



Our Voice

David Bowie sings, “Turn and face the strange/changes,” and I think of how shortsighted, naïve, and optimistic I was eight months ago—which feel like eight lifetimes ago—when I heard the Coordinator of Humanities, a contributor to this issue, say we were on the brink of an epochal change.

Facing the unfamiliar. Experiencing how the unknown takes control of our bodies, dilutes the borders of our spaces, transforms our perception of time, expels us from ourselves as, paradoxically, we are forced to isolate, to learn new ways of socializing, teaching, and learning.

Change is the thread running through this issue of *Voices of Mexico*, which seeks to advance our understanding of this period that, like a painful parody of Luis Buñuel’s film *The Exterminating Angel*, keeps us locked down, incapable of fully deciphering the reasons for our confinement and uncertainty.

Thus, the articles, short stories, and poems featured in this issue oscillate from reflections on a “normal” past, to which we can never return, to the political, environmental, educational, and economic effects that other social forces produce. Highlighting their inequalities, from our authors’ diverse perspectives, the word “crisis” winds its way through these richly illustrated pages.

But in them we also find a narrative of a challenge and a search for solutions, dealing not only with our responses to the pandemic but to urban or social issues related to the condition of women or migrants, or, in another context, with the dissemination of culture when live audiences are impossible.

And in addition, other forms of expression, through varied forms of poetry, of the word, of the body, of images, or of sounds, have found new ways to burst the constraints of Zoom and electronic monitoring, to describe the absence that defines our socially distanced day-to-day lives.

This issue on change responds to our sense of disorientation because, while it is true that everything is in constant change, this epochal change has washed over us with unrelenting force, with no end in sight.

David Bowie sings, “I watch the ripples change their size/But never leave the stream/of warm impermanence/and so the days float through my eyes/But still the days seem the same. . . . Pretty soon you’re gonna get older/Time may change me/But I can’t trace time.” ■■■

Please, wear a mask.

Graciela Martínez-Zalce
Director of the Center for Research on North America
December 2020

CHANGE



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Guadalupe Valencia García*

Times of Change, Changing Times The Temporal Disturbance of COVID-19

The time is out of joint; O curs'd spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

It is perfectly obvious that COVID-19, declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020, has wrought enormous changes in the world. These transformations are expressed in all dimensions of our lives: in the new day-to-day realities; in our emotions, today marked by the fear of contagion; in our economy; and in heightened inequalities and violence. They are also seen in our conceptions

of the world, our research agendas, our ways of working. In fact, the coming changes in our ways of life, of working, of socially interacting are still difficult to imagine, much less to calculate precisely.

But if any dimension of our existence expresses the changes that have already occurred, it is time, or the temporality of COVID-19. Conceiving of this crisis in the code of time offers us a good perspective on its complexity. If anything can characterize the time of the pandemic in its multiple dimensions and scales of understanding, it is

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something we could call “temporal malaise”: a time that is “out of joint,” that has lost its way, has lost its wits, and expresses itself as a slight indisposition, as disquiet and unease, as frenetic anxiety, or as frank irritation.

Time can be seen in COVID code because the pandemic that has overtaken us permeates, top to bottom, all orders and dimensions of our existence. And since our existence is temporal, then everything that happens to us, everything we do, the way in which we do it, and what we can no longer do are all mediated by the new times: the times imposed by the pandemic. This is so much so that today the social sciences and the humanities are thinking about the world and national problems the pandemic has brought into being and also rethinking themselves starting with the pandemic. Health and healthcare systems, migration, education, housing, the use of space, social rights, the economy, mobility, gender violence and many other issues are today being thought about in COVID code. But also being considered are sustainability, climate change, modern rationality, and the transformations that COVID will necessarily bring to our lives, as well as—with hope—the possibilities of transformation so that there is no return to a normality that will not only not be possible but is also undesirable.

I will dedicate this brief space to putting forward some of the main temporal dimensions of the pandemic; dimensions that manifest themselves on scales that, regardless of their apparent distance, are fully interwoven in this world health crisis. In the first place, the pandemic as a temporary dislocation of nature and society. If we go to its true origin, the pandemic did not come from China or Wuhan. Its real roots are to be found in the abuse of nature that many authors have already pointed out. We are quite aware that global warming and environmental mutations have led to this and other previous pandemics. And they can lead to many more if we do not change our tack. The scientific community has been alerting us for years about the relationship among the loss of biodi-

versity, the destruction of ecosystems, intensive agriculture and animal husbandry, the illegal trade in wildlife, and the increase in zoonotic diseases.

In the opposite sense, the drop in human activities that the pandemic has forced across the globe, the slowing rhythm of that world machinery of productivism, has diminished the irritation of a wounded, abused planet, bringing us clean skies, less human-made noise, and the recovery of wildlife. This kind of forced social hibernation showed just how damaging to our common home is the breakneck pace of a way of life centered on accumulation and consumption at the cost of our own health, of life itself. As Gabriel Markus rightly points out, the world order before the pandemic was not normal: it was lethal.¹

The pandemic can be seen as a global, total event. It is a total event not only because it involves the world geopolitical dimension, but because it permeates our existence top to bottom. It is a multidimensional event that touches on all aspects of life. And it is global because there is no corner of the planet that escapes its effects. For the first time in history, the entire world seems to stop, or at least to slow down. More than three billion people, half the world’s population, on all the continents, in the great cities and in small towns were, are, or will be locked down. The isolation of those who can shut themselves up at home takes place at the cost of others who cannot because they provide the population with food, services, and the products it needs. Economic activity has collapsed; unemployment rises; the crisis threatens us.

According to Humberto Beck,² an event is not a moment that brings historicity to a standstill as the occurrence of a unique, singular phenomenon that will mark a before and an after in the flow of history. It is, rather, a temporal, historical condensation of the heterogeneous, which spurs both the saturation of meaning and its apparent suspension. Continuity has been broken, and, in the kingdom of discontinuity, we are not completely sure what direction we can take: we aim for a return to a normality that has remained in the recent past. We are facing a future that does not seek the novel, but to turn back—as though that were possible—to return to a regularity that has been destabilized. It is a global event because it happens to everyone at the same time, everywhere, and affects all societies and individuals even regardless of whether there are places where that little drop of saliva that begins the small-scale replication of the worldwide disaster

has not arrived yet. The effects, to a greater or lesser degree, will be felt in every corner and crevice of the planet. As never before, we are now contemporaries, and we are also contemporaries with a virus that will mark an era in which living generations will remember this time when we lived dangerously.

In daily life, we all feel the loss of the sovereign use of our time. Some of us could make short- and long-term plans, take trips, move about, organize meetings and events. For others, the majorities in countries with greater social inequalities, the times of a job and a more or less secure wage or a precarious—but in the end possible—job are also threatened.

The temporal mechanism resulting from a social organization that pays attention to schedules and calendars has been tremendously upset, forcing us to work, when we are able to, in front of a screen to be able to work from home. While it is true that work now invades private spaces, today, private spaces are almost completely assimilated by the rhythms, sequences, needs, and demands of work. Even children must do their learning at home. But only a minority of the population has a home office. The less fortunate have no more screens than the windows in their precarious homes, and they cannot stay home, or they do and suffer the consequences of not being able to earn their daily bread.

From the temporal point of view, the main characteristic of the onset of the period we are experiencing

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materially and symbolically, besieged by the state of emergency brought on by the COVID-19 global pandemic, is doubt, uncertainty, and the destabilization of the temporal series that unfolded before. The latter gave our present, immediately before the emergence of the pandemic, a stabilizing cross-cutting axis between the recent past and the more-or-less shared images of the near future.


Time can now be our worst punishment or our best ally for the gradual construction of a new us: true otherness, which knows that salvation is either collective or does not exist, is more imperative today than ever. **MM**


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Notes


- 1 Markus, Gabriel, "El virus, el sistema letal y algunas pistas para después de la pandemia," *Sopa de Wuhan* (Argentina: ASPO, 2020).
- 2 Humberto Beck, "El acontecimiento entre el presente y la historia," *Desacatos, Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, no 55, CIESAS, 2017.


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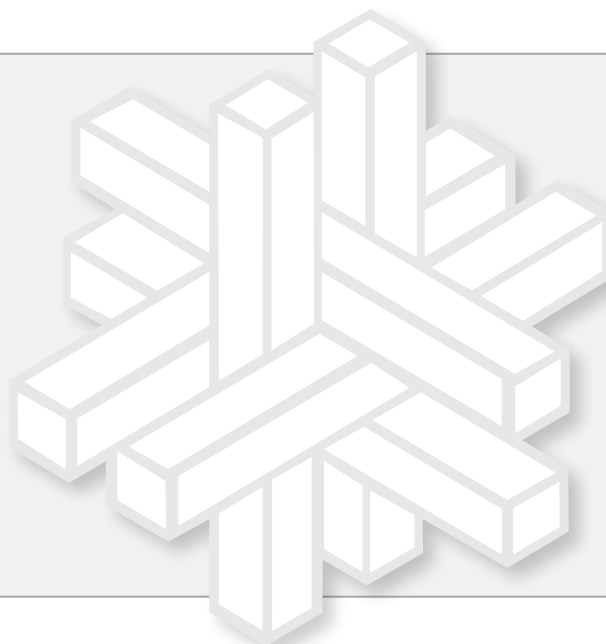
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Paz Consuelo Márquez-Padilla*

Populism: A Dangerous Change

At the end of the nineteenth century a populist movement arose in the United States in response to the industrial revolution and its accompanying rapid modernization. The Populist Party (1892) favored government intervention to quell injustices generated by the excesses of the free market. Nativist groups also opposed the Chinese immigration taking place at the time.

The final years of the twentieth century were characterized by euphoria over globalization, liberal democracy, the rule of law, and checks and balances. The great social, economic, and cultural changes this produced gave rise to both left-wing and right-wing populist movements in many parts of the world. They sprang up, once again, as reactions to accelerated changes, modernization, and immigration.

The 2008 crisis showed capitalism's ugly side, where the costs and benefits of social cooperation are not eq-

uitably distributed. As wealth became more concentrated, the crisis expelled middle and lower classes from the "American Dream." In a context of economic crisis, in addition to globalization and automation, great migrations took place in 2015 and 2016 in Europe (also due to wars) and in the Americas (due to violence), in which migrants organized large caravans, although not on the same scale on each continent.

Democracy and capitalism, which Francis Fukuyama saw as the only possible routes after the fall of the Berlin Wall, did not produce the same results for the whole of society.¹ While globalization created more wealth in the world and has reduced poverty in many places, like China and India, it has also promoted the concentration of wealth and facilitated inequality among social strata and countries, because the economic elites have acquired unbridled political power and, according to Fukuyama, have returned to a patrimonial state.

These conditions help explain Trump's election as president of the United States and England's departure

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from the European Union (Brexit). Both events signal that groups exist who feel excluded and forgotten by the current system and are nostalgic for a country they believe no longer exists. In the case of the United Kingdom, it is mainly nostalgia for the status of a great empire, for a nation without immigrants, and opposition to receiving orders and directives from the European Parliament.

In the U.S. case, the crisis is of representation: citizens feel neither reflected in nor listened to by the political parties. People perceive politics as something oblivious to their fears, their anger, and the humiliations they face. The Republican and Democratic Parties imposed the neo-liberal Washington Consensus without creating the networks needed to protect those sectors most vulnerable as a result of globalization; in other words, the political and economic elites lost their ties to the masses. Free markets, deregulation, and lower taxes for the elites facilitated greater concentration of wealth in fewer hands. Additionally, immigration has produced cultural changes. All of this has contributed to growing discontent with liberal democracy for not producing the desired results.

Unemployed white male U.S. citizens with little formal education feel a loss of identity. Their world has disappeared, and they feel excluded from the one that exists. As they were losing their jobs to automation and relocation of factories to places with lower wages, they perceived that minorities were becoming more empowered. Women's voices, with the feminist movement, the LGBTQ+ community, African-Americans, and Latinos became stronger, while white workers, particularly older ones, believed that "others" along with immigrants—with different cultures and languages—were questioning their traditional culture. They considered themselves forgotten and disrespected and that only a right-wing populist leader like Trump heard them.

Same sex marriages, LGBTQ+ rights, and multiculturalism are perceived as threats to the community imagined by white males with little formal education. In this

context, a cultural revolution was brewing as a result of identity politics. We no longer speak of citizens' rights but rather the rights of different groups or tribes; what one wins another loses, reducing things to a zero-sum struggle. These fears and the anger at being excluded are real, but people can't express them because they are immediately morally judged by Democrats who demand "political correctness."

As a candidate, Trump heard all of this and formulated an appropriate narrative, promising a return to the mythical past of an imagined all-white society that, in fact, never existed. He sought to stop immigration as a means for solving all problems; he resorted to protectionism to help manufacturing by bringing back companies that accelerate climate change, and called for a struggle against corruption and the Establishment.

The rapid changes brought on by globalization provoke reactions because there are winners but also losers. Society becomes polarized, and that creates fertile ground for movements like populism, which were thought to be part of the past, thereby generating a discourse that rejects immigration, promotes nativism, xenophobia, nationalism, protectionism, and positions that are anti-system, anti-corruption, anti-international institutions, and anti-elites.

The most problematic aspect is that many of these populisms hide behind an alleged fight against governmental corruption when, in fact, they are destroying institutions. The leaders tend to be charismatic and authoritarian, heading anti-pluralist movements, and inciting mistrust of all who hold ideas different from theirs.

The leaders present themselves as the voice of the "good" people in opposition to the elites. They speak of "us" and define the enemy as the "others." There is no willingness to dialogue, only total rejection of other positions. They speak of enemies both inside and outside the country. They simplistically exaggerate their triumphs and downplay their failures. Moreover, they blame others for their bad decisions and erroneous policies. They don't admit to their mistakes. They manipulate language to redefine their positions and lie to invent false victories. They talk about fake news trying to destroy them. They neither assume responsibility nor govern for everyone, excluding a part of society and promoting polarization.

Likewise, they attack institutions, the courts, and the enforcement of the law, to the point of justifying breaking it. They also oppose politicians, technocrats, and sci-

ence in general, and they look down on what they refer to as the “intellectual elite.”

What they present as opposition to corruption is really an attack on the system as it is constituted. Institutions are dismantled, distorted, or ignored. In this situation, democratic institutions, thought to be strong in the United States, are being tested and seem fragile.

These populist leaders are dangerous because they promote polarization, generating hate, fear, outrage, and resentment, and aiming to destroy what is established in order to impose their own criteria. Bit by bit they destroy other parties and drown out other voices, stifling the deliberation among different groups that would lead to the best solutions, and impose their own ideas so they can remain in power. This sometimes gives rise to single-party governments. A certain degree of opposition is permitted when it poses no real threat. The government does not appoint the most intelligent and best prepared, but rather the most loyal, often placing individuals with dubious capabilities in important positions.

Poland’s Law and Justice Party, Viktor Orban’s Fidesz Party in Hungary, and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela are all examples of this kind of populism. They justify limiting the press’s freedom of expression and weakening institutions, arguing that the system has not been fair to them or to the people.

These types of groups—and people—promote conspiracy theories and the idea of alternate realities. They encourage mistrust of the government and of news networks. They repeat lies and spread propaganda. As a tactic, they initiate fiscal or criminal investigations of anyone viewed as an “enemy.” They speak of a revolution against the elites while, paradoxically, exercising an elitist form of government. The leaders impose what they consider to be good for the people. They exclude economic elites, underestimating their role in society. In the United States the globalizing elites are the target.

Some persons or sectors experience uncertainty in contexts of liberal pluralism, a diversity of opinions, and deliberation, so they prefer the application of authoritarian measures to give them a sense of security. When leaders promote fear of immigrants, many average citizens may not have had much contact with them, but they reject the changes they imagine immigration may bring.

We have reached the unthinkable: it is not that there are differences of opinion about the same facts, but rather

the argument that there are “other” facts. In other words, scientific objectivity is disdained or, even worse, it disappears. There are no longer references to determining the veracity or falsehood of a given event or fact.

Unfortunately, the fourth industrial revolution’s new technologies magnify the impact the Internet may have as a tool for increasing polarization. It can be used as a means for disseminating lies and conspiracy theories. Groups form social networks and create self-contained bubbles or cocoons, where only the likeminded participate and receive the same information. Hate, resentment, and disdain are permitted and exponentially reproduced. By using algorithms designed to maximize user attention, specific messages are directed to citizens who think in a similar way. Hence, they become sounding boards that intensify feelings and promote radicalization. Closed communities are formed; the public forum disappears. The leader communicates directly with his/her base or hires experts who feed them the information necessary to accomplish his/her goals. Riding on this wave of communication, the leader rapidly enhances his/her power.

It is also very disturbing that populist movements worldwide, both left-wing and right-wing, are adhering to this contempt for liberal democracy and aiming to delegitimize institutions, particularly international ones. The fear exists that Western values are losing ground and that the state, as they have imagined it, is in danger.

The young have not lived with authoritarianism and the elderly seem to have forgotten it, so they do not perceive the danger. Only active civic participation can defend democracy from populism, which can easily become authoritarian. Leaders should not exclude groups or promote polarization and resentment; nor should they ignore the “others,” but rather govern for all. This is the only way shared problems can be solved. The danger lies not only in the opposition to liberal democracy but also in the opposition to democracy itself.

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We cannot deny that the populists' diagnosis is, in part, correct. Rapid changes have caused uncertainty. Some social groups have been forgotten, but the solutions they are trying to impose can be very dangerous as they undermine liberal democracy, the result of centuries of social and political struggles. There is no doubt that this democracy should be more inclusive, but destroying it poses a great threat to our civilization.

The pandemic, the economic crisis, and social movements created a context of great uncertainty during the elections in the United States last November. Nevertheless, voter turnout was a historically high 67 percent. Some defend liberal democracy and promote deliberation and social unity in a multicultural society. Others prefer to continue with Donald Trump's populist style, imposing simple solutions to complex problems, like building a wall to stop immigration and precipitating a trade war with China, in addition to supporting white supremacist groups.

At the time this article was written, Joe Biden had 302 electoral votes compared to 232 for Trump, and over 7 million more popular votes. Despite this, the president had not recognized his defeat and has tried to delegitimize the election results. The world's oldest and most consolidated democracy is being put to the test once again, since it seems that there will be no easy transition to the new Biden-Harris administration. In spite of the law suits initiated by Trump in various states claiming that the election was fraudulent, no evidence has been found to support such allegations. At any rate, a difference of a few votes would hardly change the outcome, even though, as it is argued, 77 percent of Republicans do not think that the election was free and fair.²

We can't ignore that Trump, who is still president until January 20, received 73 million votes—the second highest number ever received by any candidate—which shows just how polarized U.S. society is today.

The populist movement has not disappeared; it has grown. Trump received 5 million more votes than he did

in 2016. Furthermore, everything seems to indicate that the Republicans will retain control of the Senate. They won ten additional seats in the House of Representatives and had victories in local legislatures as well. Paradoxically, Trump gained votes among minorities, perhaps as a result of the money they received from the stimulus package or because they perceive him to be a stronger leader more capable of handling economic issues.

Therefore, we can affirm that democracy is still under threat from populist movements that delegitimize institutions, and it will only survive if citizens actively participate to defend it.

President-elect Joe Biden inherits a very difficult situation marked by an economic crisis, a pandemic, social movements, and a deeply divided society. The circumstances demand that the most progressive wing of the Democratic Party not exert too much pressure; and the same holds for the Republicans' most conservative wing. The president of all U.S. Americans has to take back the center in order to achieve deliberation and reach consensus that will benefit all members of society in pursuit of a more inclusive democracy. ■■■

Further Reading

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Notes

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- 2 Catherine Kim, "Poll: 70% of Republicans Don't Think the Election Was Free and Fair," *Politico*, November 9, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/09/republicans-free-fair-elections-435488>.



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Leonardo Curzio*

The United States Exceptionalism and Heterodoxy

As a research topic, the United States has been exceptionally magnetic. Understanding the U.S. is a sweeping intellectual adventure due to its political, social, racial, religious, and historic particularities. Tocqueville is the obligatory reference point since he left us so many keys to understanding this country, and, through it, the evolution of democracies and the role of popular culture and associationism. Other fascinating works exist, such as that of Paul Johnson, which continues to be one of the most beautiful ever written about the history and epic story of a people. Few have managed to capture the essence of the U.S. American nation as he did. Henry Levy wrote an intriguing book—which, by the way, he dedicated to Cullen Murphy, who years later would write that self-reflexive essay about the parallel between

Rome and the United States—in the form of a travelogue in which he recognized that the U.S. giant was divided, wounded, split. The country suffered from the disorientation caused by being caught between its imperial destiny, which, as Fergusson accurately commented, it has never dared recognize, and its democratic horizon, which has been the inspiration for so many peoples.

Now, a large part of the interpretational approaches and biases that have until today conditioned our perceptions of the United States deserve to be revisited in light of the three dynamics that are simultaneously having an impact on its current situation. In recent decades, the United States has experienced a feeling of being at a crossroads—in fact, this was the title of a book by Fukuyama—, two apparently irreconcilable roads forward that branch off in different directions. On the one hand is a country that lives in the central part of its territory, drifting toward a

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polarizing conservatism; and on the other hand, a country living on the coasts, much more cosmopolitan and leaning toward understanding that, in addition to being a nation of continental proportions, it is also the leader of the international system.

The United States today is immersed in a hegemonic transition that tends to reduce its economy's relative importance in global figures. This specificity has created growing tensions with China and a few other Asian countries and has awakened in the strategic debate the concern about its relative decline as a power. Undeniably, the Asian economies have high growth rates and a model of economic organization that has proven effective for guaranteeing rapid growth, which the United States has not achieved due to a combination of factors ranging from its inability to renovate its infrastructure to an increasingly dysfunctional political system. However, the United States maintains its military primacy. No other power will be able to challenge it in this field in the foreseeable future. It is also preeminent in the most dynamic sectors of the economy. The main firms that shape the fourth industrial revolution are U.S. American, and its universities continue to be functional for guaranteeing that U.S. particularity of linking science to the productive sector. As Tom Wolfe said derisively, a country that invents the iPhone is not in decline. It also has an enormous reserve of soft power that allows its cultural industries to ensure unparalleled hegemony worldwide.

The United States has undergone a demographic change that is challenging for its white, Anglo-Saxon population. The issue of race, as Eduardo Porter has said, is a poison more present than ever. A poison that explains the political polarization and social tensions due to police mistreatment of African-Americans. It is equally present in the country's original sin: being a democracy of whites. The United States has not managed to develop solidarity-based systems to care for vulnerable populations, among other reasons because solidarity breaks down when it is a matter of helping people whose skin has different pigmentation. The racial difference did not divide the United States only in the nineteenth century due to slavery; other communities, such as the Latinos and the Asians, have been growing in numbers and in geographical presence, generating cultural imbalances, and, therefore political imbalances in communities that were previously homogenous. I will not stop here to analyze all the political

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impacts of this population change. Suffice it to state that the issue of belonging to an ethnically differentiated group has opened up a profound debate in academic circles about identity, communications media that stridently underline the differences instead of focusing on shared identities, and a politically nativist, white supremacist discourse that experienced the presidency of Barack Obama as an affront.

The United States is also going through a domestic debate about its role in the world. In the 1990s, still drenched in optimism after the fall of the USSR, people talked about the nation that was indispensable for providing global stability. Gingrich maintained that there was no nation as diverse ethnically, as complex culturally, and with values as universal as the United States. But growing numbers of voices questioned the idea that U.S. interests could be guaranteed through an international system that defended values in a scattered, imprecise way. George W. Bush's victory over Al Gore brought to the fore, among other things, the difference between a cosmopolitan United States that could sell politically in New York very well, but was less and less understood in Montana or Idaho. From a reductionist point of view, the idea that the United States' global projection and its global responsibility clashed with the interests of those communities that, due to the political system's particularities, might be over-represented in the presidential election began to filter into the political discourse. It is not surprising that Donald Trump said at the United Nations that the world was not one of the globalists, but of the patriots. The driving force of globalization was prisoner of the dilemmas that many other countries face; that is why several authors have suggested that U.S. exceptionalism is coming to an end.

Perhaps the two parts of the society that in the last elections have shown enormous stability in their predictions understand each other less and less and remain that way because the voting system continues to allow for an over-representation of the agricultural states that

have frankly shifted regressively in recent years. This reactionary turn has loudly expressed itself in a militant conservatism that Velasco analyzed a few years ago, and has now been dissected by Jorge Castañeda in a recent book.

Castañeda has written a book that fits in the tradition already alluded to of great intellectuals who reflect on the U.S. condition. The effort of using the telescope and the microscope to understand that country's complexity is interesting. Castañeda was educated in the United States and therefore has perceptive personal experience. He has been a professor at different universities, from Princeton to California and today at NYU. But he has also been a left-leaning intellectual who, from a tradition that combines a French vision and a Latin American spirit, has clashed with the United States on different headlands.

He has done so from the field of journalism: he demonstrated, for example, that it was easy to forge a green card, and therefore exposed the hypocritical way in which undocumented migration is combatted. He was also Mexico's minister of the exterior, and it fell to him to negotiate briefly to create a migratory accord and a new general understanding with the United States—the former was cut short because the 2001 terrorist attacks permanently closed the window of opportunity that the beginning of the Fox administration and the audacity of the foreign minister had opened up.

No one could deny that the author of *Estados Unidos: en la intimidad y a la distancia* (The United States: In Private and at a Distance) enjoys a unique experience and combines experiential proximity with the broad reading of the intellectual. The book maintains that the United States is losing the exceptional character that it has self-defined it. Social mobility begins to be as normal as that of any other country. The idea of an American Dream, the hope of several generations, has stopped being a clear truth in the last 50 years; the inclusion of vulnerable groups has been quite a bit slower than in other times of history.

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Some bases for mobility like a meritocracy of professionals that could change their fate in a few years begin to be questioned with figures that show that the concentration of wealth is no different than what exists in any other country. The presidential system that was the touchstone of U.S. exceptionalism is beginning to be dysfunctional; at least twice in this century, the winner of the popular vote has not won the electoral college.

Race continues to be at the center of the great polarization in the country, and the question is if the original sin of having maintained slavery as an engine for economic growth but with racial segregation can be fought with mechanisms of inclusion that today are part of the political debate and that a new generation of U.S. Americans will have to look at through new eyes. Castañeda maintains that the new generations already have different values that could lead to a change in the medium term and make the United States a country with universal systems of protection that will avoid those breaks that so damage the national community. We'll see.

The most interesting issue is the way he links the inertia rooted in the political system and the need to co-exist with aberrant elements that are leading them into blind alleys. He puts forward four elements based on a combination of denying reality and a radical normative response. Harsh laws combine with a prudent will to ignore what is happening right around them. The most obvious case is the drugs consumed more and more—and more systematically—by millions of people. The overwhelming reality reflected in movies and TV series in which everyone smokes or consumes psychoactive substances completely naturally, while outwardly being Puritanically prohibitionist. The also overwhelming reality of thousands of people who die every year from overdoses or populate the downtown areas of many cities in worse and worse conditions. A harsh reality that it is better to partially ignore if you can use the prohibitionist paradigm, particularly if you also have a third country to blame.

It is also interesting how they have viewed migration historically. In an article published in the journal *Norteamérica*, I called it "strategic ignorance," that is, the counterpart of strategic intelligence: everything that must be ignored in order to be able to move ahead. Castañeda explains the double standard that U.S. Americans have used to preserve a *status quo* that conservatives dub unsustainable but will not touch. A bloody paradox.

The issue of mass incarceration is also revealing. The United States is the OECD-member country with the largest number of prison inmates. In 2019, there were more than 2.2 million, the product of jailing the largest number of persons for the greatest number of crimes possible as a response to a crisis of insecurity. Another factor that helps explain why our neighbor to the north has so many people behind bars is the power of district and state's attorneys. The country of freedoms is the one that prohibits and punishes the most.

Other flies in the ointment involve guns and capital punishment, but the most peculiar one is intelligent design, an elegant way of talking about creationism in society. The intrusion of religious discourse in educational systems is only thinkable in a system like that of the United States.

This is how the United States is moving through the twenty-first century, like a country that is less and less exceptional, where even the sitting president can argue, like in many republics south of the Rio Grande, that he is the victim of fraud. ■■■

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Ariadna Estévez*

COVID-19 and “Zoomist” Forced Migration

COVID-19-driven permanent lockdown will not stop forced migration. It will continue because global confinement has increased poverty and inequality in impoverished countries and places where conflicts continue. However, the new pandemic will stigmatize human mobility the same way HIV/AIDS stigmatized gay sex and drug use —class, gender, and race will determine stigmatization targets. Virologist Luc Montagnier, who won the Nobel Prize for his research on HIV, claimed a remarkable similarity between SARS-CoV-2, the cause of COVID-19, and HIV, the cause of AIDS. Since both viruses attack the immune system, Montagnier argued that SARS-CoV-2 was created in a laboratory embedding HIV into a coronavirus. Of course, this assertion has entered the pantheon of the conspiracy theories around the new worldwide pandemic threatening the civilization model known as globalization. It may be the case that both

viruses’ biochemistry is different, and they have no biological connection. However, the truth is that both viruses have similarities in their social and discursive construction, in how we assign them human materiality and bodies.

HIV/AIDS, we know, emerged in the early 1980s, first attacking men who had sex with other men and then other groups, which stigmatized the spread: drug users and hemophiliacs. The first person to be infected with HIV was a man in Africa who consumed chimpanzee meat; chimpanzees are carriers of a similar virus called the simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV). So far, HIV/AIDS has killed 35 million people all over the world. However, HIV was widespread among gay men and drug users in its early stages, leading to the biased and prejudiced claim that it was a disease of gays and drug users. This idea permeated the world’s imagination for a long time, making its diagnosis, treatment, and social visibility very difficult and shameful in a hetero-patriarchal world.

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The SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19, for its part, received its name so as not to stigmatize nationalities in the way that the Spanish or Chinese influenza previously did. The new coronavirus emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan, so that stigma was easy to establish. The first carriers of SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 to the West were travelers, middle-class and wealthy people returning from vacation, business trips, and backpacking. Immigrants in Europe and North America returned to their home countries for the winter holidays taking the virus to Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Although SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 took a colonial route to spread worldwide, it is likely that, like HIV/AIDS, it will stigmatize the mobility of the poorest, the new underclasses of the COVID-19-generated microeconomics (“Zoomism”), and the peoples who were already facing conflict, violence, and environmental degradation. Mobility will be the new “unsafe sex.” However, let us not forget that control over mobility has always been associated with at least two characteristics: class and race. Within class and race, gender and sexual orientation deepen stigmatization experiences. COVID-19 is likely to pick on the most vulnerable and stigmatize them. In this case, the “infectious” bodies will be those of the “Zoomist” forced migration.

“Zoomism” is a term I first used in a short article to describe the new form of production emerging from self-enclosure and the increasing and intensive use of teleconferencing platforms like Zoom for work, education, and leisure purposes—hence, the term Zoomism.¹ I wrote that article a couple of months after the global lockdown started; my understanding of how Zoomism affected migration was embryonic. In this article, I shall pick up on the original idea and offer a prospective analysis of the probable impact of Zoomism on migration. The argument is that Zoomism will intensify the precarious conditions of what Standing (2015) called the “precariat,” creating new underclass layers, which I shall describe as the Zoomist nomad and the “walking waste.”

Zoomism

In the short article referred to above, I argued that for the middle classes around the world, mobility control started through what I called “Zoomism.” A year ago, few people knew about Zoom, a platform for digital teleconferencing. Although other platforms have emerged (Meet, Jitsi,

Webex, Blackboard), the word “Zoom” has become part of daily life and even a verb describing the work-related activities in confinement. Zoom established the production model for which capitalism is disciplining us; it names a series of socioeconomic changes as significant as the transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism. The current change aims to immobilize us sufficiently to control human mobility without bringing production and consumption to a halt. Zoomism is a microeconomy of self-enclosure.

Fordism was the industrial production model that replaced Taylorism and guaranteed full employment and universal or employment-linked social and economic rights after World War II. The passage from Fordism to Post-Fordism in the late 1970s instituted a model of economic regulation based on labor and organizational flexibility through transnational networks over institutional sites. Networks include states as well as non-governmental organizations and corporations. The sophistication of digital technologies allowed for increasing labor flexibility, which produced ever-increasing labor insecurity and precariousness.²

Zoomism will be the production model for self-enclosure, which also increases added value since businesses are transferring their corporate offices’ operating costs to workers—electricity, the Internet, water, and even coffee. Without the need for time to travel, commute to work, and even venture outside for leisure, workers become more productive. The lockdown is disciplining us to immobility, to seclude our bodies, and to project our professional avatars through digital platforms, reformulating the perception of time and space of globalization. David Harvey conceptualized this as the compression of space and time through information technology and low-cost flights that increased and changed tourism, business, and work. We will progress from a relative perception of global space-time as something compressed to space-time perception and experience in absolute terms: a materially immobile present and space that moves only virtually.

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Zoomism leads to the emergence of new economic sectors and the radical digital transformation of others while pushing still others to close definitively (manufacturing, entertainment, the arts, sports, publishing, retail, fashion, restaurants, tourism, and transportation). Zoomism is leaving millions of people unemployed, earning half their wages, or experiencing even more flexible work hours. Zoomist microeconomics has gender implications because homeschooling has pushed millions of women worldwide to give up their jobs or drastically cut their work hours. Also, thousands of internal and international migrants are returning to their home countries or regions because they have lost their jobs or their business or are unable to pay the rent in global cities. These newly unemployed people include youngsters and young adults studying abroad, men and women with clerical or teaching jobs, women and men who lost their small businesses, and women forced to seek family support because of their young children's homeschooling.

What will happen with this Zoomist unemployment and generalization of part-time work? I believe that Zoomism will continue to impact work and, consequently, class and migration.

The New COVID-19-Forced Migrants: The Zoomist Nomad and the Walking Waste

Throughout the pandemic's first year, the economic impact on the population's well-being reversed the initial class trend discussed in the first part. While the upper classes were able to keep their jobs, people in manual and clerical jobs in the so-called "essential" activities could not remain locked up or lose their jobs. This differentiated class and gender impact on work will eventually produce new forms of forced migration generated by Zoomist economics and related labor reorganization. Zoomism will intensify and make massive mobility a logic of digital work beyond what scholars call the "digital nomad."³ It will be

a historical adaptation of what Karl Marx⁴ called the "nomadic population" based on the massive increase of "digital commuters" (Thompson 2018).⁵ There will be two types of Zoomist migrants: the existing privileged digital nomads and two new layers of the precariat (Standing 2015): the Zoomist nomad and the walking waste.

Back in 1997, Tsugio Makimoto and David Manners envisaged a world in which "The Internet would provide a liberatory utopia in which [a] worker[s] could log on (from the beach), work four hours a week, and then catch the afternoon waves on his surfboard—and he was surely male."⁶ This type of worker was the digital nomad, enabled by the gig economy—the digital service-based economy in which work is project-based. As soon as the digital nomad completes the project, the app-based employer has no further commitment. The gig economy's precarious workers have neither rights nor pension or health care certainty. Before the 2020 COVID-19 epidemic, digital nomadism was a lifestyle for an entire generation of young people in the First World: Millennials. Thompson claims that digital nomads are different from an even more precarious kind of digital worker: the telecommuter. "(Telecommuters are often balancing family duties; while nomads are balancing leisure and work—and rarely, childrearing); both find it challenging to have distinctive boundaries between work, leisure, and family life. . . . Telecommuters with small children in the house, women especially, find it hard to protect their work time from family commitments."⁷

In Zoomism, wealthy travelers, tourists, and elite digital nomads (well-established YouTubers and other influencers) will have no problem traveling because of their economic and social status; they will likely carry vaccine records, or even biological passports, becoming a privileged type of migrant. In contrast, telecommuters will become the digital version of Marx's "nomadic population." When illustrating the general law of capitalist accumulation, Marx locates the nomad population at the bottom of the social heap, the most precarious type of laborer. He argues that the nomadic population is mostly rural people working in the industrial sector, the "light infantry" of capital who are "thrown by it, according to its needs, now to this point, now to that," marching from one workplace to another, living in inadequate housing, carrying disease, and exploited as workers and tenants.⁸

Some scholars have compared labor migrants to Marx's nomadic labor, especially temporary migrant workers.

Others, like Standing, include migrants in a broader lumpen global underclass structure he calls the precariat, a global structure of millions of independent, flexible workers with neither economic stability nor social consciousness; freelancers, digital nomads, and migrants are part of the precariat.⁹ Zoomism is likely to massively increase the telecommuting precariat, exponentially multiplying the numbers of what used to be a small economic sector employing the First World's Millennials. Zoomism is transforming people into labor soldiers and tenants because telecommuting is becoming massive, and their homes are becoming their workplaces, using their own resources and earning half their previous salaries. Thousands must go back to their home regions or countries, back to their parents or abusive partners. They are, of course, potential carriers of the disease (COVID-19). They have become the "Zoomist nomads," a mass of impoverished and more precarious digital nomads and digital commuters.

The most precarious workers, forced migrants, however, are not Zoomist nomads. Manual, industrial, and essential service workers will continue to migrate because they have no qualifications for the Zoomist economy. COVID-19 pandemics will construct this type of migrant as potentially contaminated. Some biases are at play already: Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro said in August 2020 that citizens returning from Colombia would be considered "bioterrorists" and called on people to report them to the authorities. Maduro apologized the next day, but it is a sign that COVID-19 will be associated with precarious mobility. The poor and racialized migrants' bodies will become toxic, similar to what Svetlana Alexievich's book *Voices of Chernobyl* refers to as "walking waste," that is, living beings whose bodies are so toxic that they are not even useful for food.

To sum up briefly, Zoomist workers are more like digital commuters than digital nomads. However, given the

The most precarious workers, forced migrants, are not Zoomist nomads. Manual, industrial, and essential service workers will continue to migrate because they have no qualifications for the Zoomist economy.

Zoomist economic logic, there will be an intensification and worsening of their conditions and they will multiply. An ever-increasing number of digital commuters will eventually become a part of what Karl Marx called the nomadic population, but a digital nomadic population, the Zoomist forced migration. **MM**

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Deportation in Times of COVID-19 The Case of Unaccompanied Minors

Border regimes exist to manage migrants and refugees and use mechanisms such as filtering, selection, entry, permanence, redirection, and, finally, rejection if they are not functional for a given country. Deportation is a fundamental part of this regime. It is where the nation-state and its primary tools for excluding “others” (foreigners) come into play: citizenship vs. foreigner status, belonging vs. deportability, and rights vs. injustice. In fact, all non-citizens, regardless of their legal status in the immigration system of the country where they reside, may be subject to deportation. However, not all of them are expelled nor do they all face the same risk of deportation, which increases to the degree that they are viewed as no longer useful to the destination country.

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The 9/11 terrorist attacks and increased large scale transnational flows of persons in recent decades have spurred the proliferation of deportation policies and practices globally, since nations view these phenomena as undermining their sovereignty. Therefore, a deportation regime has been established, characterized by producing disposable, deportable people, based on criteria of race and class, according to a constantly growing list. The main reasons for inadmissibility include violating immigration laws, participating in criminal acts, or representing a threat to public safety. Furthermore, in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, situations have arisen that have expanded the reasons for deporting certain groups of foreigners, whereby the existing border regime also promotes racialized laws and policies related to sickness and contagion.

Deportation has a long history in the United States; after the September 11 terrorist attacks, it became a central part of “national security” strategy.¹ Obviously, in times

of the pandemic, deportations from the U.S. have not been put on hold.² On the contrary, based on the March 13, 2020 declaration of a national health emergency due to COVID-19 and related norms, the U.S. government continues to expel thousands of migrants in order to “diminish the propagation of the virus,” but without heeding the corresponding health care measures that recommend not deporting persons who are infected. With this practice the U.S. has contributed to spreading the virus in at least 11 developing countries that have deficient health care systems, as was revealed in a study by *The New York Times* and The Marshall Project.³ Detained migrants are confined in small unhealthy spaces where social distancing and hand washing are impossible and personal protective equipment is practically non-existent. This explains why in these facilities, since testing began in February and until November 1, 2020, at least 7 015 detainees had been infected with COVID-19 and 8 had died, as ascertained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) itself.⁴

The Trump administration justifies these practices on the basis of the March 24, 2020 Order Suspending Introduction of Certain Persons from Countries Where a Communicable Disease Exists, a temporary emergency measure (in effect until the emergency is over) that allows the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to prohibit, for reasons of public health, entry to the United States of persons who could spread diseases. This regulation was issued in accordance with the Public Health Service Act of 1944, wherein section §362 (codified in Title 42 of the U.S. Code §265) authorizes the surgeon general of the United States to suspend or prohibit the entry of persons or property from a foreign country when a communicable disease that poses a serious danger of being introduced to the U.S. exists in that country and the suspension is required in the interest of public health.

The CDC order expands and redefines the previous provision. To begin with, it does not impose a requirement that the prohibited person be infected or pose a danger to public health. Furthermore, it does not require an individual determination. The order is carefully designed so as to apply solely to those foreigners without valid travel documents that enter the country by land. In other words, this racialized norm is aimed only at certain groups of persons considered to pose a danger to public health and who are additionally subject to, coincidentally, summary deportation proceedings provided for in the Executive Or-

The current COVID-19 pandemic has prompted situations that have expanded the reasons for deporting certain groups of foreigners, whereby the existing border regime also promotes racialized laws and policies related to sickness and contagion.

der Designating Aliens for Expedited Removal of July 23, 2019. Therefore, the CDC order is only applicable to a specific group of persons and is totally inapplicable to U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents, as intended by the legal foundation upon which it is based (section §362 of the Public Health Service Act of 1944).

In this way the order, invoking the COVID-19 pandemic and using a manipulated and unprecedented interpretation of Section §362 of the 1944 law, has established itself as an alternative norm in immigration matters and as explicit grounds for deporting irregular migrants, asylum seekers, and unaccompanied minors, who comprise the target population. It is thereby in violation of, at least, the following rights of these persons:

- 1) The right to seek asylum in case of persecution, provided for in the Refugee Act of 1980 codified in Title 8 of the U.S.C., section § 1158.
- 2) The right to not be returned to places where they are in danger of persecution as provided for in the Convention on the Status of Refugees of 1951: Article 33 - Prohibition of expulsion or return (“refoulement”).
- 3) The right to be protected against torture, provided for in the Convention against Torture. Since it is part of this international treaty the United States government is obligated to neither expel, extradite, nor return any person involuntarily to a country where substantial grounds exist to believe that they would be in danger of being tortured. This is in compliance with the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998, Pub. L. No. 105-277, 112 Stat. 2681, 2681-821 and the 8 C.F.R. § 208.16(c), that implements the Convention.
- 4) The basic guarantees to the right of due process; while the order does not establish any procedure, it does authorize deportations without a prior hearing and thus denies access to requesting asylum. In fact,

it can be applied to persons traveling far from the border.

In this context, minors as well as adults are deported summarily, without the possibility to request asylum. Some are deported within a few hours of stepping on U.S. soil. Some are taken from U.S. government shelters at midnight, placed on planes, and deported with no notification to their family members. Others are confined alone, for days or weeks, in hotels instead of being sent to government shelters—which are empty and where they could get legal advice—while they await deportation to their countries of origin.⁵ The situation is quite controversial since the Department of Justice has tried to avoid supervision by the courts when detaining unaccompanied minors in hotels, arguing that the hotels are outside the protections provided for by the Flores Agreement of 1997. This agreement establishes general guidelines for the treatment of unaccompanied migrant children in government custody: to keep them in safe and hygienic facilities and make rapid and continuous efforts to release them and reunify them with their families, as well as to provide information on where they are being detained.⁶

Furthermore, this practice violates the legal guarantees and protections for unaccompanied migrant children provided for in the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA). This act requires that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) must make a determination on a case-by-case basis within 48 hours when a minor who is a resident or citizen of a contiguous country is apprehended, even though that minor 1) has not been nor is currently at risk of being a victim of human trafficking; 2) is not afraid to return to the country of which he/she is a citizen; and 3) may make a decision to withdraw the request to be admitted to the United States. In the case of minors who are not from contiguous countries, the law indicates that they should be placed in the “care and

Minors as well as adults are deported summarily, without the possibility to request asylum. Some are deported within a few hours of stepping on U.S. soil. Others are taken from U.S. government shelters at midnight, placed on planes, and deported with no notification to their family members.

custody” of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), within a period of no more than 72 hours after it has been determined that they are unaccompanied migrant minors. However, the CDC order does not address nor respect any of these provisions and does authorize summary deportations of unaccompanied migrant minors.

The data on the number of unaccompanied minors that have been deported during the pandemic is scarce and inconsistent, but it is estimated to be over 2000,⁷ which flagrantly violates the norms that provide for their legal protection. Previously, if they were to have arrived at the U.S. border unaccompanied by an adult, they would have had access to shelter, education, medical attention, and an exhaustive administrative process that would have allowed them to present the arguments to justify their remaining in the United States. Those who did not pass this filtering process were deported to their countries of origin, but care was taken to ensure that they had a safe place to which they could return. In the current context these practices are no longer in use and the United States maintains a form of “remote” custody over these minors.⁸ Subsequently they are deported alone,⁹ in some cases to their countries of origin,—from which they are fleeing—and in other cases they are deported to countries (like Mexico) of which they are not citizens and where they have no family ties or anyone to receive them, as is the case of minors from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.¹⁰

Since he became president, Trump has engaged in an open war on undocumented migrants and asylum seekers, both adults and minors, by issuing executive orders and policies, given the impossibility of achieving this through the Congress that allow for deporting them summarily and illegally, without granting them the possibility to apply for asylum, a legal status that is now almost impossible to attain. Unfortunately, the deportation regime in the United States operates “legally” through these kinds of regulations. This is the case of the CDC order. In spite of the fact that it is a norm issued by the executive branch, this order is, in effect, modifying migration and asylum laws, which have been sanctioned by Congress, that provide legal protections to persons who are in need of international protection and to unaccompanied minors. In this way, the CDC order is not part of a coherent public health plan for confronting the pandemic, but rather a clear example of how the law is applied in the

United States to serve specific political interests resulting in a racist and classist management of migration and asylum. **MM**

▼
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The Economics of Change In Latin America and Everywhere

While many of the trends I will mention here manifest themselves worldwide, I will pay special attention to Mexico and Latin America. Obviously, the present discussion is not exhaustive in any sense; it includes four elements that are widely acknowledged both academically and in the media.

Go Fintech. Indeed. Almost every aspect of our daily experiences is being touched by digital influences. To what extent artificial intelligence, big data, the Internet of things and the like will modify our economy in terms of consumption, production, savings, risk taking, planning, and preferences is uncertain. Nonetheless, consensus does exist that changes will be substantial and enduring. Latin Amer-

ica is not immune to the new technological realities. However, and with few exceptions, it is more a late adopter than a frontrunner.¹ The possibilities are plentiful. I would like to stress two.

First, the private and public sectors should work together in a more comprehensive, digitally-based financial system. It is shameful that one in three adults in Mexico currently does not have access to financial services (I consulted several reports by Mexico's National Bank and Securities Commission [CNBV] about this.). The use of smartphones and the development of simple apps could allow access to basic services, skipping traditional phases and with small infrastructure requirements. Some very valuable experiences exist in low-income African countries that could be considered as references.

Second, public policies should aim to enhance IT literacy. Basic understanding of hardware and some coding could open the doors to better jobs and the development

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of key sectors in the economy. Moreover, it is likely that the aforementioned digital literacy would be a marker of belonging to the middle class, with positive reinforcing effects.

Go Green. Absolutely. With climate-change-based problems widely recognized, lots of human activities and economic processes need to be reviewed and reformulated. The negative position on this is that these changes imply economic costs and challenges in the short run. A more positive view is related to new business opportunities and the awareness of the importance of natural resources in the long-run framework. Thomas Piketty's masterpiece is mostly cited for the effects of financial capital and wealth on inequality.² Nonetheless, it poses central questions on the role and effects of ecological capital. Many aspects can be discussed, I will briefly mention two.

Energy consumption accounts for a big share of humans' carbon print. The development of renewable energies is advancing at an awesome pace. While markets can cope with the changes, passive and active public policies can be extremely helpful. The range of government actions is broad: from regulating and taxing negative externalities, to fostering positive externalities, many related to networks. "Smart" electric grids are an interesting example of the latter.

A more polemical discussion refers to the changes in our lifestyles. It is possible to take a very radical stance—not necessarily rooted in science. Nonetheless, there is growing awareness that many of our consumption habits need to be altered: recycling, avoiding certain materials, transportation, and even fomenting organic produce. A big task is the aligning incentives and ensuring that environment-friendly patterns become mainstream and not too costly.

Go Old. Like it or not. Few phenomena of this importance are so ignored or misunderstood. A demographic transition is taking place all around the world. The critical

point for Latin America is the speed at which it is occurring. A transition that in Western Europe happened in about 60 years or barely three generations, would take on average 22 years in the Latin American countries, even with some baffling cases like Brazil, whose transition is expected in 18 years.³ The economic, social, political, and cultural changes implied are enormous. I will focus on four that are very direct and perhaps the most urgent.

We need to work on our pension systems. Almost every country in the region has problems of some sort. There may be a reduced participation, some persons are not included in the system, with a negative female gender bias and penalization of the informal sector. Also, receiving a pension is no guarantee that it will be "sufficient." Generally, pensions are supported by the fiscal system, and they are capturing increasing shares of fiscal space with the weakening of several public services. Even with very difficult decisions ahead, it is usually better to face them versus allowing an inertia-driven system.

Less obvious than pensions but also very pressing is the design and funding of health systems, both public and private. A demographic transition always carries an epidemiological transition. While a younger population is mainly affected by contagious diseases, an older one is more prone to chronic diseases. Both are dangerous and important; however, the latter type is substantially costlier and presents a tremendous burden for families and public finances. The recognition of the problem, including adequate funding and assessing alternatives, will be one of the key debates in future years.

A third aspect of this transition with profound effects refers to the economics of care. This is a field in social sciences that requires much more development both academically and in policy. The central point is that the older population will need attention and services from other persons. Who should provide these? What are the government's responsibilities? To what extent must the economics of care for the elderly be considered as part of social security. What about charities, altruism, and social responsibility. While many times relatives assume the functions, dwindling family size present a complex challenge.⁴

On a more neutral angle, the demographic transition will pave the way for something informally called the "silver economy." Some aspects of this idea are very direct: establishing production processes that incorporate older persons and a new set of products and services with this

Public policies should aim to enhance IT literacy. Basic understanding of hardware and some coding could open the doors to better jobs and the development of key sectors in the economy.

What the role of government and the modern state should be regarding economic responsibilities and guaranteeing their citizens some level of well-being involves a major political debate and research agenda.

population in mind. Others are subtler. As the median age of the population goes up and this group represents a higher proportion of society, political positions and even cultural frameworks would evolve too. It is difficult to forecast the exact changes, however; if we observe what has happened in Japan (one of the countries with an early demographic transition), it is safe to argue that the new reality would be structurally different from the current one.

Go Public. This is not clear. The 2008 international financial crisis spawned important lessons. More regulation in the financial sector was a logical consequence of some observed practices. However, stronger arguments were gradually made. Public opinion in developed countries questioned the fact that, while the most affluent individuals bounced back very shortly after the crisis, the damage for middle-class families could be long-lasting. The latter was harsher for those who lost homes in the mortgage market. Eventually, the case began to be built about how in the last three decades many countries had observed inequality increasing at an alarming level.

What the role of government and the modern state should be regarding economic responsibilities and guaranteeing their citizens some level of well-being involves a major political debate and research agenda. . Some people have argued that as a society some efficiency could/should be sacrificed to attain more equity (fairness). Others have pushed the point even further: the inequality we are observing is a consequence of the market system's malfunctioning. To preserve it, better regulations are needed, as well as assuring that the affluence generated is shared more broadly. Maybe this is the call to rethink and invigorate the welfare state.⁵

The situation is that now we are facing the COVID-19 crisis. Ironically, while the current pandemic reinforces the foregoing logic (for example, the need for a stronger public health system), it derails public options. How is that possible? In order to react to the crisis, governments have

resorted to debt, and, with shrinking economies, the prospects for expanding public expenditures in the coming years look very difficult.⁶ With severe public finance problems already occurring (with pensions in the forefront), there is no easy escape. Latin America is particularly affected by this toxic cocktail, just as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has been documenting.⁷ Hence, a stronger public sector would be desirable, but financial constraints make it difficult. The alternatives are not clear: the challenge is to foster a private sector with social objectives.

This essay is about important economic changes and trends in the short run, with emphasis on Latin America. My view is that fintech and ecological drivers would reshape our way of living. Also, we should think about an older population and prepare for an accelerated demographic transition. Finally, I believe it would be very desirable to have robust governments in the region and more energetic distributive policies. It is quite challenging to fund them. ■■■

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Notes

1 Rabah Arezki, Rachel Yuting Fan, and Ha Nguyen, "Technology Adoption and the Middle-Income Trap. Lessons from the Middle East and East Asia," 2019, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/314521559247613834/pdf/Technology-Adoption-and-the-Middle-Income-Trap-Lessons-from-the-Middle-East-and-East-Asia.pdf>, accessed in November 2020. This article documents similar patterns for the Middle East and East Asia, with an interesting labeling of middle-income countries.

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4 It is not the purpose of this essay to develop a full discussion. Certain issues deserve a complete presentation on their own. For, example the unfair gender bias that means that women end up with most of the load of the economy of care; also, proposals that suggest that government should provide some financial compensation to care providers.

5 Good elements for the discussion are to be found in Samuel Hammond, "The Free-Market Welfare State: Preserving Dynamism in a Volatile World," May 2018, Niskanen Center, https://www.niskanencenter.org/wp-content/uploads/old_uploads/2018/04/Final_Free-Market-Welfare-State.pdf.

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Carmen Sánchez Cumming*

The Labor Market Crisis in the United States and Mexico

The onset of the coronavirus pandemic set in motion the worst jobs crisis since the Great Depression. In the United States, the unemployment rate skyrocketed from a 50-year low of 3.5 percent to a post-World War II high of 14.7 percent between February and April 2020.¹ In Mexico, more than 12 million jobs were lost between April and May.² While most indicators made pathways toward a recovery in the months that followed, as of the third quarter of 2020 the U.S. and Mexico are still very much in a recession.

In addition to the speed with which this crisis has disrupted labor markets and the sheer number of jobs lost, one of the most striking features of the downturn is that it has been especially unequal. While recessions are always harder on those who have fewer private savings to withstand shortfalls in income, that some of the lowest-paying sectors are experiencing the greatest effects of the economic shock has made already precarious jobs even more insecure. In addition, as many schools closed and the health system became overburdened, many of the workers who do the lion's share of unpaid care work in their households have had to drop out of the labor force and risk entrenching gender disparities. Why have some economic sectors and groups of workers fared worse than others?

Exposure to Job Loss in the United States

First, the interplay between the health and economic crises have made the ability to work from home an initial

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Martín Zetina / Cuartoscuro.com

buffer against job loss, not to mention a first line of defense against the risk of getting sick.³ Starting in March 2020, shelter-in-place orders, voluntary business closures, and large drops in consumer demand for in-person services (childcare, haircuts, fitness classes, cleaning services) have left some workers in a particularly fragile position. The opportunity to work remotely is not available to most workers, and tracks some longstanding disparities in the U.S. labor market. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), as of October 2020 just 1 in 5 workers was working from home because of the pandemic. On the one hand, white and Asian-American workers, with greater levels of educational attainment, and those working in high-wage industries and occupations have been much more likely to work from home since the onset of the crisis.⁴ On the other, as workers without a college degree, black and Hispanic workers, and those in low-wage industries have been less likely to be able to work remotely; they have also been especially exposed to unemployment.⁵

Second, some of the worst-paying industries have been hit first and hardest by the economic shock. Unlike the 12 recessions the U.S. economy experienced between the mid-1940s and the late-2010s, the service sector, rather than goods-producing industries such as construction

The work of caring for children and sick family members continues to fall disproportionately to women in general and low-income women in particular.

and manufacturing, has experienced the deepest employment losses.⁶ Within the service sector, the leisure and hospitality industry has seen the greatest decline both in absolute number of jobs and as a share of its pre-pandemic employment. Encompassing businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and amusement parks, as of October 2020, leisure and hospitality had a 3.8-million job deficit with respect to the previous year, a net drop of 20 percent. Leisure and hospitality also has the lowest average wages of any major U.S. industry, and its workers are among the least likely to have access to employer-provided health insurance and retirement benefits.⁷

Third, as disruptions to the health, education, and child-care systems have translated into greater caregiving responsibilities, many workers have left their jobs. The work of caring for children and sick family members continues to fall disproportionately to women in general and low-income women in particular, and many analysts have pointed to this as one of the main explanations why the current economic crisis has hit women hardest. Thus, not only have women become unemployed at faster rates than men but, as of the third quarter of 2020, women's labor force participation rate (the share of adults who are either employed or actively looking for work) has come to its lowest level since 1987.⁸

It is also important to note that because the U.S. industrial and occupational structures are segregated along the lines of gender, race, and ethnicity, some groups of workers are more likely to hold the jobs most affected by the crisis. For example, BLS data show that while Hispanic workers made up less than 18 percent of the total U.S. workforce in 2019, they represented almost 24 percent of all workers in leisure and hospitality. What explains that some groups of workers are more likely to hold certain types of jobs? A part of the answer lies in what economists call "human capital" variables: years of work experience or levels of educational attainment, for example. Yet, economists have found that occupational sorting persists even among workers with the same level of education, labor mar-

ket experience, preferences for certain kinds of work, and even people skills, which suggests that social norms and outright labor market discrimination play an important role in determining who has the opportunity to do what job.⁹

The Crisis in the Mexican Labor Market Has Also Been Unequal

Former Mexican Central Bank Governor Agustín Carstens famously said that if the United States economy catches a cold, Mexico gets pneumonia. Existing fragilities in the Mexican labor market (low average wages even when compared to the rest of Latin America, high rates of informality, and lack of access to social insurance benefits, for example) make already vulnerable workers even more exposed to the consequences of the economic shock. Analyses of data from the National Occupation and Employment Survey (ENOE) show that between the first and the third trimester of 2020, those in the lowest 70 percent of the labor-income distribution lost a much greater share of their pre-crisis earnings than their higher-income counterparts, a trend markedly different from that of 2008-2009, when losses were spread much more evenly.¹⁰ As such, the share of the population whose earnings are not enough to buy the basic food basket climbed from 35.7 percent in the third trimester of 2019 to 44.5 percent in the third trimester of 2020.¹¹

Here, too, that lower-income workers have felt the brunt of the economic shock is the result of disparities in workers' ability to work remotely and of an even more unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities between men and women. An analysis published by the Espinosa Yglesias Studies Center estimated that about 20 percent of workers hold jobs that could be done from home. As in the U.S., telework is disproportionately available to high-income earners and workers in richer states. As for gender disparities in the burden of unpaid domestic and care work, in April 2020, women were spending more than 25 hours per week on such tasks, while men spent 12 on average.¹² The uneven distribution of unpaid care work not only helps explain why women workers have fared worse during this crisis, but is part of the reason why they are crowded out of higher-paying occupations in general, since high-wage jobs tend to require longer work weeks.

In addition, the onset of the coronavirus pandemic also translated into an unusually large shock to the informal sector, affecting some of the Mexican economy's most vulnerable workers. Generally, employment in the informal sector is what economists call "counter-cyclical": its size relative to the formal sector expands during economic downturns and contracts during booms.¹³ The reason is that as recessions lead to job losses in registered businesses, many workers transition to informal jobs, usually through self-employment. In downturns, informality therefore tends to act as a kind of cushion: a cook who loses her position in a registered restaurant and goes on to sell meals independently loses her employer-provided benefits and labor protections (the right to a minimum wage, for example), but not all of her income. As the pandemic hit, however, confinement measures and lack of demand translated to particularly big blow for informal employment, particularly for workers in restaurants and hospitality services.¹⁴

Conclusion

Projections by the Federal Reserve Bank estimate that in the United States, the unemployment rate could be back to its pre-pandemic level by 2023. In Mexico, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that the jobless rate will continue to climb in 2021, and only start recovering in 2022. Even if both labor markets follow the most optimistic scenarios, evidence from previous recessions show high levels of joblessness have long-term implications for both individual workers and the economy as a whole. Research shows, for instance, that losing a job during a recession and experiencing long bouts of unemployment have long-term consequences for peoples' future labor market outcomes. Studies following the career and earnings trajectories of people who have been displaced from their jobs have found that workers tend to be re-employed at much lower wages, as well as have lower earnings than otherwise similar workers, even decades after they were first displaced.¹⁵ More broadly, the fact that this crisis is disproportionately affecting workers who already had an especially fragile labor market standing prior to the crisis not only reflects longstanding inequities, but risks reversing some of the economic progress made in the last few decades and entrenching pre-existing inequalities. ■■■

Notes

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Iván Zúñiga*

Mexico's Environmental Crisis, a Step Backwards?



Tobias Tullius / Unsplash

To some, September 27, 1962 will sound like the remote past; however, certain discussions of that time have returned to remind us that humanity, and Mexico in particular, has a long road ahead for building what we can truly call sustainable development.

On April 3, 1963, the CBS television network published Rachel Carson's report *Silent Spring*, which shows how the rates of production and consumption prevalent then were not sustainable over time and were profoundly affecting the natural foundation that sustains life on this planet, including human life. After that, debates arose over the limits to growth. In the 1980s the first global strategies for the conservation of nature were announced, and international institutions were established to focus on this problem. Later, at the 1992 Rio Summit, the first major global agreement on the environment and development was reached.

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More than 60 years ago, humanity became aware of the limits of a civilization model that has made great progress in terms of health, life expectancy, reducing poverty, and improving the quality of life but that, nevertheless, is putting the existence of humanity as we know it today at grave risk.

To resolve this conflict between economic growth, well-being, and the planet's sustainability, the key elements for sustainable development, we have generated scientific knowledge, trained many specialists, and established global and national institutions that are creating the tools to relaunch our civilization toward a new way of enjoying nature that will allow for its recovery and sustainability.

Over this same time span, we have seen the world's population grow from almost 3 billion in 1960 to 7.8 billion in 2020—and we are expecting it to reach more than 9.2 billion by 2050—and we have experienced the expansion of the capitalist economic model through globalization. Both processes, along with the accelerated devastation of nature, have caused enormous social inequalities that have

produced global political changes, expressed in recent years in the emergence of government leaders with populist, xenophobic, and anti-liberal tendencies.

In Mexico, the change of government in December 2018 produced a real shake-up in national environmental policies and institutions. Since the 1980s, in response to global discussions on the problems derived from economic growth, the country had been building a legal and institutional framework in favor of environmental sustainability. The current administration considers that this framework is part of what it classifies as a neoliberal economic model and has taken on the task of dismantling it.

However, the first blow to Mexico's environmental agenda was in December 2013, when Enrique Peña created the Hydrocarbon Sector National Agency for Industrial Safety and Environmental Protection (ASEA) as a decentralized body of the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (Semarnat), with technical and managerial autonomy. It was given authority to manage, evaluate, and sanction everything in the hydrocarbon sector related to the environment, becoming both judge and jury, and, in effect, removing all powers to limit the energy sector from the Semarnat, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (Profepa), and the rest of the environmental institutions. The objective was to eliminate all obstacles to energy reform in order to, as explicitly stated, restore economic growth, prioritizing the economy over ecology.

That administration continued to weaken environmental policies by amending the General Law for Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection, approved during Felipe Calderón's administration (2006-2012), and making other legal provisions like the General Law for Sustainable Forest Development. The pretext was to eliminate overregulation of the sector and promote sustainable forest management and forest conservation; however, it opened the door to changes in land use to allow for the growth of urban centers and infrastructure.

The general trend during those years was to promote legal changes that seemed positive for protecting the environment and the ecological system, but incorporated critical modifications in the legal and regulatory framework that, in fact, permitted setbacks in environmental measures. This was accompanied by taking political control of the sector's emblematic institutions such as the National Commission on Protected Natural Areas (Conanp) and the National Forestry Commission (Conafor), which

up until then had been headed by environmental specialists, and reducing the sector's budget as of 2016.

When Andres Manuel López Obrador's administration (2018-2024) began —characterized by notable presidential centralism, imposing his agendas without consensus, affirming he was elected by 30 million votes (53 percent of the votes cast)—, Mexico turned toward what has been called an anti-neoliberal government. The goals are to put an end to corruption and “governing mafias,” make social justice a reality, and recuperate the state's role as the axis of development, including recovering leadership in the energy sector through the state enterprises Pemex and the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE).

The 2019-2024 National Development Plan (PND) states that it will promote the country's sustainable development based on the definition used in the Bruntland Report in 1987,¹ and explicitly states,

Ignoring this paradigm not only leads to generating all kinds of imbalances in the short run, but also leads to severely violating the rights of future generations. Therefore, the Federal Executive will always take into account the impact its policies and programs will have on the fabric of society, on ecology, and on the country's political and economic future. Additionally, it will be guided by a concept of development that remedies social injustices and promotes economic growth without affecting peaceful coexistence, ties of solidarity, cultural diversity, or the environment.²

Despite the above, the PND mentions no objectives, no goals, nor any specific actions in this area, and assumes that sustainability will be promoted through nine social programs. Most of these are based on direct transfers to the beneficiaries, and with the exception of one (Sowing Life) have nothing to do with the environment, ecology, or improving the conditions of natural resources.³ Furthermore, while the Sowing Life program is based on the logic of restoring a million hectares by implementing agroecological systems for food production in regions with high levels of marginalization, it has been sharply criticized for apparently inducing deforestation in critical parts of the country such as Chiapas, Tabasco, and the Yucatán peninsula, and for its limited results thus far.⁴

The 2020-2024 Sectoral Program for the Environment and Natural Resources (PMA), published July 7, 2020, un-

derlines that the problems in this area are due to overwhelming human appropriation of resources and that “natural resources are not infinite.” While this perspective is fundamentally correct, it sounds like it was taken from The Club of Rome’s discussions in the 1960s, possibly a simplistic version that overlooks the alternatives for transforming Mexico’s economic foundations, constructed over more than 40 years, such as promoting renewable energy sources or technology for treating waste waters.

Looking beyond the policy documents that regulate Mexico’s new environmental policies, what is most important is the underlying questioning of the legal framework and the institutions created. They were viewed as structures that accompanied and facilitated the neoliberal model, wherein the government apparatus did not question or limit the excesses caused by economic growth and, above all, where economic and social inequality grew while the degradation of ecosystems and natural resources continued.

Most of the country’s environmental specialists and activists see the government’s change of course on environmental policies as a good thing. They believe it attacks the deepest roots of the problems derived from a system that does not consider the planet’s limitations or the natural cycles required to replenish resources. That model caused serious problems such as climate change and the accelerated extinction of species —the same issues that have been present since the 1960s. Nevertheless, beyond rejecting previous policies, this government does not seem to have a clear proposal for solving environmental problems. There have been two ministers of the environment in less than two years. The second resigned after severely criticizing the government’s —and the president’s— incoherence regarding the policies they seek to implement. The current minister, María Luisa Albores González, is a specialist in social economics, not in environmental issues.

The profiles of those now in charge of the environmental ministry and their lack of experience in the area do not necessarily imply that they will manage it poorly. However, anecdotes and information do suggest total subordination of the environmental institutions to major projects and six-year programs and what appears to be a development policy dictated by a very small group within the federal government, rather than policies that aim to limit the excesses of unsustainable economic growth and seek to assure the sustainability of productive activities and infrastructure construction. Therefore, it is not clear that the

new policies, as described in federal programs, are appropriately designed to build a sustainable economy based on sound ecological reasoning. They may be merely part of a discourse that has not really defined the priorities required for sustainability in a country that loses between 150 000 and 200 000 hectares of forests and jungles each year, is undergoing severe desertification, and suffers from extreme contamination of its bodies of water, to mention only some of the most urgent problems.

Impact of the Absence of a Clear Environmental Policy

Until now, Mexico had held a privileged place for international cooperation because of its commitment to the major international environmental conventions. However, the current administration has not endorsed the goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, has shown no clear interest in advancing the biodiversity agenda —in fact, the previous head of the environmental ministry, Victor Manuel Toledo Manzur, threatened to eliminate the National Commission on Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity (Conabio)—, and has shown signs of willingness to eliminate the status of protected zones (as in the case of the Lacandon Jungle) by promoting farming activities inside them.

All this is causing Mexico’s gradual withdrawal from international cooperation in this area and a decline in resources to meet the agenda. The president himself has called out and publicly attacked environmental organizations opposed to his projects, such as those who oppose the Maya Train,⁵ and to date has no strategy to defend the territory and the environment. As a result, in 2019 alone, 15 people were killed for opposing projects related mainly to energy, infrastructure, mining, and water extraction.⁶

Budget reductions are another indication of how little importance is given to environmental issues. While significant cuts began in 2016, funding is now so low that it paralyzes government activity aimed at protecting and promoting sustainable management of forest resources, proper management of protected areas, and even legal actions against those who violate environmental regulations.⁷ This situation has put the sector at risk and, with the economic crisis derived from COVID-19, there will probably not be much improvement for the remainder of the six-year term.

It is not clear that the new policies, are appropriately designed to build a sustainable economy based on sound ecological reasoning. They may be merely part of a discourse that has not really defined the priorities required.

In spite of that, Mexico still has the opportunity to maintain and rebuild its environmental institutions and policies. The legal framework exists and can be improved; it has a large number of professionals and experts in environmental issues that constitute an invaluable capital for correcting and applying environmental policies and programs. A significant number of NGOs contribute to filling institutional and financial gaps to address regional problems. Institutions and budgets can be strengthened to comply with legal mandates and generate initiatives to promote changes favoring sustainability. Furthermore, international donors are still interested in this country given its great importance in terms of biodiversity and climate change.

The change of government in the United States along with the USMCA coming into effect, which makes greater environmental regulation obligatory in the region, will surely pressure Mexico to improve its policies in this area in coming years. Nevertheless, the country still faces the challenge of returning to a progressive environmental agenda that can respond to the current government's false dilemma of "the environment or economic growth" that was expressed in a revealing phrase uttered in reference to the Maya Train project: "People come first. We gain nothing as a country by having fat jaguars and starving children; there has to be a balance."⁸

The change of era worldwide, Mexico's economic crisis because of COVID-19, along with enormous social inequality and poverty make it very tempting for the Mexican government to abandon more than 60 years of constructing an environmental agenda that, over time, would bring us closer to a more sustainable society where people's well-being does not have to come at the cost of destroying nature. There will be no future if we do not shift to an economy based on renewable energy, circular economies, food production without inputs that degrade the soil, the water, biodiversity, and a better distribution of the wealth generated from

the use of nature. The country has great opportunities if it follows this path. However, it will require not only rebuilding environmental institutions, but also a broader political change that strengthens democracy and the balance of power, and an environmental agenda based on technical and scientific criteria rather than ideology.

Today the saying, "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day; teach him to fish and he will eat every day" is no longer sufficient. People need to learn about nature's cycles and develop technologies to make sustainable use of fisheries, otherwise it will be useless to teach them to fish. ■■■

Notes

- 1 It was originally named "Our Common Future," <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>. [Editor's Note.]
- 2 The 2019-2024 National Development Plan (PND) defines sustainable development as the satisfaction of the current generation's needs without compromising future generations' capacities to satisfy theirs. See *Diario Oficial de la Federación*, July 12, 2019, https://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5565599&fecha=12/07/2019.
- 3 The programs considered in the area of sustainable development are of a social nature, without a direct relationship to the environment.
- 4 The National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (Coneval) published the document "Evaluación de diseño con trabajo de campo del programa Sembrando Vida 2019-2020" (Design Assessment with Fieldwork of the 2019-2020 Sowing Life Program), which presents the *chiaroscuros* of that initiative, https://www.coneval.org.mx/Evaluacion/IEPSM/Paginas/Evaluaciones_Disenio_De_sarrollo_Social.aspx.
- 5 For additional information, consult the article "Exhibe AMLO ONG opositoras al Tren Maya que presuntamente reciben dinero de empresas," *Reporte Índigo*, August 28, 2020, <https://www.reporteindigo.com/reportes/exhibe-amlo-ong-opositoras-al-tren-maya-que-presuntamente-reciben-dinero-de-empresas/>.
- 6 Mexico is currently one of the five countries in the Americas with the highest numbers of environmental defenders killed each year, according to the "Informe sobre la situación de las personas defensoras de los derechos humanos ambientales 2019" (2019 Report on the Situation of Defenders of Environmental Human Rights), published by the Mexican Center for Environmental Law (Cemda), March 2020, <https://www.cemda.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/informe-personas-defensoras-2019.pdf>, pp. 20-21.
- 7 "The data speaks for itself: in the period 2015-2019, the accumulated budget reduction for the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (Semarnat) was 61 percent; for the National Forestry Commission (Conafor), the decrease was almost 70 percent; and in the case of the National Water Commission (Conagua), the adjustment reached 60 percent." Enrique Provencio and Julia Carabias, "Un trato injustificado y desproporcionado," *Este País*, April 3, 2019.
- 8 This statement by Rogelio Jiménez Pons, engineer and head of the National Fund for the Promotion of Tourism (Fonatur) and the Maya Train project, was published by the digital medium *Animal Político* in an article by Claudia Ramos, "Tren Maya: el beneficio social compensa el impacto ambiental, justifica Fonatur," February 5, 2019, <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2019/02/tren-maya-proyecto-construccion-comunidades-indigenas/>.



Paola Virginia Suárez Ávila*
Illustrated by Tania Díaz**

The New Normal in Universities Daily Life and Pandemics

Daily life, including education, has been profoundly transformed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic, social, and political crises it has prompted. The new normal is expressed in novel scenarios that deserve analysis with methodologies that take into account the importance of examining cultural change using contemporary social theories.

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Daily life can be interpreted from the point of view of semiotics (Eco, Greimas), hermeneutics (Ricoeur), and critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk), as well as new theories of interpretation and description. All this can help us look at cultural change in the North American region.

Lockdown, education, working on line, local-global inequality, sexual reproduction, and gender violence must be interpreted making an effort to understand change and the crises in the context of the health emergency.

For example, the Latin American Council for Social Sciences (Clacso) has begun a social observatory project on the coronavirus called “Pensar la pandemia” (Thinking about the Pandemic),¹ which offers a multiplicity of critical axes for analyzing and dealing with it in the day-to-day.

The UNAM has done its part by holding critical seminars since the pandemic began, such as the International Studies Seminar on North-South Global Change, organized by the CISAN and the UNAM School of Philosophy and Letters to analyze cultural change in educational spaces throughout the Americas.

Since the 1990s, North American public universities have joined an accelerated process of globalization based on the advance and modernization of technologies that make it possible. Globalization has made us ask ourselves about the importance of these advances for incorporating new knowledge into our daily life in universities in times of crisis.

In trying times like these, we put into practice the theoretical-methodological approaches of contemporary social theories. We are then faced with the question of the repercussions that this global change will have on our institutions of higher learning for institutional development, the capacity for innovation and teaching, and the evaluation of public policies implemented during this crisis. These policies will be evaluated in the future based on their success or failure to continue the projects of public universities.

Academic traditions and practices that began transforming in the 1990s due to globalization have generated significant changes in education in a new digital era, such as the appearance of virtual education. In this context, digital education can be understood as a phenomenon associated to the third globalization that has had an impact on our ways of seeing, observing, and understanding higher education for forging the most advanced thinking on the planet.

The third globalization helped us previously interpret new distance-learning and online arrangements that have become indispensable for thinking about the pandemic based on already existing concepts like cultural diversity, the digital gap, and socio-economic contexts, in which academics and students’ lives are immersed as the main actors in higher education.

Online and distance learning has had to take a new path in order to design teaching-learning processes on vir-

Online and distance learning has had to take a new path in order to design teaching-learning processes on virtual platforms, which in the North American region are always uneven.

tual platforms, which in the North American region are always uneven. As F. Javier Murillo and Cynthia Duk aptly mention, these designs focus on a minority of the population with enough technology to be able to develop those learning processes; however, they leave out the broader population that will have to cover their basic needs during the pandemic without including higher education as one of their priorities for subsisting.²

The problems higher education faces in the pandemic allow us to interpret the meaning of human actions in a scenario like this one.

In her theory of action, Agnes Heller underlined the importance of understanding micro- and macro-reality in the social communication processes that drive daily life. This is why her thinking has contributed to the development of a critical sociology of education. In a 2013 interview, she said,

A professor is, by definition, an intellectual, and his/her task is to allow the student to develop his/her capabilities and nature. We have many problems in modern universities. In general, the world has a growing bureaucracy in which the authorities control professors and professors control the students. On the other hand, upward mobility through the university has been seriously affected in recent years; the children of the poorest cannot pay the tuition.³

The comprehension of these social educational spaces on a micro and macro level has helped us to better understand what goes on in our institutions based on the experiences of our professors, academics, students, technicians, and educational administrators. Socio-educational processes are complex and even more so if we take into account the challenge we are facing as a society in the pandemic.

Lockdown has transformed our ways of working and relating to each other. Sometimes the measures taken due

to lockdown have forced us to transform our homes and the interaction with our remote workmates. We have also had to implement certain domestic measures, changing our university environments, turning them into digital spaces that are sometimes difficult to understand and to design to adapt to university academic curricula.

An analysis of daily life allows us to understand that our societies are not static, and both men and women forge our subjectivity and social identity. In her conceptualization of daily life, Mari Luz Uribe mentions “the dynamism of unfolding daily life and the influence exercised by aspects of external conditions on the individual, such as social, economic, and political factors in a specific cultural setting.”⁴

This space is shown as a place that will give human life meaning in establishing a continuity of our social practices associated with experience, as a unique capability for developing our culture.

In the case of university culture, the change from in-person schooling to virtual education has transformed the conception of living spaces for the creation of a new normal, which must express the configuration of new subjectivities in the framework of social relations.

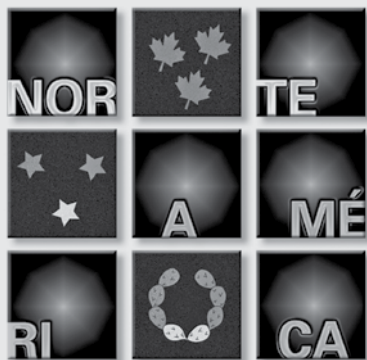
The space configured from the dynamic perspective of human culture would imply reducing the in-person surroundings, turning them into an effective space on telecommunication networks and platforms like Zoom, which display a new social order that broadens our capacity to socially signify a virtual world.

Culture, understood from the viewpoint of heterogeneity, would give us the meaning of new, broad cultures turning around these new virtual spaces of communication of university communities. The critique of a homogenization of culture in the pandemic shows us the change that we have had to undergo in terms of technological development and our openness to it with regard to the diverse, the unique, and the unitary.

The explanation of new social phenomena will allow us to signify new constructions in social relations that broaden out the meaning of human experience around dramatic episodes like the one we are currently experiencing. For that, it is necessary to give these actions meaning every day, in order to continue building our individual, social, or university identities and subjectivities through cognition and human learning in the midst of a crisis. ■■■

▼
Notes

- 1 “Pensar la pandemia. Observatorio social del coronavirus,” Clacso, <https://www.clacso.org/pandemia-y-vida-cotidiana-nucleos-criticos-para-analizar-y-abordar/>.
- 2 Javier F. Murillo and Cynthia Duk, “El Covid-19 y las brechas educativas,” *Revista Latinoamericana de Educación Inclusiva* vol. 14, no. 1, 2020.
- 3 Juan Carlos Miranda Arroyo, “Agnes Heller y la filosofía de ‘lo social,’” *Educación futura. Periodismo de interés público*, July 23, 2019, <https://www.educacionfutura.org/agnes-heller-y-la-filosofia-de-lo-social/>.
- 4 Mari Luz Uribe Fernández, “La vida cotidiana como espacio de construcción social,” *Procesos históricos* no. 25, January-June 2014, pp. 100-113.



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Juan Carlos Barron Pastor*

Living Out of Body

*I will be everyone or no one. I will be the other
who I am without knowing it, who has seen
that other dream, my waking. Who judges it,
resigned and smiling.*
J. L. Borges (1964)

Blade Runner Blues
Vangelis, 1982¹



This is engineering / Unsplash

It seems like, when we connect to the everyday devices that we use to explore cyberspace, we temporarily leave the place our bodies actually occupy. Where do we go? What happens while we are away?

The many changes we have experienced, accelerated by the pandemic, include the growth of cyberspace and the time we spend there. We know that media systems provide the context for a society's remote communications, and, starting this year, their scope has expanded in the new normality that looms over us. A new normal, in which we must maintain physical distance from one another, in which society reproaches verbal interactions and non-essential closeness, and where the mandate is to make contact with only a few people, in a kind of social bubble. Simultaneously, we are encouraged to conduct our day-to-day activities on different digital platforms designed to maintain and expand our living, working, learning, and consumer experiences, among others.

Thus, without overlooking how the inequalities and forms of violence related to the digital gap have exploded, society has embraced remote forms of communicat-

ing and the emergence of a kind of enhanced reality. With growing regularity, we leave our physical location to immerse ourselves, for moments or for long hours, in our remote communication devices. There we encounter what others have made public on the various platforms that channel our social interactions and keep abreast of our remote conversations. In doing so, we transpose certain aspects of our social conduct onto a mediated terrain where we seem to merge, or at least meld, with our machines. As this takes place, we fashion a kind of digital self, or avatar, united across different devices that serve as gateways to like-minded ideological groups, while we stereotype, apparently with ever greater inflexibility, those we identify as "others."

Perhaps we are hybridizing and turning into cyborgs, as Donna Haraway anticipated,² leaving our physical families behind and creating new families based on our affinities. But we are apparently unable to leave behind the antagonisms of the false dualities she warned of. When we leave our physical body and focus our attention on digitalizing our thoughts, emotions, and even images and sequences of images of our bodies, it raises questions of the kind posed by Cornelius Castoriadis,³ since it is unclear if, as we absent ourselves, we recreate ourselves individually,

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emerging as a performance, or if we immerse ourselves in a stream of depictions unmoored from the tangible. What happens or what becomes of us as we witness, feed, or interact with a fragment of the full potential of communication in cyberspace?

In what can ambiguously be called the modern era, the group of social actors who functioned as brokers of remote communication receded from view, as they produced all sorts of performances and cultural products, and at the same time decided what was disseminated. But it was always something that was made known to us, that entertained us, or that was sold to us. Something that allowed us to distinguish what was potentially newsworthy and what was not, within the devices of the media system. As Jesus Martin Barbero explained, the intangible gained increasing relevance and as viewers we became involved as actors, feeding the programming spaces established by certain dominant actors in the media system.⁴ Different groups engaged in this dynamic, with their presence gradually becoming less marginal, but maintaining their discordant or countercultural nature, producing richer, more compelling content.

However, as Slavoj Žižek has noted,⁵ in cyberspace everything seems accessible, but mediated through oligopolistic companies with clear forms of vertical organization whose overriding goal is the subordination of societies and governments. It is paradoxical how, as several authors continue to applaud society's "appropriation" of media content, what proliferate are mechanisms for capture, seizure, and appropriation of experience by practically all the digital platforms through which we interact with cyberspace.

We are in the midst of what some authors, like Castells,⁶ have called the information society; Schiller,⁷ digital capitalism; and Lyon⁸ and Zuboff,⁹ the surveillance

It is unclear if, as we absent ourselves,
we recreate ourselves individually, emerging
as a performance, or if we immerse ourselves
in a stream of depictions unmoored
from the tangible.

society or capitalism. Platforms based on digital algorithms, commonly known as social networks, promote the growth of content and cultural products produced by their users. Networks connect users who misinform one another, entertain one another, and market things or use themselves as merchandise. This occurs directly, when someone posts their own memes, photographs, or videos showcasing their skills doing something like a trendy dance, telling jokes, or performing challenges in their leisure time, or indirectly, as part of databases for processes of marketing and/or political control and espionage.

Thus, as mentioned above, we have gone from resisting the entertainment products offered by the media system's leading players to entertaining ourselves with something that starts at the margins but ends up being mainstream, apparently increasingly devoid of substance. This may be because the media system continues to operate with the portrayal of the anomalous and the concealment of the commonplace. However integral to the culture our videos and posting our everyday experiences become, even if we film them with a camera on the nape of our neck to show what we cannot see, the commonplace and the private, more visible than ever, appear, contradictorily, to disappear, like our very presence.

We seem to leave our physical location, to cease being where we are; our body stays there, but our presence has gone elsewhere, like when one engages in phubbing.¹⁰

For Niklas Luhmann,¹¹ a program defines the criteria for proper attribution of values in a code. Given that society is the universe of all possible communications, those that originate in the media system are subject to the dictates of social processes of selectivity (what can be published or made public and what cannot), that seek to augment the abnormal (and thereby conceal normality). A programmatic field would be a set of such programs. Thus, programmatic fields determine what happens, what entertains, what sells, and what connects (see Barron Pastor).¹² Paradoxically, in every act in which something is reported in the media—in other words remotely—, some anomalous, peculiar, or distinctive aspect must be amplified, underscored, or highlighted. The normal, the commonplace, is not only devoid of media appeal, but actually, if Luhmann is correct, it is not even reportable.

Vast swathes of the economy have been destroyed, our habits have been modified substantially, the world as we knew it has been demolished, and we still don't know what is taking its place.

Our day-to-day life is increasingly immersed in our gadgets. And what the other person receives, at the other end of the mediation, is not our presence, but a performance of oneself, previously digitized, encoded, captured, transmitted, and broadcast to the most unexpected places. Practically anywhere someone who has “friended” us is logged onto the platform of digital algorithms, but also on the screens of people we never wanted in our lives, like an analyst for some company or espionage agency.

We leave, but somehow, we remain. As an example, we can consider any of our virtual sessions, which have proliferated in the pandemic: we go online, and the stress is almost instantaneous: Can people hear me? Can they see me? How do I look? What in my surroundings can others see? Do my appearance or my surroundings look professional? An online meeting is much more exhausting than an in-person one. When someone freezes, we don't know if it is our connection or theirs; sometimes we forget to switch on the microphone, and other times we leave it on when it shouldn't be and unwanted sounds leak in: music, street vendors, ambulances, family conversations. Make sure the video is on when it's your turn, but above all make sure it's not when you use the restroom or change clothes.

When a virtual session ends on one of our devices, or if we are multitasking during a virtual session, we can check other platforms with a simultaneous feed of the most diverse information: e-mails, photographs, videos, memes, voice messages, sentences rendered incomprehensible because the automatic spelling corrector was activated or there was no automatic corrector. We may also inadvertently digitalize something from our habitat, for example, taking a picture or writing a text, we begin a process that we repeat several times a day: upload to your social networks-share-wait for reactions-react to the reactions-repeat-amplify-hide. Wait a while... Nothing has happened; repeat.

During the pandemic, life is detached from physical location and personal presence. Many of us have stayed

away from our workplaces, our public spaces, stadiums, parks, fairs and public celebrations, mass festivities. Curfews were imposed, alcohol sales were curtailed, anyone deemed offensive to others was silenced, and even a president was censored. We are witnessing the application of an unprecedented psycho-political shock beyond the wildest imaginings of Adler, Orwell, or Nourse. Vast swathes of the economy have been destroyed, our habits have been modified substantially, the world as we knew it has been demolished, and we still don't know what is taking its place. We tire of being on one platform and go on another for a change. Some countries are going through processes resembling a political restoration of liberal technocracy; in others, nationalism is resurgent with renewed hatred and phobia; religions are invigorated as spaces that build values and validate their respective local leaders. Our bodies, our thoughts, our emotions, and our experiences are being captured and used by our captors-mediators for purposes of commercial advantage and political control.

All that and more is happening while we are absent.

Will we ever be present again? How will we spend time together? Will we know how to organize so that the new normal is not an imposition, but our own creation? **MM**

Notes

- 1 A piece to accompany the reading of this text.
- 2 Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
- 3 Cornelius Castoriadis, *Imaginaria de la sociedad* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1975).
- 4 Jesus Martin Barbero, *De los medios a las mediaciones. Comunicación, cultura y hegemonía* (Mexico City: Gustavo Gili, 1987).
- 5 Slavoj Žižek, *Viviendo en el final de los tiempos* (Madrid: Akal, 2015).
- 6 Manuel Castells, *La era de la información. Economía sociedad y cultura* (Madrid: Alianza, 1996).
- 7 Dan Schiller, *Digital Capitalism: Networking the Global Market System* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999).
- 8 David Lyon, *Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 2001).
- 9 Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019).
- 10 Phubbing is the act of ignoring someone to focus one's attention on one's mobile phone.
- 11 Niklas Luhmann, *La sociedad de la sociedad* (Barcelona: Herder/Universidad Iberoamericana, 2007).
- 12 Juan Carlos Barron Pastor, *Sociocibernética crítica: Un método geopolítico para el estudio estratégico del sistema de medios de comunicación no presencial en América del Norte* (Mexico City: CISAN-UNAM/Universidad de Zaragoza, 2018).

Rodrigo Leal Cervantes*

Computers Aren't Going to Replace Us, But They Just Might Sell Us

A new economic model has been set up in Silicon Valley: surveillance capitalism. It has been so successful that in just the last decade, Amazon, Google, and Facebook, all young companies founded less than 30 years ago, have become some of the most valuable public firms in the world. Together with Apple and Microsoft, which complete the club of the five technological giants, the most important actors of this sector gather our data any way they can and make money off it.

The technology that makes this new model possible is artificial intelligence (AI), the very one that creates the incentive to gather more and more data, including personal information. However, for us, artificial intelligence mainly evokes robots, and if the term sparks mistrust, it is because of the perceived danger that “intelligent” computers could sometime in the future replace humans. Paradoxically, the role that artificial intelligence plays in surveillance capitalism involves a real risk—and not in the future, but right now—, but it goes almost unnoticed.

Artificial Intelligence

It is true that computers have become more “intelligent.” Deep Blue became the first computer to beat world chess

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Alex Iby / Unsplash

champion Kasparov in 1997, but it took 19 more years before AlphaGo could beat Lee Sedol in 2016, becoming the first computer—or to be more precise, the first algorithm—to beat a professional Go player with the highest 9-dan rating.¹ The Go playing board is larger than the chess board and offers many more possibilities on each turn; this is why for a long time it was considered beyond the reach of artificial intelligence.

Both events received a great deal of attention in the media of their time. The milestone of a computer beating the best of the humans is rather surprising and also alarming. On the one hand, the champion represents all of us, and on the other hand, the computer symbolizes technological progress. The match is a true clash between humanity and its own creation; the terrifying part is showing that a computer can be super-humanly intelligent. Or can it?

In a certain sense, nothing is surprising about computers doing certain tasks much better than we can. In one area they trounce us completely: in the number of arithmetic operations they can do in a very short time—that number actually reaches billions per second for a desktop computer. We can therefore expect that machines will excel in tasks that can be formulated in mathematical terms. Recent successes such as AlphaGo's are due

precisely to the fact that a new class of algorithms has been discovered in the field called “deep learning,” which achieves just that for a large number of new tasks: language processing, recognition of images, photo and video editing, and writing journalistic texts about simple pieces of news.

However, in the video *How Smart Is Today’s Artificial Intelligence*, journalist Joss Fong explains that artificial intelligence is not super-human at all. “Most of today’s AI can only do one task. . . . Don’t get me wrong: it can be really good at that task. The mistake is to assume that these focused applications can add up to a more general intelligence or that they learn like we do, which is simply not the case.” Artificial intelligence is “pattern recognition masquerading as understanding.”¹

Without a mental model of how the world works, no matter how basic they might be, many of the tasks we humans carry out, like telling a story or analyzing a social problem, will continue to be out of computers’ reach. Joss Fong summarizes this magnificently, saying, “Machine learning algorithms can translate 37 languages, but they don’t know what a chair is for.” That’s why the risk that robots will one day replace us continues to be very low.

The Revolution of Data And Surveillance Capitalism

Many free digital services are free because the companies that offer them have found another way of making money, almost always through advertising. To surf the Internet is to be exposed to ads in the mail, on news or video websites, or on social media. And it is true that almost since the Internet was born, cookies have done things that may seem invasive to us —have you ever looked for a product on line and now it follows you wherever you go? However, for a few years now, this has become even more the case. Do you see ads from a restaurant a friend of yours recently visited? Does your social media recommend political news that you tend to agree with?

Artificial intelligence is the technology that makes these new forms of advertising on the Internet and social media possible. It is useful for making predictions and fulfills two complementary aims. On the one hand, it selects content (videos, articles, or your friends’ comments) that will keep you interested and therefore connected.

With all that data gathered, companies
can construct a model of who we are: what
our personality is like, our ideology, if we’re
religious or interested in ecology.

On the other hand, it decides which ads may seem most relevant to you and have the greatest possibility of prompting a sale.

The products on sale are the predictions, and the buyers are the advertisers. But this requires a large amount of data because AI algorithms need them to make precise predictions. That is why the technology sector has had to look for —and has found— a practically inexhaustible source of data: our own virtual footsteps. Whether on social media, or in wide swathes of the Internet, our actions are watched: the pages we visit, the e-mails we open, the videos we watch (how long we watch, when we come back or stop watching), the friends we speak to, the political opinions we read, the medical advice we seek, and even the pornography we watch.

This new business model, in which as much personal data is gathered as possible to sell the greatest certainty to advertisers, gives rise to a new economic paradigm called “surveillance capitalism.” With all that data gathered, companies can construct a model of who we are: what our personality is like, our ideology, if we’re religious or interested in ecology. In short, the companies have a better idea of how we’ll respond to this or that stimulus, and they monetize that by ensuring that the advertisers (their real clients) are as effective as possible. Advertising, augmented by artificial intelligence, knows better than we do what we desire.

Questioning the Economic Model

It is sometimes said that when a service is free it is because the user is the product. But for computer scientist and philosopher Jaron Lanier, interviewed in the documentary *The Social Dilemma*, “That’s a little too simplistic. It’s the gradual, slight, imperceptible change in your own behavior and perception that is the product. . . . Changing what you do, how you think, who you are.”³ Social media in particular have been designed to keep us mesmerized, maximizing the time we are exposed to publicity, and the

slogan “Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life” is clearly rather ironic.

In the sector itself, many argue that the new economic model has its benefits, and if we are going to be exposed to advertising anyway, it is preferable that it be about a product that interests us. But I cannot help but be surprised that in this business model, it is the intermediary that is all-powerful and that intermediary can determine almost without competitors the price the advertiser must pay, and, what’s more, benefit financially based on the data that I generated, something personal by definition. In my opinion, the cost of hyper-personalized advertising is too high.

On the other hand, it is true that e-mail, search engines, mapping services, and even at a fundamental level, web servers and smart phones make our lives easier, and it’s hard to think about going back to a time when we did not have the tools of a digital world. Surveillance capitalism can be seen as the price that must be paid for having all these digital tools. However, I think that this is a false dilemma: in any case, advertising is the price that must be paid, but not surveillance. It is perfectly understandable that a free service be maintained thanks to ads—I’m thinking of ad spaces at bus stops—and in fact, advertising has been a way of making money with a web site since the origins of the Internet. What is new in the surveillance capitalism model, and what seems dangerous to me is the optimization based on artificial intelligence that requires our personal data.

At the end of the day, surveillance capitalism is surveillance. Companies are subject to the laws of the country in which they operate and they may—and in fact already do—cooperate with the authorities, for example in the investigation of a crime. However, what if the crime were participating in a demonstration against the government? In that case, would we want an authoritarian state to have access to our personal data? Mexico is usually not considered an authoritarian state, but would we accept it in our country, where the government has used the Israeli software Pegasus to spy on journalists and activists?

As if that were not enough, the social media have shown themselves to be very efficient platforms for distributing false information, hate mail, and even for broadcasting acts of violence live. Although it is difficult to quantify, many social scientists attribute to the social media

a certain amount of responsibility for increasing polarization or phobias (xenophobia, Islamophobia) in our societies. Proof of this is that the enemies of liberal Western societies have used them precisely to exacerbate our divisions, such as Russia’s interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. If these are ideal platforms for manipulation—even initially commercial manipulation—, why would they not be used to manipulate us politically?

Dominating Technological Change

Unfortunately, we can do very little individually to change this situation. As users, we can choose tools like the Mozilla Firefox web browser or the DuckDuckGo search engine, which emphasize protecting their users’ privacy and promise not to gather personal data. In general, it’s a good idea to take the time to deactivate personalization cookies when sites allow it and refuse applications permission to use our location without a valid reason. All these actions return to us a modicum of control over our personal data.

However, for Lou Montoulli, the engineer who invented cookies, “There are billions if not trillions of dollars at stake, and if we want to make substantial change to the methods with which tracking and advertising is [sic] done, it’s going to have to be done at a legislative level.”⁴ The European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California Consumer Protection Act (CCPA), which came into force in 2018 and 2020, respectively, point in the right direction, although much is left to be done, above all from the point of view of compliance with the law. We have to inform ourselves and talk about what is at stake because only a critical mass can demand legislation opposed to these powerful commercial interests. Our personal data are too valuable, and surveillance capitalism cannot be the economic model of the future. **MM**

Notes

- 1 Go is a traditional Chinese strategy game.
- 2 Joss Fong, “How Smart Is Today’s Artificial Intelligence,” vox.com, December 9, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/videos/2017/12/19/16792294/artificial-intelligence-limits-of-ai>.
- 3 Jeff Orlowski, *The Social Dilemma*, Netflix, 2020
- 4 Lou Montoulli, “How Ads Follow You around the Internet,” vox.com, February 3, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFyaW50GFOs>.



Alberto Palacios*

Reawakenings

I

I remember it clearly; I was watching the prodigious hands of Alice Sara Ott perform Beethoven’s third and my own Alicia intertwined her legs with mine—with no intentions of seducing me, she insisted. The year was just starting out and—why not?—it was snowing hard. No heater seemed to be enough. Our modest apartment smelled of humidity and gardenias, a left-over

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from the long confinement that we never got used to. I offered her a drink of Ardbeg Uigeadial, alluding to the “mysterious, dark place” that had once congregated us in a dive of a jazz club. But obviously, she had other things in mind.

Cynical and skilled in psychology, she showed me her treatise on COVID characteropathies, alien to the music filtering through the room. I interrupted the recording as the *allegro* ended, with the pianist’s features frozen on the screen. With a half-drunk cup of coffee and a bit upset—I admit it—I turned to look at my lover, trying to contain my irritation.

“We’re part of that silent majority that has sunk into lethargy, putting life on pause. Accepting our recently discovered condition of pariahs; renouncing social life, the pleasure of work, seeing the light, or breathing air unencumbered.”

“Enough, Iván. If you’re not interested, don’t make faces.”

“Sorry, sorry,” I responded, shamefaced. “I’m listening.”

She moved away from me, herself annoyed at my arrogance, and, after hesitating a few moments, she began to read her notes. I confess that they sparked my interest and I let Alicia go on, trying to imagine each one of her characters. The snow knocked against the cornices and the night became more penetrating with the counterpoint of her voice.

“There’s the most common one,” she began, “the circumstantial paranoiac, who lives an anonymous existence until this pandemic made his stumbling and expectations relevant. He suddenly realized he was vulnerable, exposed to a closer threat than a nuclear holocaust or economic instability. He awoke one morning drenched in alarming news that put him in an extreme position: ‘I’m hypertensive, my parents were diabetic, and I smoke,’ he recognized, swathed in panic. So, he didn’t stick his head out the door until they assured him a vaccine was coming soon. Perhaps he was partially right: several of his contemporaries died in that first wave when they intubated everybody without any great physio-pathological considerations, and people were dying of strokes or the reviled cytokine storm. But there were those who fell into delirium, refusing to speak to their relatives and friends except behind a screen or kilometers away. As you might suppose, Iván, this archetype was the most impacted by isolation and helplessness.

“Later came those with anxiety and depression; they’re always around when there’s a catastrophe. This is often a more predictable psychopathology, which has its ups and downs and its degrees. As we know, this is often the field for psychiatrists with their ruinous avalanche of drugs, especially since a good course of psychotherapeutic treatment requires more introspection and less urgency. It’s true that they abound, but they’ve stayed on the sidelines, mustering through lockdown with more contrition than rhetoric.

“Lastly are the deniers. Optimists to the hilt despite their ignorance, they decided to set off on a crusade that could be called ‘turning their backs on reality,’ like those who see themselves as invulnerable do. Naturally, many of these died, proclaiming their stupidity from daises or from oblivion. That was the most regrettable epitaph of this tragedy that has brought us all up to the present.”

“Alicia,” I interrupted, “I think you’re being too sarcastic. And you and me, where do you put us?”

“I must say that we’re part of that silent majority that has sunk into lethargy, putting life on pause. Accepting our recently discovered condition of pariahs; renouncing social life, the pleasure of work, seeing the light, or breathing air unencumbered. Perhaps I should call us melancholic by necessity, willing to accept, like the first Christians or the vanquished in any war, the humble renunciation of a destiny that no longer belongs to us . . .”

Only then did I notice her tears, which ran in slow lines down her cheeks and gave her crooked smile a singular shine. I hugged her tightly and buried my face in her hair, a balm for those hours of loneliness that relentlessly contemplated us.

Her father, a man she loved more than anyone, had died in the first weeks of the pandemic, simply because his age could not sustain him. Later, well into the summer, a dear friend abandoned her struggle and chemotherapy in an intensive care unit, her lungs rent by a rapidly progressing pneumonia that no one understood yet. Alicia and I could not say goodbye to her or pay her minimal homage in a funeral parlor. Innumerable acquaintances suffered from different degrees of symptoms, from those who lost their sense of smell and didn’t take it seriously, to those who spent miserable days on the edge of death and ended up with hidden aftereffects in their internal organs.

It was in those days, when the case count surpassed 60 million, that I felt she was on the verge of a breakdown. She told me, a prisoner of that critical moment, that in the United States alone, one person was dying every minute. “It’s annihilation,” she said, biting her lip. For a moment, I thought she was losing it, that her pain and anger had saturated her consciousness, that all the tenderness that I was capable of was not enough to contain her.

And so, with our little dizzy spells, we subsisted. But what made us most indignant, day after day, was the myopia of our government, calculating figures that didn’t match anything but their whimsical statistics, stating that

the contagion was slowing when we all knew someone who had died or several people who were hospitalized in serious condition. False promises, systematic trickery.

Amidst that much anxiety, we decided to celebrate Christmas reservedly; that is, on Zoom, that platform that became the display window for all our frustrations. We gathered a few friends, the remaining family, certain work-mates from other eras who were wandering around in their loneliness, and we organized a small, simulated get-together on our empty screens. We promised each other gifts in the spring, placed under a non-existent tree, and we almost all refused to decorate an apartment that nobody would visit. The evening was enough to get drunk, which at least allowed us to sleep in peace for a night.

Recently, we've been able to recover laughter, Alicia with her bullet-proof cynicism and myself, more temperate, because I'm beginning once again to get a glimpse of a certain rhythm in my work.

"Do you remember how we used to like to go to VIP lounges and unabashedly eat junk food?" I ask her, as I heat up dinner.

She turns, gets up from her chair, and puts the computer on pause. With a gesture I hadn't seen before in her, she takes me firmly by both arms and gives me a long kiss, letting our saliva mix, and pastes her body against mine; for the first time in many months she's aroused and suddenly demands that future that we still haven't deciphered.

II

I hear the rumor of birds for the first time in several weeks. It's like a breeze that clouds the sun and filters sweetly into my dreams. I approach Sofía silently and whisper in her ear that the plague has passed. I think she doesn't hear me; she's exhausted. She turns over and sighs, returning to her slumber.

In the floor above, a dog whines and scratches the balcony door looking for petting or left-overs, a distinctive example of these weeks of scarcity and isolation. I went so far as to think that he was dead, and I'm happy for him, for all those living beings who, like me, awaken today to get back on track.

My wife's back seems exquisite against the light, and, after tracing it with a light touch, I get up to make coffee;

They were fateful days of constant uncertainty. They started with a wave of contradictory information and continued with the screech of ambulances and the clamor of catastrophe or collective suicide.

a few Nespresso capsules that I've been saving up to celebrate this lucky day.

Now, from the living room, barricaded under books and board games, I can see some birds leaning in from the eucalyptus trees toward my window. In the distance, a couple is washing their car as though it were a party, throwing soapy water on each other, laughing joyously like children. I resist turning on the television or catching sight of my cell phone. I don't want the news or the voices of alarm to take me back again to that dark period we're emerging from. They were fateful days of constant uncertainty. They started with a wave of contradictory information and continued with the screech of ambulances and the clamor of catastrophe or collective suicide. The social media became the garbage heap of our catharsis, and you couldn't believe anyone, couldn't trust anyone with the sacred, couldn't follow anyone candidly to go down some path toward the future. Our existence occurred among the cries of death, sipping discouragement, and seeing how old people dropped like flies, until emergency services were saturated in each and every corner of the known world. We didn't know what was really happening in intensive care wards. Were they really fighting against all this dying? It seemed like an interminable nightmare in which we were the impotent spectators, prisoners of our own anxiety and intemperance.

Today, I prefer to remember our dead with the pain of battle, as innocent heroes in a war that faded away without our being able to win it despite our discipline and so much valor.

I won't complain, but I'm spent; I had to work in the mines, providing inputs, digging and waiting for instructions. I did my job as a foot soldier, without pay; and I congratulate myself that I contributed to beating this ineffable enemy that seems to distance itself moving toward a blurry horizon.

From my balcony, in shadow for so long, I can see my neighbor playing the guitar. He makes me weep with his

Sofía is my lighthouse, my destiny. As though she could hear my thoughts, she approaches, takes my hand, and, still naked, she urges me to open the main window to breathe in the morning breeze once again.

ballad. Silent healing tears, peculiarly calm tears; a feeling I hadn't felt in years. His wife is singing, but I can't distinguish her voice at a distance. I can only make out their passionate dedication, and it moves me even more because it seems to demand that the world awaken, that it restore itself and open its wings; a remote sign that the storm has passed.

The aroma of coffee exerts its spell and I drink my first cup as a kind of ritual, as I flip through the first pages of Colum McCann's latest novel that had been lying on my bureau like an elusive emblem of so many sleepless nights.

We are left with the memory, of course. What we learned and what we must forget so it doesn't martyr us. The mistakes we made at the beginning that cost so many lives cannot be repeated.

But there are also the stories of those who sacrificed themselves until they fell, vanquished. A male nurse who worked in the triage tent for three days, sleeping in snatches, always efficient; a rank-and-file worker who extended his hours, unmoved and available. I myself carried him to intensive care. He died from exhaustion, his lungs flooded and his gaze empty. Our efforts to save him were useless; he had poured his energy into others and his body was left with nothing to protect him. I embraced his fellow nurses, defying protocol, to ask them not to forget him, to carry his name and his bravery as intimate testimony, reaffirmed in the care for each patient, in the solidarity and the sleeplessness.

I also remembered my parents, both dead from preventable diseases, sightless to the input of life, to the pleasure of awakening every morning.

Without my noticing she's there, Sofía kisses me on the neck and refills my coffee cup before sitting down beside me to look at the slight swaying of the trees.

"Did you call the girls, Fermín?" she asks with that maternal tone that doesn't betray our daughters' ages.

"Sara's in Paris, on her anniversary trip, dear. Did you forget?"

"That's right," she says, coming out of her haze, as though returning suddenly to reality.

"But Manuela should be at home or in Málaga with her in-laws. Why don't we try to reach her?"

The conversation turns out to be a balm of joy and affection. The grandchildren squeal in the background and promise that they'll visit us as soon as regular flights resume. We offer to meet up on the Costa Brava, in Palafrugell, to remember old times.

As soon as I hang up the phone, Sofía puts her arms around me and I can divine her humid sex under her linen pajama. We make love slowly, rubbing our skin and caressing each other's nipples, kissing our sweat and letting ourselves sink into a long embrace of eroticism; recognizing each other, discovering our longing to be one and be reborn in complicity and desire.

I'm left alone in bed, submerged in daydreams. When I met her, Sofía was practically a little girl, but behind her naiveté hid a decided character and an iron will that has sped us forward like a locomotive. I distinctly remember her in her blue jeans, her wavy hair half way down her back, a blouse that covered her round, tense breasts, and that mischievous look that age and wrinkles have not erased. With the same eagerness that she took me this morning, we made love in her parents' house, taking advantage of their absence and the somnolence of the dogs. We laughed out loud after a simultaneous orgasm; we had conquered a prohibited world that would be ours forever. She lit a cigarette, imitating her movie heroines, and it made me cough like a consumptive, unaccustomed to tobacco and being confined. That made her make fun of me and she said—if memory serves—, "Oh, darling, if you're as weak as your lungs, I'll have to take care of you your whole life."

I watch her as she moves through the house like a lioness. It's true, she has protected me even from my own upsets. Fortunately, my weakness has been manageable and I'm a faithful man, by conviction and because of that love that I have known how to cultivate every day. Sofía is my lighthouse, my destiny. As though she could hear my thoughts, she approaches, takes my hand, and, still naked, she urges me to open the main window to breathe in the morning breeze once again. ■■■



Diego Ignacio Bugada Bernal*

VIRTUAL, THE NEW IN-PERSON CULTURAL INDUSTRY LEADERS DISCUSS THE "NEW NORMAL"

As we have seen throughout this issue of *Voices of Mexico*, the COVID-19 pandemic, more than accelerating or driving change, or perhaps triggering a paralysis of human endeavor or at least stimulating it, has tested the resilience of governments, populations, groups, and individuals, and with them, different spheres of human activity. Among all of these, its impact has been especially significant in cultural activities.

Every transformation begins with chaos. This paradigm of history can also be valid for the vast world of culture, in its proper sense of transformative action. How are we to solve this intractable problem? How should we adapt to times of confinement, uncertainty, and fear? How can we take advantage of trends in the multiple and accelerated changes we are experiencing and that were already perceptible before the crisis—in technology, in habits of acquisition and consumption, and in the virtualization of interpersonal communication, among many other areas— even before we can understand and assimilate them? How, in short, can we manage not only to survive but to transcend as a cultural discipline or industry?

We put several similar questions, albeit focused more on specific fields (book fairs, film criticism, film festivals, and art curatorship and museography) to four of the most distinguished representatives of these four areas: Marisol Schultz Manaut, director general of the Guadalajara International Book Fair; film critic and historian Leonardo García Tsao; the director of the Morelia International Film Festival, Daniela Michel; and curator and art historian Karen Cordero Reiman. If we are to identify a concurrent vision among them all, it is their belief in the capacity for creative regeneration of the industries they represent, which have successfully emerged from various other crises in the past. Nevertheless, they remain acutely aware of how much not being able to experience and relive emotions takes away from the cultural experience: for example, browsing multiple aisles replete with editorial offerings, enjoying cinema on the big screen, or recreating the sensations that come with physical and sensorial proximity to great works of pictorial or sculptural art. In effect, the virtual experience is not the same, but we should not disdain it, much less succumb to nostalgia for what, to some extent, may not return to how it was before for years. Instead, we should explore and make the most of the many unquestionable virtues and features that derive from our equally irresistible technological progress. Change and the need to keep pace with the virtual dimension of our existence were not born of this pandemic, nor will they disappear with it. Throughout history, humanity has had to adapt to many transformations of different forms and varying intensity, and cultural and artistic creativity and the combined impetus of promoters, creators, critics, and spectators has been one of the prime forces driving us to constantly improve on what has come before.

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Photos courtesy of the Guadalajara International Book Fair (FIL), the Morelia International Film Festival (FICM), and the University Museum of Contemporary Art (MUAC).



Inauguration of the 34th Guadalajara International Book Fair, November 28, 2020.

MARISOL SCHULTZ MANAUT, *director general*
Of the Guadalajara International Book Fair

Voices of Mexico (vm): How has the idea of how to hold the book fair changed since the pandemic began?

Marisol Schultz (ms): Together with the uncertainty, the devastation, the hundreds of thousands of deaths and people affected, and a radical change in living conditions that the coronavirus has so unexpectedly and in such an unprecedented way brought to this beleaguered 2020, activities in many sectors have had to stop, slow down, or change in most of the world. This has had a social and economic impact that is as difficult to predict as to stop and is the case of many mass events such as book fairs. The Guadalajara International Book Fair (FIL Guadalajara) is no exception, and although in the first quarter of the year we saw many other international fairs cancelled or migrate to an online version, we held on to the idea of being able to hold an in-person fair, with all the sanitary protocols set by the authorities in place. We worked on three scenarios for practically the entire year: one was a hybrid fair (with both remote and in-person activities); another, an in-person fair; and the third, an online fair. The evolution of the pandemic worldwide pushed us finally to make the decision that the entire program would be held on line.



The 2020 Guadalajara International Book Fair was able to go ahead on line.

VM: What proposals has the FIL made to hold the fair in the conditions we are experiencing in the pandemic?

MS: Holding the fair on line has posed many complications, ranging from logistics to technologies and budgets. The fair's organizing team has worked harder than ever this year, since, at the end of the day, we had no previous experience with a virtual fair. So, this is an uncharted path, along which we've had to learn new dynamics, new formats, and new forms of communication.

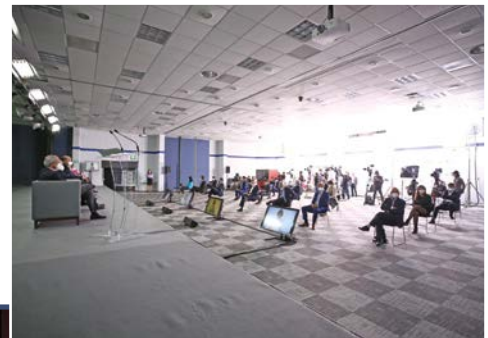
VM: Will book e-commerce change because of COVID-19?

MS: Yes, just as the outlook for books in general will change. In today's by-no-means promising circumstances, one particularly vulnerable sector is the book industry. Since the middle of March, when bookstores and many other points of sale closed in most of the world, publishing houses began to see a loss in sales that they have still not been able to get over. Unfortunately, many of the smaller houses will not survive or will only do so with an infinite number of difficulties.

VM: What has happened to book fairs this year?

MS: As I said, book fairs and literary festivals of all kinds the world over have either had to close down or move into the virtual world. This makes the crisis even bigger because, even though we have powerful platforms and good content, the magic of wandering through aisles crammed with possibilities for reading and with multiple options in all the publishing genres is irreplaceable. And this has an impact on book sales. All the links in the so-called book chain have had to change their *modus operandi*.

"Even though we have powerful platforms and good content, the magic of wandering through aisles crammed with possibilities for reading and with multiple options in all the publishing genres is irreplaceable." MS



Performance of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, Santander Performing Arts Group, 2020 Guadalajara International Book Fair.

LEONARDO GARCIA TSAO, *historian and film critic*

Voices of Mexico (vm): A trend in the film industry, already apparent even before the pandemic, is the growth of streaming, not only as a means of marketing films but also as a central player in film production, as in the case of Netflix. Do you think that, in the present situation, this dynamic could accelerate to the point of threatening the viability of movie theaters or at least a part of their market share?

Leonardo Garcia Tsao (LGT): Yes, well, the danger was present even before the pandemic; in other words, digital platforms had already created a kind of uncomfortable rivalry within the film industry. This developed because, clearly, their presence in the homes of thousands and thousands of people gave them a tremendous advantage over the idea of going to a movie theater and buying one, two, or more tickets, and so forth. So, just to mention the most popular, Netflix's incursion in film production has been controversial, even in some film festivals; I remember, for example, two years ago, *Roma*, by

Alfonso Cuarón, had plans to compete at Cannes, and due to its ties to Netflix it was blocked because, even though the festival's organizers had previously programmed films produced by Netflix, the French film distributors and exhibitors organized a kind of boycott, threatening to withdraw their entries for Cannes if Netflix films were screened, on the grounds that it would be harmful to their business. As a result, Cannes was one of the few major festivals not to show Netflix films; but from that point on a rivalry was formed, although *Roma* was subsequently entered in the Venice Film Festival with no objections and won its first major prize there.

A second remark: on the idea that cinema can compete with streaming platforms, under the current circumstances of second and third waves of the pandemic, I think not. People still prefer to stay home and avoid the risk of contagion, or at least that's how I see it. Being in a high-risk group, I have not gone to a movie theater because I don't feel safe indoors, since you never know what can happen. So yes, I do think movies in theaters are losing ground to digital platforms.



Simone Daino / Unsplash

Digital platforms, an alternative to movie houses.

“Digital platforms have cemented their dominance. The proof is that directors like Martin Scorsese, who may be today's most prestigious director, has worked with Netflix. Most people wait for new films to premiere on Netflix because it's convenient.” LGT



Cuartoscuro.com

Roma, directed by Alfonso Cuarón and produced by Netflix, won 10 statuettes at the 61st Ariel Awards show for the best of Mexican cinema.

VM: How have measures to control COVID-19 affected large-scale productions, especially those involving large numbers of people, like stunt doubles, crowd scenes, etc.?

LGT: You don't even need to go that far, any movie set is in danger because a film crew, however small, has 12 to 15 people, whose interaction inevitably carries a certain risk, which is why film production is at a standstill. Productions have resumed in developed countries, but in Mexico, as far as I know, none of them has resumed filming. The industry has been severely affected. For example, on the latest *Batman* movie, the star, Robert Pattinson, tested positive, and as a result they had to put production on hold while he was in quarantine. Imagine the cost in terms of production, millions of dollars a day; imagine the losses shutting down a large crew can cause. A similar situation occurred on the new *Mission Impossible* film with Tom Cruise. They started filming at the start of the pandemic and had to shut down for a long time. It has been extremely hard, but for the entire entertainment industry: concerts, theater, everything is paralyzed.

VM: Do you think the situation, as it applies to the entire entertainment industry, is the start of a transformation that will make way for new forms of production and consumption of entertainment? Do you see us moving toward a particular future scenario?

LGT: I think people are waiting for the COVID-19 issue to be resolved, for vaccines to finally be applied. There are signs that

we'll have enough highly effective vaccines very soon, so there's a light at the end of the tunnel. Of course, it remains to be seen how they'll be administered and other details, but people have more confidence in a solution than in coping with the pandemic.

VM: What have been the main changes in the art of filmmaking in recent years and where is it headed? What would its new normal be like?

LGT: Well, I think digital platforms have cemented their dominance. The proof is that directors like Martin Scorsese, who may be today's most prestigious director, has worked with Netflix; his film *The Irishman* had a short run in theaters and since then has been permanently on streaming. Most people wait for new films to premiere on Netflix because it's convenient. That's what's happening with *Mank*, by David Fincher, which opened in some theaters in Mexico and will be on Netflix in a few days. I prefer to wait.

VM: Are you pessimistic?

LGT: I think the film industry will recover, without a doubt, but Mexican film worries me, not because of the pandemic, but because of our government. They have eliminated all the trusts that funded film production; they have deprived the Mexican film industry of millions of pesos needed to produce films, and they did it when the local industry was on a roll, producing some 200 films a year, which, industry-wide, was very robust.

DANIELA MICHEL, director general of the Morelia International Film Festival (FICM)

Voices of Mexico (vm): How did the pandemic change the Morelia International Film Festival (FICM)?

Daniela Michel (DM): From the start of the health crisis we started organizing online screenings through our platform “FICM Presenta en Línea” (FICM Presents On Line). We wanted to offer a free, open space where the general public could see top-quality Mexican films, mostly winners from previous editions of the festival. The platform offered a curated selection of 26 feature films and 106 shorts between April and August 2020, registering 3 441 370 visits.

With this experience in mind, and given the uncertainty of the situation, we decided to plan a hybrid festival, with in-person screenings in theaters operated by the Cinépolis chain in Morelia, and parallel to that, with a significant online presence accessible through the Cinépolis Klic platform and on public television on Channel 22. The festival’s digital presence included all the Mexican entries, an important selection of films from Cannes, including the selection from its Critics’ Week, and the Indigenous Peoples’ Forum, international premieres, screenings of classic Mexican films, and special showings. Also, we prepared interviews, round-table discussions, and question-and-answer sessions, hosted on Cinépolis Klic.



18th Morelia International Film Festival (FICM), 2020.



An online interview with Matt Dillon about his documentary *The Great Fellove*, at the 2020 Morelia International Film Festival (FICM).



The premiere of the remastered digital version of Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Love Is a Bitch* at the 2020 FICM.

VM: What is the balance sheet of this latest edition, compared with previous years?

DM: This year the festival focused on the Mexican competition, which has always been the heart of our programming. We take pride in being the only festival in which the official selection in the competition is exclusively Mexican. In this edition, where the prizes were awarded by an international jury working on line, we had 89 titles in competition, practically the same number as last year.

VM: What areas of opportunity does the “new normal” create for the FICM and for festivals in general? Do you see them shifting toward a hybrid, virtual and in-person, model?

DM: This “new normal” has created a terrific opportunity to evolve toward a more digital world and cultivate new audiences. It bears mentioning that, since 2014, the festival has offered the “Online Selection of Mexican Short Films,” a virtual space through which our audiences can watch some of the short films included in the official selection free of charge and vote for their favorites. We advanced this initiative because we understand the importance digital platforms have gained in the public’s relationship with cinema. Movie theaters are the natural environment for watching films, but digital platforms expand the possibilities for reaching new audiences. Over the five days of the last festival, our digital section reached nearly a million viewers through online plat-

“Movie theaters are the natural environment for watching films, but digital platforms expand the possibilities for reaching new audiences.” DM

forms and public television, giving cinephiles nationwide the opportunity to see the finest Mexican films.

VM: Streaming, not only as a marketing tool, but as a source of sponsorship for film production, as in the case of Netflix, increasingly rivals the major production companies and film distributors and theater chains, and not just today: this has been gaining ground for several years now. Do you think under the present circumstances this dynamic could accelerate even more, and affect the film business to the point where it could even threaten the viability of movie theaters or produce a definitive transformation of this cultural industry?

DM: Digital platforms play a central role in the world of cultural dissemination. It’s extraordinary to see how international and local festivals have been able to adapt very quickly to continue providing crucial support for the film community. However, there’s nothing like the experience of going to a movie theater; nothing compares with it. In-person festivals will continue to provide vital meeting points for filmmakers, the public, and the film community.

KAREN CORDERO REIMAN, curator and art historian

Voices of Mexico (vm): Before 2020, people were already talking about museums receiving fewer visitors worldwide. Has the pandemic been an opportunity to reverse that trend even though attendance is virtual? Why?

Karen Cordero Reiman (KCR): I don't have statistics on museum attendance before and during the pandemic, but I think that it has forced museums to rethink their communication strategies from the point of view of virtual activities, exhibitions, and activations of their collections, in order to maintain an active presence with their public. The use of online platforms facilitates the participation of a broader international and national public, since it eliminates both the need for travel and admission costs; it also allows for the participation of people who perhaps wouldn't have been able to be part of a dialogue that required physical presence. This has opened up opportunities for creating broader and more diverse dialogues that museums would do well to keep in mind, even after the pandemic.

vm: The avant-gardes of the last century wanted to take art into the streets, take the artistic experience to other spaces. What are the scope and implications of putting art on screens today? What does receiving museum content in this new way mean?

KCR: The perception of art online, through computers, tablets, and telephones, while it broadens the potential public, radically

reduces the public's access to the multisensorial and material qualities of the visual and performing arts, as well as possibilities for corporeal interaction. The implications of this process vary, depending both on the medium and characteristics of the artwork and on those of the digital device used to receive it. At the same time, the possibility of creating artworks designed for digital reception has opened up new frontiers and poses new challenges for creators.

vm: Besides facilitating access, how could technology be used to establish a link between museums and the public? Do you think that augmented reality, immersion technologies, and interaction with art will strengthen the museum experience?

KCR: In my understanding, technology enriches the museum experience primarily when the conceptual and material use of these elements by artists (or museum educators) incorporates a critical vision of technology and its implications, as is the case, for example, in the work of Rafael Lozano Hemmer, or is part of the original conception of the piece. Technological elements can also be useful as an auxiliary element in museum education and provide access to additional information and examples, which complements the experience of the artwork, but are clearly differentiated from the aesthetic experience in itself. In many other cases technological elements become "gimmicks," which are attractive because of their novelty, but tend to displace the artistic experience on which the works are posited.



Photo by Oliver Santana, courtesy of the MUA.C.

Mónica Mayer, *The Clothesline*, participatory installation first exhibited in 1978.

“The possibility of creating artworks designed for digital reception has opened up new frontiers and poses new challenges for creators.” KCR



Screenshot from the online Museum of Mexican Women Artists (MUMA).

VM: Personally, as a curator, what does this new digital experience mean to you? How are you experiencing the change? What thrills you and what will you miss?

KCR: One of the ways digital elements have been present in exhibitions I have curated is as an additional interface in participatory works, such as *The Clothesline* and *No to Abducted Motherhoods*, by the feminist artist Mónica Mayer. In both these cases, the use of computers and online platforms offered an opportunity to gather information from additional sources, and in the latter case, it also allowed for the documentation of participations in activating the piece in the museum context. In both cases, these elements functioned well because they were conceived by the artist as an integral part of the works and their dialogical character.

I've also been part of the advisory council of the online MUMA: Museum of Mexican Women Artists since its inception in 2008 and have curated several exhibitions for its online platform and adapted other physical exhibitions for presentation in this format. This museum is conceived as a vehicle for making visible, documenting, and interpreting the work of women artists in the light of their extremely unequal presence in exhibitions and collections in Mexico (and in general around the world).

In both these cases, the use of digital elements is conceived in relation to broader objectives rather than as an objective in itself. In other words, it has a practical function as part of my curatorial work, but I don't think I have used digital resources in particularly innovative ways, perhaps also because I'm not part of a generation that grew up dealing with those interfaces.

Digital resources have been useful to me to facilitate processes of documentation and in working with designers who are able to create simulations of exhibition spaces that allow us to plan physical solutions in advance.

In general, I'm grateful for these ways in which digital resources have made communication and documentation processes more efficient for exhibition planning teams.

However, my work as an art historian and curator focuses in large part on the body and the senses as essential elements of aesthetic and social experience, and while some digital works deal with these aspects in creative and powerful ways (for example, works by Tania Candiani and Gerardo Suter), I find that the contrasts posed by the rich variety of techniques, materials, and conceptual tools that form the fabric of art history allow art to appeal to memory and the body in ways that are precluded by the limitation of art to digital elements and supports. **VM**

Irene Artigas Albarelli*
Illustrated by Xanic Galván**

ANOTHER MATERIALITY



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** @XanicGe.

Another materiality
A new registration protocol in dizzying mirages.
Presence as mere data.
A handprint turned mutation-spiral.

What goes on, conceivably, is the phenomenon.
What could go on is but a concept glimpsed as hope.
The materiality of wandering.

The critical moment speckled through the cross-cut.
Breathed into amphoras of uncharted lands.
A shelter found in flowing.





NOCTURNE

Some nights usher in the whisper of flawed things: a sprig not yet dry, a secret only meant for you.

The half-moon and her correspondence.

Tides.

The spin that pulls them.

In them a voice muted by the ethical imperative of the self echoes beyond the voice of that which can't be said, lost for words. A guarded voice makes sound.

The awkward dream, the vertigo

plated in melancholy.

The reverberating structure that precedes the word.

Unsolvable enigmas like the space called for here, the stealth of a close breath, frost inching forward. They spill past their forms and leave safety behind.

Make of such nights a talisman. Pebbles resting on the table.





BIRTH IS A KNOT

Uneasy, at a pause, waiting for a sound from the one with that big little foot. The first thing I saw. Before seeing. Asking myself how that foot could possibly belong to a person who came from inside of me. What I remember from that night happened at a different speed. That speed has gone on for twenty-four years. And counting.

We rushed to the emergency room on the night of January 22nd, because, as I later found out, my placenta was becoming detached and I needed a C-section. The one with the big foot didn't cry at birth, and though they said he was fine, they had to push him to cry so I would calm down. We later found out he'd been tangled up in the umbilical cord, wrapped around him thrice, which had caused the tear in the placenta. Birth is a knot. From that day, the sixth floor where we lived became a house of air. And the light at that height, with that quiet and ubiquitous child, quickened.

**

I think about all this while Pablo sleeps after his first nightshift on-call at the OB-GYN hospital. It wasn't his turn to go there, but given all the shuffling and hospital reconversions with the pandemic, he'll spend two months there. One nightshift on call every four days. Between filling out paperwork and going to and from the lab, he said he'd seen an abysmal number of babies being born. I suppose that, yes, six or seven babies can multiply the abyss.

**

My grandmother gave birth to three babies. Only one, my father, survived. Strangely endowed with being both the first and the third, he learned ubiquity. The other boy and girl died at birth. Tangled up in their umbilical cords. To give birth, to give light, can be chock with shadow.

**

Anne Carson once said that a lifetime drawing profiles from one perspective would make it seem like we only have one eye, the landscape fleeing our grasp, like we can't fully possess anything. So we shouldn't hide the fact that our canvas is flat. Mistakes are among what she thinks about the most, and she appreciates them because they let her see herself think, keeping mistakes. A mistake, a mishap in a transmission, can draw two characters with a single stroke of the brush. What goes on, and its knots, are like that sometimes. **MM**



Valeria List*
Illustrated by Santiago Moyao**

POEMS¹

I. **W**e take changes but they come suddenly
a moving car that runs over us out of the blue

it lays our organs bare
like inept witnesses
with no choice but reassembly.

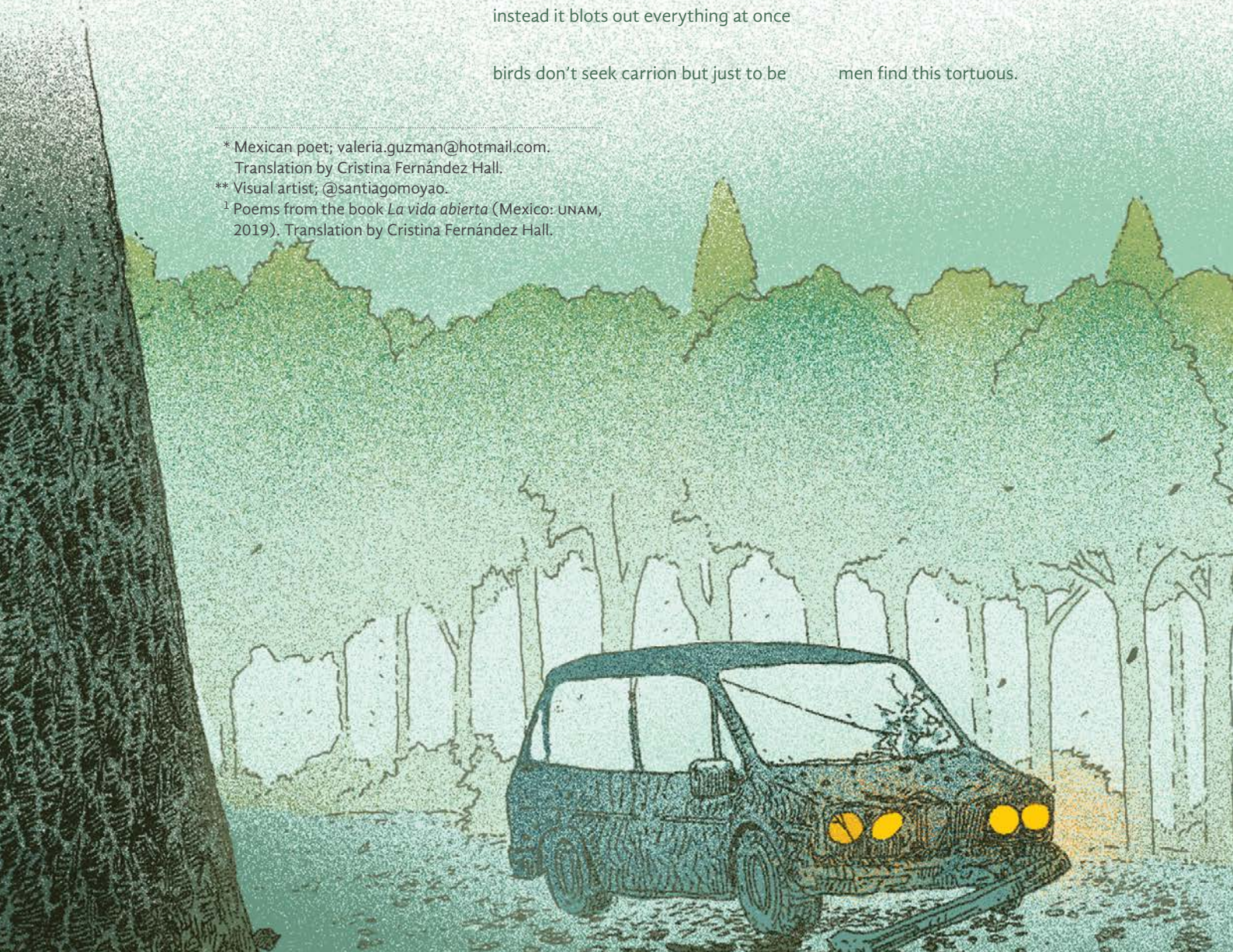
II. **T**he one frank variation in the forest is mist and this white falls but once a day
not wishing to annihilate a single print
instead it blots out everything at once

birds don't seek carrion but just to be men find this tortuous.

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¹ Poems from the book *La vida abierta* (Mexico: UNAM, 2019). Translation by Cristina Fernández Hall.



III. **T**rees never sit down
once in a while they'll lean on the next.

Trees weep once a year
and write their wills on fallen leaves.

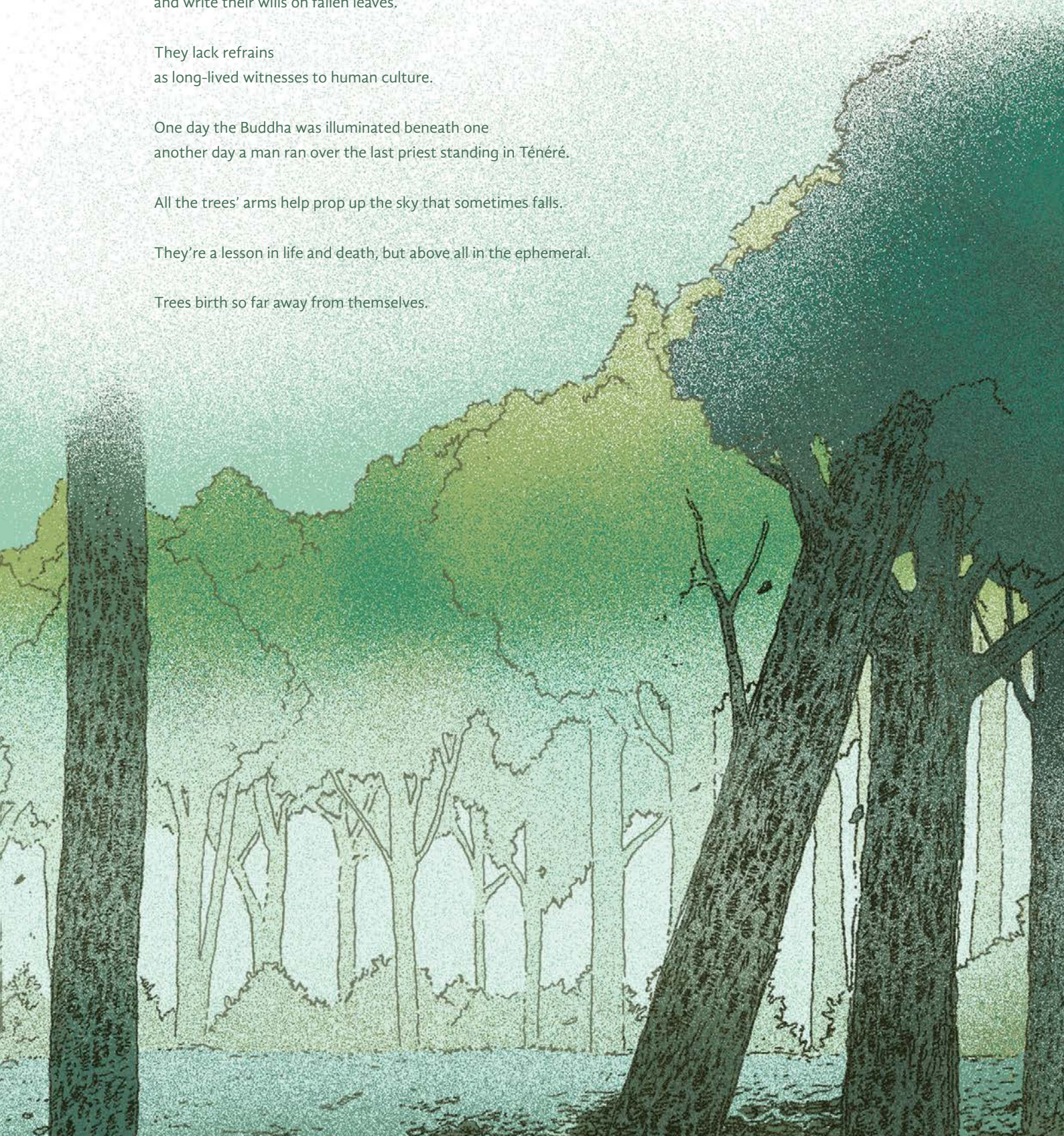
They lack refrains
as long-lived witnesses to human culture.

One day the Buddha was illuminated beneath one
another day a man ran over the last priest standing in Ténére.

All the trees' arms help prop up the sky that sometimes falls.

They're a lesson in life and death, but above all in the ephemeral.

Trees birth so far away from themselves.



Ernesto Flores Vega*

AFTER THE STORM COMES THE MUSIC



Joseph Pearson / Unsplash

No one imagined we would be celebrating the 250th anniversary of the birth of Beethoven, the personification of one of the highest points in music, in an atypical year, a year of unease and uncertainty. A 2020 filled with a pandemic and lockdowns that disrupted our daily ves. In which

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we have lost loved ones and people we admire, and which many of us would not have survived without music. I will rephrase: another 365 days in which music helped us survive.

How did the pandemic change our approach to this art? What aftereffects will it leave in our habits and ways of enjoying it? What is new and what will remain? Will we also speak of a before and an after covid-19 in the field of musical enjoyment? Will we also experience a “new musical normal”?

The Sacred Totem of the Live Concert

I write these lines with longing and the uncertainty of an old music lover of the sea. I am one more of the knowledge workers sent home and asked to adapt it into an office. Before the pandemic and the lockdown, I listened to music while I made breakfast, on the way to work in my car, when I came home from work, and during dinner or before going to bed. Now that I think about it, I see that my biggest musical moments, the most relaxed, were on the weekends when I could leave my house and practice that sacred ritual called a live concert.

On the eve of the third decade of the twenty-first century, music is more than ever an industry and a long chain of production and value. Even before the pandemic, the big recording conglomerates were already undergoing profound, diverse changes in the way their products were used and consumed. Compact discs sales were plummeting while those of long-play vinyl records were on the rise and streaming got progressively bigger and bigger.

This year has been devastating for the live music industry. Since the second quarter of 2020, mass concerts began to be cancelled and postponed. The big players, like the U.S.'s Live Nation and Mexico's Corporación Interamericana de Entretenimiento (CIE) saw their business projections brutally slashed. Suffice it to analyze the Mexican corporation's most recent quarterly report to the stock market: it showed an 82-percent drop in its consolidated sales compared to the same period in 2019. The goose that laid the golden egg didn't die, but its fertility certainly dropped.

Amidst fear and uncertainty, music continued to burst spontaneously and imperfectly from the instruments of musicians and bands wandering the streets in search of a few coins. But it also began to appear on balconies and in windows. For many weeks, Saúl, a good friend of mine from Spain, shared with me on WhatsApp the interpretations of his neighbor in Madrid, a trumpet-player from the Royal Theater. And millions of other musicians around the world have done the same, to the applause of real or virtual neighbors.

In the digital sphere, not only did The Rolling Stones debut a new song about deserted streets and urban loneliness (*Living in a Ghost Town*), but artists of the most diverse genres played for their fans from home studios, living rooms, or bedrooms. And millions of singers and professional and amateur musicians inundated social media (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter) with their own pieces and those of others. This phenomenon, this decentralization of creativity

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and interpretation, was already here and has undoubtedly come to stay.

Streaming, the Ubiquitous Resource

Nothing can replace movies at the movies, theater in the theater, and music in the moment it is being made. The best rock group of the twentieth century (The Beatles with Sir George Martin at the engineering console) was never more spellbinding live than at its recording sessions, but any kind of music and the listener's experience in the moment when it is being performed are unparalleled.

The performer is influenced by the moment, the place, the mood, and, above all, the reaction of a real, concrete, present audience. Noted jazz drummer Antonio Sánchez confessed that to me last June during a Zoom chat, "When each musician has an impact on everyone on the stage and, from there, also plays to the audience, that exchange of energy is what I most long for. That is what I most miss now that everything has come to a standstill."

The pandemic and lockdown have pushed me to listen to different performances by streaming. Some are recorded, with impeccable takes and great audio quality, like Nick Cave's anthology-worthy performance at London's Alexandria Palace. Others are live, like some of the jazz musicians I have heard from New York's Blue Note in Greenwich Village. This kind of performance stimulates the illusion of the natural, the spontaneous, and what at any moment might go wrong.

The reality of the health emergency has imposed its conditions and hasn't left any room for complaints or demanding too much. It would be worse to go without music. In adversity, digital mediation—or whatever we want to call it—has allowed us to continue to enjoy the healing, stimulating, provocative, and evocative character of music.

In Mexico, festivals like the Cervantino, the Music Festival of Morelia, Mexico City's Historic Center Festival, or the Jazz Festival of the Maya Riviera, despite not boasting the diverse,



prodigious offerings of previous years, at least have brought the sounds of multiple styles into many homes both in Mexico and abroad. This has also been the case of initiatives like the NY Jazz All Stars, a circle organized by DeQuinta Producciones in alliance with Wynton Marsalis's Jazz at Lincoln Center. Mexico's most important university, our university, has also kept up a rich musical offering online, which includes The UNAM Symphonic Series, OFUNAM Recitals, Sound Laboratories, and the Wednesday Performance.

The Lockdown and Virtual Music

Lockdown has made us favor virtual music. The exhortation to "stay at home" has also been understood as "listen to music at home." The offerings of free and paid concerts of the most diverse genres is abundant. The quality of the audio can be the absolute best. Nevertheless, something is missing. This does not seem to be the simple perception of a music lover longing for halls, auditoriums, and listeners who cough and clear their throats between one movement and another; strong scientific backing exists for the idea of the shared musical experience. Laurel Trainor, the director of the McMaster Institute

Give music the time and attention it deserves. The same that we give to reading or should give to our daily conversations. Inhabit it. Flow with it. Perhaps that is what Nietzsche was thinking when he wrote, "Without music, life would be a mistake."

for Music and the Mind (MIMM) in Ontario, has explained this in the Canadian press. Her research results make me think of our musical customs.¹ For her, whether playing music together or being present as part of the audience at a live performance generates an intense emotional, social experience. Different MIMM research projects, which use a fully functional concert hall with monitoring equipment, have found that when an audience listens and watches a concert on a video, they do not move as much nor do they enjoy it as much as when they listen and watch a live musical performance. They also show that when people move in time with the music at a concert, it raises their feelings of confidence and their desire to cooperate with others.

I won't hide it: I long for the comfort and sound quality you can enjoy in the Fine Arts Palace or the Nezahualcóyotl Hall; but I don't miss even a tiny bit the problems of access, or the crowds, or the smoke of other concert-goers that I have to put up with at mass gatherings in venues like the Sports Palace or the Sun Forum.

In different parts of the world, the new normal has begun to open the floodgates for the public to return to concert halls. Almost nobody is bothered by having to step on disinfectant mats for their shoes, having their temperature taken, obligatory mask-wearing, or for having to maintain a healthy distance from other members of the audience with several empty seats between them.

An emblematic venue like the Berliner Philharmonie in Germany's capital, with a 2440-seat capacity, was only admitting 670 people in September; by November, it was already seating 1000. Frankfurt's Alter Oper is allowing 600 people in its 2400 seats. It's a matter of addition and subtraction: to be profitable, a venue like that needs an audience of 700 or 800 people.

Welcome to the Age of Drive-in Concerts

All over the world, in all the genres and sizes of musical performances, people are looking for alternatives and new business models. Big pop music groups in Mexico like El Tri, Moderatto, Intocable, and Caifanes are exploring drive-in concerts, whether it be at the Pegasus Forum outside Toluca or at Curve 4 of the Rodríguez Brothers Autodrome in eastern Mexico City. Caifanes will offer a twofer that may become common practice in the near future: first it will give a drive-in concert (on December 10, 11, and 12) and then it will stream the same concert (on December 23) for people who prefer to stay home. We should remember that in surveys done in different places in the world, almost half the people questioned said they would start going to concerts only months after a vaccine for COVID-19 exists.

Mexico City rock and jazz venues like the Foro Cultural Alicia, the Sangriento, the Indie Rocks!, the Foro El Tejedor de El Péndulo, El Convite, Jazzorca, and Jazzatlán are beginning to open up to a few music lovers. That doesn't mean that, given the complete absence of government support, some of them, like the Alicia, aren't forced to sell records and posters to survive. If in Mexico's USMCA partner nations, the United States and Canada, where independent music venue opera-

tors are better organized than in Mexico, without federal support an estimated 95 percent of them could disappear, we have more than enough reason to be concerned about what could happen here. Mexican independent venues will have to use their imagination and come up with loyalty strategies or crowdfunding ideas.

From Digital Music to the Triumphant Return of Vinyl

The pandemic stopped music in gyms, bars, and dance clubs. This led many people to buy more music in online outlets like Amazon, making Jeff Bezos's company one of the big winners of the year: the company has earned more in 2020 than any other year of its 26-year history, and it hired 175 000 people.

Many also used digital music platforms more. According to the Recording Industry Association of America, 85 percent of the today's music is consumed through streaming. The digital citizenry has the pending task of using the power of each individual as a consumer to favor the platforms that pay the artists the best. This is a matter of fair trade and valuing intellectual work. At the end of the day, Napster, Tidal, Apple Music or Google Play Music are not the same as Deezer, Spotify, Amazon Music, YouTube, or SoundCloud. The devil is in the details, and the aware consumer will have to make a conscientious analysis to pick the best platform for him/her and the artists he/she likes.

The burgeoning return to vinyl records, on the other hand, is not merely a retro gesture by hipsters and millennials who want to be cool. Audio-lovers of all generations have already reevaluated their vinyl record collections and are increasing them. 2020 is the first year in 34 when the sale of vinyl records surpassed that of CDs, which were in frank decline.

With this panorama, it is appropriate to end by stating the obvious: the most important thing will continue to be the quality of our approach to music. Give it the time and attention it deserves. The same that we give to reading, for example; the attention we should pay to all our daily conversations. Inhabit it. Flow with it. Perhaps that is what Friedrich Nietzsche was thinking of when he wrote, "Without music, life would be a mistake."¹

Notes

¹ See <https://mimm.mcmaster.ca>.

María Antonieta Mendivil*

THE PERFORMATIVE BODY'S REPRESENTATION IN DANCE AND THE PANDEMIC

Dance once inhabited a space that explored mediation through technology, questioned the meaning of the body and the instrument/device, and extended its tentacles toward the transdisciplinary and “expanded dance,” interrupted continual movement as a way of politically questioning the raging consumerism in the capitalist system, and shifted from the body of execution to the body of feeling and expression.

The arrival of the pandemic and the abrupt confinement that ensued dislodged all of these thoughts about the body from the field of reason, criticism, and research and pushed them toward a space of confinement and forced stasis, with technological mediation becoming a last resort for expression through dance.

Well before dance became a discipline regulated by the Royal Academy of Dance’s standard of beauty in 1661, it had taken a myriad of paths: it was used in funeral rites, sacred and profane, and later, after classical antiquity, it forged a seemingly unbreakable alliance with theater and thus did not focus on movement *per se*.

However, the neoclassical, Apollonian model drew from Plato, who defined one of the three kinds of dance as destined to procure health, levity, and proper grace in the body.¹ Bodily representation in dance was conjured through the ideals of proportionality, in which young beauty, contemplative and immutable like a Greek statue, was supposed to hide any and all agitation, disturbance, effort. And this unattainable ideal demanded that constant flowing, upward movement seem to defy gravity. This exacting physical work would sublimate the body toward an ethereal ideal, unchained from the corporal, animal realm as it reached a spiritual state.

Platonic dichotomies separated the body between the heavens and the earth, matter and spirit, levity and gravity, effort and grace. Airiness, void of itself, would mark the path toward liberation from the sensual world.

In her essay “Danza o el imperio sobre el cuerpo” (Dance or the Empire over the Body), Susana Tambutti, who speaks critically of ballet’s domestication of the body, training, and discipline, and who alludes to the “dancer of equestrian dances” who needs constant training, delves deep into the discipline’s representation of the body. She states, “The body would increase its technical perfecting while reducing its symbolic function at the same time. . . . Through a conception lacking internal perception, the body was still considered an externality. My body was external to Me. The dancer recognized himself through his reflection in the mirror, and this image would exact all the technical demands needed to reap the maximum benefit from that alien body.”²

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In *Agotar la danza* (Exhausting Dance), André Lepecki notes, “The project of Western dance becomes more and more aligned with the production and display of a body and a subjectivity fit to perform this unstoppable motility,”³ until the time comes for this movement in constant flux to succumb to a spasm, a kinesthetic stutter, a wound of critical anxiety, as Lepecki calls it. The advent of change in dance, as a critical and political movement, interrupts this constant, continual, upward flow.

Susana Tambutti clearly outlines the body’s new representation as of the mid-twentieth century, in which the body abandons a kind of execution that is devoid of emotion and symbolism and becomes the place “of production of the subject’s imaginary”;⁴ the body, no longer an immaterial idealization, becomes the perceived body.

The executing body shifts to become a feeling body, with senses, energy, and a relationship to space; as such, it is an unstable, vulnerable, subjective body, at risk in the face of gravity, pauses, decadence, materiality, and sensuality. Instead of having bodies standing miraculously *en pointe*, we see bodies together, dragging themselves on the earth and its elements, on the floor, in organic and imperfect movement. Tambutti quotes Paul Ardenne explaining this lucidly: “I inhabit my body, but at the same time, I represent myself inhabiting this body that is mine.” In Pina Bausch’s words, “I am not interested in how people move, but in what moves them.”⁵

André Lepecki, in speaking of Jacques Derrida, says he “understands the body not as a self-contained and closed entity but as an open and dynamic system of exchange, constantly producing modes of subjection and control, as well as resistance and becomings.”⁶

Though Randy Martin would argue, in Lepecki’s words, that “politics goes nowhere without movement.”⁷ Nadia Sere-metakis counters that the still-act is political, as it interrupts the historic flow. As Lepecki writes, “The still acts because it interrogates the economies of time, because it reveals the possibility of one’s own agency within controlling regimes of capital, subjectivity, labor, and mobility.”⁸

While at one time, at the dawn of dance’s formality, the art was considered a scenic pause, with closer ties to theater, in more recent times our explorations of bodily representation have harkened back to non-movement as political and critical discourse. And while training before a mirror once alienated the body as an instrument outside the subject, now, the mediation of technologies, screens, and devices push the subject toward fragmentation, toward the meta-subject, with a body overflowing past its boundaries and corporality.

Technological mediation has brought dance explorations to divest themselves of corporality and re-appropriate a once-empty space that is now occupied by the expansion of the technological body—projected and refracted in other forms of virtual corporality. We are seeing a transmutation of incorporeal subjects becoming virtual bodies. Scenic elements also blur their boundaries and play with the optical illusion of melting the body in space with the theater’s lights, floors, and walls—a virtual magma in constant interaction, fusion, play, appropriation, and renunciation through movement, stillness, the body, and the virtual.

Just as technologies began to take on anthropomorphic features, “this tie between technology and art would come to characterize the avant-gardes of the twentieth century. Dance has embodied live performance since its first media images, but, in parallel, modern dance has also influenced the cinematographic experience,” recalls Nuria Carton de Grammont in her essay “Louise Lecavallier y el simulacro del cuerpo virtual” (Louise Lecavallier and the Simulation of the Virtual Body).⁹ In this sense, Maya Deren comes to mind.

“Dance appropriated these media to boost the stage’s capabilities, increasing choreographic possibilities of movement with the converging of organic dexterity and artificial illusion flow,”¹⁰ writes Carton de Grammont. “As such, the presence of electronic media in dance yields real, visual, and virtual synchronic dimensions in which the body becomes a fluidity that transits between these atmospheres.”¹¹

Carton de Grammont calls this stage in dance “meta-modernity” because “in it, the body goes beyond the mechanical, the informational, the digital. This choreographic phase would acquire meaning by transcending the physical state—not the human body *per se*, but the technological body that has characterized the history of modernity.”¹²

Dance was progressing in this exploration of new technologies and bodily resignification when the pandemic struck and confined our sentient, expressive, moving bodies in permanent virtuality—the sole performative space left.

Our optimism and horizons of exploration, imagination, and creation thus became an imposition. As such, rather than continuing to reflect upon performative theory, Jean Baudrillard resonates more to me, given his sense of urgency and criticism from a place of pessimism, which we should keep in mind when reflecting upon the virtual from a space of criticism, rather than tossing the exercise of dance into its inertial flux.

Baudrillard's words are still relevant today: "Just like we might speak of a fractal subject today, diffracting in a multitude of miniature egos that are all like the next, the subject "un-multiplies" according to an embryonic model, like a biological culture, infinitely saturating its medium through asexual reproduction."¹³

Baudrillard strives to clarify that this is not about narcissism, but about "desolate self-reference,"¹⁴ an insertion of the identical overlapping the identical, equally emphasizing intensity and meaninglessness.

In our pandemic and virtual-performance conditions, it is worth asking ourselves how the public, or the spectator, perceives this new way of consuming what we have experienced as the living arts, now that we lack stage conventions. Baudrillard states that what the spectator sees through the screen is not an act of dance, but his own brain: "Today it's not about reading in the liver or the viscera, nor even in the heart or the gaze, but simply in the brain, and one would wish to make visible its millions of connections, helping its activity along like in a videogame."¹⁵

Nonetheless, I believe that the lack of limits and boundaries that the virtual stage has yielded takes up the entire act of the creator and viewer today. The question Baudrillard posed in terms of the performer (Am I a man; am I a machine?) now extends to the spectator. The viewer, constantly connected to a virtual reality where news, educational, work-related, artistic, and cultural contents coexist and are consumed, is no longer clearly defined: Am I a person or am I a machine?

Baudrillard warned us long ago, "The communicative being, the interactive being, no longer takes vacations. It completely contradicts its activity, because it can no longer draw back, not even mentally, from the operational network in which it performs."¹⁶ This is our pandemic reality today. It is within this reality that the performative body's representation in current dance has shifted toward another dimension. By losing the space between the stage and the spectator, by sharing the virtual space, with the viewer representing him/herself as a person-machine, the mediatization of technologies has lost its former meaning of scenic or performative intent.

Instead of having bodies standing miraculously *en pointe*, we see bodies together, dragging themselves on the earth and its elements, on the floor, in organic and imperfect movement.

I also ask myself whether this constant virtual interconnection doesn't harken us back to the perpetual movement that dance had sought to bring to a pause as a way of criticizing our capitalist consumption of images, stimuli, and movement.

Most paradoxically, we have striven to boldly criticize the system and its control strategies from a space of performative expression, but today, this expression of movement constantly finds itself within the system: it is transmitted and consumed on social media, where creators and spectators are repeatedly hyper-codified, mapped, and geo-referenced according to identity, taste, interaction, and consumption habits.

In the post-pandemic era, after this forced virtuality, there will be much to learn from the representation of the performative body. The post-pandemic might also prove the right time to stop movement, to take a pause—a historic spasm, or a convulsion of the times—and reflect upon other representations, with their deepest meanings surging as acts of rebellion and criticism against the backdrop of virtual control. ■■■

Notes

1 See *Danziclopedia*, <https://sites.google.com/site/danziclopedia/home>, accessed November 25, 2020.

2 Susana Tambutti, "Danza o el imperio sobre el cuerpo," <http://movimiento.org/profiles/blogs/2358986:BlogPost:3762>, accessed November 28, 2020.

3 André Lepecki, *Agotar la danza*, Antonio Fernández Lera, trans. (Alcalá de Henares, Spain: Universidad de Alcalá de Henares-Centro Coreográfico Galego-Mercat de les Flors-Aula de Danza Estrella Casero, 2009), pp. 17.

4 Tambutti, op. cit.

5 Ibid.

6 Lepecki, op.cit., p. 21.

7 Ibid., p. 30.

8 Ibid., p. 36.

9 Nuria Carton de Grammont, "Louise Lecavallier y el simulacro del cuerpo virtual," *Fractal*, year xiii, vol. xii, no. 50 (July-September 2008), p. 103.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 105.

12 Ibid., p. 107.

13 Jean Baudrillard, "Videoesfera y sujeto," in *Videoculturas de fin de siglo* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1990), p. 27.

14 Ibid., p. 31.

15 Ibid., p. 30.

16 Ibid., p. 35.

Gretta Penélope Hernández*

MUTATION



My *Life in COVID-19/13032020* are the pages in an almanac that seemingly got stuck on a single date. But, according to the Gregorian calendar, as I sit down to write this today, 245 days have passed since I shut myself up in my home like never before in my life.

My outings in now-distant March consisted only of morning walks with Daniel, my dog. When I got home, I took off my shoes and my routine of household chores began. As I swept the accumulated dust up and washed the dishes over and over,

* Photographer; IG: @grettaph.

my mind was lost predicting apocalyptic scenarios that I hid very well in the silence of my breast. My son would not know of my terrifying dreams, my insomnia, my fear of not being able to recover the freedom we had known before COVID-19.

Every time he asked me, “When will I go back to school?” I would answer, “I don’t know, but it won’t be long now.”

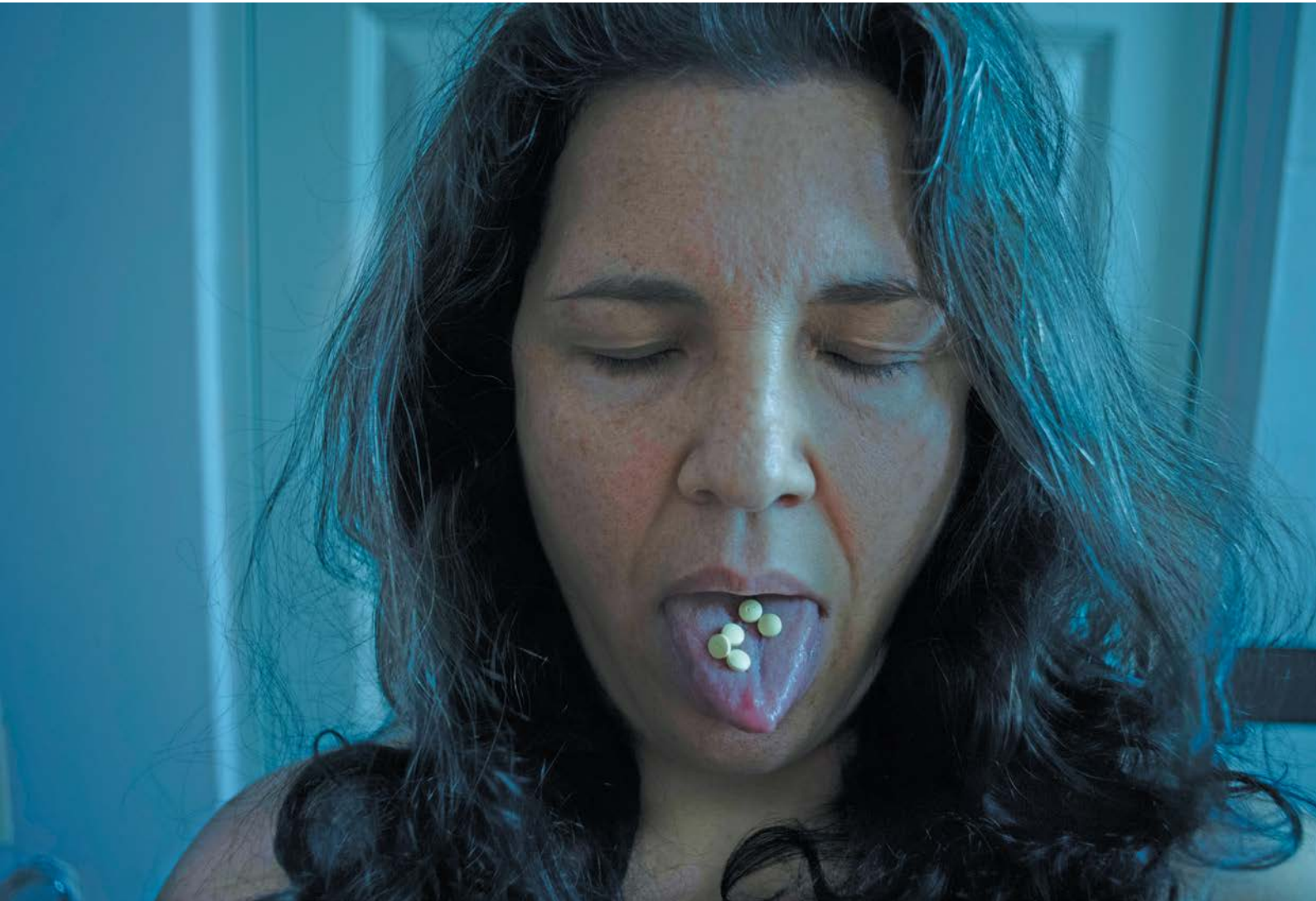
To beat back the confinement, I diversified my brain and body in all the ways I had at my disposal: yoga, reading, cardiovascular exercises in front of the screen, embroidery, and cleaning —exhausting cleaning that has left me more frustrated than satisfied.





Every morning I open my bedroom window and throw birdseed out to the birds; they're already waiting for me on the roof of a neighboring school that's on pause, the same pause that crushes the streets and the restaurants and the notions stores and the little workshops that have been forced to close.

I don't always have the strength to watch the news; it's enough to hear the stories told in the businesses in my neighborhood every time I ask the same question: "How are you doing?" Their answers leave me devastated. When the sadness passes, I make up a little food basket and give it to a passer-by. A small gesture that might encourage others.







Sometimes I ask myself what kind of karma dropped me into this time. I still don't know if I should feel privileged for living in the first global pandemic in human history. Will this lesson make us create societies with more empathy, with better access to public health, and with better digital reach? I don't even recognize myself fully; I know that I'm mutating, leaving my skin on the sheets every morning. But what am I changing into? I've always had empathy, so the new skin flakes come from a new me that is yet to be seen.

The fact is that we should live the time we have left with love and wisdom. The future and the mislabeled "new normal" has still not taken shape in our lives. Despite that, I continue to look toward a bright horizon and wait. I wait in my home for the shining moment when I can hug again. **MM**



Ángeles Eraña*

The Current Change, A Conceptual Incongruity?

The world today continues to be the same as it was yesterday; today, just like before, people die from curable diseases; today, just like before, we women are victims of domestic violence and we're afraid to go out on the street, we're exposed to the many forms of gender violence that continue to multiply. Death is that tangible, palpable, current reality that it has always been, but, in contrast with yesterday, today there is a virus that reminds us of it and, with that, shows us to ourselves for what we are: we are mortal, we are as vulnerable as anyone else;¹ the possibility of ceasing to exist is real and is always just around the corner. The uncertainty that eats away at us today has always been there; the difference with yesterday's is that today it's visible. The unease about what will happen is exacerbated for different reasons. Among them is the certainty that we have no control over it; we can't even minimally predict when or how we'll be able to go back onto the streets. Today, in contrast with yesterday, the only thing that exists is the here and now, daily survival, navigating the waters of our homes to get through the day. As Rita Segato says, life turned into "at home." This brings a lack of contact, a reciprocity that cannot be corporealized, and, in that sense, does not produce a true exchange. But it also brings the possibility of domesticating the political.

The little differences between the world that was and the one that is, the differences that are barely perceptible in this world that continues to be itself, are beginning to



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become a process. This may well leave marks; that is, it may produce transformations that we will see later on.

In this article, I will sketch out some notes that may help us imagine —more than reflect on— the world that follows, the world that we're probably already experiencing but we don't see yet. And, from my perspective, it seems impossible to see the present changes because you inhabit them, you go through them. Only after they have happened do they become observable. This is particularly the case in a world where time is experienced as an economic entity, in which there is no time for time, in which time only exists for and due to production, in which it is measured by the standards that production imposes. In that world, the one we've been living in for several centuries now, recognizing change requires distancing yourself from it. For that reason, perhaps, it is so difficult to reflect on the transformations we are inhabiting today. We do so about those that others have gone through, those that somehow have already been consolidated and set. What we see, what we deliberate about, are, in a phrase, the consequences of change, the trail it leaves in its wake, the readjusting, the devastation when that exists or the tracks of its progress.

For these reasons, among others, talking about the change in the world after the pandemic —or during it—

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is complicated: we are going through it; we are living it; and the changes that come with it—if they exist—are still opaque to us. Perhaps not all of them: the ones that have changed the immediate appearance of the world are palpable, but others, those that could transform the foundations of our planet, have not become fully visible yet.

The current situation is peculiar in many ways. One of them is what I was referring to in the previous paragraph: today's reality not only does not seem to move ahead, but it also propels us in an almost untimely fashion to think, reflect, and predict the changes that are brewing, those that are already occurring, those that we cannot yet see. The rush that constitutes us—the one born of the world of economic time and that is embodied in us—accompanies us in this impatient wait for the future, and, in the absence of any possibility of acting, pushes us to imagine. Every day many of us ask ourselves what the world will be like after lockdown, what world we will return to when science allows us to look each other in the face once again.

Perhaps we asked ourselves that question more at the beginning of the pandemic and less and less often now, but the interesting thing about it is that with lockdown came a sudden change. It was so sudden and unexpected that it was possible to see it in the very moment it happened, that we were able to perceive it as we experienced it. Here, it is worth reflecting about the characteristics and consequences of precipitous changes: they are a low-magnitude earthquake. You feel them, they shake you, and they seem to transform everything, but when they're over you can see that, while they did move around some of the debris, the foundations of our reality, the bases that hold up what was shaken, remain intact. Those brusque changes produce a kind of dizzy spell, and that sensation leads us to adapt quickly to our lives, to our ordinary way of being. We soon get used to its footprint and we make it ours. This does not happen with slow, drawn-out changes, those that last over time; those that, said another way, are themselves time. Those are like a persistent rain, a light mist that doesn't seem to wet you, but you end up soaked. Those are the ones that leave a footprint.

Confinement brings with it both kinds of transformation. The brusque and immediate one is palpable in some people staying at home and others not being able to do so; and it is embodied in the modes of time experienced simultaneously as a still pond and a running river. This sudden change in life, in activities, in social reality leads

Hopefully, the future will be populated with people, with bodies capable of knowing and recognizing their multiple lacks, one where we will be able to see that what we are not is also what we are.

some of us to live “time-of-process,”² that is, to inhabit the passing of time itself; it leads us to rooting ourselves in the set of successive phases that constitutes our days.

We populate time in its immediacy, in the repetition of events that, nevertheless, only occur here and now. Others—women—, deluged with housework, care work, work that provides pay for survival, reside in that time without even being able to estimate its passing. It is as if there were no time, as if it didn't exist. Finally, there are those who have not been able to stay at home, for whom activities have changed only to the extent that the struggle for survival is harsher and harder: it's harder to move from one place to another, there is more fear of the people you encounter along the way, more contempt, more dispossession, a vacuum that inhabits time.

Collective time also has its rhythm, and that rhythm has also suffered a change. If we think that this time is measured, at least partially, by the operation and results of the means of production, then we know that their meter is slowing down today, and even pausing on occasion. This can be perceived in the slightly gentler sounds of the city: fewer cars, fewer planes in the sky, fewer shouts—also fewer laughs and conversations, but more birds and crickets. But our world's way of being, the “productivist rigor” that guides it and governs the time that makes it,³ will not be able to stand this calm for long. The question arises, then, of how we will exit from it. And that leads us to think about the other kind of transformation, the slow, gradual profound transformation.

This change is the one we are going through and do not yet see. As I said before, we can imagine it. Imagination requires perception, and after nine months we can begin to divine the pandemic's tracks. They are not only perceived in the deaths counted or estimated, but are also beginning to be carved into us. Our bodies, our meanderings, and our gaze are diminished; our relations with others,

almost absent. The absence of an embrace is increasingly noticeable; limiting ourselves vis-à-vis others contains us, but now we're released and we're afraid to embrace each other again. The gaze through the screen promotes a failed reciprocity, the absent other presents herself in her own intimate space, but is untouchable. The other has no smell, her gestures modulated by the light of the screen, her voice distorted. The signs of confinement are also printed on the street and in the silences (or the soothing sounds) I described above. With these data, we can envisage the new reality that may not be so very new.

We can ask ourselves and use our imaginations to respond. We can think, for example, will time slow down? Will it be possible to once again take up the activities we used to do? Will our fear, already rooted in the other, grow? Will the structure of desire change? And, what consequences might all these things have for the structure of society, of the world that we inhabit and that inhabits us? Eva Illouz maintains, "The consumer culture places desire at the very center of subjectivity."⁴ If we think that this is our culture, that our world is mounted on a relational structure that requires consumption (and the mass production of commodities) to subsist, then we will know that desire is at the center of our subjectivities:⁵ we are in part what we desire and we desire what we are not, what we lack. So, we are also what we are not.

Desire is produced in affections, in that which affects us, that touches us. In the world we lived in before confinement, desire had a peculiar structure: there was always a kind of inadequacy; if what was desired appeared, it was insufficient; in contrast, its absence made it appear satisfactory. This structure corresponds to our subjectivities; we live in a perennial state of dissatisfaction: our desires are always on the point of being realized, but we never really reach the point of realization. This is due in large part to the fact that the object of our desires materializes in some commodity and the means of production always pay attention to generating new objects so that our desire continues to exist and is never realized. What structures our desire is the promise of a future that never comes.

The question is whether the temporal modifications and our perception of them will generate changes in social relations and, therefore, in our subjectivities and the structure of our desire. Perhaps, if time begins to pass more slowly, we will be capable of redirecting our desire, capable of recognizing the precise importance of what we desire,

of realizing that the satisfaction of our longings does not depend on the promise of a better future, but in the eternal realization of what exists in a transitory manner. Perhaps the imposed distance that we have had from others breaks down the walls of eternity and will allow us to perceive that the absence of the other is also isolation from ourselves. Perhaps we can understand John Berger when he says,

Not all desires lead to freedom, but freedom is the experience of a desire that is recognized, assumed, and sought out. Desire never implies merely possessing something, but transforming that something. Desire is a demand: the demand for the eternal now. Freedom does not consist of fulfilling that desire, but of recognizing its supreme importance.⁶

Today, it seems difficult to know what the world will look like when this process ends, what marks it will leave, what transformations will be fixed. Hopefully, it will be a world populated with people, with bodies capable of knowing and recognizing their multiple lacks, one where we will be able to see that what we are not is also what we are. Hopefully, it will be a world with various and multiple aromas, with gazes that find each other, and others that miss each other. That world is right now beginning to constitute itself through a long, slowly evolving process that we are experiencing today. That's why it seems important to scrutinize the process itself and labor so that its wake embraces us all equally. ■■■

Notes

¹ Throughout the article, the author consistently uses the feminine form of indefinite pronouns even when referring to the entire population. In English, this is only possible occasionally without being extremely—and misleadingly—awkward, but it is important to state the author's intent. [Translator's Note.]

² Rita Segato (2020) talks about this, about extra-economic time, time that does not necessarily turn into a commodity, and points to the idea that this may be a counter-hegemonic position involving important transformations in the structure of society (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cTp85Hma4E>).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Eva Illouz, *Por qué duele el amor* (Buenos Aires: Katz Editores, 2012), p. 60.

⁵ Frederic London, *Capitalismo, deseo y servidumbre. Marx y Spinoza*, Sebastián Puente, trans. (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2015), p. 35.

⁶ John Berger, "Hoy el infinito está del lado de los pobres," <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2006/04/24/oja108-berger.html>.



Mariana Abreu Olvera*

Women's Freedom: A Change to Come

Since the 1960s, the feminist movement has prompted a change of such grandeur that it has had and continues to have an impact on all aspects of human life. Luisa Muraro says it with great clarity:

Women began to exist as autonomous desiring and speaking subjects, and . . . that existence is destined by nature to speed ahead of the Feminine men fantasize about and that so many men put in the place of what flesh-and-bone women are: a more varied and rich existence than that Feminine that fewer and fewer women will be willing to fulfill. So, the world will never be the same.¹

It is a change that profoundly transforms existence itself. The way women and men, women and women, and—hopefully also—men and men relate to each other has

begun to change significantly. The social pact that considers that women define ourselves based on what others expect from us has been broken.

In recent years, this transformation has taken on new power. My own experience has made me see, experience, and feel how a new way of signifying ourselves, of relating, of living has been launched in the consciousness of many—very many—women and also many men. Today, there seems to be a new upsurge of what began in the middle of the last century. To talk about this new awakening, I base myself on my experience and my reading about what is happening in three spaces in particular: the university, social media, and the streets.

In Mexico, in the 1970s and 1980s, there were women's groups that fought to create spaces where women's presence would be significant. This was the case, for example, of the Autonomous University Women's Group (GAMU), the LAMBDA Gay Liberation Group, and the VenSeremos (ComeWe'llBe) Collective. These three joined together to create the Feminist Women's National Network.² They

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were important, particularly in university circles. However, a few decades later, the feminist movement in academia seemed to have faded away.

Despite the existence of these groups, the university continued to be a place where we women seemed like intruders.³ Violence experienced by women in this universe has taken different forms. Even today, most course subject matter has been designed by, for, and about men. This has excluded women as creators and as the subject of knowledge. In addition, emotions have been left out of academic studies to give priority to reason and objectivity, as though these were mutually exclusive spheres and as if incorporating the world of emotionality would subtract seriousness and validity from knowledge. Women's experience has not been considered a source of knowledge. And, in the most extreme cases, sexual violence exercised by male students and professors has forced many women to share spaces with their abusers or abandon the university. For many years, silence about these problems predominated in academia despite the depth to which they affected all university women.

On November 4, 2019, the group Organized Women of the UNAM School of Philosophy and Letters forcefully made visible the problem of violence inside the university. They did so by taking over the school, a take-over that ended in April of this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has paralyzed the world. The current circumstances have made it impossible for the changes wrought by this movement's demands to be felt in person and in a generalized way. However, even in our virtual schoolrooms, some transformations have taken place. Women students have refused to share spaces with their abusers; they have denounced the misogyny of some professors; and, together with female teachers and administrative workers, they have worked to create subjects with feminist content to ensure the presence of trained specialists who can accompany women who have suffered sexual violence. This is unprecedented and is the reflection of a profound change in women's mentality. Where before there was silence, today there is unequivocal rejection that would have been unthinkable a few years ago.

What is happening in the university is an expression of women's refusal to define themselves according to "the Feminine fantasized by men" that Luisa Muraro writes about. While male students can dedicate themselves almost exclusively to their studies, women students have

Emotions have been left out
of academic studies to give priority
to reason and objectivity, as though
these were mutually exclusive spheres.

said that we have to "fight for our lives as we try to get good grades or to have [our] ideas recognized."⁴ University women have autonomously expressed their desire to be free in a space in which they have been forced to survive male violence.

This so very public, generalized expression of women's wishes is a change that will necessarily affect university life and will be manifested in the way both male and female students relate to men and women professors, how women students relate to male students, and how women students relate to each other. What happens in the university will also have an impact in other spheres since academic training and the student experience play an important part in life itself and the future work and personal experience of all students.

What has happened in the university correlates fundamentally to the use of social media as a space for expression. Women students themselves recognize a precursor in the Me Too movement in which many Hollywood actresses began in 2017 to publicly denounce sexual harassment and abuse by their male colleagues. Something unprecedented happened with this movement, as Lia Cigarini points out: "Their [the accusers'] words were believed without having to go to trial or present proof. The individuals involved were powerful men who up until then had enjoyed impunity."⁵ This phenomenon was fundamental because, before, when a woman made an accusation, her own personal hell began. Female authority came into play, says Lia Cigarini, thanks to the women's movement's 50 years of struggle and political work. Women's authority became a symbolic force that confronted male power.

The Me Too movement has not been the only factor that has faced up to power. In general, this change visibly manifests itself on social media and has played a role in the symbolic sphere. In Mexico, for example, the 2017 femicide of Lesvy Osorio on the UNAM campus prompted the emergence of the #SiMeMatan (#IfTheyKillMe) hashtag. Many women used it to express their indignation about

the way in which the Mexico City District Attorney's Office tried to justify Lesvy's femicide using details of her personal life to portray her as a "bad victim," such as her experimenting with drugs and supposedly being a not very committed student.

What was novel here was not the use of these kinds of arguments, which are more or less frequent in government authorities' discourse, but the massive reaction of women who forcefully rejected them. The social media have become an unprecedented space for expression, becoming reference points for women's thinking, action, and critiques in all spheres. We can see here the rich, varied female existence that is becoming more and more visible and has allowed many women to recognize themselves in their sisters and signify themselves in new ways.

The streets have also become a space in which women have brought their authority into play. The green wave that emerged in Argentina and that has spread throughout Latin America and the world for the decriminalization of abortion, the April 24, 2016 Violet Spring, and the performance piece "A Rapist in Your Path," created by the Chilean Las Tesis collective and performed in different countries by groups of women, are just some of the actions that have taken place in the public space, previously dominated by men.

On March 8, women held demonstrations and work stoppages in different countries to commemorate International Women's Day. Three days later, the World Health Organization officially declared the coronavirus a pandemic. The lockdown caused by this crisis put mass mobilizations on pause and increased the number of cases of violence against women in Mexico. However, some collectives have continued to struggle. This is the case, for example, of the take-over of National Human Rights Commission facilities in different parts of the country, the take-over of the Sciences and Humanities High School east-side campus in Mexico City, and the women in Poland

Women all over the world have begun to stop defining themselves in the terms established by the patriarchy and have broken their silence in the face of male violence.

who have taken to the streets against a law that proposed eliminating the malformation of a fetus as grounds for obtaining a legal abortion. Women the world over are saying "No" to violence and the male power that attempts to impose itself on them.

What the three spaces I have referred to here have in common is the use women have made of them to make their words and voices heard to express their common experience of violence and a common desire for freedom. This is a central change that has taken place over a half century and that today is expressed with undeniable clarity. The feminists of the Women's Bookshop of Milan recognized the end of patriarchy in 1996: it would no longer order women's minds; it would no longer be the domain that provided identity.⁶ What we are seeing today is the expression of that ending. Women all over the world have begun to stop defining themselves in the terms established by the patriarchy and have broken their silence in the face of male violence. However, there is still a long way to go. We women must still find our freedom and ensure that our experiences are a source of signifying reality. Women have rejected violence and sense a different way forward from the one imposed upon them. It still remains to move forward on that path and for women to use their energies not to survive and struggle, but to live in freedom. ■■■

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Notes

- 1 L. Muraro, *La increíble suerte de nacer mujer* (Madrid: Narcea, 2013), p. 28.
- 2 "La Boletina es de Todas," *Archivos Históricos del Feminismo en México*, https://archivos-feministas.cieg.unam.mx/semblanzas/semblanzas_boletina.html, accessed November 9, 2020. This digitalized archive includes feminist publications like *Fem*, *La Revuelta*, *La Boletina*, *Cihuat*, and *La Correa Feminista*, fundamental texts for the reconstruction of a genealogy of feminist thinking in Mexico.
- 3 I use this expression, taken from the book by Ana Buquet Corleto, Araceli Mingo, Hortensia Moreno, and Jennifer Cooper, *Intrusas en la universidad* (Mexico City: UNAM, PUEG-IISUE, 2013).
- 4 El desenfado, "Entrevista FFyL: voces unidas contra la violencia de género," *Redymención*, February 12, 2020, <https://redymencion.com/2020/02/12/entrevista-sobre-paro-en-la-facultad-de-filosofia-y-letras-voces-contra-la-violencia-de-genero/>, accessed November 9, 2020.
- 5 Lia Cigarini, "La batalla por el relato," María-Milagros Rivera, trans., *Cambio de civilización. Puntos de vista y de referencia*, DUODA no. 56, 2019, p. 56.
- 6 Librería de Mujeres de Milán, "(Ha ocurrido y no por casualidad) El final del patriarcado," María-Milagros Rivera Garretas, trans., *El Viejo Topo* no. 916, May 1996.

José Ignacio Lanzagorta García*

Mexico City And Its Crisis Of the Modern Paradigm



José Ignacio Lanzagorta

On September 4, 1969, President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz inaugurated the first line of Mexico City's subway system. This infrastructure, which undoubtedly transforms life in a big city, arrived late to the Mexican capital when we take into account that a century earlier London had opened the first line of its underground train system. Nevertheless, the subway was hailed simultaneously as a social and popular endeavor and as bold and avant-garde and was used as publicity for Mexico City as a great international capital. Curiously, more than a gap that was finally filled, the metro represented a zenith for the city's modern paradigm.

Mexico City's demographic growth was so vertiginous and startling in the twentieth century that it put to test any state capacity to carry out a uniform urban development plan. Grandiose modern urbanization projects to address housing, industrial organization, food and water

supplies, public spaces, incorporating the hinterland, mobility, and managing solid waste and sewage were all undertaken in Mexico City in a haphazard and disorganized fashion and usually left incomplete. Since the 1950s, or even earlier, Mexico City has almost always been in a constant state of emergency and cannot do much more than respond to immediate problems with limited capacities.

By the 1960s, Mexico City's centralized urban development appears to have borne its best fruits. This was also the climax of the authoritarian regime of the single party that governed the country for most of the twentieth century, where control of the capital city was exercised directly from the president's office. Mexico City had been chosen as the venue for the 1968 Olympic Games and the 1970 World Cup. In the midst of the Cold War, the regime was poised to present Mexico as a development success for what was then called the Third World.

To accomplish this, Mexico City was supposed to appear to be a traditional and nationalist city that was also cosmopolitan and global. The regime was so determined to present a favorable image that it would go to great lengths to hide any evidence of backwardness, poverty, unequal-

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Photo courtesy of the author.

ity and, above all, any notion of lack of control. For example, it was the Díaz Ordaz administration that carried out the violent repression and massacre of the 1968 student movement. The scandal caused by the publication of the book *The Children of Sanchez*, by U.S. American anthropologist Oscar Lewis, is also noteworthy. Lewis gives an account of the life of a poor family in rundown housing in downtown Mexico City. The director of the state-owned publishing house that published the Spanish language version of the book was fired. The government denounced the author for defamation and the Sanchez family had to break their anonymity to prove that Lewis had not invented them.

Order and progress, the old positivist slogan of bourgeois governance for a world that accelerated its interconnections, its industrialization, and, therefore, its urbanization achieved its maximum expression up until then in Mexico City. The subway was just one of the works of infrastructure used as propaganda for a welfare, developmentalist state. By the 1960s, the city had already created and expanded expressways for automobiles; piped the main rivers turning them into drainage canals; reorganized the food markets by building a central supply center in La Merced; and begun large-scale modernist housing developments like the Nonoalco-Tlatelolco urban complex or urbanizations like Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl for the working classes, or Ciudad Satellite for the middle classes. Industrial reorganization was also underway, moving the old Porfirian manufacturing sites out of central areas and relocating them in the periphery. It was only a decade earlier that the Lerma River hydraulic system was built to bring drinking water to the Valley of Mexico from a neighboring basin to the west, or that the enormous UNAM campus was constructed on volcanic rock, and the main institutions of the welfare state were founded.

Since then, like other great megalopolises of the world, Mexico City has been paying the price for the modernist paradigm and does not have the capacity to handle large-scale, profound urban renewal. The logic of responding to emergencies continues in Mexico City, but it has been almost impossible to imagine or manage new solutions based on other paradigms. Each new situation or critical need is addressed cosmetically or minimally, knowing that it will reemerge later on.

Since the 1970s, except in a discrete and limited fashion, Mexico City has not benefitted from any infrastruc-

Mexico City has been paying the price for the modernist paradigm and does not have the capacity to handle large-scale, profound urban renewal.

ture or ordering that can provide new ways of relating to the urban space and the Valley of Mexico. There are many examples of this.

The subway is insufficient. Even though the network has expanded slowly, thus far it only covers a small part of the metropolitan area. Investment in other cheaper means of public transportation like a BRT (bus rapid transit) system or infrastructure for bicycles has increased, especially over the past two decades, but is far from meeting the city's demand or covering its entire area. It is clear that the model of urban mobility based on the automobile has failed, but given the state's incapacity to provide an efficient public transportation system on a regional scale, it has continued to invest in the expansion of urban highways, which are apparently cheaper or more profitable for a continually expanding vehicle fleet.

Mexico City continues to face, and confront with the same imagination of 400 years ago, the paradox of being a city that is simultaneously drowning and thirsty: bringing drinking water from distant sources and expelling rainwater and wastewaters from a closed basin valley. Along with local wells, the Lerma system, built at the end of the 1940s, is still the main water source for metropolitan area residents. In recent decades, the network of dams outside the Valley of Mexico that feed the system has increased and water is pumped into the basin. The distribution network has also been expanded, but the underlying problem persists.

The same is the case of drainage. Rainwater, leaks, and wastewater are all mixed together and channeled northward to be expelled from the basin into a neighboring valley. The East Emission Tunnel, inaugurated in 2019, is a major work of infrastructure that handles drainage just as it was conceived by the colonial authorities at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Taking advantage of rainwater, as well as separating drainage from natural rivers, requires considerably more investment than the current paradigm but would be a much better response to the city's growth.

Other issues have the same track record. The idea of managing the city's food supply and distribution system through a large central market was maintained. When the scale became inadequate, this central market was moved from La Merced to a location in Iztapalapa, inaugurated in 1982. New metropolitanization involved regularizing occupied or even invaded areas at the edges of the expanding urban sprawl, especially in northern and eastern parts of the valley; or they sprang up in response to corporate or elitist interests that created a disorderly and poorly planned pole of urban growth toward the west that was hostile toward working classes. There have been no other major projects to reorganize housing or to expand metropolitanization.

Along with the absence of major projects or an overall paradigm of new ideas for organizing the territory, over the past 50 years Mexico City began to experience uncontrolled growth of urban problems: environmental degradation manifested in deteriorating air quality; rapidly increasing insecurity and urban violence; swiftly growing numbers of street vendors; and over the past 20 or 30 years, gentrification of the downtown area. The lack of urban infrastructure on the peripheries and the absence of a plan for deconcentrating economic and employment poles have given way to rising costs in central areas and, therefore, growing class segregation throughout the city.

Perhaps the most significant change in the capital city's paradigm over the last 50 years has occurred in politics and the notion of citizenship. During the 1980s and 1990s, the first metropolitan commissions were formed to begin to consider the urban problem outside the limitations of no-longer-functional government policies. However, to the extent that the previous century's political system has been debilitated and is shifting toward greater democracy, what was then known as the Federal District, which today accounts for barely half or less of the metropolitan area—the rest of which is in the State of Mexico and a small part in the state of Hidalgo—has become autonomous. In 1997, for the first time, residents of the capital city were able to elect local authorities and representa-

tives to a local legislature; in 2000 they elected the Federal District's head of government.

Just recently, in 2018, the nation's capital promulgated its first constitution, wherein the term Federal District was cast aside and the name "Mexico City" was approved, thereby separating it from the rest of the metropolitan area. While this has been a positive change that broadens out citizenship rights and political representation for those residing in what is now Mexico City, there are also some negative aspects. Upon decentralizing decision-making in the metropolitan area and dividing the city territorially into different orders and levels of government, the political coordination needed to carry out large-scale projects that could change living conditions for the Valley of Mexico's inhabitants is now less feasible. This is even more the case when the president of Mexico, the governors of the bodies that comprise the metropolitan area, and the local authorities are not members of the same political party.

Over the last few decades Mexico City has become a very baffling place. It exhibits signs that the worst urban nightmares are about to materialize and, nevertheless, it resists. Major earthquakes, like the ones that rocked the city in 1985 and 2017, clearly demonstrate this. Despite all this, the city continues to amaze us. In the midst of the violence, the chaos, the risks of disaster, and the degradation constantly present in Mexico City, innumerable small spaces exist that harmonize life in the city and give it meaning, strengthening the bonds of coexistence. On almost any ride on public transportation one can experience the disconcerting sensation of being caught between fragility and solidarity. The immanence of emergency is exhausting, but it also binds us together.

The major challenge for Mexico City, as it faces the future and tries to escape from the logic of emergency, is the same as for any great metropolis. It must abandon the modern paradigm of habitability once and for all and conceive of post-urban ways of inhabiting the world. It will be necessary to conceive of ourselves not as citizens of a metropolis, but rather of a great region articulated internally and connected to other regions. This transformation will require new levels of coordination and centralization. How can this be achieved without creating new forms of authoritarianism? The answer lies in imagination and the willingness to engage in this conversation on a global scale. Only in this way will we be able to advance to the next great paradigm of habitability. ■■■

Mexico City must abandon the modern paradigm of habitability once and for all and conceive of post-urban ways of inhabiting the world.

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In her work, Camelia Tigau focuses on analyzing skilled migration, the communication of the diasporas, and scientific diplomacy, centering on the flow of skilled migrants from Mexico to the United States, and particularly the opportunities and challenges they face. Her academic production rigorously consults specialized secondary sources and generates valuable primary information needed to support theories and form a foundation for the analysis of the media discourse that has had an impact on the perception of migration and the implementation of public policies, specifically in recent years.

In this book, interviews are a valuable source of information and of enriching testimonies. Among those interviewed in addition to skilled migrants are consuls, coordinators of associations, and activists in groups of non-skilled Mexicans, to provide contrast.

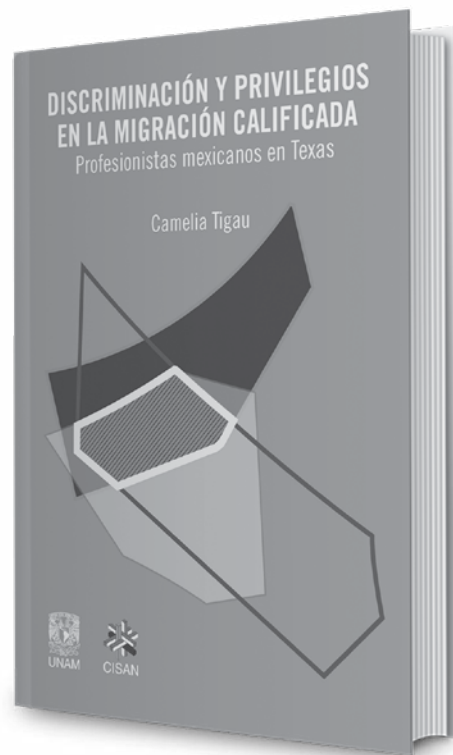
Methodologically speaking, the most valuable aspect, both because of its originality and its applicability to other migratory contexts, is that the author develops an analytical model of rejections and privileges among skilled migrants. Its macro- and micro-social components make it possible to determine the possibilities of skilled migrants' return or permanence in their countries of origin or destination, respectively. In addition, it is useful for determining the level of skilled migrants' integration as a function of their profession, whether they be engineers, businesspersons, doctors, academics, or students.

The author focuses on a segment of Mexican migrants to the United States who can to a certain extent be considered privileged due to the opportunities they have access, to but who have nevertheless not escaped the highly damaging effect of prejudices and discrimination by different U.S. actors over the years. This reflection gains objectivity by situating the phenomenon in the period starting in the early twentieth century and taking the reader through the key events until the second decade of the current century.

Each chapter can be read separately; however, reading them in order allows us to understand the subject matter comprehensively. The first chapter deals with the concepts of minorities and discrimination. Chapters two and three present a historical analysis of skilled migration, centering on the Mexican communities in Texas from the

early twentieth century until today, and then before and after the Trump presidency. Chapters four and five study the prejudices, class bias, and racism inside the Mexican community in Texas, both community-wide and individually. Chapter five puts forward the aforementioned model of rejection and privileges. Chapter six studies a contrast group made up of migrants of non-Mexican backgrounds. And lastly, the epilogue presents the results of an experiment in which young Mexicans who intend to migrate participated.

The book creates awareness about the challenges facing skilled migrants by reminding the reader of the results of the almost 70-year militant struggle of Mexicans in Texas, the roots and functioning of populism, analyzing it based on two key moments: the populism that could be foreseen before Trump took office and populism in action, after he took office, as well as their impact on the



**Discrimination and Privileges in Skilled Migration.
Mexican Professionals in Texas**

Camelia Tigau

CISAN, UNAM

Mexico City, 2020, 316 pp.

perception of skilled migration as a negative phenomenon. It also deals with the interactions between skilled and unskilled migrants. The section that analyzes the tensions among the different kinds of Mexicans living in the United States is particularly important.

Given the abundant literature about traditional migration, Tigau's research into the diaspora and organization of skilled Mexican migrants is useful and original. Another especially interesting aspect of the book is that it covers loss of status as part of the migratory process, something that mainly affects highly skilled migrants.

It is also relevant to look at the point of view of other minorities regarding Mexico to have a comprehensive view of the phenomenon, as well as the chapter about the different circumstances (armed conflict, dictatorships, absence of political freedom) that groups of skilled migrants from other countries leave behind when they go to the United States. The book also explores certain transnational spaces where skilled migrants participate based on their professions.

In my opinion, one of this work's merits is that it delves into unprecedented areas, covering gaps in the information, above all with regard to the obstacles skilled migrants face, and disregards single-cause analyses. Its precise description of the phenomenon of Mexican immigration in the current context of the United States is also original, as is the author's examination of out-of-date, persistent forms of behavior in U.S. society that make it possible to understand the prejudices and discrimination skilled migrants are subject to. She also recognizes that discrimination can exist or not according to the generation the migrants belong to, their ages, gender, and professions. In her epilogue, she even states that this discrimination does not seem to be a criterium for deciding to emigrate or not, at least among young people.

Tigau takes up discussions about generic and skilled migration that have not been sufficiently dealt with, particularly from the point of view of public policy. This is the case of the proposal of selecting migrants based on their educational levels, which could perpetuate discrimination and the reproduction of stereotypes, or her discussion of radical right-wing populism, which affects immigrants' rights rather than reducing their number.

The author's theoretical points for explaining sociological aspects that affect acts of discrimination are also opportune, such as the work of Gordon W. Allport, given

the timeliness of many of his postulates, or that of Banulescu-Bogdan, who explains how populism capitalizes on anxiety about migration. Tigau's reflection about the possibility that discrimination may be generational is also salient, since young people seem to be the least discriminated against.

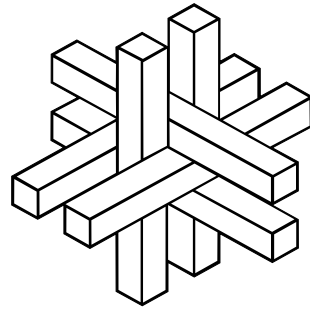
Her reasoning about Mexicans' continuing problems of integration into U.S. society since the beginning of the twentieth century is also pertinent. It is noteworthy that, since 1979, scholars have pointed out the disadvantage of belonging to an ethnic group, a minority, and being a woman, and how, even today, highly skilled immigrants continue to suffer for it in U.S. society, and that they face the challenges of belonging to three minorities: gender, ethnic, and professional. Nevertheless, one interesting conclusion is understanding migration as a source of empowerment for women in terms of being able to exercise their professions and being autonomous.

In addition, the author looks into the contradictory nature of living in Texas, where prejudices against undocumented migrants are transferred to skilled migrants, whose contribution to the local economy is simultaneously recognized and valued. In this sense, Tigau's vision of how co-national networks can counteract discrimination instead of becoming a source of those prejudices is interesting, as is her reflection about migration as a process of social harmonization that offers an experience for human growth and greater awareness.

Lastly, she opens the door to future lines of research, such as the impact of government policy on the professionals' migration, the role of immigrant professional women, the role of prejudices versus cultural incompatibilities, and the implications of migrants' not being able to return to their homelands because they cannot leave their jobs, do not have enough money to do so, or because conditions in their home countries make it impossible, among other issues. For this reason, Camelia Tigau's work is a valuable theoretical and empirical contribution to a comprehensive understanding of skilled migration, and her observations are very pertinent for the design of appropriate public policies. ■■■

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Business Department of the
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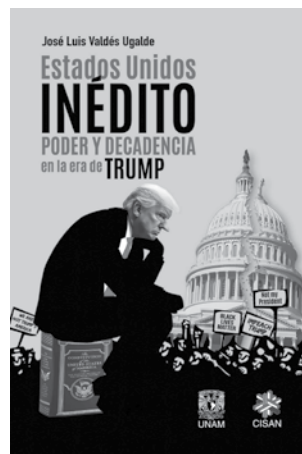
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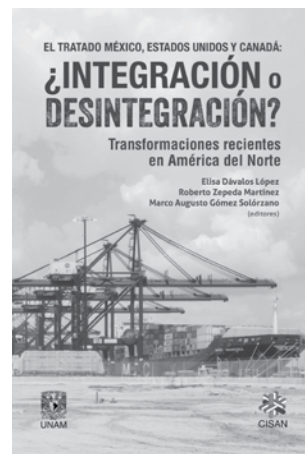
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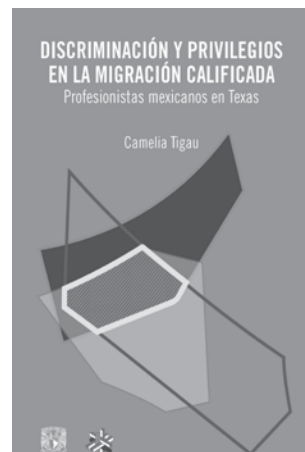
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