

EDUCATING THE SENSES: PEPE ZÚÑIGA AND MEXICO CITY'S REBEL GENERATION

EDUCANDO LOS SENTIDOS:

PEPE ZÚÑIGA Y LA GENERACIÓN REBELDE DE LA CIUDAD DE MÉXICO

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Abstract

Educating the Senses: Pepe Zúñiga and Mexico City's Rebel Generation seeks to track the feelings, desires, and expectations shaped and nurtured by educating institutions in the generation of Mexico City youth that came of age from early 1960s and undertook a massive student rebellion of 1968. The story is told through the memories and experiences of painter Pepe Zúñiga. It particularly focuses on his interaction with the mass media (radio, music, film) as well as theater. The methodology combines extensive and deep oral interviewing complemented by primary and secondary sources.

Keywords: *Education; Mass media; Cinema; Rebellion.*

Resumen

Educando los sentidos: Pepe Zúñiga y la Generación Rebelde de la Ciudad de México busca rastrear los sentimientos, deseos y expectativas moldeados por una miríada de instituciones educativas en una generación de jóvenes que alcanzó la mayoría de edad en la década de 1960 y emprendió una rebelión estudiantil masiva de 1968. La historia se cuenta a través de los recuerdos del pintor Pepe Zúñiga. Se centra especialmente en su interacción con los medios de comunicación (radio, música, cine), así como con el teatro. La metodología combina entrevistas orales extensas y profundas complementadas con fuentes primarias y secundarias.

Palabras clave: Educación; Medios masivos; Cine y Rebeldía.

Introduction

As a historian of modern Mexican education, I first published a monograph (1982) on educational policy and prescribed programs between 1880 and 1928 and a second study (1997) on the subsequent time period (1930s) in which I examined educational policy implementation at the local level as it engaged teachers, parents, and political actors (Vaughan, 1982; Vaughan, 1997). My subsequent proposal took up the following decades (1940s into the 1960s) and another dimension of education, that of student learning. I had come to realize that the history of education is overly narrow when confined to the formal classroom. I wished now to look at students' learning experiences in school, family, friendships, neighborhood, the mass media, associations of different types (sports, religious), and events. Aside from the chronological continuity, I had other reasons to choose this period. This was my own generation. It was a revolutionary generation in Mexico City, the U.S., and elsewhere, not simply in politics but in self-expression. As schools were to prevent revolutions by channeling learning, how did this happen? I decided to focus on Mexico City where the strongest rebellion exploded in 1968. This book was published in 2015 as *Portrait of a Young Painter: Pepe Zuniga and the Rebel Generation in Mexico City* and in Spanish in 2019 (Vaughan, 2019).

Into my sabbatical leave in Mexico in 2000 I had not yet found my methodology, my subjects nor a common thread that might link a generation or at least a particular social sector with shared experiences. When I read Norbert Elias's essay about West German rebel youth in the 1960s, I found a working framework (Elias, 1998). I believed his observations applied to a broad swathe of youth across the "Western world" including the United States and parts of Latin America, particularly the larger countries with stable states supported by rapid economic growth, urbanization, and educational expansion. Elias argued that the generation that turned political in 1968 was the first in the 20th century to escape war, depression, or political instability: children moved from a situation of want and displacement into one of market-driven consumption, familial security, and optimism about their personal happiness, goal-orientation,

and democracy, fed by the Cold War's heavy ideologization. Their parents were more lenient with their children than their parents had been. Children had the leisure time, the incentive, the permission, the means, and objects to play with. They took advantage of educational opportunity. When they ran up against what they perceived to be the anachronisms, restrictions, and discrimination of universities, families, and institutions controlled by their elders, they balked. In fact, as they experienced adolescence, the whole adult world seemed marked by repression, stuffiness, and corruption that clashed with the effervescence of a teeming youth culture forged in prolonged periods of time spent together. They rebelled, and their rebellion resonated across multiple spaces.

So Elias had outlined the experience of a generation, which he more or less defined by time (childhood in the immediate post war), in space (Germany and Europe but extendable), by class (roughly middle class or aspiring to it); by education (a solid public school formation with increasing exposure to higher education), and by political empathy (attuned to liberation movements, decolonizing movements in Africa, Vietnam, and civil rights movements in the U.S., etc., movements that allegedly democratic governing elites responded to with confusion, sabotage, violence and repression).

But there was something central missing from this frame. Pepe Zuñiga inserted that for me. I first got to know Pepe during evenings with friends engaged in a sentimental journey into the popular music that had shaped their parents' sensibilities and their own: Agustín Lara who sang seductive love songs over the radio and in film, Maria Luisa Landín, "Queen of the Bolero," Manuel Esperón, who composed for movies, the band of Pérez Prado and Afro-Cuban beats. They had learned this music from the radio, records, jukeboxes, film, and live theater. Now they created a middle age nostalgic return to the sweetest and most tender memories of childhood and youth, easy and pleasant to recall now as, with advancing age, so much of the hard-edged "struggle for life" was behind them. In its place, we shared an existential opening for the return of tenderness and innocence if only as a palpable memory, a feeling. Why do I include myself in the sharing? For that very reason: yes,

as a Mexican historian, I knew some of the music, and as an American, I knew its US counterparts, but most of all I include myself because I shared their feelings. That provided me with a clue as to what my project might be about.

During these gatherings, I came to appreciate the prodigious memory of Pepe Zúñiga, enriched by a sensitivity for images that marked him as a painter as well as an acute sense of sound (he had first trained as a radio technician and worked for RCA Victor). He shared his enthusiasm and intimate acquaintance with Afro Cuban rhythms which swept his neighborhood, the Colonia Guerrero in central Mexico City, in the 40s and 1950s. At the dinner table, Pepe and others recalled the movies they had seen and how they had seen them: crowds of children pushing into the weekend matinees to watch Flash Gordon, Snow White, Superman and Bambi, and Pedro Infante. They recalled how later, as they grew, they shared the wounds of the heart bared by young rebels James Dean, Montgomery Clift, and Marlon Brando, their depths of new feelings -of confusion, injustice, anger, love-. Each person at the table would recall their personal experiences until we had lit a bonfire of forgotten joys, fears, and tears. It was one evening when Pepe and cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis were belting tunes from the US Hit Parade broadcast in Mexico in those years, that Pepe approached me and asked me if I would write his biography. He said he had a story to tell. I immediately said yes, as his story struck me as the one I wanted. I needed to write about the education of the senses which now seemed to me to be a historically relevant process, one churning in the deep waters beneath the surface, one that romped in play, breathed a desire for freedom, a whispered challenge to authoritarianism, in its traveling currents of tenderness, of love received, denied, and given, of selfhood bequeathed, protected, threatened, and fought for.

Pepe Zúñiga was a distinguished painter, but not an anointed one. He was a graduate of the prestigious Esmeralda painting school and a professor there. He had spent many years on scholarship in Paris. He exhibited widely and regularly. His painting seduced me, but it may not have had the historical importance his personal story suggested to me. That story he shared with me over almost twelve years of interviewing. I am

the only biographer here delving into the experiences of a living person. Not all biographers of living persons succeed in reaching deep emotions that in turn may uncover the dynamics of a historical period: the biographer might not be looking for these, and the subject may not be open to sharing. Or, a deceased subject may reveal deep intimate emotion through his or her artistic works accessible to the biographer. In the case of Pepe, while his painting revealed his emotional erotic self, I was interested in the stories that had created this self, and Pepe overflowed with stories he was eager to share. As he dove into those deep waters, he took me with him. In recalling his experiences, Pepe was not afraid to cry as we both did watching films and listening to music or talking of his father. Nor did he hide his humiliations that marked his childhood as a poor boy as much as did exuberance, joy, and discovery. Here in this essay, I wish to share how we (I with him) constructed his story of an education of the senses that was not solely his own but with many variations, that of hundreds of others.

Our interviews took place in his studio home in the Colonia Guerrero or at my home in Oaxaca and on car rides to and from those places. Originally structured, the interviews became a running conversation. He would bring many old movies he bought from a dealer in Tepito. We would watch a Paul Muni or Joan Crawford film and comment during and after the film. He would tell me in what context he had seen the movie, how he had understood it as a child and now, how his father had introduced him to these stars. I did not transcribe but rather took rapid notes on my computer. I did not show him the interviews but had him read a more legible final draft. Our conversations covered many themes: family, school, religion, radio, film, his years at the Esmeralda, his early painting and exhibits that in turn became book chapters. We used props to prompt recall: apart from the films seen or the music heard, we used school textbooks, published lyrics, many family photos, reviews of his early exhibits and of the plays he saw, and secondary works related to these topics, accessible ones to theoretically challenging studies. We walked through the streets of Carmen Alto where he first lived as a child in Oaxaca and those of the Colonia Guerrero

in Mexico City. Pepe recalled the smell of cedar wafting from the carpenter's shop on his walk to school with his mother. In our walks in the Guerrero, we stopped and talked at length with those who had once been playmates. They shared memories about Christmas celebrations, street games, and learning to dance. We walked by his primary school and the church of Santa María la Redonda, one of the oldest in Mexico. We stopped in the church and sat in the pews where he shared his thoughts about the saints, the priest and his first communion. We walked on to the Plaza Garibaldi where the family had enjoyed so much entertainment—the mariachi bands, Pérez Prado's mambo, Tongolele's exotic dancing, María Luisa Landin's boleros. We entered the Tenampa Bar, took a table and recalled the stories we had heard of the legendary José Alfredo Jiménez and Chavela Vargas singing ballads as they drank till dawn. To arrive at a notion of how distinct were Pepe's memories and what made them so, I interviewed his brothers and his cousins. Indeed, they differed in their interpretations of the same events. We explored why that was.

My framework borrowed from Elias and fleshed out by further information on social and economic change in Mexico City from the 1940s into the 1960s gave me an argument for assuming some shared experience across a somewhat circumscribed, yet broad sector of children and youth. I became convinced that while most children able to do so shared a very solid formation in formal education, the education of the senses derived primarily from their shared experiences with the mass media: especially radio, film, and cinema (later theater) and the conditions in which they experienced them. In what follows I explain how this media inquiry undertaken by Pepe and me in our exploration of self and our times through multiple macro and micro forms of knowing.

Norbert Elias (b 1897) had written about youth's sense of justice, self-development, and freedom but he had little to say about the media or the senses. His contemporaries Frankfurt School theoreticians, Theodor Adorno (b. 1903) and Max Horkheimer (b 1895), abhorred it as a product of capitalism complicit in the rise of fascism (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979). Sociologist Oscar Lewis (b. 1914) studying the neighborhood

of Tepito next-door to the Colonia Guerrero, noted the Sánchez children he researched were constantly at the movies, but he said nothing about what they saw or thought about them (Lewis, 2011). Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929), younger scion of the Frankfurt school, wrote of the critical role of political opinion in the press and radio but said nothing about music or fiction as these were about feeling, not rationality (Habermas, 1992). Emotion for Habermas was bound up with the excesses of Nazism. Nonetheless, Habermas' recognition of the importance of press and radio—of 'public opinion'—contributed to opening the way for me to a deeper appreciation of emotion's historical importance. For me and scholars far more astute and learned than I, emotive expression became essential to public sphere analysis. Miriam Hansen (1949), among other investigators of the mass media, cinema and cultural studies, drew on the ambivalent, suggestive German film scholars, Siegfried Kracauer (1889) and Walter Benjamin (1892) (Hansen, 2012; Hansen, 2000). Her work helped me to appreciate how the technologies of photography, cinema, radio, and recording effected sensorial and affective revolutions while fostering the creation of new communities at the local, national, and transnational levels. The media created links of empathy and mutual recognition that broke barriers and formed the basis for social and political discussion.¹ In making private life public, they created and broadcast discourses, practices, and sentiments that facilitated the necessary negotiation of processes of modernization: migration, urbanization, mobility, employment, family life, romance, fashion, consumption, and gender roles. From the 1930s until the end of the 1950s, most media were censored and didactic. The public both saw themselves in and modeled themselves after the media. If the public responded pathologically to fascist messaging in Germany, I came to see the Mexican media I explored with Pepe as purposely benign. Mexican radio prohibited discussions of politics, religion, or sex. Instead, the airwaves filled with music, melodrama, advice shows, and sports. In Mexico, this censorship created an opening for shaping the senses in particular ways. In effect, the mass media operated as the soft power of the state: creating subtle affective links between strangers separated by class, spatial distance,

¹ On radio and community creation, see Loviglio (2005).

beliefs, and private disputes. In other words, the media created the substrate for nation and modern citizenship.

Affective links forged by the media are often hard to find and harder to measure. Yet, they are elements of history, perceptible through intimate biography. Consider: In the early 1940s Pepe's mother Lupe worked at a wartime mica factory in Oaxaca. Her husband had gone to Mexico leaving her with two young children: would he return, would he call for them to join him or would he abandon them? Lupe sang sacred music in church choirs, but she also listened to the tunes played over the radio in the tentement she and her boys occupied. She would sit at her sewing machine in the late afternoon singing the deeply impassioned songs of Maria Grever she had learned from the radio:

Bésame, con un beso enamorado
Como nadie me ha besado desde el día en que nací,
Quiéreme, quiéreme hasta la locura
Y así sabrás la amargura que estoy sufriendo
por ti.²

"Why are you crying?" Pepe would ask his mother. "Because I want to talk to your father. I want to tell him how lonely I am. I miss him so much. I want all of us to be together" and she would embrace us and kiss us. She would stroke our hair and give us the love she felt for him".

José Zuñiga Sr., Pepe's father, did call for them. They joined him in a cramped apartment in the Colonia Guerrero in 1943 when Pepe was six years old. The Philco radio played all day as the parents, tailor and seamstress, sewed. It played into the night. Theirs was not a happy marriage: Lupe was jealous, José stepped out a lot, his sisters and mother tortured her, and he did not defend his wife; he thought she favored her brother over him; he doubted their first born was his. This mistrust exacerbated the everyday struggle to put food on the table, to keep the children clothed, in shoes, and in health. The radio smoothed over grievances. It calmed tempers. It filled life with intimate feeling. It fomented communication. The entire family delighted in rendering verdicts in cases of marital discord brought

² "Kiss me, with a kiss of love/As no one has kissed me since the day I was born/ Love me, love me like crazy/ And you will know the bitterness I am suffering for you", see: <<https://t.ly/2kzTU>>, November 10th, 2023.

to the air by La Doctora Corazón, "Queridos amigos," she told her listeners, "Write to me, because remember, I make your problems my own".

The impassioned boleros they heard created sympathies shortening the affective distance between Lupe and José, even when their reverie drifted in different directions. When they listened to Maria Luisa Landin sing *Amor perdido*, maybe José, Pepe imagined, was thinking about the mysterious Lidia, about whom it was rumored he had had an affair, or perhaps Lupe felt a profound sadness believing that José did not return her love. Maria Luisa Landin's tender lament touched Lupe in its excruciating self-depreciation: "It's sure you are happy without me... you were never mine... No, when you pass me on the street you needn't say hello. I am not wounded". Yet the song ends on a glorious note of applause: "Let us cheer for pleasure and love!". José and Lupe, helped by a short rupture in which Lupe asserted her rights, stayed together till the end of their long lives. He came to see her, as he told Pepe, as O-Lan, the wife in the movie *The Good Earth*, long-suffering, abused, and yet responsible for the family's survival and success.

Music, which wafted from every jukebox or radio in every store, smoothed the sharp edges of scarcity, distrust, conflict, and loneliness that marked the neighborhood and its immigrant families fighting to make ends meet and to get ahead, to save themselves from alcoholism, crime, jail, sickness, defeat, all of which lingered around the corner and in their midst. As an institution of the state's soft power and of market expansion (it advertised soaps, candies, toothpaste, shampoo, chocolate milk, aspirin), radio directly targeted children from an early age. The Zúñiga children listened to Nick Carter Detective and the mysteries of El Monje Loco, who immersed them in vicarious suspense and terror; Cuca la Telefonista, who made them giggled at her silly jokes; the history of Emperor Maximiliano y Empress Carlota they tried to follow. Above all, they listened to Cri-Cri, the singing cricket created by Gabilondo Soler who from 1934 sang to millions of Mexican children each weekend over XEW, La Voz de Latinoamérica desde México.

Cri-Cri sang about the same middle-class values promoted by Pepe's public primary school:

the need for hard work, for manual labor in a society whose higher classes deplored it, for savings and prevision, for study, discipline and responsibility. But he sang about these with humor, joy, and rhyme absent from school textbooks. He bid children to play, laugh, and imagine. Pepe taught them to me and explained his preferences on the long trips we took to Oaxaca.

I came to see that Cri Cri's repertoire required an analysis that involved both Pepe's comments and my own textual reading assisted by academic analysis and other contemporaries' memories.³ Most helpful to me was the literary analysis of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank. As they examined images of children in British literature in the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, they argued that Charles Dickens' abandoned child morphed into Christopher Robin, the playful, loved boy cared for by his nanny and his mother (Kosofsky and Frank, 2003: 42-43).

In Mexican popular culture, in a country where children were just beginning to read and gain access to radio, Cri-Cri was Christopher Robin. It is not that the indigent child disappeared from the Mexican streets or mass media, but rather that the loved child, who, like Christopher Robin, delighted in nature and his animal friends, came to occupy a central instructive position: a sort of discursive mandate, a rush of affect, the declaration of rights and love.

"By awakening our imagination and our senses, Cri-Cri taught us conduct", Pepe noted. In verse and music, Cri-Cri created images and sounds that prompted all the senses: to breathe in the aroma of the soup the elves made with daisies, carnations, and hibiscus, to watch the stream of water expand and contract in the rain and the sun, to turn sad over the old doll thrown into a dingy corner—she reminded Pepe of his own ragdoll Tunca. "The sounds of the train, the motors, the whistles, the chug chug chug. This song recalled for me all the things I had seen from the train when we came to Mexico City—the cows, the sheep, the bull, the cactus, the mountains—and the emotion I felt when the train passed through the tunnel and for a moment the world turned black!"

³ Cri Cri's songs are of course published and most usefully for me in *Cri-Cri: Canciones completas* (Gabilondo, 1999). This version contains helpful reflections by artists and writers about their own childhood experiences of listening to Cri-Cri.

I knew and shared with Pepe earlier school texts that treated nature as dangerous and threatening. We talked of how Cri-Cri turned nature into magic, beauty, and the promise of life. He sang of the butterfly as she flew out of a rose, flitting her wings turned silver in the sun. As they watched her, all the animals of the forest took up their musical instruments in a symphony of joy. Cri-Cri sang of the changing seasons, water that let the daisies blossom, the flowers that filled the meadow with a riot of colors, the breeze from the mountains that shaped the sugar cane into golden flutes, the moon which lit the forest and made the lake sparkle, signaling to the elves to break into dance, the crickets to sing, and the lambs to drink. It was a world to adore and not to destroy, *to value nature was to value life and self and beauty*.

Perhaps above all, Pepe believed that Cri-Cri valued freedom. He lamented the fate of the Cuckoo bird condemned to emerge mechanically from the clock at a given hour, incapable of chirping when she wished. He celebrated the shoes which, defying the shoemaker, jumped out of their boxes and danced like crazy. But he condemned imprudence. When the cat Micifú sets out to sea in a shoe in search of treasure, he runs into a storm and discovers a bottle with a message: "Señor," says the note, "Don't be a fool. There is no greater treasure than studying." So Micifú turned around. He went to school, studied hard and became a great doctor. "Cri-Cri stirred our imaginations with his world of animals, nature, and the personalities of our neighborhood, but he also criticized bad habits", remembered Pepe. This promise that study, discipline and commitment would bring success was oft-repeated in the movies Pepe saw. How to negotiate the desire for freedom with the need for self-discipline and productive learning: this was a common challenge.

Our exploration of cinema as a shared experience for children was somewhat different from our reading of Cri-Cri. Of course, Pepe described children flocking to the matinees, in groups or alone. They created a critical public, cheering, booing, clapping, stamping their feet and yelling at each other to shut up so they could concentrate on the films. The children's films were products primarily of Mexican and Hollywood classical cinema. These had not been analyzed

together. However, it did not seem difficult to decipher their central messages. We knew both genres and their repeated scripts. Pepe noted the valor, science, and adventure championed by Flash Gordon, Superman, Captain Wonder, Tarzan and Jane, the tenderness and protection that comforted the children as they watched Snow White cared for by the dwarves and Cinderella rescued by a prince, or Pepe El Toro (Pedro Infante) crooning sweetly to his girlfriend. Pepe remembered how the children crouched in terror at the enemy: King Kong, the evil emperor Ming from the planet Mongo Flash Gordon vowed to destroy, the wicked stepmother of Snow White and mean stepsisters of Cinderella, the lethal rifle of Bambi's mother's killer. For the most part, films ended happily. Order restored peace, justice, and goodness, as commanded by the reigning cinematic paradigm. However, there were contradictions and disruptions, some created by the children who rewrote the script. Pepe and his friends delighted in watching the indomitable Maria Felix wage battle against the patriarchal order. They missed the intended point: patriarchy won. But for Pepe and his friends, her rebellion stirred their souls. She reminded them of their fathers' abuse of their mothers and themselves.

By the time this generation reached their teenage years from the mid 1950s into the 1960s, film had become entirely disruptive of a narrative of goodness and happy endings. Hollywood movies changed tone and preoccupation: they depicted confusion and anger at a corrupt and damaged adult world (the crime-infested union in *On the Water Front*, the damaged parents in *East of Eden* and *Rebel without a Cause*). Damaged adults threatened to damage their children. Yet the young people in these films bonded in tenderness and love for one another (Marlon Brando and Eva Marie Saint in *On the Waterfront*, Dean, Sal Mineo and Natalie Wood in *Rebel without a Cause*, Julie Harris and James Dean in *East of Eden*). As Hollywood censorship declined, feeling, intimacy, and flesh came to the screen in problematizing ways.

More complicated for me as a biographer was Pepe's own privileged education in film, a privilege not likely shared with much of his generation yet one that I interpreted as an intensification and refinement of shared viewing that

I confirmed by talking with his and my friends. Pepe's father taught him to see the movies. He also taught me. As a small child, Pepe accompanied his father two or three times a week to one of the many theaters in the Colonia Guerrero. A lover of cinema from his impoverished childhood in Oaxaca, José Zuñiga Sr., a man with three years of formal schooling, became a film connoisseur. As scholars would later explain early cinema, José understood how radical it was prior to classical film introduced in the mid 1930s. The speed of early cinema's chases defied normative pace, its slapstick comedy and cartoons twisted human movement and sentiment in novel directions. Mickey Mouse made people laugh out loud. Scholars debated whether the viewer experience was liberating or sadomasochistic.⁴ But José Zúñiga Sr. did not know the meaning, so he could not recall the experience of sadomasochism.

He loved Charlie Chaplin as The Tramp caring for the orphan child. "Would that we had had such fathers!" said Pepe remembering his father's words. Indeed, early cinema permitted boys and men to cry, and wept they did. This cinema also permitted them to fear. The most fascinating films the father introduced to his son were the older horror movies still playing in theaters. As Pepe and I watched these films together, he described his experiences. How haunting was the sight of Dracula's ship tossing in the wild sea driven only by the breath of the vampire after rats had ravaged the crew with the plague!⁵ Still scarier was Frankenstein. As he watched the giant monster come alive with fireworks of electricity exploding from his neck, he buried his face in his hands. He could not look. His father's gift was to explain how the monsters were made and how special effects created the viewer's terror. In effect, Pepe remembered this not only as a scary experience but an empowering one: to learn that terror was artificially created and man-made. The proposition was compatible with the scientific optimism of those years which Pepe and his father shared: indeed, cinema was one of its most effective advertisements.

⁴ See particularly Hansen's discussion of Benjamin and Mickey Mouse in *Cinema and Experience* (Hansen, 2012: 163-182).

⁵ There are many versions. The reference is to F.W. Murnau's 1922 *Nosferatu*.

Father and son saw all the *Noir* movies and discussed them over chocolate and biscuits at one of the neighborhood Chinese cafes. Their discussions were not too different from James Naremore's moving interpretation of noir as high modernism: a world devoid of happy endings and good people, full of drifters, grifters, private eyes, femme fatales, criminal gangs and crooked authorities lingering in smoky nightclubs, darkened streets, police headquarters, cheap hotels, rather reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland* which neither Pepe nor his father had ever heard of (Naremore, 2008).

On a more elegant note, José pointed out to his son how Greta Garbo's face caught by the camera demonstrated cinema's ability to display, expand, deepen, enhance—rather than violate—the physicality and emotion of the human body and face. I was deeply struck by this observation and others Pepe shared with me from his father's insights. Learning to follow the camera's techniques, Pepe talked about how moving were the closeup shots he later saw of Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift dancing in *Place in the Sun*: in love and momentarily putting at bay their painful past and devouring ambitions.

Pepe and his father loved films of dance, works of art that combined the camera, the music, the scenography, and the dancers. They loved Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Astaire was about letting go, bursting into tap anywhere anytime, on a ferryboat, in a park kiosk, on the walls and ceiling of a hotel room. When he danced with Rogers, they were sublime. In his tails and top hat, he beckoned to her, a shimmering jewel of organdy, satin, feathers, and pearls. As he swept her into his arms, they moved with aristocratic elegance, although their bodies were more closely intertwined, and their smiles spoke an intimate joy. Astaire and Rogers were central to Pepe's movie experience and to Morris Dickstein's classical treatment of US culture in the Depression: his *Dancing in the Dark* facilitated my discussions with Pepe and pointed to an experience very different from that of Nazi Germany which had obsessed early film scholars (Dickstein, 2000).

Many times, Pepe headed alone for the theater to watch Gene Kelly dance in *Singing in the Rain* (1952). "When he dances Broadway Melody, he arrives in New York and finds a lot of

ambitious, corrupt, and cruel people. He wanted to become a great dancer like I wanted to become at that time a radio technician. He encountered obstacle after obstacle, but he kept dancing, dancing, trying and trying. Then with Cyd Charisse he performed one of the most sensual dances I have ever seen in my life. Her eroticism stunned me—her long legs, her hair cut a la garcon as was the fashion in the 1920s. With her legs, her arms, her movements, she encircled and seduced him. Theirs was a sensual struggle as if they were making love. Finally, he conquered her. But she was corrupt. Her gangster boyfriend gave her a diamond ring and she took it. The boyfriend's bodyguards pushed Kelly away. This crushed him but he resisted. He had to follow his own path. Me, too, I wanted to "subir de categoría". Maybe Kelly left defrauded but what saved him was his gift of dance and his dignity. When he danced and sang *Singing in the Rain*, he exuded feeling without an ounce of sentimentality. There was too much movement, too much energy, too much conviction for that".

Father and son disagreed about Gene Kelly. In this disagreement I sensed a subtle shift in masculinity among sectors of Mexican society. "My father did not like Gene Kelly. He thought he was effeminate, not as elegant as Fred Astaire. I admired Kelly. His feet! How he moved his feet! He was an acrobat, not just a great dancer. What a butt, so masculine! I adored Debbie Reynolds too. How lovely when he sang to her on a ladder: 'You were meant for me! I was meant for you!' They danced and sang more intimately, more emotionally than Astaire and Rogers. They were my dream of partners, faithful and loving".

Changes in masculine sensibility have barely been recognized by scholars. They lie below the surface of historiographical consciousness. It takes biography to bring them into view. I noted in three generations of Zúñiga men that they carried distinct "weapons:"—Pepe's grandfather cherished a knife he readily drew in street fights in Oaxaca; Pepe's father valued the scissors he used to make elegant clothing for fashionable men and women in Mexico City and to provide for his family; his son, Pepe, took as his weapon a brush to paint sexual, emotional intimacy. This shift in weapons, I came to believe, formed part of more general story in the "domestication of violent masculinity".

Much of this story was being told in historiography as state-directed prescription, rather than lived individual experience. Still the material helped me interpret Pepe's story and that of his generation. From the late nineteenth century, so the story went, Mexican psychologists, employers, military officers, sociologists, novelists, hygienists, doctors, social workers, educators, Catholic activists, journalists, and public intellectuals expressed concern about what they viewed as lower class masculinity prone to social, political and familial violence, irresponsibility, alcoholism, and sexually transmitted disease".⁶ If in the Porfiriato criminologists viewed the "condition" as a product of biological degeneracy and sought to isolate the poor, the reformers of the Revolution sought national integration, education, and health.

From the mid 1930s when a good part of the world entered a period of devastating politics and war, Mexico began a prolonged period of demilitarization, social peace, and economic growth. In 1946, the ruling PRI abolished its military sector and the lottery replaced obligatory conscription. Overt violent social conflict decreased. Such conflict had positioned organized workers for material improvement. After 1940s, possibilities for legal, protected employment increased. Conditions of daily life improved for many in Mexico City if less than dramatically because in retrospect consumerism was in its infancy: detergents, clothing, hair products, cosmetics, gas, running water, a stove, a radio. TVs, cars, and washing machines came in the 1960s. These broad transitions are inadequately examined by historians who work in silos that fragment experience (as one discusses economic growth, another consumption, another adop-

⁶ The historiography is dense. Key primacy sources are *El génesis del crimen en México* (Guerrero, 1901); *Los criminales en México* (Roumagnac, 1908); *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (Ramos, 1934). Key secondary sources are *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Piccato, 2001), "The Science of Redemption: Syphilis, Sexual Promiscuity, and Reformism in Revolutionary Mexico" (Bliss, 1999); "For the Health of the Nation: Gender and the Cultural Politics of Social Hygiene in Revolutionary Mexico" (Bliss, 2006); *Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico*, (Buffington, 2000), *A Sentimental Education for the Working Man: The Mexico City* (Buffington, 2015); William French, *A Peaceful and Working People* (French, 1996); *Myths of Demilitarization in Post Revolutionary Mexico* (Rath, 2013), "Responsible Mothers and Normal Children: Eugenics, Nationalism, and Welfare in Post Revolutionary Mexico" (Stern, 1999); "The Mexican Revolution and the Modernization of Patriarchy in the Countryside, 1930-1940" (Vaughan, 2000).

tion, etc.) The biographer can see how discrete processes interpenetrate.

I reexamined familiar texts as pointed critiques of contemporary Mexican masculinity in the 1950s and early 1960s. To my knowledge, these had not been linked to the above narrative of state and market driven domestication. Oscar Lewis (1964) articulated new trends in psychology and personality development in his focus on Jesús Sánchez' emotional abuse of his children: the father brought home money, but his positive emotions were brutally shut down (Lewis, 2011). Octavio Paz in his *Laberinto de la Soledad* (1950) psychologized the Mexican man (especially of the popular classes) as enclosed in deep insecurity, prone to uncontrollable, drunken eruptions of violence, and not "mature" enough to embrace a universal humanism.⁷ Psychologist Erich Fromm, writing from Cuernavaca, in his *Art of Loving* (1956) called for a more emotionally open and mature masculinity (Fromm, 1956). Pepe Zuñiga concurred: he adored his father, but for all Señor Zuniga shared about the movies, he was cold, aloof, and abusive of his wife. Pepe longed for a father like *Shane*, the reformed gun-fighter who offers tenderness and advice to the adoring boy Joey Starett in the 1953 film classic. Pepe knew nothing of Lewis, Paz, or Fromm but he too was part of an ongoing social, moral and political project.

In effect, Pepe joined youth's seizure of the project on their own terms at the end of the 1950s. Fathers lost prestige and authority (Zolov, 1999, 115). Rock n roll bands and the Beatles knocked out Pérez Prado (exiled), Agustín Lara (dead in 1970), María Luisa Landín (stopped recording in 1967). Young novelists like José Agustín searched for self and love. Young readers devoured it. Students packed the theater to watch young actors trained by Hector Azar, head of the Teatro Universitario of the UNAM, enact *Olímpica*. The play explored the anguish of adolescence in a poor tenement in central Mexico City: young Eddie, handsome, restless, disoriented, and full of dreams with nowhere to go, and Casandra (Casi) frozen in her Catholic soul fearful she would fall into sin as she passed into womanhood. The actors, wrote critic Armando de Maria y Campos, directed with energy and tenderness by the very young Azar

⁷ See *Labyrinth of Solitude* (Paz, 1961). Spanish version, 1950.

protégé, Juan Ibañez, expressed the feelings of innocence and its loss, illusion and disillusion, love and frustration, trust and mistrust" (María y Campos, 1964). "The work spoke to our world, to our situation". Pepe recalled.

For Pepe, even closer to home was Gustavo Sainz' *Compadre Lobo* which came out later but spoke to his personal experience. The novelist recounted a prank Pepe had undertaken as a rebellious student at La Esmeralda (Sainz, 1977). *Compadre Lobo* told the story of a delinquent youth, repeatedly abused, acting out in violence. He discovered his considerable artistic gifts as a student at La Esmeralda. He joined the student movement. With thousands of others, he walked in the Silent March to reject the government's violence in September 1968. Participants covered their mouths with tape as a single loudspeaker announced their silence as a protest against the government's refusal to dialogue (Brewster, 2002). For *El Lobo*, these processes were transforming. He discovered his tenderness, the artist in him, and his homosexuality.

In 1968, the student leaders that floated to the top had experience in Communist and other political organizations. The movement required organization, discipline, and direction. Those who gave it were versed in an old language of politics. The politics of the street spoke a newer language as Michel de Certeau has argued for the youth of Paris: a language not fully articulated in formal programs although one could argue that the basic program in Mexico reflected a broad demand: freedom for political prisoners, for political dialogue and for expression (Certeau, 1998).⁸ In Paris, in Mexico, and myriad places, the language of 1968 was expressed in gestures, representations, performance, and new spontaneous communities. Nowhere was the language better articulated, according to participant Salvador Martínez Della Roca, than in the brigades that traversed Mexico City (Poniatowska, 1999: 55-60). Armed with megaphones, banners, guitars, and fliers printed on mimeograph machines, they visited markets, plazas, parks, factories, movie theaters, and restaurants. They boarded buses and streetcars to "communicate" with "the people". "There was more quality, more women, more interaction among men

and women, more popular contact, music, theater, and laughter", he recalled.⁹

Leader Luiz Gonzalez del Alba wrote no left group could have mobilized thousands from private and public universities and high schools, from upper-, middle-, and working-class families. He called it a festive celebration of new liberties: the clothing, the hair styles, the Beatles, sexual freedom, the possibility of escaping parental strictures, of not having to "ask permission" (González, 1993: 22-31). In chants, banners, cartoons, and insolent street language they mocked the hitherto sanctified president".¹⁰ They joyously rode atop buses they had captured waving placards and chanting Di-á-lo-go! They painted the city with their demands, denunciations, and desires—Libertad! —and their V for "Venceremos"—we will win!

1968 in Mexico was not a traditional left movement: it was an antiauthoritarian movement with demands for political freedom, standard within liberalism although radical for Mexico. These were pressed in the street with overwhelming emotional drive that created a new space of solidarity, communication and liberatory behavior. They wanted dialogue with those in power—not just to listen to them, but to talk with them about rights and demands they knew to be worthy of authority's attention and redress. The size, emotional force, and daring of this mass movement led the powerful to panic. On October 2, just two weeks after the Silent March the government opened fire on a mass rally at Tlatelolco and mercilessly repressed the movement.

In late July 1968 as the student movement was getting underway, Pepe Zúñiga stood in the long line of young people waiting to enter the Teatro Jimenez Rueda in downtown Mexico City. They were going to see *Cementerio de Automóviles*, an adaptation of Fernando Arrabal's 1938 play directed by another Hector Azar protégé, Julio Castillo (24 years old). Felida Medina, Pepe's classmate at the Esmeralda, did the stunning scenography. Pepe had known Felida as a proper bourgeois girl, carefully coifed, lightly made up, and very feminine in her dress,

⁹ Particularly important for gender analysis of the brigades is the essay "Mexico 68: Defining the Space of the Movement, Heroic Masculinity in the Prison and Women in the Streets" (Frazier and Cohen, 2003).

¹⁰ See, among others, "Mexico '68: Power to the Imagination!" (Soldatenko, 2005).

⁸ On Paris 1968, see *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings* (Certeau, 1998).

he recalled. Now she was in pants, her hair long, without stockings or a bra. She and her team of students, bonded by a commitment to art, egalitarian politics, and unity, had salvaged wrecked cars from all over the city, discarding all but the twisted, rusted, burned-out frames in which the play's characters lived. The cars were obviously a critique of consumerism, the wreckage and exclusion it wrought. Felida's changing lighting illuminated the different stories of these marginal people, "vagabonds of the street living in the poverty zones" recalled Pepe.

The couple in one car were making love. In another, a woman gave birth to a baby of unknown paternity. In a third, lived an army officer with a lesbian and, in another, a conventional couple. The story developed as an allegory of the Crucifixion set to the music of the Beatles. The main actors were three hippie youths: Emanu as Jesus and his two friends, representing apostles Peter and Judas.

They came to play music to rescue the poor from their misery. With them was Dila, Mary Magdalene, whose gigolo lover had forced her into prostitution. His violence she transformed into tenderness in her relationship with the boys. She protected Emanu, a mute, effeminate lad who knit sweaters to protect beggars from the cold but whose trumpet symbolized for one critic a rifle of revolution. Sensing Emanu's threat to the social edifice, the authorities announced an award for his capture.

His closest friend, Judas, betrayed him and turned him over to secret police agents, the same couple who had made love in their car. The crucifixion took place virtually: the police beat the ground rather than Emanu. Dila marked in red pencil the slashes on his back. The police tied him to a car and crucified him on a bicycle. As the audience heard a little doll repeat as she had throughout the play, "I love you very much, tell me a story", the figure of Emanu was projected in film onto a sheet as he escaped over a viaduct into meadows of flowers. Suddenly the technicolor of the flowers turned to damaged, blurred, black and white film as Emanu ran frantically to a place where he came upon the wounded body of Che Guevara. The play ended as the boy, smiling and making a victory gesture with his hand, waved goodbye to the dying guerrillero.

Pepe was carried away. "It was very sad, very moving —to see the way the young actors expressed their emotions. I cried but I also felt a love for life. I was excited. It made me think. It made me question myself. Not only the actors but the effects— the lights, the film's projection on the sheet, the Beatles music. The shells of the wrecked cars were unique sculptures, works of art. It was a repudiation of the authorities, a rebellion. It was about our poor, those with little education but the will to overcome. We are neither good nor bad, it's the circumstances that turn us bad and thwart us. One lives saturated and surrounded by this ambience, part of it is about loving and being loved, and another part is revolting and disgusting. The poor cannot get out because they are censored and kept down. There was more and more rancor and rebellion in youth, and I identified with them".

Subsequently in the biography, I followed Pepe through La Esmeralda and his early exhibits to his departure for Paris on a government fellowship to study painting at the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs. Then I wrote an epilogue about his painting and that of his generation emphasizing the diversity and freedom of styles and subject matter. I looked at the men's exploration of emotions but noted surprisingly few plastic inquiries into the body —that concern would be taken up for the next generation. When the Spanish language book came out, I saw him less and less and missed the excitement of our shared learning experience. When we were into that, I would ask him, "Were you listening to the Modern Jazz Quartet around 1965". "Yes, of course," he would answer and ask, "Along with Miles Davis' *Sketches of Spain*". I listened and melted upon hearing that trumpet echo across the barren Moorish plain. We had seen together Pasolini's *Gospel according to St. Matthew*. Now, he said, "We had to see his *Teorema*". We did.

I do not believe that as a biographer I became over-enamoured of Pepe. That Pepe is a committed gay man gave our relationship a certain kind of distance that also reduced other kinds of distances —particularly of our shared tastes, our deep friendship. I mention his homosexuality at the end of this essay because I am afraid that had I introduced it immediately, this essay would be read in search of a gay experience. Pepe was perfectly up front about his relation-

ships and his paintings. He simply wanted them treated as matter of fact. What became Pepe's open homosexuality was, from the perspective of both of us, one possibility among many for liberation and self-expression that marked an entire generation, or those of that generation who wished to embrace the opportunity and the many forms it could take: a love affair of any sort, Miles Davis's compositions, Pasolini's films, José Agustín's novels, Tommie Smith and John Carlos's raised black-gloved fists at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. Overidentification here is likely with the experience discovered, defined, made similar, shared. Its intensity and ubiquity may be exaggerated. Indeed, the saddest part was closing the project once the book was done. That closure coincided with age for both of us. Our memories and ecstasies drifted away once illness and other life-ending preoccupations pushed them out of our consciousness or at least our ability to articulate them. As I mourn this turn, I think "Thank goodness, we had this magnificent opportunity to call up, share, shape, and record these now faded memories. How thoroughly we should all find ways to awaken and share them".

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Received: November 19, 2023.

Accepted: December 8, 2023.

Published: December 15, 2023.

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