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POLITICS IN A HOUSE OF MIRRORS:
ART, NATIONALISM, AND REPRESENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY MEXICO

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers an account of the ways in which Mexico's transition to formal electoral democracy and its implementation of market-oriented reforms transformed the country's cultural policies and institutions, as well as the political content of its works of art. These changes, in turn, have profoundly shaped Mexico's national narratives, forms of civic participation, and the nature of political critique. Drawing on two years of ethnographic research, archival research, and visual art analysis – including participant-observation in a wide range of cultural institutions and state offices and over a hundred in-depth interviews with members of the art world, policymakers, philanthropists, and bureaucrats – I demonstrate how the creative class negotiates a novel political environment marked by tensions between autocratic institutional legacies, emergent market logics, and a newly-liberalized public sphere. This work chronicles a shift from state-sponsored, overtly nationalist art to anti-statist, market-oriented art in the 2000s. I demonstrate how these changes have affected Mexican politics, ranging from how the state commemorates its history and organizes taxation, to how museums and monuments become sites for cultural resistance, through to how feminist activists contest gender-based violence. Art, I argue, is a privileged site from which to examine the consequences of political-economic liberalization, given that it evidences the tensions between political critique, freedom of expression, and collective action.

This work makes three major theoretical contributions. First, it expands the scholarship on democratic transitions and economic liberalization by showing the reasons why and the mechanisms through which these processes shape national imaginaries, cultural policies, and civic participation. Second, building on the literature on political representation, I argue that,

despite not being voted into power or participating in traditional political forums, artists and other members of the artistic field should be taken seriously as political representatives. It is through their work that discussions about pressing political matters occur, shaping collective memory and helping to structure people's political allegiances and identities. This work can include making, displaying, and preserving art, as well as choosing what counts as art and whom it represents. Third, I make a methodological point by stressing the need to go beyond analyzing simply the content of art and other forms of political expression Instead, I demonstrate the need to examine art's conditions of production, circulation, and reception in order to understand how its political messages achieve (or fail to achieve) political ends.

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INTRODUCTION

A large maroon flag hung on an outer wall of the Palazzo Rota-Ivancich, the sixteenth-century Venetian palace which housed the Mexican pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale. The flag fluttered over gondoliers and picture-snapping tourists who were, most likely, oblivious to the fact that the flag was made of fabric soaked in blood collected from execution sites in Mexico. *Bandera* ("Flag") was a piece by Teresa Margolles, the artist invited to represent Mexico at this, the most prestigious art event in the world. Margolles is known for exposing and exploring the effects of violence by using body parts, fluids, fat, and blood, as well as materials amassed from sites where violent incidents have occurred. Some of her other pieces at the Pavilion included *Ajuste de Cuentas* ("Account Settling," jewelry encrusted with fragments of windshield glass collected after a shooting), *Sonidos de la Muerte* ("Sounds of the Dead," a series of recordings of the voices of witnesses gathered from a site where cadavers had been found), and *Limpieza* ("Cleansing," a performance which consisted of a Mexican janitor, who had lost family members to the violence, mopping the floors and windows of the Palazzo using water mixed with the blood of other victims).

While earlier in her career Margolles – who is certified as a forensic scientist – collected the material for her literally visceral pieces from morgues, by the time the Biennale opened in May 2009, the artist claimed she could just as easily gather all that she needed on Mexico's ever-more-violent streets. This was perhaps a provocation, but it was not an exaggeration. The bloodshed unleashed by the so-called drug war launched by president Felipe Calderón in December 2006 was ubiquitous, including murders, disappearances, human trafficking, and torture, and spanning the country and its public conversations. In the three years between its inception and the Biennale it had claimed the lives of over eight thousand people, marking

Mexico – at that point one of the most celebrated newly-democratic states – as one of the most violent countries in the world.[1]

The title of the Mexican Pavillion in Venice, *What else could we talk about?*, was itself a comment on this sanguinary status quo. It consisted of works by Margolles and was curated by renowned art historian Cuauhtémoc Medina. In the catalogue of the show, Medina explained that this question "encloses a visceral reaction to the expectation of the Mexican elites that for the sake of the national image or to safeguard the illusions of tourism, we should maintain a contrite silence about the indiscretion of a society bent on slaughter in such a noisy, immoderate and public fashion. They wish."[2]

However, in addition to visibilizing the violence plaguing Mexico and hinting at the complicity of the state and national elites, and despite Medina's rejection of the use of art to promote an illusory image of the country, the Mexican Pavilion also helped boost the country's reputation as a mecca for daring contemporary art, and a place where the global art world, art market, and art elite were more than welcome. Despite its firmly anti-state message, the Mexican Pavillion was partly funded by state institutions. Given the content of the works, however, some state institutions ended up withdrawing their support shortly before the event took place [3] and a number of private institutions stepped in to fund the show.[4]

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1 In 2008 alone, the year preceding the Biennale, more than 5000 people lost their lives in executions and shootings related to the drug war.

2 Medina, Cuauhtémoc. 2009. "Materialist Spectrality." In *Teresa Margolles: What else could we talk about?* ed. Cuauhtémoc Medina. Barcelona and Mexico City: RM: 29.

3 Pastor Mellado, Justo. 2010. "Teresa Margolles and the boundaries of the artistic intuition." *ArtNexus* 77: 55.

4 The opening pages of the catalogue credit two state institutions for supporting the Mexican Pavilion at the Biennale: The National Council for the Arts and Culture (CONACULTA) and the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA). Two other entities are also credited for helping fund and organize the exhibition: Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM) and the private non-profit Contemporary Art Trusteeship, A.C. (Patronato de Arte Contemporáneo). In the end, the story goes, despite what is stated in the catalogue, upon learning about its critical content, the state defunded the show and it was two private foundations – the Jumex Foundation and the PAC – which helped pay for it. (Munguía, Mariana. 2015. "Mediar sin agenda y sin dogmas. El Patronato de Arte Contemporáneo." *Itinerarios de la cultural contemporánea en México* ed. Benjamin Mayer Foulkes. Mexico: Editorial 17 & Conaculta: 136).

What else could we talk about? was representative of the art and patronage networks that marked a stark break with the past. First, the Mexican state and the artist representing it on the world stage were severely at odds. Second, the private sector, which had for the most part not taken an active role in artistic events that were meant to represent the nation, was a co-sponsor. Third, and perhaps most blatant, was that Margolles' work itself could not have been more different from the art that was associated with the Mexican nation throughout the twentieth century, such as the iconic, realist murals of artists like Diego Rivera that graced the walls of public buildings and the pages of school textbooks, which relayed the country's history and portrayed national heroes to a lay public. Instead, Margolles' installations present no linear or hopeful narratives of the Mexican nation or its people, and call for critique rather than calling people together into a common national project. Stylistically and aesthetically, meanwhile, as cultural critic Néstor García Canclini maintained, the power of pieces like the aforementioned *Bandera* (seemingly just a flag), "lay partly in the fact that it reproduced not the original scene – a shootout, murdered bodies – but rather its *imminence*, in the smells, the washcloths soaking up red stains, the loudspeakers broadcasting the voices of witnesses."[5]

Margolles' work represented Mexico and its politics, and was representative of the aesthetics and content of Mexican contemporary art, but the politics of how it came to do so also represented an entirely new relationship between the state, the private sector, and artists in the country in the wake of its shift away from autocracy. It was critical but ambiguous: a product of Mexico's particular context chosen to represent the nation, but neither patriotic nor nationalist, nor even quintessentially "Mexican."

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5 García Canclini, Néstor. 2014. *Art beyond Itself: Anthropology for a Society Without a Story Line*. Translated by David Frye. Durham, NC: Duke University Press: 164.

In Mexico, the arts have been central to state and nation formation processes. As I will elaborate below, throughout the 20th century, the state, which was ruled for over seventy years by the autocratic Revolutionary Institutional Party (or PRI), invested a huge amount of resources in the arts and worked very closely with the intellectual and creative communities to strategically deploy art as a tool of political communication and mobilization and to generate imaginaries about the nation and compliance to the state and to the party. This began to change when, starting in the 1980s, Mexico began to adopt a series of structural neoliberal reforms, which liberalized the country's financial system, opened its borders to foreign trade and competition, privatized many formerly state-owned enterprises, and flexibilized the labor market. These economic reforms, arguably, primed the country's protracted democratic transition which included the implementation of free and fair elections leading to the PRI finally losing the presidential elections in 2000 to the conservative and firmly pro-business National Action Party (PAN). I will henceforth refer to these changes as Mexico's "twin neoliberal and democratic transition."

This dissertation chronicles *how* this twin transition has transformed the artistic field and the political consequences of such transformation. Examining the artistic field and art itself sheds light on the ways in which processes of democratization and neoliberalization shape non-electoral forms of representation and different forms of collective identity, as well as narratives and imaginaries of the nation and the state. The two main questions driving this project are the following: How have the arts as a form of political speech, critique, representation, and participation changed in the wake of Mexico's electoral democratic transition and adoption of market reforms? And, how, in turn, have the transformations in the artistic field – including at

the level of artistic production, display, circulation, and reception – shaped collective narratives and imaginaries, including those related to the state and the nation?

I argue that the twin transition has profoundly shaped the way that artistic field operates and is constituted, including by breaking down the near-monopoly of the state on artistic production and opening the door for the private sector to participate in this field in unprecedented ways. These transformations have led to certain openings and an increase in freedom of expression. Artists continue to use their work to signal and shape existing forms of political allegiances and imaginaries and deploy art as a political tool. Rarely, however, do they use their art to incite *mass* social mobilization and education, as their predecessors did throughout the 20th century. Instead, art is more readily used to voice discontent at the current socio-economic and political situation, to critique the state, and to help disrupt existing forms of collective identity, including by helping to disarticulate the coherent image of the nation-state which prevailed throughout the 20th century. While representations of national symbols continue to be reproduced in art – as per Margolles' *Bandera* – they signal discontent with the state and with electoral democracy more generally.

Throughout, I use the concept "artistic field" interchangeably with "art world" and "artistic community" to refer to the core (or mainstream) elements of the visual arts system. While I do not ascribe to a strict categorization of artworks as either visual, performative, or aural, this dissertation focuses exclusively on the field of "visual arts," as opposed to that of music, theatre, dance, film, and crafts.[6] The art world, as sociologist Howard Becker famously

6 Today, "visual art" can include the traditional production of aesthetic objects (e.g. paintings, sculptures, photographs, and videos), the execution of performances and happenings, as well as a wide range of activities such as organizing a communal meal, creating a garden, giving a lecture, teaching a class, and even getting shot by a gun. For a compilation of definitions of the term "contemporary art" see: Foster, Hal (et.al). 2009. "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary.'" *October* 130 (Fall): 3-124.

argued, consists of "all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art."[7] This generally includes a combination of artists, collectors, curators, historians, critics, dealers, scholars, cultural workers, and museum and gallery employees. The "work" that members of the artistic community perform includes producing artworks, but also labeling these works as art in the first place and assigning value to them, writing and teaching about them, buying and selling them, collecting and displaying them, and also archiving and documenting them. Members of the art world also frequently write about and discuss politics and other matters and while these discussions are not necessarily directly related to art and cultural production they are informed by their everyday practice and labor.[8] Following studies like Becker's, this dissertation takes a relatively broad approach to the activities of artistic production and consumption but, ultimately, defines the artistic field as the set of relatively well-funded and well-known institutions and people who work in these spaces and who, together with their assorted work, constitute a *professional* artistic field.[9]

As I will show in the rest of the dissertation, members of the artistic community are central political actors because they shape the world we live in and thereby people's political imaginaries, including their views about the state, the nation, their fellow citizens, and the world around them. Like other members of the intelligentsia, the artistic community engages in "the imaginative ideological labor that brings together disparate cultural elements, selected historical memories, and interpretation of experiences. (...) [They are] active agents providing new visions

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7 Becker, Howard. 1982. *Art Worlds*. University of California Berkeley: Los Angeles: 34.

8 In her ethnography of the art world in Egypt, anthropologist Jessica Winegar goes as far as to claim that the members of the artistic community that she studied spent more time talking about art than making it. (Winegar, Jessica. 2006. *Creative Reckonings*. California: Stanford University Press).

9 For a similar definition of the artistic field see: Mckee, Yates. 2009. "Questionnaire: McKee." *October*130 (Fall): 64.

and languages that project a new set of social, cultural, and political possibilities."[10] Whether they do so deliberately or not, it is through their work that members of the artistic community help to construct people's identities at particular moments and their attachments to different local, national, and global communities. Artists and other members of the art world are key political actors because, in the words of Lauren Berlant, they help to "harness affect to political life" by creating images, narratives, monuments, and sites that "come to circulate through personal/collective consciousness."[11]

Art also provides testimony to people's words and actions which can help to foster attachments to different political communities. Hannah Arendt eloquently argued that humans constantly rely on the help of durable things, including artworks, to provide the shape, durability, and continuity to human life and to people's words and actions, which are themselves brief, fleeting, and ever-changing.[12] She specifically underscored the need for artists, poets, historiographers and even monument-builders because "without them the only product of [human] activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all."[13] Tangible things like books, paintings, statues, buildings and musical scores, Arendt contended, are some of those things that stay longer in the world than anything else.[14] But just like her point was not simply to interpret the world as a disjunction between the durability of objects and the ephemerality of words and actions, she was not simply praising the blunt tangibility of art. The reason why art matters, the philosopher suggests, is because it can capture people's attention in ways that

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10 Suny, Ronald and Michael Kennedy. 2003. "Introduction." In *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation,* eds. Suny and Kennedy. Michigan University Press: Michigan: 2-3.

11 Berlant, Lauren. 1991. *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthrone, Utopia and Everyday Life,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 20 quoted in Eley, Geoff and Ronald Suny. 1996. *Becoming National,* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press: 30.

12 Arendt, Hannah. 2006. *Between Past and Future*, The Viking Press: New York: 206.

13 Arendt, Hannah. 1998. *The Human Condition,* The Univeristy of Chicago Press: Chicago. 173.

14 Ibid., 206.

prompt them to reflect about the world by listening to and judging what others have to say about it. In her seminal work *The Human Condition,* Arendt introduces the term "permanence" which, as political theorist Patchen Markell has convincingly argued, signals something beyond mere material endurance and durability: permanence is for Arendt a function not of the external materiality of things, but rather of their "memorability," which has to do with the way things appear and how they provoke and prompt people to respond to their appearance.[15]

Following thinkers like Arendt and Berlant, this dissertation suggests and demonstrates that the work performed by members of the art world is political because by appearing and being seen it has the potential to shape the way people perceive, judge, and remember the world, and affects how they attend and care for it, and the kinds of claims they make and communities they build in response to it. Indeed, oftentimes, whether an artist intends to or not, her work ends up in public museums and as part of valuable patrimonial collections; it gets reproduced in textbooks and the media; it gets taught in schools and talked about in cafes and other public venues. It also travels the world, often promoted as a symbol of the nation, and deployed by politicians and dissenting social movements alike. In short, art often ends up representing people to all kinds of publics and becoming part of and producing all kinds of public imaginaries. And this is the case even when artists and other members of the artistic field are neither authorized to represent anyone nor held accountable to anyone. In other words, a form of political representation (albeit not always a democratic one) can exist even in the absence of recognition of such representation.

By studying artistic production and the artistic field in Mexico and the changes it has experienced in the last few decades, I demonstrate how certain artists (and their work) come to represent different peoples and communities and shape their attachments to the nation, the state,

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15 Markell, Patchen. 2011. "Arendt's Work: On the Architecture of the Human Condition." *College Literature* 38 (Winter, no.1): 32.

and other communities, as well as their views about class, gender, race, and sex. I chronicle how art circulates in specific art spaces, but also on the streets, public plazas, inside corporations and the homes of rich collectors, as well as in the popular press and social media.

The rest of the introduction is divided into the four sections: First, by providing a brief history of relationship between politics and art in Mexico, I demonstrate why studying this country is the ideal case to address the research questions motivating this project. I then provide a literature review on Mexico's twin transition and show how, despite the vastness and richness of this literature, none of these works examine how this transition shaped the artistic field and its resulting political consequences, including, specifically, the way notions of nationalism are changing. The third section argues that the research methods that I employed – including participant-observation in the art world – can help to problematize and complement the literature on art written by scholars both in the social sciences and the humanities. I conclude by providing a summary of the chapters.

0.1 WHY MEXICO?

In Mexico, the arts have been central to state and nation formation processes. Throughout the 20th century, the state, which was ruled for over 70 years by the Revolutionary Institutional Party (or PRI), invested a huge amount of resources in the arts and worked very closely with the artistic and intellectual community to strategically deploy art as a tool of political communication and mobilization and to generate compliance to the nation-state and to the party. Following the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921), which took the lives of over 10% of the

population, in an attempt to rebuild, unify, and modernize the country, the autocratic PRI used a variety of political, economic, and cultural strategies.[16] A central pillar of these were the arts.

José Vasconcelos, shortly after being sworn as the country's Education Minister in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, declared that "the post I occupy makes it my duty to become an interpreter of popular aspirations, and in the name of the people (...) I ask (...) all the intellectuals of Mexico to abandon your ivory towers and seal a pact of allegiance to the Revolution."[17] Like many of the artists, Vasconcelos also travelled around the country, visiting the most remote villages in the country and meeting with diverse groups of people, including rural and indigenous educators. He brought together "a distinguished team of teachers, writers, educators, architects, painters, anthropologists, musicians and experts in the popular arts. By doing all this, he helped to create the illusion in the nation that all of these people were working together in a national crusade with the goal of morally redeeming the Mexicans."[18]

The Mexican School of Painting (*Escuela Mexicana de Pintura*), headed by "los tres grandes," the muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco, is the paradigmatic example of the art that was supported by the post-revolutionary Mexican state. Based on the idea of "art for the people," the murals, which were painted on the walls of public buildings, were admired by Marxist scholars and progressive intellectuals for their "narrative style, realist aesthetic, populist iconography, and socialist politics."[19] They were designed to visually (and linearly) relay the nation's history to the lay (and oftentimes illiterate) public

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16 Lopez, Rick. 2010. *Crafting Mexico,* Duke University Press: Durham and London:13.

17 Vasconcelos quoted in Miller, Nicola. 1999. *In the shadow of the state.* Verson: London and New York: 48.

18 Florescano, Enrique. 2006. *National Narratives in Mexico. A History.* (trans. Nancy Hancock), University of Oklahoma Press: Norman: 331.

19 Coffey, Mary. 2012. *How a revolutionary art became official culture*. Durham: Duke University: 22. Muralism went through different stages and while it is often talked about as if it was a clearly homogenous movement, if one looks at the different stages it is clear just how diverse and often contradictory some of these views were (Azuela de la Cueva, Alicia. 2012. "Pinceladas de la historia." In *Centenarios. Conmemoraciones e Historia Oficial.* eds. Erica Pani y Rodríguez Kuri. El Colegio de México: México: 285).

through the depiction of scenes from the pre-Hispanic and colonial periods through to the revolution.[20] Images of national heroes, including Aztec kings and revolutionary icons, but also prominent global actors such as Marx and Lenin, made their appearance (Figure 1.1). Many of the images included in the murals were then reproduced in textbooks and shown in other formats that could be easily circulated across the country. Foreign artists and intellectuals would come to praise this work and recognize its innovative styles. This recognition helps explain why domestic political officers came to accept them as a symbol of the nation even as these works often sought to convey subversive messages.[21]

The artists themselves often became the ambassadors of these images by travelling across the country showing their work while also learning about the traditions and artistic techniques from different indigenous communities, often incorporating these learnings to their own work with the alleged purpose of making it "authentically nationalist."[22] Siqueiros wrote that

> The art of the Mexican people is the greatest (...) precisely because it is of the people and it is collective. That is why our primary aesthetic objective is to socialize artistic creation, in an effort to destroy all traces of bourgeois individualism. We reject so-called easel painting, and all the ultraintellectual salon art of the aristocracy. We exalt all manifestations of public art because they are useful to the people. We believe that any work of art that is alien or contrary

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20 While the picture of *mestizaje* presented by many of these artworks allegedly promised the erasure of the old caste-like system by promoting a class-based social organization and fostered unprecedented levels of equality and justice, it continued to favor "whitening" as can be attested by the association of indigenous culture with the feminine in ways that reasserted white, patriarchal privilege. (Coffey 2012, 11 and Zavala, Adriana. 2009. *Becoming Modern. Becoming Tradition*. Penn State University Press: Pennsylvania). In Mexico blackness was "officially 'erased' as black anti-racism … was never challenged and was mostly considered an issue that had no relevance for Mexico's unifying project" (Moreno Figueroa, Mónica and Emiko Saldívar Tanaka. 2015. " 'We are not racists, we are Mexicans': Privilege, Nationalism and Post-Race Ideology in Mexico." *Critical Sociology* (42): 7). For a contemporary account of the racist legacies of mestizaje in Mexico see Navarrete, Federico. 2016. *México Racista. Una denuncia.* Mexico City: Grijalbo.

21 Coffey 2012; Miller 1999.

22 Indeed, even before the full development of mass communication and tourism, "'the *artesanías* (crafts) of different ethnic groups, historical symbols, and regional ways of thinking transcended their localities' to become nationally unifying." This was one more aspect that distinguished Mexico's cultural landscape from that of other regions in Latin America. (López, Rick. 2010. *Crafting Mexico.* Duke University Press: Durham and London: 16). See also Azuela, Alicia. 2005. *Arte y poder: renacimiento* artístico y revolución social México, 1910-1945. El Colegio de Michoacán: Michoacán)

> to popular taste is bourgeois and should disappear, because it perverts the aesthetic of our race.[23]

Rather than seeing themselves as members of the bourgeoisie detached from the masses, artists and other members of the intellectual and creative class saw themselves as non-elected representatives, meaning that they sought to use their work to channel the voice of "the people" so that it would ostensibly be heard by the political and economic elites.

The idea that art was a tool to bring about concrete political change prevailed throughout the rest of the twentieth century. The arts became a crucial didactic tool in this mission with such force that it is difficult to exaggerate just how important these continued to be for nation- and state-building purposes throughout the rest of the twentieth century. When it came to disseminating nationalism through art and cultural practices, the Mexican state was, by all accounts, an incredibly strong state. In the absence of free and fair elections and of public opinion polls, artists and intellectuals became important (non-elected) representatives who helped to channel and amplify the voices of different communities and social movements. As anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz has argued that during the heyday of the PRI regime the creative classes functioned as an "interpassive agent of popular opinion," meaning that they became the link between segments of the population whose voice was barely heard and the political and economic elites.[24]

While the artistic community certainly helped to advance a wide range of political messages from segments of the population that would otherwise never have been heard, these efforts entailed a certain degree of disciplining and silencing. As we learn from

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23 Siquieros, David Alfaro. 2017 [1924]. "Manifesto of the Union of Mexican Workers, Technicians, Painters, and Sculptors," *Manifestos & Polemics in Latin American Art* ed. (and trans.) Patrick Frank. University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque: 38.

24 Lomnitz, Claudio. 2001a. *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism*, Mineappolis: Minnesota University Press: 210.

political science scholars, in seeking to establish *connections with* citizens, states also often establish *authority over* them.[25] What this meant in this case is that even as artists, in collaboration with the state, certainly "channeled" the voices of the population, many of these voices were distorted or remained excluded. Indeed, even as many members of the artistic community opposed the party's authoritarian policies and tactics, they nonetheless helped to reproduce specific narratives about the nation and imaginaries of citizenship which, oftentimes, produced patriarchal, misogynist, and racist views. These views included, for instance, the ideology of *mestizaje*, that is, racial and cultural mixing. *Mestizaje* ostensibly sought to promote looking beyond a person's race to create a more unified, racially mixed Mexico but in fact drove indigenous people to become less indigenous in order to become more Mexican. Many of these national myths conveyed through art, often unintentionally, also helped to reproduce the idea that the PRI party encompassed the ideals of the revolution and modernization in that they linked the party, the state, and the nation together and, therefore, implicitly sent the message that the autocratic PRI deserved to be in power and represent the people.[26]

In addition to the content and messages of artworks, there was an underlying consensus among members of the art world that the state should be *the* entity responsible for funding and managing cultural and artistic projects. Indeed, guided by the tenet that the state would become the main educator, employer, and provider of social security, "the chief

25 Gorski, Philip. 2003. *The Discplinary Revolution,* The University of Chicago Press: Chicago; Scott, James. 1998. *Seein Like a State,* Yale University Press: New Haven.

26 Coffey 2012.

caretaker of the nation,"[27] the arts became a central tool to advance this message not only in the type of art that was produced but also in the way that the artistic field operated.

The state certainly invested vast resources to create all kinds of cultural and artistic institutions and to support the artistic community. Throughout the entire seventy-year rule of the PRI, the state provided resources to the artistic community. Unlike its Latin American counterparts, the Mexican state only rarely tried to violently coerce the intellectual and artistic community. In fact, throughout the 20th century, Mexico became somewhat of a safe-haven and an oasis for the creative classes from across the region who were fleeing military dictatorships. It was through funding sources and intellectual honors that included prizes, scholarships, grants, and prestigious appointments that, as the historian Nicola Miller eloquently put it, the state "came to monopolize the routes" by which the intellectual and creative class in Mexico was "able to acquire what Pierre Bourdieu has called 'cultural capital'."[28]

The Mexican state also created all kinds of cultural and artistic institutions, including museums, art schools, art salons, and other exhibition spaces, and, as I show in Chapter Two, even gave artists the choice to pay their taxes with art rather than money. The state also offered jobs in the cultural bureaucracy to the creative elites, which explains why it was neither uncommon nor taboo for artists to work for the government in some capacity or even to choose public service as their life career. By the end of the 1980s, over a fourth of Mexican artists and intellectuals had chosen public service for their life careers and "more than half [had] served the government in some capacity." [29]

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27 Lomnitz 2001, 54.

28 Miller 1999, 44.

29 Ai Camp, Roderic. 1985. *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth Century Mexico,* Texas: The University of Texas Press: 117, quoted in Grenier, Yvon. 2001. "Octavio Paz and the Changing Role of Intellectuals in Mexico." *Discourse.* Spring: 132.

The corollary of all this was that, throughout the twentieth century, the private sector was not a particularly relevant actor in the arts. In contrast to places like the United States, where wealthy individuals and corporations have played an important role in funding the arts,[30] in Mexico the underlying consensus was that the state should be the entity responsible for funding and managing cultural and artistic projects. If the private sector was to intervene, it should do so only to further support the artists that had been selected by the state.[31] For the most part, therefore, private art collecting as well as the idea that individuals and corporations should be responsible for supporting art, an invaluable asset for the nation, was frowned upon and regarded as antithetical to the project of "art for the people."[32] For instance, in 1964, Dr. Álvar Carrillo Gil, one of the country's few art collectors, offered to donate his prestigious collection of Mexican art to the then-recently-opened Museum of Modern Art in the heart of the capital city, which lacked a permanent art collection. Not only was the offer declined, but Mexico's president at the time, Adolfo López Mateos, made a public statement about Carrillo Gil's offer: "The main collection of a national museum cannot be one that has been amassed by a private individual; this would entail giving Carrillo Gil, or any other private individual, an undeserved privilege."[33] Ten years later, Carrillo Gil was able to establish his own art museum which housed his collection, which mainly included works by the established artistic elite (the Carrillo Gil Contemporary Art Museum, MACG). However, the process of creating this museum entailed close collaboration with the state, and Dr. Carrillo Gil eventually left the museum to the state to be run by the

30 Ostrower, Francie. 2002. *Trustees of Culture*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

31 Garduño, Ana. 2009. *El poder del coleccionismo de arte: Álvar Carrillo Gil*. Mexico: UNAM.

32 Public interests (understood as the interests of the state) were deemed irreconcilable to private interests to the point that that the latter were often accused of undermining the former. Garduño, Ana. 2004. "Disyuntivas del coleccionismo: el desino de los acervos." *Curare* 24.

33 Ibidem.

National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA).[34] This case illustrates how, even as the state has relied on the private sector more often than it cared to confess, it was the former that usually set the tone, deciding what was worth collecting and displaying, and, ultimately, managing artistic and cultural spaces.

But while the artistic community collaborated closely with the state, and helped to construct narratives of the nation and the state which, oftentimes, helped to rouse support for the PRI, members of the artistic community were never merely mouthpieces of the regime. At times, they became powerful voices of dissent against the ruling party. For instance, following the Tlatelolco 1968 student massacre perpetrated by the state, many artists – most significantly the art collectives known as *Los Grupos* which flourished in the 70s and 80s[35] – refused to continue to collaborate with the government and began producing art that explicitly criticized the regime.[36]

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34 Dr. Carrillo Gil spent a great part of his life negotiating with the state to make sure that certain state commissioners approved his collection before it became public. (Garduño, 2009). Also see: Oles, James. 2007. "El coleccionista reescribe la historia: una aproximación a la colección Blaisten." In *Arte Moderno de México. Colección Andrés Blaisten*. Mexico City: UNAM: 26. Eventually the state put the land but Carrillo Gil paid for the costs of the museum and donated a large part of his collection and sold the rest at half the price to the Mexican state. The creation of the MACG did not set a precedent for other private collectors to create museums with or without the help of the state. While some private museums were created in the second half of the twentieth century, these were sporadic acts and not necessarily the product of specific laws that incentivized their creation. In most cases these museums were owned by artists, some of whom also happened to be art collectors themselves. Some examples include "El Eco" museum (1953) created by artist Mathias Goeritz, Diego Rivera's Anahuacalli Museum (1955) and the Frida Kahlo Museum (1958). During the last decades of the twentieth century other museums that operated under specific combinations of public-private partnerships began to appear. This has been the case with the Jose Luis Cuevas Museum (Mexico City), the Manuel Felguerez Museum of Abstract Art (Zacatecas), the Luis Nishizawa Museum (Toluca), the Alfredo Zalce Museum (Morelia), the Federico Silva Museum (San Luis Potosí) and, one of the most famous art museums in the country, the Tamayo Museum (Mexico City). See Garduño 2009, 24, 48 and 51; see also Ganado Kim, Edgardo. 2003. "Patrocinios, coleccionismo y donaciones México-Brasil" in *Milenio Diario,* February 13: 46.

35 In the 1970s and early 1980s, Los Grupos used their work to speak out against the PRI authoritarian regime and to show their support to guerrilla members across Latin America. (McCaughan, Edward. 2012. *Art and Social Movements*. *Cultural Politics in Mexico and Aztlán*, Duke University Press: Durham and London; Vázquez Mantecón, Álvaro. 2014. "Los Grupos: A reconsideration." In *The age of discrepancies. Art and Visual culture in Mexico 1968-1997* eds. Olivier Debroise and Cuauhtémoc Medina (2nd ed.). (trans. Christopher Michael Fraga). MUAC: Mexico.

36 Some of the events that artists specifically protested included liberating the political prisoners of the Sindicato Ferrocarrilero, the invasion of the Bay of Pigs, the Mexican state's killing of students in1968, Chile's military coup in 1973, electoral frauds, the killings of journalists, amogn others. (Illades, Carlos. 2012. *La inteligencia rebelde*. México: Océano: 25).

Despite their disagreements and temporary falling-outs, however, the artistic community and the state continued to collaborate and, for the most part, depend on one another.[37] Shortly after the 1968 massacre, for instance, during Luis Echeverría's presidency (1970-1976), ample public resources were relocated to the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) to placate artists and intellectuals and bring them back into the government's sphere of influence. Scholars, therefore, tend to describe the relationship between the state and the intellectual and artistic community as one characterized by a series of polarized couplings such as collaboration and distrust, dependence and aversion, and cooptation and repression.[38] The writer Jorge Volpi, for instance, equated this relationship to that of a "quarrelsome old married couple" who, despite their constant disagreements, have trouble separating.[39]

Even the advent of neoliberalism did not fully divest the support of the state in the arts, nor completely or immediately change this co-dependent relationship. Following the collapse of the oil market in 1982 and the subsequent adoption of the International Monetary Fund's structural neoliberal reforms, Mexico's per capita income plummeted and by 1988 over 400,000 jobs disappeared. But although the cultural and artistic sectors also suffered losses during this period, the state did not dismantle existing cultural institutions, and even created new ones.[40] President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) – who is known for overseeing the sale of some

37 Writer Carlos Fuentes, for instance, continued to back up Echeverría, even after the 1968 student massacre (Miller 1999, 54).

38 Rodríguez Ledesma, Xavier. 2012. "Intelectuales y Poder en México. La moderna añeja relación." in *1988-2012 Cultura y Transición.* Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León/Instituto de Cultura de Morelos: México. See also: Tenorio, Mauricio. 2000. *De cómo ignorar.* Fondo de Cultura Económica: México.

39 Volpi, Jorge. 2001, 144.

40 These new institutions included the Mexican Institute of Television (IMEVISION), the Mexican Institute of Radio (IMER), and the Mexican Institute of Cinematography (IMCINE). Ejea, Tomás. 2013. *Poder y creación artística en México. Un análisis del Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes*, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana: México.

of the largest government enterprises[41] and signing NAFTA[42] – invested even more resources in the arts and culture and continued to foster alliances with members of the artistic and intellectual community. This partly helps explain why, despite what many people considered to be a bold-faced electoral fraud that led him to power[43] and a tenure that caused a great deal of suffering to many people, Salinas' popularity soared shortly after he took power and, at least during his time in office, he became "the most popular president in decades."[44]

During the six months following the electoral scandal, Salinas made time to meet frequently with members of the creative classes and garnered their support. After only a week in office, in December of 1989, he founded the National Council for the Arts and Culture (Conaculta) which is meant to "coordinate cultural and artistic policies, organizations, and agencies and to promote, support, and sponsor cultural and artistic events."[45] Conaculta became

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41 Some of these industries included the telecommunications industry, airlines, petroleum exploration and refining companies, and other profitable manufacturing and service industries. This trend continued after Salinas left power. The number of state-owned firms which in 1982 amounted to 1,100 was reduced to less than 200 in 2000. (Centeno, Miguel Ángel. 1994. *Democracy within Reason: technocratic revolution in Mexico*. The Pennyslvania State University: University Park, PA)

42 NAFTA dismantled most protectionist barriers between the US, Canada, and Mexico, including those related to the arts and culture. For a summary of what this dismantlement entailed see: Cruz Vázquez, Eduardo. 2015. *TLCAN/Cultura ¿Lubricante* o *Engrudo? Apuntes a 20 años.* Universidad de Nuevo León: Mexico. Also see: Gómez, Rodrigo and Argelia Muñoz Larroa. 2014. "Cultural Industries and Policy in Mexico and Canada after 20 years of NAFTA." *Norteamérica* 9 (2: July-December): 173-204.

43 On the election night of July 6th 1988, the computers of the Federal Election Commission in Mexico inexplicably broke down as Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas – the leader of a new leftist party, the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) – was beating Salinas by at least a two to one margin in Mexico City. In quintessential *dedazo* style, following the system's breakdown, and despite the public condemnation of the intellectual community, Salinas was announced as the winner of the presidential contest.

44 Centeno 1997, 19. Following the implementation of NAFTA in 1994 the inequality gap between the poorest states in the country and the richest increased. See Scott, John. 2006. "Desigualdad de oportunidades y políticas públicas en México." In *Pensar en México*. eds. Héctor Aguilar Camín (et.al), México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes and FONCA: 237.

45 Conaculta oversees the work of all the federal institutions that are in charge of the country's cultural infrastructure, including museums, cultural centers, mass communication media, and programs that support artistic creation such as Canal 22, Radio Educación, the Cineteca Nacional, the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica, the Dirección General de Culturas Populares, the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, the Festival Internacional Cervantino and many more. Conaculta also works closely with state and municipal governments, private organizations and social groups. (https://www.cultura.gob.mx/acerca_de_en/) (last consulted: May 1, 2019).

the closest thing the country had ever had to a Department of Culture,[46] and was widely praised by members of the artistic community in ways that were interpreted by both the government and the population as an expression of support to president Salinas. Shortly thereafter, Salinas founded the National Foundation for the Arts and Culture (Fonca), a public-private partnership designed to give out grants to artists in different disciplines (music, literature, visual arts, dance, and theatre) to facilitate the production of artworks. Fonca would function as an autonomous entity that would manage the budget for the arts while remaining independent from the public administration.[47] It required the state to provide resources and infrastructure but also opened the door to private corporations and individuals through a clause that allowed "civil society" to donate money to this entity in return for tax exemptions.[48]

Meanwhile the state dismantled a series of protectionist measures including those that had to do with art and culture.[49] Unlike Canada, Mexico did not resort to the "cultural exception" clause which exempted cultural industries from the provisions stipulated in NAFTA (i.e. the free flow of artistic and cultural merchandise and investments[50]) and even reduced customs to duties on foreign goods related to the arts and culture.[51] Paradoxically, as a way to alleviate the growing

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46 Instead of replacing existing institutions including the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) and National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), Conaculta was meant to oversee these two institutions.

47 The jury responsible for selecting the grantees would be constituted by renown artists in each discipline rather than by government employees. Half of the budget would be given directly to the states as a way to incentivize decentralization. Finally, the proposal, called for transparency: a list of grant recipients would be made public, indicating how much money each one had received. The juries, members of the council, and managers would also be made public. Despite these attempts to increase transparency, the Fonca's director continues to be chosen by the Mexican President, which problematizes the "autonomous" character of the foundation (Ejea 2013).

48 Tovar y de Teresa, Rafael. 1994. *Modernización y política cultural*. Fondo de Cultura Económica: Mexico: 364.

49 During Salinas' time in power several blockbuster art exhibitions – including the iconic *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries* – were organized and toured the United States with the explicit purpose of encouraging economic investment and tourism by introducing audiences to Mexican culture and history.

50 See the Article 2005 in the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/assets/pdfs/agreements-accords/cusfta-e.pdf) (last consulted: May 1, 2019). Also see Cruz Vázquez 2015.

51 Mexico did not include sufficient legal provisions to protect its cultural productions be its cultural industries or patrimony other than what was stipulated in the 1972 Federal Law. (Aceves Sepúlveda, Gabriela. 2007. *Art and possibility: from nationalism to neoliberalism. The cultural*

anxieties about the loss of "Mexican identity" that would presumably result from opening the country to foreign trade, the state found ways to deploy the arts to invoke and reproduce images of the nation, including by organizing touring blockbuster exhibitions about Mexico.[52]

The neoliberal economic reforms implemented in the 1980s and 1990s primed the country's democratic transition which included the implementation of free and fair elections leading to the PRI losing first the control of the legislature in 1997 and then, three years later, the presidential elections to the pro-liberalization National Action Party (or PAN). In December of 2000, the former Coca-Cola executive Vicente Fox, the victorious candidate for the National Action Party (PAN), peacefully took power. Fox's victory – which occurred only six years after the 1994 Zapatista uprising and a major financial crisis which caused a profound devaluation of the peso – was one more step in a sequence of socio-economic and political changes in Mexico which are considered to have "radically modified the way the *whole* state apparatus works."[53] The shift to formal democracy constrained the previously near-total power of the president and introduced plurality to Congress, which was now constituted by members of multiple parties

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interventions of Banamex and Televisa. Master of Arts Thesis. The University of British Columbia: Vancouver: 153). When, during a public interview, Jaime Serra Puche, the Mexican officer in charge of negotiating Mexico's role in NAFTA, was asked whether the "culture industries" would be included in the treaty negotiations, he responded, "That is not so relevant for Mexico, if you have time you should see the exhibition *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries*, and you will realize that there is nothing to worry about." (Serra Puche quoted in Fox, Claire. *The Fence and the River. Culture and Politics at the U.S.-Mexico Border.* University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis: 35).

52 Despite the economic reforms that would open the country to foreign goods, "Mexican identity," president Salinas maintained, "would remain untouched." Everything else had to change in order for Mexican identity to remain fixed: "So as to maintain the essence of the Nation, change in our political, economic, and social life is indispensable. (…) [We are] confident of [our] values, traditions, and culture, which is why we are not afraid of change. (…) Change will be an exercise of our sovereignty." (Salinas, PDN 1989-1994, my translation). Rafael Tovar y de Teresa, head of Conaculta from 1992 to 2000, echoed the president's views (Tovar y de Teresa 1994, 13).

53 Woldenberg, José. 2006. *Después de la transición: gobernabilidad, espacio público y derechos*. Mexico: Aguilar, León y Cal Editores: 26. Scholars agree that Mexico's "transition" was a protracted one and that it included the failed transition of 1988, the successful transition of 1996-1997 (when electoral institutions guaranteed a free and fair electoral process and the PRI lost control of the legislature) and, then a more consolidated transition in 2000 when the presidential defeat (Díaz-Cayeros, Alberto and Beatriz Magaloni. 2013. "Mexico: International Influences but 'Made in Mexico.'" In *Transitions to Democracy. A Comparative Perspective* eds. Kathryn Stoner and Michael McFaul, The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore: 246).

competing for votes and pushing different agendas, thereby "moving from a monopolistic exercise of power to a shared exercise of power."[54] New institutions meant to facilitate public access to information and electoral oversight were also created, including the much-lauded National Institute for Transparency, Access to Information and Personal Data Protection (INAI).

Under the PAN, Mexico became a consolidated electoral democracy – new political parties were created which competed for (and won) congressional seats at both the federal and local levels in free and fair elections – but also continued to adopt ever more market-oriented reforms and policies which did relatively little to address the quotidian problems that many citizens had faced under the old *Priísta* regime. If anything, corruption, impunity, inequality, and environmental degradation grew in the wake of this twin transition,[55] as did crime and violence, which increased even more dramatically following president Felipe Calderón's launch of the so-called "war on drugs" at the end of 2006. Rather than quelling crime and public insecurity caused by the illicit drug trade, this war sparked a brutal conflict between the state and rival criminal organizations, with citizens caught in the crossfire.

This dreary situation helps explain why, in 2012, partly nostalgic for a past in which violence seemed to be less rampant, citizens once again voted the PRI into power. While many socio-economic and political reforms were announced and while the PRI claimed to have reformed itself – and it did to the extent that it complied with the new electoral rules – not much else changed during the new *Priísta* Enrique Peña Nieto's tenure: inequality, corruption, and impunity kept rising, as did the violence linked to a drug war that worsened every year.

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54 Lujambio, Alonso. 2000. *El poder compartido*, Océano: México: 21.

55 In 2006 the income of the poorest 10% of the population represented approximately 1% of the national income, while that of the richest 10% represented almost 40% (and that of the richest 1% represented over 10% of that income, a percentage that, by 2014, had increased to 20%). See Esquivel Hernández, Gerardo. 2015. *Desigualdad extrema en México. Concentración del poder económico y politico.* Mexico. Iguales and Oxfam: Mexico: 5: https://www.oxfammexico.org/sites/default/files/desigualdadextrema_informe.pdf).

In September of 2015, president Peña Nieto, in what seemed to be an attempt to mimic his predecessor Salinas' rapprochement with the artistic and intellectual community, announced the creation of Mexico's first Department of Culture. It did not go unnoticed, however, that this announcement seemed to coincide too strategically with the upcoming first anniversary of the disappearance of forty-three students from the *Ayotzinapa* Rural Teachers' College in the southern state of Guerrero. That event, in which, allegedly, police tied to corrupt politicians – a commando conformed of local government security agents and drug dealers – kidnapped, tortured, and "disappeared" students en route to a peaceful protest, had sparked national and international outrage. To many, it was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back: a blatant case of mass violence and overt impunity in a country that had become one of the most violent in the world.[56] Given this climate, despite the benefits that a Department of Culture might bring to the creative classes, the art community's reception was lukewarm at best.[57] Unlike their embrace of the creation of Conaculta twenty-five years earlier, this time prominent members of the artistic community criticized the creation of this new entity, claiming, among other things, that the Department of Culture "seems more like the result of a marketing scheme envisioned by the state rather than a genuine interest in creation and culture."[58]

This dissertation analyzes the ways in which the socio-economic and political changes in Mexico in the wake of the new millennium transformed the artistic field, and traces the political effects of such transformation. The first half of the project focuses on how the post-autocratic state

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56 Over 32000 people have been "disappeared" in Mexico (https://data.adondevanlosdesaparecidos.org/) (last consulted May 1).

57 Amador Tello, Judith. 2015. "La nueva Secretaría de Cultura, en la polémica," *Proceso* (September 18): http://www.proceso.com.mx/415664/la-nueva-secretaria-de-cultura-en-la-polemica (last consulted May 1, 2019); http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2015/12/22/opinion/002a1edi

58 Benitez Dueñas, Issa M. 2015. "Cuestionario SITAC: Razón política de la gestión cultural del Estado." (http://sitac.horizontal.mx/cuestionario/12) (last consulted May 1, 2019). See all the other questionnaires here: http://sitac.horizontal.mx/

deploys art for political purposes. Drawing on fieldwork at events that included mass national commemorations, congressional hearings, and closed-door meetings of cultural policy experts, I demonstrate how the democratically-elected state continued to employ strategies inherited from the *Priísta* autocratic regime to craft narratives of the nation and the state. Such efforts, however, increasingly failed as the artistic community refused to participate in top-down nation-building processes and openly contested them. This reveals a profound transformation in who gets to represent the nation and the logics, strategies, and tactics that are deployed to do so.

The second part of the dissertation centers on the ways in which neoliberal ideologies and market-oriented reforms have transformed the artistic field itself. This includes examining not simply the artistic field's patronage networks, funding channels, and labor structures, but also the artistic practices, projects, and objects themselves, including their subject-matter, the forms that they take, and the political messages that they allegedly seek to communicate. Because artworks (and artistic practices) do not simply exist in a vacuum, I also pay attention to the curatorial and pedagogical strategies that are used to "activate" these works and to the publics that encounter them and the ways in which they are interpellated by them.

I demonstrate how the private sector is making unprecedented incursions into the artistic field in the form of new funding sources, exhibition spaces, and via a strong art market. As the state loses its near-monopoly on artistic production and distribution, certain forms of freedom of expression are bolstered. Members of the art world are able to tap into new resources to produce and circulate work that addresses and critiques the violence produced by the drug war, as well as the inequality, corruption, and impunity in the country, and to accuse both the government and even the private sectors' complicity and responsibility in these matters. Rather than engaging in top-down forms of nation-building, moreover, art is now deployed to critique and mock both the

state and the nation and to convey feelings of anger, disgust, and disenchantment, including with electoral democracy. However, as is exemplified by Teresa Margolles' work described in the opening vignette, artists are increasingly skeptical of didactic strategies that might include communicating top-down, pre-conceived messages to a public. Rather than advocating for political action and education at a mass level, they seek to incite viewers to engage in critical thinking and incentivize individual reflections on political issues.

0.2 Literature Review

Social scientists have devoted much thought trying to explain what caused Mexico's twin democratic and neoliberal transition and what its effects have been on a wide range of issues, including party politics, social movements, and food systems, to name a few. In what follows, I will summarize these different literatures and show how, despite everything we learn from them, none of these works get at how these socio-economic transformations have impacted the political role played by the creative elites and cultural bureaucracy. The existing literature, therefore, misses the reasons why and the mechanisms through which so-called "democratic transitions" and "free-market" economic reforms work together to transform the artistic field and what these transformations, in turn, reveal about politics, including the type of political narratives and communal imaginaries that are created and circulated.

Political scientists have written extensively about why the PRI lost power, why a dominant party system finally transformed into a fully competitive one, and what this lengthy, "protracted" process looked like at the level of formal political institutions.[59] Many of the most

59 Protracted democratization processes are defined as lengthy transitions that involved ample negotiations among political elites leading to incremental reforms that eventually end in electoral competition and the end of the incumbent. See: Eisenstadt, Todd. 2004. *Courting Democracy*

important works on these matters – including Beatriz Magaloni's *Voting for Autocracy* (2006) and Kenneth Greene's *Why dominant parties lose* (2007)[60] – make some version of the argument that, due to increasing privatization of public assets, the PRI lost access to the public resources that had historically helped fund its political campaigns and corporatist networks. These forms of pork-barreling explain why the PRI was both able to stay in power for so long and why it finally caved in. While this literature teaches us much about the PRI's strategies to control material resources, buy votes, and manipulate the political elites (and its failure to continue doing so), it virtually ignores the party's ability to control aspects of the symbolic landscape – including the creation and dissemination of national myths that were tied to the party and whose production and dissemination depended heavily on the work of the artistic community – which certainly contributed to its ability to stay in power for over 70 years.[61]

For its part, the literature that focuses on the aftermath of the 2000 elections also very much centers around questions of party politics and voter preference, and tries to systematically explain the ways in which Mexico is and/or is not a consolidated democracy.[62] Matthew Cleary's *The sources of democratic responsiveness in Mexico* (2010), for instance, discusses the lack of accountability of public servants and politicians in general and, using a subnational comparative design, concludes that electoral competition did not make municipal governments in the country

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in Mexico: Party Strategies and Electoral Institutions, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press; see also Cornelius, Wayne. 2000. "Blind spots in democratization: sub-national politics as a constraint on Mexico's transition." *Democratization* 7(3): 117-132.

60 Magaloni focuses on voter dissatisfaction, while Greene pays more attention to the role of the opposition party. (Magaloni, Beatriz. 2006. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge; Greene, Kenneth. 2007. *Why dominant parties lose. Mexico's democratization in comparative perspective*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge).

61 This gap in the literature is not addressed by this dissertation, which, instead, focuses on the aftermath of the transition.

62 Some recent examples include: Ai Camp, Roderic. *2014. Politics in Mexico,* Oxford University Press: Oxford; Langston, Joy. 2017. *Democratization and Authoritarian Party Survival: Mexico's PRI.* Oxford University Press: Oxford; Levy, Daniel and Kathleen Bruhn. 2006. *Mexico. The struggle for Democratic Development.* University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles; Domínguez, Jorge, Chappell Lawson, and Alejandro Moreno (eds.). 2009. *Consolidating Mexico's Democracy,* The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore.

more responsive to the interests of their citizens.[63] María Inclán's recent *The Zapatista Movement and Mexico's Democratic Transition* (2018), in turn, focuses on why the electoral transition in 2000 was unable to fully include the Zapatistas and other indigenous communities into the formal political arena.[64]

There is also an important array of literature on neoliberalism that centers on why the PRI, who had historically been averse to market-oriented reforms, eventually implemented them and why it was able to do so in such an aggressive way and with relatively little pushback.[65] Sarah Babb's *Managing Mexico* (2001), for example, is a highly original study of the political elites in Mexico. She chronicles how these elites' education and political background changed in the decades leading up to the country's adoption of neoliberal reforms.[66] *Managing Mexico* is a welcome complement to the studies that focus exclusively on the level of the government precisely because it analyzes how non-traditional political institutions likes schools and universities influenced the composition of the political elites who would eventually came to participate in government and lead the economic transformation of the country. But even Babb's book, which carefully digests the way certain schools and universities shaped the soon-to-be political elites, avoids mentioning the role played by the artistic and other creative communities, which, as I show in this dissertation, engage in very different kinds of politically-salient work from that performed by these other elites.

There is also important work that analyzes the effects of neoliberalism on a wide-range of issues. Kenneth Roberts' *Changing Course in Latin America* (2014), for instance, studies how

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63 Cleary, Matthew. 2010. *The sources of democratic responsiveness in Mexico*, University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, Indiana.

64 Inclán, María. 2018. *The Zapatista Movement and Mexico's Democratic Transition,* Oxford University Press: Oxford.

65 Centeno 1994.

66 Babb, Sarah. 2004. *Managing Mexico. Economists from Nationalism to Neoliberalism*, Princeton University Press: Princeton.

different combinations of neoliberal reforms, party systems, the depth and duration of economic crises, and the political orientation of the economic elites led to different kinds of displacement of traditional political party systems across the region.[67] In his book *Politics after Neoliberalism,* political scientist Richard Snyder argues that neoliberal reforms do not simply dismantle public institutions but rather trigger two-step re-regulation processes that can, in fact, "create opportunities for political incumbents to expand their authority and their support bases by 'reregulating' sectors of the economy."[68] The varying strengths and strategies of different politicians and societal groups are precisely what determine the different types of institutions that will result from these reregulation processes.

There are also books that are more interpretive and focus on how market reforms have transformed people's ordinary lived experience. Alyshia Gálvez' *Eating Nafta*, for instance, looks at how food production systems and consumption patterns and habits of people across the country have changed, leading to alarming levels of obesity, malnutrition, and diabetes.[69] Another book that examines the more recent effects of neoliberalization is Erica Simmons' comparative study of Mexico and Bolivia, *Meaningful Resistance* (2016). By analyzing the grievances made by several social movements in response to the threats to subsistence goods posed by market reforms, Simmons argues that these grievances are social experiences that respond to both ideational and material factors both of which are always tightly linked.[70] But even Simmons, who takes meaning-making and symbolic worlds very seriously – including the

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67 Roberts, Kenneth. 2014. *Changing Course in Latin America*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

68 Snyder, Richard. 2009. *Politics after neoliberalism. Reregulation in Mexico,* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge: 4.

69 Gálvez, Alyshia. 2018. *Eating Nafta. Trade, food policies, and the destruction of Mexico*, University of California Press: California.

70 Simmons, Erica. 2016. *Meaningful Resistance: Market Reforms and the Roots of Social Protest in Latin America*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. Another important book on social movements that respond to neoliberalism is Silva, Eduardo. 2009. *Challenging Neoliberalism in Latin America*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

ways in which certain national symbols like corn in Mexico and water in Bolivia are connected to different conceptions of community – is less concerned with how the advent of neoliberalization (or democratization for that matter) might shape people's allegiances to these symbols and, instead, focuses on how already-existing symbolic allegiance incentivize people to mobilize.

In short then, despite everything we learn from the vast literature that analyzes the antecedents and aftermath of Mexico's formal electoral transition and adoption of market-oriented reforms, we know very little about how these transformations shaped national imaginaries, political narratives, and forms of collective identity, and how these become evident through an analysis of the cultural and artistic policies, institutions, and production. For the most part, the role of the intellectual and creative elites, and of the arts in general, which had been historically crucial in helping to create political imaginaries that tied the nation to the state, the people, and the party, thereby helping to garner support for the PRI, has been ignored by social scientists.

This is a glaring oversight. It is not simply a "gap" in the literature in the academic sense, but rather an omission that ignores what has historically been an area central to the creation of shared notions of citizenship, imaginaries of the nation, and political narratives and critique. To understand how the twin transition has impacted the ways in which the nation is represented, imagined, and discussed, it is necessary to examine how this transition has shaped and been reflected in Mexico's artistic policies, production, and publics. This dissertation takes up this challenge by analyzing the impact of Mexico's twin transition on the political role of members of the artistic community, including by studying how the relationship between the artistic community, the state, the private sector, and the public changed in the wake of this transition.

To be sure, there are important studies, mostly written by art historians and other scholars in the humanities, that discuss the type of art that was produced in the wake of Mexico's twin neoliberal and democratic transition. Most of these works can be found in catalogues for art shows or shorter pieces of art criticism that get published in specialized magazines, as well as in sporadic monographs about specific artists or art movements. For the most part, these works, which tend to be written by art historians and cultural critics, center around the formal aspects of the artworks, including the subject-matter of the art and the messages it seeks to convey, as well as on the forms these works take and the material employed by the artists.[71] They also focus on an artwork's or art movement's historical influences, genealogies, and the continuities and breaks with other movements and genres.[72] These studies, however, for the most part rarely mention – or do so only in passing or as an aside – the institutions and policies that shape these works' conditions of production, circulation, and reception.

Meanwhile, there are a few studies that do discuss these other aspects, including the country's cultural institutional and policy landscape, and well as the patronage networks and funding structures that characterize certain artistic fields in Mexico. Perhaps because these works are written by sociologists and public policy experts, for the most part they, in turn, eschew

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71 Important examples include: Gallo, Rubén. 2004. *New Tendencies in Mexican Art*, New York: Palgrave, Macmillan; Vicario, Gilbert. 2004. "What makes art Mexican?," New York: Distributed Art Publishers: 9-20; Cruzvillegas, Abraham. 2000. *Arte contemporáneo de México en el Museo Carrillo Gil*, México, Cartones Ponderosa; Schmelz, Itala (et.al). 2007. *Escultura social, a new generation of art from Mexico City*. Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art; Canclini 2014; and Carroll, Amy Sara. 2017. *Remex. Toward an art history of the NAFTA era.* University of Texas Press: Austin.

72 Important examples include: Medina, Cuauhtémoc, Luis Felipe Ortega, and Braudelio Lara. 1996. *Acné o el Nuevo contrato social ilustrado*. Mexico: Museo de Arte Moderno; Eckmann, Teresa. 2010. *Neomexicanism: mexican figurative painting and patronage in the 1980s*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press; Kim, Edgardo Ganado. 1997. *Las transgresiones al cuerpo: arte contemporáneo de México*, México: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes-Museo Carrillo Gil.

discussing the artworks altogether.[73] In other words, cultural policy studies generally tend to avoid any kind of interpretative analyses of the content, form, and messages of artworks. Accordingly, the reader cannot get a sense of how changes at the institutional and policy level might affect changes in the arts themselves, nor what the political effects of these transformations may be. These works, moreover, tend to be based mainly on interviews with art practitioners and policymakers rather than on any kind of ethnographic research and participant-observation. In other words, they take the cultural employees' and officials' words for granted and limit their analysis to written policies without examining how such policies actually affect the institutions on the ground. [74]

While there are some important exceptions in the form of scholarly books that analyze both institutions and policies but also engage in interpretive analysis of artworks – including Daniel Montero's seminal *El cubo de Rubik: arte mexicano en los años 90s* – because these works are written by art historians, they are concerned with how the artistic field as an end in itself has changed, without much concern for the political effects and implications of these changes.[75] Moreover, for the most part, these works focus on the decades that range from the

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73 Important examples include Cruz Vázquez, Eduardo and Carlos A. Lara (coord.). 2012. *Cultura y Transición 1988-2012,* Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León and Instituto de Cultura de Morelos: México; Piedras, Ernesto y Néstor García Canclini. 2006. *Las industrias culturales y el desarrollo de México*, México: Siglo XXI.

74 An important exception is Ejea 2013. Ejea's book not only provides an important panorama of the institutions and policies that structure the theatre scene in Mexico, but, because the author has worked in theatre for most of his life, also provides insights to the plays and the lives of these artists. Ejea's book focuses exclusively on theatre (rather than the visual arts) and while some of his findings are transposable to other fields in the arts, for the most part the book speaks exclusively about the theatre scene in Mexico.

75 Two recent books also extend the analysis to the 2000s: Emmelhainz, Immgrad. 2016. *La tiranía del sentido común,* Paradiso: Mexico. and García Canclini, 2014. Emmelhainz's book, written in the form of long essay, is a diatribe against "neoliberalism" and while she addresses the art world, her discussion go well beyond this field. García Canclini's book is in many ways closer to this dissertation but his work, written as a series of essays, focuses less on the historical context of Mexico and more on contemporary art in general. While this dissertation draws on these two works it also presents new arguments and evidence that help to problematize the way both of these authors deploy the concept of neoliberalism. There are also important studies on the literary public sphere and on film including works by Escalante, Fernando. 2007. *A la sombra de los libros : lectura, mercado y vida pública*. El Colegio de México: Mexico; Aguilar, José Antonio. 1998. *A la sombra de Ulises*. Porrúa and CIDE: Mexico; Zaid, Gabriel. 2013. *Dinero para la cultura.* Debate: Mexico; Sánchez Prado, Ignacio. 2014. *Screening Neoliberalism. Transforming*

1960s to the 1990s, therefore predating the formal transition to democracy and the advent of the drug war.[76] The period covered by this dissertation includes the *sexenios* of the *Panista* president Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) and of the *Priísta* president Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018). Accordingly, this dissertation assesses the impact of market-oriented economic reforms and policies on the artistic field decades after these were first implemented.

As the following section shows, this dissertation is also unique in the methods it employs. Unlike the work by social scientists (who analyze formal political and economic policies and institutions through the use of statistics, formal models, big data, archival work, and, in some cases, interviews) or that of scholars in the humanities (who engage in interpretive analysis of specific artistic objects and practices), this dissertation is, instead, rooted in ethnography and a sensibility to situated social practice of members in the artistic field.[77] By conducting a micro-level interaction study of the different actors and institutions in the artistic field, I am able to show how the state and private institutions actually operate and interact, how they are constituted, and what their attempts at meaning-making and structuring people's ordinary lives –

Mexican Cinema, 1988-2012, Nashville, Tennesse: Vanderbilt University Press; Tenorio 2000. Yet, even a superficial comparison points to major differences in the trajectories experienced by the local literary, film, and the visual art worlds. For instance, whereas the number of libraries and bookstores has significantly decreased, that of museums and galleries has expanded. In addition, the literary world has become much more concentrated—it is currently dominated by the literary groups of Nexos and *Letras Libres*—as is evidenced by the disappearance of independent editorials and publishing presses. The opposite is the case with the visual arts. As far as I am aware, no work has been done on the relationship between the public sphere and the visual arts in Mexico.

76 Montero, Daniel. 2013. *El cubo de Rubik: arte mexicano en los años 90s.* Mexico: Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo & RM; Coffey, Mary. 2003. "From Nation to Community: Museums and the Reconfiguration of Mexican Society under Neoliberalism" in *Foucault, Cultural Studies, and Governmentality*. Suny Press: Albany, NY; Yúdice, George. 2003. *The Expediency of Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press*;* Debroise, Oliver and Cuauhtémoc Medina. 2007, *The Age of Discrepancies: Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968-1997*, MUAC: Mexico; Benítez Dueñas, Issa Ma. (coord.). 2004. *Hacia otra historia del arte en México, Tomo IV,* Mexico: Conaculta; Benítez Dueñas, Issa Ma. (ed.). 2005. *Crónicas del paraíso, arte contemporáneo y sistema del arte en México*, Madrid, Ephemera.

77 For a discussion of political ethnography see: Schatz, Edward (ed.). 2009. *Political Ethnography*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

through funding art but also through aspects like taxation and shaping urban landscapes – actually look like.[78]

0.3 WHY ETHNOGRAPHY?

While not many political scientists write about art, some of the most exciting work within the discipline on this topic has been produced in recent years by political theorists who analyze novels, films, and other kinds of artworks.[79] A recent example is Anita Chari's *The Political Economy of the Senses: Neoliberalism, Reification, and Critique* (2015) which, in the spirit of the Frankfurt School, argues that artworks enable a particular kind of critique of capitalism. Unlike works of theory, which are based on reason and concepts and, therefore, prompt critique merely at a discursive level, Chari maintains that the forms of critique that are triggered by art tend to be not merely (or exclusively) based on theory but also on feelings, thereby operating at a visceral level and generating an "embodied, affectively and perceptually engaged critique."[80] The corollary of this, Chari contends, is that these works are more accessible to the public than the vast majority of political theory.[81]

For the most part, I am sympathetic to arguments like those expounded by Chari and to the work of political scientists who, like her, take art seriously as a locus of critique and as having real potential to invite people to see the world differently. However, what I find troubling is that some of the most poignant artistic analyses carried out by political scientists – including

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78 Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Ritual. Essays on Face to Face Behaviour.* Random House Mondadori: New York.

79 Kompridis, Nikolas. 2014. *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought*. Bloomsbury: New York.

80 Chari, Anita. 2015. *A Political Economy of the Senses*. Columbia University Press: New York: 167-8. In other words, engagement with artworks and artistic practices can help to develop "new kinds of critical faculties that allow a more sensuous, embodied, and concrete engagement with the material of critique" (Ibid, 216).

81 "(…) because these artworks are engaging in real-time explorations of subjectivity they are more accessible theoretical forms than traditional narratocratic forms of political theory. They are, in any case, no less accessible." (Ibid, 170).

Chari's – focus *exclusively* on the artistic object (or artistic practice) at hand, examining its formal attributes, symbolic references, subject-matter, and alleged messages all while avoiding examining the artwork's conditions of production, circulation, and reception.[82] Chari might be right that artworks, unlike works of theory, can provoke more embodied and visceral effects in the viewers, but if this is the case it is because art is materially very different from theoretical work and, therefore, is produced, displayed, circulated, and received in profoundly different ways.

As political philosopher Gabriel Rockhill correctly argues, it is not the work of art in and of itself as an isolated artifact that can produce political consequences, but rather how it circulates in its social force field, with "its various strategies and propositions, as it is received interpreted, circulated and mobilized for motely ends."[83] By focusing exclusively on the artwork itself as if it was a self-contained artifact that existed in a vacuum, scholars miss the ways in which political and economic institutions and actors who, while not necessarily related to the artistic field, nonetheless impact the type of art that is produced, who gets to distribute, view, and judge it, and the kinds of conversations it might trigger. Given political scientists' attention to power and their concern with exploitation, inequality, and redistribution, it is surprising that not more attention is paid to examining the politics of art, namely why and how certain art comes to be and its political effects. Another way of putting this is to argue that understanding what is

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82 Although Chari argues that the method she employs when interpreting artworks is "ethnographic" (Ibidem), she focuses on the artworks themselves, namely on their formal and symbolic references rather than (or in addition to) their broader conditions of production, circulation and reception. Accordingly, her interpretation of these artworks is based exclusively on how she herself, a critical political theorist who studies the perils of capitalism, experiences the pieces. One has to wonder if viewers who are not already conversant with critical theory would develop new critical faculties by engaging with these artworks and come to see the economic system differently, criticize it, and act otherwise. Can these artworks "jolt the viewers out of fetishistic spectatorship" as Chari maintains that they do? To Chari's credit, even if she claims to be doing ethnography she is open about the fact that her interpretations are based exclusively on her own experience and is careful never to argue that the artworks that she analyses will lead to any kind of political mobilization.

83 Rockhill, Gabriel. 2014. *Radical History and the Politics of Art,* Columbia University Press: New York: 181.

political about art requires studying what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai terms, in relation to "things" more broadly, an artwork's "social life"[84] or what Igor Kopytoff dubs its "cultural biography."[85] Similarly, anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, who admits that "assessing the impact of the visual arts, or any cultural or ideological apparatus is difficult," recommends that in order to get a sense of an artwork's impact, scholars should study the social fields that structure engagement with it, together with the actual ways that people relate to the arts.[86]

While simply focusing on the object at hand can help us get some sense of its political effects,[87] the power of art can often lie precisely in its ambiguity and openness to interpretation. This means that different publics – which can include theorists, critics, and ordinary citizens – will "see" different things even after being exposed to the exact same image or object. Even those artworks that seem to convey relatively overt and clear-cut messages are interpreted in vastly different ways by different people depending on the background of the viewer, the apparatus of display, and the situation in which the artwork is shown. As art historian Mary Coffey has convincingly shown for the case of Diego Rivera's murals in Mexico, despite their

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84 Appadurai, Arjun (ed.). 1986 *The Social Life of Things*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge: 3-63. Appadurai points us to the "tournaments of value" or debates surrounding the cultural construction and organization of hierarchies around evaluation that may be normalized in any given society. These may be specialized fields and arenas that are removed from economic routines but remain central for the disposition, exchange, and evaluation of goods. Appadurai stressed the movement of artifacts and their reception over time and showed how during these trajectories things may lose or gain "commodity potential."

85 Kopytoff, Igor. 1986. "The cultural biography of things" in *The social life of things*. ed. Appadurai, Arjun. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge: 64-91.

86 Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2005. *Dramas of Nationhood. The politics of television in Egypt,* University of Chicago: Chicago: 26. George Marcus also argues that single-sited ethnography does not suffice to capture the complexities that constitute "larger systems" including the art world. (Marcus, George. 1998. *Ethnography through thick and thin.* Princeton University Press: Princeton).

87 As political scientist Cora Goldstein argues "images are often more effective than words in capturing the attention of the viewers (...) [i]f something is visually represented, viewers tend to assume that it happened, that it exists, that it is true." Goldstein, Cora. 2009. *Capturing the German Eye,* University of Chicago Press: Chicago: 2-3. Goldstein's book, which is a rare example of a work by a political scientist who carefully examines the production, circulation, and reception of artworks, convincingly argues that the U.S. used the fine arts, as well as film and photography, to construct and disseminate new notions of German identity. See also Mitchell, WJT. 1986. *Iconology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

realist aesthetic and allegedly straightforward messages, it is the exhibitionary apparatus which often influences the divergent ways in which people interpret his murals.[88] In other words, where and how art circulates and is displayed matters to how it is interpreted, as do accompanying texts and materials, roundtables, and even the art market.

In insisting that we pay attention to an artwork's "social life," I do not mean to suggest that its political effects can ever be perfectly traced and measured. Studying the social lives of artworks, moreover, does not mean that these can be fully reduced to their social context. In other words, contra a strict interpretation of Pierre Bourdieu's findings – particularly in a work like *Distinction* (1984) – one cannot predict what kind of artwork will be produced or how it will be judged based exclusively on a person's economic or cultural capital (I further discuss this point in Chapter Four). Neither can the effects of an artwork ever be measured as if these followed a specific, predetermined causal path.[89] Indeed, one of the reasons why the "actual viewers" are rarely taken seriously in analyses of art is because of the difficulty of gauging and measuring the impact and effects of viewing and interacting with art. There is no sure way to know that an artwork provoked a specific thought or feeling in a person. And even if there was, this would not necessarily change a person's behavior or actions. It is often the case that an artwork might have an impact but the viewer is not even aware of this impact or, perhaps, does not register it as such until much later, even years after coming into contact with the artwork. And even if one were to find out how artworks impact an individual, it is practically impossible to make general claims based on individual reactions to them. Moreover, as Lisa Wedeen has so eloquently argued, images need not engender deep-seated beliefs, nor are viewers required to

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88 Coffey, Mary. 2012. *How a revolutionary art became official culture*. Durham: Duke University.

89 As such, I am also wary of the expectations that art should perform or help to achieve a specific task or that it is meant to accomplish a particular goal.

agree with the messages that are purportedly being conveyed by the images or take them literally in order for these to have an effect and be effective.[90] Examining artworks as if these were social phenomena also does not mean that one should preclude interpreting the works in and of themselves, analyzing their aesthetics, their formal properties, and the possible messages and strategies that they use to convey them. On the contrary, these types of interpretations – including the accounts produced by art historians, art critics, and interpreters like Chari – should be taken seriously, but so too how these circulate.

In short then, despite the difficulties of assessing the impact of art on the public, the point is that not enough attention has been paid on how art is actually produced, distributed, and circulated, including what the funding structures and exhibitionary apparatus look like. All these other aspects that cannot be discerned merely by looking at the artworks themselves can shed light on who (and how) gets to view art, which, in turn, can help us understand, even if only partially, what the political effects of engaging with art might be.

This dissertation takes on this challenge by analyzing not merely the formal properties and subject-matter of some of the art that was produced in the wake of Mexico's twin transition, but also pays attention to its conditions of production, circulation, and reception. This entailed examining the ways in which art is caught up in markets, labor structures, institutional discourses, and funding and patronage networks. It also required investigating the often contradictory and complex ways in which different people come into contact and experience art. In Althusserian terms, some of the questions that motivated the project center around understanding *how* art hails people into being and the positions it invites them to take: "Do those

90 Wedeen, Lisa. 1999. *Ambiguities of Domination*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 19.

[artworks] interpellate those shaped by them into equality? Are we energized or depleted by them? Are they a prod to new forms of life, imagination, creativity, resilience, or joy?"[91]

To do so, I carried out over two years of fieldwork, which included ethnography, participant-observation, and archival research across Mexico's artistic field. With the exception of a few artistic museums and events that I attended outside Mexico City,[92] the bulk of the research for dissertation was carried out in the capital city, which is also where I grew up and lived for twenty-four years before returning to do fieldwork.[93] With over twenty million inhabitants, Mexico City is the most populous city in the country (and one of the most populated cities in the world) and, at least since the turn of the twentieth century, it has been hailed as the "repository for the infrastructure of Nation and State and the raison d'etre of science and culture."[94]

The federal government is located in Mexico City, together with the main offices of the National Council for the Arts and Culture (Conaculta) and the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA). Most cultural institutions, museums, and art schools – and certainly the most visible and recognized – as well as the main non-governmental organizations that support the arts are also located in this metropolis. While other major cities – most notably Guadalajara, Mérida, Monterrey, Oaxaca, Puebla, San Miguel de Allende, and Tijuana– have their own lively artistic scenes which, in recent years, have gained an important degree of independence from the capital

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91 These are questions posed by Bonnie Honig in her reading of Althusser. Honig is talking about public objects in general, including art but mainly infrastructure: Honig, Bonnie. 2013. "The politics of public things: neoliberalism and the routine of privatization", excerpt of lecture "Thinking out loud" series given at the University of Western Sydney, Australia: 68.

92 I attended museums, artists' studios, and independent spaces in Tijuana, Monterrey, Guanajuato, Cuernavaca, and Puebla. I also attended exhibitions by Mexican artists outside of Mexico, including the 2015 Venice Biennale.

93 I spent one month in 2010, six months in 2013, 12 months in 2014, and then a total of four months from 2015 to 2018.

94 Mauricio Tenorio explains that at some point between 1810 and 1910, "Mexico City acquired such political, economic, an cultural centrality – drawn from the city's long history –, that it acted as an autonomous pole of economic attraction for speculation, opportunities, and investment." (Tenorio-Trillo, Mauricio. 2012. *I Speak of the City,* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago: xviii).

city,[95] Mexico City continues to be the center and works as a magnet that pulls artists, curators, and critics from elsewhere in the country. Simultaneously, the artistic community in this city heavily influences these other artistic communities. It is not unusual for curators, art critics, museographers, and artists from Mexico City to participate actively in other parts of the country and, in many cases, to continue to be the first (if not the main) point of contact with foreign audiences and the global contemporary art world. And even in those cases in which the arts that are produced outside of the capital city increasingly gain global recognition without first doing so there, "the budget for culture, academia, and intellectual production, continues to be controlled from Mexico City."[96]

Many of the claims that I make in this dissertation, therefore, despite being rooted almost exclusively in observations and research in the country's capital, are pertinent to the mainstream artistic field as a whole. Having said this, I am fully aware that many of the processes that I examine are spatialized and, therefore, are not comprehensively, nor homogenously developed across the entire national territory, nor do they have the same effects everywhere. I try to point this out whenever possible throughout the dissertation, as I believe that this unevenness – evidenced not only in the preeminence of Mexico City in the field of contemporary art but also in the fact that even as other parts of the country have become increasingly violent and unsafe, the capital city remains, comparatively speaking, somewhat sheltered from the drug war – is also

95 For studies about the artistic field: in Monterrey see Cárdenas, Rocío. 2010. *El arte contemporáneo revisitado en Monterrey. Los mensajes del presente y del futuro llegan demasiado tarde*, Monterrey: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León; and Charpenel, Patrick. 2007. (et.al.), *Los nuevos leones*, México: Fundación Monterrey; in Jalisco see de la Mora, Omar Castro. 2010. *La política cultural en Jalisco*, Guadalajara: Consejo Estatal para la Cultura y las Artes en Jalisco; in Oaxaca see Holo, Selma. 2008. *Oaxaca en la Encrucijada. Manejo del Patrimonio y Negociación del Cambio*, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes: Mexico.

96 Navarrete, Federico. 2015. "Una ruptura muy profunda." In *Itinerarios de la cultura contemporánea en México* comp. Benjamin Mayer Foulke, México: Editorial 17/Conaculta: 255.

part of the story that I am telling. For a detailed explanation of what my fieldwork consisted on see Appendix One (page 250).

0.4 Chapter Overview

Chapter One, "A Eulogy for the *Coloso*: The Disappearance of the Nation's Body Politic," focuses on Mexico's most important national commemorations in recent years, the bicentennial of independence and the centennial of the revolution which took place in 2010. These happened to coincide with one of the most violent years in the country's recent history, with over 15,000 homicides attributed to the drug war launched by president Calderón in 2006. This chapter shows how the democratically elected government struggled to exert its power by using the autocratic regime's tactics of old, which included imposing colossal works of art on the country's landscape, such as a controversial statue dubbed the *Coloso*. I show how these strategies proved to be increasingly unsuccessful, evidencing not simply the state's inability to deploy art to create lasting and compelling national narratives, but also its alienation from the artistic community and the citizens' disappointment with electoral democracy, voiced paradoxically in a more open and democratic public sphere.

Chapter Two, "*'Un Absurdo Total'*: Judgment, Expertise, and the Creation of National Patrimony," analyzes the history, practical operations, and political implications of the country's unique "Payment in Kind" tax policy, which allows artists to pay their taxes with artworks rather than money. Through the policy, the state collects artworks, turns them into national patrimony, and creates a national art collection that comes to represent the country. I show how, in the name of "democratizing" the policy, a series of market-oriented reforms were implemented in the 1990s which profoundly changed the way the state came to judge what artworks are accepted as tax. One of the main effects of these reforms was to take power away from art world experts and

handing it to managerial experts, thereby revealing the forms of expertise and judgement favored under neoliberal rule and its effects on nation-formation processes.

Chapter Three, "*Ni Sumisos, Ni Activistas:* The Reluctant Politics of Contemporary Mexican Art," shows how the private sector's unprecedented incursion into the artistic field, combined with Mexico becoming a central player in the global art world, has increased the scope for political critique and expression. This increase in freedom of expression, however, is not necessarily all inclusive but rather privileges art that engages in a very specific type of political critique: one that, while seeking to provoke viewers and invite them to engage in critical thinking, eschews links to social mobilization at a mass scale, firm normative positions, and explicit political activism. To make this argument, the chapter compares the art and trajectory of provocateur Santiago Sierra and the feminist *artivist* Lorena Wolffer. This comparison demonstrates how these two artists, on the one hand, exemplify broader trends in the contemporary art scene and differ from state-oriented art but, on the other hand, differ in their political commitments, the kind of labor that goes into creating their art, and their divergent understandings of artistic form. This chapter brings attention to the nuanced politics of how art, in its neoliberal, global variant, is circulated, consumed, and censored.

Chapter Four, "Curatorship, Education and Philanthropy: The Neoliberalization of Mexico's Museums (or how Rancière killed Gamboa)" shows how museums' curatorial strategies and pedagogical techniques have changed in the wake of the country's democratic and neoliberal. The chapter contrasts the practice of Fernando Gamboa – the father of Mexican museography who worked under the authoritarian PRI regime – with the work of contemporary curators who are profoundly influenced by the thought of Jacques Rancière. I argue that in the wake of the country's twin transition, museums shifted their curatorial practices from didactic

narratives of the nation to innovative pedagogical strategies which minimize the mediation between artworks and spectators in an attempt to foster critical thinking. I demonstrate that while curators' intentions are laudable because they aim to democratize art by reducing elitism and expertise, their efforts can, at times, unwittingly result in the messages of conceptual pieces being lost on a part of the public. The hyper-intellectualist tendencies of contemporary art have political implications, generating observable disconnects and indifference between citizens and artists. I show that these curatorial strategies fail not simply because of this hyper-intellectualism, but because of material conditions in museums, which lack funding, are reliant on capricious market conditions, and whose employees endure precarious labor conditions.

The Conclusion, "Art as Political Representation," develops the argument that artists and other members of the artistic field have the potential of becoming key non-elected political representatives. Despite not being voted into power nor participating in traditional party politics, it is through their work that discussions about pressing political matters occur, shaping collective memory and helping to structure people's political allegiances and identities. This work can include making, displaying, and preserving art, as well as choosing what counts as art and whom it represents. I also make a methodological point by stressing the need to go beyond simply analyzing the content of art when studying it as an instance of political expression. Instead, I demonstrate the need to examine art's conditions of production, circulation, and reception in order to understand how its political messages achieve (or fail to achieve) political ends.

CHAPTER ONE
A EULOGY FOR THE *COLOSO*:
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE NATION'S BODY POLITIC

2010 was one of the most violent years in Mexico's recent history. The ongoing war on the drug trade launched by president Felipe Calderón at the end of 2006 was linked to over 15000 homicides, and the visual and media landscape was saturated with gruesome images of the victims. That same year, Mexico commemorated 200 years of independence and 100 years of revolution. To mark the occasion, the state spent nearly 230 million dollars on producing myriad *lieux de memoire*, including works of art, films, and books, and organized a grand commemorative event held in Mexico City. But despite the spectacular attempts to make the state's power highly visible, the celebrations were marked by public indifference, resistance, and even outright hostility, and fell far from being an innocent expression of collective joy. People kept asking, "What is there to celebrate?"

The centerpiece of the celebrations was a massive parade that took place in Mexico City on September 15, and for the centerpiece of the parade itself, the Mexican government commissioned sculptor Juan Carlos Canfield to build a gigantic statue of a man dubbed the *Coloso* that, according to President Calderón, represented "the Mexicans." The idea was that the statute would be paraded down *Reforma* avenue and then displayed in the city's main plaza during the ceremony that would follow. Afterwards, it was to be permanently placed in the newly-constructed Bicentennial Park.

All did not, however, turn out as planned. Given the enormous size and weight of the statue, it had to be cut into pieces for the parade, an act that was reminiscent of the mutilated

cadavers whose images had become associated with the drug war. Moreover, the identity of the *Coloso* was unclear, giving rise to popular jokes about whom he allegedly represented, and inciting discussions in the media that revealed a rising discontent with the reigning political regime and with democratic representation more generally. All this bad press might help explain why the sculpture never made it to its purportedly permanent location at the Park. While it was briefly put back together for the official celebration, as soon as the event was over this quite literal body politic was again dismantled and for several years remained abandoned in the parking lot of a public building in Mexico City. In 2014, the dismembered, decaying *Coloso* was temporarily loaned to the state of Nayarit, but once again never made it to its destination, as it "disappeared" somewhere along the way.

The *Coloso'*s story, perhaps more than most other commemorative projects, speaks to a rising anxiety resulting from the growing violence linked to the war on drugs, all against the backdrop of ever-expanding market-oriented reforms, which have led to the increasing privatization of public space and objects. This story also speaks to a moment characterized by a growing disappointment with the country's so-called democratic transition that took place in 2000. Indeed, what made the 2010 commemorations so unique was not only the extremely violent context in which these took place but also that they were the first national celebrations of this magnitude to take place under a democratically elected regime.[97] Accordingly, the *Coloso's* story speaks to how the *Panista* state, which at the time of the commemorations had been in power for ten years, struggled not simply to exert its power as a state by ensuring the safety of the population, but also why and how it was unable to use the commemorations to convey new

97 Previous national commemorative events, including the one hundred years of Independence in 1910 or the fifty years of Revolution in 1960, took place under a dictatorship or an autocratic regime, respectively.

national narratives or imaginaries. While Calderón's regime deployed the autocratic *Priísta* regime's old tactics, including the imposition of colossal works of art onto the country's landscape, these strategies proved to be increasingly unsuccessful, making the state's fragilities ever more visible. Indeed, the commemorations evidenced the inability of the democratically-elected government to demonstrate that the political project that was being advanced was all that different from that of its autocratic predecessor. If anything, the commemorations revealed that citizens were unable to stand together with the state to celebrate the nation.

This chapter is structured as follows. The first section contextualizes the commemorations in a moment of extreme and ubiquitous violence. It then tells the story of the *Coloso* and analyzes the different reactions to this monument and their political implications. This section demonstrates the state's increasing inability to care for and use art as a form of power and to link artistic projects to broader political and economic plans. The last part of the chapter focuses on the ever more contentious relationship between the state and the artistic community. Given that many members of this community continue to work for the state, here I introduce some nuance and complicate the way I deploy the concept of "the state." I conclude by showing how the art that is produced by contemporary artists increasingly deviates from the monumental and durable works historically commissioned by the PRI.[98]

1.1 COMMEMORATIONS IN THE MIDST OF WAR

During his presidential campaign, PAN candidate Felipe Calderón rarely mentioned the topics of security or drugs, focusing instead on economic matters, promising to become, as per his

98 Sections of this chapter have been published in: Islas Weinstein, Tania. 2016. "Eulogy for the *Coloso*: The Politics of Commemoration in Calderón's Mexico." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 24 (4): 475-499.

campaign slogan, "the president of employment." However, during his inauguration speech on December 1st 2006, he unexpectedly announced that his priority as president would be to reestablish public security. Ten days later he launched a security initiative that became the first step of the ongoing war on drugs. Scholars suggest that the highly-contested nature of the presidential elections in 2006 helps explain Calderón's sudden interest in the topic of drug-trafficking. Both Calderón and his main rival, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, obtained approximately 35% of the popular vote. So, after the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) declared Calderón to be the winner, many people remained suspicious of the verdict and demanded a recount of the ballots. But these were never recounted; instead they were burned. While the law stipulated that the ballots had to be burned, this action was widely interpreted in the eyes of voters as a confession of fraud.[99]

There are good reasons to believe that Calderón launched the drug war as a way to improve his popularity. Yet this plan, if indeed this was his plan, failed miserably. Despite increasing the budget for security issues – during his six-year term, the budget allocated for this purpose increased four-fold[100] – the homicide rate in Mexico, which had been decreasing systematically between 1990 and 2007, began to rise sharply as soon as the "war on drugs" was launched.[101] As part of this war, the Mexican state began to organize militarized operations and

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99 Calderón obtained 35.89% of the votes, while his main rival Andrés Manuel López Obrador obtained 35.33%. The suspicion was partly the result of Vicente Fox's illegal proselytism in favor of Calderón which might have tilted the balance in favor of the latter and partly a result of the irregularities that surrounded the counting of ballots—the electoral tribunal admitted that there had been "irregularities" in the counting process but decided to do nothing about them. (Crespo, José Antonio. 2008. *2006: Hablan las actas. Las debilidades de la autoridad electoral Mexicana*. México: Debate).

100 Guerrero, Eduardo. 2012. "La estrategia fallida" *Nexos.* December 1: https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=15083.

101 Escalante, Fernando. 2011. "Homicidios 2008-2009. La muerte tiene permiso." *Nexos.* January 1: https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=14089. To put the figures in comparative context, while that same year in Iraq there were 12 murders for every 100 thousand people, in Mexico there were 18. "La guerra de Calderón contra el narco, causa del alza en la violencia y homicidios," by Emir Olivares Alonso, La Jornada, February 5, 2013 (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2013/02/05/politica/016n1pol).

to cooperate more closely with the US.[102] The result was a fragmentation of criminal organizations that compete for business leading to unprecedented levels violence.[103] As scholars and journalists have noted, while Mexico has a long legacy of weak police and judicial institutions that have always enabled crime and violence, this war has changed the drug business in important ways as can be attested by the fact that criminal organizations increasingly partake in retail drug sales, extort local governments and businesses, and engage in human trafficking and kidnapping. As a result,

> The cost [of the drug war] for the country is large but difficult to measure. The numbers of deaths and disappeared since 2006 are in the tens of thousands, with particular impact on poor young men, women, journalists, migrants and other vulnerable sectors. Violence has reached an intensity that seems to have overwhelmed both the capacity of the state to contain it and the ability of citizens to make sense of it.[104]

The federal government, moreover, never managed to convince the public of either the need for the drug war or its effectiveness. In September 2010, the month of the commemorations, 63.3% of the Mexican people perceived the security situation to be either "worse" or "much worse" than the previous year, while only 6.5% perceived it to be "better" or "much better."[105] From its inception, the drug war has been accompanied by grossly sanguinary and brutal images of the casualties which are ubiquitously reproduced in the media.

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102 The Plan Mérida, for instance, is a security cooperation agreement between the United States and the government of Mexico and the countries of Central America, with the declared aim of combating violence, drug trafficking, and transnational organized crime. The U.S. Congress has spent $1.6 billion on the program since its inception in 2008.

103 Schedler, Andreas. 2014. "The Criminal Subversion of Mexican Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* (Vol. 25, No.1, January): 9.

104 Picatto, Pablo. 2017. *A History of Infamy. Crime ,Truth, and Justice in Mexico*. California, University of California Press: 267.

105 Index of Public Perception published by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI): http://www.inegi.org.mx/inegi/contenidos/espanol/prensa/comunicados/percepcionsp.asp.

Mexico has a long history of photography of violent crimes. As media theorist Jesse Lerner has argued, graphic depictions of violence and its victims circulated widely after the Revolution in the early twentieth century: photographs of political assassinations, crimes of passion, robberies, and notorious homicides "situated violence at the heart of the modern urban experience" and helped to generate fear of an "emerging modern era."[106] As cities multiplied and grew in size, tabloids (*amarillista*) began to run more and more stories on the violence that characterized urban spaces to the point that these became "the most popular journalistic genre of the 20th century in Mexico (...) reinforcing images of Mexicans as a people inclined to commit violence for trivial reasons."[107]

What changed with the advent of the drug war, however, was that violent images and crime stories related to *narcos* and other crime organizations became increasingly prevalent in the mainstream media, which helped to trigger a generalized anxiety about personal security in the face of the seemingly endless stream of fatalities. During the Calderón regime the images that circulated most widely in the press were very often of anonymous corpses and mutilated body parts, at times bare and exposed, at other times covered in sheets to "protect" the viewers from the spectacle of limbs and blood. The content of these images coupled with their saturation of the visual landscape spread fear among the majority of the population, even when most people were in no real danger and had no direct contact with the violence. While many media messages sought to show the contrary to be true, the actual occurrence of violence was not distributed uniformly throughout the country.[108] And yet, it became increasingly difficult to conceive of the

106 Lerner, Jesse. 2007. *El impacto de la modernidad*. México. Turner: 44-5.

107 Pablo Piccato, *A history of infamy. Crime, truth, and justice in Mexico* (California: University of California Press, 2017):, p. 7

108 The homicide rate increased throughout the entire country but not uniformly (85% of the homicides occurred in 70 municipalities out of a total of 2,435 – this information corresponds to the time period between 1990 and 2009). The states with the highest homicide rate were Chihuahua, Baja California, Durango, Guerrero, Sinaloa, and Tamaulipas followed by Michoacán, Nayarit, Oaxaca, and Sonora. There were also

violence as a regional quirk (like the "regionalization" of the *Cosa Nostra* to Sicily). Writer Juan Villoro eloquently explains, "The defense mechanism of either not looking or assuming that the crimes happen somewhere far away (…) has crumbled. (…) Crime can no longer be relegated to the sedative region of the other."[109]

Although it was at this moment that Mexico earned the shameful distinction of becoming one of the most dangerous countries in the world to practice journalism – in 2010 alone, eight journalists were murdered[110] – the media never stopped publishing shockingly violent images. Nacho Ruiz, a photojournalist from Ciudad Juárez, argued, "Although we are stuck in between the *narcos* and the authority, this doesn't mean that we will stop informing, this is the reality and there is no reason to hide it. (…) One doesn't take pictures out of morbidity, but rather with the intention of capturing real scenes and all their details."[111] Fernando Brito, the photography editor of Sinaloa's main newspaper *El Debate*, had a similar opinion: "When you work for the mass media you cannot stop publishing what is happening in the city or the country. We cannot pretend to be blind."[112] Many journalists maintained that they were not there to educate their

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significant differences within each state. For instance, although only 50% of the population of Baja California resides in Tijuana, more than 72% of the murders have taken place in this city and whereas only 40% of Chihuahuans live in Ciudad Juárez, it is here where 65% of the homicides have occurred (Escalante, 2012).

109 "La estrategia defensiva de no mirar o de asumir que los atracos ocurren lejos (…) se ha venido abajo. (…) El crimen ya no puede ser relegado a la región tranquilizadora de lo ajeno." (Villoro, Juan. 2010. "La alfombra roja, el imperio del narcoterrorismo." (April 16): 8: https://catedraucv.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/la-alfombra-roja.pdf).

110 That same year 129 journalist were injured, making Mexico the fifth most dangerous country in the world to journalism (see the work by the organization Article 19 (http://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/reports/mexico-resumen-ejecutivo-2011.pdf) and "UN: Mexico fifth dangerous country for journalists," Al Jazeera, October 25th, 2011: http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2011/10/201110254559802945.html).

111 Quoted in Meza, Carlos & Acosta, Anasella. 2011. "Publicar o no, he ahí el dilema," *Cuartoscuro*, XVII, 106: 27.

112 Quoted in Ibid, p.25. Brito has won prizes for his pictures at photography biennales and received an award at the World Press Photo in 2011 for his series of dead bodies in front of deserted landscapes.

audience: "We simply do our job. It is our responsibility to show the reality of this war, no matter how crude and violent it is."[113]

These claims are a response to the critiques that, at the time, were voiced against Mexican journalists who were accused of profiting from the violence by publishing grisly images and turning serious reporting into tabloid journalism in the hope of luring voyeuristic spectators and increasing their sales. The critiques often correctly suggested that the drug war was being portrayed as if it was a sports match between the state and the *narcos.* Newspapers and television broadcasts began including score tickers (*ejecutómetros*) that reported the number of people killed in the country every day or every week. These "kill counters" were accompanied by gruesome images and only very rarely by critical analyses or any kind of context or history.

The expansion of the "technologically articulated public sphere,"[114] including the use of internet and digital imaging, helped to spread photographs faster and faster. As W.J.T. Mitchell argues, the first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed something new in the emergence of public imagery: the number of images increased exponentially. But "our time has witnessed, not simply more images, but a war of images (…) it has been fought by means of images deployed to shock or traumatize the enemy, images meant to appall and demoralize, images designed to replicate themselves endlessly and to infect the collective imaginary of global populations."[115] Mitchell is referring to the iconic photographs of the U.S. war on terror, but his description can easily be applied to those related to Mexico's drug war. This onslaught of imagery and information makes it increasingly difficult for people to process and assimilate it, promoting

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113 Journalist Alejandro Paez, deputy managing editor of Mexico's largest newspaper, *El Universal,* at the "Latin American Briefing Series: Alma Guillermoprieto, Alejandro Paez and Claudia Mendez", November 11, 2010, Center for Latin American Studies, University of Chicago.
114 Meyers, Peter Alexander. 2008. *Civic War and the Corruption of the Citizen*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
115 Mitchell, WJT. 2010. *Cloning Terror*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press: 2-3.

what political scientist Michael Rogin has termed "political amnesia,"[116] a motivated forgetting of the structural conditions which ultimately cause this violence.[117]

One of the fiercest critics of the way the drug war was being portrayed was President Calderón himself. He and his coterie, however, did not call for any kind of critical, contextualized analysis. Instead, they simply urged the press to "limit" coverage of the violence and pleaded for both the media and ordinary citizens to "speak well of Mexico" ("*hablar bien de México*"). On more than one occasion, Calderón accused the press of helping to perpetuate and even intensify the violence by propagating the drug-traffickers' messages.[118] Calderón and his team were careful never to use the word "censorship" and opted instead for the term "self-regulation,"[119] reminding citizens that while dissent and criticism would be tolerated, "speaking well of Mexico" was strongly encouraged.[120] In January 2010, for instance, during a public meeting with Mexican ambassadors and consuls, Calderón compared Mexico with Brazil, explaining that while the homicide rate in Brazil was double that of Mexico, he "had never heard Brazilians speak ill about their country," which is why "Brazil is seen as a paradise, and why it is

116 Rogin, Michael. 1990. ""Make My Day!": Spectacle as Amnesia in Imperial Politics." *Representations* 29 (Winter): 19-123.

117 Reporting on the Mexican drug war, journalist Dawn Paley observed that in a climate of such overwhelming violence and impunity, the assassinations of criminals, activists and ordinary citizens are "equally swept into the ever rising body count," thus occluding what appear as "patterns linked either to the clearing of territory through terror for future resource extraction in rural areas or to capital-flow-facilitating infrastructure projects such as highways, airports, and border bridges in urban settings" (Paley, Dawn. 2015. "Drug War as Neoliberal Trojan Horse" in *Latin American Perspectives,* Issue XXX, Vol.XX, No.XXX: 4).

118 Specifically, the accusation was that, in reproducing the images of the corpses, the media was helping to deliver specific messages from one criminal faction to another because often the corpses include *narco* messages (*narco-mensajes*) written by whoever committed the murder to rival gangs and to the state, and even to ordinary citizens. (See, for instance, Medina Mora's speech delivered on March 2009 during the inauguration of forum "The responsibility of the press in the fight against organized crime" ("La responsabilidad de los medios de comunicación ante la lucha contra la delincuencia organizada") that took place at the National Institute of Penal Sciences).

119 "Demanda Medina Mora a los medios no hacer apología de la delincuencia" in *Proceso* (March 2, 2009). (http://www.proceso.com.mx/113228/demanda-medina-mora-a-los-medios-no-hacer-apologia-de-la-delincuencia).

120 "Ordena Calderón a embajadores y cónsules 'hablar bien' del país." *La Jornada*. Claudia Herrera Bletrán. January 9, 2010: 3.

hosting the Olympic Games and the World Cup."[121] He went on to urge the media to report on the violence not as a sign of weakness of the state, but as a sign that the state was fighting against organized crime.

But the problem, according to Calderón and his cabinet, was not the drug war itself and its resultant body count, but simply the way these were being represented by the media. Such representations led to a distorted assessment of the perception of Mexico. "People mistakenly believe," argued the president, "that we are still in crisis and that there is no solution to our security-related problems."[122] Calderón suggested that tourism could be transformed into "an honest and profitable activity," simply "by digging into the national pride, by telling the *truth* about Mexico, about its beauty, and by judging the dimensions of our problems in due proportion." [123] As a way to "fix" these distorted perceptions, he increased the budget for social communication and publicity 40% in 2010.[124] The president, moreover, called upon citizens to prioritize the "interest of the nation" over their own "particular interests, no matter how legitimate the latter might be."[125] What this essentially meant was that individuals needed to

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121 Ibidem. Although Calderón often compared Mexico to "success stories" like Brazil, he mocked and condemned other more popular comparisons, particularly those made between Mexico and Iraq.

122 Calderón quoted in Jorge Ramos y Giovanna Gaxiola, "FCH pide decir "la verdad" sobre México" in *El Universal*, September 28, 2011. (http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/graficos/online-2011/uni/nacion/189357.html)

123 Calderón quoted in "Calerón pide hablar bien de México," *El Economista*, January 21, 2011). Felipe Calderón: Martes 16 de Febrero de 2010, San Andrés Cholula, Puebla.- Intervención del Presidente Felipe Calderón, durante el evento: Entrega de Apoyos del Programa 70 y más y Visita a la Unidad Deportiva Quetzalcóatl de San Andrés Cholula. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BK9rfgWvr7U)

124 Calderón plea came at a moment in which the tourism industry contributed about 10% of the country's GDP and was providing millions of jobs. Pérez Silva, Ciro and Reyna, Julia (2011) "Día mundial del turismo: Pide Calderón decir `la verdad' sobre México," in *La Jornada*, (September 28, 2011: http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/09/28economia/027n1eco). Speech by Felipe Calderón in Mazatlán, Sinaloa on "National Tourism Day" (September 27, 2011) (See: Pérez Silva, Ciro and Reyna, Julia (2011) "Día mundial del turismo: Pide Calderón decir `la verdad' sobre México," in *La Jornada*, (September 28, 2011: http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/09/28economia/027n1eco)

125 n.a. 2010. "Todos los actores políticos y sociales están llamados a anteponer el interés superior de la nación al interés particular, por legítimo que sea": *Nexos*, March 9: https://redaccion.nexos.com.mx/?p=928

amend their views – to self-regulate and sacrifice themselves[126] – in order to ensure that tourists kept coming in regardless of whether or not this influx would have any impact on their individual economic wellbeing.[127]

The Mexican government's calls to self-regulate did have an impact. In particular, following a speech by the Mexican prosecutor Eduardo Medina Mora at a forum held at the National Institute of Penal Sciences on March 2009, the number of gruesome images that were published decreased and the allegedly "successful" actions of the Mexican army were more readily commented on.[128] Even so, and perhaps unavoidably given the sheer volume of the rising violence, the drug war continued to occupy the headlines of newspapers and television shows. It was in this context that the 2010 commemorative events took place.

1.2 BITTERSWEET CELEBRATIONS

According to the official numbers, the state spent over 200 million dollars on more than 2,480 projects which included the production of films,[129] television shows,[130] songs, art exhibits,[131] and

126 Wendy Brown argues that in a neoliberal system individuals are expected to fend for themselves in a context that limits their ability to do so. They are blamed for the "woes of the whole" and are asked to make sacrifices (which might include sacrificing their freedom of expression by self-regulating their opinions) in the name of the nation's economic well-being. (Brown, Wendy. 2015. *Undoing the Demos*. Zone Books. New York.)

127 Tourism represents around 8.7% of the country's GDP (INEGI) (http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/cn/tur/default.aspx) (consulted April 8, 2017)

128 Hernández Ramírez, María Elena and Rodelo Amezcua, Frida Viridiana. 2010. "Dilemas del periodismo mexiano en la cobertura de la 'La Guerra contra el narcotráfico': Periodismo de Guerra o de nota roja?" in *Entretejidos comunicacionales.* Rodríguez, Z. (coord.), Universidad de Guadalajara: Guadalajara: 193-228.

129 For an analysis of the commemorative fiction films see Arroyo Quiroz, Claudia. 2011. "Echoes of the Mexican revolution: cinematic and museographic approaches to history in the 2010 bicentenary." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesia*, 20:4: 377-395.

130 One of these shows was *Discutamos México* ("Let's discuss Mexico"), in which over five hundred academics, artists, and public intellectuals participated. Every show consisted of a four or five of them discussing an array of topics about the country's history and culture, including "Mesoamérica," "The Democratic Transition", "Women Today", and others.

131 Perhaps one of the most impressive events of this nature was the exhumation of the bones presumed to have been of 14 national heroes that were buried underneath the *Ángel de la Independencia* statue. A laboratory was built inside Chapultepec Castle where the bones were analyzed

the delivery of flags and free history books to the homes of 25 million Mexicans.[132] Mass spectacles such as sport exhibitions and military parades were organized in which the state asserted its capacity to ensure peace and control space during the commemorative events by deploying military and police forces as well as private troops (over 7,600 agents were deployed just in the *Zócalo* and the surrounding streets[133]), constraining access to certain parts of the city, and redirecting traffic.

The pinnacle of the commemorations was the spectacle that took place on the evening of September 15, 2010. Sixty million dollars were spent exclusively on this event,[134] which included a four-hour-long parade on one of Mexico City's main avenues (*Reforma*), as well as fireworks, a light show projected onto the cathedral, a series of concerts, and the *grito* ceremony in the *Zócalo* plaza.[135] In spite of the great sums of money spent on the parade, the atmosphere of violence and anguish that had spread throughout the country led the state to determine that it would not be able to guarantee the safety of all the people that might eventually show up to the

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by a group of scientists who attempted to verify their authenticity. The findings of this scientific enterprise were kept a national secret for several years, but in the meantime the bones were briefly exhibited in the main gallery of the National Palace, so that they could be publicly witnessed (and venerated) before they were once again buried ("Los huesos de 14 héroes patrios volverán a la Columna de la Independencia," by Arturo Jiménez, La Jornada, July 29, 2011; "Experimenta INAH con huesos de héroes de la Independencia," by Silvia Isabel Gámez, July 19, 2011: http://www.terra.com.mx/noticias/articulo/1161514/Experimenta+INAH+con+huesos+de+heroes+de+la+Independencia.htm).

132 While initially a budget of three hundred million pesos was assigned for the celebrations, the 2008 financial crisis which had severely affected the state's budget led to a decrease in spending "Adelgaza crisis a celebraciones centenarias," *Reforma* (Sept, 7, 2009). See "Presentan canción oficial del bicentenario," by Nurit Martínez in El Universal, August 18, 2010; IMCINE: http://www.imcine.gob.mx/pelculas-bicentenario-2010.html; "Justifica Lujambio gastos de la fiesta del bicentenario," by Víctor Ballinas, La Jornada, September 21, 2010; "7 lujos del gobierno para celebrar el bicentenario," by Ira Franco, CNN México, September 10, 2010: http://mexico.cnn.com/bicentenario/2010/09/10/7-lujos-del-gobierno-mexicano-para-celebrar-el-bicentenario).

133 n.a. "Aíslan el Zócalo" *Reforma* September 16, 2010.

134 It is hard to know exactly how much money was spent on the celebrations, given the disparate and contradictory amounts provided by different state agencies, and the misleading responses given by those in charge of the commemorations. The reports provided by the media are not always congruent (Ejea, Tomás. 2013. "Cultura política y discurso público: el desfile del Bicentenario." In *Cultura (y) Política* (coords.) López, Alejandro y Tamayo Sergio, UAM-Azcapotzalco: Mexico: 575-628)

135 The *grito* ceremony is a reenactment of the episode that took place at daybreak in 1810, when Miguel Hidalgo incited people to rise up in arms and fight for Independence. It consists of the president standing on the main balcony of the National Palace and waving a Mexican flag while shouting "Viva Mexico!" in front of a huge crowd of people.

event. Although the parade and the *grito* ceremony were not cancelled in Mexico City – as they were in other parts of the country – a few weeks before the parade took place, government officials announced that it would be best for the citizenry to stay home.[136] "Television," they pronounced, "is a very attractive alternative to enjoy [the celebrations] with your family."[137] As an incentive for people to stay home, the organizers of the celebrations explained that television broadcasters would play a crucial role in the festivities and that over sixty-six television cameras would be installed along *Reforma* avenue.[138] These announcements were widely broadcasted on the television and radio, and, days before the event took place, people reported receiving voice messages on their home phones from government officials urging them to stay home.[139]

These announcements seemed to have worked, at least partly. As several newspapers reported the day after the parade – and as I myself witnessed first-hand – *Reforma* avenue did not feel particularly crowded. It was relatively easy to move around and find a good spot to watch the parade. According to official data, approximately four hundred thousand people attended the event, a figure that might seem impressive but is in fact average when compared with other mass events that have taken place in Mexico City, including an anti-violence protest in 2004 (attended by 1 million people), the Pope's mass in Iztacalco in 1999 (2 million people), a rally in favor of former presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2005 (1.2 million people) and even a Disney Parade which took place on *Insurgentes* Avenue in 2000 (7 million people).[140]

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136 This warning was followed by the cancellation of thirteen *grito* events that would take cities across the county. (Granados Chapa, Miguel Ángel. "Mucho y nada que festejar," *Reforma*, September 16, 2010, p.9). See also: "Por violencia, cancelan festejos en 14 ciudades," *Milenio* (September 14, 2010), and "Cancelan el grito en Juárez," *La Jornada* (September 13, 2010).

137 "El gobierno federal invita a ver los festejos del Bicentenario desde casa," by Ira Fanco, CNN Mexico, September 10, 2010: http://mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2010/09/10/11000-policias-resguardaran-el-centro-historico-de-la-ciudad-de-mexico).

138 Ejea, 2013.

139 Nuñez, Ernesto, "Prefieren en vivo que por televisión," *Reforma*, September 16, 2010.

140 Balderas, Oscar. "Luce desfile… a ratos" *Reforma*, September 16, 2010.

While no violent incident was reported during the parade – what in Mexico people refer to as "saldo blanco" which meant that no one was killed – it was an event filled with anxiety. Indeed, as scholars have noted in other contexts, when a state fails to make its citizens feel secure on a regular basis, those rare occasions on which it does succeed give rise to questions as to why it fails to do so regularly and, paradoxically, can make the occasion an apprehensive one.[141]

The parade itself, which consisted of twenty-seven different floats with no clear link between them, was put on by nine artists – mostly choreographers and theatre directors – with vastly different ideas about what the event should consist of.[142] The diverging opinions and eclecticism made the parade itself seem "considerably disorganized"[143] and helps explains why many attendees confessed to having found the event confusing, openly speaking to the press about how "they did not understand what the spectacle was about."[144] This was the case even as popular images of national heroes and recreations of well-known historical events were included, purportedly so that the public could easily identify and relate to them. For instance, many attendees took the figure of *Kukulkán* – the iconic Maya feathered snake deity whose image is reproduced in textbooks and murals across the country – to be a Chinese dragon.[145] The reactions of many spectators seem to reflect the chaotic organization of the festivities. Although a

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141 What happens in these cases, as Lisa Wedeen points out in her study of Yemen, is that people remind "each other of the state's fragilities, so that activities in which the regime is required to be a state are fraught with anxiety." (Wedeen, Lisa. 2008. *Peripheral Visions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 83.)

142 See the public letter signed by five of these producers (Alicia Sánchez, Mario Espinosa, Jorge A. Vargas, Juliana Faesler y Mauricio García Lozano) and published in *Proceso*, on August 15, 2010. For an analysis see Ejea, 2013.

143 Garciadiego, Javier. 2012. "La política de la historia..." In *Centenarios. Conmemoraciones e Historia Oficial.* eds. Erica Pani y Rodríguez Kuri. El Colegio de México: México: 353.

144 "Brilla Espectáculo" in *Reforma*, September 16, 2010, p.1. Tellingly, many participants also mentioned time and time again that the show was "not Mexican enough." Silvia Isabel Gómez y Yanireth Israde, "Especialistas señalan que el festejo fuer caricaturesco, además falto claridad e identificación con el mensaje propio de una celebración nacional," *Reforma* (Sept. 17, 2010).

145 Zárate Toscano, Verónica. 2012. "Haciendo Patria. Conmemoración, memoria e historia oficial" In *Centenarios. Conmemoraciones e Historia Oficial.* eds. Erica Pani y Rodríguez Kuri. El Colegio de México: México: 92.

committee tasked with organizing the commemorations was convened in 2006 and, while it responded directly to the President, it lacked a clear internal leadership. In only five years it was headed by four different directors who resigned from the post due to a series of political quarrels.[146] Finally, the historian José Manuel Villalpando and the Secretary of Education Alonso Lujambio oversaw the celebrations, but perhaps it was too late to instill any kind of clear message.[147]

Even more, citizens were never informed, let alone consulted as to how best to spend the public money earmarked for the commemorations.[148] Unlike many of the events and monuments that were built for the centennial commemorations of independence in 1910 – which "were introduced into public discourse not only in celebration of their finished and perfected states but in fact during all phases of their development"[149] – there was scarcely any debate, conflict, or negotiation prior to the planning of the 2010 celebrations. Moreover, despite the recent creation of the Federal Institute of Access to Information (IFAI), neither the amount of money spent nor information about how it was spent were ever clearly reported.

Indeed, the lack of transparency characterized much of the planning of the major events. For instance, for about a year Mr. Villalpando denied that Ric Birch – an Australian producer

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146 See n.a. "El tortuoso camino para festejar el bicentenario," CNN Mexico, July 25, 2010.

147 In addition to the contention between the official organizers, one of the most visible contentions was between the organizers of the commemorations in Mexico City – ruled by the opposition party Partido de la Revolución Democrática – and the federal government. The Mexico City government sought to distance itself from the federal government organizing its own celebrations. The coordination of the *Comisión B1100* of the celebrations in Mexico City, Enrique Márquez, created the internet portal titled "Aguafiestas del Bicentenario" ("Bicentennial Party Pooper") to critique the celebration headed by the federal government. "Bicentenario 'un recuento absurdo'", *Milenio* (August 29, 2010); "El Aguafiestas, el crítico del Bicentenario," *El Universal* (sept. 8, 2010); Enrique Márquez, "¿Cómo celebramos el Bicentenario?", *El Universal* (Nov. 18, 2010).

148 People did protest against the construction of the *Estela de Luz* (Pillar of Light), but mostly after its costs had been made public and the decision to build it was finalized.

149 Garrigan, Shelley. 2012. *Collecting Mexico*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press: 21. This is not to suggest that the pre-revolutionary regime was democratic.

responsible for blockbuster events that include the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, Beijing, Barcelona, and Sydney – had been hired to organize the commemorative events.[150] Although Mr. Birch signed a contract with the Mexican government on February 13th, 2009, it was not until February 2010 during a public hearing at the Senate that Mr. Villalpando was forced to confirm this information.[151] The state hesitated in revealing this information, perhaps preempting the surge of attacks that it would receive if people found out that the most important national event in the country's history was going to be organized by a foreigner with no connection whatsoever to Mexico.[152] When the decision to hire an Australian to organize the commemorations finally got leaked people were upset and several members of the organizing committee, including the renown historian Enrique Florescano, resigned in protest.[153]

1.3 THE *COLOSO:* AN UNCANNY BODY POLITIC

The central figure of the parade, and, in many ways, the central figure of the entire celebration, was the *Coloso:* an eight-ton, sixty-six-foot-tall figure of a man with a prominent mustache and sideburns, a broken sword clutched in his left hand (Figure 1.1). Costing 3.8 million pesos of taxpayer's money and built with no public consultation or input, the work's

150 The fact that one of the models and points of reference for the celebrations were spectacles like the Olympic Games in Beijing and Barcelona (and not simply national events) speaks to the importance of situating an event like the commemorations in relation to what was happening in the rest of the world. The organizers and artists are very much aware of changes outside the country. To examine this point in greater depth would be, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

151 Ejea, 2013. Also see "2010: El espectáculo de la historia de México" by Carmen García Bermejo, *El Financiero*, February 10th, 2010.

152 This type of chauvinism is not unusual in Mexico where ample examples abound of citizens insisting that people's status as foreigners "distance them from the essence of Mexicanness" that is required in order to create a monument or a work of art that will represent Mexico (see Rozental, Sandra. 2014. "Stone Replicas: The Iteration and Itinerancy of Mexican *Patrimonio*." *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*. July (Vol.19. Issue 2): 331-356). For instance, contemporary artist Melanie Smith, who was born in England but holds a Mexican passport and has lived in Mexico for over twenty years, was criticized for representing Mexico at the Venice Biennial in 2011.

153 Garciadiego 2012, 366.

meaning and the identity of this giant remained ambiguous.[154] Days before the parade took place, the sculptor Juan Carlos Canfield – who, tellingly, was, for the most part, unknown among art world circles – declared that the *Coloso*'s features were based on those of Benjamín Argumedo, a general who fought in the northern part of Mexico during the Revolution in 1910. There are not many academic studies on Argumedo, and the ones that exist portray him as a vicious and bloodthirsty man who "burned down *haciendas*, took hold of small towns, and sabotaged the railway tracks."[155] Argumedo fought against people from all over the ideological spectrum, including many of the country's darling Revolutionary heroes such as Francisco I. Madero, Pancho Villa, and Venustiano Carranza. At the end of his life, however, he changed sides and fought together with another favorite Revolutionary hero, Emiliano Zapata.[156]

FIGURE 1.1 THE COLOSO at the *zócalo* plaza on September 15, 2010
Photograph by Cuartoscuro.

154 "Lo quieren de huichol; Tepic instalará Coloso en Bahía de Banderas. Gobierno nayarita lo 'vestirá' con traje típico para, dicen, atraer el turismo," by Éric Sepúlveda, *Reforma*, September 15, 2014.

155 Salmerón Sanguinés, Pedro. 2004. "Benjamín Argumedo y los Colorados de la Laguna", *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México*. 28 (Jul-Dec): 201.

156 Salmerón, 2004; Womack Jr., John. 1985. *Zapata y la Revolución Mexicana*. SEP/Siglo Veinte Editores: Mexico City (trans. Francisco González Aramburo): 208-209 and 218.

The artist, however, was not interested in Argumedo's story. In several different interviews he explained that he had not selected Argumedo as a model for the *Coloso* because of his political or military endeavors, but rather that the choice had been solely aesthetic and based on Argumedo's physical features, which showed that he was "a very strong man" with a "lot of personality" and "a very 'revolutionary' mustache."[157] And yet the aesthetics of the statue itself were neither strong nor revolutionary. The figure was intended to resemble the pre-Hispanic figures that are found in different Mexican archeological sites, a ruin from the past that is "displaced to be rescued, reconstructed and brought to the present."[158] To achieve this effect, cracks were carved into the torso, the right hand, and the left leg, but rather than imbuing the figure with an aura of history, these cracks, if anything, conveyed a sense of fragility and melancholy.

Worse still, when the *Coloso* was first displayed, it was not as a firmly-standing Leviathan or as a healthy body. Instead, it first appeared as a dismembered, mutilated one, chopped into bits and pieces. Originally, the *Coloso* was going to be paraded alongside the other floats and placed on the *Zócalo* plaza during the *grito* ceremony. However, due to its weight and size, it became unmanageable to move in either a vertical position or even in a single piece. The solution was to cut him up into four parts: the head, the torso, the legs and boots, and the arm holding the broken sword. In this mutilated state, one could get a glimpse at the insides of the body, which is made out of steel rods and rubber, resembling bones and muscles, and of hollow polyvinyl chloride tubes that run throughout the body much like veins and arteries.[159]

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157 "Coloso Bicentenario," Once Noticias, September 24, 2010 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xz17wZ49xKs). "Bicentenario Colosal," by Ernesto Priego in *Replicante* (September) (http://revistareplicante.com/bicentenario-colosal/).

158 Vargas, Jorge. 2010. "Insurgentes y Revolución." *Cultura*. Conaculta. 3 (September): 39.

159 See www.casacanfield.com and personal communication with artist.

It was in this dismembered state that most Mexicans first encountered the statue: not as an imposing figure but as a mutilated cadaver (Figure 1.3). But this was not all. During the parade, dark clouds covered the sky and a thunderstorm seemed imminent. Given that the *Coloso* had not yet been waterproofed by the time of the parade, each body part was covered with a white sheet to protect the plaster from the rain. People found the image of body parts moving along *Reforma* avenue to be disquieting but also uncannily familiar.

FIGURE 1.2 THE DISMEMBERED COLOSO, during the parade on September 15, 2010. Photograph taken by the author.

Sigmund Freud explains that the feeling of the uncanny takes place when one encounters a strange repetition, a weirdly disturbing resemblance. The feeling of the uncanny is such "only because it is secretly all too familiar," which is why it was repressed in the first place.[160] The uncanny "is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. (…)

160 Freud, Sigmund. 2005. *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*. Penguin Books: London/New York: 240.

The uncanny [is] something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light."[161] Perhaps the reason why people found the moving mutilated *Coloso* uncannily familiar was because it was reminiscent of the images of dismembered corpses saturating the media landscape. As the event was taking place, remarks that stressed the similarity of the parsed *Coloso* with the mutilated cadavers were made on social media.

Even at the pinnacle of the commemorative events, at precisely the moment when everybody is summoned by the state to enjoy and forget, at least momentarily, the everyday reality and the atrocious violence, the "return of the repressed" occurs in the least expected manner. This story shows how all representations, even concrete and realistic ones like the *Coloso* are contingent, their power lying precisely in their ambiguity and openness to interpretation. There is "no simple correlation," Jeffrey Schnapp reminds us, "between state sponsorship and explicit political content."[162] Symbols and images that produce idealized representations of the state can also create "alternative spaces of irony and ambivalence"[163] and can often become powerful tools of dissent.[164] As I will argue in the following section, the *Coloso,* which was intended to be a symbol of unity and courage, was subverted and linked, instead, with corruption and impunity.

1.4 DEBATING THE *COLOSO*

Perhaps more than any other commemorative object, the *Coloso* triggered all kinds of debates and public discussions many of which were sparked by the statues ambiguous identity:

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161 Sigmund Freud quoted in Young, James. 2000. *At Memory's Edge*. Yale University Press: New Haven/London: 154.

162 Schnapp, Jeffrey T. 1993. "*18BL*: Fascist Mass Spectacle", *Representations*, 43 (Summer): 92.

163 Wedeen 1999, 30. See also Valiavicharska, Zhivka. 2014. "History's Restless Ruins: On Socialist Public Monuments in Postsocialist Bulgaria," *Second Hand Europe*, special issue of *boundary 2*, 41, 1 (Spring).

164 The importance of symbols tends to rest not simply on the fact that these are a source of information, but also that they convey emotional, affective, and irrational responses. Pitkin, Hannah. 1967. *The Concept of Representation* University of California Press: Berkeley: 100.

Who is this man and who, if anyone, is he meant to represent? The problem started with Benjamín Argumedo.

Given that Argumedo is not a particularly well-known figure[165] and his story was convoluted and difficult to follow, the press opted to highlight one particular aspect of his life: his support for Victoriano Huerta. In school, Mexican children learn that Huerta planned the murder of the democratic hero Francisco I. Madero, who fought against dictator Porfirio Díaz and who gave birth to the Mexican Revolution. After killing Madero, Huerta seized power, which is why he is regarded as the assassin of the man who fought for Mexico's democracy and as an unlawful (or *ilegítimo*) president who was never elected democratically. The parallel between Huerta and Felipe Calderón was made by the press as a way to stress the uncertainty that characterized the electoral process that led to Calderón's victory. People joked that Calderón had commissioned the artwork specifically because it was inspired by a historical figure known for supporting an *ilegítimo* much like himself. The *Coloso* and his alleged identity became a reminder of the fragile electoral legitimacy that, even after four years, continued to taint Calderón's term in office.

In several official press releases, the Department of Education (SEP), the governmental entity responsible for organizing the commemorations, rejected the possibility that the *Coloso* represented Benjamín Argumedo or any other specific historical figure.[166] It claimed that the

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165 It is worth mentioning that although Argumedo is a somewhat obscure figure (he does not readily appear in history textbooks and is unfamiliar to urban elites and the younger generation), he is mentioned in several *corridos* about the Revolution (there is a *corrido* entitled *"*General Benjamín Argumedo") and therefore not an altogether unknown figure. What is particularly important to highlight is that neither the artist nor the state mentioned the relationship between Argumedo and popular music or culture. In other words, picking Argumedo as the model for the *Coloso* was not linked to the connection between this figure and the imaginaries of the Revolution found in popular culture. Thanks are owed here to Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo.

166 The federal government has made several declarations of the following type: "The *Coloso* represents an insurgent, one of the many civilians of New Spain that fought for the principles of the Independence of Mexico. This man is not a hero turned into a sculpture; on the contrary, he symbolizes an ordinary person who followed heroes and leaders and by following them contributed to the creation of a Mexican nation" ("El

"gaze, looks, sideburns, chin, and mustache simply express the strength of character of a particular historical context, any character, no one in particular."[167] It was suggested that the *Coloso* "does not have a specific identity. It does not have a given name or a surname" and, therefore, it was implied that the statue represented everyone and, therefore, no one in particular.[168]

Tellingly, in the days after the parade, Canfield changed his mind regarding the identity of the *Coloso.* Although he did not recant his initial declarations, he simply stopped talking about who the *Coloso* was or what he allegedly represented. This sudden silence itself speaks volumes, but changes on Canfield's Flickr page also reveal trepidation. During the preparations for the commemorative events, Canfield recorded his progress on the sculpture and kept a Flickr page that included a photo of a model of the *Coloso* with the following caption: "First sketches of the sculpture of the *Coloso Benjamín Argumedo.*" Three days after the parade, the caption mysteriously changed: the name "Benjamín Argumedo" had disappeared with no explanation.[169]

Canfield also argued that the dismemberment of the *Coloso* during the parade and its subsequent assembly into a single piece in the *Zócalo* was to be a symbolic act of unity: individual parts would become integrated into an organic whole, "rescued, reconstructed, and brought to the present."[170] This narrative was expressed by President Calderón himself, who

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Coloso del Bicentenario genera controversia en México" by Ira Franco, CNN Mexico, September 20, 2010). Another declaration: "The *Coloso* pays homage to the hundreds of thousands of anonymous Mexicans, almost all poor peasants, that participated in the insurgent movement and that helped to write a central chapter in the history of Mexico" ("El coloso bicentenario homenaje al mexicano", by Ingrid Díaz, Diario de Morelos, November 11, 2010). In both of these declarations, the government not only emphasizes the anonymity of the *Coloso* but also the fact that this anonymity commemorates the moment of Mexico's Independence rather than its Revolution—this explicitly contradicted the artist's claims.

167 "El Coloso no retrata ningún personaje en particular: SEP", by Ariane Díaz, La Jornada, September 20, 2010.

168 "El Coloso del Bicentenario genera controversia en México" by Ira Franco, CNN Mexico, September 20, 2010.

169 "Borran referencia a Argumedo en Flickr de escultor de 'Coloso' denuncian", SPDnoticias.com, September 18, 2010.

170 "Escenas para una festividad" in Cultura y Arte de México, September 2010, Num. 3, CONACULTA, p.39

made an analogy between the statue and Mexico's body politic, pronouncing a few days after the parade had taken place that the statue was no one in particular, but rather that "the great *Coloso* of Mexico, that *Coloso* is you, you are the Mexican."[171]

Scholars across the social sciences and humanities have criticized the use of the metaphor of the body politic, claiming that the comparison of a community to a human body lends itself to associating segments of the population to body parts: for instance, the head is usually associated with the sovereign, the arms and legs with peasants and laborers, the heart, perhaps, with the artistic community. The implication, as per Plato, is that people are differently abled and ranked accordingly; only some of them are meant to rule while the rest are meant to be ruled. Metaphors of the body politic also make it very easy for medical language to supplant political discourse by describing groups of people as unhealthy and contagious and offering a set of cures which can lead, for instance, to the extermination of segments of the population allegedly in the interest of the broader community's well-being.[172]

But despite Calderón's attempts to link the *Coloso* with the Mexican body politic, people failed to directly identify either with the statue or as part of a common "body politic." Instead,

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171 "Ese personaje -así de grande, así de fuerte, de imponente- y también como todo lo fuerte y lo grande que despertó también polémica y discusión, intriga, duda; ese gran personaje, amigas y amigos, ese gran 'Coloso' de México, ese 'Coloso' eres tú, eres el mexicano, eres también el voluntario." Felipe Calderón quoted in "La verdad de El Coloso," by Alberto Aguirre in El Economista, September 30, 2010 (http://eleconomista.com.mx/columnas/columna-especial-politica/2010/09/30/verdad-coloso). The way that Calderón and his coterie tried to mold individuals into a cohesive body by insisting on the analogy between the body of the statue and the nation's body politic was consistent to the plea to "speak well of Mexico."

172 In the case of the *Coloso*, what seemed particularly problematic was that getting one statute to represent "all Mexicans" helped to the give the impression that all the differences could be suppressed into a single body, one of man no less. Perhaps if Canfield had made the *Coloso* more like a puppet rather than a fixed statue the metaphor of the body politic would have been less problematic. For one, making it the figure a puppet would have required a host of puppeteers to help move it, which would potentially help people imagine a nation as a political project that requires a host of individuals working in tandem rather than a single static monolith. Secondly, as writer and playwright Jane Taylor has argued, when the puppeteers are a visible element, it helps convey the sense that "there is a vast, all but invisible serving class that maintains and sustains the life force of the puppets, as well as the figures that they embody." Taylor, Jane. 2011. "Handspring Puppet Company and the Dispersed Body." Lecture presented at the Puppetry Conference at the University of Connecticut.

they made fun of its different presumed identities and associated it with corrupt politicians and criminals. The government's plea not to think about the *Coloso* as a specific figure was mocked by the press in ways that highlighted the rising discontent with representative democracy. A cartoon by Antonio Helguera, for instance, shows Alonso Lujambio, the education secretary responsible for the commemorations, saying "the *Coloso* at the *Zócalo* is not anybody, nor does he represent anyone." Behind him stands a man who is thinking, "Oh, then the *Coloso* must be Calderón."[173] The anonymity of the *Coloso* was also linked to the thousands of people killed as a result of the "war on drugs" and whose identity and causes of death are never investigated, many of whom end up in mass graves which usually contain dozens of bodies that are rarely identified. The state insists that the victims of this war are members of gangs and drug cartels and that it will not squander resources investigating the causes of their death or their individual identities.

For a few weeks, newspapers, magazines, television and radio shows, as well as internet forums, became saturated with editorials, reports, discussions, cartoons, and jokes that addressed the puzzle of who the *Coloso* was and what exactly he represented. The statue was identified with a wide range of figures, ranging from the Mexican *ranchero* singer Vicente Fernández to political figures such as Joseph Stalin, the former Mexican president Vicente Fox, Luis Donaldo Colosio, the presidential candidate who was murdered in 1994, and even Jebadiah Springfield, the founder of the fictional city home to the animated Simpson family. Among the many identities imputed to the *Coloso*, however, two figures repeatedly came up: Jesús Malverde and Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

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173 Cartoon by Antonio Helguera, appeared in La Jornada, September 20th, 2010. (http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2010/09/20/index.php?section=cartones&id=1)

Jesús Malverde is the unofficial saint of drug-traffickers. Until a few years ago, Malverde was a local icon, known almost exclusively in the northwest of the country. In recent years, however, his popularity has risen, as can be seen by the increasing commodification of his image through posters, scapulars, figurines, songs, and books. The link between the *Coloso* and Malverde is symptomatic of how drug-traffickers have entered the public sphere and become part of the national imaginary.

Former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari was also associated with the *Coloso*, but in this case, the resemblance had nothing to do with looks. Perhaps one of the main reasons why this parallel circulated had to do with Salinas' presence during the commemorations. During the *grito* ceremony, Salinas was captured by television cameras standing in the main hall of the National Palace, next to the balcony from which Calderón waved the Mexican flag and shouted "Viva México!" Calderón might have invited Salinas – as well as his predecessor, the *Panista* Vicente Fox – as a gesture of national unity, a way to signal the existence of a common front against organized crime.[174] Yet, given that Salinas is one of "the most universally vilified political figures in the history of Mexico" and frequently associated with drug-trafficking, money laundering, corruption, and murder, the message seemed to be one of continuity between an old criminal political regime and a newly-elected democratic one.[175] These symbolic acts are reminders that Mexico's "democratic transition" was characterized by neither "a rupture with the previous regime nor a foundational pact to inaugurate the new one."[176] Mexican political elites

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174 Several press reports interpreted the event that way (see, for instance, Guerrero, Claudia "Celebra Calderón con ex Presidentes" López, Mayolo, "Entre los festejos y los recuerdos," *Reforma* (September 16, 2010).) The last time all the living ex-presidents attended the same event had been in 1942 when President Ávila Camacho invited them to gather as a way of signaling a common front against fascism and Nazism.
175 Lomnitz, Claudio. 2001b. "Times of crisis: historicity, sacrifice and the spectacle of the debacle in Mexico City." *Public Culture*, 15 (1): 145.
176 Dresser, Denise. 2008. "Mexico: Dysfunctional Democracy." In Jorge I. Domínguez and Michael Shifter, *Constructing Democratic Governance in Latin America*. The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore: 242.

focused on electoral processes and left many attributes of the old regime untouched, including impunity, corruption, rent seeking, and the arbitrary exercise of power,[177] all of which are exemplified by Salinas de Gortari.

The fact that the *Coloso* was linked to a political figure who has been reviled and, to a certain extent, self-exiled for almost two decades (Salinas de Gortari has not lived in Mexico for nearly 20 years) also points to a nostalgia for an all-powerful authority, or, rather, a nostalgia for a moment were one could more easily apportion blame on a presidential figure that was perceived to be all-powerful. During the PRI regime, the president was a very powerful figure, much more so than Calderón ever was. This was much harder to do following the formal "democratic transition" because the Mexican presidency lost power which other actors—including drug-traffickers, corporations, state governors, and opposition parties—were quick to accumulate.[178]

Despite all the critiques that were made about the *Coloso*, what never came up for discussion was the fact that this alleged body politic was emphatically a male body. That the *Coloso* was a man appeared as an ordinary, incidental detail, which was not worthy of critique or conversation. Historically, artworks, monuments, and memorials across the country depict the Mexican nation as a mestizo (or white[179]) female figure, "a suffering and selfless, a silent and passive woman,"[180] who is generally pregnant or surrounded by children in ways that exalt her

177 Merino, Mauricio. 2003. *La transición votada: crítica a la interpretación del cambio político en México*. Fondo de Cultura Económica: Mexico.

178 Dresser 2008, 256.

179 The *Coloso's* racial features were also not discussed, but these were more difficult to discern.

180 Bravo, Paulina. 2011. "La Patria Mexicana: El cuerpo de la soberanía o la soberanía sobre el cuerpo." In *Sueños de una Nación, un año después*. ed. José Luis Barrios, México: INBA: 37-39.

reproductive character, docility, and prudishness.[181] That none of the commentaries that were made in relation to the *Coloso* noted this difference or mentioned the fact that a male body was chosen to represent the nation, perhaps points to how unaccustomed Mexicans are to noticing and discussing gender.

1.5 DEMOCRACY VERSUS NATIONALISM

In light of all the uncomfortable comparisons between the *Coloso* and a host of criminals, the federal government urged the press to "stop politicizing" the statue[182] because this would only "cause division where there should be none."[183] These pleas, however, only seemed to spark even more critiques and jokes about the *Coloso.* Eventually, perhaps realizing that they would not be able to stop these kinds of conversations, and that their pleas were adding fuel to the fire, state representatives changed their strategy. Instead of trying to suppress the discussion and to enforce compliance,[184] they sought to capitalize on this "democratic" mockery by emphasizing publicly that the comparisons between the *Coloso* and an ignominious host of characters were voiced and circulated freely in the press without any fear of reprisals. This freedom of speech, they argued, was a sign of a "healthy plural society." Indeed, in the aftermath of the commemorations, Villalpando, the head of the events, maintained that "the State did not impose

181 Florescano, Enrique. 2012. "Independencia, identidad y nación en México, 1810-1910," In *Centenarios. Conmemoraciones e Historia Oficial.* eds. Erica Pani y Rodríguez Kuri. El Colegio de México: México: 29.

182 "SEP niega que 'Coloso' retrate a personaje particular," in El Universal, September 19, 2010.

183 "El Coloso bicentenario, homenaje al mexicano", by Brenda Tellez, La Crónica, September 20, 2010.

184 When discussing the type of power that a state can exert, Lisa Wedeen differentiates "legitimacy" from "compliance" and argues that regimes can produce compliance "through enforced participation in rituals obeisance that are transparently phony both to those who orchestrate them and to those who consume them." In other words, even when people are aware that the ritual is phony they "act *as if*" it was not phony and in doing so they end up obeying and becoming accomplices of the regime. (Wedeen 1999, 6). This did not happen in Mexico where people not only believed the spectacle to be phony, but did not hesitate to demonstrate this was the case.

its worldviews" and, instead, projected "a new time, one of plurality, tolerance, freedom of creation, expression, and critique."[185] In short, the state maintained that the vitriolic critiques were a sign of a well-functioning democracy.

It is certainly true that the discussions were a sign of democratic deliberation. Although citizens never saw themselves as part of the common body politic that the *Coloso* purportedly represented, the statue did become an object that brought people together by inviting them to judge and engage in aesthetic and political discussions amongst each other, and between the government and the citizens, even when they disagreed.[186] Moreover, the commonalities that emerged among those who participated in these discussions were not necessarily given in advance of the act of participation itself.

But the conversations and comments that were sparked by the *Coloso* did not simply signal the freedom to speak out and discuss, they also pointed to a profound and generalized discontent with the status quo. Indeed, the public and the media participated avidly and engaged in discussions in ways that signaled existing solidarities and created new ones but these "episodic expressions of national identification"[187] were based on feelings of insecurity and perceptions of shared risk. Given the rising levels of violence that Mexico was experiencing, the commemorations became a moment in which people came together to mourn the dead by expressing their discontent towards a government that claimed to represent them despite both its dubious electoral triumph and its responsibility for triggering the violence. In other words,

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185 "... el Estado no impuso sus puntos vista (...) un tiempo nuevo, de pluralidad, tolerancia, libertad de creación, de pensamiento y de crítica. (...)" (Silvia Isabel Gámez, "Muestra Villalpando exitoso Bicentenario," *Reforma* (January 18, 2011).

186 For an account of how objects and things become divisive matters of concern which, nonetheless, bring people together see Latour, Bruno. 2005. "From Real Politik to Ding Politik or How to Make Things Public." In *Making Things Public*: *atmospheres of democracy.* eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass.

187 Wedeen 2008, 69.

"binding force" that brought people together resulted from common experiences of precariousness, anger, and powerlessness.[188]

But despite the temporal solidarities that were formed based on shared feelings of anxiety, fear, and anger among Mexicans of diverse socio-economic classes and geographic locations, there was no common project or goal that sustained these solidarities and invited people to work together in the long term. In other words, the commemorations became an occasion in which people *reacted* against the violence but not one in which people *acted* in response to it. No openings for the future were created and no longer-term goals that people could imagine working together to accomplish were articulated.

This inability to envision the future or create a shared world should not, however, be interpreted as a sign of depoliticization, nor a retreat into private life or indifference to the wellbeing of others. As political theorist Pierre Rosanvallon argues when he writes about disenchantment with electoral democracy in the United States and Europe, "we see people involved, we see people in the streets, we see people participating but in a 'negative' way."[189] Indeed, the outbursts of anger and the complaints can be read as a sign of democratic fervor and participation but a "negative" one. In the words of anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz, this type of participation can lead to a refusal to engage in "dialectical criticism," meaning that people place the blame entirely on the state while refusing to think about how they, as citizens, might bear some of the responsibility and what they can do to become part of the solution.[190]

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188 Sara Ahmed is referencing Ulrich Beck's claim that solidarity can arise from anxiety and has the potential to become a political force (see Beck, Ulrich. 1992. *Risk Society*, London: Sage Publications: 49 and Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh: 72.

189 Rosanvallon, Pierre. 2008. *Couter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:.254.

190 Lomnitz 2001b, 144.

But the fact that the commemorations failed to become an instance for either the state or the people to articulate a common future was not exclusively a result of the violence related to the drug-war. It was also a result of the state's inability to put forth new and compelling narratives and imaginaries that might interpellate people into a common project. Given that commemorative moments are generally considered to be ideal situations in which such narratives and imaginaries can get revised and re-instantiated, precisely because these are moments in which claims to speak in the name of "the people" are made, the question remains: Why was the PAN government unable to use the commemorations to produce and transmit new narratives?

Claims to speak in the name of "the people" (or, in this case, "the Mexicans"[191]) try to bridge an unbridgeable gap: the gap that exists between an abstract unity of a sovereign or the represemted (defined, precisely, by terms such as "the people" or "the nation" or represented by a single body or monument like the *Coloso*) and the actual diversity and plurality of social conditions.[192] In any case, "the people" are never a predetermined, naturally bounded, empirical unit. Instead, they are a political claim that in order to be enacted requires some form of observable representation – a story, an image, or a monument – which will inevitably fail to represent "the people" with all their differences and plurality of interests.[193]

But while this limitation is readily interpreted as a democratic deficit, it need not simply be a constraint or a blow to democracy. Paradoxically, as political theorist Jason Frank has

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191 While neither Mexico's struggle for Independence nor its Revolution succeeded in creating a single political community or a real horizontal comradery that was able to fully erase the "hierarchical relationships" that preceded these moments, claims to speak in the name of "the people" were made. (Lomnitz, 2001: 12) (For a convincing account on how claims in the name of the people in Mexico were made during these events see García Ayluardo, Clara and Francisco J. Sales Heredia (eds.). 2008. *Reflexiones en torno a los centenarios: los tiempos de la Independencia*, Mexico: CIDE & CESOP.

192 Insightful discussions on these matters include: Deutsche, Rosalyn. 1998. *Evictions*, MIT Press: Cambridge and London; Lefort, Claude. 1988. *Democracy and Political Theory*. trans. David Macey. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

193 Carrier, Peter. 2005. *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Cultures in France and Germany since 1989*, Berghahn Books: New York/Oxford.

convincingly argued, such a limitation can open-up a host of unimagined possibilities, and particularly during moments of commemoration.[194] In these moments the indeterminacy of "the people" can be remembered and sustained in ways that can potentially help revitalize and dramatize those incipient democratic energies. Commemorative events can become possibilities to transcend reductive and obsolete imaginaries of "the people" and be used to create new narratives that incorporate previously excluded points of views. The PAN, however, was not able to articulate any kind of imaginary of community that either challenged existing ones – and specifically those that are particularly problematic like the myth of *mestizaje*[195] – or that reconnected citizens to past symbols or narratives and helped them carry them forward in new ways.

As I recounted in the introduction to this dissertation, through art, textbooks, rites, monuments, and celebrations, the PRI was extremely successful in producing an official history that exalted specific episodes in Mexico's history and presented clear heroes and villains in ways that helped to reproduce the idea that the PRI party's wellbeing was linked to that of the nation. In the words of renowned historian Enrique Florescano,

> Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Revolution-made government was to ascribe the plan of integrating the nation through education and culture to an institution of the State. (...) [This is] a story that makes the Revolutionary movement sacred, exalts its heroes, erases internal contradictions, and converts the slogans and

194 Examples abound of how moments of commemoration can actually become moments to reevaluate and imagine a more inclusive understanding of "people." Jason Frank's analysis of Frederick Douglass's speech "What to the Slave is Your Fourth of July" is a particularly compelling account of how to speak in the name of "the people" is not to speak from a position of delegated authority, but to stage "a strange scene of interlocution, to stage a dissensus" (Frank, Jason. 2010. *Constituent* Moments, Duke University Press: Durham: 209-236).

195 In Mexico, for instance, the myth of the mestizaje that has led to the discrimination of indigenous communities could be confronted have been challenged in (Navarrete 2016).

> banners of the fighting revolutionary groups into paradigmatic goals of the governments that grew of that conflict.[196]

Contesting the narratives put forth by a party that has ruled a country for over seventy years, and one that, moreover, was particularly skilled at producing convincing nationalist imaginaries, is certainly no easy feat. This is even more challenging for a party like the PAN that, as the token (official) opposition during most of the PRI regime decades tried very hard to disassociate itself from this official history and downplayed the importance of the Revolution, presumably because the PRI's identity was largely based on this event.[197] As historian Javier Garciadiego put it, "the *Panistas* have self-exiled themselves from the Mexican historical process."[198] Indeed, an essential aspect of the PAN party was to position itself as an outsider of the official *Priista* history by celebrating very different events, heroes, and elements of Mexico's history and culture, including, for instance, the catholic religion as a cohesive element of the Mexican identity.[199] A widely shared anecdote that illustrates this point was that of president Vicente Fox publicized decision to take down the portrait of Benito Juárez, Mexico's cherished national former president (and one of the PRI's favorite heroes), which hung on the presidential office.[200]

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196 Florescano 2006, 329.

197 This explains why, during the commemorations, the PAN provided more resources and money for events that specifically commemorated the independence and subtly tried to downplay the importance of the revolution. Some of the sites and events that referenced the independence rather than the Revolution include the following: Bicentennial Park; Bicentennial Arch; Bicentennial Olympic Festival; Bicentennial Circuit; Bicentennial Expo. Moreover, the celebrations on September 15–16 that commemorated independence were much more grandiose, involved more planning, and were more costly than those marking the Revolution on November 20. In Mexico City, the federal government was in charge of the Bicentennial celebrations, while the city government – with less power and a smaller budget – was tasked with the ones concerning the Revolution (Mónica Mateos-Vega and Ana Mónica Rodríguez, "El gobierno, sin capacidad para celebrar la gesta de 1910: expertos." *La Jornada* (Nov. 19, 2010).)

198 Garciadiego 2012, 360

199 Loaeza, Soledad. 2001. "De historias oficiales y leyendas negras." *Nexos* (September 1): https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=10097.

200 Benito Juárez is hailed as one of Mexico's most cherished national heroes not simply because of his indigenous heritage but also because during his time as President (1958-1872) he tied Liberalism to Mexican nationalism (he staunchly championed the separation of state and church) and defended Mexico during the French Intervention (1962-67). His birthday (March 21) is a national public holiday in the country. According to

When the PAN finally came to power, it found itself in a difficult and uncomfortable position. On the one hand, the *Panista* statesmen lacked a strategy for turning their own historical and national narratives into a coherent message. In part, this was because, as the rest of this dissertation will show, they alienated the very people – the intellectual and artistic class – that had historically worked with the state and who might have helped the party articulate new national discourses imaginaries. Lacking buy-in from the creative classes that had once worked closely with the state, the PAN found itself outsourcing this work, as evidenced by the hiring of Birch to mastermind the commemorative celebrations or someone like Juan Carlos Canfield who was not a recognized figure among art world circles.

On the other, the *Panistas* lacked new tactics for disseminating their messages, and therefore continued – or, at least, tried – to rely on PRI-era initiatives like organizing massive spectacles and commissioning monumental works of art. In this sense, the commemorations evidenced how the democratic transition was far from being a "complete break" from the *Priísta* past. This makes Mexico's post-transition look very different from that of other countries – including, for instance, Germany following World War II[201] – in which images and narratives, and well as the strategies and tactics deployed to transmit these, change dramatically in the post-transition moment.

However, even as the PAN reproduced some *Priísta* tactics, the messages it tried to convey were either confusing or devoid of any meaning that people could latch onto. The celebrations were, most certainly, spectacular and ostentatious, but lacked any kind of historical

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an opinion conducted in July 2015 by the Consulta Mitofsky firm, Benito Juárez continues to the most cherished national hero: (http://consulta.mx/index.php/estudios-e-investigaciones/mexico-opina/item/694-heroes-y-villanos-en-la-historia-de-mexico) (Consulted: July 8, 2018).

201 Goldstein 2009.

script that could provide continuity between the past and present and project the country to the future. There was no story about how the PAN came to power and what national project it proposed for the future. That the *Coloso* was based on a historical figure, but not because of his ideological or political position, but rather simply because of his physical traits, is a clear example of the ideological void of the PAN's nation-making strategies. Hence, despite the huge amount of money spent on the celebrations, claims like those made by writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II represented public opinion: "The federal government does not have the capacity nor the interest to celebrate the centennial of the Revolution [because] it has no identity."[202]

As I have been arguing so far, and as the rest of the dissertation will continue to show, the PAN did not have much of a plan of what narratives to convey or how to convey them. In a sense, when Calderón and other state representatives hailed the conversations and jokes about the *Coloso* as a sign of a "healthy" democratic public sphere, they did so in a way that seemed to suggest that democracy meant erasing history and that democracy was antithetical to a national project.

1.6 THE *COLOSO,* AN UNINTENDED EPHEMERAL MONUMENT

The *Coloso*'s undignified end is therefore in equal measure fitting and telling. Disassembled again after the festivities in the *Zócalo*, the statue was never reassembled to be permanently placed in the Bicentennial Park as was initially intended. Instead, it remained dismembered, partly covered by the same white sheets that helped to protect it from the rain during the event, and left rotting in a parking lot of a building that belongs to the federal

202 Paco Ignacio Taibo II quoted in Mónica Mateos-Vega and Ana Mónica Rodríguez, "El gobierno, sin capacidad para celebrar la gesta de 1910: expertos." *La Jornada* (Nov. 19, 2010).

Department of Education.[203] Although the *Coloso* was not planned as an ephemeral monument, it ended up being one. Perhaps one of the reasons why it was never permanently erected as per the original plan were the jokes and negative reactions from the public following its brief display during the parade. It is hard to know if this was the case, or if its abandonment resulted, instead, from some bureaucratic conundrum or neglect.

The hope that the *Coloso* would be appreciated as a symbol of a strong and cohesive national body politic was, in any case, never fulfilled. In the summer of 2014, almost two years after Calderón's term had ended and the PRI had returned to power with Enrique Peña-Nieto as president, it was announced that the state of Nayarit was going to resurrect the *Coloso* and display him in the tourist hub of *Bahía de Banderas*. The purported intention was to create a costume for the statue and repurpose his identity as a *Huichol* Indian.[204] Once again, however, the *Coloso* never made it to its destination. Instead, it "disappeared" somewhere along the way. Over a few days in September 2014, different media and official sources provided contradictory versions of the statue's whereabouts. While some maintained that the *Coloso* had safely arrived in Nayarit, others argued that it was still in Mexico City or that it had been moved to a warehouse in Guadalajara, or even that some of its limbs had been lost in transit.[205] Whatever the case may be, this latest chapter of the *Coloso*'s story is not only symptomatic of the continuities

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203 "El Coloso otra vez en el olvido, lo arruban en 100 metros," by Luis Carlos Sánchez, El Excelsior, April 21, 2011 (http://www.excelsior.com.mx/node/731148). "Los damnificados del festejo del Bicentenario," by Jorge Ramos Perez, *El Universal*, September 14, 2013 (http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/sociedad/2013/despojos-del-bicentenario-950601.html).

204 "Lo quieren de huichol; Tepic instalará Coloso en Bahía de Banderas." by Éric Sepúlveda, *Reforma*, September 15, 2014.

205 "'Un disparate sería abandonarlo,'" by Silvia Isabel Gámez, *Reforma*, September 16, 2014; "Aparece El Coloso en Guadalajara; Resguardan escultura en bodega." *Reforma,* September 21, 2014; "20 metros... y nadie lo vio; Cumple El Coloso una semana perdido." by Silvia Isabel Gámez and Juan Carlos Sagredo, *Reforma*, September 20, 2014; "Se busca Coloso de 20 metros," Silvia Isabel Gámez and Juan Carlos Sagredo, *Reforma*, September 20, 2014; "Aparece El Coloso en Guadalajara; Resguardan escultura en bodega. Aclara la SEP paradero de gigante; lo trasladaron en junio pasado," *Reforma*, September 21, 2014. "'Desaparece' SEP al Coloso; Dicen que la escultura fue enviada a Nayarit. Sus dimensiones son las de un avión Boeing 747, y aun así pudo perderse," by Silvia Isabel Gámez in *Reforma*, September 16, 2014.

between the Calderón regime and that of his *Priísta* successor, but also illustrate how old *Priísta* strategies of arbitrarily imposing monuments on the landscape are no longer as effective as they used to be.

The 1910 centennial commemorations of Independence, overseen by dictator Porfirio Díaz, were linked to broader economic, urban, and sanitary plans that led to the construction of a series of buildings and monuments that significantly reshaped the layout of Mexico City, some of which to this day continue to organize urban life.[206] Much like the 2010 commemorations, heaps of money and resources were spent in the 1910 celebrations but with the crucial difference that most of the monuments and buildings that were constructed for the former celebrations became permanent emblems of the country.[207] The obsession with constructing monuments, which was shared by many of Díaz's successors, dovetailed with the post-revolutionary public education initiatives, launched by José Vasconcelos in the early 1920s. As I described in the introduction to these dissertation, these initiatives promoted the direct involvement of the state in the arts and favored the creation of artworks, like the iconic murals, which were somewhat legible and by virtue of being located in public spaces were accessible to the general populace.

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206 Lomnitz 2001a; Florescano 2012, 35; Garrigan 2012, 125; Monsiváis, Carlos. 1992. "Los monumentos cívicos y sus espectadores" in *Monumentos Mexicanos*, Editorial Grijalbo: México: 118; Tenorio Trillo, Mauricio. 1996. "1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the Centenario," *Journal of Latin American Studies*. 28 (1): 75-104. The fifty-year commemoration of the revolution in 1960 also generated new national narratives and helped to appease some of the social discontent that had been boiling up as a result of internal unrest linked to the Railway Movement and to influence of the Cuban Revolution (Santos, Ana. "El 50 aniversario de la revolución Mexicana." In *Centenarios. Conmemoraciones e Historia Oficial.* eds. Erica Pani y Rodríguez Kuri. El Colegio de México: México: 56).

207 Indeed, historians contend that the centennial commemorations were an event in which the nation was reimagined and people were interpelated by the narratives of progress (even if the latter never actually materialized). Nationalist rhetoric certainly helped to hide the fact that economically and politically many people were excluded from the nation. People's relationship to the nation was often more affective than based on knowledge. For instance, while people could identify a national hero, only 38% could link each hero to a relevant historical episode (Kuri and Pani 2012, 15).

In Mexico to speak about monuments and other forms of public art is to speak about their grandiose and monumental scale but also about state-implemented cultural policies. The creation of colossal monuments and murals provides certain continuity with the enormous-sized pre-Hispanic architecture – both with the pyramids and palaces and with monuments like the Olmec heads or the Atlantean figures in Tula – helping to sustain the myth that those in power are somehow heirs to the Mesoamerican empires.[208] But independently of this historical link, the colossal size of monuments and public art also helps to exert power over people's bodies. This helps explain why, even after the demise of muralism, the state continued to work with the artistic community in building colossal statues and monuments. Indeed, even as the type of monumental public art that the state commissioned changed in style, its enormous size remained a constant. In the 1950s and 1960s, for instance, the state supported a group of artists who worked very closely with architects and urban planners to transform the landscape of cities by creating huge abstract and geometric public artworks employing industrial materials.[209] Some of the most iconic monumental sculptures, which became architectural milestones, include the Torres de Satélite (1957-8) and the works that constituted the "Ruta de la Amistad" (Route of Friendship, 1967-8). Much like textbooks and official propaganda had done with the murals, the use of advertising in magazines, newspapers and television helped to pave the way for these monoliths into collective memory.[210]

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208 Barrios, José Luis. 2014. "The Falling of the Statue: On Ruins and Irony." *The Falling of the Statue*, *(*MUAC: Mexico City: 23.

209 This generation of artists, often referred to as the *Ruptura* movement, drew many elements form the international avant-garde. They maintained that with their work they were "opening the landscape to the future" and constructing "a physical impression of the modern utopia of Mexico City." Jácome, Cristóbal Andrés. 2012. "Introducción." *Desafío a la Estabilidad* (ed.) Eder, Rita, México: UNAM: 271.

210 Eder, Rita. (ed.). 2012. *Desafío a la Estabilidad*. México: UNAM.

Given Mexico's long history and tradition of erecting gigantic monuments, the 2010 commemorations which were, with very few and criticized exceptions,[211] characterized by impermanent events and sites (like the *Coloso*), are indicative of a transformation that, at the very least, is evidenced on a basic material level.[212] The few monuments and sites that were meant to be inaugurated with the commemorations were either cancelled or, like the *Coloso*, failed to become a permanent emblem. This ephemerality seems like a welcome trait, especially read in light of the backlash and disgust that the *Coloso* and other commemorative objects and sites provoked. Writer Robert Musil famously wrote: "There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument. They are no doubt created to be seen—indeed, to attract attention. But at the same time they are impregnated with something that repels attention."[213] This "something", as James E. Young rightly points out, is "the essential stiffness monuments share with all other images (…) [that] necessarily vitrifies its otherwise dynamic referent, a monument turns pliant memory to stone."[214] Other "memory scholars," like Pierre Nora, have suggested that monuments rarely work to preserve public memory but rather displace it entirely: "The less

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211 The most important exception was the *Estela de Luz* (Light Beam), a monument that was planned for the bicentennial commemorations, but due to a series of delays was not finished on time for the celebrations and opened almost a year later. The monument consists of a 335-foot-long pillar made out of quartz and a multimedia center that lies beneath the surface and includes a movie theatre, an exhibition space, and a small and somewhat restricted concert venue. The *Estela* has been dubbed by pundits the "Pillar of Corruption" given the opacity of its planning and building process and, particularly, that its costs increased substantially (and mysteriously) as it was built. What is particularly noteworthy is that despite all the criticism and pushback it received after its construction, the *Estela* has become an important landmark in the cityscape, functioning as a central site of protest, educational activities, and innovative artistic events, particularly those related to sound and multimedia art. While experts argue that the multimedia center that it houses could have been planned in much ways that allowed more ludic performance (less restricted by the way the space is laid-out), it is a space of leisure where artists and ordinary citizens to interact. The meaning that a monument like this can come to acquire, nonetheless, does not absolve the opacity (and probable corruption) behind its process of construction.

212 An exemption, would be the monument/contemporary public art piece, Xipe Totec, created by artist Thomas Glassford, which consists of a series of red and blue light-emitting diodes, or LED that cover the former Foreign Ministry. Tellingly, however, this piece was created to commemorate the 100 anniversary of Mexico's National University (UNAM), which is an autonomous entity that while receiving funding from the federal government, operates completely automous from it.

213 Quoted in Young, James. 1993. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. Yale University Press: New Haven: 13.

214 Ibidem.

memory is experienced from the inside, the more it exists through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs."[215] What is more, there is an authoritarian vein that comes with the construction of every public monument. As many "memory scholars" have argued, public monuments do not simply convey information, they convey some information but explicitly exclude another. In the words of anthropologist David Scott, "public monuments ... serve not only an informative semiotic function but also a laden declarative one. They serve to authorize a certain way to remember the past and, therefore, they implicitly or explicitly displace or seek to preclude other ways to remember the past." [216]

Artists around the world have given much thought to these conundrums and, many of them, acknowledging the irrelevance or authoritarianism of monuments, have responded by creating "vanishing" or "counter-monuments" which often require making the monuments themselves ephemeral.[217] Back in the early 1990s, for instance, cultural theorist Néstor García Canclini argued that in urban centers which tend to expand quickly, monuments and other forms of permanent public art would become overshadowed by skyscrapers and other constructions, and would eventually lose all meaning. What was needed in order "to guide the construction of public memory," he suggested, "is an aesthetic of the ephemeral."[218] More recently, Cuauhtémoc Medina, one of Mexico's most famous curators, claimed that "one of the main civic values that contemporary art performs is its relative mortality."[219] After all, "in a nation whose every plaza

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215 Nora, Pierre. 1989. "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," trans. Marc Rousebush, *Representations* 26: 13.

216 Scott, David. 2014. *Omens of Adversity.* Duke University Press: Durham, North Carolina: 118-119.

217 Carrier 2005, 21; also see Young 2000.

218 "En esta época en que los cambios sociales llevan a que ciertos monumentos sean derribados, y otros modifiquen su sentido al interactuar ocn neuvos mesnajes urbanísitoc,s pulicicatiros y políticos, se necesita una esteetica de lo efímero para guiar la construcción de la memoria pública" (García Canclini, Néstor. 1992. "Monumentos, carteles, graffitis." In *Monumentos mexicanos: de las estatuas de sal y de piedra* coord. Helen Escobedo. Mexico, DF: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes and Grijalbo).

219 Medina, Cuauhtémoc. 2014. "Interiorized Exterior." *Limitless. Contemporary Art in Mexico City 2000-2010.* ed. Edgar Alejandro Hernández and Inbal Miller (Mexico: RM): 22.

and crossroad is plagued by a tradition of monuments defined by what writer Carlos Monsiváis called 'bad taste that never dies,'"[220] ephemerality might be a desirable quality. And if we construe authoritarian spectacle itself to be in bad taste then its mortality can certainly become a civic value.

It is one thing to celebrate the ephemeral qualities of monuments if these respond to democratic urges of the type that have inspired artists around the world to create monuments that do not last. One could, perhaps, interpret the *Coloso* as an (accidental) counter-monument and applaud his ephemerality as a sign that the authoritarian *Priísta* tactics of the past no longer work. This type of interpretation would not be too different from Calderón's reading of the mockery and criticism voiced against the *Coloso*, a sign of a "healthy democratic public sphere," and could also suggest the irreconcilability of nationalism and democracy.

That the *Coloso* was not intended to be an ephemeral monument and was discreetly left behind in the parking lot, however, points more to an urge to repress (and forget) the discussions and critiques that were triggered by the statue. Rather than a response to democratic urges, I suggest, the statue's ephemerality instead points to the inability of a state to create things that last and such inability can be antithetical to democracy. After all, as political theorist Bonnie Honig, borrowing from both Donald Winnicott and Hannah Arendt, has convincingly argued: objects are part of democracy's "holding environment," because democracies are rooted in a "common love for and contestation of public things."[221] Objects and things, which can include everything from monuments and public artworks, to certain kinds of infrastructure, can provide the shape

220 Medina 2014, 26.

221 Honig is borrowing the term "holding environment" from psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott. Bonnie Honig. (2013). "The politics of public things: neoliberalism and the routine of privatization", excerpt of lecture "Thinking out loud" series given at the University of Western Sydney, Australia: 68.

and necessary durability that is needed to assure stability and continuity in human life, which is itself brief and ever-changing.[222] But it was not simply Calderón and his coterie who were unable to create lasting monuments, the artistic community – including those dissidents who criticized the official commemorations – were, for the part, also reluctant to create anything that could be confused with a permanent monument or anything that could fit the old paradigm of public art.

1.7 Conclusion: The Other Side of the State

To conclude this chapter, I show how that the artistic community in Mexico, despite continuing to work for state-owned institutions, is in fact distancing itself from the state and finding ways to use resources from the private sector to turn ostensibly state-run spaces into bastions of critique of the state. As this happens, the mutually dependent and, frankly, schizophrenic relationship between the artistic community and the state which prevailed for the better part of the twentieth century is slowly becoming a more clearly contentious one. I also show how this distancing from the state has been accompanied by the erosion of national symbols and narratives. Even during the commemorations themselves, "the nation" seemed to be absent from many of the artworks and events organized by the artistic community. If there was any kind of unifying thread that characterized these commemorative art exhibits, it was precisely a lack of nationalism or patriotic exaltation.

Every public, state-owned art museum in Mexico City included in its 2010 repertoire at least one exhibition, event, or publication that explicitly broached the subject of the

222 Along these lines, historian Shelley Garrigan has convincingly shown how "repeated visual homage paid to displayed objects [including monuments] and the naturalized habit of regarding them as meaningful" can help create collective memory and advance feelings of community. Garrigan, 2012, 95.

commemorations.[223] But despite being hosted by state institutions, virtually all the contemporary art exhibitions that were organized for the occasion did not seek to honor the nation in any celebratory way, standing in glaring contrast to the official, spectacular art commissioned formally by the state to mark the occasion. While the official, celebratory artworks – including the *Coloso* – were directly commissioned by the agency in charge of organizing the official commemorations, those commissioned by the artistic community openly condemned the state for the inequality, poverty, corruption, and particularly for the rising tide of violence resulting from the drug war.

Indeed, the exhibits organized in museums and other artistic spaces explicitly criticized the official celebrations themselves and railed against the government for spending scarce resources on banal, short-lived spectacles that deliberately avoided addressing the pressing political issues troubling the country.[224] The philosopher and curator Itala Schmelz, who at the time of the commemorations was head of the state-owned Carrillo Gil Contemporary Art Museum (MACG) in Mexico City, summarized the position of many cultural workers when she explained that museums would become the sites of contestation par excellence, "one of the few

223 These museums included those managed by the National Institute of Fine Arts (Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes; Museo Nacional de Arquitectura; Ex Teresa Arte Actual; Galería José María Velasco; Laboratorio Arte Alameda; Museo Casa Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo; Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil; Museo de Arte Moderno; Museo Mural Diego Rivera; Museo Nacional de Arte; Museo Nacional de la Estampa; Museo Nacional de San Carlos; Museo Tamayo Arte; Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros; Salón de la Plástica Mexicana) and those managed by the National Autonomous University in Mexico (UNAM), including MUCA Roma, MUAC, Museo del Chopo, Museo Experimental El Eco, and the Centro Cultural Universitario Tlatelolco.

224 Some of these critical exhibitions included: "crisisss… Latin America: Art and Confrontation: 1910-2010" at the National Palace of Fine Arts; "Spectographies: Memories and History" at the University Museum of Contemporary Art, MUAC; "Revolución Es" at the Laboratorio de Arte Alameda; "Residual/Artistic Interventions in the City" a series of site-specific projects organized by the UNAM in collaboration with the Goethe Institute, with an exhibition at the MUCA; "Flour and Epazote" at the X Teresa Arte Actual; "Micro-histories, Macro-worlds: A place out of history" at the Tamayo Museum; "Project Juárez" and "Violent Times" at the Carrillo Gil Contemporary Art Museum; and "Dreams of a Nation: One Year Later 2011" at the National Museum of Art, MUNAL (this exhibition was a critical reflection of the commemorations and took place a year after the event).

spaces with the freedom to support projects that deviated from the patriotic condescending spirit that would surely characterize the commemorative projects in more 'official' spaces."[225]

That most of the professionals responsible for these provocative exhibits and art projects were themselves government employees (whose salary is paid with taxpayers' money) working for state-owned museums complicates the notion of "state public art" in the singular and problematizes the image of a uniform and monolithic state.[226] In this concluding section I want to trouble the image of the state as a unitary and coherent entity and begin to show how members of the artistic community "took over" some of the state-run cultural spaces and used them to criticize the state. The unprecedented influx of private money that museums have begun to receive through trusteeships and sponsorships (see Chapters Three and Four) helps explain why these state-owned spaces were *able* to put on these critical shows and become spaces that *could* be subverted as sites of resistance in the form of the curation of counter-narratives.

When I asked many of these cultural employees why despite being so critical of the state they continued to work for state institutions (rather than perhaps moving to private ones, which tend to pay better), they often responded that they saw their work as being in the service not of the state but rather of "the nation and its people." In other words, working in (and for) state institutions while criticizing the state in their work was not taken to be a contradictory position

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225 Schmelz, Itala. 2011. "Política cultural y arte político en el México actual." Lecture delivered for the conference *Entre la teoría y la práctica: reconsiderando el arte latinoamericano en el siglo XXI*. Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI). Lima. November 2, 2011.

226 In doing this, I am following the work of scholars like Timothy Mitchell and Akhil Gupta. Gupta, Akhil. 2006. "Blurred Boundaries: The discourse of corruption, the culture of politics, and imagined state." In *The anthropology of the state.* eds. Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishing; Mitchell, Timothy. 2006. "Society, Economy, and the State Effect." In *The anthropology of the state.* eds. Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishing.

but a perfectly coherent one: they were working for the state but were doing so for the nation and/or its people.[227]

And yet, despite this commitment to the wellbeing of the nation, for the most part, national symbols and narratives were absent from the artworks and exhibits that were produced for the commemorations, except when artists and curators invoked them to critique them.[228] Indeed, despite the theme of the celebrations, there was no attempt to define "Mexico" (or its meaning) or to link the idea of the nation to any kind of unifying symbol (other than violence and death). According to claims made in the catalogues, brochures, and interviews of the organizers of these exhibits, many of them explicitly sought to question the ideas of a linear development of historical progress that culminated with the country's so-called democratic transition that Calderón and his coterie were, allegedly, trying to convey in the official celebrations.[229]

In Chapter Three I discuss in more detail the artworks produced by contemporary artistic community so, for now, I will provide just one example that I find to be particularly representative of the affect, tone, and messages of the artworks produced for the commemorations. The piece is titled *Vísceras de la Nación* (*Guts of the Nation*) and was created by three young artists, Juan Caloca, Fermín Díaz, and Jazael Olguín, who are members of the art

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227 Distinguishing the state from the nation, however, does not mean that many of these same individuals also vociferously criticized notions about the nation as a conceptual entity, and criticizing many of the Mexican official national narratives and symbols. In other words, I found that many cultural workers were critical of Calderón and the Mexican government, as well as of the abstract idea of "the nation," while simultaneously seeing themselves as working for the good of the Mexican nation.

228 The exhibition "Residual/Artistic Interventions in the City" organized by the Goethe institute in conjunction with the UNAM's MUCA Roma museum highlighted very specific problems and even proposed specific solutions that could be carried out by local communities. Some of the Mexican and German artists that were invited to the project produced socially-engaged artworks with the intention of creating environmental awareness regarding waste generation and created a recycling center, a composting plant, and a food stand with alternative biodegradable packaging as ways to handle residues in these specific locations. This was most prevalent in the exhibits "Spectographies…" at the MUAC, "Revolucion/Es…" at the Arte Alameda, and "Dreams of a Nation…" at the MUNAL.

229 "Spectographies…," for instance, explicitly questioned the idea of a linear historical progress. Others questioned the idea of unified and autonomous nations and, instead, chose to present work by Latin American artists in an attempt to show the commonalities in the region rather than celebrate one nation in particular (e.g. "crisisss…." at the Palace of Fine Arts).

collective *Cráter Invertido.*[230] *Vísceras de la Nación* consists of a series of actions that were documented in short videos which were shown in different artistic spaces and distributed through social media for the commemorations.[231] According to the artists, their intention was explicitly to "question the notion of Mexican identity and its symbols."[232]

The first action takes place inside a traditional *pulquería* (a bar that serves *pulque*, an alcoholic beverage made from the fermented sap of agave which can be traced back to pre-colonial times) in Mexico City. The three artists stand behind a table in the bar drinking pints of *pulque* and singing the Mexican national anthem over and over again until the words become merely a blur as the three become increasingly inebriated.[233] The second action takes place in the middle of Mexico City's *Zócalo* plaza, a few feet away from where the *Coloso* was first assembled the evening that President Calderón gave the *grito.* The camera is positioned on the ground and is aimed up at the huge Mexican flag that stands in the middle of the plaza. The three young artists, all dressed in black, stand in front of the flag, perfectly framed by the camera. Simultaneously, they all stick their fingers down their throats and vomit, and then walk away. The camera then zooms in on the vomit at the foot of the flag, where there are three splashes of green, white, and red, mirroring the colors of the flag. The third video consists of the three artists and random passersby standing next to several iconic public buildings – including the Department of Public Education (SEP), the Chamber of Deputies, and the Supreme Court of Justice – and waving a Mexican flag. The flag, however, is no ordinary flag. The original red and

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230 http://craterinvertido.org/wiki/index.php?title=P%C3%A1gina_principal

231 Comisión para las Celebraciones del Bicentenario de la Independencia y del Centenario de la Revolución en la Ciudad de México y la Central del Pueblo. While they are not represented by a gallery or interested in the art market, both Caloca and Olguín have since become quite famous in the Mexican art world (having been accredited with prestigious scholarships and grants and shown work at different museums).

232 Juan Caloca – Portfolio 2010-2014: http://juancaloca.com/index.php/visceras-de-nacion/ (Consulted July 9, 2018).

233 https://vimeo.com/12404543 (Consulted July 9, 2018).

green stripes have been painted black in a clear sign of mourning. No words are said, no music plays in the background; only the sounds of the city, including cars breaking and honking, are heard as people walk by the artists waving the flag. The artists then created a series of sculptures with these flags like "Nación Roída" (or "Gnawed Nation") depicted below (Figure 1.3).

FIGURE 1.3 CRÁTER INVERTIDO'S *NACIÓN ROÍDA* ("Gnawed Nation")[234]

In the last few years, and particularly since the disappearance of the 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teacher's College in 2014, this "black" flag has become a national symbol,

234 Photograph taken from: (http://www.andreadicastro.com/academia/sitios/JUAN_HTML/visceras.html) (Permission by the author)

readily used during protests and at commemorative events. It is difficult to know if these artists were the first to introduce this flag, or to what degree they helped popularize it. What is certain is that, despite its humor and DIY quality and style, *Guts of the Nation* captured the anger, disgust, and nausea voiced by many people across the country at the invitation by the government to celebrate a national holiday in the midst of the such extraordinary violence.[235] This was a revulsion and an anger defined in relationship to an authoritarian past and to an extremely violent present. But much like the conversations that were triggered by the *Coloso*, most of the artworks produced by the artistic community reacted against the violence but did not articulate any kind of future-oriented project for the nation.[236]

What is more, the art produced by the artistic community, including that which was displayed in state museums, in contrast to the officially-commissioned art pieces, evidenced how contemporary artists are moving away from creating anything that can be confused with monuments or anything that fits the old paradigm of public art. Rather than creating monumental works that have a pretension of lasting forever, artists increasingly engage in practices that oftentimes last no more than a few seconds.[237] They also seldom try to beautify the landscape with their work, a trend that has characterized the Mexican art world at least since the 1990s. As curator Ery Cámara contended in 2001, for the younger generations public art does not seem to

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235 There have been several artistic movements in the history of the country that have also mocked national symbols. The *Neo-Mexicanismo*, which flourished in the 1980s and 1990s, is one of the most famous ones. But the type of humor is very different, given that it focused more on the body and mocked the heteronormativity of the country's national symbols.

236 Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe,* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

237 For an account of the multiplicity of ephemeral art that was produced in Mexico City from 2000 to 2010 see: Hernández, Alejandro and Inbal Miller Gurfinkel (eds.). 2013. *Sin Límites. Arte contemporáneo en la Ciudad de México 2000-2010*, Barcelona: RM.

be "about taking art out of galleries and museums to transplant it in plazas, parks, and streets, but neither is art the city's makeup."[238]

This trend clearly did not extend to the state-sponsored works produced for the commemorations, which continued to be preoccupied with more classical aesthetic attributes of artworks. For instance, Juan Carlos Canfield, the creator of the *Coloso*, claimed that he hoped that his work would "be recognized for its high manufacturing quality and for its beauty. (…) The reason why I build statues is to commemorate extraordinary events and situations, and to identify and enrich spaces with three-dimensional elements that will last through time."[239] This neo-Kantian view of aesthetics is derided by many members of the artistic community, including those who produced critical works for the commemorations.[240] Even so, and despite their indifference to producing beautiful, lasting artworks, it was some of these ephemeral and apparently trivial artworks which more forcefully represented the general feelings of despair and disgust shared by citizens across the country in response to the country's precarious situation

By looking at Mexico's most important national commemorations in recent years, this chapter put into context the celebrations in a moment of extreme violence. It showed how the democratically elected government struggled to exert its power by using the autocratic regime's old tactics, which included imposing colossal works of art onto the country's landscape, such as the *Coloso*. These strategies proved to be increasingly unsuccessful, evidencing not simply the state inability to deploy art to create lasting and compelling national narratives but also the

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238 Cámara, Ery. 2001. *Arte y Ciudad.* PAC, Conaculta, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores: Mexico: 2.

239 "Mi objetivo es que mi trabajo se caracterice por su buena manufactura y por su belleza. (…) Construyo estatuas para conmemorar situaciones y sucesos extraordinarios. Para identificar y enriquecer espacios con elementos tridimensionales que perduren a través del tiempo." http://www.casacanfield.com/juancarloscurriculum.html#sthash.5CieMFVb.dpuf

240 Curator José Luis Barrios quoted in "Arte Oficial vs. Arte Crítico; Construir la historia nacional," by Sergio Blanco, *El Ángel*, (September 12, 2010): 1.

citizens' and the contemporary artistic community's disappointment with electoral democracy and their rising anxiety resulting from the drug war. The following chapter will continue to demonstrate the distancing between the state and the artistic community and the former's inability to generate coherent and convincing national narratives. Unlike this chapter, however, rather than focusing on the violence sparked by the drug war, it will show how the country's economic liberalization and so-called free-market-oriented reforms also help explain this shift.

CHAPTER TWO.

"*UN ABSURDO TOTAL*:"

JUDGMENT, EXPERTISE, AND THE CREATION OF NATIONAL PATRIMONY

The storeroom was cluttered with paintings, drawings, and sculptures of all shapes and sizes: abstract geometric compositions, colorful landscapes, classical-looking still-lives. Canvases were hung on all four walls, one on top of the other, and countless stacks of oil paintings and drawings littered the floor, resting next to or leaning on the miscellaneous statues scattered throughout the stuffy, ill-lit room. In the middle of this sprawling mess, several tables held an eclectic collection of smaller sculptures, ranging from busts of president Enrique Peña Nieto and former pope John Paul II to statuettes of jumping horses and nude couples locked in passionate embraces. The low ceiling explained why the bigger statues had been left outside, in the inner patio of the building, completely unprotected from the passing summer showers. It was difficult to move around the cluttered space, which resembled but felt very different from the cozy ambience of an antique shop where one feels embraced by timeless, delicate objects. So too, despite being filled with art, it lacked the clean, curated, and white-washed gravitas of a museum or gallery. Instead, the storeroom felt more like a junk shop – the place was particularly reminiscent of the popular *Galerías el Triunfo* franchise, which specializes in gaudy housewares and ornamental knick-knacks. However, although it was difficult to imagine, many of the artworks piled haphazardly all around me would soon become the nation's most precious new assets.

In the room down the hallway from the storage space, an eclectic group of people – three artists, two curators, the director of an art college, a representative from the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA), and a handful of state administrators who worked either for the Fiscal Administrative Service (SAT) or for the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit (SHCP) – sat around a long, semi-circular arrangement of tables. From time to time, people would get up from their chairs to refill their plates with the fruit, quiches, and fancy pastries that were elegantly displayed at the back of the room, alongside pots of coffee and tea and juices, and would walk around the room to chitchat and exchange jokes with one another. It was easy to tell that many of them new each other well and that, despite the ostensibly solemn occasion for which they had been summoned, namely selecting the artworks that would become Mexico's *patrimonio nacional* (national patrimony), the event was being treated as informal, even trivial.

The first artwork, which I had not noticed when I toured the warehouse, was paraded into the room, carried by two burly men wearing white gloves. It was an abstract oil painting, a splash of multiple colors over a black, glossy background. "No, no, no… we don't want that… we saw so many of those yesterday. Take it away!" exclaimed a curator sitting at the back while some of the others nodded in agreement. The next piece, another oil-painting, this one of a shining star over what seemed to be a tranquil body of water, did not even make it inside the room as those who could see the hallway from where they were sitting took a glance at it as it was being carried in and exclaimed in unison, "Oh no, no, there's no need to even bring that *thing* in here… Next please!" The members of the committee seemed restless. They had spent the previous day evaluating hundreds of artworks that were stored in the adjacent room and deciding which of them would become part of the nation's inalienable art collection. There were very few artworks left to judge and everyone seemed eager to be done.

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In Mexico, artists can pay their sales taxes with artwork rather than money. This unique fiscal mechanism, *Pago en Especie* (Payment in Kind), has produced an eponymous art collection which is not only one of the largest in the country but also the only public one that increases systematically every year. Currently it comprises works by over 1500 artists.[241] This mechanism was designed so that the state would be able to build a national art collection by acquiring – in the literal and fiscal sense – a representative sample of the artworks that are produced and sold every year without spending resources it does not have, while at the same time sparing artists from the burden of monetary taxation which they might not be able to afford. For all its promise, however, the *Pago en Especie* mechanism – and the collection that it has created – is repeatedly described by many members of the art world as a "lovely idea" that has turned out to be "*un absurdo total*."[242]

This chapter tells this mechanism's history, practical operations, and political implications. I show how a series of neoliberal reforms implemented by the state in the 1990s impacted the tax mechanism, including by displacing art world experts from decision-making processes, including by taking away their power to decide which artworks are accepted as tax and become national patrimony. This displacement, which is done in the name of "democratizing" the policy and art collection, is representative of the ways in which the state alienates the artistic community by taking away certain privileges and power that the latter had historically held and handing it to "the market." As a result, I show how the objects that are

241 The collection includes work by many distinguished Mexican artists such as: Leonora Carrington, Luis Nishizawa, Manuel Felguerez, Vicente Rojo, Francisco Toledo, and José Luis Cuevas, to name a few. Some of the younger artists whose work is also part in the collection include Melanie Smith, Damian Ortega, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Betsabeé Romero, Eduardo Abaroa, Jonathan Hernández, Pedro Reyes, and Sofía Taboas.

242 Anonymous. Interview on November 24, 2014.

collected, displayed and circulated by "the state" in an effort to represent "Mexico" and its people not only fail to resonate with the people that they allegedly seek to represent but are unable to summon "a people" into being in the first place.

This chapter advances two broader arguments related to the connections between neoliberalism and expertise. First, I argue that the relationship between processes of neoliberalism and the notion of expertise is more complex than how it has been theorized so far: neoliberalism is not synonymous with a generalized "rule of experts" but rather with a rule of a *certain* type of expertise, namely a managerial expertise. The transformations of *Pago en Especie* mechanism demonstrate the complex relationship between neoliberalism and *different* types of expertise in ways that prompt us to avoid collapsing a critique of neoliberalism into a critique of expert rule *in toto.* Secondly, I argue that the eradication of expertise in decision-making processes is not in and of itself a democratic move. I show how art world experts' loss of political power comes as a cost, including the inability to have these experts set standards that might motivate artists to want to give their best work to national collections and to summon communities into being by enunciating clear narratives that might help to hail people into common projects.

2.1 *PAGO EN ESPECIE*: FROM STATISM TO NEOLIBERALISM

Legendry muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros allegedly came up with the idea of the *Pago en Especie* tax mechanism in the late 1950s after a close friend and fellow artist had his property seized by the state when he failed to pay his taxes. Siqueiros defended the idea by maintaining that "artists should focus on the creation of their work, rather than become distracted with fiscal

and accounting obligations which involved topics that they would never understand."[243] Given that artworks tend to increase in value over time, Siqueiros argued that artists would end up paying more than their fair share and that the state would benefit enormously by building a collection that could surely become Mexico's "greatest prestige."[244]

In 1957 Siqueiros presented the idea to Hugo Magrain, the head of the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit (SHCP), who promptly accepted the offer. The first round of the soon-to-be *Pago en Especie* collection gathered over thirty artworks.[245] Although Siqueiros came up with the idea, he did not actually participate in the mechanism.[246] Instead, it was Diego Rivera, Mexico's most famous muralist, who became the first artist to offer his paintings to the newly created collection. The year that Rivera opted to participate in the mechanism he did not owe any taxes, but even so donated four paintings as a way of motivating others to participate.[247] Even Rufino Tamayo, who at the time was engaged in an open aesthetic and ideological battle with Rivera and Siqueiros,[248] offered one of his works to show solidarity with the mechanism.[249]

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243 Siqueiros quoted in Rius, Luis. 1999. *Colección Pago en Especie de la Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público 1994-1996*. Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público: México: 27.

244 Ibidem.

245 Siqueiros was not alone in lobbying in favor of this mechanism. The lawyer Arturo Carrillo Gil (brother of the famous art collector Álvar Carrillo Gil), together with Carmen Marín de Barreda (sister of Diego Rivera's first wife Guadalupe Marín) and Inés Amor (the owner of the famous Galería de Arte Mexicano and legendary promoter of Mexican art) actively advocated in favor of this mechanism. While Amor often sold artworks to foreigners, she was worried that these objects would leave the country and her hope that the Pago en Especie mechanism would help keep them in Mexico. This is a worry that, I found, continues to be common among people who work in some capacity for the Pago en Especie collection. (Margain, Hugo B. 1984. *Colección Pago en Especie de la SHCP 1975-1984*, México: SHCP. See also Garduño, Ana. 2012. "Pago en Especie: a 55 años de un convenio patrimonializador." *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas.* Vo. XXXIV, Num. 100: 233.

246 While the tax mechanism began to operate since the late 1950s, it was not until 1975 when it was officially turned into a law by president Luis Echeverría.

247 The four paintings donated by Rivera included: "The artist's studio," "The reconstruction worker of Warsaw," "Urban passage," and "Breaking the ice in Bratislava."

248 Rivera and Siqueiros' figurative painting marked by sociopolitical messages versus Tamayo's more abstract or "mytho-poetic" style (Coffey 2012; Goldman, Shifra. 1981. *Contemporary Mexican Painting in a Time of Change*. Austin: University of Texas Press).

249 Rufino Tamayo offered his signature "The Photographic Venus."

At that historical juncture, the point of contention between artists had to do with the type of art movement that the state should endorse rather than with the reasons why the state should support artists in the first place.[250] As such, artists who were locked in a bitter war over the future nature of Mexican art nonetheless found common ground in their endorsement of the state as a trustworthy safe-keeper of the nation's collective memory, embodied in fine art. That the state should be the entity in charge of amassing and protecting the works of art that were being produced every year, and that there was a common national project towards which these very different artists could work together to accomplish, did not seem to be central points of contention. The lack of a strong art market and of private funding for the arts certainly helps explain why the state – despite only collecting art "randomly and sporadically"[251] – became the most important actor in supporting and assigning value to artists' work in the country. Indeed, one of the most important stepping stones that any artist in Mexico could take to ensure herself a successful career was to have an exhibition (preferably a solo show) in a public, state-owned museum.[252] It is not surprising, therefore, that artists wanted their best work to become part of the *Pago en Especie* collection, which would ensure protection and its exhibition at a state-owned museum.

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250 Some of the artists who supported the mechanism include: Raúl Anguiano, Ignacio Asúnsolo, Angelina Beloff, Adolfo Best Maugard, Fernando Castro Pacheco, Lola Cueto, José Fernández Urbina, Ernesto García Cabral, Ernest Guasp, Agustín Lazo, Luis Nishizawa, Juan Olagíbel, Salvador Pruneda, Diego Rivera, Rufino Tamayo, Mariana Yampolsky (San Cristóbal Larrea, José Ramón. 2006. "Arte y Memoria. Historia de una Colección: Mechanisma Pago en Especie " *Mexicanísimo* (Num.40): 37).

251 Garduño, Ana. 2011. "Acervos en Construcción, Museos Expandidos." *Cimientos*. Mexico: INBA: 15.

252 These steps usually entailed the following (or some of combination): first, during the time that the "Salón de Artes Plásticas" was still organized, artists had to show their work there; then they would have a show at the Carrillo Gil Contemporary Art Museum, which specialized in "emerging" artists; then they would exhibit either at the Tamayo Museum or at the Museum of Modern Art; and, finally, only the most renown would make it the crown jewel, the Palace of Fine Arts (*Palacio Bellas Artes*). Medina, Cuauhtémoc. 2014b. "Más allá del networking." In *Yo sé que tu padre no entiende mi lenguaje modelno*, MUAC: Mexico: 28-39.

That in Mexico artists are differentiated from everyone else and that they are the only ones who have the option of paying in kind points to a unique relationship between this community and the state. Analyzing the democratic implications of the *Pago en Especie* mechanism requires thinking about the difference between its efforts to equalize and to distinguish between citizens. Scholars ranging from Charles Tilly to Margaret Levy have highlighted the importance of taxes and taxation policies to understand "the history of the evolution of the state" because the state performs certain activities in exchange for taxes.[253] In turn, scholars following Benedict Anderson, have shown that paying taxes can become a defining element in the creation of nationalism because it is a shared practice expected of all citizens.[254] As Martin et al. maintain, "[w]hen we comply with our tax obligation, we do not know who in particular shares in our contributions. When we make use of roads, schools, and other public goods and services, we do not know from whose tax payments in particular we are benefiting. Taxation enmeshes us in the web of generalized reciprocity that constitutes modern society."[255] In other words, one of the central assumptions when it comes to tax contributions is that these are made to the state in exchange for the benefit of the community as a whole as the tax money may very well end up being spent in ways that do not directly benefit the person paying the tax.

While central to the politics of taxation is the idea that it is equalizing (even if it is not a burden equally shared), the case of the *Pago en Especie* mechanism shows how artists are distinguished from the rest of the population precisely via taxation. Whereas taxation is leveling in that it is paid with currency, which is radically fungible and impersonal, and the benefits of

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253 Levy, Margaret. 1988. *Of Rule and Revenue*. California: University of California Press: 1.

254 Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities.* New York: Verso.

255 Martin, Isaac, Monica Prasad, and Ajay Mehrotra. 2009. *The New Fiscal Sociology*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge: 3.

taxation are, at least theoretically speaking, generalized, artists who pay in kind contribute a unique good, tied to their labor and prestige even when they no longer own it, and can draw personal benefits from the act of paying taxes. When their artwork becomes part of a national collection and gets included in exhibitions, this can directly affect the artists' career and the price at which they sell their work.[256] And even if it does not raise the price or reputation of their work, it will not hurt it.

Not *all* kinds of art, however, are accepted as tax by this mechanism. Every year, from January through March, artists deliver the artworks that they want to pay as tax to any of the nine delivery points across the country.[257] If one does not live close to delivery spot, the chances of participating in the mechanism drastically diminish due to the difficulties and costs of transporting the work.[258] Until 2006, moreover, only paintings, engravings, and sculptures were accepted.[259] And while that year the mechanism's statutes were amended to include photography,

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256 And yet, this kind of privilege has raised very few eyebrows. On the contrary, the mechanism has been criticized for being abusive towards artists because once the state owns the artwork as tax payment the artist will no longer receive any royalties when it is exhibited. (Carmen Álvarez, "Ven anticonstitucional el pago en especie," (*Reforma* Newspaper, Mexico City, January 24, 2002).) One of the few critics has been political scientist Carlos Elizondo Mayer-Serra. He argues that the positive externalities associated with artworks (or with anything else that is produced - he focuses on writers, but his argument could be extended to the visual arts) cannot be easily measured. As such, arguing that artists should not be taxed because their work creates positive externalities is, according to Elizondo, not justifiable and implies unduly privileging a handful of citizens. (Elizondo, Carlos. 1993. "Del privilegio de crear al privilegio de no pagar impuestos" in *Nexos* (June)).

257 In the past the delivery points included parking lots that were often full of leaks and dirt and the process of delivering a work was "like a scrap collection," as the assistant of a famous contemporary artist explained to me: "It was hot as hell in that parking lot. (…) Many artists delivered their work at the same time and we had to wait forever and then we simply dumped it there, in the basement of the parking lot. At least the tax season does not coincide with the rainy season, but if it did the whole thing would have gotten flooded." (Anonymous. Interview August 27, 2014.) Over the years, the conditions of the delivery points have improved and artists can make appointments so that they can avoid the lines and the quality control of the delivery points, according to some artists that I interviewed, has improved significantly. A painter who resides in Mexico City claimed that the delivery process was very efficient: "You make an appointment before you arrive and that means that you do not have to wait in line to pay your taxes." Another artist who specializes in engravings and oleo painting and who pays her taxes in Guadalajara, also praised the mechanism, "I have been paying my taxes this way for over twenty years and the process has improved dramatically in the last decade. It is very efficient and professional. The people who receive the artworks are professional curators!"

258 These delivery points are located in Mexico City, Celaya, Guadalupe, Matamoros, Mérida, Oaxaca, Tijuana, Xalapa y Zapopan, en las formas oficiales correspondientes (Decreto 2010).

259 The number of reproductions of the engravings cannot exceed 100. (Decreto Oficial, Presidente Carlos Salinas de Gortari, October 31st, 1994).

video art, installations, and ready-mades, a wide range of artistic practices are not yet taken into consideration.[260] Artists who do not sell their work either because they do not want to or because it cannot be sold (perhaps because they are not producing objects) are also excluded from paying taxes with the product of their labor.

Pago en Especie also presumes a distinction between art and craft, and by extension between artists and artisans. While its statutes never provide a clear definition of what constitutes art, craftsmen – who are known for employing modes of production that tend to privilege repetitive making – are excluded from participating in this mechanism.[261] By distinguishing artists from craftsmen, and allowing the former but not the latter to pay their taxes with their work, the *Pago en Especie* mechanism implicitly reproduces forms of inequality in ways that privilege traditional forms of artistic labor: those which, like painting and sculpting, are allegedly meant to produce single-authored "original" or "unique" tangible objects.[262]

When *Pago en Especie* was first established, the most prestigious artists in the country were eager to participate and not necessarily because of financial reasons but because having their work become part of a state collection was regarded as a real honor. In the last few decades, and especially starting in the early 1990s – with the unprecedented incursion of private capital

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260 "Se modificó el decreto Pago en Especie para permitir la aceptación de obras de formatos no cnvencionales, reconociendo ocn ello, de manera oficial, el valor cultural de las neuvas manifestaciones artísticas de character efímero y distintas a la pintura, escultura y gráfica." (San Cristóbal Larrea, José Ramón. "Colección Pago en Especie" Mexicanismo, 2006, p. 44.)

261 As Winnie Wong has argued, craft is usually invoked to distinguish one form of idealized labor from others in rather nebulous ways following arbitrary criteria which can include separating "the free from the paid, the sensual form the aesthetic, purpose from purposelessness, and interested judgment from disinterested contemplation." Larry Shiner quoted in Wong, Winnie. 2014. *Van Gogh on Demand.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 163. Wong explains that when compared to industrialized products (rather than artistic ones), craft is seen precisely as the more "free" and "purpose-less" creation.

262 In Mexico craftsmen are not exempted from paying taxes, nor do they have the option of paying in kind. In some states they have to pay up to 40% of their sales profit, which helps explain the high levels of informal business in the craft sector.

into the arts, visible in the advent of non-state artist-run spaces,[263] commercial galleries,[264] art fairs,[265] and even corporate museums[266] – this scenario has changed quite dramatically. By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, it was more important for artists' careers to be represented by a commercial private gallery that has an international clientele than it was to have a show at any national museum.[267]

A case in point is neo-conceptual artist Gabriel Orozco, one of Mexico's most famous contemporary artist and a clear reference point and inspiration for younger generations, including in his indifference towards seeking recognition from the state or public institutions.[268] Orozco has never participated in the *Pago en Especie* mechanism. This may be because he is not interested in having his work form part of a state collection, a position that seems compatible with his reluctance to being labeled as a Mexican artist or associated with traditional conceptions of Mexican art.[269] He may also simply opt to pay his taxes with money. Or, perhaps, he sells *all*

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263 Montero 2013.

264 According to official data, in 2014 there were close to 400 galleries of modern and contemporary art in Mexico (96 in Mexico City). but art historians and other art experts maintain that the real number is much higher given that there are many spaces that are either formally galleries (even if these are not commercial in nature) and others that de facto function like galleries but are not labeled as such and are therefore not counted in the census "Censo artístico suma 393 galerías en la República Mexicana" by Juan Carlos Talavera (March 18, 2014): http://www.excelsior.com.mx/expresiones/2014/03/18/949215

265 Zona Maco, Mexico's most prestigious art fair, opened in 2004 and has since grown exponentially every year.

266 Some private museums that belong to corporations or wealthy individuals are the Jumex Museum, Soumaya Museum, Musuem of Contemporary Art in Monterrey, Museo Amparo in Puebla, and others.

267 Even artistic institutions no longer need the recognition or official validation of the state to gain prestige.

268 By the time that his first individual retrospective was organized in Mexico, Orozco had already participated in the most important contemporary art forums in the world including Kassel's Documenta (1997), the Venice Biennial (1993), and New York's Whitney Biennial (1997). He was the only other Mexican artist (besides Diego Rivera) who has had a solo exhibition at MoMA in New York (1993) and did so before he had his first solo exhibition in Mexico (at the Tamayo Museum in 2000). His work sells for millions of dollars and has been shown in the most important contemporary art museums in the world. (Montero 2013) His rise to fame is unique and in some ways it is explained by the "cultural wars" in the United States: the insistence of including racial minorities in the canon and in mainstream institutions, while being wary of art that might be too radical. Orozco's work is conceptual and not as radical as that of other Mexican and Chicano artists of his generation like the performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña (Medina, Cuauhtémoc. 2002. "Mutual Abuse." *Mexico City: An exhibition about the Exchange Rate of Bodies and Values.* PS1: New York).

269 Gabriel Orozco interviewed by Carmen Boullosa. *Bomb Magazine* (No. 98, 2007): http://bombmagazine.org/article/2862/gabriel-orozco

of his work outside of Mexico – via any of the three galleries that represent him, *Kurimanzutto* with offices in Mexico City and New York City, *Marian Goodman* in New York City, or *Chantal Crousel* in Paris – and, therefore, owes no taxes on his art to the Mexican government.

While there are many reasons why Orozco is an outlier within the Mexican artistic field,[270] the fact that demand for his work has increased outside of Mexico speaks to a common experience: in recent decades the demand for Mexican contemporary art has grown exponentially outside the country.[271] Since 2005, for instance, auction houses like Sotheby's and Christie's no longer only classify the work of Latin American artists under the label of "Latin American Art" but also under the label of "Contemporary Art." In the words of curator Patricia Sloane, this change has meant "a great steppingstone for artists: crossing this line entails augmenting the number of zeros in the price of their work."[272]

As artists sell more and more work to private collectors both inside the country and around the world, be it through their galleries or via companies like Sotheby's and Christies, they become less dependent for financial support or promotion on the state. Of course, this does not simply mean that the state retrenches, but rather, much like other neoliberal processes, that it paves the way so that the private sector can intervene. For example, in the late 2000s, the government created a special grant to help private commercial art galleries based in Mexico

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270 For all of Orozco's anti-nationalist iconoclasm, however, there are many artists – including some of Orozco's close friends who are also represented by the prestigious *Kurimanzutto* (including Eduardo Abaroa, Abraham Cruzvillegas, and Damián Ortega) who participate regularly in *Pago en Especie*.

271 In 2012, for instance, 6.5 million dollars' worth of artworks produced by Mexican artists were bought and sold at auction houses in Mexico, while the number for those "Mexican" artworks that were bought and sold outside of Mexico amounted to 27.9 million dollars.

272 "Anteriormente los artistas latinoamericanos (lo que incluye a los mexicanos) estaban clasificados bajo la etiqueta de 'arte latinoamericano'. Hace ocho años cruzaron la frontera hacia la categoría de 'arte contemporáneo'. Esto es un gran paso para los artistas, pues cruzan una línea en la cual la principal diferencia son más ceros en el precio de sus obras." (Patricia Sloane quoted in Leticia Gasca Serrano, "Todos coinciden: Invertir en Arte Es Buena Opción" in *El Economista*, February 13, 2012).

participate in international art fairs.[273] The grant can be used to pay for the exorbitant fees charged to galleries who participate in these fairs, as well as for the travel expenses and for insuring the artworks. These grants come with very few strings attached. While the statutes stipulate that the galleries that receive the grant need to represent Mexican artists and include their work in the art fairs they attend, they do not require the galleries to exclusively represent Mexican artists. In fact, galleries can choose whose work and what work gets exhibited. In other words, rather than spending tax money to expand public art collections, the government uses it to support galleries, art fairs, and the international art market.[274] At stake here is that while the state continues to intervene in the visual arts realm, it simultaneously enables galleries (and the art market) to become the actors that decide which artists should represent the country in international forums and potentially benefit from state resources. In a clear example of neoliberalization, the state actively paves (and pays!) the way for global markets to work more smoothly or, in the words of anthropologist Andrea Muehlebach, "state absence [is] be actively produced by the state itself."[275]

With the advent of the private sector, the state, therefore, becomes one more supporter (or client) among many others and is no longer the main validator of their work. This, in turn, helps explain why artists are becoming increasingly indifferent to having their work become part of a public national collection and why a mechanism like *Pago en Especie* is losing its appeal.

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273 The clause is called "Summon for the International Promotion of Mexican Visual Artists" ("Convocatoria para la Promoción Internacional de Artistas Visuales Mexicanos"). Participating in art fairs is very expensive: in addition to paying the traveling and other logistical expenses, galleries have to pay for the transportation and insurance of the artwork, as well as exorbitant fees to have a booth in the fair which is why for small galleries participating is impossible unless they have huge capital assets to begin with. But often it is entering the international playing field which triggers local markets.

274 Tellingly, when a gallery sells an artwork outside of Mexico, even when a local artist produces it, nobody has to pay taxes to the Mexican government and the *Pago en Especie* collection does not directly benefit from any of the FONCA grants.

275 Muehlebach, Andrea. 2012. *The moral neoliberal: welfare and citizenship in Italy*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago: 105

Indeed, while *Pago en Especie* might seem like a trivial tax program, it is in many ways a clear exemplar of the changing relationship between the state and the creative classes.

When the *Pago en Especie* mechanism was first implemented, the antagonism between art and business was, for many art practitioners, regarded as a given. The "true" artist, many of them maintained, either only made art for art's sake or in the interest of "the people." For example, art critic Jorge Juan Crespo de la Serna, one of the mechanism's earliest champions, wrote at the end of the 1950s: "[Artists] are not people who are commonly known as 'practical people,' that is as people who have their feet on the ground like everybody else. Some of them are bohemians, others are forgetful, and the rest are indifferent. (…) They are in the clouds, where they perhaps get their best inspiration. (…) How can we ask them to be accountable for what they make? (…) There are blind spots in their calculus, there is chaos."[276] Creative work was supposed to be spontaneous and unpredictable, and follow no strict rules, which does not necessarily blend well with a business-oriented ethos, which requires skills that privilege management, planning and ordering.[277]

The view of the artistic community as an aloof bohemian or one who creates art exclusively for its own sake and completely unaware of the market, is increasingly untenable. Both in Mexico and around the world, artists are being trained to think about the market and are forced to self-manage their own artistic capabilities, which often means becoming entrepreneurs of their presumed "bohemian selves."[278] The artist Naomi Rincón-Gallardo, for instance,

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276 "Los artistas plásticos [...] no son lo que se conoce vulgarmente como "gente práctica", es decir, que tenga los pies en la tierra y sepa desenvolverse en este punto como todo el mundo. Unos son unos bohemios, otros unos olvidadizos, los demás unos indiferentes [...] Andan por las nubes, de donde tal vez sacan su mejor inspiración [...] ¿Cómo exigirles que rindan cuentas de lo que ganan con sus productos artísticos? [...] Hay lagunas en sus cálculos, desorden." (Jorge Juan Crespo de la Serna quoted in Garduño, 2012: 233).

277 Eikhof, Doris Ruth and Axel Haunschil. 2006. "Lifestyle meets market. Bohemian Entrepreneurs in Creative Industries," *Creativity and Innovation in Management.* Vol. 15, Num. 3: 234-241.

278 Wong 2014.

explained that "When I attended the *Esmeralda* art school [one of the most prestigious art colleges in the country] in the mid-2000s, it seemed that to be an artist meant exclusively to be an artist that produced objects to be sold in galleries."[279] That the *Esmeralda* is a public, state-funded school is an indicator of how these entrepreneurial logics cut across public and private spaces and how the notion of the artist as someone who is unaware of the economic implications of her work becomes harder and harder to sustain.

Indeed, as the rest of the chapter will show, the *Pago en Especie* mechanism is indicative of how artists are proving increasingly savvy by keeping their best work so that they can sell it, rather than give it as tax payment to the state. Being associated to the state by having their work form part of a state art collection is no longer a priority for many artists. Accordingly, while artist continue to use this mechanism to pay their taxes, they are deliberatively give sub-par work. In such an environment, claims like the one told to me by an official who works for the museum which houses part of the *Pago en Especie* collection sound not only dated but also comical: "Participating in this tax mechanism is a voluntary, civic act, it exemplifies a civic conscience on the part of the artists. (…) A responsible, serious artist would not give a lesser work to *Pago en Especie*. Artists who are aware that their work will transcend their life will not give just anything."[280]

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279 "Parecía que ser artista era exclusivamente ser un artista que produjera para una galería. (…) Como tendencia general o predominante estaba la idea de ser un artista exitoso de galería que pudiera participar en un mercado. La forma de participar en el circuito era por medio de producir objetos. Muy desvinculado de otras formas de participar en los circuitos artísticos. Se reproducía rápidamente la idea de ser artista joven, que rápidamente está exhibiendo, en la feria de arte, etc." (Interview August 20, 2014).

280 "Es un acto cívico voluntario, y ejemplifica la civilidad, (la conciencia cívica) de los artistas. … un artista responsable y serio no daría mala obra a pago en especie. Cualquier artista que sabe que la obra es una trascendencia, que te sobre pasa sabe que no debería dar cualquier cosa…" (Interview. Anonymous, August 28, 2014).

2.2 DISPLACING JUDGMENT

"The cause is noble and the intentions are good," the painter Yishai Judisman argued during a public interview about the *Pago en Especie* mechanism, "In practice, however, the Ministry's love of art is blind."[281] To say that love is blind usually implies that one does not get to choose with whom or why one falls in love. But the positive undertone that characterizes this saying is lost when one uses it to describe a *visual* arts collection. Judisman's jibe is particularly sardonic, but he is not alone in arguing that while the goal of the mechanism might be a virtuous one, the way it actually operates falls far short of virtue. A curator who has worked closely with the collection expressed this notion even more bluntly, telling me that "The *Pago en Especie* mechanism looks pretty, but it's rotten on the inside."[282]

While not all members of the art world are as critical of it,[283] many of them – particularly those who are more familiar with the way it works, including those who have been part of the selection committee or who have curated or written about the collection – tend to be very disparaging of the whole enterprise and maintain that only a small percentage of the artworks that are donated as tax have any value.[284] Art critic Santiago Espinosa de los Monteros, who has

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281 "La causa es noble y las intenciones buenas. En la práctica, sin embargo, el amor de Hacienda al arte es ciego." (Yishai Judisman)

282 "Suena chido, pero las tripas son horrendas." Anonymous. Interview on August 29, 2014.

283 Despite being aware of the collection's bad reputation and knowing that many of their colleagues keep their finest work for themselves, many artists claim to give their best work. They see the *Pago en Especie* collection as an opportunity for their work to circulate outside the country and to be included as part of a museum's collection. Based on the interviews that I conducted, many of them seemed more concerned about how the mechanism will benefit them, than about how their work will benefit a national art collection. In fact, many of the artists that I interviewed did not even know that the work they paid as tax could become national heritage. When I informed them that by participating in the tax mechanism their work could become national heritage many of them seemed completely indifferent.

284 Abaroa and Espinosa de los Monteros quoted in Cid de León, Oscar. "Hallan deficiencias en Pago en Especie." Reforma (Mexico City, November 19, 2012). Based on interviews and conversations with artists who know about the tax mechanism, it became clear that those who praise the mechanism are also those who are less familiar with the process (or whose only their experience with the process is as tax payers) but who do not know much about the collection (they usually have no idea who participates in the program or where their artworks are exhibited). Not surprisingly, those artists who favor a more conservative definition of art (i.e. those who favor classical definitions of art, namely painting and sculpting over performance, installation, or socially-engaged art) tend to be more in favor of the mechanism.

been part of the mechanism's selection committee, has publicly derided the artworks that are received as junk that could be bought at any "Saturday bazaar":

> There are shitty artists, whose stuff hangs in hotels, who are represented by unknown galleries but who, nonetheless, sell a lot of artworks. But even bad artists have the right to use this mechanism. If you sell 40 crying clowns or 40 Don Quijotes and you have the receipt to prove it, then you can use the mechanism. So then there is a problem that is worth thinking about. (…) Of course there are also very good artists, but who, for many years, have sent leftover works that they no longer wanted cluttering up their studios.[285]

These types of criticisms are echoed by many art world experts, including, for instance, by the distinguished art historian Francisco Reyes Palma who has observed that the mechanism is not capable "of obtaining first class work."[286]

While many members of the Mexican art world agree with these claims and observations, there is something discomforting about them too. After all, the *Pago en Especie* collection is meant to be a *national* art collection, so why should it be based on the judgment of a handful of art world experts rather than, for instance, on a random selection of all the artworks that are produced in Mexico? The latter would probably be a better representation of the art that is being produced across the country.[287] Who is to say what should or should not belong to the collection or what entails "first class work"? And what is implied by the claims that the artworks that make up the collection do not conform to the standards and criteria upheld by the artistic community?

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285 "Te encuentras que hay autores muy chafas, de hotel, de galerías ramplonas pero que venden mucho. Sin embargo, incluso los artistas malos tienen derecho a acogerse a él. Si vendiste 40 payasitos con lagrimita o 40 Quijotes y lo demuestras con facturas, pues puedes acogerte a él, pero entonces hay un problema que vale la pena repensar. (...) Claro que también hay creadores con mucha solidez, pero por años mandaron obras muy derivativas, que no querían ya tener en el estudio." (Anonymous. Interview on August 29, 2014).

286 "Las políticas hacendarias no son capaces de conseguir obras de primer nivel." Francisco Reyes Palma quoted in "El coleccionismo de los museos del Estado mexicano, sin rumbo" in Sonia Ávila, *Código*, 79, March 24, 2014.

287 For an argument of why random selection is a more democratic form of selection process than elections, see Bernard Manin' *XXX* (1996).

Addressing these questions and analyzing how the categories of taste and aesthetic judgments are made and by whom can shed light on how certain ideas about nationalism are construed.

The "lack of quality" of the collection certainly has to do with the fact that, as many artists openly confess, they deliberately give work that they themselves consider to be sub-par. With the growth of the global art market and as more private foundations and wealthy individuals step in to help fund the arts – and, in doing so, to validate certain type of art – the state ceases to be the dominant purveyor and guarantor of artistic value. Artists increasingly care less and less whether their work ends up becoming part of a national state-managed collection. Again, given how much prestige and power the state has lost, including in validating their work, donating a work that they consider to be their best, or even just very good, would not be a wise or rational decision. But there is more to this story.

Until 1994, a committee constituted by six to twelve members of the art world was assembled by the state every year and assigned the task of judging whether or not the artworks that were paid as tax actually corresponded to what each artist owed the state. In other words, the members of the committee had to discuss and vote on which artworks were "good enough" to be received as tax and, therefore, to become part of the nation's most precious art collection. There was a qualitative factor involved in this process, which required that the evaluators make a judgment that was not based on any pre-determined standard or criteria or on technical factors (e.g. if the painting makes good use of color, perspective, or light) but rather on the subjective judgment of the evaluators who would then, presumably, engage in a discussion before casting their vote.

At that time, artists were allowed to sell several lesser artworks and pay their taxes with a single one if that one artwork was deemed to be of equal worth as all the others and, of course,

worthy of becoming part of the collection. If the artwork that was paid by the artist was judged by the committee to be worth more than what the artist owed in taxes, then a voucher was given to the artist that she could use for future payments. On the contrary, if an artist gave an artwork that the majority of the committee judged to be unworthy or unsuitable of becoming *patrimonio* then the committee could reject it and ask the artist to either give another artwork or pay her taxes with money just like everybody else. It was not uncommon for the committee to reject the artworks that artists chose to pay with and ask them to provide alternative ones. It was also not uncommon for artists to disagree with the committee's assessment and to try to challenge it.[288]

The process certainly entailed a lot of planning and logistics and could hardly be described as "efficient." Accepting an artwork could take many months and many resources too. Accordingly, in an attempt to make the whole process run more smoothly and efficiently, in 1994, shortly before leaving office, president Carlos Salinas de Gortari – who, as was described in the introduction, implemented a series of neoliberal reforms and signed NAFTA – issued a decree which modified the operations of the mechanism. Among other things, the decree replaced the committee of experts who decided which of the bequeathed artworks to accept as tax with a tabulator that stipulated how many artworks any given artist had to pay as tax based on how many artworks she had sold that year:[289]

Number of artworks sold.....Number of artworks that should be paid
Up to 5 1
From 6 to 8 2
From 9 to 11 3
From 12 to 15 4
From 16 to 20 5
21 and up 6

288 Interview. Anonymous, August 28, 2014.

289 Article 2, Decreto Oficial. Presidente Carlos Salinas de Gortari: 10/31/1994.

The tabulator changed the selection procedure by standardizing the number of works that were paid as tax, which in itself helped to reduce the previous subjective and qualitative component that went into judging: the number of artworks paid as tax was now based on the number of artworks sold rather than on any qualitative aspect of the artworks themselves.

As a result of the implementation of the tabulator, *all* the artworks that are paid are accepted as tax regardless of their quality. The logic behind this was explained to me by the head administrator of the *Pago en Especie* area at the SAT:

> Every citizen has the obligation to pay taxes, whether or not they are talented or not at what they do for a living; the government does not make this kind of judgment but requires everyone to pay their taxes. Even if you are a mediocre baker or a lousy cobbler you still need to pay taxes for each loaf of bread that you sell or each pair of shoes you repair. So if we are allowing artists to pay their taxes with artworks why should we judge whether or not their work is good? That is something that consumers themselves are judging when they purchase their art.[290]

In short, if an artist sells her artworks it must mean that there are people out there who judge her work to be good enough to buy it. In turn, the state should collect her work. Under the new system, the main criterion for accepting an artwork as tax is its success on the market. This criteria, therefore, presumes (and helps to reproduce) the fantasy that the market – rather than a group of people who judge a work without purchasing it – can discern an artwork's "true value."[291] The tabulator also makes the process of judging the artworks much quicker (as per the opening vignette) because it is based on raw numbers, thereby standardizing judgment in ways that (for the most part) preclude the need to engage in discussions about any number of topics,

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290 Cristina López Beltrán. Interview June 11, 2014. (I did not record this conversation, so I am paraphrasing based on the notes that I took as we spoke).

291 This also presupposes that there was is one "true value" when, in fact we know by experience, that the value of any artwork tends to change according to the time and place and to person who is making the valuation.

including whether or not the artwork is beautiful, technically proficient, or pertinent to become part of a national collection.

The tabulator certainly helped to reduce the paperwork and the costs that went into returning the artworks that were rejected by the committee, making the process more efficient in this very narrow sense. Nearly all the artists whom I interviewed who pay their taxes using the *Pago en Especie* mechanism maintained that the system is an efficient one and a clear incentive to pay taxes because it is much easier to navigate than the convoluted tax system that other citizens are forced to deal with. Artist Antonio Gritón, for instance, maintains that "I don't need an accountant. I don't need to worry about my monthly tax declarations like other Mexican citizens because I can pay my taxes with my art."[292]

By facilitating tax payments, therefore, the *Pago en Especie* mechanism incentivizes artists to legalize their business and join the formal work sector which in Mexico, as is often noted, is very small – less than 40% of Mexican citizens work in the formal sector and pay taxes.[293] The "problem" of tax evasion is particularly prevalent in the art world, where most transactions take place between the artist and the collector outside the purview of the state.[294] By facilitating the use of *Pago en Especie*, the tabulator has helped to withdraw the artistic work from a broader affective economy wherein labor is construed as unproductive in light of its place

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292 Quoted in the CNTV video "Mexico government allows artists to pay taxes with art" consulted at "http://english.cntv.cn/2014/05/17/VIDE1400290433124525.shtml on January 15, 2014.

293 60% of population still works in the informal sector (*The New York Times*, September 2nd, 2015). In 2002, the federal government obtained 11.86% of the GDP in taxes. Compared to the other countries in the OCDE, Mexico is the last one on the list of obtaining taxes and the one of the last in Latin America (Elizondo Mayer-Serra, Carlos. 2006. "Democracia y gobernabilidad en México." In Aguilar Camín, Héctor (et.at) *Pensar en México*. Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes and FONCA: 54).

294 Only very rarely can one find any kind of receipt or bill. Even in recent years, despite the expansion of the big-ticket art market, many artists continue to eschew formal transactions.

outside state control. Accordingly, this economic incentive has helped to bring artistic creations more directly under the capitalist labor market.

It is difficult to know exactly how much the number of artworks that are paid as tax and of artists who participate in the system have increased since the implementation of the tabulator (and how much this increase can be attributed specifically to this change). However, according to several artists and state officials whom I interviewed and who are familiar with the mechanism and have been so for decades, the numbers have increased exponentially.[295] While in its nascent phase, this fiscal mechanism for the most part attracted artists that already had an established market and whose work was already visible among art connoisseurs, in recent years the pool of artists has increased significantly, and now includes those who are unknown to the established art world.[296] Following the implementation of the tabulator, *all* artists, including unknowns and those who have a solid career and reputation, can rest assured that *whatever* they pay will be accepted as tax and kept by the state.[297] In a sense, therefore, the tabulator allowed the inclusion of artworks donated not by professional artists (whose work usually gets bought and sold on a more "formal" art market, namely one in which art world experts, including dealers, gallerists, and collectors, participate) but also by ordinary citizens who might practice art in their free time and sell it in street markets – like the popular *Jardín del Arte* in Mexico City – or to friends and family who are unlikely to have any connection to the established "art world."

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295 While there are no records of the artworks that were accepted before the 1994 decree, some of the people that I interviewed that are familiar with the collection and have worked with this mechanism for several decades, claim that before the decree the process of selection of the artworks that were accepted and the collection that was formed as a result were much more selective.

296 Garduño, Ana. "Pago en Especie: a 55 años de un convenio patrimonializador." *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas.* Vo. XXXIV, Num. 100, 2012.

297 Many artists do not care about having their work recognized as national patrimony, others do not even know that the works that are submitted could potentially become *patrimonio*, while others can rest assured that whatever they submit will become *patrimonio* simply on the strength of their reputation and the low quality of the pool of submitted works. For well-known artists, the latter holds even if the work they submit is not representative of their work or is not particularly well regarded.

The tabulator, therefore, has incentivized more artists and ordinary folks to use the mechanism (given that the rejection rate is close to zero) and, consequently, the number of artworks that are received by the state has multiplied. But it has had the absurd effect that by seeking to become a more efficient model for creating national patrimony, it has eliminated all quality control, treating all art paid as tax as fungible, as if it was money, which is precisely what the original scheme sought to avoid.

Today, not only are artists giving work that they consider to be "bad" work but those who produce work in mass often give identical copies (or very similar reproductions) of a single artwork. The most obvious case in this regard is artist Ana Gabriela Iñiguez Snyder, who has been using the *Pago en Especie* mechanism to pay her taxes since 2008 and has since given 31 almost identical copies of her statue entitled "Borrego Cimarrón" (Bighorn Sheep) (See Figure 2.1).[298]

298 By looking at her blog, one can see that she creates oil paintings and other types of statutes as well, and yet chooses to pay her taxes with the very same statue over and over again. On an online video that she posted on her blog, one can see a plethora of oil-paintings and different types of statues. (http://parartistasycoleccionistas.blogspot.com).

Artista	Título y Ficha Técnica	Lugar de Destino	Foto
IÑIGUEZ SNYDER ANA GABRIELA	"BORREGO CIMARRÓN" 2011 18 X 10. 5 X 11 cm. Bronce	Asignado por sorteo a la Federación.	
IÑIGUEZ SNYDER ANA GABRIELA	"BORREGO CIMARRÓN" 2011 18 X 10. 5 X 11 cm. Bronce	Asignado por sorteo aEstado de Jalisco.	
IÑIGUEZ SNYDER ANA GABRIELA	"BORREGO CIMARRÓN" 2011 18 X 10. 5 X 11 cm. Bronce	Asignado por sorteo a la Federación.	
IÑIGUEZ SNYDER ANA GABRIELA	"BORREGO CIMARRÓN" 2011 18 X 10. 5 X 11 cm.	Asignado por sorteo aEstado de Sinaloa.	

Registro de Consulta Pública de Obras de Arte Recibidas como Pago en Especie (Año de Recaudacion: 2013)

Artista	Título y Ficha Técnica	Ubicación	Foto
IÑIGUEZ SNYDER ANA GABRIELA	"BORREGO CIMARRON" 2012 17 X 10 X 11.5 cm. Bronce	Entregada Asignada por sorteo a: Baja California Sur	
IÑIGUEZ SNYDER ANA GABRIELA	"BORREGO CIMARRON" 2012 17 X 10 X 11.5 cm. Bronce	Entregada Asignada por sorteo a: Oaxaca	
IÑIGUEZ SNYDER ANA GABRIELA	"BORREGO CIMARRON" 2012 17 X 10 X 11.5 cm. Bronce	Entregada Asignada por sorteo a: Federación	
IÑIGUEZ SNYDER ANA GABRIELA	"BORREGO CIMARRON" 2012 17 X 10 X 11.5 cm. Bronce	Entregada Asignada por sorteo a: Federación	

FIGURE 2.1. ONLINE INVENTORY OF SELECTED *PAGO EN ESPECIE* WORKS. Screenshot of the 2012 (image on the left) and 2013 (image on the right) online inventory of the *Pago en Especie* collection which show the work paid as tax by Ana Gabriela Iñiguez Snyder.

Numerous examples like that of Iñiguez Snyder abound, helping to fuel rumors that the valuation of artworks by the *Pago en Especie* mechanism is either an intentional joke or that, in seeking to quantify the value of art, it has done away with value altogether. As a result, many artists, particularly professional artists who tend to be represented by a gallery or a dealer, see no harm in taking advantage of a system that has its hands tied and cannot reject any of the artworks that are paid as tax, reasoning that they should not give the best if the state will accept the worst. Given that "there is always something in the closet that needs to be thrown away,"[299] for *some* the *Pago en Especie* mechanism becomes a convenient way to get rid of excess or unwanted artworks and, therefore, comes closer to a legal tax evasion system than to a tax collecting one. Warehouses like the ones described in the opening paragraph[300] become increasingly crammed,

299 Anonymous, Interview October 1, 2014.

300 The warehouse I described was a "temporary" one, but there are at least three other permanent ones which I did not get access to.

earning them the moniker "vaults of horrors" (or "*bóvedas de los horrores*"[301]) and the *Pago en Especie* mechanism itself is now often described as "a way of accumulating trash."[302]

2.3 THE SPECTACLE OF JUDGMENT

What is particularly puzzling about all this is that even as the tabulator was implemented and therefore all the artworks that are paid as tax are accepted by the state, the committee of experts was kept in place. Why was this the case? There are several answers to this question. The answer provided by the state, as stipulated in the decree, was that following the implementation of the tabulator *all* artworks would be accepted as tax but only those selected by the committee would acquire the title of *patrimonio nacional.* Objects that are considered *patrimonio* are understood to be so because of their alleged "originality, uniqueness, and authenticity."[303] Once an object acquires the status of *patrimonio* it is meant to be preserved, publicly displayed, and deployed as part of a state-led strategy to disseminate nationalism.[304] In Mexico, discourses of *patrimonio* have been enormously influential and are associated with the post-revolutionary *Priísta* state – and particularly with the ability of the ruling party to safeguard the continuation of the Mexican nation through time[305] – and with anti-market claims that draw their force from the notion of *public* good.[306] More concretely, labeling an object *patrimonio* implies that it acquires

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301 Anonymous, Interview October 1, 2014.

302 Anonymous, Interview August 8, 2014.

303 But despite the notion of originality and authenticity, objects that are considered patrimonio are still subject to mobility, repetition and replication. (Rozental 2014, 334-336). For a historical account of the different laws in Mexico that have dealt with the concept of patrimonio, see Cottom, Bolfy. 2004. *Nación, Patrimonio Cultural y Legislación: los debates parlamentarios yla construcción del marco jurídico federal sobre monumentos en México, siglo xx.* México: Porrua.

304 In 2012, for instance, fourteen exhibitions were curated which circulated around the country and also travelled to China, Germany and Morocco. (Public Interview of Architect San Cristóbal Larrea, head of the *Pago en Especie* collection).

305 The concept of national patrimony was deployed in the Mexican Constitution as early as 1917.

306 Mexican national patrimony includes among others the following: collectively organized land under the *ejido* program, the system of collectively organized land tenure instituted following the revolution; subsoil and resources including mineral and petrochemical resources, and

a distinct legal category that prohibits it from being sold to a private individual or taken out of the country without the explicit permission of the state.[307]

The decree issued by Salinas stipulated that the state would keep all the artworks paid as tax but only those that were considered "good enough" by art world experts would officially become *patrimonio*.[308] The rest would be used for purposes like decorating public offices and buildings because, as one of the SHCP bureaucrats explained to me: "Instead of spending resources on adorning offices, we can simply use the leftovers of what is obtained through the tax mechanism, even if these artworks are kind of crappy."[309]

While in theory, labeling an artworks as *patrimonio* guarantees that it will receive more protection or be more widely circulated, this is not always the case.[310] In fact, *all* artworks that are received as tax (not simply those that are deemed to be *patrimonio*) are randomly divided

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cultural properties that objects of artistic, historical, or cultural importance to the nation. Unlike the type of nationalization brought about through a threat of foreign intervention, the cultural patrimony legislation was created with a more internal focus in mind, namely to protect it from corrupt politicians and to limit the power of the state or local governments (Ferry, Elizabeth. 2005. *Not ours alone*: *Patrimony, Value and Collectivity in Contemporary Mexico*. New York: Columbia University Press: 200).

307 The Federal Law of Monuments and Archeological, Historical, and Artistic Zones. Preservation is reconcilable with market logics because something can be preserved in order to be sold. As Jaumea Franquesa convincingly argues, it is often by "denying the market that heritage plays a role in it, a connection concealed by the categorical repulsion through which it can be constructed as a legitimate autonomous sphere containing discrete objects." Heritage, therefore, is only a "friendly barrier" to the market. (Franquesa, Jaumea. 2013. "On keeping and selling. The Political Economy of Heritage Making in Contemporary Spain." *Current Anthropology*. Vol.54 (No. 3, June): 348.)

308 What tends to be *patrimonio* ranges between 5 to 12% of all the artworks that are bestowed. Cristina López-Beltrán. Interview, June 11, 2014.

309 Interview. Anonymous. August 27, 2014. The leftover artworks can also, in theory, be sold for cash at auctions organized by the SHCP. The money obtained can then be used to cover the costs of exhibiting, circulating, and preserving the artworks that are categorized as *patrimonio*. This legal proviso, however, has never been carried out. When I enquired as to why no auctions had ever been organized, I was told that no government entity wanted to be responsible for overseeing them. Putting a price on an artwork could also evidence the fact that many artists are paying much less than what they owe. Another employee of the mechanism confessed, is that is better for a greater number of municipalities to receive artworks even if the quality of these is not very good. "Bajan el criterio de calidad pues es major que los estados se queden con algo aunque sea malón que con nada…" (Anonymous, Interview, September 3, 2014.)

310 Anonymous. Interview. June 11, 2014. For instance, according to the inventory of the artworks which includes a list of the artists that have participated in *Pago en Especie* and the whereabouts of the artworks that they donated, does not distinguish the artworks that were selected as *patrimonio*. This catalogue of names and works can be publicly consulted online through the webpage of the SAT. http://www.sat.gob.mx/fichas_tematicas/pago_especie/Paginas/default.aspx

into three parts: one third is shipped to artistic institutions across the country; one third to the municipal offices; and the last third is kept in Mexico City at the museum that belongs to the Ministry of Finance and Public Treasury (SHCP) which was created specifically to house part of the *Pago en Especie* collection. That two-thirds of the artworks that are received as tax will end up somewhere outside the capital city is a way to help decentralize the collection and to try to ensure the artworks reach a wider public. This measure – which was also implemented by Salinas through the 1994 decree – does not, however, take into account the specific needs and wants of local communities but also the sheer lack of institutions that are equipped to receive and protect some of the artworks that are shipped to these places. Even if artworks are distributed more or less equally across the territory, artistic and cultural institutions are not.[311] Many of the places where the artworks are sent to do not have the infrastructure to exhibit, store, and preserve them, let alone the budget to hire curators or educators that might help to activate the works. Indeed, many of the artworks that are "generously" distributed using the *Pago en Especie* mechanism end up becoming a burden to the local institutions, which are already operating on constrained budgets and forced to spend scarce resources to care for random objects: "Many of the works they receive through the *Pago en Especie* mechanism," a curator familiar with the mechanism told me, "are worth less than what it costs to preserve them. Not only are institutions receiving dreadful things, but on top of this, it can be quite expensive to take care of them."[312]

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311 Unsurprisingly, most museums and cultural centers are located in the capital city. In 2012, most of the 1250 museums in the country (100 thousand people per museum) were located in the country's capital, Jalisco and Estado de México; there are at least four museums in each of the thirty states' capitals. But most cities and towns do not have a single museum. See Morales, Luis Gerardo. 2012. "Las búsquedas del sentido en las experiencias de 'lo sensible.'" In *Cartografía de la Prácticas Expositivas*. coord. Mónica López Velarde and Víctor Noxpango. Coordinación Nacional de Artes Plásticas and INBAL: Mexico City: 28; and n.a. 2003. Atlas de Infraestructura Cultural de México. Mexico, CNCA.

312 Anonymous. May 29, 2014. A similar statement was made by Anonymous. August 27, 2014. Cristina López-Beltrán, Interview June 11, 2014.

Even when an artwork is labeled as *patrimonio*, members of the art world continue to worry that it can be used as a decoration in a government building that is not adapted to house fragile works of art and can therefore be hurt by being exposed to sunlight, humidity, and dust. Rumors and complaints abound among members of the art world about seeing famous paintings hung on the walls and corridors of government buildings completely unsupervised, vulnerable to "be stained by the greasy hands of a bureaucrat,"[313] or damaged by a passerby carelessly bumping into them. Another common fear is that even an artwork that is taken care of by an official art institution will rarely see the light of day. These rumors are not entirely unfounded. Diego Rivera's famous "Lucila y los Judas" (1954), the first work to become part of the *Pago en Especie* collection, has only been exhibited a handful of times.[314]

Committee members are well aware of this situation: they understand that deciding whether or not an artwork is *patrimonio* will not necessarily have clear (or any) tangible implications on the artwork, including saving it from a premature death or from rotting away in a forgotten warehouse. Moreover, because they are forced to appraise thousands of artworks in the span of a few workdays – in 2014, the year I attended the committee session, the evaluation of over 1,650 artworks took place in the span of approximately six hours – judging all of them becomes a dreary (and impossible) process: there are too many options, and, in the eyes of the committee members, too many evidently *bad* ones. Indeed, as per the opening vignette, the process of judging which artworks will become *patrimonio* is a deflating spectacle or performance of sorts.

313 Anonymous. Interview September 21, 2014.

314 Anonymous. Interview July 9, 2014.

When I first arrived at the committee's session in 2014, I was hoping to witness first-hand a discussion about beauty that would perhaps illustrate Kant's famous claims on aesthetic judgment or, at least, crystallize what exactly the current national imaginaries were that were being put forward by art world experts and government officials. I was quickly disappointed by what I witnessed: The committee members sit in a room for hours at a time and wait for the artworks to be displayed in front of them by the staff hired for the occasion. Before voting in favor or against an artwork becoming national patrimony, they are welcome to comment on and discuss why it is worthy of being labeled as such.[315] But discussion seldom takes place be it about beauty or the meaning of the nation, and committee members rarely disagree about the "quality" of the works and, as per the opening vignette, concur almost immediately that most of the works are so "bad" that no discussion is necessary.[316] A generalized consensus prevails, one that precedes (and precludes) any form of argumentation or persuasion about why certain artworks should be chosen over others.

But it was not simply that committee members seem to share similar views but also that they presume that everyone in the world would agree with their judgment. As a committee member flippantly told me during an interview: "Many members of the *Pago en Especie* committee, and particularly us curators, are a mix between Hitler and Madonna, fascist divas, who want everyone to think like us."[317] This expression comically echoes Kant's famous claim

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315 All the information that they have is a list with the artists' names and the titles of the artworks that they are donating which they can consult as the artworks are presented.

316 As one of the members of the committee told me, "There is no need to discuss because it is very clear! The 'crying clown' [literally referring to one of the paintings that depicted a crying clown] does not interest us because it responds to an activity of leisure and a different level of circulation that has nothing to do with the meaning of the nation and the creation of identities and communities." Anonymous. Interview. August 29, 2014. In those rare cases that a discussion takes place, the judgments that are made rarely follow any kind of persuasive argument, and committee members are seldom called upon to defend their positions.

317 "El problema es que los curadores somos una mezcla entre Hitler y Madonna, somos unas divas fascistas (laughter), queremos que piensen como nosotros." (Anonymous, Interview, August 28, 2014.)

that when we judge something as beautiful we demand that *everyone* else agree with our judgment.[318] While scholars have yet to settle on a definite interpretation of what exactly Kant meant with his claim on the universal validity of aesthetic judgments, most would contend that he is not referring to an agreement of private feelings but rather an agreement based on something shared, on a common sense (or *sensus communis*): "One solicits assent from everyone else because one has ground for it that is common to all."[319] Or, as Linda Zerilli eloquently explains,

> Common sense is for Kant a sensuous capacity, inner relation, or "disposition of the cognitive powers" (understanding and imagination) that must be presupposed and be capable of being "universally communicated, for otherwise they would have no correspondence with the object; they would all be a merely subjective play of the powers of representation (...)."[320]

But at the *Pago en Especie* committee what this "shared feeling" entailed was never explicitly communicated.

Rather than a lesson on how matters of taste are discussed in ways that might reveal a certain common ground, the sessions seemed to confirm Bourdieu's findings in *Distinction,* namely how cultural and economic capital determines one's tastes. Indeed, it is not unusual for the artworks that get selected as *patrimonio nacional* to be those that are produced by artists who the committee members either already know or have heard of. Even if the artwork in question is not representative of an artist's overall work and is judged by the committee members to be a minor work among her general oeuvre, the chances that it will be selected are very high. In a

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318 [When] we call the object beautiful, we believe ourselves to be speaking with a universal voice, and lay claim to the concurrence of everyone. (…) The judgement of taste itself does not postulate the agreement of every one (…); it only imputes this agreement to everyone, as an instance of the rule in respect of which it looks for confirmation, not from concepts, but from the concurrence of others (Kant 1999, 172).
319 Kant quoted in Zerilli, Linda. 2015. *A Democratic Theory of Judgment.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 64.
320 Zerill 2015, 61.

sense, an artist's name becomes her brand. The flipside is that if no one in the jury has ever heard of the artist, the chances that her work will be selected are slim. For its part, the aim and meaning of a national art collection, also remained unaddressed before, during, and after the committee sessions. There is no blueprint for what a national art collection should be or guidelines that might help the committee members determine what an artwork worthy of being *patrimonio* should entail.[321]

Given the label of *patrimonio*, at least in this case, becomes to a large extent an empty label, one has to wonder why the members of the art world continue to agree to participate as members of the committee.[322] Certainly it is not for the paycheck given that they are only paid a very small and symbolic amount for their work.[323] According to my conversations with several members of the committee, they insist on participating because – despite critiquing the state and claiming not to be nationalists – many of them continue to feel proud that they have been chosen to select the artworks that will allegedly come to represent Mexico.[324] But another very important reason for joining the committee is because of the opportunity to meet up with friends and to network and discuss future work plans with colleagues. At any one time, the dozen or so members of the committee can include curators, museum directors, art critics, cultural

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321 The only stipulation that was added to the law was that in order for a committee to label an artwork as patrimonio, the artwork should be "representative" of the artist's oeuvre. (Article 5, Decreto Oficial Presidente Carlos Salinas de Gortari: 10/31/1994). Artworks are considered to be "representative" if they are similar in "size and technique" to those that were sold by the artist in the previous three years. (Article 2, Decreto Oficial Presidente Carlos Salinas de Gortari: 1994). I quickly learned, however, that this "representativeness" clause is rarely observed, for reasons as prosaic as that the committee members have no way of knowing what the career of any given artist is; artists are not even asked to turn in a portfolio of their work. This requisite, moreover, presupposes that artists do not innovate or change their style from one year to the next, when, in fact, many of them change their style constantly (Galenson, David. 2009. *Conceptual Revolutions in Twentieth Century Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

322 The only person that has resigned from the *Pago en Especie* committee was a curator and academic who was appalled not by the elitism of the committee, but by the way the artworks were delivered. Anonymous. Interview August 28, 2014.

323 A couple thousand pesos (a couple hundred dollars).

324 This was confirmed to me by several of my interviewees.

administrators, art professors, and, despite possible conflicts of interest, artists themselves.[325] Most of the members of the committee come from Mexico City and share a similar class and education background, which is hardly surprising given that everybody who is anybody in the Mexican art world knows everybody else.[326] This, once again, helps explain the similarities in their tastes and why the commonalities in their views of the artworks seem to precede the act of judgment itself rather than arising from it.[327]

While the *Pago en Especie* committee is selecting the artworks that will become part of a *national* collection, namely a collection that is supposed to represent the national population, ordinary citizens are completely shielded from the selection process. Not only are they not part of the committee, but the latter is in no way responsive to them given that everything that takes place in these sessions happens behind closed doors. The members of the committee are not publicly elected but rather selected by outgoing members, namely other members of the art world who tend to be their friends or colleagues.[328]

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325 In its earlier years, artists were banned from being part of the committee, but this tendency has changed in recent years and the number of artists has increased to the point that they constitute the largest group within the committee (including those who, despite the possible conflict of interest, directly benefit from the *Pago en Especie* mechanism)

326 But despite these similarities between the committee members, their distinctions – between certain cliques, but mostly between fame and trajectory – can also trigger power dynamics. Some of the members are better-known than others and their voice seems to weigh much more than that of younger, less-known artists. While I did not witness this myself, I was told by several informants that there have been occasions in the past in which decisions made by the committee as a whole have been overturned by the more powerful committee members. They would vouch in favor of an artwork because the artists had worked for the artists (ayudante), even when the committee had determined the work was not worthy of becoming CPN.

327 As we have learned from scholars like Pierre Bourdieu, it is not unusual for members with similar cultural capital to also share similar tastes. (Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction.* (trans. Richard Nice), Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Routledge & Kegan Paul). For a critique of Bourdieu's assumptions and conclusions, see Chapter Four of this dissertation.

328 The day that I attended the session there were fourteen people in the room, and while not all of them were authorized to vote, everyone was allowed to voice their opinion. The number of committee members which usually ranges from five to eight people, not counting the representatives from the Ministry of Finance and the fiscal authorities who are also present during the committee session but are not entitled to vote. When the tax mechanism was first implemented, the General Director of Cultural Promotion and the Cultural Collection of the Ministry of Finance and Public Treasury (SHCP) directly appointed the committee members and their tenure usually lasted four or five years. From 1977 to 2003, Juana Inés Abreu was the person responsible for coordinating and organizing all the activities related to cultural and editorial promotion and diffusion of the SHCP. She was superseded by José Ramón Sancristóbal.

It is not that the committee members were oblivious to the fact that they represented a very specific and small segment of the population. In fact, during the committee session that I attended, they voiced their concern about how the mechanism privileges a certain niche of Mexico City's artistic community and complained about how the state refused to spend resources to bring people from outside into the capital city to help constitute the committee.[329] At one point, they even imagined out loud what the opinion of people in other parts of the country far away from the urban centers might be and how it would likely differ from theirs. But this exercise in imagination did not last very long, as they quickly recognized that they simply could not know what type of art people across the country might identify with. Indeed, they seemed to come to the same conclusion as Iris Marion Young, who has observed that dialogue between hypothetical interlocutors will rarely replace that between real ones.[330]

2.4 A NEOLIBERAL ART COLLECTION

As numerous scholars have argued, the difficulties of defining neoliberalism often lie in the fact that while it is "structurally oriented," meaning that there is a pattern to neoliberal processes, it is also "heavily contextualized" because each place has unique institutional landscapes and policy regimes that produce different kinds of neoliberalism.[331] In most cases,

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329 There have been some years in which there are two committees rather than one. Usually the second committee meets in either Guadalajara or Oaxaca. The last time this happened was in 2004. There were a few occasions in which a second committee was constituted outside of Mexico City (once in Guadalajara and Oaxaca) but this was not a trend that has continued. While some of the members of the committee have worked in other parts of the country and with communities from different backgrounds and social classes, their interactions with them were rarely about art collections and never about *Pago en Especie*.

330 Marion Young claimed that people "are able to take account of the perspective of others because they have heard those perspectives expressed," and not because "the person judging imagines what the world looks like form other perspectives." (Young, Iris Marion. *Inclusion and Democracy.* Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2000).

331 I use the term neoliberalism interchangeably with "neoliberalization" to indicate an approach that is reflexively attentive to the "variegated" character of neoliberal processes, namely to neoliberalism's "*constitutively* incomplete, experimental and ultimately polymorphic character."

however, neoliberalism usually entails supporting the privatization of public services, free-market norms, trade liberalization, and financial deregulation, as well as adopting the use of market language, promoting the commodification in all kinds of realms of life, and prioritizing technical and efficient solutions to social problems.[332] In order to move towards these goals, neoliberal ideology is seen as privileging (and relying on) technical expertise rather than on deliberation and judgment: one of its central features is its "hostility to the ambiguity of political discourse, and a commitment to the explicitness and transparency of quantitative, economic indicators, of which the market price system is the model."[333]

In a sense, therefore, the *Pago en Especie* tabulator is a textbook example of a neoliberal tool. It replaced the discussion and subjective judgment of the committee with ostensible market truths.[334] In doing so, the decision-making power of the art experts that constituted the committee was significantly reduced. First, their power to reject artworks given as tax was taken away. Secondly, in spite of continuing to be summoned to decide which artworks become national patrimony, this task is rendered almost mechanical.

While one can interpret this as a case in which expertise (that of the members of the art world) is replaced by the market, a different interpretation would be that one set of experts is replaced by another. Expert knowledge, political scientist Timothy Mitchell maintains, is "a

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Brenner, Neil, Jamie Peck, and Nik Theodore. 2010. "Variegated neoliberalization: geographies, modalities, pathways," *Global Networks*. 10, 2: 217.

332 Brown 2015; Harvey, David. 2005. *A brief history of neoliberalism,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

333 William Davies quote in Collier, Stephen. 2016. "Neoliberalism and Rule by Experts." Under review as a chapter in Assembling Neoliberalism, edited by Wendy Larner and Vaughan Higgins: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/296844983_Neoliberalism_and_Rule_by_Experts (consulted April 28, 2019).

334 See Rose, Nikolas. 1999. *Powers of Freedom.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. Higgins and Larner conceptualize standards as "technologies" for the governing of conduct, and may be defined as assemblages of forms of practical knowledge… traversed and transacted by aspirations to achieve certain outcomes in terms of the conduct of the governed." (Higgins, V. and W. Larner. 2010. *Calculating Social*. Palgrave Macmillan. United Kingdom: 17).

reformatted knowledge: information that has been translated, moved, shrunk, simplified, redrawn."[335] Different types of expertise compete with one another all the time. In the case of the *Pago en Especie* mechanism we see a tabulator, which is itself an instantiation of the power of a group of experts who push for market-oriented reforms (namely technocrat economists who work at the SHCP and the SAT), replace the power of another group of experts, namely members of the artistic community.

In Mexico, many of the neoliberalization processes that were implemented at the state level in the 1980s and 1990s were a direct result of the pressures exerted by very specific groups of experts, most of whom were Mexican economists trained in US ivy-league schools.[336] Indeed, transformations like the *Pago en Especie* mechanism's tabulator are not outliers in this move towards quantification and standardization. Other areas, including higher education, have been pushed in a similar direction. Most universities in Mexico, for instance, pay professors a relatively low salary that increases based on their "productivity." The latter is measured by the *number* of courses they teach, students they supervise, and publications. As sociologist Fernando Escalante has shown, this had led to an overproduction of students who graduate and also to an increase in the number of publications, many of which are either the result of rushed or rash research, or virtual carbon copies of previous publications.[337]

In short, expert knowledge of any kind not only helps to simplify, report, and picture reality, but, in doing so, transforms it.[338] Just like the quantity and quality of academic publications has changed, so did the *Pago en Especie* collection: it increased in numbers and

335 Mitchell, Timothy. 2002. *The Rule of Experts*. California: University of California Press: 34, 116, and 118.

336 Babb 2004.

337 Escalante Gonzalbo, Fernando. 2015. *Historia Mínima del Neoliberalismo*. Mexico: Colegio de México.

338 Mitchell, 2002.

became more plural and diverse. But what this diversity signaled, in terms of who or what these aesthetic objects represented, remained unclear.

Art historian Luis Rius described the *Pago en Especie* collection as "perhaps the most eclectic collection out there."[339] This opinion is seconded by other art critics and curators who have described the collection as "*de chile, de dulce y de manteca,*" a colloquial expression that literally means "chile, candy, and lard" but refers to any group of things that, despite being thrown together, are so diverse that they become impossible to classify as a cohesive group (See Figure 3.2).[340] A way to understand just how diverse the collection has become is by looking at the exhibitions that have been organized with artworks that have been bequeathed as tax. In 2014, the Cancillería Museum held an exhibition entitled *Horizontes* with work that belongs to *Pago en Especie* collection.[341] The opening statement of the exhibition's catalogue attempted to give a unitary narrative to this boundless eclecticism, leading to the almost comical claim that "This exhibition gathers a diversity of artistic currents that together constitute a constellation of discourses and sensibilities. It includes the work of over thirty artists, all of whom are widely renowned, and who belong to different cohorts, but whose meeting point is Mexico's contemporary artistic context."[342] Lacking anything else to anchor it, the narrative thread holding together Mexico's national collection of contemporary art becomes simply the fact that it is a collection of Mexican contemporary art.

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339 Rius 1999, 30.

340 Interview. Anonymous. EGK

341 This museum belongs to the Department of Foreign Relations, and its collection is a product of the *Pago en Especie* decree.

342 "La exposición reúne una diversidad de propuestas artísticas que conforman una constelación de discursos y sensibilidades. Incorpora a más de una treintena de autores de reconocida trayectoria, pertenecientes a varias generaciones cuyo punto de encuentro es el contexto contemporáneo del arte en México." (Erik Castillo, "Horizontes" exhibition pamphlet, shown at the Museo de la Cancillería, August to October 2014.)

Registro de Consulta Pública de Obras de Arte Recibidas como Pago en Especie (Año de Recaudacion: 2013)

Artista	Título y Ficha Técnica	Ubicación	Foto
GASTELUM GARCÍA JUAN FRANCISCO	"VANIDAD" 2012 40.5 X 29 X 4.2 c Acrílico	Entregada Asignada por sorteo a: Zacatecas	
GENERALI PIFFARETTI EMANUELA GABRIELLA	"AIRE TRANSPARENTE" 2011 100 X 120 cm. Óleo/tela	Entregada Asignada por sorteo a: Puebla	
GOMEZ LÓPEZ NORMA ANGELICA	"PREPARANDO UN SUEÑO" 2012 90 X 60 cm. Óleo sobre lienzo	Entregada Asignada por sorteo a: Jalisco	
GÓMEZ MACIAS GUILLERMO	"PARA SUBIR AL CIELO" 2012 61 X 22 X 11 cm. Bronce a la cera perdida	Entregada Asignada por sorteo a: Federación	

FIGURE 2.2 SELECTED PAGO EN ESPECIE WORKS. Screenshot of the *Pago en Especie* public inventory of the 2013 fiscal year.

Similarly, the exhibit *Arte para la Nación* ("Art for the Nation"), curated by art historian James Oles in 2016 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the tax mechanism's inception and held at the *Palacio Nacional* (the seat of the federal executive), was described by Oles himself as "undoubtedly one of the most heterogeneous exhibitions of Mexican modern and contemporary art ever presented" given that "the thousands of objects that have come to constitute national collections through the *Pago en Especie* mechanism share almost no trait except their link to

Mexico, which in some cases is only tangential."[343] He added that given the "ambiguous nature of the collection's profile, which is based on the artists' decisions rather than on a univocal curatorial criteria, there are numerous absences and gaps." [344] In other words, despite the diversity of the collection, not only was it missing artworks from important artists, but even their link to Mexico (however defined), was "tangential." Oles chose 208 works by 104 artists, all of whom ended up being famous or relatively well-known artists who have exhibited in museums and galleries in the past; no "unfamiliar" name made the last cut.

This is an example of how, even as the eclecticism of the collection is often interpreted as a welcome trait because it is a far cry from any type of heavy-handed political narrative or any kind of ostentatious display of state power like the *Coloso* discussed in the previous chapter, at the end of the day, it is not unusual for this eclecticism to get selected out.[345] Other than its title, therefore, *Arte para la Nación* had no direct patriotic message, was in no way related to any kind of broader national narrative, and avoided making any kind of claims about being all-encompassing. Indeed, the exhibit could not have been more different than Rivera's didactic, linear and transparently political murals that adorned the walls of the *Palacio Nacional* that surrounded the *Arte para la Nación* exhibit rooms. Given that this show included the *crème de la*

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343 "Los miles de objetos que han llegado a formar parte de colecciones nacionales a travex de Pago en Especie no comparten casi ningun rasgo salvo su vincula con Mexico, en ocasiones solo tangencial, y con el programa especifico que le confirio su actual estatus legal." (Oles, James. 2016. "Selección/Satisfacción" in *Arte para la Nación*. Mexico: SHCP.) María Fernanda Casanueva de Diego, the senior officer of the SHCP, underscored the eclectic character of the exhibition and maintained that its main characteristic was the "heterogeneity of the proposals and language of the artists." Quoted in the catalogue *Arte para la Nación*, 2016.

344 "Se trata inequivocamente de una de las exposciones mas heterogeneas del arte mexicano modern y contemporaneo jamas presentadas, aunque hay que admitir que, debido a la ambigua naturaleza del perfil de la coleccion, sustentada más por decisions de los artistas que la componen que por un crtierio curatorial unívoco, existen numerosas ausencias y vacíos, algunos más lamentables que otros." (Oles, 2016)

345 The curatorial process behind *Arte para la Nación* was itself telling. Given the enormous number of artworks that Oles would have had to examine in order to select a few for the exhibit – a task that he described as nearly impossible – he hired a research team that was commissioned to depurate the collection: all the artworks that were given by artists who had no web-page, who were not represented by a gallery, or who had never been mentioned in a blog or newspaper were discarded *a priori* from being included in the exhibit. This reduced the number of artworks that Oles had to examine to the "modicum" number of 375.

crème of the collection, I read the exhibit as a subtle rebuttal of the vociferous criticisms of the artistic merit of the collection. And yet, by deliberately excluding the lesser-known artists, whose work is precisely the distinguishing trait of *Pago en Especie*, the exhibit effaced the collection's most unique trait even as it "succeeded" as an exhibit of "first-class" Mexican art. The point, however, is that even if it had included lesser-known artists, how the exhibit (and collection) represented the nation and why it was worth spending resources to protect these artworks as *patrimonio* remained a mystery. Examples like *Arte para la Nación* help to affirm claims like that made by Rafael Pérez y Pérez, the sub-director of the Museum of the SHCP, who maintained that the *Pago en Especie* collection "cannot be properly called a collection given that it is simply a group of artworks that follow no coherent logic."[346]

2.5 *Pago en Especie*, a collection that isn't

The underlying assumption behind the implementation of the tabulator was that it would reduce expertise (and, therefore, elitism) and increase the power of the people. The collection would now mirror the market (the decision of consumers) rather than the taste of a select few. And yet, such eclecticism was based on an understanding of democracy not as giving more power to the people to deliberate and build worlds in common but rather as giving individuals more power as a disaggregated collection of self-interested consumers.

Expertise inevitably involves inequality because there are barriers to inclusion to expertise. What I witnessed at the committee session were experts who were summoned because of their expert skills but could not put these to use for several reasons. Not only were they forced

346 Interview. August 28. 2014.

to evaluate a huge amount of work, most of which was not produced in conversation with a canon of art history, but also because it was unclear what kind of state or nation project they were meant to create a collection for, or who they were allegedly representing when judging, voting, and deciding which artworks became *patrimonio.*

Curtailing the power of these experts was expressed as a democratic move because decisions would depend on consumers' choices. The solution was to limit the power of these experts and to empower the population as a whole, i.e. the consumers. However, ideas on how to make expertise more democratic or how to integrate expertise into a wider democratic system – including, for instance, how expertise can become open to public judgment, scrutiny, criticism, and judgment[347] – were never discussed. There was no effort to inform the public or to empower democratic collective action, or even any kind of narrative or justification of the kind of community that was allegedly being summoned through the collection. If anything, the *Pago en Especie* story reflects the lack of interest on the part of members of the art world to work together with the state and to an impossibility of building any kind of collective or communal narratives through a collection. For their part, government officials also seem increasingly disinterested in working together with the artistic community.

Collections, as Mieke Bal reminds us, are a way of telling stories because they imply that facts are being put on the table and told in a specific way. Or as Susan Stewart argues, collections provide the fiction of completion.[348] Classification precedes any collection which can only come into existence precisely when a series of haphazard objects or works of art becomes a meaningful sequence. The stories that are created in response to (or in conjunction with) building

347 Moore, Alfred. 2017. *Critical Elitism.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge: 6.

348 Stewart, Susan. 1993. *On Longing.* Duke University Press: Durham and London.

a collection can create very different kinds of worlds in common that can bring people together but also exclude them. These stories – be it about the nation or more local or global communities – often take a life of their own and shape people's imaginaries about themselves, their communities, and their future. Accordingly, there is much potential (and risk) in how these stories and narratives get build but the example of the *Pago en Especie* collection was that there was no story at all.

The *Pago en Especie* collection illustrates a piece-meal creation of nationalism which is precisely the opposite of the way the Mexican government has historically gone about constructing what, on many levels, became a very coherent narrative of the nation. The collection' eclecticism and the fact that it lacks all the basic traits of a collection could be interpreted as being somewhat productive and equalizing. It evidences how both the power of the state and of the art world experts is so severely constrained when it comes to deciding what artworks become national patrimony that no top-down vision is being imposed to decide what becomes *patrimonio.* It also reveals the state's decreasing power to enunciate clear national narratives that might help hail people into a common national project. In fact, it is unclear who "the people" are in this context. It also illustrates how the type of collaboration that characterized the state and the artistic community and that led to the construction of national aesthetic symbols or, at the very least, that incentivized artists to pay top quality artworks as tax, is long gone. If anything, therefore, rather than getting a plurality of artists to participate in a project of nation-making, the collection instead fosters the conditions under which artists are encouraged to "free-ride" as individual entrepreneurs, and rather than engaging them in democratic forms of participation fosters their indifference towards participation in projects that might lead towards the creation of common worlds.

Not surprisingly, not only are the members of the committee frustrated and even cynical about the whole endeavor, but it is they who help spread the rumor (by no means unfounded) that the *Pago en Especie* mechanism is a joke. A committee member who has participated in the process for several years described this tax mechanism as an example of the "simulacra of the State" because "it is all a joke, the whole thing is so absurd." [349] After many years of working for the state, this curator now works for the private sector. His trajectory (and his fatigue) are not uncommon and help reproduce the view (also perhaps not entirely unfounded) that the state works in absurd ways. Working for the private sector increasingly becomes a more coveted option. Adding insult to injury, the mechanism does contain a provision for feedback from its disempowered experts. During the session that I attended there was an allotted time for the participants to make comments and suggestions about the collection and the selection process, and the committee members did not hesitate to voice their complaints about the mechanism and make suggestions about how to improve it. [350] And yet, "nothing happens."[351]

2.6 Conclusion: Museums are the new Nation

In addition to adding the tabulator, another change made by then-President Salinas' 1994 decree was to allow artists to donate the artworks that they pay as taxes directly to public museums. In other words, rather than giving the artworks to the tax authorities, artists could now negotiate with any public museum and donate their works directly to these spaces without

349 Anonymous. Interview. August 30, 2014.

350 But despite claiming that they were free to talk, all the people that I interviewed asked for anonymity. They did not want to be identified as a critical voice even when they claimed that much of what they were telling me and complaining about they had publicly voiced to the corresponding authorities.

351 Anonymous. Interview July 9, 2014.

consulting the federal government.[352] This clause is very useful for museums, particularly due to their historical lack of collections and to the fact that they are faced with ever-increasing budget cuts. Indeed, while the state continues to control the most important museums and exhibition venues in the country – over 60% of the museums in Mexico continue to be owned by the state (be it by a federal, local, or municipal authority)[353] – many of these spaces were built without a permanent collection that they could house and exhibit. In the words of curator Cuauhtémoc Medina, "the public has been habituated to associate museums with exhibit rooms. Far from serving as reservoirs of memory, Mexican museums have, for the longest time, adopted the politics of representing the volatility of the ephemeral."[354]

Accordingly, being able to acquire works through the *Pago en Especie* mechanism can become extremely helpful for these institutions. The former director of the Tamayo Museum, Ramiro Martínez, maintained that, for financial reasons, "public museums have very high restrictions when it comes to renewing their collections. (…) Here, at the Tamayo Museum, we do not acquire artworks." Given this situation, he added, the *Pago en Especie* fiscal mechanism "is a great way to increase museum collections."[355]

Although acquiring works through the *Pago en Especie* mechanism became a possibility since 1994, it was not until the late 2000s that both museums and artists began to take advantage

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352 Vivian Goristein, head of the Modern Art Department at *Casa Mortons,* Mexico's most prestigious auction house, also confirmed that museums in Mexico seldom buy anything from the auctions because they lack the budget. Interview. July 30, 2014.

353 22% of museums that are managed by the state depend on institutions coordinated by the state through the CONACULTA (which oversees the INBA and INAH). (Morales, Luis Gerardo. 2012. "Las búsquedas del sentido en las experiencias de 'lo sensible.'" In López Velarde, Mónica and Noxpango, Víctor (coord.), *Cartografía de la Prácticas Expositivas*, Coordinacion Nacional de Artes Plásticas and INBA: Mexico City: 28-29).

354 Medina, Cuauhtémoc. 2002. "Pseudomuseos: Sobre el Museo Salinas y Otros Ejemplos de La Museografía Parasitaria en México." Conference presented on April 27, 2002 at the Centro Nacional de las Artes in Mexico City.

355 "Por cuestiones financieras, los museos públicos tienen muchas restricciones para actualizar sus colecciones, por eso creo que ésta [mechanisma Pago en Especie] es una forma muy buena de acrecentarlas. Aquí en el Tamayo no adquirimos obras." (Ramiro Martínez quoted in Dora Luz Haw, "Benefician a Museos con Pago en Especie," Reforma, August 28, 2007).

of it. The numbers are quite revealing: while in 2010 only 89 works were donated directly to museums, by 2014 this number had risen fourfold to 361.[356] That it is only recently that museums have begun to actively use the *Pago en Especie* mechanism to acquire work reflects the growing professionalization of museum workers who are tasked with finding creative ways to increase their collections in the face of restricted budgets.

The increase in the use of this clause also indicates that artists are more reluctant to directly trust the state.[357] Hence, while the museums to which they entrust their work belong to the state – which, again, problematizes the idea of the state as a monolithic entity – artists tend to know the people who work in these institutions. It is these particular individuals, rather than the "state" in the abstract (or, the bureaucrats who work for the Ministry of Treasury and whom the artists most likely have never met), who become accountable to the artists. In other words, the mechanisms by which art becomes *patrimonio* increasingly depend on individualized connections based on the social capital of both the artist and on specific curators and museum directors and this social capital is decreasingly bestowed by the state but rather, as I will show in the following chapters, by private capital. Indeed, paying their taxes directly to the museums requires that the artist in question be well-known in the art milieu and that the museum curators and directors who decide which artworks will be selected find the work worthy of being preserved in their museum.

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356 In 2011: 126; in 2012: 258; in 2013: 170. This data was provided to me by a SAT official working for the *Pago en Especie* mechanism.
357 "Sienten amor-odio por pago en especie" by Bautista Virgina, *Reforma*, 27 July 1998; Carmen Álvarez, "Ven anticonstitucional el pago en especie," in *Reforma*, Mexico City, January 24, 2002. Alvarez, Carmen. *Reforma* [Mexico City] 12 Oct 2002 (after scandals and rumors that the collection was missing). Julio Carrasco Breton, presidente de la Sociedad Mexicana de Artistas de las Artes Plasticas (SOMAAP) anuncio que demandara al SAT -organo desconcentrado de la Secretaria de Hacienda- para que informe del paradero de las "decenas de miles" de obras recaudadas por concepto de Pago en Especie Si no dicen nada es que la obra esta en casa de algun primo de Zedillo o algun 'amorcito' de Salinas de Gortari, no lo dudo ni tantito", opino. (Carmen Álvarez, "Exigen autores datos de pago en especie," Reforma, May 18, 2002.)

Museums are extremely careful when it comes to increasing their collections because every artwork that becomes part of a collection entails a long-lasting commitment (and resources) on the part of the institution to ensure their safety, preservation, and exhibition. In fact, many museums create a special committee that is tasked with assessing (and either approving or rejecting) the decision to accept artworks into their collection, even when the artwork in question is donated at "no cost" through the *Pago en Especie* mechanism. Allowing museums to directly receive artworks from the artists certainly incentivizes artists to give better work precisely because the selection process of museums is much more selective than that of the tax mechanism. But, at the end of the day, only very few artists can ever aspire to convince a museum to accept their work and only the most recognized can have the luxury of choosing which museum they want their work to end up in. This is why even as the number of artworks accepted by museums through this tax mechanisms has increased, it remains very low.

Not surprisingly, the more renowned museums, most of which are located in Mexico City and have the most connections to the private sector,[358] tend to attract the "best" work which is

358 The museums that have benefitted the most from this clause are the University Museum of Contemporary Art (MUAC) and the Museum of Modern Art but also, and quite oddly, the Chancellor's Museum (Museo de la Cancillería). This last museum belongs to the Department of Foreign Affairs and was created in 2011 specifically for the purpose of housing works collected through the *Pago en Especie* mechanism. The Museum of Modern Art: 16, 5, 12, 14, and 21 in 2014. Tamayo Museum 0,0,0, 9, and 1. The MUAC 1, 60, 43, 0, 55. Carrillo Gil 0, 6, 0, 4, 0. The Museo de la Cancillería is a particularly interesting example because it was created especially to receive works from the *Pago en Especie* collection. The Department of Foreign Affairs (SRE) is required to have an art collection that it can tour around the world and that it can show in its offices in Mexico City. And yet the same statutes that require the SRE to create a collection do not allow this department to buy artworks (to spend money on these artworks). The only way it can increase its collection is through donations, including donations directly from the artists through the *Pago en Especie* mechanism. In 2012, a year after its creation, the museum received 30 artworks, in 2013, 33, and in 2014, 77. While only very few people have ever heard of this museum (even among members of the art world and the government), many of the most renowned contemporary artists have chosen this institution as the depository of their work. The reasons why such a low profile museum has been able to convince so many artists to donate their work to them can be explained by the fact that this museum organizes exhibitions that travel not simply within the country, but around the globe. This museum receives a disproportionate amount of work from the artists that are more renown around the world, including Pedro Reyes, Damián Ortega and Abraham Cruzvillegas, represented by two of the main contemporary art galleries in Mexico, Labor and Kurimanzutto. The day I attended the committee session, some of the committee members joked about the fact that there had been "mano negra" (corruption) and that that was only way to explain why this innocuous and low-profile museum had convinced so many artists whose work is highly coveted to donate such good work.

why the "museum clause" leads to an even more unequal distribution of the artworks. This clause, moreover, incentivizes a competition between museums – particularly contemporary art museums – to see who attracts the best artists. Rather than working together towards a common goal, the competition between museums, as I show in Chapter Four, is now described as "a form of Darwinism" in which the fittest have to fight to survive.[359] In addition, it further deters quality submissions to the centralized *Pago en Especie* collection, resulting in a sort of race to the bottom in what is an already shallow pool of possibilities. Indeed, several officials working for the *Pago en Especie* collection confessed that they fear that the "museum clause" would end up depleting the *Pago en Especie* collection of all the "good quality" work that is being produced. More importantly, perhaps, the popularity of this clause also means that issues concerning the inequality of institutions can continue to be ignored by the state because the museums that are capable of getting the most coveted artworks are those with resources and lobbying power.

This chapter analyzed the country's unique "Payment in Kind" tax policy. I showed how the perceived failure of this tax mechanism is in large part a consequence of neoliberal policies that have displaced art world experts from nation-building processes, including their role in selecting the art that becomes national patrimony. Through an interpretive analysis of the art collection, I also argued that this distancing, and the eradication of expertise more generally, should not necessarily be interpreted as a democratic move. Instead, what happened was that one set of non-elected representatives (i.e. members of the art world) was displaced by another (i.e. a technocratic elite). Rather than making the art world enclave more plural and responsive to marginalized segments of the population, the transformations of the *Pago en Especie* mechanism, instead, simply supplanted this elite for an even less democratic one. The art world

359 Anonymous. Interview October 20, 2014.

experts' loss of power comes at a cost, including not simply the inability to set standards that might motivate artists to want to give their best work, but also, and more importantly, the inability to act as non-elected representatives by summoning communities into being, including by enunciating clear narratives that might help to hail people into a common project.

In short, as I showed in this chapter, under neoliberalism, certain types of experts are privileged over others. Ultimately, however, all kinds of experts are transformed by neoliberal ideologies, which is why arguing that there is a single type of "neoliberal expertise" is misleading.[360] In the following chapter, I focus on how neoliberal reforms have shaped the art world itself.

360 Steven Collier shows how, in the United States, "expert rule" used to be very closely tied with New Deal reforms and ideology which has in recent decades become precisely the field of adversity against which neoliberal rule reacts. Collier, , Stephen. 2016. "Neoliberalism and Rule by Experts." Under review as a chapter in Assembling Neoliberalism, edited by Wendy Larner and Vaughan Higgins: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/296844983_Neoliberalism_and_Rule_by_Experts (consulted April 28, 2019).

CHAPTER THREE

NI SUMISOS, NI ACTIVISTAS:

THE RELUCTANT POLITICS OF CONTEMPORARY MEXICAN ART

If one happened to be flying into or out of El Paso, Texas in 2007 and looked out of the plane's window, one could read the word *Sumisión* (Spanish for "Submission") written in gigantic letters at the base of the iconic Black Christ Mountain, just across a highway from a sprawling slum. The slum, Anapra, is located a few miles west of Ciudad Juárez and a few miles south of the Mexico-US border just beneath Fort Bliss, the equally sprawling US army post. In the 1970s, the Anapra valley was only occupied by a handful of families, but has since become home to the legions of workers employed by the *maquiladora* factories that have sprouted in Juárez following the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and to those stranded migrants from Mexico and Central America who fail to make it to the north side of the border. The area has been dubbed "the dormitory of the *maquiladoras*" and its residents have struggled to obtain the most basic public services such as electricity, drinking water, and paved roads. Anapra is blighted by poverty and environmental problems. For instance, for lack of other means of disposal, trash is burned in the open, contributing to the highest rates of respiratory disease and birth defects in the region. Juárez itself has a grim reputation for having one of

Mexico's highest rates of feminicides, thousands of whose bodies have been dumped around Anapra.[361]

After spending several months in Ciudad Juárez in 2006 as part of the site-specific art project *Proyecto Juárez*, the Spanish artist Santiago Sierra specifically chose Anapra as the site where he would produce his piece *Sumisión.* He hired a group of local laborers to carve fifteen-meter-long letters spelling out the word into the ground and to line each one with concrete. The idea was to fill each of these ditch-letters with fuel and to set the word on fire on December 1st, which marked the first day of Felipe Calderón's presidential term. The message was intended to humiliate the Mexican political elite, which is why the word deliberately pointed south, towards Mexico City. Mariana David, the curator of the project, argued that *Sumisión* (formerly titled *Word of Fire*) would work at the level of symbolic language: "Why choose a word like 'submission' rather than one like 'bravery'?," asks David, "Because we were going to burn it! (…) Fire has always had a redemptive quality, and one of rebirth too. By burning the word 'submission' what we were trying to say was precisely that we were not submissive!"[362]

Members of the local art community, as well as activists, journalists, and students, were invited to witness the event, which was also to be streamed live on Sierra's webpage. The piece was widely discussed among members of the contemporary art world in the months prior to its planned culmination, generating widespread anticipation. But in spite of – or, perhaps, because of – the excitement that had built up, the local government intervened at the last instant and prohibited the crew from setting the word on fire, claiming dubiously that it would exceed the

361 There have been multiple cases of blood poising caused by the lead production and toxic waste has been found all of which are attributed to the ASARCO foundry (American Smelting and Refining Company created by Meyer Guggenheim).

362 Interview with Mariana David. December 4th, 2014. David also noted the parallels between Sierra's piece and the old traditions of burning the Judas and the Fallas Valencianas.

limit of locally allowed carbon emissions.[363] The government, seemingly, became worried about the potential bad press such a subversive mass public gathering would cause, even though they broached no concerns with the ambiguous word itself. Hence, instead of being disintegrated by the "redemptive" fire, the unfinished artwork remained in place for months, visible to those driving or walking on the adjacent highway or flying over the area. Paradoxically, the interruption of the work also meant that more people were able to see *Sumisión* as a land-art piece rather than a performance.

Sierra would later joke that "Submission cannot be burned away because the authorities will not allow it."[364] For him, it was a win-win situation: if the piece had gone forward as planned, it would have added to his catalog of ostentatiously provocative works, but as often happens when works of art are censored, the unfinished *Sumisión* received widespread press, helping to bolster Sierra's reputation as an *enfant terrible* of the art world, capable of making those in power uncomfortable to the point of censorship, a rare attribute these days and one that helps to raise the price of artworks. Its censorship was reported by major newspapers in Mexico and around the world and was avidly reviewed and commented on by the global art community.[365]

While the piece was never completed as intended, *Sumisión* survived as a set of black-and-white photographs and a video of the surrounding area shot from an airplane.[366] This

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363 The act of burning the word was interrupted twice, first in December 2006 and then again in March 2007. That David and her crew had acquired the necessary permits to guarantee that the piece would comply with all security and environmental provisos did not seem to matter. The authorities threatened to deploy the police to impede the burning and to fine her millions of pesos if the piece went ahead. Villela Mascaró, Pilar. 2008. "Not in my name: reality and ethics in the work of Santiago Sierra." In *Santiago Sierra. 7 trabajos/7 works*. Lisson Gallery: London: 17.

364 "La sumisión no arde porque las autoridades lo impiden" (Interviewed by Edgar Hernández for *El Excelsior*, March 2007)

365 The project and particularly Sierra's piece was covered by press from around the world including Artnet, several Spanish newspapers (particularly *El Mundo*), several German newspapers (Laitenamerika), and also local newspapers and sources from Ciudad Juárez.

366 The photographs and video can be accessed here: http://www.santiago-sierra.com/200704_1024.php (last consulted May 2, 2019).

documentation became part of an exhibit about *Proyecto Juárez* organized at the Carrillo Gil Contemporary Art Museum (MACG) in Mexico City that was part of a wave of subversive exhibits put on by the art community to criticize the state during the 2010 national commemorations. Hence, even as the burning of the letters was never allowed, the photographs and video of the piece – and with it other artworks produced for *Proyecto Juárez* – ended up circulating freely and widely both in Mexico and around the world. This is illustrative of how, in recent years, cases of overt censorship in Mexico have been extremely rare. Works that would never have been displayed and circulated during the PRI regime because of their critical content are now being shown in both private and state-owned museums. As I show in this chapter, this increase critical latitude seems to have been in part facilitated precisely by the private sector breaking the state's near-monopoly on patronage of the arts.

This increase in freedom of expression, however, is not necessarily all inclusive. As this chapter will also argue, it privileges the production of art that engages in a very specific type of political critique: one that, while seeking to provoke viewers and invite them to engage in critical thinking, eschews links to social mobilization at a mass scale, firm normative positions, and explicit political activism (understood as the use of certain tools and methods to try to bring about social or political change).

To make these arguments, the chapter begins with a discussion of *Proyecto Juárez*, including its funding and organizational structures as well as an analysis of the *in-situ* artworks that were produced. It then focuses on the work of artists Santiago Sierra and Lorena Wolffer, who exemplify broader (and diametrically opposite) artistic trends. Sierra – much like other successful contemporary artists who are represented by a gallery and receive commissions from a global art world network of biennials and museums – produces politically-motivated art but has

no pretentions that his work will actually lead to social or political transformations. In contrast, Wolffer – much like many other feminist activist artists who do not have mainstream success in the art market – ties her artistic work to her political activism and privileges process over the production of aesthetic commodities for display and sale. While her work exists alongside the contemporary art scene, it differs sharply in its political commitments, the forms of it takes, and, crucially, the labor that goes into it, which, I argue, is often invisibilized by the art world.

In short then, this chapter argues that Mexico's changing economic and political landscape has transformed the type of politically-critical art that is being produced: the most successful contemporary artists are not politically submissive (*sumisos)*, but neither are they *activistas*. I also argue that while the scope for political critique and expression has increased in recent decades, certain types of art which require specific forms of labor, continue to be marginalized and, oftentimes, subtly censored by the art market and the broader artistic community.[367]

3.1 PROYECTO JUÁREZ

Proyecto Juárez was first conceived in 2005 by curator Mariana David, who secured a grant from the state-managed National Foundation of the Arts and Culture (FONCA) that allowed her to travel to Ciudad Juárez to organize an art project that could help shed light on the city's oppressive power structures.[368] She invited an art collective (*Democracia*) and thirteen male

367 Parts of this chapter are forthcoming in: Islas Weinstein, Tania. "*Expuestas:* Laborious Expectations and the Plight of Feminist Art in Contemporary Mexico," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*.

368 David, who was in her mid-twenties when she conceived of *Proyecto Juárez*, had studied a bachelor's degree in Art History at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City and had worked for two years as coordinator of the artist space *La Panadería* (1997-1998) and then as a curatorial assistant (2000-2001) and curator (2003-2005) at the Tamayo Museum.

artists – some of whom were well known in national artistic circles and others who were outright global art world celebrities – to produce site-specific artworks that spoke about the city and to its inhabitants.[369] David rented a house in Ciudad Juárez for about two years, which she shared with these artists, who trickled in and out of Juárez for periods of time that ranged from a couple of weeks to over three months.[370] In preparation for producing their art pieces, artists met with local activists, scholars, students, and other artists, visited the city's landmarks, maquiladoras, cabarets, hospitals, universities, and archives, and attended talks about the sociopolitical and economic situation of the region.[371]

At the time, Juárez had not yet acquired the grim title of being the most violent city in Mexico and the world – titles that, following the launch of the drug war, it held between 2008-2011 and 2008-2010, respectively[372] – but it already had a reputation for its prevalent vice, violence, and impunity. It was particularly infamous for the appalling labor conditions of its *maquiladora* sweatshops, for being the home base of the eponymous Juárez Cartel (which was

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369 The artists who participated were Artemio (Mexico), Carlos Amorales (Mexico), Gustavo Artigas (Mexico), Paco Cao (Spain), Jota Castro (Spain), Democracia (Ciudad Juárez), Iván Edeza (Mexico), Antonio de la Rosa (Spain), Enrique Jezik (Argentina), Ramón Mateos, Yoshua Okón (Mexico), Santiago Sierra (Spain) and Artur Zmijewski (Poland). By exclusively summoning male artists, she wanted to show how patriarchy and masculinity (the latter conceived both as "a biological condition" and "a cultural trait") taint every system of power. David did not, however, imply that women are the only vulnerable social group. On the contrary, in her view, women are one more group within a wide range of vulnerable social groups. Brochure Project Juárez (2010), p.14.

370 The house was open not only to the thirteen artists that were involved in the project, but also to other artists who went to Juárez to do all kinds of artistic projects, including Mireya Salare who developed her project *Las Muertes Chiquitas* during her stay at the house. Other projects that were developed there included Artemio and Antonio de la Rosa's script for the movie *Me quedo contigo*. (Mariana David, Interview December 4th, 2014). Like other site-specific projects, artists usually reside in a specific location while planning and creating their art to try to understand the context. Many *in-situ* artworks are also collaborative in nature, meaning that they include "various dialogical *processes* as integral to the content of the work," and require a set of research methodologies and techniques typically associated with the social sciences (e.g. interviewing and participant-observation). (Kester, Grant. 2011. *The one and the many*. Durham and London: Duke University Press: 10.)

371 Brochure Proyecto Juárez, 2010, 5-8.

372 Ortega, José. 2016 "Violencia: Logros y Pendientes." In *Seguridad, Justicia y Paz*. Mexico City: Consejo ciudadano para la seguridad pública y justicia penal A.C.: http://www.seguridadjusticiaypaz.org.mx/temas-de-interes/seguridad/1357-violencia-logros-y-pendientes

the country's most important drug-trafficking organization in the 1990s), and for the wave of feminicides that had been taking place in the city since the early 1990s.[373]

David always maintained that while she hoped that the art that would come out of *Proyecto Juárez* could help to inform the public about the violence in the city and perhaps even trigger some kind of pressure on the Mexican state to address Juárez's precarious situation, her aim was never to depict the murders and crimes in spectacular ways – much like the tabloids were doing at the time – nor portray Ciudad Juárez as an outlier.[374] Instead, she wanted to challenge pre-existing views of the city by highlighting other attributes of Juárez, a city with a rich cultural history that was seldom highlighted by the press.[375] She also sought to stress the parallels with other places around the world which have suffered from the perils of runaway capitalism, trade liberalization, and drug-trafficking: "We wanted to make some noise (...) but avoid depicting Juárez as if it was the seed of all evil."[376]

The project, therefore, had clear political undertones and was designed to raise questions and voice critiques in the hope of informing and changing people's mind about different issues.[377] In order to do so successfully, David maintained, the pieces that were commissioned

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373 Hundreds of young, lower class women usually (many of them working at the maquiladoras) have been murdered. (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2006. *Huesos en el Desierto*, Barcelona: Anagrama).

374 Roundtable 1. David. Disc 2, min. 4. The use of violent images, often of naked, brutally beaten women, without any kind context that might accompany these texts, made it seem as though the murder had been an isolated crime of passion, divorced from any structural cause. Reproducing images of naked women, moreover, is also a way to instantiate a male gaze. (García del Moral, Paulina. 2011. "Representation as a Technology of Violence: On the Representation of the Murders and Disappearances of Aboriginal Women in Canada and Women in Ciudad Júarez." *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* (Vol.36, No.72)).

375 The famous comedian Tin Tan was from Juárez and the whiskey distilleries were established there during the prohibition drew many celebrities (e.g. Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, Al Capone) to the city.

376 (David quoted in "Se puede hacer arte en Juárez" *Excélsior*, 8 de octubre 2010, p.8). "Nos interesaba hablar fuerte y claro, llamar la atención. También desarrollar un proyecto internacional desde Ciudad Juárez y sacar nuevas imagines de ese contexto." (David in the Brochure for *Proyecto Juárez* (México: Conaculta, 2010), 7-8).

377 For instance, Ruth Estévez, the head curator at the MACG museum in 2010 at the time the exhibit of *Proyecto Juárez* took place, claimed that "artistic operations" are not "political strategies and social protest." Ruth Estevez, Proyecto Juárez Brochure, p.6. Similarly, David, the

needed to remain ambiguous, refrain from proposing *a priori* answers to political problems, and rather than being overly didactic and pushing a specific agenda, should invite people to reach their own, individual conclusions.[378] In short, to avoid trumping critical thinking, a clear distinction between art and activism needed to be drawn: the pieces produced for *Proyecto Juárez* were explicitly and exclusively works of art.[379]

The works included an eclectic mix of videos,[380] performances, [381] actions,[382] and installations,[383] which alluded to Juárez' bleak economic situation, its precarious labor conditions, and the feminicides and human-trafficking that prevailed. But while all of them addressed topics of violence they refrained from showing the violence in spectacular, voyeuristic ways. Instead, they alluded to it without, however, pointing fingers at specific culpable agents[384] or providing any kind of blueprint for action.

For instance, the installation by Mexico City-based provocateur Artemio, *Untitled (Portrait of 450 Murdered Women in Ciudad Juárez)*, consists of a pile of earth from Ciudad

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project's curator, maintained that even as art could be used to generate debate and shed light on what is hidden, it should not be confused with activism. (David in the Brochure for *Proyecto Juárez* (México: Conaculta, 2010).

378 Yoshua Okón. Interview. May 4, 2014.

379 Perdices, Alvaro. 2009. "Interview with Yoshua Okón: a Propos of White Russians," *Artecontexto* (24): 52 (https://www.yoshuaokon.com/media/textos/articulos/10okon_artecontexto_eng.pdf) (consulted April 4, 2018).

380 The celebrated Polish artist Artur Zmijeski produced a 24-hour clip of the life of an immigrant woman living in Ciudad Juárez.

381 Antonio de la Rosa's "2 Tetas y 1 Fracaso" ("2 Tits and 1 Failure") also spoke about violence against women. The piece was a performance that consisted of de la Rosa getting breast implants, which he kept for five years as a way "to put himself in the place of women, and carry with him those portentous temptations." For the MACG exhibit, a series of photographs of de la Rosa wearing the implants were displayed, together with silicon residues of breast implants. Schmelz, Itala. 2011. "Política cultural y arte político en el México actual." Lecture delivered for the conference *Entre la teoría y la práctica: reconsiderando el arte latinoamericano en el siglo XXI*. Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI). Lima. November 2, 2011. For the MACG exhibit, a series of photographs of de la Rosa wearing the implants were displayed, together with silicon residues of breast implants.

382 Argentinian artist Enrique Jezik's *Seis metros cúbicos de materia orgánica* is an action inspired on Rober Smithson's *Asphalt Rundown* (1969) carried out by dumping animal remains over a cliff with a dump truck as a way to reflect on the violence that prevails in Mexico.

383 Including Artemio´s *Untitled (Portrait of 450 Murdered Women in Ciudad Juárez)* and Yoshua Okón's *Canned Laughter*.

384 The one exception was the piece produced by the art collective *Democracia,* tellingly the only participant from Ciudad Juárez. Titled "Killer State/Freedom for the Dead" this last intervention consisted of a series of small posters that read "Estado Asesino" (Killer State) and "Libertad para los Muertos" (Freedom for the Dead) in big black and red font which were pasted all over the city.

Juárez that is meant to weigh the same amount as the weight of 450 bodies of women.[385] The artist explained that, in addition to acting as a monument to honor the murdered women, in "turning [metaphorically speaking] these women's bodies into dust," *Untitled* is also meant to be a commentary on how quickly their deaths as forgotten.[386] While the artist gathered dirt from the city, the goal is to exhibit this piece in art spaces elsewhere in the country and the world.The idea is that with time, as the piece travels from one show to the next, the pile of dirt will gradually lose more and more mass until, eventually, Artemio anticipates, all the dirt will disappear.[387] In a public interview, the artist alluded to how the state's indifference to these murders was contributing to erase their memory and argued that his piece was a way of conveying this indifference.

Another example of the works produced for the project was artist Yoshua Okón's video installation titled *Canned Laughter*, which much like his other works allegedly seeks to draw attention to people's class prejudices and to critique neoliberalism. For this piece, Okón founded a fake *maquiladora*, "Bergson" (named after the philosopher Henri Bergson), which was supposed to produce, pack, and export cans filled with laughter (a pun on the *canned laughter* that is used in television sitcoms in the United States). The artist hired an orchestra conductor to lead workers based in Ciudad Juárez as they recreated hysterical, nervous, evil, and other types of cackling as if they were a chorus. These workers were then paid to produce hundreds of cans with the logo of the fictitious company.[388]

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385 For an image of this work see: Erin Joyce. "The Ins and Outs of Contemporary Mexican Art, in Texas." *Hyperallergic* (November 27, 2013): https://hyperallergic.com/84214/the-ins-and-outs-of-contemporary-mexican-art-in-texas/

386 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xiiW-8ANEo (Artemio Interview at the Modern Art Musuem of Fort Woth Texas for the show "México Inside Out: Themes in Art since 1990") (consulted May 2, 2019).

387 Since its inception it has been exhibited in different museums around the country and world.

388 On display at the MACG in 2010, his piece included the video of the workers laughing together and samples of the coats that had been worn by the workers and the cans that purportedly contained the laughter.

Okón is known for towing the line between fact and fiction to the point where viewers are unsure to what degree what they are watching has been staged or documented. He delegates control of his work to the performers, who never follow a script. Okón, however, remains in complete control of the editing of the final product and takes full authorial credit for his videos, which are designed specifically to be shown as video-installations in contemporary art museums and other "white-cube" art spaces around the world – over 90% of his work is produced and exhibited outside of Mexico.[389] *Canned Laughter* was exhibited in museums as a series of videos displayed in unison which included clips of the workers recording the laughter and manufacturing the cans as well as the scattered cans.[390]

But even as many of the pieces that were produced for *Proyecto Juárez* seemed to be intended to circulate in art spaces outside of Juárez, David's intention was to target the project not simply to the global art world but also to the *juarences* themselves. The idea was to get the art world celebrities to work closely with the local population so that they too could share their know-how about the artistic field and to work together with locals on artistic projects.[391] In retrospect, however, David lamented, this part of the plan fell short. Most of the projects that were conceived by the local community – including videos, a radio station, web pages, workshops, etc. – did not in fact materialize.[392] Judging from the archive of the project, as well as from the catalogues and traces from the exhibits that were organized years later, based on the project, it is very difficult to get a sense of what was actually produced *by* or *for* the local

389 Yoshua Okón. Interview. February 19, 2018.

390 For images of what this installation looked like see: Yoshua Okón's website: https://www.yoshuaokon.com/canned-laugther.html (last consulted May 7, 2019).

391 Artists would learn from the locals and, in return, would share their know-how about the artistic field. Given the lack of galleries and funding sources in Juárez, *Proyecto Juárez* could help bring in resources that would be used to fund projects produced by the local community.

392 Mariana David, Interview. December 4th, 2014.

population as part of this project.[393] David confirmed that this was, in fact, the case, despite her good intentions and, as she recalled, her constant efforts.[394] As often happens with site-specific, participative art projects of this kind,[395] the art produced for *Proyecto Juárez* was more successful in promoting a type of art that was tailored for foreign audiences, including by informing them about the violence in Juárez, and that often had very little to say to the local community on which these projects were based.[396]

There were several reasons why David deliberately invited artists who already had a presence in the global art world. First, having art world celebrities participating in the project facilitated the process of finding resources to carry out the project itself.[397] *Proyecto Juárez* was financially supported by private agencies such as the Patronato de Arte Contemporáneo (PAC), by the Spanish Embassy in Mexico, and the Spanish Agency of International Cooperation, but a very important part of its budget came directly from the galleries that represented some of the artists who participated in the project.[398] That a young Mexican curator like David was able to summon a group of world-renowned artists in the first place was, in large part, a result of the

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393 With the exception of a webpage about sound and images in the streets of Ciudad Juárez, there are very few traces of other locally conceived projects. I did not carry out any research in Ciudad Juárez and so I cannot say for sure whether or not there are more traces there that can be used, but my sense is that there are none.

394 According to David herself, the only piece that was produced for the people of Juárez because only someone who was very familiar with the city could understand the message, was an installation by Iván Edeza that included images of the city's buildings (including cinemas, theaters, cabarets, canteens and bars), which were part of the city's collective memory and it historical legacy and which were being demolished and replaced by new buildings that had no connection to the city's history or the local population. (Mariana David, Interview. December 4th, 2014)

395 Namely, those in which artists parachute into a place for weeks at a time which is generally never long enough to build strong, lasting ties with the local population that might enable the creation of projects for and from the population itself. (Foster, Hal. 1996. *The Return of the Real*. Cambridge: The MIT Press: 304; Kwon, Miwon. 1997. "One place after another: notes on site specificity," *October*, (Vol. 80, Spring): 85-110)

396 While the intentions of the project might indeed have been laudable – to introduce "a new face of Juárez" to different publics – in the end, the violence of the city was perhaps too overwhelming. At the end of 2007, Mariana David and the artists who were still in Ciudad Juárez as part of *Proyecto Juárez* left the city in a hurry due to a series of unfortunate events (including the theft of David's car) without being able to give the project the kind of closure she had initially envisioned. (Mariana David, Interview. December 4th, 2014).

397 David created the non-governmental organization Palacio Negro A.C. so that she could receive donations in exchange for tax deductions.

398 Mariana David, Interview December 4, 2014. Investing in site-specific projects can be an astute financial decision for galleries because even when this kind of art does not directly yield a profit, it helps to boost an artist's reputation and can help increase the price of her work.

timing of the project.[399] The first few years of the new millennium marked a moment in which Mexican contemporary art became particularly coveted in the global art world: dozens of exhibitions and special issues were devoted to Mexican contemporary art[400] and the country became a preferred home for several up-and-coming art world celebrities, including Santiago Sierra himself who was one of the first artists of the wave of the 90s to permanently move to Mexico City.[401]

David also summoned well-known artists because she anticipated that whatever the artists produced for the project would eventually circulate in biennials, art fairs, and exhibitions around the world, which would help spread the word about Juárez.[402] While one of the original goals of site-specific art was to contest the commodification of art – these works were meant simply to survive as long as the project itself was taking place[403] – *in-situ* works have fallen prey to marketization. Now, it is the documentation of these projects that become a coveted commodity among art institutions and collectors around the world. *In-situ* projects are often "designed with an eye to how it must be photogenically adjusted for its own documentation –

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399 A central antecedent event to Proyecto Juarez was *inSite*, the biennial of site-specific art in Tijuana and San Diego. *inSite* was one of the first projects in Mexico that operated under a bi-national public-private partnership. Another antecedent to Proyecto Juarez that is worth mentioning is inSite, the biennial of site-specific art in Tijuana and San Diego. This was one of the first projects in Mexico that included in-situ art, and was also one of first bi-national public-private partnerships. All this certainly helped to put Mexico on the map of the contemporary art sceneFor an introductory analysis of this biennial. (See Yúdice 2003).

400 Some of the exhibits that were organized included: "Mexico Illustrated" at Albright College, "Coartadas/Alibi" at La Casa de México in Paris and the gallery Witte de With de Rotterdam; "Axis Mexico, Common Objects, and Cosmpolitan Actions" at the Museo de Arte de San Diego; "20 Millions Mexicans Can't Be Wrong…" at the South London Gallery; "Zebra Crossing" at the Haus der Kulturen der Wet in Berlin and Mexico City; "An Exhibition about the Exchange Rate of Bodies and Values" at the MoMA PS.1 in New York and at the Kunst Werke in Berlin. In 2005, Mexico was also the guest of honor in the renowned ARCO art fair in Madrid. At this time, atists also came be represented by foreign galleries including the following: Eduardo Abaroa by Jack Tilton; Pablo Vargas Lugo by Massimo Audiello; Daniela Rossel by Greenenaftali; Migue Calderón by Andrea Rosen; Francis Alys by Lisson Gallery; Santiago Sierra and Teresa Margolles by Peter Kilchmann.

401 Some of the art world celebrities that had moved to Mexico City by 2002 included Melanie Smith, Francis Alys, Thomas Glassford, and others.

402 Brochure, Projecto Juárez, p.5

403 Crimp, Douglas. 1993. *On the Museum's Ruins*, Cambridge: The MIT Press: 17.

and the work becomes merely the process that leads to it."[404] Accordingly, the public for many of these works is not only the local population of the sites where these are produced (as originally intended), but rather members of the global art world who learn about these projects through exhibitions, catalogues, and web-pages.

Critics of *in-situ,* collaborative projects often point to the power imbalance that is always present in the relationships that develop around these projects and the often patronizing attitude of the artist (and curator) who can come and go as she pleases, unaware of the mid- and long-term effects her presence might have on the community. They claim that it is often only the artist who actually benefits (gaining fame and money) from the interaction with the locals. Critics point to the fact that artists who participate in these projects are summoned by institutions across the world to visit different locations, "often working on more than one site-specific project at a time, globe-trotting as tourists, adventurers, pseudo-ethnographers."[405] The artist, moreover, can always pack her bags and leave, an option that is rarely available for locals. At the end of 2007, Mariana David and the artists who were still in Ciudad Juárez as part of *Proyecto Juárez* left the city in a hurry due to a series of unfortunate events (including the theft of David's car) without being able to give the project the kind of closure she had initially envisioned.[406]

In a sense, Project Juárez embodied many of the criticisms that are often voiced against *in- situ* projects: it was perhaps more successful in promoting a type of art that was tailored for foreign audiences – the artworks and documentation of the project travelled first to Mexico City and then to Madrid, and individual pieces have since been shown in different exhibits around the

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404 Mosquera, Gerardo. 2012. "Introduction." in *Crisisss...América Latina, arte y confrontación*, Conaculta: México: 28.

405 Foster 1996, 304. Foster convincingly criticized this ethnographic shift in the arts for a number of reasons including the common practice of locating the notion of the site somewhere else, in "the field of the other," of "the postcolonial subaltern," as if there was no politics to engage with in the artist's most immediate context.

406 Mariana David, Interview. December 4, 2014.

world – and often had very little to say to the local community on which these projects were based. While the intentions of the project might indeed have been laudable – to introduce "a new face of Juárez" to different publics – in the end, the violence of the city was perhaps too overwhelming. Even when most of the artworks did not simply mimic or reproduce the "horror stories" that were already circulating in the press and which people from the city were experiencing first-hand, they also did not necessarily show a new face of Juárez.

In any case, in that it pointed to the rising violence and inequality faced by many in the country as a result of neoliberalization and the drug war, and that it did so with funds provided not only by the state but by the private sector, the works produced for *Proyecto Juárez* are representative of the kind of political-critical art produced in the wake of Mexico's twin transition. The diversity and complexity of pieces and of the richness of the oeuvre of the artists involved in the project makes it very difficult to make general and broad claims about them. Accordingly, in the following section, I will focus exclusively on Santiago Sierra's work and point to the ways in which, despite its uniqueness is, in some ways, exemplary of the type of art that was produced and circulated at the time and that was endorsed by the art world.

3.2 Santiago Sierra, the reluctant activist

Perhaps the most renowned (and controversial) artist invited to participate in *Proyecto Juárez* was Santiago Sierra. In fact, even as his piece *Sumisión* described in the opening vignette, caused a certain degree of controversy, it was, comparatively speaking, a much less polemical piece than many of his other artworks. Sierra is famous for his installations that consist of marginalized people – usually illegal immigrants, prostitutes, and junkies – performing menial, useless, or humiliating tasks for pay, including crouching inside cardboard boxes, holding up blocks of wood or concrete, dyeing their hair, masturbating and having sex publicly, or getting a black line

tattooed on their back. Sierra never reveals the names or stories of the people he hires, and usually pays them no more than the local minimum wage.

For instance, for his piece "Paintings made by a fire breather" produced in 2003 at the Torre de Cuatro Caminos in Naucalpan, Mexico, Sierra hired a fire breather who he recruited from a street corner in Mexico City to spit fire from his mouth onto the surface of 17 canvases. The artist then hired a painter to affix the material onto the canvases.[407] A year later, he produced "A worker's arm passing through the ceiling of an art space from a dwelling" for an art space in the Roma neighborhood in Mexico City. This piece, as the title indicates, literally consists of an arm dangling from the ceiling in the middle of an empty white room.[408] For this work, Sierra hired a worker to lay on his side on the floor above the gallery space and to let his arm hang for hours at a time.

Given that Sierra's performances usually take place inside museums and galleries, these become one of the few occasions in which people living at the margins of society get to interact in the same enclosed spaces with individuals who frequent these spaces, including members of the intellectual and economic elite. The voyeuristic presence of the elite is part and parcel of Sierra's pieces. The artist has argued on several occasions that a central component of his work is the fact that it will be sold in the art market and will yield him very high profits.[409] Indeed, the elites that come into contact with his work do so not only during the time of the performances themselves but also when they are exposed to the documentation of these performances. What

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407 http://www.santiago-sierra.com/200307_1024.php?key=3 (consulted May 2, 2019).

408 http://www.santiago-sierra.com/20041_1024.php?key=3 (consulted May 2, 2019).

409 "In the art world you always work for the powers that be: banks, governments and so on. Who else can pay for an exhibition in a museum? You have to be conscious that we all work for a machine. Even if we're waiters we feed the machine of capital." Sierra. Santiago. 2004. "Santiago Sierra by Teresa Margolles: An Interview" in *Bomb Magazine*, No. 86, (Winter): http://bombmagazine.org/article/2606/santiago-sierra

ends up circulating in the art market and exhibited in museums and art spaces are black-and-white photographs and videos that document these performances.

Sierra is open about the fact that he has never "worked" a day in his life –"I have no calluses. I don't know how to do things."[410] – and yet makes a lot of money from his art. While some critics accuse Sierra of being a cynic and a hypocrite,[411] others hail his work as a critique of the labor process under capitalism because it helps reveal the alienation, inequality, and exploitation inherent in the way work is organized, especially with the turn to outsourcing and subcontracting. Renowned art curator Cuauhtémoc Medina, for instance, maintains that far from fostering a "voyeurism of humiliation," Sierra's work is able to

> [R]eveal the art system's ability to confer an aura of legitimacy to purely criminal gestures. (…) The obscenity of Sierra's acts lies in making visible what artistic modesty tries to conceal. (...) The artist demonstrates his condition of white-collar proletarian: an intellectual mediator who in exchange for certain privileges – mainly, being allowed to take part in the profits generated by the art sales system – introduces ideas and projects that lead to the generation of profits.[412]

Whether Sierra's pieces *reveal* something that is hidden or say something that everybody already knows is perhaps a different question altogether, and one that can only be addressed by paying attention to who is exposed to his work and how his work interpellates his viewers. But as

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410 Albarrán, Juan. 2013. "Beyond an ethics of labor: geometry, commodity, and value in the oeuvre of Santiago Sierra," *Santiago Sierra: Sculpture, Photography, and Film*. Kinsthalle Tubingen, Deichtorhallen Hamburg: Sammlung Fackeber, Snoeck: 39.

411 Miller, Jason. 2016. "Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from to Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond," *Field.* Winter: 165-183; and Menick, John. 2002. "Review of Sierra's 'Nine Forms of 100 x 100 x 600 Cm…" at Deitch Projects. *THE THING,* July 13.

412 Medina, Cuauhtémoc. 2002. "Mutual Abuse." *Mexico City: an exhibition about the exchange rates of bodies and value*. eds. Klaus Biesenbach, Alanna Heiss, and Anthony Huberman. New York: P.S.1. MOMA: 46. Art critic Pilar Villela argues that one of the most discomforting aspects of Sierra's work is precisely that the culpable agent – "who is to blame?" – is hard to locate. If we blame Sierra because he put the workers there, then we should also condemn those businessmen who engage in much more violent forms of exploitation every time they produce a commodity and also ourselves, the consumers, for purchasing those products and incentivizing these exploitative conditions (Villela Mascaró 2008, 33).

art theorist Grant Kester suggests, Sierra seems to assume a very specific type of viewer: one that possesses an intrinsic but dormant capacity for empathy that can be awakened through the presentation of evidence of suffering and social injustice in an artistic context.[413] And yet, Kester asks, "if we are able to walk by the homeless and poor on the street in our daily lives, why should their presence in an art gallery make us any less prone to denial, indifference or objectification than the typical Oxfam advertisement?" Kester astutely answers his own question by arguing that "Sierra conflates a critique of aesthetic autonomy with a critique of bourgeois complacency."[414]

While Kester's assessments are quite poignant, perhaps he gives Sierra too much credit in that he assumes that the artist genuinely aspires to change the world. But Sierra neither advocates for a more just distribution of wealth, nor for an improvement of working conditions, nor does he propose new modes of sociability or solidarity. More importantly, he himself maintains that there is nothing humanitarian or charitable about his work.[415] Indeed, Sierra refuses to take up the mantle of political activism and is the first to concede that his work does *nothing* to change the precarious circumstances in which most people live.

> If I thought about how to give real visibility to these people, I wouldn't have chosen the art world as a platform to do it, but rather a determined political activism—but I don't trust that either. Let's say that I do things because I think they should be included in the art world, but I don't have grandiose dreams that I'll actually

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413 Sierra assumes that his work is encountered by a very specific type of audience: an oblivious and unknowing denizen of the "world of culture" who seeks only escapism and hedonistic denial and is wholly ignorant of the ongoing suffering of the "lumpen beyond their borders" and whose naïve "mindset" will be "laid bare" by Sierra's work (Kester 2011, 169).

414 Kester 2011, 165. If anything, Kester maintains, the "shock" produced by Sierra's work might actually result from the physical and economic coercion of the poor and working class: "the dismay generated by Sierra's work has less to do with the fact that art world viewers are recognizing the violence of poverty or homelessness for the first time, than with the sense that Sierra is reiterating, not challenging, this exploitation (…)" (Kester 2011, 171).

415 Sierra 2004.

> achieve anyone's redemption, because that's absurd. When you sell a photograph for $11,000 you can't possibly redeem anyone except yourself.[416]

Prominent art theorist Claire Bishop suggests that it is precisely because Sierra defines his work as art that one should view it not as a reiteration of capitalist exploitation, "but as offering a specific space of experience where those norms are suspended and put to pleasure in perverse ways (…). Rather than judging art as model of social organization that can be evaluated according to pre-established moral criteria, it is more productive to view the conceptualization of these performances as properly *artistic decisions*."[417] Sierra deploys this distinction himself, putting his work in direct conversation with an art movement – "In my innermost heart I am a Minimalist with a guilt complex"[418] – and using the language of formal aesthetics.

The black-and-white photographs and videos of Sierra's performances are *the* central component of his work. As the art critic Pilar Villela argues, the value of Sierra's artworks "is not a result of the work of the person who has been directly hired to do it (…) but of the work of someone, somewhere else who, by definition, within capitalism, and in relation to commodities, becomes invisible."[419] Indeed, Sierra delegates his performances to other workers in a manner not unlike subcontracting or outsourcing, "retract[ing] the body of the artist to an administrative role, saving it from having to undergo excruciating physical labor."[420] Ultimately, however, it is the artist, not the anonymous workers, who gets paid more than the minimum wage and gains a significant degree of cultural capital. The curator Medina might be right when he claims that

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416 Ibidem.

417 Bishop, Claire. 2012. *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship.* New York: Verso: 238.

418 Sierra quoted in Jackson, Shannon. 2011. *Social Works*, New York and London: Routledge: 43.

419 Villela 2008, 23.

420 Montenegro, Andrés. 2013. "Locating work in Santiago Sierra's artistic practice" *ephemera: theory & politics in organization* 13 (1): 104; see also Bishop 2012, 222.

people who critique artists like Sierra "unfairly discharge on the messenger the fury unleashed by the message."[421] But he does not go further to note that such fury often helps these artists gain clout in the mainstream art world and that their critics, moreover, rarely expect them to actually solve any of the problems that they "expose" in their work.

My point here is not to contend that art should always have a social function or that it should be politically effective, meaning that it should have a strict and clearly articulated end-goal that can be measured according to "some rigid rubric of failure or success."[422] Instead, my point is to show that political and critical art like Sierra's is the type of art that is circulating widely in the art world despite its controversy and the constant threats (or actual efforts) to censor it. Even as criticisms are voiced against Sierra for his alleged cynicism, these critiques only boost his reputation as an ambitious political artist.[423] He is able to capitalize from them precisely because he is not challenging the rules or language of the art world itself, nor contesting what labor actually means in this context.

On the one hand, then, Sierra represents an extreme in that his work is not simply about exploitation but is itself exploitative, and in that he is extremely flippant about the potential for art to change the world; on the other hand, however, his work is exemplary of a coterie of artists who create politically-critical work but eschew normative political stances and draw a firm line between art and activism.[424]

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421 Medina 2017, 189.

422 Bryan-Wilson, Julia, Jennifer González, and Dominic Willsdon. 2016. "Editors' Introduction: Themed Issue on Visual Activism." *The Journal of Visual Culture*. 15 (1): 8.

423 It is no secret that both the visibility and the price of an artwork go up immediately as a result of censorship, as will the entire oeuvre of an artist whose work has, at some point, been censored. In a world in which freedom (or the illusion of freedom) is valued more than almost everything else, being censored, and particularly in an overt way certainly becomes a coveted prize. (In one of the most famous instances of this, Robert Mapplethorpe's prints that were censored increased in price from $10,000 to $100,000 dollars (Adut, Ari. 2008. *On Scandal*. Cambridge University Press: New York: 286).

424 Some of these artists include Minerva Cuevas, Yoshua Okón, Teresa Margolles, and Melanie Smith (Carroll 2017; Medina 2017).

But there is a very different group of artists who, contrary to artists like Sierra, openly adopt the label of political activism and use their work to try to tackle very specific problems: feminist activist artists. Rather than simply offering a critique of the current socio-economic and political moment, they also offer a blueprint for action and they do so not simply through the subject-matter and messages of their work but also through the form that their artistic practice takes, which often includes de-centering the "authorial" element of creation, privileging artistic process over the production of objects, as well as helping victims of gender- and sexual-based violence heal and educating the broader public about these issues. Crucially, what distinguishes their work from that of other contemporary artists is the labor they engage in: rather the privileging the production of objects (or the documentation of actions) for display and sale in the art market, these feminist artists privilege the processes and practices which can rarely be turned into a material for display. In what follows, I show how these forms – which have been historically tied to a feminist practice – continue to be marginalized by museums and mainstream art institutions in Mexico (and around the world). In doing so I hope to further show how an increase in private capital privileges certain types of political critique rather than others. Before analyzing these artists' work – and particularly that produced by the iconic *artivist,* Lorena Wolffer, who exemplifies this trend – I first provide some context to highlight the political stakes.

3.3 Feminist activist art

The recent worldwide idolatry of Frida Kahlo notwithstanding, female artists and feminists continue to be excluded from Mexico's museums and mainstream art scene.[425] The

425 (Barbosa, Araceli. 2008. *Arte feministas en los ochenta en México.* México: UAM: 148. See also: Antivilo, Julia. 2013. "Arte feminista latinoamericano." PhD Dissertation, Universidad de Chile: 58; Sierra, Sonia. 2012. "Apoyo a mujeres artistas o ¿cuota de género?" *El Universal,*

Mexican art world is fervently patriarchal and *machista*. Many of the most well-regarded paintings, films, and murals link ideas of masculinity to the public, collective sphere, and those of femininity with maternity and the private sphere.[426] Women were traditionally portrayed as "pious, pure, domestic, and submissive"[427] and indigenous culture was feminized in ways that reasserted a connection between racial and patriarchal privilege of the country's political elite.[428] Museums, galleries, and art fairs are all guilty of exhibiting women in lesser numbers than men.[429] Solo shows of female artists are even less prevalent, and female artists' work is instead often lumped together into collective shows which, as feminist artist Mónica Mayer suggests, is itself a pejorative curatorial practice that flattens female artists into a harmonious and unthreatening whole: "juntas y agarraditas de la mano" ("together and holding hands").[430] This uneven representation extends to art criticism. According to Mayer – who co-founded the public archive *Pinto mi Raya*, which includes all art reviews published in Mexico between 1989 and 2011[431] – for every ten art critiques that are written about men, only one is written about women.[432] This unevenness is all the more glaring because in the last few decades women have

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March 22) Between 2000-2015 the two most important public contemporary art museums in Mexico City massively privileged shows by male artists. In those 15 years, the Tamayo Museum held 61 shows by male artists and only 20 by women, and the ratio at the Carrillo Gil Contemporary Art Museum was even more skewed at 90 to 19. Between 2000 and 2012, the ratio at the Palace of Fine Arts Museum, the most attended art museum in Mexico, was a slightly more equitable 38 to 24. Meanwhile, in 2015, women constitute 65% of enrolled art students at the National University of Mexico (UNAM), but over 60% of the artworks that are exhibited at the UNAM are produced by men and only 14% of the artworks included in the permanent collection of the University's Museum of Contemporary Art are produced by women (n.a. 2015a. "¿Quiénes exponen en los museos de la UNAM?" Boletín del Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios de Género, UNAM: http://tendencias.cieg.unam.mx/boletin-14.html).

426 Zavala, 2009: 12-13; Bravo, Paulina. 2011. "La Patria Mexicana: El cuerpo de la soberanía o la soberanía sobre el cuerpo." In *Sueños de una Nación, un año después.* coord. José Luis Barrios. México: INBA; Florescano, Enrique. 2012. "Independencia, identidad y nación en México, 1810-1910." In *Centenarios. Conmemoraciones e Historia Oficial.* eds. Erica Pani y Rodríguez Kuri. El Colegio de México: México.

427 Zavala 2009, 13.

428 Coffey 2012, 11.

429 Kadner, Marien. 2017. "El arte puede hacernos reflexionar sobre el machismo y así acabar con él" *El País*, February 8.

430 Mayer, Mónica. 2013. "Testimonio de los ires y venires del arte feminista en México." *Revista Cuadrivio*, December 29.

431 http://www.pintomiraya.com/ (last consulted May 2, 2019).

432 Mayer 2013.

graduated from art school in larger numbers than men, meaning that their exclusion from mainstream display and discussion does not represent the gender balance of work actually being produced.[433]

It is important, moreover, to contextualize these trends in the art world within Mexico's contemporary political moment which, as I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, is characterized, among other things, by alarming levels of violence that have resulted from the so-called "war on drugs" launched by president Calderón in December 2006. The number of murders and disappearances sparked by this ongoing war have captured the attention of the media, which reports incessantly on the rising violence. But the violence that is generally reported on is that which happens in the public sphere in "spectacular" ways. Indeed, as I mentioned in Chapter One, the drug war has been a boon for Mexico's *amarillista* tabloid press, which publishes daily photos of the (mostly) male victims of shooting, executions, and mutilations. Meanwhile, violence against women, and particularly that which happens in the domestic sphere, which had never garnered much attention from the Mexican mainstream despite its prevalence in the first place, has been further obscured.[434]

In an attempt to tackle gender-based violence, important legal measures have been put in place in the last few years which codify, prevent, and punish related crimes.[435] And yet, due to a

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433 In 1960, 10.6% of enrolled students were women, in 2015 this number rose to 68.4% (n.a. 2015a).

434 Vela, Estefanía. 2016. "La violencia diaria en la que nadie cree." *Nexos* (June 1): https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=28508 (consulted April 4, 2018). In 2007, approxiamtely 1087 women were murdered in Mexico. The numbers increased steadily every year until the of 2012 when 2,761 women were reported as being killed. The rates went down againt until 2014 (but not much) and then spiked again. http://cedoc.inmujeres.gob.mx/documentos_download/101258.pdf

435 Some examples include the 2005 Supreme Court ruling that rape can happen within the institution of marriage; the Federal Law to Prevent and Eradicate Discrimination (linked to Article 1 of the Constitution) (2003); the General Law for Equality between Men and Women (linked to Article 4 of the Constitution) (2006); the General Law of Access to Women to a Life free of Violence (2007). This last law included the creation of the National System to Prevent, Attend, Sanction, and Eradicate Violence Against Women. For a detailed explanation of this law see: Ramírez Solórzano, Martha Alida (coord.). 2007. *Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida libre de Violencia.* México: Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres. It is often the case that institutions and legal resources are not well-funded and equipped to attend to all the cases that are presented.

combination of patriarchal culture, a general mistrust of state institutions, and personal ignorance, fear, or shame, only very rarely do women use these recently-implemented legal tools to seek justice: only one out of every three women who have been sexually harassed ever speak about the experience to a family member or a close friend, less than twenty percent seek help from a public institution, and less than eight percent press charges against their aggressor.[436]

It is in this context that Mexico's feminist artists live and create work, and it is in this context that some of them specifically seek to critique and change. At the risk of essentializing "feminist art" in Mexico *in toto,* it is not the subject matter which characterizes the work of these artists but rather the forms and methods they employ. No matter how diverse the type of work they create or perform might be (and it is very diverse[437]), feminist art has historically been associated with certain forms of political activism. The scholar and artist Julia Antivilo, who has written extensively about Latin American feminist art, goes as far as to note that, "to call oneself an artist and take on the word *feminist* as a last name requires awareness of the relationship between feminist activism and artistic creation."[438]

(Ríos, Alejandra. 2016. "La sombra de Sísifo: El Estado y las mujeres," *Nexos* (June 1): https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=28492 (consulted April 4, 2018). However, according to professor Estefanía Vela, it is also common for these institutions to be underused; that is, not enough people take advantage that these exist. ("Violence Against Women in Mexico," talk given at the Mexican Studies Seminar at the University of Chicago, November 7, 2017).

436 Frías, Sonia. 2016. "La cultura de la violencia sexual en México y sus victimas" in *horizontal.mx* (April 4): https://horizontal.mx/la-cultura-de-la-violencia-sexual-en-mexico-y-sus-victimas/. According to the 2016 INEGI report, only one out of every 10 sexual aggression is denounced (INEGI, ENDIREH 2016: http://bit.ly/2GHjzKM). And the number for 2017 show that, for instance, 66.1% of women in Mexico reported having suffered some kind of sexual, physical, or emotional aggression, but only 9.4% made a formal complaint to the authorities. (Juan Carlos Cruz Vargas. "La violencia de género afecta al 66.1% de las mujeres en México: INEGI", Proceso (August 18, 2017): http://www.proceso.com.mx/499660/la-violencia-genero-afecta-al-66-1-las-mujeres-en-mexico-inegi).

437 For a quick glance of the type of art that gets produced see: Fajardo-Hill, Cecilia and Andrea Guinta (ed.). 2017. *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985*, Los Angeles, CA: Hammer Museum.

438 Accordingly, Antivilo notes, the category of "feminist aesthetic politics," as opposed to that of "gender aesthetics," refers to artists or *artivists* engaged in any strain of feminism whose creations or actions entail the production of politically and socially committed art in which feminism is understood as a form of thought and action. (Antivilo, Julia. 2017. "Feminism Art and "Artivism" in Latin America: A dialogue in three voices. Julia Antivilo Peña, Mónica Mayer, and María Laura Rosa" in Fajardo-Hill and Guinta 2017, 38).

While feminist artistic practices diverge significantly making impossible to generalize their work without doing some kind of injustice to their particularities, there are certain traits that appear frequently: First, many of them take place in public spaces far away from the art world and, frequently, employ techniques and strategies adopted from mass communication media, including the use of banners, posters, and graffiti that can attract the attention of mass public.[439] They also, often, eschew the production of objects and focus on the process rather than on the final product.[440] In this sense performance art has been a central recourse to a feminist art practice.[441] But there are other types of artistic practice that also shun the production of objects in favor of the process, including transdisciplinary and collective practices, usually referred to as "participative art" or "socially-engaged art." These practices are characterized by the fact that the audience is not conceived of as a viewer but rather as a collaborator or participant.[442] In recent years, participative art has become a favorite among art historians as evidenced by a flurry of books, articles, and specialized journals on the subject.[443] And yet, as many scholars have noted, feminist artists have engaged in these types of practice long before art historians paid it much attention. Griselda Pollock puts it best,

> Feminism is essential for contemporary art, even though sometimes we don't even realize it. It's not just a theme that would encompass all the proposals that have to do with questions of identity and gender, but a way of doing things. Feminist art is

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439 In doing so, this type of art questions the distinction between "high" and "low" art. Felshin, Nina. 2011. "¿Pero esto es arte? El espíritu del arte como activismo." In *Modos de Hacer. Arte crítico, esfera pública y acción directa*. ed. Paloma Blanco, et.al. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca: 73-93; also see Antivilo 2011.

440 For some examples see: Fajardo-Hill and Guinta 2017); also see Antivilo, Julia. 2015. *Entre lo sagrado y lo profano se tejen rebeldías.* Desde Abajo, Colombia.

441 Taylor, Diana and Roselyn Costantino, "Holy terrors: Latin American women perform," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* (11:2) (2008): 7-24.

442 Lippard, Lucy. 1976. *From the center: feminist essays on women's art*. New York: Dutton; Jones, Amelia. 2010. *The feminism and visual culture reader,* 2nd ed., London: Routledge; Antivilo 2015; Fajardo-Hill and Guinta 2017.

443 Kester 2011; Bishop 2012; see the journal *FIELD.*

> one of the main roots of process-based art, of relational art, of *artivism* and of everything that we now place under the label of social practice. Form is content.[444]

In Mexico, an artist whose work is representative of these practices is Lorena Wolffer, whose career has run in parallel to that of artists like Sierra, but whose practice, as the following section demonstrates, diverges dramatically from his.

3.4 LORENA WOLFFER, THE RELUCTANT ARTIST

Lorena Wolffer is an important figure in the Mexican art world and part of a rich tradition of political active feminist artists. She is known not only because of her artistic practice, but also for her work as a cultural promoter – in 1993 she helped found and directed Mexico's first museum focused on performance and non-material art, the X-Teresa Arte Actual Museum – and as a political activist who seeks to visibilize, condemn, and combat the violence that is meted out against women and non-normative bodies.

For her early works produced in the 1990s, usually performances which echoed those of Ana Mendieta and Yoko Ono, Wolffer's preferred canvas was her own body, which she used as a site through which to expose gender violence. Many of her earlier pieces, which were conceived, for the most part, to be shown in art spaces were an explicit comment on the perils of neoliberalism and, particularly, on the negative effects that were (or eventually would be) brought about by NAFTA. In *If she is Mexico, who beat her up?* (1997), for instance, Wolffer performs as a bruised and wounded runway model wearing revealing dresses with colors that allude to the Mexican flag while recordings of rap songs and of the US Senate discussing

444 Pollock, Griselda. 2016. "Mónica Mayer: Performance, Moment, and the Politics of Life," in *Mónica Mayer: When in Doubt... Ask: A Retrocollective Exhibit.* Mexico: Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo: 172-3.

possible intervention into growing drug-trafficking in Mexico play in the background (Figure 3.1). The normatively attractive body of the artist wearing tight, provocative clothes contrasts sharply with the bruises all over her body. Viewers are titillated while also having to confront the violence to which Wolffer's body is subjected. In this piece, Wolffer's body is not simply a site through which gender violence is exposed but, as art historian Amy Carroll argues, in tying her body to the nation, Wolffer "systematically [unveiled] the Othering dimensions of developmentalist rhetoric that casts Mexico as a 'second sex' and a second-class citizen of the continent's NAFTAification."[445]

FIGURE 3.1. LORENA WOLFFER'S *IF SHE IS MEXICO, WHO BEAT HER UP?*[446]

Over the years, Wolffer began to forgo the use of her body to make such violence visible and moved away from producing the type of performance art for which she had become known

445 Carroll 2017, 164.

446 Photograph taken by Eugenio Castro: http://www.lorenawolffer.net/00home.html) (last consulted May 3, 2019). (Permission by the artist)

and which was conceived, for the most part, to be shown in art forums. It was around this time that Wolffer began to produce work for the streets, public plazas, and parks, as well as for institutions far away from the art world, including shelters for abused women. Rather than being the center of attention, she became something of an invisible enabler, acting as a channel through which other women could voice their own experiences of violence (relatively) unmediated by the artist.

One of the first of these works was a response to the advertising campaign launched by the elite department store *Palacio de Hierro* (*Iron Palace*) which consisted of ads and billboards across Mexico City that depicted elegantly-dressed, light-skinned women.[447] Accompanying taglines proclaimed that "Luckily we're the weaker sex: the stronger pays when we go shopping" and "The phrase that distinguishes a girl from a woman is: 'I have nothing to wear'." Included on each of the ads was the motto: *Soy totalmente Palacio* ("I'm totally *Palacio."*).[448] Wolffer launched a counter-campaign that featured ten billboards across the city depicting, significantly, not herself but rather a darker-skinned woman with a plain red t-shirt standing on the street or holding on to the banister on a public bus (see Figure 3.2). In contrast to the *Palacio* ads in which women are portrayed in sensual poses, the woman in Wolffer's ads appears shouting with rage, laughing, or staring angrily at the camera. And instead of the colorful, innocuous backgrounds of the *Palacio de Hierro* billboards, Wolffer picked black and white photographs depicting scenes of Mexico City's everyday life, including down-trodden streets and crowded buses. The tagline *Soy totalmente Palacio* was changed to *Soy totalmente de Hierro* ("I'm totally made of Iron.") and the images were accompanied by phrases such as "The problem is that you

447 For a discussion on the complicity of marketing and mass media on the reproduction of racist imaginaries see Navarrete 2016.

448 For a description of these ads see Lida, David. 2008. *Mexico City, the Capital of the 21st Century*. Riverhead Books, New York City.

think that my body belongs to you" or "A phrase that distinguishes a girl from a woman: I decide."

FIGURE 3.2 LORENA WOLFFER'S *SOY TOTALMENTE DE HIERRO.* The billboard reads: "The problem is that you think that my body belongs to you" (2000)[449]

The piece received mixed reviews from art critics. The prominent curator and art critic José Luis Barrios wrote a scathing critique, claiming that it was not sophisticated enough to be truly subversive because it privileged "morality" and "didacticism."[450] Critiques like Barrios' echo those of many art critics' and theorists' who argue that goal-oriented art – including "do good" art practices which aspire to solve social ills – risk instrumentalizing art and thereby detract from that which makes art unique: namely its capacity to convey the complexity and ambivalence of the world and stimulate critical thinking rather than offering a "right" answer in the way that propaganda, marketing, or scientific knowledge often claim to do. [451] These critics

449 Photograph taken by Martín L. Vargas: http://www.lorenawolffer.net/00home.html) (last consulted May 3, 2019). (Permission by the artist)

450 Barrios, José Luis. 1999. "Ironía y textualidad: usos y abusos del arte conceptual," *Curare* (No. 15, July-December): 79.

451 See the debates between Theodor Adorno, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Bretch, and Walter Benjamin, which summarize the political stakes behind producing art that is didactic and useful. (Adorno, Theodor, et.al. 2007. *Aesthetics and Politics*. New York: Verso.) More recently, Jacques Ranciere has come in defense of an autonomous view on art (Jacques Ranciere, *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (trans. Steven Corcoran) (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009)).

suggest, moreover, that when art is tied to instrumental goals, it subtracts from the artistic quality of the work because its good intentions can easily end up substituting for artistic quality, resulting in mediocre artworks and mediocre social projects.[452]

Tellingly, however, many people from outside the art world found Wolffer's counter-campaign to be a powerful critique against the misogynist rhetoric of the Mexican mainstream media.[453] This included the head of the *Refugio de Fundación Diarq IAP*, a shelter for abused women, who invited Wolffer to work with the women to whom it provided services.[454] Wolffer, thereby, began to organize workshops and activities with the women who temporally resided at the shelter, encouraging them to speak and listen to each other's testimonies about why they were there. Each session is different and there are no preconceived scripts, nor a set of questions or expectations of what the interaction should look like. At times, the conversation about the traumatic episode starts early in the session, somewhat spontaneously; at others, it requires more time, talking around the edges before actually getting to the issue; there are also sessions in which, Wolffer recalls, words became less important than simply being in each other's presence.

Wolffer's practice is based "on enunciation and articulation, and in a sense what I do is simply a way of facilitating in which I create the spaces so that women can enunciate their own stories [their *testimonios*]."[455] The Spanish word *testimonio*, as cultural critic John Beverley has argued, places the emphasis on the intentionality of the narrator. In testimonies – unlike, for instance, oral history – "there is usually an urgency to communicate a problem of repression,

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452 Bishop 2012, 19. For a summary of these critiques see: Groys, Boris. 2014. "On art activism," *e-flux*, No.54 (June).

453 Wolffer claims to have given over fifty interviews to the press and received up to thirty emails per day about the piece during the time in which her billboards were on display (Wolffer, Lorena. 2001. "Políticas para el arte público?" in Arte y Ciudad. PAC, Conaculta, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores: Mexico: 180).

454 Wolffer. Interview February 6, 2018.

455 Wolffer quoted in Antivilo 2013, 217.

poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, implicated in the act of narration itself."[456]

Wolffer claims that the testimonies and the conversations that ensue have the power to heal by helping to release the violence that is left in a victim's body after an episode of violence.[457] Indeed, in a manner not unlike J.L. Austin's "performatives," Wolffer believes that giving a testimony "does things" that go far beyond the act of conveying information. Speaking and listening to others, the artist maintains, can also become profoundly empowering acts because they make people realize that they are not alone. While the dynamics of the conversations that Wolffer sustains with each woman vary substantially, what remains the same is the intent to create a space of intimacy between them, a shared space where each can speak honestly and openly.

The corollary of this work are Wolffer's attempts to bring the anonymized testimonies and experiences of the women in the shelter – and other women who suffered violence – to public spaces, forcing the public to not only engage in the "shared responsibility to bear witness,"[458] but also urging them to reflect on their own lives, perhaps recognizing unspoken similarities between theirs and these women's. Wolffer's public use of testimonies helps create temporary and intimate publics that take up space in and challenge an intensely masculine public sphere.[459]

Perhaps the paragon of this approach is her intervention *Muros de Réplicas*, which consists of placing four wooden panels in a public space with the following phrase written on top

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456 Beverley, John. 2004. *Testimonio. On the Politics of Truth.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 32.

457 Wolffer. Interview February 6, 2018. See also Wolffer quoted in Antivilo, 2013, 269 and an online interview with Wolffer which can be found at: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G87yi-guLOw) (Consulted June 25, 2018)

458 Carroll 2017, 175.

459 Felman, Shoshana. 2002. *The Juridical Unconscious*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press: 228.

of each one: "I am a woman and I have been a victim of violence from a man. This is my name and this is what I have to say to my aggressor."[460] Passersby are invited to write a "reply" with markers that are placed at the foot of each panel (Figure 4.8). When she produced this intervention in Mexico City's *Zócalo* plaza in November of 2010 – right around the time that the *Proyecto Juárez* exhibit was being held at the Carrillo Gil Museum – the reactions varied widely: while some women immediately opted to participate, others, instead, chose to roam around, and only after reading others' responses would get up the nerve to write their own (or not). Some women cried, many engaged in spontaneous conversations with one another. Men would also occasionally stop and silently read the replies. Others would roll their eyes and walk away, and, some, would ask out loud to no one in particular, "How about the violence perpetuated against men?" In about three hours, the surface of the four walls was completely covered with testimonies.

460 "Soy mujer y he sido víctima de violencia por parte de un hombre. Éste es mi nombre y esto es lo que tengo que decirle a mi aggressor."

FIGURE 3.3 LORENA WOLFFER'S *MUROS DE RÉPLICA* at the *Zócalo* in Mexico City (2008).[461]

In recent years, rather than simply denouncing violence, Wolffer has sought to create moments for women and those with non-normative bodies to come together and occupy public spaces in joyful and playful ways. For instance "Estados de Excepción" ("States of Exception") – for which she was awarded the 2014 Artraker Prize in the category of social impact – consists of a table set up in a public plaza or on a sidewalk, at which women who are walking by are invited by Wolffer to sit down and enjoy a free communal meal.[462] The meal and conversation often last for over three hours, while passersby are forced to either divert from their paths to walk

461 Photograph taken by Lorena Wolffer's webpage: http://www.lorenawolffer.net/00home.html) (last consulted May 3, 2019). (Permission by the artist)

462 Between 2013 and 2016, this piece was presented at Guadalajara's Carmen Park, Guatemala street in downtown Mexico City, at the Constitución Plaza in Querétaro, among others (http://www.lorenawolffer.net/00home.html) (last consulted May 3, 2019).

around the group, or stop to puzzle at this scene of women from different social classes enjoying a meal, discussing and laughing in the middle of the sidewalk. Working under the assumption that women in Mexico live in a permanent "state of exception" because their rights are not protected, Wolffer radically flips the meaning of this term as it is used in the Mexican Constitution and creates impromptu public safe spaces.[463]

In addition to a handful of photographs – usually taken by the artist – which spontaneously capture the group of women in the act, the only other record of these events are the brief testimonies (e.g. "I felt very happy because I am a solitary person and today I learned how to socialize.") that women write on a cheap paper mantelpiece before they go on with their day. These material ephemera, the artist again maintains, can never fully capture the affective ties that develop between women during these moments. This is precisely why it continues to be so difficult to exhibit this kind of work in art museums, which despite paying lip service to process-based art that disregards tangible objects, continue to be beholden to more traditional forms of display.

3.5 Artistic Labor?

Given the type of work that she engages in, and in clear contradistinction with the artists like Sierra and others discussed in the previous sections, Wolffer maintains that she does not "establish a difference between an intervention understood as the work I am going to display somewhere [art] and the conversation I might have with a lawyer friend about the situation of women who have suffered miscarriages or about anything [activism]. I don't think of them [art

463 Article 29 in the Constitution maintains that in cases of extreme danger to the country, the president (with the approval of Congress) has the right to temporarily revoke citizen's rights (i.e. create a "state of exception") in the interest of protecting the public good.

and activism] as different things, I see them as one and the same."[464] Her work seeks to empower women by providing them a forum to publicly voice their experience, discontent, and plight. In contradistinction, Sierra's work does not empower the people he hires to perform the work, but rather seeks to comment on (and allegedly denounce) the capitalist system by mimicking it and profiting off it.

Figure 3.4 captures the profound difference between Wolffer's and Sierra's work. The left image shows a group of young women writing *their* testimonies of victimhood on a wall in Mexico City's largest public plaza as part of Wolffer's *Muros de Réplica* piece. The image on the right shows six unemployed men who Sierra hired for $30 to be tattooed. Rather than enabling these young men to voice their plight, Sierra instead uses them as props for *his* social commentary. The aesthetics of his work, moreover, are incredibly different from hers. Sierra's work, clearly, rests on the fact that he sets his art in direct conversation with an art movement (minimalism) and the language of formal aesthetics serves as a touchstone for his work (which explains why he chose to tattoo a black line, the quintessential symbols of minimalist art, on these young men). In contrast, Wolffer never cites formal aesthetic elements as a foundational resource or criterion for her projects.

464 Wolffer, Lorena. 2015. "Wolffer Interview by Bernard Vienat." March 14: http://vorticidad.org/artist/lorena-wolffer-2/?lang= en

FIGURE 3.4. WOLFFER VS. SIERRA. Left: Still from Lorena Wolffer's *Muros de Réplica* at the *Zócalo* in Mexico City (2008).[465] Right: Still from Santiago Sierra's *250 centimeter line tattooed on six paid people* in Espacio Aglutinador in Havana, Cuba. (1999)[466]

Positions like Wolffer's are often frowned upon by many art critics who claim that conceiving of art and activism as one and the same is risky and can be politically detrimental. Some go so far as to argue that by tasking art with doing things for society that were either previously (or which hypothetically continue to be) the concern of the state – whether it be minimizing crime, reducing violence against women, or raising ecological concerns – artists become, even if unwittingly, allies of neoliberal processes. By standing in for the state, they help to justify the anti-state narratives advanced by neoliberalism and its impulse to dismantle public institutions.[467] For instance, writing about socially engaged art that tries to solve social ills, art theorist Claire Bishop – who, as noted earlier, is a big champion of Santiago Sierra – posits that,

> Even though participatory artists invariably stand against neoliberal capitalism, the values they impute to their work are understood formally (in terms of opposing

465 Photograph taken by Lorena Wolffer's webpage: (http://www.lorenawolffer.net/00home.html) (Last consulted May 3, 2019) (Permission by the artist).

466 Photograph taken from Santiago Sierra's webpage: http://www.santiago-sierra.com/996_1024.php?key=10 (last consulted May 7, 2019).

467 Jackson 2012, 16. For a similar critique along these lines see Yúdice 2003.

> individualism and the commodity object), without recognizing that so many other aspects of this art practice dovetail even more perfectly with neoliberalism's recent forms (networks, mobility, project work, affective labour).[468]

Wolffer, like many other feminist artivists, certainly engages in affective labor and, in some ways, fulfills the role of a social worker, making her a clear target of Bishop's critiques: the onus of advancing social ends falls on her rather than on the state. In this, Wolffer becomes the ideal "moral neoliberal" actor, which, as anthropologist Andrea Muehelbach defines, is one whose unpaid care work is called upon to fill gaps created by the retrenchment of the social safety net.[469]

However, while Wolffer (and others) is vocal about the state's responsibility in enabling violence against women, she often collaborates with state institutions and in this sense her work rather than substituting the state, complements it. For instance, in matters of gender rights and violence, many of these feminist artists know the law to the dot and frequently work with lawyers and gender rights activists to advocate for change. In their exhibits, they include modules to familiarize women with their legal rights and with state institutions that can help them navigate issues of sexual assault. Because their work seeks to visibilize certain forms of violence, it is not unusual for feminist artists to become the first people that others think to contact to ask for advice on how to handle a situation related to gender or sexual violence and

468 Bishop 2012, 277.

469 Muehelbach 2012.

where to get access to legal and professional help.[470] Knowing how to respond to these inquiries and where to redirect victims takes time and effort that is itself, very often, invisibilized.[471]

These feminist artivists, moreover, are rarely paid for participating in these shows given that museums are seen as platforms for recognition and fame, which in theory eventually translates into income for the exhibiting artists. This is generally the case for artists who, like Sierra, sell their work in the market. However, most feminist *artivists* are not represented by a gallery (nor do they ever consider being represented) and do not produce work to sell, and while their shows certainly help them gain visibility, this visibility need not translate into commercial success. Moreover, they are expected to find the resources to carry out any additional out-reach and educational activities themselves, meaning that having a show in a museum can end up being very costly and time consuming for these artists.

While work like Sierra's can raise questions about labor and point to the precarious conditions in which most of the world's population is subjected to, his work itself does not challenge the rules or language of the art world, nor contests what labor actually means in this context. In contrast, Wolffer refuses to adopt the forms and language of the mainstream art world. And while Sierra is able to capitalize from his work, she is not, precisely because her labor in this context is not taken into consideration. Indeed, much of the work performed by Wolffer and other feminist artists is rarely considered as work. Tellingly, when I asked her how she makes a living her response was "by convincing people that they need to pay me for my

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470 There is a limit to what these artists can do to help. While they can offer suggestions on where to seek legal or psychological help, the decision to do so is, ultimately, up to the victim. Moreover, when the artist is informed that a victim has pressed formal charges, she usually drops the case as it would be very difficult to continue supervising all the cases that are deferred to the authorities.

471 Wolffer recalls how she often receives phone calls at three in the morning informing her about a case of abuse or rape. The expectations are that she should be available at any time and have the disposition to deal with the case.

work."[472] The mere act of convincing people that her work is indeed a form labor (and should therefore be remunerated) becomes itself a form of labor.[473]

Even as the definition of art has become increasingly capacious – art can entail not just painting, sculpting, and photographing but also creating a garden,[474] renouncing one's nationality,[475] or getting shot by a gun[476] and *documenting* these acts – the expectation remains that it will produce an object that can circulate or a commodity that can be sold. Regardless of the ostensible permissiveness of form in contemporary art, not all forms of labor are considered labor by the art world. Sierra's specifically centers on making visible the invisibility of labor under capitalism by turning this visibilization into a commodity and making his own artistic labor visible and valuable. Wolffer, meanwhile, actually performs the very sort of invisible labor that Sierra comments on, but this labor is not valorized in the same way by the art world. Her experience in this case shows that the artistic field, rather than transforming itself based on the critiques it makes, ends up becoming merely a reflection of the world it critiques.

3.6 Conclusion: A Longing for Censorship

It is important to take into consideration the way different kinds of art circulate and are suppressed, especially when engaging in discussions of freedom of expression and censorship, topics that come up frequently when one studies the relationship between politics and art. Addressing these topics in the case of Mexico is a tricky matter, because of the historically

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472 Wolffer. Interview February 2018.

473 Wolffer is known by her colleagues in the art world as someone who ensures that artists who participate in the projects that she coordinates will get paid fair wages. (Cerrucha. Interview August 10, 2018).

474 Jerónimo Hagerman's *Jardín Vecindario* (2012).

475 Núria Güell's *Apátrica por voluntad propia sobre la prisión de lo posible* (2016).

476 Chris Burden's *Shoot* (1971).

mutually-dependent relationship between the state and the artistic community. The Mexican state's historically supportive relationship with the artistic community not only meant that it provided resources to the arts, but also that it was relatively lenient towards the content of artworks, even as it did expect these works to be, at least to some extent, compatible with the post-revolutionary nationalist ideologies.

Throughout the twentieth century, Mexico became a sanctuary of free expression for intellectuals and artists who were repressed and threatened by their own governments, including during the Spanish Civil War and later during the wave of military dictatorships in Latin America. And yet, given that the state held a virtual monopoly on artistic funding, state officials could pick and choose the art that they wanted to support, which generally meant art that celebrated certain national narratives (and championed specific heteronormative values[477]) in ways that did not openly question the state's power.[478] The art historian Mary Coffey argues that "while the state never explicitly nominated any artist as its mouthpiece, bureaucrats and institutions alike showed favor to particular artists at particular times and promoted their work through exhibitions while awarding them high-profile commissions."[479] In other words, the flipside to the PRI's support for the arts was what Ruben Gallo terms a "veiled form of censorship."[480] Under such circumstances, different forms of suppression and self-censorship took place, even if, due to their obliqueness, it is difficult to generalize about their frequency or the logics of their enactment. For instance, when it came to certain types of contemporary art –

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477 Zavala 2010. Cases of censorship related to heteronormative values and linked to the country's catholic disposition have not been uncommon, as the famous case of Rolando de la Rosa's Guadalupana Monroe (see Rother, Larry. 1988. "Mexico City Journal Marilyn and Virgin: Art or Sacrilege?" *The New York Times*. April 2: http://www.nytimes.com/1988/04/02/world/mexico-city-journal-marilyn-and-virgin-art-or-sacrilege.html).

478 Goldman 1981.

479 Coffey 2012, 120.

480 Gallo 2004, 11.

including the work produced by art collectives known as *Los Grupos* in the 1970s and 1980s, which was generally critical of the state – the state supported only temporary shows but rarely, if ever, invested in creating permanent collections of this type of art.[481] This subtle form of censorship constituted "tolerant repression": a way for the state to pretend to accept critical artworks while simultaneously condemning them to be "ephemeral and invisible."[482]

But in addition to these ambiguous forms of censorship, it is important to remember that the state wielded a significant degree of power and could censor explicitly at any time, even if it did not always do it.[483] In fact there are cases of explicitly violent, repressive forms of state censorship, including against members of *Los Grupos*, many of whom recall having lived in fear of being followed, intimidated, and imprisoned, and in some cases of being killed. Judging by the murder of artist Melecio Galván, a member of the *grupo MIRA*, this fear was not simply a paranoid fantasy.[484]

One of the most famous examples of a more straightforward oppressive form of censorship, involved the iconic muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, who was arrested in 1960 for depicting a rail worker's strike on a mural he painted for the National Association of Actors (ANDA). The mural was a deliberate objection against a piece of anti-organized-protest

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481 The *Ruptura* movement was the last artistic movement that was consistently collected by the state. One of the main examples of the ephemeral forms of state support include the famous Salón de Artes, which worked as a temporary show of artworks.

482 Debroise and Medina, 2007. In the last few decades, the state has found new ways to support the production of art but, for the most part, continues to neglect collecting and preserving it. For instance, the National Foundation for the Arts and Culture (FONCA), a public-private partnership created by president Salinas in 1989, has become one of the most important tools to support artists. Given that artists rarely have the means to circulate and exhibit their work once it is produced, the support from FONCA has been key in helping to launch the careers of some of Mexico's most important contemporary artists – many of whom have gone on to become the country's most renowned cultural ambassadors around the globe – their work is hard to find in national public collections.

483 There are documented cases in which the state forced artists to suspend their work while they were doing it (Azuela de la Cueva 2012, 287).

484 Artist Melecio Galván whose drawings depicting members of the military engaging in torture and violence made many people in power uncomfortable and, presumably, led to Galván's murder in 1982. (Helguera, Antonio, "Dibujos de la Realidad." *La Jornada Semanal,* May 6, 2007).

legislation, and duly caused the desired offense. The piece was promptly effaced and Siqueiros was sent to the Lecumberri prison for four years. And yet, even this censorship was cast by the state as a form of mechanistic, bureaucratized censure and Siqueiros quickly returned to painting murals in public, state-owned spaces upon his release.[485] This example shows, on the one hand, just how profoundly ambiguous and schizophrenic the relationship was between artists and the Mexican state. On the other, it speaks to the how the PRI regime's practices of censorship could, at times, be relatively transparent. The state was clear that Siqueiros was imprisoned and his mural destroyed because of its politically defiant content, and after he had been punished, and ostensibly accepted his punishment, he was welcomed back into the fold of state patronage.

The idea that today an artist in Mexico would be sent to jail or killed because of her work, is almost impossible to imagine.[486] In fact, when censorship did happen, no one wants to take credit for it, nor take up the stance of an enlightened intellectual entity or a moral guardian that dictates what citizens should or should not see.[487] Neither an increasingly neoliberal state, nor an increasingly involved private sector, invoke moral or political reasons for censorship. Instead, with a few exceptions,[488] both entities seem to trumpet their broad embrace of freedom

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485 Santos 2012, 57.

486 Artist Monica Mayer compared Mexico to China: "It's nothing like in China a few years ago where our colleagues ended up in jail for performing or had to announce their events in one place and present them else- where to dodge the police" (Mayer, Mónica. 2016. *Mónica Mayer: When in Doubt... Ask*. Mexico: Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo: 234-5).

487 The case in Mexico contrasts to countries like Egypt, Poland, and Russia, where the government openly and vociferously censors artworks that it considers offensive and does so under the banner of morality. In these countries, the government openly censor and take public pride in doing so. The reasons why this is the case in an attempt to show that the state continues to be a powerful entity despite its retrenchment in other areas that are now controlled by the private sector. In other words, the state censors as a way to ensure citizens that there "are values we have always believed in and will continue to believe in. In the midst of the extremely rapid change characterizing the neoliberal experience, the state's assertion that it needs to protect us from something corruptive gives the impression of permanence and stability." Szremski, Ania. 2011. "Art and Morality under Neoliberalism: Reflections on "Blasphemous" Art from the East—A Tale in Three Parts" *Art 21*. (November 1): (http://www.art21.org/texts/the-culture-wars-redux/essay-art-and-morality-under-neoliberalism-reflections-on-blasphemous-a).

488 The most renowned cases of overt art censorship are Atlas Eidolon at the public Tamayo Museum and Miguel Ventura's *Cantos Civicos* at the National University's Museum of Contemporary Art (MUAC). While neither of these exhibits were cancelled, but Eidolon's was cut short and Ventura received a lot of pressure from museum authorities to censor certain parts.

of expression as the *sine qua non* of the newly-democratic Mexico. In a world where "freedom of expression" is sacred, being accused of censoring can be much more dangerous than allowing the scandal of a provocative artwork to unfold.[489]

And yet, during my time doing fieldwork for this project, members from the art world would often bring up the topic of censorship in conversation. What I found particularly surprising about these conversations was that while many people referred to censorship as if it was a recurrent issue and a real problem, when I asked them to mention concrete acts of censorship, and particularly cases in which an artwork that should have been shown was not shown at all, they often found it very difficult to think of any recent cases.

Instead, what often seemed to be the case was that they were giving voice to a certain anticipation of censorship, a sort of longing or desire that it would happen, even if it almost never did. For instance, on more than one occasion, employees at different museums told me how they had taken measures in anticipation of efforts from either state officials or patrons from the private sector to censor particular artworks and shows, but that nothing eventuated, and that their preparations and worries had been for naught. In one case, for example, a curator at a public, state-owned contemporary art museum told me how her curatorial department had decided to acquire and exhibit a piece that explicitly mocked both national symbols and heteronormative values. Expecting that state officials would find the piece offensive and demand its removal, she agreed with the museum's head curator and director that if they were indeed

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489 In fact, it is often those in positions of economic power are stepping in specifically so that controversial content *can* be shown. A case in point was the Jumex Foundation helping to pay for part of Teresa Margolles' show at the Venice Biennial in 2009, which, the story goes, was defunded by the state for directly referring and openly condemning the spike in violence in Mexico that has resulted from the drug war launched by President Felipe Calderón in 2007. As I recounted in the opening vignette of this dissertation, the Pavilion was originally going to be sponsored by the Mexican government but when the state rescinded the funds, the private sector eventually stepped in allowing the show to happen and facilitating the conversation.

forced to omit the piece from their exhibit, they would resign from their posts as a sign of protest. But, much to their surprise, nothing happened. Not only did no one protest, no one even raised an eyebrow; it was as if the piece had gone completely unnoticed.[490]

The case of *Sumisión* with which this chapter began, in many ways, a case in point. Even as the burning of the word *Sumisión* was stifled by the Juárez authorities, the photographs and video of the piece have since circulated widely, including in an exhibition that was organized as part of Mexico's 2010 national commemorations. In 2010, as the country was getting ready to celebrate the bicentennial commemorations of Independence and the centennial commemorations of Revolution, Mariana David, the curator of *Proyecto Juárez*, decided to resurrect the project by organizing an exhibition about it. She approached Itala Schmelz, a philosopher and cultural critic, who at the time was director of the state-owned Carrillo Gil Contemporary Art Museum (MAGC). Schmelz not only acceded to have the MACG house an exhibit about *Proyecto Juárez* – which was in large part paid by the private sector – but decided to link the exhibit to the national celebrations.

The INBA (the National Institute of Fine Arts) is required by law to authorize all the exhibitions and events that take place in state museums. The directors of these spaces submit a brief description of the shows and activities that are then approved (or rejected) by state officials. At first, *Proyecto Juárez* flew under the censors' radar and was approved with no restrictions. There is no way of knowing why exactly the exhibition passed the first round of inspections unquestioned. The most prevalent rumor has it that whoever was in charge of reviewing the exhibit linked the word Juárez in its title with Benito Juárez (Mexico's former president and one

490 Anonymous. Interview June 27, 2014.

of the most cherished national heroes), thinking it would be a historical and patriotic project.[491] As the opening of the show loomed, however, INBA officials realized that the subject matter of the exhibit was not Benito, but rather Ciudad Juárez. It was then that, according to Schmelz, the authorities began to "show caution and disconcert."[492]

Both Schmelz and David refused to give in and – unlike David's earlier experience with Sierra's *Sumisión* in Ciudad Juárez – managed to convince the authorities not to interrupt the show. They did, however, compromise by agreeing to open it ahead of time (so it did not formally coincide with the launch of the official commemorations) and also by decreasing advertising for the exhibition. It is very difficult to measure the effects of such compromise and to know if more publicity would have actually bolstered the attendance to the exhibition, which amounted to approximately 3,620 people during the three months that it remained opened. In any case, however, the point is that *Sumisión* and the other pieces of *Proyecto Juárez* were exhibited and circulated freely. Indeed, once it was produced, the piece went from being censored by the local authorities of Ciudad Juárez, to almost being censored by the federal state authorities at the MACG, to finally being appropriated by the federal state authorities and used to commemorate the most important national commemorations in years *as if* the latter had commissioned and supported it all along.[493] In a sense, it was precisely because the content of the works condemned

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491 Schmelz, Itala. 2011. "Política cultural y arte político en el México actual." Lecture delivered for the conference *Entre la teoría y la práctica: reconsiderando el arte latinoamericano en el siglo XXI*. Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI). Lima. November 2, 2011.

492 Ibidem.

493 The MACG is owned by the state, which is responsible for paying its electricity and maintenance bills and the salaries of most of its employees, including Schmelz herself. But the money that the MACG receives from the state is not enough to cover the costs of the shows and events that are planned. In fact, the museum does not even receive the money that it collects from entrance fees and from the bookstore. Instead, the INBA collects this money and then redistributes it in whatever ways it pleases. Funding from the private sector, therefore, has become indispensable for state museums to finance many of their exhibitions (See Chapter 4).

the state that it seemed as though the latter was actually open to and supportive of such criticism and, paradoxically, ended up benefiting from an increasingly contestatory artistic community.

But the state is not the only actor who has become more lenient. A year after the *Proyecto Juárez* exhibit at the MACG, Schmelz spoke publicly about how corporations and wealthy individuals are becoming more open to critique even to the point of financing art that openly condemns them. She maintained that such leniency was somewhat disappointing but, more importantly, that it worried her that perhaps those in power have become increasingly "immune to the ideological effects of art."[494] Indeed, it is not unusual to find wealthy art collectors (and corporations) who buy artworks and who fund entire exhibitions that condemn both specific corporations (and their owners) as well as the political-economic structures, including capitalism itself.[495]

However, as I have tried to show in this chapter, as rare as overt forms of censorship may be, this does not mean that all kinds of work are equally privileged. After all, censorship is not simply a prohibitive gesture, an act of suppressing meaning and silencing speech and expression,[496] but it is also about "making meanings"[497] and about producing authorized forms of truth. Even as work like Wolffer's is rarely overtly censored, producing and circulating it can be an incredibly fraught, humiliating, and exhausting experience full of battles against the art

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494 Schmelz, Itala. 2011. "Política cultural y arte político en el México actual." Lecture delivered for the conference *Entre la teoría y la práctica: reconsiderando el arte latinoamericano en el siglo XXI*. Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI). Lima. November 2, 2011.

495 The case of the Isabel and Agustín Coppel Collection (CIAC) is a case in point. In 2014 CIAC organized an exhibit in its offices in the Colonia Condesa in Mexico City titled *The overflow of productivity logic*, which included artworks that sought to "displace the meaning of some of the conceptual pillars of the prevailing economic model [capitalism]." The exhibit included works by Santiago Sierra, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Sebastian Salgao and others (Cuadriello, Barbara. 2014. *The Overflow of Productivity Logic*. Mexico: Coppel Collection).

496 Suppression can take place in different ways, including the removal or replacement of undesired material. (Ying, Jiang. 2012. *Cyber-Nationalism in China*. Adelaide, Australia: University of Adelaide Press: 63-77).

497 Mazzarella, William. 2013. *Censorium: Cinema and the end of mass publicity.* Durham: Duke University Press: 2.

world.[498] A few years ago Wolffer maintained that "the art world's approval interests me less and less. Sure, I am an artist because I was trained as one, but I don't really care if the art world sees my work as art."[499] In her increasing indifference to the art world, she is, once again, far from being an outlier. The enormous pressures to perform stereotypical notions of artistry alongside their political activism and social work has led many feminist artists to abandon or turn their back on the art world.[500]

Mexico has a long and important tradition of art that is produced with explicit political purposes, be it to call people into action, to champion a specific political cause or movement, or to deliberately try to produce and transmit a national identity. Historically, this work was supported almost exclusively by the state and, in that context, it was precisely because of their political commitment and the political nature of their work that many artists gained prestige in the artistic field. Today the situation looks very different. This chapter has argued not that artists and their field have become depoliticized as a result of the unprecedented incursion of the private sector into the field, and of the strengthening of ties with both the global art world and global capital, a claim that has often been advanced by some art critics.[501] Instead, I have argued that these structural transformations have enabled more production and a wider circulation of entirely new forms of politically-critical art, many of which overtly denounce the current political situation and the state's and private sector's complicity in it. While this has broadened the scope

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498 This was the case with a retrospective Wolffer held at the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City in 2015 (see Islas Weinstein, Tania. *forthcoming.* "*Expuestas:* Laborious Expectations and the Plight of Feminist Art in Contemporary Mexico," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*).

499 Wolffer, Lorena. 2016. "Evidencias." YouTube video, 32 min. Posted by InMujeres Guadalajara [October, 2016]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWTXMNr4_Q0

500 La Lleca. 2008. *Cómo hacemos lo que hacemos*. Mexico: Conaculta and Fundación Júmex; Antivilo 2013, 57).

501 For the case of Mexico see: Emmelhainz 2016. For the global art world see: Stallabrass, Julian. 2004. *Art Incorporated.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

for politically critical work, in doing so it has also valorized a highly aestheticized, conceptual critique while devaluing art that marries normative, practical goals to its aesthetic form. By contrasting the work of Santiago Sierra with that of Lorena Wolffer, I demonstrated that within the wide spectrum of "political art" that is produced, only certain type of work (and the labor that gets put into it) is privileged by the art world and market. Even as, increasingly, anything can be considered art, there are certain forms of labor that are invisibilized and not taken into consideration by the art market.

CHAPTER FOUR

CURATORSHIP, EDUCATION, AND PHILANTHROPY: THE NEOLIBERALIZATION OF MEXICO'S MUSEUMS (OR, HOW RANCIÈRE KILLED GAMBOA)

On November 19, 2013, the Jumex Museum, owned by the homonymous juice corporation, opened its doors to the public in the *Plaza Carso* shopping and cultural complex in Mexico City's upscale *Nuevo Polanco* neighborhood.[502] The museum's inauguration, a greatly anticipated event among art world connoisseurs across the globe, consisted of a series of widely-publicized parties and social events which had the intention of presenting "a modern Mexico to the world."[503] For days on end, these generated stories in international glamour and art magazines and blogs, duly accompanied by countless photographs of members of the Mexican economic elite sipping champagne and posing next to Hollywood celebrities like Eva Longoria and Will Ferrell and the assorted darlings of the global contemporary art world that had been flown in for the occasion.[504] In a fairly representative piece that appeared in *Vogue*'s Mexican

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502 One of the main reasons why the museum was built in *Plaza Carso* was to ensure high attendance and visibility. The motto of Plaza Carso is "*convertir pasivos urbanos en activos sociales y económicos*." http://www.plazacarso.com.mx/historia.php (last consulted May 3, 2019).
In addition to the Jumex Museum, *Plaza Carso* houses several transnational corporate buildings, expensive residential lofts, a giant shopping mall, a theatre that hosts popular Broadway musicals, and the *Soumaya* art museum, which belongs to the wealthiest man in Mexico, Carlos Slim Helú.

503 Lopez Alonso, Eugenio. "Mercado del arte" Forbes México. Video entrevista, (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_36IDaWdCU). Nov. 26, 2014.

504 Some examples: "Eugenio López y sus 'chicas bond', protagonistas del mayor acontecimiento social del año," *Hola.com* (November 20, 2013): http://mx.hola.com/famosos/201311205514/eugenio-lopez-museo-jumex-portada/ The stories and photographs revealed the decadence that characterizes the lifestyle of many members of Mexico's economic elite, who are prone to publicizing their lives on social media, newspapers, and magazines.

edition, a young Mexican socialite recalled that "at some point [during one of the opening parties] we found ourselves dancing madly with the directors of the Guggenheim, MoMA, and Louvre museums – it was then that we realized that *Mexico had really made it*."[505] The article, however, did not inquire further about *who* was included in the "Mexico" that this debutante referred to, or what exactly she meant by "really making it."[506] For his part, Eugenio López Alonso – the sole heir of the Jumex Corporation and the man responsible for starting the collection that is now housed in the corporation's museum – explained that "I wanted the museum to be international. I don't want Mexico to be nationalist, which is why I brought David Chipperfield [a world-renowned British architect] to design the museum."[507]

But the inaugural events entailed more than drinking and dancing; they also included a series of academic and artistic events. After all, the museum billed itself as a space that "cares about research, knowledge, education, and social projects."[508] The Museum's first director, Patrick Charpenel, had made a point of underscoring that

> The true axes that articulate our [Jumex] project are education and research. The true role of any museum should not simply be to become laboratories of experience, education, and research, but also platforms of resistance. They must take a stance, much like universities do. Political movements are always created in the heart of the universities. We have much to learn from this model, and I insist: museums are not spaces where historical and artistic products become legitimized, but rather

505 "Presenter el Mexico modern al mundo (…) En un momento nos encontramos bailando en la pista como locos con los Directores de los museos Guggenheim, MoMA, y Louvre - y en ese momento sabíamos que Mexico había realmente llegado." Alexander, Victoria. "Style Diary" in *Vogue* November 20th, 2013. http://www.vogue.mx/moda/estilo-vogue/articulos/diario-victoria-alexander-inauguracion-museo-jumex-ciudad-de-mexico/3078 (the italics are mine).

506 One of the exhibition with which the museum opened was *James Lee Byars: ½ An Autobiography*. This exhibit was co-organized by the Jumex Museum and the MoMA in New York City. One of the Mexican curators of the exhibit, Magalí Arriola, argued that the show evidenced that museums in Mexico finally had the potential (and the budget) to be more than mere "receptacles of what was produced outside, and to begin to export." Magalí Arriola quoted in "Colección Jumex debuta en Nueva York" in *Exclesior*, June 14, 2014. http://www.excelsior.com.mx/expresiones/2014/06/14/965145

507 López also oversaw the construction of the institution himself – which included hand-picking the Finish marble for the floors – to ensure that the museum would be able to house any type of artwork by complying with the standards of both "first-world" museum and insurance companies. (Eugenio López Alonso talk given at the Jumex Museum on February 7th, 2014).

508 Patrick Charpenel quoted in "El Museo Jumex privilegiará 'la educación y las iniciativas sociales' in *La Jornada*, November 13, 2013.

> where these are problematized because research and experimentation take place in these spaces. We hope to be very radical, to set better examples every time.[509]

At the turn of the millennium, the world witnessed an upsurge in museums, and Mexico was no exception. In 1997, there were 398 museums in the country; fifteen years later there were over 1200, with many of them reporting hundreds of thousands of visitors every year.[510] Many of these institutions, much like the Jumex Museum, have the explicit objective of becoming institutions that form critical and politically-active publics by mirroring the work performed by universities.

It was also around this time when the figure of the professional curator became more prominent in Mexico's art world. In 2011, the first graduate program in curatorial studies in Mexico was founded at the National University.[511] Scholarships, grants, and fellowships directed exclusively to fund the work of these nascent professionals became more widespread.[512] While formally the job of the curator consists on "placing artworks in the exhibition space," this often

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509 Charpenel interviewed by Marisol Rodriguez in "La Fundación del Museo Jumex," in *La Ciudad de Frente.* November 27, 2013. In an attempt to be consistent, the inaugural events included a roundtable entitled "Everything you ever wanted to know about contemporary art but were afraid to ask," a recreation of a performance by the iconic American artist James Lee Byars, and a public conversation between the museum's architect David Chipperfield and world-renowned curator Hans Ulrich Orbist. The roundtable participants included Patrick Charpenel, art critics María Minera and Luis Villoro, and artists Abraham Cruzvillegas and Gabriel Orozco (both of whom are represented by the Mexican *Kurimanzutto* gallery, considered one of the most important galleries in the world).

510 On average there are 100 thousand inhabitants per museum but these are far from being equally distributed. While there are at least four museums in each of the country's 30 states, most museums are located in Mexico City, followed by Jalisco and Estado de México. The ones with higher visibility and attendance are, by far, the ones located in the country's capital. (López Velarde, Mónica and Víctor Noxpango (coords)., *Cartografía de la Prácticas Expositiva.s* Coordinación Nacional de Artes Plásticas and INBAL: Mexico City). The Museum of the Palace of Fine Arts has over 500,000 visitors per year and the University Museum of Contemporary Art (MUAC) has over 300,000 people visit the MUAC every year. (Garcia Canclini, Néstor. 2013. "Tareas de los museos: explicar, comunicar, incluir." In *El Lugar de los Públicos en el Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo.* eds. Garcia Canclini (et.al) (Mexico: Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo): 3, 5 & 18. Slim's *Soumaya* museum boasts to have had 7,079,722 visitors since it opened in.

511 This program, titled "Programa de Estudios Curatoriales," is a master's program offered at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas at the UNAM.

512 The Fundación Jumex, for instance, provides specific grants for curatorial projects. Many curators also apply for grants and fellowships offered by international institutions.

means much more than the simple act of choosing which artworks will be included in an exhibition. In making this choice, what the curator is de facto doing is elevating the status of objects into *art*works.[513] To do so, curators perform a wide range of tasks that are usually attributed to artists, art critics, and museographers, but also, crucially, to managers and accountants. Far from being based on greater scientific or technical specialization, being a curator usually hinges on the ability to perform all kinds of different tasks and to delegate them and negotiate with people inside and outside the institution.[514] Accordingly, curators mediate not simply between the artist (and her work) and the public but also between the interests of the broader art world and the funders and donors. But what does this upsurge in both curators and museums that bill themselves as universities demonstrate about the ways in which art has changed as a tool of political speech and education in the wake of the country's twin transition?

In this chapter, I address this questions by chronicling the ways in which the curatorial and pedagogical strategies of art museums have changed in the wake of the twin transition. [515] The first part of the chapter examines the curatorial practice of Fernando Gamboa, the "father" of Mexican museography, who organized hundreds of exhibitions during the PRI's heyday, pioneering an exhibitionary style that was heavily didactic and presented top-down narratives of the nation. I then move on to show how, in the wake of the country's twin transition, art

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513 Groys, Boris. 2008. *Art Power.* The MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts.

514 Paradoxically, as curator Cuauhtémoc Medina argues, even as the curatorial field has become much more professionalized, the figure of curator is based on "de-professionalization." (Medina, Cuauhtémoc. 2008. "Sobre la curaduría en la periferia." *Laberinto* by *Milenio Diario* (September 24, 2008)).

515 In addition to the few studies of museums that exist as well as first-hand observation and participant-observation in different art museums in Mexico City in 2013 and 2014, the bulk of the data that I used to write this chapter is based on interviews that I conducted with curators, educators, museum directors, and a wide range of museum employees, artists, and people attending exhibitions. Given that most of the people I interviewed asked to remain anonymous I chose to focus on the commonalities and general trends that these museums are experiencing rather than on the particularities of each institution. I do so even as I recognize that there are important differences between public and private museums, as well as between individual institutions. I note this now so as not to be disingenuous and to warn the reader that, unless explicitly stated, no one museum will entirely fit within any of the traits that I discuss in this chapter.

practitioners are moving away from projects like those of Gamboa and making their way to curatorial strategies influenced by the ideas of philosopher Jacques Rancière. These strategies, which reduce exegesis and explanation to a minimum, are allegedly tailored to incentivize critical thinking in individual viewers. While these curatorial trends are representative of global trends in the art world, I demonstrate that in Mexico these are justified as a move away from the country's autocratic past and are seen, specifically, as a rejection of the PRI's cultural policy.

I argue that even as curators come to reject didacticism in the name of democratization and the empowerment of the public, their "well-intentioned" curatorial strategies often fail to interpellate the public. That this happens at a time in which the state funds for museums are decreasing is not coincidental. Even as an unprecedented amount of resources is coming in from the private sector, these resources are not enough to compensate for the decreasing state budgets allotted to the arts and the rising costs faced by museums and are rarely directed to the education departments within these institutions. The exhibits that are being organized seek to incite political awareness from the public in ways that do not simply provide information and top-down messages. This, however, requires time and resources both from the institution and the public, which are not always guaranteed.

In short, then, this chapter points to a series of elective affinities between changes at the following levels: a) funding and patronage networks in museums (decrease in public funds and increase in private funds); b) the precarious labor conditions for curators and other museum employees; c) the non-didactic, Rancierean-influenced curatorial strategies that are implemented in these spaces; and d) the experiences of the public in museums and the ways in which such experience is being measured by museum officials.

4.1 GAMBOA'S LEGACY

Throughout the twentieth century, the arts were deployed by the Mexican state first and foremost as a didactic tool through which to disseminate information and educate the masses about national history.[516] Images were reproduced on a mass scale and distributed across different venues through murals painted on public buildings and the reproduction of images on textbooks but also through other means of informal education, like mass, popular workshops. The corollary of this mass art-education strategies was that the country's cultural policy was never based primarily on the institution of the museum.[517] When these institutions began to appear with more frequency in the 1950s,[518] large segments of the population had already encountered art in some capacity and, unlike their European counterparts, were more open to associate museums with "the people" rather than with the rich and powerful.[519]

Museums in Mexico became famous early on for their curatorial and museographic strategies, which included "text panels, didactic displays, and exhibitionary strategies that (…) render[ed] specific interpretations of their meaning readily accessible to large numbers of foreign and domestic visitors."[520] These strategies which could include clear and detailed explanations of the artworks, as well as exhibitionary tactics that sought to interpellate the viewer on a more affective level, helped to make art more accessible to the public. Simultaneously, and perhaps

516 Schmilchuk, Graciela. 1994. "El Murmullo de la Historia." In *Arte, Historia e Identidad en América. Visiones Comparativas*. (Tomo II, XVII Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte) (Mexico: UNAM).

517 Reyes Palma, Francisco. 1987. "Acción Cultural y Público de Museos de Arte en México (1910-1982)" In *El Público como propuesta*. eds. Esther Cimet (et.al). México: INBA and CENIDIAP.

518 It was not until after the Revolution ended in 1921 that museums began to proliferate, going from two museums in 1917 to 40 in 1964.

519 García Canclini, Néstor. 1987. "Museo y Público: Cómo Democratizar la Cultura." in In *El Público como propuesta*. eds. Esther Cimet (et.al). México: INBA and CENIDIAP: 63.

520 Coffey 2012: 22.

inevitably, these also constrained other potential interpretations.[521] Many of the texts that accompanied the murals presented the state, and the PRI in particular, as the embodiment of the ideals of the Revolution and as the guardian of the future development and prosperity in modern Mexico. Competing readings of artworks that could signal, for instance, the failed promises of the revolution and the authoritarian nature of the party were rarely included.[522] Crucially, it was the artworks together with the exhibitionary apparatus organized by a plethora of other actors who worked behind the scenes, which shaped viewers' interpretations of art and experience of museums.

Arguably the person most responsible for the development of what would become the country's signature exhibitionary apparatus was Fernando Gamboa (1909-1990),[523] a cultural promoter,[524] diplomat, museographer, curator, and head of Mexico's most important art museums.[525] Nicknamed *El Jefe* (The Chief) [526] and *el mandarin* (the mandarin)[527] by his contemporaries, Gamboa was responsible for putting together more than seven thousand

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521 This is true even of the type of art which, like muralism, was meant to be readily accessible and legible to the lay public and which had been originally designed to be housed in non-artistic venues rather than in museums. Indeed, despite the vitality of mural art in the 1920s and 1930s, it reached its apogee when murals became integrated into the public museums in the 1940s. This strategy reached a highpoint in 1958. (Coffey 2012, 14).

522 Coffey 2012, 22; García Canclini, Néstor. 2004. "Modos de mirar los murales." In *Quimera de los murales del Palacio de Bellas Artes*. ed. by Mercedes Iturbe. Mexico City: INBA: 33-43.

523 Although Gamboa is by far the most credited for these endeavors, he collaborated with Miguel de Covarrubias and Dr. Rubín de Borbolla. Together they helped to create what many came to designate as the "Mexican School of Museography."

524 Gamboa also participated and headed important archaeological expeditions to study and document pre-Hispanic ruins and he also helped establish the journal *Artes Visuales* (1973-1981) which became the most important and influential publication of its kind in Mexico during the time it was in print. (Marcín, Mauricio. 2016. "Breve relación de gestiones de Fernando Gamboa." In *Colección Cisneros*. (October 8, 2016): http://www.coleccioncisneros.org/es/editorial/statements/breve-relación-de-las-gestiones-de-fernando-gamboa#)

525 In his youth he had been an artist associated with the leftist LEAR (Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers. He directed in the marginal neighborhood of Peralvillo. (Torres, Ana. 2005. "Mexicanidad y desarrollismo en el diseño de políticas culturales." In *Discurso Visual*. CENIDIAP: Mexico; Molina, Carlos. 2005. "Fernando Gamboa y su particular version de México," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* (Núm. 87) UNAM: Mexico; Marcín 2016)

526 Molina 2005.

527 Debroise, Olivier. 2018. *El arte de mostrar el arte mexicano*. Mexico: RM: 46.

exhibits,[528] mostly under the auspices of the Mexican government.[529] With the aim of attracting tourism and foreign capital, over six hundred of these exhibits[530] not only toured the country, but were also sent around the world, including through the Mexican pavilions organized at international fairs such as Brussels in 1958, Montreal in 1967, Osaka in 1970, the New York World's Fair in 1965, and others.[531] Gamboa also held important positions, including as head of the visual arts department of the National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature (INBAL), and created some of the most important artistic institutions in the country, including the famous *Salon de la Plástica Mexicana* were painters and sculptors could exhibit their work.[532] Even as presidents came and went, and with them their preferred cultural employees, "Fernando Gamboa was one of those unique characters who was not affected by the six-year [presidential] term. He kept his mandarinate for over thirty-four years (...)."[533] In a sense, then, rather than embodying a presidential figure, Gamboa embodied that PRI itself.

Gamboa was not only prolific, he was also profoundly creative and determined to catapult Mexico into the mainstream global art scene. Scholars and art practitioners have coined the term "spectacular museography" to refer to Gamboa's innovative museographic and curatorial techniques which drew links between global art history and Mexico's national history.[534] Gamboa often essentialized Mexico, describing it as being "eminently ideographic

528 Some examples include: "Mexico Eterno: Arte y Permanencia, las estrategias utilizadas en el pabellón mexicano y durante la muestra Aztecs in London 2002 and in the exhibit "Treinta siglos de art mexicano en París." One of his most important shows include "Mexican Art, from the Pre-Columbine Period to Our Days" at the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris (1952) which travelled throughout Europe. (Molina 2005, 117)

529 These included several Mexican pavilions for international fairs and one at the XXV Venice Biennale (1950).

530 Marcín 2016.

531 Ibidem.

532 Debroise 2018.

533 Ibid, 66.

534 This term was coined by the late art critic and curator Olivier Debroise (Coffey 2012, 51).

and idiosyncratically visual."[535] He maintained that for museography to fulfill its mission – which was "to become an active part of a country's culture" – it needed to use "the elements that seduce *the Mexican*, that stimulate and interpret him."[536] His aim was to convey the idea that there was a fixed "Mexican essence"[537] that, anachronistically, had existed at least since pre-Columbian times and "whose modernity was rooted in an alternative but no less spectacular antiquity than that of the European avant-garde."[538]

While Gamboa's aesthetic and museographic ideas were inspired and influenced by foreign scholars,[539] he developed an innovative type of curatorship that included exhibiting objects and images that could be easily related to Mexico.[540] To accomplish this, Gamboa's exhibits comprised an eclectic mix of objects from or pertaining to Mexico, which at any one time could include pre-Hispanic and colonial artefacts, folk art, and modern art, enlarged photographs of the country's landscape and of its inhabitants' everyday life, as well as objects for domestic use that, while not considered "artistic" objects in the eyes of most museums, would be elevated to this status as a result of Gamboa's exhibits (Figure 5.3).[541] He also employed dramatic lighting, which gave his exhibitions the feeling of being on a theatre set or in a commercial storefront[542] and gave the objects on display an aura of monumentality and refinement. The didacticism and heavy-handedness present in Gamboa's exhibits was based less

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535 Ibidem.

536 See Fernando Gamboa's "Fragmentos de Discursos" (1985) quoted in Schmilchuk, Graciela (ed.). 2003. *Museos: comunicacion y educacion. Antologia comentada.* Mexico: CENIDIAP: 283-4.

537 See Alfonso Soto Soria's "Museografía moderna en México" (1976) quoted in Schmilchuk, Graciela (ed.). 2003. *Museos: comunicacion y educacion. Antologia comentada.* Mexico: CENIDIAP: 279.

538 Coffey 2012, 60.

539 Including, in particular, Frederick Kiesler and Paul Westheim (Debroise 2018, 57).

540 Ibid 62.

541 Molina 2005, 131.

542 See Juan Baigts' "El museógrafo es un diseñador" (1975) in Schmilchuk, Graciela (ed.). 2003. *Museos: comunicacion y educacion. Antologia comentada.* Mexico: CENIDIAP: 282.

on elaborate textual explanations and bibliographical data about the objects that were exhibited – the preferred practice in European galleries at the time – and more on the aesthetics of the display itself. In other words, Gamboa put more thought on the architecture and lightning and where the artefacts were located in relation to each other so as to exalt their visual traits and, especially, the fact that these were made in Mexico. In touring a Gamboa exhibit, the viewer would find herself confronted (and dwarfed) by the plethora of eclectic, striking, and easily identifiable items.

While at the beginning of his career, Gamboa privileged realist aesthetics – he was partly responsible for helping Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco acquire the title of "los tres grandes" of Mexican painting – with the advent of the Cold War, he downplayed the images of armed struggle and of the regime's authoritarian and repressive side and privileged work that portrayed Mexico as a peaceful, civilized utopia.[543] Gamboa was, therefore, also crucial in helping to consecrate muralist Rufino Tamayo – whose work was more abstract and less overtly political than other lauded muralists – as Mexico's fourth great muralist.

543 These exhibits were staged not simply for a national audience, but also became a key diplomatic tool deployed by the regime, particularly during the Cold War. (Torres 2005).

FIGURE 4.1 EXHIBIT CURATED BY FERNANDO GAMBOA, which included enlarged photographs, pre-Hispanic sculptures, and explanatory texts.[544]

Almost a quarter of a century after his passing, people throughout the Mexican art world continue to invoke Gamboa's name and refer to him as "the father of Mexican museography." Gamboa came up rather frequently not only in many of the interviews that I conducted but also in current exhibitions and publications which explicitly referenced both his work and his persona.[545] It was not unusual for museum administrators and employees who, in an attempt to explain to me how they perceived the current artistic institutional landscape, would contrast the

544 Photograph taken from the Department of Culture website (Secretaría de Cultura): https://www.cultura.gob.mx/recursos/sala_prensa/fotogaleria/2648/ORI04.jpg

545 The Jumex Museum – the most important private art museum in the country – opened with an exhibition and editorial project about the origins of curatorial activity in Mexico hat resulted from an investigation carried out by curator Mauricio Marcín based on Gamboa's extensive archive. "Las ideas de Gamboa" (Press Release) http://archivo.fundacionjumex.org/en/exposicion/las-ideas-de-gamboa. That a private museum opened with an exhibit about Gamboa was interpreted by many in the art world as a coveted message by the Jumex's owner, López Alonso, declaring that he was the new Gamboa and that a private institution should be able to house his archive.

contemporary moment with the period of time in which the "omnipotent" Gamboa was still alive and "single-handedly" ran the show.[546] For instance, a renowned museum director maintained: "Before, there was one czar: Fernando Gamboa. Now the competition in the art world is fierce. It is a form of Darwinism, in which only the most apt are the ones who survive."[547] This newfound competition was often described by my interviewees as "healthy" because, as they explained, rather than relying on the goodwill and genius of a handful of individuals like Gamboa, museums now have to demonstrate that their exhibits are worth supporting in order to gain visibility and resources. The celebrated curator Osvaldo Sánchez explained that Gamboa, in his capacity as curator and director of different museums,

> would go to artists' studios and say, "You are not invited, you will show this work, I will buy this painting from you, I will not buy this one," he would even say this in a much more despotic way. (...) Today the field has become much more complex, there are more curators and more competition, the curriculum vitae matters. There has always been a person in charge of organizing exhibits with an effective power to select. (...) What is new is that this power has been displaced.[548]

Indeed, while Gamboa is respected and admired as a historical figure, most members of the contemporary art world made sure to distance themselves from his political project and conveyed a certain degree of ambivalence towards his persona, often highlighting his excessive power. For instance, prominent curator Patricia Sloane maintained that Gamboa "was not interested in the formation of new generations [of artists] and did not care what was happening outside of Mexico. It was precisely after he died in 1990 that we get the impression that other kinds of [artistic] spaces [in addition to those supported by Gamboa] opened."[549]

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546 Marcín 2016.

547 Anonymous. Interview October 20, 2014.

548 Sánchez quoted in Montero 2013.

549 Sloane quoted in Montero 2013, 180.

Because Gamboa is associated with the *Priísta* nationalist political project and with specific types of exhibitionary and museographic strategies that are heavily didactic and nationalist, art practitioners would often invoke his name as a way to begin to explain to me why they were neither using art for didactic purposes nor to advance any kind of nationalist political project. The assumption behind many of these comments was that the artistic projects supported by Gamboa were supported by the PRI regime and by exalting Mexican nationalist tropes helped to mask the injustices and repression of the state. In short, the implicit message that was often conveyed was that his exhibits and the fact that the state supported the arts could be reduced to authoritarian propaganda.

But the figure of Gamboa was not simply linked to the "soft" repressive aspects of the PRI, but also to its darker side, including to corruption, theft, and impunity. During an interview, a prominent curator explained to me that Gamboa's close relationship to politicians and the lack of transparency and accountability in the way he went about his business helped to fuel rumors that he stole artworks and archives, including some that should belong to public institutions but are now found in Gamboa's private archive and collection.[550] The curator then went on to blame Gamboa for the current widespread perception that museums in Mexico are not trustworthy institutions that protect their collections. In another interview, a museum director went even further, claiming that despite Gamboa's important role in promoting Mexican art, his negligence when it came to taking care of artistic objects helps explain why many of the country's art collectors have chosen to take their collections elsewhere or donate them to foreign institutions: "When you see photographs of Gamboa's exhibition you can tell that they were full of living plants – this is unviable due to humidity control! (...) It is not surprising that some of the main art

550 Anonymous. Interview. (July 10, 2014).

collections in Mexico have ended up elsewhere, like the Gelman collection which is now part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York."[551] That these kinds of control measures – like prohibiting living organism in the exhibition space – were not necessarily practiced in museums elsewhere in the world seems beside the point. Gamboa is readily invoked as the embodiment of all the negative aspects of the PRI and therefore, *ipso facto*, as a figure that should not be emulated.

Anti-Gamboa rhetoric prevailed across the artistic field and was voiced not simply by curators and museum employees, but by artists themselves. For instance, Carlos Amorales, one of the country's most recognized contemporary artists, claimed that, historically, art in Mexico, including muralism, had been used to educate the "large uncultured masses" and, in doing so, had stifled people's imagination and their ability to engage with art in creative ways. The "Mexican masses," Amorales wrote, are habituated to engaging with artworks as if these only had one clear message or unambiguous lessons to be conveyed.[552] During a public interview conducted in 2014, another renowned artist, Abraham Cruzvillegas, similarly complained that the post-revolutionary state of which Gamboa was a central player

> invented such a powerful, important, and well-thought-out structure that to this day we have not come up with anything better. The priority of this nationalist identity project was to bring culture to the people, that is why muralism was born, to make art as public as possible. I think this is horrible – not that I think that muralism is

551 Anonymous. Interview. (May 28, 2014).

552 "Los pintores muralistas representaron conceptos ideológicos para ser entendidos por el pueblo de una manera directa, pedagógica, en la que los niveles visuales fueron reducidos semánticamente a lo que se ve y entiende a primera vista, sin ambigüedades. Este fue un arte que se hizo con una función social predeterminada: la educación moral y política de una gran masa inculta, mediante la articulación de una simbología visualmente narrativa con significado nacionalista. … En México comúnmente se entiende el arte como una ilustración ideológica que viene desde arriba hacia abajo, justificada como educación, pero expresando las políticas institucionales del Estado o, en los últimos años, de la iniciativa privada." (Carlos Amorales, "Censura en el Museo Jumex; el problema también es de los artistas mexicanos" *Excelsior*, March 2, 2015: http://www.excelsior.com.mx/expresiones/2015/03/02/1011093).

> horrible – but rather the demagogic, paternalistic attitude of the government of bringing culture to the people in an institutional way (…).[553]

As I will discuss below, many curators and museographers are aware of, and for the most part agree with, these views. In an attempt to move away from *Priísta* strategies and afraid of being too authoritative, paternalistic, and of imposing predetermined readings of artworks, the prevalent curatorial strategies now seek to foster critical thinking and adopt pedagogical techniques allegedly used by universities. In distancing themselves from Gamboa-like practices, curators are making their way to a practice that resonates more closely with the ideas of philosopher Jacques Rancière.

4.2 RANCIERE'S PROGENY

Throughout my research, it was astounding to me to find how in seeking to escape Gamboa, many of the arguments advanced by curators, museographers, and museum directors either directly drew on or resonated closely with those of philosopher Jacques Rancière, whose work has become highly influential among the artistic community across the world.[554] Rancière is widely known for arguing against top-down forms of pedagogy based on an authority figure (i.e. a teacher or expert) who conveys knowledge to the layman (i.e. a student or apprentice). Top-down forms of education based on explanation and transmission of knowledge, the philosopher claims, can stultify the student's capacity to think for herself and can prompt her to consider herself to be less intelligent and capable than her teacher. Ultimately, these forms of

553 "Interview Abraham Cruzvillegas by Bernard Vienat" http://vorticidad.org/artist/abraham-cruzvillegas/?lang=es (last consulted May 4, 2019).

554 See, for instance, Rockhill, Gabriel and Phillip Watts (eds.). 2009. *Jacques Rancière. History, Politics and Aesthetics*. Durham: Duke University Press.

education produce and reinforce inequality between people, even in those cases in which by educating and transmitting knowledge one seeks to combat inequality. The core of the problem, Rancière contends, is that one starts from the premise that equality is a goal to be achieved through education and explication rather than a principle that already exists and simply needs only to be confirmed. In his own words

> To explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself. Before being the act of the pedagogue, explication is the myth of pedagogy, the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, ripe minds and immature ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid. (...) The pedagogical myth, we said, divides the world into two. More precisely, it divides intelligence into two. It says that there is an inferior intelligence and a superior one. (...) [T]he child who is *explained to* will devote his intelligence to the work of grieving: to understanding, that is to say, to understanding that he doesn't understand unless he is explained to.[555]

Although the book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987), wherein Rancière expounded at length on his ideas on education, is not specifically about art, the philosopher then went on to elaborate these claims specifically in relation to art. In his book *Dissensus,* published in 1995, Rancière argues that viewers of artworks, much like the child or pupil, are not passive subjects who need to be taught what and how to view but who are, instead, already active and engaged.[556] He writes that,

> [V]iewing is also an action (…) The spectator … observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of places. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her. She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way – by drawing back, for example, from the vital energy that it is supposed to transmit in order to make it a pure image and associate this image with a story which she has read or dreamt, experienced or invented.[557]

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555 Rancière, Jacques. 1991. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation. Stanford University Press*: California: 6.

556 To make this argument, Rancière draws on a long list of predecessors, including most prominently Immanuel Kant and his ideas of *sensus communis*, as well as on ideas of the autonomy of art including those expounded by Theodor Adorno. But it is the philosopher Friedrich Schiller's term "play" which best captures the form of experience that Rancière is describing when he writes about aesthetic experiences. "Play" is an activity that has no end other than itself and is not intended to gain any effective power over things or persons.

557 Rancière, Jacques. 2009. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London: Verso Books: 13.

The corollary of this argument is that one should be wary of overtly didactic art, including that which relays a determined message or tries to incite the viewer to think or act in a specific way. The goal, in short, is for artists and curators to communicate without explaining. Explanations presuppose that one knows in advance what the viewers need to know about the world or what she is supposed to learn from the artwork. If one's goal is to try to change the world, however, one should steer clear of using art to provide information to the viewer about what exactly is wrong with the world and, instead, use art to try to help the viewer gain the confidence to critically analyze and change it.[558] Rancière maintains that art can only help to bolster this confidence if it refrains from processing its messages in advance and instead finds more delicate ways of communicating with the viewer.[559] Because there is no straight path between viewing art and understanding the world, nor from viewing (or understanding) to political action, then art should neither be aimed at informing or attempting to steer the public towards a specific action but rather at inspiring "a way of looking that doesn't preempt the gaze of the spectator. (…) [E]mancipation is the possibility of a spectator's gaze other than the one that was programmed."[560] Taking Rancière's views as a prescription on how to curate exhibits, would mean refraining from providing an accompanying prescriptive narratives to artworks and artistic practices.

But one has to wonder whether prescription and authority more generally are indeed completely done away with by adopting a Rancierean framework. As art theorist Grant Kester

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558 Very often the information that is conveyed through artworks is already known by the viewers, turning artworks into "a parody of its alleged efficacy." Rancière, Jacques. 2010. *Dissensus. On Politics and Aesthetics.* (ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran) London: Continuum International Publishing Group:140 & 148.

559 Tanke, Joseph. 2011. *Jacques Ranciere. An introduction Philosophy, Politics and Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

560 Rancière in "The art of the possible: Fulvia Carneale and John Kelsey in conversation with Jacques Rancière," *Artforum*, March 2007: 267. Also see: Rancière 2013, 143

has argued, "While Rancière is eager to do away with the hierarchical distinction between teacher and student, he is less prepared to sacrifice a spatialized concept of authority *per se*."[561] Kester goes on to explain that rather than challenging authority, what Rancière does is displace it from the artist (or the curator) to the artwork: "[T]he world remains divided into those who compose [artworks] and those who consume them, those who fabricate spectacles and those who view them."[562]

It bears noting that Rancière oeuvre is directed explicitly against views like those of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. In his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste,* Bourdieu argues that taste depends exclusively on social upbringing and education and that artworks have "meaning and interest *only* for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded."[563] Working-class people do not have the luxury of free time and therefore are unable to have the type of disinterested aesthetic experiences like those described (and romanticized) by Rancière or, before him, by Immanuel Kant, which is who Bourdieu is arguing against. Instead, Bourdieu maintains, working-class people's lives have programmed them to expect every artwork "to explicitly perform a function ... and their judgments make reference, often explicitly, to the norms of morality or agreeableness."[564] Art and cultural consumption, the sociologist concludes, are intrinsically linked to social difference: they are both a product of this difference and help to reinforce it.

Rancière critiques Bourdieu's conclusion and methodology: rather than uncovering people's reactions to an artwork (i.e. their thoughts and feelings about it), the methods used by

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561 Kester, Grant. 2011. "The pedagogical (re)turn in contemporary art/El retorno pedagógico en el arte contemporáneo." Lecture given at the Encuentro Internacional de Arte in Medellín, Colombia (MDE15).)

562 Ibidem.

563 Bourdieu 1984, 2.

564 Ibid, 5.

the sociologist (i.e. surveys by questionnaire) simply reinforce the idea that people coming from different social backgrounds have entirely different worldviews and cannot possibly enjoy or find the same artistic object beautiful or compelling. Bourdieu, Rancière maintains, simply transforms a test of taste into one of knowledge: what he measures is not people's tastes, but rather their ability to judge the meaning of the questions included in the survey and to answer them accordingly. In doing so, the sociologist mistakenly concludes that individuals with different *habitus* are unable to be moved by the same artistic and cultural objects. Rancière not only believes that this conclusion is wrong but also maintains that it is very dangerous because it helps reinforce inequality, namely the idea that there are different types of intelligence that take precedence over others, and that aesthetic judgments and taste are solely based on cultural, economic, or educational capital.[565]

While Bourdieu's method certainly has many flaws and Rancière's critiques are, indeed, quite powerful and get at some of the shortcomings, the latter's method also leaves much to be desired. Whereas Bourdieu comes to the conclusion that we can know *a priori* how people will react to artworks based exclusively on their socio-economic background, Rancière seems to suggest that we can never really know how people will react. Even if Rancière's intentions – much like those of the curators and educators who avoid being too authoritative – are laudable in the sense that he ascribes the viewer considerable agency, then why not examine the conditions of this interaction between artworks and the public more closely? And even if one agrees with Rancière that viewing is already active, why not think more seriously about who gets to view, what viewing actually entails, and about what happens after viewing? Presuming that the viewer

565 Rancière, Jacques. 2004. *The Philosopher and His Poor*. Durham: Duke University Press: 187. Rancière also argues that Bourdieu's methods lead to "the suppression of intermediares, of points of meeting and exchange between the people of reproduction and the elite of distinction… there must be no mixing, no imitation" (2004, 184).

is already active often simply means that one presumes an "ideal viewer"[566] or a viewer that is similar to ourselves. In other words, while Rancière is right to criticize Bourdieu for claiming that aesthetic judgments (and taste) can be fully explained through a handful of surveys, he himself closes the door to other forms of research that might help better understand how different types of publics engage with art. Even more problematically, given the impossibility of ever knowing art's effects, he opens the door for art practitioners to be complacent with the way they are carrying out their jobs and, as I will show in the following section, to maintain that their curatorial strategies are working even in the face of evidence to the contrary.

4.3 All well and good in theory, but how does it work in practice?

In the art world, references to Rancière are not merely performative lip-service to signal belonging to an intellectually-trendy in-group. Instead, Rancierianism – named as such explicitly or enacted in practice – permeates the Mexican art world. The philosopher's texts, unlike those of many other authors, have been translated into Spanish and are published by multiple presses.[567] They are widely read in art school, included in syllabi, and referenced not only in academic journals but also in popular magazines that circulate more widely.[568] Many of the

566 Art theorist Grant Kester has shown how "a significant strand in the history of modern art involves this rhetorical mode of address, in which the artist speaks both to a hypothetical bourgeois viewer, and past them to the knowing critic. The result is a set of normative assumptions shared by artists and critics in which actual viewers, in their concrete particularity and diversity, seldom figure." (Kester, Grant. 2011. "The pedagogical (re)turn in contemporary art/El retorno pedagógico en el arte contemporáneo." Lecture given at the Encuentro Internacional de Arte in Medellín, Colombia (MDE15).)

567 Some of the presses that have published his texts include: Laerte, Herder, Eterna Cadencia, Asociación Shangrila Textos Aparte, SERV0072, Tinta De Limon, Clave Intelectual, Casus Belli, Prometeo Libros, Del Estante Editorial, Manantial, Wlduther, Nueva Visión, Lom Ediciones, Politopias, La Cebra, among others.

568 See for instance: "Recomendación: 5 autores contemporáneos para entender el arte." 2015. *Revista Código* (June 2, 2015): https://revistacodigo.com/arte/recomendacion-5-autores-contemporaneos-para-entender-el-arte-franco-berardi-bifo-boris-groys-andreas-huyssen-

curators at both public and private museums that I interviewed would explicitly reference Rancière by name when explaining to me the theories in which their curatorial strategies are based.[569]

To be a curator at a moment in history when the world is bombarded by images from all kinds of different media and agents is a challenging endeavor. As the curator Willy Kautz who has worked for different public and private institutions in Mexico put it, this bombardment saturates viewers and precludes them being able to reflect, think, and, ultimately, take "a critical positioning with respect to reality."[570] Curators are desperately trying to find ways to show images and objects in ways that differentiate them from mass entertainment by prompting viewers to think critically and question their taken-for-granted assumptions. But they are also extremely wary about the negative effects of over-determining possible interpretations of the pieces and of reproducing the authoritarian and controlling role deployed by their *cacique*-like, *Priísta*-friendly predecessors. Even the nomenclature of education departments and pedagogical activities in many of these spaces changed in ways that reflect an anxiety of didacticism. Rather than being labeled as educational, pedagogical, or didactic, these departments are now called "mediation departments" or "parallel activities." These new names, as the people working in these spaces explained to me, are meant to signal a more horizontal relationship with the public.[571]

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jean-luc-nancy-jacques-ranciere/; Sánchez, Sandra. 2015. "2015: Libros de arte contemporáneo para empezar el año." (January): http://gastv.mx/top-06-2015-libros-de-arte-contemporaneo-para-empezar-el-ano/

569 Two other important theorists, whose work is studied and put into practice by many art practitioners in the country are Boris Groys and Georges Didi-Huberman.

570 Willy Kautz interviewed by Octavio Avendaño Trujillo. 2014. "Curaduría y Discursividad." *Larmagazine*: http://contentviewer.adobe.com/s/LARMAGAZINE/000140fd-c80b-5aca-83d6-5ff31f152ea3/016LARMAGAZINE/Article016_Octavio.html#page_2

571 Anonymous. Interview. May 20, 2014; also Anonymous. Interview. December 16, 2013.

In their search for ways to do this, Rancière's ideas, which are based on ideas about equality and democracy, strongly resonate with many curators. Perhaps not coincidentally, in the second decade of the new millenium, around the time that Rancierean thought began to disseminate more quickly in the Spanish-speaking world,[572] art museums began to bill themselves as spaces that care about research and education.[573] Many of the art museum directors and curators that I interviewed maintained that museums are actively trying to become "thinking platforms"[574] and model themselves after universities and particularly those that incentivize discussion and debate rather than simply conveying information in a didactic, top-down manner.

As I stated earlier, much of contemporary art is produced with the goal of fostering critical thinking which entails getting the viewers to think about different politically-relevant issues without, however, providing the message in advance. The task of the curator becomes quite tricky because of the difficulty of presenting work that increasingly tends to be highly abstract, conceptual, and theoretically inflected, but also politically-critial, all while avoiding any kind of over-determining, top-down exegesis. Essentially, as I will illustrate below, what this looks like in practice is that the preferred curatorial strategies are moving away from both elaborate explanatory texts that might over-determine a specific reading of an image and the striking Gamboa-like displays. Instead, curators are finding ostensibly less spectacular and,

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572 While many of Ranciere's books had already been translated in the first decade of the new millennium, it was not until 2010-2015 that many more publishers began to publish his work. For a list of books from the author in Spanish with dates see: https://www.todostuslibros.com/autor/jacques-ranciere (last consulted April 10, 2019).

573 Charpenel, Patrick quoted in "El Museo Jumex privilegiará 'la educación y las iniciativas sociales'" in *La Jornada*, November 13, 2013.

574 Paola Santoscoy quoted in "Entrevista a la directora del Museo Experimental El Eco," *Revista Código* (July 31, 2012): https://revistacodigo.com/arte/entrevista-a-la-directora-del-museo-experimental-el-eco/. Also see: Interview of Paola Santoscoy by Samantha Bermúdez and Capitel. (August 19, 2017): http://capitel.humanitas.edu.mx/entrevista-a-paola-santoscoy-directora-del-museo-experimental-el-eco/

allegedly, less constraining ways to interact with viewers with the aim of allowing them to reach their own conclusions.

How are these professionals conveying complex ideas to the lay public without providing any messages in advance that might constrain the artwork and possible interpretations? When I pressed the dozens of curators that I interviewed to elaborate on this question, some claimed that allowing the artworks to speak for themselves by simply exhibiting them was enough to do the trick. Many others, however, would bring up the "education department," or rather the "mediation departments," and explain to me that the job of those working in these departments was precisely to ensure that certain ideas and messages got across to the public. When I asked a prominent curator how he knew that his curatorial work – which he had explained to me at length by citing thinkers like Derrida, Artaud, and Ranciere – was, in fact, interpellating the spectators in the way that he envisioned, he responded that

> I know because I work with people from the education (or mediation) department who have specific indexes (or indicators) and ways to measure this. As a curator, you have a statement, a concept that you want to get across, and then these mediators propose things to you based on your idea. My only reservation when it comes to these educational proposals is that they have to generate critical conditions rather than didactic ones. I am the enemy of didactic museums ("didactismo museológico"), absolutely! I am not interested. So I always have to appeal to a certain affective-critical level of the spectator rather than a pedagogical/didactical.[575]

But even as many curators told me that they worked closely with their education departments, this information was rarely corroborated by those working in these departments or from what I gathered while conducting participant-observation in several museums, both public

575 Anonymous. Intreview July 14, 2014.

and private. In fact, the opposite seemed to be the case. The words of an employee of the education department at a public art museum summarizes this case: "There is a distance between departments; the museum is segmented, bureaucratized, specialized, compartmentalized, and there is little to no communication between the areas."[576] Virtually identical claims were made by all kinds of museums employees, who also often confessed that the area of education was subsumed to the curatorial one, in terms of both the budget and decision-making power, including in choosing what exhibits should be organized or what artworks should be bought for the museum's collection.

To illustrate these different claims, take, for instance, the exhibit *The Hunter and the Factory*, curated by Magalí Arriola and Juan Gaitán in the spring of 2013 at the Jumex Foundation's art gallery, an exhibition space that belongs to the juice corporation and which preceded the construction of the museum and was, for many years, the main exhibit space in the country. This space is embedded, discordantly, in the sprawling compound of the juice manufacturing plant, which itself is located in the ashen and crime-stricken municipality of Ecatepec, home to thousands of factories and workshops.[577] In keeping with the critical spirit that characterizes much of contemporary art, the curators' intention was to problematize the series of contradictions embodied by the Jumex Foundation, including the relationship between the Jumex corporation's precious art collection, the gargantuan juice factory, and the living conditions in the downtrodden area of Ecatepec where most of the factory's employees live.

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576 Interview. Anonymous. June 24, 2014.

577 Ecatepec is a municipality located in the northeast outskirts of Mexico City, that has experienced rapid urbanization and a growing population. With a population of over two million people and more than 1,500 industries located in the area, the area is known for its lack of basic public services, including street lighting and sewage, as well as its rising crime rates.

In trying to make these contradictions evident, the exhibit sought to interpellate the factory workers and Ecatepec's residents by raising questions about the municipality's sociopolitical and economic plight, including its rapid industrialization, which has led to an inadequate provision of public services and to a lack of recreational and green spaces (Figure 4.2). To do so, Arriola and Gaitán opted to convert the gallery into a "nocturnal park," which is why the gallery space was darkened and the walls that usually divide each room were taken down. Rather than having any kind of narrative arch, the viewer was exposed to the few artworks at once, which were scattered sporadically around the space. Unlike Gamboa's exhibits, which were saturated by everyday objects and were colorful and even cozy, *The Hunter and the Factory* was, instead, stark, minimalist, and eerie.[578] No labels or captions accompanied the pieces. The spectator was left all to herself to walk around the rooms and make the (not particularly obvious) connections between the different artworks produced by fifteen male darlings of the global contemporary art world. These works included a sculpture of a fiberglass tree trunk attached to a mirror made by American artist Sam Durant, a (stuffed) dog who was seemingly asleep by the Italian provocateur Maurizio Cattelan, a beautifully shot video of wild animals confined inside motel rooms by Californian artist Doug Aitken, a human-size clay mountain by Mexican artist Damián Ortega, and one of the now-classic light installations by the Danish artist Olafur Eliasson.[579]

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578 Originally, the curators had planned to organize the exhibition inside the factory itself and to forego the gallery space altogether. This intention, however, was quickly dismissed due to the fragility of some of the artworks.

579 The exhibition also included pieces by Peter Fischli & David Weiss, Ugo Rondinone, Wolfgang Tillmans, Danh Vo, and others. One fourth of the artists, Dan Vo and the three Mexican artists included in the exhibit, Abraham Cruzvillegas, José Hernández, and Damián Ortega were represented by the Kurimanzutto gallery. In addition to the 15 works included inside the gallery space, two other pieces were commissioned specifically for the exhibit. The first, by Roman Ondák, consists on the performance of a ten-year-old child that imagines the future of Ecatepec. This piece took place outside the confines of the gallery, and was executed together with Ecatepec's Casa de la Cultura. The other piece was a book of stories written by Valeria Luiselli (an up-and-coming Mexican writer based in New York City) together with ten workers from the

As part of the pedagogical activities organized in conjunction with the exhibition, a public talk with the curators followed by a Q&A session took place in a scorching Sunday afternoon in mid-May. The curators explained that the exhibit was meant to speak *about* and *to* Ecatepec and to trigger some sort of political reflection. At some point during the discussion, a middle-aged woman that had been sitting quietly, stood up and proudly acknowledged having been born and raised in the heart of Ecatepec, where her grandmother and other members of her family continued to reside. She then confessed that despite being a native of the area and having seen the exhibit and listened attentively to Arriola and Gaitán, she still could not figure out how the exhibition spoke about Ecatepec or to its residents, or how it did or could do anything to help them understand or solve any of the problems that had been duly recognized by the curators. What this woman's comment might have signaled is that as tempting as it may be to want to leave everything to the artwork and to argue that in doing so one is behaving more democratically by not imposing a specific reading of an artwork's message, this often leads to the message of the artwork actually being lost on the viewer. In the absence of any guidance people often feel at a loss when confronted with artworks even when they are allegedly free to interpret them in whatever way they want. This is especially true with much of contemporary art whose aesthetic content rarely links neatly with its alleged political purpose, and which, precisely in its attempt to defines itself against mass culture by using complex references to art history and political theory, oftentimes require specialist knowledge of its viewers.

Even as the exhibit did not resonate with the woman who stood up in protest (and perhaps with many others), the political implications and potential political effects that come with being

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factory who are part of a reading club. The stories became part of the catalogue and an inspiration to the exhibit. Charpenel, Patrick. 2013. "The curator and the manufacturing plant." *The Hunter and the Factory*. Fundación Jumex: México: 15.

given (and seizing) the opportunity to stand in front of a crowd and voice one's opinions (and discontent) in the way the woman did that day, should not be minimized. In a country that is profoundly unequal and where there are not many opportunities for people from different social classes and with different cultural capital to share a space and a conversation, instances like these (e.g. roundtables, seminars, workshops, and discussion sessions), which are seen as a necessary companion to the often stark and austere exhibitionary apparatus, should be recognized. The discussions that are triggered in these forums not only concern the exhibits and artworks themselves, but very often, given the content of the exhibitions, evolve into discussions about politics more generally. During the many public events of this kind that I attended, I witnessed the public – which included members from the art world but also ordinary citizens – participating actively by asking questions, making comments, and voicing their discontent against the state, private corporations, and even the art world itself in ways that made these forums seem to be truly plural and lively public spheres.

But, of course, the public that can join these kinds of events only constitutes a very small percentage of all museum attendees. That this is not considered a problem by many art practitioners is itself telling. As the head of the education department at one of the most important art museums in country told me: "What matters is *not* how many people I can reach, or how many people enter the gallery. What matters is creating experiences that have a profound effect at the individual level. Even if we can only reach a handful of individuals, the idea is that they then go on and share what they've learned with others, in a rhyzomatic way."[580] Even as many art practitioners recognized that museum attendees who are unable to join these conversations will be left to fend for themselves with very little to guide them when engaging

580 Interview. Anonymous. April 2, 2014.

with art, they still believe that this is a better outcome than the alternatives that *a priori* constrain viewers' interpretations. A way to ensure broader representation would be to ensure that even if the number of people participating is limited, that the sample be diverse and representative of the broader population. This, however, is not always the case and it is unclear whether the incursion of the private sector into the arts is actually fostering such diversity.

An example of this was the creation of the Jumex Museum which led to the closing of the gallery space in the factory of Ecatepec. It is true that the latter never reached the attendance levels from either the factory workers or the people from the neighborhood that the Foundation's directors aspired to. In fact, years after it first opened, its base public continued to be, for the most part, art world folks who would drive out to Ecatepec from Mexico City. Even so, during the time that it remained open and, particularly during events like the aforementioned public talk, it did function as a vibrant public sphere that included people with different economic and cultural capital discussing with one another. The Jumex Museum caters to a much larger public than that of the gallery but it a very different kind of public, one comprised more by white-collar workers and tourists than by blue-collar workers and people from underprivileged neighborhoods like Ecatepec. While public talks, workshops and debates continue to take place in this museum, it is clear that, ultimately, the corporation's support for the arts is part of larger scheme to gain visibility among certain sectors of the population and the global art world than to bring into the conversation and into these art spaces, the voices of underprivileged and marginalized publics.[581]

But the transformations in the curatorial and pedagogical strategies are not only happening in private museums and institutions but also, increasingly, in public ones.[582] Take for

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581 The generous grants, scholarships, and funds granted by the Jumex Foundation to many different artists and art practitioners should not be minimized.

582 There are, of course, important differences between public and private museums. Do to space limitation, I am focusing on the similarities.

instance, the exhibition of Teresa Margolles' piece *La Promesa* (The Promise) curated by María Inés Rodríguez at the public University Museum of Contemporary Art (MAUC) in Mexico City in the spring of 2013. The show consisted on dismantling a low-income house in Ciudad Juárez, sending the debris to the museum in Mexico City, and hiring workers to, at the pace of one hour per day, mill this debris into tiny fragments and spread it around the exhibit room.[583] This last part of the action, together with the debris in the room, is what viewers at the museum are actually able to see (See Figure 4.4). This action takes place over six months; by the end of the show, the entire room is covered by residue.[584] To accompany the piece, an archive is presented at the museum's documentation center which comprises videos, texts, and newspaper articles about how the violence in Ciudad Juárez has forced many residents to leave the city, and with it their homes.

583 The care with which the process was carried out is meant to contrast with the systematic destruction and abandonment to which the city has been subjected.

584 For Margolles the piece is a "un pedazo de Juárez" and show how "las casa abandonadas van peridendolo todo: los brazos, las manos, los pies. And show how the minimo texjo social despaarece y la obra allude a un bienestar que nunca llega." (Gerber Bicecci, Verónica and Pinochet Cobos, Carla. 2013. "Aproximación etnográfica al MUAC." In *El Lugar de los Públicos en el Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo.* eds. Garcia Canclini (et.al). Mexico: Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo).

FIGURE 4.2. TERESA MARGOLLES' *LA PROMESA*[585]

La Promesa was the result of a lengthy investigation – financed by the Ford Foundation[586] – carried out by Margolles in Ciudad Juárez on the meaning of rootedness in a city which was transformed from being a transit city on the US border ("una ciudad de paso") to one that, as a result of the post-NAFTA maquiladora industry, became a destination in its own right, and then again to one people were forced to flee due to violence unleashed by the government's war on drugs. As a result of this migration and displacement, over 115,000 homes in Juárez were left vacant or abandoned in the span of a few years. Juárez, as per the title of Margolles' piece,

585 Photograph taken from: Sonia Sierra, "El arte politico de Teresa Margolles," *El Universal* (October 4, 2012): (http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/cultura/69962.html)

586 Hernández, Edgar. 2012. "Las promesas se derrumban, Teresa Margolles en el MUAC," *Excelsior* (July 2, 2012): https://www.excelsior.com.mx/node/845027.

has become a land of (unfulfilled) promises about which the artist earnestly hoped to educate the audience. The curator, Maria Inés Rodríguez, for her part, insisted that because the exhibit would open shortly after the 2012 elections, it would prompt the viewers to reflect and think critically about the failed promises of the elected representatives.[587]

The viewer in this case, much like those of *The Hunter and the Factory*, is expected to do a lot of work in order to make the connections between what is being visually relayed, the specific story the piece alludes to, the failed promises of electoral democracy, and, crucially, more abstract processes of neoliberalization that have incentivized the type of violence referenced by Margolles' piece. The difficulty of doing so successfully was borne out by a study undertaken by the MUAC which, unlike most museum visitor studies that consist solely of surveys, included both a survey and ethnographic observation by two anthropologists.[588] In the actual space where *La Promesa* was being shown, there was only a small pedestal with a brief text that provided some clues for interpreting and deciphering the huge installation and its associated interventions. Even the artist was uncomfortable with the way the text was displayed, claiming that "it should have at least been written on the walls."[589] Perhaps unsurprisingly, according to the MUAC's survey, 27% of attendees neither learned anything from nor felt anything about the piece.[590] The narrative portion of the study describes a moment in which a

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587 Ibidem.

588 The MUAC study was conducted by two researchers in 2013 and consisted on 30 semi-structured interviews to museum attendees (including 10 follow-up interviews) and participant-observation in the museum for two months. The study revealed that despite being a university museum, the public that attends is quite diverse and includes a significant number of non-student population and tourists. Each of these very different demographic groups experienced the museum in very different ways, which complicates any attempt to summarize the public's experience. For instance, while students found the explanatory texts very helpful, others did not read these explanations. (Gerber Bicecci and Pinochet Cobos 2013).

589 Bicecci and Cobos 2013, 34. Not every member of the public shared this feeling. In fact, the study clearly shows that the public can be segmented into different categories (students and frequent visitors; tourists; and then the non-captive public which has never been to the museum before) and it is only those who fall into the last category that feel alienated and confused by the works.

590 Bicecci and Cobos 2013: 36.

girl asks her mother, about *La Promesa*, "What is this, mom?" The mother reads the short text that is available in the room, but even after doing so has a difficult time explaining the piece to her daughter. Quickly, both of them give up and exit the room.[591] This study also showed that most visitors were unable to make a connection between the archival part of the installation and the rest of the piece and, instead, interpreted these as being separate exhibits, which further fueled the confusion.

This example shows that was is expected of the average visitor is often untenable. The public is expected to be able to navigate different parts of the museum and to devote time to immersing themselves in the archival part of the show. Unlike universities, in which the student is accompanied by professors and other students who, through discussion, can help clarify theories and concepts and raise and address questions, museums seem to be putting all the responsibility and onus of education on the individual viewer.

Museum practitioners, however, continue to justify the lack of mediation and to deny the accusations and findings like the ones published in the MUAC's study. For instance, only a year before *La Promesa* exhibit opened to the public, the head curator of the MUAC, Cuauhtémoc Medina has argued that "I don't see how artworks can be thought of as being opaque, illegible. Show them to me, I'd love that. I'd love to subscribe to a form of artistic production that had such levels of snobbism that it became unreachable to the rest of the community! This type of artistic production would be very welcome, but it is not happening at this time, not that I know of."[592] It would appear, however, that at least some people who attend spaces, including the

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591 Ibidem.

592 "Yo no veo cómo puede pensarse que las obras de arte son opacas, ilegibles. Que me las muestren, me encantaría. ¡Me encantaría adherirme a una forma de producción artística que tuviera niveles de esnobismo inalcanzables al resto de la comunidad! Me parecería un gozo, pero no está pasando en esta época, que yo sepa." Medina quoted in Gómez, Christian. 2012. "El arte contemporáneo y sus mediaciones. El circuito del arte contemporáneo en la Ciudad de México como espacio público de construcción de sentido." UNAM: Mexico City.

MUAC, leave feeling that they encountered artworks that are indeed opaque and illegible. This is visible also in the comments that are left in the guest books in many other contemporary art museums – some of the ones I documented included honest confessions about not understanding artworks, expressions of overt frustration and anger, and even threats about not coming back to these spaces – showing that the MUAC study in not an isolated case.[593]

Art practitioners, theorists, and curators often praise an artwork or artistic practice when it provokes discomfort and argue that this reaction is part and parcel of an artwork's power.[594] Such discomfort can be an invitation for viewers to question their taken-for-granted assumptions about the world, to learn about the world, and even to want to do something to change the discomforting situation. However, as per the previous examples, the type of discomfort that people seem to be experiencing in museums does not necessarily invite them to reflect on and question their assumptions about the world. Even as many art museums devote significant amount of resources on the research and investigation that goes behind the exhibits,[595] many of which intend to raise pressing political questions, all this knowledge and critique are often lost to the public. It is the discussions that happen in conjunction with the exhibitions that often trigger certain political awareness and certain commonalities among the attending public. But triggering and participating in these discussions can take time and resources which, as the following section will show, are scarce and rarely available to museum employees in charge of "activating" the public.

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593 In some cases, these books are available in the museums themselves and I was able to browse through them. In other cases, these visitor books are kept in the archives of the museums or are given to the curators.

594 The prominent art critic and theorist, Claire Bishop exemplifies this trend when she argues that "unease, discomfort, or frustration –along with fear, contradiction, exhilaration and absurdity – can be crucial to any work's artistic impact." (Bishop 2012, 26)

595 Some of the most important work research on different artistic movement is indeed taking place in museums rather than universities. Examples.

4.4 *LIMOSNA* AND THE JET-SET PROLETARIAT

Even as unprecedented amounts of money and resources from the private sector are being directed to the arts, private museums continue to be the exception rather than the rule: over 60% of art museums in Mexico continue to be owned by the state, including the most widely attended ones.[596] And even as public museums are finding innovative ways to accept money and resources from the private sector – resources that are becoming indispensable to finance exhibits – they continue to depend heavily on (diminishing) state resources.[597] The state usually covers the salaries of employees, as well as fixed costs like rent and property taxes, electricity, and water.[598] To take just one representative example, in 2011 the expenses of the Museum of National Art (MUNAL) amounted to approximately 165 million pesos, of which only about 10 million (approximately 8%) came from the museum's private trusteeship.[599] Notwithstanding this being

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596 López Velarde, Mónica and Victor Noxpango (coords.). 2012. *Cartografía de la Prácticas Expositivas.* Coordinación Nacional de Artes Plásticas and INBAL: Mexico City.

597 State budgets allotted to museums have either remained stagnant or not increased proportionally to the rising operation costs. In 2015, over 1,100 million pesos were cut from the budget. Approximately 10% of the budget assigned to Conaculta was cut. ("La batalla por el prespuesto cultural." *horizontal.com* (August 18, 2015): https://horizontal.mx/la-batalla-por-el-presupuesto-cultural/). See also: Alida Piñón. "Habrá austeridad administrativa: Tovar," *El Universal* (June 10, 2015): http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/cultura/2015/06/10/habra-austeridad-administrativa-tovar; "21 datos que no escucharás en el informe presidencial." *horizontal.com* (September 1, 2015): https://horizontal.mx/21-datos-que-no-escucharas-en-el-informe-presidencial/#sthash.5nThpCyU.dpuf; Alberto Serdán. "Arte y cultura para todos?" *Animal Político* (September 9, 2014): https://www.animalpolitico.com/el-dato-checado/arte-y-cultura-para-todos/; Roberto Garduño. "Bajó 26% el presupuesto de cultura de 2012 a 2018." *La Jornada* (December 9, 2018): https://www.jornada.com.mx/ultimas/2018/12/09/bajo-26-el-presupuesto-de-cultura-de-2012-a-2018-604.html. This phenomenon is not unique to Mexico. As Manuel Borja-Villel, the head of the Reina Sofía in Madrid, described how, until the crisis in 2009, Spanish museums received up to 95 percent government funding. The Tate Modern is another example of a museum that went from receiving almost 100% of state funding to only 30%.

598 Some of the museum directors that I interviewed did not even know how much these costs amounted to because they are never billed given that the state directly covers the costs. At the end of the day, the state budget is usually higher than what is contributed by the private sector. Obtaining precise costs and budgets for museums is extremely hard in large part because most of what they receive from the private sector is channeled through their private foundations, which are technically private entities that are not required to publicly report their expenses even when the latter are directly tied to public museums. Civil associations, non-profit organizations, and trusteeships have therefore been created to obtain and manage these resources. For the most part, these associations operate independently from the INBA and remain completely autonomous from and unsupervised by the state. Because these institutions are not public, it is very difficult to know how much money they are channeling from the private sector into museums.

599 Mateos-Vega, Mónica. "Utilizan el Munal para celebrar 25 años de una revista de modas" *La Jornada* (November 14, 2014): 3: http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2014/11/14/cultura/a03n1cul.

a relatively low percentage, the MUNAL and its active trusteeship is considered by members of the art world to be one of the most successful examples of how to channel resources from the private sector into public, state-run institutions.

Many museum directors, curators, and administrators talked to me openly about the difficulty of obtaining resources from the private sector. Several of my interviewees used the word *limosna* (the change that is given to beggars) to describe both the amount that they receive from this sector, but also the "humiliating" process that they endure when "begging" for money. They have to constantly nag potential patrons and find different ways to pamper them to convince them to donate even just a couple thousand pesos.[600] The few quantitative studies that have been conducted on Mexico's philanthropic activities, tend to highlight its general absence. According to Indiana University's Center for Philanthropy, for instance, philanthropic donations in Mexico only amount to 0.04 percent of the country's GDP, which is below the global average (0.37%) and that of Latin America (0.23%).[601] Studies also show that the arts are nowhere near the top of the list.[602]

With the exception of a few corporations that consistently provide resources to the arts (e.g. Bancomer, Banamex, and Jumex), most businesses that engage in philanthropic activities

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600 Especially in those cases in which they had to repeatedly nag donors who had already agreed to donate money and resources. (Interview. Anonymous. Septemebr 19, 2014). Moreover, the money that they are able to secure from the private sector can come with strings attached in the sense that it has to be used for specific purposes. It is not uncommon, for instance, for donors to decide which exhibit among a plethora of potential ones they want to fund. Because of the difficulty and lack of transparency when it comes to obtaining this data, this information is based on anonymized interviews with administrators and museum directors from several public art museums.

601 Carrillo Collard, Patricia, et.al. 2007. *Diagnóstico sobre filantropía corporativa en México*. Alternativas y Capacidades A.C.: Mexico City.

602 Philanthropy is understood as donations that are given with the desire to promote the welfare of others, expressed especially by the generous donation of money to certain causes. Only very few quantitative studies have been conducted on philanthropic activities in Mexico and the ones that exist measure the donations of different corporations and individuals. There are no studies that aggregate the total investment in the arts but according to a study conducted in 2006 and then again in 2008, the areas the investment to the cultural sector went down from a 38% to 26% (Carrillo Collard 2007, 10).

rarely donate to this sector.[603] Several of my interviewees recalled that in the early 2000s, soon after the PAN won the presidential elections, the expectation was that private collectors and donors would multiply quickly and that the field would change profoundly as a result. It soon became clear, however, that even as more and more corporations and individuals sporadically contributed resources to the arts, in the absence of a tradition of support from the private sector, building strong and lasting relationships between artistic institutions and corporations or wealthy individuals has proven to be a titanic task. Even as important efforts have been undertaken by members of the artistic community to try to convince individuals and corporations to donate money to the arts – including, for instance, the creation of associations and foundations that exist to facilitate private donations to the arts[604] – these efforts are far from yielding the expected results. If anything, the creation of immediately-iconic private art museums like the Jumex Museum help to give the *impression* that the private sector is actively involved and supporting *all* art museums and *all* the different areas that constitute a museum. In fact, the working conditions for museum employees can be quite precarious and the budget allotted to certain areas within museums quite negligible.

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603 Many of the museum directors and managers that I interviewed complained about the difficulty of having to compete with other social causes that are much more pressing, like fighting cancer and hunger, for meager resources. This can partly be attributed to a lack of tradition in doing so but also to the fact that donations to the arts are not fully tax deductible.While deducting taxes is increasingly becoming a way to attract funds, the amount of taxes that donors can deduct is not particularly high. Unlike other countries where they can deduce up to 100% of what they give as charity to the arts, in Mexico this amount is much less. The law in these matters changes frequently and makes it very difficult to know for sure what percent is tax deductible at any one time. There are different types of receipts of tax deduction (the most they can deduce is 65% nada mas sobre los intereses generados por su empresa generados al año. The percentage of taxes that can be deduced by corporations according to their utility is 7% (Interview. Anonymous. August 13, 2014).

604 The Jumex Foundation, the Bancomer Foundation, the Televisa Foundation, the Patronato de Arte Contemporáneo, and FEMAM are some of the most important. Important non-profit organization include the Mexican Federation of Museum's Friends Associations (Federación Mexicana de Asociación de Amigos de Museo, A.C., FEMAM) established in 1991, the Museum Leadership Institute (ILM), a non-profit association which is inspired by a homonymous program created by the Getty Foundation, and the best known one, the Patronato de Arte Contemporáneo, which rarely give money to museums but rather to specific projects, curators, critics and theorists.

Many museum employees are hired under temporary contracts ("por honorarios") for a specific amount of time or who are paid on commission for organizing specific projects, exhibits, and events (something akin to the figure of the adjunct who is hired to teach courses without receiving the benefits that an employee would receive).[605] What this usually means is that these workers receive no benefits (e.g. health insurance, pensions, etc.).[606] The MUAC's head curator Cuauhtémoc Medina humorously explained that the art world has become a space "defined by the dialectic between the new private jet set [i.e. the wealthy art collectors and patrons] and a *jet proletariat* [the artists, curators, museographers, and other art workers]."[607] In order to make a living of their work, curators (and other museum employees) are often forced to organize dozens of exhibits every year.[608] Accordingly, even as the private sector is making unprecedented incursions into the private sector, the benefits are far from being equally distributed.

As a way to survive in the current system, it is not uncommon for museum workers to have other jobs in order to make a living. Curator Medina – who is, tellingly, the most well-known curator in the country and a prominent figure in the global art world[609] – has to work as

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605 It is not uncommon that, due to bureaucratic issues, museums that are supervised by the state often delay paying their employees, in some cases for months at a time, usually at the beginning of each tax year. During my fieldwork, I witnessed this in several state art institutions: even as the museum's temporary exhibition calendar continued normally and the events programmed by the museum went on as usual, employees were not getting paid. For instance, the Palace of Fine Arts organized an exhibit to commemorate Octavio Paz, *En esto ver aquello. Octavio Paz y el arte,* which included works from artists that Paz had written about. The exhibition was very expensive and I learned of staff members who did not receive their paycheck for several months. Some of them resigned, but others kept working in large part because they were committed and enjoyed their work, they were also proud to be working at the Museum of the Palace of Fine Arts, the most prestigious art museum in the country.

606 One of the trends that are becoming increasingly visible in museums is that unionized workers are being replaced by those who work either with a temporary contract – so as to avoid paying them a pension – or by project or exhibit (por *honorarios*). Most of these positions lack benefits. In the last few decades, the number of INBA union members has decreased (from 3,500 to 2,300), and more employees are being hired by short-term contract work, (*honorarios*).

607 Medina, Cuauhtémoc. 2010. "Contemp(t)orary: Eleven Theses" in *e-flux* Journal #12, (January 2010): http://www.e-flux.com/journal/12/61335/contemp-t-orary-eleven-theses/

608 Several of my interviewees provided examples that sustain this claim. The exception are usually institutional curators who are "tenured" by a museum and so they are less at risk of losing their jobs.

609 Medina was chief curator of Manifesta 9 in 2012, the Shanghai Biennale in 2017, and associate curate of the Tate Modern's Latin American collection.

an academic at the Aesthetic Research Institute in Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM). But even as his two jobs complement each other, there are also important tradeoffs that affect his output. His salary as a professor of the UNAM, much like those of many academics in the country, partly depends on the monthly stipend provided by the state's National Research System (Sistema Nacional de Investigadores, SNI). To be part of the SNI and receive a salary, one must publish a certain number of articles and books, give a certain number of lectures, and teach a certain number of courses. Curatorial projects and texts that are aimed for the lay public (rather than published in certain peer-reviewed journals) are not counted towards the SNI quota. As Medina notes, if one works for a museum but depends on the SNI for income then one quickly learns that "one would need to make a suicidal choice between having a public repercussion or having the necessary credits to receive funding from the SNI. (…) This system silences opinions because they don't count the texts, curatorial projects, or any intervention that might have social impact. They simply want you to write exclusively for an audience of specialists."[610] In other words, Medina publicly acknowledges that there is a trade-off between, on the one hand, organizing exhibits and writing about art for a non-specialist audience and, on the other, earning enough money to make a living.

While money runs scarce in museums and salaries are low across the board, there are some areas, particularly the educational one, that are hit harder than others. In the vast majority of art museums that I studied, education departments are often the ones that tend to be the most underfunded and understaffed, with many of the staff members working as unpaid volunteers. In one case, for instance, in a public museum in the outskirts of Mexico City, the educator of that

610 In Mexico, academics often become affiliated to the SNI to complement the meager salaries that are paid at universities. But in order to belong to the SNI, they have to publish a certain number of articles and do so in a certain journals and magazines. Opinion pieces for non-peered journals or any other type of didactic material that might help connect with the public is not something that is used for tenure.

museum (the department of education consisted of her exclusively), opted to train the security guards who were paid to stand around in the museum all day long to give tours to the visitors and explain the artworks to them. This worked fine for a few weeks until an artwork was stolen and the guards' neglect was attributed to the fact that they were forced to perform two roles instead of one. The guards were, therefore, instructed to go back to simply being guards and the public was once again left to fend for itself.[611]

The bigger and more prominent and well-attended museums have education departments. However, the innovative pedagogical strategies that curators and museum educators envision can be costly, even if only because they require paying salaries. A way to get around this is to create unpaid positions and internships. This option is becoming increasingly popular in both public and private museums. A case in point is one of the Jumex Museum's main educational programs, which is transparently titled "Volunteers." This program aims to train individual volunteers – usually young people who can commit to work without pay for at least six months and up to two years – to learn about contemporary art and communicate this knowledge to members from the local communities. The public University Museum of Contemporary Art also has a volunteer program called *enlaces* (which in Spanish means "links" or "facilitators"). *Enlaces* are, for the most part, students from the university who take up this unpaid job as a way to comply with their social service, a mandatory unpaid internship required by the Mexican government that usually lasts approximately six months. The job of *enlaces* is to guide visitors through the different exhibits, helping them to navigate the shows and make sense of the different artworks. The idea is that attendees spontaneously approach the *enlaces* to ask them questions about specific artworks or about the curatorial scripts of each exhibit.

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611 Interview. Anonymous. February 23, 2015.

Both the *voluntarios* and the *enlaces* are a source of pride for the museums' higher authorities who talk about them in interviews and reports about the institution's performance.[612] *Enlaces* "seek to incite questions and experiences in the user," explains the MUAC's director Graciela de la Torre, a role that she maintains is related to "a conception of the museum that goes beyond the didactic, transforming the idea that museums need to teach the public and substituting this idea for one in which museums exist to serve the public."[613] The *enlaces* are meant to be discrete and, as art historian Karen Cordero explains, their presence is meant to "buffer and/or counteract reactions – often summed up by, 'I don't understand contemporary art' – such as sense of confusion and helplessness that may arise among visitors unfamiliar with contemporary artistic phenomena and their interpretative 'codes'."[614] From what I was able to observe, having spent many days at the museum, was that *enlaces* were able to fulfill this role and help counteract some of the anxiety triggered by incredibly abstract contemporary art pieces. Rather than providing fix definitions or messages of what the artwork was meant to convey, *enlaces* ask questions that can help the viewer see the piece in a different light. However, I did notice that, for the most part, the visitors who solicited the "help" of the *enlcaces* or who were

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612 These cases are clear examples of how, in neoliberal times, specific forms of private virtues are equated with the larger public good. For a fascinating analysis on this topic see Muehelbach 2012.

613 Graciela de la Torre quoted in Granados García, Josefina. 2011. "Colecciones, museos y conservación en el ámbito del arte contemporáneo: entrevista a Graciela de la Torre sobre el MUAC," *Intervención.* Escuela Nacional de Conservación, Restauración y Museografía: INAH. 2 (3, January-June): 23-24.

614 Art historian and curator Karen Cordero argued that the presence of the *enlaces* "humanizes the experience of the monumental, imposing building and exhibition spaces. It also proves and adaptable 'verbal' educational interface that allows the museum to avoid an excess of explanatory texts, and adapt the interaction and/or information to the particular situation of individual viewers." Cordero Reiman, Karen. 2009. "Addendum: The MUAC and its initial encounter with its publics." In *The global art world audiences, markets, and museums* (eds.) Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg. Ostifildern: Hatje Cantz: 362. I spoke to many *enlaces* during my time in the field. I did so both as a member of the public and as a researcher. Most of them seem to move away from an authoritarian interpretation of the work and instead try to incentivize the public to reflect on what they see. Art critics and historians, as well as artists, have diametrically different opinions about the work they do. Contrarily, artists and art critics Victor Noxpango and Pilar Villela criticize *enlaces* claiming that they do not perform any kind of serious job and simply are there to distract: "adolescentes que entretenga a las visitas." Noxpango and Villela quoted in Reynoso Polenhz, Jorge (et.al). 2011 *Jardin Academus. Laboratorio de Arte y Educación*. UNAM: Mexico: 51).

more willing to interact with them were those segments of the public who already had some degree of familiarity with the museum. Judging from my participant-observation at the museum and from the ethnographic study carried out by the MUAC, many visitors, and particularly those who are not frequent visitors, never consult the *enlaces*. Much like the archival part of Margolles' exhibition was missed by many viewers, so to was the fact that the *enlaces* were there to help them navigate the exhibits.[615]

Moreover, while the *enlaces* can come to learn a lot about the public who attends these spaces and about what visitors find engaging and helpful, they rarely stay on for more than six months, which is why their knowledge and potential input is often lost. Time and resources are spent in training these workers but because they are not paid, most of them understandably leave as soon as their term is over. *Enlaces* become, in many ways, the employees who most closely work with the public – allegedly, a central part of any museum – and yet they are easily expendable. If the museum is lucky, then the *enlace* will write a vignette of her experience and turn it in – but this does not happen frequently.

4.5 Assessing the Public: Quantity over Quality

Even as the now-prevalent rhetoric voiced by museum directors and curators is that "the public, the visitor, is at the center,"[616] studies about who constitutes "the public" and how it engages with the art that is exhibited, are lacking. During president Felipe Calderón's *sexenio*,

615 Bicecci and Pinochet Cobos 2013, 25-6.

616 Graciela de la Torre quoted in Zetter Leal, Julio and Fernando Boulouf de la Torre. 2011. "Entrevista con la Mtra. Graciela de la Torre, Directora del Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) y Directora General de Artes Visuales de la UNAM." AAPAUNAM Academia, Ciencia y Cultura. UNAM: MUAC: 46: http://www.medigraphic.com/pdfs/aapaunam/pa-2011/pa111j.pdf

efforts were made to try to gather systematic information about art publics.[617] For the most part, however, these studies revealed very little about the public's actual experience with art and instead focused on demographic metrics that seem to be directed exclusively to appeasing donors and patrons who worry that not enough people are visiting museums.[618] Given that in Mexico tax incentives for donations to museums are not as attractive as they are in other countries, many of the donors who support museums (as scarce as these may be) do so in exchange for advertisement, including in the forms of banners and posters that are placed inside these spaces.[619] At a moment when museums are becoming increasingly dependent on the private resources – less because of the generous amounts given by the private sector and more due to the decreasing state budgets for museums – providing proof that thousands of people enter these spaces is decisive to secure funding.

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617 These include the Altas de Consumo Cultural, Encuestas de Juventud 2000 and 2005, Encuesta de Lectura, Encuesta de Museos, etc. In 2007, the Cultural Information System (el Sistema de Información Cultural), which is a subset of the National Coordination of Institutional Development of CONACULTA prepared the survey of museum publics 2008-2009 in collaboration with the INAH, INBA and private institutions. The Cultural Information System (SIC) produced an atlas of infrastructure, two quantitative studies of cultural practices and consumption, and a public of museum survey 2008-2009. Twelve museums were included in this study, including four private museums, and three museums that are supervised by INBA: Bellas Artes, Munal, and the Modern Art Museum. Other studies include the Encuesta Nacional de Prácticas y Consumo Culturales 2003, the Atlas de Infraestructura Cultural de México 2003, the Encuesta Nacional de Lectura 2006, the Atlas de infraestructura y patrimonio cultural de México 2010, el Análisis de la Encuesta de Prácticas y Hábitos Culturales de Guerrero 2010, the Encuesta Nacional de Hábitos, Prácticas y Consumo Culturales 2010 and the Mapa Interactivo de Recursos Culturales and the "Estudio de visitants a museos 2010" CONACULTA, December 2011. Consulted in the portal de Sistema de Información Cultural del Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes.

618 Some of the findings included the following: approximately 65% of the visitors claimed it was the first time they attended that museum. More than half of them learned about a museum through a textbook or teacher. Approximatley 70% of those who attended a museum did not pay an entrance fee (be it because it was a Sunday or holiday or because they are students, teachers, seniors or children and therefore are exempted from paying). Over 96% of those attending museums are Mexicans (and 56% of them are from Mexico City). Most of those who attend are students (45.7%). Most people attend museums in pairs, followed by themselves alone, or with two other people. The average attendance to museums is once every four months, followed shortly by one every two months. About 7% never go to a museum. (2008-2009 "Primera Encuesta General a Públicos de Museos": http://sic.conaculta.gob.mx/documentos/1250.pdf). Although the webpage for this site is periodically updated, a study as a whole has not been conducted.

619 I saw this first hand and many of the my interviewees corroborated this information.

In short, museums are increasingly assessed according to quantitative metrics that include the *number* of visitors and public activities they sponsor rather than by the quality of their infrastructure or by their collections and archives, and even less by the publics' experience in these spaces. Rather than trying to assess the attendees' relationship to the artworks that are shown – including trying to understand what people learned or found confusing or intriguing – the studies are based on surveys that, in addition to learning the public's demographic data, ask people to evaluate the cafeteria, the gift shop, the bathrooms, the lighting of the different rooms, and even the attitude of the security guards.[620] In the state-sponsored "2008-2009 Survey on Museum Publics" – which is conducted in public, state-managed museums – over 90% of the people who were surveyed responded that *everything* in the museum that they were asked to evaluate was either "good" or "very good."[621] What these responses actually mean in terms of museum content, however, remains a mystery.

The drive to quantify and discern information merely using these surveys has led to absurd results. For instance, image 4.5 shows one of the slides of the result of the official 2008-2009 survey. In order to visualize the recorded data, the survey team opted to use the Chernoff face technique, which is meant to display multivariate data in the shape of rudimentary hand-drawn black and white emoticon stick figure faces.

620 What many of the studies do show is that visitors spend an average of thirty minutes inside the institution, even as many of the activities and exhibits that are organized require much more time from the viewer. See: http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/programas/museos/. See also: Luis Carlos Sánchez. "El 60% de los mexicanos ha ido a un museo: INEGI." *Excelsior.* (July 13, 2018): https://www.excelsior.com.mx/expresiones/el-60-de-los-mexicanos-ha-ido-a-un-museo-inegi/1252074.

621 The possible responses were "very good," "good," "average," "bad," and "very bad." As such, the impression is that these surveys are simply designed to give museums a pat in the back – and yet, we also learn from the survey that most people will *not* return to the museum which leaves one wondering why this might be the case.

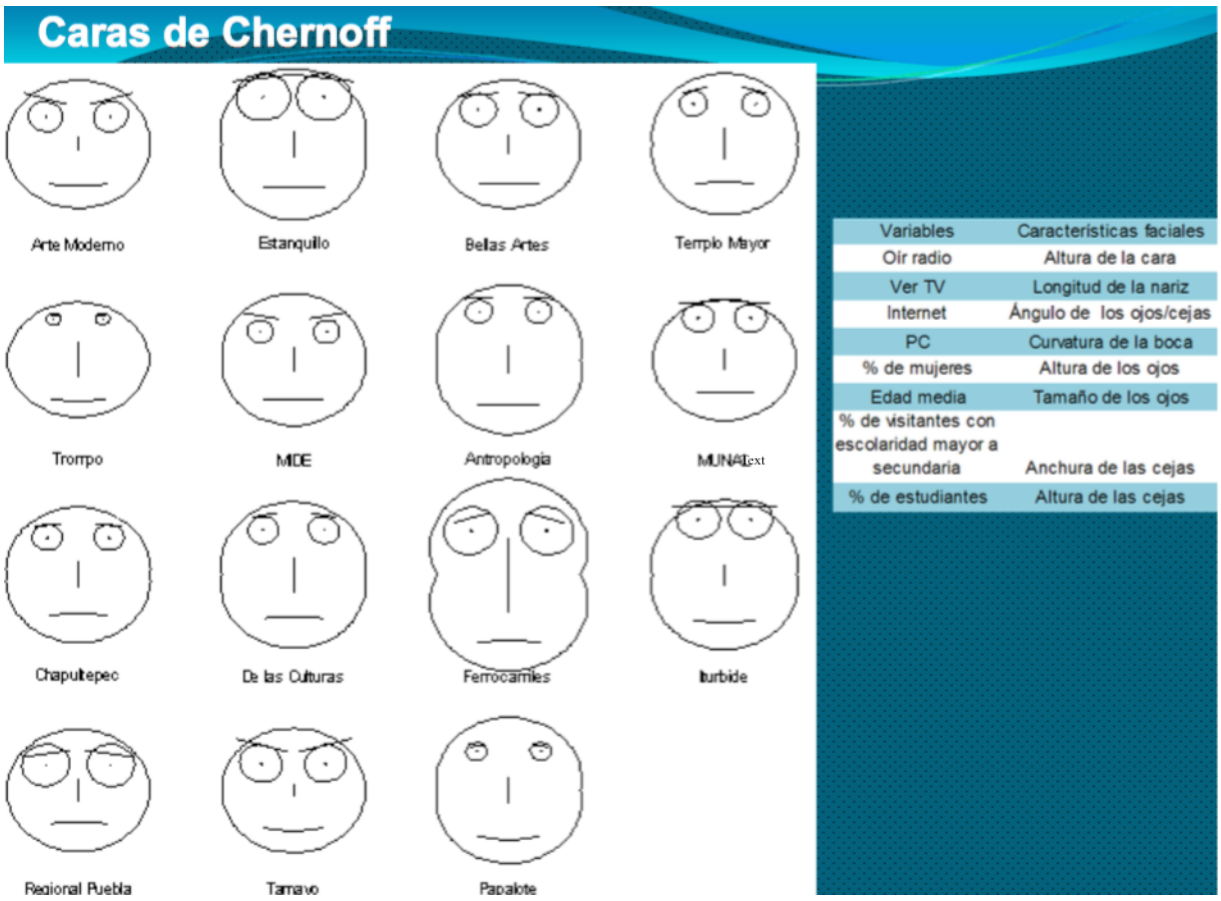

FIGURE 4.3 "2008-2009 SURVEY ON MUSEUM PUBLICS" CONDUCTED BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS AND CULTURE (CONACULTA). This is an image taken from the study. Each face represents a different museum. The art museums included in the survey are the Modern Art Museum (top left), the Palace of Fine Arts (third one on the top row), and the Tamayo Museum (the second on the last row).

Each face is meant to represent a different museum and each of the facial traits is meant to represent a fact found through surveying visitors. For example, the length of the nose is meant to indicate that people found out about the existence of the museum through television advertisements and the height of the eyes is meant to show the percentage of women who attended these spaces. These somewhat absurd results tell us nothing (or very little) about people's experience in these spaces or about the museums themselves. For instance, the faces associated with two important art museums, the Modern Art Museum (the first face on the top row) and the Tamayo Museum (the second face on the bottom row), look very similar to the face

associated with the Interactive Museum of Economics or MIDE (the second face on the second row). That the art museums are profoundly different from the Economics one in terms of their contents but also their curatorial and educational strategies makes this comparison meaningless.

Studies which do not simply rely on surveys or quantitative data are very scarce.[622] Most of the people who I interviewed who worked in education departments in different kinds of art museums had a very difficult time mentioning specific qualitative, let alone ethnographic, studies of museum publics that I could consult. In many cases, they would respond with a shrug or a laugh and would tell me that museums have no resources or incentives to conduct these kinds of studies. When a museum does conduct a qualitative study – like the aforementioned MUAC study – there is usually no follow-up, which makes it very difficult to analyze what might have changed with time and why this may be so.

4.6 Conclusion: Measuring Success

Even as contemporary art has been gaining ground in Mexico – more museums devoted to contemporary art are opening and concerted steps to include contemporary art in national collections are taking place – these gains have been accompanied by an enormous degree of pushback not simply from conservative art critics but also, and much more problematically, from important segments of the public. It is telling, for instance, that one of the most widely read art critics in the popular press in Mexico today is Avelina Lésper, who has argued that *all* contemporary art is a money-making, fraudulent enterprise, and who equates and derides the work of artists as diverse as Ai Wei Wei, Gabriel Orozco, and the Guerrilla Girls. Despite efforts

622 In 1977, a team led by Rita Eder conducted the first ethnographic study of museum publics. In 1982 and 1983, Eder led another similar study based on four exhibitions (Cimet, et.al. 1987). Néstor García Canclini also conducted an ethnographic museum in the Palace of Fine Arts in 2004. (García Canclini 2004).

from members of the art world to dismiss her claims – and the constant derision of her writing in art circles – her readership continues to grow.[623] Being derided by Lésper has become a sign of pride among members of the art world because it signals that one is on the "right" side of the battle against conservative, reactionary pundits. The problem, however, is that while significant efforts are undertaken to show why and how Lésper's views are weak and wrong, not much attention is being paid to understand why people identify with Lésper's claims in the first place.

This is happening at a moment in which many of the art exhibits that are being shown in these spaces have a more critically-political edge than ever before. They denounce troubling political and socio-economic conditions, they foreground the violence plauging Mexico rather than exalting its beauty and charm, and seek to prompt viewers to reflect on their complicity in these situations and question their taken-for-granted assumptions about politically-relevant issues. Curators and other museum employees are trying to find ways to share these critiques with the public without, however, reproducing the didactic curatorial strategies associated with the autocratic regime. Unlike top-down, overdetermined and spectacular type of curatorial strategies deployed during the *Priísta* heyday and exemplified by the exhibits organized by Fernando Gamboa, the new strategies are moving away from any kind of explanation and minimizing mediation. These laudable attempts to avoid constraining possible interpretations and the curators' good intentions notwithstanding – as was evidenced by two representative exhibits discussed in this chapter, *The Hunter and the Factory* and *La Promesa* – this lack of mediation also often leads to the political implications of conceptual pieces being lost on a significant part of the public and, ultimately, to important segments of the public feeling at a loss when faced

623 Lésper has a weekly column in *Milenio Diario,* a blog in which she writes very frequently, and is constantly invited to give talks both in Mexico and in other Latin American countries.

with the art that is exhibited. The people who are allegedly meant to be interpellated by politically-minded exhibits either are not, or are outright alienated by them. That they are not interpellated in those ways, however, does not mean that they are not interpellated period.

Whilst it be read as such, the point of this chapter is not to argue that exhibitions in museums and art spaces have no effect on the viewer. On the contrary, even when the viewers are not being interpellated in precisely the ways that the exhibitions were intended to by curators, they are no less shaped by them. Being outright alienated can, for instance, foster resentment and might help explain why, a large percent of the local public only visits a museum once and opts never to return. By continuing to tailor the pedagogical apparatus for a very specific set of people, the museums miss the opportunity to become more inclusive public spheres.

In the wake of Mexico's twin transition, the curatorial and educational strategies in museums have changed while the intentions behind many of the contemporary curatorial and museographic changes are laudable because they seek to democratize the art world by reducing elitism and expertise, they can, unwittingly, exacerbate inequality. Even as many of the exhibits that are currently organized seek to critique the perils brought about by neoliberal economic reforms, the curatorial strategies employed can inadvertently help to reproduce ideas that are compatible with neoliberal ideologies, including the idea that individuals are responsible for their own education and well-being. Not only is the art that is presented provocative and difficult to engage with, but the curatorial strategies that are put in place also do not necessarily facilitate this engagement. The most successful aspects of these strategies are when they foster conversations and discussions. But these activities take time and resources that are not always available to the people putting these strategies in place.

CONCLUSION:

ART AS POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

"Our contribution is simply to raise questions," declared the curator Magalí Arriola during a public talk held in conjunction with the Jumex Foundation's art exhibit *The Hunter and the Factory* (discussed in the previous chapter), "We are not going to alleviate the poverty in the neighborhood. This is a very complex task, which we don't have the capacity to undertake. I know that curating an art exhibition is not enough. I wish I was a congresswoman, but instead I studied Art History."[624]

As much as Arriola recognized that art can contribute to transforming the world by raising questions, as modest as this contribution is, she also drew a firm line between political and artistic representation. Invoking such a divide is surprising in a country like Mexico where, historically, members of the artistic community have been intensely politically active, playing a defining role in nation- and state-formation processes and explicitly invoking and practicing principles of direct and representative democracy. Her comment is indicative of a transformation in the political role of the members of the artistic community in the wake of Mexico's twin democratic and neoliberal transition.

This dissertation chronicled this transformation and analyzed its political effects, including the ways it shaped national imaginaries, cultural practices and policies, and forms of civic participation and political critique. I showed how Mexico's political and socio-economic transformations fundamentally affected cultural and artistic policies and institutions, including

624 Magalí Arriola, public talk at the Fundación Jumex. May 5th, 2013.

the forms and conditions of labor of different members of the artistic community, which, in turn, impacted the kind of work they perform, the art that they produce, how they perceive of their political role and engage in political speech and critique, and the types of publics that their work interpellates.

In this conclusion, I summarize the main findings and arguments of the project and advance one of the main theoretical arguments of this dissertation, which is that artists and other members of the artistic field should be taken seriously as non-elected political representatives because despite not participating in traditional political institutions, their work helps trigger discussions about pressing political matters, shapes collective memory, and helps structure people's political allegiances and identities.

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Over half a century after it was first published, Hannah Pitkin's classic *The Concept of Representation* (1967) continues to be the "touchstone work" in the field of political representation.[625] Pitkin maintains that while the concept of representation is a "single, highly complex concept," taken generally it means "the making present *in some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact."[626] Following this definition, political representation happens when a political actor (i.e. the representative) speaks, advocates, symbolizes, or acts on behalf of others (i.e. the represented).[627]

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625 Disch, Lisa. 2010. "Faitiche-izing the People: What Representative Democracy Might Learn from Science Studies." In *Political Matter.* (eds.) Bruce Braun and Sarah Whatmore. Minnesota University Press: Minneapolis: 276.

626 Pitkin 1967, 8.

627 Pitkin maintains that "the single, basic meaning of representation will have very different applications depending on what is being made present or considered present, and in what circumstances" and argues that there are different kinds of representation: formalistic, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive (Pitkin 1967, 10).

Politically representing others essentially entails making their voices, opinions, and desires "present." This, however, does not simply entail the representative channeling these interests as if these existed (and were fully formed) prior to the act of representation itself. In fact, it is through the act of representation that the representative can help to generate conversations and discussions among different kinds of people (or a greater number of them) and draw attention to the concerns, beliefs, and viewpoints that different people might come to share. In other words, it is precisely by drawing these connections that the representative *creates* the community of people that she then *de facto* comes to represent.[628] Political theorist Nadia Urbinati puts this best when she argues that it is through the act of representation that individuals are made to "see and understand that they have something in common that unifies them. They reflect upon and therefore create their common interests; they do not encounter them ready-made, like objects autonomous from people's awareness, beliefs, and linguistic idealizations."[629] The act of representation is, therefore, a profoundly creative act because the representative fosters connections between individuals and different groups of people that were not there before, thereby generating new forms of collective identity (i.e. she "makes present" certain communal bonds). In short the act of political representation entails the act of "making present" certain communities that "are not present literally or in fact."

Accordingly, as Hannah Pitkin duly notes, the concept of representation is paradoxical because it simultaneously signals something that is present and absent.[630] What this paradox

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628 As much as the representative "creates" or shapes the represented, the opposite also happens. In the words of Ernesto Laclau, ''The represented depends on the representative for the constitution of his or her own identity.'' (Laclau, Ernesto. 2007. *On Populist Reason.* London: Verso: 158)

629 Urbinati, Nadia. 2006. *Representative Democracy: Principles and Genealogy.* The University of Chicago Press: Chicago: 35. See also Disch, Lisa. 2011. "Toward a Mobilization Conception of Democratic Representation," *American Political Science Review* (105 (1)): 100-114.

630 Montanaro, Laura. 2018. *Who Elected Oxfam?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 14. Edmund Burke maintained that that the notion of peoplehood created through the act of representation is "first and foremost a community of sense" because it is through this act that people

indicates is that no matter how closely the representative stands for, speaks for, or acts in the name of the people that she represents, she can never perfectly replicate (or *mirror*) them.[631] It is precisely in the "inevitable difference between the represented and its representation" where "politics" is located.[632] In other words, the represented chooses what issues, concerns, and opinions to bring to the table for discussion and how to frame them. In doing so, she also chooses what voices to distort, amplify, or silence. The representative, we might say, holds up a mirror to a political community, but points it back at the community and at others so that they can see it.

Rather than trying to do away with or overcome this paradox when trying to find successful ways of engaging in the act of political representation, Pitkin suggests that we wrestle with this tension. Essentially, what she means is that even when representatives act independently of the wishes of the people they represent, they should find ways to be accountable and responsive to them.[633] Doing so entails analyzing representation not merely as the static moment that happens only during the act of voting for someone who will make decisions in our name. Instead, it entails considering representation to be a dynamic process that happens all the time in a wide range of spaces and which involves a plethora of actors who

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become associated and attached to one another "by resemblances, by conformities, by sympathies." (Burke quoted in Frank, Jason. 2014. ""Delightful Horror": Edmund Burke and the aesthetics of democratic revolution." In ed. Nikolas Kompridis. *Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought*. Bloomsbury Publishing. Gordonsville: 17-18). More recently, other scholars who make similar claims include: Disch 2011; Laclau 2007; Rosanvallon 2008; and Saward, Michael. 2010. *The Representative Claim.* Oxford University Press: Oxford.

631 These concerns often stem from the fact that no matter how close the individual doing the representing (i.e. the representative) comes to mirror or replicate her constituency, she can never do so perfectly. For a discussion of this see: Ankersmit, F.R. 2002. *Political Representation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; Ankersmit, F.R. 1996. *Aesthetic Politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. See also Blekeir, Roland. 2001. "The aesthetic turn in international political theory," *Millennium: Jounral of International Studies* 30 (3): 510); Alexander, Jeffrey. 2004. "Toward a theory of cultural trauma." In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity.* eds. Jeffrey Alexander (et.al.). California: University of California Press: 9.

632 Bleiker 2001.

633 Another way of putting this is by claiming that representatives are delegates (i.e. when they follow the preferences of her constituents very closely and channel their voices in a straightforward way) or as trustees (when they summarize different viewpoints and thereby emphasize, amplify, and disregard certain voices).

despite neither being voted into power, nor militating in traditional political party settings, can, nonetheless, fulfill the role of political representatives.[634] In addition to party systems, political campaigns, and the struggles for power within political parties, there are many other aspects of politics that are not directly, exclusively, or primarily linked to elections and party politics but that are, nonetheless, central components of political representation. These issues can include the way political information gets disseminated, the existence (or lack) of public spaces where people can come together and engage in discussion, and the kinds of narratives that exist about a community's past.

Moreover, in addition to traditional political actors who are formally elected, there are many other actors who, despite not being voted into power, nor participating in political party bargaining, come to represent others. These "non-elected representatives," as political scientists have come to refer them,[635] can often help to "compensate" for the weaknesses of electoral representation by monitoring and overseeing those in power or by addressing problems that are silenced or overlooked by elected representatives and voicing the opinion of people who are excluded from traditional political forums.[636] So too can they do the opposite by channeling the desires of already-dominant groups in ways that exacerbate existing forms of inequality and

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634 Urbinati 2006, 35.

635 Non-elected representatives often "self appoint" themselves as such, meaning that they openly claim to represent all kinds of people (and even non-human animals) outside of electoral institutions and apart from state authority (Eckersley, Robyn. 2011. "Representing Nature." In *The Future of Representative Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 236-257). But there are also many kinds of non-elected representatives who, while never claiming to represent anyone (that is they are non-elected representative but not self-appointed ones) nonetheless end up doing so because through their work they invite individuals to think about and take a position on certain political issues. Political representatives can, therefore, not only come to represent people but can also represent discourses, namely "a set of categories and concepts embodying specific assumptions, judgments, contentions, dispositions, and capabilities." John Dryzek and Simon Niemayer (2008). Political theorist Michael Saward suggests that rather than analyze representation as something achievable through elections, we do so in terms of the *claims* that are made by a variety of political actors. Saward, Michael. 2006. "The Representative Claim," *Contemporary Political Theory* (5): 298. See also Montanaro, Laura. 2012. "The Democratic Legitimacy of Self-Appointed Representatives." *The Journal of Politics* 74(4): 1094-1107.

636 Rosanvallon, Pierre. 2011. *Democratic Legitimacy: Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity*. Princeton University Press: Princeton: 88.

exclusion.[637] In many cases, however, non-elected representatives will do both: they will help contest certain forms of inequality while simultaneously reproducing and advancing others.

But even as scholars have recently come to argue that all kinds of non-elected representatives – including celebrities, business people, philanthropists, NGOs, and corporations – should be taken seriously as political representatives, political science has yet to engage critically with the political role of artists (and other members of the artistic community) and to theorize their role as political representatives. Indeed, even as notions of making, creativity, and imagination lie at the core of representation and all kinds of analogies between political and artistic forms of representation have been drawn,[638] political scientists eschew examining representation in the terrain of the arts and rarely, if ever, make the claim that members of the artistic community are explicit political actors or that their work is an act of political representation.

This dissertation has demonstrated that artists and other members of the artistic field are central non-elected political representatives. Artists, curators, critics, and collectors, and most other members of the art world rarely if ever participate in the electoral field or in other traditional political institutions and forums. It is, instead, through their that they engage in the act of political representation because they foster connections between different kinds of people and communities, which can shape the way people perceive and judge the world, and how they attend and care for it and the kinds of claims they make and communities they build in response

637 Political scientist Laura Montanaro has given much thought to these conundrums and argues that self-appointed representatives provide a democratic form of representation not only when they offer political presence for affected constituencies but also when such constituencies authorize them to do so. She concludes that the latter tends to happen when the constituency empowered to authorize and demand accountability is different from the constituency whose interests the representative claims affect. (Montanaro 2012).

638 Ankersmit 1996; Ankersmit 2002. Blekeir 2001; Alexander 2004.

to it. This work can include producing, displaying, circulating, preserving, and writing about art, as well as choosing what counts as art in the first place and whom it represents.

One of the central puzzles motivating this dissertation was precisely to understand how the forms of representation of non-elected representatives, and particularly members of the artistic community, changed in the wake of Mexico's formal transition to democracy. In trying to challenge the viewpoint that democracy is constrained to elections, and in trying to get a sense of how Mexico's implementation of free-and-fair elections actually impacted people's lived experience, I analyzed the transformations experienced in the artistic field and its political effects.[639] Doing so entailed taking a broad approach to the definition of the artistic community and engaging in ethnography and participant observation to better understand different aspects of the art world, including the artworks and artistic practices but also how these circulate and interpellate different types of publics. This also entailed examining all kinds of different actors and institutions in charge of displaying, circulating, critiquing, collecting, and paying for this work and who these different members of the artistic community become accountable and responsive to in the wake of the country's twin transition.

Even when there are no clear accountability and authorization methods, it is clear that members of the art world continue to be accountable to someone, and this someone changes together with broader political-economic transformations. As Pierre Bourdieu has convincingly argued, few social actors depend as much as artists and intellectuals for what they are and for the image that they have of themselves on the image that other people have of them and of what they are. Even the artist who is "most indifferent to the lure of success and the least disposed to make

639 In doing so, this dissertation joins a body of work that questions the straightforward relationship between elections, representation, and democracy and contest conceptions of representation based on formalistic and minimalist understandings of democratic governance. (Manin, Bernard. 1997. *The principles of representative government*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). See also: Wedeen 2008, 103-147.

concessions to the demands of the public is surely obliged to take account of the social truth of his work as it is reported back to him by the public, the critics or analysts, and to redefine his creative project in relation to this truth."[640] This "reporting back" can take all kinds of different forms and it is often by analyzing how artistic production and practices come to be recognized as having aesthetic value and which artists come to be respected by their peers and the public at large that one can come to learn about a society's political life. Market value is also a way of measuring success. In recent years, having economic success has become a close proxy for this recognition. However, as this dissertation showed, while economic capital can morph into cultural capital (and vice versa), this process is neither immediate, nor necessary. It is much more complex. Indeed, I find that even as market-oriented policies and ideologies interpellate members of the artistic community and configure them as market actors many of them remain in the business of art for reasons other than money.[641]

As I was finishing this dissertation I realized that many of the examples that I discussed in detail are about the *generative failure* of art to represent in the way that those producing, displaying, circulating, and commissioning it intend it to. Like a *house of mirrors*, this creates myriad forms of representation, which can be true to life, slightly distorted, comical, grotesque, seemingly impossible, or entirely novel. Sometimes publics can find themselves reflected in these images and in doing so discover themselves. The participants in Lorena Wolffer's pieces (described in Chapter 3) find voices and solidarities that did not exist prior to the act of representation. Viewers of Cráter Invertido's *Vísceras de la Nación* (described in Chapter 1) may see a representation of the nation much more true to their lived experienced than the state's

640 Bourdieu, Pierre. 1969. "Intellectual Field and Creative Project," *Social Science Information.* 8 (2): 95-97.

641 This is similar to what Matti Bunzl finds for the members of the art world who work at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago: Bunzl, Matti. 2014. *In Search of a Lost Avant-Garde.* The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London.

nationalist symbols and tropes. But so too, despite the good intentions of the actors that carry them out, most of the art projects that I analyze – be it the *Pago en Especie* tax scheme becoming "*un absurdo total*" rather than a transparent and inclusive mechanism that creates national patrimony; *in situ* art projects, like *Proyecto Juárez,* that are presumably targeted to local populations but instead end up hailing elite publics across the world; feminist art practices failing to be included into the mainstream art institutions and the art historical cannon; the state's impotence to create lasting monuments that citizens might identify with, while unintentionally creating solidarities rooted in despair and criticism; curatorial strategies that seek to reimagine an engagement with art, but are unable to interpellate diverse publics or prompt them to question their taken-for-granted assumptions about politics; cultural officials failing to understand the public or measure its relationship to art; among many others – fail to do that which they were intended to. And yet, these failures – which are a result of a combination of a series of political and economic structural conditions – are themselves productive in new and unexpected ways and shed light on the meanings and effects of socio-economic and political transformations.

Historically, throughout the twentieth century, members of the Mexican artistic community openly identified themselves as political representatives and adopted the cause of the masses.[642] As historians have noted, in the absence of opinion polls and free-and-fair elections, writers, artists, other public intellectuals often claimed to channel the voices of different segments of the population into a national, though highly restricted, public sphere. They helped to develop "narratives about the progress of popular will."[643] The creative elites never followed a democratic procedure, nor were they all inclusive in who and how they chose to represent; often

642 Miller 1999; Lomnitz 2001.

643 Lomnitz 2001, 208.

their narratives were more convenient to the ruling party than to the people they allegedly represented, and even as they advanced ideals of national unity and equality, they often perpetuated racist and patriarchal tropes. Nonetheless, theirs was an attempt to imagine a national public *and* a national community and to constitute it *by* representing it.

This was a highly successful endeavor largely because of the ongoing support these artists garnered from the state, which provided the capital, means, and infrastructure to ensure this art's distribution and circulation. Indeed, the state's near-monopoly on artistic production made the Mexican state amazingly strong at creating national identity through the promulgation of nationalist images and narratives. The art produced under the PRI was meant to be easily legible to masses of people and was meant to represent them, thereby hailing the public – all Mexicans – into identifying as part of a community that had not previously existed and into constituting, at least nominally, a single national public sphere. Art under the PRI, in other words, created Mexican nationalism.

In the wake of the twin transition, as this dissertation has shown, this has changed profoundly, which has led to what can best be described as a crisis of representation. What I mean is that the unified – albeit restricted – national public sphere has fragmented. The twin transition was marked by a retrenchment of the state's support for the arts and in its deployment of the arts for political ends. A series of economic reforms also opened the door for the private sector to participate in the arts in unprecedented ways, including through the creation of art institutions and foundations, through tax incentives, and the creation of a private art market. As a result of this changing political-economic context, artists find themselves facing a new set of opportunities, threats, incentives, and constraints. Their audience is no longer an imagined national community, but rather distinct, smaller, and often siloed groups, communities, and

individuals. As this dissertation has shown, these range from battered women and marginalized communities, to intellectual and economic elites, as well as specific patrons in the global and national art market, through to museum-goers from across different social classes.

In the wake of Mexico's transitions, instead of putting forward preconceived imaginaries of a unified national community or messages that would hail the public into a common national project, artists reject what they view as the PRI era's paternalistic and authoritarian representational practices. Rather than conjure up mass communities as they or the state would like to see them, they instead produce ambivalent, open-ended art that seeks to interpellate individual viewers by calling on them to reflect on their taken-for-granted assumptions, or call them into solidarity with critiques or denunciations of particular political, economic, or social realities. If this creates communities, it creates them in a reactive way around either acknowledgment of critique (like Teresa Margolles' or Cráter Invertido's gruesome or humorous derision of national symbols) or recognition of belonging to a particular subgroup (be it membership in an economic art patronage elite or one of Lorena Wolffer's temporary feminist public spheres).

Art, in other words, has become *differently democratic*. Pre-transition art claimed to represent the *polis* and hailed people into a common national project in an expansive but shallow view of democracy, where the goal was broad recognition and the forging of community and unity, even if this was done in a top-down manner and, often, in the service of an authoritative state. In the wake of the transition, the kind of political representation in which members of the artistic community engage is democratic in the sense that they are reluctant to impose their specific vision of the community that people should feel a part of, or the politics to which they

should subscribe. Instead, they privilege critical thinking and agency at the individual level rather than solidarity the mass or national level.

The reasons for this are both ideological and structural. Many artists are distancing themselves from the state, which is no longer their main addressee or supporter, and relying instead on the private sector for funding opportunities and consumers. For a growing national elite, in turn, belonging to the art world can be a way to distinguish themselves from the rest of their wealthy acquaintances. If one has the monetary means to do so, participating in the art world as a donor or patron is a relatively easy way to join the club. In the words of a prominent Mexican art collector I interviewed at length, "The market is a fundamental aspect of the contemporary art world, and it is through the market that you can become a part of that world (…) You are immediately taken in as a sponsor or museum supporter. (…) My best friends are artists, curators, and critics. (…) You can buy your status in the art world, you can buy your way into that world."[644] In the wake of Mexico's twin transition, the art field has become more open to the participation of private wealthy individuals and corporations, who, like this collector, are now purchasing art in unprecedented numbers, building their own museums and art spaces, and incentivizing private donations to public art institutions both through newly-available tax exemptions and by lending their private collections to these spaces. However, private funds are not only even more unequally distributed than state funds, but also fail to make up for the decreases in state funding for the arts. Moreover, many artists continue to work in or for, or at least show art in or interact with state art institutions, which despite neoliberalization continue to form the structural backbone of the Mexican art world.

644 Anonymous. Interview. September 23, 2014.

This dissertation, therefore, chronicled the micro-processes of how Mexican creative elites navigate a form of what Zygmunt Bauman terms, after Gramsci, a time of *interregnum*, the time lag between the end of one fixed system and the emergence of a new one.[645] It sought to capture a moment in which the creative class, and particularly the artistic community, is changing. It is a moment in which the state is no longer the one who provides the routes to acquire cultural or economic capital, but neither has this role been completely taken over by economic elites either inside or outside the country. This situation shapes both how the art world operates and the sort of work it produces; namely who, how and why it represents. Democratization at the electoral level does create a more robust space for free expression and critique, but if democracy is taken to mean a greater voice for the people, then Mexico's democratization does not achieve this goal in the sphere of the art. The greatest beneficiaries of freedom of expression after democratization are often economic and cultural elites. Simultaneously, it is not that neoliberalism depoliticizes art or simply commodifies it in an immediate or totalizing way. Rather, I find that even as they increasingly bend to the dictates of the market, artists and other members of the artistic community continue to find ways to use art as a political tool and specifically a form of political representation, and do so under increasingly precarious, unstable, and violent conditions.

645 Bauman, Zygmunt. 2012. "Times of interregnum," *Ethics and Global Politics.* 5 (1): 49-56.

APPENDIX
FIELDWORK

During my time in the field, I consulted archives and libraries located at museums, cultural spaces, and government offices,[646] as well as personal archives that are kept by artists, curators, and other members of the art world which are not publicly available.[647] However, because of the high turnover rate in many art institutions, paper artifacts are not always available which is why relying on interviews (despite their limitations) can be a crucial supplement. Given that I had the good fortune to study a period in which most of the actors shaping the artistic terrain are alive, I was able to meet many of them. I studied not simply the work of artists, curators, and critics, but also of the people doing the work "behind the scenes," namely bureaucrats both in private and public institutions. Doing so helped me get a sense of how the micro-politics of the state work, how state authority and government operate in people's daily lives, and how the state comes to be imagined, encountered, and reimagined by the population.

Over the course of my research, I conducted over one hundred open-ended interviews with artists, curators, critics, and museographers, as well as private donors, art collectors, government bureaucrats, and a plethora of associated professionals and cultural employees.[648] In

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646 The archives that I consulted were the MUAC, Museum of Modern Art, the Tamayo Museum, and the Carrillo Gil Art Museum.

647 This is the case less because of the controversial content of the material and more because there are very few public archives where such material can be kept safely. Indeed, many of the people who lent me material either did not think the material was important enough to be kept in a public archive or they did not trust the institutions that could house them. In more than one occasion and in different archives, I tried to consult material that scholars and art world professional had either previously consulted or assured me was there, but neither I, nor the employees working there, could find this material.

648 I interviewed people working at the MUAC, the Jumex Museum and Foundation, the Museum of Palace of Fine Arts, MUCA Roma, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Carrillo Gil, the Tamayo Museum, the Modern Art Museum, the National Museum of Art (MUNAL), the Museo del Chopo, Museo del Eco, Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros, Galería José María Velázquez, and Museo de Hacienda y Crédito Público. I also interviewed professors and students from the Esmeralda, ENAP, SOMA and Centro, and from a plethora of galleries including Kurimanzutto, Marso, Yautepec, talcual, Proyectos Monclova, Galería Enrique Guerrero, and others who asked to remain anonymous. I also attended and

addition to meeting these people, viewing their work and visiting their studios, I also engaged in extensive participant-observation in museums, galleries, cultural centers, and art schools, as well as in government and corporate spaces involved in the art world. Accordingly, I witnessed firsthand how these institutions operate and how different people interact with the artworks and the spaces in ways that rarely make it to the archives. My interpretations of the artworks and artistic practices that I discuss throughout this dissertation are, therefore, shaped by the time I spent immersed in the artistic field, getting to know how it operates.

As part of my fieldwork, in 2014 I enrolled in classes at two of the most important contemporary art museums in the country, the University Museum of Contemporary Art (MUAC) at the National University (UNAM) and the privately-owned Jumex Museum.[649] These courses became a way to witness first-hand how art history and theory are taught in Mexico both in public and private institutions. They also proved to be ideal settings to begin to meet different members from the artistic community including students, professors, and staff members of museums (many of whom I interviewed and who became my colleagues and friends, and who eventually introduced me to other members of the community). Having to be physically present

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interviewed several "independent spaces" including Bikini Wax, Atea, Pandeo, Cráter Invertido, and Casa Gallina, as well as participants of the cultural institutions Faro de Oriente.

649 I attended two seminars at the public MUAC which is part of the public, autonomous but state-funded university UNAM, which were part of its pedagogic program called "Campus Expandido" (Expanded Campus) and which are designed for the masters' students studying curatorial studies at the univeristy but which are also open, at no cost, to anyone who is interested in the specific topics being taught – the seminar are usually four hours long, one day a week in the middle of the day and attended by artists and other members of the artistic community. The seminars I attend were titled: "Introducción al Arte Contemporáneo en México, 80s, 90s, 2000s" ("Introduction to Contemporary Art in Mexico, 80s, 90s, 2000s") – this seminar was imparted by three curators and was the first of its kind in Mexico – and "La crisis de la crítica: hacia una revisión de la crítica de arte desde los años 90" ("The crisis of criticism: towards a revision of art's criticism starting in the 1990s), imparted by Dr. Daniel Montero. Simultaneously, I also attended another seminar called "La comunidad de los amantes: arte politico y modos de sociabilidad contemporáneas" ("The community of lovers: political art and forms of contemporary sociability") at the recently opened Jumex Museum. This seminar was neither free, nor open to the public. One had to apply (the application included a written essay on the work of Elizabeth Grosz) and pay a fee of 30 dollars. The students that attended this seminar were mostly artists rather than academics, they were also younger, most of them in their early 20s.

at these museums several days a week over the course of several months allowed me to observe and get a sense of who attends these spaces, the types of exhibits that are shown, and the education and outreach programs that accompany them.

During my time in the field, I learned about and attended many art-related events, including conferences, seminars, talks, shows, screenings, parties, and opening receptions.[650] I visited galleries and non-profit organizations as regularly as possible, including the weekly artist talk at the school SOMA, which has become an important space where members of the artistic community from different generations meet to learn about each other's work and projects. I also attended the most important art fair in the country Zona Maco three years in a row (2013, 2014, and 2015) and other major art fairs including the Material Art Fair and events related to the art market such as the "gallery weekends" and art auctions hosted by Morton Casas de Subasta. I was also invited into the homes of several prominent art collectors and was able to interview them and see their collections.

As part of a semester-long undergraduate course on "Art, Aesthetics, and Politics" which I taught at the public college Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) in 2013, I organized a research visit to the Museum of the Palace of Fine Arts (Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes). This experience gave me the opportunity to work closely with the staff members in the education and curatorial departments at what is considered the most important public art museum in the country and to experience first-hand the way that national history is taught in these spaces, but also the working conditions of the museum staff. That summer, I assisted Pablo Helguera – the renowned Mexican artist and director of the academic program at the Museum of Modern Art

650 I made a point of attending the "Noche de Museos" (Night of Museums), which happened once a month on Wednesday evenings, in which museums were free and open late to the public and talks, concerts, visits and performances took place.

in New York City – with the production of a socially-engaged art project called *Librería Donceles* at the Kent Fine Arts Gallery in New York City. Given the global flow of people and art, this experience helped me get a better sense of the relationship between members of the Mexican art world and their counterparts in the United States. In the spring of 2014, I participated in a seminar on sound art at the Museo del Chopo, through which I met another diverse group of artists, curators, and critics, with whom I eventually collaborated in the writing of a book, *La Orquesta Desafina: Prácticas Experimentales Alrededor del Sonido en la Ciudad de México*, about this topic.[651] Later that year, I helped to organize a conference related to the "Theory of Color" held at the University Museum of Contemporary Art (MUAC) which brought together scholars from the University of Chicago and several institutions in Mexico City. This experience also helped me better understand the process of organizing exhibits and educational events in public museums. In addition to participating in art spaces, I also engaged in participant-observation in government institutions and events related to the arts, witnessed and participated in a series of commemorative events that were organized to celebrate Mexico's 2010 bicentennial commemorations of independence and centennial commemorations of revolution, and also attended a series of Senate hearings on cultural policy. I was also granted privileged access to the meetings of the selection committee of the *Pago en Especie* tax mechanism and to the storages where the artworks that are paid as taxes are kept.

651 *Forthcoming,* Andrea Ancira and Tania Islas Weinstein, "El sonido en las artes / Las artes del sonido," Andrea Ancira, Rossana Lara, Inti Meza, (coords.), *La orquesta desafina: prácticas experimentales alrededor del sonido en la Ciudad de México*.

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