in Mexico and the United States. These measures have been termed "monumental" by the U.S. ambassador in Mexico, Antonio Garza, and "unprecedented" by the U.S. Attorney General. Many of the U.S. political media have been surprised by a policy as significant and transcendental as this.

Regardless of these actions' long-term effectiveness, it certainly is the case that they have involved a profound, grave decision on the part of the Felipe Calderón administration, a determination most Mexicans have supported and that will require a very cohesive society to withstand the repercussions inside the cartels, which may well respond very violently. Without a doubt, it is a decision that will very soon have an impact on our bilateral relations with the United States.

Nevertheless, we will have to wait for the long-term response of the whole U.S. establishment, particularly the executive and legislative branches. In that sense, it is important to emphasize an issue that has been the subject of discussion in this space in the past: the urgency of U.S. reciprocity toward Mexico, absent during almost the entire term of President George W. Bush. Without reciprocity *vis-à-vis* the transcendental measures the Mexican government has taken, Washington will be in serious difficulties in the future, not only in terms of talking about cooperation, but even in terms of demanding it.

* * *

The real effectiveness and media impact of the strategy to fight organized crime will undoubtedly have an effect on the main U.S. political actors' perception of our country and bilateral relations. In our "Politics" section, journalist Jesús Esquivel analyzes this issue, centering on the positions Felipe Calderón will have to take on matters like migration and relations with the Democrats.

The Democratic Party victory in November's U.S. midterm elections—or rather, George W. Bush and the Republicans' thunderous defeat—is the topic of articles by four Mexican specialists in U.S. politics in our "United States Affairs" section. Silvia Núñez centers on current social policy's effect on the election outcome and recent trends in women's political participation. Paz Consuelo Márquez-Padilla analyzes the impact on Republicans' poor performance of so-called neo-conservative ideas and the religious right in the design of foreign and domestic policy respectively. Víctor Anaya focuses on explaining the reasons why an erroneous—not to say disastrous—foreign policy played an unprecedented role in determining the midterm elections' outcome. And, lastly, my own contribution seeks to offer elements for understanding the Grand Old Party's electoral fiasco, situating its causes in the three phantoms that have molded U.S. public opinion in recent times that the Republicans read wrong and dealt with incorrectly in their campaign: the shadow of the alleged electoral fraud in Florida in November 2000; 9/11 and the obsession with security and the fight against terrorism; and the—for many inexplicable—unnecessary protraction of the war in Iraq.

Bilateral relations with the United States are taking on enormous strategic importance in Mexico in the recently inaugurated Calderón administration's foreign policy, although the same cannot be said of the attention they have been given by our northern neighbor's politi-

cal actors. Amy Shannon reflects on the huge, surprising demonstrations by Latinos and other immigrants last year in the United States protesting the House passage of a restrictive, discriminatory immigration bill. Hernán Salas, for his part, looks at our northern border, which he conceives more than as a line separating the two countries, as a multicultural space with its own territory and identity: a line that separates, but also joins.

The new Calderón administration also faces enormous challenges on the domestic front. One is the consolidation of democratic governability, above all after the break in the political system caused by the last elections. Constitutional expert Miguel Carbonell describes the characteristics the urgently-needed new electoral reform should have; among them are giving the electoral monitoring body greater powers to oversee and, if necessary, sanction political parties. Another challenge will be to ensure economic stability in a context in which oil prices are likely to drop and the U.S. economy will probably decelerate. Economist Pablo Ruiz Nápoles reflects about the strategies Mexico's last administration and central bank used to safeguard the economy from the risk of exchange-rate and financial crises, pointing out that the remedy may be worse than the disease. Problems of democratic governance are not exclusive to Mexico, or even phenomena that develop exclusively in the sphere of national states. Internationalist Antonio Ortiz Mena describes how multilateral organizations like the United Nations, the Organization of American States or the World Trade Organization have had to face the false dilemma between democracy and effectiveness; he also proposes a series of strategies for Mexico's better performance in these organizations.

* * *

Our "Art and Culture" section includes an exclusive interview with Federico Silva, one of the country's most versatile artists, committed to contemporary art and political culture in Mexico. Over 80, Silva recognizes that his will to live is tied directly to his work and that eternal search for meaning underlying all artistic expression. Susana Enríquez, a Mexican painter residing in Australia, whose art is fed by the language and movement of music, closes the section with an article describing her most recent project, "Themes and Variations."

San Luis Potosí abounds in attractions too plentiful for a single visit. For that reason, we once again go there in our section "The Splendor of Mexico." We start off with Real de Catorce, an old mining town, inexplicably fascinating to any traveler who wanders its streets, feeling the presence of those who can no longer be seen. In the same vein, we continue with Las Pozas de Xilitla, created by Edward James, a wealthy English aristocrat who found in Mexico the ideal place for breathing life into his surrealist delirium. Then we include a brief look at the innumerable examples of natural beauty to be found in the Potosí Huastec region. The visit ends with a tour of the Potosí Regional Museum in the state capital, one of whose main attractions is its detailed description of the different facets of Huastec culture.

Practically one year after his death, *Voices of Mexico* pays well deserved homage to the renowned, prize-winning writer Salvador Elizondo, one of the most important pens of twentieth-century Mexican literature, author of one of most controversial, acclaimed novels in the history of Mexican letters, *Farabeuf*. Three well-known scholars of his work, Dermot Curley, Alejandro Toledo and Juan Antonio Rosado, examine it from different angles, reflecting on his impact on Spanish-language letters, his personal motivations, his concern with writing's form and technique and his undoubted contribution to universal erotic literature. All this is accompanied by another view —the most intimate one— that of exceptional Mexican photographer Paulina Lavista, his life partner.

José Luis Valdés-Ugalde

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A Window on the Future Mexico's Next Electoral Reform

Miguel Carbonell*



Cuartocero/IFE

Today political analysts and parties are debating whether the electoral reform should include replacing the Federal Electoral Institute councilors.

Now that the July 2 federal elections are far behind us, perhaps it is the time to reflect about what should be reviewed or changed in a future reform to our electoral legislation.

After what happened during the electoral process, I think that we now have important evidence to be able to carry out a good electoral reform. But we also have enough time to serenely, unhurriedly make the changes needed because the next federal elections will not be held until 2009. This does not mean we should postpone the reform until then, but it is important that the changes not be “cooked up” overnight given that the experience of recent years

shows that that is not the way to get the best possible reforms.

In any case, the next electoral reform should take into account the following:

1. REDUCE CAMPAIGN LENGTH

The effectiveness of politics in general and electoral campaign politics in particular is determined to a certain extent by time. In politics, time always has an impact, whether positive or negative.

The attention to (and tension during) campaigns cannot last very long. Otherwise, we run the risk of making electoral activity banal, of starting to repeat the same messages and, in

* Researcher at the UNAM Institute for Legal Research.

short, of making the race boring, while it should rivet the public's attention.

Nobody's attention is riveted in Mexico, as we were able to clearly observe in the 2006 campaign. During the last few weeks before voting day, everyone was getting tired and fed up; candidates' speeches became repetitive and thousands of citizens took refuge in the World Cup soccer matches.

The period when candidates can officially campaign urgently needs to be reduced. Campaigns should start in early April and last three months at the most.

2. CUT PARTY FUNDING

We can think it is a good thing or not, but the fact of the matter is that one of the main things that determines electoral outcomes today is the amount of money available to a candidate. Briefly put: the more money you have, the greater your chances of winning the election. In that context, if we want to maintain equality among the contenders and ensure that the principle of "one person-one vote" continues to be upheld, we have to regulate the availability of funds the candidates and parties have to spend.

Generally speaking, we can say that the breadth and level of detail with which Article 41, Subsection II of the Constitution regulates party financing can only be understood in light of Mexico's political history. For decades, inequality was a constant in politics. While the long-time hegemonic party enjoyed unlimited resources (much of which came out of the public coffers), the rest of the parties could barely survive on their members' dues and small government stipends. To create greater equity and improve conditions for electoral competition, it was necessary to increase fund-

ing to all the parties, making it predominantly public. This would, in addition, make it easier for electoral officials to monitor it.

The idea of public financing has its proponents and its opponents. Many say that the financing parties receive is excessive in light of the many needs Mexico has in areas like education, health or housing. For others, public financing is the only way to balance out the conditions for electoral competition and to make certain illicit monies are not introduced into campaigns and party structures. It certainly is true that public funding has been very positive and its effects

**Electoral legislation
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the media.**

are undoubtedly encouraging. But, in the future, the amounts—a large part of which are funneled directly into the broadcast media—should be diminished, at the same time that electoral officials' monitoring ability is improved.

Despite electoral authorities' important efforts to monitor spending and the sophisticated legal framework aimed at avoiding excesses and abuses by political parties, campaign financing scandals have surfaced in several of the recent electoral campaigns. Although to differing degrees, no national political party seems exempt from committing all kinds of trickery and offenses.¹ For this and other reasons, we should continue to think about the best way to finance parties and, more generally

speaking, about the relationship between money and politics.²

The next electoral reform will have to deal with these issues. I do not believe that it will be necessary to discuss the relevance of public financing, which has already shown itself to be an important lever for ensuring the political pluralism we enjoy, but what is indefensible is the current amount. Parties will have to get used to running much more austere campaigns with fewer resources. Electoral legislation must take into account the need to reduce public financing. For this point to have positive effects, it should go hand in hand with the next point on regulating the communications media. We must not forget that a substantial part of campaign funding goes directly to the media, particularly the broadcast media. Therefore, a reform that regulates parties' access to the media differently could imply an important decrease in the funding they receive.

3. REGULATE RELATIONS BETWEEN PARTIES AND THE MEDIA

Whether we like it or not, the communications media are among the most important actors in our contemporary democracies. During election campaigns, the media become even more important since their news coverage or analytical programs can sway the vote of a not insignificant percent of the electorate. If election results are very close, such as in the case of the 2006 presidential race, media influence can be decisive.

The media can have a positive or negative influence. They can weigh in heavily for one party or another and act in consequence. In fact, it is not unusual for the media to have a "preference"

for certain candidates or to espouse a discourse and editorials favoring one over another. In this context, we should start thinking about mechanisms to promote media pluralism, which is the only thing that would allow us to limit the media's influence, since the preferences of one medium would be compensated by the preference of others, and could even be neutralized so they would not be exposed as biased in the face of their competitors. Media pluralism fosters a diversity of voices, beliefs and discourses and ends up substantially nurturing public debate.

Electoral reform on these matters should at least prohibit direct purchase of publicity in the broadcast media, where most party funding currently goes. It is an absurd form of public "subsidy" that only makes for private profit, mainly for the two major television corporations. There are several options for avoiding this waste. One is to centralize all purchases of publicity spots in the hands of the Federal Electoral Institute so that they will be acquired for all the parties before the race starts. Another more radical but much more beneficial solution is to forbid all publicity in the broadcast media. It is important for the parties to learn to live without buying television air time, but to earn coverage with good speeches and news of general interest to the public. The citizenry is asking for ideas and proposals, not slogans and jingles.

4. EXPAND MECHANISMS FOR MONITORING PARTY RESOURCES

In recent years we have seen important scandals over illicit party funding activities. Naturally, Mexico has not cornered the market on this particular item

worldwide: similar scandals have broken in Spain, Italy, Germany and the United States, to mention just a few. But it certainly is true that the level of criminal activities we have seen in Mexico is considerable and has involved at least two of the three main political parties.

There is much to be done in this area, but we could begin at least with effective monitoring of the so-called "pre-campaigns," on the one hand, and on the other, give electoral officials the authority to investigate "informal" contributions that different associations and groups give parties and candidates. Often toward the end of the campaign,

The law must ban statements that clearly defame a candidate or are simply insults without any kind of positive message.

when the parties are about to go over their spending limits, ads sponsored by "civic associations" or "citizens groups" appear, pushing for a vote for one candidate or another. This allows us to suppose there is a funding network parallel to the official one. This should not only be banned —as a matter of fact, it already is— but also punished.

In any case, most of the illegal resources flowing into campaigns continue to come from the public coffers. We would have to conclude, then, that effective supervision of campaign spending would necessarily mean an improvement in monitoring of public institutions, which often use their resources to pay for the campaign activities of candidates running on the ticket of the political

party their directors or ministers are members of.

5. GRADUAL RENOVATION OF ELECTORAL BODIES

In recent decades, the electoral road as the only legitimate way to access public positions has required the construction of a complex electoral institutional framework. This institutional, normative framework has become an example for many countries, even some with consolidated democratic systems. Electoral bodies' successful functioning has been based on their good institutional design. But some matters have been neglected (perhaps deliberately) and should be corrected in a new electoral reform. One of these questions is the renovation of the members of the highest electoral body.

Once the presidential election was ruled upon, six of the seven judges of the Electoral Tribunal finished their terms of office; one remained: Judge Alejandro Luna Ramos, who had replaced Don José Luis de la Peza when he died. The six were replaced by people who in a few weeks will have to make important decisions about local elections held during the second half of the year. Would it not be better for the judges to be replaced little by little and not all at once?

The same thing happens with the administrative electoral authorities. Federal Electoral Institute councilors are not replaced gradually either. This institutional arrangement is not very beneficial for the continuity of electoral activity and only ensures that every time officials are replaced, there is a long phase of adaptation and learning. This should be changed as soon as possible.

6. GUARANTEE CONTENDERS’
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

During the 2006 campaigns, an issue came up that had not been discussed before and was of the greatest importance: the freedom the contenders have to bad-talk other candidates. The so-called “negative campaigns” were new to our political scene and in some cases ended up in electoral court.

If we look at how campaigns are held in other countries, we would conclude that the law must ban only statements that clearly defame a candidate or accuse him/her of having committed a crime or are simply insults without any kind of positive message. For example, it should be forbidden to say that such-and-such a candidate is a child molester, but not that his/her election could represent a “danger” to Mexico or to its financial stability.

Campaigns are an ideal moment for presenting the electorate with all

the elements needed to decide which party to vote for. Citizens’ criteria can only be adequately formulated if they have enough information, both negative and positive, about those who are asking for their vote.³ Raoul Vaneigem’s thinking should also be taken into account: “There is no idea or statement or belief that should be free of criticism, scorn, ridicule, humor, parody, caricature, imitation.... Anything that sanctifies kills. Execration arises from adoration. Sanctified, the child is a tyrant, the woman an object, life, a disembodied abstraction.”⁴

All these points should be studied during the discussion Mexico’s Congress will have to have about the new electoral reform. It is encouraging to think that these important issues are all based on the supposition that we already have a functioning electoral system which merely requires some adjustments. Therefore, it is not a matter of reinventing the way we organize elec-

tions but of improving it, something very positive in light of our bad historic experiences. **MM**

NOTES

- ¹ Jaime Cárdenas’s interesting narration of two unique cases of this kind can be found in his book *Lecciones de los asuntos Pemex y Amigos de Fox* (Lessons on the Pemex and Friends of Fox Affairs) (Mexico City: IJ-UNAM, 2004). Another book on the same subject is Lorenzo Córdova and Ciro Murayama, *Elecciones, dinero y corrupción: Pemexgate y amigos de Fox* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 2006).
- ² For a novel look at this, see Bruce Ackerman and Ian Ayres, *Voting with Dollars. A New Paradigm for Campaign Finance* (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 2002).
- ³ Thinking about the role of freedom of expression within a democratic political system can start from Cass Sustein’s important book *Democracy and the Problem of Free Speech* (New York: The Free Press, 1993). The same author defended a dissident discourse and its necessity in the democratic regeneration of any country in her *Why Societies Need Dissent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).
- ⁴ Raoul Vaneigem, *Nada es sagrado, todo se puede decir* (Barcelona: Mesalina, 2006), p. 12.

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Felipe Calderón and the U.S. New Coordinates for the Bilateral Agenda

J. Jesús Esquivel*



Convincing the White House to promote a comprehensive immigration reform cannot and should not be President Felipe Calderón's most important challenge in his relations with the United States. Calderón's tactics have to be pragmatic since realpolitik demand that the Mexican president create a new relationship with the U.S. Congress, and the Democrats are now the real power in Washington, at least for the next two years.

President Bush and the Republican Party's defeat in the November 7 midterm elections left

the White House without the political and moral authority needed to impose the parameters of legislation for the next 24 months. For Calderón this is a great opportunity to reformulate relations with the United States which during the Fox administration erroneously concentrated on acquiescing to Washington's political clout, dominated by the Republicans.

Senator Harry Reid (Nevada) and Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (California), Democratic majority leaders in the two houses of Congress that opened their sessions in mid-January 2007, control their country's political agenda. Mexico's attention will center on three issues: immigration, trade and the fight against drug trafficking.

* Weekly magazine *Proceso* and radio news broadcast "Enfoque" correspondent in Washington, D. C.

Mexico's insistence on the issue of immigration that the Fox administration zeroed in on in its relations with the U.S. makes no sense to the Democratic leadership. This is obvious from Representative Pelosi's decision to leave the comprehensive reform of immigration legislation off the list of priorities for the new Congress. Reid did exactly the same thing.

When President-elect Calderón visited Washington last November 9, he realized this and sent the Capitol a message that his administration would focus more on efforts to keep Mexicans in Mexico than on justifying the economic errors he was inheriting from Fox. There continues to be, however, a need for the United States to amend its immigration legislation to benefit the community of seven to eight million undocumented Mexican immigrants who have lived and worked in that country for many years now.

Pelosi said that President Calderón's vision was interesting and timely, and at least more responsible, and that she hoped he did what he said he was going to do.

Even if it is not one of the Democrats' priorities, U.S. immigration reform is a necessity. Unfortunately, however, it does not have the least political-electoral weight, as could be seen in the November 7 elections in which the Iraq war was the fundamental issue that fueled the Democrats' spectacular defeat of Bush and the Republicans. For that reason, Pelosi did not include immigration on her list of priorities: the Speaker of the House has her eye on Iraq, the social agenda and the U.S. economy because they will play a vital role in deciding who comes out on top in the 2008 presidential race, which the Democrats are determined to win.

The Calderón administration seems to have understood the political message sent by the Bush/Republican defeat. It was right to put U.S. immigration legislation reform low on its list of priorities because it knows that sooner or later, with the Democrats holding the balance of power in Washington, Capitol Hill will have to pass a law dealing with it, without it being a radical or racist blow against Mexican immigrants, since it was the Republicans, with support from the White House, who tried to criminalize them.

Last November 8, Bush became a lame duck president, centering only on finding a way to live with the Democrats that will not affect his own party

**The most urgent issue
the Calderón administration
will face in its relations
with the United States
is the war against
drug trafficking.**

even more, which the polls and experts say runs the risk of losing the White House in 2008.

The Calderón administration should deepen, broaden and improve its relations with the Democrats in the U.S. House and Senate. This means that it really needs to choose someone with a political profile, even if he is a member of Mexico's Foreign Service, as ambassador to Washington.¹ Mexico's U.S. embassy needs to be thoroughly cleansed of anything smacking of Foxism. Carlos de Icaza, the outgoing Mexican ambassador, is a perfect example of our foreign policy's ineffectiveness over the last six years.

It is said of De Icaza, a wooden, arrogant diplomat, that he "was born and grew up an ambassador," by way of justifying his ineffectiveness; because of his lack of political acumen, he became a simple puppet of former Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez.

The lack of the initiative that a political ambassador would have brought to the job was noticeable in the way relations with Democratic legislators were neglected during the entire Fox administration. This led directly to Pelosi's decision to eliminate immigration reform from her list of legislative priorities.

The most urgent issue the Calderón administration will face in its relations with the United States is that old saw: the war against drug trafficking.

Drug-trafficking-related violence, which has grown and taken root throughout Mexico, including in the capital, is a disease the Americans do not want to catch. On Reid and Pelosi's list of social priorities, the fight against drug consumption and dealing is urgent for a simple reason: Bush has ignored it all these years because he concentrated almost entirely on Iraq and the war against terrorism.

Drug consumption in the U.S. silently rose 15 percent from 2003 to 2005 according to Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) figures. This is read on the Hill as the Mexican government's failure in the fight against drug trafficking, and as always, the producing or transit countries get more of the blame than the consuming country, which is directly responsible for the increase in demand.

"The fight against organized crime will be my administration's most difficult challenge," said Calderón last November 9 in Washington, D.C. The Democrats and even the White House

will be paying close attention to progress made in this area because once Iraq changes course, the Republicans' electoral interests in 2008 will be to distance themselves completely from the president, who will not be able to reciprocate in order to not create the image of a divided party.

In this context, once again the Mexican government will come under the watchful eye of some of the United States' federal agencies like the DEA, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which will take note of the Calderón government's slightest actions against organized crime, hoping even to investigate cases of alleged involvement of highly placed military officers, politicians and members of the president's family in drug trafficking, which were ignored during the Fox administration.

Because of the implications and violent consequences of drug trafficking, even if Washington were more self-critical in its assessment of the increase in drug consumption, narcotics will once again become all-pervasive in Mexican-U.S. relations like they were during the Institutional Revolutionary Party presidencies of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982-1988), Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) and Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (1994-2000).

The United States' southern border is a latent concern for the White House because of its fear of contagion from Mexican drug-traffic related violence. During the Fox administration, Bush relegated criticisms, demands and denunciations of this violence to Tony Garza, his ambassador in Mexico City. With the Democrats as the new power in town, the panorama changes.

When the Democratic Party had the majority in Congress during the

De la Madrid and Salinas administrations until 1994, Capitol Hill made the sharpest criticisms of the Mexican government's fight against drug trafficking, sometimes causing a radical cooling of bilateral relations.

If he does not take a hard, impartial stance in the war against organized crime, Calderón will face a situation similar to the one the PRI presidents did when Washington dubbed them corrupt beneficiaries of the drug cartels.

In a House of Representatives led by the Democrats, some legislators, particularly from border states, continue to try to reestablish the certification of the Mexican government's anti-drug efforts, a practice discontinued in 2001 as part of a pro-

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ject to get Latin America to improve its anti-drug production and trafficking efforts without pressure from Washington.

The other priority in the new Mexico-U.S. relations during the Calderón administration is pending trade issues: transportation and agriculture. In these areas, Calderón is obliged to defend Mexican interests that Fox put on the back burner in favor of concentrating on the immigration issue. Sometimes they were not even mentioned for fear of irritating the Republicans and the White House, which in turn hurt perspectives for immigration reform.

The enormous trade advantages the Americans have over Mexicans that

were promoted by Bush and the Republicans in frank violation of NAFTA provisions are and will continue to be common practice under a Democratic Congress. The U.S. transportation industry and farmers continue to be economically untouchable because of their electoral and political importance for both Republicans and Democrats.

Calderón's pragmatism would be an essential tool for dealing with issues like corn and other grains, where Mexican farmers have been displaced and hurt by existing U.S. farm subsidies. This issue could be the measure of the Mexican president's tolerance *vis-à-vis* Washington, more than the war against drugs in which the Mexican government must participate because of its national interest. The U.S. Congress and the executive have trampled on many trade interests since 1994.

The World Trade Organization could be the ideal forum for Calderón to defend Mexico's rights and interests from U.S. incomppliance and violations of NAFTA mandates. If Calderón handles relations with the United States astutely and pragmatically, following closely the cannons of international diplomacy like Argentina, Chile and Brazil do, for example, Mexicans and particularly undocumented migrants could benefit from the change in political power in Washington, which with the Democrats has gone from a bellicose conservative radicalism represented by Bush and the Republicans, to a self-critical conservative liberalism with a view to the 2008 presidential elections. **MM**



NOTES

¹ By the close of this edition, Calderón had nominated Arturo Sarukhán as Mexico's ambassador to the United States, a young politician whose profile fits the author's description. [Editor's Note.]

Self-insurance as a Safeguard Our Entry into Modernity

Pablo Ruiz Nápoles*



President Calderón and the new finance minister, Agustín Carstens.

In northwestern Mexico City, at the Polanco and Santa Fe malls, elegant brand-name boutiques, jewelry stores and perfumes, indigenous only to the world's great capitals, are common. What may surprise some Mexican and foreign tourists visiting the area are the luxury car dealers, selling not only BMWs, which almost any local resident can buy, but also Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Jaguars and others. But the most outstanding feature is that near these dealerships, body-shops abound specializing in armor plating, a sign of car owners' fears

due to the insecurity that prevails not only locally or in the capital, but countrywide. And they are not wrong: this area, including Las Lomas, Tecamachalco, Inter-lomas and part of the Cuajimalpa borough, Mexico City's entire northwest, is a real cluster, where the country's upper class lives, eats, studies, works, shops and parties.

Many of these streets, not to mention the exclusive housing developments, are guarded by gates and rent-a-cops. Almost everything is imported, and houses and lots are sold in U.S. dollars. Here are the corporate headquarters of the multinationals that bring capital, as well as the banks and financial institutions that ex-

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port capital. Estimates put Mexican citizens' deposits in U.S. banks alone at more than U.S.\$65 billion.

This whole story is repeated, perhaps on a smaller, less luxurious scale, in the country's second- and third-largest cities, Monterrey and Guadalajara. This is all the product of the modernity that came to Mexico from the mid-1980s with the economic opening and integration with the United States through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Not very far from Mexico City's northwest, in the downtown area and east of there, the whole thing repeats itself but in a socio-economic mirror image. Here, itinerant sales proliferate, vendors setting up stands daily on the sidewalks of previously important avenues, in alleys and even on the streets themselves. Every imaginable kind of import is sold here, mostly "legal" contraband and Mexican-made and imported "pirate" copies of brand-name shoes, clothing, watches and liquor, CDs, videos and computer software and hardware. These informal markets exist not only in the poor areas of Mexico City, but also in those of the other cities. This, together with crime, is a way of life for the thousands or millions of Mexicans who cannot find a regular job in today's modernized formal economy.

This sector of Mexican society, the unemployed, also lives with flight to the United States, but not capital flight: labor flight. An estimated more than half million people try to cross Mexico's northern border every year using all kinds of transportation, and, of course, on foot. This figure, far from dropping with modernity, has increased and changed its profile. Now it is no longer just agricultural workers who literally flee in search of work, but also young

people with different levels of schooling. Those who stay abroad—and their numbers are legion—regularly send part of their earnings home to their families in Mexico, making this the second most important source of foreign currency after those accrued from oil exports: about U.S.\$20 billion a year.

In a country like Mexico, with an economy that is uneven in many senses, so close to the giant, the United States, foreign currency, particularly U.S. dollars, has been the Achilles heel that has brought about all its economic crises. Suffice it to remember the 1994-1995 crisis, when several events sparked an unusual amount of dollar

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flight that required a direct loan from the U.S. government of almost U.S.\$50 billion, which destroyed forever our country's commercial banking system and left a government debt then estimated at about U.S.\$100 billion, which has most certainly grown due to accumulated interest.¹

2000 and 2006 were election years and the end of administrations in which financial markets were so unstable that the owners of capital sought liquidity in dollars to cover themselves in case of a devaluation, thereby causing, whether they knew it or not, the much feared devaluation.² This concern accentuated in 2000 when the Institutional Revo-

lutionary Party (PRI) was replaced in office by the National Action Party (PAN); and things looked even worse for 2006 because some sectors feared that the left would win the elections, which from their point of view, would cause uncertainty. However, the typical end-of-administration crisis, always a crisis of speculation in foreign currency, did not come about.

Traditionally, the main cause of foreign currency flight was the rumors of a devaluation of the peso, which the outgoing administration was expected to cause to adjust an overvalued currency and assume the political costs of the adjustment. The currency is overvalued when there is a difference between domestic and external inflation requiring frequent adjustments in the exchange rate, which, in turn, causes new inflationary pressures, generating an inflation-devaluation spiral that is difficult to stop. For this reason, the monetary authorities postponed the adjustment as long as they could.

Fears also increased when the traditional deficits in the previous year's foreign trade balance and the trends in the current year were announced. Financial advisors then hastened to recommend that their clients, the investors, divest themselves of Mexican pesos and acquire U.S. dollars, making the devaluation a self-fulfilling prophesy.

The last time something like this happened was in December 1994 when the outgoing Carlos Salinas de Gortari administration (1988-1994) refused to assume the political costs of devaluating a peso that was about 20 percent over-valued, and the incoming Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León administration (1994-2000) handled exchange rate and monetary policies very badly, which caused the aforementioned financial

collapse, with its international consequences. Of course, the devaluation was much larger than what was originally expected, in addition to the fact that the jump in interest rates made private debts to commercial banks unpayable.

Although through the central bank, the state has been the guardian of the country's international reserves (made up mainly of foreign currency), the bank's autonomy, the development of the financial system and of the exchange market make it possible for this market to directly buy and sell foreign currency, and therefore determine the exchange rate. Today, the central bank only intervenes indirectly. This happens as part of the customs of modernity in many countries. Since 1995, Mexican exchange rate policy consists of a flexible regime that leaves the determination of exchange rates for different day-to-day economic and financial operations to the market. Thus, when there is a tendency to have a deficit, the market must react on its own by depreciating the currency and when the tendency is to surplus by raising its value.³ That is, there is an automatic adjustment. In Mexico, this has not happened: at the end of the last two administrations, the currency has been overvalued, 48 percent in 2000 and 36 percent in 2006, as well as during the entire intermediate period.⁴ The exchange rate has remained stable—in other words overvalued—despite the trade deficit mainly due to the large short- and long-term capital inflows, the extraordinary foreign currency earnings from the high price of oil and the remittances sent home by Mexican workers in the United States over recent years.

Maintaining a flexible exchange rate regime with free mobility of capital (both

incoming and outgoing), having a trade deficit and simultaneously avoiding speculation has required that the monetary authorities keep international reserves high. This makes real or potential investors believe that the country is capable of resisting strong waves of speculation without substantially affecting its exchange rate, price or interest rate stability. At one point this was called self-insurance. At the end of 2000, gross reserves surpassed U.S.\$30 billion, growing steadily until, by 2006, they exceeded U.S.\$80 billion.⁵

Since the 1990s, this insurance is common practice in developing economies, which are more vulnerable to ex-

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ternal and speculative shocks. Not long ago, the International Monetary Fund recommended maintaining reserves equivalent to the total short-term foreign debt in countries whose access to external credit is uncertain, but only as a starting point, since, in general, these countries should have even higher reserves, depending on different factors like their macro-economic variables, the size and composition of their foreign debt, etc.⁶

This financial shield consists of ensuring that for every dollar of short-term foreign debt acquired, the central bank acquires another in the currency market and keeps it in the reserve. So

as not to leave the purchased dollar idle, the central bank acquires a U.S. government bond (or any other short-term asset) for the same amount; so, what it actually keeps in the reserve is a bond. In order to avoid an internal monetary expansion in the country, the next step is for the central bank to sell the private sector government securities denominated in national currency for the amount of the increase in the reserve, in this case one U.S. dollar. This last step is known as “sterilization” of reserves.⁷

However self-insurance has several adverse consequences for the country that implements it. On the one hand, there is no net transfer of resources from abroad, since the foreign debt acquired is equivalent to the bond or external security purchased. On the other hand, the private sector's general investment capability does not increase since it ends up acquiring government securities in the amount of its external indebtedness. In addition, the interest paid on the external bond or security is usually less than the interest paid on the foreign debt. The spread between one rate and the other is sometimes very large. A moderate estimate of the average social cost of self-insurance in 2004 came to almost one percent of the gross domestic product of developing economies.⁸ This seemingly small sum, in the case of Mexico was equivalent to five times the amount earmarked in that same year for the government's Progres a poverty-fighting program.⁹

Some authors say the social cost could be justified if its aim were really to be able to maintain local currency at its real value *vis-à-vis* other currencies, that is, regularly adjusting the exchange rate without generating major speculation, in order to maintain industry's

level of competitiveness with the exterior. Otherwise, it would seem a better option to use the reserves to pay off the foreign debt.

In Mexico's case, the private foreign debt has been growing given the lack of internal credit for productive investment, credit that is scarce and expensive. For this reason, local and foreign investors themselves have made sure the peso's exchange rate *vis-à-vis* the dollar stays below its real level, thus avoiding fluctuations that would be very costly for them.

In that sense, in Mexico, we are in an absurd situation: we have a margin of reserves that is enough to pay off almost half our foreign debt or to cover eight months of imports without having any foreign income. However, we maintain a highly overvalued curren-

cy that does not aid much in improving the level of international competitiveness.¹⁰ Thus, the wealthy class has a double economic armor-plated safeguard: its imports are indirectly subsidized by the entire society, since the exchange rate is unrealistic. In addition, it can transfer any amount of its money abroad whenever it deems necessary since the practically idle reserves can stand that kind of movement, which we all pay for. **MM**



NOTES

- ¹ I am referring, of course, to the Savings Protection Bank Fund (Fobaproa) later transformed into the Bank Savings Protection Institute (IPAB). See www.ipab.org.mx
- ² This is all that is needed for there to be a dollar drain.
- ³ This should happen in a flexible regime, according to Milton Friedman in his "The Case for

Flexible Exchange Rates," *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953).

⁴ According to the annual averages of the real exchange rate of the Mexican peso with respect to 111 countries calculated by the Banco de México (www.banxico.org.mx).

⁵ Banco de México. At www.banxico.org.mx

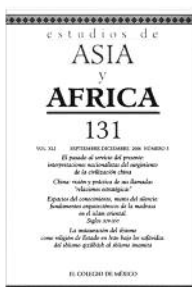
⁶ See Stanley Fischer, *Opening Remarks at the IMF/World Bank International Reserves: Policy Issues Forum*, Washington, D.C., April 28, 2001. At <http://www.imf.org/external/np/speeches/2001/042801.htm>

⁷ See Alan Greenspan, "Currency Reserves and Debt," Remarks before the World Bank Conference on Recent Trends in Reserves Management, Washington, D.C., April 29, 1999, at <http://www.federalreserve.gov/BoardDocs/Speeches/1999/19990429.htm>.


⁸ See Dani Rodrik, "The Social Cost of Foreign Exchange Reserves," paper prepared for presentation at the American Economic Association meetings in Boston (January 2006), to be published in the *International Economic Journal*.

⁹ *Ibid.*


¹⁰ Among OECD countries, Mexico is in last place in competitiveness.




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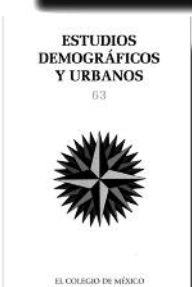
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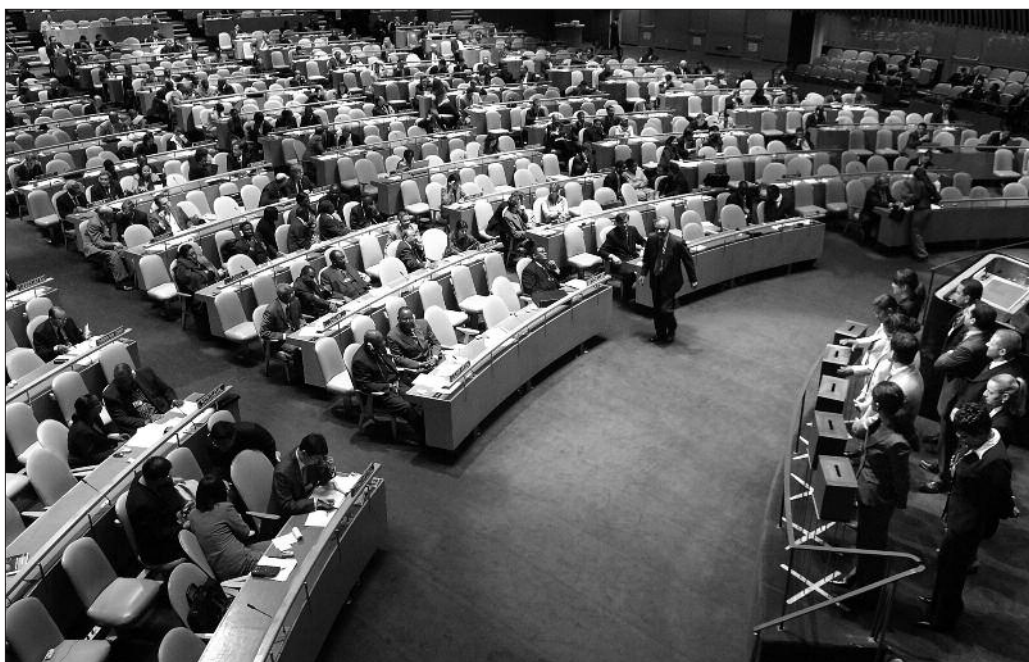


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International Bodies, Governability And Mexico's Multilateral Policy

Antonio Ortiz Mena López Negrete*



There has been a lot of talk about the challenges of governability in countries where the creation of a democracy has sparked expectations and hopes but where this change in political regime did not translate into a notable improvement in security and well-being. Given this, some non-governmental and political organizations see in international bodies a possible incentive for achieving a better performing democracy.

While international bodies may foster democratic governability, they themselves face serious challenges in their own governability. Robert O. Keohane, one of the world's most outstanding internationalists, has been insist-

ing on the topic of international bodies' governability for several years now, but academia's steps forward have not been strongly reflected in these bodies' functioning.¹

In this article, I deal with the tension between representativeness and efficiency inside international bodies and propose some guidelines for action that Mexico could consider when it decides on possible actions in the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS).

REPRESENTATIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

The challenge for international bodies is very similar to those that domestic political institutions face: how to achieve a fair balance between rep-

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Recent OAS efforts have focused more
on rediscovering its *raison d'être* in the post-Cold War
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it face regarding its governability.

representativeness and efficiency.² By representativeness I understand the degree to which a political institution, whether domestic or international, faithfully reflects the diversity of interests of the individuals, groups or countries that it represents or which must express their points of view inside it.

I use the concept of efficiency in two senses: as the degree of difficulty with which a political institution (in this case, international bodies) can come to agreements and carry them out, and as the ease in identifying those responsible for coming to a decision or not and implementing it.

A challenge for institutional design is precisely how to resolve the trade-off between representativeness and efficiency: a very representative body in which all voices have a place and unanimity is needed to come to an agreement will be very representative but not very efficient. On the other hand, a body in which only a few make the decisions or a simple and not a two-thirds majority is needed for making agreements will be more efficient, but at the cost of representativeness.

Many international bodies are representative but there is no weighted voting and decisions are usually made by consensus or two-thirds majorities. Other bodies have weighted voting, which makes for greater efficiency but less representativeness.

The popular perception about international bodies ranges between these

poles: some, like the International Monetary Fund, are considered efficient, but not very representative, while others are seen as forums for deliberation of limited usefulness, such as perhaps the OAS during the Cold War and the UN General Assembly.

Some UN issues are more easily resolved when they leave the floor of the General Assembly and pass to the Security Council, but even there difficulties persist because each of its five permanent members has veto power. In this case we are faced with an anomaly that represents the worst of both worlds: it is simultaneously unrepresentative and inefficient.

Other very important bodies, like the World Trade Organization (WTO), are also formally representative, but have problems with efficiency. Each of its 149 member countries has only one vote and the decisions are often made by consensus, or, depending on the issue, by a two-thirds majority. This has meant that, as the number of members and consequently opposing interests have increased, the rounds of multilateral trade negotiations last longer and longer: six years for the Tokyo Round, eight years for the Uruguay Round, and the five years that we have been immersed in the Doha Program for Development, which was slated to end in January 2005.

The most difficult decisions for recognizing and facing this inherent tension between representativeness and efficiency

have not been made, and therefore, the functioning of many international bodies leaves much to be desired.

It may seem fair that every country has one vote in the WTO, but it could also be argued that it is extremely unfair. Why should the decisions of China, with its 1.3 billion people, or the United States, the world's largest trade power, have the same weight as those of the Marshall Islands (60,000 inhabitants) or St. Kitts and Nevis (40,000 inhabitants)? Without a doubt, the actions of China and the United States have a greater effect on international trade than those of the Marshall Islands and St. Kitts and Nevis, and more Americans and Chinese are affected by developments in international trade than the 100,000 inhabitants of the two island countries.

On a national level, usually the lower chamber is proportionately representative of the population, which would be the equivalent of a weighted vote if we take into account the number of legislators from each state. The upper chamber is representative of the states or provinces, which usually means that each one has the same number of votes, regardless of their population. There are also different types of majorities, depending on the issue under discussion, but seldom is consensus or unanimity required to come to a decision. That would usually lead to paralysis.

Internationally, *de jure* representativeness is not always respected in practice. It is not unusual for powerful countries to exert political pressure and coercion on weaker ones to try to force them to vote a certain way.

The five permanent members of the UN Security Council were chosen at the end of World War II. We should ask ourselves whether, even taking into

account the need to achieve a minimum of efficiency in this very representative institution, it is fair that the international balance of forces has remained frozen for half a century so that the United Kingdom and France are permanent members of the council, but two economic powers like Japan and Germany, the two great losers of World War II, are not.

Despite several attempts to reform the UN and the Security Council in particular, very little headway has been made and problems of both representativeness and efficiency persist. In the case of the OAS, recent efforts have focused more on rediscovering its *raison d'être* in the post-Cold War period than on dealing directly with the challenges it faces regarding its governability.

The WTO, for its part, may be greatly weakened if a way is not found to make it more efficient and it continues to be expected to resolve the conflicts of interests of so many countries with its current design. What is not achieved in negotiations will be channeled through the institution's conflict resolution mechanism, creating an overload of conflicts and the impossibility of resolving them appropriately.

Beyond efficiency and representativeness, clear, adequate accountability of international officials and government representatives to different bodies is also not the norm. This complicates efforts to improve international bodies, but it is the reality Mexico must deal with and act within.

Internally, Mexico seems to have passed from efficiency with low representativeness during the golden age of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to inefficiency with low representativeness during recent decades. Today we are suffering from inefficient rep-

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resentativeness. If the debate about national institutions is complex, like in the case of Mexico, it may be even more so in the international sphere.

What can be done given this panorama? It would be healthy to begin with three things. In the first place, we should recognize that there is a tension between representativeness and efficiency and that it is very difficult to achieve both at the same time. It is a good idea to situate from this viewpoint the strengths and weaknesses of the body you are going to act in, whether to propose changes to it or to find the best way to foster Mexico's interests without changing the rules.

In the second place, fortunately, leadership is important. It is true that the secretaries-general of the UN and the OAS are mainly administrators and not at all the heads of the member states. These are not supranational bodies, but inter-governmental ones. But leadership has an enormous importance that must not be underestimated: the secretaries-general can try to establish clear priorities, a discussion agenda and the particular focus for looking at problems. They can favor the establishment of certain alliances and coalitions in order to foster specific actions.

Leadership, legitimacy, moral authority and persuasion are key in this sense. It is a matter of the capability for political action of those who head these important institutions. Leadership is

necessary, but insufficient to improve the UN and the OAS's efficiency and representativeness.

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General since January 2007, will face the great challenge of furthering its operational agenda, and he will not be able to concentrate only on the substantive issues. José Miguel Insulza, who heads up the OAS, enjoys great prestige and moral authority both personally, as a political exile who defended democracy in his country, and professionally, due to his outstanding work at the head of different ministries in Chile. If he so desires, he could foster improvements in OAS functioning, which would result in advances in priority substantive tasks like democratic governability in Latin America.

In the third place, it must be recognized that problems of democratic governability are often more rooted in the internal than the external sphere, and it is easier to deal with them in that way instead of blaming the functioning of international bodies for what are really internal deficiencies. In this sense, it is important to ask ourselves if the legislative branch has the power to veto the nomination of government representatives to international bodies and to supervise their performance, and whether those representatives are clearly accountable to the executive and the legislature. If these abilities exist but are not exercised appropriately, then an important facet of the problem of

representativeness resides in the national sphere.

MEXICO IN THE UN AND THE OAS

Regardless of the intrinsic difficulties of acting in inefficient international bodies, one limit on Mexico's effective action is the lack of a committed majority on a domestic level. Without a politically backed agreement on key issues of security, democracy and development dealt with in the UN and the OAS, it will be difficult for Mexico to have a presence in accordance with its economic, demographic and political weight.

For example, in Mexico's recent presidential campaign, the candidate of the Coalition for the Good of All, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, stated that the best foreign policy was a good domestic policy, and that the country should sustain very cautious, measured activity on the international stage. For others—myself included—the best foreign policy is foreign policy: one that exercises leadership, does not let itself get trapped by local, short-term interests and which puts forward and develops a long-term strategic vision. This undoubtedly also implies running certain risks.

While the ideal is to achieve broad consensus and “state policies” on issues like international relations, in democracies it is only natural for there to be different points of view. If consensus cannot be reached, action must be based on what the majority decides.

The impression exists that Mexico is divided, but on some issues there are pluralities (though small) and majorities that offer spaces and can orient Mexico's action in the UN and the OAS.

For example, Mexico does not participate in peacekeeping operations. How-

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ever, a part of the population is in favor of it doing so: in 2006, more Mexicans supported our country's participation in peacekeeping operations than those who opposed it (49 percent versus 43 percent).³

From my perspective, Mexico's participation in peacekeeping operations could lend greater weight to Mexican positions in the debates about UN reform. Brazil has done its homework in this sense: it participates in peacekeeping operations and is a hefty player in the UN. Mexico is also, but it would be even heftier if it participated in peacekeeping operations and not only through its financial contributions.

There are also those who think that the fight against terrorism is of interest only to the United States, but 71 percent of Mexicans think that the Security Council should authorize the use of force to prevent any country from supporting terrorists, and 71 percent of Mexico's elites strongly or moderately agree that Mexico should once again seek a seat as a non-permanent member of the Security Council.⁴

Another key issue both in the UN and the OAS is alliances. Mexico's participation in the OAS could be much improved, both regarding the hemispheric rules of the game and substantive issues, if it handled its alliances carefully and intelligently.

Latin America's geo-political situation offers interesting opportunities:

it is wrong to read the current situation as a dichotomy, with governments of the left and the right. There are many “lefts” and they are extremely varied, as is the possibility of interests coinciding and Mexico carrying out concerted actions with other Latin American countries.

Mexico's relations with Chile's “Conciliation” administrations were very good, but in 2005 they were unnecessarily damaged precisely because of the fight to head up the OAS. They have improved in recent months, but similar episodes should be avoided. Chile is economically and politically stable, a trustworthy partner; and Mexico should take extreme care in this relationship.

The Mercosur is redefining itself with the entry of Venezuela and the serious conflicts between Argentina and Uruguay about the establishment of two paper processing plants on the Uruguayan side of the Uruguay River. In addition, Brazil's policy toward Latin America has been severely limited, above all regarding energy cooperation with Bolivia, which nationalized important Petrobras investments, and, in my opinion, Venezuela's entry into the Mercosur, which will be more costly than beneficial for Brazil in the medium and long term.

Lula's new government could favor an ideology-driven, merely reactive policy toward Mexico and ally with cer-

tain “left-wing” countries,⁵ or adopt a new pragmatism that would make closer relations with Mexico possible. The conditions exist in Mexico, at least amongst the public, for this to happen: 59 percent of Mexicans prefer for Mexico to participate with other Latin American countries in resolving the region’s problems without trying to be the leader compared to 22 percent who think Mexico should try to be the leader of Latin America and 13 percent who think it should stay out of Latin American efforts and problems altogether.⁶

In the same vein, while 83 percent of Mexicans see Brazil as a friend or partner, only 69 percent put Venezuela in the same category, and 14 percent of those surveyed think Venezuela is an

economic rival or threat for Mexico, while only 4 percent see Brazil in this way.⁷

Concerted action by Brazil and Mexico in the UN, the OAS and the WTO would greatly increase what each one could do alone since together they make up more than half of Latin America’s economy and population.

When common action and negotiation are achieved, efficiency sometimes comes about *de facto* with the action of global or regional powers and without changing the formal rules. Without that concerted action, Mexico would have great difficulty in advancing in the substantive issues or favoring democratic governability in international bodies. ■■■

NOTES

- ¹ Robert O. Keohane, “International Institutions: Can Interdependence Work?” *Foreign Policy* 110 (spring 1998), pp. 82-96.
- ² See Mathew S. Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- ³ The survey *México y el mundo 2006: opinión pública y política exterior en México* (Mexico City: CIDE-Comexi, 2006).
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ This foreign policy orientation for Brazil is well represented in Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães, *Desafíos Brasileiros na era dos Gigantes* (Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto Editores, 2006).
- ⁶ *México y el mundo 2006: opinión pública y política exterior en México* (Mexico City: CIDE-Comexi, 2006).
- ⁷ Ibid.



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Notes on the Mexico-U.S. Cultural Border

Hernán Salas Quintanal*



This essay is an invitation to think about the northern border from the ecological sphere, from the standpoint of the historic references of occupation of Mexico's northern desert, to the social sphere, both in terms of territorial limits and in the way that geographical borders also became cultural borders.

Given the diversity of groups they found in their path, the people who took it upon themselves to "conquer" the inland territories began by deciding what could be conquered: defining the "other," delineating it in a culturally homogeneous, conceivable space, making it visible. But by implementing colonial policies to control space and subdue its inhabitants, an infinite number of definitions emerged to reveal

the heterogeneity of the native population, their linguistic diversity, the multiple forms of political organization, the ways of appropriating space, the alliances and conflicts.

Since the origins of Mexico as a nation-state, the North has expressed its dual nature, that of being an imposing border and also of being extremely arid. The desert region, called the great Chichimeca, which later became a clear international divide, was conceived of as a no-man's-land, susceptible to conquest, the land of rebellious, unruly Indians. The use of the space traced by the original inhabitants was not recognized by the Spaniards, who considered it a territory to be conquered.¹

Hunters and gatherers optimally exploited a large part of the Sonora desert from season to season. They also defined the space in which the tribe or society could use natural resources. The Spaniards not only changed the original

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Photos by Hernán Salas Quintanal.

For both countries, the border was the self-confirmation of specific, significant traits. For Mexico, it was also a great region that separated and distanced it from its powerful northern neighbor.

territoriality, but also sought to modify the relationship of the indigenous with it by confining them to villages, thus destroying their foraging and hunting cycles and their food systems.

In the strict sense, desert means an abandoned, unpopulated, uninhabited space. In its ecological sense, it is a large body of land where vegetation and humidity are scarce and the harsh climate makes life difficult. Aridness comes both from the lack of rain and the soil's inability to preserve humidity; plants' permeability, evaporation and transpiration; and the intensity and length of sunlight, heat, atmospheric humidity and wind. Thus, in regions characterized by factors that limit the establishment of large populations of organisms, human beings have developed a culture—called a desert culture—with strategies oriented to dealing with environmental restrictions.²

In the desert culture, the arid environment establishes strict limits. However, when human society appropriates the space, it defines its borders, changing natural conditions into cultural resources. When a group faces a hostile environment it does so with its cultural arsenal, its values and forms of behavior, with its organization and technology, changing behavior patterns and resources and developing knowledge to help it adapt. This actually involves a profound transformation of the habitat, re-signifying its ecological

meaning with the incorporation of culture into the geographical space.

The bigger the limitations imposed by aridness, the more human beings have increased their capability to transform the environment. The most significant expression of this has been the processes of artificiality, accompanied by a high degree of mechanization and application of technology to agricultural, fishing, hunting and gathering activities. In Mexico's northern desert, the border is a recurring concept. It points to territorial limits as well as divisions in disciplines or group, class, ethnic and gender demarcations. Its definition has both conceptual and empirical bases with social, humanistic or cultural perspectives.

The 1848 shift to the south of the U.S.-Mexico border is another moment in the territorial fragmentation of the indigenous groups living in the area. The ferocious resistance of the region's peoples to the imposition of the Spanish conquistadors paradoxically managed to establish a certain social and socio-economic equilibrium, a specific way of handling resources and a sedentary life-style sustained by the combination of activities like hunting, fishing, gathering and agriculture.

This resistance, first to colonial policies and then to those of the republic, led to both countries militarizing their border areas and the indigenous groups apparently accepting a sedentary life. The form this process took on the U.S. side, confining the Indians to reservations, was not very different from the indigenous communities and *ejidos* that the Mexican state used to impose pacification.

The border is not a simple dividing line that the local inhabitants just accepted, leaving behind complex histories of relationships and social move-

ments. From that starting point, concepts like sovereignty, citizenship, nation-state, race, countryman or foreigner began to take on meaning, becoming run-of-the-mill terms in a region that had rapidly become bi-national. For both countries, the border was the self-confirmation of specific, significant traits. For Mexico, it was also a great region that separated and distanced it from its powerful northern neighbor.

A border is the work of two countries fighting to impose their nation-state projects. In both cases, the idea was to decimate and subdue the native population, make them speak the imperial language (English and Spanish, respectively), and impose specific forms of control and distribution of the land, a system of production based on agricultural exports, a single school system and subject them to a central government. The indigenous groups in Mexico's North ceased active resistance in the form of armed rebellion, but using their bi-nationality and ancestral mobility that eventually becomes trans-border mobility, they have developed resistance strategies to preserve their identities.

Yesterday, the Pápagos, Pimas, Yumanos; today the Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Nahuas. Cultural differentiation seeks to analyze combined processes of resistance, adaptation and change, from the perspective of great demographic and socio-economic dynamism, leaving to one side the reductionism of notions like Westernization, Hispanicization and acculturation. For that reason, the border should be defined from a multidimensional standpoint in which diverse cultures, societies, ethnic groups or modes of production enter into play.

Before the political-administrative border was established, these areas were situated on the margins of the burgeon-

ing national states, alien to economic interests, outside state control, an attraction for outsiders, non-conformists, migrants and colonists. Far from the center of power, from that time, they were established based on significant cultural and social diversity; the ever-changing line between settlements that pointed to the advance of civilization. However, they became key for the formation of the national states.

Today, the borders are a significant part of Western society's expansionism, which dismantles civilizations and cultures, fed by power relations. From the time that Frederick Jackson Turner's definition of the American border became famous in the political sphere, it has been analyzed as an unmovable, a-historical space separating two supposed socio-cultural realities: civilization and barbarism, a dichotomy that continues to function as a historic justification that allows the United States to proclaim itself the guardian of Western civilization creating a border as the universal example for separating the order of sedentary peoples from the disorder of nomadic peoples. Since that time, the migratory process has been instrumental: Mexico's poverty facilitates the attraction of abundant, cheap, unskilled, disciplined labor over long periods of time.

The desert's nomadic cultures were part of this border space. This is what the first colonizers who came from Sonora thought, as well as the Americans who later began the colonization of the Southwest, conceived as the nation in its infancy.

According to Carlos González, nativist ideology originated in the eighteenth century and, from its inception, preached the "natural" superiority of white Anglo Saxons over any other human group.³ In the nineteenth century, it was adopt-



ed by the economic, religious and political elites who saw the U.S. indigenous population and the waves of immigrants as a challenge to the racial and cultural purity of the Anglo-Protestant group that then governed the nation.

U.S. nativism spread into the government itself and was key in designing the country's most important migratory policies. Both Europe and the United States for the first time defined the "white race" as a privileged social group in world history. Nationalism developed as a result of these ideas, growing throughout the nineteenth century with tacit agreement on the part of the political and economic elites of Northern European extraction and academics, who from the institutions of higher learning and the press, created a narrative discourse that "propped up" the idea of Anglo-Saxon superiority.

The U.S. border is the farthest part of the pioneer settlements and also the dividing line with free lands. It is a region capable of returning to Man his purity; it is an area of violence and regeneration, the creator of a new man and a new, specifically American, nation.

This radical nativism based on the cultural limit of the border took on

the form of "Anglo-Saxonism" or white nationalism that gradually began to center its "doubts" on the immigrants pouring in from the south and Eastern Europe.

In Mexico's historical-cultural tradition, the northern border has been a rather undefined far-off space, a fearful place, "a land of savage Indians, nomadic groups who live from robbery and thievery," making up an ambiguous and perhaps conflictive relationship between Central Mexico and the North, which is recognized as part of the nation's territory, but as a heritage that is peripheral to the country's spatial and cultural heartland. The border context forced the emergence of a complex process of relationships and alliances that often makes it possible to question the weight of identity limits in the sense of cultural belonging, blurred in the face of complex social distortions that arise out of diverse policies and economies.

Today the material gap between the two nations is so vast and produces so many imbalances that any effort to turn the border into a place of great cultural wealth due to the multiplicity and variety of its exchanges and syncretisms becomes an offensive attempt to romanticize something that of necessity is conflictive. On the border, material and symbolic violence is a daily occurrence, stemming largely from the fact that the power relations and subordination

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crisscrossing the links between an imperial nation and a peripheral one are concentrated in a relatively small space, of a complexity and tension irreducible to peaceful, harmonious, easily understood border areas.

Given the complexity of what the border separates, it almost always takes on a material form. But, above all, it is a cultural construction that sparks events and situations present in daily life, in which many specific societies are articulated and interact. Crossing the border becomes, then, a challenge for those who, full of hope, seek a better life, even though it means living in the shadow of xenophobia. These are the paradoxes of the border and its transgression, which cannot be reduced to the material existence of a line or fence, which barely represents its symbol. The procedures for achieving it can never be simple or spontaneous. They always imply a certain dose of material and symbolic violence and the exclusion of some by others.

In contemporary societies, with the advent of telecommunications and the instant, simultaneous transmission of data and information, people's reasons for moving increase and accelerate. In that sense, the idea of geographic unity as elementary for understanding culture and society becomes obsolete.⁴ Territoriality is fragmented: the meaning of territory is transferred to contemporary

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nomads, is re-imagined and increasingly acquires a specific plasticity. Like a membrane, the border is asymmetrical-ly porous for human beings, information, knowledge, practices and goods, all of which have an impact on the plurality of individual and collective experiences and, of course, on development policies.

Today's desert inhabitants have built some borders and re-built others in order to both survive economically as individuals and achieve the survival of the ethnic group as such. To do this, they re-design their original nomadism in a transnational context, and design a multidimensional collective identity that makes it possible to deal with different situations.

The idea of the border linked to identity conceives of human groups separated from one another—or against one another—with each one occupying its territory, so that the migratory dynamic becomes central. In a transnational context, migrants re-design a difficult-to-explain break between the rural world and the rapid emergence of an urban industrial economy evident in almost all the states of the U.S. West, including California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, which to a great extent owe their economic vigor to a convenient proximity to Mexico and its abundant cheap, disciplined workforce kept in line by being undocumented. The populations re-signify an original mobility and conceive a collective identity that goes beyond parochial identifications of ethnic group, tribe, band or lineage. In that sense, the cultures of northern Mexico are pioneers in transposing ethnic-territorial, national and ethnic-cultural borders and in developing resistance strategies based on their transborder mobility and on the constant alteration of their identity,

which ends up by being inclusive, based on the principles of belonging to culturally, politically and socially imagined communities.⁵

The cultural mosaic of the construction and experience of the northern border is such that it cannot be dealt with as a geographical-social entity constant throughout history: quite to the contrary, it is a broad field in which cultural diversity is an expression of a socio-historical complexity that does not admit generalizations, much less simplistic explanations oriented to homogenizing the abstraction "north" in time and space. One of the fundamental dimensions of the concept "border" refers to the processes of identity, which do not necessarily correspond to territorial criteria; that is, they are based, rather, on a sense of belonging to a group and then what separates is being Indian or *ladino*, savage or civilized, national or foreign, native or stranger.

These are, then, cultural borders designed, imagined, negotiated and rethought by people who are geographically spread out in their day-to-day existence, indifferent to the material crossing of the line. In that sense, the concept of border regions emerges, in which particularly diverse societies are established. The nearest example is Mexico's northern border, which since it was created has been made up of a society of migrants that goes beyond the neighboring nations, characterized by the breadth of its territory, its economic dynamism and the existence of networks that change the operation and results of production processes, power and culture, a society based on the flows that individuals build to circulate toward, from and inside the region. The main characteristic of these movements, which have functioned as a trampoline, a bridge, a tunnel and a turn-

around point for migrants who are trying to get to the United States, is that their influence as such is greater than the flows of power.

Given the real possibility that this multi-culturalism could become a risk, states are forced to decide on rules for behavior within their borders, taking into account that the future co-existence of many social groups will be marked by ethnic and cultural pluralism, in which the issues of citizenship and pluralism will become central under rules that recognize individual and collective rights for all.

The border region, then, is made up of a materiality and an environment, a scenario in which social relations play out that include both a sense of localness and a sense of globality by involving different nationalities, cultures, lifestyles and languages. In this sense, the border space is the heritage of those that build it, live, move through and experience it, practices in which groups create their own identity and recognize themselves as situated, where they organize daily life around significant places, in such a way that borders stop being

simply a dividing line and become a space in which different societies converge, creating their own territorial dynamics.

Globalization brings us face to face with homogenization, which presupposes that all polyphonic elements are fated to be absorbed into a uniformity through cultural convergence as part of the political and social project of the dominant groups. Far from that uniformity, the global fluidness of symbols, messages and goods has sparked responses and resistance where the meanings are developed and recreated in specific local contexts. In this sense, the border continues to be as vital as it has been since its origins and throughout its development.

Politically speaking, it has created territorial and group divisions that have resulted in many forms of violence and social movements. Economically speaking, it has permanently changed its survival strategies, imposing constant challenges and opportunities that the groups living there have had to take advantage of to establish themselves and turn the region into a place of important resources

Material and symbolic violence is a daily occurrence, stemming from the fact that the power relations between an imperial nation and a peripheral one are concentrated in a relatively small space.

that at some points have been very attractive. Culturally speaking, historical discontinuity has sparked different identity processes and scattered the population located in the region, which is experienced and inhabited by subjects with plural and sometimes contradictory identities and strategies that in daily life combine conflict, violence and social and environmental deterioration.

The lack of a developmental vision has turned the potential wealth of the meeting of different cultures into a cultural mosaic whose results sometimes question the nationalist strategies of the historical projects on both sides of the border. ■■■

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NOTES

¹ For research about border groups living in arid areas, see the articles in Hernán Salas et al., eds., *Desierto y fronteras. El norte de México y otros contextos culturales* (Mexico City: IIA-UNAM/Plaza y Valdés, 2004).

² For information about the Mexican North's desert cultures, see *Revista Culturales* II, no. 3, January-June 2006, published by the Baja California Autonomous University (UABC).

³ Carlos González, "Purificando la frontera: eugenesia y política en la región," Hernán Salas et al., eds., *op cit.*, pp. 429-446.

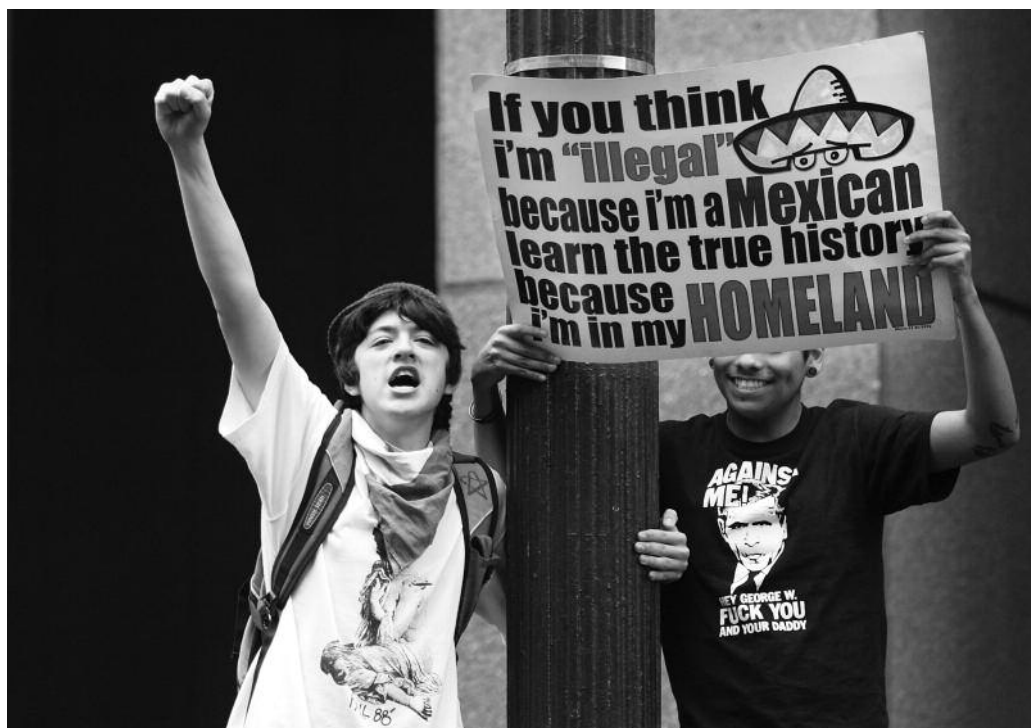
⁴ Renato Ortiz, "Otro territorio," *Antropología* no. 12 (Madrid), October, 1996, pp. 5-22.

⁵ Everardo Garduño et al., *La frontera interpretada. Procesos culturales en la frontera norte de México* (Baja California: UABC, 2005).



Mobilizing for Political Power Immigrant Marches and Their Long-term Impacts

Amy Shannon*



Reuters/Kimberly White

On March 10, 2006, the streets of Chicago filled with peaceful marchers. Estimates of participation in the rally range from 200,000 to over half a million. The mostly Latino demonstrators spoke out against proposed legislation that purported to criminalize undocumented immigrants in the United States. Perhaps even more alarmingly, the bill also threatened to turn anyone who “helped” such migrants into felons, potentially including their own family members, clergy members and social services agencies. Despite the cold weather, entire families turned out for the march. Many people took the day off work or allowed

their children to miss school in order to participate.

The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, known by its number as “HR 4437” or more popularly as the “Sensenbrenner Bill” (after Cong. James Sensenbrenner, its original sponsor), had been approved in the House of Representatives back in December 2005. But it was not until the Senate took up the immigration issue that the potential impact of the House bill became clear to immigrant communities. At that point, fear of a punitive immigration law, combined with anger at the increasingly anti-immigrant rhetoric of elected officials, ignited anxiety in immigrant communities that had been simmering for years.

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Mobilizations serve both as a visual manifestation of the demographic changes in the U.S. and as a powerful statement that immigrants are no longer content to remain invisible.

Throughout the months of January and February 2006, Latino immigrants and their families were exposed to coverage of the immigration debates in the Senate, as well as analysis of HR 4437 on Spanish-language media. Radio stations were particularly critical in getting the message out to a broad audience and in framing the legislation as an assault on the Latino community. Since the immigration debate received less (and quite different) coverage in the mainstream English media, it appeared to many people that the marches simply sprang up spontaneously. Others suspected that the media, and specifically a few popular radio deejays, had simply whipped their listeners into a frenzy. But the enormous community mobilizations cannot be dismissed so easily. A closer look reveals a complicated picture that some have likened to the “perfect storm” of new actors, new alliances, new and old media and a credible threat that served to bring everyone together.

As marchers filled the streets around the country in March and April, the visual effect was undeniable. In Chicago, waves of marchers stretched for block after block, and the rally site filled to overflowing before the last marchers departed the starting point, more than a mile away. Within two

weeks, a similar outpouring of civic concern took place in Los Angeles, and a tidal wave of pro-immigrant demonstrations rolled across the country. In city after city, town after town, immigrant populations came out, held vigils, marched and otherwise made themselves visible to the general public in unprecedented numbers.

By the time May 1 rolled around, a current of energy surged through immigrant communities and was even felt in home countries. Organizers picked May Day to coincide with international Labor Day, even though this holiday is not celebrated in the United States. In some cities, notably Los Angeles, organizers called for both marches and a general boycott, a “day without immigrants.” In Chicago, organizers called for a massive rally, for which some 700,000 people turned out. In Mexico, television coverage of the events went on all day, and had a parade-like feel.

New messages had also evolved from the first wave of mobilizations. Whereas the March and April events focused on opposition to HR4437, the May 1 rallies called for an immigration reform that would allow those in the United States to legalize their status. “Aquí estamos y no nos vamos” (We’re here, and we’re not going away) chanted marchers in Chicago. Even the symbols changed. Responding to criticism that immigrants were disloyal to their adopted country, marchers replaced Mexican and Central American flags with a sea of red, white and blue. Organizers had also begun to think about next steps: “Hoy marchamos, mañana votamos” (Today We March, Tomorrow We Vote) became a common refrain, and organizations began campaigns to help those with residency permits apply for citizenship, and to register eligible voters.

THE CATALYST: HR4437

The anti-immigrant content and tone of the House bill felt like a slap in the face to immigrants and their families. The bill made an explicit attempt to link the public’s fears of terrorism to anti-immigrant sentiment, a trend that had been gaining steam since September 11, 2001. Back in 2003, Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo had argued that Mexico should be considered a prime source of terrorists. In an interview with a sympathetic journalist at *Frontpage-mag.com*, the congressman alleged, “There are terror cells in Mexico. We have identified terrorists who have come into the United States through Mexico.”² Meanwhile, politicians on both sides of the aisle decided that anti-immigrant rhetoric, couched in the language of “security” or “making America safe” could prove a useful tool to energize voters who were looking for someone to blame for violence and economic insecurity.

Immigrant communities took a few months to grasp the HR4437 threat, but once they did, it provided the spark that ignited popular discontent. As a tangible symbol of racism and xenophobia masquerading as national security issues, the legislation provided a target around which everyone could rally. The media then played a key role in channeling fears of a bad immigration law toward participation in the mass mobilizations. Radio personalities with a national reach such as “El Piolín” and “El Cucuy” in Los Angeles touted the marches relentlessly on the radio, which many immigrants listen to at work and at home. Other local radio deejays worked closely with local organizers to make sure that people were getting a constant stream of information about the purpose and

the logistics of the rallies. In Chicago, local activists appeared dozens of times on radio shows in the days leading up to the March 10 mobilization.

THE UNDERLYING ORGANIZING

One of the striking aspects of the mobilizations was the degree of locally-based organizing behind them. The larger national organizations, including labor unions, lagged behind local communities in grasping the urgency and potential of channeling popular unrest into large, visible public actions. In the case of Chicago, the energy for the March 10 rally came from a loose coalition of local activists, Mexican hometown associations and other Latino immigrant-led groups and local churches. By the second rally on May 1, the labor unions had jumped on board and the “March 10 coalition” included a fairly diverse group of immigrant-led organizations (Polish, Arab, Russian, Indian, etc), unions, and more traditional immigrants’ rights activists. But the role of the new actors continued to be critical. In Chicago, the Casa Michoacán, headquarters of the Michoacán Federation in Illinois served as the central organizing hub for both the March 10 and May 1 mobilizations. Hometown associations, acting directly and indirectly through a city-wide Confederation of Mexican Federations in Chicago (Confemex), played important leadership roles in both organizing the marches and in motivating their members to participate.

Given the lack of a national coordinating force, the mobilizations came together in different ways in different cities. An analysis carried out by a consortium of radio stations in the Los

Angeles area concluded that the marches should be attributed to “a broad network of immigrants’ rights activists and organizations community groups, religious groups (Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and Muslims), student organizations, labor unions, peace groups, politicians.” The authors concluded that many of the organizers had honed their skills in previous battles at the state level, including the struggle to defeat Proposition 187 in the 1990s. In contrast, many of the Chicago groups were relatively new to political organizing, at least *vis-à-vis* the U.S. government. Confemex, for example, got its start in a battle with the Mexican government over a vehicle tax that targeted migrants returning to Mexico over the Christmas holidays. The confederation used a list of contacts developed through a drive to register Mexican absentee voters as a starting point for organizing its base for the March 10 rally.

In other cities, the mobilizations offered activists their first taste of the potential for Latino immigrant organizing. Marches took place in Atlanta, Houston, Cincinnati and a host of other cities, surpassing records for previous turnouts in almost every case.

THE IMPACTS

After the initial euphoria dies down, the inevitable questions arise: What is this new “immigrant movement”? Where is it going and what has happened since? Does it really have the capacity to build political power. To start, it is important to recognize that there was never a single movement. Rather, in different places, different coalitions formed (and un-formed in some cases) according to existing local capacity. These loose

The spring 2006 mobilizations pushed the issues surrounding immigrants into the spotlight of political discourse in the U.S. after nearly a decade of stagnation.

coalitions proved extremely effective in coalescing the community around a march, but have yet to demonstrate the capacity to drive a coherent longer term agenda.

On the other hand, a number of organizations and alliances have become stronger as a result of their participation and leadership in the mobilizations. The umbrella group of nine hometown federations (and dozens of hometown clubs) in Chicago, Confemex, has come to see advocacy on behalf of immigrants as an important objective of the confederation. At the national level, a relatively new player, the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC), has articulated an advocacy agenda that links immigration reform with calls for more equitable, sustainable development in migrant-sending countries.³ NALACC saw its members jump into the mobilizations in full force and is attempting to capture some of their momentum in a coordinated advocacy campaign in favor of legalization for undocumented immigrants.

Although the heterogeneity of the organizing behind the community mobilizations makes it difficult to make sweeping statements about impacts, the psychological effect of the marches on immigrants themselves should

Among other challenges, immigrant organizations are discovering that voting is just one part of the puzzle in terms of building power.

not be underestimated. The mobilizations served both as a visual manifestation of the demographic changes in the United States and as a powerful statement that immigrants are no longer content to remain invisible, toiling in the shadows. Marcia Soto, president of Confemex in Chicago recalls the marches as simultaneously exhausting and exhilarating. She immediately points out that the real challenge lies ahead, as organizations like hers seek to channel the energy from the mobilizations into a sustained advocacy agenda.

WHAT IS NEXT?

The spring 2006 immigrant mobilizations pushed the issues surrounding immigrants into the spotlight of political discourse in the United States after nearly a decade of stagnation. The potential to have a healthy dialogue about migrants and the root causes of immigration is a positive step, but progress in that direction has been slow at best. Although the Senate did not pass punitive legislation along the lines of HR4437, its version of an immigration reform bill included a complicated set of tiers of eligibility for residency or guest worker permits, as well as a number of the security measures in the

House bill. For many immigrant organizations, even the improved Senate version left much to be desired. Activists feared that even the weak provisions for legalization might be stripped out in the reconciliation committee that was charged with creating a consensus version of the House and Senate legislation.

As the mid-term elections drew nearer, the issue became too hot to handle and the reconciliation committee dragged its feet until the end of the session. The Senate did approve an appropriations measure that would fund the construction of a wall along the border between the United States and Mexico. This was one of the most controversial components of the original House bill, and one that Mexicans found particularly galling. The vote for the wall crossed party lines, with many Democratic Senators voting in favor of the measure on “security” grounds.

This bipartisan approach to immigrant bashing carried over into the electoral campaigns, with candidates from both parties seeking to make hay with working class voters by professing a “tough-on-immigration” stance. Some candidates did attempt to steer the discussion into an analysis of trade policies and other policy drivers of both migration and working-class economic insecurity, but these were relatively isolated cases. Nevertheless, Latino voters did shift significantly toward Democrats as compared to previous years. This trend may have marked a reaction against perceived Republican antipathy toward immigrants rather than a true vote of confidence for the Democrats. Some Republican analysts perceived this risk. In an interview with the *Washington Monthly* just days before the elections, Republican Congress-

man Dick Armey expressed concern about the electoral impacts of HR 4437 and the immoderate tone of some Republicans on the issue of immigration. “A lot of Hispanics around the country are taking this very personally,” said Armey. “They’re saying, ‘The problem with Republicans is that they just don’t like us.’”

It is tempting to look to the midterm elections in November as a test of the strength of immigrant organizing, but it is too soon to tell. The election does offer some interesting trends to analyze, but it remains to be seen whether immigrant organizations and their allies will manage to construct durable political power in the wake of the 2006 mobilizations. Anecdotally, organizations reported increases in voter turnout in areas where get-out-the-vote activity was particularly strong, but Latino voting rates are still abysmally low.

The catchy slogan “Hoy marchamos, mañana votamos” has a feel-good ring, but turns out to be hard to put in practice and nearly impossible on a six-month time frame. Among other challenges, immigrant organizations are discovering that voting is just one element of the puzzle in terms of building power. In order to make progress on the range of issues that affect immigrants and their families, communities will need to get involved in state and local political activism, and nurture new political leaders who can break out of the silo of nationalistic approaches to migration and begin to see the issue in its regional and global complexity. A great deal of voter education will also be needed, above and beyond more mechanical campaigns to register and get out the vote. Immigrant leaders will need to strengthen their own organizations and work together more effec-

tively to press for change. Most immigrant-led organizations are chronically under-funded, and many rely on an all-volunteer work force that makes it difficult for them to nurture a professional leadership cadre.


Shaping media messages poses another critical challenge. Although the Spanish-language media played a positive role in the marches, much of the media messaging in the mainstream press continues to portray immigrants as law-breakers and potential threats. Finally, immigrants need to use the experience of unity in the marches to reach out to allies and potential allies at the local level. Building mutually supportive relationships with African-American communities will be a particularly important step in the right direction. The reality is that many people in the United States, particularly working people, are feeling a great deal of anxiety

about their economic future. Immigrants have become a handy scapegoat for the ills of globalization. Immigrant organizations will need to break through this barrier and push past racial prejudice to find common cause with other communities.


Still, there are some positive signs. NALACC members wasted no time after the 2006 elections before calling on Congress to take a new approach to immigration reform focusing on permanent residency and uniting families. Around the country, local efforts to register voters and educate them about immigrants' concerns continue to gain momentum. Immigrant communities have already proven their ability to mobilize millions of people, but over the longer term they will also need to mobilize and sustain both the organizational and financial resources necessary to keep up the pressure in Washington. **NM**

NOTES


- ¹ Enlaces América is a project of the Heartland Alliance in Chicago that serves as a resource center for immigrant-led organizations as they develop strategies for transnational civic participation and political engagement.
- ² Paula Kaufman, "The High Cost of Immigration," *Insight* <www.Frontpagemag.org>, August 12, 2003.
- ³ NALACC is a network of approximately 75 community-based organizations led by Latin American and Caribbean immigrants throughout the United States. NALACC member organizations are working to improve quality of life in their communities, both in the United States and in countries of origin. This network seeks to build transnational leadership capacity and increase immigrant civic participation, so that immigrants can advocate effectively for public policies that address the root causes of migration, as well as dealing with the challenges faced by immigrants in the United States. To date, this latter work has focused on efforts to reform U.S. immigration policies to make them more humane and effective. Over time, NALACC aspires to become a nationally and internationally known voice of organized Latino and Caribbean immigrant communities in the U.S. In particular, NALACC hopes to become an entity recognized for its ability to articulate the challenges faced by transnational immigrant communities, as well as viable solutions to those challenges. (See www.nalacc.org)



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Federico Silva's Unending Quest

Víctor Vizzuett*

Federico Silva, painter, sculptor and prospector, with boundless good humor, has found self-realization in art. With clear, firm beliefs, his language is based on personal truths that he has transcended until they became universal. Each of his works possesses a cryptic language that only with time can be seen by the viewer, who is then the sole person responsible for his/her personal understanding and enjoyment.

Last November, Federico Silva opened the doors of his studio and its vast grounds covered with monumental sculpture to us for a few hours to talk off the cuff about his ideas, passions and memories. We discovered in them the basis of a legacy for contemporary and future artists constructed over the course of many years. This legacy goes far beyond the physical work, for it includes a way of being and interpreting Mexico's social, cultural and political life.





Mauricio Degollado

Art is a passionate, impossible quest. Real art is found in a constant search, and what you learn is that you will never find exactly what you're looking for.

To be heard, you must use silence and distance.

Federico Silva¹

What were the most important influences on you?
At first, Vasconcelos, Tolstoy, the authors I had within reach...and my contact with [David A.] Siqueiros. His compelling vision of art and his relationship

* Mexican writer and photographer.

with society, with large spaces. Above all, his conception of the participation of the viewer in his work. I was very young when I participated in the first exhibition organized by Siqueiros in the Fine Arts Palace, to protest against World War II as it was coming to an end. It was a very educational experience because I got the chance to meet many people involved in the fight against fascism like Pablo Neruda, people who participated very actively, very generously, in favor of the best causes in the world.

What has artistic creation given you?

Well, I don't really like the words "artistic creation." Instead, with time, you begin to understand about the processes of artistic creation. I have come to the conclusion —and I'm absolutely convinced of this— that the driving force that creates proposals and changes is work. Fantasies and inspiration, all of those things, don't exist.

Work has many virtues. In the first place it's where the artist achieves realization. Because the artist does not achieve self-realization through success, or through the sale of his or her work, much less through praise. When you're young, you're full of fantasies; you think that destiny and the way to reach your goals are in sight, that it's just a matter of waiting a little while or betting on good luck. But work teaches you that art is solitude enriched by the passion of finding something. Art is a passionate, impossible quest. That's why the creator perseveres in the quest and does not allow him or herself to be trapped by the sirens' call, or by fame or money,

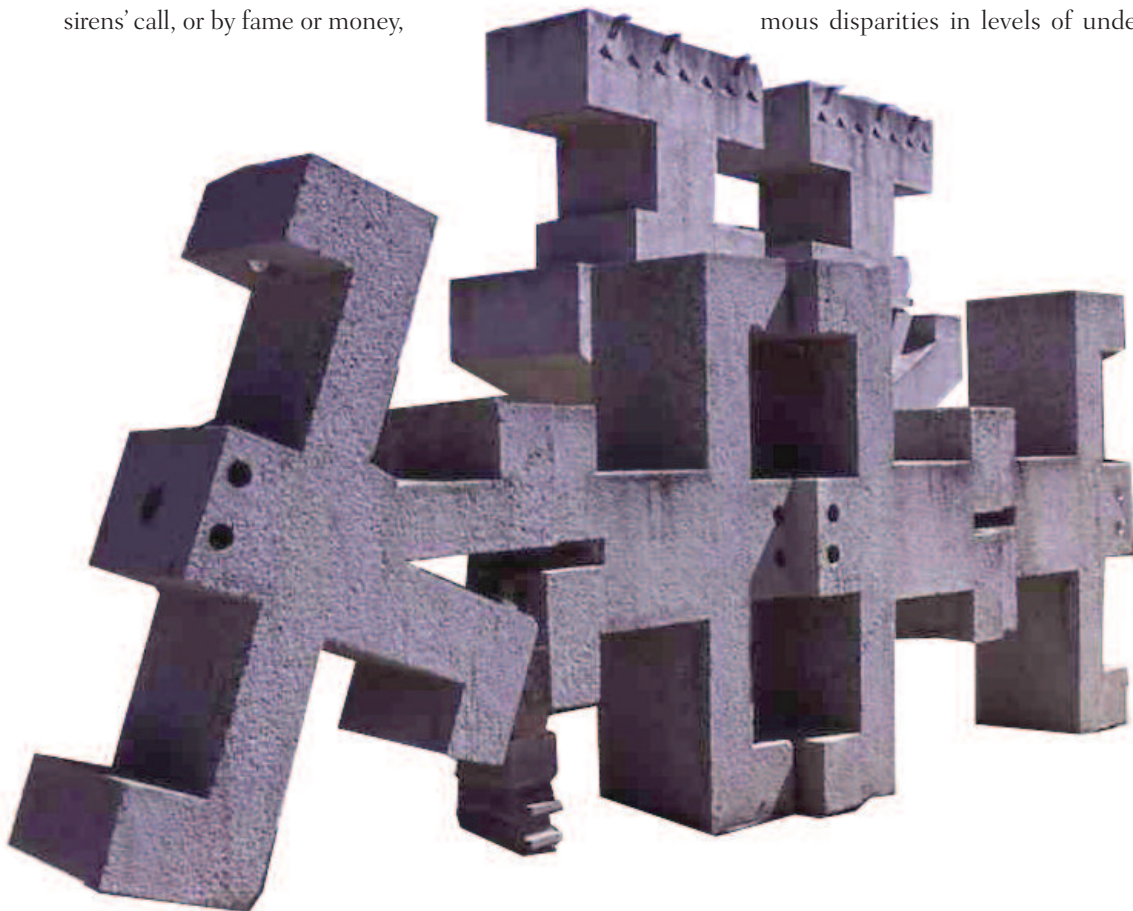
or by making the mistake of letting his or her efforts be commercialized. Real art is found in a constant search, and what you learn is that you will never find exactly what you're looking for.

How would you define an artist?

An artist is a prospector. I find it hard to use the word "artist" because it's very confusing. But, who defines it? How is it discovered? Where's the dividing line? I think that in this instance, the only thing that can answer your question is time.

What is Federico Silva's definition of art?

I think that art is an expression suspended in a permanent question. Art does not provide answers; in any case, it asks questions. It probably occurs in the extraordinary moment of communication between the work and the viewer. Because the object itself is never an artistic object as such; it only is when it is looked at by the viewer. But this process is very difficult because there are enormous disparities in levels of under-



Elsie Montiel



Mauricio Degollado

guage. Because in art, it doesn't matter what you say, but how you say it.

How does Federico Silva perceive himself, given the solitude of artistic endeavor?

During the effort of artistic creation, your greatest companion is solitude because that is where the internal dialogue of things is taking place. In this kind of work, there are no schedules; you work all the time; you work when you're asleep; you work during the night. It is a constant obsession. But something very curious takes place: a young artist works with music. Some even have their favorite composers who they identify with. They even follow the color of the music. They listen to Mahler all the time, very loud. They can't create their art without music as an eternal companion. But when you've been doing this for many years, you end up not needing anything. You don't need music anymore. You're not lonely. You're immersed in the conflict of creation, in the enjoyment of it. That's the part that compensates for the next stages of artistic work. Because later you face failure; finished works fall apart; their defects show up; the illusion of having achieved something fades away and you are left with no alternative but to persevere in your quest. That is the philosophical touchstone. Perhaps my will to live longer is because I continue to persevere in the quest.

How has your work changed?

In a great many ways. It cannot be static because you don't live in a test tube. Everything that happens around you affects you, even though people say that artists are ahead of other people. I don't think we are ahead of anything. Rather, what happens is that the mechanics of your work lets you express almost immediately what other kinds of thinkers, scientists, sociologists take longer to decipher.

What influence has the history of Mexico and the world had on your work?

It's an endless game. Naturally, there have been key moments that have influenced my work. The 1968 movement was a break and a fundamental change for artists in Mexico. What they say hap-

standing, in sensibilities, and in viewers' cultural background when they stand before a work.

For example, sculpture and painting are arts that are very difficult to capture. Nevertheless, people think they capture them in an instant. They often go to openings, look at the exhibit, drink a cocktail and end up thinking they "saw." But the reality is that they didn't see anything at all. Not even by standing a few minutes in front of a single canvas or a sculpture do they manage to see it, because their internal language is cryptic, full of hidden signs that are difficult to decipher for someone who doesn't have the keys, and these are only revealed very slowly, going back to the piece time and again, at different moments.

How is your person manifested in your work?

What remains of you in your work?

If anything remains, the most important thing would be passion, also expressed in cryptic lan-



A work of art is full of hidden signs that are difficult to decipher for someone who doesn't have the keys, and these are only revealed very slowly, going back to the piece time and again, at different moments.



Mauricio Degollado

“In 1945... it occurred to me to publish a magazine with contributions from renowned artists. But the magazine wasn’t about art; it was about politics... a magazine by artists in defense of Mexico’s sovereignty and progress.”

pens—and they even announce to the four winds as though it were a commercial product: “The Break”, which they chalk up to one poet and painter or another—is a very vain idea because they think they changed the world. But the break was a great social break with the past, the accumulation of a series of circumstances in Mexico and the world that caused a big shake-up in Mexican society. We all changed. That social break showed us other horizons and how to re-learn the surroundings of our lives, our horizons, where we were situated and that we were part of the world of Mexican society. That made us explore once more, to learn the new signs. For me, it was an enormous shake-up and naturally, I abandoned the things I had believed in before. I did not abandon my ideology. I continue to think in the same way. But, I stopped doing the same things because they no longer made sense; their function was an anachronism; it was

repeating a language and persevering in a stubborn, senseless way. The idea is to become part of a great crusade for things to change, improve, be different, and so that there can be room for understanding things.

What is the key to Federico Silva always looking for something new?

Not being satisfied and life, because the best way of living is to have a reason, to fight and trust, to be optimistic in doing what you’re doing.

What attracted you to politics?

I thought that the function of art was political. I believed that firmly. Art should serve to strengthen and contribute to social change. After the first nuclear explosions, after the Cold War, a new stage of struggle for peace began. I really believed that we were on the brink of nuclear war. I didn’t do it to

go out and campaign for somebody to win a seat in Congress; it was really a sense of fear and responsibility. I joined that struggle and I said to myself, "It makes no sense to paint things against the war if what matters is that people gain awareness, sign petitions, take part in demonstrations." My love of Mexico includes the pain of its losses. I am one of those Mexicans who still grieve for the loss of our territory, something almost nobody dares say anymore. If we look at it like that, how could I not be interested in getting into politics, not as an activist, not at all, but you can take a stance and if there's a need to express something clearly, well, you do it.

How did you develop your conception of social consciousness?

I was lucky enough to be in contact with long-time fighters for social justice, some of whom had been members of the Communist Party at a time when the party was very sectarian, when they were expelled. But they were very well known. I was very

young and wanted to be like them, have the same adventures, go out into the streets and put up posters, do all that street activism, because that's where you learn about solidarity, man's greatest virtue. I understood the sacrifice of people on all levels. Social consciousness is a very complex thing, linked to two things: ideology and practice. Without social practice, there is no consciousness.

What is your relationship to the UNAM?

My years at the UNAM have been definitive. I have fewer links than I would like, but I feel that there have been changes for the better. And I continue to think that it is perhaps the country's only beacon of light. I hope it is preserved because, given the country's current political situation, I fear that movements like we had in the past, reactionary, fascist-type movements are going to filter in and become strong in the university. It is not hard to believe that that could happen, turning the university into a Catholic university like in the eighteenth century.



Elsie Montiel

What does the sculptural space represent for you, seen from a distance?

I think it was the detonator of all Mexican sculpture. Before the existence of the sculptural space, Mexico's presence in this field was low key. This work put wind in its sails because it was based on a broad, generous, collective conception, practically without the name of any particular originator. The people who participated came to the sculptural space without the preconceived idea that it belonged to this artist or the other; they were also attracted by a certain dramatic, religious connotation because this space is a ceremonial space that did not come about by chance, but because of a convergence of ideas and circumstances.

What does the sculptural space trigger in the visitor?

I think many sensitive people perceive a ritual halo when they're there. It is not the contempla-

tion of beauty; it is not surprise at perfection or at a work of art, but the presence of a collective spirit that reminds you of the great ceremonial spaces. In that sense it is the continuity of a historical awareness; that is the UNAM's contribution.

What is your opinion of Federico Silva?

I see myself as someone who fosters change in all causes. Someone who finds realization in his work and always tries to keep a sense of reality, without believing in false praise, because it is just a dead weight that instead of giving you strength, clouds your vision.

What does universality mean to you?

I had a formula for defining the concept that I think continues to be valid: the universal is always born of the local. There can be nothing universal that is disconnected from its own character. No one can conceive of making universal art; that would be madness. But, if someone is able to perceive and disseminate the essence of what is his own, and expresses it with truth and force, it becomes a universal value. There are powerful universal values like human solidarity, which produce acts that move you regardless of the country they are from. I associate this idea with art. **MM**



NOTES

¹ Federico Silva, *México por Tacuba, Pasajes autobiográficos* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 2000), p. 125.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.



Victor Vizzuetti

Federico Silva keeps himself firmly anchored in this world. His art continues to express a passion for unfinished work. Incorporating the teachings of the different periods that have molded him, changed his path and the path of the world, he refuses to abandon his quest, thus putting within our reach an unfinished body of artistic work, whose translation is the responsibility of those whose presence gives his art the opportunity of emerging and being revealed.



Mauricio Degollado

How Do You Make A Monumental Sculpture?

How do you make a large-scale sculpture? This was the question that Clemente, Federico Silva's assistant for more than 10 years, answered for us. "The first thing is to decide what you're going to do, that is, the figure. Then you make a small plaster model. When Don Federico is satisfied, we make a sketch of the dimensions the sculpture will have." Federico Silva's workshop in Tlaxcala is in a former thread factory called La Estrella, so many sketches can be done on paper hung on its high walls. "Once you have the sketch and you know the proportions, you decide what material you're going to use: concrete or iron. Depending on that, you build a mold onto which the material will be poured." The test of the proportions is important because, for example, determining the distribution of the weight of a piece is what will allow it to remain in place.

Concrete sculptures are made of a mix of materials selected by the sculptor: red and black *tezontle* rock, river sand, mined stone, and they are all mixed with cement to give it a different texture. That is where the red, black and almost white dots we can see in the piece if we get close enough are from. The mix can take on different hues. "If Don Federico decides that it should be colored, he adds earth and pigments; then it is poured into the wooden mold, almost always set on the floor, or it's poured vertically, because when it's set, it's very difficult to pick up." The process can take as long as two months and the result, in the case of concrete, are pieces that weigh almost 20 tons. Sometimes two cranes working together are not enough to pick them up. The iron pieces are made in another way, but no by any means a simpler one. For them, the skill lies in the ability to decide where the welds should be made so they are not noticeable and the sculpture looks as though it were a single piece. **MM**



About the Sculptural Space

*I think many sensitive people perceive a ritual halo when they're here.
It is not the contemplation of beauty; it is not surprise at perfection or at a work
of art, but the presence of a collective spirit that reminds you of the great ceremonial spaces.*

FEDERICO SILVA

The Sculptural Space is built around an impressive base of lava, intentionally devoid of soil and vegetation, with a platform on which 64 many-sided cement modules sit. Their rectangular bases measure 9 x 3 meters and are 4 meters high. The modules' visible planes were finished with rough marte-line hammer blows to give them texture. They are arranged in a circle by quadrants, with 16 modules in each quadrant, separated by streets oriented toward the four points of the compass. The platform surface is finished in pressed *tezonite* rock to make it permeable and give it a touch of color. The diameter of the interior ring is 92.78 meters and the exterior one is 120 meters.

Information taken from *El espacio escultórico* (Mexico City: MUCA/Coordinación de Humanidades/Centro de Investigación y Servicios Museológicos-UNAM, 1980), pp. 7 and 27.

Photos by Elsie Montiel

Manifesto of the Sculptural Space

A precondition for reaching concrete proposals for the conception and design of the Espacio Escultórico was to overcome the contradictions inherent in our varied cultural formation and esthetic experience.

It is unusual today for personalities in the field of art to be able to subordinate their particular formal vision and corresponding doctrine to the general interest.

Public art is always a collective issue; but the complexity of society and rapid growth of the community requires that artists hoping to undertake public art follow a scientific methodology free from any impositions.

Multidisciplinary teamwork is one way, with a sense of responsibility, to approach an understanding of what art in its relationship to the life of urban man should mean to us, art which should not only recapture its testimonial value but also achieve a role as a cultural instrument to transform our sensibilities.

The panorama of public art is depressing due to negative commercial influences and to a lack of criteria; it is art commissioned in offices of politicians with influence over its development who treat it like private property. In its realization, artists seeking public praise, with the complicity of architects and “urbanists,” copy and unscrupulously deform what others explore.

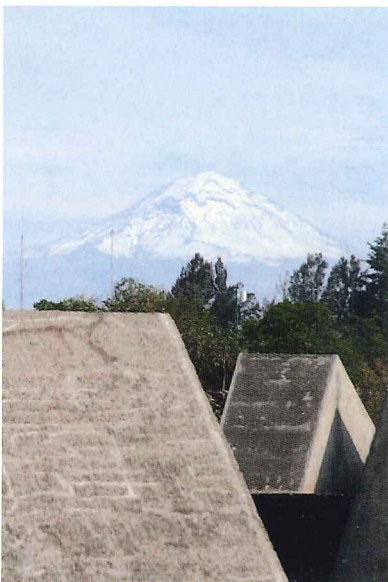
These forms of aggression toward the city and its inhabitants, which are a kind of corruption, are generating serious new types of contamination which, in addition to confounding and forestalling any attempts toward advancement by corrupting judgment and a sense of beauty and equilibrium, harm man in his basic structure.

We participants in the university Espacio Escultórico Project have attempted to put into practice principles forgotten for centuries: to try to make art a great event for everyone and forever, overcoming, at least on this occasion, the selfish and false individual will.

Even were no other work of the artists forming this working team to survive, the Espacio Escultórico, even though hidden and anonymous, must remain as the most important collective undertaking in public art in recent years.

*Helen Escobedo, Manuel Felguérez, Mathías Goeritz,
Hersúa, Sebastián, Federico Silva*

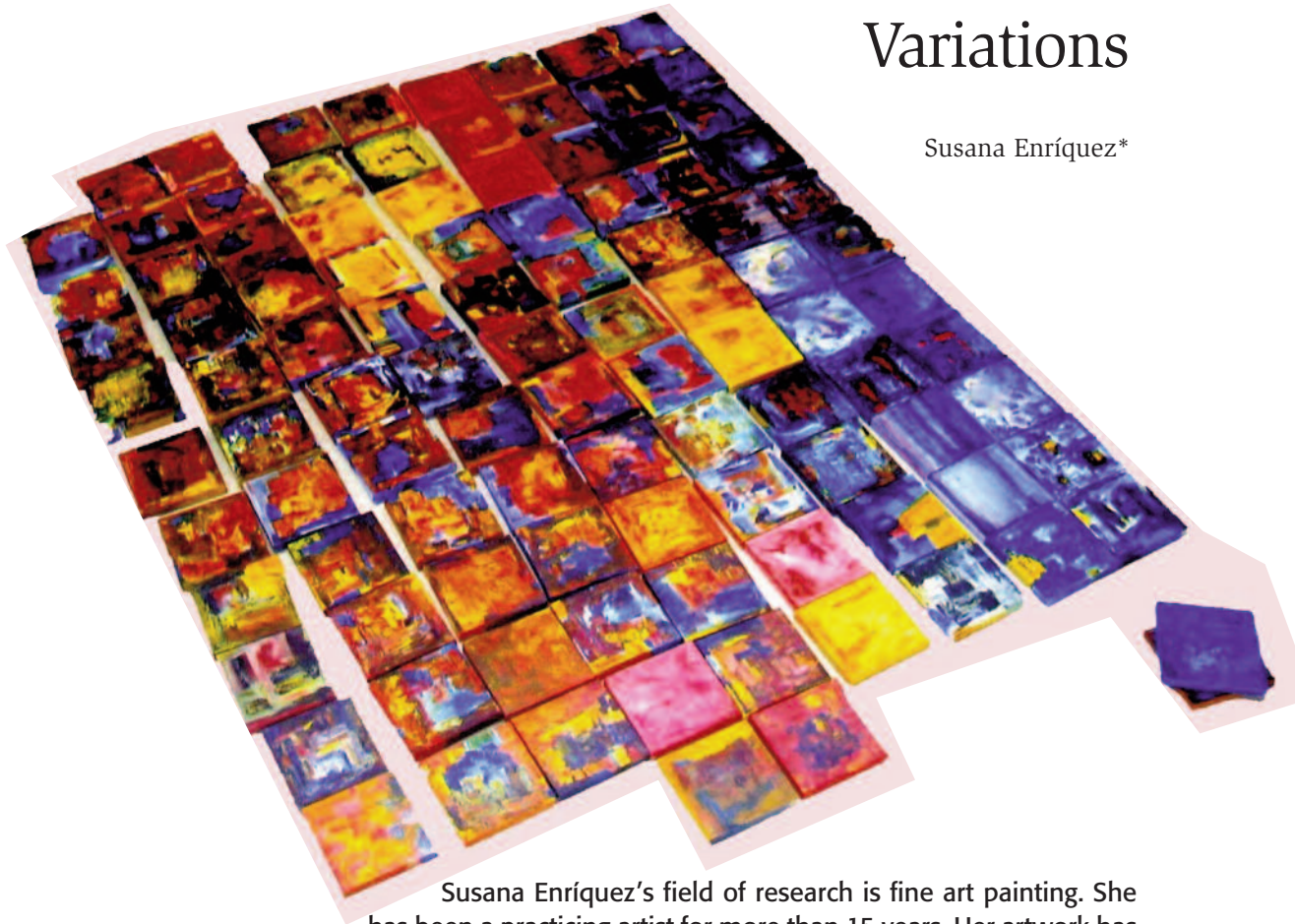
1980



Creating an “Aleatory” Visual Orchestra Piece

Theme and Variations

Susana Enríquez*



Susana Enríquez’s field of research is fine art painting. She has been a practicing artist for more than 15 years. Her artwork has been based on the relationships of music and color and notions of sense of space and movement. She’s had many exhibitions in Mexico and abroad of paintings, drawings and digital art and collaborated with musicians and composers. In the last five years, her work has been a response to personal experiences with classical and modern music. Experimentation has been an important element in twentieth-century music and, similarly, she has endeavored to create pieces that move away from the traditional, still canvas. Visually, at first glance her work could be linked to abstract expressionism with its strong, raw colors, gesture and anonymous forms within the plane of the picture. These forms are open to interpretation and any resemblance to landscapes or architectural skylines of manmade cityscapes is completely unintentional.

* Mexican visual artist resident in Newcastle, Australia.

In search of a visual idiom adequate to the new world view, many artists at the beginning of the twentieth century turned to music and its independence of sources to create images. With music as an ideal, they separated their imagery from the objective context, by means of liberating colors and forms creating what we know as abstract painting. Wassily Kandinsky is a good example. They found a model in the new sound language developed by contemporary composers, especially after World War II.

The elements of a musical composition are far different from those of a painting, although both share qualities such as harmony, contrast and rhythm. Nevertheless that did not stop artists from experimenting and expanding their horizon using any muse in the long and lonely path of creation.

Ekphrasis by association does not render exactly what the eyes see in a visual image or on the printed page of a literary work but is inspired by a primary work of art, spinning off new or familiar thoughts and mental or emotional connections.¹ In this instance, it is the music that is transformed into a visual image using a personal code of color, with no previous references, created in accordance with the sections of a symphonic orchestra.

The borderline between this kind of association and an *ekphrastic* interpretation is blurred. In the latter, the artist uses not only associations of a personal nature, but rather, implications known to and shared by all three parties; the creator of the original work, the responding artist and the community of viewers.

From the very outset of this project, it was my intention to produce a body of work that was based on an interpretation or translation into paint (color) of sound (music).

The sounds I speak of are not experimental; they are scored musical compositions. To achieve my goal it was imperative for me to establish a code or a foundation of structured meanings of particular colors that were relevant to me and that related to particular instrumental sections found in an orchestra.

In the early stages of this project I compiled a list of orchestral instruments and the colors they represented. My colors representing sections of the orchestra are as follows:

Red: percussions

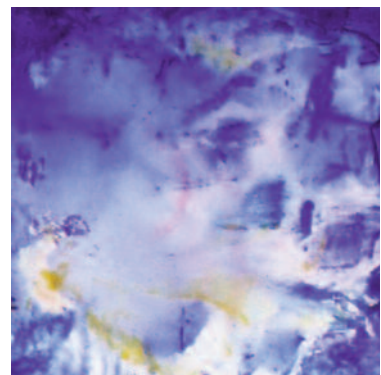
Blue: strings

Yellow: brass and woodwinds.

I am familiar with the meaning of colors as represented in theoretical and symbolical ways; for example, John Gage's *Color and Meaning, Art, Science and Symbolism*, and also various established interpretations of color. Red equals blood, warmth, aggression, and blue may be interpreted as distance, water and cold.

It was essential to create my own personal visual vocabulary that would form the foundation of my studio works as this vocabulary would allow me to listen, interpret and produce works not directly attached to any other artist, movement or theory.

My work would sit comfortably within the context of sound and color theory and contempo-



Theme and Variations, three out of one hundred pieces, 30 x 30 cm each, 2004 (acrylic on canvas).



rary art, but not be attached to or bound by any established movement. The dream of creating a visual music comparable to auditory music found its fulfillment in animated abstract films by artists like Oskar Fischinger, Len Lye and Norman McLaren; but long before them, many people built instruments, usually called color organs, that displayed modulated colored light in some kind of fluid fashion comparable to music.²

I could not see the point in rehashing or redoing old themes, theories or work done over quite a long period of time throughout the history of art, particularly the relationship of color and music, which has a long history. In 1927, 1930, 1933 and 1936 the University of Hamburg hosted an international "Color-Music Congress," which brought together artists including those in music, dance, film and painting, perceptual psychologists, and critics to explore issues of synaesthesia and multidisciplinary art forms.³

The music I selected to use as a reference came from twentieth-century composers like Manuel Enríquez, Igor Stravinsky, Bela Bartok, Pierre Boulez, Olivier Messiaen, Györgi Ligeti, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Claude Debussy and John Cage. These composers provided a strong formal structure and a parameter or boundary that I would be aware of, but not frightened to cross over if necessary. In the production of the work one other aspect became crucial. This was gesture; sponta-

Theme and Variations is not a group of paintings; it is one piece consisting of 100 pieces, considered as a polyptych. Metaphorically, it is a polyphony of color.

neous movements that, although not recorded or listed like the color or the instruments, were connected closely to the immediate translation of music into color at the moment of executing the work, thus recreating from time (music) to space (the white canvas).

For me, translating the sounds into color creates a different way of working within the parameter of the canvas or paper to recreate my interpretation of the sounds into color. I moved in two directions: firstly, emotions and mood, then the rigor of composition and bearing in mind the formal elements that occur in music as they do in painting.

A piece of canvas was not enough for my purposes to re-create music, considering I wanted to work with symphonic and chamber music. Since there are many instruments producing different sounds at the same time, I did not have enough space to create the entire atmosphere and textures and other elements involved in the complexity of a musical piece. My experience as a musician is that the same piece could sound slightly different every time you play it because, since music is a perform-

ing art, the results depend on the human element as well as the place where it is performed.

The music does not stay the same. The notes in the score do not change, but the sonorous result can be different depending on the conductor's interpretation, the acoustic quality of the place where the concert was played, the number of rehearsals, the musicians' skill, and other factors. Although visual art is not a performance, I wanted to have the same results with the painting; the same piece could look different but the composition would be the same.

These aims prompted the idea of a work made up of an indeterminate number of pieces.

Looking at musical scores, I found that in the modern writing of music the composers use geometric forms where they enclosed some passages of the piece. The most common are geometric or irregular shapes like we can see in the scores by Manuel Enríquez (*Tzicuri*) or Stockhausen (*Zyklus*) just to mention two examples.

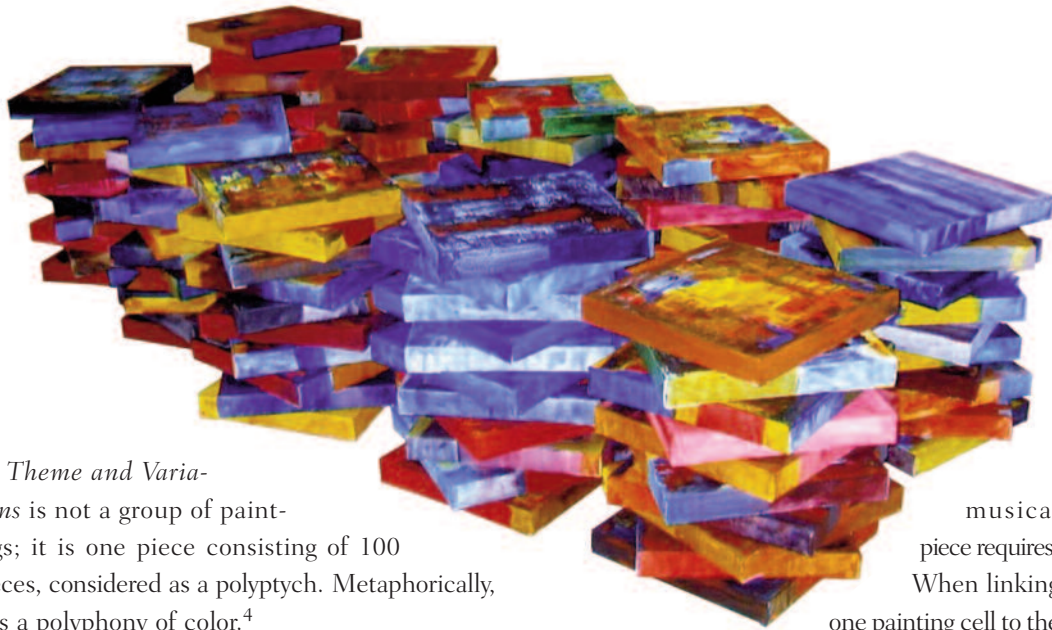
The decision about how to display the piece does not remain with the artist, but the curator, and also depends on the characteristics of the space where it is going to be shown.



Other traditional compositions use bars as well, the vertical lines that separate each unit of music time, such as $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, but also the study letters in a musical score are always enclosed in a square. I decided that this project of painting had to be made of squares, which would be like cells that would develop in different spaces, using primary colors to create secondary and tertiary colors according to my color code. Each painting would be a variation, not a repetition. The square canvas would be a bar that encloses a unit of musical time from a composition by an orchestra and the link between them would be primary colors.

To explain more about how the music corresponds to the colors in an orchestral piece, according to my coding system, I will give an example:

The percussions (red) start the piece, followed immediately by the string instruments (blue) which come together, *tutti*, from *mezzo forte* to *fortissimo*, with the percussions still playing (blue and red = purple). Then one trumpet (yellow) appears in the background. At the beginning it mixes with strings and percussions (purple and yellow) but slowly it starts to be the predominant sound and separates from the other instruments, and more trumpets and English horns (yellows) sound together. Now the strings seem to disappear, but they are in the background (very light blue); they did not become completely silent, but just decreased in volume.



Theme and Variations is not a group of paintings; it is one piece consisting of 100 pieces, considered as a polyptych. Metaphorically, it is a polyphony of color.⁴

I conceived this artwork as the conversion of a random orchestral piece into a painting, which means that once the piece is in the hands of the conductor/curator, they will make the decision about how to start the performance of the musical/art/piece. The idea behind a random piece is that every time it is performed, it will sound different because of the participation of a third criteria. In this case, the decision about how to display the piece does not remain with the artist, but the curator, and also depends on the characteristics of the space where it is going to be shown. Like in a concert, the sound can change depending on the acoustic conditions of the concert hall.

One of the concepts I have considered for recreating the music into color in this artwork is movement; not in the sense of the musical concept: "several self-contained sections that make up a large-scale musical work, often differentiated from one another by different tempos and characters." My idea is about motion, because sound is not static, it is fleeting. With this concept in mind I was looking to change the concept of a painting as a static object. I had to play with motion and give all the possible variations to a small canvas using it as a cell that would develop to form a second, then a third, continuing but still giving each cell its own balance as an individual painting. Using the analogy of music, it would be possible to link one painting to the next, echoing a bar of music and following the dynamics that the whole

musical piece requires. When linking one painting cell to the

other, the color that represents the sections of an orchestra gives the clue that connects them, strings with strings or joining the continuation of the sound of percussions represented by the color red: red with red and so on. With my color code as a guide, it is possible with this piece to create a string chamber orchestra using all the blue canvases.

My idea with this aleatory piece was tested at the University of Newcastle Visual Arts Building in 2004, as well as in an exhibition in Canberra (2005) where the curator of the show organized the canvases in a different way than the previous showing, and finally at the University of Newcastle at my final exhibition and doctoral examination (2006).⁵

Personally, the importance of my painting music is that it has kept me breathing. I combine my two passions in solitude. Music is my past and painting, my present, and it is showing me that I still have a long journey, a future. **MM**



NOTES

- ¹ *Ekphrasis*: from the Greek words *ek* (out) and *phrazein* (tell, declare, pronounce), *ekphrasis* originally means "telling in full." An *Ekphrasis* is a poem written about another form of art. This other form of art is most often painting.
- ² William Moritz, "The Dream of Color Music," *Animation World Magazine* (Berkeley, California), April 1997.
- ³ *Idem*.
- ⁴ Polyphony is a musical composition that uses simultaneous, largely independent melodic parts, lines or voices.
- ⁵ "Aleatory": having the sequence of given notes or passages in a piece of music chosen at random by the performer.



NORTEAMÉRICA
Academic Journal of the CISAN-UNAM

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The National Autonomous University of Mexico's Center for Research on North America (CISAN) is preparing to publish the third issue of its biannual journal based on academic excellence, *Norteamérica*, with the aim of contributing to the study and reflection about the political, economic, social and cultural situation of North America. To this end, we wish to invite the national and international academic community to contribute under the following

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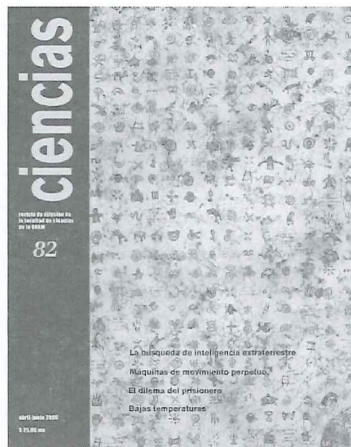
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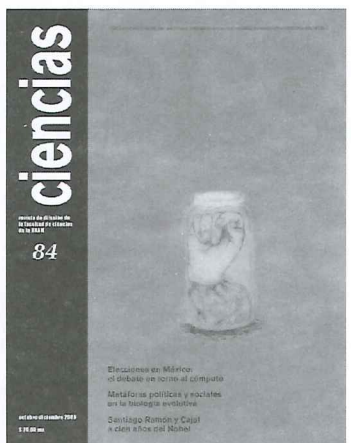
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Bush: The Last Battle Lost

José Luis Valdés-Ugalde*



Reuters/John Gress

One of the main beneficiaries of the midterm elections faces the 2008 presidential race.

Three frightful phantoms pursued President George W. Bush in last November's midterm elections, three phantoms that have followed him from the beginning of his term in office. One is the presumption of electoral fraud in Florida and of the loss of the popular vote; neither prevented him from taking office in 2000, but they did weaken his presidency and prestige in the eyes of Americans and the world from the onset. Secondly, the worst of all nightmares: the September 11 terrorist attacks that devastated New York's financial district and submerged the country in the worst security crisis and loss of innocence in its entire history. What is more, from that terrible moment, Americans have been more afraid

of losing control than of death itself. Their astonishment stems fundamentally from the feeling that they were immersed in an apocalyptic future, which while it had been majestically depicted in the mass media and the world of fiction and film in U.S. iconographic culture, caught them unprepared to face such a real scene as the one that was so forcefully presented to them.

It was an event that marked the United States' social and political life forever and was certainly exploited by the president and his party to the last minute of the electoral campaign, just like the Iraq situation (the third phantom). Both became polarizing parts of extraordinary importance in the elections and in the development of a bellicose discourse which, though it invaded most of both parties' campaign headquarters, was used in a pedestrian fashion by

* Director of CISAN-UNAM.

the White House, apparently alienating public support more than attracting it. By attempting to latch onto the war in Iraq and use the issue for electoral ends, given the fact that the public was clearly sick of it, Bush committed perhaps the most serious mistake of his political career. And Karl Rove, his omnipotent Machiavelli *à la carte*, could not see his way forward this time with the tricks that he had always used to advance the president's cause.

The sweeping Republican defeat in the House of Representatives and the races for the governors' houses, which for the most part reverted to the Democrats, shows how difficult it was for Bush to rid himself of these three phantoms, though mainly the latter two. In any case, both his legitimacy and his declining popularity and, of course, his domestic and foreign policy decisions, have depended on the phantoms of September 11 and the Iraq war. And the political-electoral climate in the months prior to the November balloting was determined by them. They are also responsible to a great extent for the election outcome, which was much more unfavorable to the Republican Party than expected since it never even remotely considered it would lose its Senate majority.

It is common knowledge that since August 2002, President Bush proposed waging an anti-terrorist campaign that has led to the worst foreign policy and domestic policy crisis in the United States since the Vietnam War. This effort, despite its failure, was consistently fostered from the Pentagon by Donald Rumsfeld, a Vice President Cheney *protégé*, whom Bush inexplicably supported for a very long time. What was expected to be a campaign that would make it possible for a sector of

the right wing very identified with the governing party to capitalize politically, became, as the spectacular political-military fiasco it was, its Achilles heel in the recent elections. All of this, linked to other extremely sensitive domestic issues, will most probably have a favorable impact on the Democratic Party in the 2008 presidential elections.

This scenario of Republican defeat is even more underlined if we observe that in addition to the Iraq issue, the voters are very unsatisfied by other aspects of Republican rule. Particularly outstanding is that in pre-election polls about practically every key issue of the Bush administration, the public thought the Democrats could do a better job: for

Although for Mexico
the new Democratic majority
is no guarantee of a solution to
the problems at least we might
be able to relax and hope for
greater moderation.

example, Iraq, 48 vs. 40 percent; the war against terrorism, 44 vs. 43 percent; the economy, 50 vs. 41 percent; the North Korean situation, 47 to 40 percent. Other points also stand out that are always central in midterm elections: at voting time, the president's approval rating was extremely low, around 35 percent, due above all to the public's disapproval of the Iraq war (57 percent); the rejection of his administration (66 percent); and, to top it all off, there is a marked perception that given Washington's foreign policy inadequacies, the United States has a bad image abroad (77 percent).

The U.S. elections, then, became mainly a kind of referendum about the administration and the president's prestige based on his Iraq policy, more than

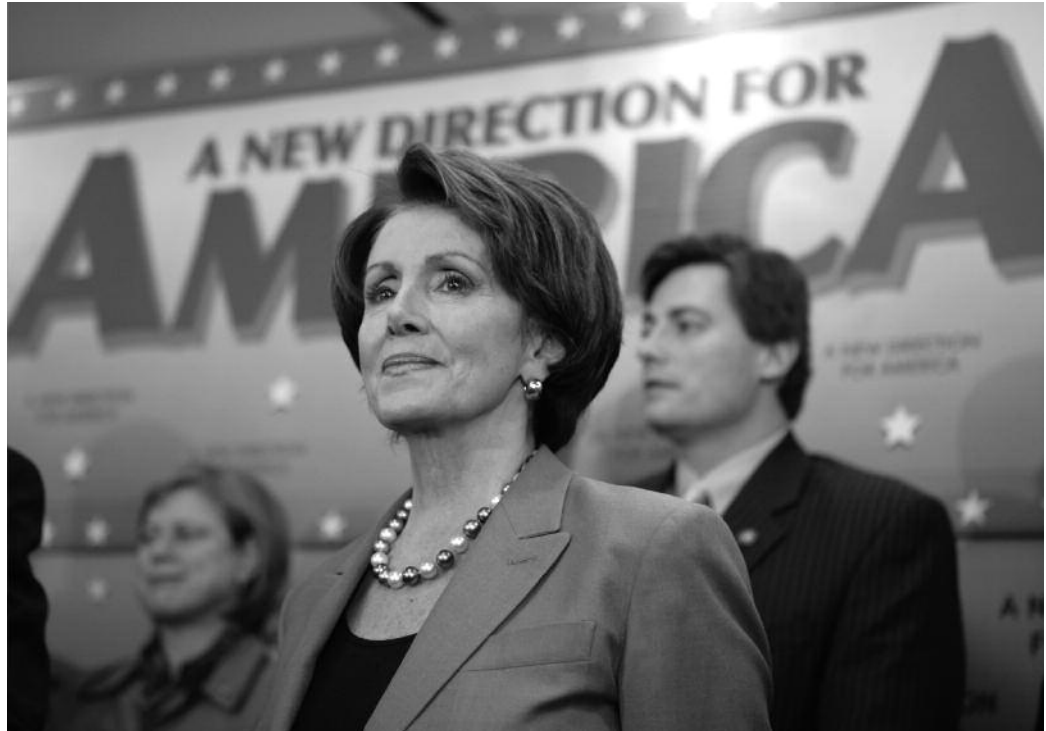
on the big domestic issues, and the president does not seem to have passed the test. This tension made the recent campaign the most hotly contested, dirtiest and most expensive in U.S. electoral history. It also meant that a reactive vote to punish the Bush administration predominated over a vote affirming anything.

The results show that the voters opted for countering presidential power and the administration's ineffective policy in matters of extreme importance for Americans. This change of heart will undoubtedly have a big impact on U.S. policy over the next two years. And perhaps —why not?— it could also be a reason to be optimistic, given a very significant fact: conditions are being created to put an end to the policy of the two extremes. It is well known that the last six years have been very tense for Americans, but that there have also been ideological excesses, the violation of constitutional rights and government corruption, all perpetrated in the name of a cause, the war, that today may be turning into a relic.

Although for Mexico and the world the new Democratic majority in both houses of the U.S. Congress is no guarantee of a solution to the many unresolved problems with Washington, at least we might be able to relax and hope for greater moderation in solving the problems accumulated because of the White House's unilateral excesses in its world policy since 2001. In that sense, we can underline the important consolidation since the last elections of two politicians who offer some preliminary indications of the viability of aforementioned optimistic hypothesis: Hillary Rodham Clinton, the leader of the Democratic center, and John McCain, the leader of the Republican center. Both very probably presidential candidates for 2008. **MM**

Social Snapshots of the U.S. Midterm Elections

Silvia Núñez García*



For the first time a woman, Democrat Nancy Pelosi, will preside over the House of Representatives.

The expectations that gave rise to the recent U.S. congressional election results are the framework for this article. Its object is to use statistics to illustrate the social conditions surrounding the process, which, because they were mainly domestic, received little attention from Mexican analysts studying the central aspects of U.S. foreign policy: Iraq, security and the fight against terrorism, among the most important.

Five years after the tragic events of 9/11, followed by the failed invasion of Iraq and amidst corruption scandals, the U.S. public has gradually reduced its support for President George W.

Bush and his party. Voters favored the Democrats, basing themselves on two central considerations: the administration's inability to control and manage the complex situation in Iraq and evidence of bad economic performance.

With regard to the former, I will limit myself to pointing out that casualties since the beginning of the U.S. army's campaign have already exceeded 3,000 dead and almost 22,000 injured,¹ and estimated expenditures have reached U.S.\$350 billion.²

This not only discredited Bush, but prompted the questioning of one of the doctrines of U.S. foreign policy that legitimized interventionism as a "humanitarian responsibility." In other words, the means for achieving a higher

* CISAN academic secretary.

Among the different interpretations of women's recent advancement is politics' bad reputation because of corruption where men have been the central figures.

goal, went, in this case, from the promotion of democracy and the liberation of a people to the imposition of U.S. domination.

ON TRUST

Even though examples abound in U.S. history demonstrating an anti-state tradition favoring a limited bureaucracy and small government, the political actors headed up by the president need to have the public's trust to legitimize their actions. In that sense, we find that by mid-2003, 70 percent of the U.S. public supported President Bush, who benefited from a media strategy that appealed to traditional values like patriotism to be used as a practical instrument to channel the problem of growing uncertainty due to the terrorist threat, personified in Bin Laden and Iraq's supposed destructive capabilities.

Since the end of 2004, once safely re-elected by the small margin of 62 million to 59 million of the popular vote, Bush's critical performance as a military strategist and political leader deepened until it ended up turning the November 2006 midterm elections into a referendum on himself. The results were that 56 percent of Americans did not approve of him, and 61 percent

considered the country needed to change course.³

This same downward trend has affected trust in the administration as a whole. In July 2004, 40 percent of those interviewed by CBS News and *The New York Times* said that they always or almost always trusted it, while, by September 2006, that figure had dropped to 27 percent.

Another symptom of President Bush's failing popularity is also the 10-point drop in the public's trust in the executive branch, contrasted with its trust in the judiciary between 2004 and 2006: the former dropped from 58 percent to 48 percent, while the latter increased from 65 percent to 69 percent.⁴

ON SOCIAL WELFARE

According to the numbers, it would not be wildly speculative to say that the incisive support for reinforcing national security *per se* worked against strategies to strengthen social welfare policies, which had a big electoral price tag for the Republican Party. According to a Pew Center survey before the elections, voters' preferences for the Democrats cited their greater ability to deal with health issues (48 percent) and the economy (46 percent), in addition to security matters, as the reasons. A September Gallup poll showed that 66 percent of Americans thought the economy was weak, and that their two main concerns were hikes in gas prices and energy consumption (26 percent) and the gap between rich and poor (24 percent).⁵

In this last scenario, I think it is important to underline the fact that the Census Bureau drew the poverty line for a family of four at an annual income of U.S.\$19,157 in 2004. This means that

37 million U.S. citizens are considered needy. Of these, almost 13 million are under 18, and some studies conclude that they have fewer opportunities for upward social mobility than poor children in different developed European countries. With regard to education, estimates say that only 3 percent of students at the best U.S. universities come from families with limited incomes.

Considering the importance of immigration in U.S.-Mexico relations, we can observe a peculiar political cast to the understanding of the poverty-immigration link since analysts insist on saying that most immigrant minors face poverty in the United States given that the Census Bureau itself recognizes that 74 percent of children living in poverty are not immigrants (2004). Disregarding this evidence, conservative groups like The Heritage Foundation oppose bills favoring amnesty for undocumented immigrants, arguing that they promote the entry of non-skilled labor which in turn will force an increase in welfare programs, spurring greater poverty and overloading U.S. taxpayers.

On the other hand, for the Democrats to consolidate their position, education is key. Debate on the issue has bogged down because the Republicans have opposed reforming the local funding system that deepens the disparity in the quality of education between rich and poor counties, while the Democrats have not been capable either of limiting teachers' unions because they are afraid of losing their votes.

In a universe that in 2004 contained a little over 290 million people, total spending on welfare programs reached U.S.\$583 billion. If we examine its distribution by the educational level of the heads of households benefited, we find

the higher the level of schooling, the lower is the government subsidy. People with university degrees receive U.S.\$638 for each family member while those without a high school diploma receive U.S.\$4,461 per member.⁶

The middle class has felt the negative impact of the economic slow-down and some statistics show that university graduates' annual income has dropped for the first time in decades almost to the levels of that of high school graduates.

While the income of average workers in the United States has increased only 10 percent in real terms compared to what they earned 25 years ago at the same time that their hourly productivity has increased 30 percent, the tendency to concentrate income at the higher levels has continued to rise during the same period.⁷

The top one percent of Americans doubled their participation in total income from 8 percent in 1980 to 16 percent in 2004. One-tenth of this group has tripled their participation from 2 percent to 7 percent; and the 14,000 taxpayers at the very top of the pyramid have quadrupled their share from 0.65 percent to 2.8 percent in 2004.⁸

It is estimated that the average U.S. CEO earns 300 percent of what he or she would have earned in 1970 in a post with the same responsibilities.

The table on this page shows the disparities in average annual income by kind of household, gender and race.

ON WOMEN AND POLITICS

The table shows at a glance the gap between households headed by women and two-parent families. This makes it useful to put into context some char-

acteristics and results of the recent elections.

The numbers point to a constant increase in women's participation in U.S. elections since 1992, to the degree that they made up 51 percent of the voters in the last election.

Of a total of almost 79 million voters, women are recognized as a central part of the Democratic Party's constituency, together with Hispanics and Afro-Americans: 55 percent of women and 50 percent of men voted for it.

Rutgers University's Center for American Women and Politics stated that this election has been a significant advance for women running for office: as of January 2007, 71 seats out of 435 in the House of Representatives will be occupied by women, compared to only 19 in 1975.

A total of 138 women ran for the House, a number close to 2004's record of 141 women who won their parties' primaries and ran for the lower house.

Women have been slower to enter the Senate. Of the 100 seats, in 1991, only two were occupied by women; in 2001, 13; and by 2006, the number had increased to a record 16.⁹

It is important to recognize that in both houses, most women with seats are Democrats. In the House, 50 Demo-

U.S. political culture continues to be very determined by voters' social class, race and gender, while its practices and values are markedly masculine.

crats and 21 Republicans were women; in the Senate, 11 women are from the Democratic Party and 5 from the Republican.

Among the different interpretations of women's recent advancement is politics' bad reputation because of corruption—exemplified by the Abramoff case—where men have been the central figures. Nevertheless, perceptions about politicians' behavior can be very diverse. This is the case of recently re-elected Senator Hilary Clinton. Her performance as First Lady, together with her vocation for public service, has made her very popular despite the fact that her recent campaign cost more than U.S.\$33 million.

Lastly, it is important to point out that for the first time in the history of the United States a woman, Nancy

FAMILY STRUCTURE AND INCOME
FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN UNDER 18 (2003)
(U.S. DOLLARS)

	WHITE	AFRO-AMERICAN	HISPANIC
Two-parent families	73,622	55,533	39,850
Families with female heads of household	31,076	20,670	22,556

Source: Douglas J. Besharov, "Measuring Poverty after Katrina," *American Enterprise Institute*, August 28, 2006.

Pelosi, will be Speaker of the House. In addition, nine women governors represent 18 percent of the total; six are Democrats and 3 are Republicans.

Thus, the high number of women's votes means, among other things, a willingness to transcend strictly competitive values and a renunciation of private life in order to favor cooperation.

CONCLUSION

The functioning of democracy requires reference points that allow citizens to trust in its mechanisms and institutions. Like a body that results from the interaction of groups, communities and individuals, it also ends up determining the kinds of relationships established among them to resolve their differences. For that reason, democracy

fulfills its function beyond electoral processes when, through transparent management, it allows for the articulation of different interests seeking the health of the nation.

This article attempts to show that social welfare and inclusion are transcendental issues for promoting a new era in U.S. democracy, still characterized by asymmetry, shown, among other things, by the fact that 64 percent of registered voters are members of families whose annual income is over U.S.\$30,000.

I think that the U.S. political culture continues to be very determined by voters' social class, race and gender, while its practices and values are markedly masculine. This situates the country far from what is called parity democracy, in which women's participation in political posts would not be

lower than 40 percent or higher than 60 percent. **MM**

NOTES

- ¹ www.defenselink.mil, consulted December 12, 2006.
- ² www.nationalpriorities.org, consulted December 12, 2006.
- ³ NBC News/Wall Street Journal survey, October 2006.
- ⁴ Gallup Organization, *The Public Strategies Report*, October 5, 2006.
- ⁵ NBCNews/Wall Street Journal survey, September 8-10, 2006, quoted in *The Public Strategies Report*, October 5, 2006.
- ⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey*, March 2005 (data for 2004).
- ⁷ "The rich, the poor and the growing gap between them," *The Economist*, June 17, 2006, pp. 24-26.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/>, consulted December 17 and 18, 2006. The Center for American Women and Politics, under the aegis of Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics, has a long-running, prestigious reputation for the production of rigorous statistics, history and analysis of women and politics in the United States.

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How the Republicans Were Defeated

Paz Consuelo Márquez-Padilla*



Reuters/John Sommers II

Nobody was surprised by November's U.S. election results. From the start of his second term, President George W. Bush had gone down sharply in the public's estimation. The surveys registered a 39-percent¹ and even a 37-percent approval rating,² one of the lowest levels ever for a president two years from finishing his term in office. The aim of this article is to show how all the problems the Republicans faced in the elections can largely be explained when we analyze the actions of the two fundamental groups that put Bush in the White House for two terms: the neo-conservatives and the religious right. These two groups joined forces to put Bush in office —though once there, the for-

mer concentrated on foreign policy while the latter dedicated themselves to postulating their extreme positions about domestic politics—and are responsible for the change of leadership in both houses of Congress. Before the elections, only 27 percent of the population thought they could trust the government.³

Several problems have been piling up, although undoubtedly the most important one was the Iraq war. At its onset, the Americans underplayed the fact that they never found the infamous weapons of mass destruction because they thought that the world was better off without Saddam Hussein anyway. However, as the years passed and the situation in Iraq became more complicated, the justification for starting the war takes on renewed importance. That is, if the United

* Researcher at CISAN.

States had scored a rapid victory and withdrawal, making sure of the country's stability, the causes of the war would have been rather irrelevant. However, the more complicated the situation becomes, the more U.S. soldiers die, the further away the end appears to be and the more fragile the original reasons for beginning the war seem. Only 8 percent of the population thinks that the administration is misleading the public about how the war is going.⁴ On the other hand, a rapid withdrawal from Iraq could create conditions for extreme violence and facilitate the creation of a new totalitarian power born of the most fundamentalist and profoundly anti-U.S. groups.

When we look at Iraq as an isolated case, it is difficult to understand how it could have such a decisive impact on the election results. Nevertheless, when we understand the importance of the neo-conservatives in the United States, their actions and their effects make sense in a broader context, beyond the elections. These neo-conservatives have a clear foreign policy position which was reshaped at the end of the Cold War, during which they warned that *détente* was not sufficient *vis-à-vis* the dangerous enemy, the USSR. Rather, they thought a more aggressive policy was required, which was clearly formulated during the Reagan years and consolidated when neo-conservatives came into positions of power, which finally accelerated the fall of the Soviet Union.

From this group's perspective, policy must not be isolationist but active: the United States must impose its power to preserve its hegemony. After 9/11, this hegemony was seriously questioned. So-called preventive war was justified by the need to attack those

While the Democrats
won back the two houses
of Congress, many
of them presented
themselves as conservatives
in their campaigns.

enemies, even entire countries, who in their eyes represented a "threat" to the United States. Then, the justification went beyond that offered by the UN Charter itself, which consists of being able to respond to an attack, since in this case, the mere possibility of a future attack justifies U.S. intervention.

Since it began, the war has been complicated more and more, in part because the administration lacked analytical capability sophisticated enough to understand the complexity of the different groups in Iraqi society. Therefore, what has happened is more understandable when within a whole world strategy the aim is to carry out an active, unilateral foreign policy, and hasty decision-making is explained by seeking a basis for an aggressive foreign policy.⁵

Paradoxically, the neo-conservative justification of the war based on the defense of the values of liberal democracy ends up undermining its own citizens' liberal democratic rights. In order to impose their values on totally different cultures and societies, they enter into a labyrinth of conflicts and contradictions that become unmanageable. Along the way, President Bush got the Patriot Act passed with a bi-partisan vote, and uses it to begin to limit the rights of Americans themselves. As a result, a court order is no longer needed to tap phones, detect key words in personal e-mails on the Internet, locate requests for "dangerous" books, more

easily arrest suspects, use coercion in interrogations and treat newspapers' publishing classified information as a crime.

Richard Poner justifies the president's power in the current situation in the United States and thinks that none of these counter-terrorist measures is unconstitutional.⁶ Regardless of his pragmatic view of the Constitution, which considers that judges' decisions must adjust to the circumstances, without denying that special conditions do exist, what is irrefutable is that the ordinary American is not feeling safer, but rather that because of the war in Iraq, he/she is more vulnerable.⁷ While they feel their freedoms are being threatened by their own government, they also think they have paid a high price but not received sizeable benefits in terms of security. So, society has begun certain attempts to recover democratic freedoms from a government, which, given the predominance of the executive and the Republican control over Congress, cordoned off their rights. The vote was not so much in favor of the Democrats, who presented no clear alternative plan, but against Bush.

From the start of the so-called American experiment, the citizenry created a system of checks and balances to prevent government abuse of the citizen. The public's mandate in voting was to limit the concentration of power in the hands of the president. While they do think the situation is critical due to terrorism and the war against Iraq, they also think that a bi-partisan decision, which implies negotiations and agreements, is better than an "enlightened" decision. Forty-eight percent of the population thinks that it is better to have a president from one party and a Congress dominated by another.⁸

President Bush's second electoral constituency has been religious groups. Conservative, right-wing religious groups focused their goals on domestic politics, and therefore, another issue that has complicated Bush's actions is his religious beliefs. Since its birth as a nation, the United States has been a very religious country, but it has attempted to keep that in the private sphere. Publicly, it has fostered a clear separation between church and state. In the framework of this neo-conservatism, the support of very religious groups has been fervently sought and, despite Bush's efforts, they have been disappointed.

When George W. Bush, a born-again Christian, began his campaign for the presidency in 2000, he said, "I know it won't be easy on me or my family, but God wants me to do it." I believe this statement shows us how important religion would be for this president. Karl Rove was the strategist who helped him get re-elected in 2004, mobilizing the most conservative groups: his promise to hold referendums to block gay marriage or stem cell research led the most conservative groups to go to the polls to vote for George W. Bush. He also said that they "had cultivated the extensive network of religious right organizations, and they were consulted every step of the way as the administration set up its policies on gays, AIDS, condoms, abstinence programs, creationism and other matters that concerned the evangelicals."⁹ In the framework of what he called "compassionate conservatism," President Bush created the so-called "faith-based initiative," despite the fact that the Constitution forbids religious campaigning with public monies, and supported religious ministers' giving sex education, arguing that it was a secular cause. What is more, they created the

White House Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives, which clearly supported religious groups in promoting their values and in bringing them closer to Republicans.¹⁰ The president tried to get a faith-based bill through Congress but failed. One possible explanation is that different religious groups, the Jewish community among them, may have perceived the potential danger of a law that earmarked public funds for religious organizations. Obviously, some religions may be given priority over others. However, the president pushed it through by executive order anyway. President Bush also suggested that schools teach "intelligent design" together with Darwinism. His administration forbade using public money for abortion counseling and promoted abstinence instead of condom use for contraception and AIDS prevention. It only allowed federal funding for stem cell research that was already underway, saying it would not provide more. In addition, Bush used his veto to put a stop to the law that had already been approved by the Republican-dominated houses of Congress.¹¹ Despite these actions aimed at supporting Christian religious groups, many of them felt disappointed by not having won their complete agenda. So, not even the people the president had openly worked for felt satisfied.

This created a great deal of discontent internationally and domestically.¹²

The U.S. electorate's intention was to capture the ideological center and reestablish checks and balances in the political system.

In addition, the neo-conservatives have differences in their own ranks. Some are not quite so conservative on issues like stem cell research, and others, like part of the religious right, are against an active foreign policy. Paradoxically, it has been said that the right has begun to migrate over to the Democratic side: almost 30 percent of evangelical whites voted for the Democrats, partly because they were unhappy with an activist foreign policy and because of political corruption (the scandals involving Republican legislators and their staffs).¹³

This ideological framework of support from the neo-conservatives and the religious right outlined George W. Bush's policies. In the long run, this has divided society given the neo-conservative hegemony in foreign policy and the domination of the religious right domestically since different social groups feel threatened by the domination of one religion in a society characterized by pluralism in its beliefs.

But we should not forget that while the Democrats won back the two houses of Congress, many of them presented themselves as conservatives in their campaigns. It is interesting to note that many Democrats tried to draw closer to the religious groups talking about values and religion. I think that more than a political realignment toward an extreme Democratic position, the U.S. electorate's intention was to capture the ideological center and reestablish checks and balances in the political system. The issue of the corruption of some Republican legislators, curiously, was almost as important as the war in Iraq, which shows strong disapproval of the hawkish Republican internationalists and the conservative religious groups.

This time, some of the historic rules for U.S. elections played out and others

were jettisoned. The traditional wisdom that says that voters tend to punish a president in the midterm elections of his second term played out: as I said, the votes were against President Bush, against his foreign policy, not a vote based on people's pocketbooks, as is customary, since the economy is in good shape and unemployment has dropped.¹⁴ It was also a vote to urge institutions to recover their capacity to monitor the implementation of decisions and to put checks and balances back into operation. Perhaps the best example of this is the defeat of Democrat Joseph Lieberman in the Connecticut primaries after he voiced his support for the war in Iraq; after that, he decided to run for the Senate as an independent and won the seat. Despite being a conservative, he managed to get elected, showing that the electorate did not vote for a fundamental ideological change, but for reestablishing institutional checks and balances, rejecting a president who has not been successful in Iraq, in Guantanamo, or during the Katrina events, a president who, after inheriting William Clinton's sizeable economic surplus, has let the budget deficit soar to enormous proportions.

In trying to decipher the possible consequences of the midterm Congressional elections for Mexico, we cannot have great expectations. As I already pointed out, many of the Democrats who won are considered conservatives or presented a centrist profile: this was Nancy Pelosi's case, who is now the first woman speaker in U.S. history. Many of them, following the lead of the illustrious symbol of neo-conservatism, Samuel Huntington, see Mexican immigrants as the greatest threat to the United States. Clearly, regardless of which party he belongs to, his idea has permeated U.S.

society. No bill will be easy to get off the ground, and any attempt will require a great deal of negotiating. However, it is also clear that a small window of opportunity can be expected for achieving a bi-partisan agreement in this area in which President Bush may try to show his ability to govern with an opposition Congress.¹⁵

Like with everything else, from Mexico we tend to see problems as the choice between all or nothing, forgetting the differences in the United States. U.S. federalism has great weight and in that context, we have to try to understand possible agreements that could be reached on immigration issues. In the case of Texas, relations have been less difficult than, for example, with Arizona, where the infamous Minutemen were born. Arizona's governor wants to stop the flow of remittances and the federal government wants to punish employers of undocumented immigrants in the state. Timing is also important: Schwarzenegger has maintained an anti-immigrant position, but he just visited Mexico out of concern for California harvests. I think it would be more beneficial to carve out agreements between border states, based on local considerations, and then pressure for a reform by the executive. Constant meetings between border governors might have a bigger impact on a possible immigration bill, which, although probably insufficient, could include Mexico and the United States' main concerns about the issue.

Undoubtedly, the neo-conservatives have taken U.S. foreign policy in the direction of unilateralism and misunderstandings. Hard power has dominated as opposed to other periods when soft power was important.

Given the failure in the mid-term elections, there may be a tendency to re-

turn to the ideological center. The Democrats' control of Congress creates great expectations with regard to immigration, but we should not forget that the unions and other minorities are the Democratic Party constituency, which means that the trend will be instead to carry out small changes because of the need to control the border to ensure national security. **MM**

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NOTES

¹ A 54-percent approval rating on handling terrorism, 37 percent on foreign policy and the economy and 36 percent on Iraq. *Public Strategies Report*, October 5, 2006.

² According to *The New York Times* and the Pew Center.

³ *The Public Strategies Report*, October 5, 2006.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Sixty-one percent of the population disapproves of the Iraq war.

⁶ David Cole, "How to Skip the Constitution," *The New York Review of Books*, vol. LIII, no. 18, November 16, 2006, p. 20.

⁷ Only 39 percent of those surveyed believe that the United States is winning the war on terror and 46 percent believe that the war in Iraq is hurting U.S. ability to win the war on terror. *The Public Strategies Report*, October 5, 2006.

⁸ *The Public Strategies Report*, October 5, 2006.

⁹ Garry Wills, "A Country Ruled by Faith," *The New York Review of Books*, vol. LIII, no. 18, November, 2006, p. 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹² Fifty-seven percent of all independent voters, and 60 percent of those under 30 voted for the Democrats.

¹³ Before the elections, 41 percent of voters said the scandals had made them feel less favorable about the Republicans retaining a majority in Congress. *The Public Strategies Report*, October 5, 2006.

¹⁴ The UBS/Gallup Index of Investor Optimism rebounded to 74 percent in August, although there is beginning to be a certain fear of a possible slow-down in the economy. *The Public Strategies Report*, October 5, 2006.

¹⁵ Outstanding opponents of immigration in the One-hundred and Tenth Congress are Tom Tancredo (R-CO), Steve King (R-IA), John Culberson (R-TX), Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), Nathan Deal (R-GA), Brian Bilbray (R-CA), James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) and Senators John Kyl (R-AZ) and John Inhofe (R-OV). Coming out in favor of the immigrant community are John Conyers (D-MI), Harry Reid (D-NV) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA).

The U.S. Midterm Elections The Weight of Foreign Policy

Alejandro Anaya Muñoz*



Reuters/Jason Reed

The newly elected Democratic members of Congress on the Capitol steps.

As the readers of *Voices of Mexico* already know, the Democratic Party wrested control of both houses of the U.S. Congress from the Grand Old Party in the November 7 midterm elections. I offer here a preliminary reflection about three aspects of that election: the unprecedented importance of the foreign policy agenda in their development and outcome; the possible impact of the new legislative balance of forces on the U.S. strategy in Iraq; and their probable influence on U.S. immigration policy. Finally, using a constructivist focus,

I propose some thoughts for understanding the origins and significance of the result.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA

Certainly, a comprehensive explanation of the election results must be sought in a complex combination of factors and processes, including corruption scandals and other forms of immoral behavior on the part of Republican congresspersons and individuals linked to them, the general state of the economy, local political agendas, etc. However, I would like to focus on the unprece-

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dent impact of foreign policy issues, particularly the war in Iraq, on the results.

Several weeks before the balloting, different analysts pointed out that it would be decided by foreign policy issues and not by traditional matters like employment, education, social security, etc. They also talked about specific races that the Republicans would easily win if the election had centered on the incumbents' performance in each state or district or on local political, economic or social agendas. However, in a different scenario, unusual for a midterm election, it was clear that a good number of Republican seats were in serious danger because the Iraq war

Iraq war as the center of the Republican campaign in an attempt to demonstrate that the voters had a choice between Republican firmness or Democratic weakness.² Until the very last minute, Bush continued to present the elections as the moment for deciding between "staying the course" in Iraq or "surrendering to the terrorists."

As Council on Foreign Relations analyst Michael Moran says, the number of presidential elections—not to mention midterm elections—that have been directly and significantly affected by matters of foreign policy can be counted on one hand. International affairs have been important in other votes, but not to the degree of being the decisive

important in the electoral debate: U.S. immigration policy. A few weeks before the voting, the debate about immigration reform, together with the war, both linked to security, seemed to be one of the key issues that took foreign policy to the heart of the debate. However, after a sweeping majority of legislators from both parties approved building a fence along the Mexican border, immigration began to lose importance in the congressional races. Probably the fact that the party divide between Republicans ("firm") and Democrats ("weak") had blurred on the issue of border security and the flow of undocumented immigrants "neutralized" the issue, making it less important to the electoral debate.

The election outcome will have an impact
on the way the U.S. intervention in Iraq is being handled,
but it will not necessarily change the course
of immigration policy.

and President Bush's corresponding low approval ratings were becoming the dominant factor.

While increasing numbers of Republican candidates were trying to center the electoral debate on local issues and trying to shake off the shadow of White House foreign policy, their Democratic opponents underlined the president and the Republican Congress's inability to run the war properly.

Bush's low approval ratings and the war became a dead weight for his party.¹ We should remember that, paradoxically, it was the president himself who initially led the electoral debate to the field of foreign policy by introducing the "war against terror," security and the

factor in legislative elections.³ Thus, the 2006 balloting will go down in history as the first midterm elections largely determined by foreign policy issues.

Naturally, a fundamental element in attempting to explain this unprecedented process are the September 11 terrorist attacks. More concrete factors, however, seem to be the increasingly imminent civil war in Iraq, the growing number of "black bags," the uncertainty about the duration of U.S. presence there and the recent intelligence report that concludes that the war has increased and not reduced the United States' vulnerability to possible terrorist attacks.

Another issue with a strong foreign policy dimension was also initially very

2. THE ELECTORAL OUTCOME AND THE FUTURE OF U.S. STRATEGY IN IRAQ

As has already been suggested, this election was a kind of referendum on President Bush's performance, particularly regarding the war, in terms of staying or changing its course.

It seems evident that the November 7 electoral results show that the majority of the American people want a "change of course." However, what is not clear is what that change should consist of. It is clear that there is no consensus among the Democrats themselves about what this means: immediate withdrawal and leaving the Iraqis to fend for themselves? Scheduling a progressive withdrawal? Or the political-administrative decentralization of Iraq and the establishment of autonomous regions?

As Republicans have denounced, up until now, the Democratic position

on Iraq has consisted simply of criticizing the situation and underlining Bush's inability to guarantee a favorable outcome for the United States; that is, they have not proposed a specific alternative. As Michael Moran said, "Democrats continue to struggle to sound anything but negative on Iraq."⁴

In any case, the central responsibility for defining the Iraq strategy continues to fall to the executive branch, despite the new Democratic majority in Congress. As analyst James Lindsay, director of the University of Texas Robert S. Straus Center, has observed, "Presidents have considerable leeway in foreign policy. Congress can criticize, Congress can fund, Congress can provoke, but at the end of the day when it comes to troop deployment, it's going to be George Bush's call to make."⁵

The president has recognized that he is not satisfied with the way the war is going and that he is open to considering all kinds of options, including what the Democrats might propose. In addition, Donald Rumsfeld's resignation and the appointment of Robert Gates as the new secretary of defense suggest that the White House, in effect, is preparing a "change of course." However, we will have to wait to see what it consists of: if the U.S. military presence in Iraq increases or decreases; if the preparation of Iraqi security forces is sped up or not; if a plan for gradual withdrawal is decided on or not; if Iran and Syria are involved, etc.⁶

In the next two years we will probably see the establishment of congressional committees to investigate the irregularities in the decision-making process that led to the Iraq invasion and the awarding of contracts to big U.S. consortia there. It is unlikely, however, that the threat by some Democratic

congresspersons to bring impeachment proceedings against the president will come to fruition.

In any case, any change in policy will be the result of a strategy defined not on the Hill, but by the executive, probably along the lines of the conclusions the Iraq Study Group, coordinated by James Baker and Lee Hamilton, have come to.

3. THE ELECTION OUTCOME AND IMMIGRATION POLICY

In the months prior to the election, a stronger isolationist or protectionist position began to take shape in Congress

The Democratic ranks include a foreign policy current that could be called isolationist, particularly regarding the economy, which implies a rejection of using foreign labor.

with regard to different issues, including immigration. It is important to remember that the Democratic ranks include a foreign policy current that could be called isolationist, particularly regarding the economy, which implies not only a rejection of the country's economic opening, but also of using foreign labor. In fact, as Lindsay says, a large number of Democratic representatives waged their campaigns on an isolationist platform of this kind.⁷ Therefore, it is also relevant to recall that a good number of the new Democratic members of the House clearly tend to be conservative. So, the question is up to what point these "conservative Democrats" have closed or inflexible positions on immi-

gration. Even though President Bush's discourse on immigration coincides on certain points with the proposals made by influential Democratic congresspersons, particularly with regard to defining a process to legalize currently undocumented workers and implementing a guest workers program, we cannot automatically conclude that there will be better opportunities for a comprehensive immigration reform over the next two years. Undoubtedly, Democratic members of Congress already have their eyes on 2008, so they will be extremely cautious and will not seek to stretch their mandate beyond what is electorally necessary and prudent. On the other hand, it could be argued that

the approval of the border fence and its effect on the recent election outcome suggests that a hard line on border control was well received by U.S. voters. For that reason, it would seem prudent to be cautious in our analysis about the possibilities for comprehensive immigration reform and not overestimate the effects of the Democratic victory in Congress.

4. SECURITY, THE IRAQ WAR AND IMMIGRATION POLICY: A CONSTRUCTIVIST FOCUS

After the 9/11 attacks, U.S. domestic policy underwent a process of growing

The security discourse proposed by Bush and adopted by most of the political class redefined U.S. interests and the means for procuring them: unilateralism, preventive wars, limiting individual liberties, building fences, etc.

“internationalization.” Of course, a broad, profound link between domestic and international policy is nothing extraordinary in the case of a superpower. However, it is important to note that after 9/11, the relationship between what happens in the United States and the rest of the world has broadened out and deepened. The situation in Iraq was a defining factor in the midterm elections, while the outcome will be equally important in deciding what will happen there. We could venture different explanations about this process of growing “intermesticity” of politics in today’s world.⁸ However, I would like to underline the role of the Bush administration emphasis on security and the “war against terror.” The security discourse proposed by Bush and his team, but subsequently adopted by most of the political class and U.S. society, redefined U.S. interests and the means for procuring them: unilateralism, preventive wars, limiting individual liberties, building fences, etc. Electoral races, as a central aspect of the democratic decision-making process in a representative, liberal system, are spaces *par*

excellence for (re)defining a political community’s perception of “reality.” However, the recent elections, as a space for the social construction of U.S. interests, did not substantially change the “securitization” of the U.S. agenda. They seriously questioned some of the means for achieving it, mainly unilateralism and the doctrine of preventive action, but they did not bring into doubt that security is today the United States’ main interest. The election outcome will have an impact on the way the U.S. intervention in Iraq is being handled, but it will not necessarily change the course of immigration policy. A radical change in this sphere will not simply come from changing the balance of forces in Congress—or the White House for that matter—but from a transformation of the vision of the majority of U.S. social and political actors about immigrants’ political, economic, social and cultural role and the best way of controlling and ordering their flow. Nevertheless, while security dominates the U.S. collective imaginary, it is not very likely that we will see important changes of this kind. **MM**

NOTES

¹ Analyst Jeff Greenfield spoke of “Bush’s reverse coattail,” that is the president’s downward pull on his party’s candidates. “Greenfield: GOP tripping over Bush’s ‘reverse coattails,’” CNN International.com, November 1, 2006.

² The reader will remember that Republican firmness had surfaced just before the election campaigns in bills they introduced dealing with military tribunals for judging accused terrorists and the program for surveillance of conversations and other communications between suspected terrorists.

³ Michael Moran, “Election Will Turn on Foreign Policy,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 3, 2006. See also Robert McMahon, “Foreign Policy and the U.S. Midterm Elections,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 27, 2006 at <http://www.cfr.org/>

⁴ Michael Moran, *op. cit.*

⁵ Bernard Gwertzman, “Lindsay: Bush, Democrats Likely to Look for New Approach to Iraq from Baker-Hamilton Commission,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, November 9, 2006, at <http://www.cfr.org/>

⁶ In January, before this issue went to press, George Bush announced his strategy proposals for Iraq, including among other things, an increase in troop strength of 20,000. [Editor’s Note].

⁷ Bernard Gwertzman, *op. cit.*

⁸ See Bayless Manning’s classic article, “The Congress, the Executive and Intermestic Affairs: Three Proposals,” *Foreign Affairs* 55, no. 2, 1977, pp. 307-324.





*The Seduction of
Real de Catorce*



Mauro Degollado

▶ The two ends of the Ogario tunnel.



Courtesy of the San Luis Potosí State Ministry of Tourism

“The magic of Real de Catorce lies in the energy of the ore lying underneath us, the ore that is the cause of the attraction, like a magnet that makes people who come once return,” says Doña Candelaria, an old resident of the town.¹ And you would have to agree. Real de Catorce exercises a kind of supernatural influence that, with time, turns the wish to return into a need.

Nevertheless, every outsider who visits it gives a different reason for returning. In my case, it would be to get rid of that feeling of a “presence” that I carried with me from the moment we went through the tunnel and came out into that unexpected scene, jammed between arid mountains with an almost metallic blue in the background. I think that it is the souls of so many dead who refuse to leave the place, since, according to legend, from its very foundation, many have died violently here. It is said that the first were 14 outlaws who held up the stagecoaches loaded down with the gold and silver mined in the area, who were all hanged. That is how it began to be known as “the place where the 14 were killed.” But, even before that a meeting of souls must have started because of the many miners trapped in the belly of the mineshafts in over a century of working its veins.

◀ Photo previous page, Elsie Montiel.

Even today, sporadically, some people “stay behind.” That is what the guides who take you around the town say. They are people who explored the area without a guide and carelessly went into the innumerable tunnels, never to come out again alive.

Others have come attracted by the desire for a mystical experience. Real de Catorce is an obligatory stop on the way to the Cerro del Quemado, home of the gods of the Huichols.² Every fall, from Nayarit, Jalisco and Zacatecas, Huichols make the journey on foot to the place where they will find their sacred food, peyote. The trip takes many days, but they never fail. Accordingly, hundreds of young backpackers from all over the world come with the hope of reaching the place where the legendary peyote grows and, perhaps, to test its virtues.

Real de Catorce is also the place of residence of the venerated image of Saint Francis of Assisi, known as the “charrito saint” or “Panchito.” His annual fiesta, culminating October 4, attracts thousands of pilgrims who invade the town and its environs from September 22 to October 12, making it impossible to get there by any means of transportation, whether public or private. Trucks and cars have to park kilometers away, before the tunnel leading to the town. Legend has it that this saint is not only completely miraculous, but that it also has its own ghost story. The articulated

wooden figure of the little *charrito* (or traditional Mexican cowboy) was originally placed in the Guadalupe Chapel, until it began to be “seen” wandering around the town in the middle of the night. It walked through the town toward the late eighteenth-century Purísima Concepción Church, where it disappeared. The watchmen saw the figure so often that it was decided to move it to the church, whereby the sightings ceased and the miracles and multitudinous pilgrimages began. So they say.

More recently, the town became famous and made some money because it was used for filming movies with world-famous actors, who left behind them innumerable stories that the guides through the town take full advantage of. For example, they say that Julia Roberts, who made a movie here with Brad Pitt, did not want to come by car, and the only way to bring her was by helicopter. Of course, the town did not have a heliport, so one had to be improvised near the old cemetery. But that was unsatisfactory to the illustrious actress, because when it landed it stirred up enormous clouds of dust. So, the production team asked for the space to

land the helicopter to be cemented over overnight. Naturally, Roberts is not around to corroborate the story, and the only remains of the cement are a few traces eroded by wind and soil, but the site is known as the Julia Roberts Heliport anyway.

But, even with all this background, a first-time visitor will not understand the inexplicable seduction the town exudes, with its streets that can practically be counted on the fingers of two hands, with no more than 1,500 inhabitants, abandoned buildings, arid scenery, situated at more than 2750 meters above sea level, making its nights freezing and its days dry and hot. Not at all surprisingly, until recently it was considered a ghost town, a name well earned in my opinion because here, I repeat, the souls of those who refuse to leave even when they have gone on to a better life continue to wander around together with the living.

ORIGINS AND DESTINY

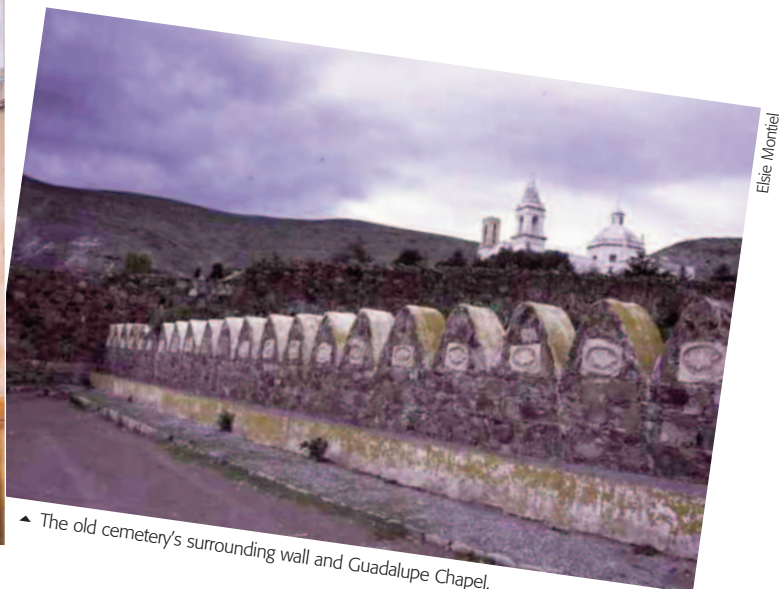
Real de Catorce is one of the countless towns that grew in the wake of the mining bonanza and de-

Here the souls of those who refuse to leave even when they have gone on to a better life continue to wander around together with the living.



Mauricio Degollado

▲ The “charrito” saint.



Elicé Morrón

▲ The old cemetery's surrounding wall and Guadalupe Chapel.

clined when the veins wore out. It was declared a “real de minas,” or a mining town, in 1639 under the viceroyalty of the Marquis of Cadereyta. At that time it was called Real de Minas de Nuestra Señora de la Limpia Concepción de los Álamos del Catorce. They used the word “real” to designate a mining town, especially if it had silver. It was dedicated to the “Purísima Concepción”, the Immaculate Conception, because of the Spaniards’ Catholicism; it was “de los álamos” because poplar trees abounded in the town and its environs; and “del catorce” because of the aforementioned 14 outlaws. Down through the years, the name changed and was finally condensed to Real de Catorce. It was founded as a town in the 1770s when the first vein of ore was stumbled on by chance in the area.

Perhaps the difference between this mining town and others is that its location in the Catorce Mountains determined that when mining declined in the early twentieth century, it was abandoned and condemned to isolation. At its height, the town had more than 15,000 inhabitants, three daily newspapers, magazines dedicated to art and culture, many two-storey buildings, a theater, a cock-fighting ring and a bullring. The Mexican Revolution and overexploitation of the mineral deposits brought ruin. By 1915, the population had plummeted to less than 200. One part of that handful

of inhabitants were dedicated to local trade, and the rest eked out a living by subsistence agriculture. Until a few decades ago, when its fame as a ghost town turned it into a tourist attraction.

Here, there are no big restaurants or multi-star hotels; no banks or exchange houses; television is only available by satellite and few cell phones have a signal. However, time flies because its cobblestone streets can be explored parsimoniously; there are several points of interest, places to have an excellent meal, and inns that, without losing their local flavor, offer modern accommodations. Of course, the visit of international stars turned some hotels into luxury villas.

As the sun sets, the cold and wind make themselves felt, and the feeling of being accompanied by “the others” increases. However, you do not stop wanting to stay the night.

Real is reached by an ascending stone-paved highway that offers wonderful views of the valley; you pass by the Luz and Santa Ana Mines until, turning a bend, you reach the Ogarrio Tunnel, the only access on foot or by motor vehicle. The tunnel stretches 2.3 kilometers through the mountain’s solid rock, and was built in the early 1900s, using dynamite for the first time in Mexico to blast through. Since it is only wide enough for one vehicle, watchmen at each end of the tunnel



▲ A panoramic view of the town.



▲ One of many two-storey buildings now in ruins.



▲ Cock-fighting ring.

Photos on this page by Elsie Montiel



Photos on this page by Mauricio Degollado

Real de Catorce is one of the countless towns that grew in the wake of the mining bonanza and declined when the veins wore out.

direct traffic so that two vehicles do not enter at the same time in opposite directions. It is riddled with innumerable semi-invisible caves, and they say that a ghostly miner also makes his appearance here at night.

Once in the town, it is time for a panoramic tour, and you turn around to the left on a narrow road that curves until it comes to a point that gives you a view of the entire *real*. Its terraced constructions, with the Purísima Concepción Church as the centerpiece, merge with stone-colored mountains behind them. Getting to the town takes a few minutes; then there is time to leisurely visit the places of interest on foot. Outstanding among them are the church where “Panchito” is displayed waiting seated for his annual fiesta; the old mint; the central plaza; the magnificent late nineteenth-century cock-fighting ring that reminds you of a Greek theater with its circular forum and stone seating. The old cemetery, surrounded by an imposing wall with an original wrought-iron gate; though the Guadalupe Chapel is one of the oldest buildings in the town (1770), it still has some frescoes. On the outskirts, with a guide on horseback, in a jeep or on

foot, you can still visit old abandoned mine buildings or the Huichol reserve. Even if you have visited everything on your check-list, and the feeling of “being accompanied” turns into something to be considered during the night; it is not easy to leave Real. Little by little, the mind and spirit become obsessed with staying a few more days, living at another speed and in another time. When there is nothing for it but to go through the tunnel and leave behind this supernatural landscape, the only thing that seems certain in the future is that some day we will return. **MM**

Elsie Montiel
Editor



NOTES

- ¹ “Leyendas vivientes,” *Ruta sin Límite*, second special edition of a magazine from San Luis Potosí, published by Editorial Ruta Sin Límite, July-September 2006, p. 35.
- ² Leonardo Fernández Borja, “Huiricuta: The Routes of the Huichols,” *Voices of Mexico* 77, October-December 2006.

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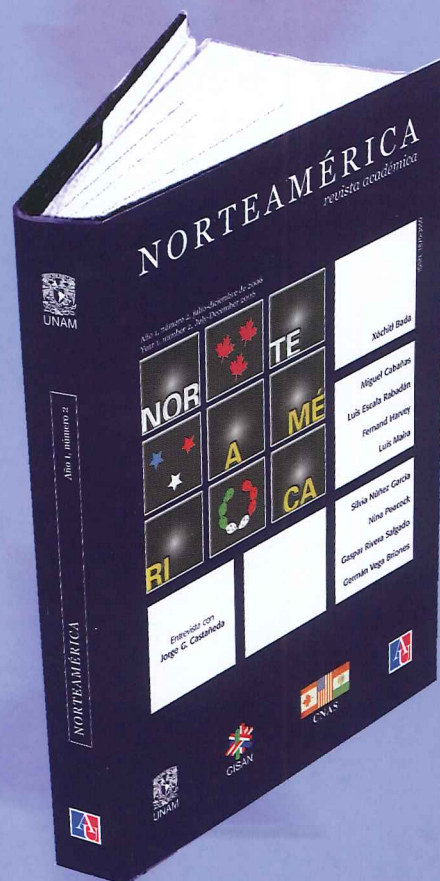
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Xilitla
The Architectural
Delirium of Edward James

Mauricio Degollado Brito*

HISTORIC REVIEW

Xilitla is located in the southeastern part of what is now the state of San Luis Potosí in the Huastec region. It borders on the north with Aquismón and Huehuetlán, on the east with Axila de Terrazas, Matlapa and Tamazunchale, on the south with the state of Hidalgo and on the west with the state of Querétaro. It is about 350 kilometers from the state capital.

The name Xilitla comes from the Nahuatl word for “place of the snails,” and it was called that by the Aztecs who lived in this region once their empire dominated the Huastecs during the fifteenth century.

After the study of codices and ancient chronicles, it was discovered that what we call the Huastec culture is based on the Olmecs. An agrarian society *par excellence*, the Huasteca produced extraordinary art that had its golden age between 100 B.C. and A.D. 900.

* Photographer and *Voices of Mexico* staff writer.

Photos by Mauricio Degollado.



*Las Pozas surprises you
as you suddenly find yourself faced
with a cliff next to columns that look
like bamboo plants.*

Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, the Huastecs were invaded by groups of nomadic, hunting and gathering Chichimecs from the north. By that time the golden age of the great Huastec culture was long over, and although groups of Huastecs had joined the migrants who left Pánuco for Tula, there continued to be Huastec communities in the area, which is what the Chichimecs encountered on their raids.

These blood-thirsty nomads were not the only enemies of Huastec inhabitants: in the mid-fifteenth century the Mexicas arrived headed by Moctezuma Ilhuicamina, who consolidated the vast empire of Tenochtitlan, subduing and conquering the fiefdoms and kingdoms that bordered on the great metropolis.



Moctezuma was succeeded by Axayácatl, Tizoc, Ahuizotl and Moctezuma Xocoyotzin. The latter, apparently to consolidate his domain, instigated a plan to colonize many sites in what is today the municipality of Xilitla.

It was in the time of Moctezuma Xocoyotzin that Hernán Cortés landed on the beaches of Mexico and put an end to the Aztec Empire in 1521. A little later, he commissioned several of his captains to travel to different regions of the country to consolidate the conquest. He himself left Coyoacán at the head of an army to conquer the Pánuco region, which included the Huasteca.

The so-called spiritual conquest began when the Augustinians decided to evangelize what was then called the High Sierra in 1537, naming Friar Antonio de la Roa as the missionary there. He was the first to spread the Gospel in the area and is credited with many feats and is even considered a saint.

In 1553, as part of the campaign to spread the Gospel, construction began on the Xilitla Monastery, which would also serve as a fortress to resist the Chichimec onslaught. It was attacked and burned in 1569 and 1587 by groups of Chichimecs, with the resulting total destruction of the vault and the theft of many objects from the vestry. Faced with so many problems, the Augustinian friars decided to withdraw from Xilitla at the end of the sixteenth century. The monastery stopped being a priority, and more work was done instead on the Huejutla monastery. The building then became a simple hostel for a few Augustinians who remained there until 1859, when they had to leave it because of the Reform Laws.

LAS POZAS

In addition to its pre-Hispanic and colonial past, in Xilitla there is a place that might seem like the vestige of any of the aforementioned ancient civilizations, but in reality is not. Xilitla's Las Pozas is something quite different. Let's call it a whim, or perhaps the largest outdoor surrealist monument ever conceived. Here, the paintings of Escher, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Remedios Varo or another



*Xilitla's Las Pozas
is something different.
Let's call it a whim, or perhaps
the largest outdoor surrealist
monument ever conceived.*



*We would make
no mistake if we said
this was the garden Lewis Carroll
would have liked for his Alice.*

Mexican artist, Leonora Carrington, stop being something living on a canvas and become an uninhabitable garden city conceived in the imagination of the English aristocrat Edward James (1907-1984). Today, his labyrinth and his city without walls dialogue with the lush vegetation of the Huastec forest of San Luis Potosí.

Las Pozas is not on the most conventional tourist itineraries. It is located where the Eastern Sierra Madre becomes a forest, in what was mainly a cof-

fee-growing area until the bean's international price plummeted so low that cultivation practically disappeared a decade ago. It was here that Edward James, the heir to several fortunes and possible bastard grandson of Edward VII, had an epiphany while swimming in Xilitla's natural pools when he was surrounded by Monarch butterflies. That was in 1945.

Just like in the language of his friends and protégées, including Salvador Dalí and René Magritte whom he supported for years, the symbol took a physical form. Over a period of 20 years, he would build 30 hectares of architectural delirium: he built stairways that reached toward the sky, columns that support nothing but air, arches that look like plants and cement flowers, birds and legs. We would make no mistake if we said this was the garden Lewis Carroll would have liked for his Alice.

"I built this sanctuary so it could be inhabited by my ideas and my chimeras."¹ That is how James designed his garden of fantastic architecture. Nothing is useful in Las Pozas, but it is all beautiful. There is no premeditation,

but there is mystery. Las Pozas surprises you as you walk through it, as you climb, as you suddenly find yourself faced with a cliff next to columns that look like bamboo plants. It is not only physical vertigo, but vertigo of the imagination.

Only whimsy resided in Las Pozas. Edward James was a passionate lover of orchids, which was what first brought him to Xilitla and kept him there until 1962 when frost destroyed all his plants. James collected them compulsively. It was then that his furious building began, when he populated hectares of his property with animals (from deer to ocelots and snakes), erecting houses without walls, cages without bars. For them and for himself.

James wandered nude or dressed only in a long white robe, surrounded by his animals, with a



*Nothing is useful
in Las Pozas, but it is all beautiful.
There is no premeditation,
but there is mystery.*

macaw on his shoulder, imagining new impossible forms, thinking about how to populate his imitation cement jungle, his invisible, labyrinth, ecstatic city. Today, Las Pozas is a place for play, like it was for James.

Just as he wanted, the work continues to be under construction. But now it is not his hallucinatory hand that imagines the cement and guides the dream: now it is nature, the forest's humidity, that makes Las Pozas a work in progress. James never declared it finished. He never wanted to. For that, he would have needed hundreds of years and to have finished at some point any of his ideas.

The surrealistic game, with its dose of surprise and humor, is the raw material holding up Xilitla's structures. André Breton already

said that Mexico was "naturally surrealistic." And he was right.

The English aristocrat's paradoxical city would not have been possible without the help of a practical man: Plutarco Gastélum, a Yaqui Indian whom James recruited in the Cuernavaca post office in the 1940s and who became his friend and overseer. Gastélum accompanied James from the beginning to the end of his San Luis Potosí adventure.

The materialization of the chimeras would also not have been possible if Edward James had not sold part of his vast collection of surrealist art and invested about U.S.\$5 million. Las Pozas also reveals much of the genius for crafts of Xilitla's native artists and masons.

Undoubtedly eccentric, or, as Dalí would say, "the only true madman," in many ways Edward James continues to be the man with his back to the viewer who Magritte painted in *Reproduction Prohibited*. A mysterious man whose face very few people ever saw and fewer understood, whose imagination never stopped growing.





“My house has wings and sometimes, in the depth of the night, it sings,” wrote James.² The epitaph on his gravestone at his West Dean residence in the United Kingdom, today headquarters for a foundation and one of the world’s most prestigious schools for restoration, reads simply: “Edward James, poet.” He wrote a great deal of poetry, though it was not very enthusiastically received during his lifetime, but his architectural fantasy is and will

continue to be the great work of this rich kid who said he was born a surrealist. **MM**

◆
NOTES

¹ Taken from Sara Brito, “Reportaje fuera de ruta. Casas que cantan en la selva”, *El País*, May 6, 2006.

http://www.elpais.com/articulo/viajes/Casas/cantan/selva/el-peanviaame/20060506elpviavje_13/Tes

² *Ibid.*

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The Potosí Huastec Region's Natural Beauty

The Potosí Huastec region, nestled in the Sierra Madre, is one of the four areas of the state of San Luis Potosí. Its tropical vegetation and countless rivers and lagoons combine to create indescribably beautiful scenery. The innumerable waterfalls in the area are just one example. Here, we present our readers a brief sample.


(Old Mines Falls)

Photos by Mauricio Degollado

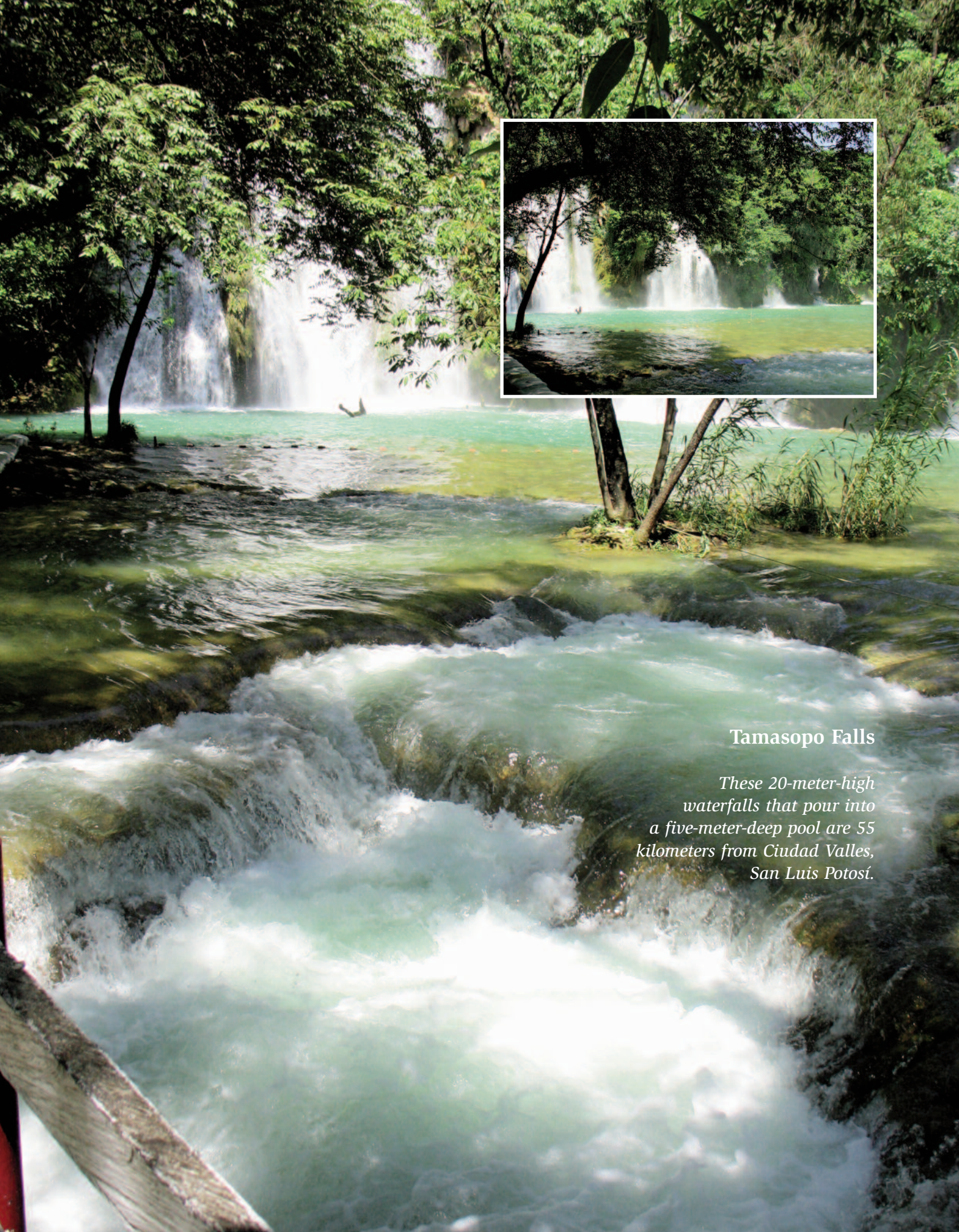
Old Mines Falls

From Ciudad Valles, you take Highway 85 toward Antiguo Morelos, and then Highway 80 9 kilometers toward El Naranjo to the Minas Viejas turn-off. Surrounded by lush vegetation, two 50-meter waterfalls create a pool where visitors can swim and camp. Nearby are other waterfalls and the Laguna de los Patos (Duck Lagoon), where fishing is allowed.



A lush, green landscape featuring a large, mature tree with a thick trunk and dense foliage on the left bank of a river. The river flows from the background towards the foreground, where it cascades over a small waterfall. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, and white foam is visible at the base of the waterfall. The background is filled with dense, green vegetation, including various trees and shrubs. The overall scene is serene and natural.

*The Sierra Madre scenery is exquisite:
mountains covered in vegetation,
crisscrossed by rivers, punctuated
by waterfalls and ponds.*



Tamasopo Falls

These 20-meter-high waterfalls that pour into a five-meter-deep pool are 55 kilometers from Ciudad Valles, San Luis Potosí.

Bridge of God Falls

Four kilometers from the Tamasopo Falls on the way to the El Cafetal train station, after walking 15 minutes, this waterfall is tucked between two hills. With the passage of time, the strong stream of water has created a cavern through which the Tamasopo River flows.



A natural stone bridge surrounds a pool with abundant vegetation. Underneath there is a cave with stalagmites and stalactites.



Lookout Falls

A 45-meter drop, the waterfall in El Meco, known by locals as “Lookout Falls,” is one of the biggest attractions in the Potosí Huastec region.

It is a fundamental part of the El Salto River, which creates emerald green pools as it flows along.

*The Potosí
Regional Museum*

Luis Pedro Gutiérrez*





When the conquistadors arrived, the arid San Luis Potosí highlands were populated by groups of Chichimecs, subjugated in the late sixteenth century by the Spanish army under the command of mestizo Captain Miguel Caldera.

The military and spiritual conquests took place simultaneously. The first religious to arrive in the area were Franciscans who settled on the site of what is today the capital of San Luis Potosí in the second half of the sixteenth century. They then began building the monastery they would later occupy in 1592, when San Luis Minas del Potosí de la Nueva España was founded.

The San Francisco Monastery was closed and divided up as a result of the Reform Laws in 1859. A blacksmith's shop, plumber's and other workshops, a school of arts and trades, a funeral home, private dwellings and a Masonic lodge were all set up in the building. By order of General Jesús González Ortega, Hermenegildo Galeana Street was opened up, definitively dividing the

The museum formed its initial collection with donations. Remains of ceramics found and classified by historian Joaquín Meade were the start of the archaeological rooms.

* Architect and director of the Potosí Regional Museum.

Photos by Mauricio Degollado.

Room 1 contains an exact replica of “the adolescent,” a Huastec sculpture which portrays a nude young man carrying a child, believed to symbolize the god of corn.



building in two. The monastery's old stables became what is now the Aranzazú Plaza, a very typical corner of the capital city.

Beginning in 1874, attempts were made to establish a museum in the building and different boards were created to do so, but they were not successful until the mid-twentieth century. Under the initiative of a group of local citizens, the Aranzazú Chapel and its annexes were turned over to the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) in 1949, which began restoration work to turn it into a museum. Both the chapel and the San Francisco Church were declared national historic monuments.

The museum was inaugurated November 20, 1952, forming its initial collection with donations. Remains of ceramics found and classified by historian Joaquín Meade were the start of the archaeological collection. The purchase and donation of different pieces of sixteenth-to-nineteenth-century wrought iron make up the largest collection of this kind of any museum in the country.

Fossils, minerals, crafts, different Meso-American pieces, oil paintings and other works constitute the rest of the collection.

A VISIT TO THE MUSEUM

The museum entrance is on the ground floor; in the vestibule is a museum shop which offers publications, reproductions, jewelry and souvenirs. The visit begins in the Meso-America Room, whose pieces are organized by place of origin: the Gulf of Mexico region is represented by several objects from the Totonac and Olmec cultures; ceramics from Western Mexico, with groups that inhabited the current states of Nayarit, Colima, Jalisco and Michoacán, are also exhibited. From the Maya region there are figures from the Island of Jaina, Campeche, and ceramic receptacles. The museum boasts several urns from Oaxaca that represent Cocijo, the Zapotec god of rain, and ceramics from the Mixtec culture. Lastly, the room contains an exhibit of objects from the cultures of the Central Valleys: pieces carved in obsidian, ceramics and stone sculpture, the work of the peoples of Tlatilco, Teotihuacan and Tenochtitlan.

Next is the Huastec Room with its introductory space describing the region's geography. The room also displays pieces referring to ethnic and funeral customs. Anthropological studies have shown, for example, that the Huastecs practiced the deformation of the body and the skull: they perforated their noses, tattooed their bodies and mutilated ears and teeth.

The room also displays a chronological chart of the Huastec culture and a typical Huastec burial: the body is laid out horizontally with a receptacle on the head known as the "capital vessel."

The next stop is Room I, which describes the first Huastec settlers, their habits, their dwellings, etc. Since the evolution of the Huastec culture can be traced through its dishware, examples of utensils and outstanding pieces of Huastec ceramics are displayed here.

Next is the description of Huastec society, organized around ceremonial centers used for civic-administrative, trade and craft production activities, indicating that the society was already divided into different strata. Several atypical archaeological objects found in the Huasteca show that ancient inhabitants carried out intense trade with central Veracruz and the central highlands.

The Huastecs adorned themselves with nose and ear plugs, decorating their bodies with paint and tattoos which they applied with clay seals like the ones displayed in this room. In addition, they wore the necklaces and metal, shell or clay pectorals exhibited here.

The room also contains an exact replica of one of the most important sculptures found at the El Consuelo (Tamuín) archaeological site, "the adolescent," which portrays a nude young man carrying a child, believed to symbolize the god of corn. A large part of his body is covered by pictures relating to agriculture and fertility, which is why he is identified as a representation of a priest of Quetzalcóatl himself. The original piece is displayed in the National Museum of Anthropology.

Room II begins by examining religion. Among the Huastecs, natural phenomena took on a magical, religious meaning that gave rise to a cult of nature rooted in fertility. They worshipped the sun, the moon, the wind, corn and the god of animals. It is thought that one of their main deities was Quetzalcóatl and a goddess of fertility and the moon. The Huastecs are considered the main exponents of the cult of the phallus, as well as great warlocks and wizards, and this room displays extraordinary, high-quality pieces of sculpture related to these topics. The museum boasts an important piece of Huastec art: the Goddess of



The Aranzazú Chapel, built in late 1749 under the initiative of the monastery's guardian, is a prime example of Potosí baroque architecture.



Fertility, an adult woman with characteristics typical of this culture: a cone-shaped cap and a feathered head-dress, a naked torso showing her breasts, the symbol of maintaining and creating life, with the palms of her hands on her belly.

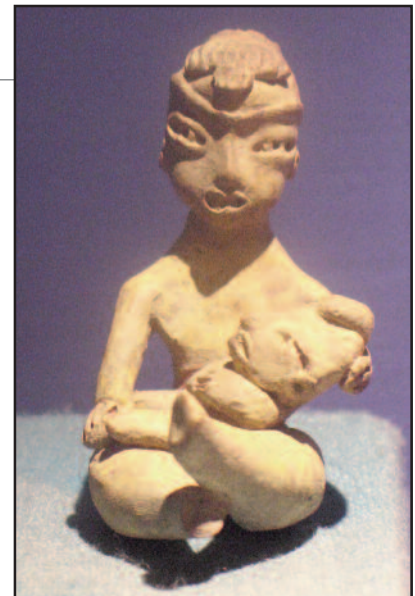
Room III offers a description of the Tamtoc archaeological site, the most important in the Potosí Huastec region of northeastern Mexico. It displays work in shell where the Huastecs depicted extremely well executed mythical-religious scenes and other objects made of shell.

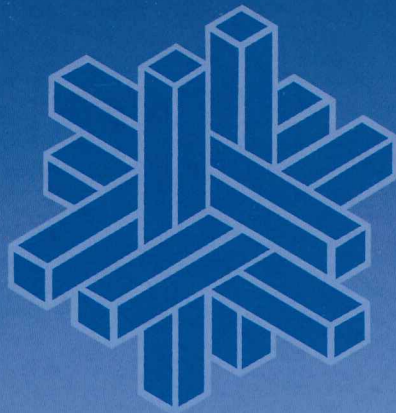
The visit ends upstairs in the Temporary Exhibit Room and the Aranzazú Chapel, built in late 1749 under the initiative of the monastery's guardian Friar Joaquín de Bocanegra, with the moral and economic support of Don José de Erreparaz, the monastery's treasurer. The chapel is a prime example of Potosí baroque architecture and its stone façade, with its slender reversed pyramid pilasters and elongated back-to-back figures, greets the visitor, surprising everyone because of how uncommon it is to find this kind of construction on a second floor. The shallow niches and the mesquite door with its original high-relief carvings are of note; the stairway leading to the chapel was built in the early twentieth century to create an independent entryway.

The chapel includes a painting gallery which, among other valuable pieces, displays two eighteenth-century paintings: one by Oaxaca-born painter Miguel Cabrera depicting Saint Rosalie, crowned with flowers and accompanied by an archangel, and the other of Our Lady of Candelaria by an unknown artist. **MM**

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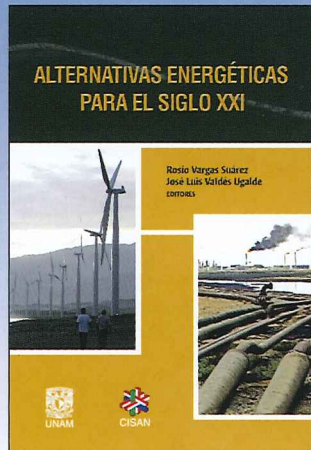


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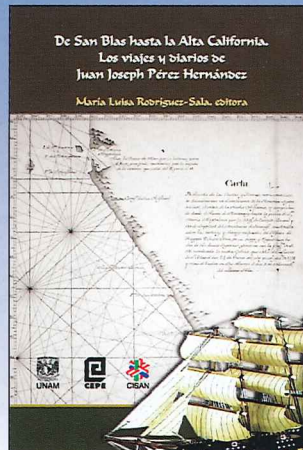
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Alternativas energéticas para el siglo XXI

Rosío Vargas and José Luis Valdés-Ugalde, editors



This book deals with a vital issue for the world today: the search for energy alternatives to compensate for the imminent scarcity of traditional sources, particularly oil and gas. Based on specialized studies warning that current rates of oil consumption will exhaust known reserves in about 40 years, the authors offer a panorama of the international oil situation, emphasizing the growing importance of natural gas and other renewable energy sources, as well as the obstacles and perspectives these new options face.



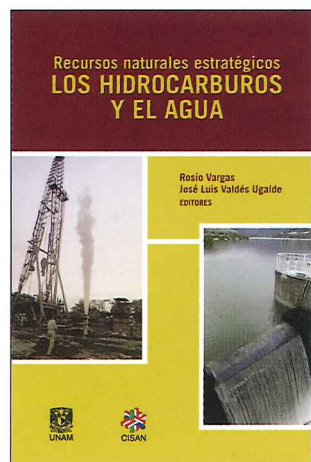
De San Blas hasta la Alta California: los viajes y diarios de Juan Joseph Pérez Hernández

María Luisa Rodríguez-Sala, editor

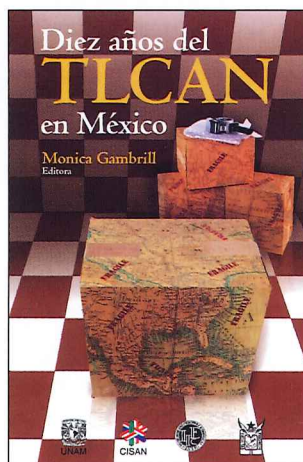
This book deals with the vicissitudes and feats of Juan Joseph Pérez Hernández, a Spanish Royal Navy seaman in charge of the maritime exploration of the northern part of the New World in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The author explains that the ultimate reason for these travels was to be found in the policy and aspirations of two European empires, the Spanish and the Russian. The Spaniards wanted to consolidate and expand their territories in these northern latitudes in the face of the threat of the penetration through trade and settlement by the nascent Russian empire.

Recursos naturales estratégicos. Los hidrocarburos y el agua

Rosío Vargas and José Luis Valdés-Ugalde, editors



This book deals with an issue vital to the survival of the so-called global village: the imminent scarcity of strategic natural resources, basically oil and water, and the risks this poses for the world's well-being and peace. Experts from different disciplines and of different nationalities look at the problem from different perspectives. The prospects are not very promising.



Diez años del TLCAN en México

Monica Gambrill, editor

Ten years after NAFTA came into effect, specialists in different disciplines met to evaluate the effects of its implementation in Mexico. Among other topics, the book looks at macro-economic factors, national industry and the maquiladora plants, foreign investment, labor mobility, agriculture and animal husbandry, cargo transport, the environment and conflict resolution. Particularly interesting is its focus on the agreement's implications with regard to greater integration with the United States.

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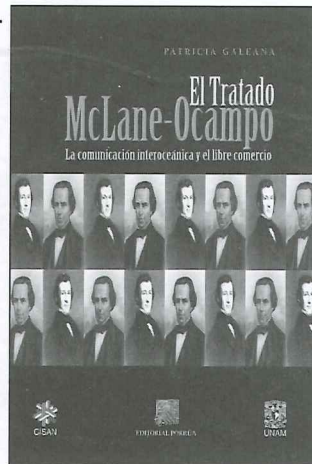


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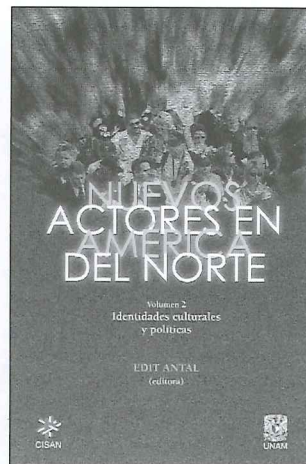
Patricia Galeana



The difficult relations between Mexico and the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century, the dispute among the great powers over inter-oceanic traffic, the rivalry among Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama over what would be the center of world trade and the debate between protectionism and free trade are just some of the topics this book deals with. It also contains previously unpublished reports by the U.S. representative in the diplomatic negotiations that followed, some of the most difficult Mexico ever experienced.

**Nuevos actores en
América del Norte (vol. 2)**

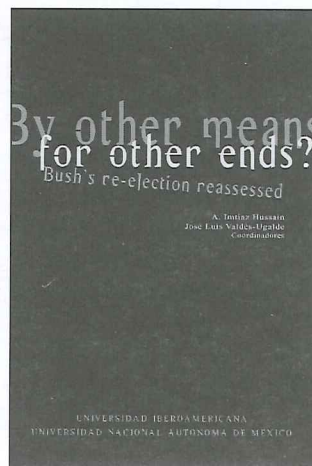
Edit Antal, editor



This work analyzes new and pre-existing actors in North America and the dynamics of their relationships. With a multidisciplinary focus and from their own point of view, the actors themselves evaluate the role they have played while the authors try to understand the mechanisms they use to create societies of a new kind. The book is structured by topic, with four cross-cutting themes: energy resources and security; economic and environmental issues; cultural identities (including indigenous questions); and problems linked to social actors' political identity and empowerment.

**By other means for other ends?
Bush's re-election reassessed**

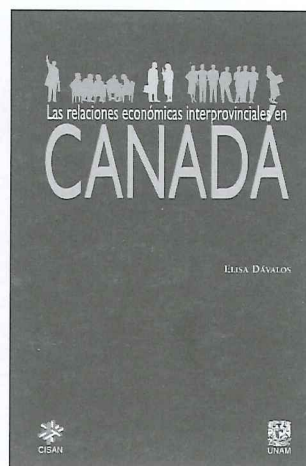
A. Imtiaz Hussain and
José Luis Valdés-Ugalde, editors



This book explains the results of the 2004 presidential elections, pointing to the changes in U.S. society after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Taking into account factors like the expansion of international violence and terrorist activities, as well as domestic socio-political variables, the authors analyze society's reaction to the perception that there was a crisis of survival. This book is the result of a very up-to-date research project, citing specialized journals, influential U.S. newspapers and magazines, web sites of the most influential political and social actors and documents that aim to explain the U.S. political scene.

**Las relaciones económicas
interprovinciales en Canadá
(Inter-provincial Economic
Relations in Canada)**

Elisa Dávalos



The decentralization of the Canadian state gives autonomy to the provinces in matters that in other countries are only decided by the central government. Issues like the ability of provinces to regulate aspects of their economies, which has created some inter-provincial barriers to trade and a certain fragmentation of the national market, or the constitutional jurisdiction of the provinces over their own natural resources are studied in this work that analyzes the provinces' regionalist behavior, highlighting their economic interrelationships and performance.

Forthcoming

Procesos de integración en las Américas

*La integración energética de América del Norte vis-à-vis América del Sur: regulación y geopolítica
Seguridad y gobernabilidad en América del Norte: agendas nacionales e integración*

My Husband *Salvador Elizondo*

Paulina Lavista*



One year after the death of Salvador Elizondo (1932-2006), one of the twentieth-century's most talented Mexican writers, a master of erotic literature and linguistic invention, *Voices of Mexico* pays him well-deserved homage.

I am daring here to write a brief portrait of Salvador Elizondo, my husband for almost 40 years. I think it is risky because I am neither a writer nor a photographer. This craft forces me to concretize the idea in an instant; writing is complex and requires a discipline and rigor that I do not possess, though I do have those implicit in sharing an entire life. For that reason, I happily take on this task that is not precisely my specialty.

* Photographer.

All photographs in the "Literature" section are courtesy of Paulina Lavista.

The first character trait that I would point to—taking for granted his being an artist, which is always mysterious—is his critical attitude toward *all* things. I believe this astuteness and constantly exercised attention made him unique among Mexican writers, among other things because he applied them first of all to himself. But more than critical, he was analytical, and you could say that nothing escaped his analysis. Even his writing reflects this propensity to dissect and break down everything, but he never had problems with writing. I never saw him suffer because he couldn't do things. He walked around his table. Then he took a seat and wrote

his idea down in a notebook, by hand, first off. Everything about him was aimed at the general. The particular didn't interest him more than as part of an ideal generality.

Salvador was a voracious but systematic reader (or re-reader) in four languages; he was also familiar with the principles of Chinese writing. I shared his readings because although I lacked both the time and the ability to read them myself, he always gave me a digest or summary. Some of them were present in our lives. I remember that many years ago his enthusiasm for *Monsieur Teste* prompted him to translate it so I could read it. Salvador also painted in oils a watercolor by Valéry, *The Soirée in Monsieur Teste's Home*. Since then our household slogan has been *Transiit classificando*... although we didn't always follow it. It's very useful in the kitchen.

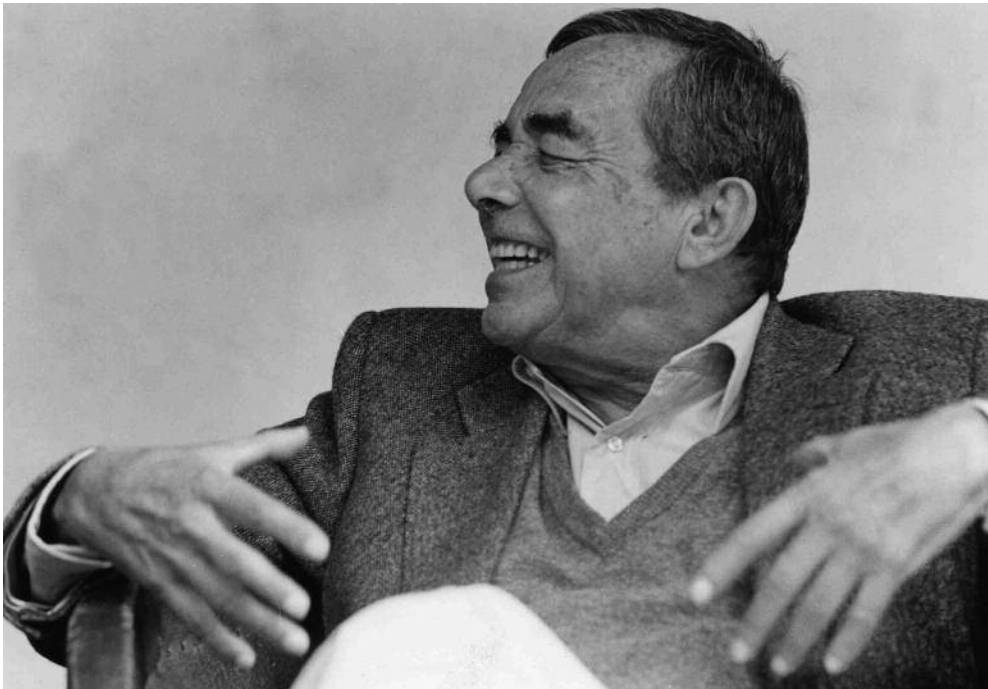
Among the artists who dominated his life, the most important place was always taken by James Joyce. As a professor of literature, I would say that he was the most important figure for him. Salvador believed that *Finnegans Wake* was the end of literature and that two centuries were needed to achieve this level of literary writing in any language.

For almost 40 years, Salvador infected me with his preference for authors who reflect about the

nature of things or for artists who use a technique to obtain harmony and beauty in a work of art. For him, poetry, architecture, painting and music were the same: the result of the application of the same principle...or the same chance. Leonardo, Poe, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry and Joyce were his perennial idols, in addition to innumerable transitory ones, usually baseball players, matadors, opera singers.

He was an autocratic but pleasant conversationalist, as though he always wished that the art of conversation still existed. Although he had stage presence and confidence as a teacher, he was absolutely impractical in matters of everyday life. Incapable of cashing or depositing a check, he was totally baffled by ATMs. Although very lazy, he was obsessively punctual and very reliable.

This is only one way of understanding Salvador. There are many. His personality changed depending on the angle you looked at him from. Generally speaking, I would say that being with him was to face a severe, rigorous critic, who demanded above all thought and ideas; he was like that in everything. It was not easy being his wife; it was very difficult, but it was a fascinating adventure that I wouldn't exchange for anything. **MM**



Salvador Elizondo

The Drama of Writing

Dermot F. Curley*



Salvador Elizondo (right) talks with Octavio Paz (center) and Jorge Luis Borges (left).

1981

For story-line *aficionados* and realist *connoisseurs*, the writings of Salvador Elizondo (1932–2006) do not guarantee an easy read. They will not find in his work the familiar signposts they have grown accustomed to and have adamantly refused to renounce for goals more challenging yet equally, if not more, rewarding. In Elizondo's *Obras* (Complete Works) published in three volumes by El Colegio Nacional in 1994, there is scant reference to the Mexican political arena, absolutely no social comment and little or no local color. At the more formal level, plot has been scrapped and

rounded characters are few and far between, while genre, in the traditional sense of the word, is treated ironically and with a certain degree of playful disdain.

If all this is true, then what is the reader offered instead? The work of Elizondo chronicles very consistently and persistently not the drama of life but the drama of writing. The backdrop for his work is not the strengths and fragilities of human nature, or the pains and pleasures of love, or the reconstruction in words of the modern Latin American metropolis, but the vast universe of literature, art and cinema. *Literary projects* replace recognizable genres, and these projects continually mirror the act of writing, each project seeking to purify this act and cleanse it from the external world itself or from

* Coordinator of foreign languages at the Autonomous Metropolitan University, Cuajimalpa campus.

a literature that arrogantly boasts a faithful depiction of it.

After a premature and unsuccessful collection of poems (*Poemas*) published privately in 1960, and two years before the appearance of *Farabeuf* in 1965, in 1963, Elizondo produced a book on the Italian filmmaker Luchino Visconti. His approach to Visconti's art is revealing: he expresses no interest in the social and cultural content of the Italian's work, but rather in the film director's art, in a phenomenological description of his vision of Italian life. Elizondo analyses with an acute eye films such as *La terra trema*, *Senso*, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* and *Le notti bianche*. In each analysis emphasis is placed on the careful elaboration of technical concepts, on the use of point of view, the long shot, tone, specific lighting or photography to convey, for example, a dream-like atmosphere, as in the case of *Le notti bianche*. Elizondo's interest in other filmmakers, such as Ingmar Bergman, Sergei Eisenstein and Alain Resnais, not to mention certain directors involved in experimental cinema (the Americans Robert Frank, John Cassavetes and Richard Leacock, for example), further confirms the writer's interest in the technical aspects behind the art of film making.

The obsession with technique, particularly the application of Eisenstein's principle of composition known as *montage*, is evident in Elizondo's first novel, *Farabeuf*, published in 1965 and winner of the Villaurrutia Prize. The year 2005 was the fortieth anniversary of the book, which was and, still is, hailed as one of Mexico's most fascinating literary creations. It is a disturbing novel by all accounts: on the one hand, it is by no means easy to read; on the other, the atmosphere conveyed is one of pain and pleasure, sadism, eroticism, torture and madness. The reader—and the critic—is obliged to throw off old habits and refrain from asking the obvious: "Where are we? What's happening now? Who's who?" The reading trajectory is not linear

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but spiral; you read to feel, to experience, rather than to know; the drama is at the level of the writing itself. To piece together a storyline would serve little purpose. Like an involved poem, where the meaning behind the constellation of images is not immediately apparent, *Farabeuf* has to be read patiently, perhaps even aloud. It is the reader's task to follow the guidelines set by one of the many narrators, an impersonal voice that encourages us to retain every detail. The text begins and ends with the question: "Do you remember?" (¿Recuerdas ... ?). It also insists on the importance of these details in an attempt to chronicle what is, in fact, impossible to chronicle: the precise instant of death of a tortured Chinese boxer (China) hypothetically recorded by Dr. Farabeuf, the photographer, or of a prostitute dissected, this time by Doctor Farabeuf's surgical instruments of torture (Paris). A third moment occurs by the sea (Honfleur) and links in the reader's mind the concepts of pleasure (coitus or *la petite morte*) with pain and torture through a series of images and elements evocative of the other two macabre scenes that took place in China and Paris. The result

is a novel that, by working diligently with poetic procedures and *montage* techniques, rather than realist conventions, succeeds in building up an intensely disquieting atmosphere unprecedented in Mexican prose.

Farabeuf established Elizondo as one of Mexico's most talented young writers. This reputation was consolidated in subsequent years with two collections of short stories: *Narda o el verano* (Narda or the Summer) (1966) and *El retrato de Zoe y otras mentiras* (Zoe's Portrait and Other Lies) (1969), as well as a second novel, *El hipogeo secreto* (The Secret Hypogeum) (1968). However, while it is true that critics persist in categorizing this literary output within the familiar realm of *literary genres*, Elizondo moves expertly in and out of the world of *literature* and styles, using the whole range of



literary and non-literary conventions to fabricate, as did Borges, his own *fictions*. Elizondo reveals unquestionable talent as a weaver of tales and confabulations, yet he is quite prepared at any given moment to subvert tradition and to declare greater loyalty to personal goals.

In *El grafógrafo* (The Graphographer) (1972),¹ this loyalty, this adherence to the idea that writing is a prodigious and arduous interplay between the mind, the spirit and the *plume*, is taken a step further, this time banishing not only external reality but also the *universe of literature* from his writing den and replacing it with a mirror: “I write. I write that I’m writing. In my mind’s eye, I see myself writing that I’m writing...” The author has distilled language to a state of pure self-reflection.

Refreshed perhaps by this literary purge, unburdened by an endeavor that can go no further unless it is the blank page (*la page vide que sa blancheur défend*), Elizondo adds significantly to his own literary tradition in subsequent years. *Miscast* (1981) represents the writer’s initiation into the world of drama with a play on playwriting, on the theatrical mechanisms involved in producing laughter (*Miscast* is, according to the sub-heading, an “opaque

farce”). In essence, *Miscast*, rather than being a play to be staged is the staging of a writing to be read; the protagonist is “the written word.”

Camera Lucida (1982) brings together a series of writings published on a monthly basis in the magazine *Vuelta*. Returning to themes, images and memories that have fascinated Elizondo for many years, he manufactures instruments and machines (*el anapoyetrón*, *el cronostatoscopio* and *la camera lucida*) and parodies techniques and conventions, in order to depersonalize or capture on the page an essentially subjective obsession or experience. In *Ein Heldenleben*, for example, the author returns to a name from the past or, to be more precise, the name returns to him: “its sudden presence . . . leaped onto the blank page of the notebook.” However, in order to recall this person with a minimum degree of fidelity, the writer is obliged to have recourse to his literary patrimony. The person can only become *real* as a *literary figure* via the technique of constant digression as employed by Conrad.

In *Elsinore* (1988) Elizondo, as he had done in *Ein Heldenleben*, returns to a specific period of his past life, a time of precociousness, self-discovery and adventure. The storyline, potentially very

straightforward and *realist*, becomes an intriguing exploration into the various and varying dimensions of a writer's mind, from the real event in time, to its invocation through the mysterious and magical world of dream, fantasy, imagination and writing. The beginning of this "chronicle" sets the tone for what is to come: "I'm dreaming I'm writing this story. The images appear one after the other and circle about me in a frenzied whirl. I can see myself writing in the notebook as if I were locked in a parenthesis within the dream, in the motionless center of a vortex of figures both familiar and unknown to me, which emerge from the mist, reveal themselves momentarily, move about, speak, gesticulate, then freeze like photographs, before disappearing into the abyss of the night, overcome by an avalanche of oblivion, lost in the unquiet stillness of the lake."

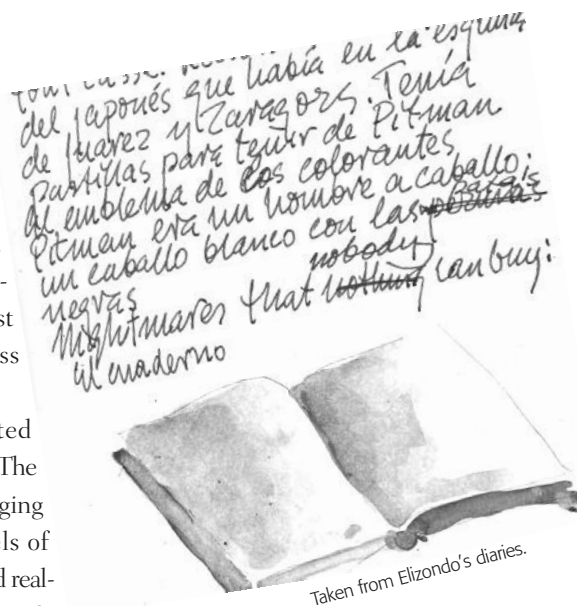
Elsinore is narrated with meticulous care. The interlinking and merging of the different levels of dream, imagination and reality provide great depth to the writing while offering an infinite number of possibilities at the level of reading. It also brings to a successful close a cycle of *literary projects* begun 23 years previously with *Farabeuf*.

Elizondo leaves behind an impressive volume of work, published and unpublished. As well as being a writer who, from an early age, opted for the secluded life of his study and steered clear of the polemics of the so-called "literary groups," he contributed willingly and, when necessary, publicly to the growth of cultural life in Mexico. He was a professor at the National University for some 35 years; he sat on the editorial board of two key cultural magazines, *Plural* and *Vuelta*; he founded and directed the magazine *S.Nob* (1962);

he co-founded the magazine *Nuevo Cine* (1961-1962); he translated major international writers from English, French, German and Italian; he not only held a scholarship from the Mexican Writers Center (1963-1964) but, in subsequent years, worked closely with Juan Rulfo in advising and supporting other young Mexican writers; he worked frequently for Radio UNAM and for many years ran his own program on which, on occasions, he interviewed prominent national literary figures such as José Gorostiza.

Elizondo will be remembered for the overall artistic persistency of his work. While each *literary project* exhibits its own inner coherence, so too does the entire creative trajectory as a whole. Whether it is a short story, a novel, a play, a premature autobiography, a translation or an essay, Elizondo develops and executes each piece of writing with consummate skill, with surgical precision. As the years pass, there is increasing evidence of a more playful approach; in *Miscast* and *Camera Lucida* a touch of

light humor and irony infiltrates what is, undeniably, an on-going and utterly consequential meditation on the art and craft of writing. The artist has reached full maturity. ■■■

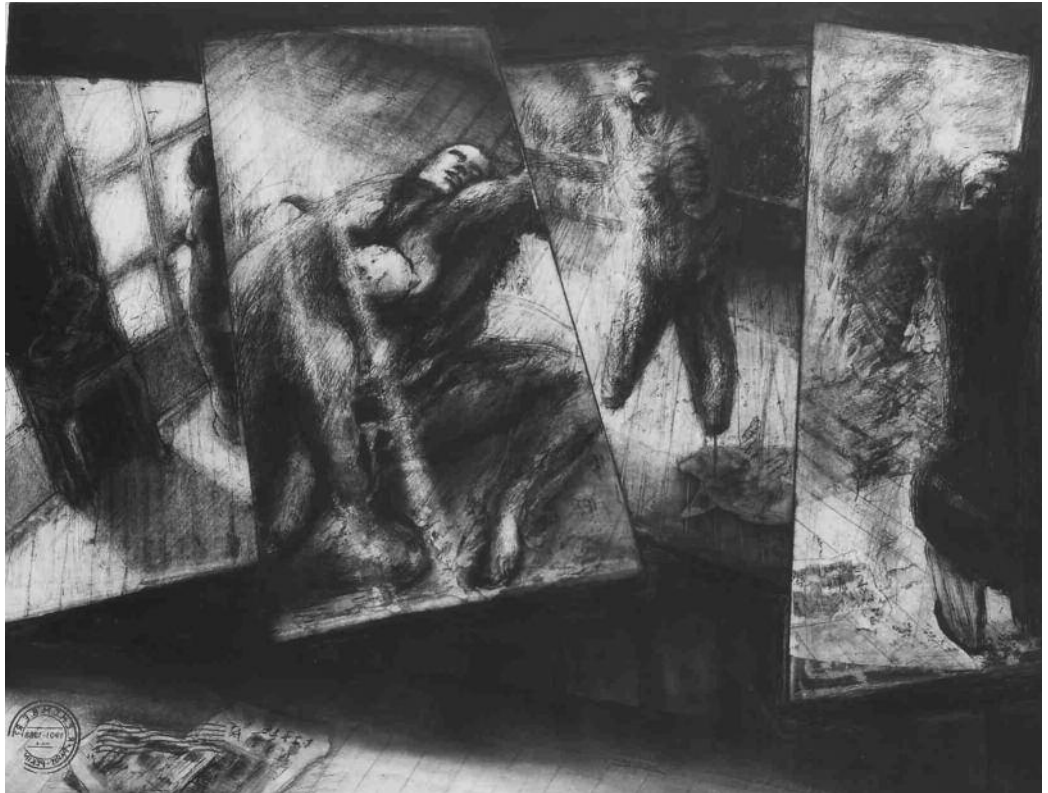


NOTES

¹ Grafógrafo (graphographer) is an invented word from the Greek *grafé* (writing) which means "the writer of writing." This is explained in the story that begins the book and that Mario Vargas Llosa used as the epigraph for his novel *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*: "I write. I write that I write. Mentally, I see myself writing that I write and I can also see myself seeing that I write. I already remember myself writing and also seeing myself writing." [Editor's Note.]

Elsinore¹

by Salvador Elizondo

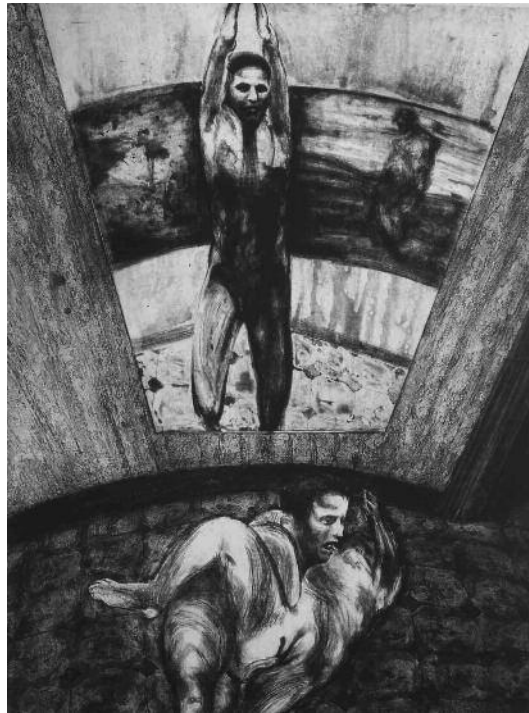


I decided to pay a visit to Mrs. Simpson...*drop in and see me*, she had said. 222 *Margaritas Drive*. I took a Yellow Cab. It wasn't far. An apartment building with *bay windows*. 301 H.S. Simpson...*dancing and stage coaching*. I went in. The carpeted lobby produced an impression of impersonal domesticity that smelled of Creolina disinfectant. I went up to the third floor. The door of 301 was just pulled to. I knocked...*Come iiiin!* ... I went in...*Be with you in a minute*....In the living room were the remains of a party. A half-full bottle of Black & White, some high-

ball glasses, one unfinished, the ashtray full of cigarette butts, the furniture in disarray. On a little table was a photograph of a man in Air Force uniform, but you couldn't see his face very well because it was at something of an angle in the corner. Mrs. Simpson was in the room next door. A mirror showed her reflection lying on a *couch* underneath a sun lamp...*Can't break my sunning time, you know...who is it?* I walked to the threshold of the sun room. She was dressed in scanty underwear, like a bikini, under her own personal sun...*Oh it's you, Sal!*

I'll be right with you... unless you want to cream me up my back. She turned off the sun lamp. I understood then the mystery of her golden skin. Speechless with admiration, I was rooted to the spot in a kind of ecstasy before her almost nude body that I had only dared to intuit when I watched it fully clothed during dancing class. Silently, like someone preparing to carry out a tribal ritual, I dipped my hand into the jar of Max Factor and began to caress that body that like an immense golden sea contained the turquoise islands of her gaze. She reclined on the couch in a pose that years later I would discover was that of the Villa Borghese hermaphrodite. In that position I began to spread the Max Factor cream on her back. Handfuls of it. I had never seen, touched, breathed in a cosmetic-heavenly emanation as sublime, as abysmal, as divinely to my taste. *You have a wonderful body, Mrs. Simpson. Your legs are magnificent!... Oh, dancing, you know...* Sweet mama! shouted my mind, body and soul all at the same time in Spanish.

Should I go over or under your brassiere, Ma'm? Just untie it. My hands shook and I had a very hard time undoing the knot. When I took the Max Factor to the upper edge of the lower part of the bikini, I didn't dare ask her the same thing in English, and skipping over that section, I went directly to the back of her thighs. *I'll do your legs now.* She lay face down and while I caressed her splendid thighs, she asked me if I had come to talk about private dancing lessons. My hands came and went like Porfirio Díaz's pruning shears over that stormy sea of beauty and harmony. I told her no. As though by mistake, my hand passed under the miniscule panty and, letting it rest in that Paradise, I said that



I had come to tell her that I loved her and wanted to marry her. *Don't be silly! I could be your mother, Sal!* All the better. *That's all the better where I come from... Don't be childish!... What's wrong with that?* I continued to caress her for a good while and we got enmeshed in an argument about the pros and cons of our marriage. That I didn't have any experience in life; that she did, and besides, there was the matter of her profession. *Spread your legs apart a little so I can do the insides.* That I couldn't even get a marriage license... *you don't need one in my country.* And money. *What about money?... My dad is in show business. I'm sure he could...* She was already set up. She was known in all of Riverside County and even in Los Angeles. *But I love you and I kissed the back of her knees. Don't be silly! Come on, behave yourself! Love is a very serious matter come my age...* *You could teach me. Real private tutoring, you know.* I invited her to spend Christmas vacation at my house. Imagine the look on my mother's

face! Even though she had said I could invite a friend... *What will your mother say? Oh, come on, just this once. Just imagine!* We could go to Acapulco for New Year's... *That would be wonderful I'm sure, but...* Suddenly we heard the front door open. *That you, Craft?... Yes!* said a ghostly voice from the living room. *My dancing partner,* she told me in a whisper and she hurried into her robe. *Make yourself at home, Craft. I'll be with you in a sec. Want you to meet a young friend of mine who came to ask about private tutoring, etc.* I was very aroused and at that age it's difficult to hide. We left the room. The visitor, impeccable in tails, stood up as we entered, disdainfully letting a splendid

Spanish cape lined with wine-colored silk drape over the back of the armchair. He had left the top hat and his immaculate kid gloves on a nearby chair, leaning an ebony, ivory-handled walking stick against the railing. He bowed deeply to kiss Mrs. Simpson's hand. *Craft, she said, I want you to meet Sal. He is one of my best pupils in Elsinore; and then, speaking to me, Sal, this is Professor Ebing, my dancing partner; we're Ebing & Brenda on the stage, you know.* The professor disparagingly nodded his head slightly, looking the other way. *Mr. Ebing used to be with the Royal Opera in Budapest before the war, you know...Oh, how thrilling!* I said. Mrs. Simpson excused herself. *I'll just put something on, and be right with you. Make yourselves at home.* Mr. Ebing sat back down on his magnificent cape. I don't know if it was because of the tails, but he looked a lot like the father of my fellow cadet, Lugosi. With exaggerated naturalness, he took a silver cigarette case out of his pocket and offered it to me. *Have one of these.* My hands were shaking, my fingers covered with cream. With a great deal of difficulty and without getting up, I stretched out my arm and picked up one of the oval, gold-tipped cigarettes he was offering me. They weren't the same cigarette tips as the butts in the ashtray. I took out my field Zippo and offered him a light. He refused it. He took a very long Dunhill out of his piqué vest and lit his own. He breathed in deeply and became pensive. Ah Vienna! He said, exhaling first through his nostrils and then through his mouth...Ah Vienna, he repeated...*You don't know what life was in Vienna before the war...I was assistant maitre de ballet to the greatest. I have Nijinsky's photograph dedicacée to me. His wife Remola is a distant relative of mine...Saw him do entrechat douze, but now nothing is left; all charm is gone out of life. We have nothing left but those abominable Latin rhythms...Tango is coming back it seems to me...Because of Gilda. Brenda and I are trying to do*

I began to spread
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Handfuls of it. I had never seen,
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our best with Amado Mio. He spoke in British English but with a strong Viennese accent. Mrs. Simpson came back after a while. She had put something on: an evening gown, sumptuous in its blood-colored silk folds and drapery, strictly outlining the contours and curves; identical to the one Gilda wears in the Amado Mio scene...*Well, how does it look?...You are absolutely ravishing, my dear,* said the count...*You look real marvelous in it, Ma'm.* She was gorgeous, better than naked. She bragged to us about the dress's label...*straight from Adrian!* The vampire proposed a toast. Later, said Mrs. Simpson, and told him that I had invited her to spend Christmas vacation at my house... Mexiko, huh? said Craft, throwing me a sarcastic grimace that showed his oversized, prominent canine teeth. He was as pale as a sheet. Mrs. Simpson asked me how she would look in that dress in Acapulco for the New Years Eve party. I said it would be marvelous. I imagined her strolling through the garden with her splendorous red dress or sitting on the big sofa in the living room in front of the fireplace. Dracula took a folded piece of paper out of his jacket. *I'm sorry to tell you, my dear,* but you have to decline *this young fellow's invitation. We're all booked for the Christmas season.* From the paper, he read summarily *Elsinore, Christmas ball, Brenda on the 19th, then we have Pirates' Den in LA on the 20th, Coconut Grove on the 21st and 22nd, and so on until New Year's.* So it was impossible. *So why don't we have a drink and do all well-wishing now.* But Mrs. Simpson said she didn't want to rumple her dress and that she would rather review the main steps of Amado Mio to see how the folds acted. She turned on the record player. Ebing put on the top hat and gloves and they danced for a good while. At least a quarter of an hour because the record played automatically at least three times in a row. *All right,* said Dracula. *I think we've quite got it.* Mrs. Simpson asked me how it looked. *Oh,*

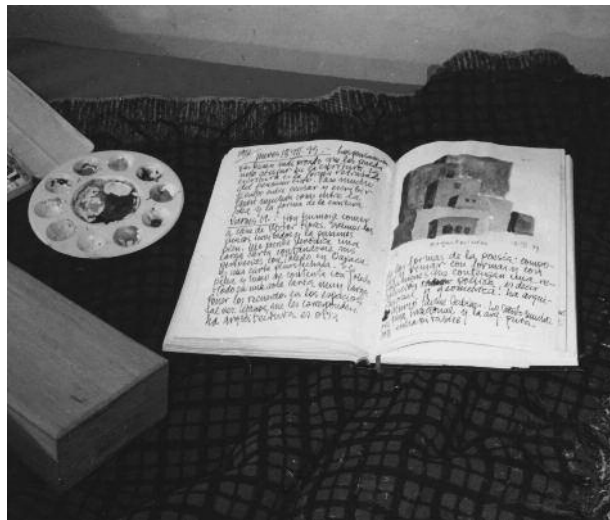
just wonderful, Ma'm... Well, take a last look! And she disappeared to change again. Greatly agitated, Dracula took off the top hat and gloves and served himself a highball that he drank in two or three gulps one after the other. Then he said a few words, in French, I think, that I didn't understand. He explained exaltedly that it was the first verse of a poem dedicated to Poe. *Poe, you know, eh?... Yeah, we had The Raven in class...* Ah! he said. And started to explain to me how only the dance revived him and made the blood flow through his veins. And it was true. He didn't look as pale any more, though his gaze seemed feverish. *It makes my blood boil and my head turn like the big Ferris Wheel in Prater...* He served himself another whiskey and sat down, caressing the ivory head of his cane. He took out his cigarette case. He offered me a cigarette without holding it out toward me. He put it away again; he lit it and breathed deeply. He exhaled a mouthful of bluish

smoke and said, *Listen to me, my young fellow, if you have any intentions about Brenda...* I assured him that my intentions were perfectly honorable, that I was in love with Mrs. Simpson and I wanted to marry her... He raised his cane and put its ferrule against my neck. *Listen to me, you little scoundrel, if you insist, you know what I will do?* I said I didn't have the slightest idea. *I will transfix you!* And he added that all he had to do was to press a little button in the handle and a blade would jump out of the tip of his cane. It was like the one in Gilda. He was going to count to seven for me to give up that sublime love, for me to forswear that immense passion... *Einz!*...for me to renounce the azure of her gaze... *Zwei!* The graze of her sun-drenched flesh... *Drei!*...the warmth of her heavenly skin... *Vier!*...

the culmination of the Eternal Feminine... *Fünf!*... *Please help me, Mrs. Simpson, Ma'm!*... And at that moment, she came in. *Hey! Hey! What's the matter with you guys!* Now she was wearing a simple tailored tweed suit and low-heeled shoes, which gave her a *motherly* look. *Put your damn stick away, Craft!* *Oh, no I won't,* and he smiled like a character from Psychopathia. All he had to do was press the little button for the stiletto to come out. *Stop it, I tell you!* shouted Mrs. Simpson. Dracula smiled his malignant smile again. I didn't care one way or the other. I was very happy to spill my blood and

give my life for the peerless Lenore. A moan could be heard, like something spilling, like a visceral abundance emptying, like an exhalation of the last breath of life. Then I heard a voice saying *Hey! Come on, you lazy bastard! Wake up! Wake up!* The final exhalation was the whining of the bus's pneumatic brakes. We had arrived in

Los Angeles. *We made it, BF! Here we are!* said Fred. When I got off the bus I didn't know if what I saw around me was part of the same dream. The longest night of my life continued... And now what do we do?... **MM**



The writer's day book.



NOTES

¹ Fragment of Salvador Elizondo, *Elsinore. Un cuaderno* (Mexico City: FCE, 2001), pp. 85. Translated by Heather Dashner. Given the main character's bilingual experience, the author originally included many English fragments in this Spanish-language book. In this translation, the fragments originally in English have been put in italics for the reader's identification. [Translator's Note.]

Salvador Elizondo

A Writer on the Verandah

Alejandro Toledo*



1971

I. Salvador Elizondo, or someone who speaks in first person for him, walks through University City's great esplanade near the area known as "the islands" and the Central Library toward the School of Philosophy and Letters, reflecting on an article about the future that Ramón Xirau solicited from him for issue 36 of the magazine *Diálogos* (Dialogues). Elizondo is looking for the tone, the words, the length and even the typeface for this future text, "the exact form that this still unrealizable piece of writing would have," when an English accent interrupts his monologue. "Excellent reasoning," says a little

man with bird-like features, dressed in nostalgic, shabby black, who seems to be a mind-reader. After a short pause, he asks Elizondo, "Don't you recognize me?"

The narrator then starts to sift through his memory. Not immediately, but in a matter of seconds, he manages to connect the character's words with others read in English a while back in junior high school or high school, or in Spanish in the *Antología de literatura fantástica* (Anthology of Fantastic Literature) by Borges, Bioy and Silvina Ocampo. Did he by chance recognize him? Didn't his words sound similar to that "Try to make them know that I did exist!"? Who was that by?

* Writer and cultural journalist.

“You are...,” exclaims Elizondo, or the one who uses the first person in the story “Futuro imperfecto” (Future Imperfect) and leaves the sentence unfinished.¹

“My name is Soames.”

“Of course! You’re Enoch Soames, the greatest literary researcher who ever lived!”

The excessive compliment might have pleased the other man, even though the “who ever lived” part sounded a bit like a rhetorical trick.

Max Beerbohm, or the first-person narrator of the story “Enoch Soames: A Memory of the Eighteen-nineties,” describes his main character as “a stooping, shambling person, rather tall, very pale, with longish and brownish hair. He had a thin, vague beard, or rather, he had a chin on which a large number of hairs weakly curled and clustered to cover its retreat.”² He wonders whether to call him “dim” or “hungry, but—hungry for what?” He encounters him for the first time at the Café Royal at the end of 1893; he there discovers that Soames is the author of *Negations*, assembled stories, poems and aphorisms. While later conversing with Soames, he finds out that the man

had rather unfavorable opinions of Shelley and Keats, of whose writing he thought only a few passages salvageable. He approved of Milton, finding a dark intuition in his work. The narrator’s last encounter with Soames takes place in the first week of June 1897 in the Restaurant du Vingtième Siècle.

He remembers all this while reviewing a book about 1890s literature by Holbrook Jackson, where he finds no reference to Soames in the index. He has faded from view; the narrator may be the only person in the world who hasn’t forgotten him. Both his books, *Negations* and the later *Fungoids*, were ignored by the critics. By way of consolation, the narrator tells Soames, “An artist who gave truly new and great things to the world had always to wait long for recognition.” He had to wait for the judgment of posterity, to which Soames reacted

ill-humoredly, “Posterity! What use is it to me? A dead man doesn’t know that people are visiting his grave, visiting his birthplace, putting up tablets to him, unveiling statues of him. A dead man can’t read the books that are written about him.”

That is when he comes up with the idea of projecting himself into the future, of going to the British Museum Reading Room 100 years hence and looking up “Soames, Enoch” in the catalogue, to see the “endless editions, commentaries, prolegomena, biographies.” And he pronounces his fateful words: “I’d sell myself body and soul to the devil for that!”

Another diner is listening closely to what the two men are saying. It is, of course, the devil. They introduce each other and come to an agreement. The devil transports Soames into the future, to June 3, 1997. He goes to the reading room and

finds no reference at all to himself. A few hours later, it occurs to him to look up “Beerbohm, Max,” the man he has been talking to, the only witness to his pact with the devil, and there he finds his name listed as a character in a short story by this intellectual he despises.

But that is his key to being

remembered. On his return to the Vingtième, “‘Try,’ was the prayer he threw at me [Beerbohm] as the devil pushed him roughly out through the door, ‘try to make them know that I did exist!’”

When Salvador Elizondo met him between the islands and the Central Library in University City’s grand esplanade around 1970 or 1971, Enoch Soames was already a consummate time-traveler. He even had issue 36 of the magazine *Diálogos* containing the article Elizondo was trying to write for Ramón Xirau. And he gave it to him so he could copy it out in full, which Elizondo did, taking care to be absolutely faithful to the “original.” But Elizondo, or whoever spoke in first person, thought that Soames’ was a senseless tragedy.

So, just as every June 16, we celebrate Bloomsday, in honor of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, we should

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dedicate June 3 to the Enoch Soames of this world. To be sure, on that day, but in 1997, a few innocent readers waited in the British Museum's Reading Room to see if Soames would appear to look in the card catalogue. One swore he had seen him.

2. For Salvador Elizondo, the year 1965 was crucial in deciding his fate as a writer. His novel *Farabeuf o La crónica de un instante* (Farabeuf, or the Chronicle of an Instant) came out that year, a 180-page volume in the Joaquín Mortiz *El volador* (The Flier) Series, whose chapter seven included the terrible image of a man being subjected to the Chinese *Leng-tche* torture, or the Torture of the Hundred Pieces. The book was disconcerting not only because of the photograph, taken from a work by Georges Bataille, but also because of the plot, both terrible and diffuse, in which horror mixes with eroticism, perhaps stylistically akin to the French *nouveau roman*.

"Forty years ago I started something with an uncertain future," remembered Elizondo in early 2005, the last time I spoke to him. "Not even my vocation had been decided. I wanted to be a movie director because I had failed as a painter. Then I published *Farabeuf* and they gave me the Xavier Villaurrutia Prize. That way someone led me to understand that that was my road, something I had never understood before."

Elizondo let me visit his home in Coyoacán, but our talk had to conform to the conditions of someone who was recovering from a 10-hour surgery, which he perceived as a first look at death, and limit itself to the few topics he thought about after living through what for him was an extreme experience.

"The operation changed my face and therefore also my behavior and personality. It is very difficult to face. I have friends who do what I had done to me on purpose, for reasons of vanity, to look more beautiful or younger. But I had to have it done to me out of necessity. I am a kind of a curiosity because the operation was very difficult and changes the skeleton a lot. From this Mephistophelian operation, without wanting to, just because of memory, I returned above all to my adolescence, when for many reasons you are not aware of what you are doing,

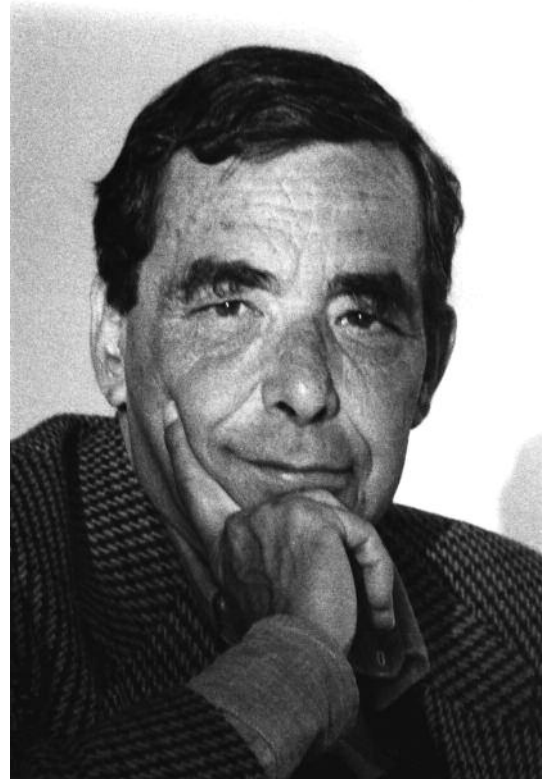
more than the memory that remains in your mind and that revives now that I'm about to turn 73."

The points of his personal geography were well-known: a portal or internal corridor where he used to sit around midday facing a large garden crowned by a robust jacaranda tree. He called this place the "veranda" (or "verandah", as he preferred), a border or threshold, a light blue lightening rod.³

"For 70 years, my life's point of view has been the place where I am now, and that ridge on the wall at the bottom of the garden where a tree I planted now grows, serving as an easy yardstick to measure the growth of things, the passage of time."

A few days before, the equilibrium of the verandah was broken by a loud crack that got Elizondo out of his chair. He thought that a small plane or a helicopter had crashed into the house. He ran to see what had happened and found that a badly placed three-meter iron beam had slipped out of its railing and fallen noisily without hurting anyone. The maids were looking at each other, frightened, but they said they hadn't heard anything.

It was a scare. Just that. To remember it, Elizondo wrote the word "beam" in his pocket day-book.



So, the verandah was the point where literary and personal stories met.

* * *

Politics, said Elizondo, was something that had never interested him much and when they did, only as a joke. He thought that we had gone from a perfect dictatorship to an imperfect democracy, worse than any dictatorship. “There’s one thing that really bothers me: Mexico’s immediate political fate is a mystery.”

He didn’t want to say much about his books: “Fortunately, they’re all a little different. And for me, there are too many of them. One critic called me infertile; he could have called me other things. I have other, simpler, descriptions. It’s the most I have been able to do in 40 years.”

And although he declared himself without any kind of literary concerns, saying “they have all been more than satiated,” the chat moved through the areas of writing and reading.

He remembered, for example, a phrase of French writer André Maurois that a friend had told him in his youth and that had stuck

so vividly in his mind that he wrote it on the wall of his study: “Into your hands will come the book you must read and the woman you must love.”

About women, he said, “This business of women always happens. Every one that comes along, you think, ‘This is the right one.’ And this happened to me several times until I realized that it wasn’t, or until one really was. . . . But for me, that’s a problem that has long been resolved.”

The matter of the book is perhaps more complicated: “I believed that it was also resolved because I was already very familiar with the work that for me seemed to be the absolute end of literature, unless a whole other system of writing could be devised, which was *Ulysses* by James Joyce, the perfect construction. And then I realized that the book that I must read had come to me, richly

supplemented by the attempt to take writing and the known language to the end: I’m speaking of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* together. That’s clear. I clearly realized that beyond *Finnegans Wake*, our ability to read, as readers, was at an end.”

Nevertheless, in December 2004, he went to a bookstore and found on the “recent arrivals” table the IV Centenario edition of *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, with the seal of approval of the Spanish Royal Academy of Language.

“That’s when I realized that my knowledge of this strange thing called literature was not complete, because I had already seen its final limit, but not its exact point of origin. Therefore, I didn’t know where this thing that I and a few others in the universe understand by literature had begun.”

Elizondo had had varied encounters with the work of Cervantes. As a boy, his grandmother recited Chapter 11 of the *Quijote* to him from first to last, including the speech about the Golden Age (“Blissful age and happy centuries to which the ancients gave the name of golden.”), with no literary comment at all.

“At home I have gathered editions, at least ten

different editions of the *Quijote*, which simply came to me. I paid no attention to them. To me, it was not the same to read *Don Quijote* as to read *Ulysses*. Supposedly I understood everything because I knew the ending, but I was ignorant of the beginning of the period of literature that concerned me. For a long time, I have known that literature has ended; that I intuited without realizing it, like intuitions always are, when in a completely indirect way I began studying Chinese, interested in the way it was put together, something I also found in Eisenstein’s cinema. With this rediscovery of *Don Quijote*, I realized that I had completed the scheme of things, the alpha and the omega. Now I believe I know where modern literature begins and where it ends.”

“That was the book you had to read.”

y no le preguntaba al mesero ni un
cudmor. También un libro comido
por los ratones.



From Elizondo’s diary.

“And the incredible thing is that it only cost 93 pesos, when in my situation it resolved absolutely all my problems: the greatest gift that can be given in a book in Spanish. I don’t believe there is any other more important than that one. I already knew that, but I had never managed to read *Don Quijote* all the way through. I had read the beginning, I had read the end, when the character —not Alonso Quijano, but Don Quijote de la Mancha— is born, and some stellar moments....Now I have annotated the entire book. I ask myself what had kept me from reading it until now?”

“You will have also established relations with Joyce’s *Ulysses*...”

“They are the same book. For me technically as a writer, *Ulysses* is more similar to *Quijote* than to Homer’s *Odyssey*, on which it is based. And *Quijote*, of course, is also an odyssey. That’s what’s so special about it and I have finally understood that. Even though the instrument I was using, writing, is all used up for me.”

“According to Borges...”

“For me, today, Borges no longer has any importance. Neither does Goethe, because I’m terminal. That is difficult to understand. I no longer have anything to live for but memory, to recover some things that are lost or momentarily misplaced. I have nothing to say about literature. When you say Borges, he’s erased.”

“His writing has been erased for you?”

“No. It’s there, but I no longer concern myself with it. Now the pen is useful to me only to write my appointments or what happens in my day book.”

* * *

On the night that the Xavier Villaurrutia Prize for literature celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, when, amid the long list of prizewinners Salvador Elizondo and his novel *Farabeuf* were announced, they merited a little longer round of applause than the others, despite the fact that the author could not be present in the Fine Arts Palace. Elizondo heard comments about the evening from different sources. He did not seek out any explanations; he preferred to file it away in his folder of mysterious items. He associated the incident with a farewell.

“The other day a lifelong neighbor came to see us; she was moving away because she had sold her house. She came to say goodbye. She’s a woman whose proximity had become a tradition. I said to her, ‘Good luck, madam. I’m sorry you’re leaving.’ And she replied, ‘Thank you, Don Elizondo. I’m very happy about the success you have recently enjoyed.’”

“Your neighbor, of course, was referring to the applause in the Fine Arts Palace.”

“Those who told me about it thought that it was extraordinary that in a meeting of supposed professional writers there should be such a warm acknowledgment, given that I am practically a forgotten author. I like that non-explanation more; it must be for some reason. I’m sure that those who applauded me have spent at least two pesos on me. But it is a mystery why they should have applauded me so much that day, me compared with others. In any case, my editorial bank statement, so to speak, does not vary. My royalties have been non-existent. I have never earned a penny from literature; or I have, indirectly, by honors or awards... I’m surprised that the applause is no more than that and that my book sales don’t increase. But for me, the applause is significant because it comes from people who at least know who I am.”

“It was applause from the readers of *Farabeuf*.”

“When I was writing that novel it seemed to me that I didn’t have enough experience. It seems that when I wrote it, according to the Villaurrutia Prize or those who awarded it, I learned something. At that moment, I defined my road as a writer.” **MM**



NOTES

¹ Salvador Elizondo, *El grafógrafo* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1972), pp. 77-86.

² Max Beerbohm, “Enoch Soames: A Memory of the Eighteen-nineties” (New York: The Century Co., 1916), at <http://www.netlibrary.com/nlreqader> or www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=36058pageno=8

³ The term “verandah,” also used in the title of this article, refers to a literary genre that Elizondo called by that name, “the ideal sphere for two forms of English literature: conversation or nostalgia. The verandah is the place where characters talk or listen to someone narrate something. There are no women; there is no music; just a few men dressed in twilled linen who smoke, drink whiskey and listen to the story seated before the swaying lantern on a verandah in Sambir or Singapore. The narration is expanded and amplified by the voice itself.” Javier García-Galiano, “El principio de la invocación,” prologue to Salvador Elizondo, *Elsimore. Un cuaderno* (Mexico City: Asociación Nacional del Libro, 2006), pp. 17-18. [Editor’s Note.]

Farabeuf¹

by Salvador Elizondo



I am trying to remember, but my mind can recall only the moment when for the first time you showed me the photographs of the man. You urge me to sift through my memory. How could I forget! It was dusk. We were walking along the beach, engaged in a banal conversation. We passed a woman dressed in black who was followed by a dog, a *caniche*. A boy was building a sandcastle. The tide rose perceptibly. We went up the cliff and sat on the rocks to watch the play of the waves and the flight of the pelicans as they dove for fish. Yes, I remember it all perfectly. I remember the cry of the waves. And the thrashing of the sea, each time more violent, pressuring the night which, there by the sea, was always slower in arriving. Then we returned, retracing our steps. We passed the ruins of the sand-

castle without noticing them. When we went in, there was a yellow envelope on the chest of drawers, while outside the seagulls continued calling. When you opened the envelope and showed me that unexpected and ecstatic face, night had fallen. It was as if that tumefied look carried night to every corner of the house. I remember everything. Perfectly. And you, do you remember?

“Yes, I remember your body streaked with the reflections of twilight which looked like trickles or stains of blood. Your fragmented words were like wrenched cries in a millennial and ritual torture, and your expression at that time was like that of the man in the photograph. Should I forget everything now...?”

“Are you capable of forgetting it?”

“Oblivion cannot overcome the things that already unite us. The pleasure, the torture, present here, now and forever with us, like the presence of the man who gazes at us from that unforgettable photograph...”

“Yes, ever since that time our expressions are like his.”

* * *

We have played at having our eyes meet on the surface of the mirror—we have communicated, our bodies have touched in that unreal dimension that opens towards the infinite on the wall stained and furrowed by small, anxious insects. Before that inexplicable meeting, you would have told me that all the mirrors in the world could not have contained that sensation of vertigo to which you would have abandoned yourself forever, just as you abandon yourself to death as reflected in the eyes of this nude man whose photograph you love to contemplate every afternoon in a desperate attempt to discover the meaning of your life. That is why you would like all mirrors to reflect your face, in order to feel more real than the gaze of those demented eyes that now and forever keep watch over you.

* * *

Let us help you, dear Master. You must reconstruct a scene from your youth. In this way we will be able to gain access to the most accurate data. Do not forget that in “your day” rain fogged glass just as it does today. Is life, that process which is suspended and at the same time synthesized in the appearance of the carcass that it is your custom, dear Master, to manipulate and cut when stiff, pale, bloodless and still, usually the cadavers of men and women who have come to some violent end, that is, *caro data vermicibus*—is it by chance any different now than it was then? You touch that rather immutable essence known as the body—whether reeking or perfumed, smooth or scrofulous—but always the same in the final analysis. The organs, whatever interest they may have for you, are the same now as they were then and the rain that fogs the glass or soaks the

shoulders of your coat is—is it not?—the same rain that fell in Peking on the day when you, accompanied by your lover (yes, Doctor Farabeuf, *your lover*), with great effort, trying not to get your photographic equipment wet, uttering the same imprecations and interjections that workers and people of the lower class addicted to radical parties utter in our own day even in public places, made your way, pushing and shoving your way through a rather stupefied crowd, until you were able to profane and perpetuate that singular image, unique in the history of sadoerotic iconography. You who delight in diminishing the extension of the human body with your sharpest of knives, you dear Master, who in a night of delirium arranged a covenant with an old whore whom the medical students called *Mademoiselle Bistouri*, or “The Nurse,” due to her marked proclivity, like the Baudelaire character, to sleep indiscriminately with those who prepare amphitheatres and handle cadavers.

* * *

Pay attention. I will try to tell you everything, without neglecting any of the details. The people were not waiting with great anticipation. They arrived gradually after the ceremony had already begun. But he was there. For how long, I don’t know. The fact of the matter is that he was already there, as if he had always been there. It is hard to know exactly what is going on. Suddenly he emerges from the curious onlookers with his hands tied behind his back. Everything about him, everything around him, is tense, as if reality were about to be shattered from one moment to the next. But he does not stumble. He walks with difficulty, but he does not stumble. The stake is fixed in the ground beforehand. Perhaps it was put there the day before. The material mechanism of justice, it might be said, goes unperceived. Who builds the scaffolds? Who sharpens the knives? Who makes certain that the mechanism of the guillotine functions perfectly? Who oils the hinges of the garrote? The identity of the executioners is unknown, as is the merit of their office. It is difficult to describe those things since they happen without our knowing exactly how they happen. Suddenly

the body is covered with blood, and we do not know with any certainty when the executioners made the first cut. Our fascination with that experience is total. That is undeniable. When the torture was finished, we were soaked. We had not realized that it was raining. Suddenly, he was already there, but we did not look at him. We looked at the knives that the executioners brandished proudly, with the wisdom and dexterity that is theirs by habit. In the hands of other men these knives would be awkwardly manipulated, used with excessive caution in their attempt to avoid touching the blades, flinching at the slightest contact with the cutting edge. It is possible that the victim does not know exactly what is happening. The procedure continues in this manner. One watches closely. Nevertheless, when the shower of blood suddenly spurts from the wound, we find that it is impossible to say exactly when the cut was made. That is the way the procedure progressed from the start, when one sees blood slowly trickling down the length of his body, striping his hairless, distended skin, coiling in streams that gravitate toward the saint's genitals, which in these circumstances are the only part of his body that is invulnerable. Then the blood accumulates in the pubic hair until it seeps through, dripping onto the pavement and turning black like coal a few moments later. But that is not what is most disturbing. The Dignitary, the one in the photograph

who appears to be peacefully watching the scene from behind at the right, approaches the man and, introducing his fingertips between the seams of the initial cuts the executioners have made, grasps the lower edge of the wound and yanks downward—first the left side, then the right. It is curious to note how strong the flesh is. One can see it in the effort which the Dignitary must use in order to lay bare the man's ribs. The victim never screams. His senses perhaps are mute to the pain. The Dignitary withdraws and positions himself where he appears in the photograph.... The one at the extreme left of the photograph holds his arm up, exerting with minimal effort a small amount of pressure on one of the bonds or tourniquets located behind the patient. This bond, not seen in the photograph, is most likely sustained by the stake itself as a point of support producing the pressure that holds the arms together and keeps them tight around the stake. One immediately sees that the man carries with him the wisdom of his office. The absolute efficiency of his actions is portrayed in the serene look he directs at the operation of the executioner, who appears at the left side of the photograph, in the foreground, with his back to us. A quick twist of one of the bonds located at the level of the subject's shoulder facilitates the dismemberment of the legs at the knee. To his left—to the right in the photograph—another executioner whose face we cannot see is found.



The polemical photograph of Chinese torture that inspired the novel.

Nevertheless, a distinctive trait of his personality is visible. The man holds a stake which, by its position, by its peculiar angle, most likely exerts the greatest force of all in the procedure. It is, in fact, a large tourniquet. This would not be important were it not for the fact that the executioner's right hand, the one that operates the tourniquet, does not grasp the lever at the point where its probable proportions and weight would have one suppose, above all given the extreme force which it is to exert. On the contrary, it rests, or so it seems, delicately on the beam, in a position similar to the way one would hold a violin bow, bending the little finger delicately in and holding it so that it does not even touch lever. The gesture indicates, without a doubt, that since the executioner's left hand is used to hold the tourniquet at the necessary height, as demonstrated by the firm gesture with which his hand holds the stake from below, his right hand is used to produce slight modifications, barely perceptible increases, infinitesimal decreases, instantaneous and localized relaxations of the general pressure applied to the patient's body—modulations that serve to delay to the most exasperating degree that implacable dismemberment, modulations like those the bow produces on the strings in the *cadenza* preceding the *coda* in a musical score, forcing one to go back. There is yet another executioner behind the victim. His right hand and his face are barely visible. Surely he performs a function similar to that of the executioner on the extreme left of the photograph. Like the other one, his only task is to increase and decrease the pressure of a tourniquet made of hemp. In back, behind the victim, it is possible to see part of the face and the edge of a cap belonging to another executioner who is located at a position that is perfectly symmetrical to the one of the executioner manipulating the hemp tourniquet. And, immediately behind him, we see another executioner with his hair cut in the Manchu style who, like the one at the extreme left of the photograph, exerts pressure behind the victim, at the same time carefully following the operations of the other two in the foreground of the picture, who perform the quartering itself. These two have their backs to the camera. Each works on one of the patient's legs, dis-

membering it at the knee with saws. They will undoubtedly proceed in the same manner with the arms, if they have not done so already. This can only be inferred because, having amputated the hands and then the forearms at the height of the elbow, great pressure on the arm's stumps would be needed from the bonds in order to support the entire weight of the body, thus justifying the function of the executioner who operates the large tourniquet. It is necessary to note the symmetry of this image. The absolutely rational, geometric positioning of all the executioners. Though the identity of the executioner located behind the victim cannot be determined, his existence should not be doubted. Note the expressions on the faces of the spectators. It is curious that of all those included in the scene the victim is the only one who looks up. All the others, the executioners and the curious onlookers, look down. There is one man, next to last at the extreme right of the photograph, who looks straight ahead. His eyes are filled with terror. Notice also the expression of the man located in the center of the photograph between the Manchu executioner and the Dignitary. He is trying to follow the various stages of the procedure, and to do so he must lean on the shoulder of the spectator to his right. The victim is a very beautiful man. A delirious and exquisite mystery is reflected on his face. His look justifies a disturbing hypothesis: that he is really a woman. Had the area around the genitals not been retouched, had the chest wounds been caused by the bloody removal of breasts, there would be no doubt about it. The man seems absorbed in a supreme pleasure, as if contemplating a bacchanalian god. His senses form a halo around him that begins and ends at the same place. That is why there exists a point where pleasure and pain fuse. **MM**



NOTES

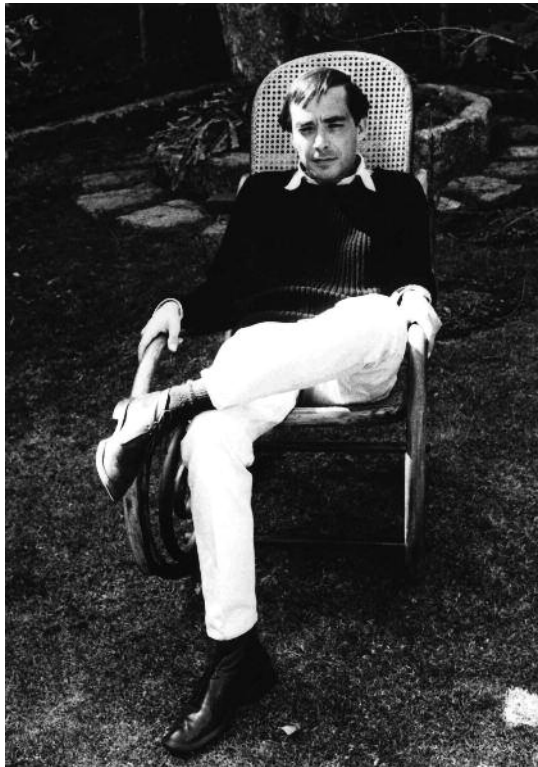
¹ Fragments taken from chapters two, three, four and seven of Salvador Elizondo, *Farabeuf*, translated from Spanish by John Incledon (New York, London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992). Reproduced with the permission of the translator.

Between Love and Death Salvador Elizondo's *Farabeuf*

Juan Antonio Rosado*

In 1965, half-way through the decade, a great diversity of expressions and ways of understanding letters emerged in Mexico. While on the one hand, the *Revista mexicana de literatura* (Mexican Journal of Literature) stopped coming out, on the other, the most recent production of the avant-garde writers was published in the also cosmopolitan *El corno emplumado* (The Plumed Horn) (1962-1969), edited by poet Sergio Mondragón and writer Margaret Randall. Avant-garde experimentation blossomed even more with the presence in our country of Chilean Alejandro Jodorowsky, who in the early part of the decade began to direct Beckett's plays. As a kind of turning point, in 1965, books were published that were as different as *La hija del rey o Electra* (The King's Daughter or Electra) by playwright Luisa Josefina Hernández; *La señal* (The Sign), with its 14 short stories, by Inés Arredondo; *Gazapo* (Young Rabbit/Great Lie) by Gustavo Sáinz, with its return to day-to-day life and colloquial language; *José Trigo*, by Fernando del Paso; and a predominantly descriptive work with certain influence of the French *nouveau roman*, although with a handling of symbols and existential ingredients that separate it from that current: *Farabeuf o la crónica de un instante* (Farabeuf or the Chronicle of an Instant) by Salvador Elizondo.

For many, this novel (or "anti-novel") was very difficult to read. It turned its back on what



has been considered the "Mexican literary tradition" and was one of the great experiments in the novel during the 1960s. In the words of Octavio Paz, *Farabeuf* describes "an erotic ritual that is simultaneously a surgical operation, a political-religious conspiracy, and a ceremony of divination."¹ To this precise description, we should add that Elizondo follows Charles Baudelaire's lead in *Fusées*, where he compares coitus with surgery and torture. Baudelaire knew that in the three cases there was *intervention* of a foreign body and an experience in which individual identity was annulled. *Farabeuf* also borrows from another text by Baudelaire, *Ma-*

* Fiction writer and essayist.

dame Bistouri, as well as from Franz Kafka's short story *The Penal Colony*, in which the torture consists of writing with needles about his own guilt on the victim's body. Elizondo's profound admiration for Chinese culture is also evident (he took formal courses in Chinese at El Colegio de México, and it is not by chance that *Farabeuf* begins with a reading from the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*, the oracle of the Chinese emperors). But above all, his work shows admiration for Georges Bataille's concept of eroticism and the "scientific" discourse taken from a real surgical manual written by a Dr. Farabeuf, of no relation to the main character. And while, as I already mentioned, the novel admits the influence of the *nouveau roman*, in reality, it goes further by including the questioning of identity from the existential point of view.

For Elizondo, the face of the victim he based himself on reveals "something like the mystical essence of torture."² However, *Farabeuf* is both a reflection about representation and about writing about representation. Here is where a marked coincidence with Jorge Luis Borges appears.

For that reason, beyond Baudelaire, in *Farabeuf*, coitus, surgery, torture but also writing are all related. The four activities contain the experience of the "otherness": leaving oneself and destroying identity.

Perhaps the most important device used in *Farabeuf*, in addition to description, is *repetition*, which cancels time and, therefore, narration. The latter is reduced to three instances: the torment of the Chinese man in the early twentieth century (with a historic and pseudo-historic discourse), a French beach (where there are a cliff and some bathers) and the house of Dr. Farabeuf, where the presence of the Ouija board and the *I Ching* make the connection with an esoteric discourse. Two characters run through the book, a man and a woman, although because of their changes, they seem to be several people: a nun and a photogra-

pher, a nurse and a doctor, a victim and a victimizer. The three instances (Beijing, the beach and the house in Paris), united by repetitions and symbols (the dead starfish, the woman in mourning, the collapsing sand castle, the rain, the Chinese ideogram, the hexagram, the position of the victim...), are also united by the experience of ecstasy as a loss of identity: death or orgasm.

In terms of the historic discourse, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Fu Tchu Li is condemned to *leng tche* or dismemberment because according to the newspaper *Chen Pao*, he was found guilty of the murder of Prince Ao-Ovan. A Western photographer went to the torture session and took photos. In 1951, Bataille published *The Tears of Eros*, including three photographs of the torture. Elizondo, who in an interview confessed finding

his inspiration in books and because of that, like Jorge Luis Borges, he considered himself a bookish author (although he excluded his novel *Elsinore* from that category), based himself on one of the photographs and on Bataille's book itself. *Farabeuf* is a *sui generis* manifestation of

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the fantastic novel that transcends dreams to connect up in a fortunate dialectic with objective reality through an almost dispassionate discourse.

Philosophically, the novel meditates about the eternity of the instant and the relativity of time. If a "chronicle" implies "successive time," the subtitle of the first editions is paradoxical: "Chronicle of an instant." The subjectivization of time, characteristic of the modern novel—remember Marcel Proust—is the heir of romanticism, and as such, it emphasizes the individual and everything the interior of the subject implies. An "instant" can become an eternity.

Farabeuf requires an active reader who creates the work as he/she goes along, organizing in his/her mind the links made up of fleetingness. It is simultaneously a reflection about the death instinct (*Thanatos*) and about the dialectical re-

relationship between *Eros* (the life instinct) and *Thanatos*. The primordial image of torture, whose victim achieves ecstasy in death, is the synthesis of that dialectic: the *Yin* and the *Yang* are joined in the *Tao*. The Being and the Non-being of the ancient Hindu and Chinese dialectic are mixed, linked in the instant of the Absolute. The relationship between the sexual act (Being) and death (Non-being)—remember also *la petite morte*, another term for orgasm—is explicit and constant.

Dr. Farabeuf, renowned specialist and the author of treatises on amputation, amputates reality and seeks the union of the fragmentary in an instant of eternity. This is why he loves a nurse, who at the beginning precisely consults the *Book of Changes*, perchance of *metaphysical amputations*. The presence of Farabeuf in Pekin, where he observes the torture, belongs to the distant past and is linked up to a walk on the beach (in another past) and with a present in the doctor's house in Paris, where the woman is the same one who accompanied him to the torture and the walk on the beach. Farabeuf, a professor of medicine, is confused with the narrator: first, second and third persons are mixed in a chaotic, plural apparent reality made of ephemeral instants that trap unity only to let it escape and trap it again. The experience of Love and Death is lived in all times and spaces. The symbolic plane is broad: external and symbolic presences that are repeated until the reader's memory is transported to other instants and tries to find the link that joins them, the unity of all the instants in a single one: the *Tao* of life and of death.

Is Farabeuf the *Yang*, the positive, the sky, the active, masculine principle, that amputates realities? Is the nurse the *Yin*, the negative and passive, the earth, the feminine principle, the victim? Both are joined in the experience of Love and Death. Observe the torture, an experience that is always the same because death or *la petite morte* always come, even if only in an ephemeral, fleeting instant, impossible to grasp without letting it escape.

Farabeuf, a “difficult” novel, despite its “difficulty,” is now 40 years old, which implies that, like many other “hermetic” works of art—remember

the electronic concert music from the mid- and late 1950s or certain abstract expressionist paintings—continues to have a readership—albeit a cultured readership—that can appreciate it on different levels. Like Inés Arredondo's *La señal* (The Sign), *Farabeuf* is part of Mexico's cosmopolitan, universal literature that 40 years later continues to be studied and admired not only for its stylistic quality, but also for its profundity. ■■■



NOTES

- ¹ Octavio Paz, *Generaciones y semblanzas. Obras completas* vol. 4 (Mexico City: Círculo de Lectores-Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996).
- ² Salvador Elizondo, *New Twentieth-Century Mexican Writers Present Themselves Collection* (Mexico City: Empresas Editoriales, 1966), p. 43.

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