

Mexican Magazines: Wealth and Woes

"An initial approach to Latin America can be made through its books," says Fernando Benítez.

To paraphrase him, we'll say Mexico can be approached through the magazines it publishes. A great variety of them, with different formats and content, can be found in any bookstore nationwide.

The range includes publications on film, literature, politics, culture, photography and architecture; there are also publications put out by institutions, political parties, research centers, non-profit organizations and by foreigners exiled in our country. Mexican universities and institutions of higher education also publish their

own magazines, or more than one, as is the case of the National Autonomous University, UNAM.

Decades of social and political stability, a long period of sustained economic growth, and a protective, stimulating attitude toward cultural freedom, are some of the contributing factors to this broad multiplicity of journalistic publications. Such variety is unusual any place else. This unique phenomenon also stems from the new qualities of a country whose population has moved to the cities in the

last decades, leaving behind the rural Mexico of the early part of the century. The nation has also undergone a population explosion and, as a result, a majority of Mexicans are young.

These factors help explain the extraordinary development of the publishing industry in Mexico over the last 20 years. It is also the context to keep in mind when we view our magazines, some of which have become undisputed points of social reference, such as the weekly *Proceso*, containing information and analysis on Mexican and world events, the monthly *Vuelta*, a literary magazine, and the weekly *Punto*, which covers general information.

Veteran newspaperman Julio Scherer García and a group of co-workers from the newspaper *Excelsior* founded *Proceso* in 1976. Scherer is general director of the magazine, and the well-known writer and playwright Vicente Leñero is assistant-director. Some of Mexico's foremost intellectuals, such as Carlos Monsiváis, Heberto Castillo and Fernando del Paso, write for the magazine, as do international figures like Gabriel García Márquez. During its ten-year life-span, *Proceso* has followed an unwavering critical, independent policy, and has earned a first-rate reputation for its analysis of Mexican issues.

Vuelta was founded by poet Octavio Paz, also in 1976, and brings together writers and poets like Salvador Elizondo, Juan García Ponce and Enrique Krauze. The magazine plays a unique role in Mexican literature, and its influence has carried over into an international edition of *Vuelta* which appeared in Buenos Aires in July, co-sponsored by a group of young Argentine intellectuals. *Vuelta* also covers local and international affairs, and publishes pieces by the likes of Bioy Casares, Mario Vargas Llosa and Susan Sontag.

In the May 1986 issue of *Vuelta*, Octavio Paz gave some of his views on the current historical situation, illustrating his magazine's project. In an interview granted to French intellectual Jean Francois Revel, Paz said: "On the one hand we are Euro-



Photo by Renzo Costoli.

Newspaper stand in Mexico City a large selection, little quality.

pean, like the United States. At the same time, we are doubly marginal. To begin with, we are heirs to a culture, that of Spain and Portugal, which was itself marginated during the XVIII century. Spain didn't really have a Century of Enlightenment. Additionally, we Latin Americans had an unfortunate XIX century: the wars of independence didn't really help modernize our countries. Yet all of these disadvantages changed to advantages when Latin America's intellectuals turned to Europe in order to assimilate her culture. We saw Europe as a whole. Since

the early part of the century we moved closer, not to Spain, but above all to France. And through France we became interested in German philosophy and in England, and then we naturally returned to Spain. Thus, we are the eccentric offspring of the West. It is this eccentricity which often makes our point of view polemical and distant."

If we consider *Vuelta* as the most prestigious Mexican publication abroad, because it publishes some of our internationally re-known writers, then we would say that *Punto*

and *Nexos* represent a younger generation of writers, journalists and political analysts with a more critical attitude, sometimes openly contrary to official policy. These publications are both sympathetic to new on-going experiences in Latin America, yet tend to be read in relatively narrow circles, readers and analysts whose social and cultural level is above the norm. On the other side of the ideological spectrum publications like *Impacto* and *Siempre!* represent an older, more traditional press that seems to be undergoing a period of relative decline and

loosing influence.

An overview of Mexican magazines would be incomplete if we failed to mention the political and cultural publications put out in our country by exiles fleeing repression throughout Latin America over the last ten or fifteen years. Among the most outstanding of these are *Cuadernos del Tercer Mundo*, (Third World Notebooks), with a shared Mexican-Brazilian editorial board, and *Cuadernos de Marcha*, an editorial experience that originated in Uruguay.

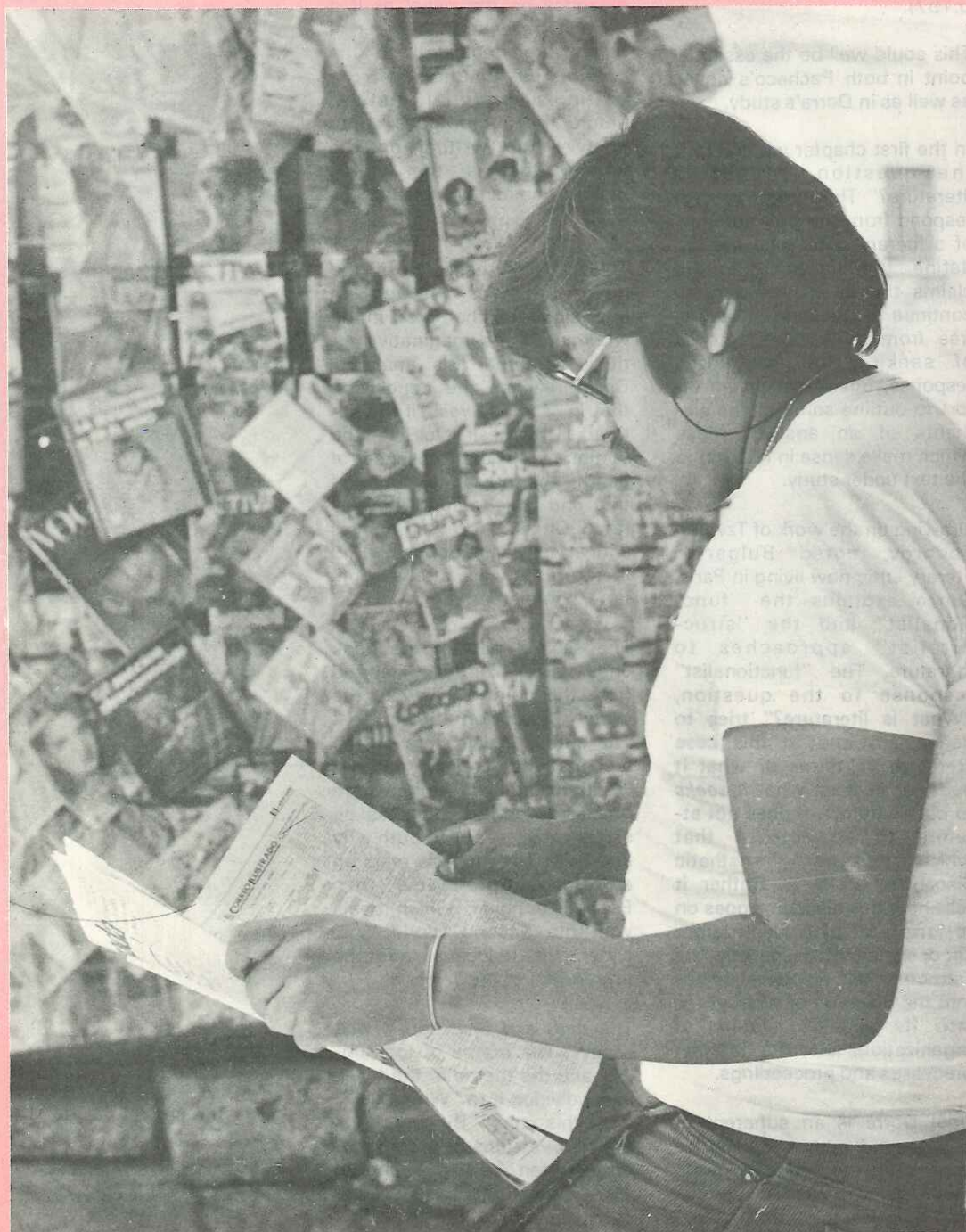
Finally, among university magazines, it's important to mention the *Magazine of the National Autonomous University of Mexico*, and *Casa del Tiempo*, (The House of Time), published by the Autonomous Metropolitan University (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, UAM). Both appear regularly and feature articles by high-quality writers.

We should add that with falling oil prices and the acute economic crisis, Mexican publishing has fallen on hard times. Most of the paper, type-setting and printing equipment, and other materials used in printing, are imported from the U.S. Thus, prices have skyrocketed, and some publications have become unprofitable.

This situation has given rise to new editorial experiments, such as magazines conceived as newsprint tabloids. Such is the case of *Dicine*, which specializes in film topics and is headed by film-critic Emilio García Riera. *Traza* was another similar experience, done along the lines of New York's *Skyline* magazine. Among the members of its editorial board were National Award to the Arts winner Teodoro González de León, an architect, and the North American Paul Heyer.

There is no denying that economic woes have complicated publishing considerably. At this point, the only magazines whose future seems secure are those firmly rooted in their readers, and those whose institutional financing frees them from economic pressure.

Pedro Sondereguer



Reading a newspaper while waiting for customers.