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Rearticulating the Social: Spatial Practices, Collective Subjects, and Oaxaca's Art of Protest

By

Iván Arenas

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Anthropology
in the
Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Charles Hirschkind, Co-Chair
Professor Alexei Yurchak, Co-Chair
Professor Donald Moore
Professor Jake Kosek
Professor Charles R. Hale

Fall 2011

Rearticulating the Social: Spatial Practices, Collective Subjects, and Oaxaca's Art of Protest

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By Iván Arenas

Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

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Professor Charles Hirschkind, Co-chair

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My dissertation, titled "Rearticulating the Social: Spatial Practices, Collective Subjects, and Oaxaca's Art of Protest," explores how the popular uprising begun in Oaxaca, Mexico in 2006 is reconfiguring conceptions of public space and rights to the city, redefining political participation through novel practices of self-formation, and questioning the role of democratic government in Mexico's future. As both an architect and an anthropologist, my central research objective was to analyze how shifts in Oaxacan's habitual practices enabled and engendered socio-political and subjective transformations. In eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork (2007-2008), I thus worked closely with and became a member of a group of political street artists from marginalized communities who were part of the coalition of individuals, collectives, and social organizations that became the Popular Assembly of the People's of Oaxaca, or APPO. Focusing on practices of struggle such as the making and maintaining of barricades, protest marches, sit-in strikes, and making the art of protest, the dissertation argues that APPO's practices of struggle in Oaxaca have been *both* highly mobile and mobilizing. As the dissertation argues, greater attention to both senses of movement as moving bodies and the capacity of spatial practices to mobilize people affectively allows us greater understanding of the materiality and imagined political geographies of social movements.

The dissertation focuses on the role of practices of struggle and the competing aesthetics of political street artists, protest groups, elite cultural and governmental institutions, and ordinary Oaxacans to emphasize the importance of everyday spatial practices and a recognition that, as Michel de Certeau writes, "history begins at ground level, with footsteps" (1984:129). Whether manifested as literal occupations and appropriations of city spaces or as

different modalities for inhabiting and making place, Oaxacans' spatial practices disrupted dominant understandings and uses of the open and democratic nature of public space. In stenciling their graphic messages on city walls, street artists gave visual form to a long history of the systemic marginalization of the Oaxacan people and, more importantly, to the Oaxacan people's courage in mobilizing to find a solution. Speaking from the perspective of shared experiences and struggles, images on city walls revealed common points of identification that interpellated the collective subject of *el pueblo* (the people). Focusing on the transformative potential of artists' spatial practices through their investment in the material spaces of the city, my dissertation contends that political subjectivities are formed in and through an encounter with the city's material environment. Consequently, I argue that urban space is not a passive landscape but is an actant—to use Bruno Latour's terminology—that interpellates individuals as members of particular political publics. This is rendered visible, for example, in how an anti-government stencil hailing *el pueblo* on the façade of a municipal building invites a different mode for inhabiting social and physical space from a billboard promoting tourism for foreigners framing the city as the heritage and patrimony of all Oaxacans. An empirical and theoretical focus on these practices of struggle is central to work that I conceive of as an anthropology *of* urban space and provides a critical perspective on spatial practices that are changing definitions of political agency and public responsibility in an increasingly polarized urban world.

Though artistic expression has been central to contemporary and past social movements such as those of the Black Panthers, the Chicano movement and the United Farm Workers, and more recent struggles against the World Trade Organization, the artistic and social relevance of this cultural production has not received much scholarly attention in anthropology. For the economically impoverished and socially marginalized youths that made up the street art collective I worked with, artistic expression and collective organization became a means not just to make their voices heard, however, but fostered communal practices that gave rise to alternative models of human flourishing or of "the good life." Organized through participatory assembly, creating and collaborating on art projects as a group, and holding art workshops to teach artistic skills to members and others, members of the art collective were able to transform their isolation and create a space of dialogue and debate that produced a powerful sociality that went beyond aesthetic expression or the imagined political and social horizon of the social movement engendered by APPO. Assessing the social and political dynamics produced by the art of protest, the dissertation addresses how Oaxaca's terrain of political positioning was constantly shifting, putting into doubt the notion of a possible scripted strategy pre-existing the mobile dynamics of contestation and struggle. The practices of struggle that APPO engendered were an invitation to insurgency, yet lacked any roadmap. As situated spatial practices with multiple mobile manifestations, the practices exceed the possibility to pin down APPO as a political formation, model, or organization. This raises challenges for mapping Left and populist politics in Latin America and the Global South, yet offers new opportunities for considering the power and possibilities of social movements from Caracas to Cairo to change and challenge not just governing regimes, but dominant social norms and forms.

Attentive to the spatial practices through which collective political subjectivities were formed in Oaxaca's social movement, my dissertation also brings a critical perspective to how social movements in the Global South are commonly assessed in political imaginaries in the West. Filtered through discourses of democratic representation or human rights, social movements are generally appraised in relation to the possibilities that these

afford for subaltern groups to subvert the dominant structures that marginalize them by giving voice to the injurious workings of power. I argue that an important effect of the political imaginaries of resistance that emerge from this perspective is to conceive of political traction through the lens of what Michael Warner refers to as "state-based thinking." Under the framework of state-based political imaginaries, agency is acquired in relation to the state and the state remains the means of political self-realization. However, by looking at the internal processes that social movements enable, I consider how social movements produce possibilities for social transformation that go beyond the external goals that they set forth. The mobilizing practices of struggle in Oaxaca demanded and gained recognition and rights to the city at a multiplicity of social and geographic scales. While marches, local media takeovers, and stencils on city walls were localized political practices, their political traction and demand for recognition addressed multiple audiences that included, but were not limited to, regional or federal government bodies. The dissertation argues that, when the state is imagined as the ground by which to secure social justice and political change, this marginalizes the productive power of practices of struggle in social movements as transformative of spaces and social relations in their own right.

In a contemporary moment where democracy is both seen as the global future and yet is also in need of being defended and implemented militarily, the dissertation contends that practices of social protest in urban settings produce forms of organizing collective life that call into question prevalent conceptions of representative democracy and the state as the pinnacle of political organization. What emerges from an ethnographic analysis of the practices of struggle of the public assemblies, neighborhood barricades, political art on city walls, and the mega marches of millions are the ways in which these transcended the purely confrontational aspect of a repudiation of the governor to become their own point of reference; Oaxacans' embodied practices are forming alternative conceptions of ethical communities and a collective subject that bypasses state-based frameworks as the necessary horizon of Oaxaca's future. I thus argue that *making* the populist collective subject of "the people" is just as important as challenging the state in pursuing social justice and making a space for politics. Delimiting the political and social effect of APPO in relation to the authoritarian politics of Oaxaca's governor means neglecting how its mobilizing practices of struggle changed forms of political subjectivity and social community, with effects that continue to reverberate to this day.

In Memory of Allan Richard Pred (1936 – 2007)
and Ramón Jiménez Caballero (1947 – 2008)

and for the *latosos* of ASARO

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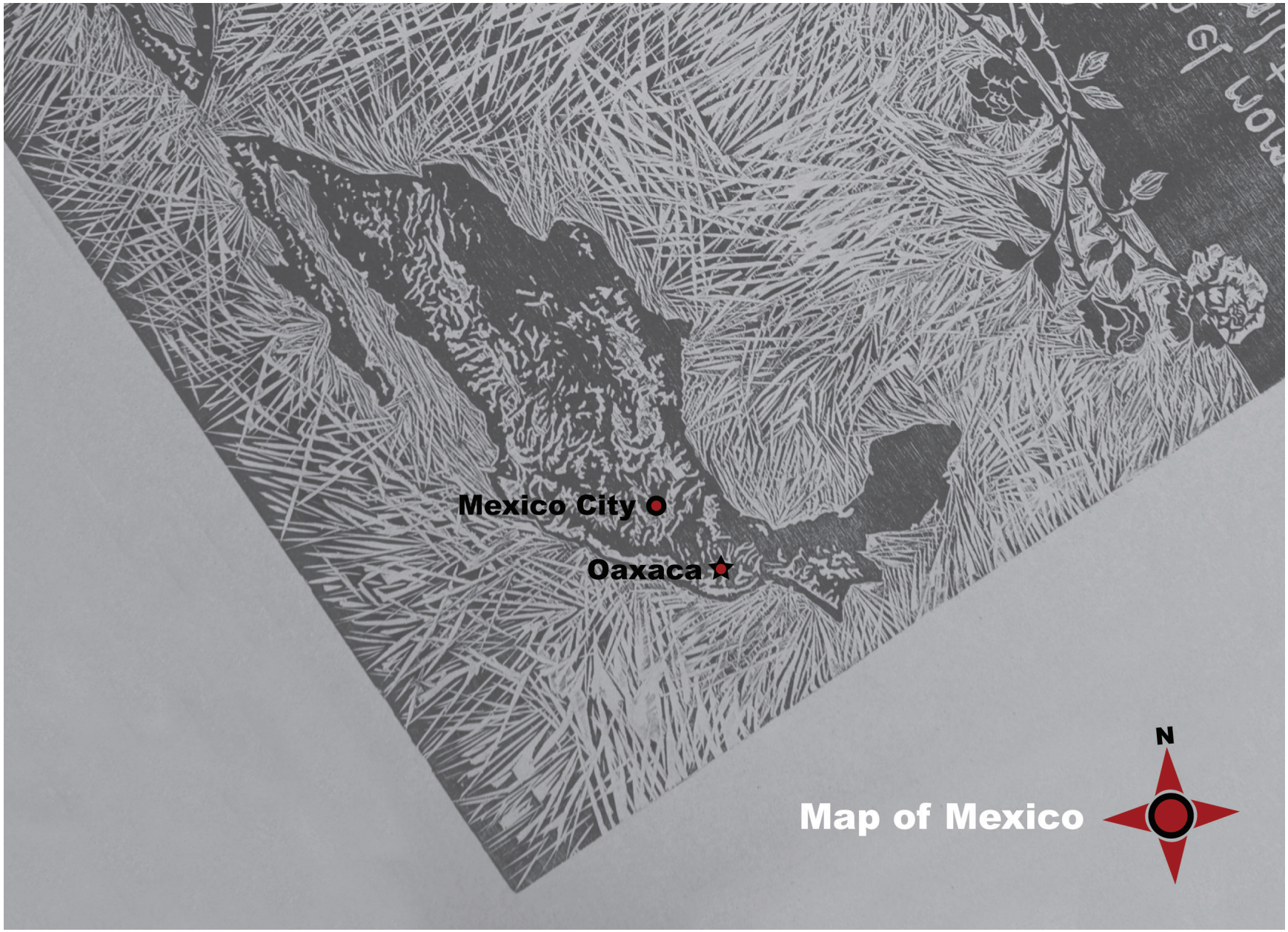
Mexico City
Oaxaca
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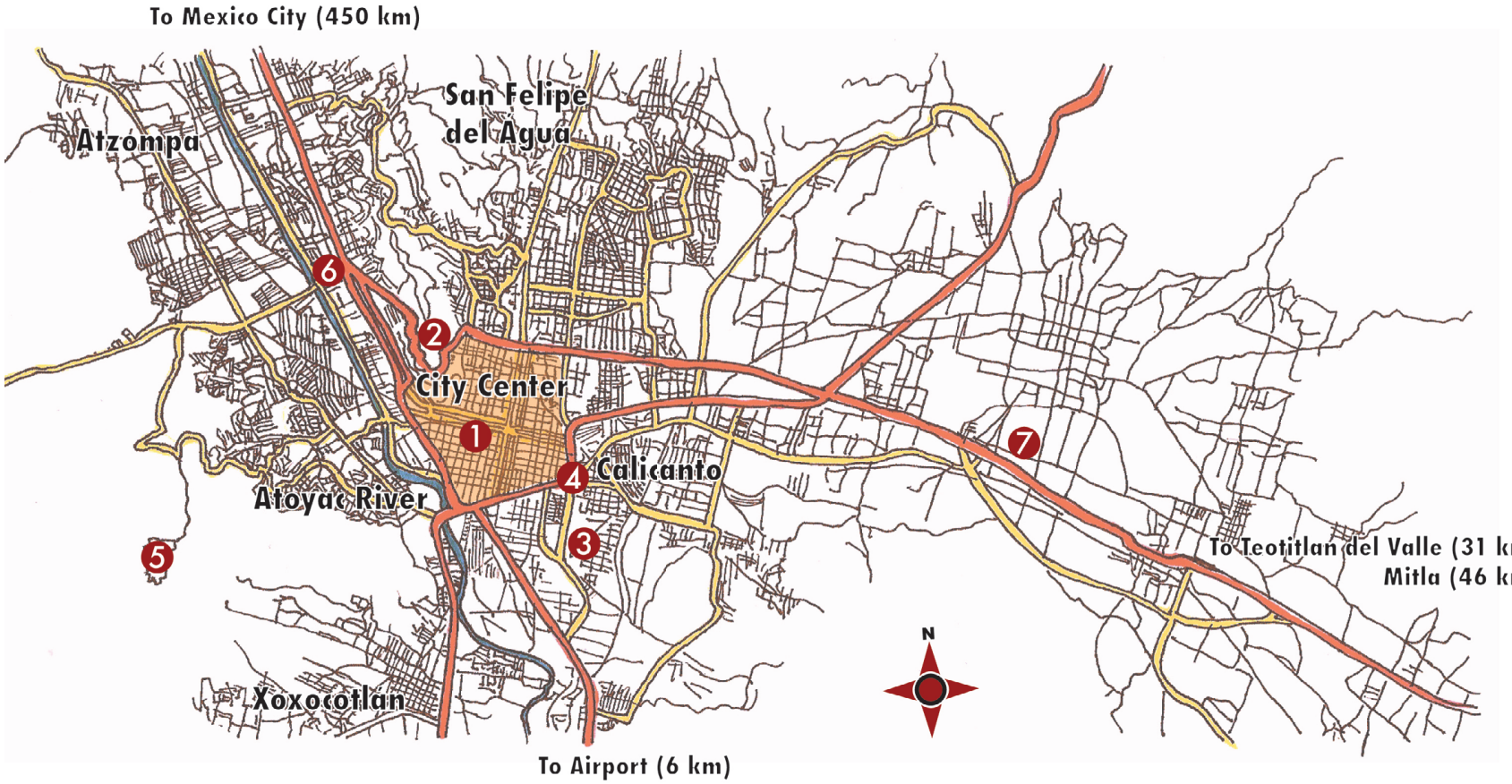
Map of Mexico

Oaxaca Regional Map



1 Zócalo 2 Guelaguetza Auditorium 3 UABJO University Campus 4 Cinco Señores Intersection
5 Monte Albán 6 Instituto Tecnologico de Oaxaca Campus (ITO) 7 Administrative City

Oaxaca City Map
TO SAN FELIPE DEL AGUA
PORFIRIO DIAZ
NIÑOS HEROES DE CHAPULTEPEC
TO MEXICO CITY
Cerro del Fortín
JUAREZ
PINO SUAREZ
CRESPO
TINOCO Y PALACIOS
MORELOS
INDEPENDENCIA
MELCHOR OCAMPO
PERIFERICO
AV. UNIVERSIDAD
TO UABJO CAMPUS, AIRPORT
N
Historic City Center Limits
Pedestrian Avenue
1 Zócalo
2 Cathedral
3 Alameda
4 MUPO
5 Macedonio Alcalá Theater
6 MACO
7 Casa de la Ciudad
8 Labastida Plaza
9 CFMAB
10 IAGO
11 Santo Domingo Church
12 Carmen Alto Plaza
13 Ethnobotanic Garden
14 MUFI
15 El Llano Park
16 Conzatti Park
17 El Pochote Film Club
18 First Class Bus Station
19 Baseball Stadium
20 Guelaguetza Auditorium
21 Tinoco y Palacios Gallery
22 City Hall
23 Casa de la Cultura
24 Cinco Señores Intersection

Quick Reference for Common Acronyms and Spanish Terms

Appistas A shorthand reference for the collective subject formed by individuals who were either members of the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* or who were perceived as supporting APPO and were against the state governor.

ASARO *Asamblea de Artistas Revolucionarios de Oaxaca* (Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca). A political street artist group which came together in the Fall of 2006 as a result of APPO's call for all sectors to organize. ASARO uses stencils, wood-block prints, silkscreens, paintings, and other visual media to contest the government and to push for a different political and social order.

APPO *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (Popular Assembly of the People's of Oaxaca). Born as a response to the 2006 government repression of Oaxaca's teacher's strike, APPO is an assemblage composed of Oaxaca's teacher's union, students, peasants, unions, segments of the indigenous community, and over 300 left-leaning groups all calling for the governor's resignation. APPO regularly held massive marches through Oaxaca's streets, took over local radio and television stations to broadcast their political messages, and used barricades to block city streets and take over the historic center.

Calenda (Procession). These are typically religious processions organized by neighborhoods or particular parishes or social organizations. In Oaxaca these processions usually involve large puppets, colorful candles, and music.

CASOTA *Casa Autónoma Solidaria Oaxaqueña de Trabajo Autogestivo* (Autonomous Oaxacan Home in Solidarity with Autoproduced Work). Participating in a network of autonomous centers each undertaking a variety of projects, CASOTA looks to contribute to the organization and autonomy of popular neighborhoods and indigenous communities in Oaxaca by recuperating the knowledge and hand-made production of machines.

Casa de la Ciudad (The City's House)
An urban research center funded by Oaxacan philanthropist Alfredo Harp Helú whose mission is to study and disseminate information about the development and conservation of Oaxaca's historic center.

Casa de la Cultura Oaxaqueña (Oaxaca's House of Culture). Housed in a restored ex-convent, this government sponsored cultural institution was founded in 1971 and has as its aim promoting the development of Oaxacan culture through workshops in diverse artistic practices as well as by hosting performances and through its library and media services.

CFMAB *Centro Fotográfico Manuel Álvarez Bravo* (Fotographic Center Manuel Álvarez Bravo). This is Oaxaca's most important and only center dedicated to photography. It was founded in 1996 by renown Oaxacan artist Francisco Toledo and has its home in a restored colonial mansion in Oaxaca's center.

CIESAS *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social* (Center for Investigation and Graduate Study in Social Anthropology). With seven centers across Mexico, CIESAS is a social science research and teaching institution focusing both on local, regional, and national research themes and projects. Oaxaca's center was founded in 1987 principally to study projects related to the Indigenous pueblos of the region.

COCEI *Coalición Obrera, Campesina, Estudiantil del Istmo* (Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus). A leftist social and political movement that developed during the 1970s, this coalition has successfully won local political offices on and off since the 1970s but has had a tense relationship to the ruling PRI party that generally controls the state government and supporters of each have found themselves in violent contests that included the army occupying the city of Juchitán in 1983.

COMO *Coordinadora de Mujeres Oaxaqueñas* (Coordinating Committee of Oaxacan Women). An organization born during the 2006 social movement in Oaxaca out of the women's March of Pots and Pans on August 1st and the take-over of the state television station when marchers were refused air-time to publicize the march.

DGCH *Dirección General del Centro Histórico* (General Management of the Historic Center). A municipal agency that advises individuals in their dealings with INAH for projects seeking to make transformations in buildings inside the historic center. Born in 1993, the DGCH was seen as an intermediary that could open up a dialogue between residents and INAH, who was and continues to be perceived as an authoritarian and arbitrary federal bureaucracy responsible for the historic center.

EZ *Espacio Zapata* (Zapata Space). This art and project space was opened ASARO in late October of 2008 to promote artistic works dealing with social and political themes as well as to offer a place for Oaxacans to learn and share artistic skills.

FPR *Frente Popular Revolucionario* (Popular Revolutionary Front). A Marxist-Leninist group promoting socialism, the FPR was highly active in the 2006 social movement in Oaxaca. The FPR publishes a weekly, Vanguardia Proletaria (Proletarian Vanguard), and through its political activities generally pushes for a transformation of the state and of capitalism.

Guelaguetza (Zapotec for reciprocity). A mid-July harvest festival, this celebration showcases dancing groups from the seven regions of the state who gather in Oaxaca to perform their regional dances. Since 2006, with the APPO and the government producing competing events, this has become an important cultural and political battleground.

IEEPO *Institución Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca* (Oaxacan State Institution of Public Education). This is the institution in charge of planning, programming, budgeting, organizing, running, and

supervising state schools in Oaxaca. This institution coordinates schools across the state and is in charge of coordinating with the federal government's Secretary of Public Education.

IAGO *Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca* (Graphic Arts Institute of Oaxaca). Founded in 1988 by Oaxacan artist Francisco Toledo and housed in his former home, this institute has a rotating exhibit space and a permanent library that holds an important and impressive collection of books dedicated primarily to the arts.

INAH *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* (National Institute of Anthropology and History). Created in 1939, this federal agency is responsible for investigating, conserving, protecting, and promoting the archeological, anthropological, and historical heritage of Mexico. INAH is in charge of many museums and all archaeological sites in Mexico and, through its thirty-one regional centers, oversees and regulates sites deemed of historic value.

Marcha de las Cacerolas (March of Pots and Pans)
A women's march that took place on August 1st, 2006, that resulted in the creation of the Coordinadora de Mujeres Oaxaqueñas and the take over of the state television station after the female marchers were refused air-time to publicize the march and the movement.

MACO *Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca* (Oaxacan Contemporary Arts Museum). Founded in 1992, this museum is located on the restored site of the Lazo de la Vega y Pinelo family's manor. Built around the turn of the 18th century, the imposing building has important original details, including the family's coat of arms adorning the entranceway.

MUPO *Museo de los Pintores Oaxaqueños* (Museum of Oaxacan Painters). Opening its doors for the first time in 2004, this museum was created by the State Government with the stated mission of housing the art of Oaxaca's master painters. The building is a restored mansion from the seventeenth century that once served as a charitable school for girls run by the church and has housed other museums in the past.

PRI *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party). Since its founding in 1929 until its defeat in national elections in 2000, the PRI effectively had political and social control of Mexico. Though the authoritarian PRI no longer controls the national presidency, the legacy of its 70-year rule continues to be felt at the state and local levels, where PRI functionaries continue to hold on to power in much of the country.

Plantón(es) In Spanish, this word refers to either a plant or shoot that has been set in the ground or to a military sentry or individual that stands in wait for someone. As both usages show, the connotation is of something that is grounded, set in place. As a political practice, the plantón refers to the take over of a space by a group aiming to make its demands heard and is comparable to a sit-in strike.

PFP *Policía Federal Preventiva* (Federal Preventive Police). Formed in 1998, the PFP brought together various police agencies into a new centralized force. Controversial since its inception for including many military personnel and for a broad mandate that included watching over transportation routes and combating drug trafficking. Charged with the "mission of safeguarding the integrity and rights of the people, preventing crimes, and preserving public liberties, order, and peace," the PFP was the primary instrument that the federal state used to end the social movement in Oaxaca in 2006. In December of 2008, Mexican President Felipe Calderón decided to transform the PFP into what is now the Federal Police.

RCM *Revuelta Cultural Mexicana*, also Rekum (Mexican Cultural Revolt). In January of 2008, political street artists gathered at the World Social Forum in Mexico City came up with the idea to create a national collective encouraging art that supports social struggle. In March of 2008, 40 street artists representing 6 states gathered during the Mexico City stop of the traveling exhibit of street art "Las Calles Estan Diciendo Cosas" and formalized the national collective, choosing then to give it this name and to run the collective via a system of local to regional to national assemblies.

Tequio (Work gang.) This is a self-organized or volunteer workforce that gathers in order to undertake an agreed upon task. The practice of organizing work gangs is integral to the effective functioning of many of Oaxaca's pueblo communities and to *usos y costumbres*.

TGP *Taller de Gráfica Popular* (People's Graphic Workshop). Founded in 1937, the TGP followed in the footsteps of both the art and political sensibilities of José Guadalupe Posada, producing political prints for broad distribution, often as broadsheets, flyers, or as posters. Comprised of a group of talented artists, the workshop organized itself collaboratively and used the sale of its prints to keep afloat financially. Though not well known beyond Mexico, and though its most productive years are behind it, the TGP continues to produce prints and its art continues to inspire printmakers and political satirists to this day.

Tianguis Cultural "Libertad y Resistencia" (Freedom and Resistance Cultural Market)

A project spearheaded by ASARO that sought to bring together artists and creators who were producing their own handicrafts but did not find a space to sell these in the commercial art market of Oaxaca. Activities at the Tianguis Cultural included painting workshops for kids, chess tables, musical numbers, art exhibits, and film projections. Held in an appropriated public plaza in the city center, the Tianguis Cultural sought to open up a space for interaction between artists and Oaxacans.

URO Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. He is the embattled and controversial PRI Oaxacan governor who began his six-year term in 2004 amidst allegations of

fraud. His authoritarian policies have been highly contested and denounced by many Oaxacans and although the 2006 social movement had as its central demand his resignation, he finished his term in office in 2010.

Ulisistas This is a shorthand way to point to the collective subject of individuals who were either supporting the governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz or were perceived to be supporting him and his positions.

UABJO *Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca* (Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca). The most important of Oaxaca's universities, hosting Radio Universidad and with the barricade of Cinco Señores at its doorstep, this public institution offered one of the pillars of support for the APPO and the social movement of 2006. When federal and local police first attempted to repress the movement on November 2nd of 2006, the UABJO was the site of the famed "Batalla de todos los Santos" (Battle of All Saints) where, after a seven-hour confrontation, the police were defeated by the people who were defending the university and the social movement.

UniTierra *Universidad de la Tierra* (University of the Earth). This is an organization dedicated to learning, study, reflection, and action, UniTierra seeks to create horizontal relationships where learning happens through the exchange of knowledges in conversation and debate with others and as a matter of learning by doing. UniTierra seeks to create social change by fostering conviviality and radical democracy and has spaces in Oaxaca, Chiapas, Toronto, and is in the process of forming a space in California.

Usos y costumbres
(Customs and traditions, *or*, literally, uses and customs.) This term refers to the exercise of practices such as the assembly, community service (*cargos*), and work brigades (*tequios*) that many communities in Oaxaca use in governing in lieu of decision-making by representatives elected through ballots and political parties.

Vallistocracia A word used to refer to the upper classes and elites of Oaxaca that combines Oaxaca's geography as a valley and the aristocratic aspirations of its elite residents.

VOCAL *Voces Oaxaqueñas Construyendo Autonomia y Libertad* (Oaxacan Voices Constructing Autonomy and Liberty). An assembly and assemblage of various activists with libertarian and anarchist sensibilities who found each other through their participation in the social movement of 2006, VOCAL actively looks to find ways to eliminate the hold the government has on our lives by re-appropriating the notion of governance and democracy as being the direct responsibility of a community's active practices of decision-making and collective follow through.

Zócalo The Spanish term used in Mexico to refer to a city's main plaza.

Preface: Acknowledging Collective Practice and a Shared Terrain of Struggle

Traveling from Mexico City towards Puebla, the concrete dwellings and cement structures snake alongside you for what seems an impossible distance. The billowing clouds pouring out of industry smokestacks remind you that not every job left the United States for Mexico and then has moved on to China. It is a world of grey. Cinder-block stacked atop cinder-block, each forming a small, square room, each small square room joining another to become a small home, each small home eternally unfinished, aspiring to tell another story, aspiring to color. Counting the bricks, it becomes easy to believe and imagine that the endless Metropolis has more than 20 million people. Then you turn right, or southward, and the landscape changes. The grey homes are replaced by grand cactus structures whose limbs push up to the sky. These are called *órganos* in Spanish and they are so named because their structure resembles that of organ pipes.

It is summer as I drive, and the land is largely flat and dry. Mountains loom ahead, however, and crossing into the state of Oaxaca the earth rises up to the sky. Snaking upwards, there are some homes, a few towns in the distance, some signs for turn-offs leading to cities, but mostly mountains. Descending into the valley of the city of Oaxaca, the dry earth and irrigated farmland abruptly comes to an end and a small wave of poorly constructed homes hugging the valley floor leap up the mountainsides like billy goats in search of air and food. I follow my map and wind through the streets but quickly get lost climbing through neighborhoods where the city's growth has created awkward spaces of porosity where million dollar homes lie next to tin shacks containing a family and farm animals. Hardly a cloud graces the sky and the sun beats down mercilessly upon the city.

When I call Dr. Jiménez he says that I am close, very close. He will come guide me. I insist that the car is full of things, that I can make it, but I am told not to move. Soon I am in Dr. Jiménez's house and it is his turn to insist, call me Ramón. Best friends with an uncle of mine, when my family got in touch with him to say that I was going to do research in Oaxaca, Dr. Ramón offered to house me as I settled in. And for the next month, as I settled in, Dr. Ramón and his family adopted mine as if we were kin. We ate together and Dr. Ramón shared stories about how he had met my uncle when he was an impoverished medical student far from home in Mexico City and how my uncle's family had taken him in. Now an accomplished and respected oncology doctor who taught classes at the University and had founded a medical clinic in Oaxaca, Dr. Ramón was today offering the same hospitality to my family and I. We moved out and fieldwork soon consumed most of my time, but Dr. Ramón and his family made sure we would often get together.

On the 12th of May of 2008, as Dr. Jiménez was attending patients in his clinic, a student of his entered his office and shot him three times. The student's father had been a patient of Dr. Jiménez but had not survived and the bereaved student decided that it was due to the care he had received. Dr. Jiménez died on the spot. It was our turn to grieve. It was also time to remember, reflect, and give thanks. My research, and this dissertation, could not have happened without the help of Dr. Ramón, Doña María Hermelinda Cuen Higuera, his wife, Ramón Jiménez Cuen, his son, and Adriana Jiménez Cuen, his daughter. This dissertation is largely about the violence of the state in Oaxaca and the hopes and dreams of political street artists who were responding to that violence; but it is also about the hospitality and kindness of people like Dr. Ramón who in the face of incredible challenges are and do make all the difference. He is missed.

I came across many amazing and gracious people in Oaxaca like Dr. Ramón who not only made academic research possible but enriched and nurtured life in other ways. Even before I met the youthful street artists of ASARO, I had already been inspired and intrigued by their stencils on Oaxaca's walls. Working with them resulted not just in artistic and intellectual challenges and insights, but was also an intense experience that continues to inspire and for which I am ever grateful. Likewise, I would like to thank Gustavo Esteva, Sergio Beltrán, Daniel Perera and all of the people who came together in seminars at the deinstitutionalized learning space of UniTierra for providing a welcoming space of reflection. I am grateful to have met and been supported in my research in Oaxaca by other extraordinary people, among them artist Arnulfo Aquino, video journalist Arpad, art historian Deborah Caplow, the talented musician Chinto, graphic designer Carlos Franco, IAGO director Guillermo Fricke, the gracious Yolanda García, activist Leonardo Vicente Gómez, and anthropologist Michael Higgins.

While new friends such as Laura Tilghman and Marissa Smith brought merriment to moments between research endeavors and Francisco Leonardo Reséndiz was a true academic accomplice, I would not have made it to Oaxaca without the support of friends and colleagues. Melissa Edmands Marsh, Amanda Li Hope, Carina Pernia, and Michael Zweck-Bronner have made sure that I have not forgotten either architecture or New York City. At Berkeley, Zeynep Gursel, Misha Klein, and Tarek Elhaik provided intellectual sparks as well as friendship. Saúl Mercado and Brad Erickson offered the generous warmth of an extended family. Peter Skafish and Peter Rawitscher made everything from classes to filling out funding proposals enjoyable. Laeticia Cesarino and Bruno Reinhardt were always ready to take my family in while Callie Maidhoff, Ramón Quintero, and Zhivka Valiavicharska were always ready to head out and hit the streets. Teo Ballvé and Angela Carrioza were always ready to explore the geography of the neighborhood. Jennifer Casolo and Megan Ybarra made sure to keep the pages coming in. And, whether in Brazil or Seattle, Michael Donovan, Meg Stalcup, and I continue to share stories of the Pacific Northwest.

I am thankful as well for the multiple advisers who have helped me paddle through academic waters, even when I have insisted on going upriver. Donald Moore's mentoring practices at Berkeley have provided a sublime model of academic commitment to research and teaching that I can only hope to aspire to and for which I cannot express enough appreciation. Alan Pred's sudden passing cannot erase the imprint of his volcanic passion and elegant erudition; there was no one better to experience and explore the city with. Charles Hirschkind's sage advice has been timely and its sonic trace reverberates throughout my work. Compañero Alexei Yurchak has walked unswervingly with this project from the decaying walls of Havana to the revolutionary ramparts of Oaxaca. Jake Kosek has stepped admirably into Alan Pred's shoes and I look forward to continued engaging conversations. I have also benefited from discussions with Charlie Hale as we have traversed terrain along the wooded paths of Berkeley, city streets of Philly, and the hills of Oaxaca. José Luiz Passos has always received me with a healthy dose of both crítica and caipirinha. Nelson Graburn has always had his door open at Berkeley and has opened doors for me in Lisbon and beyond. Laura Nader has been fiercely supportive of both academic and political projects. Long ago, Elaine Combs-Schilling was the first to encourage exploring artistic and academic articulations. Barry Bergdoll's poise and pursuit in mapping urban and architectural terrains has always been an inspiration.

Many funding agencies also provided invaluable financial assistance and made both research and writing possible. A Chancellor's Opportunity Predoctoral Fellowship allowed me to begin the

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No, I have not forgot you Fausto! Though we don't always see eye to eye, I know that you are always be ready to do whatever it takes to help out. Like the night of November 24, 2008, when we painted a canvas related to the anniversary of the federal government's military repression of the social movement. The ASARO exhibit was in the *zócalo* the next day and we spent all night painting. Recycling a canvas from the graffiti contest, by the first light of morning we transformed the spray painted tag into a series of animalesque-humanoid creatures intertwined by arms, tongues, and erections. At the back of the line was the devil, then a figure wearing the presidential sash, then the bishop, and finally, a soldier. In the background, a wave of people was coming down from the Oaxacan hills, but it was unclear whether to challenge the beasts or be eaten by them. It was imaginative fun and the work, though intense, did what work between ASARO members or family does, which is to bring people together. Many thanks dad.

Rearticulating the Social: Spatial Practices, Collective Subjects, and Oaxaca's Art of Protest

> Intelligence…circles around, taking the greatest possible number of external views of the object, which, instead of penetrating, it draws towards itself. But it is intuition which will lead us into the very interior of life.
>
> —Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 1930-32.

Coinciding with international worker's day, in May of 2006, Oaxaca's teachers union took over the main plaza of this UNESCO World Heritage Site to hold a *plantón*, or sit-in strike. With over 70,000 members in the teachers union and the power to close down schools across the state, the union has found these work stoppages and sit-in strikes to be effective tools in gaining political traction vis-à-vis the state. Yet, for the last three decades, it has repeatedly taken the practice of seizing the square to get the government's attention to deficiencies in schools and the needs of teachers and students. While these strikes are typically resolved through mutual negotiations, in the early morning hours of June 14, 2006, Oaxacan governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz deployed from 1,000 to 3,000 state police to break up the *plantón*. Caught by surprise, the teachers who had scattered regrouped in the streets around the square and retook the plaza that morning. In the following days, what began as a teachers strike rapidly became the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), a broader populist movement including students, farm-workers, multiple indigenous groups, as well as over 300 social and civic organizations spanning a gamut of causes from environmental to human rights, and an array of social actors ranging from dedicated anarchists and devout church groups to committed socialists.

Although the state of Oaxaca is internationally renown for both its cultural heritage and natural beauty, Oaxaca consistently ranks, along with Chiapas and Guerrero, as one of the three most marginalized Mexican states (see CONAPO 2006). Authoritarian politics, poverty, and social protests have been regular facets of Oaxaca's historical trajectory. Previous social movements in Oaxaca resulted in the ousting of three Oaxacan governors—Edmundo Sánchez Cano in 1946, Manuel Mayoral Heredia in 1952, and Manuel Zarate Aquino in 1977. While the social movement that coalesced around APPO was ultimately unable to achieve the removal of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, the scale and scope of the social movement was unprecedented. In a state of almost 3.5 million people, APPO mobilized over one million Oaxacans in 2006 through marches, assemblies, barricades, and street art against the authoritarian practices of Oaxaca's governor. New organizations constituted in the social movement, such as the Coordinating Committee of Oaxacan Women (COMO) and Oaxacan Voices Constructing Autonomy and Liberty (VOCAL), joined more established organizations such as the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI) in calling for the resignation of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz.

At the start of my eighteen months of fieldwork in June of 2007, when I began to research the social and political aftermath of APPO, the barricades were no longer a daily occurrence, yet the social struggle remained highly visible through the continuing practice of spray painting political stencils on the walls of the World Heritage Site and through the many marches that took over city streets. In January of 2008, I joined the *Asamblea de Artistas*

Revolucionarios de Oaxaca (ASARO), a political street art group numbering around 26 members and collaborators that came together in 2006 as a result of the social movement. As a former member of ASARO and teacher at one of the fine art schools in Oaxaca told me, in the early days after APPO's conformation, students of the art school began to meet with other artists in the main plaza, or *zócalo*, to create painted cloth banners for organizations to use in the sit-in strike or in marches and it was here that the idea to organize artists came into being. Soon, meetings were being held in the Fine Arts Academy and, following the broader APPO organizational strategy, the art group that congregated began to gather in assemblies in order to make decisions. With increased numbers and organization, ASARO members were able to put up larger stencils with more complex designs along march routes and, as a result, the group attracted more members and grew. At one of the assembly meetings, an artist who had a studio offered his space as a *taller* (workshop) for what was by then the Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca (ASARO).

As the teacher recalled, the fall of 2006 was a time of ceaseless production. Everyone put in some money for supplies and there was no shortage of interventions in the streets, with the group producing paintings, stencils, woodblock prints, and cloth banners as member's skills, time, and the occasion called for. Underscoring both the sense of frenzied participation and the stakes involved, she also recalled that, during an assembly in the *taller*, one member confessed that he had been planted there in order to be an *oreja* (ear) for the police but that "si le gusto lo que hicieron" (he liked what they did). Realizing the need to be more careful, the group has since taken greater care of who may join the assembly even as it continually takes in new members. After the social movement's repression by federal police forces on the 25th of November of 2006, participation in APPO and the broader social movement has fluctuated; nonetheless, much as other groups affiliated with APPO who remain committed to social struggle, ASARO has continued to produce art of protest and to challenge not just Oaxaca's authoritarian governing practices, but also the social place of graffitist youths in society.

This dissertation is largely about ASARO and the social movement in Oaxaca that took off in 2006. However, before engaging with the marches, barricades, assemblies, and street art, I would like to begin by framing the project's methodology, as it illuminates many of the concerns that animate the work. Trained as an architect and anthropologist, my interests pertain to how spatializing practices produce collective subjects and to the political relevance of these social formations.[i] Working with

[i] Building on Allan Pred's mentorship, my research with political street artists, and work as a graphic designer, the dissertation also strives to (re) consider the relationship between text, image, and the page as well as how academics might use images as more than ethnographic facts.

political street artists in an urban environment meant crafting an appropriate methodology by which to address both the relevance and production of the urban milieu and the labor and effects that spray painting the city produced. In the 1960s in France, the artists and intellectuals of the Situationist International advocated graffiti as an urban tactic of *détournement* that could shake people out of their habitual routines and push them to consider the urban environment and social conventions that framed their spatial and social practices. As an unauthorized appropriation of the street, *détournement* was first and foremost a political intervention that reconceived the urban environment as an antagonistic field. *Détournement* translates as diversion, and it is useful to understand it both in the sense of being a spatial, temporal, and political detour from a common, established course as well as in its sense as play and movement out of a routine—as a diversion from the ordinary. Street art in Oaxaca was and is creative, serious play that offers a diversion in all of these senses.

As a temporal and spatial practice, fieldwork in the urban environment is a coming and going, a traversal that also offers a *détournement*. The relationship between anthropological practices, sites, and theoretical insights has been addressed by others (see Clifford 1997; Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Low 1996), and rather than cover this ground, what I would highlight about fieldwork as a methodological practice is the intimate relationship between having an itinerary—a set of theoretical concerns and a sense of where, how, and with whom research will address these concerns—and the way in which the traversal itself provides new insights that redraw and divert conceptual and embodied maps. Researching urban space and society, philosopher Walter Benjamin found that, rather than try to master the urban environment and produce a unified theory of the city, his method was to cultivate the art of getting lost in the material milieu. As he put it, "to lose oneself in a city—as one loses oneself in a forest—that calls for a quite different schooling. Then signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest" (1932:8). Working with architects, urban planners, and historians, and laboring with political street artists, fieldwork in Oaxaca provided a method and means by which to cross "frontiers not only social but topographical" and to discover the "places…in the great cities where one stands on the edge of the void" (Benjamin 1932:11). The art of fieldwork as a conceptual and physical diversion, of straying, of getting lost in and traversing the material and social spaces of the city, was and is productive.

In an urban and social environment being transformed by an ongoing social movement, taking fieldwork in Oaxaca as a mobilizing strategy of traversals allowed for an attention to *how* people's practices, discourses, and imaginative geographies were producing emerging and different senses of people and place. At stake in the methodological traversals and articulations that fieldwork and the dissertation provide are what philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe as a rhizomatic entanglement attentive to "all matter of becomings" (1980:21). On the one hand, the practice of fieldwork as *détournement* allows one to take contingency and becoming seriously, a matter of importance in a field site where, as Oaxacan intellectual Gustavo Esteva notes, "not even the most attentive observer could register all that is happening…. Impossible to attend all the workshops, encounters, colloquiums, sit-in strikes, occupations, festivals, projects, expositions, demonstrations, assemblies, and events of all types that interminably happen under the common denominator of rebellion, that also expresses itself in concrete actions of transformation" (2008:37). On the other hand, the challenge has been as well to render visible moments, practices, and processes of becoming without suggesting that anything goes.

What materializes from such an effort, and what is reflected in this dissertation, is not a definitive take on the 2006 social movement or on street artists in Oaxaca, but rather an attention to how the practices of protest produced emerging collective subjects and ambivalent political and social horizons that continue to have relevance in Oaxaca today. Much as anthropologist Kathleen Stewart described James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the project and politics of entanglement that arises "is an account that, far from proposing to 'solve' the problems of documentary or ethnographic representation in a perfect text, tries to wrest cultural representation free of the very claim to problem-solving, absolute knowledge" (1996:23). Entangled with political street artists and the social movement, and attentive to the traversals of fieldwork, contingency, and becoming, rather than resolve gaps or tensions in a narrative that promises closure, the dissertation focuses on the productive tensions of spaces of ambivalence and emergence.

Attentive to the tensions, ambivalences, and contingent becomings of the contemporary city, in his *Arcades Project*, Benjamin offered the following take on its methodology: "Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't *say* anything. Merely show.... The rags, the refuse—these I will not inventory but allow... to come into their own: by making use of them" (1982:460). As an aesthetic and methodological practice of construction out of bricolage, montage offers a means by which to present different slices and perspectives on a theme, site, concern, or idea. Working with the debris of the city to offer a "defamiliarizing shock of disjuncture...[that] leaves us in a space of tense confabulation" (Stewart 1996:26), the dissertation's montage offers two ways of working with refuse in Oaxaca: one is the refusal of any linear narrative or of a discourse that could produce a mythological coherence not borne out by the practices of struggle in Oaxaca or their emergent spatial or social manifestations. (Whether of APPO, ASARO, or other social groups in the city, totalizing accounts can be constructed only by omitting or disavowing the differences, fragmentation, and contestations making up the practices that produce both space and social formations.) Second is the work of re-fusing that a montage does; this is the work of articulation that a montage does, how its construction informs by showing, by seeking to make something visible that enunciates as well as joins things together (see also Pred 1995). Translating the insights and traversals of the *détournement* of fieldwork into a montage whose re-presentation seeks to fuse together different elements in order to open up a conversation rather than to present a definitive portrait is also a way to invite the audience or reader to actively participate or question its construction.

Moreover, as an aesthetic and methodological practice, the work that montage does as an *articulation* offered the most useful methodological and conceptual landscape by which to show the way in which social formations and collective subjects were being produced in Oaxaca through practices of struggle. Other conceptual vocabularies to speak about social formations exist—assemblage, culture, society, public, nation, the people—and these are deployed when appropriate; however, given the central argument of the dissertation that *making* a space for the people has been the socially and politically productive work of the practices of struggle of the social movement in Oaxaca, articulation speaks most clearly to both the labor of creating a collective subject out of difference as well as to its precarious nature. (Though assemblage is also important, the term suggests that, once assembled, the resulting social formation has more or less stable properties and an enduring form.)

Interested in how practices of struggle produced shared interests and collective subjects in Oaxaca, I draw on philosopher Henri Lefebvre's reminder that spaces invite particular practices but

cannot determine them (1974), and cultural theorist Stuart Hall's reminder that discursive formations position particular subjects but cannot compel individuals to become subjects of its discourse (1996b). For Hall, the concept of articulation describes the work of being positioned and positioning oneself and provides a means by which to formulate "an account of how subjects are constituted" (1996b:13). Whether spatial or spoken, articulations invite or suggest particular framings; yet, because articulations are relational, the work of articulation is always subject to further articulations or to different framings as these are taken up, modified, misunderstood, or contested by others. Further, as political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantall Mouffe note, while the field of political struggle has typically been figured on the basis of essential identities and unitary political positions, new social movements—or new theories on social movements—are elaborating a radical democracy that "accepts the structural diversity of the relations in which social agents are immersed, and replaces the principle of representation with that of articulation. Unity between these agents is then not the expression of a common underlying essence but the result of political construction and struggle" (1985:65). As a montage, the dissertation's articulations enable discussions of the issue of representation, recognition, and the creation of shared interests and identity through relational dynamics of struggle in Oaxaca's ongoing social movement.

Lastly, as geographer David Slater has written, new takes on social movements are characterized by a recognition that these are "archipelagos of resistance…that have the potential to be connected across space, but which are also distinct, specific and embedded in local and regional contexts" (1997:259). The work of articulation engages directly with the issue of the historical sedimentation and particularity of practices of struggle as well as how archipelagoes of resistance may be connected both locally and translocally. Although overlapping and articulated together, as a way to situate the montage and provide a relevant entry point into Oaxaca and its social movement, as well as its relevance for social movements beyond Oaxaca, the following three sections frame the dissertation by mapping out interconnected concerns around space, subjects, and social movements and by introducing concepts that animate the project.

Take I—Barricade Sociality: Spatiality, Subjectivity, and Social Movement

Streets are the dwelling place of the collective. The collective is an eternally unquiet, eternally agitated being that—in the space between the building fronts—experiences, learns, understands, and invents as much as individuals do within the privacy of their own four walls.

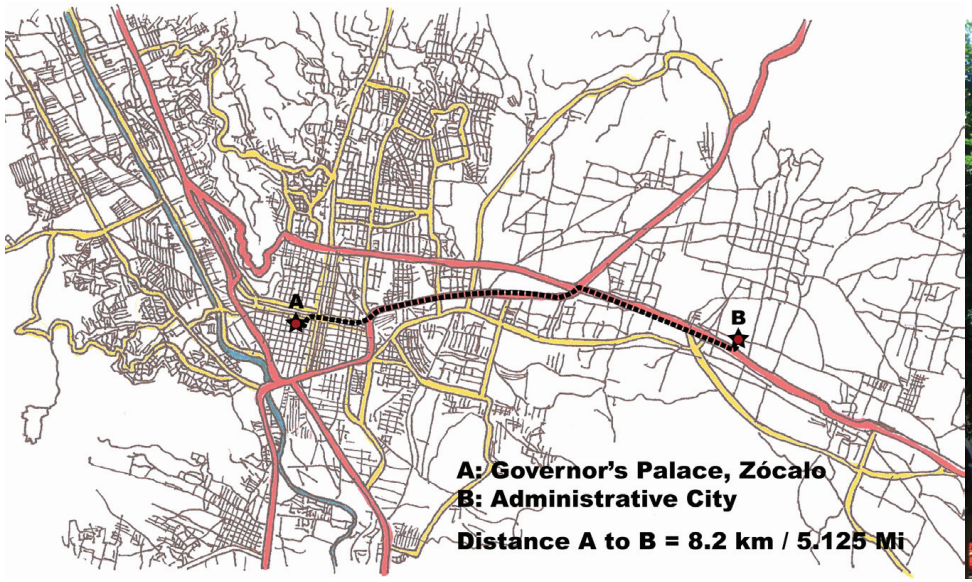
— Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 1982.

Academic preoccupations with space since the 1990s have been characterized as forming a spatial turn in theory. Nonetheless, while critical texts have established that space is a social and material product that shapes our actions and subjectivity as much as our actions shape it (de Certeau 1984; Foucault 1982; Lefebvre 1974), most often the discourse surrounding the urban milieu has yielded diagrammatic representations of urban space that treat it as the setting where life and research happen rather than considering it as a focal point of investigation. Though Oaxaca's marches, assemblies, and barricades dominated national news in 2006 and made the international press, most scholarly and journalistic accounts have focused on the present and treat the city as the backdrop for these events (for exceptions, see Arellanes 2007; de Aguinaga 2007b; Gibler 2007; Martínez Vásquez 2007b). Mapping collective practices of struggle in Oaxaca's social movement, I seek to move beyond the generalization that there is a mutually constitutive relationship between materiality, spatial practices, and the creation of subjects in order to concretely address *how* space is a consequential actant—to use Bruno Latour's terminology (1999)—in processes of the formation of political subjects and transformative social relations.

The urban transformations that Ulises Ruiz Ortiz—or URO, as he is acrimoniously called—set in motion at the start of his governor's term in December of 2004 provide fertile starting ground for examining the concrete articulations and intertwined relationship between Oaxaca's spatiality and the production of political subjects that ultimately came together in the social movement of 2006. Under the pretext of modernizing the city for tourism, URO undertook a series of urban transformations that would radically alter what former IAGO director Fernando Gálvez de Aguinaga has termed "the neurological points of the capital city" (2007b:118). These included removing the traditional green stones for which the city is known from the prominent Plaza de la Danza and replacing them with cement; felling trees in the city's second largest park, the Paseo de Juárez; remodeling an important fountain that symbolizes the seven regions of Oaxaca; amplifying a highway that runs through the Cerro del Fortín, an important symbol of Oaxaca and the site of the popular Guelaguetza festival with such poor engineering and execution that it caused a tremendous landslide threatening the hillside community below; wiping out an entire city block despite widespread protests in order to build a modern first-class bus station in the historic neighborhood of Jalatlaco; installing parking meters in the historic city center; proposing to build an underground parking lot below the city's most important market; and recommending a light show at the sacred Zapotec site of Monte Albán.

However, it was his transformation of the main plaza, or *zócalo*, in the World Heritage Site that most radically altered not only Oaxaca's urban space, but also its social and political present. For starters, in 2005, URO decided to move the offices of the governor's palace from the *zócalo* and the nearby state senate from the city center to a location 8.2 kilometers away on the outskirts of the metropolitan area. Critics pointed out that moving these sites of government bureaucracy were political decisions having to do with removing the seat of government from the immediate proximity of social protestors. Despite criticism, as construction on the remote Administrative City began in 2005, the governor's palace underwent renovations to become a museum and the state senate a theater. With government functionaries in the process of relocating to different sites around the city, the symbolic and operational functioning of the governing bureaucracy was uprooted from the historic center and became a moving target for political protestors looking to express their discontent.

Undeterred by criticism, URO continued his tourism and development campaign by mobilizing an army of workers who descended upon the *zócalo* early one Sunday morning in March of 2005 and quickly enclosed it with a tall laminate fence. Although they lacked the required authorization of INAH, the federal agency that oversees this World Heritage Site, workers used heavy machinery to begin tearing up and removing the square's porous greenish stones. This work exposed the roots of the massive laurel trees that gave shape and shade to the square. When one tree fell, it was sawn to pieces. As if pointing a finger, another fell onto the ex-governor's palace and it was only because a crowd gathered to protect the tree that it was restored to its place and not cut to pieces. Cement slabs were the primary material and square edges the governing aesthetic of the project. As local architect Jaime Ortiz Lajous proclaimed, "the *zócalo* has a mediocre fascist spirit, it is a vulgar fascism, the result of the state of impunity that we are living in, and a lack of respect to citizens" (in Arellanes 2007:139).



By the end of the project, no official reason had been given for the plan and it was unclear how much money was spent on the work since the overall project had been subdivided in such a way as to avoid the need for contractors involved to publicly bid for it. While the government cited figures of 2.3 million dollars spent, rumor has it that not only did the project reach upwards of 60 million dollars, but that much of the funds went to the pockets of Roberto Madrazo, the PRI candidate for the upcoming national elections who had promised the keys to the presidential palace for his good friend and supporter Ulises Ruiz. Furthermore, local papers announced that the restoration specialist responsible for the project was none other than the governor's brother.

Given that the *zócalo* is the center of Oaxaca's urban footprint and the focal point of both the city's social and political activity as well as of its historical image, Oaxacans' response to the governor's imposed project was decidedly negative. However, as local historian Anselmo Arrellanes Meixueiro points out, this negativity manifested itself in constructive ways. He writes, "since the start of the destruction of the *zócalo*, citizens organized a variety of peaceful marches with allusive banners, posters manufactured by the marchers, and with a musical group in the front. It was in an organized protest against this affront where people shouted for the resignation of Ulises Ruiz for the first time, and he had not yet completed six months as governor" (2007:146). Despite the fact that museums, high-class hotels, pricey restaurants, and rents well beyond the average Oaxacan budget have radically transformed the city center since 1987 when it was declared a World Heritage Site, Oaxacans continue to identify this space strongly as their place. This is powerfully evident not only in Oaxacan's narrated discourse about the *zócalo*, but more importantly is evident in their spatial practices. With children overrunning the *zócalo* with bubbles and balloons, young lovers on benches, the elderly listening to local musical groups, and people spilling out of the cathedral after mass,

the *zócalo* is a dynamic space and, as was evident in 2005, one that Oaxacans are heavily invested in. The important thing to point out is that, from angry housewives and young students to the clergy and architects, protests of URO's urban transformations articulated a collective subject out of diverse individuals and multiple groups who had not found a common cause to unite them before. Like the APPO movement that grew out of the teachers' repression, the *zócalo* protests brought them together against the long-standing authoritarian model of governance in Oaxaca where one person, without any input from *el pueblo*—or "the people"—can decide how, where, and what comes next.

Oaxaca's PRI politicians have been characterized by an authoritarian and patriarchal governing style that imposes social, economic, and urban projects and doles out money and material goods to communities across the state. However, Oaxacans are neither passive spectators nor the dupes of politicians. Rather, as chapter four of the dissertation addresses, authoritarian governing practices *and* collective manifestations of discontent in public space have historically made the hegemonic norm in Oaxaca. As chapter four further elaborates, the history of the collective subject of *el pueblo* stretches back to colonial struggles that racially and spatially marked out the proper place of indigenous and colonial bodies, sites, and social locations. Neither a static category nor passively accepted, the social and political place of *el pueblo* has been negotiated between ruling elites and Oaxaca's marginalized populations since colonial times, presenting both challenges and opportunities. For example, in a state where 418 out of 570 municipalities are currently governed by *usos y costumbres* (customs and traditions), indigeneity is a powerful source of personal and group identity but, in relation to the national project of *mestizaje*—the fusion of Spanish and Indian races and cultures—that followed Mexico's colonial independence, indigeneity remains for many a sign of second class citizenship. As chapter four points to, this history matters for the possibilities that it provides in the present for social and political change, whether in contemporary calls to recognize the pluricultural nature of Mexican nationality, or APPO's turn to indigenous governing practices as both an organizational tactic and a source of identity. This history makes a difference for the very *practices* through which collective subjectivity and solidarity are conceived and constructed, for, as chapter four argues, the ideals of justice, equality, and harmony that APPO sought to find in the indigenous practices of the assembly and *tequio* (work-gang) also produce problematic dynamics as they attempt to make communal hegemony across difference. (Tensions that parallel the promises of liberal democracy and the practical exclusions of making the democratic state.)

Geographer Michael Watts has described the triangulation between identity, forms of rule, and territory within a community as forming a "governable space" (2004). Occurring a few months before the annual teachers' sit-in strike, the transformations in Oaxaca's spatiality by the evacuation of the governor's palace and by the fence surrounding the *zócalo* were a clear message that URO had altered the governable space of Oaxaca. Long before the PRI, sit-in strikes in the *zócalo* and marches to the governor's palace had served as locations by which to negotiate the ruling hegemony between dominant and subaltern groups. Moreover, the authoritarian nature of Oaxacan politics has also resulted in the fact that, in Oaxaca, government functionaries rarely raise an eyebrow to a group's dilemmas unless they take to, or take, the street. As anthropologists Arthur Murphy and Alan Stepick have noted, "the *zócalo* is not solely a scene of tranquility and periodic exuberant celebration. It is the symbolic locus of Oaxaca's social tensions, the place where groups congregate to confront the government with their underlying discontent with the state's economy and

social structure" (1991:61). However, with the governor's office now a museum, and with the blood and sweat of former struggles having seeped into stones that were now replaced by white cement sidewalks, for URO, politics no longer had a place in the *zócalo*. However, while URO's urban transformations altered Oaxaca's political spatiality and interrupted the social and political norm, they also began to articulate together a mobilized populist subject that became the seedbed for the subsequent social movement of 2006.

In 2005, URO moved government functionaries and the locations of the government bureaucracy, and protestors mobilized themselves in response. While URO's material transformations interrupted the governable space of Oaxaca, the way in which politics was literally on the move in Oaxaca points to the fact that the social and spatial formations of governable spaces don't describe a static site. The geographic territory of a governable space describes a means by which governing relations within a community are negotiated. Materially and symbolically recoding the *zócalo* as the site for tourism challenged the moral economy and the spatial practice of the *plantón* used to negotiate the clientelist pact established between the PRI and teachers for the last 30 years and more. This historical relationship negotiating the clientelist pact and ruling hegemony between governing apparatuses and *el pueblo* forms the substance of chapter four. Though it would appear that APPO was a spontaneous manifestation reacting to the teachers' repression by Ulises Ruiz, Oaxaca's social movement of 2006 was, on the contrary, a long time in coming.

Moreover, with the social movement of 2006 prominently featuring stencils of Zapata and other icons of the Mexican Revolution and highlighting practices and discourses of indigenous identity and struggle, the past and Oaxacan present were effectively articulated together to suggest continuations in collective histories of resistance. Chapter seven of the dissertation addresses how collective memory in Oaxaca provides a further battleground over the inheritances of the past and legacies of the future. This chapter analyzes events that happened within a week of each other in November 2007—the spectacle of a hand-over of security equipment by URO in the *zócalo*, the presentation of a human rights report, and an ASARO street art exhibit in the *zócalo*—to consider how spaces, embodied practices, and discourses anchor collective identity through memory-work that in turn mobilizes and articulates collective subjects. Chapter seven addresses how shared memories of social mobilization and struggle are created in such a way as to produce not only a coherent account of the past (from the perspective of the present), but also a coherent and stable sense of self that can anchor not only individual and collective belonging but also mobilize a shared horizon of expectations that, in looking to the past, also projects itself into the present and future.

Together, dissertation chapters four and seven consider the importance of historical sedimentations from the colonial past and contested present in order to remind that Oaxaca's divided and disputed social and spatial relations are the contingent and contested product of over 500 years of social and political struggle. Spatially and socially, for example, with the state's mountainous profile providing isolation from Mexico City and with the city of Oaxaca a regional center since the time of Monte Albán, the urban and rural patterns of Oaxaca's spatial history of settlement have produced highly stratified social and spatial hierarchies (Murphy and Stepick 1991). Whether focusing on the *zócalo* (chapter 7) or on the historical entanglements of *el pueblo* (chapter 4), the mobilization of memory, history, and tradition in Oaxaca's social struggles reveals relationships to the past to be neither innocent nor inconsequential but the grid through which the present is

perceived (and acted) upon. These dissertation chapters argue for a recognition that sedimented social, spatial, and political patterns continue to make and mark difference in Oaxaca while the contingent mobilization of these histories through memory-work is politically and socially consequential and productive, yet offers no guarantees.

Given that city planners and theorists alike have championed the crowded streets and public plazas of ancient and modern cities as the material grounds for a functioning democracy (see for example Arendt 1963; Holston 1989; Low 2000; Rowe 1997; Sorkin 1992), many urban critics and scholars would undoubtedly assess the importance of URO's transformations to the *zócalo* and other city sites in relation to their challenge to the viability of spaces where democratic civic life and public discontent could manifest themselves. However, while the vision that particular urban forms can produce proper social norms has been a mainstay of urban planning, the articulation of norms and forms sidesteps critical issues of inclusion and exclusion and the conflicting construction of public spaces in both the past and present. "From the standpoint of radical democracy," as art historian Rosalyn Deutsche points out, politics "is about the constitution of the political community. It is about the spatializing operations that produce a space of politics" (1996:289). Chapter two of the dissertation analyzes how the marches, sit-in strikes, and barricades of the social movement of 2006 constituted the mobilized political community of *el pueblo* by producing a space of politics.

As a way to analyze and underscore the profound social and political transformations engendered by the social movement of 2006, chapter two engages with the creation of what anthropologist Dace Dzenovska and I have referred to as *barricade sociality* (2010). Barricade sociality refers to how shared practices of struggle, such as the spatial and material practice of building barricades, produced an affective and visceral sense of togetherness that articulated a collective subject out of radical difference. Recent work on contemporary material culture has productively challenged the entrenched binary and commonplace hierarchy between things and thoughts (Buchli 2002; Miller 2005). In focusing on subject-object relations, barricade sociality offers another avenue by which to approach the mutually constitutive relationship between spatial practices and the production of political subjectivities. Most importantly, chapter two points to how, as Oaxaca's 1,500 to 3,000 barricades spread throughout the city, barricade participants created a barricade sociality through the shared practices of erecting barricades out of the rubble of the city, holding the barricades from dusk to dawn, huddling together to listen to the radio for updates, and checking the skies for the fireworks that announced particular trouble spots in need of immediate help. When I spoke with him in December of 2007, Oaxacan activist Sergio Beltrán felt that barricades were by and large created by groups who "worried about taking care of their city" and were an example of people "recuperating our space." As chapter two argues, the barricades exemplify the transformation of street spaces into places that became identifiable as both a locus of belonging and as being part and parcel of the fight for the commons and what Sergio referred to as the common practices and shared rituals that create the "collective identity of the city."

Following Lefebvre's call to examine the triangulation between material, social, and mental spaces, the concept of barricade sociality shifts the lens from theoretical abstractions that promise a theory of the city to grounded, empirical observations that can provide analytical concepts by which to examine the lived dynamics of our contemporary cities. As anthropologist Setha Low has noted, there is a need to continue developing "an anthropology *of* the

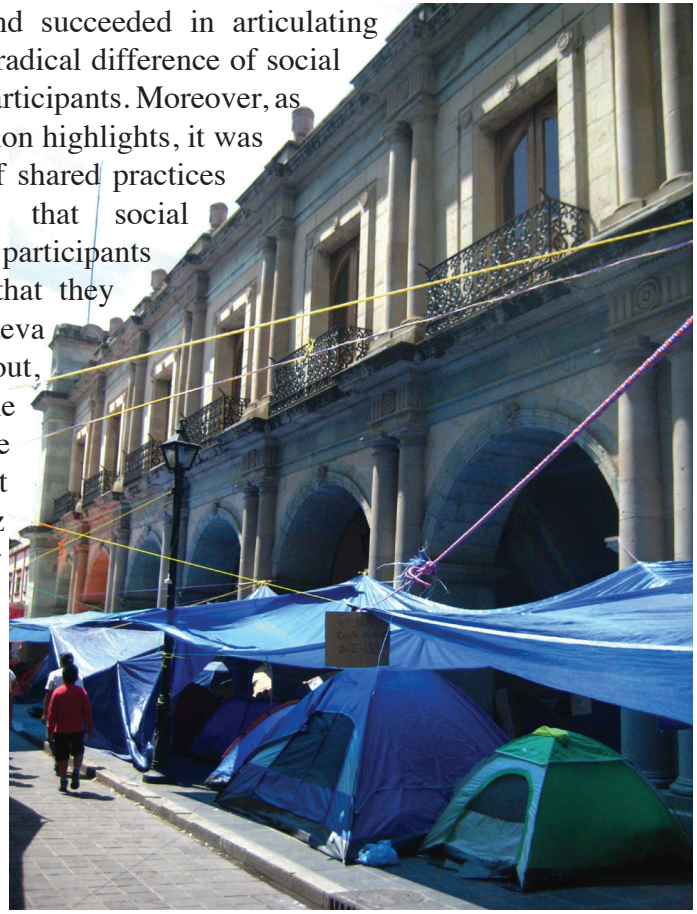
city, rather than *in* the city" that assesses "the 'urban' as a process rather than as a type or category" (1996:384). As an anthropology of Oaxacan spatiality, a central issue in the dissertation is how collective subjects are formed in and through an encounter with the city's material environment.

In Oaxaca—as in La Paz, Caracas, or Cairo—the political community of *el pueblo* is produced not through particular configurations of concrete and plazas, but rather through practices of struggle such as marches, barricades, and street art that shape a democratic and populist social formation not as a wholly inclusive body, but out of competing and contested visions of the commons. "As with the open city," urbanist Teresa Caldeira writes, "the polity that truly incorporates all citizens equally has never existed. Yet its founding ideals and its promise of continuous incorporation have retained their power…shaping people's experience of citizenship and city life and legitimating the actions of various excluded groups in their claims for incorporation" (2000:302). The concept of the open city and the politics of inclusion are important as a way to *ground* the fight for equality in the divided urban spaces of the world. However, though arguments about rights to the city emphasize the articulation between public space and social and political inclusion (Harvey 1973; Mitchell 2003; Soja 2010), the dissertation contends that making a space for politics does not mean fighting for an inclusion of the marginalized in the visible spaces of the city, but rather making a space for conflict and contestation that questions the assumption of the normative ideal unity of the public or of that unity as the goal or essence of the social or political community (see also Lefebvre 1974; Rancière 2000; Watts 2004).

Bulldozers in 2005 and bullets in 2006 were political technologies that signaled the governor's attempt to restructure this Gramscian terrain of political struggle, producing what architect Eyal Weizman terms a "hollow land" (2007) carved out by urban planning strategies. However, as the terrain for this negotiation shifted, and as people mobilized in response to this shift, new possibilities and perils also arose. APPO, and the permanent take-over of the *zócalo*, were the populist response and, as chapter two points out, the social and spatial dynamics of occupation were integral in *producing* the populus. Speaking on the roots of the social movement, Chichas, a political street artist, pointed out that, "Mexico is tired of Priismo," that is, of the PRI and the PRI's ruling style. Put another way, long-time activist and APPO member Carlos Beas Torres wrote that, "in many places the demand for the dismissal of Ulises Ruiz signifies in reality the fall of local *cacicazgos* [political bosses], the destruction of a network of interests and complicities that has historically provoked a great number of injustices and suffering" (2007:36). Hatred for URO was strong among APPO members. Yet, with youthful anarchists, middle-aged socialists, Catholic grandmothers, and academics, housewives, environmentalists, and community organizers all forming part of APPO, hatred for URO was important, but it was not enough to suture together APPO as a populist collective.

Composed of myriad individuals with a wide range of experiences, ages, and points of view, chapter two points to how the barricade sociality and collective subject of *el pueblo* that was forged through the long and dangerous Oaxacan nights was built upon practices that made the recognition and acknowledgement of difference into an important component in the communal articulations that came to be identified as *el pueblo*. In the process, the radical uncertainty that goes with any heightened moment of danger was transformed into a collective sense of possibility. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall reminds, the nature of political and cultural struggle is "the capacity to *make* the divided classes and…separated peoples… *into* a popular-democratic force" (1981:239). Given the range of

its participants and multiple manifestations of social struggle, it is difficult to know how to characterize the social formation that came together in 2006 in Oaxaca. Can one speak of *an* APPO, perhaps of a movement of movements? Rather than a particular political or social platform, APPO and *el pueblo* were articulated together by shared processes of organization and struggle. As the dissertation contends, it was through the process of producing a barricade sociality in the *plantón*, marches, assemblies, barricades, and street art that APPO members created the populist collective subject of *el pueblo* and succeeded in articulating together the radical difference of social movement participants. Moreover, as the next section highlights, it was as a result of shared practices of struggle that social movement participants would find that they could, as Esteva has pointed out, transform the politics of one NO against Ulises Ruiz into many YESes (2007:23).



Take II—Competing Aesthetics of the City: the State, Revolutionary Social Justice, and the Politics of Antagonism

No matter how terrifying a system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings. On the other hand, I do not think that there is anything that is functionally—by its very nature—absolutely liberating.

— Michel Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power," 1982.

From May to November of 2006, APPO sought to transform the authoritarian politics of Oaxaca and oust Ulises Ruiz Ortiz by using assemblies to make decisions, by taking-over television and radio stations to broadcast messages, by holding mega-marches of up to a million people, by using street art to write its demand of political transformation on the walls of the World Heritage Site, and by using barricades to block streets and protect themselves from government paramilitaries. As noted, however, despite this tremendous energy and mobilization, the city returned to government control after federal police forces swept through in November of 2006. URO, moreover, finished his term in office in December of 2010 without ceding power. Social movements are commonly assessed in relation to whether or not they achieve their primary political or social demand. Yet, while many feel that the social movement was ineffective and is today effectively over, post 2006, many also commonly affirm the claim of Gustavo Esteva that, "Oaxaca is today another society."

Dissertation chapters seek to highlight the extent to which a normative conception of politics and of social transformation is at stake in the give and take between antagonistic or rival political groups; specifically, a conception of politics oriented through what

social theorist Michael Warner refers to as "state-based thinking" where alternative publics "acquire agency in relation to the state" (2005:124). Whether struggling through the courts, in the media, or by taking to and taking over streets, the practices and politics of social struggle generally have their sight lines on the state as both the object and the guarantor of change. Moreover, from the Haitian and Mexican to the Bolshevik revolutions, state-based thinking has colored practices and imaginations of radical social transformation, producing the common notion of "the idea of revolution as the takeover of state power…to create a new society *afterward*" (Raunig 2007:28). Along with a concern for the interrelation between spatiality, subjectivity, and social movement, a central concern of the dissertation are the ways in which Oaxacans' practices of social struggle both remained mired in and transcended the triangulation between state-based thinking, revolutionary movements for social justice, and the polarizing politics of antagonism.

Thus, although APPO did not achieve its primary demand of ousting Ulises Ruiz, by looking at the internal processes that the Oaxacan social movement enabled, the dissertation invites a consideration of how social movements produce possibilities for social transformation that go beyond the external goals that they set forth and the polarizing politics of state-based thinking. Chapter three of the dissertation, for example, explores the way in which struggles over the contested politics of aesthetics of culture and heritage in Oaxaca form a *competing aesthetics of the city* that produces different visions of collective social and spatial formations. On the one hand, chapter three focuses on how state-based thinking and the politics of antagonism are central to competing aesthetics of the city. Redeploying philosopher Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation, the chapter assesses contemporary and historical struggles by governing regimes and Oaxaca's elite—the Vallistocracia—to produce cleansed spaces in the city center and a strategic indigenous cultural identity as representations hailing the proper space and subject of a sanitary citizenship. In contrast to this elite interpellation and vision of Oaxaca's spaces and subjects, the chapter attends to how stencils placed on the walls of the World Heritage Site seek to create *conciencia* (awareness or consciousness) and continue the social struggle begun in 2006 by hailing the collective subject of *el pueblo*.

On the other hand, focusing on the competing aesthetics of the city mobilized by the mid-July Guelaguetza festival, a touted example of a traditional Zapotec harvest celebration that showcases dancing groups from across the state, chapter three concludes that, what became most evident from the practice of struggle of putting up stencils was the ways in which this practice transformed the social location of the marginalized youths who spray painted the images. It was during marches in 2006 where youths involved in graffiti began to tactically use—and be aided and supported by—the

hundreds of thousands of moving marchers claiming the city as a shield to prevent police surveillance of subversive spray painting on the walls of the World Heritage Site. Though associations of graffiti as the work of disaffected teenage and 20 something youths led to a mixed reaction in APPO to stencils on city walls, for these youths, the social movement pushed them to a new level of political, social, and aesthetic participation. The politics of antagonism and state-based thinking may have set the initial condition for the *plantón*, marches, barricades, and street art of Oaxaca's social movement, but the creation of stencils and a barricade sociality amongst its participants is ultimately not reducible to the state.

As chapter three concludes, the competing aesthetics of the city between governing elites and marginalized street artists during the Guelaguetza and Oaxaca's closely monitored World Heritage Site status have produced different visions of collective social and spatial formations through a rift between expressions of community identity seen as being for the Oaxacan people versus those which are seen as for profit and for tourist consumption. However, building on the work of philosopher Jacques Rancière, chapter three argues that the politics of aesthetics is to be found in the way in which art can challenge the shared yet sedimented contours of social and political subjectivity that define a community as a particular way of being—what Rancière defines as "the distribution of the sensible" (2000). Moreover, redeploying philosopher Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation, what I argue in this chapter—and throughout the dissertation—is that it is not only individuals who hail subjects, but that spatiality also has the capacity to hail, that—as a social-material formation—spatiality plays an important and dynamic part in the process of transforming particular individuals into subjects.

In Oaxaca, with national elections looming on July 2nd, 2006, the presidential contest between the center left Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the PRD party, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa of the conservative PAN party, and Roberto Madrazo of the dictatorial PRI was a topic of much discussion for APPO members. Organized against Ulises Ruiz as the embodiment of authoritarianism, many APPO members supported local, state, and national assemblies as a desired form of government while many others saw representative elections as a way to fulfill the promise of democracy as a means to social change. At the fifth APPO general assembly on June 30th, local journalist Nancy Davies reports that, after debate and deliberation, the first accord reached was to ensure that APPO members would not tamper with or obstruct the election and therefore render it annulled. "The second consensus urges that people cast a 'punishment' vote, meaning other than the PRI or the PAN candidates. While asserting that there is no guarantee of

change through any of the present political parties, the public is encouraged: 'Don't stay home watching soap operas or soccer, go vote'" (2007:36). And people did, and for the first time since the PRI's founding in 1929, the PRI lost the majority of Oaxacan state districts and the presidential vote. Though regional problems were of foremost concern to APPO members, the possibility of a return to PRI rule at the national level galvanized them to vote even as many were also weary of the notion that change could come from the ballot box.

The results of the highly contested national election, with Felipe Calderón beating López Obrador by the slimmest of margins, 243,934 total votes out of almost 40 million cast, was consequential for APPO's continued inability to find a ready and willing partner in the federal government to listen to the collective demand to remove Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. As a contact working at a state educational institution told me in February of 2008, with López Obrador contesting the election, PAN held the reigns of a fragile national government while the PRI had formal control of the inexistent Oaxacan state government, with the result being that each side needed the other's political support. Caught between the PRI's and PAN's political needs, the demands of APPO and of the Oaxacan pueblo were swept under the rug.

With the national election over, and with talks between parties mediating between an APPO council and the state and federal government going nowhere, a series of important local events in July escalated the tension in the city and raised the stakes for both of the antagonistic camps of APPO and Ulises Ruiz, with neither side giving an inch. Mid-July has customarily been a time when Oaxaca is buzzing with activity in anticipation of the upcoming Guelaguetza festival. For the city and state of Oaxaca, the event has become an important source of tourist revenue, but its commercialism has been criticized as exploitative of the state's culture for the benefit and enjoyment of the wealthy elite. In 2006, amidst APPO's take-over of the stadium where the Guelaguetza is held, the event was cancelled and an alternative, *Guelaguetza Popular* (or people's Guelaguetza), was organized by APPO and its sympathizers. Well attended by city residents and a few tourists, the *Guelaguetza Popular* and the lack of an official state-sponsored event gave more momentum to APPO and put further pressure on the government to resolve the situation.

Early on the night of July 22nd, moreover, masked gunmen in a pick-up shot at an APPO radio station. While URO denied any involvement,APPO members publicly blamed the state government for the shooting. In the following days, detentions of state functionaries, arrests of APPO members, and Molotov cocktails thrown at the homes of organization leaders who were part of APPO brought the struggle to a heated point. With the conflict escalating, as Davies reported, "during a twelve hour session concluding at 5 am on July 26, the APPO decided to indefinitely blockade the access to the state congress, the state supreme court, and the offices of the secretary of finances, and the attorney general. The press office of Section 22 of the teacher's union…said the measure was taken in order to increase the ungovernability of Oaxaca and hasten the departure of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz" (2007:64). From then on, the state senate had to meet in the conference rooms of local hotels while the governor for a time had his office in a hangar at the local airport on the outskirts of the city—a convenient site since he is reported to have spent more time in Mexico City than in Oaxaca during the conflict. Looking to transform Oaxaca's social and political horizon by changing their relationship to the state's governing bodies, APPO members effectively had shut down the state government.

Physically taking over and holding government offices clearly intensified the pressure for a response from the federal or state government to APPO's popular demand for URO to step down. Much as it happened in other sites of struggle, however, building occupations became sites of sociability that provided opportunities for further transformative practices beyond state-based thinking as people barricaded themselves in to secure government locations. Holed up in the finance building, Leyla, an activist from the *Comité de Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo* (Committee in Defense of the Rights of the People), recounted how, "it was in the Finance Department where we came up with the idea for the March of Pots and Pans. We were there chatting, and thought, why don't we women do a march where we symbolically close the hotels that were providing meeting places for Ulises' bureaucrats?" (in Denham 2008:89). In the shifting spatial politics of Oaxaca, APPO responded to URO's counterinsurgency strategy removing government offices from the center with their own insurgency strategy that effectively evicted all government functionaries from the city center. With the Administrative City still under construction, bureaucrats moved to rented private space in hotels to conduct government business. No longer having access to government functionaries, social movement participants turned the streets into the space by which to gain other spaces. Beating pots and pans with kitchen utensils in the style of protest marches made famous by women in Argentina, on August 1st, 2006, Oaxaca's women marched to the hotel effectively serving at the moment as the seat of the state government. There, the women threw eggs (huevos) at the door to show that they had more *huevos* (balls–slang) than state functionaries.

Marching onwards towards the *zócalo*, Oaxaca's women were not simply transforming symbols of their domestic burdens into female empowerment. More importantly, by chanting and marching together, and by holding assemblies to decide together on the next course of action, they were creating a collective political subject through their spatial practices. During the women's meeting in the *zócalo*, someone suggested going to the state television station to voice their grievances on the air and the women decided to continue marching. Tonia, a participant, recalled that when the march arrived at the television station, "the women in front were asking permission for an hour or two to broadcast, but the employees of Channel 9 said it was impossible…. We decided, 'Okay then, we'll take over the whole station'" (in Denham 2008:135). And they did. After the take-over, the women organized themselves into different work teams and began their on-the-fly experimentation and training from the few station employees who had not fled. That night, those who tuned in to the state television channel looking for the usual program on the state's cultural traditions or for the latest news broadcast found instead a group of women sitting in front of a banner discussing the current situation in Oaxaca.

On August 5th, Fidelia, a teacher and APPO supporter, came on the air and stated that, "we are women who don't usually have a voice because we are brown, we are short, we are fat, and they think that we don't represent the people, but we do. WE are the face of Oaxaca" (in Stephen 2007b). In an authoritarian and patriarchal state, multiple exclusions had not left much room for these women to carve out a positive social space in Oaxacan society. For starters, being brown continues to mark out bodies for discrimination, indigeneity is both a positive source of collective identity and also a stigmatized mark of second class citizenship. Moreover, in a state where the minimum daily wage in 2006 was $45.81 pesos and in 2010 was $56.70 pesos (or around $4.16 dollars and $4.53 dollars respectively (www.conasami.gob.mx), to be poor means to be further marginalized.[ii] To be female, furthermore, is to be placed at the bottom of the barrel (see also Gleber 1997; Massey 1994; and Parsons 2000 for other articulations of how gendered subjects and spaces produce particular exclusions).

ii In its 941,536 homes, for example, the 2010 census shows that 68.9% of homes have access to water through pipes, 59.5% of Oaxacans in the state have a refrigerator, 35.2% have a dirt floor in their home, and 14.3% homes have a computer (www.inegi.org.mx).

Combining issues of the public sphere and public space, the women's march and subsequent take-over of the television station can be analyzed through the prism of what Lefebvre famously termed "rights to the city." When Fidelia notes that short, fat, brown women are the face of Oaxaca, however, she is not only speaking to URO or to government bureaucrats to demand rights as a full citizen who belongs in public space or the public sphere. Fidelia is also speaking to Oaxacan men, APPO and otherwise, and to the politics of gender that marginalize women in public *and* private spaces. Marching that day to make their own space in the social movement, women of all sizes, ages, colors, and a mix of classes created a barricade sociality and solidarity through spatial practices of struggle. In a highly patriarchal state where women's political participation in public life is becoming more visible yet also remains limited and highly contested (Stephen 2005), mobilizing through spatial practices of struggle created the conditions of possibility for women who are typically discriminated by their race, indigeneity, poverty, and gender to take over the station and to imagine that they could not just have their say, but literally become broadcasters when a minute ago they may have characterized themselves, if asked, as housewives.

Through their participation in the social movement, in other words, these and other women ended up intervening in relation to a whole set of normative discriminations internal to Oaxacan society. The newfound political awareness of the women was enabled by collective practices of struggle that mobilized the women and produced conditions through which women voiced, practiced, and remade their social and political place in broader Oaxacan society. One wonders what might have been if the explicit intention from the start of the Marcha de Cacerolas would have been to take over the state television station? Would the women have gotten as far, would they have had the courage to occupy the station, or did the

shared recognition and affinity—the visual, audible, tactile, and embodied togetherness producing a barricade sociality—result in the women's desire and willingness to occupy the building in the face of the television station manager's refusal? Alone, scrutinizing, contemplating, analyzing, reflecting, and evaluating the possibility of marching and taking over the station amidst Oaxaca's polarizing politics of antagonism, would the lone individual have been able to imagine themselves as part of a collective subject that could (and did) realize such an act? It is important to emphasize that the women's march or the take-over of the television station were not decisions taken as part of some strategic plan; rather, these were contingent moments of opportunity that presented themselves and were made possible as a result of a sense of togetherness that was harnessed and cultivated through spatial practices.

The generative effect of these practices is signaled by the fact that this march gave rise to the Organizing Committee of Oaxacan Women (COMO), the first organization to be constituted within APPO. The individual women who came together to march on August 1st were not the same women who, later on that same day, found themselves organized into a collective that could take over and run a television station. An occupation gave birth to a march where thousands of women's feet moved in unison; subsequently, assemblies produced a collective decision to take over the television station. As geographer Gillian Rose would describe it, this was "a spatiality of action and performance, the constituent elements of which shift even as they also emerge through the process of being performed" (1997:197). The performative aspect of marching and holding assemblies on the go produced a radically spatialized place for politics and an emergent collective subject that was always on the move—transforming place, people, and politics in its wake.

This is not simply because the COMO is still active, but more importantly because women's practices of struggle were as consequential in changing the terrain of politics and gender, and hence the governable space of Oaxaca, as the evacuation of government functionaries from the *zócalo*. Though it may not have had much of a visible effect politically in removing URO or vis-à-vis the women's relationship to government functionaries, the women's demand to remake the gendered social landscape of Oaxaca rippled out and produced conditions of change throughout APPO. In 2007, as I spoke with Rubén Valencia, a prominent Oaxacan activist, and in his written comments in 2008 on the social movement, he repeatedly brought up the fact that, "in conversations with…male *compañeros*, the respect that women won in the movement has been commented upon" (2008:102). At each step, women's participatory practices produced a gendered collective subject with transformative capacity that continues to have effects in the patriarchal landscape of Oaxaca today. The very fact that this is continually remarked upon and remarkable demonstrates not only that the social movement reworked the landscape of gender relations in Oaxaca—but also how low the expectations and lived practices of women's social and political positions previously were.

Similarly, chapter five of the dissertation assesses the productive work of ASARO's assemblies as a political technology that was able to transform the conduct of conduct of the political street artists in ways that transcended their collective focus on changing Oaxacan politics through their art practices. As the chapter argues, it was through the labor of organizing themselves and gathering together in assemblies that ASARO members were able to cultivate the collective practices of listening, speaking, and making decisions that fostered the suturing together of the group. The politics of antagonism towards the PRI's authoritarian politics may have initially brought the street artists (and other social movement participants together), but five years on, ASARO continues to articulate itself together as a collective group despite far-reaching differences in ideological perspectives—for example between anarchist and socialist members—as well as significant differences in life experiences, schooling, age, and artistic abilities. The urban transformations of URO, clashes between APPO members and various police forces of the state government, and the marches, barricades, and street art point to the contested nature of the street and to the competing aesthetics of the city as the groundwork for political challenges between antagonistic groups looking to control state governing posts and power. Although APPO sought to remake this political terrain as a way to change the social condition of Oaxacans, it was primarily through social changes amongst social movement participants brought about as a result of the very practices of struggle themselves that the most relevant social changes have taken place in Oaxaca since 2006.

Ultimately, the women's march and ASARO's practice of assembly provide examples that highlight the importance of practices of struggle to articulate or create a social formation with political and social potential in its own right; delimiting the political and social effect of APPO in relation to the authoritarian politics of URO or

the PRI means neglecting how the creation of APPO set millions of Oaxacans in motion and the way in which its mobilizing practices of struggle changed forms of political and social subjectivity, with effects that continue to reverberate in Oaxaca to this day (see also Esteva 2008; Recondo 2007). Following on the work of philosopher Michel Foucault (1982) and political scientist Timothy Mitchell (1991) on how modern practices of governmentality at once craft and create subjects while at the same time producing "the state effect," (Mitchell 1991), one of the important interventions that the dissertation seeks to make is to explore the limits of discourses of social transformation that see the power of the state as both the goal and guarantor of change.

Take III — Regimes of Value: Rights to the City, Mapping Insurgency, and the Mobilizing Politics of Social Movements

Freedom of old used to be the monopoly of the privileged class. By means of the cities it again took its place in society as a natural attribute of the citizen. Hereafter it was enough to reside on city soil to acquire it.

— Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*, 1925.

The political rights of Oaxacan citizens to participate in the democratic process and express a contrary point of view through assemblies, protest marches, and street art in Oaxaca's public spaces has been a source of contested discourses and competing practices since the social movement began in 2006. Fighting for rights to the city and not just in the city, for many Oaxacans and for many of their supporters around the globe, fulfilling the ideal of an inclusive democratic public and of public space was at stake. Throughout the struggle, as Oaxacans looked to transnational channels for support, many began to criticize the state government's acts of violence, incarceration, and torture as a violation of both their human rights and of the democratic process. Writing about Oaxaca, anthropologist Lynn Stephen notes that, "how people imagine themselves as citizens has increasingly been influenced by global rights discourses" (2008). As Latin America has transitioned to democratic governing processes from authoritarian regimes, scholars and Latin American subjects alike have questioned the effects of this transition in living up to the promises of its ideals (Alvarez 1998; Eckstein 2003; Esteva 1998; Holston 2008). If the example of urban violence and discrimination in countless cities in Latin America troubles the idea that the "public spaces of modern

cities…promote interactions among people who are forced to confront each other's anonymity on the basis of citizenship and therefore to acknowledge and respect each other's equal rights" (Caldeira 2000:303), for many scholars and activists, the *idea* and *ideal* of the open city nonetheless remains central to social struggles over social justice and rights to the city. However, in engagements with police forces at the *plantón*, on the streets at the barricades, and in failed conversations with representatives of the state government around bargaining tables, Oaxacans were finding the limits of both the freedom of the city and of the democratic ideals of equal citizenship and rights for all.

However, in engagements with police forces at the *plantón*, on the streets at the barricades, and in failed conversations with representatives of the state government around bargaining tables, Oaxacans were finding the limits of both the freedom of the city and of the democratic ideals of equal citizenship and rights for all. From the beginning of the rise of the modern Western city, celebrations of the democratic and progressive promises of urban space have been coupled with contrasting discourses of the perils of the metropolis epitomized by the atomized sociality of city crowds composed of abstract strangers.[iii†] Everywhere, it seems, the contemporary city is in crisis. Though the power and the promise of the city was precisely in gathering together diverse classes and shattering rigid feudal bonds (Pirenne 1925; Weber 1922), in practice, crowded city streets have not become points of encounter but rather are witnesses to the rising isolation of the newly constituted city subject, the independent, yet lone individual. Fundamentally, urban spaces in today's Western cities

[iii] In architecture (Davis 1990; Ghirardo 1991), philosophy and critical theory (Casey 1997; Lefebvre 1974), city planning (Le Corbusier 1929; Lynch 1960; Wright 1932), and in anthropological, sociological, and geographical texts (Engles 1844; Holston 1989; Massey 1999; Rutheiser 1999; Pile 1997; Simmel 1968; Smith 1996), much has been made of the way in which modern cities are formed by collectivities of abstract strangers who may pass or gaze at each other daily but do not effectively see or know each other.

are ultimately not characterized by crowded streets, but by walls (Caldeira 2000; Davis 1990). From Los Angeles to São Paulo and Oaxaca, the white picket fence has given way to insular fortresses where steel walls and security alarms surround us on all sides. In the divided city of Oaxaca where a substantial number of individuals supported APPO and where a considerable number supported the governor, yet where many also came to feel ostracized and trapped between them, pertinent contemporary and historical questions of who has rights to the city, of who is felt to belong and who is understood as an outsider, matter deeply and map onto both the social and physical fabric of the city.

Focusing on the shared practices of struggle of barricade building, marching, making street art, and holding assemblies, however, the dissertation points to how APPO transformed the constitutive norm of stranger relationality that Warner points to as the norm in contemporary public sociability (2005). At each site and event where people gathered, embodied practices produced pockets of people participating in APPO's social movement whose relations to each other were transformed from those of strangers to those of the *compañeros* and *compañeras* (mates or comrades) that made up the collective subject of *el pueblo*. As chapter three discusses more fully, in Spanish, *el pueblo* means both "the people" and "the town." The articulation of a socio-spatial connection between the people and the town is an apt one to describe the work done by the signifier of *el pueblo* vis-à-vis the abstract notion of social formations in the city such as the public, citizens, or the crowd. On the one hand, the raising of barricades helped articulate together the collective subject of *el pueblo* as an insurgent social formation seeking rights to the city; on the other, as chapter two of the dissertation points out, as closed spaces that were also sites of confrontation—with government paramilitary forces as well as with anyone trying to pass by—practices of struggle such as barricade building also fed into the social and political camps and politics of antagonism that make Oaxaca a divided city.

A 2007 issue of the independently produced magazine *La Barrikada* provides another example of Oaxaca's divided city and its competing aesthetics. Given to me during a presentation of a human rights report, the magazine begins by giving description of what the state of Oaxaca offers. Here, however, there is no mention of the colorful wooden *alebrije* figurines, black or green pottery, woven rugs from Teotitlán del Valle, or of the historic city center or archaeological site of Monte Albán that the state is known for from its travel guides; rather, the state's diversity, poverty, and the flourishing of "one of the most important peaceful social movements in today's world" are given center stage. After historicizing the events of last year by grounding them in a longer history of indigenous resistance, the magazine notes that, APPO "is the sum total of all of us and also our collective identity." As dissertation chapters contend, if APPO presents and represents itself as the voice of *el pueblo*, ASARO's message and iconography holds this precarious assemblage together by providing a nodal point of graphic identification that conjures up and interpellates the rebellious collective subject of *el pueblo*.

Thus, an ASARO poster featured in their "Abriendo Conciencia" (Opening Consciousness) show of 2007 superimposes the words "somos pueblo" (we are people/town) over the southern half of a map of the historic center while, running along a main street are the words "do not get lost, we are all APPO." Given the contested politics of the wealthy northern half and the impoverished southern half of the historic city center, it is no coincidence that the map's carefully composed socio-spatial geography articulates the city and the people through its southern landscape. Forming an alternative route for navigating the city, one that highlights a different area

of the center and runs in different directions from the maps given out free to tourists, this image is an example of how ASARO's art provides an interpretation of collective belonging and a symbolic economy that challenges dominant interpretations and exclusive imaginations of Oaxacan's common heritage as promoted through the discourse and image of Oaxaca as a famed UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Whether in relation to a stencil, the festival of the Guelaguetza, conflicts over rights to the space of the *zócalo*, or a neighborhood barricade, these moments of contestation also reveal different classification systems that are used to determine an object's or practice's symbolic meaning or worth and the subject positions that make up the Oaxacan community—or what chapter six of the dissertation on the art market refers to as a *regime of value* that produces both people and a space for politics. By looking at the contested relationship between the regimes of value of the street and the art gallery as conflicts over the sites and subject of artworks, the core of chapter six addresses the relationship between how the established art market in Oaxaca produces a "period eye" (Baxandall 1988) and how the political street art of ASARO seeks to produce different "ways of seeing" (Berger 1972). As chapter six argues, declaring ASARO artworks in public space as instantiations of insurgent claims for rights to the city for marginalized populations or as instantiations of contributions to democratic free speech misses the consequential fact of differing regimes of value and a competing aesthetics between Oaxacan elites, the established art market, and political street artists that belies any simple notion of shared visions of democratic rights, the public, or public space.

During the conflict in 2006, the general director of INAH and Carlos Abascal, Mexico's Secretary of the Interior, announced that they would bring forward legal charges for those found to have damaged Oaxaca's cultural heritage during the social movement. Responding to this, the polemical writer Fernando Gálvez de Aguinaga, wrote that, "really, the nails in the sidewalks and walls of the historic center and the graffiti in the façades of the ancient mansions are minor damages that can be solved with paintbrushes and by filling in defective spots. On the other hand, how is it possible that the very Catholic Abascal does not raise his voice to ask where the ancient doors of the Cathedral of Oaxaca have come to rest…?" (2007c:113). Certainly, through our practices we all participate in valorizing heritage. Yet, whether speaking about spray painting on the porous green stones that the city is known for or the loss of the Cathedral doors, what might be acknowledged as heritage in one group or for one person may be quite different from what another group or individual might choose to valorize.

Moreover, just as practices signal different ways of valuing and caring for heritage, so too do the regimes of value differ greatly between different populations within Oaxaca.

Clandestinely putting up stencils on city walls, the Oaxacan street artists of the *Asamblea Revolucionaria de Artistas de Oaxaca* (ASARO) that I worked with routinely encountered both the limits of who and what belonged in public space and of their purported democratic right to free speech. In part, the idea of public space as a site of engagement and debate did color their imagination of the kind of intervention that street art had. For example, in the analysis of Francisco Leonardo Reséndiz—a fellow anthropologist and ASARO member—placing stencils on the street provides a form of expression that "recovers public space, not only as territory, but also as a space of debate" (2010:48). This recovery of public space and of a public sphere of debate, however, does not preserve a social imaginary where citizenship provides shared birthrights to all; neither does it envision the practices of representative democracy as capable of producing either political freedom or an inclusive public sphere of debate. While academics like Francisco and I at times have interpreted the act of putting up stencils as a way to carve out public space and a public sphere of debate, ASARO artists rarely—if at all—mentioned urban space and social dialogue in relation to *the* public. (See chapter four for a discussion of Oaxacan media in relation to the formation of a public.)

Indeed, ASARO artists are quite explicit that the place and space of debate that they are interested in opening up through their political art relates specifically to the space of the street and to the community of *el pueblo*. Thus, ASARO characterized their intervention a year after coming together as "art for the people, a slingshot of graphic resistance that launches our artistic expressions to the streets with the objective of throwing rocks that open the social awareness of the oppressed and forgotten pueblo." (2007). The touted dichotomy between urban planners and streetwalking pedestrians set up by theologian Michel de Certeau (1984), and the fact that social movements take to and take the streets, has lent a certain romance in academia to the street as a space of resistance. As sociologist Michael Keith points out, "street culture readily stands for the contemporary, truly 'where it's at'" (2005:99). As the place (and people) where it's at, the street, barrio, or hood works as a legitimating device connoting resistance and authenticity. With the street seen as a site of resistance and raw experience, historian Joan Scott's reminder that experience "serves as a way of…claiming knowledge that is 'unassailable'" (1991:797) is pertinent. In the imagined geographies of resistant experiences, sites, and subjects, cultural critic Marcy Schwartz reminds that graffiti is coded by

academics in cultural studies as a particularly raw experience from the muscular margins that can speak truth-to-power by straddling high and low cultures (2009). Whether through the lens of public space in urban studies or in relation to authenticity and resistance in cultural studies, streets are imagined as contact zones and as the site of democratic engagements where oppositional groups contest, collide and come to accept each other. However, as chapter six points out, rather than conceive of the street as a space through which to produce or give life to the dream of democratic encounters, ASARO's street art calls attention to the historical sedimentation of habitual social and political discrimination.

Writing on Brazil, anthropologist James Holston refers to this sedimentation as productive of "differentiated citizenship" whereby "formal membership, based on principles of incorporation into the nation-state" may agglutinate the community of citizens, yet there exists a differentiated and disjunctive "distribution of the rights, meanings, institutions, and practices that membership entails to those deemed citizens" (2008:7). In Mexico, as elsewhere, these disjunctions are no secret to anyone. However, different lessons and actions are drawn from this fact. When considering the relationship of the different barrios across Oaxaca to each other and to the historic city center, as well as in relation to the practices of protest that take to and take the street, what emerges throughout the dissertation is the picture of the archipelago-like spatiality of a highly divided city and society. Reflecting on their experiences in the streets, political street artists in Oaxaca have concluded that the streets of the city are sites for the expression and production of differentiated citizenship rather than sites for the production of a democratic public space and public sphere of debate. Rather than assume prefigured oppositional identities or resistant groups and the resistant and unmediated nature of experience, however, dissertation chapters address how the materiality and sociality of streets articulate with and produce collective subjects.

For example, although the lack of a police presence permitted many people to participate in spray painting the city during the high point of the movement, in the

highly policed streets of Oaxaca today, urban street artists have gone back to being labeled or looked upon as either criminal vandals or transgressive rebels. It may seem obvious that to spray paint a street wall can be seen as both a criminal and a transgressive act, depending on the spectator's point of view; yet, precisely because it seems obvious, exactly what the nature of such a transgression is and the reasons that this act are criminalized are not usually thought through beyond simple declarations of damage to public and private property and sticking it to the man. At one level, it is both a criminal and transgressive act because the clandestine practice of placing an image that does not seek to sell a product and which does not pay for the use of public space calls into question the ways in which discourses about the democratic public spaces of our modern cities mask the reality, in practice, of exclusionary, highly policed, and privatized public spaces. Rather than a plurality of voices and perspectives, normalized spatial practices and political discourses in modern democratic urban spaces have come to be defined in an ever narrowing and highly particular way. Following Foucault's attention to the blood dried in the codes of liberal principles (1997), and Weber's attention to the blood seeped into the stones in the making of the freedom of the city and citizenship (1922), the way in which the streets and spaces of the city form a largely invisible war zone or have been effectively militarized is an important theme of the dissertation, whether in respect to barricades (chapter 2), contested cultural events like the Guelaguetza (chapter 3), or the disputed uses of the *zócalo* (chapter 7; see also Bourgois 1996; Fanon 1952; Gilmore 2007; Graham 2004; Mbembe 2003; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Weizman 2007). In the name of social order and the public good, in Mexico and in many democratic countries, the right to manifest a contrary opinion or to engage in public protests has been criminalized or has been effectively managed and domesticated by defining particular temporal and spatial slots during which this is allowed—for example through planned marches that have permits, a specific date, and a particular route.

In conclusion, however, it is a central point of the dissertation that making the people is a practice that makes a space for politics. Fifteen years ago, geographer Don Mitchell offered that, "dissidents of all types must continually assert their presence *into* public space, if they ever are to be seen and heard" (1996:129). For Mitchell, social justice depends on striving through struggle to fulfill the ideal of a democratic public space that is also a truly public sphere of debate and deliberation across difference. Here, city spaces provide the grounds for the visibility and voice through which marginalized communities can struggle to achieve rights to the city that are eventually secured through laws or state regulations. As Lefebvre pointed out, however, "space is at once result and cause, product and producer; it is also at *stake*, the locus of projects and actions deployed as part of specific strategies, and hence also the object of *wagers* on the future" (1974:142). The mutually productive articulation between spaces and social formations points to how practices of struggle *make* both people and place, shaping politics and interests rather than simply providing a stage on which to show them.

In 2006, with the occupied walls of the World Heritage Site becoming the largest community mural in Latin America, desires for other futures and a repudiation of URO's authoritarian governing style were highly visible and audible. At the start of my eighteen months of fieldwork in June of 2007, the militarization of the streets and the persecution of street artists laboring to be seen and heard by putting up stencils against the authoritarian government reminded me of the very real stakes in struggles to achieve rights to the city in Latin America. As I worked with, watched, and listened to them in 2008, however, I began to see and hear how stencils in this

World Heritage Site were important not in calling for the inclusion of marginalized groups in the public sphere or public space, but as a competing aesthetics of the city that produced different publics and challenged the very grounds of *a* Oaxacan community. This was rendered visible and audible, for example, in how an anti-government stencil hailing *el pueblo* on the façade of a municipal building invites a different mode for inhabiting social and physical space from a billboard promoting tourism that frames the city as the heritage and patrimony of all Oaxacans.

Activist and writer Erick Lyle has reported how, in Buenos Aires at the end of 2001, "the crisis was so far-reaching and the breakdown of the social order so complete that people from all walks of life began to meet in their own neighborhoods to discuss ways to help provide food or health care for each other and to start up alternative media to print the truth about the popular uprising in Argentina" (2007:79; see also Sitrin 2006). Meeting together in the street, assemblies in Argentina were not only a forum to voice grievances, but became rallying points for action and vehicles by which to solve problems. Interviewing an Argentinian stenciling duo, Lyle writes how, "it was out of this new spirit of participation that the art movement of stenciling in the streets was born. 'It was in the air,' says Gonzalo today. 'You'd see all the people in the streets and think, 'I have to do something'" (2007:79). In Oaxaca, whether at the open-air assembly, in the neighborhood barricade, listening to APPO's alternative radio or television channels, or walking along the march route, people's participation encouraged the participation of others, and young people responded. As in Argentina, Oaxaca's social movement pushed people to try new things, to move in new directions, and to express themselves in ways that connected with others from the scale of a small group in their neighborhood all the way up to the city, state, and national level.

As with the women's march, youth's participation and their political awakening through political art (and in the barricades, marches, and assemblies) was a response to the possibilities of the moment rather than an effect of APPO strategy or youth organization. As Chichas noted, "the practice of going out to the streets was not thought through or a conscious response." Rather, it was a practice that got its momentum from the circumstances at hand, from the possibilities afforded to put images on the walls as marches moved through the streets, from the invitation to get involved in the small and large assemblies that were actively defining the movement's direction, from the rage and camaraderie that setting up barricades and confronting the police produced. As Gustavo Esteva writes, "the long nights of sleeplessness created the opportunity for extensive political discussions that awoke a social conscience in many youths that was up to then inexistent or vague.... New graffiti lucidly expressed the profound changes that were occurring in their political conscience" (2008:69). Though not everyone who is a member is necessarily young and though not everyone comes from the marginalized periphery, the beginnings of ASARO were spurred on by the confluence of diverse actions and events that came together in the streets and plazas of the city. Women transformed their place in Oaxacan society not by claiming rights granted or guaranteed by the state, but by producing a barricade sociality through their mobile, performative spatiality. Likewise, the creativity of political street art remains relevant in Oaxaca today not only because it continues to reflect the concerns of APPO members in public space, but also because the maintained participation of the mobilized youths making up the majority of street artists today embodies the social transformation that took place across these sectors of Oaxacan society as they came together *through* the practices of struggle to make the populist subject of *el pueblo*.

Oaxacan activist Rubén Valencia has written of graffiti artists that, "few were interested in knowing why they did it and they were excluded, not just by the system or State but also by society, until they were the first at the front lines of the battles, marches, and mobilizations and when there were few opportunities to communicate, to give voice to the movement, they did it" (2008:100). Nonetheless, it is extremely important not to romanticize what were often limited engagements across difference. The novel social identifications of women, youths, and of APPO participants as a popular collective subject are certainly tenuous and fragile and, as the work of political stencils hailing *el pueblo* points to (chapter 3), they necessitate the continual reassertion of the identity and identification of participants with the still emerging community of *el pueblo*.

The very fact of the repeated reiteration of the difference that practices of struggle in 2006 made with regard to the space and place of women and youths in Oaxacan society, and the need for the continued struggle of women and youths through 2011, points to the fact that the community of *el pueblo* was itself deeply divided along gender and generational lines. While the look at the historical relationship between *el pueblo* and governing bodies in chapter four reminds that community is anything but necessarily antithetical to the state, the final chapter of the dissertation further cautions against romanticizing resistance or fetishizing the scale of face-to-face community relations and politics as a space of utopian harmony or inclusive democratic participation (see also Creed 2006; Mallon 1995; Recondo 2007). Fifteen years ago, Deutsche noted that, in theories of radical democracy, "public space…is the uncertain social realm where, in the absence of an absolute foundation, the meaning of the people is simultaneously constituted and put at risk" (1996:268). Practices of struggle in Oaxaca produced place, people, and an emergent politics that was constantly on the move; place people, and politics were continually being constituted, contested, and coming apart. Precisely because it was through participation in the practices of struggle that *el pueblo* was constituted or articulated together, the community was always forming and was always at risk (see also Hall 1981; Laclau 2007). As such, the political horizon and political subject of its radical democracy was inherently incomplete, continually in motion and continually needing to negotiate both the collective subject and collective projects. Therein lie *both* its limitation and its social, spatial, and political relevance.

In the end, I would like to reframe the three points that this framing of the dissertation argues for as follows: first, that socio-spatial practices in Oaxaca have been *both* highly mobile and mobilizing. Thus, greater attention to both senses of movement as moving bodies and the capacity of spatial practices to mobilize people affectively allows us greater understanding of the materiality and imagined political geographies of social movements. Second, that because the terrain of political positioning was constantly shifting, for example not only through URO's moving bureaucracy but also by the contingent dynamics of the women's march, the notion of a possible scripted strategy pre-existing the mobile dynamics of contestation and struggle itself is put into doubt. The practices of struggle that APPO engendered were an invitation to insurgency, yet lacked any roadmap. As situated spatial practices with multiple mobile manifestations, the practices exceed the possibility to pin down APPO as a political formation, model, or organization. This raises challenges for mapping Left and populist politics in Latin America and the Global South, yet offers new opportunities for considering the power and possibilities of social movements from Caracas to Cairo to change and challenge not just governing regimes, but dominant social norms and forms. Lastly, that the mobilizing practices of struggle demand and gain recognition and rights to the city at a multiplicity of social and geographic scales. While marches, local media takeovers, and stencils on city walls were localized political practices, their political traction and demand for recognition addressed multiple audiences that included, but were not limited to, regional or federal government bodies. Most importantly, though, whether considering gender or generational changes, when the state is imagined as the ground by which to secure social justice and political change, this marginalizes the productive power of practices of struggle in social movements as transformative of spaces and social relations in their own right. In the end, as a final way to frame the focus of the dissertation, I argue that *making* the people is just as important as challenging the state in pursuing social justice and making a space for politics. Come with me, then, as we join APPO and ASARO members on the

streets, at the march, gathered on the street corner for an assembly, and spray painting protest stencils on the walls of the city. To the barricades![iv]

[iv] Textually, there are times when, much like a stencil in the street that hails passersby, I seek to specifically interpellate the reader by inviting you to sit, to listen, to imagine, to follow, etc. The rhetorical "we" is often used in scholarly work precisely to interpellate the reader to share an affinity with what is said, to suggest agreement, and to foster a particular reading. Here, I use this strategy sparingly so as to make the reader aware that the act of reading is an invitation, like hailing, one that makes articulations, but is also an invitation to take up different interpretations, to write in the margins, and to engage not simply by following my lead, but to walk with me through the journey and draw your own conclusions.

Barricade Sociality: A Community in Formation at the Front Lines [i]

Every revolutionary protest is also a project against people being the objects of history. And as soon as people feel, as the result of their desperate protest, that they are no longer such objects, *history ceases to have the monopoly of time*.

— John Berger, *Another Way of Telling*, 1982.

[i] This chapter has benefited greatly from discussions and the joint practice of writing two articles about the barricades with Dace Dzenovska; thus, while the analysis of Oaxaca is my own, the conceptual architecture and theoretical standpoints of barricade sociality are the product of a rich, shared effort. (See Arenas and Dzenovska 2010, Forthcoming)

In May of 2006, as has been the custom for over three decades, Oaxaca's teachers union erected a tent-city in the *zócalo, or* main plaza, to hold an annual sit-in strike, as a way to pressure the government for better working conditions. The sit-in strike, or *plantón*, has been typically resolved through negotiations; however, in the early morning hours of June 14 governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz sent in from 1,000 to 3,000 state police armed with riot shields, clubs, and tear-gas to break up the *plantón*. While initially caught by surprise, teachers regrouped in the streets around the *zócalo* and, now joined by others who had heard of the police repression, retook the space later that same morning. As noted in the previous chapter, in the following days, what began as a teachers' strike rapidly became a broader movement including students, farm-workers, unions, different indigenous groups, and over 300 left-leaning groups all calling for the governor's resignation. The *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (APPO), as this assemblage came to be known, regularly held massive-marches, took over local radio and television stations to broadcast its political messages, and blocked city streets to take over the historic center. In late August of 2006, after paramilitary groups in moving vehicles shot at a radio station and killed an APPO member, barricades were quickly and spontaneously erected all over the city at night to protect against the government's "convoy of death."

Historian Mark Traugott (1993) writes of how barricade participants in Paris could identify themselves as a collective "we" in relation to a long history of French revolutionary practice. As in Paris, the collective identity of barricade participants in Oaxaca was the result of the specific articulation of the political and material conditions of that particular place and moment. A highly active and visible social movement participant who used the alias Mama Lucha (Mother Struggle), told me in February of 2008 that there was a sense among those participating in the barricades that "we

were making history, fighting for Oaxaca, for a new world." As I will argue, this sense of historical agency and of revolutionary practice is not merely the product of an acute awareness of political history or of the gravity of any movement which seeks to overthrow individuals in political power, but is itself a product of the socio-material practices of taking over sites, marching, holding assemblies, and building barricades as these actions congeal into the sense of togetherness that anthropologist Dace Dzenovska and I have referred to as a *barricade sociality* (Arenas & Dzenovska 2010, Forthcoming).

With Oaxaca's controversial governor finishing his term in office in 2010, many believe that the social movement that began in 2006 is effectively over. Despite its failure in achieving the demand that the governor resign, my contention is that the social movement has nonetheless produced lasting effects. To argue this point, this chapter begins by showing that it was through the *practices* of struggle that APPO was able to produce a barricade sociality that could articulate its participants as a collective subject despite their significant differences. In what follows, I will first provide a brief summary of the authoritarian practices of governing that frame the formation of APPO and its populism. Next, I will look at how the spatial practices of sit-in strikes, marches, and barricades engendered a barricade sociality that seemed to offer the promise of governing relations that could replace Oaxaca's authoritarian politics and dysfunctional representative democracy. Through an examination of violence, the conclusion of the chapter will address the difficulties of disarticulating the entangled relation of the collective subjects formed by barricade sociality from the governing apparatus. Establishing the intertwined relationship between repression and the romance of populist revolution in Oaxaca, this chapter lays the groundwork for subsequent considerations of the hard labor of social and political transformation.

From Repression to Collective Political Expression

Oaxacans living in the capital are used to it. For the last three decades, every May Oaxaca's teachers union takes over the city plaza and begins a *plantón*, or sit-in strike. Overnight, as colorful plastic tarps are strung between the trees and as sleeping bags are rolled out side by side on top of cardboard or, if lucky, inside a camping tent, the central square becomes the teacher's tent-city. Coinciding with international worker's day and meant to show its solidarity with workers around the world, the teacher's take-over responds to both the general plight of labor across the world but also has its own particular spatial and temporal inflections. Eleuterio, an indigenous elementary school teacher, stated that "the idea is to draw attention to the deficiencies in public education, our needs as teachers and the needs of our schools and students. Thousands of teachers camp out in the city center until the government agrees to attend at least [to] a part of our demands" (in Denham 2008:45). In Oaxaca, the history of work stoppages and *plantones* by the teachers union has been one of the few effective tools in gaining political traction vis-à-vis the state. Asking year after year for pay increases tied to the increase in cost of living, for better schools, student meal programs, and uniforms and shoes for the state's poor students, the teacher's demands are framed by what they see as a failure of the state to provide a free and decent education to all Oaxacans, a responsibility outlined in the constitution. In a state hovering near the bottom of all social, economic, and educational indices in Mexico (Conapo 2006), teachers are not alone in arguing that the state's marginalization is in great part the product of both misguided policies by local and state functionaries and also by the lack of attention paid to the marginalized population—except at election times.

With over 70,000 in their union, and with the power to close down schools across Oaxaca, teachers are in a unique position to use their leverage to make demands; yet it has repeatedly taken the practice of seizing the *zócalo* to get the governor's attention. And so, year after year the teachers have returned, and year after year the government has negotiated with the leaders of the teachers union and found a little more money or made a few promises of improvements in order to placate the striking teachers. And year after year, after each side has given way and both sides reach a compromise, the plastic tarps are rolled up and the sleeping bags are loaded onto trucks and the *zócalo* returns to its state as a public plaza. Given the difficulties of negotiating a compromise that both sides can agree to, however, means no one knows precisely how long teachers will be there. While the general population begrudgingly tolerates and understands the tactical reasons for the teacher's *plantón*, the annual ritual of the take over of the center

and the closing of schools has not won teachers many friends among the general population.

As in the past, on May 1st of 2006, the teachers union handed over their list of demands to governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. Two weeks later, on May 15, the teachers held a march commemorating teacher's day and, one week later, on the 22nd of May, the teachers union began a work stoppage and installed their *plantón* in the *zócalo*. At the end of May, teachers criticizing the government's "insufficient offer" began a series of protests that included the take-over of a section of a state highway and blocking the entrances to public offices and commercial centers. The government demanded that teachers return to class by June 5th or face reductions in pay for the days they had been on strike. On June 2nd, teachers realized a mega-march of 50,000 to 80,000 people to denounce the government's demands. On the 7th of June, writes local sociologist Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez, teachers remained on strike and organized a "second mega-march, in which it is estimated that around 200,000 people participate. The presence of mothers and fathers, students, civil society and social organizations stands out. With the participation of neighborhood associations, syndicates, and communities that had already suffered repression by the state government, the march concludes with a popular trial against Ulises Ruiz" (2007a:63). With the *plantón* now covering the *zócalo* and around 50 streets of the surrounding historic city center, with negotiations effectively at a stale mate, and with the face-off between the governor and the teachers union intensifying, there did not seem to be any clear resolution to the standoff in sight. Few, however, could have foreseen what was to come.[i]

In the early morning hours of June 14th, approximately 1,000 to 3,000 police from different units stormed the *zócalo*. Using batons, shields, and their firearms, the police quickly dislodged the teachers from the square. As a helicopter shot tear-gas canisters into the crowd, teachers chaotically fled the scene. While police units in the *zócalo* began taking apart the tent-city and burnt some items, word spread of an attack at the syndicate's offices, where police action concentrated on the destruction of the teacher's pirate radio station, "Radio Plantón." As the twilight of dawn became early morning, stunned teachers began to regroup in streets surrounding the *zócalo*. News of the repression spread via cell phones and teachers congregating in the streets to decide what to do were soon joined by others who had heard of the police repression. Describing that day's events, Eleuterio recalled that, "we stayed back at the Plaza Labastida [about four blocks to the north of the *zócalo*] and people started bringing us stones and bricks. I don't know if there was anyone really coordinating or taking charge or if it was just pure anger that guided us" (in Denham 2008:50). In a move that would foreshadow much of the actions and decisions taken by what would become the social movement of 2006, without any explicit direction from the leaders of the teachers union, teachers in the streets decided to fight back.

[i] As I was not in Oaxaca during 2006, this chapter draws upon multiple sources to construct and analyze the significant events that gave rise to the APPO and Oaxaca's social movement of 2006. Though sources are cited throughout the chapter, the chronology of events that I present draws extensively on Martínez Vásquez 2007, Osorno 2007, and for cross-referencing Davies 2007. In Denham 2008, personal testimonies highlighting how event participants experienced and understood these events were also valuable. Interviews and anecdotal narratives collected during fieldwork in Oaxaca from June 2007 to December 2008 have helped to situate and sort out the relevance of these events in their aftermath. Created from myriad chronicles of the barricades that exist in print and oral narratives, in images, internet sites, songs, and documentaries, and through recollections and analyses of this time by those who were there and through my own experiences afterwards, the composite picture is representative of the shared discursive formation, image, and imagination of the barricades that has emerged from the movement—a process with important effects that is explored in chapter seven on collective memory.

Soon, the thousands of police situated in the city center found themselves surrounded by an angry group brandishing sticks and throwing stones their way. Protected by riot gear, the police formed defensive columns and responded to the threatening group by firing more tear gas. More and more people joined the ranks of the teachers. After hours of confrontation the police stood-down and the teachers re-took the *zócalo*. As highlighted by a book analyzing the conflict, the teacher's triumph was important not only because of their ability to thwart the state's heavily armed repressive apparatus, but also because "the heroic and surprising victory electrified the state. During the battle for the *zócalo* in the city of Oaxaca, the municipal palaces of Huautla de Jiménez, Jalapa del Marqués, Pinotepa Nacional, Tehuantepec, Salina Cruz, Ciudad Iztepec, Juchitán de Zaragoza, San Blas Atempa, Matías Romero, Zanatepec, Tapanatepec, Chacuites, and Santiago Juxtlahuaca were all taken in protest" (Movimiento Popular Revolucionario 2008:18). Actions supporting the teachers both in the city and across the state surprised everyone involved by their breath, spread, and speed and signaled a broadening of the union's struggle. As teachers re-established their *plantón* in the *zócalo* on the 15th of June, they were joined in solidarity by the healthcare worker's union and by scores of students.

The following day, on the 16th of June, teachers organized a third mega-march with the aim of putting pressure on the federal government to intervene and remove Ulises Ruiz. In the midst of pouring rain, more than 500,000 people participated in this march. The governor's repression led to the active participation of a broad cross-section of Oaxaca's population at the march, including many who had earlier expressed annoyance with the yearly *plantón*. In solidarity and support of the teachers, and as a direct response to the destruction of Radio Plantón's broadcasting equipment by police forces, students at the Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca (UABJO), took over the university's radio station, Radio Universidad, and began using it to broadcast information related to the teacher's struggle. By the 16th, with this march and with the take-over of the university radio station, what started as an annual strike by the teachers union had quickly become a referendum on the governor's controversial administration and his authoritarian ruling style.

For an overwhelming number of people, the violence against teachers was another in a long list of accumulated grievances against Ulises Ruiz that were finding an outlet in the teacher's strike. Before taking office in December of 2004, credible allegations of fraud during the governor's election had generated ample controversy. His attack on *Noticias*, a newspaper that had negative coverage of his election campaign, and an unsuccessful attempt to jail his opposition candidate increased concern—as did the successful incarceration of leaders of organizations across the

state working for social rights. Turning the state senate offices into a theater and the governor's palace into a museum, Ulises Ruiz moved the state offices out of the city center to a spot on the outskirts of the city that ensured he would be far from the path of any march, *plantón*, or other expression of social protest. Ulises Ruiz also began a series of unprecedented transformations of city parks, monuments, and highways in the capital city.

In the summer of 2005, an unannounced project to modernize the *zócalo* of this UNESCO World Heritage Site brought people out into the streets to protest. With the felling of trees in the *zócalo* and a landslide in a mountain caused by road construction, there were many that were angered due to environmental concerns. Others were disturbed by the fact that the project had begun without any public consultation and continued the governor's affront on any pretense of democratic practice through the repression of media and free speech. During the protests against Ulises Ruiz in the summer of 2005 and again in the summer of 2006, the myriad demands against Ulises Ruiz began to be articulated together through a discourse repudiating his authoritarian politics. Political theorist Ernesto Laclau has identified this process of articulation, whereby plural claims are brought together and given expression by a central discursive element, as the incipient conditions of the political logic of populism (2007). In this process, as he outlines, one of the claims must be singled out and become the means through which all other claims find room for expression. For Laclau, a critical effect of populist political reason is that it creates an "internal frontier" that divides a community into two antagonistic camps, the body who makes a claim and those to whom the demand is addressed (2007: 80-93). For the camp that comes to identify itself as the people, however, Laclau notes that, "the popular subject position does not simply *express* a unity of demands constituted outside and before itself, but is the decisive moment in establishing that unity" (2007:99). In Oaxaca, the creation of a popular collective subject that could articulate its different standpoints meant positioning themselves and being positioned as subjects in relation to a discursive formation whose central claim hinged on a repudiation of the longstanding authoritarian governing practices of Oaxaca as embodied by Ulises Ruiz Ortiz.

Since the PRI was formed in 1929, all of Oaxaca's governors have belonged to this party (as was also the case at the national level until the election of Vicente Fox in 2000). With power at the local and state levels in the hands of one party, the PRI's authoritarian governing style has dictated and dominated the political and social horizon of Oaxaca for the last 80 years. Citing political scientist Edward Gibson, Martínez Vásquez has characterized Oaxaca and Mexico as suffering from "subnational authoritarianism." As he writes, this refers to how Mexico's "national democratization resulted in the consolidation of provincial authoritarianisms" (2007a:17). While the PRI lost its grip on the presidency in 2000 as a consequence of democratization efforts, the direct effect at the local and state levels has been an entrenchment of the authoritarian governing practices of the PRI and its supporters as they struggle to maintain the benefits of political power. Moreover, given that in Mexico PRI party control was almost absolute—i.e. that it manifested itself at the national, state, and local level—the loss of national control has also meant that, as anthropologist David Recondo states, "with the PRI loosing the presidency, the governors of this and of other parties have acquired an autonomy without precedent" (2007:466). For Oaxacans, the result of the praised opening of Mexico to democratic change has been a continuation, if not exacerbation, of the PRI's despotic rule.

Whether sensing a groundswell of change soon to come, or whether as a manifestation of the entrenchment of local political control under subnational authoritarianism, the actions of Ulises Ruiz in the first year and a half in power demonstrate the difficult tensions Mexico is living through in a moment responding to the promises of an imagined democratic future yet still living with the hangovers of the dictatorial past. As Sara, the Communications Director of the Oaxacan Human Rights Network put it, "the operation created to violently displace the teachers clearly revealed the criminalization of the struggle for social justice and corresponding demands. Like never before in Oaxaca, public force was used against one of the most significant sectors of society. Everything that came later…has all been the consequence of an authoritarian power that maintains itself at any cost" (in Denham 2008:66). For many in Oaxaca, growing support against the authoritarian politics of the governor was seen as an opportunity to fulfill the promises of democracy. For many of Oaxaca's poor, the opposition to Ulises Ruiz was seen as an opportunity for a more equitable distribution of resources in a state where 70% of the population in 2006 made less than 8 dollars a day (Conapo 2006) while the urban transformation of the *zócalo* was rumored to have cost upwards of 60 million dollars. Moreover, as a worker at the Oaxacan State Institution of Public Education (IEEPO) reminded me in February of 2008, with 70,000 teachers in the state, every family has one or two teachers in its midst. Indeed, just a few days earlier, when discussing the roots of the conflict with Mama Lucha, she recounted proudly how a year ago her five-year-old son had gone out to the streets after

hearing on the radio about the police raid on the *zócalo* and began gathering up stones on the street, saying he needed to go and aid the teachers, his teachers. As she told me, the "teachers union is the only one fighting *por todo el pueblo* [for all the people]." Whether through the idiom of kinship, the hopes of democracy, grievances over inequitable economic distribution, or a concern for human rights, the discourse of authoritarianism was establishing the unity of multiple popular demands. Moreover, a day after the teacher's mega-march drew 500,000 to the streets, this popular articulation would broaden further through the formation of APPO.

APPO is as APPO Does: Practice and Participation Define this Movement of Movements

On the 17th of June, the teachers union convened a meeting where the *Asamblea Popular del Pueblo de Oaxaca* was born (it would quickly be changed to the plural, Pueblos, an act that not only acknowledged the significant differences among the participants but marked its broad popular support and extent). With the creation of APPO, as Martínez Vásquez states, "the first stage of the teacher's movement concluded, as it went from being strictly a labor issue to become a broad spectrum political conflict, a political crisis. The teachers union thus became the catalyst of the inconformity and social protest that had been finding a place against authoritarianism" (2007a:69). Composed of over 300 organizations, as well as by diverse unions and syndicates, each with its own history of struggle, and joined by a range of social actors, from devout church groups and committed socialist organizations to loose collections of dedicated anarchists and an assortment of neighborhood associations, APPO was able to channel many different fights into one groove.

The constitution of APPO after the government's repression seems to follow the observation in the classic political writings of Carl Schmitt that, as political philosopher Susan Buck-Morss summarizes it, "to define the enemy is, simultaneously, to define the collective. Indeed: *defining the enemy is the act that brings the collective into being*" (2000a:9). After all, whether you were an

ecological crusader, an indigenous rights activist, or a neighborhood housewife, the one thing that everyone seemed to agree on was that Ulises Ruiz had to go. However, if the need to oust governor Ulises Ruiz was APPO's central demand, forming a collective subject ultimately meant much more than defining a central enemy. As Oaxacan intellectual Gustavo Esteva noted, "with a foundation in concrete experiences, such as the successful opposition to the establishment of a McDonalds in the central plaza of Oaxaca, it quickly and clearly adopts the politics of one NO and many YESes characteristic of many contemporary social movements. This policy finds a factor of unification and articulation in a common rejection to an action or omission, to a policy, or to a functionary or a regime, yet it admits at the same time a plurality of motives, affirmations, projects, ideals and ideologies that define the real condition of the world" (2008:71). Similar to the ways in which lawyer and activist Marina Sitrin (2006) described the articulation of Argentinians during their days of economic and social crisis, the practices of protest were central in articulating the popular subject of APPO.

The capacity of APPO to articulate the poor and teachers or anarchists and churchgoers was precisely because, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall has noted, a discursive formation does not consist merely of language, but rather relates to an interrelation of practices, statements, and meanings that produces a shared framework that shapes speaking, acting, and listening subjects (1996a). Political positions might be shaped by structural locations such as class, race, ethnicity, or gender, but interests are discursively produced and are not reducible or determined by structural positions in the last instance (Hall 1986; Moore 2005). In 1991, philosopher and biologist Donna Haraway moved away from essentialised identities as the basis of collective association by proposing affinity as a way to respond to the political need to create a commons with "contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes" (1991:149). Producing shared interests *through* practices of struggle, Oaxacans were finding affinities and engendering a situated sociality that recognized both the necessity and challenge of "the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary" (Haraway 1991:149). While the historical constitution of class, race, gender, and ethnic relations *themselves* created affinities that made a difference for the resulting social formation of APPO, who became a subject of its discourse was not discernible from the perceived identity of its participants with regard to class, race, gender, or ethnicity.

Describing APPO is challenging because the general imagination of social movements, and the reality of the social organizations, syndicates, and larger established groups that composed APPO, is one of vertically structured associations with a leader or leaders and a clear hierarchy. However, as "a movement of movements" (Martínez Vásquez 2007a:71) that relied primarily on the practice of the assembly to articulate its multiple strands together, APPO effectively lacked leaders or a general plan to guide the future.

Without leaders or direction, APPO could have dissolved as quickly as it came together. It did not. Instead, APPO was defined and given shape by the participation of hundreds of thousands of people, each with their own opinions, habits, politics, and problems to guide the movement's motion. "In organizations there is discipline," reminds Esteva. "In movements, on the other hand, there is commitment. Convocations are attended voluntarily, with open participation. The vitality and force of movements is manifested in the quotidian conduct of those that participate" (2007:20). The story of APPO is the story of the everyday acts of the millions of people that at one point or another took part and continue to take part in the movement. APPO is, then, as APPO does.

With millions of individuals in multiple locations undertaking myriad actions, the story and history of APPO is impossible to tell—indeed, *the* story of APPO as such does not exist because, as a popular assembly cobbled together across multiplex differences, *the* APPO does not exist. In what follows, as I continue to analyze the major events of 2006, I want to take seriously philosopher Walter Benjamin's observation of "the opposition between theory and method. In its effort to represent what is general, theory hovers above science, whereas it is characteristic of method that every examination of a universal principle immediately discovers its own specific object" (1926-1927:38). For Benjamin, thinking through theory means an effort to represent the universal while working through method presents a universal principle that cannot be thought outside its specific object. In what follows, I hope to work from the concrete, specific object not only as a means by which to shed new light on existing theory or push towards new conceptions, but also as a means by which to highlight the importance of material practices for our analytical conceptions. It was, after all, through practices such as holding the center in a *plantón*, organizing mega-marches, making decisions through assemblies, and ultimately taking over government buildings and setting up barricades, that the social movement found a way not only to respond to the actions of Ulises Ruiz but also to transform the social and political horizon of possibility for Oaxaca—with effects that continue to reverberate today.

From Anonymous Individuals to the Creation of Collective Subjects in the Marching Crowd

On the 22nd of June, a march organized by business owners in support of governor Ulises Ruiz drew 20,000 to 400,000 people to the streets (reported numbers vary depending on which newspaper you read). At the same time, an APPO assembly decided to continue the *plantón* in the city center in order to increase the pressure on the state and federal government to attend to its demand to remove Ulises Ruiz. Beyond this strategic political function, however, in its month of existence, the *plantón* took on a social life of its own. As journalist Diego Enrique Osorno put it, "in Oaxaca the sit-in strike is a tradition prior to being a manifestation. While the politicians and the syndicate leaders get together in hotels and offices, the *plantón* becomes the stage for a lively social life. *Plantones* are centers of protest as well as spaces of re-encounter and of *tertulia* [get-togethers], the *plantón* is the place where visitors and temporary inhabitants mix. Discussions over worthless or transcendent themes take place in the street while the surroundings are transformed into a center of barter and exchange" (2007:18). At once the site of material exchange and also of debate and dialogue between strangers, friends, and new acquaintances, the *plantón* was a site that fostered new encounters and engagements. Living in a tent-city in the center meant, effectively, that the physical walls that separate homes and individuals from each other were no longer there. As Marinita, a grandmother who participated in the sit-in strike characterized it, "at the *plantón* we started to meet *compañeros* [mates or comrades], make friends, and form little groups.… In our group, there was a doctor, an architect, people from all different fields. We met each evening under the tents to share our bread and coffee" (in Denham 2008:59). While café's around the *zócalo* provided a space to sit and watch others, the sedentary and leisurely gazing these promoted had rarely produced conversations with strangers. Benches around the square likewise provide a space to sit and talk, but they are few and far between and cannot accommodate more than four people comfortably. As a pedestrian plaza with lots of users, the *zócalo* provides a space for neighborliness of the kind that urban critic Jane Jacobs

(1961) ardently argued for as critical to urban life, but it has not produced spatial practices of community. With no space to sit or sleep that wasn't a space next to someone else, and with the basic acts of everyday survival now communal activities, the *plantón* transformed the objectifying gaze of the strolling flâneur that Benjamin characterizes as the man about town of the emergent metropolis into the active engagement of the collective subject that Jacobs laments of as dying in the mid-1900's American city.

By transforming socio-material relations in the *zócalo*, the *plantón* redrew its participants' everyday spatial practices and fostered encounters through which APPO members began to constitute themselves as a community. Likewise, APPO's mega-marches transformed both space and social as the marching multitudes took to the streets. On June 28th, the fourth APPO mega-march assembled between 500,000 and one million people to march from the city's airport to the sports stadium, a distance of nine miles. Stretching further than anyone could see, marchers crowded together and chanted slogans as they held up homemade banners, posters, and paper-mâché puppets that expressed their repudiation for the governor and the miserable condition of Oaxaca's marginalized majority. Arm in arm, with their bodies finding a concrete rhythm and with their voices chanting slogans in unison as they took over a highway into the city, Oaxacans supporting APPO were finding a collective voice and a sense of togetherness through the spatial practice of marching. With hoarse voices and aching feet, as they reached the stadium the marchers gathered to take part in an APPO statewide assembly. "A statewide meeting is significant not only as the vast show of popular opposition to the entrenched PRI domination but also as a preview of national assemblies. The talk is of constitutional changes," wrote Oaxacan journalist Nancy Davies one day after the assembly. "The present coalition…hopes assemblies will replace the elected legislature controlled by the PRI" (2007:33). From a teachers' movement looking for better working conditions to APPO pushing for constitutional changes and rule by general assemblies a month later, the practices of protest engendered a barricade sociality whose discursive formation was giving shape to radically different imaginations about Oaxaca's social and political future.

The conditions of possibility for such a dramatic development, I am arguing, are not just a question of the significantly increased numbers of APPO supporters. It was, rather, the force of the socio-material transformations engendered by Oaxacans' active participation in spatial practices such as *plantones* and marches that created the movement's emergent force and articulated the collective subject's claim for new governing practices. As Marinita later recalled, "I feel like another person at those marches. I can feel myself transform. That's how it happens. I can open my mouth and yell really loud" (in Denham 2008:60). From the smallest of marches of a few hundred people to mega-marches of up to

a million bodies, taking over and marching through city streets is a spatial practice that produced a barricade sociality and the emerging collective popular subject of *el pueblo* (the people).

While the sense of empowerment that Marinita felt in finding a public voice at the march with which to express herself might suggest that on the streets of Oaxaca the subaltern found a way to speak, literary critic Gayatri Spivak's (1988) critique of an unmediated, transparent sovereign subject free of "constitutive contradictions" remains salient. This sense of empowerment was not reducible to the opportunity to yell so as to make grievances heard by the ear of government functionaries, the media, or the Oaxacan public; more importantly, it was the resulting barricade sociality that APPO cultivated through its practices of struggle that produced transformative political possibilities whose effects were not always visible. "The construction of a 'people'," Laclau notes, "is never merely a verbal operation but is embedded in material practices which can acquire institutional fixity (2007:106). The APPO was constituted as *el pueblo* through practices of struggle whose regularity and embodied qualities created a shared affinity amongst its participants.

Given that it was through APPO's practices of struggle that its different participants established a relational bond and the "affective investment" that Laclau posits as critical to populism (2007:116), perhaps it is only in marching with others that one can become sentient to its lived quality. From mid-2007 to the end of 2008, I participated in myriad marches, both APPO and non-APPO, of hundreds of participants and of hundreds of thousands; while experiencing the lived qualities of these marches is not possible via its re-presentation, I invite you nonetheless to march along with me and APPO on Friday, February 8th, 2008 as we take off from the Fountain of the Seven Regions in the northern edges of the city…

Well before the march began, people start to gather at the Fuente de las Siete Regiones, forming small groups that cling to the circle around the fountain at first and then, as the crowd increases, push out to the busy avenue around the small square itself. As the northern gateway of the city and as a symbol of the unity of the state, this was a highly symbolic site well before it became a politicized site due to the transformations that Ulises Ruiz undertook here in 2005. With the mountains above San Felipe in the background and a stately white building—once the gateway to a plantation but today part of the medical school—in the foreground, march participants patiently wait as their numbers grow. Arriving by bus, on foot, and in groups on the back of pick-up trucks, those who could see the placard spelling out the name of their respective organization wander through the crowd to meet up with their group, if they have one. Others use cell phones to find friends or simply walk about until they find a place to wait.

A bit after 9 in the morning with the sun shinning brightly on the cloudless sky, the day was hot already. Using sombreros or umbrellas to shield themselves, marchers form a mass of colors that by now overtook the usually busy avenue leading from San Felipe to the city. There are no transit police directing traffic today (as there sometimes are, even at APPO marches), and at the rear of the waiting crowd is simply a wall of people that blocks the avenue. I heard of the march first from someone I was interviewing, then from a friend, and also on the radio this morning. Drivers surprised by the march, however, quickly reverse direction upon finding the people in their path. Congestion is kept at a minimum as the cars rapidly turn what was a one-way street leading to the avenue into a two-way path leading away from the march. Nonetheless, as always, there are some cars lined up behind the crowd, windows down, with their drivers patiently waiting for the march to move and the avenue to be cleared out, listening to the radio or chatting

with marchers. (While some of these cars are commandeered by APPO supporters and are seen as providing safety, most are not and are content to wait the march out.)

Where a pick-up truck had delivered a series of large cast-iron pots, there now stands an improvised stall selling bowls of food. Likewise, there are people selling hats and umbrellas, and others with juice and water that are making the rounds through the crowd. With its homemade soups and people selling handfuls of caps, the lively commerce that sprouted at the march might be on the fringes of capitalism, yet for some it would definitely fit squarely within capitalism's entrepreneurial spirit of seeing a niche and filling it; others might see these sellers rather as doing what they can to fulfill the need of survival. While bottles of water sold today are not expensive, from 5 to 10 pesos (50 cents to a dollar, approximately), this commerce could be contrasted with the practice during the height of the movement in 2006 of people handing out bottles of water or fruit and other goods for free to marchers. There are also a lot of people trading and handing out flyers. Most of these are one or two page statements providing an analysis of the conflict or promoting the respective view of a particular group.

With the march soon to start, people stand around reading these flyers or talking among themselves or on cell phones and the buzz of the crowd creates the audible murmur of hundreds of people talking at once. Looking around at those gathered, there are almost an equal number of men and women, though perhaps there are a few more women than men. All ages are represented as well, though there are definitely more adults, youths, and kids than grandparents. Just before the participants start moving down the slight slope towards the center, the scene before us under the sharp sunlight is of a three-lane street and the small square surrounding the fountain filled with people. The sound of people's voices provides a constant sonic envelope that is at times punctuated by some cars honking their horns, usually in displeasure at other cars not clearing out quickly enough, but also at times in solidarity with the march—as is the case with almost all of the buses that go by. The few businesses immediately around the fountain are mostly commercial, and so the smell of the food filling the air must be coming from the improvised stalls along the edges of the waiting multitude. With the number of people gathered entirely filling out the space and with late stragglers arriving in small pockets, people are now congregating tightly and there is little room between people.

Another march scheduled to meet this one in the *zócalo* took off that morning from the Monumento a las Madres on the outskirts of the city along the highway that connects Oaxaca to Mexico City. Whether or not we began to march at a precise moment in order to coincide with the other march, people near the rear of the march could soon see those in the distant front moving. With the waiting crowd extending over a city block, it took a while for people at the back to begin to move forward. When the last marchers left the fountain, it was only just possible to see the front of the march some five or six blocks down the road. At the front, loudspeakers and a person talking through a megaphone led the way while throughout the crowd people held up banners and placards with messages ranging from statements supporting APPO to others repudiating Ulises Ruiz. Taking pictures of the march from a street corner, one can see that people are eager to share their messages and do not shy away from the camera lens.

As they pass by, these placards and banners, and the clothing and umbrellas of the hundreds marching form a riotous rainbow of different colors; the voices, however, are united and together form a choir chanting slogans that fill the space as effectively as their

bodies do. Around 10 am, as the march passes a section of the street which is strictly commercial, almost all of the stores have their metal shutters down or their doors closed and only a few of the established businesses are open. Tel Cel, a national cellular telephone operator, has all of their metal shutters closed except for the one in front of the entrance where a security guard stands before the open door doing his best to look as menacing as possible. No one but this anthropologist seems to be paying him much attention. In visible and visceral ways, the contrast in affect between the closed businesses and marchers chanting "la APPO somos todos" (everyone is APPO) is quite stark and striking.

As the march arrives at the *zócalo*, the line of participants spreads out across the plaza in every direction. With this and the other march filling the square, the space rapidly took on the characteristics of a *plantón*. Whereas a week ago returning tourists were visible throughout the *zócalo* and along with them the musicians, ambulant street sellers, and tourist police that accompany them, today the street sellers are back but these are not selling woven rugs and *amate* paintings to tourists but rather pirated music and movies to marchers. The tourist police are gone, and though there were no musicians, music is provided by the loudspeakers that different organizations set up along the square, though primarily by the loudspeakers next to the tent where an *ayuna* (hunger strike) was started that weekend in support of freedom for political prisoners. Large groups of people gather around the tent to listen to recorded messages speaking about different issues such as the government's theft of land along the coast to make good on the Plan Puebla-Panama, a commercial superhighway meant to unite Central and Northern America. Other people cluster around the kiosk, listening to different people speak and here they demonstrate their solidarity not only by gathering and listening, but also by chanting further slogans in unison and raising their fists in the air in accompaniment. The *zócalo* thus becomes both a space of conviviality and of accusation. Later that afternoon, as I say goodbye to you and leave for home on streets that had been returned once again to

automobile traffic, I continue to be struck by the way in which the character of the city streets and the *zócalo* change radically with events such as this one.

With illustrative banners, mocking life-size puppets, street theater, spray painted stencils, and music of protest composed for the moment, in marches such as this one, participants discovered (or rediscovered) a creative capacity to express themselves. Through this creativity, people were not only expressing their discontent at the authoritarian government of Ulises Ruiz, but were also both performing their difference and articulating their solidarity. Though more fully treated in the next chapter on the competing aesthetics of the city and Oaxaca's political street art, what is clear here is that through its multiple means of expression, by bodies in rhythmic motion, quiet and loud voices chanting in unison, in taking over the street with their bodies and the walls with their spray-paint, *at moments*, the transversal affinity and creative force of APPO as manifested in all its contrasts and difference transcended the purely confrontational aspect of a repudiation of Ulises Ruiz to become its own point of reference. Martínez Vásquez writes that "in marches the chorus was: Shoulder to shoulder / arms locked together / the APPO / the APPO / the APPO / the APPO is everyone! 'Todos somos APPO' [Everyone is APPO] said the graffiti. The APPO is in that sense a sentiment of social and political belonging and visibility" (2007a:75). It was during the marches that graffiti artists who previously tagged the walls of the city with their signatures first began to use stencils to graphically support the movement and to visibly mark private and public city spaces as their place, in the process continuing to give shape to the collective subject of APPO members as *el pueblo*.

The Barricades: Islands in a Sea of Abstract Sociality and the Atomizing Spatiality of the City of Walls

Three weeks after Oaxaca's women's March of Pots and Pans took over Channel 9, government functionaries decided to destroy relay equipment housed at the top of the Cerro del Fortín hill overlooking the city in order to take back control of the media station. On August 20th, before dawn broke, paramilitary forces shot at the transmission equipment and scattered APPO activists who were guarding the site, injuring one in the leg. The response from APPO members was swift. That very morning, the twelve commercial radio stations that operate in the city were occupied. Though by the end of that day all but two would be voluntarily returned, forces under the command of Ulises Ruiz were also quick to action and, as Gustavo Esteva reports, "on August 21, in the high hours of the night, there started to circulate what people quickly called the 'convoy of death': 36 state government pick-ups with a thousand *sicarios* [mercenaries] dressed in black, shooting in the air. The radio, based on people's calls, immediately started to report it and someone at the station suggested that to stop them and to protect the occupations it was necessary to raise barricades. Hundreds, maybe thousands of people, went outside to do so and in minutes dozens of barricades had been lifted" (2008:25). Though the convoy of death would continue its nighttime shooting in an attempt to sow fear into Oaxacans, barricades were for the time effective in protecting APPO occupations and *plantones*.

Using paramilitaries arranged into death squads and employing extrajudicial kidnappings of APPO members, the state government's dirty war claimed its fourth official victim on August 21st when architect Lorenzo San Pablo Cervantes was killed as he was heading to the streets to help erect a barricade. The barricades,

as almost all sources point out, were a necessary response to the government's violent aggressions and a means by which to maintain spaces already taken over by APPO members. Silvia, an active participant in the barricades and a sociology student at the UABJO adds that, "the barricade was part of a political strategy. It was a way of demonstrating the government's lack of capacity for governance through civil disobedience…. It was a way to put pressure on the state and federal government, but also a means for our own protection" (in Denham 2008:201). As with the barricades, from the decision to extend the *plantón* in the *zócalo* to the call to take over state government offices, APPO actions could be described through the logic of demonstrating, locally, to the nation, and internationally, that Ulises Ruiz had lost the power to govern the state and thus a new governor was necessary. These can be seen, in other words, as moves directed at an audience and social and political imaginary where representative government is central; as such, they remained within the purview of what social theorist Michael Warner has described as "state-based thinking" where alternative social and political groups find that "they acquire agency in relation to the state" (2005:124).

However, in all of these cases, through the practices required to carry these actions out, the interesting thing is that they introduced other social and political imaginaries besides state-based thinking, even if these were always-already entangled with the state. Both out of a desire to take control of their desperate situation and as a necessity due to the eviction of government entities, from security to sanitation, APPO members had to organize themselves in order to resolve all manner of small and large problems. Through the negotiated practice of governing, APPO participants would come to demonstrate not only the state government's eviction, but also would begin to realize the virtues of a collective subject that could take control and responsibility for decisions and actions taken. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the barricades, which "quickly became more than just a place where communities gathered in self-defense; it was a space where neighbors got to know each other, shared ideas, and developed new strategies for

organizing. The barricade was emblematic of the fundamental aims of the social movement to construct autonomy and direct democracy" (Denham et al 2008:31). As they had in Paris two centuries earlier, where architect Carl Douglas has pointed out that "passers-by were each invited to contribute a paver" to barricade building, a practice that meant that "construction became a means of…converting observers into participants" (2008:39; see also Traugott 2010, 1993), in Oaxaca, as the barricades quickly spread across the entire city, they drew in people and neighborhoods that up to now had remained out of the center of the conflict. Involving people and places that did not necessarily consider themselves either Appistas (APPO supporters) or supporters of Ulises Ruiz but nevertheless became participants, the barricades opened up the third phase of this struggle that began with the teacher's strike, became the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, and now could be classified as the broader Oaxacan social movement of 2006.

A modernist epistemology suggests, as philosopher Karl Marx's parable of the bee famously did, that the conceptual is of primary importance and that the material world of produced objects is merely the objective manifestation of reasoned thought. While it follows from this that spaces and objects are merely the objective records of mental processes, philosopher Henri Lefebvre argued decisively for the importance of spatial practices and material relations as products of conceptual thought yet also as themselves actants (Latour 1999) with the power to affect our mental processes. As he put it, "like all social practice, spatial practice is lived directly before it is conceptualized; but the speculative primacy of the conceived over the lived causes practice to disappear along with life, and so does very little justice to the 'unconscious' level of lived experience *per se*" (1974:34). Following Lefebvre's warning not to privilege cognitive frameworks over people's practices and material conditions, and drawing on recent work by materiality scholars (Buchli 2002; Miller 2005) that focus on how everyday subject-object relations provide a window into our social and political formations, when asking what the import of barricades is at the level of changed consciousness, the answer can only be gotten at by exploring Lefebvre's critical triangulation between material, social, and mental spaces. Analyzing the production of the spatiality of the barricades through spatial practices, material-subjective relations, and cognitive reappraisals will be the route to considering the resulting subjectivities and competing aesthetics of the city post 2006.

In the spring of 2008, over a year since the last barricade standing had been wiped out by government troops, the editor of *La Barrikada*, an independently produced magazine started during the movement and intended as a "bohemian reflection on the anxieties of Oaxaca today," spoke with me about the barricades. He began by noting that his barricade had been Calicanto—a barricade that

was in a neighborhood with a high number of PRI supporters and thus saw a lot of tense and often violent confrontations between Appistas and paramilitary contingents, including one in which two people were shot and killed by PRI supporters. Rather than focus on the violence, however, the editor stated that this was "a space of communion and of intercommunitarian communication and dialogue." When I asked him to explain further, he succinctly stated that this was "a fundamental point of encounter." In considering the barricades beyond their defensive functions, the notion of the barricades as points of encounter is critical in analyzing how this mix of materiality and human practice formed a novel spatiality whose social formations had political possibilities.

A point of encounter. To begin with, the words denote a particular space, a point, a singularity in the city, and thus carve out a difference from the rest of the metropolis. The rise of the city has been famously commented upon as a transformative social moment that gave rise to the freedom of the individual and ended rigid feudal bonds (Pirenne 1925; Weber 1922); celebrated for its democratic promise to bring together a mix of classes in novel encounters, at the same time the crowded street and the city's segregation of different populations have been emblematic of the isolation and alienation of individuals (Caldeira 2000; Engles 1844; Simmel 1968). From the landmark study of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs in 1961 to more recent writings on *Community* by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman in 2001, a critical question being asked across popular and academic writings revolves around the issue of how individuals can discover, or recover, community in our contemporary urban and global landscapes.

With the rise of the megalopolis, anthropologist Nestor García Canclini argues that, in places like Mexico City, "a large part of what happens to us is imaginary because it does not derive directly from real interactions" (2009:42). Characterized by a lack of encounters with others, the sociality of the megalopolis is truly an imagined community and one that, García Canclini has argued, is characterized by the fracturing of connections in what is "a disassembled jigsaw puzzle" (1995:748). Urbanist Nelson Brissac

Peixoto has argued that the spatiality of Latin American cities is dominated by a lack of "spatial continuity. There are only shapes arranged in proximity to one another, and they share no proportions or limits…. The interstice is the paradigm of the contemporary Latin American metropole" (2009:236). As with many cities in Latin America, Oaxaca may be well known for its colonial center, yet the bulk of the population lives either in well-off neighborhoods where electrified wires and 12 foot fences separate homes, or in poor shanty-towns which grow haphazardly in the perimeters of the city. Whether through such fortified walls or via the impassable

dirt roads and social stigma that effectively form moats around poor areas and poor populations, Oaxaca's spatiality is formed largely by zones of exclusion. Writing on Algeria, the subjectivity that this produces has been described by psychiatrist Frantz Fanon as the "zone of nonbeing" (1952:xii). Surrounded by social and physical barriers of exclusion, and barricaded in homes where technology has become our window and connection to the outside world, it is no wonder that with the tension between the formless metropolis and the modern city of walls, questions of community have taken on critical importance.

When I asked him about how one might conceive the relationship between the people and the forces of the state during APPO's uprising, the editor of *La Barrikada* answered that the "street was the only space that the government gave. Taking the street through peaceful assault" was thus the name of the game. As capitalist social relations have transformed the human and physical landscape, geographer Michael Watts points out that community, tradition, and custom have emerged as counterweights standing "in sharp contrast to the more abstract, instrumental, individuated and formal properties of state or society in the modern sense" (2004:196). In Oaxaca, community, state, and society are violently articulated and entangled through spatial conflicts and practices that produce differing social relations and imaginations. Whether in the marches or at the barricades, city streets that were the arteries of vehicular transit became not only central points of articulation between social movement participants, but also sites of engagement between movement participants, Oaxacan society, and the different elements that comprised the governing apparatus. In the place where barricades were born, as anthropologist Paul Rabinow points out, "from as early as the fifteenth century, urban order in France had been conceived in terms of three elements—the house, the street, and the city—and the problem of how (legally, aesthetically, financially, socially, politically, and medically) to relate them. The state and society met at the street" (1989:74). In the eighteenth century, with Pierre Patte's plan for Paris of 1765 and the *Plan des Artistes* of 1793, the French state became proactive in seeking to control not only urban form but, by regulating space, to also regulate society (see also Foucault 1982). Haussmann's cuts through Paris in the 1860s were the logical conclusion of the governing functionaries' mature awareness of the importance of

the relationship between social norms and urban forms and of the need to control them. In the twenty-first century in Oaxaca, state and society were meeting at the street in the most direct of ways.

While it might seem paradoxical, in this zone of nonbeing where a landscape of individual atoms was separated by a sea of walls and security, the thousands of barricades that filled Oaxaca's streets every night from the end of August to the end of November in 2006 presented a radical difference from the normative physical and social configuration of the city. Recording their appearance and performing an analysis of the barricades, architect Hector Ballesteros noted that, "in moments in which barricades arose throughout the city of Oaxaca, it was evident that one was present in a unique happening: the city had become a laboratory: never in the country's contemporary history, in any city, had a framework of barricades been produced at such a scale" (La Curtiduría 2007). As a socio-material experiment involving primarily the material alteration of open city spaces into closed and restricted defensive positions, how did the barricades, then, give meaningful sense to living in the city amongst others and recuperate the social sense of the word neighbor, which had essentially come to denote solely a spatial designation?

In the context of APPO's organizational method of assembly and of the social dynamic created in its assemblies, *plantones*, marches, and occupations, what the laboratory of the barricades and the social movement produced through its material-spatial practices was the affective, shared, and visceral sense of togetherness that Dace Dzenovska and I have glossed over as *barricade sociality* (2010). Similar to what I have been suggesting in the context of marches and occupations, though having broader import because more people participated and because the dynamic of their participation was not necessarily already framed by their affiliation with APPO, through the embodied nature of barricade construction, through the consequential demands of managing and maintaining them, and via the social bonds that these practices forged, the barricade sociality these engendered constructed shared social experiences and imaginaries that radically transformed the abstract modern city and its social relations, turning abstract strangers or unknown neighbors into comrades.

In Oaxaca, it had been a long-standing political practice for groups to close off streets in order to gain the attention of the media and of broader society for a particular issue or demand. Nevertheless, the barricades of 2006 were in effect an innovative practice. As noted by city center resident Sergio Beltrán, a member of UniTierra (a project-based learning center), when barricades first started to appear, they were "without any control" and would use whatever material was around, often burning garbage and trees, for example. However, through people's guidance, through spots on the radio, and through a popular song that spoke about how to make a barricade in a "conscious and even respectful manner," people began to change their practices.

The song that Sergio referred to, entitled "A las barricadas en primera fila (To the Front Line of the Barricades)," indeed highlights the emergent nature of the barricades by instructing individuals how to build them:

> *Pongamos barricadas, pero que sean en serio* /
> Let's set up barricades, but serious ones
>
> *Juntemos muchas piedras, pongamos muchos troncos* /
> Let's gather many rocks, put down many logs
>
> *Evitemos violencia, no hay que ponernos broncos* /
> Avoid violence, there is no need to get hostile
>
> *No hay que quemar las llantas, salvo sea necesario* /
> We need not burn tires, unless absolutely necessary
>
> *Y cuando llegue el dia todo hay que levantarlo* /
> And when day comes, take everything away

As a novel practice whose contours were still being worked out, the barricades were in the midst of producing a particular social and material space, though in these first few weeks what the effect of such a space would be was unforeseen. After all, "the spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it," writes Lefebvre; yet, "a spatial practice must have a certain cohesiveness, but this does not imply that it is coherent (in the sense of intellectually worked out or logically conceived)" (1974:38). Much as social movement participants themselves, spatial practices such as the barricades do not necessarily follow a model but rather creatively and actively make and imagine the present and (becoming) future in the very moment of their practice and through their intended and contingent effects.

Creating the space of the barricades and producing the possibility to imagine other futures meant moving objects, making bonfires, finding food and blankets, listening intently to the radio for updates, and keeping a close eye on the skies to watch for fireworks announcing sites in trouble. This work could only be truly accomplished by people laboring together since in general there was no one house or individual who had enough material or manpower to form a barricade of one. Beginning with, "a las barricadas en primera fila (to the front line of the barricades) / con todos los vecinos, con toda la familia (with all the neighbors, with the whole family)," the song's refrain narrates a common feature of Oaxaca's barricades that touches on this point, namely that their sociability was built around the core of families and neighbors.

Composed day in and day out from the collected rubble of their particular street for a period spanning about three months, Oaxaca's barricades created a collective not simply by demarcating a dividing line in space, but also through the material and social practices entailed in their construction and maintenance. Describing some of their distinctive features, Leyla, the activist who earlier described how the idea for the women's march came to be, commented first

that, "the barricades emerged as a form of self-defense, of pacifist resistance. They developed their own communication system, like fireworks as a danger warning. Some women even banged on their pots and pans to wake up their neighbors" (in Denham 2008:95). Leyla's first observations point to how the barricades provided spaces of protection that offered neighbors some measure of renewed control over the streets in their neighborhoods. Following her first characterization, Leyla's subsequent commentary underscores how the barricades were important spaces that fostered novel encounters and dialogues between individuals who may have lived next to each other all their lives but never truly have spoken to each other: "You found all kinds of people at the barricades. A lot of people tell us they met at the barricades. Even though they were neighbors, they didn't know each other before. They'll even say, 'I didn't ever talk to my neighbor before because I didn't think I liked him, but now that we're at the barricade together, he's a *compañero*.' So the barricades weren't just traffic barriers, but became spaces where neighbors could chat and communities could meet." (in Denham 2008:95). Sweating and dragging rubble out into the street together, stacking logs to assure warmth for the cold nights, sharing food and coffee that others brought, and taking turns maintaining the lookout post so that others could sleep, in building barricades, Oaxacans began to recognize the strangers they lived amongst as comrades. The agency and force that the social movement nurtured was built on a growing sense of connections and points of intersection between individuals who were no longer abstract to one another—as is, say, a factory worker who imagines his or her interests in relation to all the workers of the company or to the proletariat class as a whole. These embodied connections were critical to shaping the sociality of the social movement beyond the "stable system of signification" of anti-authoritarianism that sutured together the "plurality of demands which, through their equivalential articulation, constitute a broader social subjectivity" and a populist subject (Laclau 2007:74). Finding common ground amidst a sea of difference and people's constitutive contradictions, individuals participating in the social movement were weaving networks that tied and bound each of them to the others.

Just as no one household had all the material to build a barricade, neither did one household alone provide the food that fueled the insurgency. Relying on the collective to provide food and security, and gathering together around the bonfire to cook meals that were eaten in shared companionship, those at

the barricades were making evident their dependence on others and translating this dependence not into a weakness but into shared trust. In our modern cities, essayist Paul Valéry observed that, "the inhabitant of the great urban centers…reverts to a state of savagery—that is, of isolation. The feeling of being dependent on others, which used to be kept alive by need, is gradually blunted in the smooth functioning of the social mechanism" (in Benjamin 1939:174). In Oaxaca, where the social mechanism had broken down, the savage isolation of the city was being reworked into solidarity. This transformation, however, was not effected as the rational endpoint of a process of conscious analysis, but was rather the product of shared and embodied practices such as the breaking of bread with others. This is because, as Susan Buck-Morss puts it, "the sensory circuit of the body, as a critically perceptive agency *is* consciousness. The world of the corporeal senses is the ground of philosophical experience" (2000a:257). In the sweaty work and shared effort of building barricades, spatial practices and socio-material relations were remaking both the city and people's awareness—reforming concrete and consciousness.

Though it can be written about and analyzed, much as at the *plantón* or the march, the visceral and lived sense of the barricade sociality that composed this social togetherness and reworked philosophical perception is elusive. Imagine, if you will then, that dusk is arriving, with the sun dropping behind the mountains, you are carrying a bag of cement to the middle of an intersection. Some other day, you hope to use that cement to build an addition to your house. Another neighbor brings some old logs from a tree in his yard, others bring leftover bricks. A man who works as a mechanic brings some used tires. Everyone stacks these across the street, blocking the way to traffic. As the dark settles and the cold comes, a bonfire is started near the barricade. Those whom the group has decided should stay for the night huddle closer, those who will take the watch on another night go home to rest. As with tens of thousands of others across the city, you turn on the radio and listen for updates. You talk with the others about the conflict, about your families, about the cold. A song comes on between the news bulletins and everyone sings along. A neighbor drops by with food and hot coffee for everyone. You make sure that your small barricade has some fireworks handy in case there is a need to signal others. You doze a little. As morning approaches, new coffee and food arrives and as the first rays of the morning settle upon the rooftops you and the others are busy removing the materials that made up the barricade. Luckily, the death-squads were far from your street that night. You go home to rest a little before thinking about going to work.

Maintaining the barricades and carving out their own space, neighbors not only shared coffee and bread as they discussed politics and the lived reality of their city experience, but often also had to make collective decisions on issues ranging from pragmatic questions such as who was to take that night's watch or what each would do in the event of approaching danger, to more

contested topics such as whether or not to let someone pass by. Whether large or small, these decisions were largely the product of agreements established through dialogue by neighbors of all social stripes. In a study of barricade participants that she presented at the aforementioned colloquium in October of 2008, "Political Crisis and Oaxacan Social Movement 2006-2008," Tania Fernández Moreno noted that "the majority of the people interviewed did not know what happened in the [APPO] assemblies nor did they know who were the spokespersons or how decisions were taken." In holding their own block or neighborhood assemblies or meetings to decide on relevant issues, as well as in the ensuing collective actions taken as a result of these decisions, barricade participants were learning to have confidence in their ability to resolve their own dilemmas without outside influence or interference. As Fernández Moreno recalled, an often-repeated phrase or saying during this time was "we do not want to be told what to do, but we don't know what to do." The widespread repudiation of representative politics in favor of direct action that Oaxaca was living through was a moment that presented great possibilities, producing great exhilaration at times, yet also producing a great deal of anxiety (see Guardino 2005 for a historical perspective on popular entanglements with electoral politics in Oaxaca).

From the cooperative effort of hauling bricks and sandbags to the street to gathering together in order to take decisions, practices that made the physical and social space of the barricades necessarily entailed engaging with others. And, as Silvia's comments on her barricade at the Cinco Señores intersection make evident, for many at the barricades these engagements often reached across social and political chasms: "with such a diverse people gathered to defend the space, many social differences became visible. There were people that could stop by in their cars and drop off some coffee, and others who may not even have had homes" (in Denham 2008:202). Composed largely of appropriated buses and at an

important crossroads that led to the University, Cinco Señores was one of the larger barricades and thus, the diversity that Silvia points to was not observable at all barricades in the same way or to the same degree.

Nonetheless, though responding to their own particular configuration, the daily and repeated engagements across difference that barricade practices propitiated often helped to break down established discriminations. Talking about her own difficulties understanding and connecting to a young street kid, Silvia described how "it was sometimes difficult to relate to people with Chino's attitude; they're stigmatized by the whole society, so it makes them suspicious of other people and a whole chain of prejudice is created. The barricade at Cinco Señores was about breaking that.… People learned to get along, and being together all the time created a feeling of mutual support and solidarity" (in Denham 2008:203). Prejudice, stereotypes, and discriminations continued to shape relations amongst individuals in Oaxaca. However, as Silvia notes, thrust together at the barricades, and given the time, space, and practices by which to develop an affinity with each other, as a barricade sociality began to develop, marginalized and moneyed individuals, youths and elders, women and men found themselves coming together in spatial and social relations that their everyday practices and prejudices had previously impeded.

Even if at times shared affinities and common ground between radically disparate individuals may have been established only at and through their link at the barricades—that is, even if it is not the case today (or then) that all street kids, secretaries, and social scientists that met at the barricades continue to get together—nonetheless the barricades did establish points of encounter through material practices that constructed an embodied barricade solidarity and points of convergence. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have used the concept of the rhizome as a way to speak about relational connections that may form an assemblage yet do so through the intersection and traversal of multiple points that may be moving in different directions (1980). These barricades were producing material and social points of convergence whose spatiality was precisely rhizomatic for, although widespread, they happened in pockets around the city that connected certain points and people yet excluded others. As David Venegas, an APPO council member selected as a voice of the barricades put it, "if it wasn't for the barricade maybe I never would have made friends with them. In the barricades we were many fighting 'for a better society', but this society has many faces. A housewife sees an oppressive government that raises the price of services and does not provide healthcare for her kids. As a student I see more the deficiencies of education, the barriers set up for opportunities to develop. Many street kids want to 'thrash' the police. They have a legitimate reason for rebellion, yet a fuzzy conviction. It enriches us to understand them" (in Gijsbers 2007:246). At the scale of the city, as these conversations and newly found common identifications were reflected by the latest songs, protest graffiti,

radio station programs, and pamphlets, these experiences became not only a shared discourse against authoritarianism, but also the emergent and viscerally lived sense of togetherness of a growing barricade sociality.

In using the term "sociality" to speak of the social relations or human bonds that characterized the *plantones*, marches, assemblies, and barricade events, Dace Dzenovska and I have sought to convey not only the emergent quality of these bonds but also the fact that, in their production, they transformed individuals into particular, yet also collective subjects; as a sociality, in other words, it gives shape to both a collective subject as well as to the individual identity of those who are part of this collective (Dzenovska & Arenas, Forthcoming). As we have argued, it is the specificity of particular practices and the kind of social relations that in turn produce a collective subject that make the concept of sociality useful. The collective itself can be variously conceived of in many shapes, scales, and spaces such as a neighborhood, a city, people, a public, an ethnicity, a nation, or nation-state; for all of these, it is the sociality characteristic of these formations that lend them their specific character (Dzenovska & Arenas, Forthcoming). Barricade sociality in Oaxaca was a social formation that depended on the creation of shared affinities through spatial practices that defined belonging and the contours of an emerging collective subject. Though this collective subject was shaped by populism, the contours of its sociality are thus specific to the particular articulation of its affective social relations, spatial practices of struggle, and the resulting political imaginaries that these produced. As subsequent chapters will address, in a moment when the barricades, marches, and *plantón* are no longer an everyday and pedestrian practice, barricade sociality continues to be important in interpellating the collective subject of *el pueblo* produced in 2006 even as the contours of its production shift.

Through its practices of production, the barricades articulated the subjects and spaces that together gave form to the sociality of the barricades. The radio, for example, was instrumental in consolidating a discourse of the social movement as a participatory subject (see also chapter 4). In its use at the barricades, as people called in with reports or huddled around the bonfire to listen for information and for recreation, the radio functioned not only to interpellate barricade participants as subjects who were part of the social movement, but it also situated this collective subject vis-à-vis its embodied practices and material sites. As individuals called in from one barricade or another, and as these calls reverberated through the cold night air all over the city to others huddled around the radio or listening in at home, the stranger-relationality of a discourse public (Warner 2005) and the abstract relations of the modern street gave way to the embodied and sited relations of a barricade sociality. Then, and still today, as Fernández Moreno's conference presentation in October of 2008 noted, "people's trustworthiness is judged according to their participation in the barricades." In the embodied and sited sociality of the barricades, people know and locate you vis-à-vis practices and places that mark belonging. Much as the practices of protest in assemblies, *plantones*, and marches created the collective subject of the Appista, barricades made places by connecting subjects and specific spaces, rooting identity in identifiable locations and practices that marked and made the collective subject of the barrikadero or barrikadera. Articulated together through the populist discourse of antagonism towards the authoritarianism of Ulises Ruiz, Appistas and barrikadera/os, marching mothers and striking teachers produced the popular collective subject of *el pueblo*.

Then, as today, the socio-material relations of building barricades transformed the city's physical and social landscape. In the articulation between people and place, moreover, each became

synonymous with the other. A year after the barricades, El Alebrije—the name David Venegas was christened with by the movement—noted that, "the barricade transcended physical space, since although not physically here today, people continue to identify us as those from the barricade" (in Monter 2007:199). This identity was not only forged in space, however, but itself became inscribed in particular places. Urban planner Kevin Lynch observed that the city "can furnish the raw material for the symbols and collective memories of group communication. A striking landscape is the skeleton upon which many primitive races [sic] erect their socially important myths" (1960:4). Creating an especially striking landscape, the barricades furnished the raw material for the mythology and memory of the social movement. Though I engage with this mythology and memory in chapter 6, here the point is that the creation of this striking landscape not only produced the collective subject of a barrikadero or barrikadera but, in anchoring this subject spatially, also produced a spatiality with the capacity to hail this subject.

As such, for Mama Lucha, Silvia, and for the editor of *La Barrikada*, the physical site and memory of the barricades at Brenamiel, Cinco Señores, and Calicanto continue to define their subjectivity and to interpellate them as barrikadera/os. As with all subject positions and collective identifications, moreover, the hailing and interpellation of this subject position not only recognizes certain individuals as having particular traits and defining characteristics, but it also drags with it the affective baggage and even ethical and moral sentiments from previous articulations that continue to color social relationships. As El Alebrije reminds, though the barricades are no longer here, and though the practice of providing others there with coffee and clothing is no longer a daily happening, for those who are recognized as barrikaderos and barrikaderas, "they still continue to give us a hand" (in Monter 2007:199). The city is thus an actant not just because it transforms our psychological and social relationships, as sociologist Georg Simmel argued (1968), but in the capacity of its spatiality to hail us through the collective inscriptions that our social-material relations produce in making subjectivity and spatiality. As Lefebvre might say, we produce, and are produced by space.

Violence, the Collective Subject, and the Divided City

I have been arguing that, through their production by collective and embodied material practices, the fortified spaces of the barricades gave birth to a barricade sociality that seemed to offer the possibility of replacing Oaxaca's authoritarian governing relations with governing practices structured through participatory assemblies. In the nearly six months that the *plantón*, marches, assemblies, and barricades were a daily feature of Oaxaca's urban landscape, the visceral togetherness of barricade sociality that developed was able to help transcend some differences and the city's alienation. This wasn't the only social and material effect of the practices of struggle, however. Most importantly, if behind the barricades a coming together of some people through new points of engagement was flourishing, for example, did—or how did—these points of engagement connect to others on the opposite side of the street? That is to say, if the spatiality of the barricades was rhizomatic, articulating *particular* people and *particular* places through nodal points in the city that formed islands, what was the social effect of the barricades when considered in the broader framework of the city as a whole? This is an important question for, as my contact at the IEEPO reminded me in February of 2008, though there is a perception that the whole "familia oaxaqueña" (Oaxacan family) participated in the APPO, "of course there are supporters of Ulises Ruiz." This is an obvious but also unstated fact, and one that takes on salience in the face of media reports that pitch the conflict as that between "the people" versus the governor, when in reality it is a sector of the population in conflict with another sector of the population, Appistas and Ulisistas.

Violence and the threat of violence were an everyday reality of the barricades. Conceived and constructed as a response to the state's

paramilitary violence, from the start the barricades articulated an opposition that marked both sides of the fence. Via flying bullets and improvised blockades, the barricades antagonistically articulated armed supplements of the state government and Ulisistas as a camp in opposition to Appistas and those who were becoming barrikadera/os. As was the case when common hatred of the authoritarian governor quickly consolidated a range of organizations and causes into APPO, the convoy of death initially brought different people together at the barricades in repudiation of the militarization of the streets as much as in solidarity with APPO. In the aftermath of the barricades, however, the personal narratives and reflective discourses that have developed mention the tension and fear that violence produced, yet overwhelmingly focus their attention on the internal character of the barricades as spaces of sociability across difference. Though the singular focus and attention to the cohesion of barricade sociality is itself an interesting and important social fact of the subsequent discursive formation and collective imagination *about* the barricades, the question of urban violence between state forces, Ulisistas, Appistas, and barrikadera/os is also consequential not just for the issue of the transformative and unifying force of violence.

With barrikadera/os in the trenches just over a month, talks between APPO and the federal government were ongoing but, as before, going nowhere. At the end of September, as reported in the national Leftist newspaper *La Jornada*, Carlos Abascal, Mexico's Secretary of the Interior, warned that should APPO and the government not make progress in their next round of meetings, then the federal government would have no other recourse but to use force. On the 30th of September, military helicopters circled over the city of Oaxaca and there were reports of arriving planes, all-terrain vehicles, and more helicopters on the coast. Amidst the increased militarization of the state, APPO refused to meet with the Secretary of the Interior and called on people to reinforce the barricades. On the 2nd of October, as Mexico City's *El Universal* newspaper reported, Carlos Abascal announced the possible "peaceful occupation" of Oaxaca. With tensions high, APPO was on red alert. Violence from the convoy of death and other paramilitary groups on the streets continued, and on the 14th

of October, Alejandro García Hernández was killed at a barricade as a bullet struck his head. Martínez Vásquez informs that "at the site were found documents from a member of the military of 22 years of age named Johnatan Ríos Vásquez" (2007a:234). With Alejandro's death, nine people had been officially killed by state forces in the conflict.

As Alejandro's blood seeped into the stones of the city, his blood reminded that the very possibility and formation of this colonial city was the result of centuries of exploitation and domination. From the days when the Zapotec, Mixtec, and later Aztecs fought for control of the valley, to the transformations of its colonial and republican entanglements, blood and conflict have continually seeped into the valley floor (Gay 1881; Guardino 2005; McNamara 2007; Murphy and Stepick 1991; Overmyer 2006). Though he does not make much of it, Max Weber mentions the high mortality of immigrants and the exploitation of serfs as aspects of the development of the Western city and the establishment of rights for its residents through "the legal status of citizenship" (1922:96). Blood on the stones formed the conditions of possibility for the freedoms of the city (see also Mbembe & Nuttall 2004). As philosopher Michel Foucault has argued in *Society Must be Defended*, "the blood that has dried in the codes" (1997:56), and one might add the blood seeped into the stones, form part of the silenced legacies of the violence of liberalism. Tracing the history of spatial displacement, colonization, and occupation in the war between nations, Foucault locates a transformative shift in a moment when dominant forces in a political territory looked not only beyond their borders but turned to the enemies within. What Foucault alternatively terms "race struggle" or "race war" is defined by the principle that "We have to defend society against all the biological threats posed by the other race, the subrace, the counterrace…" (1997:61; see also Stoler 2002 on the internal frontier). Much as the bloody stones of the city are the unseen grounds for the development of the concept of citizenship, Foucault demonstrates that race war is the underneath of liberalism, the disavowed ground pointing to the constitutive violence of its inclusions and exclusions.

Though each does so through different techniques, legal statutes and urban planning are what Foucault would describe as "technologies of power" that have as their object the management of the population and the production of particular subjects (2004). As a particular technology of power, control over urban form has and continues to be a particularly effective tool for managing and reshaping social life and for tipping the scales in the race struggle against internal others (Graham 2004; Weizman 2007; Wright 1991). For Frantz Fanon, the colonial city was not simply the background to the Algerian war of independence, but was itself an important actant that delineated a consequential divide between two antagonistic camps. As he wrote, "the settler's town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel.… The settler's town is a well-fed town, an easygoing town; its belly is always full of good things. The settler's town is a town of white people, of foreigners. The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute.… The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire" (1961:32). Creating a blunt division between Us and Them, colonial spatiality produced a world divided—physically, discursively, imaginatively, and socially. Secured by gates and a gulf of wealth that divides the dirt streets of the poor from the skyscraper cities of the rich, the contemporary city of walls forms the grounds for the development of the "dichotomic division of society into two camps," that Ernesto Laclau (2007:83) posits as central to populism.

Although medina walls in the colonial city typically segregated the settler's town from the native's town, in contemporary Oaxaca the spatiality dividing an Us and a Them presents pocket-like clusters where differences traverse markers of race, class, and ethnicity. At times, these differences are visibly etched onto the landscape. In San Felipe del Água, an old peasant town on the northern hills that has effectively become a suburb of Oaxaca, million dollar homes with armed guards and parking space for three SUVs abut wooden shacks with tin roofs where donkeys are the only mode of transportation. When he is in Oaxaca, San Felipe del Água is the place Ulises Ruiz calls home, though his armored flotilla of vehicles rarely has to share space on the street with donkeys being moved to different grazing patches or with carts hauling wood from the forests to people's homes, for his preferred mode of transport is a helicopter that takes him from the hills to the administrative city he built 6 miles outside of the city center and back again. With highly marginalized segments of the population living next to gated McMansions, this polarization of Oaxacan society has been inscribed not just onto differentiated segments of the population, but is also mapped out and visible across city space. In many zones of Oaxaca, manifest gaps between the small number of wealthy and the overwhelmingly poor or impoverished majority mean that the process of gentrification in neighborhoods like San Felipe presents stark contrasts.

This is true not just for newly gentrified sections of the city where the disparities between residents describe an unbridgeable chasm, however, but also in communities where racial, class, and ethnic differences may be less stark, yet are equally consequential and also spatially pronounced. Leaving downtown Oaxaca, with its cafés and art galleries, the highway that leads towards Mexico City passes through the periphery of the city, cutting through towns swallowed by the extending metropolis. A few kilometers before one reaches the very edge of the sprawl is Pueblo Nuevo, the community where Mama Lucha lives. Today politically divided between Appistas and supporters of the PRI, or Priistas, this division has been a fact

of life for its populace well before the APPO came into being. The division separating the community has been evident at city hall, where for years a series of occupations and manifestations from one side of the political divide have opposed the policies of the other. This separation is also discernible in the very make up of the town's streets, with the part of town where Priistas generally live enjoying paved roads in contradistinction to the other side of town with its unpaved and potholed dirt streets. Analyzing

the relationship between rituals and political representation, anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz noted that "the reasons why this factionalism between conservatives and *progresistas* could be made to coincide with a spatial division of the whole village can be found in the relations of kinship and patronage around the political leader—whose core of support was mainly near his own residence" (2001:269). These are relationships that Lomnitz traces to the colonial period and the hierarchical associations between church, state, and local populations. In Pueblo Nuevo, as in many marginalized communities across the state, the place where the sidewalk ends describes a social and political delineation that is the result of a long process of differentiation and historical sedimentation.

Marginalized communities forming seemingly homogeneous neighborhoods of class, race, or ethnicity are often imagined to have *natural* affinities or share the brotherhood of the barrio. Oaxaca, however, provides examples of neighborhoods that are more or less homogenous with respect to class (and at times ethnicity) yet are consequentially divided politically (see also Gregory 1992; Slater 1994 for a related perspective). Oaxaca's city of walls is creating the spatiality of zones of nonbeing whose rhizomatic articulations do not spread through space like a virus but rather move and change by hopping from point to point, shifting the relationships between its points in response to contingent events or in relation to different issues. They form, in this way, what geographer David Slater refers to in another context as "archipelagos of resistance where linkages may be tenuous, intermittent or broken" (1997:273). Academics have made inroads in demonstrating that the seemingly brute fact of gender is performative and produced (Butler 1990), that class reproduction is manufactured as much as fated (Willis 1977), and that race is a social construction whose consequential effects are different for the same population in different situations (Brodkin 1994; Hartigan 1999); when assessing the seemingly brute fact of the stones of the city, Lefebvre's point that spatiality is also relationally produced and not just inert or self-evident matter seems equally salient.

In Oaxaca, even as the polarization of society has a long history that has produced the dichotomous camps of Us and Them, the sociality of these camps is created through the active and relational entanglement of specific discursive formations, spaces, and practices. As anthropologist Liisa Malkki's research in the Hutu

refugee camp of Mishamo in Tanzania has shown, "the refugee camp as a technology of power was both limiting and productive. Within it, certain kinds of political action were possible, others impossible. Certain kinds of socio-political forms and processes, and certain kinds of objects and subjects, emerged while others did not" (1995:237). Isolated and confined to Mishamo's close quarters, refugees in the camp developed a strong collective subjectivity and shared discourse that stressed their identification as Hutu and their antagonism to their ethnic Tutsi rivals. In contrast,

refugees who fled to the neighboring city of Kigoma did not develop a discourse that rooted their subjectivity in a lost homeland or in a collective sense of Hutuness. Much as in Tanzania, in Oaxaca the discourse of APPO and of barrikadera/os as a united group sharing a sense of belonging was a discursive formation that was fostered by the logic of that particular time and place. The barricades, like the camp, were spaces productive of an entrenched togetherness where a lengthy temporal engagement, shared material practices, *and* a common adversary all produced not just a discourse of togetherness and of that time, but a lived sense and sensibility of community. (Indeed, if a common enemy or antagonism might be said to map out a collective, as Buck-Morss has noted Carl Schmitt's political theory posits, this does not mean that it makes a community.) United through shared practices and by collective information networks such as the radio, cell phones, and fireworks, each barricade nonetheless remained largely cut off from the rest of the city and effectively spliced the city's social and spatial fabric. Camp-like, the lived sensibility of the rhizomatic community of the barricades was fed by the awareness of living in a foxhole with an enemy that could violently surprise one at any time. Living in the trenches in the midst of open race war and classified by forces aligned with the state as the enemy within, the collective subject forming as a result of barricade sociality was not only learning about each other and creating a community, but was also learning how to defend itself.

Standing in the patio of his house in mid-February of 2008, as the last shadows of the evening sun receded and the cold began to creep over the mountains, Teak lit up a cigarette next to his motorcycle and continued telling me about his experiences on the barricades. An artist turned stencil maker during the movement, Teak recounted how his motorcycle had been crucial in negotiating the rhizomatic spaces of the streets during the barricades, where he was able to move around the burned out buses and bags of cement with greater agility and where he could take off his helmet to be quickly recognized rather than have to get out of a car. Teak spoke about how the motorcycle became a point of face-to-face communication between people wanting reliable information. He was often stopped by others who wanted to know what was happening where he had just been and who were eager to tell him what was going on where he had just arrived. Giving and receiving information, he was better able to deliver needed materials such as vinegar, Coca-Cola, and glass bottles from one side of the town to the other. It was at this time, as he said, that those at the barricades were taught how to use such materials to defend themselves. Someone showed them how to immobilize a vehicle by putting nails inside of an orange that could be thrown under a car's tires to puncture them. They learned how to make Molotov cocktails and also learned that, with oil, gasoline, and paint, you could make a mix that would stick to the surface that it hits.

Finishing his cigarette, Teak told me that at one point someone sitting behind him had taken some footage of the city as he rode around. The picture was shaky, though, not only because of the poor roads, but mainly because of the nervous condition and fear that everyone was experiencing during the movement. Fearing falling under the sights of the snipers and soldiers looking for a target, or scared of meeting the convoy of death on the road, Teak's shaking hands and body registered the nervous condition of a city violently under siege. Much as philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre found that in the colony "the status of 'native' is a nervous condition" (1961:20), for those who had been classified as "Others" in the race war in Oaxaca, the state of siege offered no respite to the nervous condition. As political scientist Achille Mbembe points out, however, "the state of siege is itself a military institution. It allows a modality of killing that does not distinguish between the external and the internal enemy. Entire populations are the target.... Daily life is militarized" (2003:30). Through the violent repression of the teacher's sit-in strike by police forces, the state government not only institutionalized violence as state policy but also made violence an everyday fact for all Oaxacans. In militarizing city spaces and rendering anyone within certain areas as targets, violence produced conditions whereby broader segments of Oaxaca were articulated into either of the two camps. For the paramilitaries roaming the streets at night on the convoy of death and for the Ulilistas loyal to governor Ulises Ruiz, soon anyone supporting the APPO and

anything behind the barricades and at the encampment in the *zócalo* were a target.

Having sanctioned the use of violence against Appistas through its sniper attacks on marchers and via the convoy of death, the state government effectively gave license for Ulisistas to target social movement participants. As Martínez Vásquez reminds, it was in mid-August, for example, that "a page on the internet appears from the self-named organization 'oaxacaenpaz' [Oaxaca in Peace] that calls for the detention of those it considers leaders of the APPO, providing their names, photographs, home addresses, and political history" (2007a:218). Though no longer found online, this website actively promoted violence against APPO members, grimly drawing a large red X over the photographs of Appistas who had been killed. For the ironically named Oaxaca in Peace organization, the systematic eradication of anyone with a different political position was a way to win the race war and achieve peace.

Eighty years ago political theorist Antonio Gramsci described political conflict as the struggle for the state and civil society through a system of earthworks, fortresses, and ditches (1971). Architect Eyal Weizman's topographical study of the colonial occupation of Palestine today points to a terrain of political struggle where the system of earthworks, fortresses, and ditches no longer describes a unified landscape plottable on a fold-out map. The spatiality of the new landscape of political struggle is one where fences, overpasses, checkpoints, helicopters, and planes both divide certain places and people and connect others (Weizman 2002). In the rhizomatic spatiality of a city under siege, with points both literally cut off from each other and with general areas also surrounded, few places and people can escape the battlefield. As Diego Enrique Osorno reminds, "the common Oaxacan, who is neither APPO nor 'Ulisista', must learn to live alongside the barricades. There is no other way. He cannot go to Miami or to Mexico City, like some businessmen have done" (2007:105). For the few whose spatiality was not coterminous with the global point-to-point rhizome of flexible citizenship (Ong 1999), there was little room to stay neutral and no sidelines to speak of.

At a Christmas party in 2007, one such Oaxacan recounted how the barricades near his house on the Cerro del Fortín hill had been maintained by teenagers who kept asking for his voter registration card in order to verify who he was and where he lived so as to decide whether to let him pass or not. Exasperated by the inability to get around and by the fact that he continually had to show his identification, he told me that at times he got fed up and yelled at the teenagers that he had a right to circulate. Michael Watts has described the conduct, practices of governing, and imaginations of a community as productive of a "governable space." Yet, he has also noted that, "at the center of each governable space is a community *contradiction*" (2004:212), a situation where the very relations that produce a community as a governable space

come into friction with those of other communities. Frictions between the community of barrikadera/os who see themselves as defending their space and the community of citizens who find that their right to circulate the city are compromised are one such community contradiction. This anecdote provides evidence as well of a the constitutive contradictions within the practices of Oaxaca's mobilized community: in spaces that were cultivating practices that many identified as instantiations of direct democracy that repudiated both the authoritarian politics of governing and of representative democracy, the political technology the state used to legitimate an individual's right to vote was being used to determine inclusion and exclusion in extremely localized pockets throughout the city.

Though disputed, reports of the forcible detention of government functionaries and of other acts of violence and vandalism by Appistas color the picture of a social movement that was by and large non-violent and yet was also caught in, and continued, this cycle of violence. Early in 2008, a municipal functionary from the PRI gathered a group of academics together to discuss opening an urban research center. At the meeting with us, as we discussed the streets and violence in 2006, he pointed out defensively that "here there is a great curtain of smoke, there are photos of Appistas with guns shooting at police as well." Moreover, he noted that, with "the common citizen…caught between the two forces," as a result Oaxaca experienced a heightened "state of anxiety, of fear that common citizens lived." Characterizing this through a personal anecdote, he told us the story of his street, where signs staked in the ground like colonial flags proclaimed "aquí es APPO" (here is APPO). In front of his condominium, a barricade had built a great bonfire and was burning tires. As a direct result of this, life in the condominium was impossible because of the lack of air. However, he noted, when the people from the condominium complained and wanted to remove the tires, they were told to "move it, don't fuck with the smoke." Seeing few options, people moved out. In the contemporary city under siege, the landscape of political conflict is one where violence has been militarized and city spaces themselves are targets for campaigns of "urbicide" that, by making space uninhabitable, make everyday life unbearable (Graham 2004). As such, the conflict in Oaxaca created a "grey zone" (Levi 1986) where the lines between victim and victimizer were not always clear. For this municipal worker and those who lived in his building, there was little opportunity to carve out neutral spaces of coexistence in this city under fire.

Smoke from the smoldering city streets did not respect private property and often reached under the door, entering the home itself. As such, at one point during our conversation in February of 2008, Teak mentioned that although his parents and four brothers were highly involved in the APPO, many in his family are also

PRI supporters and as the conflict started to simmer, they contacted Teak's family and told them that they were "finishing with Oaxaca." They admonished them for fighting for "pendejadas"—a vulgar way of saying idiocies that in the context of the conversation referred to teacher's salaries—and noted that they had been "indoctrinated." Teak's parents responded that they were not just fighting over money but also for issues that affected everyone—"quality of schools, uniforms, meals, materials, education, rights…life!" From this time on, Teak's family split apart and there has been no contact or dialogue between the warring camps since 2006. As such, whether through walls of smoke and fire outside of their homes or indoors around the family table, these tensions touched everyone and rewove the social and spatial fabric of Oaxaca at all levels.

Violence was a daily reality throughout the months of open conflict between the government and the social movement's participants. In August 2007, a human rights report "estimates that during the conflict initiated by the repression of the *plantón*…between 500 and 700 people have been arbitrarily detained" (Diakonie 2007:31). The same report cites that "about 26 people have died, victims of the state government's deliberate violence towards manifestations" (Diakonie 2007:27). Given that the deaths, disappearances, and arbitrary detentions during this period have been attributed to the violence of Ulisista forces having an affinity with the state government, they have not been subject to proper investigations by PRI authorities. Verifiable numbers are impossible to obtain—and cannot give a sense of the state of siege. Carlos Beas Torres, co-founder of the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus, states that, "the government's violence used in Oaxaca has a clear fascist outline, since more than physically destroy its opposition, it has sought to create a climate of terror that paralyzes the population and makes it docile and manageable" (2007:46). State sanctioned violence was a technology of power whose strategy of intimidation was used to wear out Appistas and barrikadera/os and to instill fear in others for their safety should they participate.

This strategy worked all too well. The tension and nervous condition produced by a climate of fear where violence may be around every

corner and at any time of the day clearly has both a physical and psychic toll, producing what anthropologist Michael Taussig refers to as a "culture of terror" (1984). This tension and terror, moreover, did not discriminate and affected not just those that actively participated in support of the social movement or those that opposed them, but everyone that lived (and continues to live) in Oaxaca. Two years after the barricades, verbal recollections, jittery reactions to loud noises, and shaking bodies when police forces appeared registered the scars that Oaxacan's bodies and minds continue to bear. These scars are at times visible on the material landscape. Finishing our interview in February of 2008, Mama Lucha swiveled her chair on the impeccable dirt floor and looked around from her kitchen table. She told me how, during the conflict, "Radio Mapache" (Radio Raccoon)—slang for a station supporting Ulises Ruiz—had identified her and her home as a place where Appistas lived. The result of this was evident in her walls, where round holes the width of fingers created beautiful but eerie light beams that shone towards the interior, perhaps tracing the very path of the bullets that made the openings. Mama Lucha and her family left their home after the bullets began to traverse their house and moved to a site in the city center. Displaced: political refugees creating a new community in the camp-like trenches within the war-zone.

Caught in a state of siege that surrounded the city and all who lived in it, for Oaxacans violence was the norm but never became normal. For the state government, however, it was old hat. In 2007, the Centro de Medios Libres (Center of Free Media) published a pamphlet that analyzed Mexico's recent state-sponsored economic and physical repression. Oaxaca figured prominently. In a piece about the rising militarization of the country, as part of this analysis the Centro pointed out that "since 1980," in both Mexico and Central America, "the typology recovered from the manuals of the School of the Americas, founded in 1946, is of Low Intensity Warfare" (2007:11). Fighting a proxy war against socialist radicals, whom it saw everywhere but could not always find, the School of the Americas—training ground by the United States military for Latin American counterinsurgency squads—sought to maintain in power regimes the USA's leaders could trust or manipulate and to repress any and all socialist or opposition groups. Founded in Panama but moving in 1984 to Fort Benning, Georgia, the school has since then taught Latin American militaries and states not only to see the countryside's fields and the city's streets as battle scenes, but also how to engage and fight against a civilian population. Though enemy groups have changed, in this concealed war, the militarization of the everyday and of everywhere in the fields and streets of Latin America has in fact extended itself to include the execution of violence and repression by "shadowy paramilitary death squads and state security forces trained by the United States" (Gill 2004:2). With paramilitary forces utilizing unmarked cars and with civilian clothing, the state's panoptic disciplinary apparatus becomes possibly everywhere and its repressive apparatus becomes possibly anyone.

Though violent clashes of a spectacular nature did occur in Oaxaca in 2006, nonetheless in its everyday manifestation it was not always easy to differentiate unknown others as either friend or foe and thus there was little respite from the constant tension and terror. Yeska, a former graffiti artist, and Beta, currently an architecture student, are two ASARO street artists that I worked with. They made the challenge of determining friend and foe eminently clear in an anecdote they shared with me from their participation in 2006. One afternoon during the APPO take over of the city center, they rested after a march in the shadow of the trees surrounding the church of Santo Domingo. While sitting, Yeska noticed that a man not too far from them held a camera awkwardly in one hand. Yeska saw him press the shutter. He noticed that the man spoke out of the corner of his mouth to no one in particular. Yeska looked around and quickly took note of three other suspicious men. Beta had dozed off, but when he heard from Yeska that they were photographing them, he jumped on his feet and confronted the man. Yeska noticed that the three others quickly left the scene. Surrounded instantly by a group of youths, though he was dressed in civilian clothes the man drew a gun. He pointed it first at Yeska and then at Beta, speaking frantically into his jacket. Beta told him to go ahead and shoot. The man pointed the gun from person to person wildly without knowing what to do, but most likely sure that if he were to shoot he would probably only get one shot. Backing away, he ran off and everyone watched as an unmarked pickup with men on the flatbed holding semi-automatic weapons hoisted him up.

Michel Foucault's writings have convincingly argued for the importance of productive power alongside repressive power in reflections on governmentality (1982). Taking productive power into account meant reconsidering the isomorphism observed between force and the state in Max Weber's characterization "that a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of force* within a given territory" (1946:78). Although there is recognition of the importance of productive power, many nonetheless continue to assume that there is such a "thing" as *the* State. As such, disarticulated from its lived reality and often written about abstractly, encounters such as those between Yeska, Beta, and a plainclothes member of a police force are considered as clashes between the APPO and the State. Rather than a thing called government, for Foucault governmentality pointed to an assemblage of practices whose combined effect on the conduct of conduct across the social produced the dispositions of a normative disciplinary society (1982). Whether across media headlines or in the pages of academic analyses, the notion that the events of 2006 were a conflict between the government and the APPO flattens significant differences in each and erroneously assumes their coherence, unity, and intentionality.

As Laclau has noted, "the people" represents *part* of a community, "a partiality which wants to function as the totality of the community" (2007:81). Making *the* people, thus, is an effect of the discourse of populism that articulates multiple differences as if they not only represented an internal unity but also stood for the entire community itself. As political scientist Timothy Mitchell has argued, moreover, the state is the *effect* of the structure provided by myriad disciplinary processes that guide practices in sites such as the military, schools, and courtrooms that, in their aggregate, suggest an institution that stands apart from the performance of these very practices (1991. See also Coronil 1997; Nelson 2009; Taussig 1997). Throughout the conflict, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz continued to claim he was governing Oaxaca and argued that his rule had not been compromised. Confrontations between Appistas and disparate police, paramilitary forces, and Ulisistas at different barricades dotted across the city suggested that there was little cohesive control. A specially created federal Comisión del Senado

de Gobernabilidad (Senate Commission on Governability) met in Mexico City to deliberate on whether federal intervention was needed in Oaxaca. On the 19th of October they summarized their findings by stating that: "one cannot avoid the grave conditions of instability and ingovernability in the state of Oaxaca; that the juridical order and social peace have been seriously disturbed. However, sticking to the standing juridical framework, this Commission's verdict can only conclude that the acts that this situation have generated do not imply the disappearance, that is, the absence or inexistence, of all the powers of Oaxaca" (in Martínez Vásquez 2007a:126). With a weak PAN party at the federal level needing the support of the PRI to consolidate its tenuous hold on Mexican politics, on this day the fractured nature of governing in Mexico effectively sustained in office an absent and embattled state governor that was in charge in name only.

On Friday, October 27, an APPO assembly called for a two-day, statewide strike and mobilization in order to put further pressure on the state and federal government. As part of this action, barricades were prolonged during the daytime and all government offices were closed down. As a response to this strategic maneuver, a wave of police and paramilitary violence was unleashed under the pretext of restoring access to roads. The operation resulted in the deaths of six more APPO members that weekend. Among the dead on Friday was Indymedia cameraman and reporter Bradley Roland Will. Killed in the Calicanto barricade as he was filming municipal police in civilian clothing shooting at the barricade, Brad's video recorded his own killers. For many, Brad represented not only confirmation of the world's attention upon Oaxaca, but was a potent symbol of global solidarity with Oaxaca's struggle. For the federal state, the death of a citizen of the United States forced their direct involvement in the conflict and bringing to justice those responsible for Brad Will's death became the pretext under which federal police forces would invade Oaxaca that very weekend.

Urged by the APPO general assembly not to provoke federal forces, Appistas and barrikadera/os formed human lines that stood in front of incoming federal police battalions to resist and protest their entry to the city. Clad in full riot-gear, shooting tear-gas canisters at those in front of them and at times using their firearms, the Policía Federal Preventiva, or PFP, pushed into the city on the 29th. In order to move whatever obstacle lay in their path, the Federal Preventive Police was led by heavily armored vehicles equipped with high-pressure water cannons and large metal plates to bulldoze barricades. Recording a well-known public secret that is not news to anyone in Mexico, Osorno writes that "to get together the five thousand elements that participated in 'Operation Oaxaca', federal forces had to turn to the Mexican Army. 'We are the same',

assures the [PFP] member with a baby face, who carries a weapon because his job is to escort one of the principal commanders of the incursion" (2007:224). Pacifist resistance was no match for the training, numbers, and equipment of this militarized police force and by the evening, the PFP had retaken most of the city, including all government offices and the *zócalo*, where the PFP set up their own encampment. As Hugo, an artist supporting the social movement described the scene, "there were so many police there that it looked like a *plantón* of police. That is, the *plantón* of the teachers and the APPO had been replaced by a police *plantón*" (in Denham 2008:173). Over the next few weeks, as federal police tents replaced teacher's tents, many Oaxacans whom I got to know would complain to me over a year later that the federal police, seen as a foreign occupying force, were a thousand times worse than the teachers, as exemplified by their use of the *zócalo* as a large open-air toilet and by allegations that, lacking provisions, they took to ransacking nearby businesses.

On November 2nd, the PFP made a final push towards the intersection of Cinco Señores just outside the University to remove the last significant barricade. Radio broadcasts from stations affiliated with the APPO reported the PFP's advance and called for reinforcements to the barricade. As the Movimiento Popular Revolucionario notes, "the requests from Radio Universidad achieved that, in total, according to different estimates, from five to twenty-thousand people departed from the surrounding neighborhoods to confront the force of two to four-thousand police" (2008:70). The large number of federal police deployed suggests that the federal and state government expected a confrontation; in mobilizing such a massive force, they also effectively managed to create the conditions where a confrontation was inevitable. Hailed by both federal forces on the move and by the radio, the thousands that came out to defend the barricade and the University fought with pvc pipes and fireworks that were used as homemade rockets and by throwing Molotov cocktails at the occupying forces of the federal police. The federal police arrived in full riot-gear and were aided by helicopters and armored vehicles shooting a mix of water and a chemical substance that burned the skin and eyes. The primary weapons used by those gathered to defend the barricade were hands and slingshots used to throw stones at the PFP. Narrating the events of this and other confrontations, Oaxacan plastic artist Guillermo Pacheco told me that during this time women, men, kids—everyone—was stealing shopping carts from chain stores Chedraui and Gigante. These were used to transport either the vinegar, petrol, and women's kotex pads used to make Molotov cocktails or were filled with stones found in the street or, better yet, made by smashing the street itself into pieces. (Hence the prevalent stencil of the market cart that filled city streets, a stencil whose insurgent meaning of rebellion mobilizing a charged symbol of women's difference, reworking corporate property, and reusing the material nature of the street as a weapon might be lost on someone who reads this image merely as a shopping cart.)

On the 2nd, shopping carts filled with stones moved quickly from the back, where people stacked stones or other projectile materials inside, to the front lines where mostly teenage to middle-aged men with faces covered in handkerchiefs threw these missiles at the PFP. Some brought metal garbage lids or other materials to use as shields and construction helmets for protection. Many didn't have any protection, however, and used a mix of bravado, adrenalin, and rage to step up and send the rocks flying. Inside the university campus, a team of medical students attended to the wounded. As Beas Torres narrates, "that day, everyone did something. The baptized *Batalla de Todos Santos* [Battle of All Saints] has a special significance, as for many of its participants the fight that day was against an army of occupation, to confront an invading militia that had come to Oaxaca to sustain a tyrannical governor" (2008:61). Though the federal police continually shot canisters of teargas at those assembled and into the University itself, the PFP also quickly adopted the practice of throwing stones sent their way back towards protestors.

So it was that, facing each other less than fifty yards in places, for about seven hours the same stones flew back and forth between federal police and the barricade defenders. It must have seemed to the PFP forces that no matter how many stones they sent back, and no matter how many individuals they managed to hit and hurt or to drown in a cloud of teargas, there were always more ready to take their place. Finally, overwhelmed by the number of people gathered as much as exhausted by the relentless counterattack, the PFP retreated back to the *zócalo*. Through cellular phones, the radio, and by word of mouth, news of the PFP's retreat resonated throughout the city and state of Oaxaca. For the Movimiento Popular Revolucionario, "it was a great victory of the pueblo, comparable only with the battle of the 14th of June that unleashed the political movement to depose Ulises Ruiz. It heartened the people and demoralized the state's bruisers, that despite all of their equipment could not handle the numbers and determination of the people, enraged and irate by the flood of crimes and aggressions of the repressive forces of the state and federal governments" (2008:71). Though clearly critical in terms of the social movement's material survival, the victory over the federal police was important not only in demonstrating the cumulative strength and resolve of those who fought, but also because it fed the imagination of some participants that the collective subject formed by its barricade sociality could bring down Ulises Ruiz and transform the governing structure of the state.

In the battlefield of the streets, military repression joined economic marginalization, social discrimination, and physical segregation as the most visible expression of the continuing race war in Oaxaca. Philosopher Hannah Arendt has noted that "rage is by no means an automatic reaction to misery and

suffering…. Only where there is reason to suspect that conditions could be changed and are not does rage arise" (1969:63). A calculating rational individual exercising his free will in making decisions about the present and future is central to Arendt's philosophy and is far from the subject that I am arguing was an emergent product of the collective practices and historical contingencies of Oaxaca in 2006. Nonetheless, Arendt's analysis points to how, throughout the conflict, the violence and indignation that arose on the part of social movement participants was not just a response to the violence of various police or Ulisista forces or spurred forward by a desire to settle the account on the accumulated heap of historical injustices; rather, as this emergent community and its collective subject were giving shape to a discursive formation that could imagine other futures, violence was one of the practices of struggle through which *el pueblo* was trying to give shape to that very future.

The exhilaration, sense of camaraderie, and feeling of collective power felt by the victorious APPO and barrikadera/o forces that day would have been recognizable to Fanon. Having participated in Algeria's struggle for independence from French colonial forces, Fanon found that this revolutionary violence was not only necessary in order to defeat the colonizers, but was also creative in its own right. Thus he wrote, "violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organized and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them. Without that struggle, without that knowledge of the practice of action, there's nothing but a fancy-dress parade" (1961:147). For Fanon, collective violence was a practice that produced social truths, and the most important social truth that it engendered was the creation and recognition in the colonized of shared affinities and of forming a collective subject: "for the colonized people this violence, because it constitutes their only work, invests their characters with positive and creative qualities. The practice of violence binds them together as a whole" (1961:93). Ultimately, for Fanon the power of revolutionary violence is transformative not because it may succeed in overthrowing the (colonial) government, but precisely because it produces historical agents that recognize each other as a collective subject through shared practices of struggle.

Violence was not the only creative and collective practice of Oaxaca's revolutionary turn. Forming new social and political organizations, coming together in the *plantones*, marches, assemblies, and barricades, and engaging in violent clashes with police, shared practices of struggle by social movement participants contested Oaxaca's authoritarian model of governing; as Fanon suggests, moreover, for its marginalized participants these were also creating a sense that they were historical protagonists. On my way out the door of Mama Lucha's home in February of 2008, she wanted to let me know that "we are very poor, but very proud and we have to do something…. *Oaxaca es punta de lanza*." This imagination of Oaxaca's marginalized as the spear's tip and of being at the forefront of new possibilities was an effect of the discursive formation produced by the spatiality and sociality of Oaxacans' barricade practices.

Euphoria over defeating the PFP would not last long, however, for not only did this victory fail to translate into the removal of Ulises Ruiz, but the state-sponsored violence also continued without

abating. Events in 2006 would come to a final and violent finish on November 25th when, after the APPO's seventh mega-march drew hundreds of thousands to the street, clashes between the PFP and APPO marchers as they went by the police *plantón* in the *zócalo* quickly escalated into an all-out confrontation. This time, however, after hours of violent fighting—which included the burning of the state's Superior Tribunal of Justice—the PFP managed to take control of the city. Considering the burning of the court records, the battalions of painters that followed closely behind the police as they swept through the city, and claims that the marchers that first threw stones at the police quickly took off, many saw the events of the day as yet another case of a premeditated aggression on the part of the governor's authoritarian apparatus that had planned to take advantage of the march and the continued state of exhaustion produced by the state of siege to strike.

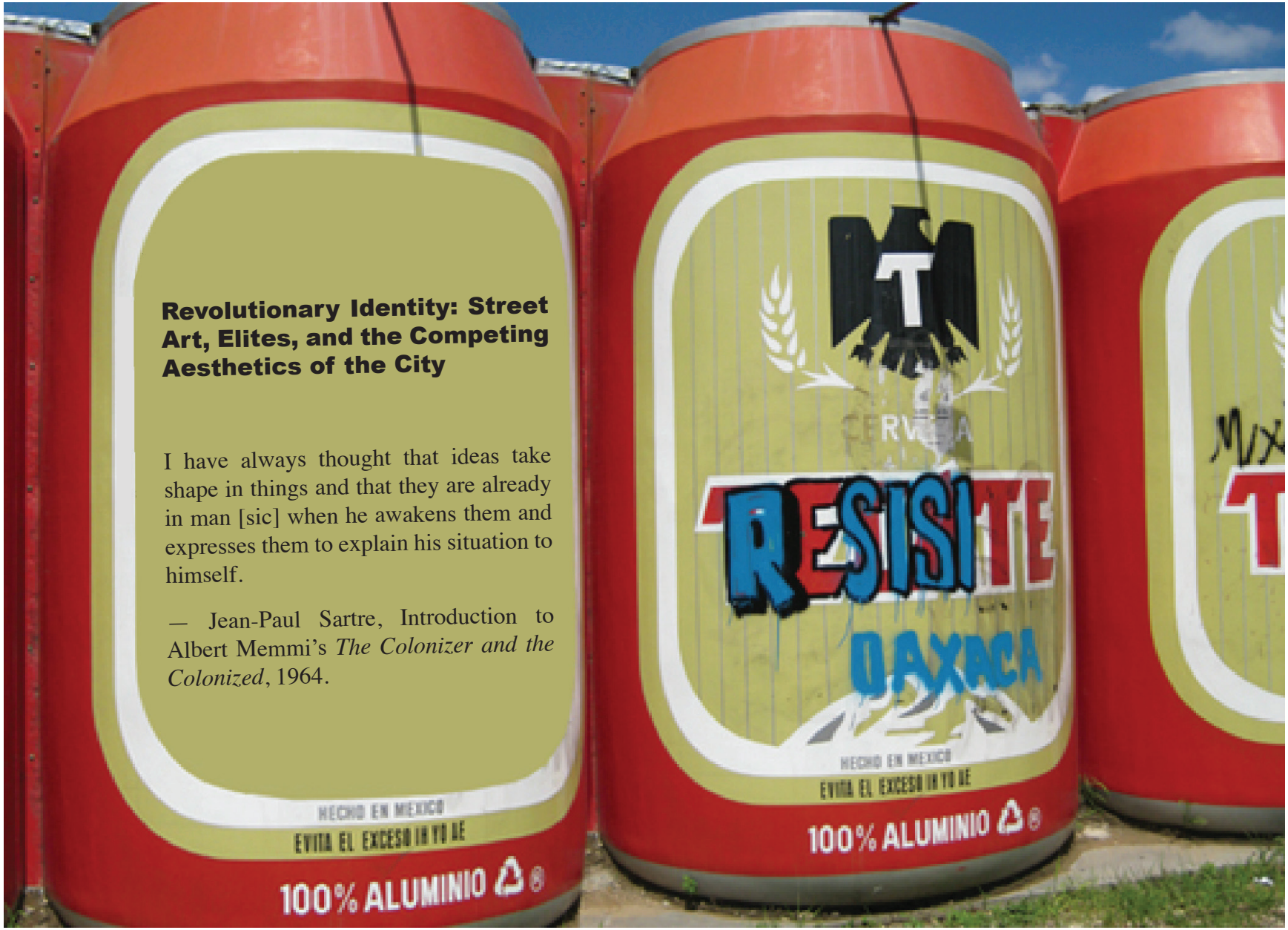
The barricades may have increased participation in the social movement, but they also produced further social polarization and a divided city. Having been singled out as a target by the oaxacaenpaz website, Miguel Ángel Davila, a former coordinator of the Frente de Organizaciones Sindicales Democraticas de Oaxaca (Front for the Organization of Democratic Unions), knew first hand about the social polarization that the movement marshaled. Speaking in his office in January of 2008, after discussing the barricades, Miguel Ángel expressed the opinion that the APPO was in the "dynamic of everyone or no one." Everyone or no one: this appears to be a very different characterization of what APPO was than that provided by the notion of APPO as a space founded on inclusion and the articulation of radical difference. Confronted day in and day out for over five months with marches and manifestations, police brutality and barricade blockades, even for those that did not directly participate, staying neutral would have been extremely difficult. The practices of struggle that animated APPO and the social movement did present opportunities to form new affinities and a rhizomatic spatiality and sociality in Oaxaca, yet they also further widened already existing social polarization. The events of 2006 articulated new people together, and yet disarticulated others. With different channels on the radio dial and on the television screen each supporting particular sides, with city streets as spaces of open confrontation, with the historic center being used as a barracks by both APPO and PFP forces, and with Ulises Ruiz, Ulisista and Appista and Barrikadera/os equally rigid in their defiance of the other, circumstances bordered on a localized civil war.

Using the overwhelming force of its militarized police forces, the state apparatus was finally back in control of the city over five months after the state police forces sent by Ulises Ruiz had first tried to wipe out the teachers' *plantón*. This repression, further militarization of Oaxaca's streets, and the subsequent hunting down of those considered to be the social movement's leaders terrorized many individuals into ending their active and public participation in support of the social movement. Others succumbed

to the depressing realization that, short of taking arms, there was little else that social movement participants could have collectively done to depose Ulises Ruiz, yet he remained in power despite everything. With the graffiti and stencils lining city streets painted white and with cars once again freely circulating throughout the city, as fellow anthropologist and barricade participant Francisco Leonardo Reséndiz noted in July of 2008, "on the 25th and 26th, with everything clean, this was a moment that told you that life went on." After five-and-a-half months of open confrontation, struggle, and open race war on the streets of Oaxaca, however, what might life going on mean?

In late 2007, with just thirty percent of eligible voters taking part, municipal elections in the city of Oaxaca saw PRI candidate José Antonio Fraguas victorious. For the moment, the majority of Oaxacans were clearly disillusioned by any promise of change through representative democracy and, after five months of actively participating in marches and assemblies, many were equally skeptical of populist participatory democracy. As this divided city succumbed further to the fatigue of siege warfare, however, for others like Mama Lucha, Teak, Yeska, and Beta, the practices of struggle that articulated them as part of the collective subject of *el pueblo* continued to interpellate them as a participatory community in action. In the divided city, the cloud of teargas from confrontations and smoke from burning tires at the barricades created a smokescreen that those peering in from beyond could not penetrate: "during those days, crossing a barricade is like going from one world to the other," as politician Tatiana Clouthier Carrillo told Diego Enrique Osorno. "If you see the barricade from the outside there is ignorance and fear, if you take a step and enter, you see the hope" (in Osorno 2007:173). This hope manifested itself through the further sharpening of social antagonisms into stark polar binaries. This hope also manifested itself through the creation of spatial practices and social formations that mobilized people not just to aspire or imagine better futures, but also to continue seeking to actualize these.

Join us, then, around the barricade bonfire and listen to the women tell the story of *La rebelión de las latas* [The Rebellion of the Cans]: "and there we began to think about how we were going to materialize the struggle, because aside from being dreamers we are very practical. And we looked at each other again, thinking. And someone said that we were born on the path, and that we had no other way of conceiving of ourselves except walking. And another scratched her head and asked where we were walking to? And we looked at each other again and thought. Then someone said that the road does not exist but is invented" (in Centro de Medios Libres 2007:18). Segregated by militarization and marginalization in the avenues of the contemporary city, this hope was discovering community and a collective subject through the making and unmaking of the city of walls. Caught within webs of signification not of their own making, people all across the city began to spin their own yarns. Listen a little more: "and in that first moment we thought that we had to change the reality in which we lived. That reality of concrete walls, machines, smoke, advertising billboards that we walked everyday. Transform it into the stage, the platform where the new ideas would go marching by to awaken consciousness and to expand the messages of struggle. And, in the second moment, the cans of spray paint came out into the street. First we did it quietly, at night, looking for dark alleyways…. But then reality, that reality that those above look to hide came tumbling down upon us and we no longer hid. The rebellion of the cans had begun" (in Centro de Medios Libres 2007:18). In the divided city, on Oaxaca's streets and on its walls, the social movement of 2006 brought to light social antagonisms that created a competing aesthetics of the city. In the divided city, on Oaxaca's streets and on its walls, the social movement of 2006 gave shape to collective subjects and community contradictions (Watts 2004)—Ulisista, Appista, barrikadera/o, citizens, *el pueblo*. In 2007, though the barricades were a thing of the past, the collective subject of *el pueblo* and its practices of struggle continued to make all the difference in Oaxaca. Don't just take my word for it, though, for, after all, in Oaxaca the writing is on the walls. Grab your spray can, then, and come along.



Revolutionary Identity: Street Art, Elites, and the Competing Aesthetics of the City

I have always thought that ideas take shape in things and that they are already in man [sic] when he awakens them and expresses them to explain his situation to himself.

— Jean-Paul Sartre, Introduction to Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 1964.

On a crisp October morning in the fall of 2008, under rolling white clouds traveling quickly through a blue sky, I joined fellow ASARO artists Yeska and Acker as they were actively putting together a sand painting at the corner of Calicanto and Lazaro Cardenas. Surrounded by votive candles and the fragrant and bright orange cempoalxochitl flowers (Aztec marigolds) traditional to the Day of the Dead festivities taking place a few days from now, the central image of the sand painting depicted American journalist Bradley Roland Will, a gun aimed at his head with the word PRI written on the handle. Exactly two years after Brad Will's camera filmed the local PRI municipal workers whose bullets killed him at this spot on October 27, 2006, Yeska and Acker's memorial was an offering to the deceased and a reminder that, although known, the government killers had never been brought to justice. With a tree-planting ceremony, speeches, a musical act, and a march to the *zócalo* (main plaza) planned for that day, the events also were a testament to the fact that, two years after the federal police swept through the barricades and the local government whitewashed the city center's stencils and graffiti, the social movement begun in 2006 was far from over.

It was still early in the morning when Yeska and Acker finished the sand painting, and the crowd that would soon surround the intersection where the Calicanto barricade had been located had not yet materialized; the street, however, had already been barricaded at all intersections by four appropriated city buses and one Pemex gasoline truck. Using the back of one of the city buses as a canvas, Yeska and Acker proceeded to spray the stencil of Brad and the gun onto the vehicle, the black spray paint glossy against the white metal surface. As if to underscore the point, they added a voice bubble, with Brad now letting us know that "yo si sé quien me mato" (I do know who killed me). ASARO was not the only group using the city spaces of this makeshift plaza to make a statement that day. As the sun reached its noon zenith and the crowd began to pack in tightly, the following stencils were also making their mark: on the cement sidewalk one image depicted the silhouettes of Brad's shooters, the words "lxs asesinxs son del PRI!!!" (the killers are from the PRI!!!). Another sidewalk stencil had a likeness of Mexican anarchist Flores Magón, accompanied by his famous saying "Viva tierra y libertad" (long live land and liberty). In green lettering, someone had sprayed "Oaxaca resiste" (Oaxaca resists)

on the Pemex truck and, with talk of privatizing the national oil company, red lettering reminded everyone that Pemex "es de Mexico" (is Mexico's). On the side of another commandeered public bus, one stencil called for "dignidad rebelde" (rebellious dignity) while Sr. Smock's stencil of a military man shooting an AK-47 at "*el pueblo* (appo)" was accompanied by the phrase "ni con tankes ni metrallas al pueblo se le calla!!" (neither with tanks nor machine guns will you silence the people!!). Other artistic creations included an oversized *monigote* (puppet) of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, prominent red horns protruding from his head and blood from his lips, and a traditional *ofrenda* (altar) to the memory of Brad Will. Homemade placards calling for the killers to be brought to justice and other words of outrage at the government were also scattered among the dense human landscape that gathered for the march.

Before setting off for the *zócalo*, the crowd (and media) gathered around the spot where the tree-planting ceremony was taking place and then listened to short speeches blasted from the sound-system set up for the musical act, *Raíces* (Roots). Though the band had the crowd moving shortly after taking over the microphones, the crowd's energy further elevated when they began to play the "son de las barricadas," a song that had become the 2006 movement's anthem. The song creatively fuses the fact that "son" is both the style of music and also means "to be" in Spanish to identify everyone who participated in the movement as fellow fighters from the barricades. The song's beginning up to the first four lines of the repeating refrain are as follows:

El día catorce de junio del año del 2006 /
On the 14th of June of the year 2006

en la plaza de Oaxaca se puso el mundo al revés /
in the plaza of Oaxaca the world turned upside down

temprano por la mañana, a punto de amanecer /
early in the morning, just as day was breaking

nadie hubiera imaginado lo que iba a suceder /
no one would have imagined what was about to go down

La huelga del magisterio tenía la plaza tomada /
the teachers' strike had taken the plaza

mientras que el pinche gobierno preparaba la celada /
while the fucking government prepared the ambush

antes que amanezca el día, quitamos este plantón /
before day breaks we will wipe out this strike

gritaba la policía y empezó la represión /
shouted the police and so began the repression

¿Qué de dónde son, qué de dónde son? /
Where are they from, where are they from?

Que son de la barricada /
they are from the barricades

¿Y de dónde son, de dónde son? /
and from where, where are they from?

Que son de la barricada /
they are from the barricades

Most often a part of marches and commemorative rallies, on this day and on many others, the vocal and animated collective singing of the "son de las barricadas" effectively recreates the visceral sense of unity from the barricades that it references. On the anniversary of Brad Will's murder, the lead singer from *Raíces* concluded the song by adding another verse, spoken as a poem following the rhythm of the song, telling us how

Por el pueblo voy pasando y oyendo sus sentimientos /
Through the town and people I walk, listening to its feelings

los recogo y al momento se lo devuelvo cantando /
I gather these and this moment return them singing

también se lo digo versando con mi verso humilde y fresco /
I also tell them through this fresh and humble verse

lo poco que doy lo ofresco con alegría y con encanto /
the little I give I offer it with joy and delight

Y al pueblo de doy mi canto porque al pueblo pertenezco /
and to the pueblo I give my song because to the pueblo I belong

The crowd roared their approval at the improvised words and soon after we moved en masse toward the city center. As we marched, the group chanted slogans against the government and street artists took advantage of this moment, as they had since 2006, to place their images down the length of the route. Alongside ASARO's stencil of Brad and the gun, images on the walls of this UNESCO World Heritage Site put up by the FPR, a Marxist-Leninist organization, made clear their stance against the government's plan to privatize public schools while outside of upscale restaurants and banks anarchist groups placed images calling for the death of capitalism.

As a black sky replaced the day's sunshine, the march entered the main plaza where a *plantón* (sit-in strike) and an army of street-vendors had taken over the *zócalo* (main plaza). Here, flags from marching FPR supporters flew by an anarchist faction that had stopped marching and were attempting to use their spray cans to set fire to one section of the square. Gathering around the kiosk in the center of the plaza, people listened attentively to speeches against the government from varying sides of the political spectrum before finally dissipating, the night's chill having squarely settled on this valley in the hills.

The last chapter stressed how participatory practices during the height of the social movement in 2006 produced a barricade sociality with seeming transformative political potential out of the radical difference of APPO participants and local residents; in doing so, I noted how the sense of togetherness created by those that participated in the *plantones*, marches, assemblies, and barricades articulated new collective subjects and yet also emphasized that the divide between those that were actively involved in the movement and those who opposed it further contributed to the polarization of Oaxacan society. The commemorative events on the second anniversary of Brad Will's death bear witness to the fact that barricade sociality remains an important condition of possibility and groundwork for current struggles in Oaxaca. Though no longer manifested through weekly confrontations between police forces and protestors, even if today's battles may seem more ephemeral because fought with sung words and with images spray painted at night on the façades of the city that are then painted over during the day, the trenches between the two camps in these competing aesthetics of the city are just as acutely drawn and the political and social stakes are just as high. The way in which the city is marked through stencils that challenge the authoritarian government or through billboards promoting Oaxacan culture forms what I am here calling a competing aesthetics of the city and are consequential insofar as each interpellates or invites different subjects to dwell in the space.

Given the stark polarization of Oaxacan society between government supporters and protestors, and the sharp internal differences within social movement participants (for example between the FPR faction looking to take over the state and anarchists looking to abolish the state—and everything in between), this chapter will address whether the competing aesthetics of the city can continue to map out a space for collective practice and shared identity for social movement participants. First, a discussion of the political street art of the Asamblea de Artistas Revolucionarios de Oaxaca (Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca) will provide the means by which to explore the continuing production of barricade sociality and the interpellation of the collective subject of *el pueblo* after the barricades of 2006. Then, the struggle over cultural production and representation as manifested in the festival of the Guelaguetza will provide a means by which to address the stakes and effects of creating shared identifications amid the competing aesthetics

of this divided city. Throughout this chapter, as in the dissertation more broadly, I am concerned with showing how the material milieu is a consequential actant—to use sociologist Bruno Latour's terminology (1999)—in the formation of subjects and spaces. As philosopher Henri Lefebvre noted (1974), the triangulation between material, social, and mental relations produces space. Anthropologist Donald Moore notes that this triangulation forms a "spatiality—a term emphasizing the production of space, its discursive and material practices, as well as its cultural understandings" (2005:3). Following Lefebvre and Moore, I want to attend to how this triangulation also produces particular subjects, that is, I am concerned with the relational entanglement between sociality and spatiality. Continuing to assess clashes between government forces and social movement participants, in part I wish to return to the iconic scene of interpellation between a policeman and his subject; much has been made of the relational and performative nature of this encounter, yet the streetscape that forms the site of interpellation itself has not been the subject of analysis. It is my contention that spatiality is an active and important participant in the process of producing individuals as subjects, an argument that I take up here through street art.

Barricade Sociality and the Making of el Pueblo

Born during the uprising of 2006, and having recently celebrated their fourth anniversary, the Asamblea de Artistas Revolucionarios de Oaxaca, or ASARO, is a prominent political street art group that I followed since mid-2007 and labored with for a year in 2008. Like others who regularly found themselves in the city center, I first came across the group's art on the city's walls, their stencils providing a contrasting backdrop to research with architects and urban planners on the dilemmas plaguing this World Heritage Site. Having soon amassed an extensive image catalog of their prolific public artwork, I approached the group in 2007 during the making of another sand painting for an APPO member killed by the government and was presented with a colorful foldout triptych titled "Nosotros somos ASARO" (We Are ASARO). With images of stencils and woodblock prints as well as a written statement, this was the group's manifesto, which I translate and reproduce here in full because the themes it raises animate the questions of this chapter and of the dissertation as a whole.

> "The creative capacity has been a strategy that the pueblo of Oaxaca has historically used to survive and revitalize. The Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca grew out of the necessity to refuse and transcend authoritarian forms of power and an institutional culture characterized by its discriminatory and dehumanizing nature in looking to impose one version of reality and a morality based on simulacrum.
>
> Confronted with the irrationality of government and its oppressive forms of sustaining itself in power, ASARO looks to create images that synthesize the critical force that is born in the periphery, in the barrios, the pueblos, and in youth.

We have retaken the form of the assembly because we believe in the possibility to recover the power of the collective in art and because the assembly is the form in which the pueblos have a dialogue and hold decisions based on collective interests. In this way, we respond as well to the APPO's call to create an ample front of civil resistance.

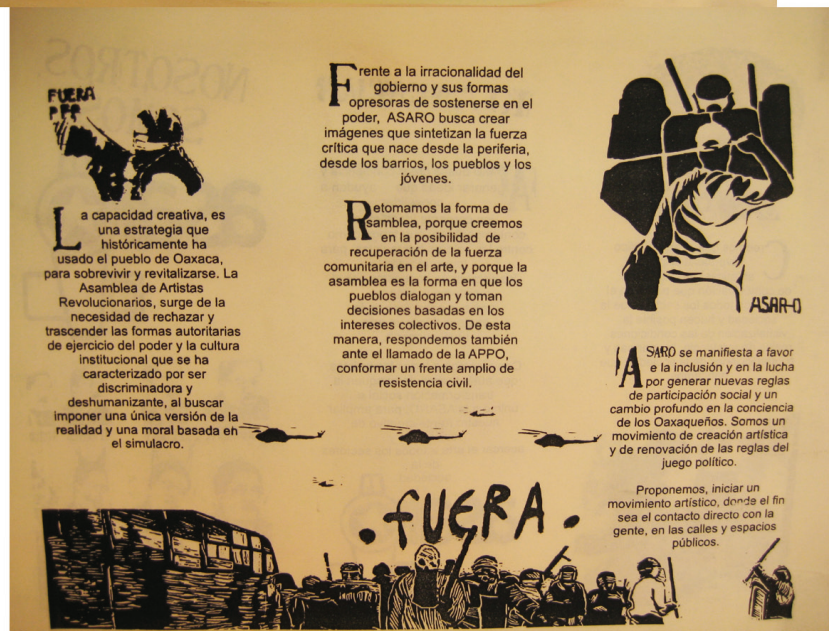
ASARO manifests itself in favor of inclusion and of the fight to generate new rules for social participation and a profound change in Oaxacan's consciousness. We are an artistic movement and are remaking the rules of the political game.

We seek to initiate an artistic movement where the final goal is direct contact with people in the streets and public spaces.

We believe that public art (in all its diverse artistic disciplines) is a form of communication that allows for a dialogue with all sectors of society and which makes possible the visualization of the real conditions of existence—the norms and contradictions of the society that we all inhabit.

ASARO seeks to create *conciencia* [consciousness / awareness] and to generate ideas that help to consolidate a contemporary ideology, one that has as its core humanistic values, in order to break the schemes imposed by the system and to generate a society free of alienation and a revolutionary art.

We call on all artists who truly seek social transformation to join ASARO in order to broaden our creative front of resistance and in order to bring art closer to all the sectors of society."



ASARO's manifesto embodies the challenges and frictions of competing aesthetics in Oaxaca. Critical of and yet entangled with the state apparatus, ASARO looks to the creative capacity of the marginalized periphery and in the practice of the assembly in indigenous pueblos for alternative ways to conceive and practice relations of governing. Critical of and yet entangled with the established art market in Oaxaca, ASARO looks to break open the closed spaces of the gallery and museum via the street as a way to reach Oaxacans and generate a collective discourse and awareness of present reality absent in public space. ASARO's highly polemical art and participatory art practices underscore tensions within a social movement whose politics of social struggle defines identity and belonging through binary oppositions between rival camps while yet also aiming for inclusive social participation and seeking to create community. Furthermore, ASARO's art practices embody the challenging contradictions of trying to sustain a social and artistic revolution that is critical of art's commercialization and capitalist exploitation while also needing to sell its art in order to continue to create more art and revolution. How, then, does the creativity of political street art in Oaxaca continue to sustain the social movement begun in 2006 and contribute to creating both social and artistic change?

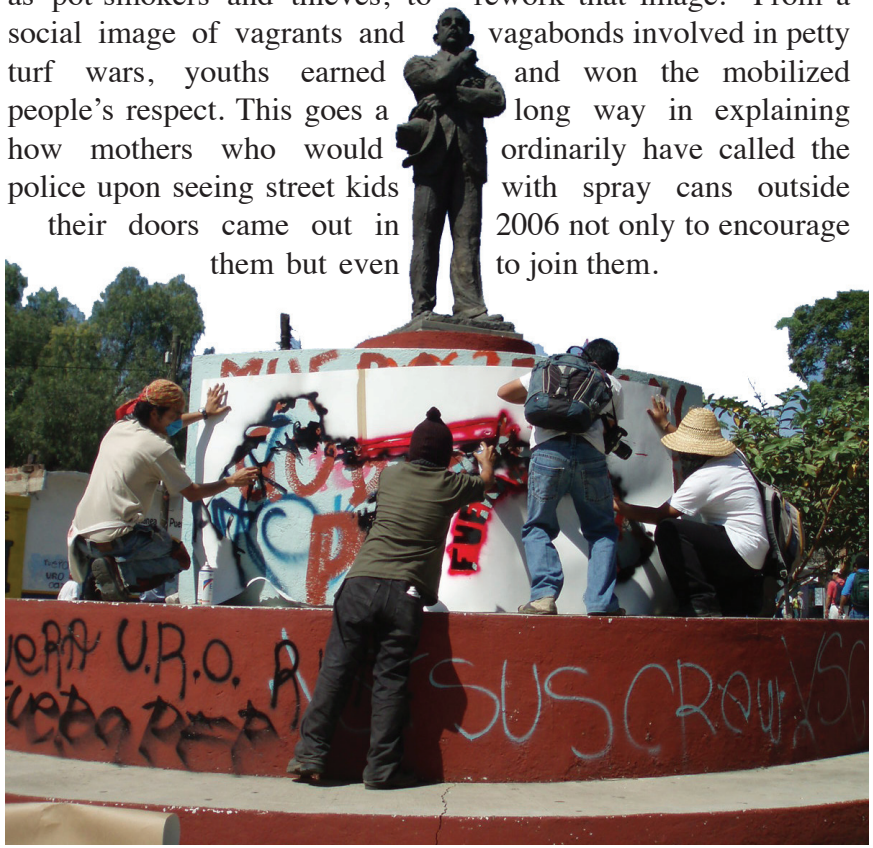
Though perhaps obvious, in a moment when the streets are no longer taken over by APPO members, groups practicing political street art continue to fuel the social movement by steadfastly using city walls as canvases for socio-political art. Active throughout the year, street artists are a continual challenge to the municipal and state government's claim to be in control of the city and of any return to "normality"—as the slogan of a 2007 advertising campaign proclaimed. The graphic power of stencils has not been lost on the government. A permanent painting brigade targets political stencils, erasing them usually within a day or two after they appear, many times leaving the graffiti beside them untouched. Police practices also differentiate between those who are spray-painting their tag and those who are putting up political images, often fining the first and detaining and intimidating the latter. Despite the danger and the fleeting life of their images in the militarized space of today's city streets, street artists continue to defiantly put up their stencils. From a stencil placed on a wall to that stencil being painted over to another stencil being placed on that same wall, the competing aesthetics of the city between the government and street artists continues to articulate both in an antagonistic relationship.

Nonetheless, political street art transforms Oaxaca's streets, reminding everyone that in 2006 the walls of the historic center

formed the largest community mural in Latin America and were an important site for the public projection of discontents and wishes for alternative futures. As it was in the barricades, children, construction workers, young anarchists, old socialists, professors and street vendors—a significant cross-section of Oaxacans—participated in the creation of this collective mural. In March of 2008, ASARO artist Mario explained that, "the social movement in Oaxaca opened the eyes of many people. The people, these very same people appropriated the images. *El pueblo* does not feel identified as creative. But during the movement *el pueblo* was carried away by the artistic, as creators." At the most basic level, this continued practice reminds the collective subject of *el pueblo* that during the social movement in 2006, central to the practices of protest and to the discursive formation that developed was the notion that marginalized Oaxacans have a right and need to participate in making decisions about Oaxaca's present and future. In a state where 19.3% of the population above the age of 15 cannot read or write (Conapo 2006), moreover, the act of putting a visual image legible to all was in and of itself a critical and political act.

Though most street art groups and collectives active today formed during the social movement in 2006, APPO participants have not always welcomed their interventions. In October of 2008, ASARO member Chichas—an extremely talented print maker—recalled how after six months of struggle, on the "25th of November [of 2006], people helped them paint during the march. However, many people also yelled at you not to paint." For many, the mixed reaction to spray-painting city walls stemmed from the negative associations the public had with graffiti as unreadable scribbles that disaffected and vagrant gangs of teenagers and those in their early 20s—*chavos banda*—would indiscriminately place all over the city. The social movement, however, pushed the chavos banda to develop a newfound sense of political participation and broader identification with society. Speaking on this point with me in December of 2007, activist and academic Sergio Beltrán observed

that, "while the movement of the teachers union has a history of years, the youths do not, and the [political] participation of youths was limited." Before, moreover, when any kind of political graffiti appeared, Sergio noted that it was tied to "themes, eyes from abroad." (He mentioned the Zapatistas and campaign to free Mumia Abu-Jamal as examples.) We spoke about how APPO had radicalized youths and the graffiti scene, providing a local focus that incited them to write their histories on the walls. For Sergio, the result was that, during the movement, graffiti and the participation of the chavos banda helped to "vindicate the youth, their image as pot-smokers and thieves, to rework that image." From a social image of vagrants and vagabonds involved in petty turf wars, youths earned and won the mobilized people's respect. This goes a long way in explaining how mothers who would ordinarily have called the police upon seeing street kids with spray cans outside their doors came out in 2006 not only to encourage them but even to join them.



In the streets, next to the housewives marching with pots and pans, the teachers shoring up the *plantón* in the *zócalo*, and the neighborhood clusters who were manning the barricades, many once mistrusted youths found a place and won acceptance in the broader movement as street artists or at the front lines of police clashes. As these different social groups were creating a commons through the practices of struggle, the stencil images of street artists were important in helping to articulate the discursively produced interests of social movement participants and to congeal the collective subject of *el pueblo*. The creativity of political street art in Oaxaca today continues to sustain the social movement not only because its images continue to articulate shared concerns of *el pueblo*, but also because the ongoing participation of the youths making up the majority of street artists today embodies the political and social transformation that took place across many sectors of Oaxacan society as these came together to form APPO and the collective subject of *el pueblo*.

Through their participation, street artists and other youths were reworking not only the city's walls, but also redefining the contours of collective belonging. Though there are as many reasons for becoming a street artist as there are practitioners, a theme continually voiced by street artists I interviewed and those I worked with reiterates the sentiment of being both a part of and also of giving voice to the struggles of *el pueblo* verbalized earlier by the lead singer of *Raíces*: as one art collective put it, "visual resistance is our weapon.... We express that which comes from inside, not only from the heart, but also from our conscience and all of this sentiment is transferred to images that travel through our memory. In all of this being placed on the street, it reaches everyone, from the poorest to the richest. Our goal is to reach *el pueblo*, because we are part of it, we live with it and we want something better for it" (Arte Jaguar 2007). Though placed on

walls where they are quickly painted over and are thus ephemeral, Arte Jaguar invites us to also consider their enduring effects, the way in which these images create a visual record in the memory of those who repeatedly see them on city walls as they navigate the city. Though visible to all who pass by, Arte Jaguar makes it clear that stencils on Oaxaca's streets seek to hail or interpellate *el pueblo*.

With images of priest Miguel Hidalgo calling for liberty, much as he did when his church bells began Mexico's war of independence, images of indigenous archers taking aim, and images of women with crossed gun-belts and rifles asking viewers "sexo debil?" (the weak sex?), stencils in public space reference a long history of everyday suffering and shared struggle. These interventions in public space certainly are meant to remind *el pueblo*—and others who stop to pay attention to them—of a long history of everyday suffering and struggle; that is, of the systemic nature of the marginalization of *el pueblo* and, equally important, of their courage in mobilizing to find a solution. Stencils on the streets often depict the violence of police forces and point to the authoritarian character of government figures like Ulises Ruiz. With images of kids drawing pictures on the sidewalk, indigenous women marching through the city, and young men throwing Molotov cocktails in the air, the images that find their way onto Oaxaca's walls are not simply depicting a shared history, however, but are articulating the moments of suffering and struggle by different groups as part of a common and collective experience. The history of political struggle varies greatly between different pueblo communities. These differences are consequential and creating the collective subject of *the* pueblo out of *many* pueblos does minimize their particularities. The local power struggles, economic entanglements, and issues of gender relations of the pueblo of weavers in Teotitlán del Valle (Stephen 2005), for example, have a radically different trajectory from the formation of the leftist political coalition of COCEI in the Isthmus of Oaxaca (Campbell et al. 1993). In the city of Oaxaca, the political experience and struggles of youths have been different from that of the teachers union.

As the previous chapter argued, though, the collective subject of *el pueblo* articulates its multiple differences and demands through the nodal point of a populist discourse against authoritarianism. As such, *el pueblo* is not articulated together through an essentialized identity that posits a unitary history but is articulated rather by a shared affinity (Haraway 1991). Standing on an African shore, After historian W. E. B. Du Bois had discredited the relationship between race and biology, he nonetheless marveled at the strange affinity that he felt with Africa. Reflecting on this, Du Bois concluded that "the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery" (1940:640). Through their participation in *plantones*, marches, assemblies, and barricades, Oaxacans were articulating their kinship with each other as part of a similar shared history of suffering and struggle. Stencils on Oaxaca's walls rendered these histories of suffering side by side on

walls throughout the city that visually framed these experiences as a shared heritage of one common struggle.

As both an artistic and political practice, however, what kind of representation of *el pueblo* is produced by placing stencils on city walls? In asking whether the subaltern can speak, literary critic Gayatri Spivak smartly pointed out that in analyzing representations one must distinguish between "representation as 'speaking for'… and representation as 're-presentation'" (1988:275). Practices of struggle in the social movement were on the whole a repudiation of the notion that any proxy could "speak for" or represent the collective. Street art is no different. As is clear from Arte Jaguar's statement, while street artists feel they are a part of *el pueblo*, they do not claim to be speaking for *el pueblo*—as the group's spokespersons or ambassadors—but rather see themselves as both speaking *as* part of and *to el pueblo*. Similarly, ASARO's slogan is "arte del pueblo y para el pueblo" (art by the pueblo and for el pueblo). Street art is a form of re-presentation, it offers a portrait, a depiction offered from the perspective of the chavos banda. For some of the passersby that see them on the street, they may feel struck by the images and share the combative sentiment of former IAGO director Fernando Gálvez de Aguinaga, who writes that, "the artists launched their works like the youth launched stones in the barricades" (2007d). For other passersby that are interpellated by the portrait as *el pueblo*, they may find the image to be a true re-presentation of their experiences and struggles or of those that they are coming to recognize a kinship with and the affinity of shared struggle.

Whether depicting suggestive images of grasshoppers in gas masks surrounded by fields colonized by transgenic corn or portraying realistic images marking important battles with police, the clear-cut aesthetic and often blunt socio-political message of politicized street art in Oaxaca has made quite a visual impression upon Oaxacan walls and minds in the past four years. Commenting on ASARO's art, Oaxacan artist Arnulfo Aquino Casas stated that "the images, which circulated (and continue to circulate) during the Oaxacan movement, have had such a presence and impact in the Oaxacan community and on national and international tourists that they have given the movement its image, a traditional and contemporary image, urban, rebellious, critical, dynamic,

conceptual and malleable and as such an artistic expression" (2007). In the absence of the barricades, images that reference the carts filled with stones, Molotov cocktails, or homemade rockets that were used during struggles with police interpellate *el pueblo* by way of the circulation and reiteration of the discursive formation on the commons that was forged during the barricades of 2006. As Chichas mentioned to me in October of 2008, the effect of these "images that repeated was that the people identified themselves with the image and in seeing them." That *el pueblo* identifies themselves with and through these images is consequential for, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall has noted, "an effective suturing of the subject to a subject-position requires, not that the subject is 'hailed', but that the subject invests in the position" (1996b:6). In other words, whether through an utterance or an image, interpellation is not a one-way street but, to put it in Hall's terms, is an articulation, a process of being positioned and positioning oneself in relation to a particular discursive formation. Through their message, iconography, and by the sheer fact that these images

and the groups that place them have been present in the streets and in Oaxacan's minds for some time now, those who recognize themselves as APPO and *el pueblo* have both come to identify with these images and to become identified by them.

One effect of ASARO's street art was to continue to interpellate the collective subject of *el pueblo*. This effort was not directed only at those who already recognized or identified themselves as *el pueblo*, however, but also to those who might *become* subjects of the discursive formation of *el pueblo*. For Edgar Saavedra, cultural editor for the Oaxacan magazine *Mujeres* (Women), "the revolutionary attitude of ASARO is centered around invective images that have as their objective awakening consciousness in order to create an ample front of thinking individuals and realize, in the best of cases, diverse actions against bad government" (2007:45). With a collection of their woodblock prints shown in September 2007 under the title of "Abriendo Conciencia" (Opening Consciousness), it could be said that ASARO images explicitly attempted to open consciousness; they did so, though, by positing a project and model of *conciencia* very similar to that put forward by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire when he wrote that: "the fundamental role of those committed to cultural action for conscientization [*concientização*] is not properly speaking to fabricate the liberating idea, but to invite the people to grasp with their minds the truth of their reality" (1970b:59). Articulating multiple registers of shared struggle in a visual re-presentation, ASARO stencils hailed *el pueblo*'s current and becoming subjects precisely through Freire's sense of invitation.

Wheat-pasted on the wall of an abandoned building alongside Macedonio Alcalá, Oaxaca's popular pedestrian street, two posters announcing the show articulated linkages between current unrest and historical struggles; one image depicts Emiliano Zapata in his

famed hat and crossed bullet-belts alongside individuals wearing the equally recognizable *pasamontañas* (ski masks) of the Zapatistas. Another image depicts the statue of Oaxaca's most illustrious figure, the liberal Zapotec president and champion of indigenous rights Benito Juárez being mocked and ridiculed today by federal police. Though neither image uses words, the recognizable iconography establishes common threads between historical struggles for social justice and contemporary struggles whose aims and ideals are thereby posited as a continuation of these struggles. Three images point to the power and force of people acting in concert and depict groups of Oaxacans coming together under banners that call for "el gobierno del pueblo por el pueblo y para el pueblo" (the government of the people by the people and for the people). Noting that here we have "colonos en pie de lucha" (neighbors ready at the fight), both the written and the graphic nature of the images point to the way in which the participation of young and old neighbors, women and men, those in indigenous dress and those wearing shorts and sneakers produced the solidarity in action of "la comuna de Oaxaca" (the Oaxacan commune) in 2006. Two images depict political prisoners behind bars, one actively screaming out for the release of all political prisoners while the other shows an inert figure sitting on a cell floor; both accentuate the skeletal nature of the prisoner's bodies, reminding the viewer that unless something is done about those behind bars, they will find their end in jail.

Two other ASARO images depict women dressed in regional indigenous dress similar to the tourist advertising that papers the city and is used to promote Oaxaca. As anthropologist Deborah Poole has noted, the circulation of images of Oaxacan women in indigenous dress "in the early twentieth century provided an imaginative conceptual framework for an emergent, shared sentiment of 'Oaxacanness'" (2004:41). In a territory that was fragmented geographically, ethnically, and politically, the effort to promote Oaxacan state unity through difference was a highly political project (see Hirsch 2000 for a related perspective on the management of difference in the Soviet Union). Poole notes that this shared identity "gained purchase in the popular imagination through the intimate association of both race and region with

women's clothes and the female body" (2004:41). As ideal-types, women and women's regional dress—or *traje*—rooted particular places and people as symbols of the unity in diversity of the state: culture, these twentieth century images stated, was the way through which Oaxacans affirmed their common belonging and the only acceptable plane through which they were allowed to demonstrate their differences. With one of the ASARO images depicting a woman's face covered with a handkerchief and the other crouching as if ready to spring, and with the words "lucha" (fight) and "resiste" (resist), here ideal-types taken as icons of the state's cultural heritage are transformed into women as symbols of lively resistance. Looking to open consciousness, ASARO's art invited the passersby to become involved in the social movement and sought to transform the social and political landscape from one that was populated by ideal types and passive spectators to one that was saturated by engaged participants.

Though I have translated it as opening consciousness, "Abriendo Conciencia" can also be translated as "awareness." Given that for philosopher Jacques Rancière it is precisely through the question of awareness and of collective belonging that he connects politics to aesthetics, his writings help shed further light on the political and social effect of ASARO's art in Oaxaca. For Rancière, "aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense—re-examined perhaps by Foucault—as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (2000:13). Though seemingly connected to the issue of giving the subaltern voice, Rancière's more fundamental point is that aesthetics, like politics, has the capacity to challenge the given order of things and that it does so, moreover, not only by unmasking the taken-for-granted, common ground of shared understanding and practice—what he terms the distribution of the sensible—but that it does so by producing new possibilities for collective subjectivation.

Thinking of the sensible as that which ties our embodied experience to cognition, that is, as the interplay between sensory experience and how subject's make sense of things, Rancière writes that "politics invents new forms of collective enunciation; it re-frames the given by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible" (2010:139). Following on the heels of Michel Foucault's insights on the conduct of conduct (1982) and Henri Lefebvre's production of space (1974), Rancière places aesthetics as an articulatory link between the lived and conceived or the embodied and perceived, yet does so in relation to the way in which both politics and art help delineate the social and physical place that map "our" position as recognizable subjects of and for the community—what we do and how we do it, where we fit in and how we define the contours of our social experience. As he states, "the important thing is that the question of the relationship between aesthetics and politics be raised at this level, the level of the sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of this visibility and of its organization" (2000:18). Repeatedly asserting the presence of the enunciative collective subject of *el pueblo* in the material landscape, street art interrupts the given distribution of the sensible of Oaxaca as a site and social centered on its status as a World Heritage Site.

On May 6, 2007, the archbishop of Oaxaca declared at a press conference that not all the voices that take to the street represent the people of Oaxaca and that, insofar as demonstrations are respectful they are within the framework of freedom of expression but warned that they become unacceptable once they seek to damage the city center and the patrimony of *Oaxaqueños*, or Oaxacans. Political theorist Uday Singh Mehta might recognize *Oaxaqueños* as the frame of a "liberal universalism" whose contours appear to be expansive, yet in practice form the structural limit and litmus test for inclusion into liberal freedoms (1999). Whether from architects, government dignitaries, or the archbishop, much of the official discourse about the visual and social state of the city center returns to the question of the harm that is being done by marches, strikes, and street art to the heritage of Oaxaqueños and of humanity. Since Oaxaca was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, city elites and government functionaries have not only cultivated and policed its colonial image but also generously profited from it through their control of tourism and urban development. In this time, the crafting of an image "proper" to Oaxaqueño identity has become synonymous with the production of a space imagined as appealing to tourists. This image has given form to a particular architectural morphology—two-story, traditional, colonial, colorful; this image has also framed a particular vision of the place of everyday Oaxacans within its social landscape—folkloric, traditional, a cultural attraction to complement the black and green pottery, wooden figurines, woven rugs, archaeological sites, and

regional cuisine the state is known for. An image of place and people that, as Poole notes (2004), is also part of a political project producing a distribution of the sensible where cultural diversity depoliticizes difference (see also Brown 2006; Hale 2002; McClure 1990).

Critical theorist Diana Fuss has written on how colonial relations of domination produce a Manichean process of subjectification where "identification…is itself an imperial process, a form of violent appropriation in which the Other is deposed and assimilated into the lordly domain of Self" (1994:23; see also Povinelli 2002). The Oaxacan elite's invitation to the marginalized majorities to become "proper" Oaxaqueños posited their acceptance and submission to this vision of folkloric identity as the terms under which they would be recognized as valid subjects. With the docile Oaxacan majorities in revolt, the social movement of 2006 clearly disrupted this idyllic vision of placid, content, ethnographic people populating the city. Moreover, with artworks referencing long histories of struggle, street artists call to attention the fact that the historic center has over 500 years of blood that has seeped into its stones, a history of race war whose dark legacy is as much a heritage of Oaxaca as its UNESCO status. In contradistinction to the ways in which, at its broadest, referencing *el pueblo* today marks out the collective subject position of all the individuals who were involved in the social movement of 2006 or who today would have affinities with it, Oaxaqueño is meant to reference a more inclusive collective that would encompass everyone who lives in Oaxaca or who identifies themselves as Oaxacan. However, though it marks out the public spaces of the city center as being the heritage of *all* Oaxacans, official discourse (and police practices) make it clear that not every Oaxacan or every form of local expression is welcome there. Street art thus calls into question this discursive formation that positions Oaxacans and Oaxaca as a people and place in the service of a tourist economy from which elites and governing functionaries have profited both economically and politically, but which has impoverished the vast majority and wrecked the social and material landscape in the process.

ASARO art is political not merely because it has authoritarian governing and social themes as its focus, but more importantly to the extent that it contests the distribution of the sensible of Oaxaca's physical landscape as a UNESCO World Heritage Site where *el pueblo* is understood as a tranquil, folkloric prop rather than as a collective political subject. Challenging dominant Oaxaqueño

identity and the taken-for-granted social hierarchy, ASARO art and APPO movement have both created and contributed to the contested aesthetics and competing political subjectivity between *el pueblo* and Oaxaqueños. Art historian Rosalyn Deutsche writes that "categories like 'the public' can, of course, be constructed as naturally or fundamentally coherent only by disavowing the conflicts, particularity, heterogeneity, and uncertainty that constitute social life" (1996:259); similarly, categories like *el pueblo* or *Oaxaqueños* can only be constituted as coherent social categories only by flattening out their "constitutive contradictions" (Spivak 1988) and by sidestepping their internal differences. As political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe note, because social relations are discursively constructed in relation to others, identity, or any totality "only exists as a partial limitation of the field of contingency. It is in this terrain, where neither a total interiority nor a total exteriority is possible, that the social is constituted" (1985:111). Because *el pueblo* and Oaxaqueños are subject positions whose identity is partially fixed in relation to the other, neither of these can be taken as a stand-in for "the public" in Oaxaca, yet by further exploring the contested contours and the politics of aesthetics that produce these collective subject positions, a better understanding of the way in which these form competing aesthetics of the city and of the stakes involved will become clearer.

UNESCO and the Politics of Oaxaca's Authoritarian Heritage

Begun in the 16th century as a Dominican monastery, the ex-convent of Santo Domingo de Guzmán is today the home of a regional museum housing important pre-Columbian artifacts as well as the site of an ethnobotanical garden with diverse plants from across the state. Here, on December 7th of 2007, in a narrow lower hall now turned into an auditorium, the beautifully restored ex-convent was the fitting site for a conference celebrating the 20th anniversary of the inscription of the archeological ruins of Monte Albán and the city center as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The current state of these World Heritage Sites and the challenges of conservation were the main themes that anthropologists and architects were to speak on over the course of the next two days. Looking around at the scattered groups seated in the slender auditorium as the conference was about to begin, it was also evident from the many familiar faces that anthropologists and architects were also the main audience for this event.

After discussing Monte Albán in the morning, the theme of the afternoon was devoted to the historic city center of Oaxaca. The first speaker was Víctor Pérez Cruz, an architect working for INAH, the federal agency responsible for investigating, conserving, protecting, and promoting the archaeological, anthropological, and historical heritage of Mexico. In a presentation titled "Los problemas para la conservación del Centro Histórico de la Ciudad de Oaxaca" (Conservation Problems of the Historic Center of Oaxaca), he spoke of the harm caused by the "transformation of the urban image by graffiti" and, citing the "deterioration of the urban image," concluded that "whether or not the demonstrators were right or wrong, the city suffers." From the point of view of INAH and Pérez Cruz, and for many of those following his talk

that day, the main problem in safeguarding the city's heritage were not the grievances of protestors, but rather their "lack of education and *conciencia*"—a problem he thought should be addressed by a campaign of "workshops, television and radio programs, print media, etc." As it was for ASARO, developing and fostering *conciencia* was a critical concern for architects and anthropologists worried about the fate of the city's patrimony in the face of recent unrest.

During this conference, and in many others on heritage, architecture, and preservation that I attended in Oaxaca, the discourse focused on issues of loss, blame, and of reclaiming city spaces for "nosotros" (us). Central to this recuperation of city space for the implicit yet never fully specified "us" was the issue of inculcating in "others" a knowledge and awareness of the importance and value of the city as a repository of historical heritage and communal identity. For this project of consciousness-raising, *el pueblo* was always highlighted as the marginalized actor in need of improvement and *conciencia* and as the elusive subject that was the final piece in the puzzle of conservation. Unlike the invitation to discover knowledge provided by ASARO's stencils, the architects, city officials, anthropologists, and academics speaking in the name of conservation posited what Freire describes as the "banking concept of education." In this model, "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as a process of inquiry" (1970a:72). Much like filling a piggybank, this discourse of consciousness had as its starting point that by imparting their expert knowledge to the marginalized majorities they would become aware of the importance of the built environment, realize the value of caring for their milieu, and transform their harmful actions. Moreover, as

anthropologist Ana María Alonso notes, this discourse continues longstanding colonial legacies "implying that indigenous people lack historical agency and…only the 'stronger' mestizo can wake them up" (1994:465). The inscription of a border-zone and boundary between "nosotros" and "others," or between the city's elites as the defenders of Oaxaqueño heritage from the ignorant, marginalized majority directly feeds into the polarization of the city and the struggles over collective identity, social relations centered on governing, and who and what publics belong in public space that make up the competing aesthetics of the city in Oaxaca today.

El Patrimonio, the patrimony and inheritance that were being celebrated on this day has an important and long history of articulating people, place, and politics to proper ways of being. Three centuries ago, philosopher John Locke established that working the land turned nature into personal property and that "the great and chief end…of men's [sic] uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property" (1690:57). In connecting land, labor, and law, Locke made particular dispositions the work of both possession and dispossession (see Carter 1987 for an elaboration of this triangulation in Australia). Locke noted that inheritance was the individual's right to pass along genes and goods to their progeny, positing "breeding" as one of the ways through which the proper disposition towards possessions was inculcated in others, thus making biology and race salient for assessing proper subjects. On education, another of the means of inculcating proper dispositions, Mehta's critique of Locke and liberalism reminds that "far from giving expression to capacities that are universal…education is an initiation into the enormously significant specifications of time, place, and social status" (1999:62). At the conference celebrating twenty years of Oaxaca's status as a World Heritage Site, architects, anthropologists, and urban planners followed a long tradition connecting social norms and spatial forms (see Foucault 1961, 1975; Rabinow 1989), worrying that unless people developed a proper conduct and relationship to place, both the social and the spatial were in jeopardy.

In the discourse of preservation and patrimony, the city to be saved and the heritage to be salvaged focus almost exclusively on the area delineated by the colonial city center. Seemingly invisible, the rest of the city falls off the grid as if the city had not grown beyond its colonial borders. Off the map, people and place fall into the "zone of nonbeing" psychiatrist Frantz Fanon identifies as characteristic of the camp like spatiality and subjectivity of the colony (1952:xii). When urbanists do engage the broader metropolitan area, the problem is not a failure to comprehend that the periphery affects the city center, but precisely in thinking that the periphery is the problem. At issue, as well is not only that, for many, Oaxaca is not just composed by the image and imagination of an intact and well-preserved colonial center, but also that filth, disease, crime, poverty, racism, and discrimination are as much continuing legacies of the colonial era as its reconstructed architectural façades (see Chassen-López 2005; Higgins & Coen 2000; Murphy & Stepick

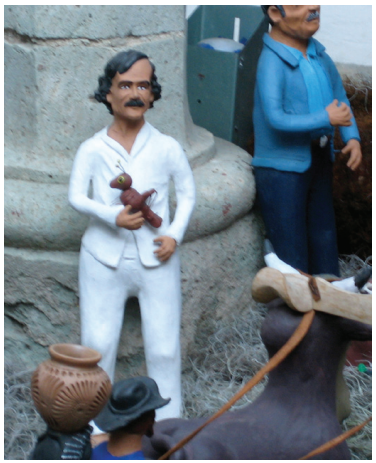
1991). Interested in the history of the formation of this dominant vision of Oaxaca's urbanism, historian Mark Overmyer-Velázquez begins a recent book by pointing out that although the city center is praised and promoted as a shinning example of Spanish colonialism, "much of what the contemporary visitor sees of this Mexican provincial city was constructed or reconstructed during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, under the reign of President Porfirio Díaz" (2006:1). For both Overmyer-Velázquez and myself, the critical issue is not whether tourists, UNESCO, or the marginalized majority are duped in buying into the colonial image of Oaxaca, but rather how Oaxaca has been "imagineered" (Rutheiser 1999) as a colonial exemplar in need of preservation, and what the implications of this are for Oaxacans. For, after all, this imagineering deems the colonial architecture of the center as heritage worth preserving and, without mentioning the subjugated Indian labor that built the original homes, uses UNESCO's stamp of approval to selectively frame the legacy of colonialism to be remembered. The relevant point is that the interweaving of urban projects, government heritage and tourism programs, and of official and civic institutions safeguarding patrimony produces a distribution of the sensible, a slotting of place, people, and practices whose order of things continues to have very real effects in Oaxacan society even as it has most recently been challenged by the social movement of 2006.

The social landscape enframed by the competing aesthetic of official elite culture was best enframed by a speaker at the 10th International Meeting for the Development of Touristic Heritage, a conference held in the same Santo Domingo auditorium two months earlier in October of 2007. Here, Celestino F. Gómez y Gómez, the General Coordinator of Tourism and of Economic Promotion for the city of Oaxaca presented a video on Monte Albán and a slide show comprised of women weaving, Oaxacan food, and local churches. Gómez y Gómez spoke about how cultural events such as church festivities present important moments of "conviviality between Oaxacans and national and international tourists." Through images of such events, Gómez y Gómez highlighted the role played by government functionaries in promoting Oaxaca's heritage and bringing the region international recognition. Fittingly, this talk was followed not by another speaker but rather by a parade of women promenading up to the stage wearing regional trajes (dresses). As if in a beauty pageant, as each cheerful woman walked down the middle aisle towards the stage, the announcer located the indigenous community where each traje was from and emphasized distinguishing aspects of each garment. Noting that Oaxaca is unique for having women dress in traditional garb, even in the city, the announcer mentioned that this was—and still is—a means by which to differentiate where one is from. As the women left the stage, the announcer informed the audience that the owner of these dresses, and of a collection of 50 others, is Jávier Gonzales. In the midst of a conference devoted to heritage and tourism, the smiling parade of women in traditional traje seemed to provide evidence not only that the political project to unify the

state through its folkloric cultural differences had successfully achieved a hegemonic status with everyday Oaxacans (Poole 2004), but also that as Oaxacan identity it was a marketable and profitable commodity for the commercial consumption of another's gaze—a gaze which, as Overmyer-Velázquez notes, also involved the removal of vagrants and prostitutes from the city in order to make and mark its modernity (2006). Much as geographer Melissa Wright finds in contemporary Ciudad Juárez, in Mexico, questions of modernity and tradition continue to be violently articulated with calculations over tourism and control over women's bodies in public space (2004).

In December of 2007, I interviewed a worker at the Casa de la Cultura Oaxaqueña, a city institution whose mission is to promote Oaxacan culture. According to this worker, official cultural policies are centered on "promoting culture as a business." The packaging of Oaxacan culture for tourist consumption has not only meant that Oaxaca's people and place have become commodities, as this worker told me, but also that "the Oaxacan public is not in the sight lines of cultural promoter's projects." With governor Ulises Ruiz mandating that cultural services and programs need to generate funds, cultural projects that do not draw in tourist dollars have become endangered. As Sergio Beltrán noted that same December, the result has been that today "the most concentrated efforts to take care of the city are private. Harp y Toledo." While the turn to private funding in the arts might be said to follow a general trend worldwide, in Oaxaca the wealthy banker Alfredo Harp Helú and the highly talented and successful artist Francisco Toledo almost single-handedly support and sustain the arts and cultural projects in the city. For good or ill, whether loved or hated, Oaxaca has cultural *caciques* (bosses) whose word, will, and funding power literally have shaped the city's cultural and physical landscape (see Holo 2004 for a further account of Oaxaca's cultural museums).

For Manuel Esparza, former regional director of INAH in Oaxaca, despite their "work in conserving heritage," figures such as Harp Helú and Toledo present cases of "narcissism that, as altruistic as it might be, can damage patrimony." Speaking from former experiences he had as director, Esparza gave the example of the late Oaxacan painter Rodolfo Morales, whose Fundación Cultural Rodolfo Morales (Cultural Foundation Rodolfo Morales) is often credited as fundamental in preserving historic sites and creating new cultural opportunities in his home town of Ocotlán. As Esparza noted, however, after Morales obtained the approval of Oaxacan governor Diódoro Carrasco to preserve churches in Ocotlán, the resulting work was carried out without INAH supervision and transformed one church to the extent that its historical value was severely compromised. Citing this as an example of "patrimony as personal project," Esparza added that, whether a wealthy businessman or famous painter, such projects of preservation reflect personal visions of heritage that at best waste money or at worst damage what should be everyone's legacy. Commenting with wonder at how, in a state with the third highest illiteracy rate in Mexico, "here in Oaxaca nobody reads anything but we establish a network of libraries," and wondering



about the import of Harp Helú's museum of stamps for Oaxaca, the frustration that Manuel Esparza felt was grounded in a commonly shared sentiment that little thought was given to how culture and heritage might engage with or assist the majority of Oaxacans. Boiling over, Esparza diagnosed Oaxaca as suffering historically from an oversupply of cases of "phallic and authoritarian narcissists."

In 1992, a project promoted by Francisco Toledo restored a historic manor from the 18th century in the city center and turned it into the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca (Oaxacan Contemporary Arts Museum). When I spoke fifteen years later in October 2007 with the museum's director, Femaria Abad, she began our interview by stating that between the government and culture "discourse and action are divorced." To underscore the point, Abad noted that "I don't know the secretary of culture and he has never stepped foot in here! Government does things without thinking." Citing the change of the Governor's Palace to a museum as an example, Abad was of the opinion that as this building "has a great representation in the social imaginary," the governor should continue to occupy it. She was incensed, however, not only because the governor's exit was a political decision that had to do with the route of protest marches, but also that, while the publicity campaign of Ulises is "tourism and culture," the pitiful attempt at a museum that barely fills a couple of rooms in the stately building missed a crucial opportunity. Critical of how culture and tourism have become politicized in a city where the government named these as priorities yet lacked any vision of what they were other than as political and economic pawns. For Abad, the "result of [such] bad politics was…conflict." Faced with problems of poverty, corruption, and continued fallout from the unrest in 2006, "they tell us to put a smile on for the tourists. Everything is alright," said Abad. As she further noted, "migration" has become the language by which to speak about forcible evictions. Much as the indigenous traje has come to stand in for the proper place of culture as pacified political difference or migration for economic deportation, so too are the impoverished conditions where the majority live erased through a focus on the invented panoramas of Oaxaca as a World Heritage Site.

Describing the place of the city's elite in relation to the conflict of 2006, Carlos Beas Torres of the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus has written that, "during the greater part of the last century, economic power in Oaxaca has resided in a small group that some Oaxacan intellectuals named as the 'Vallistocracia' 30 years ago. This group is formed by families with 'noble' last names, almost all of foreign origin, dedicated

principally to commerce, land speculation and services. In recent years, this group has taken control of the historic center of the city of Oaxaca in order to convert it to a tourist market" (2007:23). Mockingly known as the Vallistocracia, a term that fuses the geography of the city as a valley and the aristocratic dreams of the city's elite, this group has profited from the revenue brought in by tourism through its lucrative control of commerce, hotels, rents, and services in the city center. Furthermore, as the Casa de la Cultura Oaxaqueña worker put it, for the Vallistocracia, patronizing the arts or going to an event establishes that "they are cultured." As sociologist Pierre Bourdieu famously pointed out (1979), cultural capital gotten through artistic appreciation and as a benefactor of the arts has been a social currency useful in establishing a mark of distinction in terms of class difference.

While the Vallistocracia profits from culture, for the marginalized majority trying simply to survive, culture in Oaxaca has indeed become an imperial process of identification (Fuss 1994) whose marketable subjectivity presents one of the few inroads to a subsistence wage. Thus, the people and place of Teotitlán del Valle are known for its woven rugs, San Bartolo Coyotepec for its black clay pottery, Atzompa for its green ceramics, and the towns of Arrazola and San Martin Tilcajete for their wooden alebrije figurines. Having to contend with rising prices spurred by an influx of foreign money into Oaxaca, for those living off the ethnographic and folkloric identity promoted by the Vallistocracia and the state government as part of Oaxaca's charm, culture offers a precarious livelihood that offers little chance to change their material conditions. Caught between a dependence on money from outside the state and an identity framed as traditional that they are both asked to embody, live and yet also must exploit, Oaxacan patrimony and culture provide ambivalent sites of collective identification and inheritance.

This tension and ambivalence are also central to the institutions safeguarding heritage who must balance the need to follow strict UNESCO norms and policies in order to continue to receive funding and World Heritage Site status at the same time as they also try to address the needs of Oaxacan communities for whom these norms and policies often present obstacles rather than benefits. Speaking with me in February of 2008, architect Guillermo Gonzales noted that the Dirección General del Centro Histórico came into existence as a response to the fact that the "situation here in Oaxaca is that there is no money from national organizations." Money exists, he continued, yet only "from international organizations, but this implies complying with the norms." Much as IMF loan conditions produce structural relations that guide the conduct of conduct of institutions shaping the local terrain, the municipal office of the General Management of the Historic Center was meant to ensure that UNESCO norms and regulations within the historic city center were being complied with. It was also asked to mediate between locals and the federally regulated institution of INAH, who people had baptized with the nickname of "Y NO" (and No) because of its opaque regulations, uneven record approving or denying projects, and general perception of collusion with, if not outright corruption as witnessed through the movement of money in projects like the recent remodeling of the *zócalo* by Ulises Ruiz Ortiz.

Institutions safeguarding heritage in Oaxaca and communities trying to survive in colonial homes not sanctioned for subdividing or in the shadow of famous pyramids are often at odds. Speaking on this point at the 10th International Meeting for the Development of Touristic Heritage in October 2007, INAH archivist Rocío Arroyo Belmonte made the observation that a building, a plate of food, and a regional dance are not "homogeneous goods," yet the label of World Heritage implies that such things and such sites as China, Italy, and Mexico are homogeneous even though they "exist in different realities." For Arroyo Belmonte, the label of World Heritage not only conflates their differences but also erases their messy realities, producing neat packages ready for a global audience and world citizen to both value and consume. In Mexico, she wondered, "to what level are we selling or taking advantage of heritage?" Using the archaeological site of Monte Albán as an example, Arroyo Belmonte was critical of the way in which the local community living along the flanks of this mountain site had been repeatedly displaced from homes deemed to be standing on land included within the federal monument. Speaking about these evictions, she asked everyone to consider the problematic implications of the "forcible delimitation of the heritage site as if it did not exist in a community and in relation to a community." Thus, while the population around the base of the archaeological site considers this land as part of their heritage and see themselves as direct descendants of those who built the ruins standing at the top of the mountain, INAH considers the site to be encroached upon and in danger from the community at its base.

Testing Locke's triangulation, Zapotec squatters who have built makeshift homes point to their labor on the unused and unmarked land to stake a claim of property, and to their body and blood to suggest an inheritance from the past that should be recognized for the community. Meanwhile, aside from Rocío Arroyo Belmonte, other INAH representatives have invoked the inheritance and the social body of the Mexican people to stake a claim on the site. In the name of the Mexican people and their property right, INAH thus evicts and demolishes homes deemed illegally built by Mexicans it thus disenfranchises. At the conference, architects, anthropologists, INAH, and the Vallistocracia acknowledged and yet very much lamented the fact that, as one conference speaker said, in the end "community use is conservation."

On a street wall, an image of a peasant wearing a hat and carrying a hoe that is almost lost against the dark blue and white background. On a white wall with peeling plaster and multiple layers of crusty paint, an image of a flag of the United States, red rifles forming stripes and blue crosses the stars. Through spray paint on the colorful walls of the streets in the city center, the community of Oaxacan street artists is also engaging with deep histories of dispossession and asking about the broader community's belongings—both as property and identity. The messages of the images matter, of course, but as I was also reminded by Chichas in October of 2008, the walls and the very act of placing images on these walls matter as well. As he put it, stencils and graffiti "narrate the historical moment. As such, spraying the cantera stones or the Cathedral speaks to you

of the history that you are living. The church no longer has that power." What Chichas is getting at is that, whether spray painting the porous, green quarried stone that the city is famous for or spray painting the side of the Cathedral, the current historical moment has transformed the sacred spaces and old hierarchies of Oaxaca; once, perhaps, these were sanctified spaces where respect had to be paid, but today the act of placing images there demonstrates that Oaxacans no longer have to kneel before the church or pay homage to the center as a World Heritage Site.

The conduct, practices of governing, and imaginations of the collective subject of *el pueblo* and of the Vallistocracia present an example of the antinomies and "community contradictions" that geographer Michael Watts (2004) posits as a challenge in the formation of a governable space. Many Oaxacans voice their disagreement and disgust for the urban practices of the governor and of institutions such as INAH. Many Oaxacans voice their disagreement and disgust for those who spray paint the city center—many find fault with both. No matter where they stood, few Oaxacans I spoke with failed to express an opinion about street art or to use it as a platform by which to offer their thoughts on the state of the city and its future. For Yolanda García, a sprightly but seasoned elder whom I spoke with in October of 2008, the stencils expressed the "courage of saying what we were thinking; but many times you felt assaulted by the paint on the cantera for much history and blood of the ancestors is there that has to be respected." Both the blood seeped into the stone and the blood dried in the codes (Foucault 1997) were being unearthed in Oaxaca, yet the legacies that these ghostly inheritances from the past pointed to were anything but settled. For many Oaxacans, these competing aesthetics of the city produced ambivalence and the recognition of partial identifications.

For many who identified their belonging either as part of the Vallistocracia or as *el pueblo*, however, these competing aesthetics were critical in continuing to conjure up and suture together a collective "we" and an opposing "them." As anthropologist Donald Moore generously reminded me, for Stuart Hall, it is precisely because identity is a "detour through difference" that the process of forming an identity takes on the *quality* of a concrete position. As Hall writes, "it is only in relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the 'positive' meaning of any term—and thus its 'identity'—can be constructed" (1996b:4). On the one hand, then, we have the position (and opposition) from the

camp of the Vallistocracia as expressed by Mexico's Secretary of the Interior, who in 2006 stated that the government would press legal charges for those found to have damaged Oaxaca's cultural heritage. On the other hand, we have the position (and opposition) from Fernando Gálvez de Aguinaga who, in referencing the urban changes of Ulises Ruiz, wrote that "Cultural Heritage is not being defended by the authorities, it is being utilized to demonize the mobilized pueblo of Oaxaca" (2007c:115). Though this antagonistic

identity would seem to position each as the negative of the other, an opposition is a powerful form of articulation that, in marking the boundaries of an Us as Not Them, binds the two together as relational terms that can produce "a partial limitation of the field of contingency" (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:111).

The temporal rhythm set up by the placing of anti-government stencils on the walls at night, the mobilizing of the government's paint crews during the day, and the return of street artists at night produces a cyclical tempo that unites the two in a polyphonic melody. As art theorist Gerald Raunig wrote about a graffiti cleaning campaign in the city of Strasbourg, "the arbitrary colors on different backgrounds were almost as easily recognizable and identifiable as the sprayers' slogans. In a way, this duplication of the creative painting process extended the activist practice of distribution in space into a practice of the city administration" (2007:261). Though bound antagonistically together, there are many instances where their borders and margins blend into each other and contradictions arise. Thus, in a glossy and expensive coffee-table book produced by a local press, there is a captivating picture of El Alebrije, a well-known Oaxacan anarchist, holding a spray paint can that is meant to signify a threat to heritage. Thus, in an APPO calendar produced by an art collective, an image of the barricades prominently shows a young barrikadero smiling in the foreground wearing a Nike shirt with its check mark logo, trademark to commercialism and symbol of what many consider a foreign economic occupying force. In each image and material production, the boundary between these competing aesthetics is unclear and visibly full of ambiguities if not contradictions.

Identity's detour through difference is one way to assess the competing aesthetics of the city. Art critic Jelena Stojanovic's turn to the Situationist International in France during the late 60s presents another; as she writes, its members "used graffiti as a means of urban *détournement* arguing that the spray can…offers the writer the one way he can be certain of being read by everyone" (2007:37). *Détournement* has often been translated as "diversion," yet this works only if, as in Spanish, both senses of *diversión* are taken into account, both its meaning as play as well as its connotation as a movement away from a steady, known course. Reconfiguring the taken-for-granted urban landscape through graffiti, the Situationists not only manifested their desire to shake people out of their listless complacency with social conventions, but also sought to induce others to transform their environment through creative, serious play (see Knabb 2006). For the Situationists, as for ASARO, diversion has both a spatial and temporal dimension: it is a detour in the pedestrian urban landscape orienting the walker in a different direction; it is also a detour from "telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary." What philosopher Walter Benjamin identifies as "the concept of the historical progress of mankind," (1950:261) that posits the present as-if it were fated and not the conditional result of multiple struggles with contingent effects.

Through various urban renewal projects aimed at modernizing and homogenizing the social and spatial geography of the historic city center, turning it into a space that hails a struggle-free vision of the present and past, and through its promotion of tourism and culture as the only road to the future for Oaxaca, the government and Vallistocracia have presented their vision of the future for Oaxacans. At the same time and in the same space, groups such as ASARO are presenting a *détournement* to the official image and imagination mapped onto the city. As with the sit-in strikes, marches, assemblies, and barricades from 2006, the competing aesthetics of the city mobilized through questions of culture, heritage, and belonging present a polarizing picture of two camps entangled yet fundamentally at odds with one another. However, as in the barricades and other practices of struggle, through the shared practice of creating cultural expressions and making street art in 2007 and 2008, participants discovered other dimensions of collective belonging that inched beyond this antagonistic binary. Come along, then, to the Guelaguetza, Oaxaca's most important annual fiesta and *diversión*.

From Guelaguetza to Guerraguetza

In a city and state where one of the government's slogans is "tourism and culture," the tensions between popular culture and official cultural performances are a source of great debate and conflict, none more contested than the renewed collisions surrounding the Guelaguetza since the APPO's boycott of the event starting in 2006. In what follows, however, the emphasis on a distinction between popular and official culture is not meant to map out the terrain between a "false" and an "authentic" expression of "the people;" rather, following Stuart Hall's observation that culture delineates "ways of struggle" rather than "ways of life" (1981), culture is here seen precisely as a terrain of struggle that has the *effect* of producing the politically charged subject of *el pueblo* as an authentic expression of the people.

Famed as a traditional cultural example with roots stretching back to pre-Hispanic times, the Guelaguetza—a Zapotec word for offering—has become a symbol of Oaxaca and of Oaxacan identity and is thus at the center of clashes over the parameters of collective identity and belonging in Oaxaca. Originally a harvest celebration in honor of the goddess of corn, Spanish missionaries incorporated it into the celebrations surrounding the Virgin of El Carmen that take place on July 16th. In 1932, in honor of Oaxaca's 400th anniversary as a city and in anticipation of a visit by the Mexican president, an auditorium was constructed at the top of the Cerro del Fortín hill and the city hosted the "Homenaje Racial," the precursor to the contemporary Guelaguetza. As Deborah Poole describes, "the Homenaje was to consist of five delegations of 'Racial Embassadoresses' and their indigenous entourages; each delegation, supposedly representing a discrete cultural territory within the state, would render homage to the city of Oaxaca" (2004:76). The event's hierarchical relationship between the city

and the countryside was meant to help suture together a state considered by then governor Genaro V. Vásquez to be "fragmented by interests, languages, races, and regions" (in Poole 2004:73). With the indigenous countryside paying homage to the city, the celebrated racial and cultural fusion of the indigenous and Spanish as Mexico's *mestizo* identity was positioned at the head of a hierarchical chain where racial differences were managed through vertical cultural and spatial relationships. These articulations sought to form what Moore has termed an "ethnic spatial fix," where "an administrative regime of rule sought to incorporate territorially fixed tribal polities within a colonial cartography of power" (2005:153). Looking to make a governable space from a fractured social and physical landscape, the effect of the Homenaje Racial was to articulate identity, culture, and territory into an enduring formation that anthropologist Liisa Malkki has described as a "sedentarist metaphysics" (1992:31). For the Vallistocracia and governing elites, culture became the index through which racial difference was marked (see also Stolcke 1995 for a related European perspective).

The regional display of dances, attire, and of local crafts has come to be a standard practice of the performance of both local identity and state unity at the Guelaguetza since then, forming what literary critic Raymond Williams would characterize as a "selective tradition" (1980:39). In naming the Guelaguetza performance a selective tradition, the point is not that this is an invented tradition—they all are—but instead to point to the consequential and continuing political effects of selecting and articulating together certain elements of the past as *the* dominant tradition; a dominant tradition which, moreover, is not simply accepted uncritically by "the people," but is, rather, part of the "dialectic of cultural struggle" (Hall 1981:233) that in part defines the parameters through which dominant and dominated groups contest their articulations and hegemony. The parameters of struggle over this selective tradition have changed over time. As anthropologist Charles Hale notes for nearby Guatemala, since the 1990s, at the moment that state governments adopt neoliberal governing models, the image of the mestizo as the normative national subject was being repositioned in favor of a recognition of multicultural identities that granted and promoted rights to difference on cultural, but not political terms (2002). Political struggle was managed or marginalized through a discourse favoring everyone's right to be culturally different. Culture, however, remains a powerful means by which to continue to negotiate not just identity, but the hegemonic articulations between dominant and dominated groups. In 2006 at the Guelaguetza, this cultural struggle took center stage.

Since 1974, the Guelaguetza has been performed on the two Mondays following July 16th in a new amphitheater that seats about 12,000 people. Organized by the state's tourism office, tickets to the Guelaguetza in the amphitheater's upper section are free and available on a first-come, first-served basis. Tickets to the two lower sections are upwards of $50 dollars a seat and thus primarily affordable to tourists and the Vallistocracia. As on the slopes of Monte Albán or for those looking to live in the historic center, the commercialization of the Guelaguetza has left many Oaxacans feeling yet again that their traditions and identity have been usurped and that they have been evicted. Thus, the government's decision in 2005 to stage both a morning and afternoon Guelaguetza spectacle on each of the two Mondays has been criticized as a decision based solely on the profit to be made. Along with the Guelaguetza, in July the city's amphitheater also hosts the *Bani Stui Gulal*, a theatrical interpretation of the Guelaguetza across the ages, as well as the *Legend of Donají*, a choreographed show presenting the story of the last Zapotec princess (see Lizama Quijano 2006 for an illuminating historical and anthropological study of the

Guelaguetza). These shows are not free and the decision to attend must be weighed against the fact that for a Oaxacan family of four earning the state's minimum daily wage of $45.81 pesos—or about $4.36 in US dollars—even these cheaper events would cost about 10 days worth of pay (see www.conasami.gob.mx for Mexico's wage rates).

In 2006, amid APPO's takeover of the city, the official Guelaguetza was suspended for the first time in its history and an alternative and free "*Guelaguetza Popular*"—Popular Guelaguetza or People's Guelaguetza—was organized and successfully held by the APPO and its sympathizers. In 2007, with the barricades and *plantón* gone and with Appistas no longer in control of streets in the city center, the government decided to begin staging the Guelaguetza again. Boycotting what came to be known as the "Guelaguetza comercial," or the commercial Guelaguetza, Appistas decided to continue staging the *Guelaguetza Popular*. Putting on parallel events with contrasting messages even if with similar dances and regional participation, the competing Guelaguetza celebrations demonstrated how the social conflict was far from being resolved as well as the importance of heritage, aesthetics, and the politics of collective identity to the continued struggle.

Arriving in Oaxaca in July of 2007, the month when the Guelaguetza festivities were to take place, the tension and anticipation surrounding the festival were hard to miss. Strolling through the city center, colorful government posters announcing the "fiestas de los Lunes del Cerro" (Festivals of the Mondays of the Hill) competed with stencils and spray-painted slogans plastered throughout the city center calling on people to boycott the Guelaguetza Comercial. Businesses cheerfully announced the return of the (official) Guelaguetza while wheat-pasted flyers and posters pushed for people to attend the *Guelaguetza Popular*. Walking the streets of the city center with pale skin and a red beard alongside my daughter, a blond-headed baby, and her red-headed mother, we were routinely approached by government employees working in booths around the *zócalo* and Santo Domingo who provided tourists with pamphlets announcing that month's festivities. Produced by the Tourism and Economic Promotion office, these official pamphlets provided general information about the Bani Stui Gulal, Legend of Donají, and Guelaguetza shows in both Spanish and English. Images, a schedule of events, and a map of the Guelaguetza auditorium were also included and let the reader know that the seats in the two sections closest to the stage "are for special guests and paid ticket" while the upper sections "are open for the people in general and free access."

In contrast, in the "detour through difference" (Hall 1996b) of Appistas as they continued to cobble together an identity, wheat-pasted images around town directed sightseers in Spanish to visit "Oaxaca, city of dignity and resistance" and to support the teachers' and APPO's *Guelaguetza Popular*. Above and below the central image of a map of the state infilled with photos of Guelaguetza performers, the APPO's poster asked for the support of visitors and Oaxacans by invoking the need to "defend our autochthonous traditions and customs." In its detour through difference, the posters called on everyone to "boycott the official, commercial Guelaguetza" and made it clear that this defense

was needed "because of profits made with our roots in benefit of the bourgeoisie!" and "because our cultural traditions should not be the object of commercialization!!" With the government's pamphlet sponsored by Coca-Cola, whose logo on the front cover rivaled the city's seal as it encouraged everyone to "take the good stuff," and with the Ticketmaster number and website where one could purchase tickets to the official Guelaguetza filling the back-cover, the costly commercialism that the teachers' wheat-pasted poster denounced could be seen even before any event took place. "¡¡Basta Ya!!" (Enough!!), APPO's poster proclaimed, as it invited folks to attend the *Guelaguetza Popular* that Monday the 16th on the Cerro del Fortín at 9 in the morning.

As is now customary, the day before the Guelaguetza, delegations from across the state set to perform the next day parade through the street in their regional traje. During this *calenda* (procession), they present the audience with gifts from the region. On Sunday the 15th, the day of the *calenda* for the *Guelaguetza Popular*, as the hour of the procession approached, people began to arrive downtown in great numbers and soon stretched solidly from one end of the street to another for blocks on end. With the empty Guelaguetza auditorium at the top of the Cerro del Fortín hill as a backdrop, oversized puppets of everyday city folk and a brass band kicked off the event and headed the lively procession. Commenting on the *Guelaguetza Popular*, activist Diana Denham and the C.A.S.A. collective wrote how, in moments such as these, "the movement showed its capacity not only to organize political acts, but also to create cultural and artistic events to recover a history of Oaxaca unmediated by the sheen of tourism" (2008:36). Bringing together locals and others from around the state as well as tourists from Mexico and abroad, the procession's festive atmosphere transformed the vehicular avenues of the planned city into a pedestrian parade. Theologian Michel de Certeau reminds that "the motions of walking are spatial creations" whose footsteps "cannot be localized: they spatialize" (1980:129). As the parade snaked through the city, its embodied and collective journey transformed not just the spatiality of the city but also its sociality.

However, if the gift giving of visiting dance delegations and the local residents attending pointed to an event not marred by the commercialism surrounding tourism, nonetheless, around the plaza where the *calenda* began, stalls selling everything from food to music to handicrafts sprang up early in the morning and pushed against the sides of houses and established businesses in the center. Demonizing the commercialism of the official Guelaguetza while making space for the permissible commerce of ambulant stalls is part of the constitutive contradictions that the movement struggled with (a tension more fully addressed in chapter 5). With most of the surrounding businesses offering food, clothing, and handicrafts at prices well beyond the reach of the majority attending the *calenda*, however, many would doubtlessly point to the alternative

commerce of the ambulant sellers and the fact that these businesses were closed during the march as a take over of the economy of the city center by sellers who are members of *el pueblo* and thus as a political and not just a commercial act. Local residents joining the procession also presented others around them with gifts as the parade moved through the streets, another sign of the entangled relationship between political economy and a moral economy.

As in 2006, this year the *Guelaguetza Popular* was being filmed by "Mal de Ojo," a local video collective that produced documentaries about, and was born during, the social movement. Speaking to a producer of mezcal attending the *calenda*, the production team asked him, "what do you think of the government's Guelaguetza, that they charge us more than 500 pesos there?" As he continued to hand out this Oaxacan alcoholic drink to those around him, he responded, "that is not correct, because that is no longer the festival of *el pueblo*. That is a private business where one no longer knows where the money goes." At the beginning of the finished documentary, running text informs the audience that here tradition is not simply to be understood as folklore, but as solidarity, as a way that the people have resisted years of colonization and domination (Mal de Ojo 2007). In supporting the *Guelaguetza Popular* by walking with others through the *calenda* or by drinking mezcal and sharing food with people around you, the event definitely transformed the affect of a spectacle one pays $50 dollars to observe to a shared ritual one participates in. As anthropologist Marcel Mauss pointed out, the social and material practice of gift exchange creates a social and moral relationship—a kinship of the gift—between giver and receiver that binds them together (1950). Ekaterine, a dancer in the people's Guelaguetza explained how "in indigenous communities, the word guelaguetza refers to an exchange. I ask you to donate something for a party I'm giving in the community and then I return the favor when you need it.... It's the traditional symbol of the Guelaguetza, reciprocity: to help others, exchange things" (in Denham 2008:115). The Guelaguetza, then, is not just reciprocity, but a shared compromise, an exchange for the future that brings and binds the community together and one that, since 2006, Oaxacans in the city have been actively trying to recover.

Early in the morning the day after the *calenda*, hailed by the mountain as the traditional site of the Guelaguetza ritual, marchers attempting to reach the Cerro del Fortín in order to stage the *Guelaguetza Popular* were met at the base of the hill by a wall of police forces impeding further advance. Clearly under orders not to let anyone pass, the large numbers of PFP, AFI (Federal Investigative Agency), state and municipal elements, some dressed in riot gear, were both meant to intimidate marchers and yet, as in 2006, were also a clear invitation for a confrontation. The standoff between marchers and the police forces did not last long, however, and the situation quickly escalated from an exchange of

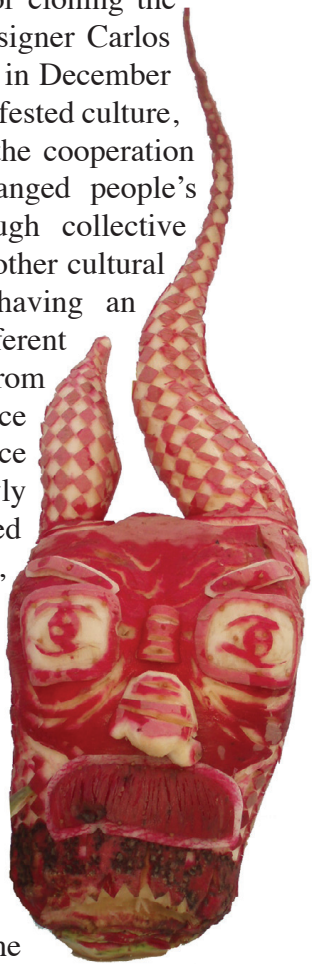
insults to rocks thrown at police and teargas canisters shot at those gathered. Ample media coverage of the clash shows buses burnt by movement participants (even as it also shows police smashing bus windows, presumably to add material damages and vandalism to the list of crimes committed by Appistas); media images also document the brutality of police in beating those they caught. Pictures show police gathered together thrashing individuals already on the ground as well as how individuals caught were blindfolded and forced to kneel before police in order to have their heads shaven before being taken off to various prisons around the state. The fury of police was communicated and condemned by APPO participants who, unable to make it to the top of the Cerro del Fortín, began staging the *Guelaguetza Popular* in the Plaza de la Danza, a small square just outside the city mayor's offices.

Watching Mal de Ojo's footage of the 2007 *Guelaguetza Popular* after having observed that year's clashes between the marchers and police forces, the contrast between the sea of the security forces gathered to beat marchers and the cultural expression produced by the sea of people gathered together to celebrate the *Guelaguetza Popular* was stark. A woman speaking before the start of the *Guelaguetza Popular* expressed this sentiment when she stated that, "today, the place where we go to celebrate our Guelaguetza year after year is besieged by the corrupt, servile police that URO ordered brought in, because it is only this way that he wants *el pueblo* to recognize him. But I am telling him, URO, wake up! You cannot fool the people any longer. *El pueblo* has passed you up; come and observe this beautiful march, with which we are sharing this afternoon, it is the feeling of *el pueblo*" (Mal de Ojo 2007). Marches, assemblies, barricades, stencils, the *plantón* in the *zócalo*, and the *Guelaguetza Popular* in 2006 helped produce this feeling of solidarity as *el pueblo*. A year later, with another staging of the *Guelaguetza Popular*, *el pueblo* was not only reaffirming this collective identity but also conceiving of culture and identity as practices of social struggle.

A life-size ASARO stencil placed on the wall of the Cathedral in July shows three dancers in costume performing the Danza de la Pluma (Feather's Dance). As initially performed, this dance is a dramatized presentation about resistance to the Spanish conquest

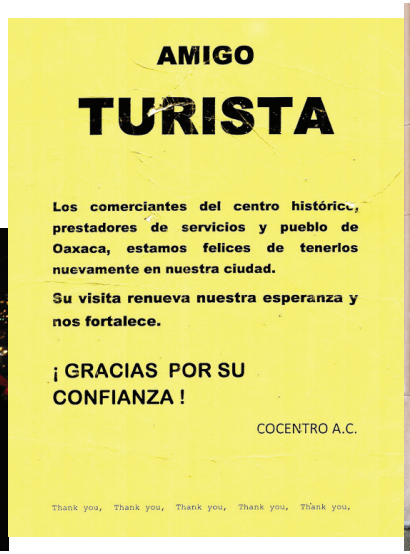
(Harris 1997). Featuring vivid movements by male dancers who wear a large feather headdress and colorful costumes, today the dance has become synonymous with the selective tradition of the Guelaguetza; however, in today's performances it no longer includes dancers in Spanish military uniforms, obscuring the origins of the dance as a resistance to colonization. In ASARO's rendition, the three dancers hold a machete in one hand while the other arm is raised and holds a rifle at the ready. Calling on people to support the *Guelaguetza Popular* and to boycott the government's Guelaguetza, the stencil's written message and iconography returns to the theme of culture and identity as resistance, even as the enemy to be resisted has shifted. Similar to how, in an earlier moment in the isthmus of the state, the politicized coalition of COCEI "invoke[d] a selective view of history and Zapotec culture to legitimate the movement's current politics" (Campbell 1993:88), in the city of Oaxaca, the selective traditions of Oaxaca's contemporary competing aesthetics make culture as critical as any barricade.

Political theorist Antonio Gramsci wrote that "it is stupid to believe that when one is confronted by illegal private action one can counterpose it to another similar action—in other words, combat commando tactics by means of commando tactics. It means believing that the State remains perpetually inert, which is never the case" (1971:232). In staging the *Guelaguetza Popular*, *el pueblo* was not simply duplicating or cloning the state's festival, however; as graphic designer Carlos Franco told me when I interviewed him in December of 2007, the *Guelaguetza Popular* "manifested culture, the people's way without cost and by the cooperation of the people. In this way, they changed people's perception." Peaceful, produced through collective participation, and free of cost, this and other cultural expressions by Appistas and those having an affinity with the APPO shaped a different perception of the social movement from that provided by the spectacular violence and highly publicized clashes with police forces. With its colorful posters, newly composed songs of resistance, oversized paper-mâché puppets, satirical street art, and sand paintings, culture has been a visible arm of the social struggle since 2006. Moreover, as Franco further noted, in Oaxaca the government was unsure of how to respond to the women and children holding flowers and singing songs at the front lines of the Federal Police or to the fact that cultural traditions such as the national Day of the Dead festival and the local Night of the Radishes became political platforms.



Under heavy police presence, on July 23rd and again on July 30th, the official Guelaguetza was held in the morning and the afternoon in the auditorium atop the Cerro del Fortín. Interested in the audience at the official Guelaguetza festivities and the elite's selective representation of the past, I attended the *Bani Stui Gulal* performance in the city's dramatic amphitheater a night before the official Guelaguetza. This retelling of the Guelaguetza throughout time is split into four historical phases. Pre-Hispanic times were communal dances, the conquest was a bloody theatrical piece that included a long and drawn out Spanish mass, and the revolution was a costume parade with distinct classes, genders, and races represented by different manners of dress and demeanor. As in the Guelaguetza itself, a parade of women in local dresses from the seven regions outside of the valley of Oaxaca represented the contemporary moment. The accompanying discourse spoke of the pride of Oaxacans as derived from a sense of identity that is conveyed by solidarity with the other seven regions and through internal difference in harmony. With rain falling steadily throughout the performance and with most people wearing plastic ponchos to the event, it was difficult to ascertain what the make-up of the audience was. However, listening to the narrator's discourse about the egalitarian present just feet from a wall of policemen ready to pounce produced a jarring disconnect that belied the fact that Oaxacan brotherhood is anything but stable in the contemporary moment.

In the streets of the city, this disconnect was evident on every wall. Government posters encouraging visitors to enjoy the Guelaguetza proclaimed that Oaxaca had returned to peace while ASARO stencils, one showing a policeman with a gun at the ready while wearing a Danza de la Pluma headdress, made evident the policing of heritage and how the government's peace was only possible by militarizing the streets. On street corners in the center, civic associations made up of city center businesses such as Cocentro A.C. handed out flyers thanking tourists for returning to the city, informing them that, "your visit renews our hope and strengthens us." Behind them, an ASARO stencil showed women in traditional traje carrying Molotov cocktails and fireworks to the dance instead of the traditional pineapple atop their shoulders. It was evident to all that, as a friend stated, we had gone from the Guelaguetza to the Guerraguetza. *Guerra* means war in Spanish and, given the contested clashes over the politics of culture and collective identifications since 2006, this reinterpretation of the Guelaguetza seems fitting.



Day and night, cleaning crews and tourist police patrolled the newly remodeled *zócalo*. Street artists and Appistas protested. Business and government workers handed out material promoting that month's events. Mexican and international tourists traversed the space in different human constellations. With performance stages set up in the *zócalo* and around Santo Domingo, anthropologist Gary McDonogh's observation that competing cities must construct a sanitary spatiality through both "technocratic urban cleansing" (1999:370) and by ensuring that it is populated by a diverse citizenry "linked to 'culture'" in order to appeal to the consumptive tourist seemed as fit for Barcelona in the Olympics as it was for Oaxaca in the Guelaguetza. As McDonogh further points out, this process highlights "a further transformation of discourse in and about the city…from a city of process to a city of events, indeed, of spectacle" (1999:373). From city officials to architects and urban planners, spectacle and multicultural diversity structure the form and discourse of the city; and, throughout, spectacular events and the image of multicultural diversity in events such as the Guelaguetza are geared to sell the city both to tourists and to businesses ready to invest.

As mentioned, the government's urban cleansing and the spectacle of harmonious cultural diversity are also geared for sale to Oaxacans, forming an important technology of power for a government attempting to forge a sanitary citizenship where city spaces and cultural belonging are presented as if free from struggle and streets are swept clean from undesirables (Overmyer-Velázquez 2006). Under the auspices of UNESCO and of the Guelaguetza, the sanitized and selective traditions of Oaxaca's colonial and cultural past have become its present. The result is that, as anthropologist Charles Rutheiser notes, to the degree that it engages its residents and tourists, the city does so blandly only under the guise of "edutainment" (1999). Offering entertainment as education, cultural

events and city spaces are spectacles "imagineered" for immediate legibility and consumption for passive spectators who are asked to see rather than to participate. As art historian Jonathan Crary has further pointed out, "spectacle is not primarily concerned with a *looking at* images but rather with the construction of conditions that individuate, immobilize, and separate subjects" (1999:74). Though produced and often rendered precisely for the crowd, the general effect of the subject of the spectacle is to produce passive and pliable subjects.

This investment in the image of sanitary citizenship was particularly evident during the official spectacle of the Guelaguetza, coloring both what was shown and what remained off stage. While the forcible repression of the *Guelaguetza Popular* march is the most obvious example, Oaxacan theater troupe leader Manuel Coronado mentioned other ways that the Vallistocracia and the government seek to control the spectacle of Oaxacan heritage and identity. As

he mentioned over dinner one night in November of 2007, the Guelaguetza has an authenticity committee made up of Oaxacan elites who travel around the state and decide which performers and performances may be shown at the yearly event in the city. The authenticity committee creates its own rhizomatic spatiality by traveling from city to city year after year to decide what events will be shown at the Guelaguetza. Coronado recalled one case where a man from the Mixtec region was not allowed to dance because he was an albino and, therefore, was deemed not to have the necessary indigenous image of "our indio" (Poole 2004). Much as African colonial administrators were consequential to the process of codifying certain customs and were not just simply observers of age-old-traditions (Gluckman 1940; Mamdani 2001; Moore 2005), so too did the Guelaguetza authenticity committee's selective process craft the customs and the racial and ethnic subjects that count as authentic representation of cultural identity and Oaxacan tradition.

The question of authenticity was central to these competing aesthetics a year later when both the *Guelaguetza Popular* and the official Guelaguetza took center stage in Oaxaca yet again. In 2008, however, there were no violent confrontations between police forces and Appistas. Instead, on a blisteringly hot July 21st, the *Guelaguetza Popular* and one of the official Guelaguetza performances were held simultaneously. Entering the football stadium of the Instituto Tecnológico de Oaxaca, a local technical college at the foot of the Cerro del Fortín hill where the *Guelaguetza Popular* was being held, a sea of colorful umbrellas and pale straw hats overwhelmed the eyes. From early on, folding chairs around the central stage were full and the massive metal bleachers surrounding the field were also fairly crowded both above and below, where those without umbrellas or hats were taking advantage of the shade. Regional dance numbers were accompanied by music that blasted from loudspeakers. In between performances, pronouncements from the announcers comparing this event to the official Guelaguetza rang through the crowd. At one point, as a group that was performing at the Guelaguetza for the first time was coming onstage, the announcer noted that, "one of the most important fruits of the movement of 2006 is the *Guelaguetza Popular*, the culture of *el pueblo*. The authenticity

committee is not necessary, this is the space of everyone and it is defined by participation. We are more than 35,000 souls, 35,000 fists, 35,000 rebellions. A popular festival." The Guelaguetza amphitheater is visible from the football stadium. However, in case those at the commercial Guelaguetza were unable to hear the roar of the audience to statements such as these or did not care to look down the hill, at two points in the day inflatable balloons were sent off into the sky with APPO banners hanging from them. Taking a moment to stop the dances, conversations, and the sharing of regional food and crafts, the crowd watched as these floated through the sky between the Cerro del Fortín and the center, delivering their message for the city that, two years after the social uprising was quelled, things were far from over and APPO and *el pueblo* were going strong.

As I looked up towards the hill, I could see that despite the call to boycott the official Guelaguetza, performances in the amphitheater were quite full. It seemed that support for the official event was equally substantial. Yet, as a friend working with a local NGO mentioned in July of 2008, in San Andrés Huayapam, a small rural community 20 minutes from the center of Oaxaca, townsfolk and two volunteers of hers were offered free bus rides to the official Guelaguetza along with a hundred pesos each. As told to me by a friend whose husband is a government employee, moreover, all municipal workers were given these two Mondays off, yet were expected to attend at least one of the official events. An FPR protest poster from the summer of 2008 thus shows two sheep with a voice box in the distance exclaiming how "a la Guelaguetza de los acarreados yo no voy" (I am not going to the Guelaguetza of those trucked in). The words and image clearly convey how being bussed into the event is akin to being an unthinking animal in a herd, following someone else's orders. Paired with the sheep poster, another image with a police line up similar to the one that prevented people from reaching

the Cerro del Fortín adds how "a la Guelaguetza policiaca yo no voy" (I am not going to the Guelaguetza of police). Whether from government workers themselves or from people in the streets, it is commonplace to hear that the commercial Guelaguetza is stocked with government workers or by people paid

and bused in from surrounding communities to ensure that stadium seats around tourists are full in order to judge the event a success.

Speaking three months after the balloons had landed and the *Guelaguetza Popular* was over, in an intervention at the October 2008 colloquium "Crisis Política y Movimiento Social Oaxaca 2006–2008" (Political Crisis and Oaxacan Social Movement 2006–2008), philosopher Rosa Margarita Zires from Mexico City referenced the *Guelaguetza Popular* as an example of the "new exercise of community as politics." Citing Rancière and the distribution of the sensible, Zires felt that through participatory festivals such as the *Guelaguetza Popular*, participants were able to differentiate their collective identity from the government and in the process to create "new political subjectivities in the movement." This differentiation was produced through a strong antagonistic detour through difference that gave shape to a contestatory community; however, creating these collective political subjects was not simply the labor of an antipodal discourse of community, but was also achieved through the labor of shared material practices. Some of these practices included violent struggles and clashes with the police. Most of these practices, however, involved the hard labor of putting people in motion for creative, constructive, and not just confrontational aims. As a stencil in the center put it, "la resistencia es fértil" (resistance is fertile).

In comments that relate to ASARO's art as much as to any political discourse, Rancière wrote that the effect of the politics of aesthetics is in how: "the circulation of [political statements and literary locutions] causes modifications in the sensory perception of what is common to the community, in the relationship between what is common to language and the sensible distribution of spaces and occupations. They form, in this way, uncertain communities that contribute to the formation of enunciative collectives that call into question the distribution of roles, territories, and languages. In short, they contribute to the formation of political subjects that challenge the given distribution of the sensible (2000:40)." Translating this, what I hear Rancière saying is that the politics of aesthetics involves much more than the trick of pulling back the curtain on the Wizard of OZ to expose the workings of power or the constructed nature of social relations; that it involves more even than putting forward an alternative distribution of the sensible; rather, it seems to me that Rancière's more fundamental point is that art and politics may produce collective subjects that *make* new social and political relations possible.

As an enunciative collective actively struggling to make new social and political relations possible, Rancière would be correct in noting that the collective subject of *el pueblo* is an uncertain community. After all, through practices such as street art, decision-making by communal assemblies, massive public marches, and the building of neighborhood barricades, the social movement of 2006 brought together indigenous peasants and entrenched socialists, hard-core anarchists and middle-class intellectuals in a new articulation of what and who *el pueblo* is. Whether assessing the effect of the *Guelaguetza Popular* or of an ASARO stencil, as aesthetic and political practices these continue to give shape to—and are formed by—the still becoming and uncertain community of the social movement as *el pueblo*, an enunciative community that is challenging the given hierarchy and sedimented order of things via its competing aesthetics and participatory practices.

Grounding Enunciative Collective Subjects and Revolutionary Identities

Struggles over the Guelaguetza are both an example of the competing aesthetics of the city in this World Heritage Site as well as evidence for the stakes involved in continuing struggles over the place of the collective subject of *el pueblo* in a city shaped and controlled by the Vallistocracia and government interests. On the walls in the historic city center, stencils hailing the revolutionary subject of *el pueblo* sit next to commercial advertisements from Burger King that invite viewers to get it "Como Tú Quieras" (Have it Your Way). Vendors with loudspeakers announce their store's latest special while waiters stand on the street, menus in hand. Oaxaca's spatiality is replete with competing sensory and material information that vie for an individual's attention and identification as a particular subject. This is true for any city. While there may seem to be a large gap between moments which invite us to recognize ourselves as subjects who have affinities with a larger collective characterized by active struggle and moments which invite us to follow the global wave and drink Coca-Cola, in large and small ways these hailings are elements through which individuals and collectives form and frame identity.

If I continue to return to the importance of spatial practices such as spray painting, marching, or selling culture in the amphitheater or the plaza and to investments in turning the abstract spaces of the city into collective places, this is because these moments (and sites) of recognition and misrecognition are both shaped by places and places are also shaped by them. Material sites, spatial practices, and the competing aesthetics of the city are critical to both the political practice of *détournement* (diversion) and the "detour through difference" that anchors identity and to a subject's identifications with that identity (Hall 1996b). Thus, that a woman walking next to me in the *zócalo* wearing sandals and an indigenous traje (dress) is not invited to sit at one of the empty café tables while I and countless tourists are repeatedly asked to do so is consequential in terms of how she and I (and the waiter or anyone nearby) comes to understand who and what belongs in a particular place; in fundamental ways, whether through spoken words, bodily comportment, clothing, stencils or advertising, moments such as these shape both our individual and collective identities as well as our spatial practices. This is true whether we are talking about a World Heritage Site in Oaxaca or who belongs in or around the former site of the World Trade Center in New York City.

Though it might be inferred from the example of street art, commercial signage, or spoken words that space interpellates or hails a subject only through *people's* marks or actions in space, the broader point, it seems to me, is that there are no "wild" or blank spaces for an individual to encounter. "Places are articulated by a thousand usages," de Certeau reminds, and "these dances of bodies haunted by the desire to live somewhere tell interminable stories of the Utopia we construct in the sites through which we pass" (1980:131). As de Certeau also notes, however, spatial practices and the desire for Utopia are always-already entangled within relations of power that shape city, self, and social. The

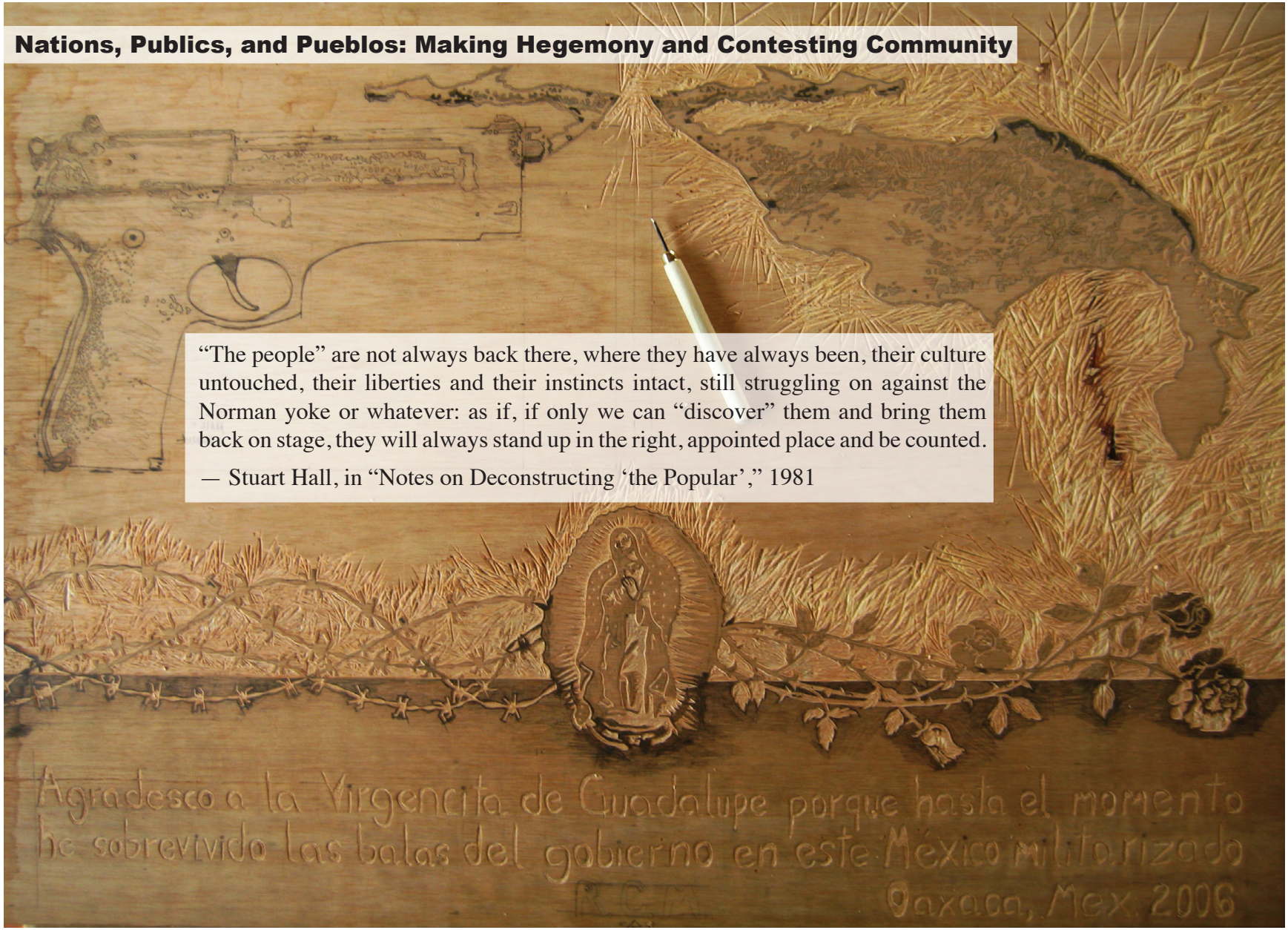
revolution must be spatialized. And through the practices of struggle, individual subjects and enunciative collectives make a spatiality—that is, they articulate Lefebvre's material, social, and mental spaces and specific subjectivities. It might seem that spatial practices transform places and people only in the moment of their doing yet are lost in the aftermath. However, to the degree that the practices of struggle articulate together and produce both space and subjects, this articulation means that sites in the city *may* continue to hail these subjects; this is so even in moments when the trace of the spatial practices has been lost on the material landscape. Cinco Señores, the Cerro del Fortín, a wall on Independencia street, all of these are haunted by myriad spatial practices that have the capacity to hail different subjects (de Certeau 1984). And through the constant and contested production and articulation of spaces and subjects, collective identity is ever in the process of being shaped as well as struggled over.

Amid the competing aesthetics of the city, then, my point is not to argue that all individuals who come to recognize or identify themselves as belonging to *el pueblo* through a stencil on the wall or by remembering the memory of a barricade battle at an intersection experience or internalize the experience in the same way. My point is rather to begin to open up a conversation about the ways in which spaces are actants in the ongoing process of recognition and misrecognition that today characterizes individual and collective longing and belonging in our contemporary urban landscape. After all, philosopher Louis Althusser's work pointed out that interpellation depends on all the groundwork that institutions do to frame particular subject positions (1970); critical theorist Judith Butler emphasized the performative nature of a hailing, that is, its relational, contingent, and contested nature (1990); literary critic Raymond Williams and cultural theorist Stuart Hall have reminded that in this process, "there are no guarantees" (Williams 1980; Hall 1986) and thus that any hailing may not only interpellate individuals differently, but also has contingent effects. In this and the last chapter, through barricades and the competing aesthetics of the city in Oaxaca, I have endeavored to return to the primal scene of interpellation, the meeting between a figure of the state and a subject in the street and to emphasize the *grounded* nature of the encounter, the way in which spatiality matters to this and every interpellation. At stake, then, is awareness of the fact that material space forms more than the background to political practice or to the formation of subjects through interpellation but is instead consequential for the formation of political subjectivities.

After all, with its well lit and visibly patrolled streets and brightly painted shops, abundant restaurants and museums, Oaxaca's city center is a place that many Oaxacans feel at home in and one where many Oaxacans also feel they do not belong. In

contemporary Oaxaca, as evidenced by stencils, police practices, and the Guelaguetza(s), competing aesthetics of the city are actively framing collective belonging through stark binaries that are producing a divided city and society. At the same time, competing aesthetics of the city in Oaxaca are also producing collective identifications through participatory practices like the making of neighborhood barricades, the take-over of the *zócalo* during a *plantón*, and parading and dancing through the streets in the *Guelaguetza Popular* that create community through shared practices rather than through ascribed markers of identity such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, and age.

As I have argued in this chapter, stencils participate in the continuing creation of this uncertain community by both interpellating those who already identify with the enunciative collective subject of *el pueblo* and by looking to articulate the demands of others into its populist discourse of anti-authoritarianism. In his book, *On Populist Reason* (2007), political theorist Ernesto Laclau makes it clear that what he is addressing is the political *logic* of populism and not its manifest content. After all, as he notes, "the rallying point in the constitution of a 'people' remains largely open. We can have a populism of the national state, following the Jacobin model, a regional populism, an ethnopopulism, and so on" (2007:191). If "the people" thus seems to be an empty signifier that at any one moment different individuals, different demands, and different political directions can fill, nonetheless *el pueblo* has a *particular* history that, from Mexico to Mozambique, shapes both its social and political possibilities. As the next chapter on the history of *el pueblo* will show, this history has been central in constituting both the political limits and possibilities for social struggle in Oaxaca.



"The people" are not always back there, where they have always been, their culture untouched, their liberties and their instincts intact, still struggling on against the Norman yoke or whatever: as if, if only we can "discover" them and bring them back on stage, they will always stand up in the right, appointed place and be counted.

— Stuart Hall, in "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'," 1981

The Plazuela del Carmen Alto is a small square that sits just behind the Graphic Arts Institute of Oaxaca and in front of an old Carmelite temple dating back to 1751 that is today a school and the government registry office. By 9 am on July 26th, 2008, as it had every Saturday for the past month, the "Freedom and Resistance" Cultural Market had taken over the main walkway leading through this small square. Home-sewn dresses, hand-made jewelry, ASARO's art, silk-screened shirts, and documentary films lined the ground from end to end while, above, plastic tarps shielded some sellers from the strong summer sunshine. Today, across from the sellers were 26 large white canvases lined up in a row along the temple's outer wall. By 10 am, participants in a graffiti contest organized by ASARO were busy priming the canvases and sketching out their ideas onto the white surface. Some brought stencils while others worked off of drawings in notebooks and applied spray paint freehand style. Some participants used acrylic paints and brushes while others only used spray paint; many mixed both. The poster announcing the contest had not specified any particular style.

What the poster did stress, rather, is that the event, titled "the color of resistance," was being held "por el respeto y libertad de expresión al arte urbano y callejero" (for the respect for freedom of expression in urban and street art). Though not stated explicitly, the event had been organized by ASARO in response to concern over a recent media campaign vilifying graffiti as visual pollution in the city. The assembly surmised that, with the Guelaguetza festival coming up, the wave of negative articles surrounding graffiti were in effect a strategy of government agencies so they could undertake a clean-up operation claiming they were responding to the will and needs of the Oaxacan people. (Earlier in the year, after all, a series of newspaper articles condemning the deplorable state of the plaza in front of the Cathedral were followed by a Department of Public Works project that, in the name of the needs of the Oaxacan people, replaced the green cantera stone with cement slabs.) On the poster, a young graffiti artist in a defiant pose holds a spray can at the ready while wearing a gas mask covering his face and bearing a Danza de la Pluma headdress. The visual impression makes it clear that the graffiti contest is an event participating in ongoing struggles over cultural expression and identity. In giving graffiti artists time to create their art, and a canvas upon which to showcase it, ASARO's tactical reply sought to counter the negative publicity not just politically, but also artistically. To further legitimize the contest as an artistic and not just a political act, ASARO's assembly asked respected local artist Arnulfo Aquino Casas to judge the competition and decided to award prizes: $3,000 pesos for first, $2,000 for second, and $1,000 for third. Not small sums.

As people gathered that Saturday to shop at the Tianguis or to watch the graffiti artists paint, musical bands sang and a theater group from Mexico City performed a play. Though a moment of rain caught everyone off guard, it was the arrival of state preventive police that caught everyone by surprise. Coming in three pick-up trucks, by motorcycle, bicycle, and on foot, the wave of police arrived quickly with machine-guns in hand and fingers on the trigger. They were responding to a scuffle that had arisen between two onlookers in the crowd watching the event. Surrounded in minutes by state police forces, the charismatic Yeska was able to defuse the tense situation by convincing the police that everyone there had gathered for a peaceful cultural cause and that the person who started the altercation was not part of the event and had violated its no drinking policy. For an event trying to give a different impression of graffiti artists, old identifications were proving hard to disarticulate.

Throughout the day, a mix of ages, genders, and talents worked on the canvases. A few brought to life expressions against the privatization of national assets like Pemex, corn, and archeological monuments; many featured the violence of police forces and the violence of resistance; yet others made cultural motifs central. In the end, despite the arrival of police, and although the range of talent of the participants varied, the contest was able to demonstrate the artistic merit of stencils and graffiti as well as street artist's commitment to the medium and to free expression. Moreover, the canvases also made it clear that graffiti artists had a point of view and something to say beyond their tag on a wall. As judged by Arnulfo Aquino, the

event finished with 3rd place going to a realistic pre-conquest urn stenciled against a blue patterned background. Explicitly called out as an act "reivindicando cultura" (revindicating culture), the stencil by Colibrí (Hummingbird) looked to both defend and demand a claim on this inheritance from the past. In 2nd place was a freestyle piece by Odios (Hatreds) depicting a woman with a red star on her shirt carrying a naked child while walking a dog whose face is that of governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. With many possible interpretations, the one thing that is clear is that the woman holds the child, an inheritance of body and blood, protectively in a maternal gesture at her side and away from the obedient or dominated governor pit-bull. The winner was another realistically crafted stencil, this

one by the duo of La Piztola (The Pistol) that showed a young barrikadero throwing a Molotov cocktail out into space. On the red background were the words "cuando la patria esta en peligro todo esta permitido excepto no defenderla" (when the homeland is in danger, everything is valid except not defending it). Here the homeland, an inheritance tying soil and soul together, is what is at stake and what is to be protected, not maternally but militarily.

Altogether, if the canvases created that day are taken as a collective picture of "the color of resistance" in 2008, what does that image show? Or, to put it another way, if the very notion of resistance suggests (at least) two opposing forces, then who is resisting and what is being resisted? Given the events during the social movement in 2006 and clashes over the Guelaguetza in 2007, at a general level it is possible to say that in Oaxaca in 2008 *el pueblo* continues to resist the government's authoritarianism, and that culture remains an important terrain of this struggle—at least, this has been an argument made in the previous two chapters. Is the young barrikadero throwing a Molotov cocktail in defense of the homeland the same subject that is revindicating pre-conquest culture, however? Perhaps. Is the authoritarianism of the rat with a PRI badge pulling strings to get money, or the authoritarianism shown in the reproduction of a famous photo of a Vietnamese man executed in the street parallel to the authoritarianism plaguing Oaxaca today? Why not? After all, perhaps these represent an example of the continued "construction of a global identity out of the equivalence of a plurality of social demands" (2007:83) that political theorist Ernesto Laclau posits as necessary for populist politics. Indeed, Laclau notes that the force and constitution of populist articulations is precisely its capacity to house multiple demands under one roof.

A symbol of authoritarianism, if not for many its essence, the actions of the government of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz did bring together a plurality of social demands. Yet, it is here, at the level of *social demands* that I find it difficult to *place* the relationship between the canvases at the Plazuela del Carmen that day. Let me explain. Laclau notes that, "if we want to gauge the specificity of a populist articulatory practice, we have to isolate units smaller than the group, and to determine the kind of unity that populism brings about" (2007:73). Laclau does just that when he subsequently notes that "social demand" is the smallest unit and then clarifies that the importance of demand is that "it can mean a request, but it can also mean a claim (as in 'demanding an explanation')" (2007:73). It is at the moment when the authorities fail to respond to isolated demands and these become articulated through a chain of equivalences "into a stable system of signification" (2007:74) that the basic conditions for populism are met.

Yet, to claim means to establish a right to ownership (to 'claim an inheritance') and, similarly, it also means to contend or argue a point (as in, 'it is my claim that…'); in both of these cases, however, whether it is ownership or an argument that is at stake, the *right* to own and the *validity* of the point are also part of what a claim establishes. Yet to do so, the claim must therefore have some

grounding. From where, though, does the camp of *el pueblo* stand in order to make a claim on the camp of the authorities? That is to say, on what basis does *el pueblo* establish its claim? The very fact that there are two camps: the people / not the people suggests that there *is* a specific contour or frontier to its social formation. "The people versus the power-bloc…is the central line of contradiction around which the terrain of culture is polarized," writes cultural theorist Stuart Hall. "This gives to the terrain of struggle its own kind of specificity" (1981:238). If populist reason is built on the

structural relation between two camps, what, however, is the social body in the global identity that populist politics engenders in Oaxaca? Considering the social identity of "the people," Laclau offers that, "in order to have the 'people' of populism…we need a *plebs* [the underprivileged] who claims to be the only legitimate *populus* [the body of all citizens]—that is, a partiality which wants to function as the totality of the community" (2007:81). Is the patria that La Piztola's stencil calls the community to defend the same as that marked out by citizenship or the Mexican passport, however? Though in Oaxaca it is the Vallistocracia, rather than *el pueblo*, who claim the mantle of citizenship by using Oaxaqueño (Oaxacans) as a way to stake a claim on behalf of the totality of the community, it may be that in thinking about the kind of community formed by the articulation or disarticulation of the underprivileged and the citizens, something about the specificity of the social body undertaking Oaxaca's struggle will become evident.

After all, both Laclau's populist reason and philosopher Jacques Rancière's distribution of the sensible make community central to the political terrain and to their interventions. In *Imagined Communities*, political theorist Benedict Anderson pointed out that, "all communities…are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (1983:6). Anderson then goes on to argue for the centrality of media—specifically newspapers and print media in the public sphere—for the imaginative construction of the national community. Anderson emphasizes the importance of the private performance of reading a newspaper for creating, in each and every reader, the certainty of a connection to millions of other readers performing the same ritual that is central in constituting a national collective from the multitude of strangers. Most importantly, Anderson establishes that a community—whether at the scale of the nation or of the neighborhood—is possible only through such mediation and performative rituals, for no one person can know all others within neighborhood or nation.

In this chapter, I will first consider the political and social importance that media and the public sphere play in constituting *el pueblo* as an imagined community. Then, by examining the style

of *el pueblo's* performative rituals in Oaxaca's public sphere, I will point to the way in which *this* pueblo is constituting a political and social basis for its claim, precisely on the grounds that the community of *el pueblo* is constituted primarily through the direct embodied relations and performative rituals of its assemblies, marches, sit-in strikes, and barricades. Next, by assessing the historical formation of *el pueblo* as deeply entangled with the state, I will question the fetish of the embodied community as political opposite of the abstract community of the nation or citizens and as anything but entangled with the state and "state-based thinking" (Warner 2005:124). By looking at the practices and discourse of governing in pueblo communities, I will question the facile articulation between direct democracy, progressive politics, and social justice that the assembly politics of small-scale communities conjures up as an alternative to the coercive politics of the nation-state formation. In concluding, I will return to the Plazuela del Carmen as a site of struggle and to the issue of the basis upon which *el pueblo* stakes its political interventions.

Mirror Image or Mirage? Performing Community and a Collective Subject in the Public Sphere

In Oaxaca in 2006, with the state government producing and controlling the local television channel's programming and with the opposition newspaper *Noticias* having been the target of repeated closure attempts by government forces, media coverage of events in Oaxaca had a consistent bias towards support for governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. Considered at best part-citizens and certainly underprivileged *plebs*, the marginalized majority was highly aware of its historical exclusion from participation in Oaxaca's already limited public sphere. Demonized on television and in many newspapers for mobilizing as APPO, social movement participants

were realizing other painful dimensions of their exclusion from Oaxacan media. Thus, as journalist John Gibler reports, from the start, APPO participants actively and loudly questioned the veracity of media coverage, with "one of the most common chants in marches becoming: 'prensa, si tienen dignidad, digan la verdad' [press, if you have dignity, tell the truth]" (2007:97). Moreover, with the mainstream national media concentrated in Mexico City and with the capital dominating national news, the provincial and

impoverished state of Oaxaca had for long been off the national media map. Focusing on its more spectacular aspects, coverage of the "insurrection" both in Oaxaca and nationally was highly slanted in the government's favor. Thus, the Movimiento Popular Revolucionario surmises that, "it would not be adventurous to suppose that the great majority of Mexicans outside of the state of Oaxaca *never knew* what really happened here" (2008:40). Whether in Oaxaca, Durango, or Colima, for the invisible Mexican majorities, it is not a stretch to say that the public sphere can be as much a site of disarticulation from a national imaginary as it is a source of identification with a broader collective identity.

Lacking access to the public sphere, and hemmed in by Mexico's vertical social and political geography, as Oaxacans gathered in the streets to protest, they were following historical patterns that had made the ritual of taking over public space the primary means by which subordinates exerted any influence upon the dominant groups above them. As anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz notes, Mexico's established hierarchical relations mean that "political ritual is substituting for arenas of discussion and argumentation" (2001:164). The politics of spectacle may generate political momentum that has effects, but it does not produce any sustained or engaged discussion that could solve particular political or social problems—after all, the teachers' sit-in strike has occurred yearly for three decades largely over similar issues. In highlighting that the street has become a primary site for the rituals of political theater through the *plantón* (sit-in strike), march, barricade, or assembly, the point is that, despite the politics of visibility that taking or taking to the street generates, the street is not a site of dialogue or debate that could be said to form a public sphere. After all, even before the repression of the teachers' *plantón* had taken place in June of 2006, governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz had moved the government's offices out of the *zócalo*, fundamentally reworking the effect of the ritualized political performance of taking over the site. Moreover, given the violent militarization of the streets and the police repression of the *plantón*, for the *plebs* forming "the underneath of the metropolis" (Mbembe & Nuttall 2004:364), public space offers an ambivalent site of engagement that is not without risk.

It is in the context of political ritual having substituted for debate in Mexico's partitioned and partial public sphere that the importance of APPO members' takeover of radio and television stations can be assessed for the collective imagination about the community that this generated. During a presentation on October 20, 2008 at the colloquium, "Political Crisis and Oaxacan Social Movement 2006-2008," Mexican scholar Lolita Macarena made the point that, up to the takeover of the television station by Oaxaca's women, much of the media—state and private—were clearly mobilized against the movement and that, in general, "many Oaxaqueños did not see themselves reflected in Oaxaca's media." This metaphor of the media as a mirror reflecting the image or concern of *el pueblo* echoes many comments on the relationship

between media and the community during the social uprising in 2006. George Salzman, a former physics professor and now anarchist Oaxacan, wrote that, the women's takeover of channel 9 was incredibly important because, for the first time on television, "ordinary people in everyday clothes spoke of the reality of their lives as they understood them" (2007:211). Filmed without any post-production, minimal set decorations, and little in the way of any scripted dialogue, for the three weeks that Oaxaca's women held the station, the image and imagination of this as a space of unmediated reflection was strong. In this time, as journalist Diego Enrique Osorno commented, "when on the other side of the big screen, the public began to see their neighbors or in the majority of cases people just like them on television, with their same problems, thoughts, looks, ideas, doubts, fears, and stuttering speech, this was when the APPO's insurrection achieved a major advance. The screen was a convincing mirror, impossible not to watch for the crudity of the image shown, of the image that explained everything: one's own image" (2007:73). The image of the media as a mirror that, in reflecting your particular experience, provides the means by which you can recognize your struggle or existence as connected to that of others is a powerful metaphor.

Given that the media always-already participates in the *production* of subjects and does not simply present reality, the notion of an unmediated, transparent, and direct image on the television screen is a fabrication. However, this does not negate the importance of its effect in creating an imagined community. Furthermore, as historian Joan Scott pointed out, "we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences" (1991:779). The question is, then, how did the takeover of the television station help produce new subject positions and an imagined community? Or, another way to put it, what did it demonstrate about the way in which Oaxaca's "ordinary people" had been positioned as subjects prior to APPO holding the television station? The discourse that the media reflected marginalized subjects without filters for the first time points to two interrelated claims: one, that the media previously did not represent marginalized subjects (or represented them inaccurately) and, two, that they could represent themselves. How, then, did the local media position marginalized others?

With a litany of slots devoted to dance, music, cuisine, and travel—more often than not about Oaxaca itself—Oaxaca's state run television station emphasized cultural programs. By actively promoting the folkloric characteristics of Oaxaca's population, state television programming continued a longstanding political strategy that erased the lived struggles of the marginalized majority, promoting them as specimens of Oaxacan tradition, but not as a political subject (Poole 2004). Whether on state television or in

newspapers affiliated with the state's elite, the image of Oaxaca promoted in the media was of a culturally strong state that was also moving towards modernization and economic progress through infrastructural projects such as new highway construction or the development of wind farms along the coast. Relating Oaxaca's current moment to the legacy of the Zapatistas, Oaxacan intellectual Gustavo Esteva commented on the effect that the media had during the Zapatista uprising in 1994, when "the media showed the real Mexico, that of our dramas and miseries, not that of new bridges and resplendent skyscrapers that for years created the illusion of a country that did not exist or existed only for a few. The people saw themselves again as they were, in that dramatic reality. It was a revelation" (2008:43). 1994 was a moment when the North American Free Trade Agreement was being celebrated as further evidence of Mexico's continuing path towards economic prosperity through neoliberal market reforms and when the country was reportedly already in the process of transitioning to democracy. For Esteva, one immediate and important effect of the Zapatista uprising was that it interrupted this dominant triumphalist discourse in the media and forced it to focus on the underside of Mexican modernity. In doing so, it revealed the national image of Mexico's imagined modern and democratic community to be based on a mirage.

Having been positioned as cultural props, through participation in radio programs and at the television station, individuals who had never had an opportunity to participate in the public sphere were positioning themselves as political subjects. On the one hand, participation itself challenged the notion of Mexican democracy by visibly and audibly pointing to its exclusions. For Carlos Beas Torres, director of the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus, the radio was able to achieve "something that is fundamental: they gave voice to anonymous people. Thousands and thousands of simple folks, men and women, for the first time were able to publicly give their opinions, ideas, and critiques. Radio in Oaxaca recovered its social purpose" (2007:36). Composed mostly of comments made by people calling in, the radio became a forum on the political and social crisis. In this way, for commentators such as Fernando Gálvez de Aguinaga, ex director of the IAGO, APPO stations such as Radio Plantón and Radio Universidad "reclaimed the spaces of democratic life hijacked by a corrupt political class and by the large groups with economic interests that left society without channels of expression" (2007a:83). Providing tactical on-the-ground information as well as creating a space in the public sphere where "simple folks" could express opinions, documentaries such as *Un poquito de tanta verdad* (A Little Bit of So Much Truth, 2007) point to how Oaxaca's alternative media became a means by which individuals excluded from participating in the public sphere found that they could enter into a conversation.

Though the public sphere is often characterized as a site of public dialogue, in a social, physical, and political landscape as fractured as that of Oaxaca in 2006, what did entering into a conversation in the public sphere mean, precisely? For social theorist Michael Warner, to conceptualize what conversations in the public sphere produce, it is first necessary to understand that the public in the public sphere is not synonymous with the people. Rather, as he explains, "a public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself. It is autotelic…. It exists *by virtue of being addressed*" (2005:67). Describing the sociality of a discursive public, Warner notes that a discursive public comes into being through an enunciation that hails an audience and, insofar as there is a sustained response to the hailing, it constitutes a particular public of that discourse. Self-organized, with individuals free to participate or not, a constitutive characteristic of discursive publics is their voluntary membership and the fact that, by definition, the hailing addresses an audience it seeks to constitute but which "therefore cannot be known in advance" (Warner 2005:74). Having noted that the public sphere is not synonymous with the people and that discourses hail indefinite strangers, Warner points out that "dominant publics are by definition those that can take their discourse pragmatics and their lifeworlds for granted, misrecognizing the indefinite scope of their expansive address as universality or normalcy" (2005:122). In Mexico's public sphere, the discourse of democracy and the nation are two examples of discourses thought to address and interpellate *the public* at large and fit Warner's definition of a dominant public.

In what sense, though, did members of APPO standing at Radio Plantón's microphone or barrikaderas coming to Channel 9 consider the extent of their discursive address? Were APPO radio waves and television broadcasts what democracy sounds or looks like? The very fact that these media stations had to be taken over for social movement participants to have the opportunity to address others already points to the limited nature of the scope of Oaxaca's public sphere. Moreover, while discourse publics may theoretically address an indefinite number of strangers, given limitations of technology, literacy, and language, in practice they can only reach a limited number of people and, in turn, only a limited number of people have the means by which to participate in discourse publics. As a site of debate and discussion, conversations in the public sphere are limited. (Hence, even if free speech is considered a sign of democracy, participation in the public sphere is no guarantee of, or even a good litmus test for, democratic debate.) Given Oaxaca's political and social polarity, this is even more so. UniTierra member Rubén Valencia writes that, "one of the things that we noted in listening to the radio is that these were communication media not only in the service of the movement but that this was the movement speaking and listening to itself" (2008:105). Much as stencils on the streets did, even if accessible to all who tuned in, the discourse heard over APPO affiliated radio stations and on channel 9 was explicitly addressing social movement participants.

Clearly though, the discourse did so under conditions where it could not take its discourse pragmatics or lifeworlds for granted. For Warner, the discursive public of APPO would thus be a

counterpublic: "a counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one" (2005:119). As a public and public sphere, the discourse of APPO hailed an audience; yet, as a counterpublic, it "also addresses those strangers as being not just anybody. Addressees are socially marked by their participation in this kind of discourse" (Warner 2005:120). Highly aware of its subordinate status vis-à-vis the dominant public, and with participants hailed not as strangers but as always-already socially marked subjects, the social body that APPO's discourse produced fits the parameters of a counterpublic.

With Radio Universidad, Radio Plantón, and Channel 9 all serving in August of 2006 as conduits for the discursive production of a counterpublic, it could be said that these media stations were critical in stirring the imagination of marginalized Oaxacans towards a new sense of collectivity and solidarity. Though Warner defines a discourse as text based (that is, as mobilized linguistically), if discourse is understood instead as a discursive formation, that is, as the shared framework of subjectivity produced by practices, statements, and meanings (Foucault 1969; see also Hall 1996a), it is possible to understand how Appista discourse addressed the socially marked subjects of its counterpublic not only textually, but was also able to interpellate it through the address of embodied practices. It was through the very act and fact of holding onto these media stations, and through the *plantón*, marches, assemblies, and other occupations, that APPO was able to construct a community based not on an abstract and imagined sense of similar others, but on participatory practices that hailed socially marked subjects as *compañeros* (mates or comrades). The sense of an imagined community may have fueled the fire of people's desire to participate, and the APPO's media may have created a discursive public, but it was in seeing and sensing the sweaty body pressing next to you as you marched and chanted slogans together, it was in discussing what comes next in the occupied hallways of government buildings with people who you did not know 24 hours ago, it was in making plans to meet at night with others at the *plantón*, it was in presenting your opinion at an assembly and listening intently to the opinions of others on the radio, it was in learning to run a television channel with others who knew as much as you about the broadcasting panel that your group was now in charge of, and it was in the long nights making the barricades, that APPO truly made its community and established its links of solidarity. Bodies in motion hailed other bodies in motion.

Entrenched hierarchies instilled through habitual practices of governing with roots as far back as colonial times have meant that, for the majority, it is only as a collective body that they have any political force. As such, most often those protesting collectively do not define the practice as part of their civic duty or

as part of their participation in a Mexican public sphere of debate, but rather as a means to achieve an immediate political end. As a national social and political formation, Lomnitz thus notes that Mexican "nationalism does not ideologically form a single fraternal community, because it systematically distinguishes full citizens from part citizens or strong citizens from weak ones (e.g., children, women, Indians, the ignorant)" (2001:12). Though it posits an idiom of horizontal brotherhood, Lomnitz points out that, in Mexico, the national imaginary that Benedict Anderson writes of can be as deeply coercive a form of domination as any other. It is through vertical hierarchies of dependence that the Mexican nation is materially sutured together. Thus, rather than the private participation of individuals as consumers of print media that fueled Anderson's imagination of the national community around the 1800s, in contemporary Mexico the majority of individuals participate in public life only as a collective body and there is both little opportunity and little trust in the highly mediated discourses of Mexico's public or political sphere. As Lomnitz points out, "in Mexico, the nationally articulated public sphere has never achieved wide-spread credence—too many voices are excluded from it" (2001:158). Excluded from the opportunity to frame concerns or participate in a public sphere of debate, and thought of as part-citizens at best, many living in Mexico know that it is only in the imagination that the national community offers liberty, equality, or fraternity for all on the same basis.

For those who took part, the social movement may have been an imagined community when conceived of at its broadest extent; however, if it displayed "the remarkable confidence of community in anonymity" (1983:35) that Benedict Anderson writes of, the limits of the imagination of that community were also sharply drawn and always-already structured by practices of struggle in relation to a dominant public. As such, the parameters of its community imaginary were not based on envisioning other individuals undertaking rituals of consumption of print media, but were based on political rituals of collective participation in practices of struggle against the authoritarian government. As a

counterpublic, APPO members were deeply entangled with the sphere of dominant publics. As a social movement, moreover, APPO necessarily and problematically entered into the space of the state. As Warner concludes, "one of the things that happen when alternative publics are cast as social movements—they acquire agency in relation to the state. They enter the temporality of politics and adapt themselves to the performatives of rational critical discourse. For many counterpublics, to do so is to cede the original hope of transforming, not just policy, but the space of public life itself" (2005:124). The social movement begun in 2006 clearly had a discourse and desire to transform policy, polity, and public life. Though debatable whether or not Mexico's authoritarian politics and the weak public sphere participate in rational critical discourse, the social movement did struggle with its state-based entanglements. For many participants, it was precisely by enacting

an embodied counterpublic marginalizing the state and state-based thinking that policy, polity, and public life would be transformed; for other participants, it was precisely through the discourse, spatiality, and temporality of state-based politics and processes that they felt change would come about.

The novel participation of Oaxaca's marginalized part-citizens in the public sphere was important in continuing to craft a collective political subject and in positioning its mobilized members in relation to debates around state-based thinking. Though this tension remained constant, in the end, the difference that the social movement made and continues to make was not that of defining an alternative or utopian space that disengaged itself from contemporary state-based social and political configurations but rather in defining new political subjectivities in relation to dominant forms of governing. The antagonism between dominant and subordinate discourses, or populist and state formations is relational, "there are no completely autonomous spaces from which, and within which, collective action takes place" (Sharp et. al. 2000:11). Moreover, if the collective subject of *el pueblo* was starting to position its counterpublic vis-à-vis the dominant discourse of governing through participation in the public sphere, other dominant discourses about their marginality were important in positioning them in relation to the broader imagined Mexican national community. These dominant discourses made a difference for *how* marginalized Oaxacans were able to represent themselves on and off the media's focus, establish a claim vis-à-vis the dominant discourse, and imagine the community of *el pueblo* in such a way as to gain social and political traction. Complex historical processes articulate *el pueblo* and the state through the troubled relationship between indigenous traditions and mestizo futures. This dominant discourse continues to promise political and social equality yet seems only to continue

to produce social and political inequalities. Forming a discursive line of historical argumentation—what anthropologist Talal Asad has described as a tradition (Mahmood 1996)—it is to the tradition negotiating indigenous identities, Spanish colonial hierarchies, and changing political state formations that I now turn to.

From El Pueblo's Indigenous Identity to Mexican Mestizo Modernity: Contesting and Contrasting Community, Autonomy, and State

The 2006 social movement reconstituted what had up to then been abstractly termed public spaces into places of and for *el pueblo* through the takeover of the *zócalo*, neighborhood barricades, cultural performances, general assemblies in public plazas, street art on city walls, and via marches involving the movement of millions through Oaxaca. While "*el pueblo*" is often translated as or is assumed to be synonymous with "the people," the embodied and affective sociality of *el pueblo* that the social movement cultivated in Oaxaca has a specificity that cannot be captured by an abstract concept or by its translation as the people as generally imagined in state-based democracy. Given that it was through an identification with the collective subject of *el pueblo* that the social movement reworked the relationship between Oaxaca's sociality and spatiality—the articulation between people and place—a genealogy and analysis of the history of *el pueblo* is useful not only in highlighting the distinctive nature of its identifications, but also in pointing to the social and political stakes of this identification in the present.

To begin with, in Spanish *el pueblo* has the dual connotation of referring both to a "people" and a "town." In Mexico, as historian Emilio Kourí notes, the history of *el pueblo*'s articulation between people and place has its origins in colonial times as a juridical term placing the untamed, indigenous people and village at the lowest scale in a hierarchy from village to town to the white, civilized city (2002). In the Spanish colony, an evolutionary logic that saw native Indians as savages and white Spanish settlers as civilized was being mapped onto particular places and people. Though this constructed order of things soon became the presumed order of things, coloring identifications between populations and places, Kourí carefully notes that for all intents and purposes, *el pueblo* was at this time strictly a legal concept identifying a place and the people living in that place. Nonetheless, as Claudio Lomnitz points out, since Mexico's colonial times, both the laws and the land hierarchically differentiated and separated Spanish and Indian rights and residences (2001:18). Writing a two-volume history on Oaxaca published in 1881, priest José Antonio Gay relates how the city of Oaxaca took social and spatial shape as a direct result of this differentiation: "The Indians were, in effect, a font of riches and the foundations on which the Spanish residents of Oaxaca raised their fortunes" (1881:342). With a particularly critical eye, Gay writes that the land grants given to Spaniards were the result of dispossessing the Indians (despojos) and that the Indians were then the very population that subsequently worked the land, built the homes for the Spanish on top of them, and worked as domestic servants in them (1881:342). Gay writes that indigenous communities were required to pay tribute or taxes to the Spanish, however, for Indians that came to work in the city: "as a reward they did not pay tribute, they were free as their Spanish neighbors, and they were offered a share of undeveloped plots by the municipality to build their own homes" (1881:383). Through land grants rewarding the Indian's ironic freedom to work for the Spanish, settlements of

Indians formed around the edge of the colonial city. Throughout the colonial time-period, Gay notes that the valley of Oaxaca was beset with constant uprisings not just between the Spanish and the subjugated indigenous communities, but also conflict between Spaniards vying for control over the remote territory.

The spatial division of the city and the hierarchical social division of colonial Oaxaca was not new to the region, however, for as anthropologists Arthur Murphy and Alex Stepick have pointed out, "urban centers in Oaxaca have endured for over two millennia. Marked stratification has consistently characterized these societies" (1991:4). With local Zapotec, Mixtec, and foreign Aztec groups battling for control of the area when the Spanish arrived, social and spatial stratification, inequality, and violent conflict were not new to the region. However, as Lomnitz has generalized, during the Spanish colonial era, "instead of belonging to a world composed of dominating and dominated peoples (who remained connected through relationships of kinship, political alliance, and social mobility), all indigenous communities found themselves subordinated to a caste with which they could not easily meld" (2001:41). As both Lomnitz and Gay point out, legal codes and the church became the mediating structures not only between Spanish colonial society and the indigenous periphery, but also between localities, regions, and the representatives of the Spanish crown governing the country.

In the period just after Mexican Independence (1810), the challenge to forge a single nation was made problematic because of the nature of an indigenous population still subjugated to Spanish settlers whose loyalties to crown and country were being tested. For all of these groups, the forging of a nation was a moment that offered both perils and promised opportunities. Assessing the importance of the imagined community of the nation to political and social formations, Lomnitz writes that nationality is "the moving horizon that actors point to when they need to appeal to the connections between people and the polity, when they discuss rights and obligations, or try to justify or reject modernization and social change. National filiation is therefore used to hammer out a consensual or hegemonic agreement" (2001:xiv). In Mexico, the articulation of this relationship between social relations and state formations is a negotiation that since colonial times has taken place across a historically fractured social and political landscape.

Under the presidential leadership of indigenous Zapotec lawyer Benito Juárez, a liberal impulse during the period of La Reforma (The Reform) in the 1850s attempted to erode the power of the church and institute citizenship as the hyphen that connected the subjects of the newly formed nation to the nascent state. However, as Lomnitz points out, "most of the social actors of the period were illiterate and lacked property and other characteristics that were

deemed central to being a citizen" (2001:150). Thus, although citizenship offered the promise of equality and indeed enshrined it in legal codes, community practices continued to produce a "disjunctive democracy" (Holston & Caldeira 1988) that continues

to color the nation. As political theorist Uday Mehta writes, liberal universalism posits the equality and commonality of all human beings as a theoretical precept, yet finds its "limits…inscribed in the dense minutiae of social and cultural descriptions" (1999:58). In point of fact, rather than articulate the Mexican state and the population, citizenship became a term that further cemented the colonial limits between classes; it continued to spatialize difference, only now making a general distinction between the city and the countryside. As Lomnitz notes, "in the nineteenth century, the term *Indian* gained a new acceptance, fusing racial and class factors: for the urban middle and upper classes, any poor peasant was an "Indian"; that is, the category "Indian" came to mean those who were not complete citizens" (2001:52). Fusing the peasant class and indigenous racial bodies together, it was around this time that the relationship between *pueblo* as a site and *pueblo* as a social group began to emerge.

Echoing Emilio Kourí, anthropologist Paul Eiss further argues for how the popular imagination that exists today of *el pueblo* as an organic, cohesive traditional community sheltered away in the countryside is in fact a recent political construct. As he notes, it was during the long dictatorship of Oaxacan born president Porfirio Díaz (1876 to 1911) that "el pueblo became a strategy through which modernity and tradition were collaboratively produced by state officials and local elites" (2008:525). As the constant references to progress and peace in Eiss' text show, producing a differentiation between citizen and Indian, modernity and tradition, and peace between the city and countryside was not easy. Enamored by the discourse of modernity and progress, around the country Porfirian functionaries poured money and praise onto urban projects materializing modernization and at the same time celebrating pueblo sites and communities for the lively color of their contrasting local customs.

In Oaxaca, the distinction between traditional indigeneity and modern metropolitan citizenship furnished the grounds for the continued production of distinct social and spatial identities. Following Lamarckian precepts of that moment positing a strong connection between proper architectural forms and proper social norms (see Rabinow 1989), historian Mark Overmyer-Velázquez recounts that, "elites in Oaxaca altered and adorned the city's spaces and imbued those spaces with symbols of progress, nationhood, and modernity in relationship to the capital's human geography"

(2006:41). Oaxaca's Vallistocracia elite continued to police an internal frontier by renovating parks, putting up monuments, setting up street lights, and also by moving vagrants, prostitutes, and the destitute to the outskirts of the city in an effort to sanitize not just space but citizenship. In this effort, the distinction between traditional indigeneity and modern metropolitan citizenship furnished the grounds not only for the production of particular social and spatial identities, but also became the centerpiece of government and elite efforts to promote and build a tourist market for the state. During the Porfiriato, as Overmyer-Velázquez recounts, "by simultaneously promoting and juxtaposing the state's 'traditional' indigenous cultures and 'modern' economic and infrastructural developments, the government turned the capital itself into a touristic commodity that attracted foreign visitors and highlighted the modern cast of the state capital" (2006:29). Since as far back as 1876, the competing aesthetics of the city and the tension between tradition, modernity, and citizenship have been crucial to the creation of polarized Oaxacan identities that are contingent and negotiated but appear to be enduring.

If *el pueblo* came to demarcate a differentiation "in the implied style of life between city and country" (Velasco 1992:12) that articulated with polar differences between citizen and Indian, and state and nation, this was not a one-way street, however. Thus, as historian Florencia E. Mallon points out, if it was through both armed struggle and liberal notions of citizenship that the contours of the local and national community were being defined, it was also through these local struggles that the Mexican state was taking shape: "The state, in this context, can best be understood as a series of decentralized sites of struggle through which hegemony is both contested and reproduced" (1995:9). Most importantly, what Mallon shows through her study of a peasant community in central Mexico is that its "communal hegemony was organized around a gendered and generational concept of justice" (1995:74) where older patriarchs produced peace and prosperity by controlling women and younger men. Saturated by "relations with the broader society and economy" (1995:74), Mallon effectively

demonstrates the negotiated production of both community and state hegemony during Mexico's period of Independence. For Mallon, "what emerged from this interaction of communal hegemony and Liberal struggle was, in the words of Judith Stacey, a 'democratic patriarchy'" (1995:75). In both the pueblo communities and at the level of the state, patriarchal benefactors provided for the local and national community as they negotiated the limits of their entangled relations.

On the one hand, the negotiation of communal hegemony in Mexico continued to reproduce its divided social and spatial geography. On the other hand, as Lomnitz points out, "this process of radical transformation occurred alongside the emergence of a new form of popular politics, in which social movements cut across the boundaries of villages and castes, regions and guilds" (2001:27). Mexico's liberal government passed laws that aimed to suture the national body together by providing equal rights to all individuals through citizenship. Enduring colonial hierarchies, and patriarchal authority at the community, church, and governing levels continued to produce practices of inequality. Whether through the popular politics of the nation or the liberal discourse of citizenship, opportunities and obstacles abounded for peasant farming families, indigenous elders, church bishops, and government functionaries as they worked to make the map of Mexico's ruling relations through communal hegemony.

In 1910, a hundred years after achieving Independence from Spain, Porfirio Díaz jailed opposition candidate Francisco Madero and declared himself president of Mexico for an eighth straight term. Fleeing jail and landing in Texas, Francisco Madero called for a revolution and for the next ten years, violent fighting raged throughout the country (see Gilly 1971; Katz 1988; Womack 1970). After the revolution, Mexico remained more than ever a fragmented polity that continued to suffer due to colonial inheritances and from the inability of liberal laws or modernist reforms to deliver on promised equality and prosperity. Though citizenship had failed to fuse a national body, intellectuals and state functionaries after the revolution would make *mestizaje* a policy of state; the fusion of Spanish and Indian races and cultures, mestizaje was seen as the most promising route to overcoming the colonial legacy of racial and cultural separation (Alonso 1994). Thus, Oaxacan born Minister of Education José Vasconcelos wrote *The Cosmic Race* (1925), as a general argument for the *possible* virtues of the mixing of races, including the Spanish and Indian fusion in Latin America, that "eventually will give rise to a new human type, composed of selections from each of the races already in existence" (1925:3). Similarly, anthropologist Manuel Gamio returned from studying under Franz Boas at Columbia University and in 1916 published *Forjando Patria* (Forging the Homeland). The book is an explicit attempt at producing a national subject out of the "bronze" mix of Spanish and Indian races and cultures. However, as historian David Brading notes (1988), while Manuel Gamio worked to transform the negative view of the indigenous communities, he did so primarily by championing the material heritage of pre-hispanic cultures; dividing the country into two civilizations represented by an indigenous rural population and a hispanic city population, Brading comments that Gamio's "indigenismo derived from his liberalism and was animated by a modernising nationalism, which promoted the incorporation and assimilation of the Indian communities into the urban, hispanic population" (Brading 1988:88). What both anthropologist Ana María Alonso (1994) and Brading find (1988) is that an enduring legacy of mestizaje in Mexico has been the identification of the Indian race and culture as the female soul and soil of the nation while the Spanish race and culture provides the rational, modern component that Mexico needs to step into the future.

The mestizo fusion of traditional and modern elements was also present in state-sponsored artistic projects at the time. During the 1920s, for example, Mexican muralists produced "an art of *advocacy*…intended to change consciousness and promote political action" (Goldman 1994:101) by presenting the indigenous and colonial past in relation to political and cultural struggles in the post-revolutionary present. Much as José Vasconcelos sought to do with words, and Manuel Gamio looked to achieve by excavating

Tenochtitlán, Mexican muralists created the iconography of the indigenous past as a resource that could be used in a *project* for making the present and future nation. Since the 1930s, as Mexican anthropologists Enrique Florescano and Lucida Jiménez pointed out in a conference on Mexican Culture in Oaxaca in September of 2007, this state-sanctioned image has been part of a broad and continuing cultural program aiming to make a "united nation and elevate the population." Sponsored by the state, and looking to "uplift" the marginalized indigenous population, art historian Guisela Latorre echoes Ana María Alonso's critique (1994) of the national anthropology museum when she writes that, "Indigenism, specifically in the Mexican context, did not provide platforms for self-representation for indigenous peoples…. The power of the public mural, as the Mexican muralists of the 1920s and 1930s knew, resided in its ability to not only prescribe ideology but also construct its own spectators" (2008:6). Much as in Oaxaca's Guelaguetza, the project to elevate the indigenous population through mestizaje was largely a palliative cultural project that could offer, at best, a better image of indigeneity for the imagined national community.

Mestizaje seemed to offer an inroad for the indigenous community to become modern Mexican national subjects; however, when the emphasis on the cultural relevance of its aesthetic past was coupled with the notion of "elevating" or whitening the indigenous population, the project's effect was to continue a colonial regime of value where the worth and place of the indigenous subject was appraised solely as the repository of unchanging traditions now coded as the cultural embodiment of the emerging nation. Exiled to the margins of the city and relegated to the dustbin of pre-hispanic temporality, Spanish colonial spatiality and sociality continued to set the scene for repeated erasures and disavowals of the indigenous community as belonging to the modern, urban present. Wrapping up the indigenous woman in the Mexican flag as the traditional half of the nation, more than ever, the project of mestizaje posited a clear divide between *el pueblo* as a spatial and social entity different and separate from the city. The result of over 500 years of struggles continuing to articulate indigenous identity and culture with dusty community villages has been a resilient and enduring "sedentarist metaphysics" (Malkki 1992:31). Hence, to speak of *el pueblo* today is to locate a fairly rigid and divided material and social geography conjuring up traditional sites and socialities whose position is one of marginalized outsider to the urban centers of political and economic power. The strength of this articulation is such that political scientist Stacey Hunt theorizes that "for the city-state or elites to appropriate the domain of *el pueblo* would be a fundamental reconceptualization of what is meant by the term, as *el pueblo* has been socially and historically constructed in direct opposition to both" (2006:96). Well known documents such as Emiliano Zapata's *Plan de Ayala* from 1911 make evident the influence that indigenous and peasant land struggles had to the Mexican revolution; yet, *el pueblo* is not recognized as a political subject in the mutual product of the complex negotiations

That pueblo communities have always been deeply articulated with the governing state and that both have been integral in shaping the possibilities and limits of each should be clear. As anthropologist David Nugent points out, "missing from the oppositional model is any sense of the mutual interdependence of concrete forms of state and community, of how each helps create, construct and enable (or not enable) the other according to specific material-political interests and cultural conceptions that are contingent in time and through space" (1994:336). It should also be clear that, in making hegemony, they do not participate as equal partners. Indeed, one of the effects of their articulation over the last 500 years has been to continually produce and posit *el pueblo* and citizens, and the countryside and the city, as radically separate and unequal. This image and needed to make communal and state hegemony. Instead, and even after the revolution, *el pueblo* continues to suggest an incommensurable chasm between the modern citizenship and political power of city and state elites and the traditional customs of insular indigenous communities.

imaginary of a nation divided has been enduring and has a long history. Taking a bird's-eye-view of this legacy, it would seem almost as if, rather than a flexible joint negotiating connections between marginalized indigenous pueblos and metropolitan mestizo citizens, this articulation produces only the paralysis of two antagonistic camps. For psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, this was precisely what the racism of the colonial system produced: "there will always be a world—a white world—between you and us," Fanon writes, paralyzed "in the face of this affective ankylosis of the white man" (1952:122). A word that does not flow smoothly, ankylosis is, according to Webster's Dictionary, the stiffening of the joints in the body by disease or surgery, a process whereby separate bones consolidate into one unmovable structure. Articulated, yet bound together by what seemed to be a permanent distance, the radical nature of this gap between dominant and dominated, and the way it positions the haves and have nots in Mexico has been the subject of much debate.

The relevance of the claim that, standing at the radio in 2006, marginalized Oaxacans were representing themselves for the first time needs to be weighed in relation to the prevalent imagination of Mexico as a nation deeply divided into two separate but intertwined civilizations. In 1987, Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla published *México profundo: Una civilización negada* (Deep Mexico: A Negated Civilization). At the core of the book is the idea that creating the modern Mexican nation in the mold of an Occidental civilization has meant dominating and negating the influence and traditions of the Mesoamerican civilizations that continue to mold life for the overwhelming majority of individuals living in Mexico. Calling the Western tendency "Imaginary Mexico" and the Mesoamerican tendency "Deep Mexico," Bonfil explicitly pointed to the failure

of the post-revolutionary project of making the Mexican national subject out of a mestizo mix of Spanish and indigenous races and cultures. This state scheme and intellectual tradition was for Bonfil "a project that ideologically affirms mestizaje, but in reality is completely affiliated with only one of the slants of civilization: the Occidental" (1987:186). Much as Manuel Gamio revindicated the material cultural heritage of pre-conquest indigenous society, what Bonfil sought by calling for a pluricultural national project was to demonstrate that the political practices and social relations of living indigenous populations were viable modes and models of governing and living for contemporary Mexico. Since its publication over two decades ago, this book has been influential in focusing positive attention on the politics and practices of the indigenous community and on community itself: its direct relationship to cultivating the soil, tendency towards self-sufficiency and autonomy, harmonious family relationships, relatively manageable territorial limits, unpaid communal labor, and governing via relations of social respect and service to the community.

As the long history of the articulation between state functionaries and subject populations has pointed to, while the communities of deep Mexico have been shut out of the public sphere or the institutional centers of political power, this does not mean that they have not been represented there. Whether through the church in colonial times, reformist liberal leaders such as Benito Juárez and local government functionaries after Mexican Independence, or academic intermediaries like José Vasconcelos and Manuel Gamio in post-revolutionary times, the part-citizens of Mexico have always been articulated through vertical hierarchical relations with the state government. Critiquing the notion of deep Mexico, Lomnitz notes that, in the highly partitioned public sphere of Mexico today, we continue to have "the formation of an intelligentsia that can aspire to represent the community" (2001:284; see also Alonso 1994; Mallon 1992). Given that interested intellectuals such as Guillermo Bonfil Batalla continue to articulate marginalized communities to state institutions, Lomnitz proposes the term "silent Mexico" instead of "deep Mexico" as a way to avoid essentializing the identity of indigenous communities as the national subject and to mark the broader terrain of "the various populations that live beyond the fractured fault line of Mexico's national public sphere.... [and] have no public voice" (2001:286). With street and media takeovers in 2006 in Oaxaca, silenced Mexico was claiming a public voice and looking to represent itself in public space and in the public sphere.

With APPO turning to modes of governing used in indigenous communities in order to structure relationships in the city of Oaxaca, however, it is clear that Bonfil's thesis has practical grounding. As Lomnitz points out, "the intuitive appeal of the imagery of a deep versus an invented Mexico…undoubtedly stems from the ascertainable fact that large sections of Mexico's population are and have historically been shut out of the national public sphere" (2001:264). Forcing their participation in the public sphere by taking over Oaxaca's television and radio stations, and instituting assemblies in order to demonstrate other governing practices, many participants in the social movement could ground the demand of an end to authoritarianism by turning to the imagined community of deep Mexico as an example of another way to live the present. In ASARO's graffiti contest, revindicating culture as *el pueblo* was not a cultural, but a political project for the present that was as much a task of barrikadera/os and Appistas in the city as it was of the indigenous communities across the state.

At one level, this resignification of the historical place of *el pueblo* from the cultural heart of the traditional nation to the center of its political present adds a further layer to the issue of the competing aesthetics of the city and Oaxaca's political polarization; for, after all, the sedimented social and spatial polarization between *el pueblo* and Oaxaca's elite Vallistocracia feeds directly into the struggles over collective identity, governing, and who and what publics belong in public space that make up not just Oaxaca's, but also Mexico's competing aesthetics. Gustavo Esteva commented on the relationship between México profundo and the social movement of 2006 by noting that, here we had "the social majority, rooted in conceptions of a negated civilization that is separating itself from the Occidental project or conceives of it in a different way" (2008:49). In the streets of Oaxaca, deep Mexico was not simply pointing to the difference, but was critiquing the gap by presenting a political alternative for the contemporary present.

With its forcible inclusion in the public sphere structured in part by the image and imagination of deep Mexico, however, the revelation of *el pueblo* standing at the microphone or in front of the television

camera was not that through these takeovers the subaltern finally found that it could speak—what self-authoring discourse could *el pueblo* have used (Spivak 1988)? While the assemblage that is articulated together as "the people" or "el pueblo" and the populist politics that they mobilize around are not given in each particular place and time that this formation arises, as a collective political subject, *el pueblo* has a particular history in Mexico and this history positions its political traction and participation in the public sphere—the people is anything but a floating signifier in Mexico. As political theorist Timothy Mitchell has noted, "just as we must abandon the image of the state as a free-standing agent issuing orders, we need to question the traditional figure of resistance as a subject who stands outside of the state and refuses its demands. Political subjects and their modes of resistance are formed as much within the organizational terrain we call the state, rather than in some wholly exterior social space" (1991:93). Having been positioned in part by a discourse that posited their political inclusion as subjects of the negated community of deep Mexico, APPO members turned to pueblo practices to constitute their community.

However, as anthropologist Gerald Creed has noted, while the image and imagination of community itself is one of "harmony, homogeneity, autonomy, immediacy, locality, morality, solidarity, and identity, as well as the idea of shared knowledges, interests, and meanings" (2006:5) and thus has great affective power, making a harmonious community through pueblo practices such as the assembly necessitated the difficult labor of making hegemony across difference (Watts 2004). As such, what became evident was that the assembly and pueblo governing could be as contradictory, coercive, and conflictive as the exclusions of representative democracy (Mallon 1995; Recondo 2007). Furthermore, Creed reminds that, "the fact that communities carry such emotion while remaining subordinate to the state makes them particularly useful as a mechanism of governance" (2006:8). In what follows, through an examination of the governing practices of *usos y costumbres* (customs and traditions) in Oaxacan pueblo communities, I will examine the ambivalent role that the romance of community presents as a means by which *el pueblo* can make demands for equal rights, economic redistribution, and political participation. As such, I seek to show both the continued opportunities and limits that community and indigenous identity present for marginalized and dominated subjects to negotiate political and social hegemony with the dominant power-bloc.

Communal Hegemony, Rights, and Radical Democracy: the Political Uses of Custom and Tradition

Though the historical differentiation between the dusty village pueblo and the paved metropole has produced a social imaginary that posits a wide gulf between the powerless indigenous people of the village and the erudite cosmopolitan urbanite, the indigenous population in the city of Oaxaca is not only plentiful and continues to have extensive roots in the state's surrounding communities, but as the social movement of 2006 demonstrates, was becoming anything but politically dormant. Oaxacan sociologist and APPO member Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez noted that in the teachers union, "the majority continue to be influenced by their peasant and indigenous social origin and orient their actions in relation to their original frame of reference, and I consider that this segment has had an enormous weight in the Oaxacan teacher's movement" (2007a:54). Collectively taking over public space and articulating themselves as part of *el pueblo*, the weight of participation of Oaxaca's indigenous population in the social movement rendered visible their invisibility. This invisibility was, to some extent, part of the fruits of post-revolutionary state policy. Under the policies and politics of mestizaje, as Mallon notes, "the postrevolutionary state was corporatist, articulating the people directly to the state through occupational organizations—unions, ejidos, peasant organizations, etc. The Indian past was glorified, but contemporary Indians found they had to 'incorporate' themselves into society through education, agrarian reform, and state-sponsored development programmes, while their 'autochthonous' cultures were reconstructed as folklore and tourism" (1992:46). The promised path to progress for the indigenous community was predicated on its own erasures. While indigenous *traje* (dress) continues to be a source of cultural pride for many women in the city, Murphy and Stepick point out that, in general, "one is far more likely to succeed in the city, economically, politically, in school, or however, if one adopts a Mexican identity, rather than maintaining visible indigenous roots" (1991:130). Culturally celebrated but institutionally marginalized, indigenous Oaxacans have found it advantageous to take up the bargain that post-revolutionary corporatist politics offered.

As architect Samuel Herriera Mier told me the first time we met in January of 2008 at a local café where we were enjoying regional coffee, Oaxaca possesses a strong "identity and rich culture" and the "people who originate in Oaxaca have familiar cultural values, of use, of memory, of remembrance, an *arraigo*." This sense of arraigo, of deep rootedness and an ingrained way of being that is born of entrenched local customs and gives shape to an identity cultivated and proper to place was finding open expression in 2006 the form of indigenous affiliations that were breaking out and blossoming like new flowers growing between the cracks in the city's cement. In writings analyzing the social movement, anarchist and college student David Venegas reflected that, the barricades demonstrated "the organization of *el pueblo* that many did not understand and that cannot be found in theory. What this experience of auto-organization demonstrated is that we can govern ourselves through respect, as it is done in the '*usos y costumbres* of the pueblos'" (in Valencia 2008:97). Whether in academic and popular writings or in conversations on the streets, the discourse and image of indigenous pueblos organized by communal governing practices and an ethos of horizontality and respect was continually articulated to the discourse of the horizontal and participatory character of Oaxaca's social movement. For local activist Rubén Valencia, "the assembly emerged due to the search for inspiration in a form distinct from that which the city had, its marked individualization.... And the principal option was given by the inspiration of organizing as they do in the indigenous communities of Oaxaca" (2008:98).

Continually brought up, the indigenous practices of Oaxaca's pueblo communities became the site for a renewed identification by people in the city who may not have categorized themselves as belonging to *el pueblo*, as well as by those who continued to have deep roots and an arraigo with surrounding pueblo communities.

Heard inside academic auditoriums and outside in city sidewalk conversations, at its most basic level, this discourse was effective in positing deep roots between the social movement and indigenous governing practices. On many occasions, however, the positive valorization of *usos y costumbres* (customs and traditions *or*, literally, uses and customs) produced a revolutionary romance bordering on the veneration of Bonfil for deep Mexico. Anthropologist David Recondo usefully summarizes the general extent and parameters of usos y costumbres as follows: "this comprises the norms and practices that regulate the designation of municipal authorities and the exercise of local governance in three-quarters of the municipalities of the state of Oaxaca (418 of 570). This involves communal style practices that are based on an imperative of service to the collectivity to which, theoretically, every adult or married member of the pueblo is tied to. Community service is articulated around a hierarchy of functions or 'cargos' that every individual has to undertake by turns and in ascending order throughout their life. In general, the designation of local authorities is realized without the direct intervention of political parties. The election is undertaken in assemblies that unite a variable number of 'citizens' that acquired their right to participate by having fulfilled their community service" (2007:27). As even this schematic outline points to, the communal good is produced through uneven community labor obligations organized by hierarchical relations that determine one's capacity to subsequently participate in the communal assembly. In the city, the very practices of maintaining the *plantón* in the *zócalo*, taking over the streets in marches, holding general and neighborhood assemblies, and constructing barricades demonstrated that communal harmony and respect were nothing if not the hard labor of negotiating and making hegemony across difference. As Stuart Hall has written, "the capacity to *constitute* classes and individuals as a popular force—that is the nature of political and cultural struggle: to *make* the divided classes and the separated peoples…*into* a popular-democratic force" (1981:239). Though drawing on indigenous governing practices and on sedimented historical relationships of struggle, the emerging collective subject of *el pueblo* was an articulation whose political force was contingent and whose existence was the product of the hard labor of manufacturing hegemony.

On many occasions, the positive valorization of indigenous governing practices followed Bonfil's vision of pluricultural trajectories to argue against the implicit tunnel vision of the

modern mestizo subject wed to representative democracy and capitalist commercial and cultural values as the future of the Mexican nation. As such, Oaxacans have not only repudiated the authoritarian and patriarchal politics Ulises Ruiz Ortiz modeled, but also have been questioning the purported representative democracy that President Felipe Calderón presents as breaking on the horizon. Many Oaxacans have also been questioning narratives of progress presented not just by politicians looking to secure votes, but also by transnational companies promising that through the consumption of Coca-Cola, Nike, or McDonalds, Mexicans will acquire the modern marvels that define the good life that so many seek throughout the globe or that through neoliberal market policies opening up borders and privatizing national industries Mexicans will find better and cheaper corn, more profitable oil revenues, and increased material wellbeing for all.

For many Oaxacans, indigenous pueblo practices represent an alternative means of being a contemporary urban Mexican subject; they are, however, precisely an alternative, and as many who are part of *el pueblo* have looked to indigenous organizational practices, it is with an eye to recognizing the radical differences that have to be negotiated and the multiple options that need to be explored. As Oaxacan street art collective Arte Jaguar has explained, "the *conciencia* [awareness / consciousness] that has been developed is not just of the current situation, it is also of how we got to the present, of the historical evolution that has formed us as we are, of our roots, which they want to erase, to transform us into a pueblo without identity, which they try to finish in the name of progress… to make us believe that we were born with the current system and its norms and that we should live only under this system" (2007). On street walls, through images not just of Emiliano Zapata or Benito Juárez but also of movie actors like Pedro Infante and Cantinflas, street artists place their images as part of a political practice that looks to contribute to an ongoing debate about the history and place of *el pueblo* in the face of a modern-national and consumptive-transnational identity that they feel presents a myopic vision for the future. Arte Jaguar concludes that, "given this situation, we underscore the importance of transmitting from where we have come, yet not with an eagerness to return to a pre-hispanic past, but of demonstrating that we are the product of a miscegenation that includes many

roots" (2007). For Arte Jaguar, as for many in Oaxaca, the project of forging alternative futures was not simply that of revindicating or elevating an indigenous identity that had been buried or negated for so long; referencing multiple trajectories from the past and turning to indigenous governing practices such as the assembly, at its best, Oaxacan practices of struggle looked to recognize and acknowledge difference, debate, and contestation as an important component of contemporary political subjectivity and practice.

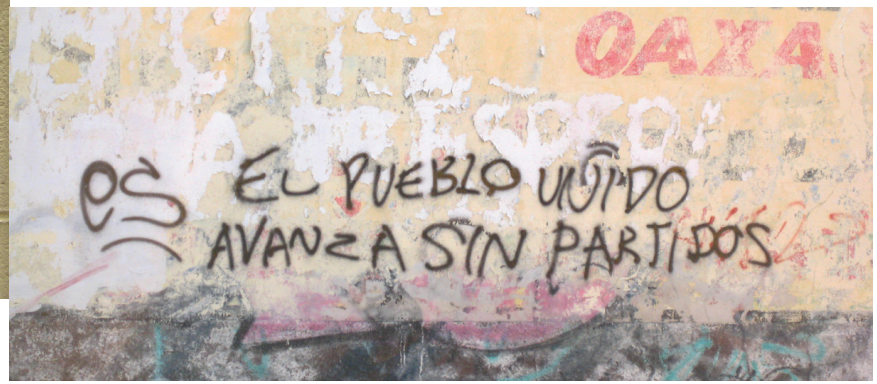
As the previous chapters have argued, through the neighborly practices of barricade building, women's active involvement in marches and other practices of struggle, and youth's participation in street art and at the front lines of police clashes, *el pueblo* has been reconceptualized in Oaxaca as an emerging urban political subject that cuts across difference as much as it is strongly framed by historical differences. By engaging together in practices of struggle modeled after those in indigenous communities, social movement participants found new affinities and discursively produced interests (Hall 1986) that articulated into the collective subject of *el pueblo*. Having said this, I find that it is extremely important not to romanticize what were often limited or small-scale engagements across difference; indeed, the repeated reiteration of such encounters in the aftermath of the height of the barricades, marches, and street art points at once to their transformative potential at the same time as it points to the fact that such engagements were otherwise rare in everyday life in Oaxaca. This reconceptualization, and the communal hegemony produced in the practices of struggle do present an opportunity to rethink the given political and social "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière 2000); however, this communal hegemony is certainly tenuous and fragile and, as the last chapter demonstrated, necessitates the continual reassertion of the identity and identification of the uncertain community of *el pueblo*.

Moreover, the paralyzing ankylosis produced by the historical legacy of colonial sociality and spatiality continues to present formidable obstacles and enduring challenges. From crushing poverty and inadequate education to racist discrimination and the military force of the government's police forces, managing the pragmatic politics of the possible in the everyday in relation to the struggle for alternative futures on the horizon is no easy task. For example, despite the political participation of Oaxaca's marginalized community in APPO, the weight of the imagination of *el pueblo* as either politically unsavvy or as dupes of the government nonetheless remains widespread. Thus, in February of 2008, as she tended her neighbor's small garden amidst the cackle of chickens, APPO participant Mama Lucha observed that there was no work in the state, a situation which in her opinion was almost a state strategy of "annihilation of the poor through hunger." Herself living in the fringes of the city, Mama Lucha was reminding me that behind the statistical numbers that rank Oaxaca as one of the poorest and most marginalized states in Mexico is the desperate struggle of millions to survive. The reality of this

impoverishment has political implications for, as Martínez Vásquez notes, "it is fundamental to mention that, in Oaxaca, poverty favors clientelist politics and continues to play against democratization…. [This] favors a situation where electoral processes continue to have an ample margin of manipulation, either through the traditional buying of votes, the distribution of food, giving out cement, etc." (2007a:35). For those governing the state, *el pueblo's* poverty continues to be strategically advantageous and is exploited through programs that deliver government handouts as a means of ensuring votes and party loyalty.

As Mama Lucha and others eloquently demonstrated through our meetings and conversations, however, members of the marginalized, impoverished, and indigenous Oaxacan urban community are quite aware of the ways in which the state both produces and takes advantage of their marginalization and aspirations for better futures. While they might not describe their situation through phrasings such as "subnational authoritarianism" (Martínez Vásquez 2007a:17), nonetheless the poor have their own popular saying for the state's paternalistic and clientelist political strategy: as one teacher stated, "nos dan atole con el dedo [they feed us porridge with their finger]" (in Movimiento Popular Revolucionario 2008:13). Many of Oaxaca's poor are well aware that the pattern of "democratic patriarchy" (Mallon 1995:75) established during the Independence period is alive and well as a governing strategy, continuing to position them as children to be placated and kept quiet through the morsels their politician parent's provide them, and that they are expected to be grateful and doting in return for such scraps.

However, rather than render the poor's trading of votes for goods as a demonstration of how the marginalized are either duped or politically unsavvy, perhaps the situation can be effectively analyzed, as Claudio Lomnitz does, as a result of the sedimented hierarchical political relations where "local constituencies have little choice but to engage in very pragmatically calculated transactions, where they receive certain resources or concessions in exchange for their voice" (2001:268). With clientelist relations helping to secure political support and the hegemony of the silenced urban periphery, the traction that a bag of cement has in negotiations over a family's vote means that, in Oaxaca, democratic elections are in point of fact a referendum on the feeble power of democracy to effect change through the ballot box. In Mexico, the marginalized majority might easily point to the political participation that the middle classes have come to think of as an expression of their political and democratic right of citizenship, and which they continue to imagine as the road for social and political change, as evidence that it is the aspiring middle classes, and not the poor, who have been duped (see Diane Nelson 2009 for a related analysis of duping in relation to social struggle in Guatemala).



Whether in 1592, 1810, 1910, or 2010, with the promise of citizenship proving illusory and the project to forge a mestizo or a pluricultural nation failing to create horizontal camaraderie or solidarities, the political force of collective rituals of struggle that make visible a grievance had often been the only recourse that Mexico's part-citizens had to remind state functionaries of the hegemonic pact that they had struck and to mobilize state functionaries to act. Consider, for example, how the political force of the *plantón* in Oaxaca's main plaza in 2006 was precisely derived from its character as a highly public collective ritual that individuals considered their only effective recourse in order to make claims on governing bodies: as Tonia, a female participant in the social movement recalled, "at first I didn't sympathize with the striking teachers. On the contrary, I was annoyed with the sit-in in the center and felt like the teachers just repeated the same thing every year. But everything changed after the brutal repression that the government unleashed against them. It made me put myself in their shoes…. If they do this to a union that big and organized, what can you expect if you're a single citizen or housewife making some demand or expressing your discontent?" (in Denham 2008:131). With the police repression of the teachers' sit-in strike in 2006 demonstrating that the democratic patriarchal government the Oaxacan pueblo was bargaining with had become an authoritarian state, the Oaxacan pueblo once again took to the streets in part to demand its share of a bargain that had been long struggled over and negotiated between governing functionaries and the marginalized majorities. As it did so, it looked to the practices of assembly of indigenous communities as a means by which to create a collective subject with political force.

Though some participants in the city tended to romanticize the relationship with pueblo communities and governing practices, an examination of the romanticized agrarian and village communities where *el pueblo* was said to properly reside leads one to question any facile reading of pueblo governing practices as anything but entangled with the state and mired in their own inequalities. It is, after all, through continued negotiations between state functionaries and community members that communal hegemony as well as the shape of the governable spaces of the state and the federal government are worked out (Mallon 1995; Mitchell 1991; Watts 2004). For David Recondo, studying the indigenous communities in the state of Oaxaca has provided him with an ambivalent and complex picture of the intertwined relationship between *el pueblo*'s communitarian ethos and the government's authoritarian politics. As he notes, historically the governing practices of "*usos y costumbres* are inseparable from the mode of domination that was installed after the Revolution. Indigenous communities were integrated little by little to the national political system and linked in turn to the hegemonic party, the PRI. What we will call the 'revolutionary institutional community' assured the reproduction of a certain space of local autonomy at the same time that it secured the reproduction of the State-party system" (2007:29). Since the founding of the PRI in 1929, a clientelist pact has helped assure PRI officials that they could continue to hold onto power at the state and regional level if and when they provided pueblo communities with a measure of local control over their own affairs.

With the PRI Party largely in control of the local, state, and federal government from 1929 until 2000, when it lost the national election, the negotiation of this clientelist relationship between local communities and state functionaries produced a relatively stable hegemony (the most important exception to this being COCEI in the isthmus since the 1970s—see Campbell et al. 1993). With control of the institutions that distributed federal and state resources to pueblo communities, and with continuing control over the state's manufacturing and tourist industry, for Murphy and Stepick the result has been that ties to the state are critical for both rural and urban Oaxacans aspiring to a better livelihood. Though the church and Catholicism continue to be influential in this socially conservative state, Murphy and Stepick wrote that, "the state now shares the stage with the family as one of Oaxaca's most important social institutions" (1991:106). Most importantly, Recondo notes that, until recently, an effect of the economic centrality of the state, the PRI's control of resources, and this clientelist pact has been the production of an identification between the ruling PRI party and the state government. As a frustrated worker in Oaxaca's State Institution of Public Education told me in February of 2008, in the nearby pueblo communities that he had visited in election years, he had often witnessed how town meetings and official events always began—and could only begin—when locals did the sign of the cross before the PRI banner with the flag in the background and the official candidate in the front. It matters, he noted, that the PRI party has the colors of the Mexican flag in its party logo. In 2008, even as the PRI had lost control over the federal government, this clientelist pact and the association between the official government and the PRI continued to provide it a measure of success and stability in Oaxacan elections.

Although the clientelist pact appears to be stable, economic and political changes since the late 80s and 90s have altered the balance in significant ways. As Mallon notes, during this time, "the privatization of the state sector, and the complete opening of Mexico to markets and capital in the United States have jettisoned the principles of redistribution and economic nationalism, development and indigenismo that have defined the original pact. What has remained is only racism and authoritarianism" (1992:52). At the same time as economic changes challenged the state's central position in Mexico's economy, indigenous groups struggling for rights (Li 2000; Nash 1995, 1997; Speed 2007) and academics quoted in the public sphere were challenging the idea that mestizaje was a viable way to create either equality or produce a national Mexican subject. As anthropologist Charles Hale has pointed out, the result of the convergence of these factors in Guatemala was that, in the 1990s, multiculturalism replaced mestizaje as state-endorsed policy. However, as Hale notes, "neoliberalism's cultural project is to harness and redirect the abundant political energy of cultural rights activism, rather than directly oppose it" (2002:498). All levels of the governing hierarchy found that investing resources in the promotion of culture was a means to celebrate cultural difference as a site of collective freedom without having to give up much political power.

Whether through the Guelaguetza or on the television screen, in the state of Oaxaca, displacing political demands by promoting cultural difference has been an old strategy of governing regimes (Poole 2004) who celebrate and promote the state's cultural

subjects as a way to disavow the effects and tensions that prolonged poverty, chronic disinvestment, and enforced economic and racial segregation have produced. Though the state of Oaxaca had actively promoted its diverse cultural communities, Recondo points out that it was only in the late 1980s and early 90s that the state of Oaxaca transformed its state laws to legally recognize usos y costumbres as a legitimate option for political organization in pueblo communities (2007). It took the increasing mobilization of the indigenous community, economic transformations, and continuing demands from multiple sectors for democratic reforms and open elections to push Oaxaca to change its clientelist relationship with pueblo communities. Paralleling changes in Oaxaca's constitution, anthropologists Shannon Speed and Jane Collier note that, at the federal level, "the 1992 constitutional reform focused only on the cultural rights of indigenous peoples, omitting reference to political rights, self-determination, or autonomy" (2000:883). As Recondo points out, whether savvy strategy or unintended effect, the move to recognize the right of Oaxaca's indigenous communities to have usos y costumbres as the local governing mechanism resulted in its ratification in 418 out of Oaxaca's 570 municipalities. While this provided a measure of freedom at the local level, through its clientelist network, the PRI expected to continue to hold onto power at the state level.

Given the entrenched hold that PRI had over the institutions and individuals that negotiated the dispersal of state and regional funds to local municipalities, the ratification of usos y costumbres as the recognized governing mechanism in pueblo communities could also favor the problematic use of tradition to curb freedoms and maintain the status quo. Indeed, Recondo highlights cases where demands for increased political participation by women, groups affiliated with political parties other than the PRI, and advocates of religious groups seeking social justice have been denied a hearing in pueblo assemblies by *caciques* (local bosses) loyal to the PRI who have effectively argued against them by invoking the defense of tradition and customs from outside interference. Even when everyone participates, the historical work of Mallon makes evident that pueblo assemblies are often hierarchically organized and that, "they had a well-established, almost ritualized practice with concentric circles of power represented within them" (1995:71). As her historical analysis and Recondo's contemporary research demonstrate, differences in gender, age, Spanish language proficiency, ties to external groups, and local divisions are the baseline for the fractured field of assembly politics and the making of communal hegemony.

Researching local conflict resolution in a Oaxacan Zapotec community in the 1980s, anthropologist Laura Nader noted that its usos y costumbres included an "emphasis on conciliation, recognition that resolution of conflict is inherently good…[and] a belief that consensus is of greater survival value than controversy" (1990:2). She also pointed out that, by producing a degree of social stability and resolving conflicts internally, these principles allow the pueblo community a degree of political autonomy. However, Nader also notes that, as "the pressures to settle and reconcile even under the most difficult circumstances are strong" (1990:193), the emphasis on communal harmony offers avenues by which

hierarchical structures of domination continue to be replicated or tolerated within the pueblos. For a woman whose husband drinks and beats her, for example, even as the community will seek to reform her husband's wayward behavior, the pressure to establish harmony with her husband can be a heavy and constant burden.

This ambivalence over the benefits and abuses of usos y costumbres permeates many academic analyses. Though it might seem that achieving political autonomy through usos y costumbres has provided local communities with a measure of distance from state supervision, Speed and Collier highlight recent cases where, in neighboring Chiapas, the state government has been "using the discourse of human rights to justify intervening in the affairs of indigenous communities whose leaders happen to displease government officials" (2000:878). As both Nader and Speed and Collier point out, by keeping accused individuals in jail without evidence, or by putting individuals on trial in cases where their crimes are not in the state's legal codes, the practice of achieving communal harmony often violates the legal or human rights of individuals. Given that the authoritarian politics of Mexico are today quite contested at all levels, usos y costumbres has thus become an important means by which both the state and local communities continue to negotiate the balance of power between them and within them. As always, though, the two sides do not come to the negotiating table on the same terms for, as Speed and Collier note, "when decisions about what is a rights violation and who is a rights violator are left in the hands of the state, governments are able to make political use of their opportunities" (2000:900). Speed and Collier, Nader, and Recondo all emphasize the way in which usos y costumbres provide both the means for continued domination and at the same time avenues for democratic participation and greater community autonomy. This ambivalence reminds that although the community and neighborhood politics has recently been hailed as a laudable alternative to problematic global neoliberal economic policies and the hegemony of the nation-state, communities are as politically problematic as either and are deeply entangled with both. As Stuart Hall pointed out (1986), for the hard work of political transformation, there are no guarantees.

Back to the Drawing Board

What to make, then, of the relationship between the stencil of a young boy pointing a gun at the viewer that stands next to a canvas where a colorful figure with an open mouth speaks of "sembrando ideas, cosechando reveldia" (planting ideas, harvesting rebellion)? Or of the image of a pre-conquest Indian with a corn offering that is immediately next to a stencil of an armed Zapatista brigade walking by ghostly faces and the start of a poem from subcomandante Marcos that reads "no morira la flor de la palabra. Podra morir el rostro oculto de quien la nombra" (The flower of the word will not die. The masked face that names it may die) and then concludes with an improvised line "pero nuestros sueños no" (but our dreams will not)?" Is there a specific contour or frontier to the social formation of *el pueblo* from which this collective subject could ground its claim on the dominant ruling bodies? Perhaps not for, as Ernesto Laclau writes, the contours produced by the articulation of a popular camp are such that, "a popular struggle involves the equivalence between all those partial struggles, and in that case the global enemy to be identified becomes much less obvious. The consequence is that the internal political frontier will become much less determinate, and the equivalences intervening in that determination can operate in many different directions" (2007:86). Despite operating in many different directions, however, these stencils do interpellate a collective subject whose contours may not be specific to a particular demand visible across their surfaces, yet are grounded nonetheless by the political practice of collective struggle itself, by the public act of their making. This is so because, as Stuart Hall wrote, "'the people' are not always back there, where they have always been" (1981:239); the contours of the collective subject of *el pueblo* are produced through struggle, and it is the practices of struggle that articulate what is often the unwieldy and seemingly incongruent collective of "the people."

The 500-year history of the articulation and the making of hegemony between dominated and dominant groups in Mexico clearly shapes not only the parameters of struggle but also the moving frontier between *el pueblo* and governing bodies. As this brief genealogy shows, both as a concept and in its historical usage in Mexico, *el pueblo* has been defined in oppositional terms that have been, and continue to be, consequential for its collective subjectivity. Hence, in one era *el pueblo* defined the way in which Spanish settlers referred to colonial settlements as differentiated from indigenous communities and from the uncivilized wilderness. At the time of Mexican Independence, defining the contours of the nation through citizenship was envisioned as the means by which to raise the place of *el pueblo*. After the revolution, cultural programs promoting mestizaje were to do what citizenship had not been able to and forge a Mexican nation that could bring *el pueblo*

from tradition to modernity. Today, plural usage of the term—*los pueblos*—marks the negotiated recognition of the multiple ethnic groups that make up the Mexican nation and their claim to varying degrees of relative autonomy. As Paul Eiss notes, "to trace the genealogy of *el pueblo* is to consider it as both idea and practice, a constantly changing complex of the various forces and agents—popular and elite; governmental and civic; social, political, and intellectual—that have taken part in its construction and contestation" (2008:526). However, as it relates to the confluence of race, class, nationality, and space, and to hierarchies between city and country, the articulations that shape *el pueblo* can never form an enduring constellation but are instead continually being reworked. Thus, as mentioned in the previous chapter, grounded in a particular place, *el pueblo* is the local community that is constituted not through abstract notions of belonging but rather through concrete practices of struggle that construct shared social experiences and imaginaries.

Whether listening to Radio Plantón or seeing a stencil on a city wall in this UNESCO World Heritage Site, *el pueblo* is interpellated as much by an identification with the discourse spoken or image shown as it is by the very practice of struggle itself. The contours designated by the collective subject of *el pueblo* are precisely the grounds of politics and of political negotiation. As philosopher Jacques Rancière points out, if the ground of politics is precisely a struggle over the roles, rights, and responsibilities that constitute a community—what he calls the distribution of the sensible—the identity or contours of the subject hailed by the invocation of "the people" cannot be assumed to pre-exist the very act of hailing: "Politics cannot be identified with the model of communicative action. This model presupposes partners that are already pre-constituted as such and discursive forms that entail a speech community, the constraint of which is always explicable. Now the specificity of political dissensus is that its partners are no more constituted than is the object or stage of discussion itself" (2010:38). Politics for Rancière is not the give and take of a debate between two or more established subjects and subject positions; politics, rather, involves the introduction, or creation, of a political subject as an intervention in the given distribution of the sensible that disrupts the normative governing hegemony. Ultimately, for Rancière "a political subject is not a group of interests or of ideas, but the operator of a particular *dispositif* of subjectivation and litigation through which politics comes into existence. A political demonstration is therefore always of the moment and its subjects are always precarious. A political difference is always on the shore of its own disappearance: the people are always close to sinking into the sea of the population" (2010:39). The transformative power of politics, that is, does not lie specifically in storming senate gates, introducing controversial topics in congress, or in making space for marginalized groups to find a place in mainstream society, but

rather in the moments when the production of political subjects opens up a space that puts the normative community at risk.

In Oaxaca, the production of a political subject putting the community at risk was largely the result of its practices of struggle; hence, participation in the barricades, marches, assemblies, street art collectives, sit-in strikes, and cultural performances was and continues to be central to both the continual making of the political subject of *el pueblo* and to its political dissensus. Art historian Rosalyn Deutsche has noted that, "according to new theories of radical democracy, public space emerges with the abandonment of the belief in an absolute basis for social unity, a basis that gives 'the people' an essential identity or true interest. Public space, in this view, is the uncertain social realm where, in the absence of an absolute foundation, the meaning of the people is simultaneously constituted and put at risk" (1996:268). As I have argued throughout the dissertation, the practices of struggle are not only continually producing the uncertain community and precarious political subject of *el pueblo*, but have also shaped the realization in many of its participants that the ground of politics and political practice is less the staking of a position and taking a stand as it is the hard labor of perpetual negotiation, discussion, deliberation, and partial agreement; this is what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe mean by radical democracy, a political practice that "replaces the principle of representation with that of *articulation*" (1985:65). This is the practice of making communal hegemony across difference without, however, achieving any closure and constantly putting the community at risk.

Given that this practice of political struggle is the making of hegemony through an articulation that puts the community at risk, what is at stake is not simply a particular demand, but the field of politics itself. This is the case due to the fact that, if "struggles derive their meaning from their hegemonic articulation," as Laclau and Mouffe have pointed out, then "their progressive character—from a socialist point of view—is not assured in advance" (1985:71). It means realizing that citizenship, multiculturalism, and neoliberal reforms articulated to the state can be a means of dispossessing and disenfranchising individuals and communities, as has been the case for Mexico's part-citizens. It means realizing, however, that citizenship, multiculturalism, and neoliberal reforms articulated to the state can also be a tool for struggle and social justice; thus, as anthropologist Nancy Postero notes, in Bolivia "neoliberal reforms often reinforced the structures of exclusion that keep Indians poor and powerless. My argument is that because of this failure, poor and indigenous Bolivians are moving past neoliberal forms of multiculturalism—and indeed 'indigenous politics'—to a new era of citizenship practices and contestation focused on redefining the state and popular access to it" (2007:6). It means realizing the real ambiguity and ambivalence of any political position, for example, how human rights can be as much a tool of domination and coercion in southern Mexico as it is a means by which to ensure that no individual is discriminated or persecuted against on the basis of their difference (Speed & Collier 2000; Stephen 2008). It means

recognizing that the Western liberal-democratic tenets of liberty, equality, and fraternity have a checkered colonial history that includes the enslavement and subjugation of others (Buck-Morss 2000b; Fanon 1961; Mehta 1999). Above all, however, it means recognizing that, as Florencia Mallon notes in reference to Latin America, "as the experiences of the last decade—not to mention the last 500 years—have shown, the important political and ethnic lessons are only learned through blood and suffering" (1992:53). Ultimately, it is through struggle and the hard labor of hegemonic articulation that individuals, communities, and states continue to realize and actualize any movement towards the progressive ideals of social justice and equality.

Though at times romanticized, whether through the language of revolution or through the imagination of utopia, for the hard work of struggling for political transformation, there is no heroic space of resistance outside of history or the state. The history of the entangled relationship between *el pueblo* and the dominant governing bloc is important precisely because, as Tania Murray Li reminds, "every articulation is a creative act, yet it is never creation ex nihilo, but rather a selection and rearticulation of elements structured through previous engagements. It is also… subject to contestation, uncertainty, risk, and the possibility of future articulation" (2000:169). There is no doubt that the antagonistic relationship articulating *el pueblo* to the state has been central to negotiating the contours of the governing hegemony between social movement participants and the dominant elite in Oaxaca. In the next chapter, however, a focus on the organizational practices of ASARO will form the basis of an ethnographic examination into how the social movement has been able to continue to articulate a precarious but powerful collective subject that is at once entangled by previous historical engagements with the state and yet is also looking to produce a new politics by continuing to put the community at risk. While the social movement of 2006 failed to topple governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, in looking at the dynamic practices of the assembly in ASARO, I will seek to show that important political transformations have occurred through the practices of assembling through which the community of *el pueblo* is redefining the field of Oaxacan politics as an ongoing negotiation across difference and amidst all the constitutive contradictions that the politics of making hegemony entails. As the chapter will show, the political horizon and the political subject of this radical democracy is limited, continually needing to negotiate both the collective subject and collective projects, and that therein lies its relevance and power.

ASARO and the Art of Assembly: Crafting the Commons

This then is our fetish now: that the dream of collectivism realize itself…as Marx's self-realization of human nature constituted by taking charge of social being here and now. This means neither picturing social form nor doing battle in the realm of representation, but instead engaging with social life as production, engaging with social life itself as the medium of expression.

— Blake Stimson and Gregory Scholette, *Collectivism After Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination After 1945*, 2007.

The email had an address and gave as a point of reference the police station that was just behind the municipal offices downtown. After uncomfortably passing by the machine guns of the cops guarding the entrance, I walked down the street and watched the numbers on the walls. Not long after rounding the corner, an unassuming black metal door matched the number I was given. It was closed. Looking inside through its iron bars, I saw ASARO member Chichas and knew that I was in the right location. He saw me too and motioned for me to reach through the bars to open the door. Apparently, it wasn't locked. I passed through into a narrow courtyard and found that although the gathering for those interested in joining had been called for 6 p.m. and it was now 6:05, many members had not yet arrived and I was early. So, for the next hour or so, I chatted with those who were there, glanced at some of the books and magazines that they have in their small library, and looked around the *taller* (workshop). The *taller* had two main rooms. In the larger of the two, an improvised and weathered drafting desk and another flat wooden table where an old computer sat provided workspace. A long wooden bench against the wall and a series of silver metal stacking chairs provided a place for members to sit. Stenciled on the white wall above the black metal doors leading in from the courtyard was the image of an eagle held back from soaring into the sky by a ball and chain attached to its foot. An oversized *chapulin* (grasshopper) wearing a gas mask and decorated with a large star on its body was perched atop the doorway that opened up into the smaller of the two rooms. (Oaxacans eat and enjoy eating grasshoppers and as such the grasshopper has become a symbol of Oaxaca.) Though these were the only images on the walls, the ghostly outlines of shapes hidden below layers of paint suggested that, at one point recently, others had joined them.

Walking into the smaller room, a large metal printing press dominated the cramped area and left only the narrowest of spaces by which to walk around it. On two shelves under the press, stacks of prints were testing gravity, threatening to slide at any moment onto the floor. Rows of blackened wooden plates sat haphazardly underneath a small staircase leading to a tiny alcove. At the far end of the wall stood another improvised table. Two rollers and an industrial sized tub of black ink made it evident that this is where the wooden plates were inked. With a welcoming energy that he always seemed to display, Chichas showed me the room. Chichas is in charge of doing the group's reproductions from the wooden plates, and he mentioned that there is an archive of the images and a desire to keep the originals in storage. Though no stencils were spray painted on the walls, a framed artwork by Shinzaburo Takeda was located next to the stairs, testament to the influence that this Bellas Artes teacher had on both printmaking in Oaxaca and on the development of ASARO as a group.

As the meeting to welcome new members got going, the eighteen men and five women huddled in a circle on the metal chairs and the wooden bench. It was clear from the way that bodies turned towards Mario for his first words, and from his composed demeanor and delivery that he was the calm, collected, figurehead of this leaderless group. After welcoming those ten of us who were interested in joining ASARO, Mario gave a brief history of the group. The emphasis was on how the events of 2006 brought different people together. Through these encounters, graffiti artists and fine arts students found in APPO a channel for shared social concerns, were inspired by the social movement, and started to come together. In October of 2006, ASARO was formalized as a group and they took the *asamblea* (assembly) as their mode of operation, for it was the way that both APPO and the pueblo communities organized themselves to make decisions and take action. Now January of 2008, though members had come and gone, the group had grown. There had been good times and bad times, ups and downs, but throughout, Mario stressed that two things guided the group. First is its social and political message. Second is that the group operates collectively—in other words, that what they do is not for personal promotion or gain but rather to give people tools by which they might open their *conciencia* (awareness / consciousness) to what is happening around them. Continuing the roadmap, Mario told new members that ASARO is organized around four *comisiones* (committees): Press and Publicity, Finances, Political Formation, and Organization. ASARO survives through the sale of their work, which allows them to be self-sufficient, to rent the *taller*, and to purchase materials.

When Mario concluded, Yeska stated that, for him, it was important to emphasize the street as the theater of action that, in being a public space, belonged to everyone. However, while there are many *pintas* (graffiti and stencils) on the streets, some signed, ASARO has a social message and puts up pintas through a selective process and not just for the sake of spray painting a wall. With an outspoken and youthful energy that kept him from standing still, this former graffiti artist and graduate of the fine arts school stressed that everyone is welcome to put out ideas; the assembly debates them and, if a vote shows that there is a general agreement to go ahead, the group then puts the idea into action. In contrast to Mario, who was not only older but also intensely serene, Yeska was charismatic but more impulsive in speech. As he darted from point to point, you could sense how Yeska's infectious and vibrant energy filled the room.

More reserved, but with an imposing physical presence, Teak added that because the group decides things through assembly, it was crucial that people participate so their voices would become a part of it. In addition to working in the streets, ASARO listens to what is happening in the streets in order to feed their projects. The events of 2006 are at the root of ASARO's artistic and political response not only because the memories of the events live on with them as individuals, but more importantly because they continue to have effects that reverberate through the present and because the issues the movement raised continue to be relevant in the contemporary moment.

Looking around at the new recruits, Yeska commented that he saw mostly graffiti artists and stated that ASARO is also a space to learn new artistic techniques, but learning and work flow from one's *compromiso* (engagement and commitment). Mario interjected that, ensnared by the influence of the individualistic life society lived, collectivity has cost the group the most work. While the group's work in the streets was strong, Mario also felt ASARO needed to develop a discourse that could describe and defend what they do. Furthermore, though the streets and *el pueblo* were

with them, in order to survive economically and perhaps also as an artistic movement, the group needed to continue to enter and conquer the closed spaces of the art world and the written pages of intellectual debate—perhaps even to join together with similar collectives at the national level.

After Mario spoke, the meeting concluded with those who were interested in joining taking turns introducing themselves and speaking briefly about their interest in the group. In the end, no one got up to say that they would get back to us. They had mentioned that ASARO is always interested in new members and, apparently, everyone who wanted to join was welcome back. There was no secret handshake, no ledger to sign, no password to memorize, no test of drawing skills to pass. Instead, though I had not yet realized it at the time, what defined ASARO membership was attending and joining the assemblies and actively laboring on the projects that the group collectively worked on. As I walked out the door that day, Chichas told me that the project they were currently working on was on transgenic corn and that they were going to be working in the *taller* the next day around 10, which, he mentioned, meant everyone would show up around noon.

In the year that I worked with ASARO, I walked through the outer black metal door countless times and had many opportunities to join the assembly and to produce art with the group. In that time, it became clear to me that the importance of ASARO in relation to the political and social transformations Oaxaca was undergoing could not simply be read off of the images they placed in the streets. Rather, it was in the work that the group did behind the

black metal door and beyond the eye of the public that some of the more interesting and relevant revolutions were taking place. In 1867, philosopher Karl Marx described how our social relation to a commodity disguises the labor (natural and human) that went into making an object, alienating both its producer and the consumer in the process of fetishizing the end product. The illegal character of stencils, and the contours of the image on the wall may remind passersby of the hand that made them. However, the fetish of the image on the wall (or of the printed or digital copy in hand or

online) cannot convey the labor of its production because the two dimensional nature of the final work cannot speak to the sociality of the art *practice* of making it. ASARO sought to cultivate a different regime of value and materiality from that proscribed by the capitalist commodity, where the value of an item is given in terms of its material exchange and where production is valued for the material goods it produces (see chapter 6). When the image on the wall is taken to be shouting against authority—or in this case against authoritarian governing—the visual reading of the image fails to convey how the very *process* of assembly is also what produces the group. It is precisely through the practice of assembling together to speak, listen, debate, decide, and then do, that ASARO produces a particular ethical and political subject. Much as the previous three chapters made the case for how the collective subject of *el pueblo* is an enunciative, provisional articulation constantly in need of being constituted through practices of struggle, so too does ASARO remain ever in the making.

Consider, for example the two senses of assembly. As a noun, or as a political scientist might define it, an assembly refers to a group of people gathered together—here it is its sense as a thing (an event or commodity) that is highlighted. As a verb, or as a mechanic might describe it, assembly refers to the act of putting something together—here it is the process that is important. The spatiality of assembly in legal and political science is described by architect and scholar Eyal Weizman as the "forensics" of the forum, a site whose logic is one where experts present evidence and debate and deliberate until taking a decision (2010). ASARO is the *act* of assembly—the assemblying itself—the art of attempting to put together multiple pieces to produce, not a finished product, but a working model. The resulting model or object can be put in motion for particular goals and is composed of myriad components that must work together, yet it does not presuppose the sameness of its parts. It is to inhabit a political and ethical modality that is of the moment and open to the moment. It corresponds to what anthropologist David Scott means when he writes that, "to speak in the vocabulary of the contingency of the present…is to affirm an *ethics* of action. It is to give priority to the ethical-political project of making provisional claims and negotiating settlements (constantly reopened and reimagined and reworked) over the epistemological aim of converging on a final Truth" (2005:7). Assemblying was the exhausting, exhilarating, and unending labor of crafting a provisional subject across difference that came together in order to undertake political and artistic action. The modality of assemblying, as Scott might add, "is to make oneself receptive to the given—and not always (indeed, not ever) transparent—circumstances in which one is obliged to act, receptive to the dialogical encounters of agonistic argument in which some positions are staked out and other positions undermined or subverted, and receptive, moreover, to the risk of failure to which any intervention (by dint of being 'without guarantees') is necessarily always exposed." (2005:7). What was at stake for ASARO members as they met behind the black metal door was not only creating "arte del pueblo y para el pueblo" (art by the people and for the people), but also the cultivation of an ethical conduct of receptivity, a political practice that was as productive and consequential as any stencil on the streets.

For ASARO members, on the first evening that I met them, the challenge of assemblying was framed in relation to the struggle between individualism and collectivism and the desire to create a productive community where, as Mario put it, "no one is more and no one is less." As a means to overcome individualism and achieve collectivism, ASARO sought a populist articulation across difference balanced by a socialist ethos of equality. Though everyone accepted these as basic principles, accomplishing them

in practice remained difficult. For example, everyone agreed that art created as ASARO by its members would bear the group's seal and the individual artist who made the piece would remain anonymous. This was meant to make the message the focus of the art and to assure that no one member would receive more recognition than another. With the group composed primarily of fine arts students and graffiti artists, many actively making their own art outside of ASARO and looking to make a living out of art, however, differences in artistic ability, in artistic output and embodied labor, and in seniority as a member were constant sources of friction. These differences were particularly acute when the assembly had to decide which members and which artworks would represent the group in moments when ASARO was invited to exhibit its work or to participate in activities outside of Oaxaca. Moreover, simply given the dynamic of groups, where it is nearly impossible to establish an even distribution or balance between the work that needs to be done and those who do it, how ASARO could ensure that "no one is more and no one is less" presented particular and continual challenges. As was also evident that first evening, though they had struggled with this issue for almost a year and a half now, the group remained steadfast in its conviction that the art of assembly provided the best way to address this issue.

Philosopher Walter Benjamin was highly critical of intellectual and aesthetic works that supported the revolutionary cause of the proletariat, but whose authors nonetheless remained wedded to bourgeoisie practices. In "the Author as Producer," Benjamin pointed to the common mistake of those who "have passed through a revolutionary development in their attitudes, without being able simultaneously to rethink their own work, their relation to the means of production, or their technique in a really revolutionary way" (1934:84). In this chapter, I focus on ASARO's efforts not just to rethink, but also to reform the production of art practice. To do so, I take the means of production to be a material, discursive, and embodied spatial practice that produces not just artifacts but subjectivities. As a means of production across difference that seeks to craft the commons, the labor of assemblying addresses the fact that, as political theorist Ernesto Laclau put it almost thirty years ago, "the cleavage of the subject is the terrain and starting point for political action: hegemony is nothing other than the attempt—by definition incomplete and open-ended—to perform an impossible suture" (1983:118). In what follows, I thus concentrate on the work that assemblying does not only as an organizational strategy and meeting space, but as an effort to perform the impossible suture and produce the elusive collectivity that Mario spoke about.[i]

i Mario's voice is particularly strong in this part of the dissertation and, in a chapter on collective practices, I would like to explain why this is so. To begin with, Mario is part of ASARO's Press and Propaganda committee and, as such, part of the position he occupies within ASARO is precisely to think about and to formulate a conception of what the group is doing. Mario is also the oldest member of the group and one whose personal experiences teaching art among black coastal communities radicalized him for, as he put it one night in April of 2008, that was a space "where one person decided everything for the group. I don't want to repeat that experience here." As such, Mario continued, "it is not a coincidence why I am pushing for something collective and that there be debate." Mario's life experiences and the role he occupied within the group—that of senior press spokesman as well as constant champion of further debate and deliberation—mean that his voice is the most audible in relation to an academic consideration of assemblying and its role in the group's organization. He was not the only one that reflected on the role of the assembly, but Mario was the most analytical in his reflections and these reflections were often part of our joint conversations about ASARO.

Statutes and Standards, Speaking and Listening: Seeking a Formative Framework to Codify or Create Collectivity

In January of 2008, sixteen days after having my introductory meeting with the group, and during the second ASARO assembly that I attended, Mario wrapped up the meeting by asking when the group could re-assemble to debate and revise the group's statutes and principles. Tired after a long assembly discussing the schedule for upcoming art workshops for new members, debating at length on how to decide which member would go to a museum exhibit in Houston that ASARO was participating in, and considering what was pending for the upcoming launch of the "Tianguis Cultural" (Cultural Market), the group haphazardly tossed around upcoming dates. Mario cut in and used this moment to call attention to everyone that there were "many internal problems." Clearly frustrated, Mario specified his point, stating that "the assembly has been proposed as the space to resolve them, but there is a problem of the lack of a culture of listening." As he saw it, there was the "need for normativity," a normativity that could be provided by well-defined statutes and principles: there are "problems that continue to resurface but they would be minimized by having statutes. It is a problem of a lack of clarity." To resolve this once and for all, the group agreed to get together ten days from then for a special assembly devoted solely to this issue.

In speaking of a *culture* of listening, Mario was simply suggesting that people needed to focus and pay more attention, but rather was noting that the labor of assemblying required the cultivation of particular habits and dispositions. This meant actively crafting particular ways of being for the self and for the group, a project that philosopher Michel Foucault described as "technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and a way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (1988:18). Mario was recognizing that ASARO members lacked the practices of deliberation and debate, of speaking and listening that assemblying required and were imagined to be integral to the production of an ethical subject in pueblo communities. Listening was critical because it was not simply a question of "hearing" someone else, but of what anthropologist Charles Hirschkind has called a "tradition of ethical listening." Describing the circulation of sermons via cassette tapes among the Muslim community in Cairo, Hirschkind notes, "such tapes contribute to the creation of a sensory environment from which the subject draws its bearings, an environment that nourishes and intensifies the substrate of affective orientations that undergird right reasoning" (2009:125). In Oaxaca, ethical listening involved creating an environment that fostered an ethical conduct of receptivity to what others were saying, an embodied and affective act that asked the group to continually be open and alive to difference that might destabilize the certainty of the self.

As I then heard, for Mario, establishing common guidelines through statutes would make creating this environment easier. Four days after the assembly date had been set, Mario told me that statutes and principles actually did exist, but these had been drawn up when

ASARO had first come together. Having been penned during the intense and fast-paced days of 2006, the statutes and principles were skeletal. Moreover, in the heated days of daily manifestations there had been neither the time nor the drive to make sure that what had been defined was actualized in practice. Now in early 2008, though APPO manifestations and police confrontations continued, ASARO was in a better position to revisit the document not only time wise but, given the group's growth and development, to ensure that it could fulfill its mandate as a framework guiding ASARO procedure and practice. For those who had been there since its inaugural days, the hope was that through a codified set of stipulations, a measure of normative procedures could be established so that the assembly could avoid having lengthy deliberations covering the same ground each time that a similar issue resurfaced—such as how to decide who should go to events—or when new members arrived.

Knowing that this would be a lengthy gathering, the assembly had been scheduled for a Sunday morning starting at 10 am and, to ensure attendance for this weighty matter, was to culminate and conclude with a shared meal. As customary, around noon the group swelled in numbers and assemblying finally began. I was surprised by the lengthy 7-page document that was passed around. The document included 34 articles, many with multiple clauses. It was noted that the statutes had been based on those of a civic association but had been modified with "an artistic and social optic." The rest of the assembly process consisted of going through each article and clause to debate its relevancy, wording, and whether or not anything was missing and needed to be added. As the group made headway through the document, it was clear the articles that caused the most debate addressed points that had been issues in the past and that clarifying a position would be helpful in the future. Some points produced strong sentiments with different positions; for example, whether or not there should be a time limit to the assembly and whether or not, after a period of debate, the assembly should take a vote so as not to leave issues pending for the future. Some points were resolved through a process of deliberation and amendments to the articles were drafted accordingly. This was not always or usually possible, however, and places where the assembly was having a hard time pulling in one direction or pushing in another were marked as pending.

The limits of trying to codify guiding principles for collectivity were made evident by the particularly astringent debate over whether or not members who left the group were entitled to keep the work they had produced as part of ASARO. Some advocated for a position where a departing artist should be able to take any woodblock and silkscreen that they had made but leave behind reproductions made up to that point as the property of ASARO. Others felt that, in principle, all artworks and material having been produced as a member of ASARO should belong to ASARO and that assembly members should be able to decide its future uses. Yet others stated that it should be decided on a case-by-case basis between the artist and an assembly. Ultimately, though past examples and present cases of members leaving provided a template, the differences over these and the imagination of multiple future scenarios meant that

assemblying that day could not produce any general consensus nor the desire to decide the issue by taking a split vote. At an impasse, the group finally decided the assembly should treat the issue on a case-by-case basis.

For me, this particular moment points to two interrelated and important aspects of the radical nature of ASARO's experiment attempting to rework their relation to the means of artistic production via the technology of assemblying. On the one hand, given the nature of the debate on this issue, where people actively made the case for particular positions and the group bounced back and forth between numerous scenarios, it appears that the very real contingency of possible futures frustrated attempts to put specific rules into the statutes that could govern the behavior of ASARO members. This suggests reluctance among the group to codify the nature of their interactions. It also suggests, on the other hand, that there was a very real and growing faith in the practice of assemblying to provide them with the necessary means to respond to present and future situations. Throughout the three-hour assembly, as issues were debated and particular clauses were either added, amended, or erased, what emerged was not a document concretely setting out policy actions or detailed governing procedures for particular conditions; in the end, what emerged was a set of general criteria or founding principles that, for the most part, referred back to the decision-making apparatus of the assembly as the final arbiter and authority for all decisions.

Having been a member for a year, I can say in retrospect that while many of the points addressed by the statutes may have served as general guidelines for the group's standard practice, this was not because they codified, clarified, or provided a normative framework or blueprint for these practices, but rather because they reflected what the group was already doing and had learned through its practice. As Mario mentioned, and as many would agree, ASARO had many internal problems. These problems, though, could not be resolved by recourse to articles and clauses in the group's statutes. With members inexperienced in the practice of organizing and conducting themselves through assemblying, turning to this method had been a leap of faith and implementing it a learning experience that continued. As educator Paulo Freire has noted, "because men [sic] are historical beings, incomplete and conscious of being incomplete, revolution is as natural and permanent a human dimension as is education. Only a mechanistic mentality holds that education can cease at a certain point.… Revolution must be a continuous event" (1970b:64). The tension in turning to the codes was based on the fact that statutes could not address the continuous event in the present or contingent eventualities of the future, not even with what may seem a straightforward question of property rights.

Furthermore, though all ASARO artists agreed with its founding mission of using art to provide a critical perspective on social problems, and though all ASARO artists rejected the authoritarian and repressive policies and governing practices of the Oaxacan government, their political philosophies covered a broad and sometimes conflicting range of perspectives. As Teak noted a week before the assembly on statutes, while the "level of commitment is individual, we all have it." Yet he wondered how the "statutes are going to reflect everyone because some of us are not APPO, others are something else…etc." With members such as Yeska, Teak, and Yomek who espoused anarchist positions, and others such as Mojo, Balta, and Mario who flew the Communist flag, and still others who did not identify with either position, what sutured the group together was, first and foremost, commitment to the practices of assemblying—a commitment, that is, to a process of discursive argumentation in relation to which individuals form their

subjectivity, shaping what anthropologist Talal Asad described as a tradition (Mahmood 1996). If the practices of struggle in the barricades, marches, and at the *plantón* (sit-in strike) had helped materially and discursively produce shared interests and the collective subject of *el pueblo*, assemblying was also meant to suture together or articulate a collective subject that would undertake the projects and art practices that the group decided to support and produce. If individual members could identify themselves as ASARO, however, this was not a normative or circumscribed subject position for, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall writes, "the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed —always 'in process'. It is not determined in the sense that it can always be 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned. Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference" (1996b:2). Given both the shared social focus and the range of differences between ASARO members, perhaps the greatest clarity that the statutes provided was precisely to enshrine the practice of assemblying as the heart and soul of the group.

The statutes, in fact, never once mention APPO or the social movement of 2006, focusing instead on aesthetic and social principles and on the autonomous nature of the assembly as that which guides the group and defines its membership. While ASARO supported the social movement and while its members identified themselves with *el pueblo*, ASARO did not claim to represent APPO or to be its aesthetic vanguard. As analyzed in chapter 3, the stencils on the streets were not intended to speak for *el pueblo* or APPO but as part of *el pueblo* and walking with APPO. When asking "can the subaltern speak?" literary critic Gayatri Spivak differentiated between proxy and portrait as two senses of representation (1988). If I have already noted that ASARO looks to re-present *el pueblo* as a portrait, I bring it up again because it relates to another important issue explored in the last chapter, namely to the fact that, whether well intentioned or not, interested intellectuals have always looked to or even claimed to represent *el pueblo*. Spivak's essay is not asking if the subaltern can speak; clearly, she does, but rather whether or not we can listen. It is, as anthropologist Donald Moore reminded me, about an ethics of listening. In the assembly and out on the streets, ASARO members looked to actively cultivate an ethics of listening that shaped its art practice as an act of receptive re-presentation.

In the year that followed, the provisional document on statutes was rarely mentioned and never resurfaced, not even when new members subsequently joined the group. Ultimately, the assembly on the statutes was useful and important not because it produced guidelines for procedure, but rather as a debate and conversation about the stakes involved in the continual making of ASARO. Though in the end gathering dust in ASARO's archives, the statutes do highlight

and reflect a broader process that has continued to shake and shape Oaxaca's social and political landscape as much, if not more, than the police teargas and Molotov cocktails of 2006. As Carlos Beas Torres, director of the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus, describes it, "below the APPO's mantle, there is another social phenomenon taking place that is necessary to expose: the construction of organization. The great quantity of organizational processes that have been generated in the heat of the movement is characteristic of this citizens' eruption" (2007:40). What ASARO and its artists, resident academics, and *chavos banda* (marginalized youths) were discovering was that, nearly two years after the APPO came together, the construction of organization through the art of assembly continued to be a work in progress.

Two years after APPO had come together, moreover, what ASARO members saw and heard in the broader social movement convinced them more than ever of the importance of continuing to work on the assembly. As Laclau notes, given "the fact that any populist unification takes place on a radically heterogeneous social terrain" (2007:98), the creation of a populist subject requires articulating together multiple positions. For Laclau, critical to unification was that "the line separating the two camps continued to act as a stable framework of significations which made it possible to identify social agents and their antagonisms" (1985:37). However, although the antagonism between camps continued to be strong well into 2008, the articulations within the APPO camp had begun to show fissures. After the government's final repression in November of 2006, with the *plantón* and barricades gone, and with marches and assemblies much diminished, the practices of struggle that had ultimately secured the social movement's barricade sociality could no longer articulate APPO together. As geographer David Slater has noted of new social movements, this is because "the orientation and significance of their demands and revendications are constructed through their practice" (1997:263). The antagonism, unfulfilled demands, and system of signification (here authoritarianism) that Laclau posited as pivotal for populism was not enough to suture together the social movement. The most divisive rift was over whether or not APPO should take over the

state or detonate the state. As Mario mentioned in September of 2008, "it is an ideological battle (anarchists and reds). The idea is to unify…. But there is a polarization because of what happens in the interior of the APPO. And these postures do have an effect. And because of our neutrality, when we convoke [an event/action], many organizations support us." With this rift exploited by the government, loudly commented upon by the press, and creating visible tensions within APPO, many groups that had once walked together in marches and sat together at APPO assemblies had fallen back into entrenched positions and were openly criticizing not just the government but each other. Listening and looking both at the situation around them and at the group itself, ASARO members realized and were grateful that, because of the *practice* of assemblying and their continued shared struggle to craft artistic projects, ASARO was able to maintain a working sense of unity that traversed multiplex differences.

This sense of unity and the desire to foster collectivity, as I was reminded time and again, did not mean that ASARO was a collective. ASARO is an assembly. Though the differences were never outlined in statute articles with clauses or spelled out fully by any ASARO member, the differences between a collective and an assembly do indeed matter and help to underscore the uniqueness and challenge of ASARO's efforts to reform its relation to the normative mode of artistic production and political practice. Though he begins by noting that "what constitutes a collective is clearly something open to interpretation," activist, artist, and educator Jesse Drew does offer the following useful parameters: "Collectives run the gamut from loose associations of like-minded individuals working toward a common goal, to rigid, cadre-like single minded organizations with a vanguardist, democratic centralism at their heart. It would be safe to say at least that collectives generally seek some kind of consensus around work to be performed…. Egalitarian concerns are high on the list of priorities, whereby rank is downplayed, at least official rank, and the division of labor seeks to be nonhierarchical and rotating, so that everyone can do all" (2007:99). With the art of assemblying generating the approval of work to be done, and with a division of labor emphasizing group participation in all aspects of a project, it would seem as if ASARO fits Drew's general parameters for a collective.

However, though neither cadre-like nor loosely associated, ASARO cannot be said to be full of either single-minded or even particularly like-minded individuals. Though sharing a common interest in making *arte del pueblo y para el pueblo*, there are many striking and important differences between ASARO members. Like Chucho, some have regular jobs, including in prestigious cultural institutions. Like Yomek, others have endured unstable family and school situations. Some, like Mindy, are in high school while many, like Chapo and Irving, are in college at the fine arts academy. Teak and Mario have children and a couple of other members have steady partners. Many are exceptional artists, though there are some members who might be picking up a paintbrush or a *gubia* (a woodblock carving gouge) for the first time; as academics, for example, Francisco and I had devoted ourselves to books and had limited artistic ability. About half of the group had computers at home and a few, like Line, a talented graphic designer, could manipulate design programs flawlessly. Everyone had been to Mexico City (the trip to the capital takes 6 hours by bus), and while the trip to Tijuana to paint the border in 2008 had been the first time Balta had flown, most had been on an airplane before. Most ASARO members were between 15 to 28 and could be characterized as youths, but some, like Mario, Francisco, and I were well into our 30s. The majority of ASARO members are male, but in the year that I was there Ita, Abigail, Chui, Slappy, Mindy, and Alejandra constituted six females among the twenty-

four members of the assembly. Thus, when Yeska stated in June of 2008 that, "there will always be differences but here we have to resolve them and…the assembly is the space of discussion," it is important to listen to this sentence and to hear the tension: there will *always be differences* that the assembly *needs to resolve*. The art of assemblying means cultivating what David Scott refers to as "an agonistic regard for—a respectful contentiousness toward—identity\difference" (2005:14). Arguing for an ethics of receptive generosity in the work of Stuart Hall, Scott writes that "we stand a chance of flourishing better, he suggests, the more open we can *make* ourselves to our own vulnerability—our own fragile, exposed, receptivity—to difference. This is not multicultural sentimentality. A real ethical labor is required" (2005:15). As a technology of the self, the practice of assemblying is an ethical labor that continually puts the community and the self at risk. It "resolves" or produces partial closures that allow the group to act, but it cannot erase the fact that "there will always be differences."

Precisely because the statutes were gestural and not treated as codified law, ASARO's assembly did not come with an instruction manual and the group continued to endeavor to find a way to improve the assembly as an environment that fostered an ethical conduct of receptivity. It attempted to do so, moreover, as a group, a fact that rendered the process of change difficult in and of itself for, as Oaxacan artist Arnulfo Aquino commented about ASARO, the more cooks you have the harder it is to stir the batter. Writing about the same dynamic for APPO, Oaxacan intellectual Gustavo Esteva noted, "this great diversity propitiates divergences and contradictions and makes the gestation of consensus difficult.… These conditions, however, are an immense source of strength. The APPO is not hung on one leader" (2007:21). Though some may characterize APPO as being hung on deposing a leader, because it is through its articulations that the logic of populism produces the

effect of two antagonistic camps, neither APPO nor ASARO had a particular, objective target or a definitive composition that could provide one. Rather, as Laclau wrote in the mid-80s in an article on "new social movements" in Latin America, "the dimension of horizon of the political imaginary, is no longer constituted as a 'total model' of society, but is restricted to certain demands and certain specific social relations. The radically democratic potential of the new social movements lies precisely in this—in their implicit demand for a radically open and indeterminate view

of society, in so far as every 'global' social arrangement is only the contingent result of bargaining between a plurality of spaces and not a foundational category, which would determine the meaning and limits of each of these spaces" (1985:38-39; see also Latour 2008). Though from a bird's-eye-view it appears as if the social movement of 2006 was specifically a conflict between APPO and governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, previous chapters have pointed out that many of the most significant transformations relate to changes in the social position of women and youths in society *among* APPO participants. Moreover, as the women's march of August 1st, 2006, demonstrated (chapter 2), each act of assembly in the social movement offered both the promise and the peril of changing course, of finding new targets, of literally moving the social.

As in any group dynamic, however, people do find different roles within the group. Mario's contemplative poise, greater organizing experience as a card-carrying member of the Frente Popular Revolucionario, and work ethic, thrust him into the role of leader in ASARO. However, he continually resisted this position, challenging himself and those who were most active within the group in July of 2008 to be aware of the "problem as well of creating a *cacicazgo* [fiefdom] between 3 or 4 *compañeros* [mates or comrades]." He and others were well aware that because ASARO did not have leaders but instead had a horizontal structure that depended on the assembly, certain tasks did not advance as quickly as they may have if the group had a vertical hierarchy with a boss at the apex who decided what to do next. Mario continued, "in the assembly it is not from night to day that things can change (in practice or thought). How are we going to advance as ASARO? Walking in a slow process with our own ideas, or walking faster but ceding some things?" With everyone encouraged to participate, the number of cooks definitely did produce a longer gestation time for issues to be resolved or for ideas to become projects. As Esteva, Mario, and ASARO members knew, however, this was indeed also a source of strength, for the projects that did arise had been thoroughly debated and were shaped not by one point of view but by many; moreover, when the projects finally found their way out of the *taller* and onto the streets, rather than mandates from above that needed to be implemented, projects had the support and backing of the group, who together sought to actively make them happen.

Though this gestation time and the process to produce projects or resolve issues could often seem glacial, there was an immense respect for the process from members all along the spectrum of participation, even among those who were often most frustrated by them. The most common annoyance was the need to repeat ground already covered. This happened often for many reasons: either because the topic was new and the group needed more time to debate it, because no resolution was taken or achieved, because the group needed to move on to a more pressing matter, because the group was encountering the same issue in a different context, because there was a feeling that there were too few members present to take a decisive vote, or because a member who had missed an assembly felt particularly strongly about an issue and wanted to re-open the debate. If there were moments of frustration, nonetheless, this dynamic also often took on other dimensions. For example, in an assembly in October of 2008 related to the opening of ASARO's exhibit space, Espacio Zapata, Chucho brought up an issue related to the logo that sparked a bit of debate. With the

comments by those gathered making it clear that the assembly had already considered the issue and what position it had taken, however, Chucho quickly acknowledged that "it had been decided before" and was ready to support the position of the assembly. Although he had not been there, Chucho was willing to both trust and respect the fact that the assembly had taken up the issue and, through a process of deliberation, had made a decision. As that very same assembly continued to consider what needed to happen next for the upcoming opening of Espacio Zapata, one member noted during an important vote that Yeska and Mario were absent. Marking their absence acknowledged the weight that these two members had within the group and raised the issue of whether a vote should be taken at this time. Typically reserved and only lately finding his voice at the assembly, Yomek rapidly replied: "¡Pero somos asamblea!" (But we are an assembly!). No more needed to be said and a vote was taken.

Whether finding a voice and putting out one's point of view, learning to listen ethically, or finding the stamina to have three to five hour meetings, no matter what was being debated, assemblying was not only a work in progress, but also took a lot of energy and labor to create a space and cultivate practices that would make the process effective. Consider, for example, the issue of time. Whether you have been in a three hour seminar at school or a four hour meeting at the office, you know that it is not easy to keep everyone focused for hours on end, no matter how engrossing the topic being debated. Moreover, with the dynamic being that the meetings typically started over an hour after they were scheduled, it was not easy to know when a meeting would start, and impossible to say when it would end. This meant that there were people who strolled in late and in the middle of a debate or others that had to leave before an issue had been decided. With the average meeting lasting just over three hours, and with an average week having two to three meetings, ASARO members had to have or develop stamina to engage with everyone regularly in debates for such a long time. Despite the fact that many ASARO members have a recent relationship to a scholastic space, assemblying was a novelty for almost everyone and everyone had to actively cultivate technologies of the self to make the practices of talking, listening, and engaging with the debate a part of their habitual routine. Moreover, despite meetings that could run to over five hours, with

everyone actively encouraged to participate, as these practices became part of people's embodied disposition, it was often the case that there did not seem to be enough time.

Though treated more fully in chapter 6, the fact that ASARO has the opportunity to be self-sufficient and operates outside of the art market machine both helps and hinders the issue of time and the process of generating a working assembly. Studying art collectives in Cuba, art historian Rachel Weiss made the interesting point that because the Cuban artists she was researching were state-sponsored and do not have to depend on their art for their livelihood, they had time and space to create collectives: "these conditions were propitious for collective-based working processes that are, among other things, notoriously time-consuming and therefore difficult to maintain under the pressures of a market-driven production" (2007:119). Because ASARO often created art in support of other organizations in the social movement, its members often felt the pressure of looming deadlines. Moreover, much as the condition of possibility for someone to attend a march, maintain a barricade, or camp out at the sit-in strike was that someone else continued to labor at home or at work, many ASARO members were supported by an unseen labor force that made their political activity possible. A great many of its members did have to secure a living or accommodate class schedules and other commitments, however. This meant that assemblies were held in the evening or during the day in the weekends. Thus, although in general time bends and stretches with more flexibility vis-à-vis daily job schedules in a place like southern Mexico than in the United States, even before the question of picking up a paint brush or a carving tool, organizing an assembly and ensuring that people could participate presented a significant challenge for ASARO.

Although one might expect that activities such as going out from 11 p.m. to 3 a.m. to put up stencils formed the lifeblood of the group, the reality is that ASARO members spent as much if not more time debating in the *taller* than out in the streets. Assemblying is the center of ASARO. This is so not only because it was through this process that the group debated what to do, but also because it was through this process that members concretized plans for when to undertake an activity. As many opportunities for actions were contingencies of the present moment, unless attending the assemblies or actively working at the *taller*, the opportunities for members to participate in activities decreased dramatically. As might be imagined, an outcome of the fact that assemblying was the lifeblood of the group was that the burden of work quite frequently fell on the same core group of 8 to 10 members. The lack of equilibrium between the number of people associated with ASARO or recognized as members and the reduced number who were doing most of the work was a source not only of tension but also of concern. Strengthening participation at assemblies was at the forefront of addressing these interrelated issues.

Cultivating practices at assemblies themselves was one way that this challenge was addressed. This might mean that, when conversation was dominated by one or two people's voices and opinions, someone would ask those who had not spoken what they thought. Before a vote, the options on the table were recounted and a call for other options to consider was made before voting took place. As Mario noted in a conversation in June of 2008, ASARO does "take up the fight for others to assume their role in the assembly of speaking and listening." In my year with the group, cultivating participation was bearing fruit and some of the younger members or those not accustomed to speaking were beginning, tentatively, to make their voices heard. It did take a long time and shared labor for members to gain the confidence that they could provide their opinion and to understand that their point of view was welcome. For some who spoke frequently, it meant learning to make space for other voices to be heard and becoming comfortable with silence; for those who spoke less, it meant gaining the trust to risk a position.

Making space for others to speak and speaking, however, were easier practices to cultivate than their partner, listening. The "problem of not having the habit of listening to the assembly," as Beta put it in July of 2008, was one that haunted the group. After all, how does one work on the conduct of conduct of others to inculcate listening practices? At times, if the speaker felt that not everyone was listening, s/he might comment on the seriousness of the conversation as a way for others to pay attention. At other times, gauging the fact that the group had run out of energy and simply could no longer remain engaged became important. Though seemingly a Herculean labor, the most important way that listening was cultivated among the group was by listening attentively oneself. If engaged, the bodies seated upright in chairs and arranged in a circle had an affective pull that invited and produced concentration from the collective's comportment. Similar to the way in which Hirschkind describes the figure of the *da'iya* as "an active and concerned citizen, one who, having honed the skills of public concern and careful listening, is able, through example and persuasion, to move fellow Muslims toward correct forms of comportment and social responsibility" (2009:131), so too did ASARO members strive actively to inculcate habits of comportment in themselves that could incite others through example and persuasion to ethical listening practices. Embodied practice interpellated similar embodied practice.

However, in contrast to Cairo, there was no foundational text by which to begin to ground virtue. Although indigenous community imaginaries provided a perspective, and statues existed, it was through the acts of speaking, acts of listening, acts of deliberation, and artistic practices, that ASARO members were actively engaged in searching for and sorting out what was virtuous conduct. Working on the self meant working on the social. As anthropologist Michael Rowlands further points out, "in any given materiality, Foucault argues that techniques of the body and instrumental techniques are also techniques of the self. Consciousness is therefore formed through bodily acts of making and doing, in interaction with others" (2005:78; see also Mahmood 2004; Zizek 1989). As the group was finding out, embodied practice shapes consciousness, producing individual and collective subjectivity. However, ASARO assemblies were never smooth, nor did they ever magically come together. People's participation needed to be fostered, not simply talked about as important, but *made* important.

For the ethical listening subject being produced by assemblying, above all, patience and confidence were necessary. Patience was needed to trust in the process and to continue to actively shape self and social at the assembly. Patience was also necessary because

of the realization that, when Mario stated in July of 2008 that the "assembly is important for the practice of discussion, although it is not easy for everyone," what he was getting at is not simply that habits of speaking and listening are not taught in Oaxaca's schools or valued in the home, but also that, for the majority of ASARO members, their everyday interactions with Oaxacan society have taught them that they have nothing to say or that what they have to say is worthless. Providing confidence in others that the group valued their opinion was a constant challenge, especially when an ASARO member could state in an assembly, as one did, that "no me gusta decir nada o leer porque yo no sé nada" (I don't like to say anything or read because I don't know anything). ASARO sought to cultivate a different regime of value and spatiality from that proscribed by what Freire calls the "banking concept of education" (1970a), where experts at the blackboard or behind the podium feed knowledge into the minds of a passive audience. Practicing an

ethics of listening was a way of valuing another member's opinion that could provide them not only with the confidence to continue to share their points of view, but also was a way to build shared knowledges within the group. Discussion and debate were not simply mechanisms to decide what comes next but were seen—and served—as spaces to share and construct knowledges. As geographer Gillian Rose has noted, moreover, for organizers of community arts projects in marginalized communities in Edinburgh, "many of the workers I spoke with elaborated at length how difficult it could be to get people listening to themselves, and they argued that this difficulty was itself the most profoundly oppressive aspect of the marginalization of communities" (1997:196). Marginalization produces a failure to constitute an ethics of listening not just to others, but to oneself. Holding assemblies to debate certain topics or to provide a workshop forum to speak on certain issues, the assembly was reconceptualizing knowledge not as an individual possession that one either had or lacked, but as a shared conversation useful in helping guide virtuous conduct and an ethical practice towards self and others.

With patience and repeated practice, as Yeska saw it, ASARO members would come to understand that the assembly was a social and a material, embodied space where people had to "rifarsela" (to gamble). They would come to understand, in other words, that the shared dynamics of the assembly provided an opportunity for everyone to follow Freire's advice and "to think, to imagine, to risk themselves in creation" (1970b:63). The risk was real in the small stakes of having your proposal for a particular project debated on and voted down—which is what Yeska was referring to. The risk was also real in the larger stakes of finding the limits, flaws, or constitutive contradictions of a particular position that you valued when this position was debated and discussed among the group—or even simply that most people felt otherwise. Risking the possibility of difference, risking, that is, the threshold or frontier of the self was not easy and meant understanding assemblying as "a never ending agonistic democratic struggle and negotiation between particulars which, as it were, acknowledge their insufficiency" (Hall 2000:11). In both Yeska's, Freire's, and Stuart Hall's articulations, it was also the risk of going somewhere new, it was to risk life as an open-

ended creation. As such, the process of assemblying required a great deal of respect and trust among members and was helping to build this trust and respect among members (trust and respect that was also necessary for the group's political art practice in Oaxaca's militarized streets).

Many ASARO members also commented that they felt a responsibility towards the group and each other. Similarly to what Weiss found in the Cuban cultural community in the 1980s, for ASARO its "ethics are situational rather than metaphysical, derived from their work and from the affiliations and obligations that they had to each other rather than from grand claims" (2007:118). The assembly provided the opportunity to practice a different sense of collective sociality from the atomistic individualism of the crowd and the capitalist regime of value—whether of an artwork or knowledge as a commodity. Continually questioning self and others through the practices of assemblying, ASARO quickly realized that there was no one road to social and political transformation but only contingent paths leading away from the present. On the hard road to renewal, the only certainty was the practice of struggle itself, and the shared solidarities among the group that struggle produced.

As the group was finding through assemblying itself, the process needed to be trusted even if, and especially when, it was necessary to debate an issue that promised to be uncomfortable or produce tension. Such was the case one November evening in 2008 when Mario raised the issue that the work of certain members had been given more weight in the black and white catalog that ASARO produced to celebrate its second anniversary and the opening of Espacio Zapata. Pointing out that two members had about 10 or 11 images each while others had none, Mario mentioned that someone had spoken to him about this discrepancy. Members present pointed out that the group conducted assemblies to go over the images to use and that there had been plenty of possibility for everyone to participate in the selection process. Yeska commented that none of the images in the catalog mentioned who had done them but belonged and represented everyone, as always. Yomek then smartly stated that this kind of critique was best done by the

individual here, at the assembly. As I pointed out, the more serious issue was not whether or not the number of images are skewed in favor of one or another person, but rather that someone had not felt comfortable in participating openly in the space of the assembly.

Uncomfortable topics ranging from other experiences of perceived favoritism, individuals putting up personal work at group invitations, and instances where broken promises by individual members directly affected the group had been addressed collectively in assemblies where those who were involved were present. As Chucho noted in one such discussion that July, "there are cliques here" and though this is a collective effort, we continue to confront the "problem of what is best for persons or individuals." Assemblying was clearly a work in progress that would never function perfectly—and did not have to. Indeed, it was moments of friction such as these that ultimately demonstrated the health of assemblying and the fact that, even if slowly and unevenly, ASARO members could feel comfortable to raise tense issues at an assembly before the group rather than hold their apprehensions in or release them through the rumor mill—and they could also feel comfortable in knowing that, for those who were effectively called to attention for their behavior, the assembly sought a space of conciliation rather than rupture.

Communal Hegemony: Force, Power, and the Conduct of Conduct

On October 1st of 2008, after participating in the opening of the exhibit at the Curtiduría gallery to commemorate the 1968 massacre of protesters in Tlatelolco, ASARO members went to the presentation of the latest work from "Hecho en Oaxaca" (Made in Oaxaca), a virtual art space that connected various local artists together. After a slide show of current work, a panel of four artists and critics spoke and took questions from the crowd. In one exchange, a panelist mentioned that what artists needed was "crítica real" (real critique) and that artists could no longer rely on that type of critique that is only "patting ourselves on the back." Rather, what Oaxacan artists really needed was the "critique that is confrontation. It is here where dialogue and discussion is born, not in throwing flowers at ourselves." Though ASARO assemblies were works in progress looking to cultivate a collective ethical subject together, they were spaces of confrontational critique whose moments of friction provided the kind of creative spark that did in fact produce some of the most productive debates.

However, given the group's differences and the friction and tension that moments of open critique at ASARO assemblies created, did debates produce shared consensus or did they convince those with opposing viewpoints to support an antagonistic position? Or, to put it another way, if the assembly was not simply an organizational approach that ASARO took to rework the group's relation to the means of artistic production, but was an active technology by which to form attentive and vocal subjects, was it able to produce collectivity without coercion? Anthropologist David Recondo's analysis of assemblies in communities that govern themselves through *usos y costumbres* (customs and traditions) suggests that, "in reality, the 'complementarity' of consensus tends to

involve strong pressures so that dissidents will adhere to majority decisions" (2007:353). ASARO's assemblying practice did not require a unanimous vote or complete consensus, but the tendency within group debates was to try to win over those with opposing viewpoints and to seek conditions where votes would not be closely split between issues. As deliberations took shape, it was often the case that one option stood out as having the clear backing of the majority within the group. While the ASARO assembly was not structured through gender or age differentiations, as were the peasant community assemblies in central Mexico that historian Florencia E. Mallon studied, nonetheless her articulation of the process of deliberation as "communal hegemony" (1995) is useful here in highlighting that practices of deliberation, even among groups with a communitarian ethos, are practices where consent needs to be negotiated. As such, even among seemingly egalitarian groups, *making* communal hegemony is a process that continues to answer political theorist Antonio Gramsci's pivotal question of how to "obtain their consent and collaboration, turning necessity and coercion into 'freedom'" (1971:242). Veering tensely on the border between consent and coercion, when it was time for a final vote in ASARO assemblies, each member indicated her or his preference by a show of hands, a practice that allowed everyone to see how others voted. While some might code this transparency positively as a way to visibly avoid fraudulent vote counts (no small matter in Mexico), others might code this as an act of coercion that could have the tendency to produce more votes for the option that had the most visible support or discomfort for voting against the majority opinion.

The ironic sense of freedom that Gramsci writes of also animates Foucault's writings on power (and Marx's writings on capital labor). Enshrined in the statutes, ASARO's assembly did have the authority to discipline members. Disciplinary force was not necessary, however, since the practices of assemblying functioned as a collective technology of the self that shaped member conduct. Describing the kind of power that is capable of shaping and steering the conduct of conduct as productive power, Foucault wrote: "What defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts on their actions" (1982:340). For Foucault, what distinguishes repressive and productive power, or subjection from subjectivity, is that while repressive power forces a subject to act in a particular way, productive power works through the relational dynamics between subjects to make some actions more possible than others and to inculcate certain behaviors rather than others. Productive power "operates on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of active subjects is able to inscribe itself" (Foucault 1982:341). Through its discursive practices and embodied dispositions, the assembly not only defined the proper subject of the ASARO assembly but also molded the conditions of possibility for member comportment in that direction. Communal hegemony was shaped by the discourse and embodied dispositions of the assembly.

Discursive acts, for example, were often critical in inciting the group to reflect on past and present practices and to define new avenues for action in the future. In early April of 2008, in a moment when ASARO continued to be busy each week organizing the newly created Tianguis Cultural "Libertad y Resistencia" (Cultural Market "Liberty and Resistance") and found itself also at the forefront of an effort to launch a national network of street artists, Mario asked the group: "how does everyone see what ASARO has been propelling? Here is the space to manifest yourselves. We have to assess what ASARO has been doing. The past few months a shitload of things have been pushed forward. If it is necessary, perhaps we have to put some things aside and retake others." As the assembly took up this invitation to reflection, the answers produced

took the form of promises by individual members to do more to contribute to the group. As one said, "I have been detached, need to give it more effort." Another: "there are some artworks that I have done, but I do have…." What that member thought he needed to do was drowned out by another member who proclaimed, "I will give it more effort!" Whether impelled by the collective affect of shared responsibility, guilt over differences in workloads, or the powerful feeling of being interpellated by words spoken at the assembly, assemblying in the *taller* was representative of productive power relations. Hailed by the power of a collective voice, though it might take repeated instances, in many occasions these moments of interpellation did produce changes in behavior and were not just contemplative exercises demonstrating shared desires or the effects of the power that the eyes of the assembly could have on individuals or the group.

If practices of assemblying were productive of particular dispositions that shaped consciousness and an ethics of listening, practices of deliberation clearly remained a risk and in general the assembly did not achieve a consensus of opinion. Thus, there often were dissenting voices for actions that the group supported and undertook. As one of the members commented, the problem of rule by assembly majority was that if you want corn and everyone else says wheat, then you must eat wheat with the group. However, after members noted their reasons for opposition to an idea or project or presented an option moving in a different direction before the assembly, dissenting members tended to work as ASARO to support the group in accomplishing the project, even when the majority vote went against them. Clearly, the line between coercion and consent becomes muddied in moments when someone undertakes an action that they have specifically taken a stance against. Yet, it is also possible to say that this is neither a case of "contradictory consciousness" where theory needs to catch up to practice, nor a case of the tyranny of the majority, for no one that failed to support an action they opposed was ever reprimanded. Rather, it seems to me to follow Freire's invocation to risk the self in creation. Thus, what the practices of assemblying invited members to do was not to eat either only corn or wheat, but to risk the possibility that, at a certain moment, in a certain time and place, one might risk trying the other one even if imagined as unpalatable.

As ASARO members engaged in the practices of deliberation, debate, and decision and cultivated an ethics of listening that produced a confidence to risk the self and the group, the productive power of assemblying extended beyond the *taller*. In late September of 2008, for example, Chichas and Line went as representatives of ASARO to speak at a "Resistencias Colectivas" (Collective Resistances) forum in Mexico City. Put together by the Centro Cultural de España (Cultural Center of Spain), the forum included the voices of many art collectives and artists from around the country. As Chichas mentioned upon returning, there was a sizeable audience present that day and this made it difficult to speak. However, he felt that, "well, that is how the assembly decided, that I come" and knowing that the assembly had voted for him to go and that he had their support, he was able to move out of his comfort zone and speak about ASARO before a large audience. Interestingly, here was a case where, as anthropologist Donald Moore would note, Foucault's conception of conduct is operative: "conduct both orchestrates and enacts agency, emphasizing how power relations imbue actions, including those 'freely' performed" (2005:9). The labor, time, and body of Chichas was, after all, ironically "volunteered" to go and speak at the event and Chichas "freely" went. Yet, because of the very real *trust* that he had in ASARO and in the process of assemblying, he was able to risk stepping across to something beyond his habitual frontier.

Learned habits of debate also made it possible for ASARO members to step beyond their frontier and engage with each other in respectful and considered conversations across difference outside of the space of the assembly. In late September, around the same time as Chichas returned from Mexico City, Mario, Beta, Yeska, and I found ourselves in the *taller* after an assembly seated around the printing press talking and drinking beer. The discussion turned to problems in the social movement and tensions between socialist and anarchist tendencies within it. Knowing that Mario was an ardent supporter of a Marxist-Leninist viewpoint and that Yeska pulled towards anarchism, Beta asked Yeska, "you as an artist, a person, what do you want? Because I know what I want, but the problem is that I cannot find the road." In his response, Yeska put forth the position that each nation, depending on the particular conditions it found itself in, had to find their own solution to common social and political problems like poverty, education, and exploitation. Mario pushed Yeska to define the relationship he saw between the people and the state in his conception of the nation, and then wondered whether or not Mexico offered any homegrown solutions: "Something new? What? Zapatistas? For how much longer will they be an example? So long as the pueblo does not take power, things won't change." Mario expressed the viewpoint that indigenous movements like the Zapatistas that sought to create united pockets of autonomy within a broader national framework were doomed to fail because they relied on a false sense of autonomy from the state that, sooner or later, the state would exploit. From Mario's perspective, ultimately power remains and is rooted in the state and, for him, the road towards any kind of lasting change needed to go through the state. Hence his support for a Marxist-Leninist organization.

As the shadowy light of dusk slowly crept across the printing press, we turned on the garish overhead lights, opened more beers and continued the conversation. Beta and I listened to Yeska and Mario and considered what they had to say with regard to the relationship between the nation, *el pueblo*, and the state. If revolutionary change was not achievable through the nation or via indigenous identity, Beta wondered what Mario felt could create a community that could challenge or take over the state? Given that in addition to being an architecture student Beta also drove a motorcycle-taxi to make a living, what his daily experience during the social movement had shown was that there was a problem in assuming that some kind of class solidarity existed between the marginalized members of *el pueblo*. As he put it, "the people of the moto-taxis said that they were with the APPO and after the *desmadre* [chaos] began they said that they weren't—but the *gente* [people] are supposed to be of *el pueblo*!?" Mario delivered a canonical Marxist take on how it was impossible that all the masses could understand their objective

conditions or the need to take over the state, a condition that made a revolutionary vanguard necessary. (As such, then, Mario resisted vanguardism in ASARO as a way to achieve change, but felt that it was necessary in relation to the broader social and the state.) After listening to Mario, Beta still wondered, though, not only whether or not a nationalist, anarchist, or socialist perspective provided the best path towards social transformation, but also *how* to make change happen: "the problem is, one says weapons, another says elections, so in which direction to walk?" Coming nearly full circle to where Yeska had started the conversation, Mario's response was that "Lenin says that each country has its own conditions." While both Yeska and Mario could agree on this point, the conversation hinged precisely on how to read the conditions in Oaxaca and Mexico at the moment.

Though we had come full circle and had not been able to agree on one perspective or another, Beta stated that, "the cool thing about the group is that you butt heads against many ideas and see other points of view." Running out of beer and with a clock that now read well past midnight, Beta's statement seemed to cap the night off nicely, but the conversation continued as the four of us debated the relationship between party politics, material conditions, the glacial or accelerated rate of change, ASARO and Oaxaca. Agreement did take shape around the fact that, no matter what your political or social position, what Oaxaca's social movement was able to bring about were conditions where the "problem of *borregismo*, of following ideas in a dogmatic line" was challenged. Around 2 am, as the four of us were finally heading out the door to get some food together, Mario concluded that night's reflections (but not the fiesta) by stating that, "as it happened in the APPO, in ASARO there is resistance. It is not a matter of confining people…that because they are peasants this means 'x'." Whether peasant, proletariat, professor, or politician, old identifications of what people should be were being replaced by what people could do. No matter what your political, social, or material conditions, in Oaxaca the people had stopped following others like unthinking lemmings. If the militarized streets, crushing poverty, and continued authoritarian governing practices meant that the future was anything but wide open, it was at least open to debate.

At the neighborhood barricades, in the *zócalo* at the *plantón*, at small gatherings in local plazas and massive meetings in giant stadiums, practices of assemblying were articulating individuals, groups, and causes together across difference. Talking with Mario one afternoon about the similarities between Oaxaca and other uprisings in Mexico like the 146-day Sicartsa steel-worker's strike in Michoacán and the revolt to stop the appropriation of farmland for a new Mexico City airport in San Salvador Atenco,

Mario noted that as long as neoliberal policies dominated the state's agenda, the future foretold the continuation of these kind of confrontations. When discussing why Oaxaca was different, if at all, Mario and I focused on the role of the assembly in APPO in bringing people and organizations together in situations where what was asked of them was not to iron out their differences, but rather to establish a common ground for decisions that tended to produce immediate actions. Assemblies produced, in my reading, a politics of the moment that, in conjunction with the acute crisis and elevated state of emergency, were not predicated on generating a well defined horizon that everyone could agree on. Rather, practices of struggle focused on finding a path by which to suture together a community in action and, through assemblies, to momentarily set aside differences by focusing on the crafting of shared projects. Through the art of assembly, what was manufactured was neither a song of praise for diversity and multicultural sunshine (see Scott 2005), nor the force of consensus as practiced by many pueblo community governing practices (see also Mallon 1995; Recondo 2007).

The space of solidarity that assemblying produces in articulating difference is situational. Unlike the practices of deliberation of party politics, where debates tend to be contests where two candidates with differing viewpoints try to convince others that they are right and the person across from them is wrong, the politics of assemblying in Oaxaca (at least as practiced by ASARO) are built on finding—or building—a provisional common ground in order to achieve a joint activity. Assemblying practices are modeled on what David Scott highlights as the call from Romand Coles for "a *receptive* generosity, that is to say, a mode of practicing generosity that is as responsive to *receiving* as it is to giving, as responsive to *listening* as it is to speaking" (2005:12). As ASARO practiced them, assembly politics are project based, not platform based. Ultimately, the practices of assemblying and of making art collectively are what continually hold the radical differences of the group together and create an affective bond between its members. Though inspired by the practices of assembly in the pueblos rather than modeled after anarchism, anthropologist David Graeber's observations on anarchist organization aptly describe the general qualities of practice in ASARO assemblies: "anarchist-inspired groups tend to operate on the assumption that no one could, or probably should, ever convert another person completely to one's own point of view, and that decision-making structures are ways of managing diversity, and therefore, one should concentrate instead on maintaining egalitarian process and on considering immediate questions of action in the present" (2007:301). Working on shared projects and actions in the present, ASARO became a space of debate, dialogue, and practice where individuals with contrasting political philosophies could find common ground across difference.

Though the lessons provided by assemblying that ASARO was learning were not intelligible to all who saw their stencils on city walls in Oaxaca, ASARO was able to take its experiences producing both the art of assembly and art of protest into the project of forming a national collective of Mexican artists who created art with a social message. Coming together as a result of the opportunity to connect with other street artists provided by ASARO's participation in the World Social Forum and the itinerant exhibit of "Las Calles Estan

Diciendo Cosas" (The Streets are Telling Us Things), what would become *Revuelta Cultural Mexicana* (Mexican Cultural Revolt) is another example of the significance that rethinking the relations of production of art can have. It is also an example of the practices and goals of the new collectivism that art historians Blake Stimson and Gregory Scholette find is growing within the world of art. As they point out, this new collectivism retains the age-old goal of "the dream of redemption, of experiencing the imagined community as an end to alienation" yet, rather than provide aesthetic representations or abstract intellectual depictions of utopia, seeks to "realize itself not as an image or as a flight from images but instead as a form of social building that brings itself into being wherever and whenever it can" (2007:13). This suggests that today, if artistic groups look to fulfill the Russian constructivist's call of "art into life," the focus and effort is not simply to mass-produce art for the masses, but rather to transform art by focusing on its social production and in seeing sociality and the art of crafting collective life itself as a goal of art practice.

Revuelta Cultural Mexicana: Oaxaca, Mexico City, Puebla...Some Assembly Required

Continuing on the busy street past ASARO's *taller*, just before the road intersects with the highway that cuts over the Cerro del Fortín, a large green building sits at an intersection. This is the Hotel Magisterial, and though its architectural form suggests that once it was a hotel, the graffiti and flyers that cover its walls loudly announce that today it has another function. If its exterior walls have become a sounding board for statements from others about both the teachers and the social movement, inside, the teachers union holds its meetings. Walking in, I could see a few of the flyers ASARO had put up that week all around the city announcing today's meeting. ASARO's poster and a concurrent online posting called on those interested in "creating an artistic bloc to advance a more socially committed art" to a statewide meeting in order to create proposals to represent Oaxaca in the first national meeting to be held on the 13th in Mexico City.

Of the eleven people gathered in the Hotel's foyer that day, March 10, 2008 five of us were affiliated with ASARO. Alongside Mario, Yeska, Teak and myself, former member Patricia Tovar was there. Gonzalo, the editor of the *Las Barrikadas* magazine had also come. The others I was meeting for the first time. After everyone had introduced themselves, Mario recounted that the origins of the idea for a national organization started in a meeting in January with like-minded art collectives during the World Social Forum in Mexico City. The need for a network of socially committed artists stemmed from the fact that "artists are removed from what is happening around them." Turning to Oaxaca, Mario referenced "what was done in the streets during the movement. People saw the manifestation of a social art, of the art of *el pueblo*." While ASARO was part of this collective manifestation, Mario mentioned that

ASARO took the lessons of the streets and saw the need to "arrive at something more concrete, that artists also organize to give force and life to these proposals." After wrapping the idea of a national collective around the history of ASARO, Mario noted that the majority of those painting in the City Museum at the "Las Calles Estan Diciendo Cosas" exhibit, where the first national meeting was to be held, were eager to participate.

Curious about what Mario had outlined, but also cautious, a member of the collective *Revolucionarte* (Revolutionart, also, "to become revolutionary") asked, "what actions are being proposed?" The reply from Mario was that, "establishing a dialogue here is the means by which to think and do." Realizing that everyone gathered was being invited to participate in giving shape to the effort rather than simply being told what was happening, the group opened up a dynamic conversation. And for the next hour and a half, the group sat in a circle and discussed what the national collective might look like, how it would be organized, what activities it could propel forward, what themes it might take up, and how artists from the state of Oaxaca could participate. This opening dialogue established the open format of assembly and the desire to create an ethics of receptive generosity as the means by which Oaxacan artists would organize themselves and thus as one of the contributions that the state would bring to the national network.

At one point early in the discussion, the issue of how to define what encompassed the "committed art of *el pueblo*" came up. Looking for confirmation that he had understood ASARO's position, the young man from Revolucionarte looked for confirmation that the role of art in "the periphery is to open consciousness, not to try to generate for them what they have to think but to open their mind to think." Teak quickly replied that this was accurate, that the idea was "not to give one option but to show the many realities.... Without telling anyone what they have to think or see." In a similar way as ASARO experienced at an assembly, the idea was to open up a discussion rather than impose one point of view. Patricia Tovar, who was trained as an anthropologist at CIESAS in Mexico City, offered, "there are no empty minds to fill, they all have a trajectory. Better to move consciousness than to open consciousness.... The strategy is of making sense, of movement, of direction." For Patricia, opening a collective dialogue means creating provocative images whose political force stems from the fact that "stencil enters easily into the imagination of the people because it is there in the street" and in doing so "this image motivates me to mobilize myself and to engage." As framed that afternoon, images on the street are there for everyone to see—rich or poor, conservative or progressive—and are powerful because their pointed messages mobilize people to discuss topics and to create community debate around issues. Artists working in the street had an important part to play in opening up the conversation, but, much as any individual around the assembly circle, they were part of a broader discussion and not the prophetic vanguard of *el pueblo*. In the assembly discussion

that day, it was clear that the street artists understood that there was a difference between visibility and intelligibility. Political art might disrupt or put into question the order of things that govern social relations, what philosopher Jacques Rancière calls the "distribution of the sensible" (2000:40), but the audience taking in the message was not merely a passive spectator but also had a point of view. Moreover, given the vast differentiation of users of sidewalk and street, whether *el pueblo* or the Vallistocracia, spectators were not a homogenous mass. If there was a visionary aspect to the idea of organizing artists at the national level, it started with the attempt to get artists involved in opening up this conversation in the streets in the first place—and this started by getting together at meetings and assemblies such as this one.

As the meeting and brainstorming session was wrapping up, the assembly decided that the two members of Revolucionarte should attend the national meeting as representatives from the state in order to provide a diversity of points of view and that, for the moment, ASARO would cover their costs. ASARO would also go, but by their own means. Teak brought up the point that "believe it or not, we are one of the most organized states." Indeed, ASARO's experiences and success organizing itself via assemblying were integral to this achievement and were also important at the national meeting three days later as an example for how a national network could coordinate itself. Because of their commitment spearheading the Tianguis Cultural, Yeska and Teak could not go. It was thus decided that Mario and I should go to Mexico City as representatives of ASARO. I went home to pack for the trip and early the next morning I met up with Mario at the bus station where a long, six-hour trip awaited us.

Although the opening of "Las Calles Estan Diciendo Cosas" (The Streets are Telling Us Things) at the City Museum was set for 7 p.m. on Tuesday, March 11th, well before then the line of young people waiting outside the door wound around the building. Having joined ASARO members Chichas and Ita, who were already in Mexico City, the four of us marveled at the size of the assembled crowd. The City Museum is an imposing baroque building a few blocks from the *zócalo* and had not been the home of an exhibit on street art before. With a large central courtyard surrounded by a colonnade creating portico spaces on its two floors of exhibit spaces, the museum is spacious, but it didn't take an architect to see that it was going to have a hard time accommodating the people waiting outside in the street. With street art criminalized in the streets and marginalized from museums (ethnographic or artistic), exhibit organizers noted in the exhibition text that, "this is an uncommon and necessary encounter between two spaces traditionally separated by the thickness of the walls." Whether through a label, or how the space is curated, art historian Michael Baxandall has commented that, "it is not possible to exhibit objects without putting a construction upon them" (1991:34). What

was immediately striking about the exhibit, however, was that contextualization for the event was minimal and was provided by the street art collective that had organized the event. The museum offered a space to exhibit and had left the rest up to the artists. In two written introductory paragraphs, the organizers chose to emphasize that, "with their collective voice of color and cement, exterior walls outside art express powerful truths, at times disturbing, that not all are disposed to listen to." Today, however, they asked those reading to "let, then, the streets enter the museum and listen to what they have to tell us." Calling for an ethics of receptive generosity, the exhibit classified graffiti and stencils as art but did not make further claims about the need to open all museum doors to street artists as they would to Kahlo, Picasso, Pollock, or Matisse. Indeed, if cultural theorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has noted that, "the exhibition of objects as art is predicated on the singularity of each object" (1991:392), here, walls saturated with stencils, canvases, and posters that at times bled into one another blurred notions of singularity. Furthermore, the exhibit did not offer any descriptive labels and, unless the street artists had tagged their art, the property rights of authorship were unclaimed and it was often impossible to say who had created which piece.

When the front portico finally opened, the wave of people flooded through the door and quickly filled the courtyard where Jerónimo Freymann, a street artist from Mérida, offered his thoughts on where street art was headed. Roco, a popular ska and hip-hop singer from *Maldita Vecindad* (Damned Neighborhood), spoke about the connection between streets and the social movement in Oaxaca in 2006 and urged everyone to get involved in social causes and to show what is going on. With that, the interior doors opened to the exhibit and people began to shuffle through. The crowd moved slowly forward and as they did, heads turned in all directions to ensure that they caught the walls from every angle for, contrary to most gallery shows where the artworks are framed, separated, and displayed at eye level, here the walls of the museum were the canvas and all the walls were used, floor to ceiling. Writing about museum displays displaying the exotic "other," Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes that, "spectacle, by its very nature, displaces analysis, and tends to suppress profound issues of conflict and marginalization" (1991:428). Much as in the spectacle of the street, with art enveloping the space, this created an atmosphere that immersed the spectator and provided too much information to take in. With little time to stop, all around cell phones snapped

pictures or took video as the crowd herded through the space. That the youthful audience was interested in engaging the art was clear. However, it was not easy to say what was either voiced or heard from this spectacle. Having been able to walk through the exhibit before it opened, and considering what I saw in light of the effort to create a national collective of artists committed to social themes, it was not easy to discern how receptive the street artists represented here would be to this effort. What to make, in the end, of walls where Pancho Villa waited for ice cream? Or of a room where an ASARO image protested the privatization of PEMEX, the national oil company, through an image of oil barrels carted off in a colonial wagon and faced a lovingly detailed Rezizte stencil paying tribute to "Pachuco Boogie"? Much as in the streets of the city, the walls of the exhibits were most certainly telling us things, but what they were collectively saying was not always clear or congruent.

The audience had shown their interest in street art on Tuesday; on Thursday the 13th it was time for the artists to show their interest in forming a national network. The scheduled meeting drew about 40 people to the museum. Given the large number, museum staff decided to put us on the roof. As we gathered in a large circle, the museum's director mentioned that the show had broken all opening attendance records and that it had been a pleasure for all of the staff to work with everyone, even if the museum had been hesitant at first. New doors were sure to open for us after this, she noted. It seemed that, as measured by the museum's barometer of attendance, the event had won them over; it now remained to be seen if the event could produce collective returns for the artists. After each person introduced herself by noting what group and state they represented, ASARO had the largest number and, together with Revolucionarte, Oaxaca made up 6 out of the 40 artists that were present. After introductions, Edgar of Guerrilla Visual, a collective from Mexico City, opened up the floor by speaking about the reasons for the meeting. Mario followed Edgar to provide his point of view and offered ASARO's experience in Oaxaca as an example of the difference that organizing makes. At first, others were reluctant to speak, thinking, as Revolucionarte had in our first meeting in Oaxaca, that they were here to learn about the effort rather than to participate. However, after a few artists bravely offered their point of view, the energy level in the circle picked up as people became excited about the reality that, high above the rooftops of downtown Mexico City, a gathering of street artists was meeting to discuss forming a community and thinking about the future.

Having begun assemblying on the go, and now working under the assembly format, which would become standard practice at future meetings, the group bounced ideas around and began trying to concretize proposals. The collective body was able to take some

specific decisions: we needed a name, a web presence, a format for continuing to meet and work as a coherent body, and a statement of why we were undertaking this effort that could help give shape to the group both internally and also externally. Eventually, after putting down ideas on paper, the name the group settled on was *Revuelta Cultural Mexicana* (Mexican Cultural Revolt). After going around the room and sharing what problems were affecting the different regions, the assembly decided to make militarization the first theme that Revuelta Cultural Mexicana (RCM) would work on collectively. A date was set for this coordinated action. Numbers and emails were exchanged. One member volunteered to create a website. Because I had been keeping close notes of the meetings, I was "volunteered" to write the first draft of a Manifesto. Much as Chichas had experienced the ironic freedoms of the assembly earlier, I now had been granted additional labor that was on the visible edge of transforming coercion into consent, burden to privilege. Lastly, it was agreed that the next national meeting would be when "Las Calles Estan Diciendo Cosas" came to Puebla in August. Everyone was encouraged in the interim to try to organize a regional encounter in the North, Center, and South.

Mario and I left shortly after the assembly was over to catch the night bus back to Oaxaca. Along the way, we discussed how the first national assembly of what was now Revuelta Cultural Mexicana had certainly produced a lot of energy and momentum visible in the number of projects and proposals. The question, as always, would be how to make these proposals a working reality and not just a wish. As we both saw it, the greatest difficulty would be that, at the scale of the nation, it was impossible to have regular assemblies or even meetings to debate issues, create a community, and continue to develop proposals. Back in Oaxaca, along with producing images on Militarization and a Manifesto in the months following the national meeting, ASARO also decided to use the upcoming second anniversary of the June 14th repression of the teachers' sit-in strike to organize a regional event as part of RCM. With a schedule for murals to be painted in the streets on the 12th, a musical event and art show in the *zócalo* on the 13th, and a plan for everyone to spray paint along the march route on the 14th, the roster of events was ambitious. Sending out a call for all interested individuals and collectives nationwide to participate, ASARO welcomed Guerrilla Visual from Mexico City, Komal collective from the State of Mexico, and a group of street artists from Chiapas. Locally, a handful of individual street artists joined ASARO and collectives Revolver and Zape in representing Oaxaca in the painting of murals.

The morning of June 12th, speaking to those gathered together to do murals, Edgar from Guerrilla Visual characterized this RCM event as an "effort to create *conciencia* [awareness / consciousness] and to express it in the streets. Oaxaca is an example of how this sector [artists] can be an arm of the struggle. We need to show that we are part of this struggle, we have to seek to make change." Following up on Guerrilla Visual's portrayal of the street as the space to both

manifest our point of view and also to invite others to take a point of view, Mario noted that "here in Oaxaca, the event is to help propel the politicizing of other states. We have to realize concrete activities." While commemorating the second anniversary of the government's repression, the RCM event, in other words, was also meant as an action that would provide a push for other states to continue to mobilize. Moreover, having already brought many street art collectives and musicians together—some of whom had recently joined RCM—Mario felt that through Revuelta Cultural Mexicana, the group could achieve what APPO had not and "unite all sectors." Gathering steam as the final buckets of paint were readied for the mural activity, Edgar motivated everyone to "do strong work to demonstrate what is Rekum [the acronym for RCM as it had been popularized in Mexico City]. It is art that goes out to the streets, for it is an art for the streets and for *el pueblo*. Lets hit it hard. To the work!" As the different collectives and teams gathered up their material, Mario added his final word before the groups left:

"What we do need to work is the question of information and for this there are the assemblies. We have to make this space stronger together. The issue of the assembly is difficult and it develops on the go, that is the experience of ASARO and RCM. It needs to be a community, collectively, and this is where the differences are resolved or debated and a way to seek that what is achieved be for everyone." As this flowing exchange between Edgar and Mario shows, street and assembly form the vertical columns creating the conditions of possibility for the production of street art and the development of the active political community of *el pueblo* in Mexico. Much as Paulo Freire has pointed out, "only praxis in the context of communion makes conscientization a viable project. Conscientization is a joint project in that it takes place in a man among other men [sic], men united by their action and by their reflection upon that action and upon the world" (1970b:58). Laboring both the street and the assembly, works in progress developed on the go, were required to create and articulate the *conciencia* that Edgar visualized and the community that Mario desired. Each feeds the other for assemblying is a collective gathering that seeks to find an action while collective actions are practices that bind the collective together. Both, moreover, are integral in bringing others—and other points of view—into the fold.

Street and assembly, and *el pueblo* and the continued development of RCM, remained central to debates in the national meeting in Puebla on August 3rd, 2008. Bringing in new artists through the "Las Calles Estan Diciendo Cosas" show, the second national meeting continued the effort of the first in trying to articulate

together collectives and to ground shared projects for both new and old participants. After delivering a brief history of RCM, Jorge, from Komal collective of Mexico City, opened that day's deliberations announcing that Komal had received an invitation for five graffitists to go to the national senate and "give a talk on the question of graffiti." An artist from Tlaxiaco, a Oaxacan city not far from the border with Puebla, put forward the problem that, whether or not we went to the senate, "how could we speak with our heads without having our feet firmly planted? Firm! If not we are going to contradict ourselves." As this artist conceived the situation, creating a shared project such as RCM meant being able to define a concrete and common platform for action and discourse that everyone took onboard. Otherwise, whether in the senate or in the street, we would continually negate and invalidate each other.

Finding that this point of view presupposed that only fully formed political people with a like mind could form a collective, Francisco from ASARO offered a different perspective. As he put it, the "business of the assembly is very important. RCM works this way…. That is how it would have to be for a question like this one. Assembly, process of debate, discussion, take a decision, and act. What is our political position before the state? What is our concrete objective in realizing this action? The street is an informal politics that does not have to do with the state but rather with a quotidian politics." The senate floor provides a formal politics and particular relationships between presenter, audience, and arbiter: its sociality and spatiality are those of a "forensic forum," a site where experts provide evidence before a deliberative body that pronounces judgment (Weizman 2010). Understood as a space where proxies gather in a secluded space to represent the community, the regime of value of the senate's forensic forum differs from the original Latin meaning of the forum as a marketplace. Francisco thus replied to Jorge's question about speaking at the senate as well as to the concern for a political platform from the artist from Tlaxiaco by offering the street as the space for a politics of *el pueblo* and the assembly as the space that would allow a disparate and differentiated group to achieve, not necessarily political unity or a platform, but community hegemony on what projects the group could bring to the streets and to *el pueblo*. Cultivating a political and social horizon and collective art would happen as a result of the practices of assemblying and its fruits: collaborative and coordinated action in the streets.

A member of Grafika Contra el Sistema weighed in on the debate to enter the legislature: "to whom is RCM directed towards, to the people below; those above don't listen…. If we go [to the senate] as RCM it is not to say if [graffiti] is right or not, that *el pueblo* will tell us. How are we going to look upwards when we haven't stopped looking downwards?" Ultimately, as other groups added

similar input or seconded points already made, despite Jorge's reminder that this was an opportunity to put forward another vision of graffitists besides criminal vandals and vagabonds, and despite Mario's opinion that having two or three senators on our side would be helpful as the struggle for the streets got more heated, the general point of view that developed from this debate was that *el pueblo* and the forum of the sidewalk was to be the ultimate arbiter of the worth of RCM's art. Yeska summarized the prevailing sentiment when he noted that, "the walls are a means of discussion, that is how we gain a pueblo and we don't need a congressman."

In its debate, the assembly formed a common viewpoint that an effect of working in museums had been that art institutions had moved closer to an acceptance of street art. Through this, it was felt that the state had taken notice of the tremendous interest that street art kindled in youths and sought an inroad to both the youths that created graffiti and to its audience by offering a space for graffiti artists to speak at the senate. At the RCM assembly, however, street artists were reiterating a position that repudiated the politics of state-based thinking in favor of the politics of the sidewalk. Interestingly, throughout its first year of existence, as RCM was starting to take shape, there was little mention of it as an aesthetic or artistic movement; rather, its import was always considered in relation to social struggle. And for its part in this social struggle, as that day's debate demonstrated, the assembly and the street were the foundation stones of RCM's effort.

After this, as assemblying was winding down, Mario looked to make this practice the recognized organizational technique of RCM and put forward the "proposal of the assembly as the space of dialogue to start to put behind our differences for, in the end, there is the same idea of changing our existence and reality." As people nodded their ascent, Yeska followed Mario's call to come together through

assemblying by challenging us with the "task and commitment of adding more crews and to do work for Revuelta Cultural. Work, like the task on militarization, to also start to demonstrate what is RCM. Work will also start to unify us because that is how the gang will start to ask, 'what is RCM?' and the actions will come to unify us." Though framed at that moment as a call "to put behind our differences," I hear the stress on unity that Mario and Yeska looked to create through collective assemblying and collaborative art practices as a recognition of the fact of difference and of having to struggle to articulate community hegemony across difference. As such, when I listen, I hear an echo of what Laclau emphasized 25 years ago: "*There is no subject position whose links with the others is permanently assured; and consequently, there is no fully acquired social identity which is not subject, to a greater or lesser*

degree, to the action of articulatory practices" (1985:33). Precisely because of this, *without the constant action of the practices of struggle*, there is also no social identity that is not subject to dis-articulation. Assemblying, that is, was an act of struggle.

Following Mario's and Yeska's call for assemblying and labor not just as technologies of the self but also as tactics for articulation that could foster community, the RCM assembly put together a work proposal with the following four tasks: 1) on the 1st of September, when there would be a work stoppage to protest the second annual report of president Felipe Calderón, stencils with the themes of the fascism of the government, militarization, migration, and the privatization of oil; 2) on the 6th of September, to realize sidewalk forums about graffiti in each state; 3) on the 15th of September (Mexican Independence Day), in silkscreen, satirical images of Mexican heroes (a project to put together a portfolio of images to sell in support of RCM activities); and 4) regional sidewalk forums from the 1st of October to the 15th in Oaxaca, Mexico City, and Chihuahua. Finally, it was noted that the next national assembly would take place when the itinerant exhibit reached Guadalajara on the 5th of December. With much work to do, assemblying ended and the fiesta began.

As September came and went, however, only Guerrilla Visual and ASARO, the two most active and organized RCM groups, completed stencils on militarization. In time, ASARO would also create images relating to the privatization of PEMEX, as well as on migration. Statewide and regional forums were never held, and if satirical images of Mexican heroes were created, these were not circulated through the RCM network. Gathering and debating as an assembly had produced generative consensus regarding the goals of Revuelta Cultural Mexicana as expressed in the Manifesto, strong support for the streets as the focal space for work and *el pueblo* as the audience to address, and it had generated excitement in everyone for helping build this effort together, including establishing concrete tasks to undertake. However, the dreamwork of the RCM assembly never materialized into shared labor on the streets and without the resulting articulations through shared work that Yeska pointed to, RCM never got off the ground to fulfill the vision or promise that national assemblies illustrated. As both the gains and failures of the RCM assembly demonstrate, though it could produce the conditions of possibility for a productive debate across difference, and though it was effective in generating proposals for action, an additional mechanism was needed by which to realize this dreamwork of the assembly. For ASARO, it was the work of its committees that helped to transform the dreams of the assembly from desires to realizable projects that were materialized through collective action.

Acts of the Committee: Making Art(iculations) Happen

Behind the black metal door, at the assembly for new members in January of 2008, those of us looking to join had been told that ASARO was organized around four *comisiones*, or committees: Press and Publicity, Finances, Political Formation, and Organization. A month later, at the assembly on statutes, those of us who continued with ASARO found the same four committees mentioned in article 22. Though clearly conceived as important, in practice the work that the committees did had remained largely invisible up to that point. In explaining their history, Mario mentioned that the committees were created by the assembly in August of 2007, but that not much had been accomplished so far. If these four committees had not made their presence felt, however, lessons in the importance and function of the committees did materialize for new members when the assembly voted at the end of January 2008 to pursue a project proposed by Yeska of creating a Tianguis Cultural (Cultural Market). On the day when we discussed the Tianguis Cultural proposal, as was usual in assemblying when a project was put on the table and the group became interested, ideas were flying across the room: it could have a space for music, art workshops, performance and theater, art exhibits, room for artists to sell goods they make, a zone for bartering. As ideas and visions filled the air, Chucho, who was always grounded and pragmatic, tried to bring the group back to earth, stating that we had to "put our feet on earth. We can do this, but it will require a lot of planning." Caught in the moment, though, the ideas continued: it would be a way to show the creative power of youth, a space to attract *el pueblo*, it could be in El Llano park. Mario too tried to intervene and steer the ship back to earth, proposing that we establish "a committee to start documents, the organizational issues. A committee to land this." Though several more ideas surfaced after Mario's call for a committee, in the end Yeska and Teak stepped forward and formed ASARO's new Tianguis committee.

The Tianguis committee subsequently assessed the feasibility of the ideas that ASARO members had proposed. The committee also reported its progress at the assembly and got feedback. Then, after noting what was needed to put the space together, assemblying produced work crews to realize the proposal. In theory, the committees were designed to address Francisco's pertinent

observation that, "we lack the organization to land the good ideas that come out in the assembly." Imagined as floating in the air, committees were seen as the most effective way to grab hold of these good ideas from the realm of the clouds and, in the process of wrestling them from the sky back to the earth, to figure out what it would take to transform them from dream to reality. If assemblying was a technology of the self that cultivated an ethics of generative reciprocity in its subjects, the committees were a technology that looked to cultivate ideas, rooting them in practices that had material effects. Committees actualized the dreamwork of the assembly.

In January, as new members were entering the assembly, ASARO took this as an opportunity to provide all of the moribund committees with new life. At that time, and throughout the year, the assembly took up the issue and debated what exactly the committees were supposed to do. Press and Publicity, as the name suggests, was to handle the work of disseminating information about the work of ASARO. This meant doing interviews with the media, but also producing ASARO's written work (fanzine, Manifesto, etc.). In addition to disseminating information, this committee also had the task of compiling and distributing any work that others wrote about ASARO. Although it had been its duty to respond to emails sent to ASARO, with the volume increasing, this task was made a duty of all committees.

The Finance committee was entrusted with keeping track of the group's monetary situation. Seemingly always in a cash crisis, this task might seem relatively easy. Given the irregularity of its finances, the violent swings in cash flow, and numerous projects to fund, however, it was not an easy task. With different spaces to sell the work, there was usually always some trickle of cash coming in. With people borrowing cash from the group, and with materials to buy, the *taller* to rent, and funding needed to participate in events, this cash usually went out as fast as it came in. Given the instability of the situation, the Finance committee was also entrusted with considering how to secure funds. With the group criticized by some for selling and profiting from the revolution, though, Mario noted that the problem was that "people already think that ASARO is into selling. And they don't see what the money goes towards. The issue is, rather, how to use what we already have to secure resources." The idea was, in other words, that rather than create commercial works in order to pay for the principled work that the group thought was important, the finance committee should see how the principled work could also bring in money so that we could continue to do our work without a conflict of interests. (At one point, for example, the group was asked by an organization within the APPO to dress up the parasols they were going to use in an upcoming march with our designs. The stencils used for the task, as it was pointed out, could be used again to make umbrellas for the Tianguis Cultural.)

The Political Formation committee was charged with the task of instigating a space of debate on topics of interest to ASARO members or that were seen as relevant to *el pueblo* that were not being addressed during weekly assemblying because pragmatic and contingent considerations took center stage. This was to be done by creating workshops that would provide information about a topic to the group in order to generate discussion around the issue. As they were imagined, workshops might involve audio-visual material, written material to read, or, if needed, a presentation by someone from outside the group. Some of the themes that had been proposed ranged from a socio-historical survey of artistic groups to information about social movements; particular topics that were mentioned included militarization and violence, urban art and society, migration and the border, and neoliberalism. The Political Formation committee was also entrusted with looking for new books for the group's library. It was hoped that this committee might continue to expand the collective knowledge of the group. Moreover, given that the group was being recognized as much for its socio-political message as for its artistic skills, it was hoped that this committee could provide everyone not only with new themes to feed their artistic inspiration, but also help develop concepts and a discourse that could elucidate the social and political position of their art and of ASARO to others.

Many, though, did not see the place of Political Formation within ASARO and defining its role was itself an illustrative process of debate and deliberation. Speaking from the perspective of a member with anarchist affiliations, for example, Teak pointed out in July of 2008 as we were discussing the goals of this committee that we needed to consider "the problem that the issue of politics does not interest many of us." Behind the dislike for politics that Teak identified was the more fundamental issue that many ASARO members imagined the intent of *Formación Política* workshops to be that of indoctrinating others. However, as Mario replied, "to say politics does not mean to speak about ideological questions. There are a great number of themes that ASARO could use and political formation is a tool. In 15 minutes or 2 hours we are not going to define [an issue] but rather to open up curiosity in people." Part of the challenge of this committee was to encourage ASARO members not to conceive of Political Formation workshops through the "banking concept of education" (Freire 1970a)—i.e. as a classroom lecture delivered by experts where knowledge is a possession to be stored in the memory-bank—but rather as another opportunity to form themselves as political subjects via an engagement in the practices of assemblying.

The Organization committee had only one task, but it was the most difficult, that of coordinating and facilitating the activities that ASARO developed or agreed to take on. As Mario stated later that year in July, "the organizational campaign is the most trying because it is not about being a policeman but about organizing and pushing forward the tasks." This might mean keeping track of what work remains pending and when it is to be turned in, encouraging those who volunteer to undertake an action (or are volunteered to take an action) through the process of completing it, and making sure that there are no loose ends so that the group does not drop the ball. Though these corresponded to the individual parameters of the committees, it was also pointed out that all of them needed to work together and had significant overlap. Press and Publicity and Political Formation met at the library, for example, while Finances and Organization needed to work together to help secure both funds and labor for all tasks.

Although the committees had been established in August of 2007, their tasks and responsibilities only began to take some clarity in 2008. Although vague directives had clearly produced challenges

in achieving these or any objectives, the most important hurdle continued being that, as Mario put it in September of 2008, "the majority of the *compañeros* have not assumed any individual responsibility, let alone collective. It is part of a certain culture to assume a role. We lack the culture to play a part. It is not that we cannot or are irresponsible." Much as with ethical practices of speaking and listening at the assembly, taking onboard the tasks of the committees was a practice that ASARO members had to cultivate. Having working committees, each with well defined tasks where members assumed and followed through on their responsibilities, held the promise of actualizing the dreamwork of the assembly with more regularity. As always, however, if the ideal did not match the real, all ASARO members realized that ASARO was—and would always be—a work in process and that "progress" would only be achieved by continually working.

Moreover, although the committees were far from perfect, by continually laboring on the task of organization, changes had already been achieved. As Chichas once mentioned to me, in the early days of ASARO, as the group was still in the process of coming together, Mario had to call everyone to get them to come to assemblies. His phone bills, as I found out later, had been anywhere from $700 to $1,000 pesos a month (about $64 to $92 dollars). With tasks now handled through the committees and with members largely taking on the individual and collective responsibility to come to assemblies, his phone bill was now a fraction of that. Because it does not involve spray paint or carving tools but rather deliberation and decision-making, the assembly forms the offstage production of ASARO that is almost entirely invisible when encountering an artwork on the streets. Likewise, the work of the committees is the offstage production of the assembly, one that involves the less glamorous and often overlooked aspects of emails and phone calls, planning and budgeting. Though this work is central to the functioning of ASARO and the group values those who do it, there is little glory or glamour in the work.

Moreover, as Teak pointed out that January of 2008, the "committees are a commitment with the group that requires time," time that was lacking in the heated moments of 2006. It was only now that ASARO had the breathing space and impetus to consider the importance of this aspect. This was because, inasmuch as ASARO had come together as a result of APPO and the social movement, the moment of crisis in 2006 had provided plenty of direction and projects for the group to participate in. Now in 2008, however, although the group continued to actively support the social movement, the group was also actively working to ensure that it

had the ability to define, develop, and carry out its own projects and positions. Increasingly, the work of the committees was seen as integral to this effort. Having joined the Political Formation committee, for example, Francisco stated in July of 2008 that, "we have to strengthen this [committee] because we are in a moment of repetition, reactionary…. There is the need to expand the space and have a broader reflection." In the case of Political Formation, broadening the space of reflection meant not only facilitating assemblies with different themes for the group to debate, but more importantly proposing concrete activities through which ASARO could respond to political and social issues that were affecting not just Oaxaca, but also Mexico and the world.

Though I describe ASARO's art practice in the next chapter, here it is important to recognize that, despite the fact that the committees functioned irregularly and unevenly, the fruits of their efforts and of the desire of ASARO to produce its own projects were evident in 2008 in the Tianguis Cultural "Libertad y Resistencia," Revuelta Cultural Mexicana, and Espacio Zapata, all projects that ASARO was spearheading and for which the committees were instrumental. When the idea for a project came from outside of the group, the assembly more or less had the role of debating whether to take up the proposal and how to best achieve it. This was the case with the proposition to exhibit stencils in the IAGO, create artwork commemorating the massacre of protestors in 1968, or produce sand paintings in memory of APPO members who had been killed. In contradistinction to these, the Tianguis Cultural, RCM, and Espacio Zapata were all projects that ASARO had developed. In these instances, rather than reactionary organization and a just-in-time production mode, to make them happen ASARO had to develop another relationship to time and work. A committee was created for ASARO projects precisely for that reason. And, while in certain instances the final labor to produce the projects happened at the last moment, the experience of planning and organizing these projects through committees—whether successful or stunted—were all new experiences for ASARO members. Moreover, as Chichas pointed out in an interview late in 2008, while at times ASARO and its committees do not work, such that, for example, though ASARO undertook art workshops for its members that year, it had not been able to carry through with the desire to do art workshops in marginalized communities—a project discussed throughout 2008—the sincere desire is there, and it has taken root in our committees and, for good or bad, sloppily or well, these are working on it.

Whether talking about the Tianguis Cultural, RCM, Espacio Zapata, or art workshops, it is important to note that the role of the committees created for each project was to further it along. While active participation in a committee demonstrated a commitment to ASARO that may have increased the moral authority of committee members, and while

people certainly appreciated their efforts, ultimately the group also realized that differences in time commitments and personality played a part in who could assume the responsibilities of working on a committee. The "committees are important because they are the ones that push things," Mario reminded in March of 2008, yet "those in the committees are not the leaders of the group…the assembly is ASARO." Though it was in part through committees that ASARO sought to foster the practices and space of assemblying, committees continually reported to the assembly and were seen as vehicles by which to carry out its collective resolutions. In anthropologist David Recondo's analysis of the governing system in the pueblos, after outlining the primary importance of consensus, he points out that, "consensus is indissociable from a Second principle that undergirds community democracy: that of '*mandar obedeciendo*' [leading by obeying]…according to which the community authorities are only the 'mandataries' of the assembly. Their role is limited to 'recollecting' the accords of the assembly and executing them. According to this interpretation, the assembly is the maximum authority of the community that the members of the city council should consult regularly" (2007:353). In any and all cases, if those in the committees were understood to have taken on particular responsibilities vis-à-vis the group, it was also understood that these roles did not make them ASARO's leaders.

Nor, indeed, could it have, for the role of the committees was precisely to prevent any one ASARO member from having the lion's share of control over the group's operations. Everyone who has been a member of ASARO since its founding can tell you that in the first year or so of its existence, Mario was at the forefront of almost all activities. Some of those who have left ASARO will tell you that they left in part because he had too much influence. New members can tell you that Mario continues to have a great deal of moral authority within the group and that his voice is highly respected. However, they can also tell you that his role outside of the assembly is now centered on the Press and Publicity committee. Others are now at the forefront of the group's finances, new voices speak about political formation, and each project produces a team to handle its organization. As Mario himself will tell you, this is a relief, for the greater the need for one person to manage most activities, the more labor that this person has and the greater the chance that things will be done poorly.

If not always speedily, committees created to help manage specific group needs or projects have been effective not just in actualizing projects but also in both consolidating and expanding group participation. The fact that the Tianguis Cultural needed a weekly poster, for example, led its committee to enlist the help of ASARO's human network to call on friends who were graphic designers in order to complete this task. Two partners of ASARO members regularly helped in this effort and, when the assembly saw the need to create a design committee who could handle activities like poster making and the layout and production of ASARO foldouts, pamphlets, and an anniversary booklet, they effectively became ASARO members and took on design responsibilities as well as caring for the website and digital archive of ASARO work.

Much as different points of view were valued, the particular skills and talents that individual members brought to ASARO were often called upon to enrich the space. For example, because of their

expertise and enormous artistic talents in specific areas, Mario ran the drawing workshop, Chichas the one on woodblock printing, Yeska on stencils, and Line gave a workshop on silkscreening. Because of our training as academics and anthropologists, around May of 2008 Francisco and I took on the responsibilities of the Political Formation committee. As Francisco put it in July, "this is the place to return to the group the usefulness of our more academic reflections." Although it was not expected that either artists or intellectuals would blossom overnight, the idea was to share and disseminate knowledges and skills, and in so doing to capacitate others to become better artists and critical thinkers. Though not voiced in this way, through these exchanges and assemblying and art practices, ASARO created a barricade sociality where incompleteness was the foundational relation by which to create collective unity out of difference. Writing about the Soviet kolkhoz, art theorist Gerald Raunig similarly described how "in the practice of the organizational work in the kolkhoz…the different specific competencies of the individual participants in the collective had a productive impact. Linking these competencies meant linking one specific knowledge with another specific knowledge in a patchwork that did not have wholeness as its goal, but rather a transversal relationship of exchange" (2007:168). The regime of value that this model of exchange worked on was neither capitalist exploitation nor expert mastery, but rather an ethics of reciprocal generosity that acknowledged incompleteness and the need for continuous articulation through the cultivation of practices of struggle.

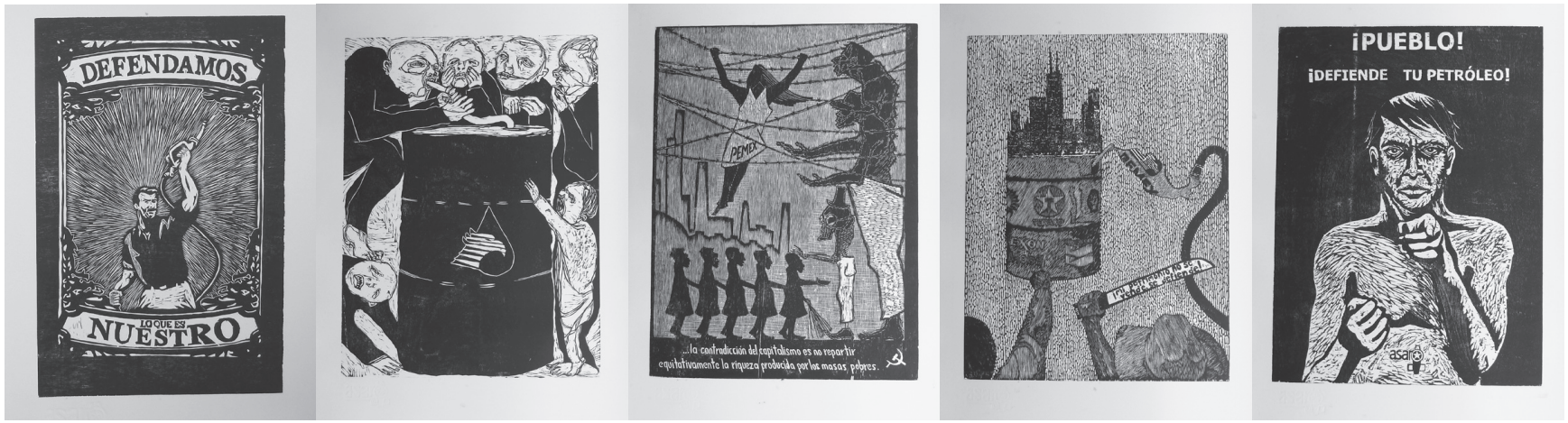
ASARO members had marked differences in artistic and educational levels, political positions, and life experiences that were visible at times in the positions they took in deliberations at the assembly. With concrete questions to decide on, however, there was little space during assemblying to engage with social and political issues or with these differences as their own topic of discussion. Political Formation was designed to cultivate a space where such a debate could happen and, most importantly of all, to foster practices of critical thinking, that is, to move beyond providing an opinion about an issue to analyzing issues critically (i.e. to assessing assumptions and evaluating an issue to support a position). As such, the goal was not to define one point of view about what to do about militarization or privatization, but rather to provide a space to develop the habit of considering an issue critically from other points of view. As Irving, a fine arts student and ASARO collaborator mentioned in June of 2008, this was important "so that we also get to know each other. An assembly to speak how we see reality." Political Formation workshops would provide an opportunity for individuals to analyze the underlying reasons for why members with other perspectives took certain positions. Clearly, it would also challenge those members to risk themselves and move closer to David Scott's call to "cultivate…a restless receptivity to otherness *within* identity, a generative will to disturb, disrupt, unlearn our easy complacency with the identities we always-already inhabit, and the pressures to stabilize and congeal identity in dogmatism" (2005:14). Whether having communist, anarchist, or liberal affiliations, whether considering oneself APPO or not, socially privileged or part of *el pueblo*, the workshops in Political Formation were to provide a forum for ASARO members to define, describe, and debate their particular point of view and thus to continue to build more tools by which to challenge the given distribution of the sensible.

If the assembly needed to create enough community hegemony so as to take a collective decision that all could live with, Political Formation workshops could engage points of difference without, however, needing to smooth them over or create consensus. Contrary to common perception, as Jacques Rancière has pointed out, "the essence of consensus…does not consist in peaceful discussion and reasonable agreement, as opposed to conflict or violence. Its essence lies in the annulment of dissensus as separation of the sensible from itself, in the nullification of surplus subjects" (2010:42). As a space of critical debate that sought to engage with difference but did not need to reduce difference to closure or do away with surplus standpoints, the aims of Political Formation and of ASARO produced a different kind of political subject from that of consensus. "Consensus is the 'end of politics': in other words, not the accomplishment of the ends of politics but simply a return to the normal state of things—the non-existence of politics," wrote Rancière (2010:42). The politics in Political Formation were not ideological indoctrination, uniformity, or communal harmony, but were precisely continuing to carve out a space for continued dissentual debate.

Working together to shape a program for the Political Formation workshop, Francisco and I decided to do a workshop each month addressing the following themes in sequence: militarization, neoliberalism, public space, migration, and social movements. Like good academics, Francisco and I then got together to devise a list of short texts for upcoming months, mapped out readings we wanted to do, and scheduled meetings with each other to develop presentations. Then, a museum exhibit in Houston that ASARO was part of, a request for paintings for an event on the theme of people who have been disappeared by the government, and other activities pushed our meetings to tomorrow, to the following week, to next time. And a month passed.

Finally, the federal government's ongoing efforts to privatize parts of Mexico's national oil industry, PEMEX, brought Francisco and I to organize a workshop session on June 20th devoted to privatization and neoliberalism. Privatizing the national oil company had been on the minds of many for some time now—no doubt on the minds of Texaco, BP, and Exxon—but also the federal government, which claimed that PEMEX loses money and that privatizing some aspects of the operation would yield greater gains for the Mexican people and save PEMEX. Few in the federal government seemed willing to discuss how the losses stemmed largely from the fact that, because Mexico only has 6 refineries, it produces a lot of crude oil but needs to import about 25% of the petroleum it consumes. Mexico loses money in sending its crude oil elsewhere to be refined and purchasing refined petroleum back at a higher price.

The presentation during the Political Formation workshop went through the process of extracting oil from the ground and ended with it coming back in oil tankers to sell at the gas stations. Questions on the process were clarified to the best of our knowledge during the presentation and, afterwards, a discussion about possible futures for PEMEX and its ramifications for Mexico was initiated. The discussion was broadened to privatization in general and to the gains and losses of the introduction of a neoliberal economic model for Mexico that started in earnest with President Salinas de Gortari, a political economist and Harvard graduate who ran the country from 1988 to 1994. The national telephone company, Telmex, was privatized in 1990 and though its privatization was touted as the way to produce better telephone service and lower prices for consumers through competition, the only outcome was that at one point it made the very portly Carlos Slim the richest man on earth. The group discussed as well the divide and differences in Mexico between the North and South, which is to say between



capitalist development and resource extraction. As people became charged up during the debate, Francisco noted that "the aim of the Formation session is to dialogue all of this, to locate ourselves and to see what actions we can take as ASARO." Actions discussed included doing an exhibit at a gas station as a peaceful protest, making woodblock prints on the theme, and distributing stickers, pamphlets and more information about privatization in the center. More or less as it had been envisioned, the workshop had acted as a catalyst for both discussion and action. It responded, in that way, to Francisco's vision and member's own restlessness of using this effort to create ASARO's own agenda and projects. In the end, what was agreed upon was to start by making woodblock prints as ASARO on the theme of the privatization of PEMEX, and then creating an exhibit and passing out information at a gas station as Revuelta Cultural Mexicana in the near future.

At the end of the month, ASARO members had a chance to start a conversation in the open sidewalk forum when it attended "Petrofest," an event against the privatization of PEMEX sponsored by another collective in Xalapa, Veracruz. At this downtown event, on a municipal platform that had been appropriated for the occasion, ASARO's stencils and woodblock prints were the backdrop for theater performances, musical acts, and a powerpoint presentation on PEMEX. For the gathered crowd who huddled under the tarp on this rainy day, there were speeches to listen to, art to explore, plays to observe, and conversations to join in on, but nothing to buy. Bringing different groups together around the issue of the privatization of a national company, the objective had been to open up a debate and promote people's active participation in a conversation on the future of PEMEX that, so far, had been dominated by the federal government's position on the absolute need to privatize it. At this event, as at many ASARO interventions, art historian Alan Moore's description of the objective of art collectives today seems fitting: "Artists' collectives do not make objects so much as they make changes. They make situations, opportunities, and understandings within the social practice of art. The collective mode of organization has become another strategy artists use to construct situations that work on particular social problems or sets of issues" (2007:216). Much as Ernesto Laclau observed that new social movements articulated a collective

around issues rather than be defined by the essentialized identities or social location of their members based on class, race, or gender (1985), so too are artists mobilizing not as specific social bloc with interests born of specific, essentialized identities, but as interested individuals and collectives looking to make an intervention around specific social issues.

In July, the arrest of an ASARO member after he was assaulted outside of a bar moved Francisco and I to put together a workshop on militarization and an individual's rights during arrest or detention. A human rights lawyer who worked with APPO came and gave a disturbing three-hour presentation. We learned what those of us who had not been arrested needed to do to attempt to ensure the safety and life of a *compañero* who had been arrested—what legal brief to file, where, and what media and human rights groups to contact. We learned what those arrested needed to be aware of—what articles from human rights declarations to invoke, whom to address them to, and what rights as detainees we had. We learned as well how important it was to try to stay calm if lifted off the street and remember all the details of one's detention in order to be able to build a legal case for government repression. The human rights lawyer informed us of the different torture methods that the government had used during the social movement: crushing toes or feet, sticking razors into the body, screws under the nails, burns, electric currents, forcible nudity, rape, asphyxiation by either wet or dry methods (wet methods are preferable for the state since they leave lesions that heal in under 15 days). We learned that some of these have names: the blender, where they pull you by the hair in all directions; the telephone, where they hit both your ears simultaneously (so called because of the ringing this leaves in your eardrums); the submarine, more commonly known in English as waterboarding. Chillingly, we heard about how in all the cases of torture in Oaxaca a doctor came to examine the person being tortured. I could only imagine that, rather than stopping tortures, it gave torturers the green light to inflict more pain, since their victim was "holding up." We heard about the physical, psychological, and social scars of those who were detained and tortured. And, as a way to conclude, the human rights lawyer urged us to use this information to create a plan for the worst since, as she stated, unfortunately, the "teachers did not have a strategy for detentions, except the basic and only one, that is…run, run, run, and don't stop running." The following week, Francisco and I created a small pamphlet outlining what to do and distributed it.

It took a lot of discussions, debates, and two or three different schedules before the Political Formation workshops became a reality. It took a long time before I recognized that the learned and practiced habits of being an academic—looking to create a lecture, to read voraciously on a subject before presenting it, and to find appropriate texts and questions for debate—had prevented Francisco and I from trusting, as ASARO members did, that it was through the very process of its collective production that the group learned the most. As much as ASARO needed to remake its relations to the means of production, so too did Francisco and I need to remake our relation to the means of knowledge production. In the end, the process of collectively crafting the commons through the art of assemblying and the committees did indeed generate

notable changes in the conduct of conduct of its members: habits of participation at the assembly, an ethics of receptive generosity in speaking and listening, as well as a critical attitude towards social conditions—and not just a general desire for change or a repudiation of the current social and political landscape. Following on the work begun by the social movement, ASARO was finding ways to collectively and creatively engage difference. Through this process, the assemblying practices of deliberation, debate, speaking, listening, and critical thought were cultivating roots in what many had characterized before as barren soil.

In a chapter on practices of debate, deliberation, and decision-making via assemblying, you may have noticed that there is scant reference to what was actually said at the assemblies. The focus, rather, has been on the practices and process of assemblying itself. This parallels geographer Gillian Rose's description of community arts projects in Edinburgh, where there was a refusal from organizers to speak as translators of the marginalized community or from participants to use the final products as representations of themselves. Rather, "their tactics are those of excess and surplus. But their tactics are also about a politics of praxis beyond discourse and its myth of community" (1997:195). The community of ASARO is no bounded, unified whole but rather produces a performed sociality and spatiality of becoming that is always an identity under erasure. These are provisional, situated selves who come to being only through relations with others and cannot be pinned down for, "the point of process is to produce more process, more participation" (Rose 1997:195). These are incomplete, surplus subjects that destabilize the distribution of the sensible of the community. Much as marching through the streets and the process of lifting and taking down barricades daily, assemblying on the go is a radically spatialized practice that also produces a politics that is out of place, always on the move.

If this chapter attended to how an ethics of receptive generosity could produce a collective subject whose regime of value was reworking dispositions that risked self and social in productive ways, the next chapter concentrates on ASARO's efforts to remake the means of production of their art practice and the place of their artworks within circles of consumption: that is, the kind of relationship they wished to create through art with the consumers of their artworks, the proper locations from which to address this audience, and its broader relationship to the commodification of art and artists by the established art market machine.

But is it Art? Shifting Regimes of Value from the Street to the Museum

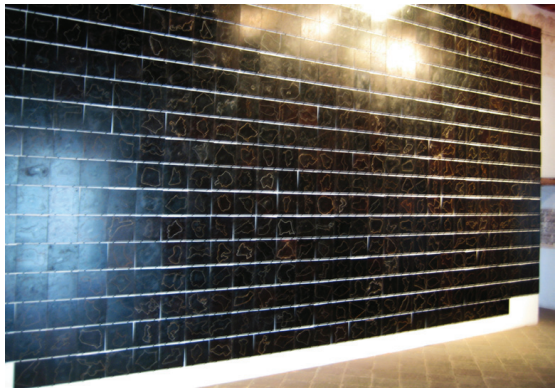
The private property aspect of creativity must be destroyed; all are creators and there is no reason of any sort for this division into artists and nonartists.

— El Lissitzky, "Suprematism in World Reconstruction," 1920.

Walking along the pedestrian street of Macedonio Alcalá, if you stop to ask those who pass by about the imposing building that houses the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca (MACO), most people will likely state with confidence that this house once belonged to Hernán Cortés, the famed conquistador who unseated the Aztec Empire with his victory at Tenochtitlán and claimed the land that would become Mexico for the Spanish crown. In 1529, after all, the Spanish court did grant Cortés the title of Marqués del Valle de Oaxaca. The arresting façade of the MACO, however, was never the entrance to the home of Cortés. It is, though, an exemplary and largely unique example of architecture in the city from the Viceroyalty period. Restored as a museum, the building preserves much of its original design. From the outside, the mix of the green cantera stone, finely crafted wrought-iron balconies, elaborate and ornate columns, heraldic shields and statue of the Archangel Michael produce a delicate balance between permanence and elegance for this solid and stately composition. Inside, the three courtyards, surrounding arcades, and various rooms provide ample space for the MACO's permanent and rotating exhibitions as well as for its schedule of conferences and workshops.

The museum's covered arcades provided a cooling contrast to the sweltering noon sun blanketing the city outside as I entered the MACO in September of 2007. Wandering through the show "Exploraciones" (Explorations), I was struck by a large art piece that filled an entire room. Titled *Valla* (Barricade), the piece clearly referenced the conflict from the previous year and presented Argentinian artist Enrique Jezik's vision of a state under siege. Dividing the room, the work consisted of three finely welded and oversized metal screens pushed together. A carefully crafted outline of the state of Oaxaca comprised the figural center on the mesh screen forming the barricade. In an adjacent space, another piece by Jezik continued his reflections on the conflictive state of Oaxaca by presenting a wall replete with metal plates of the same size lined up in a grid and separated a few millimeters from each other. The exhibit label informed the viewer that the piece was titled *Divide y venceras* (Divide and Conquer) and the inlaid outlines on each of the 570 metal plates represented one of the state's 570 municipalities. As the title and image indicate, this work touches on the theme of the imbrications between *usos y costumbres* (traditions and customs) and the authoritarian governing practices

of Oaxaca's political parties that was the substance of chapter 4 of the dissertation.



Channeling philosopher and biologist Donna Haraway's critique of the "god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (1988:581), exhibit curator Antonio Calera-Grobet wrote that Jezik's art presented another cartography, one that challenges the "scopic vision of power which looks down as if from a satellite and puts on the table a map of identity that joins things together strangely from the outside." Here, the curator continues, "we are in front of the logic of the cortex, of the most grotesque knife where the concept of artificial unity has no end as it is only the sum of its parts." Making the critique of Oaxaca's artificial unity the centerpiece of his art, those who came across Jezik's works in the museum were being asked to contemplate the fragile political threads that held Oaxaca together. At the same time, outside the museum, ASARO stencils on the streets also touched upon governing and community contradictions. The contrast in context between city sidewalks and enclosed gallery spaces, and the difference in audiences produced by crowded sidewalks open to all and lonesome galleries open to those who could afford the museum's ticket price, provided a further dichotomy to contemplate beyond the government's artificial unity.

After all, the divide between art meant for museums and political art placed on street walls seems to be as clear and uncompromising as that created by any barricade. Inside, the renown of an artist's signature can carry as much weight for private collectors willing to spend large sums of money as the work's craftsmanship or aesthetic import. Outside, the work of street artists such as ASARO is free and freely visible to all passersby. Collectively labored and placed anonymously, the danger of police apprehension is ever present and the lure of material riches seems ever distant. At first glance, the museum and the street seem to be separated by much more than walls: for one, each seems to hail a different audience; museums also primarily promote signed artworks done by individuals while the streets often show artworks created by unknown numbers marked only by an alias; finally, each uses different criteria to evaluate their social and aesthetic value and a different discourse to mark that difference. However, as the artwork and career of street artists like Banksy, Shepard Fairey, and Mr. Brainwash demonstrate, the relationship between streets and sales, or revolution and revenue, are not so clear-cut. Moreover, the work of artists like Jezik in museums such as the MACO suggest that long gone are the days when the formalism of art critic Clive Bell was the dominant paradigm and he could assert that "art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation. For a moment we are shut off from human interests; our anticipations and memories are arrested; we are lifted above the stream of life" (1913:25). On the contrary, in 2007, professional artists and mainstream museums in Oaxaca were diving into the stream of life and had begun to consider and reflect on the events of 2006 in their projects.

Within any community formation, different "ways of seeing" establish the "relation between things and ourselves" (Berger 1972:9), positioning objects and subjects in relation to different regimes of value in ways that can be conflictive, producing tensions

that put the community at risk. I take a regime of value to be the classification system that regulates the criteria used to locate an object's or subject's relative symbolic meaning and material worth; assessing the different regimes of value at work in street art and the established art market illuminates the habits of recognition and ways of seeing that color both the production of art and its reception. This chapter will thus explore how artworks point to different ways of seeing and parsing out the distribution of the sensible of the community as they circulate within and between spaces and social groups with different regimes of value (see also Wright 2004). In what follows, I will address the competing aesthetics of the city created by ASARO's efforts to remake their relationship to the means of artistic production and the capitalist art market machine of Oaxaca. This will mean examining the tension between the museum or gallery and the street as sites that hail different audiences and produce different interpretations of what an artwork is and what it does. Then, I will locate tensions between Oaxaca's established artists and the political art of protest of the social movement as well as identify continuities between ASARO and Mexican art traditions. Examining the sale of ASARO art, at stake in the final sections of the chapter will be the ways in which ASARO's art practice is entangled with Oaxaca's art market machine even as the group attempts to reposition their artworks through a different regime of value from that of capitalist circles of consumption and exchange.

But is it Art? Tensions in the Writing on the Walls

In February of 2008, ASARO members got together with Oaxacan artist Guillermo Pacheco at his hillside home. With the sparkling lights of the city spread out below, at one point the discussion turned to the Oaxacan art scene. Pacheco remembered that, during the start of the heated days of 2006, he had been scheduled to participate in a group exhibit at the state-sponsored Museo de los Pintores Oaxaqueños (MUPO). Pacheco tried to pull out of the show for, as he put it, it would be wrong and absurd to display art in that space for an exhibition that had nothing to do with what was going on in the *plantón* (sit-in strike) outside the museum doors at that very moment. When it was made clear that withdrawing from the event in the state-sponsored museum would be damaging to his artistic career, Pacheco decided to do a triptych with one of the panels directly addressing the confrontations going on outside. Despite the chaos in the *zócalo* (main plaza), the exhibit did indeed go on as planned. ASARO member Chichas recounted that, for this exhibit and ever since the confrontations, the door to the museum has been covered over with a thick layer of transparent plexiglass to protect its surface.

While in 2006 MUPO placed yet another barrier between city sidewalks and its gallery spaces, in 2008, MACO and other museums were experimenting with the appropriate balance between aesthetic and social considerations. A piece by artist Iván Edeza in a darkened room adjacent to Jezik's barricade played a continuous five and a half-minute loop. The image projected on the museum wall was of street walls where stencils and graffiti had been covered over with paint at different moments in time to produce the effect of an overlapping mosaic of shapes and colors. In each cropped and close-up image, the pastiche of bright Oaxacan house exteriors and the multi-colored paints used to cover up the graffiti produced

riotous combinations that rivaled any abstract expressionist piece. The ironic title of the work was "Sin título (Escuela Oaxaqueña)," or "Without Title (Oaxacan School)." The reference suggests an off-hand critique of the highly colorful paintings of the droves of artists of the Oaxacan School who follow in the work and tradition of Rodolfo Morales—asking us, as such, to filter the social movement's political message through a cleansing aesthetic lens which Clive Bell might have approved of. Or, perhaps, the irony in the title and the work itself suggests that the art world should consider including stencil and graffiti artist's works in the canon of the Oaxacan School, even if they don't yet have titles, a name, or renown.

In the darkened room, Edeza included three thin mattresses and pillows for viewers to accommodate themselves as they took in the slide show overhead. As I laid there contemplating the images, I imagined how Edeza might be asking us to reflect on these images not merely aesthetically, asking whether or not they were art, but as the free-flowing dreamwork of the city, a record of its wishes and dreams for different futures. Perhaps, rather than transporting these exterior walls and protest slogans inside to museum walls in a move that detached them from the stream of daily life to a space where they could be considered purely aesthetically, Edeza found that these images could break down the walls between the museum and the street. Perhaps they could take down the barricade between abstract aesthetics and art committed to a social struggle, between art for the privileged few and art for *el pueblo*, or "the people." Perhaps.

Perhaps it had already been taken down for, in a pattern that repeated itself throughout my research in Oaxaca, depending on who one asked, Oaxaca's established artists were either entirely absent or committed but silent movers in the events of 2006. An activist friend who in 2008 had posed himself the question of "why artists participated as persons, but not as artists?" felt that, ultimately, artists' convictions were with the social movement but the reality of their professional careers prevented them from open participation or support for APPO. Seconding this assessment when gathered at his house, Guillermo Pacheco responded to my surprise to the fact that a significant number of artists in Oaxaca had not openly participated in the social movement and that the social struggle was not reflected in their art by noting that many did participate; by giving stencils they created to street artists to spray paint or by giving money for necessary supplies. As Pacheco explained, the reason that most artists participated behind the scenes and wished for their participation to remain unknown was due to the economic reality that the majority needed government grants or support from the gallery system. If Oaxacan artists supported APPO, yet were constrained by their economic bonds with museums and galleries, did MACO's exhibit register a sign of change in thinking at the institutional level?

In early April of 2008, as ASARO was preparing for "Defending Democracy," an exhibit at the Station Museum in Houston, a member of the group was contacted by MACO staff and a meeting was arranged with the museum director. During the week, as the group pondered what MACO might have in mind, Mario noted that an exhibit there would be "a definitive step. Here in the Oaxacan frame. Open a dialogue with Oaxaca, but with which Oaxaca?" As Mario's comments point to, the possibility of entering into the museum produced interest as well as ambivalence. With each museum or gallery invitation, ASARO repeatedly debated the

costs and benefits to putting the group's art in the closed walls of a gallery or museum as opposed to the open air of the street. Overall, the general consensus was that the group should attempt to open, develop, and encourage dialogues with as many sectors of Oaxacan society as possible and in whatever way that this was possible. Mario noted as well that any opportunity to enter a museum "has to fortify our discourse, rather than cause us to say 'we have been accepted,' because people are not going to see ASARO any more as delinquents. We have to use them and not the reverse." As Mario was acknowledging, entering the museum entailed a difficult shift in perception since this would cause many people to question ASARO's motives and the group's commitment to the social movement. At the same time, Mario was also pointing out how entering the museum could offer a strategic refusal of the dominant discursive construction (Foucault 1982) of political street artists as either transgressive political rebels without an aesthetic project or of aesthetics, art, and the museum as sites beyond the streets or the political.

One result of aesthetic creativity being often imagined as a specialized activity that artists undertake, and museums underwrite, has been a divide situating art and the museum as a realm naturally separate from political activism. This way of seeing and dividing politics and art not only problematically forms part of our socially unquestioned "commonsense" (Gramsci 1971), but is also propagated by academic concepts and disciplines that divide and parcel out the world into specialized zones for study. As art critic Gerald Raunig has noted, "artistic activism and activist art are not only directly persecuted by repressive state apparatuses because they operate in the neighboring zones of art and revolution, they are also marginalized by structural conservatisms in historiography and the art world. As a consequence of the reductive parameters of… rigid canons, fixation on objects and absolute field demarcations, activist practices are not even included in the narratives and archives of political history and art theory" (2007:19). Just as philosopher Gilles Deleuze reminds that there is no such thing as a blank canvas for an artist to work on (1981), and art critic Michael Baxandall reminds that societies produce a "period eye" that colors the way in which artworks are assessed (1988), so too is there no blank page or objective perspective from which those assessing aesthetic works could stand. Given the dominant paradigms of historiography, the art world, and the commonsense perspectives that continue to make a difference in how activist aesthetic practices and groups are assessed, ASARO sought to make an intervention in both the prevailing production and reception of political art by entering the museum.

Moreover, by April of 2008, this move to the museum was being seen as necessary not only in order to enable or force a dialogue with a broad sector of Oaxacan society, but also because of the fact that ASARO had seen a marked increase in professional Oaxacan artists using or appropriating the social movement as a platform to promote their art. As Mario put it: "we have to enter the MACO to recapture the discourse from the painters that are crossing over to our side." As the group's analysis concluded, while some artists had genuinely shifted their solidarity towards the social movement,

for many this turn reflected a calculated response to the general interest and popularity of APPO and social protest and was tied to a desire to increase art sales. Rather than painters becoming interested in social or political themes, what the group observed is that commercial artists were beginning to employ street art and graphics in their art as a profit-making strategy. The artistic development of stencil and graffiti during the social revolution, you might say, had become stylish.

If ASARO was contemplating entering the MACO, this was not only to make an artistic statement, but also to use this moment of interest in street style by art institutions to make a political and social statement. However, on the day that a group of us met MACO's director, we quickly discovered that, having just been hired as a director and new to Oaxaca, he was primarily interested in "having a dossier of art in Oaxaca." Compiling such a dossier, he explained, was critical because there was a general lack of information about Oaxacan artists that stemmed from "the problem of the dominance of the Oaxacan Art School." The prevalent image and imagination that flowed from this dominance, he noted, meant that only certain names and sites were visible when it came to who and what counted as an artist and art in Oaxaca. The director thus encouraged us to compile a folder or CD of images of our work and advanced a proposal for us to integrate our works into the museum's archives. Listening to the director, and attentive to the body language of ASARO members seated around me, I could sense that the group wondered at who might take a look at such an archive. Would the woman buying tortillas for supper that night stop in at the MACO to see the archives on ASARO? Would the carpenters carrying their loads on rickety wagons cool off in the vaults of the museum after hauling their orders around town? Would the director of the law school in the university building across the street do so either? After all, while MACO exhibits might be critical of the Oaxacan School, and while it definitely offered another take on the art scene than that offered by a typical Rodolfo Morales image, it nonetheless was very much a part of the institutionalized circle of art production in Oaxaca that ultimately controlled and validated the cultural canon. As such, the audience that the MACO's archive would engage was most definitely enclosed by the national and transnational art community and possibly by academic researchers or specialists interested in the artistic lay of the land.

If the street did not manage to make it into the museum on this day, however, this was not the first time that ASARO had an opportunity to enter a famed museum in the city. Indeed, in early 2007, just over a month since the Federal Preventive Police had returned the city to the government's control, ASARO had been invited by Francisco Toledo to present their work in the Oaxacan Institute of Graphic Arts (IAGO). Everyone from ASARO who brought up this exhibition recalled that debates over whether to enter the museum and the work of putting together the exhibit itself nearly broke up the assembly. The swelling of members attending ASARO assemblies after the invitation to present their art in the IAGO testified to the immense interest generated by the proposal. Debates as to whether or not to accept Toledo's offer, however, were contentious, with many members stating that the open streets were the only site they should paint in, and others arguing that the closed spaces of the museum needed to be opened up to the streets and that the offer should be

taken advantage of. Deciding to participate, how the group might negotiate spaces for members to paint in the museum presented another difficult hurdle. Moreover, as multiple artists recalled, the exhibit also brought to the foreground internal divisions over the present and future direction of ASARO that forced smaller groups and individual members to take sides even though these were often contests structured by the competitive egos of dueling artists within the group. All of these frictions did result in many members and collectives stepping aside and even leaving the assembly even as others eagerly lined up to enter the hallowed institutional art site.

Titled "Grafiteros al Paredón" (Graffitists to the Big Wall), the controversial exhibit opened to a packed crowd on the 2nd of February 2007, and, as if looking to stage a showdown, it did so at the unusual hour of noon. In text accompanying the images on the walls, the museum framed the show and provided its opinion by stating that, "IAGO disapproves of all acts of aggression towards the architectural patrimony of Oaxacans. We know that in graffiti the marginal, subversive, and radical elements are inseparable from its own action and scene; its anonymous and collective condition does not bring together a consensus of ideas in (con)fusion, but it does give shelter and an opening for public catharsis." Though critical of the placing of graffiti and stencils in buildings in the historic city center, IAGO's director recognized the importance of graffiti in opening up the floor to a debate that, while it might not produce consensus, did bring to the surface and channel the collective anger and anguish of the public over the current state of affairs of Oaxaca. In comments published on the 4th of February of 2007 in the Mexico City daily *La Jornada*, Francisco Toledo expanded on both of these points, noting that the IAGO opened its doors to graffiti artists because, historically, graffiti "has served as a means of expression of the appetites, desires, and aversions of a historical sector." Moreover, if critical of damage to the city's heritage by stencils, Toledo also was of the opinion that "prohibiting graffiti is to wave the opening flag (to paint on the walls of homes and buildings)." For both of these reasons, then, and given the political affinities of the liberal artist and the social movement, IAGO welcomed graffiti artists from the movement to place their images at that time within its exhibit walls.

Sharing a drink with current ASARO members in a local bar downtown over a year and a half after the exhibit, in October of 2008, a member of Arte Jaguar recalled that not everyone who placed images in the IAGO show was active in the streets during the movement of 2006. An important and respected street art collective, Arte Jaguar had left ASARO due to the IAGO exhibit and it was clear that—even as ASARO members and Arte Jaguar members were on good terms—the memory of that event and the debate over it continued to reverberate long into in the present.

With exasperation and a hint of irritation, this Arte Jaguar artist communicated that night that even as far as Tijuana there had been a guy in 2006 who called himself an ASARO member but was putting up bunnies and other things that had nothing to do with what was going on in Oaxaca or had any social theme. Furthermore, for this member of Arte Jaguar, the exhibit also produced questions about why IAGO was interested in their art in the first place. With Arte Jaguar active well before 2006, but never garnering any interest from museums or in the popular press, he legitimately wondered whether or not the social movement was the sole reason why graffiti and street artists were now in the spotlight, rather than the aesthetic quality or social message that the art of groups like Arte Jaguar had projected well before the social movement.

Stopping for a moment to take a drink from his beer, Mario's response to the Arte Jaguar artist was that what he was saying about artist's participation in the IAGO show was indeed true, but added for consideration that "ASARO's proposal is an open one, let all the people who want to join enter and let them train themselves as artists; there is a process, you don't have to arrive artistically or politically formed. You enter with bunnies and come out with cannons." In many ways, Mario's line of thinking paralleled the broader APPO position that developed through the practices of struggle in 2006 whereby, through the practices of struggle, whether one was an artist or an academic, a ballerina or a bus driver, people of all stripes underwent a series of personal and political transformations as they went from bunnies to cannons. As such, Mario noted that night that "the position that everyone who participated in "Graffiteros al Paredón" should have been graffitists is a closed position that does not allow an opening for other points of view, other people, or other ways of being. This openness is important and so is searching for spaces to train others and to foment this process so that people will express their word." While this openness to people and places had resulted in the past in different people characterizing ASARO as either sellouts or as non-committed to the cause, here Mario was also pointing to its benefits.

Many supporters of the social movement, though, were skeptical of the gains to be realized by entering the museum or felt that it was a step towards the cooptation and institutionalization of street artist's external position and as such a step that deadened the movement's critical voice. In November of 2007, cultural critic Edgar Saavedra wrote that, "although these collectives gathered certain force in 2006 and 2007, currently they are suffering from a certain stagnancy. The social act, public art, or political act that they have represented in 'articulating action and ideas' in an independent and auto-sustainable manner seems to be suffering the difficult and incongruent transmission of passing from the street to the museum. We shall see" (2007:46). As outlined by Saavedra, the critical question in the group's movement to the museum was not so much if the art was compromised because it appeared on a museum wall instead of out in the street, but whether or not the

artist's assembly and its art practices could continue to articulate its radical actions and critical thought, its independent ideas and collaborative practices.

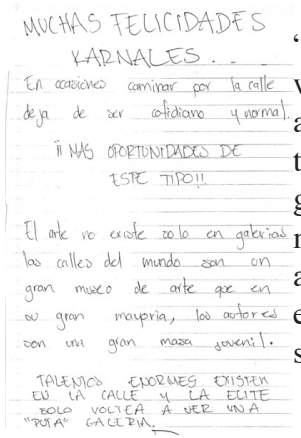
For ASARO, their entrance into IAGO was not only in keeping with its commitment to opening up a dialogue between different sectors of society, but also resulted in the discovery and development of new ideas through the practice of putting up the exhibit itself. For example, it was as a result of the opportunity to exhibit in the museum that the assembly debated and developed its original manifesto "Nosotros somos ASARO" (We Are ASARO). In 2006, the energy and effort of the group was focused primarily on its artistic production. It was only in 2007, then, that this opportunity resulted in an effort to put down the group's ideas on paper—an act that led to further discussions and debate and finally to the crystallization of the group's initial written statement. Though not everyone was on board with the final document, the IAGO exhibit provided an opening for the group to reflect on its practices and define more clearly its positions and future direction.

For others who were assessing this move to the museum, the IAGO exhibit also allowed for a different consideration of the aesthetic merit of the group's art and stencil's artistic qualities. In a recent article for the *National Center of Research, Documentation, and Information on the Fine Arts*, Oaxacan artist and art critic Arnulfo Aquino wrote of the exhibit that, "of course, it was not the same to see the walls of the city randomly painted under the excitement of adrenalin with the texture of layered and repainted stencils and graffiti as the images realized expressly on the white walls of the gallery; however, the inconformity remained ever present and it was possible to appreciate other aesthetic elements, to discover new images and additional points of view" (2010). Given the time to produce the images and the certainty that they would not be erased the next day, street artists responded to the museum's opening not by merely and mechanically reproducing their stencils, but by creating new and lively compositions that took advantage of work already done and of the museum's architectural features to produce new readings.

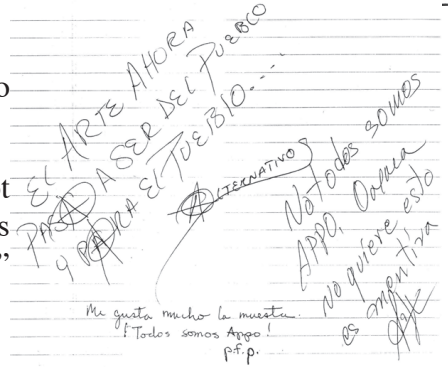
Images in the museum's exhibit depict a range of perspectives and artistic levels. With a bloody club, in one room Oaxacan governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz and Mexican president Felipe Calderón can be found beating a costumed Guelaguetza dancer. Elsewhere, under the stormy skies of a considerable helicopter attack, a composition of stencils on one wall begins with a youth's face; where the mouth should be, a wall of people stands in an image reminiscent of a famed woodblock print by Adolfo Mexiac produced for the Mexican student movement of 1968 of a youth gagged by a chain across his mouth and the text "liberty of expression" below. Next to this image, another ASARO artist had placed the image of a youth yelling forcefully into a megaphone, the words "fuera PFP" (PFP out) exploding from the megaphone as a sea of raised fists supports this sentiment. Lastly, a policeman in riot gear stands with

baton in hand, his shadow forming the bloody cross of repression as an accompanying text exclaims "No mas esta sombra!" (No more this shadow!). Almost as an afterthought, the visage of Flores Magón has been placed in an open white spot at the bottom of the composition, a red but bloody heart shape surrounding his face. In other images, popular media and advertisings are reframed to produce a message critical of the status quo. One stencil thus uses the name and familiar packaging of a Malboro cigarette carton, however this product is named "Malburro" (Bad-Donkey) and it features images of old and young men behind bars as part of the packaging for this brand which cursive lettering further identifies as "sistema" (the system). Another image uses a character from the film *Clockwork Orange* with the familiar logo of the national television station "Televisa" across his chest to call for an "end to the corral around information."

Finding that Clive Bell's views on aesthetics problematic because they framed works of art as autonomous entities to be contemplated in a plane beyond ordinary experience, art critics like John Dewey noted that this evinced their quality as *works*—that is, as the productive result of the practices of particular times and as "part of the significant life of an organized community" (Dewey 1934:5). As both an artistic and social statement, "Graffiteros al Paredón" pointed to the tension in this long-standing debate. Most importantly, however, by blurring the lines between the walls of the museum and the street, this exhibit offered a reconsideration of the social role of the museum and the artistic medium of the sidewalk and began a debate about the closed nature of the Oaxacan art market that was not limited to artists and art institutions but became a topic of interest for Oaxacan society. Though it took the controversial and ambivalent step of ASARO's entry into a museum to force this debate, the dialogue was productive and the move did indeed open the doors of the museum not only to new art, but to a public that had not up to that point felt interested or welcome in museum spaces. This is evident not only by the fact that this was the most visited event of 2007 in the IAGO, but is also starkly evident in the written responses that were collected in the exhibit's official register throughout the time that the event lasted. Here, in sentences missing punctuation and grammar and in those that are written as poetic verses, in statements written by locals in Spanish and by tourists in English, the register records a full spectrum of responses, from sentiments of support and solidarity to those that see entering the museum as selling out or that interpret the art as nothing more than opportunism. Both for and against APPO and the social movement, and at times directly referencing and riffing on each other, the statements provide the most complete record of the public's response to ASARO's art and, thus, the following pages reproduce a translated sample of the hundred or so pages from that 2007 document.

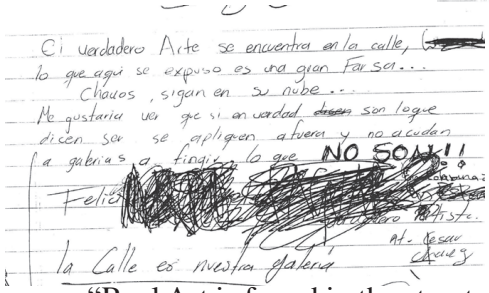


"Much congratulations mates… At times, walking down the street stops being normal and quotidian. More opportunities of this type!! Art does not exist only in the galleries[,] the streets of the world are a great museum of art and in the main, the authors are a great mass of youths. Enormous talents exist in the street and the elites only turn to see a 'whorish' gallery." (page 204)

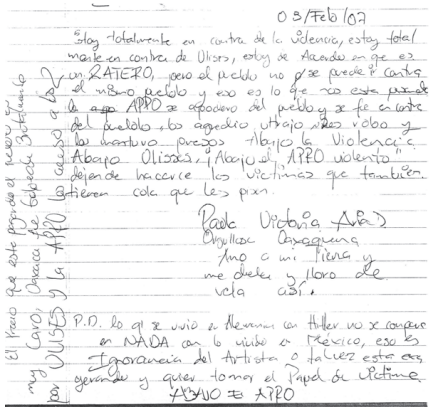


"Art now comes to be of el pueblo and for el pueblo…*Alternatives*"

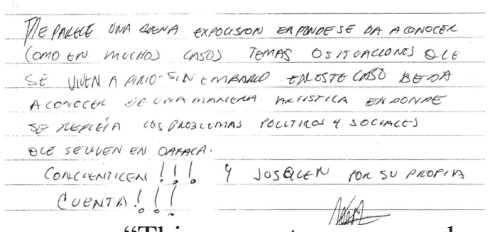
As a response to this, "Not everyone is APPO. Oaxaca does not want this, it's a lie. *H.H.*" (page 210).



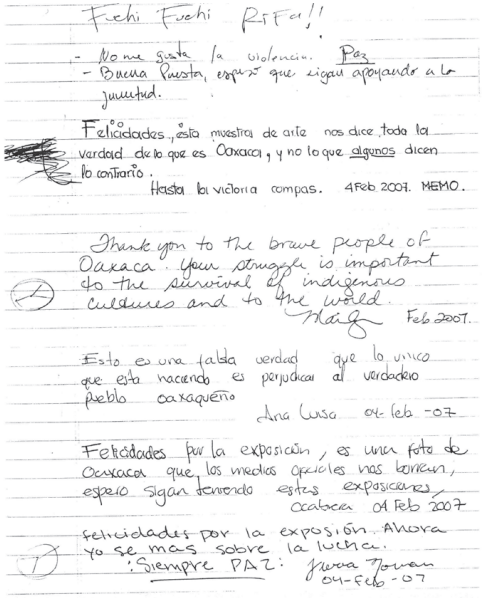
"Real Art is found in the street, what is shown here is a great Farce… Youths, keep on riding your cloud… I would like to see if in reality you are what you say you are [and] apply yourselves outside and not throng to galleries to pretend what you ARE NOT!! The street is our gallery." (page 218).



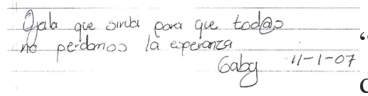
"I am against the violence, I am totally against Ulises, I am in Agreement that he is a THIEF, but *el pueblo* cannot go against itself and that is what is happening. The APPO took over *el pueblo* and they went against *el pueblo*, they assaulted, insulted, robbed and kept it prisoner. Down with Violence. Down with Ulisses. Down with the violent APPO! Stop making yourselves the victims for you also have a tail to step on. *Paola Victoria Aria D.* Proud Oaxacan. I love my land and it hurts me and I cry to see it this way. P.S. what was lived in Germany with Hitler does not at ALL compare with what is lived in Mexico, this is Ignorance of the Artist or maybe they are exaggerating and want to take the role of victim. DOWN WITH THE APPO." And in the margins, as if there was no room at all to express all she had to say, Paola continues, "The price that *el pueblo* is paying is very High, Oaxaca was brutally beaten by ULISES and the APPO." (page 213).



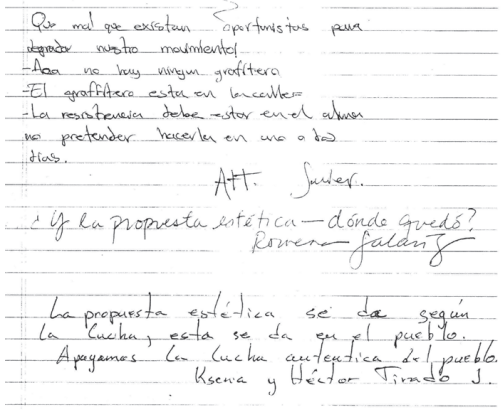
"This seems to me a good exhibit where one gets to know, as in many cases themes or situations that are lived daily, but in this case you get to know them in a realistic manner where the political and social problems that are seen in Oaxaca are reflected. Make awareness!!!" (page 234).



"Gross Gross *Rifa* [Risk, Gamble]!!" And below that, "I do not like violence. Peace. Good exhibit, I hope that there will be continued support for youths." And below that, "Congratulations, this art exhibit tells us all the truth that is Oaxaca, and not what some say on the contrary. *Hasta la Victoria*, comrades. 4 Feb 2007. *Memo*." And below that, "Thank you to the brave people of Oaxaca. Your struggle is important to the survival of indigenous cultures and to the world." And below that, "This is a false truth that the only thing it is doing is damaging the true Oaxacan pueblo. *Ana Luisa*." And below that, "Congratulations for the exhibit, it is a photo of Oaxaca that the official media erase, y hope they continue to have these exhibits, *Ocabrera*." And finally, "Congratulations for the exhibit. Now I know more about the struggle. Always PEACE." Ultimately, this page shows the range of responses to the exhibit, from the fact that it tells the truth about Oaxaca to the fact that this is a vision that damages the real Oaxaca, to the fact that there is a difference between the official and popular versions of events to the idea that the exhibit educated someone about the movement itself. (page 219).

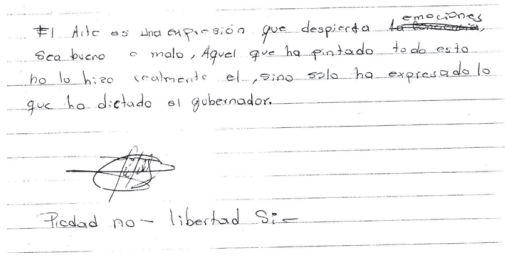


"I hope that this serves so that everyone does not lose hope. *Gaby*." (page 238).

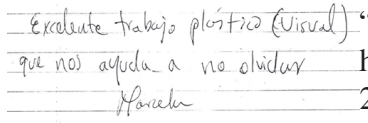


"How terrible that there are opportunists to degrade our monument! Here there are no graffitists. The graffitist is in the streets. Resistence needs to live in the soul and not pretend to make it in one or two days. Attn. *Sarter*." (page 255).

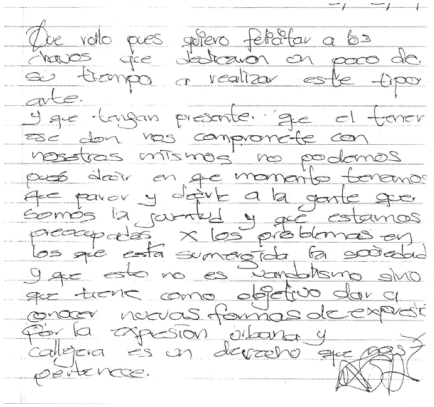
"And the aesthetic proposition—where did it end up? *Rowen Salan*." And in response right below, "The aesthetic proposal is given according to the struggle, this is given in *el pueblo*. We support the authentic struggle of *el pueblo*. *Ksenia y Hector Tirado J*." (page 255).



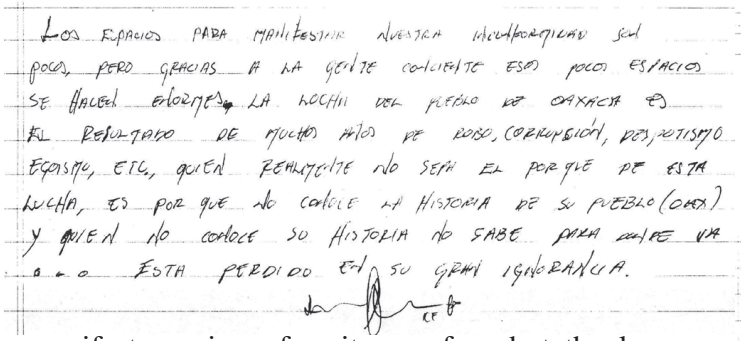
Art is an expression that awakens emotions in consciousness. Be they good or bad. Whoever has painted this is not really him, but has expressed what the governor has dictated. Mercy no, liberty yes." (page 266).



"Excellent plastic (visual) work that helps us not to forget. *Marcela*." (page 220)

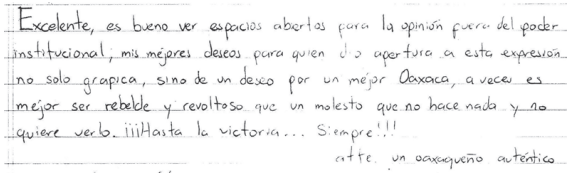


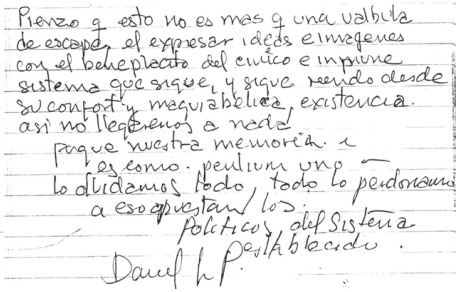
"What's happening, well I want to congratulate the youths that dedicated a bit of their time to realize this type of art. And that they have present that having this gift means having a commitment with ourselves since we cannot say the moment that we have to stop and tell the people that we are the youths and we are worried for the problems that society is drowning in and that this is not vandalism but that it has as its objective to make known new forms of expression for the right to express an urban and street expression belongs to us." (page 216).



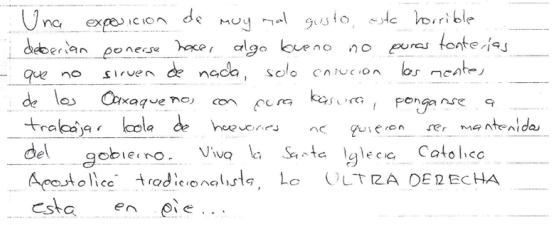
"Spaces to manifest our inconformity are few, but thanks to the people of conscience these few spaces are made enormous. The struggle of *el pueblo* of Oaxaca is the result of many years of theft, corruption, despotism, egoism, etc. Who really does not know why this struggle exists, is because they do not know the history of their *pueblo* (oax) and who does not know their history does not know where they are going… They are lost in their great ignorance." (page 285).

"Excellent, it is good to see spaces open to opinions outside of institutional power, best wishes for whomever gave the opening to this exhibit not only graphic, but also of a desire for a better Oaxaca, it is better at times to be rebellious and unruly than someone unconformed that does nothing and does not want to see. *Hasta la Victoria… siempre*!!! Attn. *An authentic Oaxacan*." (page 285).





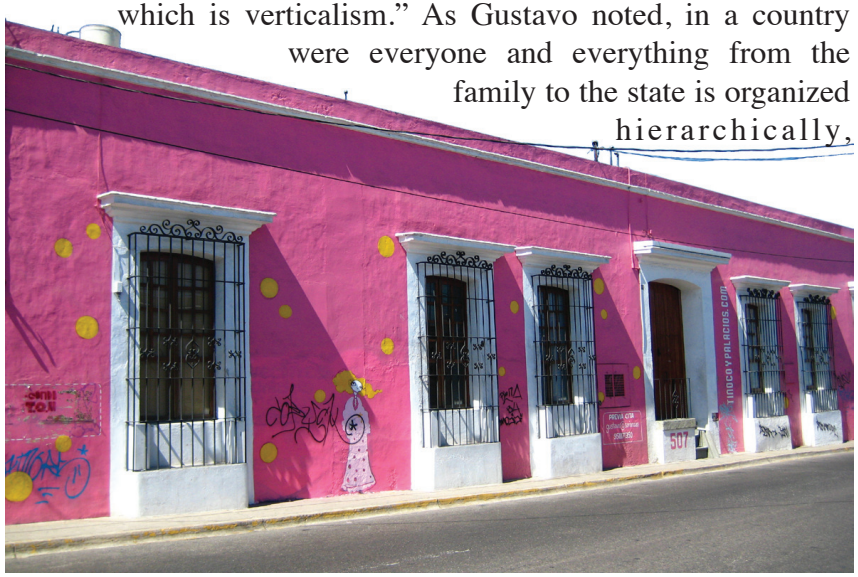
"I think that this is no more than an escape valve, the expression of ideas and images with the approbation of the cynical and unpunished system that continues, and continues its comfortable and Machiavelian existence. In this way we will not get anywhere because our memory is like a *peulium* [sic. pendulum?] and we forget everything, everything we forgive and this is what the politics of the established system bet on. *Daniel*." (page 269).



"An exhibit of very bad taste, it is horrible they should put something good not pure stupidities that are good for nothing, only to dirty the minds of Oaxacans with pure garbage, get to work you lazy bunch that want to be maintained by the government. Hooray for the traditionalist Saintly Catholic Apostolic Church, The FAR RIGHT is at the struggle." (page 287).

But is it Art? When Gallery Walls Look to Accommodate Activist Art Practices

January 28, 2008. I crossed the busy intersection and entered the Tinoco y Palacios gallery at the edge of downtown to meet with gallery owner Gustavo Soriano. Having been introduced by a mutual friend, Gustavo and I spent the next hour or so discussing our respective projects and the art scene in Oaxaca. Though this was my introduction to the world of Oaxaca's art galleries, Gustavo launched into a critique of the official art scene and quickly let me know that Tinoco y Palacios, or TyP, as he called it, was no ordinary art space. The world renown "Oaxacan School" dominates the art scene in the city, he began, and has the advantage that it has an established art market for its works that has secured an economic livelihood for many artists. However, Gustavo continued, there is a very real "danger to the Oaxacan School," namely that it produces an established "artistic hierarchy" which is most evident in the fact that some artists are called "*Maestro* [teacher, or expert], which is verticalism." As Gustavo noted, in a country were everyone and everything from the family to the state is organized hierarchically,



the fact that some artists are designated *Maestros* demonstrates how Mexico's verticalism is "reflected in art. People become institutions." As powerful institutions backed up by a lucrative art market machine, the influence of the *Maestros* and the Oaxacan School has created conditions whereby it is possible to find 2,000 artists that have similar work and new generations of artists that are schooled largely in its tradition.

Echoing this viewpoint, on the February night that ASARO artists gathered at his home, Guillermo Pacheco noted that the art market in Oaxaca had become extremely commercialized and in doing so had become highly mechanical. Everywhere, you saw the same crickets or the artist who has been painting the same skinny cow for decades. Once in the system, he stated, you become a machine and, although perhaps successful in terms of sales—as he was—because you are successful selling you continue to make the same art and soon everything you do comes out identically. Though Oaxaca's art market machine has been highly effective in shining a spotlight on Oaxacan art, the consensus that night was that, now that Oaxaca's art has garnered international attention, Oaxaca's art scene has been continually recycling the image that got artists noticed in the first place. Once plugged into Oaxaca's successful art market machine, the machine became the master and there was little hope of spinning successfully out of its orbit of influence.

Just a few days earlier that February, ASARO artist Yeska walked me through the ways in which art galleries in Oaxaca form an integral part of the institutionalization of the Oaxacan School and the commercialization of Oaxaca's artists. First, as Yeska noted, a gallery owner asks an artist to leave an artwork with him or her to look it over and to consider its aesthetics and craftsmanship. If accepted, and if that piece sells relatively quickly, the owner might call the artist and ask for three or four other pieces of a similar

style. Once sold, the gallery keeps at minimum 40% and usually 50% of the sales price. However, while the gallery owner is paid up front, Oaxacan galleries tend to pay artists in installments, thereby seeking to continue a relationship with an artist and guarantee that they work almost exclusively with that space. When an artist no longer sells, he or she is simply no longer promoted or given room in a gallery's wall.

Assessing the effect of this process, Yeska stated that an artist becomes known for and bound to the 'type' or 'style' of his or her art that sells. The pressure to create similar material is thus quite high and has lasting effects both for the artist and for the kind of art that is both produced and available in Oaxaca. Both Yeska's and Pacheco's takes resonated with Gustavo's point of view at TyP that, although Oaxacan artists are highly prolific, they are merely and mostly repeating models and produce the same theme or signature landscape ad nauseam. Given the situation, Gustavo emphasized that Oaxaca cannot have "only Guelaguetza everyday. We have to renovate culture." And renovating culture, for Gustavo, meant reconceiving art and the gallery as "a social project, an exchange." TyP, as Gustavo told me, is a response to the aesthetic monoculture of Oaxaca as well as an attempt to break the hierarchy and halo of *Maestros* that has resulted in conditions whereby ordinary Oaxacans feel that artists are exalted and inspired beings producing aesthetic works beyond the capabilities and reach of ordinary commoners.

On the one hand, TyP sought to renovate culture and demystify art by creating and offering artistic products for sale that had their place in everyday life: clothing, magazines, dolls, etc. On the other hand, TyP sought to renovate culture and demystify art production by promoting collaborative art projects that offered the opportunity for people and the gallery to get involved in the creation of an artwork and not just to see or show the final work. Explicitly citing the work of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and the concept of the rhizome, Gustavo mentioned that TyP builds on the work of collective groups and efforts such as IndyMedia for its approach to art and organization. Much as ASARO sought to do, TyP aimed to generate social bonds through collaborative art projects.

Two decades ago, anthropologists Arthur Murphy and Alex Stepick commented that, rather than visit museums or archeological sites, "when Oaxacans have free time, they prefer to enjoy—not culturally enrich—themselves at movie theaters, in bars, at sporting events, or visiting relatives" (1991:55). As a way to change the fact that in Oaxacans' everyday reality most people do not have any interaction with museums or galleries, TyP established collaborative projects with students at local universities. Conceived as a horizontal space of social and aesthetic encounters geared towards youths, Gustavo was highly receptive to the creative energy unleashed by the social movement since 2006. Commenting on the power of street art, Gustavo felt that today, "museums are not the same spaces as before, now [the museum] is the streets." In his estimation, Gustavo felt that stencils and street art had upended the dominant verticality and hierarchy of the Oaxacan art scene and allowed people to see that you do not have to become part of an elite group of artists or a *Maestro* to be heard; now anyone could do it. He noted, however, that Oaxaca's street art "has much to do with repression" and that the only response has been to "shout." While shouting had its moment, Gustavo felt that it was an adolescent reaction and that, now in order to grow up, street art in Oaxaca needed to go beyond shouting and grow or evolve its artistic and social message. Believing first and foremost that "the gallery is a space to learn and dialogue," Gustavo had thus recently welcomed a proposal by a duo of street art collectives from Mexico City to host the Oaxacan leg of an itinerant show of Mexican street art.

For Gustavo, as he noted that day, the intent in bringing this show to TyP was not to commercialize graffiti but rather to open up space for urban art to engage in a dialogue and critique from an aesthetic and intellectual perspective. Gustavo felt that, much as hip-hop and graffiti in the United States had moved from shouting against authority in the streets to becoming an urban art movement that captured mainstream radio waves and museum walls, so too did Oaxacan artists need to move from an anti-government discourse to develop their own social and aesthetic proposal. Urban art exploded with the social movement, but Gustavo felt that it could not remain there for, if the utopia of urban artists was simply to damage the city, he and many others would not participate.

Titled "Las Calles Estan Diciendo Cosas" (The Streets are Telling Us Things), the urban art exhibit began its national run in the neighboring state of Chiapas and, as the organizers told me in February of 2008, part of the show's intent was not only to showcase the work of urban artists from across the nation, but also to continually grow and change by incorporating the art of local groups as it moved from state to state. In its Oaxacan manifestation, the exhibit took place from the 8th of February to the 2nd of March of 2008 and brought together 23 urban art collectives, with three of these being local groups ASARO, Arte Jaguar, and Revolver.

Having been invited by Gustavo to come by on the night of February 7th to meet Olga Margarita and watch the "high culture of curators in action," I was surprised by the empty gallery space as I walked in. Finding out that the art had only left Chiapas that afternoon and thus had not yet arrived, the most that curator Olga Margarita could do was to speculate on the placement of pieces. As a general principle, she did mention that priority should be given to pieces from elsewhere, for "who in Oaxaca does not know ASARO or Revolver?" Understandably frustrated by the lack of organization on the part of its street art promoters, as she was leaving she jokingly mentioned that, "as they say, when you get in bed with children, you wake up wet!" Gustavo imagined that the exhibit could produce a fruitful dialogue between urban artists and the gallery that would shake up the established art market machine. Even before a picture had been hung, however, tensions in the coming together of the separate worlds of the professional art gallery and street artists had arisen. These tensions speak to the materiality and social imaginary of a gallery as a space where established artists or those looking to make a name for themselves exhibit "high art" for an elite audience and the image of urban artists as youthful vandals haphazardly spraying city walls to the detriment of society.

It was only on the morning of the show's opening, then, that Olga Margarita had a chance to curate the show and members of ASARO, Revolver, and Arte Jaguar painted the spaces they had been assigned. That night at the opening when I spoke with Olga about hanging the show, she mentioned that the organizers of the exhibit were a bit disappointed that some of the works shipped had not been included. However, as she stated, "the gallery is not the street, and saturating the space is a form of dialogue, but the gallery has norms and the space is already overburdened." Clearly, from Olga Margarita's perspective, the curatorial dictates that the art world established needed to be understood and respected, even if questioned. Both the art and the discussions it generated were evidence that the clash between the norms and publics of the gallery and street was creating interesting frictions for, after all,

urban art in the street too has its norms and customs that define standard practices such as the fact that a clean and clear wall space is fair game for an intervention, no matter how saturated that wall might be.

Looking at the artworks as Olga had hung them, it was clear that the space of the gallery is not the space of the street. The gallery affords a controlled environment where lights, colors, noise, and the art's rhythm, frame, and placement—along with the social imagination and embodied habits of a gallery space—has the effect of producing interpretations that privilege or push aesthetic considerations to the forefront. Socialized into particular interactions with art in galleries and museums, the encounter with a work of art placed in a gallery and the same work of art found without warning in the street produces different levels of engagement and interpretations. On the street, lighting, surrounding colors, the visual and auditory quality of the urban environment, and what others may add or subtract to a piece are not elements that street artists can control and these change constantly throughout the day, producing different ways of seeing, contemplating, and reflecting on a piece.

The expectation of a novel dialogue between street and gallery had been quite high for both TyP and ASARO members. However, when Gustavo had the opportunity to assess the works in the show a week after the opening, he noted that many of the pieces were "very cool, but they did not go much further than what had already been seen." While praising a group of art-objects made out of converted spray-cans—one that was of a military scene did have the quality of stating something about the practice of making urban art from the perspective of its practitioners—Gustavo felt that the stencils had the function of being a "mask for a lack of technique." Ultimately, Gustavo was of the opinion that, for the organizers, entering the gallery had been the goal and in the end the art did not create much else beyond this feat.

For ASARO members, the resulting tension in the meeting of street art and the Tinoco y Palacios gallery was not unexpected, but was equally frustrating. One crisp night not long after the "Las Calles Estan Diciendo Cosas" opening, the topic of conversation after an assembly turned to the show and to disparaging comments about ASARO that the show's curator was said to have uttered in a recent interview. Discussing the intellectualized, abstract discourse of aesthetic critique, an ASARO member voiced his opinion that, ultimately, the art world's critics and repetitive critiques used

palabreria (wordiness) to cover up for a lack of artistic talent. Much as Gustavo's opinion of stencils, so too did ASARO members find *palabreria* to be a crutch for a lack, this being the inability of critics to take up a brush and get to work themselves.

However, in Mario's opinion that night, "the battle now is not only artistic, but is also one of intellectualism and of *palabreria*. We have to bet on everyone having the tools to respond." Mario acknowledged that, as with the IAGO exhibit, entering TyP had put ASARO in a space where both the group's motives and artistic merits would be questioned; Mario also nonetheless felt that, as with "Grafiteros al Paredón," the group would ultimately benefit from the TyP experience, for it would push ASARO to "defend our own position, but *mas de suelo* (closer to the ground)." If gallery owners, curators, and art critics could lay claim to or deploy the necessary resources and *palabreria* by which to judge the group's art aesthetically, by engaging with the world of museums and galleries, ASARO sought not only to interrupt or expose the verticalism and aversion to politics of the established art market machine, but also wagered that the painful experience would be valuable in helping the group to sharpen its own *palabreria* in order to defend its position. While poet and writer Audre Lorde warned that it "is an old and primary tool of all the oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns" (1979), ASARO was not looking to dismantle the verticalism of Oaxaca's art market machine with an aesthetic discourse. On the contrary, ASARO members were deeply aware of the differences in power and privilege that such elite spaces mobilized and, rather than look to "dismantle the master's house with the master's tools," ASARO looked to such experiences as opportunities for the group to continue to position and establish the artistic *and* political relevance of the street and the marginalized *barrio* (neighborhood) more effectively.

Throughout my time working with ASARO, many opportunities to enter a gallery or museum surfaced and in each instance the decision was always a fraught one and highly debated amongst the group. As it did in May of 2008, this debate most often hinged on the relationship between the commercialism of the art market machine and ASARO's desire to create art of protest for *el pueblo* from a grounded position *mas de suelo* (closer to the ground). That day in May, the group had before them an invitation for ASARO to put together a show in a gallery owner's space where some members were already selling their own personal work. In the ensuing deliberation, one of the more pointed opinions expressed was that, ultimately, we had to consider the fundamental "problem of the gallery; who goes to see it, how does the gallery fulfill our idea of *arte del el pueblo* [art for the people]? That is where the rich go with their coffee and say, what good technique." In this member's opinion, the gallery or the museum were spaces not only enclosed by physical walls, but also open only to certain social sectors and perspectives. Mario synthesized the terms of the debate that night by noting that, "the gallery is a space of sales…. The gallery is money." In the end, while ASARO members were reminded that they were free to exhibit their personal work where they wished, the consensus vote in the assembly was to avoid putting an exhibit in a gallery when the sole reason to do so was financial.

ASARO is clearly not the first or only outsider artistic group to make choices about entering into the official art market. Following the case of an Australian aboriginal artist whose work entered into and circulated in the official art market machine, anthropologist Fred Meyers notes that when indigenous paintings enter the art market, "surely what is taking place is not a simple commodification, not a reduction of objects to quantitative exchange value, but rather a reorganization of the hierarchy of values adhering to the objects" (2005:104). As Meyers gets at, the art market—as any market—

operates by certain principles and aims to create a *particular* product, one that is more than simply the fact of the art object itself, but which in this case includes the sanctification of artists as expert *Maestros*, the glorification of each artwork as a unique object, and the cultivation of the artist as a distinct and noteworthy personality whose symbolic capital is personified by the value of *the* signature. Though not explicitly, ASARO's rejection of the gallery as a space of commodification included an understanding that "paintings enter into an art market characterized by a race for 'product,' and a competition for 'name' artists" (Meyers 2005:104) and that this reorganization of the regime of values by the art market machine not only challenged the stated aims of the group to reach *el pueblo*, but also was one of the potential threats to the collective aspect of the group's art production and cohesion.

To undertake this reorganization of values and to promote and continually grow the commercial value of artists and artworks, the capitalist art market machine is highly dependent on art critics and gallery and museum spaces. Despite a fixation with the loss of aura that philosopher Walter Benjamin famously decried with the advent of mass-produced objects, art historian Boris Groys has written that, "what differentiates contemporary art from previous times is only the fact that the originality of a work in our time is not established depending on its own form, but through its inclusion in a certain context, in a certain installation, through its topological inscription" (2008:74). Calling this a process of de- and re-territorializations and of de- and re-auritizations, Groys argues that it is through its literal and physical location in the gallery or museum that the art market machine sanctifies and validates particular artistic works as art and particular individuals as recognized artists. An artworks aura, that is, no longer depends on its uniqueness as an object, but in its being located inside the highly enclosed, scarce, and sanctified spaces of the gallery and museum.

Placing art on the streets, ASARO sought to deterritorialize the museum as a sacred site for artistic contemplation and respatialize the street as a site for the mass-production and contemplation of art. Flooding the city with multiple copies of the same stencil, the group's art traded the aura of a unique instance for the communicative political power of the copy that Walter Benjamin found as the trade-off of art in times of technological reproduction (1936b). Uploading images onto its websites, moreover, in the electronic age of virtual reproduction, the group's street-specific work took on a presence beyond any sited location and, in the everlasting online world, ultimately it took on a presence even beyond any particular social or political moment (see http://www.myspace.com/asaroaxaca and http://asar-oaxaca.blogspot.com/).

While ASARO's reterritorializations and deauralizations through the streets and online seek to resist the topographical capitalist commodification of the gallery and museum, ASARO members are also highly aware that there is an aura to the transgressive act of placing art illegally in the city's streets and public spaces. They were aware, as well, of the way in which this aura was being co-opted by established Oaxacan artists, the art market machine, and popular culture producers who were promoting or using the latest revolutionary street style in their commercial works. This process of co-optation is not new and the history of critical activist or radical art is littered with endless examples of the power of the capitalist art market machine to engulf and swallow the critical creative aspect of artistic, political, and social movements.

Writing about perhaps the most famous example of radical art that nobody today would recognize as anything but mainstream, art historian Suzi Gablik quoted artist Wassily Kandinsky as stating that, "the phrase 'art for art's sake' is really the best ideal a materialist age can attain, for it is an unconscious protest against

materialism, and the demand that everything should have a use and practical value" (1984:21). In her assessment of art-for-art's-sake, Gablik finds that it can be understood as an example of the disillusion of the modernist dream of another society via aesthetics and, as such, a radical critique of the problem of materialism via a U-turn towards self-referentiality. Given that Kandinsky's "Study on Improvisation 3" sold at auction in 2008 for $16,882,500 dollars, however, the end result of art-for-art's-sake's critique against materialism was its co-optation by a developing global art market that used it to establish the lucrative image and illusion of art's autonomy from social concerns and of the artist as a figure removed from everyday life.

Speaking with me a week before "The Streets are Telling Us Things" opened, Gustavo Soriano wondered whether or not Mexican street artists might not soon be co-opted by the art market machine or become sponsored by the government and official culture? "How authentic could a rebel be," he asked, "in the moment in which you take your 'rebel kit' and use it?" Globally, in Spain, Germany, and the United States, this rebel kit was, as he pointed out, already commercialized and was an expensive style: torn baggy jeans, dark shades, stylish sneakers, emblazoned shirts with branded logos. Commenting on the upcoming exhibit, Soriano noted that, "the sponsors of the show are Vans and Montoya cans—an extremely expensive German aerosol can to paint with that has a pretty, luxurious aesthetic." As Gustavo saw it, capitalist commodification of Oaxaca's urban art and social rebellion loomed and, in order to avoid becoming just another artistic fad, street artists would have to change to stay ahead of the game.

Four days before Gustavo's comments, Yeska had also brought up the relationship between co-optation and the Oaxacan art market machine. However, from his point of view, it was the majority of Oaxacan artists who had not been able to stay ahead of the game for the identity of artists in the city was itself a product of the art market machine and this identity and image was instrumental in distancing artists from creating art on social and political issues. While not an "official Oaxacan artist kit," Yeska noted that the popularized stereotype of the Oaxacan artist generated by the art market machine was one where small town *guaraches* (sandals) and a simple, provincial style of dress located artists as being at a remove from the concerns and politics of the city and went hand in hand with the Oaxacan School style of largely a-political painting.

In this instance of the coming together of street and gallery, although neither TyP nor ASARO members were satisfied that they had productively engaged with the other side, the "Las Calles Estan Diciendo Cosas" show did produce many points of debate and questions that both sides were forced to struggle to come to terms with. Assessing the similar meeting of Australian Aboriginal art and the official Australian art market machine, Meyers noted that it was only through the materiality of artworks that their different regimes of value came into play and thus had the capacity to transform each side. As he writes of their meeting, "the result is inevitably

a complex and transient accommodation rather than a domination between the sense of ownership and meaning that paintings come to have as Aboriginal culture.... Each permeates and leaks into the other, subverting its internal integrity by becoming an 'excess' that cannot simply be contained by the system of values that generated it" (2005:106). However, if urban art is an object that, once placed in a museum or gallery, is matter out of place—a slippage—that makes possible small or large disruptions in the distribution of the sensible of the art market machine, the art market is ultimately nonetheless in the position of deciding what may be classified as art and who may be classified as an artist. Street artists and the streets may be "telling us things" in the galleries and museums of the world, but out on the sidewalk, the wall between the hallowed art halls and *el pueblo* remains as thick and solid as ever.

Thirty years ago, philosopher Gilles Deleuze pointed out that artists do not work on a blank surface or with an additive principle, layering paint, plaster, or musical notes to create a composition; artists work, rather, on a principle of subtraction, of filtering out. As Deleuze wrote, "if the painter were before a white surface, he could reproduce on it an external object functioning as a model, but such is not the case. The painter has many things in his head, or around him, in his studio. Now everything he has in his head or around him is already in the canvas, more or less virtually, more or less actually, before he begins his work" (1981:71). Assessed through the subtractive principle, artists belonging to the Oaxacan School may have been those most affected by the social movement, those who had to do the most work in their art to filter out and subtract the events around them. Personally, politically, and in their art—even if not always visible or at the surface—there is no doubt that the social movement has made its mark across the Oaxacan art landscape. However, it is also true that the Oaxacan School also was and is very much alive and a presence in the work of the overtly political street artists of Oaxaca that critique and also refuse this trajectory. Quoted in an ASARO fanzine produced to celebrate their first anniversary of existence, artist Arnulfo Aquino voiced that, "ASARO also comes from an autochthonous tradition, the Oaxacan plastic arts and their manifest creativity." Whether from an additive or subtractive perspective, how could it be otherwise? Moreover, even if not always emphasized due to the focus on the social movement of 2006, along with this local tradition, ASARO also comes from a long history of Mexican art of protest and it is to this history that I now turn.

But Whose Art is it? The Past and Present of Mexico's Art of Protest

On October 2nd, 2008, members of Oaxaca's social movement organized several events in remembrance of the 40th anniversary of the federal government's massacre of hundreds of protestors and students in the plaza of Tlatelolco in Mexico City in 1968. Having been one of the students coordinating graphics for the '68 student movement, Arnulfo Aquino was marking the occasion by curating a commemorative exhibit at the Curtiduría gallery and launching a book about the art of protest from the 1968 student movement. Invited by Aquino to take part in the exhibit, ASARO's assembly unanimously decided to participate not only because of the importance of recalling another moment when government military forces repressed social protestors, but also because ASARO knew that street art groups such as Arte Jaguar and La Piztola would also participate. Despite APPO's collectivist ethos and the articulation of *el pueblo* in relation to police repression and URO's authoritarianism, the competitive habits of graffiti crews from the days before APPO continued to influence the relationship between Oaxaca's mobilized art collectives.

Though the exhibit's opening was on October 1st, it was only in the final day of September that ASARO brainstormed possible designs to fill the oversized canvas. After mulling over several ideas, the assembly decided that, since the massacre occurred just ten days before Mexico hosted the Olympic games, the group would contrast the fervor of collective protest and people's mobilization with the state's sponsorship of the sport of militarization. On the computer, the group arranged a collage superimposing a photo of students with raised fists at the sports stadium and a famous photograph of detainees from Tlatelolco who had been stripped down to their T-shirts and underwear before the Mexican military. Projecting this onto the canvas, someone suggested that the group could use the famed three tiered lettering that had been created to promote the Olympics to outline the figures, thereby transforming them into lingering, ghostly shadows. After highlighting a few individuals, however, it was decided that this technique would not work at this scale and ASARO members began shading the figures in white. As night wore on, the number of people working on the canvas steadily decreased until only a couple remained.

Returning early the next morning, the bright Oaxacan sun filtering through the *taller* (workshop) window revealed an utterly transformed canvas. A coat of red paint had been dripped from the top to the bottom, creating tendrils of red that streaked across the surface and masked the white figures below. On one side, Mario had irreverently sketched a large-scale figure of Oaxacan banker and art patron Alfredo Harp Helú masturbating while standing on a tank. Next to Harp, Yeska had placed a stencil of a PRI gun shooting into the distance. Both busily sketching, as more hands and ideas were added to the mix, the final painting had Harp Helú's semen falling over a caricature of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, the Mexican president in

1968, as he sat atop the tank's barrel with an umbrella in one hand a gun in the other. In front of the tank, a pig-like dog wearing a gas mask lunged towards the silhouettes of the captured students. Underneath, Olympic-style script declared the scene an example of "fascismo 08" (fascism 08).

Delivering the image at the last minute, ASARO members effectively had an early showing of the Curtiduría exhibit and rival group's artworks. At the entrance, the duo of La Piztola produced an intricate and sharply defined stencil of a young girl holding an image of a wounded "paloma de la paz" (dove of peace), an icon created for the Olympics. Behind the girl, wallpaper formed by Olympic circles with images of famous woodblock prints from the student movement of '68 completed the scene. Along the main exhibit wall, one member of Arte Jaguar superimposed a pair of hooded eyes and the smiling figure of Díaz Ordaz to remind us that, "40 years and still they don't fill their face with shame." Zape, another street art collective, had a lifelike poster depicting the figure of a murdered young man as it burned under the Olympic torch. On one side of ASARO's painting, Siniestro produced a life-like scene where a young man holding a red flag reading "the 2nd of October is not forgotten" walked under the watch of an approaching police brigade in a city where one of the buildings had become skulls. On the far wall, a familiar silhouette of Felipe Calderón riding a tank while crushing the dead completed the exhibit hall. A final image by another Arte Jaguar member took advantage of the space under the stairs to depict Díaz Ordaz as a speed walker racing over a path made of human skulls.

As a whole, exhibit artworks clearly referenced parallels between a moment of government repression and people's mobilization from four decades ago and the present. As art of protest, moreover, the exhibit also continued to a long tradition of Mexican art connected to social mobilization and transformation. At one level, this was achieved pictographically; as art historian Dana Arnold has written, "the volatility of the meaning of images is a fascinating element of art history. But.... there is a common language or set of symbolic conventions that can be used by artists to fix the meaning of artworks on one level or another. This introduces us to iconography" (2004:3). Thus, for example, though the skulls in many works clearly referenced death, the stylized Calaveras in another also marked the artistic legacy of the political art of Mexican satirist Guadalupe Posada. On the walls of Curtiduría, moreover, while the graphic iconography of the artistic and political past resurfaced, it was also transformed as it mixed with the iconography and

aesthetic techniques of the present; through the paint on the walls, the woodblock prints, dove of peace, Olympic typescript, and the visage of Díaz Ordaz carried the hopes and pains of 40 years ago while Felipe Calderón, Harp-Helú, the Zapatista ski mask, and the *chavo banda* (marginalized youth) marching through the city connected them to iconography carrying the hopes and pains of the present. Whereas woodblock prints and leaflets had been the tools of transformation for artists in the 30s and through to the 60s, in Curtiduría today—and out in the streets around the art space—the stencils on the walls demonstrated both street artist's continuing commitment and also the aesthetic transformations in Mexico's contemporary art of protest.

At the exhibit's opening, I spoke with Arnulfo Aquino about street art and we discussed the production of ASARO's piece. As I noted, though ASARO's collaborative art making process had produced inventive and sharp works previously, altogether, the process of putting together this canvas was a collaborative mess that came together at the last minute and was transformed awkwardly as those working on it shifted the idea and image in its execution. In response, Arnulfo made the interesting observation that "La Piztola has good work and since they are two…the work is easier. Working collectively implies learning through dialogue but is made difficult in the work." While rightfully admiring the technique and artistry of La Piztola pieces, Aquino's provocation that collective work has benefits that do not always show up in the final product because a greater number of artists makes art practice more complicated does encapsulate ASARO's production (and his experience as a member of MIRA, a Mexican art collective from the 70s). In my year working with ASARO, what the group learned from each other and from the collective process of producing art together went beyond that which is visible in a final artwork. Writing about it today, moreover, I feel that much of the shared learning also went beyond the sayable or that which I could put into words. Critical feminist theorist Norma Alarcón has discussed how to speak, or translate, "in one's behalf rather than the perceived group interests and values is tantamount to betrayal" (1989:63); translating the embodied work of collective art practices and the social processes of debates and dialogues in assemblies may not only be impossible, but is a betrayal of collective practices whose value goes well beyond the artwork produced. If the Curtiduría canvas was not an artistic success, discussions during its creation did serve as a way for ASARO members to consider and connect the past to the present; moreover, the final canvas was not simply a mnemonic placeholder of what happened, but was also a commentary on the relationship between the historical past and the Oaxacan present.

On the night of October 23rd, 2008, the relationship between the art of protest, the historical past, and the Oaxacan present was the theme of "The Impact of Contemporary Political Graphics," a presentation Arnulfo Aquino gave at MACO to promote a book he edited titled "La Gráfica del '68" (Graphics of '68). Although Arnulfo's talk would conclude with Oaxaca in 2006, he built a case for the importance of the political graphics of 2006 by turning to 1968. Noting that, "68 was the sporting *and* also cultural Olympics," Arnulfo pointed to the way in which Mexico at this time experienced a radical change in its cultural sense of self. The transformations in preparation for the games introduced modern designs in architecture, public art, clothing, and design that radically altered Mexico's self-image. As highlighted by Arnulfo, this moment of cultural transformation,

however, was not accompanied by a change to the government's longstanding authoritarian practices. Reminding the audience that the student movement of 1968 "was a response to the government's repression," Arnulfo noted that it was through art of protest that the growing student movement would find its most important political voice. As Arnulfo stated, "1968 opened up a space that did not exist before: liberty of expression." Analyzing the graphics making use of and extending this liberty of expression, Arnulfo commented that the legacy of the Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP) from the 1930s was present, yet its impact was less as a style to emulate and more as an inspiring example of an earlier moment when Mexican artists were also committed to social change. In the context of the fast moving media of Mexico City in the 60s, artists moved from the traditional style of the TGP to a blunter graphic design that traded complexity for forceful and immediate impact.

Woodblock prints are one of the primary aesthetic media that ASARO works with; through group members who attended Oaxaca's Fine Arts School, woodcarving lessons that ASARO ran for its members, and texts in the small workshop library or in the vast archives of IAGO, the history of the TGP was as well known to group members as it was to Arnulfo Aquino. In October of 2008, when I asked Chichas about the roots of woodblock prints in relation to the group, he replied that, "ASARO is like the TGP in having graphic art. The technique and theme is what relates ASARO to that history." As I read more about the TGP (see Caplow 2007; Ittmann 2006), I came to understand what both Arnulfo and Chichas were pointing to. Insofar as both make prints using similar woodcarving techniques, TGP and ASARO artists share particular methods and skills in printmaking. Moreover, as a printmaking group whose 1938 statute noted that, "their graphic work shall be in benefit of the interests of the Mexican *pueblo*," (Híjar Serrano 2007:117), the TGP shared ASARO's commitment to making "arte del pueblo y para el pueblo" (art by the people and for the people). Furthermore, like ASARO, art critic Alberto Híjar Serrano notes that the TGP's "dynamic of work consisted in weekly reunions and in general assemblies to analyze and discuss projects" (2007:117).

However, as both Chichas and Arnulfo allude to, there are important differences between the two. The most distinctive difference is pointed out by literary critic Rubén Gallo, who notes of the TGP that, "though its members came together to discuss political issues and their relation to art practice, most of them signed their works as individuals: for them collectivism was about political discussion and strategizing, but when it came to authorship, most members preferred to be known as individuals" (2007:166). The result is that, although the TGP has now been active for over 70 years, this artists' workshop is principally known through the art of two or three of its most illustrious and talented individuals. For ASARO, the fact that no one signs their work is a way to avoid giving preference to any one of its members; additionally, it is also a strategy the group uses in order to avoid the commercialization of its art and the individualizing forces that keep people from realizing their collective links. Holding workshops in artistic techniques for new members, moreover, ASARO emphasizes and celebrates the creative capacity of each and every member, no matter what their talents, and each and every woodblock carved by an ASARO member is printed and represents the group. For ASARO, as for the artists from 1968 that Arnulfo was speaking about, although

the TGP was studied and admired for its technique, its most lasting legacy by 2006 was as an inspirational example of commitment to the social cause.

Moving on in his presentation, Arnulfo found that the 1970s was a time when artists both envisioned "artistic production as social service" and also found that they had to "join together or die." Mistrustful and critical of the government and of its institutionalized cultural spaces, newly formed artist collectives such as MIRA, SUMA, and Proceso Pentagono purposefully took to the streets. Highlighting the fact that SUMA was the "first group to use stencils," Arnulfo noted that art collectives in the 70s took to the streets not only to protest government oversight, but also in order to undertake projects that emphasized spectator's participation and the construction of social connections through art practice (see also Gallo 2007). Echoing educator Paulo Freire's concept of *concientization* (1970b), Arnulfo highlighted aesthetic expression as a political technology of political intervention and social mobilization. The way in which art could be deployed as a political technology producing collective subjects was the centerpiece of Arnulfo's focus as he moved more quickly through the artistic response to the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City, protests in 1992 to the 500-year anniversary of the voyage of Christopher Columbus, the Zapatista uprising in 1994, and commemorations of the student movement of '68 in 1988 and 1998.

While Arnulfo's history of contemporary Mexican political graphics emphasized aesthetic expression as a tool for social formation and mobilization, Arnulfo also focused on the "generational change brought about by the manipulation of technology as a natural form" during the 1990s. With computers now a principal tool for making and manipulating graphics, the technical knowledge and practice of making images changed. The possibility for graphics to participate in social movements remained, yet Arnulfo noted that, if in previous moments the people directly involved in social movements were also the primary producers of the graphics of the moment, with the generation that grew up since 1968 now taking jobs and settling down, graphic arts have become a professional enterprise requiring specialized knowledges and technological equipment and software that not everyone has access to.

Technology made its mark in the art of protest in other ways, however, a fact that Arnulfo focused on as he turned to Oaxaca in 2006. Connecting Mexico City in October of 1968 and Oaxaca in June of 2006, Arnulfo felt that, while both displayed "graphics in the street [and] had its identity in the street," the images from 2006 could not be hidden and repressed by the government because, through the internet, they found not just a local but a global audience. Though the Oaxacan government erased images on city walls, these were not only firmly implanted in the minds of those that had seen them in the streets, but also in those that saw them in photographs in websites displayed online to anyone, anytime, and anywhere. Technology had made graphic arts a more specialized discipline than ever, yet it had also extended the reach of the art of protest on the streets. Moreover, with street artists as well as *el pueblo* placing stencils in the streets, Oaxaca's art of protest returned to a graphic medium that not only reached people in the street, but that people in the street could also appropriate.

Walking through the historic center after Arnulfo's talk while recalling the way in which *el pueblo* had appropriated these walls in 2006, turning them into the largest community mural in America at the time, I wondered what Arnulfo might have to say about Oaxacan stencils in relation to the artistic and social legacy of the Mexican muralists from the 20s and 30s. While the TGP provides an artistic and political lineage that influenced Oaxaca's current art of protest, when considering the Mexican muralists, it is perhaps the differences that are most striking, rather than any similarities. In chapter four, the murals of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros were connected to the project of creating a national subject emphasizing the country's indigenous roots; if Mexican muralists embraced indigeneity and espoused notions of equality and justice through socialist imagery and ideals, however, unlike the art of protest from 2006, the muralists were sponsored by the state and big capital. Moreover, though in theory the scale of murals was touted as making the images accessible to the general population, in practice the murals were often inside enclosed state spaces, painted on museum walls, or in the lobbies of private buildings that most Mexicans never set foot in. The art of the Mexican muralists portrayed the people as *el pueblo* in images said to be produced for mass-consumption, but the murals were of and about them and their struggles rather than truly addressing them. The Mexican muralists' art contributed to a national mythology yet, unlike stencils on city walls, the street was never their canvas nor the average streetwalker their audience.

However, if not in sponsorship, style, scale, or location, Gallo does point to one relevant and important similarity between the Mexican muralists and the political art collectives that followed them. As Gallo writes, with capitalist individualism an important villain of the Mexican revolution, collectivism emerged after 1917 as the new guiding light of Mexico's social project: "The muralist movement…emerged as the preferred postrevolutionary art form, in part because it replaced the individualistic production and reception of art (a process that followed a capitalist model) with an art form that was collectively produced (a large team of painters and helpers was needed to paint a mural) and destined for collective reception (large crowds could stand in front of a mural and study its message)" (2007:166). While both the TGP and the Mexican muralists created art through collective processes yet ended up glorifying a few individuals, the idea and ideals of collectivism are ones that street art groups like ASARO are attempting to not only espouse in its manifestos or discourse, but put into practice.

Mexican art practices and the revolutionary past were themes that Mario and I spoke about one day early in April of 2008 as ASARO sold art in the *zócalo* during an APPO takeover. Discussing the history of LEAR (League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists), a radical artist association with which both the Mexican muralists and members of the TGP were linked, Mario felt that ASARO had much to learn from their political and artistic writings and needed "to appropriate the words of movements from the past." At the

same time as Mario felt that ASARO members had to improve its discourse and produce not just political artworks but political statements that could define the group's position, he also stated that, "our practice is not bad. It is a dialectical process. ASARO has advanced, if we looked at it in [and from] the first reunions. Oaxaca demonstrates that the theoretical question is developed in practice and they don't walk apart." While the revolutionary aesthetic past could provide a template and important learning platform for the present, Mario's comments highlight how ASARO put the weight on collective art practices, finding that neither a scholarly understanding of the artistic legacy or history of social struggle could provide as much of an opportunity to learn and transform the present as the practical education that occurred through the processes of collective art practice themselves—whether producing a colossal mess or a spectacular success.

But Whose Art is it? Selling to Survive or Selling Out the Revolution?

ASARO's practical education extended not only to the issue of aesthetics and social mobilization, but also covered the pragmatic, controversial, and consequential issue of how to sustain the group financially. Given the basic problem of procuring funds to maintain projects, ASARO continually faced the predicament of how to make an aesthetic intervention supporting a social struggle highly critical of capitalist commercialism and the politics of the state *and* at the same time survive in a capitalist environment without state sponsorship or commercial support. The minimum list of materials needed to simply make the group's art of protest was long: blades, cardboard, spray paint, markers, wood, carving knives, block printing ink, rollers, screens, emulsion, solvents, silkscreen inks, canvas, brushes, acrylic paints, frames.... And maintaining a space where the group could get together to hold assemblies and make art was not overly expensive but it was not cheap either.

ASARO member Teak recalled that, at the height of social mobilization in 2006, when streets were taken over and ASARO was just starting, the group would pass around a hat or plastic cup to collect a *coperacha* (voluntary cooperation) in order to get the necessary funds to function. Putting in what they could, or bringing supplies from home, work, or school, individual members not only had a personal or political investment in ASARO, but a financial investment as well. Today, with the *taller* (workshop) and supplies provided by ASARO—or by groups who ask ASARO to make art for a particular event—members do not have any financial investment in the group. Moreover, though individual members continue to bring in tools and materials to the *taller*, and continue to put in tremendous amounts of time, labor, and creative energy into the group, the group survives financially from the sale of its art (primarily paintings or reproductions of woodblock prints).

Multiple opportunities for ASARO to sell its art existed: in the *zócalo* when APPO events take it over, in the Carmen Alto plaza at the Tianguis Cultural "Libertad y Resistencia" (the weekly cultural market that ASARO helped launch), to individuals or groups visiting the *taller*, or in ASARO exhibits in galleries and museums abroad. Though many people were interested in buying the group's art, and though at one time the sale of a series of paintings resulted in ASARO having over $11,000 dollars at its disposal, the group's finances were nonetheless very volatile. Success in sales had enabled the group to purchase a computer and projector, for example, yet ASARO often needed to pawn off these devices in order to raise needed cash for rent.

Given the shifting relative riches of the group and its aim to make *arte del pueblo y para el pueblo* (art by the people and for the people), finances were a source of tension because the issue implied entering into a mode of thinking about ASARO's art as an object for sale and consumption that implicitly meant commercializing the group's activities and artworks. If a woodblock print supported the social movement by helping make and mobilize the collective subject of *el pueblo*, what was its value when sold as a commercial object? Although Yeska noted in the end of July 2008 that, it is "not a question of making money with the movement but of being with *el pueblo*," clearly there is a difference between a stencil on the wall that was not for sale and a reproduction of a woodblock that the group was actively trying to sell. Instrumentally, the sale of prints helped ASARO to continue making its art of protest and all members recognized that, as long as the group wanted to remain independent of any sponsorship, ASARO would have to sell its art to survive.

It was also recognized, however, that the tension between supporting the social cause and selling its art also produced troubling contradictions. However, the underlying issue for most was not so much the implicit contradiction between critiquing capitalism and engaging in capitalist practices, though that also came up, but rather the way in which engaging in art market machine practices reconfigured and rerouted the regime of values through which artworks were assessed, as well as the relationship that it produced between artwork and owner, and between the consumer/buyer and the producer/seller.

Multiple compromises helped ASARO navigate these contradictions and continue to live up to the aim of making art by the people and for the people. With woodblock prints priced at $100 pesos for the larger prints and $50 pesos for mid-sized prints (about $10 and $5 dollars), ASARO aimed to price its art in such a way as to make it

accessible for *el pueblo* and not just for the Vallistocracia or tourists. In comparison, in 2008, an ear of corn on the cob from the local *zócalo* seller ran about $10 pesos and pirated movies at the *plantón* cost 3 for $50 pesos while the Indigo Gallery in downtown Oaxaca sold a black and white woodblock print by Fernando Olivera—similar in size and style to a medium ASARO print—for $450 dollars unframed. As one of thirty prints, the art market machine rewards the preciousness of Olivera's piece with a higher price tag and adds value for the fact that his signature is on the artwork, for his biography as a recognized artist, and for the fact that it is being sold in a gallery rather than on the street. ASARO's prints, on the other hand, include only the group's embossed logo to identify them, are being sold in the *zócalo* and in a popular market, and are reproduced until the pressure from the press has worn out the wood and the image no longer registers well. Emphasizing the message and the financial and material accessibility of the works as its most precious aspects, ASARO classifies the relative symbolic meaning and material work of its art using a different regime of value from that of the art market machine.

The differing regimes of value and tensions ASARO navigates in walking the tightrope between profits and the people was encapsulated by an incident in January 2008 when the group sold a series of paintings to an art dealer from a central Mexican town known for its art galleries and artists. Early in the morning in the *taller*, after the dealer had scrutinized and agreed to buy 17 canvases

and 30 woodblock prints, Yeska took this opportunity to bring out a reproduction of an 8-foot by 4-foot woodblock engraving that he had made and printed on cloth. As members stretched out the cloth so that everyone could see it better, the dealer asked Yeska how much he wanted for it. Yeska responded that he wanted $6,000 pesos and the dealer replied that it was too much "for this thing." After bargaining a bit more, they settled on $3,500 pesos. The dealer then motioned with their hand for Yeska to turn over the cloth and when doing so, asked him verbally to hand over "that piece of art." Though everyone laughed at the fact that it had been merely an object when bargaining but, once bought, it had become art, the laughter also acknowledged the group's unease at the fact that, given the differing economies between dealer and artist, the dealer could purchase the piece for so little. The moment also registered the tension between clashing regimes of value in a moment when art that was produced for the social movement and meant for *el pueblo* was being sold to a dealer who would undoubtedly frame it and hang it in a gallery rather than display it in a street next to the *zócalo*, as this piece had been during 2006. (All of the pieces that the dealer purchased on this day, in fact, had been displayed at various times in the *zócalo*—a moment described in the following chapter on memory.)

Laughter on this day was an index of the broader problems of translation between two different regimes of value as they met and were being negotiated in and through ASARO's artworks. The problem was one of translation between the values of collectivism and the social focus that the group strove to keep front and center in its art practice and the values of individualism of an art market machine that venerates and fosters the cult of artistic genius, the uniqueness of artworks, and their general distance from the broader masses. As Meyers notes, "even with the best intentions of all concerned, dangers can result from the very materiality of social action objectified into concrete form" (2005:109). As has been evident in the debates and ambivalence that the group has experienced in making decisions about entering the IAGO show, being part of a traveling exhibit at the Tinoco y Palacios gallery, and in selling its art through the art market machine, the danger for ASARO has always ultimately been that the group lose sight of its shared identity as part of the collective subject of *el pueblo* and of its mission to create art by the people and for the people. At stake was not just the price of an artwork; being negotiated through how the group's art entered into material and social relations was the collective identity and social belonging of the group and its members.

Attempting to further complete the transformation of "this object" into "that piece of art," the dealer asked Yeska to sign the cloth and also asked that the group provide a brief written blurb about each canvas so that when a potential buyer came along the dealer could provide an appropriate narrative about it. Much as the Indigo gallery's recognition of Fernando Oliveira as an artist and his biography added commercial value to his artworks, in this instance, an appropriate narrative about each canvas would function similarly; in all fairness, this is not to deny that a narrative about the canvases could provide important contextual information about the conflict of 2006 that the works referenced. Nonetheless, it was clear that the romance of revolution was to be as much a part of the subsequent selling of these artworks as was their technique or aesthetic composition.

After putting *their* signature on a check, the dealer did have one final request before leaving, namely, to be told—only for their personal knowledge—which artist had done each piece. The dealer knew that part of ASARO's policy and practice is that artworks are not signed by individual authors but rather belong, as it were, to a collective effort. The dealer had been trained and worked in the art market machine, however, which clearly valued principles of individual creativity, authorship, and ownership and used these to calibrate an artwork's value and meaning. Having worked with video collectives, film director and scholar Jesse Drew summarizes the tension that groups like ASARO face in clashes with the art market machine as a dilemma between individualism and collectivism: "Collective art production is often antithetical to authorship and ownership, or is at least ambiguous. The question of authorship, however, is strongly tied to the financial value of

the work. Even more, it is integral to modern Western ideas of the genius of the individual as the prime mover of history" (2007:97). Resisting the terms of engagement that the art market machine provided, yet needing to sell their art while not fully compromising its principles, ASARO was caught negotiating the contradictions of a classic "double bind" (Bateson et al 1956) where the art world's individualistic regime of value threatened to interrupt ASARO's collective subject.

Each painting, for example, had been sold for $9,500 pesos and, as ASARO's statutes called for, 70% of that would go to the group and 30% would go to the individual artist. With some artists raising the issue that the percentage that individual artists received for their art was too small, the group debated the issue at an assembly. With some artists having sold more than one painting and others none, some members noted that prolific individuals were essentially subsidizing the work of those that produced less. On the opposite side, other members noted that it was only because of the high percentage that the group received that ASARO had the opportunity to maintain its *taller*, provide materials for members to work with, and hold workshops on artistic techniques for less skilled members. In the end, the assembly voted to keep the percentages the same but to continue the debate in the future. ASARO strove for collectivism yet its financial accounting nonetheless ended up valorizing individual talent and dividing the collective subject.

Speaking with Yeska a week after the sale to the dealer, he noted that selling art to dealers and in galleries was a necessary evil needed in order for him to eat and for ASARO to survive. He noted then that he had come to accept this and even to revel and marvel at the fact that it was possible to paint images critiquing the bourgeois world that nevertheless were bought up by representatives of that very world. Given the different regime of values that animate the appropriation of the art of protest by the art market machine and the competing aesthetics at play between collective and individual visions of art production, the friction in translating between these regimes of value is striking. Assessing a parallel moment of translation in the United States when the art market machine transformed graffiti taggers into artists, art historian Suzi Gablik wrote that, "the spectacular success and popularity of the graffiti style generated a new type of entrepreneur." Through new entrepreneurs seeking to cash in on street subculture, "graffiti artists have been encouraged to trade in the [subway] trains for money-making canvases and worldwide commissions" (1984:110). In its translation from subway trains to canvases, graffiti went from being a transgressive act against property and authority to a marketable commodity. As Gablik noted, the main problem with this was not so much that marginalized individuals were being taken advantage of—after all many graffiti artists did go on to have successful artistic careers—but rather that, with graffiti moving from below ground to becoming a darling of the art market, it lost its social sitedness and could no longer communicate "a desire for constructing an alternative set of social relations which will reconnect art with neighborhood communities" (Gablik 1984:111). Though ASARO resisted a similar wholesale commodification of its art, the debate over finances and philosophy within ASARO produced evident tensions within the group that related not only to the issue of collectivism and individualism but also affected the articulation between ASARO and its artworks in relation to the community of *el pueblo*. Whether entering a museum, putting up a show in a gallery, or selling its art to a dealer, for ASARO members, one of the more important practical lessons that these engagements taught the group was of "the process of alienation inherent in commodification—the complete detachment of these objects from their producers and those authorized to have them

produced" (Meyers 2005:109). The distribution of the sensible of the art market machine's regime of value reinscribed not only the material worth but also the social location of ASARO works.

In early August of 2008, ASARO members responded to this situation by beginning a series of long debates entertaining the idea of opening their own exhibit space. In heated assemblies, some ASARO members argued that our own exhibit space would allow ASARO to translate the commodification of the art of protest into a direct engagement with *el pueblo* through workshops where people would learn artistic techniques and through cultural events such as art exhibits, film screenings, and conferences that could both mobilize and create the community of *el pueblo*. At the other end of the spectrum, ASARO members opined that an exhibit space was not needed in order to do workshops with communities; as evidence, they pointed to the purchase of two small portable printing presses using funds from the sale of ASARO art at the "Defending Democracy" show in Houston and to recent talks with contacts in three marginalized communities over the possibility of organizing workshops in their neighborhoods. While some members pointed out that ASARO's work belonged in the streets and not in gallery walls, no matter who owned them, others argued that this did not mean ASARO would abandon the streets and that ASARO's exhibit space could be more than merely a space for selling.

As the idea for an exhibit and workshop space began to convince more members, it became articulated with the notion that an exhibit space would offer the possibility for ASARO to provide a site where makers of the art of protest could display and sell their art, thus keeping the artworks close to their producers and ensuring that artists doing work with political and social themes could begin to secure a livelihood through their art. After much debate, in September of 2008, the assembly organized a commission to look into funding, location, publicity, and all the other relevant details that opening an exhibit space implied. The assembly also decided that 50% of the price paid for an artwork would go to the artist and 50% would help maintain and grow the exhibit space. While a percentage of sales was a small step, it was hoped that by providing a space to exhibit and sell the art of protest, ASARO could be integral not only to the political and social lives of its members, but also begin to guarantee that they could engage in their protest art without having to worry about financial considerations—a situation that had kept many ASARO members from being able to participate in group activities because they had to do work that earned them a wage and ensured them a living.

In the coming weeks, the commission created a budget, located a site and signed a lease, and noted that the assembly needed to decide on a date and theme for the first show as well as define a name and general agenda so that publicity for the opening could go forward. With Arnulfo Aquino's exhibit at Curtiduría coming up fast, ASARO expected to be busy in early October. It was pointed out, however, that Day of the Dead festivities on November 2nd would commemorate the "Batalla de Todos los Santos" (Battle of All Saints Day) where *el pueblo* had successfully repelled the federal military forces at the University two years earlier in 2006. With Mario adding that ASARO would have its two-year birthday in November, the group settled on October 31st as the opening

date and on making paintings related to the "Batalla de Todos los Santos" for the opening exhibit.

Having settled on an opening date and exhibit theme, in late September, ASARO gathered to decide on a name for the exhibit space. At the assembly, Line and Chui, the ASARO members responsible for most of the graphic design of ASARO posters, noted that, with a month to go, "what is most worrisome is the name and the logo for…it means making a whole corporate identity." Getting a fast lesson in branding, ASARO members began the branding endeavor by first deciding on a name. While consciously avoiding the word gallery due to its association with the official art market machine, as the group brainstormed ideas, the names in final consideration were: "Espacio Zapata, Estudio Zapata, Espacio Emiliano Zapata, Espacio 2010, and Rebelarte." As is clear from the choices, in Oaxaca, Zapata's legacy was secure not just as a leader of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, but also as the figurative father of the Oaxacan social movement of 2006. In keeping with the tenets of branding that the group was then learning, after some deliberation the group chose "Espacio Zapata," (Zapata Space), not just because it was a name appropriate to the kind of politicized art and artists the group hoped to promote, but also because both its iconography and shortened "EZ" name were seen as marketable.

While assembly debates helped solidify a shared vision for Espacio Zapata, both EZ and ASARO also came together through the embodied labor necessary to give this vision material form. As Francisco, the group's treasurer noted, money was scarce and "there is a need to work many things in order not to spend. In one form or another, we all have to get involved, not with money but with labor." A list was provided with tasks to be accomplished and people volunteered for jobs ranging from illumination for the space, covering the windows, painting the walls, cleaning the bathroom, figuring out how to exhibit the woodblock prints, and putting up posters around town announcing the upcoming opening.

Having volunteered my architectural skills and manual labor to the effort, I headed out on October 12th to 116 Melchor Ocampo for the *tequio* (work-party) that the EZ commission had convened at its downtown site. When I arrived, Francisco, Chucho, Mario, Yeska and Beta were already there and I integrated myself into the work of making a panel to cover a window in order to gain more space to hang art. With Chichas, Yomek, Slappy, Paec, and Teak soon joining the laboring workforce, the effort to transform the space gained more momentum. At one point, as Yomek and I were spackling a wall, I asked him if he was doing an artwork for the opening. Putty knife in hand and plaster on his clothes, Yomek replied: "Nope, it does not go with the ideals of ASARO." Yomek explained that as EZ would exhibit and sell political art behind closed doors, it contradicted ASARO's call to make art for *el pueblo*. I was impressed that Yomek felt strongly enough about this not to participate in the opening exhibit; I was more impressed, however, that he also felt strongly enough in the success of ASARO and in the solidarity of the group that he was contributing his labor and energy to make the space happen anyway. Though unsure of how to do it or what would come of it, as with many of ASARO's endeavors, group members were willing to labor to

make it happen and to learn through the labor of making it happen. Much as the shared and sweaty labor of constructing and holding the barricades had created strong bonds and a barricade sociality between barrikaderos in 2006, so too did assembly debates and the collective manual labor of putting together EZ create strong bonds between ASARO members.

Everyone was busy in the final weeks before the October 31st opening putting the finishing touches on the space and, for those who chose to do so, completing their artwork. Knowing that the streets were an important space to define what Espacio Zapata was and could be, ASARO members also got together to wheat-paste flyers across the city for the opening. Posters at the start of the month featured a stylized half silhouette of Zapata with the word "Proximamente" (Coming Soon) in red. I felt that this poster was particularly captivating since the words and image were not explicit in stating *what* exactly was coming. Given recent events in Oaxaca, the imagination of Zapata's legacy, and the anniversary of both Mexican Independence (200 years) and the Mexican revolution (100 years) looming in 2010, I could see how the image would be effective in producing many different interpretations as people seeing it projected and filtered their own imagination about the future through it. Removing it from downtown buildings and at bus stops, the government's response was clear enough. A week before the opening, ASARO members were back in the streets to put up a more informative poster that included the chosen logo and details about the event.

On the night of October 31st, 2008, the strong showing of young and middle-aged Oaxacans and the support of musical groups affiliated with the social movement demonstrated *el pueblo's* clear response and made the exhibit's opening a success. Moreover, with 20 artworks about the "Batalla de Todos Los Santos" on display,

from the start, the walls of Espacio Zapata began to complete their function as a space for the display of political art that could not have found any other home in the galleries and museums of the city, and for an audience that was not accustomed to entering Oaxaca's galleries and museums. More generally, it might be said that Espacio Zapata responded to a situation where, as sociologist Judith Kapferer describes it, "the autonomy of the arts is constantly threatened by the cultures of affluent consumers and investors—the patrons and courtiers of post-industrial society. Artists are squeezed by state policies, on the one hand, and the arts market, on the other, thus being denied the creative space and freedom of expression to pursue their own distinctive practices" (2008:10). With the only restriction being that the artworks on display be by artists supporting the social movement through their art, much as in the social movement of 1968, Espacio Zapata provided artists with freedom to express their social and political viewpoints aesthetically. As Teak mentioned in August of 2008, EZ "will give us the opportunity to more fully commit to do the work that we like." However, with the art needing to sell in order to pay rent,

lights, maintenance, and someone to act as docent, gaining this measure of freedom also meant that ASARO now had to engage in some of the hard economic logic and cold calculations of the art market machine that supporting and sustaining the space required. As ASARO was learning, any notion of artistic autonomy is illusory.

On the positive side of the calculation, part of the practical education that ASARO was gaining by opening Espacio Zapata was a refresher course since the barricades in the continued importance that opening up spaces of encounter can have—and a reminder of the absence of these spaces in the contemporary city. While EZ was an important space of debate within the group as it put together the space, it was also a space of exchange with many people who had seen ASARO's stencil work in the streets but had never met or talked with group members or seen its paintings and woodblock prints. Moreover, though street artists had not yet found much acceptance in the Oaxacan art world or outside of the social movement, EZ also provided ASARO with an opportunity to engage a wider segment of Oaxacan society, including people who had never heard of the group or who may have supported governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz.

A week before opening night, for example, municipal construction crews began redoing the paving on Melchor Ocampo outside of Espacio Zapata as part of a city beautification campaign. Gaping holes over five feet deep outside the entrance made ASARO members nervous about the success of opening night. Yeska, however, managed to track down the construction foreman and explained the situation. The foreman told Yeska not to worry about it, that he and his work crew would take care of the holes. Two days before the opening, when Francisco went to the space to open it in the morning, the holes in front of the door and to the sides had miraculously been filled in with sand and the construction crew had placed metal rods and tape as a warning where the holes remained. Whether in exchanges in the opening later that night or earlier that week, "what transpires across and within such seemingly small gestures is the larger expression of a desire for connection. They are unlikely reference points for cultural and aesthetic revolutions," writes sociologist Nikos Papastergiadis. "What could be significant in such small gestures in specific places? At one level, alienation begins with the shutdown of communication and ends with the banalization of all exchanges. The power of the poetic gesture in art is revolutionary in that it acts as a circuit breaker in the closed system of habituated equivalence between signs" (2008:369).

Articulating together different political and social regimes of value, and challenging the regime of value of Oaxaca's art market machine, the aesthetic and political revolution that ASARO hoped to launch through Espacio Zapata had begun through this small gesture, and in the coming weeks it would pay off in the form of further small engagements across difference for, as Yeska noted in

an assembly in mid-November when talking about who had visited the space so far, "the public who has entered has identified with the artwork. The [construction] workers have dared to come in because of this identification. And they ask about what the art is." Small engagements perhaps, but each a step closer towards rearticulating and rebuilding Oaxaca's social fabric.

Though the political stance of ASARO artists and of its art is overt, ASARO members also recognize how making—or rearticulating the social—is a political project that can be achieved through an aesthetic collaboration that bridges differences or that brings people together. As Papastergiadis writes of such process based art, "the politics in this practice is situational" (2008:367). Its politics have less to do with its progressive or conservative slant and more to do with the creation of novel assemblages and articulatory forms through collaborative processes of a creative nature: "There is a dual level of commitment to the aesthetic and the political. In the past decade, there has been an emergence of artistic practice that defines itself explicitly as project-based and that seeks to work across diverse community networks" (Papastergiadis 2008:364). ASARO envisioned art workshops, for example, not as opportunities to force its political point of view or to spread its dislike for the government; on the contrary, in the debates and dialogues that ASARO assemblies had on the subject, and in conversations that I had with individual members, there was a consensus that the aim of the workshops was to provide individuals from marginalized communities with artistic tools by which they could express themselves and their point of view. With almost all of the artists from ASARO coming from marginalized communities, the general opinion was that their point of view would be politicized enough to begin with. Moreover, the group felt that the very act of marginalized communities being able to express their point of view was already a highly political act.

On the negative side of the equation, part of the practical education that ASARO members were getting by opening Espacio Zapata was a reminder that, no matter how much control the group might have over what was displayed and how much autonomy EZ might grant to artists to express themselves freely, there was no way to escape the fact that the need to sell the art to keep the space running meant that ASARO was engaging in some of the same kind of logics and practices that the group sought to break free from. Doing calculations with actual costs, for example, the group discovered that it need approximately $15,000 pesos a month to break even, or around $500 pesos a day in sales. As a response, in assemblies some members of the group though that we needed to bring in more articles to sell—stickers, T-shirts, spray cans, etc, and someone else suggested another publicity campaign to bring more people in. More in keeping with the original vision, others thought that ASARO needed to finish setting up Espacio Zapata as a site for workshops by bringing in a table, books, and art supplies and that as people came to learn about art and how to make art, they would also become interested in buying. Another person mentioned that in order to make up the gap ASARO could charge more than $100 pesos for the woodblock prints when these were sold at EZ.

It was interesting how, in having a fixed cost that needed to be taken into account, calculations over the value and accessibility of the woodblock prints was shifting. This was perhaps the most dangerous side of opening up the exhibit space for, whether or not the pieces inside were thought of as art, or whether the space was thought of as a gallery was less relevant than the fact that renting this place meant that ASARO needed to think about revenue.

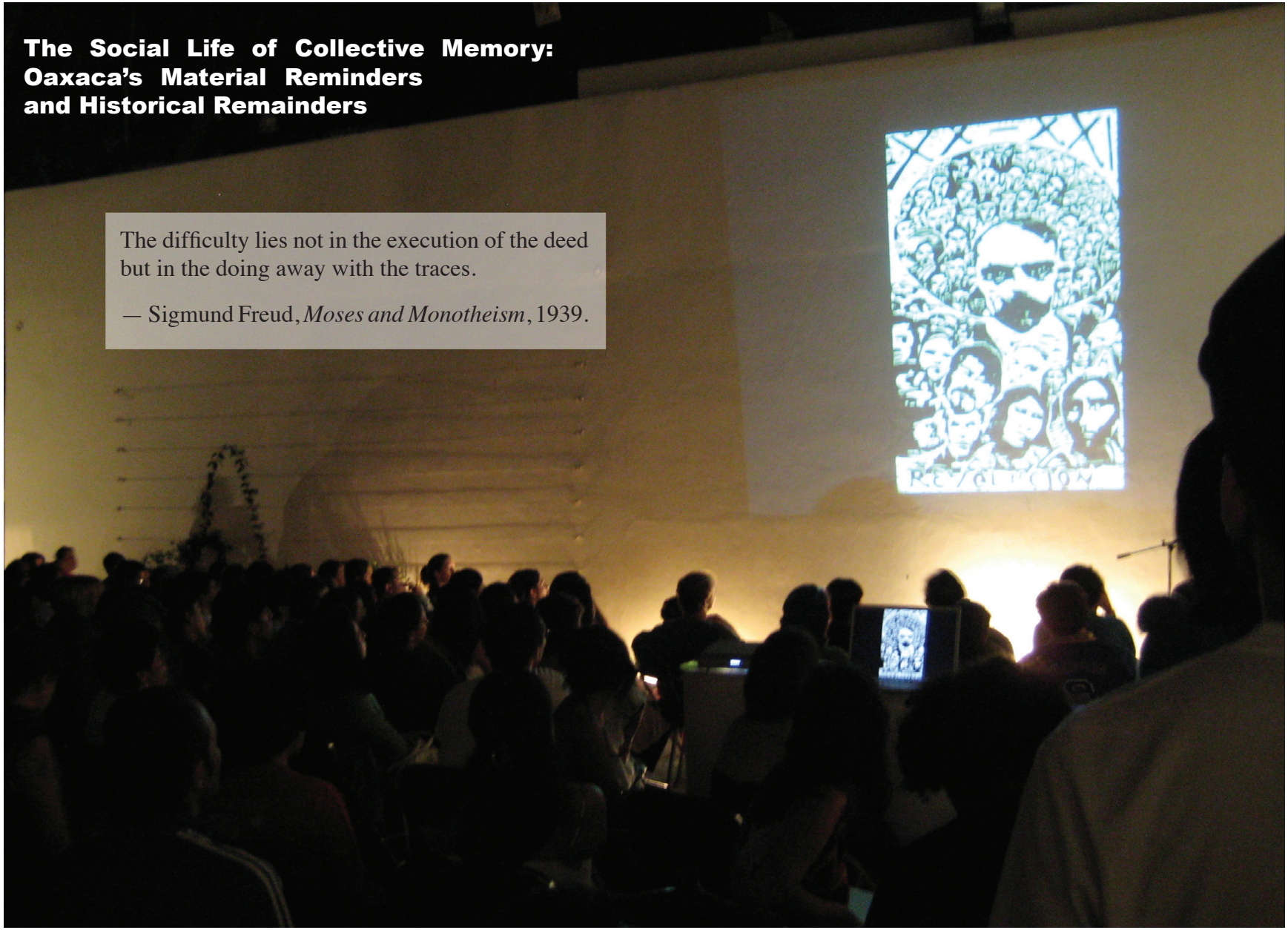
Although in the end the group decided not to change its pricing policy for woodblock prints sold inside and outside of Espacio Zapata, the assembly did decide that each individual artist should price their artworks in the "Batalla de Todos los Santos" show as he or she felt it should be valued monetarily. Signing as ASARO and having a flat pricing structure made sense when economic calculations had not been at the forefront of considerations; however, with ASARO trying to help its members secure a livelihood through political art, for the first time, the group had to contend with price differences in artworks created by ASARO members when these were sold in one of its spaces and with a regime of value where price differences were an index of disparities in artistic ability amongst members of the group. Discussing the topic of prices and whether or not individual artists should sign the "Batalla de Todos los Santos" artworks, Francisco wondered in an assembly the week of opening night what it was that "we are proposing in saying art by the people and for the people and putting a certain price?" As the debate continued, despite his intense criticism of the capitalist system and the art market machine, Mario came to the conclusion that, "we have to consider the public that we are addressing. A woodblock print is accessible but a painting at $3,000 [pesos] won't be bought by a teacher. There are *compañeros* that are entering 100% committed to the social issue. We are entering into buying and selling, but it is justified because of the goal, going out to communities [to do workshops] justifies it. If we don't forget the streets and the communities, it is justified." However, this would need to be proven and part of the problem in opening Espacio Zapata as a vehicle for workshops in marginalized communities was that this would only happen after the space was well established and that, at the end of 2008, the majority of ASARO's energy was devoted to Espacio Zapata to the detriment of everything else. Moreover, with EZ producing tensions between competing regimes of value as much as articulations across difference, in the month after it opened, it was not easy to evaluate the worthiness of the endeavor.

Today, in assessing both the positive and negative consequences of the experience of opening of Espacio Zapata, as I reread my field notes from those days, look at images of the event, take a look at the Espacio Zapata blog (http://espaciozapata.blogspot.com/), speak with current ASARO members, and think about how this might connect and speak to different popular and academic perspectives, I am impressed by what ASARO members learned from the practice of creating and maintaining this space together. To look at this record now is to fully understand for the first time just how little ASARO really knew about what it was getting itself into before it started, and yet it is also to realize the creative power of the aesthetic and political revolution that Oaxaca's social movement

unleashed, how it enabled groups such as ASARO to embark on new endeavors with the confidence that—while not everything had been fully worked out, mapped, planned, or calculated ahead of time—people would learn and transform their reality through the practice of struggling together to create and make shared projects happen.

ASARO members believed that its most radical political and aesthetic project was to provide creative tools by which the marginalized communities of *el pueblo* could express themselves. At the assembly or in the streets, ASARO members believed that the conflict and tension of multiple perspectives presenting their point of view was in the end a productive practice that generated both better politics and a more enriching collective social existence. Whether outside in the streets, at the "Libertad y Resistencia" cultural market, or inside at the *taller* or the exhibit space of Espacio Zapata, ASARO members struggled together to make this project happen. In May of 2009, ASARO began offering art workshops in Espacio Zapata. In the end, though each workshop included a minimal entry fee, and though participants needed to be 13 or older (there was a painting workshop for kids from 6 to 13), entry into the workshops was not restricted by any other consideration and all but the video workshop included the art materials as part of its fee. Having myself been in 2008 an ASARO member highly critical of how Espacio Zapata would take scarce labor time and financial resources away from doing workshops in marginalized communities, and having felt that we should begin by going out to communities to create workshops before opening an exhibit space, I celebrate the tremendous accomplishment of ASARO in having been able to make this dream of the assembly happen. My only regret is that I was not there in person to participate in the workshops or to see the first wave of new creators come through.

The Social Life of Collective Memory: Oaxaca's Material Reminders and Historical Remainders



Early on in my fieldwork, researching the politics and publics of the city meant working primarily with architects and urban planners while conducting research in and with Casa de la Ciudad, an urban research center funded by Oaxacan philanthropist Alfredo Harp Helú whose mission is to study and disseminate information about the development and conservation of Oaxaca's historic center. In mid-November 2007, with the mountains surrounding Oaxaca to the north framing the city under a typical clear and cloudless blue sky, I hurriedly walked from Casa de la Ciudad towards Armenta y López, a street the government had recently shut down under heavy military guard in order to push forward its plan to convert the street to a pedestrian avenue. Crossing into the *zócalo*, I was stunned by a dramatic change to the landscape in front of the picturesque Cathedral. Parked in a row that stretched from one end to the other of the Alameda, as the space in front of the Cathedral is formally known, was a line of large, brand new police pickup trucks whose girth and weight made them seem like small tanks. Few police were present, and even fewer pedestrians or tourists. Seeing no possible reason for this invasion of police force, I was informed by two tourist police on patrol that the vehicles were there for the "entrega de equipo de seguridad pública." This official ceremony to "hand-over public security equipment" was to take place at some unspecified time later that day.

When I returned from Armenta y López in the afternoon, the shinny new vehicles continued to glisten in the sun but the police presence had intensified in the form of a standing army of live bodies composed of men and women from the diverse security forces that patrol the city and state. Local transit cops stood next to police forces wielding musical instruments on one side of the walkway. Across from them, the State Preventive Police in full riot-gear were clustered next to other cops with machine guns in hand and fingers on the trigger—a trained and engrained force of habit. Every police force in the state was well represented. When

Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, the state's controversial and infamous governor finally arrived, the police forces straightened up and stood at the ready. Meanwhile, a crowd dressed in their Sunday best sat in chairs under the shade of the laurel trees to listen to two speeches reiterating the value of security and praising the state government's efforts and expenditures to spend their way to better guns, trucks, and, presumably, more and better security. Amidst a battalion of media photographers snapping pictures, Ulises Ruiz and Manuel Esesarte Pesqueira, the city's mayor, walked down from the podium

and ceremoniously inspected the vehicles—sirens turned on and lights now blaring—and then made their way to one vehicle where the governor sanctimoniously handed over the keys to the police officer facing him. Then, as quickly as he arrived, the governor was gone and the event ended.

While many bystanders who had been watching from behind the police trucks left after they caught sight of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz—or URO, as he is often acrimoniously called—many Oaxacans sat around the *zócalo* in the other half of the square, enjoying the mid-day break, seemingly disinterested or unconcerned to pay much attention to what was occurring. However, happening but two days before the governor's mid-term address, scheduled for November 15th in the *zócalo* at the former governor's palace, the show of force could easily be seen as a carefully orchestrated military parade intended to intimidate supporters of the Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (APPO). APPO had announced that URO's speech would not only be boycotted, but stopped. Indeed, while the first speaker emphasized the fight against "organized crime," his summary of the equipment delivered "to make a front against delinquency to the benefit of our society" consisted of "105 radio communication units, 400 headsets, 6,035 pieces of riot-gear equipment, 500 gas masks, 605 police clubs, 100 short and long arms of different calibers, 65,000 cartridges of different calibers, and 40 vehicles, representing an investment of over 20 million pesos in equipment for public security units." As is evident from the preponderance of crowd-control gear in what was supplied, the imagination of delinquency and crime that the state saw itself making a front against mapped more closely onto dealing with urban protests than onto narco-trafficking operations along the mountains or the coast.

Today, it seemed, the *zócalo* returned to its colonial status as the Plaza de Armas (Arms Square), following the prototypical town plan given to Spanish conquistadors to lay out the main square with space for "the government palace, the town hall, the custom-house, and finally the arsenal" (Kinsbruner 2005:25). As someone commented in statements later printed by the press, "it would seem as if they were going to war." And so, almost a year to the day from the moment when in fact the police did go to war with protestors, the police once again retook the *zócalo* not just physically but symbolically. To see the armed guards in the *zócalo* again a year after 2006, to feel the armed presence of the governing apparatus, and to see the governor walking around in the *zócalo* brought out ghosts from recent and bygone eras that colored the scene spatially and temporally.

With the event over, en masse, the transit cops boarded city buses marked with different destinations, "periferico, central, chedraui, cinco señores," while those in light riot gear jumped onto older

pickups parked alongside the square that quickly sped away. A select few drove off in the new trucks with the police in heavy riot gear hanging onto the steel bars that formed a protective canopy over the rear cargo area gazing out over the onlookers from their higher vantage point. As the officers left, I watched a cop from the Auxiliary Bank Police take off his characteristic blue shirt and hand it to his wife to place in a backpack. Quickly slipping on the uniform of the Chivas soccer team and grabbing his youngest son, the man, his wife, and another youngster in tow melted back into the shadows of the Alameda's laurel trees with the rest of the population. The sirens faded, the roads returned to their normal traffic, and as I walked northward towards Casa de la Ciudad, the people began to fill the spaces of the state spectacle once again with their own agenda. Whether taken for granted by the majority, or silently stored away in the entrails of consciousness and *coraje* (rage), it was, it seemed, just another day in the ongoing struggle in the center of Oaxaca.

Arguably, the *zócalo* is Oaxaca's heart. The literal foundation of the urban footprint and its most important public plaza, the *zócalo* is also the focal point of both the city's social activity and of its historical image. As has been seen, whether manifested in disputes over transformations enacted by the governor's urban planners in 2005, in physical confrontations between police and APPO supporters during the uprising of 2006, or in continuing struggles over the competing aesthetics of the city and the signification of Oaxaca's heritage by political street artists in the present, the *zócalo* is a site composed of multiple and competing practices, aesthetics, and social layers. On any given day, with street musicians playing for change, families strolling together after work, tourists sitting at outdoor cafés, revolutionary art groups working for social change, state-sponsored dancers performing, and academics trying to make sense of it all, the *zócalo* is a site which challenges one to take seriously philosopher Walter Benjamin's observation that "one only knows a spot once one has experienced it in as many dimensions as possible. You have to have approached a place from all four cardinal points if you want to take it in, and what's more, you also have to have left it from all these points" (1926-1927:25). The *zócalo* is a site that habitually presents an array of socio-spatial coordinates to explore, inviting and interpellating Oaxacans from many different directions.

The dissertation has focused on how practices of struggle produce collective subjects that have challenged the distribution of the sensible of Oaxaca's spatial, social, and political norm. In this chapter, I want to engage with another dimension of Benjamin's provocation and examine how the city center and the *zócalo*'s material and social coordinates illuminate intersections and interrelations between material spaces and collective practices of memory-making as these produce collective subjects. After all, finding history inadequate insofar as it proposed a triumphal march to the present, Benjamin stressed the need to remember the contingency that illuminates any and all presents. Now that the barricade days are over, this chapter addresses what practical and political work memory and remembering do in anchoring and actualizing contingent social imaginaries. In doing so, I show how an ethnographic analysis attentive to the practices of memory-work offers insights not only for the contested literature on the politics of remembering, but more importantly for how memory is embedded in sensory perception and material practices that *make*, and not just simply narrate, contingent collective memories and subjects.

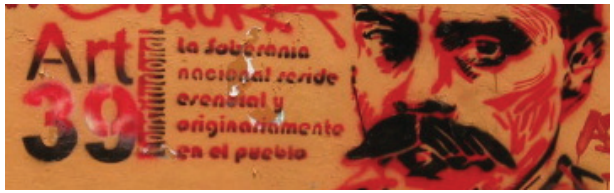
Negotiating Collective Discourses, Managing and Making Social Histories

On November 15th, 2007, at the same time as a carefully selected audience gathered in the former governor's palace in the *zócalo* to hear URO's mid-term address, a range of generations filled the stately meeting hall of the University Law School for the presentation of the "Informe sobre violaciones a los derechos humanos y detenciones arbitrarias en Oaxaca 2006-2007" (Report on Human Rights Violations and Arbitrary Detentions in Oaxaca 2006-2007). From any window inside the long, ornate conference room of the Law School one can see the Alameda. Looking outside as I sat down for the event, I could not help but think back to two days earlier when new police trucks had lined the square from end to end. The presentation was put together by the International Commission of Jurists, a human rights organization with headquarters in Geneva, and the human rights unit of Diakonie, a German organization founded by the Protestant church. The

local moderator began this event emphasizing the report's "highly significant value because it is not us, oaxaqueños, that are saying what appears in the report, but external eyes that see what the situation is like in Oaxaca from abroad." After making this point about the value of external oversight in providing an impartial vantage point, the speakers were introduced and their expertise was valorized through their accomplishments. However, the panel's merit was not found in accumulated academic publications, but by involvement in conflicts and conflict zones. Here, their link to social struggles in Chile, Guatemala, Argentina, Colombia, Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Germany validated the stance of speakers Roberto Garretón and Christiane Schulz as qualified expert eyes in the field of human rights and human rights abuses.

Amidst a cacophony of babies crying, the murmur of audience voices, cellular phones ringing, and traffic roaring outside, the international human rights experts focused on outlining and explaining the value and place of universal human rights concepts in relation to Oaxaca. In comments that spoke directly to what had taken place in the Alameda two days earlier, Garretón noted that the issue of "security is being invoked permanently in Latin America, including in Oaxaca and Mexico, as an urban problem… for people who have property." As such, rather than focus on a universal "human right for security" that applies to rich or poor, Garretón heatedly pointed out that security was being used as a "pretext to violate human rights" (see also Speed and Collier 2000 for a related perspective on the ambivalent uses of human rights discourses). Citing Oaxaca as an example, Garretón stumbled over the date that the teachers' strike was repressed, and before he glanced down at the report, the audience unanimously and loudly shouted out the date. Reverberating through the hall, the crowd's sonic echo suggested that the experience of the conflict had created memory traces that continued to be alive in the audience and whose immediacy escaped the experts.

The contrast between different practices and perspectives by which the past and the present in Oaxaca were assessed by audience and experts at this event resurfaced during the question and answer session. The stated protocol was that the human rights panel would take three questions and then address them. A local human rights worker first voiced the need to address torture more comprehensively, afterwards, an audience member wanted more guidance in response to a statement made during the presentation that social groups and civil society needed to do more. Third, a woman stood up and thanked the panel for coming to see what had happened in Oaxaca but noted that this was "a report perhaps incomplete, for only *el pueblo* oaxaqueño [the Oaxacan people] knows what they have lived." For the next four minutes, with eyes that rapidly filled with tears and a body that began to quiver as her voice became not just louder but grew in volume, the woman attempted to give voice to aspects of that experience. Like the panelists, the woman criticized the gap that existed and continues to exist between Mexican laws, universal human rights concepts, and government practices, yet she also spoke of the chasm that existed between *el pueblo* and the panelists for "today, though you speak, you don't know the terror that we lived, day and night, as pueblo." Earlier, panelists' experiences interviewing, intervening, and legally adjudicating and advocating for human rights in various international conflict zones had been put forward as validation of their credentials as experts; their position as external observers had been presented, moreover, as the ground through which their claims and opinions secured their force. "I am a witness of everything that has happened to my pueblo." With these words, the woman put forward her lived experience as the grounds by which to make claims on the experts, imploring them to do what she could not do, to take "esta voz" (this voice) of *el pueblo* to the international community and to let them know that here was a cry that demanded to be heard and a people that would not be still for they had seen many wrongs across the centuries and would continue to fight against them.



After the roar from the audience subsided following her intervention, the human rights panel had the opportunity to respond. Taking each question in turn, Garretón first spoke at length and in detail about the rules of warfare and torture in relation to peace, then he addressed the issue of what the Oaxacan pueblo and civil society could do by explaining what had been done in Chile as a way to suggest an avenue for action. Given that the panel's prepared remarks and Garretón's responses up to that point articulated all circumstances, times, and places through a generalized narrative about human rights abuses that largely flattened out their differences, it was not surprising that Garretón's response to the woman's impassioned intervention was simply to say, "señora, all my solidarity. That is why we are here," before then turning to the role of women in the history of struggle. After another round of questions had been addressed, the event wrapped up and people began to congregate in clusters to chat. Catching up with the outspoken woman from the audience, this was how I first met Mama Lucha (Mother Struggle)—the alias that she was baptized with during the confrontations of 2006—a woman whom you might remember from earlier chapters.

Joan Scott has cautioned academics that, "we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience" (1991:779). Human rights advocates that day constructed their expertise in relation to an external, legal discourse of rights that

promised an objective perspective. In contrast, for *el pueblo*, the discourse of human rights provided a translocal forum by which to criticize URO's authoritarian abuses, yet their focus on embodied proximity to events grounded a contending regime of value that devalorized distance and objectivity. Fundamentally, whether in relation to URO's discourse of security as a means to achieve social order in the struggle against internal elements of disorder, in the push by the human rights report to promote the concept and practice of human rights as a universal entitlement that applies to and connects everyone worldwide, or in Mama Lucha's rendering that the truth of what happened could only be fully known by those whose bodies experienced and continue to experience the struggle firsthand, it was striking how these events became a means by which to both create and validate a discourse about the value of the recent past as well as to collectively negotiate this discourse in the present.

Most often, studies of memory begin from the premise that, as philosopher Ian Hacking notes, "there are facts out there about memory, truth-or-falsehoods to get a fix on" (1996:69). Whether in archives or in the recesses of the mind, the assumption is that traces of the past remain stored and can be mined. Nonetheless, anthropologist Paul Connerton has observed that in psychoanalysis, personal recollections are the product of negotiations between an analyst and subject where to "reconstruct a coherent account of the past" means "to become capable of forming meaningful narrative sequences" (1989:26). Connerton's reminder is useful in foregrounding the fact that discourses producing personal representations of the past and of past experience are always-already collective constructions and not individual possessions. Moreover, even when the recollected memories of the past can be said to reference our own private and embodied experience, the practice of remembering most often begins with another's hailing for, as sociologist Maurice Halbwachs smartly noted, remembering is most frequently set in motion "in order to answer questions which others have asked us" (1952:38). Whether in a psychoanalyst's office or in the street, the labor of remembering that produces the meaningful narrative sequences taken to be "facts about memory" are collectively informed. Rather than assume either the transparency of experience or the fact of memory traces, however, the productive tension between demands or assumptions of Truth and acknowledgements of the constructed nature of experience and remembering form the grounds by which to consider *how* collective memory was both created and mobilized in the social movement that came together in Oaxaca in 2006.

Relationally produced, the meaningful narrative sequences that form a collective discourse about the past are shaped by the social scene of their production. Conceived as discursive representations, memories are collectively hailed and produced partly as a response to place, time, audience, and ongoing, shared conversations—what in another context anthropologist Talal Asad refers to as a discursive tradition (see Mahmood 1996). These discursive formations give rise to an imaginative geography that frames the past in such a way as to produce both meaningful narrative sequences and meaningful social subjects. In the conference room of the Law School during the human rights report, Mama Lucha framed her comments on the barricades within the idiom of citizenship and as evidence of the lack of respect for human rights that the government exercised: "It is terrible for the Oaxacan pueblo, for the pueblo of Mexico, that we have to recognize that we have a constitution, that written laws

exist but not in deeds. In Oaxaca and in Mexico justice does not exist. I am but one more of this pueblo—simply another citizen—that had to be behind obstacles [barricades] merely in order to safeguard the integrity of our teachers." In our conversations about the barricades, and in the general discourse and recollections of the barricades that I collected, the barricades are framed as a necessary reaction to government aggression yet neither violence nor human rights violations are emphasized; rather, as noted in chapter two, the unexpected and productive aspect of the barricades as sites of collective social encounters are what was emphasized. In dialogical exchanges, as discursive representations about the past orient themselves towards the perceived expectations of the audience, and as the participants shift, challenge, or legitimate the discourse—that is, as they strive to find common ground or encounter radical disagreements—the collective shaping of the narrative is a negotiation. In a group, this tends towards a socially mediated mean that often glosses over details in favor of the points of convergence that arise from the collective validation of the significance of Connerton's meaningful discursive sequences.

Rather than the sum of multiple individual recollections, the general discourse about the social movement has been the result of collective *processes* that have shaped a shared meaningful discursive sequence. From media and stencils on the streets to interviews and written analyses about 2006, multiple sources and sites have contributed to the crafting of a narrative about the past where barricade sociality—over and above the violation of human rights—has become the most meaningful feature of the barricades and practices of social struggle. This process can literally be seen in Oaxaca in relation to the social movement of 2006. In early August of 2007, Oaxaca's most important and only center dedicated to photography, the Centro Fotográfico Manuel Álvarez Bravo (CFMAB), launched an international contest titled "Miradas del Movimiento." The general guidelines for the "Glances into the Movement" contest mentioned that entries documenting events from 2000 to 2007 in the form of "photographs, films, and videos about social movements in Oaxaca will be accepted.... with the objective to see the diversity of forms through which social groups express themselves in their fight for diverse causes." The contest closed on November 9, 2007. A ceremony to announce the winners along with the inauguration of the exhibit showcasing a selection from all entries received took place on May 21, 2008, in the impeccably restored colonial residence in the center of the city that the CFMAB calls home.

Speaking to me, Guillermo Fricke, the CFMAB's director noted that the Miradas del Movimiento committee had been overwhelmed

and surprised by the response, which included 56 photographic series and 1,154 images in total. Given widespread participation in the social movement begun in 2006, it may not be surprising that the resulting entries in this important archive focused almost exclusively on the events of 2006 and that only 44 images are not directly associated with APPO. Nonetheless, what struck me as I looked over the entire set of photographs was the way in which they continually and closely revolved around or returned to the focal points of what was rapidly becoming the popular collective visual and narrated discourse about 2006. As if forming its central spine, the photographs submitted and those on exhibit almost exclusively showed images that can be narrowed to three themes: 1. points of conflict or confrontations between police and protestors—including barricades, people wounded, and the funerals of those killed; 2. APPO assemblies, marches, and *plantones*; and 3. graffiti, stencils and other creative means of popular expression.

In the written narratives that accompanied the 56 entries, only one photographer framed his eight black and white images of burned buses, barricades, and graffiti as a record of the damage that protestors were causing the city. Focusing on very similar images, the rest of the narratives continually pointed to the historical importance of the photographs in documenting the most important and critical dates of the conflict. Many emphasized the photographs as testimonies of the rage people felt or spoke admiringly about the forms of expression that the movement unleashed. Yet others highlighted the part that specific actors had to play, focusing on women, youths, and the indigenous community. The overall sentiment was best captured in the following quote taken from the only anonymous series, titled "¿Cuánto Más?" (How Much More?): "Looking at the photographs, you can see and feel the wishes and hopes of the noble people of Oaxaca's pueblo and observe the brutal and violent response of the government." Undoubtedly, the title of the contest, the stenciled image of indigenous president and Oaxacan Benito Juárez in a gas mask on the poster announcing the contest, and the fact that the show was to be held in a cultural center initiated and sponsored by the prominent, liberally inclined artist Francisco Toledo made a difference to who might consider submitting an image and to the discourse that this archive both supported and engendered.

While this ties to the point made in relation to the human rights report about how representations and narratives about the past are formed and framed in relation to both the perceived audience and the space of encounter, what is most salient about the Miradas del Movimiento show is the way in which it suggests—when considered alongside discourses of the barricades and ASARO's art—how a more or less coherent image and imagination of the movement of 2006 is congealing amongst those that consider themselves a part of, or to have an affinity with, *el pueblo*. Individual recollections and memories of events in 2006 are quickly articulating or translating the vast field of uncountable personal experiences from 2006 within and between the more narrow collective discourse, image, and imaginative geography presented in the CFMAB show

in 2008. "For us to be willing to accept them, memories have to be sorted and sifted," wrote anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss; as a result of this sorting and sifting, "through a degree of manipulation which…takes place below the level of consciousness, actual experience is replaced by stereotypes" (1955:39). While the notion of a transformation between actual experience into stereotypes might bring up an image of a contrast between Truth and Illusion, and hence of duped individuals and deluded collectives, rather than debate whether or not an event "actually" happened one way or another, what Lévi-Strauss points to is the centrality of the stock imagery of society—its collectively formed discourse and imaginative geography, in literary theorist Edward Said's sense of the production and mobilization of a landscape demarcating a dividing line between self and other (1978)—for what we ultimately take to be our memories and personal recollections.

As this stock imagery gains further social traction, the particular details of this broader imagination or other events that might point to alternative narratives about the past will tend to be overlooked or pushed to the fringes—becoming, as it were, the alternative glances at the past that for many open inroads by which to write alternative or contingent counter-histories. As counter-histories, these follow what anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler has described as an enduring notion of "memory as a repository of alternative histories and subaltern truths. This 'hydraulic model' rests on the premise that memories are housed as discrete stories awaiting an audience, as repressed or unrecognized sources poised to be tapped" (2002:169). Thus, while Miradas del Movimiento is poised to become a centerpiece for how the 2006 movement is remembered, photographs from Irving Goldworm's "Aplanar los topes" (Flattening out the Speedbumps) offer another image and imagination of the events of 2006. Running from July 20th to October 16th of 2007 at Casa de la Ciudad, this exhibit of 80 photographs taken during the height of APPO manifestations presented the barricades, *plantón*, police, and demonstrators that the CFMAB exhibit showcased, yet it also presented many images of everyday moments in spaces seemingly not touched by the social struggle. As Goldworm told me when we met in October of 2007 to talk about his images and experiences from 2006, having moved to Oaxaca in July of 2005 and hence not yet well versed in its different political and social fissures, one of the things that struck him about the social movement of 2006 was the way that the media's focus and attention on the images of conflict became the public face not only of the movement but of Oaxaca as well.

In the text that accompanied the "Aplanando los topes" show, Goldworm addressed how the media's lens was shaping the narrow perspective through which Oaxaca's present was being seen in 2006 (and that remain filters through which that past is

remembered today): "During the difficult times last year, one day I took photographs of the APPO and the next day I walked another part of the city where there were no demonstrators and took photographs of the other Oaxaca. If life in Oaxaca would have been one thing or the other—normality or rupture—it would have been exciting, easier to manage it. However, protests could not interfere with shopping in the markets, families walking through the street, kids playing, and the ephemeral realizations and other chores of life. Political struggles tend to minimize the importance of the quotidian." With images presenting different facets of the conflict, Goldworm's photographs presented a provocative mix of everyday life that continued as it had before the conflict and of the conflict as a radical alteration and altercation between *el pueblo* and governing bodies. In an image taken in El Llano, a park ten blocks away from the *zócalo*, Goldworm shows a young couple on a bench enjoying a romantic moment together. The image is striking not just because its theme of love seems out of place in relation to the more prevalent images of conflict that typify Oaxaca in 2006, but also because it reminds us that a city block can make a tremendous difference and that beyond the broad borders of the conflict zones, other histories were being lived in 2006 even if not written about or under the public gaze.

It is in this uneven landscape that one might assess the question of the filters that inform particular narratives about the past. However, rather than argue over whether either exhibit's photographs more accurately represent reality, I am inclined to follow anthropologist Michael Taussig's lead when, stuck between competing narratives of rubber plantation violence practiced on tranquil natives and indigenous uprisings slaughtering enterprising colonists in Colombia, he noted that "to cross-check truth in this field is necessarily Sisyphean, ratifying an illusory objectivity, a power-prone objectivity which in authorizing the split between truth and fiction secures power's fabulous reach. Alternatively we can listen to these stories neither as fiction nor as disguised signs of truth, but as real" (1987:75). Taking El Llano's quotidian landscape and the *zócalo*'s militarized stand-off as real does not mean suggesting that both are equally true—clearly, both did happen—what it means rather, is to focus on and ask about the effects of these discourses, images, and imaginations. It means, therefore, shifting the critical lens from arguing over whether an image or memory actually corresponds to what did happen to trying to understand *how* the past is alive and continually being shaped in the present and why it matters.

The past is not simply grounded in an experience that stays with us as if an etched engraving of a particular lived moment. Rather, at multiple levels of their production and projection, the images and idealizations of the past that individuals construct are always-already molded by society. As psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud noted, "I do not think that much is to be gained by introducing the concept of a 'collective' unconscious—the content of the unconscious is collective anyhow, a general possession of mankind" (1939:170). Thus, for Freud, there was no collective unconscious that would somehow stand apart from individuals and no individual unconscious that was not always-already collective, social and socially formed. Moreover, as Marilyn Ivy's anthropological work suggests, the very nature of remembering takes place across a temporal and spatial lag that has important effects for how we recall past events. Examining the intersection of national identity and the sites and practices of national commemoration in contemporary Japan, Ivy argues effectively for how, through tourism campaigns, a revival of interest in folklore, and changing mourning practices for the dead, Japanese are anxiously addressing the perceived loss of a traditional past amidst a successful yet destabilizing capitalist present. In the process, Ivy's research into the Japanese

past "reveals how an originary event can never be grasped in all its punctual thusness, but can only emerge as an event across a relay of temporal deferral.... The second event—when the originary moment emerges as an event to consciousness—is thus the *first* instance: the origin is never at the origin; it emerges as such only through its displacement" (1995:22). Through collective moments such as the hand-over of security equipment, the human rights report, and photography exhibits about the recent past, this originary moment continues to emerge as an event on Oaxacan's consciousness and it continues to be subject to further transformations and displacements. As Ivy remarked about Japan, "the event never simply exists as such, but produces its effects only after the fact, in a repetition that becomes its own spectral origin" (1995:22). In that sense, the past is not only that to which we return, but also that which haunts us.

On the one hand, as recollections and remembrances of Oaxaca in 2006 continue to be filtered through the dominant imaginative geography and discourse about that past, its stock images and representations will not only continue to shape what is remembered, but also will shape the kind of subjects that recollected experiences are seen to engender. On the other hand, while it thus might seem that the relative crystallization of a collective image and imagination by which to narrate the mobilizations of 2006 four years afterwards provides a better vantage point by which to say that they happened *this* way, because the process of remembering and of coming to terms with the past is never ending, recollections of that past will continue to be subject to collective revisions and further transformations.

If the images, discourse, and idealizations of the past that individuals recall are always-already molded by society and might promote the shedding of details that made up individual lived experience in favor of collective stock images and a shared discourse, what, if anything, might they be said to offer in return? First and foremost, the camaraderie that was evident in the reaction to Mama Lucha's intervention and that was also visible in the Miradas del Movimiento opening suggests that what Lévi-Strauss characterized as the replacement of experience by stereotypes also provides signposts for a shared sense of collective belonging and social bonding. Philosopher Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation describes the process by which every individual in their particular uniqueness steps into subjective categories that fold personal geographies into more idealized types—mother, teacher, banker, artist; it is by stepping into and recognizing the hailing of ourselves through these subjective categories that as individuals we take on a social identity and a public role. For individuals, articulating the stereotyped images or discourses of this shared past is a way to carve out and validate their belonging to that group. The social purchase of the discourse of barricade sociality that Mama Lucha and others espoused certainly created more space for social

bonding than assertions of human rights violations. Lévi-Strauss adds that, "remembering is one of man's great pleasures, but not in so far as memory operates literally, since few individuals would agree to relive the fatigues and sufferings that they nevertheless delight in recalling" (1955:63). Memory's imaginative, social, and re-creative capacity opens up a distance by which to turn personal pain into collective pleasure. Collective memory is scenic, composing its impressions in the form of a montage that takes many moments and splices them together to compose a general image and to create a particular affect, "the idea of a type of life" (Halbwachs 1952:60). Treated as treasured possessions, enduring visions of the past represent not life as lived but the aura of a type of collective life.

Indeed, while the openness and contingent nature of the barricades and the social movement of 2006 formed a recurrent imaginative geography and discourse about these during 2007 and 2008, the visceral and affective pull of this narrative is intelligible and has meaning precisely because of the gap established by a moment when other political and social possibilities were nascent and other futures seemed to be on the horizon, and the reality of a present when URO was still the governor of Oaxaca and political protests continued to face repression. As Ivy pointed out, "the realization of loss is forestalled, denied, by an insistence that nothing is lost. It is denied by an idealization, a memorialization of place, a bracketing of practices, an assertion of continuity" (1995:188). As the personal history of Oaxaca's demonstrators is translated into the terms of a broader and shared imaginative geography that is marked by the affective register of shared hardships and struggles that transformed Oaxaca's social landscape, and yet also is marked by the loss of certain imagined futures in the making in relation to politics, this is accompanied by a "move to monumentalize loss by replacing it with an image" (Ivy 1995:190). In the aftermath of 2006, the collective trauma of the past has been turned into the enduring seed of collective belonging and site of affective pleasure that make up Oaxaca's contemporary glances into the movement.

On Common Ground, Spatial Practices and Imaginative Geographies

Much as the audience in the *zócalo*, law school auditorium, and photography exhibit space shaped the collective glances into the past, I would likewise argue that the material setting itself enframed particular discourses about the past in each of these sites. At its most elemental level, the articulation of material spaces and collective memory-work finds one expression in the often-cited fact that, in cities, buildings from different times coexist. Standing next to each other, a Gothic church, an eighteenth-century bank, and a twentieth-century skyscraper might rub shoulders. Whether you are a citizen who daily navigates the stones of your city's history or have ever been a tourist treading through a foreign city's past via its monuments, it is equally apparent that the multiple memory traces one might find buried in bricks are not readily transparent. From guidebooks to city folklore, from memorial plaques, city street names, and commemorative statues to historical and architectural groups, multiple means of grounding this past as well as multiple means of ensuring the visibility and legibility of this past exist. If the historical past is indeed spatialized, a lot of memory-work takes place to make that possible (see Pred 1995).

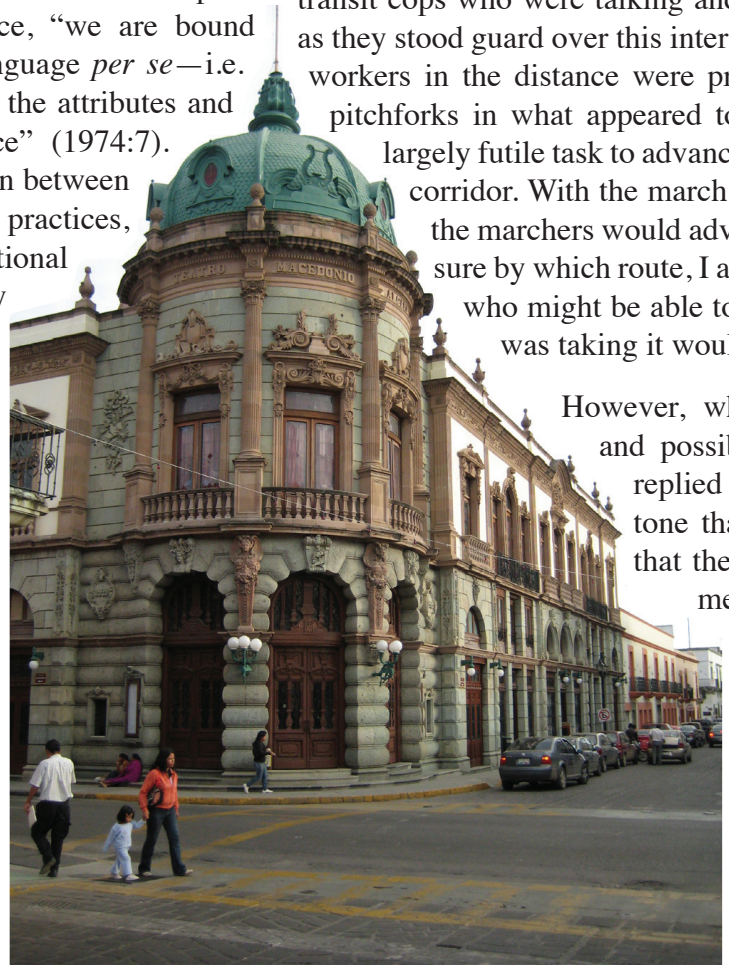
In academia, even if through a process of translation, material remains and physical sites are nonetheless commonly understood as speaking to and for the past. For Lévi-Strauss, for example, archaeological sites were places "in which every stone, instead of simply being a component part of a house, bore witness to the past" (1955:91). These articulations of place and past are grounded on the foundational assumption that material remains act like Rosetta stones whose inscriptions can be read as evidence of the cultural and cognitive frameworks of their makers (see Buchli 2002). Thus, philosopher Karl Marx's observed that while bees might construct magnificent cells, "what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement" (1867:174). However, parallel to how Stoler criticized the hydraulic model of memory as positing that memories of the past lie within our mind as so many narratives awaiting an audience, this stratigraphic model linking cognitive

intentions to material remains should give us pause, for it too rests on the assumption that the past abides, passively preserved in stone, waiting for the moment when it may be decoded (see also Abu El-

Haj 2001; Weizman 2010). If material products are simply taken as the physical manifestation of a designer's intention, spaces become merely warehouses storing illustrative records of their individual or collective maker's intentionality.

Finding that this view was typical across the social spectrum, the starting point for philosopher Henri Lefebvre's influential *The Production of Space* was precisely that, when material space is understood as *descriptive* of mental space, "we are bound to transfer onto the level of discourse, of language *per se*—i.e. the level of mental space—a large portion of the attributes and 'properties' of what is actually social space" (1974:7). Pushing for a consideration of the triangulation between material, social, and mental spaces—or spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces—Lefebvre's triad offers another way to analyze the relationship between material landscapes, meaningful discursive narratives, and memory-work in Oaxaca. (Moreover, as touched on in chapter two, Liisa Malkki's anthropological work among Hutu refugees in Tanzania and the development of the discourse of a "mythico-history" (1995) supports detailed considerations of the importance of space in constructing and constricting the discourses that root collective memory and belonging.)

Notebook in one hand and newspaper in the other, on the quiet Monday morning one day before the hand-over of public security equipment in the *zócalo*, I rushed by the church of Santo Domingo on my way to the Cinco Señores intersection. Having just read about a protest march in that day's paper, as I glanced at my watch I realized that I was most likely not going to make the scheduled 11am start to the planned march by Antorcha Campesina (Peasant Torch)—a group representing farmers and community members who were protesting government failures to live up to previous promises in 149 community projects across the state. Pressing on, as I got to the corner of Independencia and Armenta y López, I spotted two transit cops who were talking and laughing next to their vehicle as they stood guard over this intersection while three construction workers in the distance were prying paving stones loose with pitchforks in what appeared to me to be a monumental and largely futile task to advance the governor's new pedestrian corridor. With the march on my mind, and knowing that the marchers would advance towards the *zócalo* but not sure by which route, I assumed that if there was anyone who might be able to tell me what streets the march was taking it would be two transit cops.



However, when I asked about the march and possible routes, one of the officers replied in an assuring and dismissive tone that I should not worry about it, that the number of officers in the area meant that they would not get this far. I replied that in fact I was *trying* to find the march and had an interest in speaking to the demonstrators. Whether unable to process my desire to find the protestors or in fact not having any information about the route, while moving his head in an assertive nod the officer

reiterated that there was nothing to be concerned about before turning to face his partner and getting back to their conversation. Unable at that moment to make full sense of the officer's remarks and eager to find the march, I resumed my hike towards Cinco Señores. Though I never did catch up to Antorcha Campesina, as I walked on that day I began to unpack the misconnect between the officer and myself in multiple ways.

Certainly, race matters—being white continues to be a specific marker of social status and is closely articulated with being middle to upper class in Mexico. Though dressed in jeans and a plain colored t-shirt, and though it is clear from my Spanish that I am from Mexico, the officer may have been drawn to offer his remarks based on his reading of the way I looked. While these factors most likely made a difference, however, in this instance space may have been just as important as race and class. Using Lefebvre's triad, let me elaborate what I mean by this.

To begin with, it was consequential that the exchange took place with the Macedonio Alcalá theater as the background and with the work to transform this street into a pedestrian corridor in the foreground. At the edge of the divide between the northern and southern sections of the historic city center, the theater represents the outer limits of a dividing line that, like the Mason-Dixon line, separates two social continents. Though most often thought of and referred to as a whole, the geography of Oaxaca's historic city center is starkly different in its northern and southern components. The north pole of the city center is dominated by museums, restaurants with prices in the hundreds of pesos and hotels in the thousands, as well as by countless art galleries and crafts shops catering to tourists and to the Vallistocracia (Oaxaca's upper-classes). In the southern pole, one finds taco stands, barbershops, hotels for lower budgets, fabric and construction stores, as well as two typical markets that largely serve local lower-class populations. Indeed, part of what was at stake for the government and its urban planners in turning Armenta y López into a pedestrian corridor was precisely to extend the geography of the northern half into the southern part of the center. The government's physical and conceptual framework—their representations of space, in Lefebvre's terminology—was becoming actualized and manifested through the spatial practices of the policemen and construction workers.

Coming from the north towards the south, and framed by the 100 year-old Macedonio Alcalá theater, whose style follows a French inspired Neo-Baroque model, our conversation was bounded by a symbolic economy that was important in positioning both me and the policemen as particular subjects. As such, though it may be thought of as a silent partner, the interpellative work of the

physical space was such that it hailed or participated in framing the discursive performance between us. This geography, as much as my skin and clothes, marked me as a particular type of subject—upper class, possibly tourist—and marked out a conceptual and contextual space within which the officer's dialogue fit—the upper classes and tourists in Oaxaca are concerned with security and officers provide this security. Oaxaca's contested physical

geographies and the imagination of scared tourists and concerned Vallistocracia clearly have ramifications in the politics of street encounters. As a spatial practice, the performance of particular social relations produced and reproduced the symbolic relation, or representational space, that anchored this imaginative geography. In this way, images and imaginative geographies travel in and through city space, connecting people and place through Lefebvre's triad, even if at times in ways unexpected.

As with the social negotiation of collective narratives about the past, in these spatial encounters, the past is not an archaic historical remnant cemented in stone that could point to a particular historical period or that seamlessly reflects the fossilized intentions of a bygone era, but is always-already part of the social and spatial negotiations that compose both place and social belonging. Addressing the relationship between space and subjectivity, Lefebvre wrote that "every space is already in place before the appearance in it of actors; these actors are collective as well as individual subjects inasmuch as the individuals are always members of groups or classes seeking to appropriate the space in question. This pre-existence of space conditions the subject's presence, action and discourse, his competence and performance; yet the subject's presence, action and discourse, at the same time as they presuppose this space, also negate it" (1974:57). Space is not simply a historical urn or the stage for any particular action but itself interpellates individual and collective subjects, subjects whose very spatial practices also participate in shaping this space and subsequent hailings. Thus, what I am suggesting is that the very same question posed between the officer and myself in another part of Oaxaca may have produced a different response.

With the concept of interpellation, Althusser pointed to the way in which repeated material practices and embodied habits inculcate particular dispositions in individuals and produce social subjects out of individuals. The performative dimension that connects all three aspects of Lefebvre's triad is also a meeting point with Althusser that connects space and subjectivity. As anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis has noted, "performance is also a moment where the unconscious levels and accumulated layers of personal experience become conscious through material networks, independent of the performer. However, the mode and content of completion/connection with the sensory artifact is not determined in advance, it is not a communication with a Platonic essence, but rather it is a mutation of meaning and memory that refracts the mutual insertion of the perceiver and perceived in historical experience" (1994:7). As performative moments, spatial practices and collective discourses both tap into the historical sedimentation of material networks and yet are also moments of creativity that open up other possibilities. Collectively negotiated, like the popular discourse about the social movement of 2006, the dense material landscape of interpellation provides further avenues by which individuals and groups ground and perform their shared subjectivity.

For urbanist Kevin Lynch, an individual and group's mental map of the city is formed and informed by habitual engagements with the built environment, and the social and spatial city hails this map through the sensory cues it provides us, connecting us to personal and collective experiences and associations from the past (1960). However, these personal and collective maps are not actively present to our conscious minds nor are they transparent or readily readable from the writing on the walls; rather, these memories, meanings, and mental images of city and self are part of that active and ever engaged register of embodied remembering that lies buried just below the level of consciousness, in our bodies, in our senses, in our muscles, and in our habitual practices. Yet, as art historian Jonathan Crary reminds, if memory is formed and informed by performance, habits, and the senses, the circuit between exterior world, reflection, remembrance, and consequent action is not a seamless loop (1999). Through its constant bombardment of information, the modern city may, in fact, deaden or over-stimulate the senses. Political philosopher Susan Buck-Morss explained that, for Benjamin, "as the synaesthetic system is marshaled to carry technological stimuli in order to protect both the body from the trauma of accident and the psyche from the trauma of perceptual shock. As a result, the system reverses its role. Its goal is to *numb* the organism, to deaden the senses, to repress memory: the cognitive system of synaesthetics has become, rather, one of *an*aesthetics" (1993:131). Hence, the aim of Benjamin's Surrealist-inspired verbal montages was to illuminate and awaken the sleeping masses. Sense perception has to be restored, along with its link to cognition and memory. Hence the importance of the governor's delivery of security equipment for, even in a moment of the generalized militarization of the Mexican streets and of society, the scale, location, and unannounced spectacle of the event was shocking; hence the importance of ASARO's stencils in the city center, an importance that lies not only in contesting the governor's spectacle but also in its continued capacity, through the visual transformation of the familiar landscape and via the stark pictorial message, to jolt people out of their daily experience by continuing to articulate past events to future possibilities. Having studied the work of Freud and feeling affinities with the writings of novelist Marcel Proust, Benjamin posited that past events lie dormant within self and material sites and that these may be awakened by a sudden experience in the present that jolts the past back to the forefront of our minds.

The relationship of any one moment to the material and social milieu is open, yet much ground-work has taken place to invite particular framings and mappings of a subjective self in the material landscape (see also Pile 1996). Nonetheless, if the senses connect memory to place, sensual recall proves to be excessive, for one cannot control either the senses nor the associative recollections brought on by its small or large jolts of illumination. In its embodied, material aspect, memory-work will always thus prove to be beyond reason, intention, or willed recollection in its spontaneous capacity as a springboard from which the past dives into the present or the present plunges into the past.

The involuntary response of the senses to "*the surface of things*" is critical for Seremetakis' claim for the senses as "witnesses or record-keepers of material experience" (1994:6). However, if the senses act as witnesses and keeper of the personal and social maps of communal memory, "the storage of memory in the senses…is based…on deferred consumption" (Seremetakis 1994:6). Memory is, then, the mobilization of these stored experiences. Nonetheless, Seremetakis is careful to note that the experiences mobilized by this subjective and material engagement in the present are not simply re-enactments of the past; rather, "memory is concerned with, and assembled from, sensory and experiential fragments. This assemblage will always be an act of imagination" (1994:29). The senses and habitual performance stand at the center of and mediate the traffic between social and self, the city and the community, past, present, and future, and thus are at the center of questions about the politics and social life of memory and memory-work.

Beyond the reach of conscious perception, efforts to remember cannot faithfully produce (or reproduce) the details of the past. However, in their interactions with a particular milieu, the senses are transformative: they transport us through space and time. And yet this is a journey that takes place both within ourselves and is also a journey that exceeds the boundaries of the conscious self. The volcanic nature of sensual memory has no geologic time-table; rather, whether encountering an ASARO image or a military convoy in the *zócalo*, it erupts based on the earthquakes of present experience that hail a particular moment from below the surface of our consciousness. Though drawing different conclusions from this, for Proust, Freud, and Benjamin, the past is ever present. Ambivalent articulations between present and past reside and are latent in our charged sensual body as it connects with the objects and circumstances in our milieu. Thinking about the connective tissue between past and present as this is established in the interaction between people, places, and embodied experience, Benjamin wrote that "one ought to speak of events that reach us like an echo awakened by a call, a sound that seems to have been heard somewhere in the darkness of past life" (1932:59). During my time in Oaxaca, echoes connecting past and present were surfacing continually, whether as involuntary responses and reactions to the immediate milieu or as recountings of narrative discourses about 2006 brought on by questions about that time. So it was that on the night of September 15, 2008, after an ASARO assembly, a group of us headed out the door towards the *zócalo* where there was to be the customary "grito de Dolores" (cry of Dolores) to celebrate the moment when Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a Roman Catholic priest, sparked the start of the war for Mexican independence on this night in 1810. As legend goes, a plot by Hidalgo and some local born Spaniards to start a revolt was foiled by the Spanish government and led to the imprisonment of pro-independence supporters. Fearing for the worst, Hidalgo and others freed the men from jail and, in the moments just before midnight on September 15th, he rang the church bells in the town of Dolores and called on his congregation and others to revolt, beginning Mexico's anti-colonial war. Since then, on this night in most towns and all cities

around Mexico the church bells ring and the mayor addresses an audience outside the *zócalo*, repeating the patriotic cry of Hidalgo and opening the popular celebrations of September 16th, the holiday that commemorates Mexican independence.

As four of us walked out of ASARO's workshop towards the *zócalo*, the crowds heading towards the center were already considerable. It was early on, however, and so we decided to stop in at a small restaurant selling popular fare. Over food and drinks, our talk moved in all directions, books we enjoyed, the poetry we were reading, the work of ASARO, and recent run ins with the law that morning when setting up the open-air market in the *zócalo*. After our meal, again on our way down Independencia street, about three blocks from the *zócalo*, we managed to catch a bit of the official parade heading to the *zócalo* for the grito. There were a lot of families and individuals making their way down the street alongside us and soon fireworks lit the sky. The fireworks were two blocks from us and did not reach far up in the sky. The sound was deafening. Boom, Boom…Boom. The atmosphere of sounds, noise, and crowds in the *zócalo* invoked a moment of recollection about the events of the 25th of November in 2006, when the Federal Preventive Police swept through these streets and ended APPO's occupation of the center. Chichas and Francisco each spoke about where they had been. Francisco told us of how he had twice narrowly escaped being rounded up by the police. At one point, as he and teachers he had befriended on the barricades were heading away from downtown towards the North—a woman standing in her doorway told them not to walk further since the police had just lifted three *compañeros* (mates or comrades) up ahead. And, sure enough, as they looked ahead they saw two police trucks shut the street down. Later, they made their get away from the center in a friend's car and saw, in the rear-view mirror, how only moments after they passed, two police trucks closed that street down. They had been lucky that night almost two years ago. Hailed by this articulation of sensory cues and material place, as the fireworks continued to light up the night sky and ring in our ears, and as we jammed into the *zócalo* with the dense crowds to celebrate Hidalgo's cry almost two hundred years ago, passing by police that lined the square memories and stories of revolt, rebellion, and repression from the past continued to flow out on this night, September 15, 2008 as if it were November 25, 2006 or even September 15, 1810.

Whether rare or frequent, as our senses respond to the milieu, these moments of shock triggering memories from the past are only one of the ways in which our bodies, sites, and senses act as record-keepers of material experience. Walking the streets in a familiar route from home to work and from work to home, riding a bicycle, driving a car, making a favorite meal for the hundredth time, marching with teachers striking in the 1970s or in 2006, these and other experiences point to the body and our material landscape as the site for the everyday manifestation of a habitual memory and remembering that is ever at work but nonetheless goes largely unnoticed. Much as I have insisted that while we often take our memories to be our personal possession and as a preeminent

and formative site for our individuality, these are nevertheless strongly colored by collective practices—whether through shared discourses, group spatializations, or by the relational nature of interpellation—so too are our habits the product of an interaction between the self and social that blurs the boundaries between a unique I and a collective We. Though philosophy privileges the cognitive aspects of remembering, nonetheless, "habitual skilled remembering illustrate[s] a keeping of the past in mind that… re-enacts the past in our present conduct. In habitual memory the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body" (Connerton 1989:72). This sedimented landscape connects personal and social, past and present, in and through the sensual, sentient, and often intuitive actions of the body interacting and responding to the environment. This means that, as Buck-Morss points out, "if the 'center' of this system is not in the brain but, rather, on the body's surface, then subjectivity…plays the role of mediator between inner and outer sensations, the images of perception and those of memory" (2000a:309; see also Küchler 2005). The subject and milieu are both product and mediator of this relationship.

While Connerton argues for our habitual practices as an important site for the inscription and mobilization of memory-work, and while Buck-Morss reminds that the subject is the conduit between embodied memory and the milieu, Althusser's concept of interpellation likewise centers in on habitual practices and subjective selves, arguing that while we typically imagine that our consciousness or beliefs govern our bodies and practices, in fact it is our material practices that establish or ground our beliefs. Shifting the focus from materiality—spaces and objects—to material practices, Althusser points out that while the general belief exists that an individual "must '*act* according to his ideas'…I shall talk of actions inserted into *practices*. And I shall point out that these practices are governed by the *rituals* in which these practices are inscribed, within the *material existence of an ideological apparatus*" (1970:168). The importance of Althusser's concept of interpellation for a consideration of memory goes much further than pointing to how the past may be hailed by the present in relational encounters between two or more subjects; equally important is Althusser's insistence that it is through our habitual, embodied material practices that we are produced as particular subjects holding onto and cultivating particular beliefs.

The centrality of material practices in Althusser's rendering of interpellation and in Lefebvre's triad points to space and spatial practices as central to subject formation. Seremetakis' attention to the importance of performance and material networks in spatializing memory adds another dimension for considering the intersections between self and site. Taken alongside Malkki's ethnographic work on the spatialization of memory and collective identity through the grounded practices, discourses, and imaginations that "actively territorializes our identities," forming the essentializing moral, material, and mental geographies that she refers to as a "sedentarist metaphysics" (1992:31), these considerations of Oaxaca's material and memorial landscape are animated not just by the issue of how memory is spatialized through the senses and interpellation, but by the broader problematic of the subjective and political stakes in this spatialization in the first place, stakes reflected in my engagement with the transit police and by Lefebvre's reference to groups appropriating space.

Disciplinary Spatialization, Archives, Experts, and Colonial Returns

Previous chapters addressed how the city center is embroiled in an active spatial and symbolic struggle manifested through APPO's takeovers, ASARO's art, architect's investments in conservation and urban planner's investments in transformation, and the state government's promotion of commerce and tourism. Within these competing aesthetics of the city, here I would like to emphasize how the promotion of Oaxaca as a UNESCO World Heritage Site is not only a critical component of the government's strategy to bring in more tourist dollars, but is also important as a memory for forgetfulness, an erasure not only of current, but also of past struggles—indeed, of struggle in general. A strategic part of the work of remembering that official commemorations of heritage produce is to erase struggle.

Writing about nostalgia in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union, what art critic Svetlanya Boym finds is that, as "history has become spatialized, the art of memory has turned into the art of leisure.... Here everyone peacefully coexists" (2001:91). While the heritage of many groups is marked and remembered precisely through struggles, amongst the UNESCO World Heritage Sites you will find multiple fortresses, palaces, and historic centers, and the ruins of Pompei but not the ruins of Srebrenica—though Auschwitz does appear, a lone dark spot amid the 689 cultural properties currently listed as World Heritage Sites. The remembered past of this global heritage has become post-historical, aiming *not* to recall conflict and struggle. While the "heritage industry" is attacked "for turning history into escapist nostalgia," for geographer David Lowenthal, however, "heritage is still the term that best denotes our inescapable dependence on the past. What we inherit is integral to our being.... bonding us with precursors and progenitors...and with our promised successors" (1994:43). Though forgetful, fabricated, and at times the product of violent exclusions, Oaxaca's inheritance and commemoration of the city center as a Spanish colonial site presents and represents the impossible purity of a sanitized past through which Oaxacans are asked to mark their identity. Yet, as Nelson Graburn has pointed out, "the mere presence of a visible, historical built environment is not enough to determine that it must be considered the heritage of the local inhabitants" (2001:75). Adopting and deciphering the writing on Oaxaca's walls involves a "selective tradition" (Williams 1980) that is also a selective memory, a process of memorializing certain parts and not others that suggests particular trajectories and visions that necessarily exclude or occlude others (see also Carter 1987; Povinelli 2002; Sparke 1998; Yoneyama 1999). In the whitewashing of struggle and contestation—including the erasure and continual painting over of ASARO images on city walls—the government promotes Oaxacan identity as a sanitary citizenship that glosses over its multiple violent creations.

Whether to debate the merits of the urban plans of governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz or to argue for a need to preserve the patrimony of this UNESCO World Heritage Site in the face of corrupt and inept government agencies or its defacement by graffiti and the physical take-over of the center by political groups, earlier chapters have

already noted how the united voices of architects and urban planners form one of the most vocal and active groups in Oaxaca today. Often highly critical of government functionaries and at the same time also weary of how APPO's practices of struggle damage the city center, the way in which this particular assemblage draws on Oaxaca's past and the way in which they anchor that past provides a much needed counter balance to images and imaginations of Oaxaca that present a stark black and white spectacle of a divided city with little or no grey zones.

In late September of 2007, I settled into the stately conference hall on the second floor of the Macedonio Alcalá theater to attend the presentation of a book on architectural preservation in Oaxaca. When the first of the five panelists seated before the audience spoke, his words highlighted a central problem that I would hear echoed in many different settings and by differently positioned social figures during my year and a half in Oaxaca: this book, he said, "will create *conciencia* about the city of Oaxaca…and its assaulted urban image." *Conciencia*, literally, to be conscious of or to be aware; as I would soon find out, everyone in Oaxaca was both lacking *conciencia* and everyone was trying to raise it. Yet, if *conciencia* was the fetishized goal of the endeavor—whether awakened through ASARO's art, in the pages of an academic text, or by a policeman's baton—it made all the difference whether one saw the city through the lens of a colonial history that was reflected in its architecture but that was daily being damaged by *el pueblo*'s lack of consciousness and care for that past or whether one saw the focus on this history as yet another means by which the people were excluded and exploited in the present. Different regimes of value animate the lenses through which the past is mobilized in Oaxaca's contested present.

Titled *Sobre la ciudad de Oaxaca, su conservación y el turismo* (On the City of Oaxaca, its Conservation and Tourism), the focus on and fusion between architecture, conservation, and tourism made a clear argument that a deeper awareness of and appreciation for the city's material heritage was what was needed in order to counteract the "lack of consciousness" that plagued Oaxaca and Oaxacans. Under the intricately carved wooden girders that crossed Macedonio Alcalá's ceiling, it was also crystal clear that the architecture to be preserved and the memory and heritage to be reclaimed was not the memory of twenty or thirty years ago, but rather the memory of the city as defined by the uniform two-story building height and the continuous line of the building's windows and doorways that the book returns to as a model for an orderly and harmonious city. To the question of "what do we do with the city," the book's author, architect Javier Márquez Sarrelangue, offered that "we get to know it and enjoy it…and getting to know it we gain *conciencia*." It is clear that the city we get to know and enjoy, and the consciousness and awareness to be gained, is to be found by reclaiming rights to the city of the past.

Frozen in a particular slice of time manifest by the fading photographs presented in the book, where people, horses, and trams rather than cars populated the avenues of the city, the memory of the past celebrated a moment seemingly without time, a bucolic past that the audience and reader are invited to draw from and learn from and literally embody. For ultimately, isn't the model city of heritage also to be populated by model citizens that walk through the *zócalo* on Sunday along the well worn and habitual lines of class, race, and gender, knowing their proper place (see also Rabinow 1989)? In Oaxaca's troubled present and its contested social and political landscapes, ghostly images of the past formed a mirage-like reflection of an imaginative geography of the past from which the Vallistocracia and architects modeled the proper dispositions that were also a means of historical dispossession (see also Foucault 1982; Overmyer-Velásquez 2006; Poole 2004; Rancière 2010).

On another particularly frigid night a few days before Christmas in 2007, the past became the center of focus again at the Casa de la Ciudad as it hosted the presentation of the two-volume work *475 años de la fundación de Oaxaca* (475 Years Since the Founding of Oaxaca). Spearheaded by Sebastian van Doesburg, a historian and the director of the Casa de la Ciudad, the books and festive event brought together the sizable portion of the Vallistocracia who are both concerned with the state of the city and who support their friend and wealthy philanthropist Alfredo Harp Helú's projects. Gathered as well were many of the architects and urban planners whose now familiar faces I had last seen during the previous book launch and the commemorative events held around the 11th of December to celebrate Monte Albán and Oaxaca city's twentieth anniversary as World Heritage Sites.

On this night, Manuel Esesarte Pesqueira, the city's outgoing mayor, opened the proceedings by noting that this book was the realization of the dream of Sebastian van Doesburg and Harp Helú and that the celebration of 475 years of Oaxaca's rank as a city, and the recent celebration of twenty years as a World Heritage Site, were "dates that mean a great deal." And, indeed, for the Vallistocracia and architects gathered at the Casa de la Ciudad that night, measured in centuries, the legacy of the past in Oaxaca was important both as a way to understand the "history of how it was that we came to be here," as Esesarte put it, as well as for taking "pride in having what we have." Politicians measure time in governing cycles, rural peasants according to the cycles of the seasons and popular festivals; through books, archives, conferences, and in institutions such as the Casa de la Ciudad, the Vallistocracia seeks to establish and articulate enduring lineages and continuities between the colonial past and the contemporary present. In a time of social unrest, the significance of these dates was highlighted by Esesarte's seamless connection between "embellishment, care, and security" in remarks that night. *Cuidado*, as with its English counterpart, care, this word connotes both taking care of as in tending to or cultivating, and as in watching out for or being vigilant.

Cultivated with great vigilance, as a temporal and physical landscape through which this group grounds its belonging, the Vallistocracia's investment in and celebration of the colonial past has generated a potent imaginative geography demarcating a dividing line between self and other (Said 1978; see also Gregory 1994). Conceived of as the arc of a temporal scale framed through historical epochs,

this imaginative geography perceives and represents the past as the roadmap to (and for) the present; memories and recollections of that past are, therefore, largely commemorative and conform to Benjamin's observation that when assessing the past from the point of view of the present, "like ultraviolet rays, memory shows to each man in the book of life a script that invisibly and prophetically glosses the text" (1923-26:483). Whether rendered triumphantly or tragically, when the past and present are viewed largely as an uninterrupted historical line, the past becomes a seedbed to be scanned for clues pointing to the inevitable present and foretelling the future.

While the past may be understood as the progenitor of the present, for the Vallistocracia, this does not necessarily mean that the past is transparent. Recognizing the relevant passages of the past requires the memory-work of experts who can excavate the past and produce prophetic portraits not just of what was, but also of its relevance for what is and for what may yet be. Celebrated and codified, the historical past reveals its nature and importance as an instrument for instruction in the present. As the director of the editorial house that produced *475 años de la fundación de Oaxaca* noted, "to understand, we need tools for knowledge." And "to understand what we have, it is necessary to understand our antecedents." The book was clearly meant to provide both; it is an instrument of knowledge that can provide the tools for comprehension of the past, and this comprehension of the past is what will allow Oaxacans to value and vigilantly cultivate and care for the past, present, and future that surrounds them. Though underneath and all around them, in the estimation of the majority of architects, urban planners, and the Oaxacan Vallistocracia, the colonial present is nonetheless either unknown or largely overlooked by the majority of the population or willfully misused and exploited by government bureaucrats who also fail to understand the value of the past except as a means to personal and political profit. It was as a way to close the black hole of historical memory that the editorial director characterized the value of the book, finishing her remarks by stating that the knowledge to be found in the book will allow people to come to terms with and to answer "¿cómo quiero mi ciudad?" (how do I want my city?). As an issue of affect as well of public policy, the reverberating echo of the public's applauding hands and the visual sight of heads nodding their approval in the Casa de la Ciudad's central patio suggest that this question remains not just fundamental in Oaxaca's chaotic present, but also that, for the Vallistocracia, neither the *zócalo*'s remodeling project by URO nor APPO's take over produced a palatable answer to this question or a lineage for future generations to follow.

When Sebastian van Doesburg spoke, he began by noting in his nearly flawless but heavily accented Spanish that the "initial idea was a book for people that already know their city, not for tourists." As such, "here, the idea is to find a bit more than what we already know of the city, to go beyond the privileged parts of the city

(Alcalá, *zócalo*, Santo Domingo)." In order to deepen the learned public's knowledge of the city, the book seeks to shift the compass from the city's generalized and stereotyped collective discourse and material parameters of its World Heritage to other spatial and temporal points of focus. This is crucial because, as Sebastian himself put it, "today the historic center is not the city, it is a minor part of its extension." While the mayor, the book's editor, and the audience continually celebrate the center as if it were the city, and undoubtedly for them the celebration of its 475th anniversary as a city is not a celebration of where it is—with its marginalized periphery, overcrowding, poor sanitation, transportation problems, unemployment, and social unrest—but rather a celebration of where it was, a moment of reflection of another time and place that is today overshadowed by the events of the recent years and which must be recuperated. For a moment, van Doesburg's project seemed to offer an avenue towards a different interpretation and reading of the historical past and the future legacy of Oaxaca.

Whether learning about the Spanish king's decision to elevate Oaxaca to the rank of a city as a way to support Spanish colonist's claims against the viceroy of the territory, the famed conquistador Hernán Cortés, or of how the form and format of the modern Guelaguetza was a response to the 400th anniversary of the city, for van Doesburg the "idea is to mark the path." Trained as a historian, van Doesburg imagined that the two-volume book would illuminate the corners of the past as these gave shape to the present. More importantly, however, as he noted that night, "knowledge of the past helps to better project the future…. If we understand from where the city of today comes, we can understand where we are going, how to solve the problems of today." The past, in this rendering, was much more than the shadow cast by the city's colonial buildings and historical trees, but also encompassed and had a part to play in defining the interactions between the city and its citizens and between the haves and the have-nots. Van Doesburg urged that to understand the contemporary moment in Oaxaca, a moment with many social and urban challenges, it is necessary to understand the past.

As he explained, this was so because the perspective and scale that history provides allows us to better control our emotions. Much as anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli's account of the problematic way in which "late liberal ideology works through the passions of recognition…without subjecting itself to the throes of contestation and opposition" (2002:17) by channeling subaltern pasts and presents through a historical lens allowing for cultural but not political difference, van Doesburg likewise sought to depoliticize passionate attachments to the past by cultivating a proper historical attitude or relationship to the urban landscape. For example, as he once told me when we were in his office, knowledge of the past might have provided a different response to the falling laurel trees in the *zócalo* for, after all, as he illustrated by pointing to an enlarged photograph of the *zócalo* hanging on the Casa de la Ciudad wall, a hundred years ago the *zócalo* was a barren and treeless landscape. Through history, via efforts such as the two-volume books and the projects of the Casa de la Ciudad, van Doesburg hoped that the passion and emotion displayed over public space could be tempered by Oaxaca's urban history, rather than by political instinct and the heated sentiments of the moment. While the chapters in the two books were written by academics, architects, and urban planners, van Doesburg noted that "the book is for the Oaxacan public in general" and was meant to provide a "transfer of knowledge. The text is academic but combined with abundant graphic material." And, indeed, the book is beautiful and will no doubt sell well as a commemorative artifact for the Vallistocracia's bookshelves and coffee tables. Like the green cantera stones that made up the city's historic sidewalks, books such as these become talismans

that open up particular desires. With a price tag of 900 pesos—or about sixteen and a half times the minimum daily salary of 54.47 pesos in 2010—this is not the case for all, of course, and the issue of who the audience is for the two volume work remains focused specifically and mostly on the city elite (for whom the book is an item of prestige that both declares their wealth, social status, and presumably their interest in the city and its heritage). For the lower classes, kept behind the glass and stucco walls of the bookstore, or shelved in a library that they may never enter, the book will remain inaccessible and unknown. Though Esesarte had the final word of the evening when he noted that the project demonstrates "the interest in leaving something for the city that is for the future," in Oaxaca, with the latest government statistic in 2005 of 19.35% of the state population over 15 years of age as illiterate (CONAPO 2006), the economic and educational barriers to the transmission of knowledge of this (or any) book is staggering. Whether incorporated as valuable knowledge about the city's past, stored on a library shelf, adorning a coffee table, or absent and altogether inaccessible, as a memory of the past with an eye to the future, the books were consequential indeed.

It takes a whole lot of memory-work to spatialize belonging by anchoring meaningful discursive sequences and embodied practices to sites and create mnemonic maps that hail collective subjects. Whether by Oaxacan architects, by the government, or by ASARO, the constant cries for *conciencia* do indeed turn to different points in the past to raise awareness in the present and for the future. The investment in and shared sense of urgency in raising and developing *conciencia* points to the stakes involved, for the different landscapes of the past that these groups turn to do indeed produce very different personal and collective roadmaps for belonging and, as imaginative geographies, all of these bring with them attendant inclusions and very real exclusions. Active

in spatializing memory, architects and urban planners in Oaxaca generally argue that, when properly read, the city's historical past as written in stone can redeem the present. Writing a new history for the present on the walls of the historical city, ASARO and architects alike feel that they must speak directly to the people, for both agree that the government has failed the city and its citizens.

Yet, though both seek to work from the ground up, at the level of footsteps (de Certeau 1984), the personal and collective utopias that they envision for Oaxaca and for Oaxacans present different investments in the past and hence produce very different visions of the future.

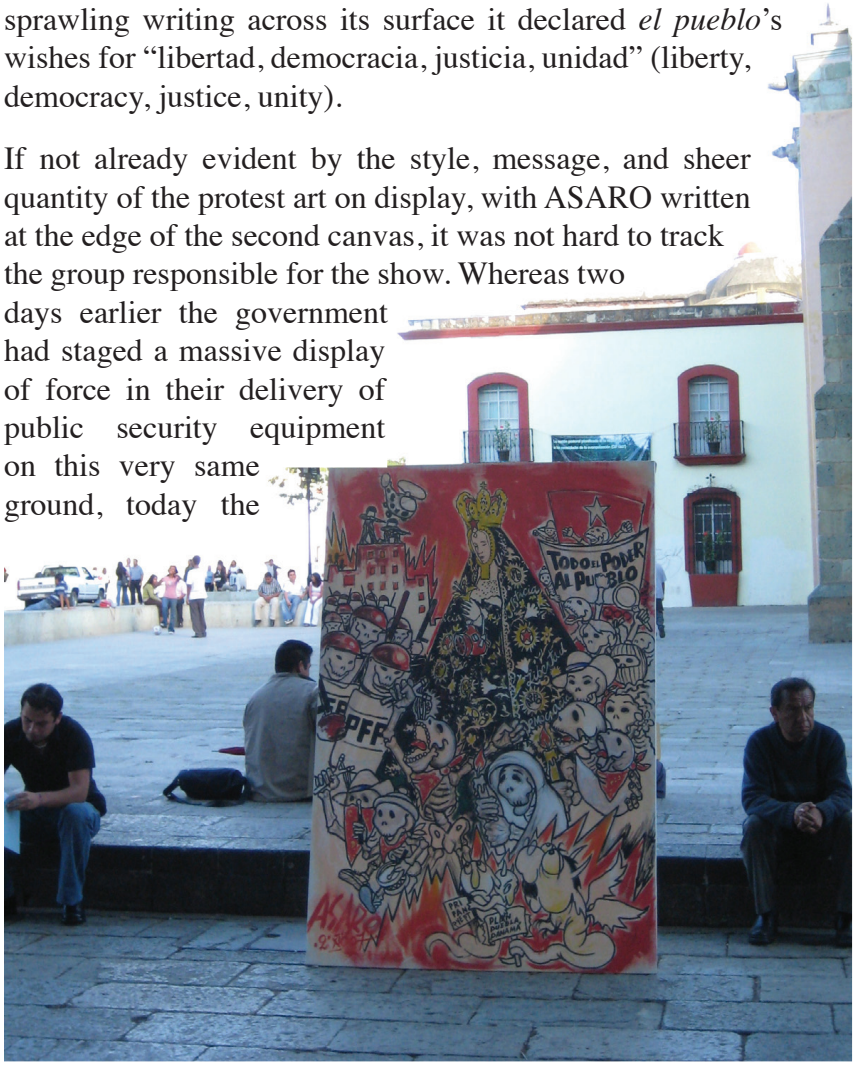
Negotiating different forms of memory and memory-work is critical to the competing aesthetics of the city, whether it be the government's sanitized version of traditional folklore, APPO's politicized take on tradition, or architect's investments in the colonial landscape. At the intersection of the politics of culture and the politics of remembering is a consequential question that goes beyond arguing over whether URO's, APPO's, or architect's version of the city and culture are more or less authentic; fundamentally, since "collective memory goes back, as the case may be, to varying points in the past," (Halbwachs 1952:165), the question of what is at any time highlighted and what is left behind becomes important since to choose a person, a landscape, or a particular time, and to make of this a world has consequences. Moreover, if multiple absences and enforced presences mark and locate the mnemonic field of Oaxaca's center, it is important to insist that spatialized memories are not simply sites for the rooting and cultivating of particular visions and versions of the past, but that spaces are themselves active participants in struggles over the past. As anthropologist Lisa Yoneyama notes, "battles over memories have not simply materialized *as* struggles over actual space; more important, they have developed *out of* and been mediated through space" (1999:34). Spatialized memories are not simply the site of the rooting and cultivating of particular visions and versions of the past, but are the terrain of contestation over these.

As it is for collective discourses, it is crucial to think through, therefore, what makes some sites and some narratives important and effective markers of select memories. In the city and its collective spaces—the plazas, the parks, the streets, cafés, theaters, etc.—the space for collectivity exists, but in and of itself this does not make these spaces collective places. Addressing the affective, emotional, and poetic component of city spaces, urban planner Kevin Lynch stressed that, "the landscape plays a social role as well. The named environment, familiar to all, furnishes material for common memories and symbols which bind the group together and allow them to communicate with one another. The landscape serves as a vast mnemonic system for the retention of group history and ideals" (1960:126). Here, then, space is not an inert receptacle for group memories but itself informs their production. Yet, if so, as already pointed out, structuring and constructing the landscape as a vast mnemonic grid of intelligibility is not without struggle and contestation. No matter how dominant a particular image of the landscape is, or how cohesive a group might seem to be, the material and memorial environment does not everywhere or for everyone hail the same past or the same group belonging. The landscape may mean, but what it means and for whom it means is always subject to revision.

Four Days, Six Cardinal Points, and Multiple Collective Mappings

Walking out of the Law School after the presentation of the human rights report had concluded, I made my way to the *zócalo* to see whether or not I could weasel my way inside the ex-governor's palace where URO was giving his mid-term address. Suddenly, I was taken aback by the site of a trio of skeletons pedaling a bicycle while carrying above them a fat skeletal figure who was steering the contraption and hanging on to an umbrella as a hail of missiles rained down on the group. Painted on a canvas and propped up at the entrance to the passageway into the Alameda, in case the meaning of the image was lost on anyone, *proletariado* (proletariat) was repeatedly written across the wheels of the moving bicycle while across the fat man's body was the word *capitalista* (capitalist). As I looked down the length of the *zócalo*, I could see other canvases spread across the square. Moving on to check out the next image, I quickly forgot about URO's mid-term address as I saw the Virgen de Guadalupe (Virgin Mary) leading a religious procession of skeletons whose bandanas, slingshots, pans, ski masks, and banner reading "todo el poder al pueblo" (all power to the people) clearly identified them as APPO. While the Virgin's long mantle shielded the procession from the oncoming Federal Preventive Police, in sprawling writing across its surface it declared *el pueblo*'s wishes for "libertad, democracia, justicia, unidad" (liberty, democracy, justice, unity).

If not already evident by the style, message, and sheer quantity of the protest art on display, with ASARO written at the edge of the second canvas, it was not hard to track the group responsible for the show. Whereas two days earlier the government had staged a massive display of force in their delivery of public security equipment on this very same ground, today the



same space was the site for the iconic images of the Asamblea de Artistas Revolucionarios de Oaxaca. Using this heavily trafficked public space as an open-air gallery, other ASARO canvases depicted images of the governor gunning down Emiliano Zapata and Benito Juárez, of protestors using slingshots and fireworks at the barricades, and of a policeman, complete with wind-up knob, masturbating atop a figure that he had just gunned down. Connecting the political and social struggle of 2006 to the recent Day-of-the-Dead celebration, many of ASARO's canvases used skeletons as their main figures. Whereas the sight of police in the *zócalo* a few days earlier undoubtedly brought back particular memories for those who witnessed the military display, ASARO images articulated and conveyed a rather different image of the police and of security as they also reminded Oaxacans in the *zócalo* that things are far from over yet.

Hung in Oaxaca's largest stage, the outdoor images formed quite a display in the *zócalo* and I was not alone as I looked over and took photographs of the 17 canvases. While I had encountered ASARO stencils on the streets before, this was the first time I had seen any of their paintings and only the second time that I got to meet and talk with members of the productive but elusive group. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Cathedral and across the tree-lined square from the governor's former palace, APPO had set up a large tent with information and images about the 2006 movement. The tent also housed a group of people staging a hunger strike calling for the release of political prisoners and serving as a protest to the governor's mid-term address.

With no visible police presence in the *zócalo* on this day, and with canvases resting against the Cathedral without so much as a bishop or priest's challenge to the appropriation of the space, ASARO's art would seem to be a good example of Yoneyama's argument for the way in which space mediates struggles over memory and for Lynch and Connerton's observation that groups anchor memory maps via material spaces and spatial frameworks. Or, as he put it, that "groups provide individuals with frameworks within which their memories are localized and memories are localized by a kind of mapping.... No collective memory can exist without reference to a socially specific spatial framework" (1989:126). Clearly a direct challenge to the state's own mapping that week, ASARO's images provided another avenue by which to localize memory within the *zócalo*'s dense geography. Speaking to and trying to consolidate a different group than the governor through its mapping, the protest art disputed any assertion of an end to the social struggle. It did so, moreover, not only by drawing on the events of 2006, but by connecting those events to broader struggles in the past such as the Mexican Revolution, to artistic lineages linked to social struggle, such as the broadsides frequently illustrated by the calaveras of José Guadalupe Posada, and even to popular traditions such as the Day-of-the-Dead. Much as individuals who participated in the barricades continue to be known and identified by the name and location of their barricade, so too does the *zócalo* furnish a fertile material milieu through which group identity is both anchored, mobilized, and contested.

With the Antorcha Campesina march, the government's display of security equipment, the presentation of the human rights report, ASARO's public show, APPO's tent, and the governor's mid-term address all taking place within four days of each other in and over the same geographical space—a geographical space overrun as well by families playing, kids shining shoes, and musicians singing songs—exactly what and whose spatialized and localized memory was being mapped? In this contested arena, it is clear that—symbolically, physically, and in social discourses—the *zócalo*, or any space, is not and cannot be the exclusive possession of any one group. As different groups endow the same material space with different memories, mappings, and meanings, space itself becomes a critical site for socio-political contestation and struggle and an actant—to yet again borrow Bruno Latour's phrase for a non-human entity that nonetheless has consequential agency (1999)—in these struggles themselves. Space matters. It matters and is crucial precisely because of its multiple investments and ambivalent nature. After all, what is ambivalent does not simply signify something about which one may be unsure, but is also something that is flexible, something articulating or connecting multiple possible endpoints.

Whether pedestrian, heroic, shocking, commemorative, or fleeting, Yoneyama reminds that it is important to take into account that "there are competing attitudes towards remembering, that not all mnemonic sites have endorsed the same sense of pastness, nostalgia, and modernity" (1999:34). From Antorcha's march to the governor's and ASARO's public displays, varied performances point to the spatialization of memory not as stratigraphic layers of the past buried in stone, but as contested negotiations over mnemonic maps and the collective subjects that these maps mobilize. In these negotiations, the city is not an objective record that transparently speaks for a particular time. Rather, as different individuals and groups turn spaces into places through their spatial mappings and situated investments, particular places may nonetheless be listened to and be seen as testifying about particular pasts and against or for particularly powerful visions. Engaging multiple social histories, the past is not an archaic historical fragment or remnant buried in stone—a kind of ornate, beautiful, but static urn—but the very

lifeblood of spatial practices and daily interactions that animate spaces without necessarily pinning them down to one historical time period, event, or a single mapping. Places, in other words, not only form part of the daily urban experience and way of seeing for us as modern individuals, but also shape an important part of our collective horizon of possibility, framing the present and future by hailing our situated pasts (see Gillis 1994; Nassy-Brown 2000; Nora 1992).

Even if continually negotiated and collectively constructed, Walter Benjamin's continual search for the redemption of alternate histories and Pierre Nora's attempt to find and set down the sites of French national memorialization attest not only to the difficult and ongoing work of constructing and securing a particular past and present, but also point to the fact that despite the constructed nature of remembering, and despite the acknowledgements of historical amnesia(s), modern society grants to individual and collective sites of memorialization the particular power of being and bearing witness. Through art, through physical occupations of space, by anchoring collective narratives and social mappings to particular sites, these framings and spatialized memories are struggled over in sites such as Oaxaca's *zócalo* and these sites are being called on today as living witnesses looking to secure that past amidst multiple competing mappings.

If part of the work of spatializing memory is precisely to claim the physical and imaginative ground through which different groups situate their collective belonging, struggle and contestation are of critical importance in relation to the overwhelming focus on certain aspects of the contested past above other more mundane and less combative places and discourses. (While many individuals nostalgically recalled to me moments from their childhood on the plaza, the collective imagination of the *zócalo* in the present turns and returns to this site as witness to multiple antagonisms. From the two decades of teacher occupations to urban transformations that polarized the population, the spatialized memories and collective subjects that the *zócalo* is currently hailing are oppositional and resistant identities.) This collective mapping has meant, in turn, that while "plazas, like other significant public spaces, are centers of urban civility that provide a forum for the social and political exchange necessary to democratic life" (Low 2000:123), the everyday use of Oaxaca's plaza and its spatialized memories and identities points to antagonistic social relations that call into question as much as they can be said to confirm the democratic nature of this public space as a site of engagement across difference.

With the Virgen de Guadalupe, Zapata, and Juárez present, how do ASARO's images and imaginative geography produce competing senses of the past from the spectacle of governing functionaries or the colonial cartography of Oaxacan architects? Moreover, how do they produce different subjects in the present? In ASARO's

mapping, their seemingly free use of icons and historical figures from the past such as Che Guevara and Emiliano Zapata has led ASARO to be criticized for presenting anachronistic or contradictory histories and nostalgic visions of a past that many say is as imaginative and fictitious as the colonial image of the heavily reconstructed city center promoted by architects or the traditional cultural typology promoted by URO's governing machine. While nostalgia typically finds a ready metaphor in the sepia tones of old and fading photographs, memories and images of the recent past are not often described as nostalgic. However, as anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis writes, for Greeks, nostalgia "evokes the sensory dimension of memory in exile and estrangement" (1994:4). Nostalgia, that is to say, begins from an underlying condition of displacement and uprooting that memory seeks to bridge. Whether that uprooting happened 500, 50, or 5 years ago, the bridge to the past that nostalgia builds cuts across a landscape of loss and longing. Turning to a past that with the eyes of the present is seen to have been significant, a strong, affective register characterizes nostalgia.

Whether it lingers in the monuments of the past or in its ruins, as a type of memory-work, nostalgia offers a sentimental relationship to the past that can apply equally well to times of crisis as to times of triumph. After all, the golden eras of the personal and collective past are populated as much by adversity and challenge as they are by ease and comfort. Halbwachs thus observed that the "faraway world where we remember that we suffered…exercises an incomprehensible attraction on the person who has survived it and who seems to think he has left here the best part of himself, which he tries to recapture" (1952:49). In its interpretation of the recent past, the collective discourse about the social movement of 2006 is indeed characterized by the sentiment that those who participated found in those days the best part of themselves and that spatialized mappings provide an avenue by which to ground these histories.

The remembrance of this past can be described as nostalgic precisely because memories of that past point to the estrangement and exile that many feel for the (lost) personal and collective possibilities of that moment. While traumatic memories may be called upon as witnesses testifying about transgressions committed in the past, nostalgic memories are called upon to bear witness to and to try to fill absences in the present. One points the finger at a damaged past that continues to haunt the present while the other presents a golden past as evidence of a damaged or unfulfilling present. Often characterized as an imaginative fable, of all the arts of memory, nostalgia might be the faculty of remembering that offers the strongest criticism of the empty present. It does so, moreover, precisely through its affective and imaginative qualities as a fable. As a particular kind of remembering, nostalgia points to how the haunting qualities of memory are driven not only by trauma in its emotional register but also by the sense of a temporal and spatial distance that, even as it is crucial to creating memorable moments, also marks a separation between past and present. As

Marilyn Ivy points out, "the desire to rediscover implies a loss, a forgetting of the object of knowledge, and thus the need for the repetition of discovery" (1995:43). As with any physical journey of discovery, the mental passage between what was then and what is now is marked by a lack. Boym adds that nostalgia "is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (2001:xiii). Returning to the past as if coming home from exile, whether looking for Zapata, longing for the barricades, or dreaming of the World Heritage Site as the material instantiation of colonial relations and imperial nostalgia (Rosaldo 1989), nostalgia's journey through the past promises a change from the present as it travels back to an imagined (and imaginary) homeland. Longing for a past yet stuck in the present, this journey can never be fully complete; however, as with all travel, it leaves both the here and there, the now and then transformed.

Analyzing the relationship between the past and our modern present, for Walter Benjamin, nostalgia is not simply a longing for the past as imagined to have been—whether accurate or not—but demonstrated an affective yearning for the aura of an enchanted past that had largely been lost in the modern world. Characterizing the modern present as an age of information that had replaced storytelling, Benjamin felt that the foundation of nostalgia was a romance with the storytelling faculty itself. As the burden of information is its "claim to prompt verifiability," Benjamin wrote, "the prime requirement is that it appear 'understandable in itself'" (1936a:89). Produced and digested almost instantaneously, information leaves few traces because it is consumed differently from a story. "It is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it," Benjamin explained. In a story, "it is left up to [the reader] to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks" (1936a:89). The storyteller does not inform, the storyteller does not confront the listener with facts but rather tells a tale that enchants through allegory and whose meanings and experience are not thus exhausted in the instant of their consumption. Stories (and many stencils) engage and engross us, inviting an interpretation.

For Benjamin, nostalgia is the predominant form of memory in the modern world because the modern world has replaced stories with information. In doing so, we have lost both the art of listening and of interpretation. Surrounded by information as the dominant means of communication, and caught in the isolating and atomizing environment of the modern metropolis, for Benjamin nostalgia represents a search for an enchanted and allegorical world. As Buck-Morss points out, though, Benjamin understood nostalgia and our attention to the past through "the dream 'wish,'

which is not to redeem the past, but to redeem the desire for utopia to which humanity has persistently given expression" (1989:145). The nostalgic past does not present a formal model for how to remake the empty present; rather it presents a model for how to rethink our relationship to the world: nostalgia redeems or invests present forms with an enchanted nature and revolutionary utopian potential. This utopian potential was found by remembering the aura of a past anchored by the imaginative play and enchanted power of storytelling as an antidote to the age of information. Benjamin's project, as Buck-Morss' study argues, was centered on finding a way to articulate political action and imagination—hence his interest in shock and the work of the surrealists.

It is this articulation of shock and remembering that I see at work in the images of ASARO. ASARO's images re-enchant Oaxaca's walls, challenging Oaxacans to redeem the desire for utopia embedded not just in the figures and history of Emiliano Zapata, Che Guevara, or Benito Juárez among others, but in the fusion of their dreams of another world with the creative power of the social movement. For Benjamin, the loss of storytelling and the weakening of memory ended the transfer of symbolic, collective meaning through the memory of lived traditions. Our relationship with the past was forever changed. As Buck-Morss explains, Benjamin understood that "the rupture of tradition was irrevocable. Far from lamenting the situation, Benjamin saw precisely here modernity's uniquely revolutionary potential" (1989:279). No longer bound and tied to the past, humanity's symbolic investments were now free from the yoke of tradition that had kept us from thinking otherwise.

On Oaxaca's streets, Lucio Cabañas, Josef Stalin, and Ricardo Flores Magón share a wall. Che Guevara and Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla are found side by side proclaiming and urging revolution. The Virgen de Guadalupe with gas mask on and Frida Kahlo with gun drawn are two female fighters ready to do their part. At the basic level, on Oaxaca's streets, these images were not meant to communicate a history lesson, but rather to articulate a shared affinity between that figure, their legacy, actions, thought, beliefs, and the present. As anthropologist Howard Campbell notes, the mixture of contemporary politics, the revolutionary past, and utopian imaginations of the future is not new to Oaxaca: "COCEI allied itself with the Mexican Communist party and won the municipal election in 1981. It called its administration the 'People's Government,' flew a large red flag with the hammer and sickle over Juchitán City Hall, and installed posters and statues of Marx, Lenin, and Che Guevara in its offices. Yet the new mayor, Leopoldo de Gyves, said that his government was based on Zapotec cultural principles" (1993:86). The continuity and parallelism that Campbell finds in these articulations of historical struggles between the past and the present continue to animate the contemporary politics of memory in Oaxaca.

Most importantly, whether achieved by merging, contrasting, or holding in tension the triangulation between past and present, ASARO images challenge passive viewing, shocking the sensory apparatus through unusual and imaginative combinations that invite viewer's interpretations. With recognizable Mexican actors such as Tin Tan, Cantinflas, and Pedro Infante, messages such as "rezizte" (resist) and "ton's que?" (now what?), and with headgear

emblazoned with the socialist star, stenciled images could be said to harness these actor's expansive popular appeal and recognizable faces to capture the broadest audience in order to deliver messages in support of the social movement. In using media icons, the images could also be said to be making a statement about the power of the media to control information—an explicit theme, for example, in the image of Alex from the film *A Clockwork Orange* pointing at us while wearing a shirt with the logo of Televisa, one of Mexico's leading television broadcasting stations, and a message that reads "la revolución no sera televisada" (the revolution will not be

televised). Other readings could speak to the power of personalities to sell a product or point of view to us, whether revolution, shaving razors, or rum, in images plastered all around our cities. All of these are possible and plausible readings, and all of them depend on an open-ended imaginative play that, like a rhizome, expands outward in multiple directions. Even if the transgressive use of spray paint and stencils on city walls ties these to the social movement, these images are overdetermined—inviting, as Freud and Althusser might note, many interpretations. Resist, one says. Resist what, exactly? Now what, one asks, and waits for the viewer to formulate an answer.

Using stencils on city walls to connect to the past through thematic links or by showing shared affinities between ideas and ideals, like Benjaminian conjurers or mystics, the reflective nostalgia of street artists lingered and fused the dreams of another place and time with the hopes of the present. ASARO member Chichas was of the opinion that "stencil is the appropriation of images, but it is in a different context and a different moment." Appropriating the past in and for a different and contemporary moment, Chichas felt that "appropriating the past also brings all that history from before," yet ultimately it is not us who step into the past of Oaxacan anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón or Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata; rather, they step into our present, and what is hailed from their past is the aura of that moment, their dreams and ideals (see also Arte Jaguar 2007). For ASARO, to appropriate an image, to appropriate a historical individual, and to appropriate a history was to make it theirs. Through the spatial practice of spraying a wall, ASARO artists manifest a representation of space that hailed the ideals of the past in and for the making of a political space in the present.

As the past steps—or is dragged—into the present, it does not make this journey unchanged. Stencils referencing the past do not just draw that past into the present as an object lesson; images of Zapata with a Mohawk or of Juárez with a beret and red star are another example of the way in which the past is resignified in the present. Whether this signifies a transformation, actualization, debasement, or erosion of that legacy, or whether or not one feels that it is anachronistic or appropriately contemporary, this resignification opens up room for debate about the present and Oaxaca's future,

inviting a different way of seeing (Berger 1972) or distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2000). The resignification of the past and debate about the present takes many forms. On April 10, 2008, during an APPO march commemorating the anniversary of Zapata's ambush and murder at the hands of Venustiano Carranza's soldiers, ASARO members participated in the march and along the parade route repeatedly placed an image of Zapata in his tomb with the words "tu muerte sera vengada" (your death shall be avenged). Talking and walking with marchers and onlookers and gathering informal responses, there were many and diverse opinions in response to this stencil.

Stopping to watch as the image was placed on the wall, rather than comment on the content, most people spoke instead about the gesture of putting up a stencil; one person offered a positive interpretation, stating that this was a "form of free expression. Everyone has their opinion." Another felt that in placing images on the walls, "the youth take a risk [se lo rifan] and they have our support and admiration for their courage and passion." On the other hand, another person opined, "I am not in agreement, we come out to march and they give a bad face to those that march." Strolling along the sidewalk, the proprietor of a business who happened to be on the march route mentioned that he is against this practice for "it hurts entrepreneurs and is a great expense." Still another individual felt that "government needs to pay more attention, and also those doing graffiti need to pay more attention to what they are doing." When the march stopped along its route to the *zócalo* at a statue of Zapata, one person offered the following, "you have to also know who they are [i.e. Zapata, Juárez, etc.] and the stencils help open *conciencia*." With lingering associations between graffiti and disaffected youths, critiques of anarchist factions within APPO that routinely broke windows and spray painted businesses in the center during marches, and ASARO stencils included in the mix, APPO members voiced ambivalent responses and mixed and multiple feelings about the place of stencils in the movement.

In Oaxacan anthropologist Norma Patricia Lache's analysis of stencils, the "mission of [street] art is to provoke, it does not matter what the response is." Certainly, there was no shortage of responses on this April day to the graffiti and stencils and few of the people I talked to or overheard speaking were indifferent. While it is true that ASARO stencils placed in public spaces seek to capture *el pueblo*'s attention, for the group a response is equally important, for insofar as the stencils do present creative fusions and produce a variety of opinions that get people to express different viewpoints, the stencils are seen as openings into dialogic exchanges that open up collective debates about past and present. (Little is gained, after all, if the cyclical exchange of spray painting, painting over, and spray painting again becomes just a way to play tag with the government on city walls.)

The fact that images making reference to legacies from the past could and did produce vastly different interpretations does lend support to Benjamin's claim about the loosening up or freeing of the present from the yoke of tradition. However, even as these images may have been produced in a moment of relative freedom to poach from the past and resignify its legacy in ways that would not have found political traction in previous eras, nonetheless these images at times and to differing degrees had to take into account

contemporary pressures to produce the appropriate political purchase—as with the government's turn to the Guelaguetza or architect's framing of Oaxaca's colonial landscape, ASARO's look to the past also offers a selective tradition. In looking to the past to gain political traction, whether in the open-air market or in the workshop, as its members repeatedly proclaimed in words and demonstrated in deeds, ASARO's main preoccupation was producing *conciencia* through art that challenged the political and social imagination of the present. In this, as Chucho told me in an interview, "the image is at times not what matters most, it is only the complement to the idea; the idea is the most important." Working around the polarizing politics of the present to graphically present an idea that could spark a social debate was not the only challenge, however, for along with the pressure to produce the appropriate political purchase, the group also had to contend with the tensions between promoting and producing social revolution and using icons of the past to literally sell products cloaked in the image of revolution.

With an online store dedicated to selling licensed products of "Ernesto Che Guevara merchandise" that promises to fulfill "all your revolutionary needs" (http://www.thechestore.com/), and with images of Che Guevara used to sell products such as "el Ché-Cola" (http://www.elche-cola.com/), it is easy to side with Chucho when he mentions that there are "images and discourses that are well-worn and trite [trillados], Che Guevara for example." Unless you are using your metal "Che Guevara by Andy Warhol" lighter, selling at beougraund.com for $24.99, to ignite a Molotov cocktail, the commodification of Che Guevara's image and of the *idea* of revolution and of rebellion by the capitalist market is hard to deny. In an entrenched and global capitalist economy, the question of how to sustain the revolutionary ideals, energy, and dreams of Oaxaca's social movement as well as to feed the revolutionary body so that it can fight another day is a tricky one when resistance itself has been co-opted by the market.

If in our contemporary present, as Benjamin proposes, the symbolic investments of tradition no longer have a hold on us and we are free to resignify and reimagine our relationship to the past, how the desire for utopia might be redeemed when this desire for utopia itself is being constantly resignified by marketing departments and carnivorous capitalist markets is a constant challenge. Commodified, resignified, recycled, or hailed creatively, the past produced multiple returns in Oaxaca's present that spoke not just to the redemption or continuation of utopian revolutionary desires, but also to a broader range of contemporary wishes. Given the different imaginaries, interpretations, and utopias that were brought to life in Oaxaca, what this mix produced at different moments in the present was anything but given.

In the *zócalo* during APPO events and with the tianguis in full swing, for example, the mix of images referencing historical

figures often produced fantastic groupings. On one occasion, with ASARO's stall set up near the spot where the socialist Frente Popular Revolucionario (Popular Revolutionary Front) had set up, the visual scene in this corner of the *zócalo* included banners of Marx, Engles, Lenin, and Stalin in the backdrop and woodblock prints of Benito Juárez, and Pancho Villa in the foreground. The

first time I had seen the image of Stalin, his face was stenciled on the boarded up door of a restaurant that was called "La Independencia" (Independence) and I had found the image ironic. Upon seeing the banner in the *zócalo*, I was intrigued and curious about the contradictions involved in calling for URO's resignation largely on the basis of his authoritarian ruling practices and in having Stalin as one of the faces symbolizing the FPR. So, I began to ask others for their take. At one end of the spectrum of responses, a vendor who was selling shirts of Juárez with a beret told me he did not know who Stalin was, another person mentioned his affiliation with the socialist party and thought that he might be a German; others shrugged their shoulders and waited for me to tell them who he was. On the other end of the spectrum, when I asked one young man why Stalin was there, he replied by asking me if I had any gasoline with me and was eager to burn the banner. Someone else mentioned that many in Oaxaca don't know who Stalin is or if they know they believe the stories of his atrocities are untrue and they hold him up as a model of a tough and accomplished leader.

Given that ASARO member Mario is a card-carrying and supportive member of the FPR, one day in February of 2008, when I was in ASARO's workshop helping set up for the tianguis, I asked Mario about Stalin's gulags, the millions estimated to have died there, and his authoritarian leadership. Painting a banner for the FPR on the workshop's wall while I cut the cards used for an APPO Memorama, Mario replied that, in fact, many innocent people do die in war but that, ultimately, there are no innocent people in war. You have to choose sides, he thought. Whether or not what people say about Stalin is true, Mario noted that, "what is seen today is more cruel…kids dying of hunger and people doing nothing." For Mario, it was impossible to judge Stalin or his time without first taking stock of the fact that a silent war is going on in our streets today and that in this war there is no outside, no abstract or safe position from which to judge impartially. Questions of extreme violence, Mario was reminding, needed to be put within a context of the everyday and constitutive violence that our democratic, liberal societies are built upon and that continue to kill and marginalize as a matter of policy yet remain largely invisible (see also Bourgois 1996; Foucault 1997; Gilmore 2007; Scheper-Hughes 1992). Though skeptical of the evidence, Mario was willing to admit that Stalin may have committed acts of cruelty, yet he and others in the FPR saw Stalin as comparable to Charlemagne, that is, as the unifier of a vast empire at the moment of its historical, cultural, and geographic apex.

I continued cutting Memorama cards, Mario kept painting, and we kept discussing the past and present. At one point, Mario turned and addressed one of the three communication majors and filmmakers from Mexico City who had decided to do a documentary of ASARO as their final project and he told her, "see, this is what ASARO is." A space of assemblying, debate, dialogue, and a space where, as we continue to work on art projects with each other, we can also share an experience across difference while remaining in and retaining our solidarity as a group. Whether for some the issue is historical fidelity, for others turning to the past as a means for generating transformative interventions, and yet for others remembering as a way to forget or erase the past and present, images establishing a relationship with the past on Oaxaca's walls today—and the responses to these images—are anything but simple or linear. What is certain is that, whether interpreted to be offering nostalgic yet generative flights of fancy or scrutinized and lambasted for a lack of textbook accuracy, the past and images of the past continue to generate many and multiple points of view and competing subjects in Oaxaca's present.

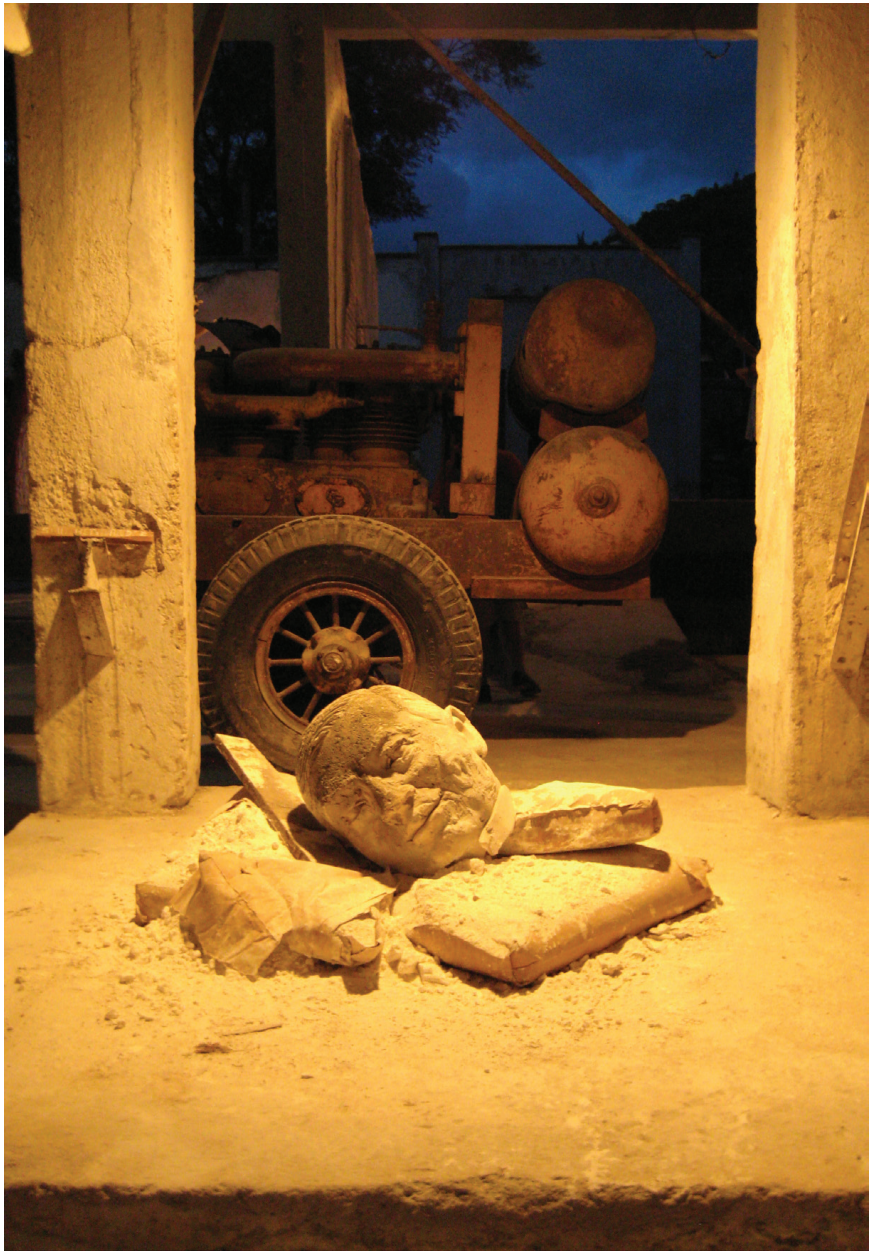
In the *zócalo* or on the walls of Oaxaca, Marx, Engles, Lenin, and Stalin might one day just as easily find themselves next to Villa and Zapata or Flores Magón and Tin Tan. In Oaxaca's *zócalo*, the remaining laurel trees from the 1870s give shade to a kiosk installed in 1901—which stands in the spot occupied by a fountain from 1739 that lasted until 1857—all in a plaza first designed in 1529. From architects to artists to activists and government administrators, differing interests and intersections with Oaxaca's pasts have produced interesting and competing mnemonic maps that do have political and social traction in the present. As entangled as Oaxaca's famous quesillo—imagine a bocce ball made of a single strand of braided string cheese—rather than seek to unravel the threads, what is most interesting about Oaxaca's complex memories are the ways in which these argue against any stable notion of the past.

Benjamin found that in becoming unhinged from tradition, the past was free to become the fuel for today's revolutionary transformation. Dislocated and unmoored, drifting off into the unknown, it also appears as if today, more than ever, recovering the past is a constant concern. In Oaxaca, for some memory is celebrated for its capacity to conceive and imagine otherwise, yet for others memory is called upon and challenged to remember the past as it was, faithfully. While it is the site of a select and selective process of inclusion and exclusion, while it is a site of subjection and subject formation, memory is *also* an imaginative encounter, a form of connective and collective tissue that may at times present an impossible reality and endless forgetting, yet is also the site of an articulation, of a beginning that presents what perhaps never was or never will be, but nevertheless at the moment is.

Different sections of this chapter have argued for the importance of the discursive nature of remembering or the way in which contested experiences shape social and personal recollection. At other times, the spatialization of memory and its location in our embodied habits has been stressed in order to discuss the significance of memory for our subjective identities and for group belonging. This section sought to highlight the issue of our investment in the past not simply as the ground for a historical genealogy of the present but more importantly as an imaginative landscape and repository

that connects and speaks to our current hopes and dreams. “The movement is reflected in the question of art. The art transcends, it remains. Benito Juárez with his beret. Benito Juárez, icon of the struggle conjugated with Che, another icon”—words spoken during a seminar in June of 2008 at UniTierra by Juan Manuel, an anthropology student from Michoacán. The fact that these stencils were no longer present in the streets or that, when in the streets they lasted but a short time before being erased, clearly did not mean that they did not leave an impact or have an effect. The art of the movement did indeed leave lasting images of the past for the imagination of other futures. If “Zapata Vive, La Lucha Sigue” (Zapata lives, the fight continues), as the popular chant continues to proclaim in Oaxaca, this is so because, throughout this and other social struggles in the past, the idea and ideals that Zapata stands for are kept alive in images that continue to visually narrate, to reclaim and spatialize, and in the practice of their production, to embody and articulate the utopian desires buried in that past now brought to the present.

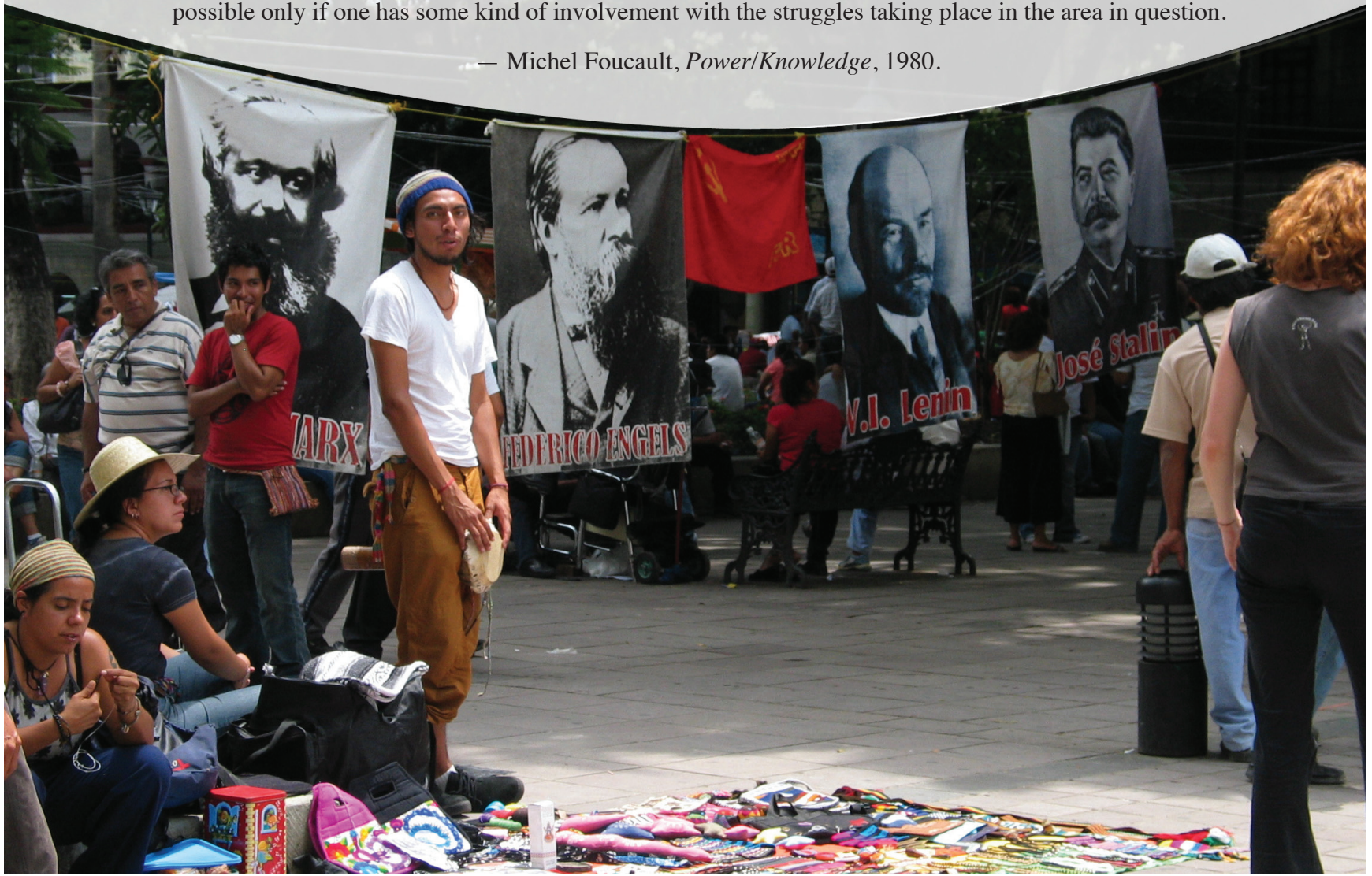
With Benjamin, I see an opening to view and imagine these not just as citations or reproductions of historical figures with known legacies, feats, and facts, but to see them with the eyes of a conjurer and mystic as points of entry to utopian wish images in need of redemption. To conclude, then, Appendix B of the dissertation offers a montage of historical figures that animated Oaxaca’s walls as they were represented there in 2007 and 2008. Although they typically appeared on the walls of Oaxaca without any historical framing, I offer a brief contextual note to locate the figure for those unfamiliar with the figures shown, yet remind that, on the walls, it was precisely the interpretive articulation of the past and present that every viewer used to decipher the connection between these figures and Oaxaca’s present (and future) that produced political sparks that animate the politics of remembering in Oaxaca.



Compañeros, Commodities, and the Romance of Revolution

If one is interested in doing historical work that has political meaning, utility and effectiveness, then this is possible only if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question.

— Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 1980.



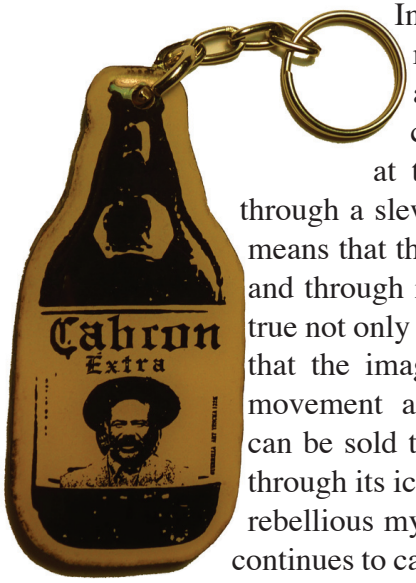
Rugged mountains come to rest against the Pacific Ocean along much of the coast of Oaxaca. Moving north towards the state of Guerrero, the mountains retreat slightly and it is here, on the narrow but extensive strip known as the *Costa Chica*, or Small Coast, that a significant Afro-Mexican community resides. Largely isolated by the lack of roads leading to the area, it is said that communities here continue to practice many cultural traditions brought to Mexico by their African ancestors. The "Son de la Artesa," for example, is a dance where a long, hollowed out log forms the main instrument and centerpiece of the performance. Moving rhythmically atop the wooden log, dancers footsteps add to the music. In the city of Oaxaca, the *cajón* (empty box) is similarly used both as a platform for dancers to perform on as well as an instrument adding to a song's cadence and sound.

This instrument is an important part of the musical culture of the state and, through the group *Raíces*, formed an important part of the music of protest in the city. After all, the women from the group who danced in pairs or alone atop the empty box became a focal point of a ritual of resistance replayed in countless performances of the "son de las barricadas" that I saw before or after APPO marches and in various events that movement participants organized. As I found out one day when attending a local café with foreign friends visiting Oaxaca, the sound of the *cajón* was also present in many performances of the "son de las barricadas" by *Raíces* in indoor venues with a cover charge that I did not see. With the government accused of commercializing and profiting from popular culture in events such as the Guelaguetza, it is important to also address the issue of the commodification of the popular movement since 2006. The problem of how to sustain a social movement's ideals, energy, and dreams while also feeding the revolutionary body so that it can struggle another day are not new; yet, at what point does selling the revolution become selling out the revolution? As the last chapter touched upon, in a moment when Ernesto Che Guevara or Emiliano Zapata are instrumental in selling everything from T-shirts to trinkets by being symbols of resistance and revolution, clearly capitalism, commodities, and the romance of revolution are not mutually exclusive.

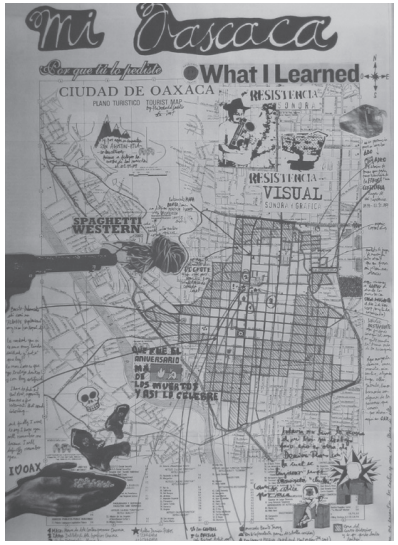
The graphic image and imagination of recent events in Oaxaca, both in Mexico and abroad, largely runs through the images that ASARO and others paint on the streets as these find their way to the memorabilia and souvenirs about APPO and the social conflict that both locals and visitors purchase and collect. Given that the image of Oaxaca's social movement as a revolutionary struggle has been carried across local, national, and international channels, it needs to be taken seriously not just in relation to the identity of the collective subject of resistant Oaxacans, but also in relation to their material economy and to the general economy of desire for

revolution. Via songs or stencils, videos, posters, prints, or T-shirts, and whether at ambulant stalls in the *zócalo* or in high priced boutique art stores near Santo Domingo, the Oaxacan revolution sells.

At APPO's third congress in the fall of 2007, for example, Sonia Venegas of the "Colibrí Colectivo Libertario" (Hummingbird Libertarian Collective) noted that people should feel pride in the movement as she sold me a 2008 calendar with images from the conflict in 2006. Each month features one color photograph with a written statement below. The calendar was both a graphic statement offering a perspective on what had occurred, yet also a means by which to assure that in 2008—and into the future—the struggle continued daily and did not slip into forgetfulness. The text for June thus reminds that, "We lifted 1,500 barricades. We stopped the terrorist groups of the police and the paramilitaries of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz." The accompanying photograph shows a barricade in the city center from 2006 and prominently features a young boy wearing a gas mask and a grey T-shirt with the Nike logo at the center. With one of the primary fronts in APPO's discourse being the neoliberal capitalist empire, this image speaks to the permeation of international corporations into even the most marginalized of local Oaxacan communities for, after all, this is a young, local revolutionary fighter with the banner of the enemy across his chest. Nike—victory—but by whom and for whom? APPO, Nike®, neither? Unwittingly, the image and calendar speak to the everyday sites of a contradiction and confrontation related to the tension between making, consuming, and selling (out) the revolution. Exchanging the calendar for cash, Sonia was quick to tell me that all proceeds go to support the victims of Oaxacan government repression—a claim that, notwithstanding problematic questions of the boundaries of such a group, was also her response to this very tension.



In contemporary Oaxaca, the revolution is paradoxically both alive in and through people's continuing practices of struggle at the same time that its projection through a slew of products and media channels means that the social movement is also alive in and through its revolutionary branding. This is true not only insofar as some people have found that the image and imagination of the social movement as a revolution is profitable and can be sold to tourists, but also insofar as it is through its iconography and the aesthetics of its rebellious mythology that the social movement continues to capture the imagination of Oaxacans and those from abroad. From its inception, the imagination of the social movement as a consequential revolution was spurred on through images and has subsequently come to be imagined and re-lived through these images, sprouting a revolutionary aesthetic and style. Revolutionary narratives and images not only helped to make the collective subject of *el pueblo* in 2006, but—with the global nature of media and of the new-world border produced by economic migration (see Gómez-Peña 2001; Stephen 2007a)—these also continue to frame the place of *el pueblo*, the social movement, and of social struggle from Oaxaca to Oaxacalifornia.

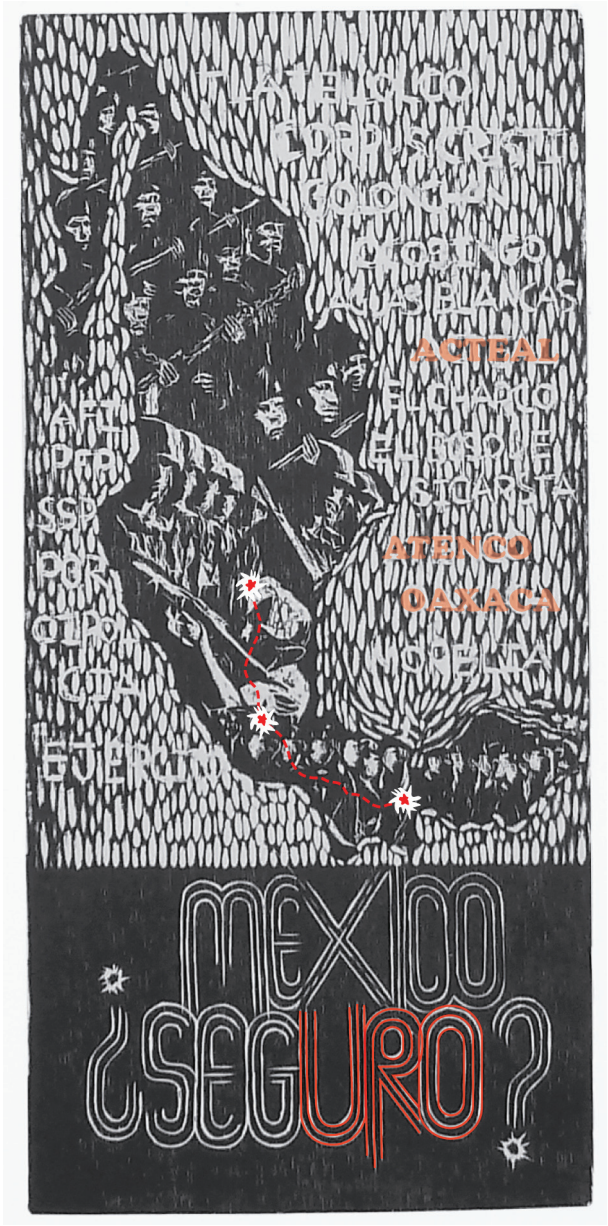


While it is impossible to locate a point at which resistance becomes another commodity for sale, in Oaxaca post 2006, it quickly became clear that as interest in the social movement grew, so too did the number of individuals that sought to profit from its popularity. Thus, in a magazine article late in 2007, Oaxacan cultural critic Edgar Saavedra wrote that, "impostors and artists from the tenements who profited from the movement were not wanting" (2007:45). Whether discussing the issue with ASARO members, with gallery owners and academics, or in conversations with locals, the question of the sincerity of many artists and intellectuals that claimed to be part of the social movement was a constant topic of conversation and colored collective calculations over whom one could trust or work with in present projects and struggles. The distinction between those that actively and sincerely supported the social movement and those that were jumping on the revolutionary bandwagon or playing at being subversive because it had become a trend or profitable fad was a recurrent theme; however, beyond ascertaining whether or not a person or group had been visible in the streets in 2006, there is no simple diagnostic test nor social marker that could establish an answer or consensus on this question. Furthermore, with Ulises Ruiz Ortiz having now finished his governor's term (2004–2010), and the PRI opposition candidate Gabino Cué Monteagudo of the social democratic Convergence party now governor, similar questions pertaining to the sincerity of artists and academics have surfaced with regard to their position vis-à-vis the new state government. Whether or not politicians, artists, and academics have found the social movement economically, politically, and professionally profitable has become an important issue of debate.

In the aftermath of social protests in Argentina, activist and writer Erick Lyle reports that the left-leaning local government of Buenos Aires no longer bothers to erase protest stencils as it did during the height of the crisis in the years around 2002. Talking to a street artist, Lyle quotes him as saying: "'I think they leave it up for the tourists. Don't you?'…. 'All the Americans want to come here to see 'The Revolution'" (2007:77). As Lyle writes, "street art has, indeed, become a tourist attraction. *Time Out Buenos Aires*, a guide book for tourists sold at every newsstand, has an article on stencil art and recommends the purchase of *Hasta La Victoria, Stencil!*, a glossy art book from late 2004" (2007:80). With photos of stencils from the crisis and a catchy title referencing a well-known Cuban revolutionary slogan coined by Argentine Ernesto Che Guevara, Lyle comments on how "the book clearly intends to link the stencil look with Latin American revolution. But with a hefty cover price of nearly $17 US and essays in English as well as Spanish, the book is clearly more directed towards tourists than Argentines" (2007:80). In Argentina today, while protest stencils have become a commodity that finds its way more often onto guidebooks and

museum rather than street walls, the political organization and collective participation of the neighborhood assemblies that gave rise to both a barricade sociality and to the stencil movement in Buenos Aires have become a thing of the past (see also Sitrin 2006).

In Oaxaca in 2011, even as the left-leaning state government has claimed an affinity for APPO, the political and social struggle continues and continues to sell; glossy books such as *Protest Graffiti Mexico: Oaxaca* ($27.95 US, in English), have joined many academic texts in publication, while ASARO's "Espacio Zapata" art-space has been joined by multiple other workshops promoting and selling the art of protest. If it has become more difficult to distinguish the boundaries between making and selling the revolution, it is nonetheless certain that, as the contemporary image and imagination of Oaxaca as a site of revolutionary struggle grew in 2006 and in the years immediately proceeding it, many people from other states in Mexico and abroad came to Oaxaca in search of revolutionary liberation. In mid-2008, ASARO artist Chucho and I discussed the marked increase in a class of travelers I had not noticed in trips to Oaxaca before 2006, namely, those who came to Oaxaca in search of what Chucho called the "route of revolution: Chiapas, Oaxaca, Atenco." Baptized by us as *mochileros* because of the oversized and completely stuffed backpacks that weighed down these youthful explorers from Europe and the United States, this new class of visitor represented a tourist boom for Oaxaca, even if not the class of tourists that the government's promotional campaigns aimed for. As the next section touches upon, whether in 2006 or 2011, the lasting impact and effect of the fact that the city remains on the itinerary of many seeking Mexico's route of revolution goes beyond its import to the feedback loop between the production and consumption of the revolution as a commodity.



The Global South and the Romance of Revolution

Long recognized for its indigenous populations, colonial center, archeological ruins, fine art, and popular cultural production, for many of its visitors prior to 2006, Oaxaca beckoned with the promise of a unique encounter with living folkloric cultures and world-renown historical surroundings. Tourism scholars and anthropologists have suggested that individuals often undertake journeys in order to provide a contrast to their daily surroundings (see Graburn 2001; Lévi-Strauss 1955; MacCannell 2001). Arguing that the urban middle classes living in Western cities suffer from feelings of anxiety that their modern lives are artificial, anthropologist Dean MacCannell suggests that, in traveling elsewhere, Western urbanites from the global north seek to find an authentic and traditional experience they feel they can no longer encounter at home (2001). If a focus on the traditional authenticity of Oaxacan culture meant that the marginalized condition of neighborhoods surrounding Oaxaca's historic World Heritage Sites were overlooked, after the social movement in 2006, Oaxaca rekindled and added fuel to the image and imagination of revolutionary insurrection from the marginalized global south that had already been stirred up by the Zapatista uprising in the neighboring state of Chiapas. Philosopher Walter Benjamin may have found storytelling dead in the age of information (1936a), yet images of daring confrontations and narratives of the audacious deeds of everyday Oaxacans inspired many people and have fed a heroic imaginative geography of Oaxaca's social movement as a contemporary revolutionary epic. Whether folkloric or incendiary, long before visitors set foot in Oaxaca, imaginative geographies have already situated or framed the place, people, and experience of Oaxaca.

As literary theorist Edward Said has pointed out in relation to the Middle East (1978, 1994), a critical consequence of the creation of enduring imaginative geographies of the global south in the moment of Western colonial expansion is that individuals continue to encounter the Other through representative lenses that always-already frame the experience in relation to its difference and contradistinction from the imagined geographies of "the West" (see also Gregory 1995, 2004; Mitchell 1988). Some foreign visitors that came through Oaxaca and ASARO's *taller* (workshop) expressed their attraction to the image of revolutionary insurrection precisely in relation to the gap between the global south and the West; however, rather than see the West as the placeholder for progress and as the horizon of the global future, these visitors expressed anxiety that, on the contrary, the marginalization of the global south and of places like Oaxaca is produced by Western decadence. For these visitors, their discernment of the place of the West, anxieties over their own complicity, and their perception of the virtues of Oaxaca's social movement has produced a particularly powerful romance of revolution.[i]

[i] Without having conducted research on foreign travelers in Oaxaca, I can only speak directly to concerns expressed by visitors I encountered principally in ASARO's workshop or at APPO events. I thus offer the following remarks on the romance of revolution specifically in relation to such travelers.

Oaxacan expressions of the romance of revolution from abroad can be taken as critical takes on the imagined geography separating and articulating the West and the global south. However, this critique often manifested itself differently depending on the dissimilar experiences and generational dynamics of its older and younger proponents. As political philosopher Susan Buck-Morss notes, for many individuals who grew up with the Cuban revolution and the Soviet Union, socialist dreamworlds entered into the construction of their fantasy spaces of childhood (2000a). After the fall of the Berlin wall, and now in adulthood, these utopian imaginations have returned in the form of nostalgic desires not simply for a world that was, but for a world that was imagined as being in the process of becoming a reality. Arguing for their close ties as modernist projects, Buck-Morss notes that one of the critical consequences of capitalism's dominant globalization is that the dreaming side of both socialist and capitalist modernity has faded, and along with it the imagination of better horizons. Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo has described the longing for something that one is complicit in having destroyed as imperialist nostalgia (1989); for many middle-aged visitors suffering from guilt over imperialist nostalgia, Oaxaca's social movement offered the romance of a revolution still in the making that could redeem the vision of social justice and equality perceived to be at the heart of socialism's utopian horizon or modernist progress and found wanting in the contemporary capitalist West.

For younger critics who grew up instead with Subcomandante Marcos, have followed or took part in protests against the World Trade Organization, or have attended World Social Forum gatherings, Oaxaca's social movement presented a continuation of ongoing efforts to both challenge current neoliberal capitalist horizons and create alternative social and political possibilities. In either case, the romance of revolution of Oaxaca's social movement allowed individuals from the West to relive the vision of movements for social change from the 1960s or 1990s and to imagine other socio-political horizons. With APPO's marches and assemblies epitomizing particular fantasies for a truly participatory democratic society, and with a discourse calling for a more evenhanded distribution of economic resources, Oaxaca's social movement presented a powerful affective pull on the West's faded and aged counterculture as well as for newer generations seeking a more equitable world in the wake of capitalist globalization and protests against the World Trade Organization.

For many individuals looking and coming to Oaxaca, social movements such as that of APPO offer a site in the present where desires and investments from the past and for the future may be actualized. As an imagined possible utopia, Oaxaca presents a screen for multiple Western projections and continuing political projects. For example, in *Protest Graffiti Mexico: Oaxaca*, where the story of APPO is told through stencils on the walls, author Louis E.V. Nevaer notes that teachers were repressed in the United States in the nineteenth century for teaching slaves and today women are denied an education and oppressed by the Taliban in Afghanistan before writing: "That war on the right to an education is now taking place in the Western hemisphere, this time in southern Mexico. In Oaxaca the war on teachers, women and the struggle for social justice picks up where the American Confederacy and the Taliban left off" (2009:25). To literally illustrate this point, Nevaer uses a photograph of an ASARO stencil of a crouching woman. The pairing of this text and the image of a woman whose head is covered by a speckled *rebozo* (shawl) and whose face is partially concealed creates a connection between these international sites, contexts, and struggles. These articulations between education and emancipation, however, reflect the interpretation and dreamworld of Nevaer as much as any implied or intended connection that the

ASARO artist who made the image may have planned or that its Oaxacan audience may have found. (This is the same image that appeared as a woodblock print in the "Abriendo Conciencia" show in chapter three, where the dress and sandals are more clearly defined and locate the woman as an indigenous Oaxaqueña rather than as an imagined Middle-Eastern Palestinian freedom fighter.)

As I have been arguing throughout the dissertation, the power of Oaxacan stencils to conjure up or hail an identification with the collective subject of *el pueblo* depends in part on the relational give and take between an individual and their interpretation of the image before them. The dreamworlds, desires, and experiences that each individual brings to the encounter, as well as how that individual partitions the distribution of the sensible that helps them make sense of the world strongly colors this interaction. Conceived and perceived as a revolutionary moment, for some Oaxaca's social movement presents an image of the continuity of global struggles and issues that have plagued humanity across the ages; as such, it presents both our failure to arrive at a present of social justice, yet also our desire to overcome worldly challenges.

¡El pueblo, unido, jamás sera vencido! Spoken in the present tense, whether or not the slogan highlights continuity with past struggles, its use in social movements continues to mark the temporality of the present with a future that is becoming. For example, the notion that through its capacity to come together "the people, united, will never be defeated" suggests that then, now, and tomorrow—as need be—people's solidarity and the revolutionary struggle will continue until, together, *¡Venceremos!* "we shall overcome." With the continuing circulation of images from 2006 and the creation of a stable discourse about APPO and URO, the stock mythology of the revolution provides a telegenic screen upon which multiple audiences looking to Oaxaca both within and from abroad project their on-screen fantasies and desires for change.

In the documentary *Examined Life*, political philosopher Michael Hardt spoke of his experiences with Latin American revolution during the 1980s and recounted how the romance of revolution from the global left at that time colored the social landscape not only of the global south but also in relation to imaginations of the politics of the possible for the prosperous global north. Thus, as Hardt remembered, in a meeting with students in El Salvador, "at a certain point a friend there said, 'Look, we are really grateful for these American comrades who come to help us. But it would be really, what would be really best for us, is if you all would go home and make revolution in the US. That would be really better than to come help us here.' And it was true, of course" (2010). However, as Hardt relates, the thought of going to the mountains and starting an armed cell in the United States presented not only practical challenges, but did not seem congruent with the political or social reality of the USA. The powerful draw and mystique of social transformation as only possible or more favorable in conditions of revolutionary struggle abroad produces multiple oversights, not the least of which is to fail to imagine the possibility to struggle for radical social change in places such as Europe or the United States.

If the messy political and social reality of the United States presents challenges to the thought and practice of revolution at home, the Oaxacan landscape painted by the romance of revolution presents the seemingly simple morality of a world divided between APPO and governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, or between good and evil camps—the continuation of a Manichean cold war order that, with the rise of terrorism and Islamic militancy at the forefront of the "axis of evil," many people continue to understand (see Fanon 1961 the colonial roots of this camp mentality). Whether in El Salvador in the 1980s or Oaxaca in 2006, the imagined geography of the romance of revolution produces reductive tropes that, by framing struggles through stark visions of good and evil, overlook what chemist and writer Primo Levi has termed the grey zone between good and evil (1986). As the dissertation has argued, whether in relation to the entangled historical relationship between Oaxaca's marginalized communities and the state's authoritarian government, or in relation to questions of struggling for or selling out the revolution, making and mobilizing the revolutionary collective subject of *el pueblo* through practices of struggle has not occurred without contradictions, tensions, and challenges.

In the year that I worked with them, ASARO's *taller* not only hosted many individuals from abroad interested in new artistic directions but also frequently hosted individuals like Hardt looking for the next revolution as well as myriad groups interested in social justice. As such, the group's workshop was home to newly found friends not only from Mexico but also from the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Finland, and the United States. During a discussion on politics in mid-September of 2008 with ASARO artist Yeska in which we addressed social struggle and debated the reach of worldwide capitalist corporations in Mexico, Yeska noted that the current struggles in Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Atenco were not really against foreigners as such, but against *el sistema* (the system). Given the global reach of the neoliberal system, Yeska was of the opinion that, rather than come to Oaxaca to look for change or to advise Oaxacans on how to achieve change, foreigners who wished to transform the world should struggle to transform the system in their countries. As he put it: "que ellos vayan a hacer su lucha y nosotros la nuestra" (let them go and make their struggle and we will make ours). Only then, as he noted, would each *pueblo* be able to treat the other with mutual respect and equal rights.

From afar, Oaxaca may beckon like the shinning crisscrossed gun-belt Emiliano Zapata wore across his chest but, despite the widespread permeation of images of APPO, the messy reality of Oaxaca's social movement remains largely unknown. As anthropologist Donald Moore has cautioned, academics need to be especially careful of the "dangers of romanticizing…remappings of resistance and according alternative geographies an insurrectionary, insurgent or emancipatory potential" (1997:88). Much as psychiatrist and political activist Frantz Fanon described the subsequent passionate attachment of formerly colonized individuals for the culture they were asked to sacrifice on the way to modernity (1956), for Western

academics and activists alike, part of the attraction of sites of struggle such as Oaxaca appears to be due to the overwhelming passionate attachment of the left for the idea and ideal of geographies of equality and social justice that they gave up on as possible or probable at home. Chasing the ghost of Zapata and looking for the next Che Guevara, however, what happens when, instead of finding Subcomandante Marcos in Oaxaca's urban jungle, one finds that the freedom fighters on the streets of the city are young rappers and anarchist punks that carry spray paint cans or are grandmothers waving pots and pans as they march rather than militant rebels in fatigues brandishing weapons in the hills?

With respect to the making of Mexican political protest art, and interesting disconnect existed between groups or individuals who expressed their interest in joining or supporting ASARO after seeing the group's art online or in the streets and their follow-through once they met the group and visited the *taller*. A definite gap existed between romantic imaginations of an encounter with contemporary Mexican muralists or reincarnations of the Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP), and the reality of marginalized youths struggling not just with police but also with the ongoing makeshift process of articulating together a working social and artistic collectivity. If the growing interest in ASARO's political art parallels a growing interest or passionate attachment in APPO and Latin flavored revolutions—whether in Chiapas, Bolivia, or Venezuela—the disparity between dreamworlds of alternatives to neoliberal capitalist lifeways and the reality of social struggle in Oaxaca, San Cristóbal, La Paz, or Caracas, may produce dismay or disillusionment in many.

Just as importantly, moreover, for locals actively involved in the social movement's struggles, the fixation with revolutionary political change and social utopias also has important repercussions. Yeska highlighted this one evening at an ASARO assembly in late March of 2008 when he spoke to the group of a proposal from prisoners who wanted support via stencils in the streets and art workshops in jail. As Yeska reported, for the prisoners, what was most important was "that they feel that we are still struggling, this is what they most want and which gives them support. That we also identify them because not everyone is Flavio Sosa. Not that they be identified as leaders but as pueblo." Shinning a flashlight on a dark and hidden corner, the prisoners and Yeska were pointing out that, *because* of the social movement, some people and causes had come to dominate the spotlight. A highly vocal activist, member of left-leaning political parties, and part of the provisional collective council of APPO, Flavio Sosa was presented as the poster boy for

political prisoners by the media when he was jailed in December of 2006. In protest marches, hundreds of people held up placards with his picture and the demand for "presos politicos libertad" (liberty for political prisoners). As such, the plight of many other Oaxacans who identified themselves as belonging to *el pueblo* but were sitting behind bars both for non-political and for political reasons unrelated to APPO were being overlooked. As the plight of the prisoners reminded everyone at the assembly that night, the sight lines of transformative revolutionary struggle in Oaxaca produced exclusions and local myopias that needed to be addressed.

As Michael Hardt's experience in El Salvador points to, it is not always the case that participation by people from outside the local community is perceived as positive or that encounters across difference yield desirable results. If the romance of revolution has its blind spots, however, and if many travelers to Oaxaca seek a dreamworld that may not exist as envisioned, the encounter between locals and foreigners in Oaxaca often nonetheless does produce new illuminations and not just omissions or oversights. As Mama Lucha reminded me when I brought up the issue of "revolutionary tourism" in February of 2008, "many fell in love with the APPO and became our brothers." Opportunities by foreigners to appreciate the hard work of social struggle and reality that Oaxacans were undertaking, and for Oaxacans to gain valuable perspectives and solidarity from abroad undoubtedly existed and nurtured the social movement. So, perhaps I ought not to be too harsh on those that came and still come to Oaxaca looking for the next revolution only to find that the revolutionaries are 17 or 71, wear Nike shirts or colorful *huipiles* (blouses), and listen to American rap music or Frank Sinatra. Many did, after all, create *vínculos* (bonds) with transformative potential.

Learning about Oaxaca and coming to support the struggles that Oaxacans were fighting for, rather than the change that others imagined they should be striving for, many who came to Oaxaca transformed their romance with an imagined revolutionary *pueblo* into active solidarity and participation with the social movement. Coming from Mexico City to Oaxaca in February of 2008, for example, Armando Garduño Acacio, Rosa Amelia Salcido Álvarez, and Daniela Hernández Nuñez were three such individuals. For their final bachelor's thesis project in communication at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, the trio of students decided to do a documentary of political stencils in Oaxaca. As such, over the better part of 2008, the documentary crew filmed the life of ASARO. Participating in everything from the making of stencils to their realization in the streets, walking with the group through marches, observing assemblies, talking with, drinking with, and living with ASARO members, ASARO's projects became their project and vice-versa.

Participating in the making of this documentary, ASARO members were pushed to consider how street art had developed and accompanied the social movement since its inception as well as reflect on the goals and effects that ASARO's practices of political art production endeavored and were accomplishing. Without ASARO members collaborating with the documentary film makers, and without the students collaborating with ASARO, perhaps it would have taken much longer to achieve these perspectives and insights. In viewing the finished documentary eight months

after having first met the students, one thing became evident on the improvised screen at ASARO's workshop that day. Rather than a representation speaking for the group or more generally for Oaxacan street art, *El Muro* (The Wall) was the product of a collaborative re-presentation, or what literary critic Gayatri Spivak would term a portrait rather than a proxy (1988).

Moreover, some artists with differing imaginations of the making of Mexican political protest art found other goals and effects upon meeting ASARO. Lester Doré, a talented printmaker from the United States was one such artist. Having come across ASARO prints in the *zócalo* during the sit-in strike in 2006, and finding them reminiscent of the work of the Taller de Gráfica Popular, Lester got to know and work with ASARO in two visits to Oaxaca and came to support the group's art and political efforts by organizing two ASARO exhibits in cities in the United States. As Lester told me in February of 2008 before departing to set up one of the exhibits, the aim of the shows was "to raise consciousness about the APPO, Oaxaca, poverty, and why we have so many illegal immigrants [in the USA]." In other words, based on his experiences working with ASARO and organizing exhibits of the group's work, Lester found that the prints were much more than beautiful art connected to a history of political printmaking in Mexico, but also a tool for greater understanding of what is happening in Oaxaca and Mexico

at the moment; moreover, that they could be a tool by which to better understand the human dimension of the often fractured relation between Mexico and the United States.

If Lester was genuinely impressed by and interested in ASARO's art, so too were ASARO artists impressed by and interested in Lester's display of solidarity with the group; solidarity that was evident not just in organizing ASARO exhibits in the United States, but more importantly in producing art with the group in Oaxaca. Indeed, when ASARO put out a call for members to create art protesting the lifting of trade restrictions on corn imports to Mexico from the United States on January 1, 2008, Lester produced a beautiful print that the group continues to use and exhibit. As with all work done by ASARO, the print does not have the artist's signature and bears only the group's name. As with all work done by ASARO, the wooden board on which Lester's print is carved can be found in the group's *taller* and belongs to the group. This print done by an American artist has now traveled and been hung as an ASARO artwork numerous times in museums, café's and University art galleries across the United States. Through his active participation with the group, Lester went from a curious tourist to a de-facto member of ASARO and both he and the group were richer for the encounter and exchange. In some cases, much

as the sweaty work of the shared practices of struggle transformed strangers at the barricades into *compañeros* (mates or comrades) in 2006, collaborative labor between groups working for socio-political change in Oaxaca and visitors from abroad had the capacity to translate idealized calls for solidarity and social justice into practical acts with transformative potential.

Scholars such as sociologist John Holloway have argued that resistance is most productive through "struggles which are consciously prefigurative, in which the struggle aims, in its form, not to reproduce the structures and practices of that which it struggled against, but rather to create the sort of social relations which are desired" (in Raunig 2007:42). Although Holloway's emphasis on the importance of acts of resistance that do not have a takeover of the state as its focus is important, he nonetheless continues to cling to a vision of change as the outcome of a preconceived model where intentions draft a roadmap guiding actions and producing effects. However, as I am arguing in relation to the romance of revolution here, or more broadly in the dissertation in relation to the making of barricade sociality and the hard work needed to articulate together *el pueblo*, practices of struggle may achieve social change, yet they often do so via unforeseen paths or in relation to issues unrelated to the direction that social movement participants may have imagined as the pivotal goal at the outset. As intellectual and long-time resident of Oaxaca Gustavo Esteva has stated, social movements "are engines driven by experience, not by an imagined object or goal" (2007:19). Beyond intentions, roadmaps, or imagined future horizons, practices of struggle are themselves generative. A central contention and goal of the dissertation has been to demonstrate that social mobilization itself creates new interests, solidarities, and contingent futures that cannot be envisioned or preconceived prior to undertaking the processes of struggle itself.

Thus, that the social movement begun in Oaxaca in 2006 mobilized millions and yet was unable to remove governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz is unexpected and impressive. That APPO marches, assemblies, and barricades succeeded in uniting socialist and anarchist factions, wives, homemakers and street youths, and was able to articulate together the collective subject of *el pueblo* is remarkable and was unforeseen. Assessing the situation in 2006, moreover, few could have foretold that APPO would propel groups such as ASARO to come together. As the next section addresses, however, even fewer may have foreseen that, well into 2011, ASARO would continue to struggle for social and political change while, on the march, the solidarity and promise of APPO has largely unraveled.

Dirty Pasts, Ambivalent Presents, and Unknown Futures

In Mexico, as both the perpetuation of URO's power and the rise of APPO demonstrate, the bleak reality of repression and authoritarianism and the romance with the unrealized utopian ideals of Emiliano Zapata or Benito Juárez refuse to lie buried and continue to shape social and political subjects. Thus, on October 2nd, 2008, different protest groups in Oaxaca convened competing marches to commemorate the grim 40th year anniversary of the Mexican government's massacre of student protestors and sympathizers at the plaza of Tlatelolco in Mexico City. Given Oaxaca's recent events, the parallels between the surprise massacre of untold numbers attending a peaceful rally, the federal government's repression through military force of the student movement of 1968, and the subsequent cover-up and impunity of those involved were an uncanny history all too familiar and real for Oaxacans. Happening just ten days before Mexico hosted the 1968 summer Olympics, a sporting event that the Mexican government dubbed the "games of peace," the Tlatelolco massacre has provided an unfortunate model from the Mexican government's dirty past that has continued to shape Mexico's political subjectivity throughout the last four decades.

Yet again, however, the past has also provided another example of how Mexicans have continued to mobilize to fight for social and political change. In the morning of October 2nd, 2008, Oaxaca's teachers union organized a march to keep the memory and lessons of this important event alive. Gathering its usual numbers, the march took its now customary route starting in the outskirts of the city and finishing in the *zócalo*. In the afternoon, a student association affiliated with the Marxist-Leninist FPR organization called for their own march to start at the main University (UABJO) and end in the *zócalo*. At the same time as the FPR, the anarchist factions of the city organized a contending march taking off towards the *zócalo* from a different location. Two years after the height of the social movement, the rivalry between communist and anarchist perspectives was visibly breaching APPO's seemingly united front. Though these groups had been united under APPO's umbrella in 2006—and indeed continued to profess an affiliation to the broader social movement in 2008—it was clear that these marches were not only commemorative, but were also contemporary political and spatial contests over the direction of the social movement, with socialist groups calling for APPO to make full use of the number of its supporters to put forward a political candidate for electoral office and anarchist groups pointing to this as a traitorous betrayal of the ideals and practices of the social struggle.

At the University around three in the afternoon, if it was not for the red flags they were carrying, the small gathering of people before the main gates could have easily been misinterpreted as a group of

students gathered to smoke and chat outside as they discussed Lenin and the weather. Though not many in number, it was clear by the barricaded street and their restless bodies that they had the resolve to march across the city. While admiring their determination and waiting for the group to grow so the march could get going, I spent some time reading a collage that they had mounted on brown Kraft paper and hung on the University gates. In broad strokes, one side told the story of the 1968 student movement. Panels on the other side, however, asked whether or not the deaths of the students and subsequent commemorations had transformed or taught Mexicans anything: "what remains today after this day is silence. If there are indeed marches and commemorations of this date, it would be best to ask oneself if it was worth it. If in reality these deaths changed something and that simply 'remembering' them helps in some way. For us this is living in the past, not seeing what to change in the present, and self-flagellation with memories that in the end taught us something that we have not been able to socially apply." In a direct manner, the collage asked its readers to consider what commemorating or remembering the past has to teach us if it does not lead to transformations in the present, if it means simply recycling errors and continued wishes for better tomorrows without any action today? Considering that question in Oaxaca on that day of commemorative marching, what was most interesting was the way in which the distant past produced the opportunity for resistant Oaxacans to get together once again as a collective subject in order to continue to call for and demand change, and yet how distant the ambivalent present seemed from the recent events of two years ago when socialist and anarchist groups had been able not only to imagine a shared future but to march together towards one.

Just before the FPR march got going, I caught up with ASARO artist Teak, who had brought some friends and a stencil reading "Mexico 68 / Ni perdon Ni olvido" (Mexico 68 / Neither forgiven Nor forgotten). I was surprised to see him at this march because of his anarchist political inclinations and social circles; however, as he mentioned later, he did not know, and was surprised to find out, that there were multiple marches for that day; but, being there, he was certainly going to take advantage of the march to put up his stencil. As the small group slowly got going towards the *zócalo*, an anarchist friend informed me via cell phone that the anarchists had just started moving and were marching quickly. I walked with the youths of the FPR for a kilometer or so before breaking off to take a shortcut to the main plaza. Given the rivalry and tensions between the two groups—and the purposeful intent to hold separate

marches—as I sped along to reach the anarchists, I wondered a bit anxiously about what would ensue if the two met up along the road or later on in the *zócalo*.

A few blocks from the square, however, these thoughts were blotted out by a din of noise and sound. Yelling and banging on posts, cars, and the sliding metal doors that businesses were quickly shutting, I heard the anarchist wave well before it hit me. Dressed almost exclusively in black and almost all using bandanas or ski masks to cover their faces, the youthful anarchist march was more than a few blocks long and was leaving a mass of broken glass and spray paint across the businesses and homes in its path. As it quickly became clear, the overwhelming favorite among the slogans sprayed across the route was some variation of "2 de oct no se olvida" (the 2nd of October is not forgotten). At times simply shortened to just "2 de oct," the slogans did not get much more specific than this not because the anarchists did not have anything else to say, but rather because the pace of their gait was almost that of a military drill march and this left little room for those spraying to write much else. As Teak or any other ASARO member knows, the numbers and bodies during a protest march offer cover and protection to put up a stencil, but anyone left behind the marchers while finishing an image is much more likely to be a policeman's prey.

Today, however, no police presence was visible or made itself known during either the smaller and more controlled FPR march or the larger and rowdier anarchist march. As in 2006, the streets of the center were absent of any and all signs of the state government's repressive apparatus. Seeing this, the anarchists took full advantage. That street walls were literally awash with the October 2nd tag was just the beginning of it. The cacophony continued as the anarchists reached the *zócalo*, where they quickly ran around the central square twice in a high trot before starting to occupy the kiosk and the plaza. Just as anarchists began to take down the Mexican flags, banners, and other paraphernalia that remained from the celebration of Mexican Independence on the 16th of September and continued to adorn the square, I could see from afar that the FPR march entered the *zócalo*. Finding himself caught between the two competing groups, Teak told me later that he started to jump up and down like the anarchists around him who were eager to start a confrontation and were shouting "traidores, traidores" (traitors) at the FPR marchers.

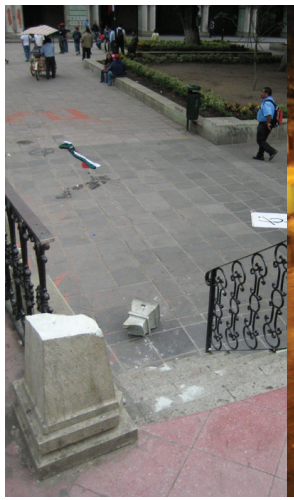
In the end, nothing much happened. The FPR marchers moved onward to meet up with other socialist groups who had set up a tent next to the cathedral and the anarchists continued to gather at the kiosk. However, Teak—who had been in the worst of the barricade confrontations with police in 2006—did express that he felt concerned by the palpable tension and the feeling that anything could happen. The rivalry between anarchist and socialist groups might be historically informed, but it also reflects a broader schism among APPO members in general: the takeover of the state as the road to change (whether through electoral politics or revolution), or the abolishment of the state as the means to produce change (by social mobilization or by force). Despite the fact that both groups agree that the present social and political situation is untenable and, ultimately, both seek the abolishment of the state, even if under different time frames, differing imaginations of the path towards that goal, and the fact that they no longer march, hold assemblies, or make barricades together has meant that the barricade sociality that brought the two sides to the APPO table has dissolved. Rival protest marches and the temporal and spatial separation in the *zócalo* of APPO, socialist, and anarchist contingents on this day spoke volumes with regard to the fraying of practiced solidarities.

However, rather than pay attention to the arriving communist contingent, most of the sizable anarchist group was busy crowding around a few of their fellow anarchist *compañeros* trying to burn one of the banners with the colors of the Mexican flag. Finding that the banner's synthetic fabric was highly flame resistant, they persisted in using their spray paint cans as flamethrowers until they persevered. The burnt flags, broken green cantera stone surrounding the kiosk, and the slogans from hundreds of empty spray cans that covered the center demonstrated anarchists' deep seated anger and very real hatred of the Oaxacan government in particular and of government authority in general. The state governor's former palace and now nearly empty museum space became the target not only for an overall coat of spray paint but also for a rain of stones and found objects that smashed through most of its upper-story windows. Nonetheless, much of the destructive character of the event was also high theater. At one point, as three anarchists finally got the flag banner to light in flames, they were surrounded by a wall of media photographers forming a ring around them while a larger circle of anarchists surrounding the mayhem cheered wildly, yet consciously left ample room for photographers to gather around. After burning the kiosk decorations and breaking windows in the palace, some anarchist youths hung around to listen to short speeches from fellow marchers but most dispersed through city streets without so much as one police officer arriving on the scene.

Though most eateries surrounding the *zócalo* cleared out when the anarchists arrived, throughout all of this the different groups of ambulant sellers that accompanied political events continued to promote their wares on the plaza. Across the square, under the watchful eye of the customary banners of Marx, Engles, Lenin, and Stalin, the FPR event continued with a series of speeches blasted

from loudspeakers as FPR members sat under the white tent or stood around the perimeter holding communist flags, flanked by the protective southern façade of the Cathedral and surrounded by street sellers peddling everything from cheap CDs to spicy corn on the cob. Lengthy invectives against government repression and sermons commemorating the seventh anniversary of Oaxacan Sergio Barrios, the First Secretary of the Communist party of Mexico, sonically enveloped the space.

Meanwhile as was the case in the streets and in the square that day, on city walls surrounding the *zócalo*, stencils from both Marxist-Leninist and anarchist groups competed awkwardly for space as they sought out every usable inch or crowded in next to or on top of each other. By the time everyone finally dispersed that evening, the visible volumes of spray paint, broken windows, and *zócalo* stones had materially transformed the city center in ways that no one could ignore and which were certain to get a reaction out of people. While most responses from the media and by Oaxacans in general focused on the divided nature of APPO protests that day, many also commented on the destruction of the *zócalo* and businesses as petty vandalism that did not offer any viable social or political project but was, rather, an opportunistic use of the social movement by youths who simply wanted to rebel. On this day, rather than help produce a barricade sociality that could articulate the collective subject of *el pueblo* and thereby strengthen the social movement, these protest marches had only weakened and divided it further. As that day's events pointed to, and as the dissertation has argued, APPO and *el pueblo* form an uncertain community whose tenuous articulation is grounded by shared practices of struggle. As such, the parameters of identification with *el pueblo* or the reasons for an affinity with the social movement and collective struggle do not form set boundaries but are always in production and, at times, this production creates frictions and tensions that both nurture and challenge this collective subject.



At a gallery opening that night, I discussed that day's events with ASARO members Teak and Chichas, and Carlos Franco, a talented graphic designer who often worked with ASARO to create posters for its events. All agreed that the tension between FPR and anarchist factions was only increasing and that, as a result, APPO was losing its capacity to sustain solidarities from existing supporters or to create interest in others in joining. Chichas contrasted the inability of APPO to continue to articulate anarchist and socialist groups together and the range of political affinities in ASARO by stating

that, for him, "what I like is the unity in difference of ASARO." As Chichas well knows, however, this unity has not come easily for, as the dissertation has attempted to demonstrate, it has only been through the process of learning to debate, deliberate, and craft the commons at assemblies and through collective art practices that ASARO has been able to articulate together a collective and to demonstrate ways in which practices of struggle may continue to articulate social formations across difference. Looking back to the recent past and thinking about what groups such as ASARO were doing, Carlos Franco noted that, "in its moment, what the APPO had was all this creativity but this moment has passed and today is another moment and what we have to do is to try to sit down, to heal all this rupture that has occurred and this is what we are trying to do." As early as 2008, however, not many groups seemed interested in tackling this rupture; moreover, given the internal divisions visible in that day's events, the possibility to simply negotiate a shared sense of collectivity into being seemed slim. Adding to the uncertainty over the social movement's viability going forward, it was notable that different factions had turned against each other instead of working with each other as they had two years earlier when shared practices of struggle and a collective dialogue had produced a common search for alternative political and social futures. Perhaps the smartest thing that government functionaries and police forces did that day was simply not to show up and let these competing groups further foment and demonstrate their differences out in the open.

Sociologist Michael Keith has suggested that, "a politics of the possible must inevitably emerge from a sustained engagement with the empirical, not a naïve romance of the real but instead a commitment to address the specific and the particular" (1997:279). Empirically, what protest marches and the conflict on October 2nd, 2008, point to are the strains in APPO and the disarticulation of the social movement's collective subject. Whether in relation to the arduous labor of making the populist collective subject of *el pueblo*, or in relation to the schisms that fracture its combative front, addressing the specific and particular nature of Oaxaca's protest movement should thus provide pause in romanticized imaginative geographies or revolutionary resistance. However, rather than lament the situation or see the internal conflict within APPO as a lost opportunity for Oaxacans to create social and political change, perhaps the lesson to remember is that conflict

and contestation are central to social struggle, for it is principally through conflict and contestation that, as philosopher Jacques Rancière notes, communities create political subjects and contest the given distribution of the sensible (2000).

However, if it is through conflict that communities debate and define the parameters of social experience and transform the status quo, then conflict between antagonistic groups must be understood as central to transformative social and political practices. Rather than imagining the aim of social movements and democratic political practices to be the inclusion of formerly marginalized social groups into a more unified, unfractured community, a central tenet of the dissertation is that it is through the productive labor in the tensions, frictions, and challenging antagonisms faced in *making* a collective subject through practices of struggle that the promise for social and political change are to be found. For APPO women and youths, transforming their place in society did not come through legislative changes granting them rights to the city, but rather through challenges to the status quo that came about through conflict and antagonism.

While APPO participants made changing political leadership their principal goal, it is impossible to say whether or not the place of these combative women and youths may have come under such scrutiny and transformation had APPO been able to depose Oaxacan governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz in 2006. Despite this fact, the imaginative geography of what the road to social change looks like continues to run through the revolutionary takeover of the state or through the power of the people to affect social change through democratic processes. While cultural theorist Stuart Hall famously pointed out that politics and political struggle offer no guarantees (1986), much mainstream political activism remains mesmerized by the mystique of state power and is spellbound by the allure of discourses of representative democracy promising power to the people. Failing to see the deep crisis and contradictions that contemporary discourses of democracy engender, as philosopher Henri Lefebvre wrote, the idea of revolution remains that of "a political change at the level of the state" (1974:422). As an alternative, Lefebvre invites us to consider how revolution might be "founded on the permanent participation of the 'interested parties,' with their multiple, varied and even contradictory interests. It thus also presupposes confrontation" (1974:422). One of the principal lessons of Oaxaca's social movement is precisely to contest the state-based thinking of the imaginative geography of revolutionary political change or of social transformations via democratic processes.

In light of URO's enduring power or APPO's dissolving collectivity, it might be tempting to dismiss Oaxaca's social movement as a forgettable or failed revolution. However, while the outcome of the social movement's collective actions and its practices of struggle may not be certain, and while their capacity and power to engender transformation may seem fleeting, it is precisely because collective stories like Oaxaca's are wrapped in contingency that they are so powerful; this is so because it tells us that, despite the collective discourse and imagination in Western

nations of struggles against authoritarianism in the global south as manifestations of the democratic intentions of communities in struggle, social mobilizations neither follow a roadmap nor always produce imagined or intended political effects.

Indeed, despite championing social mobilization in the Middle East as manifestations of a democratic movement that United States media has termed the Arab Spring, anxieties today in Washington D.C. and Brussels over the makeup of combative forces in Cairo or Tripoli point to the fact that social mobilizations do not follow a roadmap and that their social and political outcomes are less than certain. While questions about the makeup of groups in social struggle are legitimate, rather than focus nervously and apprehensively on whether or not members of groups with an Islamic fundamentalist bend are amongst the combative crowd in Cairo or Tripoli, however, perhaps Oaxaca's social movement can remind us to make room as well for the transformative power and potential of social movements to produce new political subjects. That is, that it is not always the case that the subjects that take to the streets and the social relations of the combative community are the same at the outset of social struggles as they are as a result of undertaking practices of struggle.

In closing, though *el pueblo's* active resistance in Oaxaca may be more pedestrian than the take over of the state, and though it may soon be forgotten or overshadowed by the next spectacular revolution—whether in Libya or Lebanon—its collective footprint is certain to be lasting. As Yeska reminds, however, don't wait for the next revolution to begin in the global south, whether in El Salvador or Eritrea, call your *compañeros* and *compañeras*, pick up your spray can, stencil, or sign and take to the streets, wherever you are.

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Appendix A: Defending Democracy at Houston's Station Museum

In March of 2008, we received visitors from Houston's Station Museum. They had heard about ASARO through a friend and were interested in exploring the possibility of showing the group's art in an upcoming exhibit, "Defending Democracy." After meeting with Museum director James Harithas and exhibit curator Alan Schnitger and having the opportunity to show them our art, they decided that we would be a good pairing for this show which would also include the art of Emory Douglas of the Black Panther Party and the local group Otabenga Jones & Associates. As part of the show, the museum asked ASARO if we could compose a written piece providing a context for our art. Given the distribution of talents within the group, its communal ethos of collaboration and cooperation, and given our interest and participation in ASARO as anthropologists, group member Francisco and I were entrusted with the task of writing the initial draft for the assembly to debate and revise. Using fieldwork material that we had accumulated up to that moment, conversations that we had with group members, previous written statements by the group, and our assessment of ASARO, over the next month Francisco and I collaborated to produce a draft. In a session in May, those gathered in an assembly read the written work and provided their critique. After the comments were incorporated into the text, the resulting work was sent to the museum in Houston and sections of it went up on the walls along with the group's art.

The Houston document addresses important themes that have been present throughout the dissertation: the importance of ASARO's art of protest as a practice of struggle that engages with the street and in doing so calls into question the public in public space as well as the ambivalent role of the street as a spectacle of individual consumption and site for the creation of community; how the indigenous practice of the assembly has been taken up by the group and the effects of this in suturing together or articulating a collective subject working with, rather than erasing, broad differences; and how ASARO's art both critiques and is enmeshed with Oaxaca's art market machine. Francisco and I, we, well…ASARO presents, then, a transcription of the full Houston text from May 27, 2008, in its English version.

ASARO, Art by the People and for the People

Although a movement of art for art's sake exists, art is not, or should not be, an abstraction of life but rather a bringing closer and reflecting on life—at least, that is what we think. What follows, then, is a bit of the context from which ASARO's art emerges and the reason why it exists. We invite you, then, to walk with us, to see with our eyes, to feel the texture of our lives, to savor our pains, and to hear the sounds of our Mexico.

Come with us, then, through the streets of our beautiful city of Oaxaca. Maybe you already know that it is a city that dates from colonial times and has over 500 years of history. Did you also know that it was an outpost of the Aztecs when they sought to countervail the growing power of a Zapotec king? Maybe you have already visited or have seen photos of the market, the zócalo, or Santo Domingo. Maybe you already have a painting from one of our famous Oaxacan School artists or a black or green clay pot, a rug or a wooden figure for which the popular artisans from our villages stand out. Now, at this red light, look at the clown doing cartwheels while a young boy swallows fire and others wash the windows of cars for two pesos. What do you say, should we buy some gum that the shoeless kids sell? No, don't get depressed, that is not my intention; I only wanted for you to see how beauty and poverty, joy and misery are here two sides of the same coin. Mexico is, after all, a country of high contrasts and the state of Oaxaca reflects this since it is not at all difficult to find here a million dollar house with a large car park and three cars next to a hut where a farmer lives with his donkey. Oaxaca is one of the most extreme expressions of this contrasting and arresting reality. Here in the city and state of Oaxaca the absence of services such as water, light, and infrastructure are the norm and affect the majority of people, save those who have economic means. Poverty, racism, and scorn for the indigenous that form the majority of inhabitants and for the black people who live on the coast is high in Oaxaca. Here in Oaxaca, for years the government's extreme and generalized corruption and the sale of Oaxacan's heritage have left their mark. And, without a doubt, this continues to be a beautiful city, a city that Oaxacans continue to be proud of.

This is the split reality that defines the two (and more) Mexicos. This has been the divided reality of a country where the bourgeoisie was nationalist until the presidency of Salinas de Gortari. This is the divided reality of neoliberal globalization that has penetrated not only the discourse of Los Pinos, the presidential palace, but is also heard daily in the streets of the most marginalized villages of the country. This is the divided reality of a capitalist system without breaks that has made Oaxaca one of the most impoverished states of all of Mexico. This was a reality that was accepted as the norm here in Oaxaca until governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz arrived in December of 2004—which changed everything. It was a bitter election where it looked like the PRI, the political party that Ulises belongs to, would loose the state's governorship for the first time since the party was founded in 1929. However, during the night when the votes were counted, the system counting the votes fell mysteriously three times, and each time that the machines woke up, the number of votes in favor of Ulises inexplicably increased until he was finally ahead by 45,000 votes. For many, the PRI stole the election. This in itself is no great novelty, but what Ulises did as governor transformed everything. For starters, he decentralized the governing powers in the capital; after over 500 years of having the powers of the church and state together in the heart of the city, Ulises converted the governor's palace into a museum—today it is almost empty and, if you wish and have the money to do so, you can rent it out for parties. Similarly, the building that once housed the legislative powers is today a theater. Effectively, the protest

marches that once passed by the legislative house and ended in front of the governor's palace find themselves today without a politician's eyes or ears to see or hear them.

These would not be the only transformations that Oaxacans or the city would suffer at the hands of Ulises for, with a small Napoleon complex, and without citizen's participation, Ulises began an urban renewal project that, in maiming Oaxaca's beautiful architectural expression, also redefined Oaxacan identity. Let me give you a few examples. During the course of 2005, in the Plaza de la Danza square, Ulises changed the green masonry for which the city is known worldwide for cement; he razed various trees while remodeling the El Llano park, the most important in the city; he pushed forward construction works along the highway that crosses the Cerro del Fortín, Oaxaca's most important hill and a highly symbolic space, but with such shoddy engineering that it caused a tremendous landslide that threatened the community at the foot of the hillside; despite protests, he demolished an entire block of the city in the historic neighborhood of Jalatlaco in order to build a first class bus station; he ordered the remodelation of the zócalo, during which, while replacing the green masonry for cement, two of the gigantic Laurel trees that gave shape and shadow to the square fell down—one, as if pointing to the guilty, fell onto the ex-governor's palace. And, if that were not enough, he proposed a light and sound extravaganza for the ruins of the ancient Zapotec city of Monte Albán—this project, fortunately, was never realized.

Other projects could be mentioned but, to finish speaking of the city's trampling—and not to give more importance to a man that, in the end, is simply a puppet of the system—let me just say that there are rumors that the remodelation of the zócalo alone cost over 70 million dollars, much of which is thought to have gone to Roberto Madrazo, friend of Ulises and the PRI's candidate for president. Let me also tell you that the company responsible for the construction of many of these works was that of Ulises' brother, apparently a second-class restorer. These works enraged many Oaxacans, but it was the unexpected way in which Ulises took care of the annual teacher sit-in that was the final drop that took us to the events of 2006. Have you heard?

For more than two decades, on teacher's day, the 15th of May, the Oaxacan teachers union realized a sit-in encampment in the zócalo to demand better conditions for schools and for students as well as better salaries for teachers. And, for more than two decades, an agreement was reached through negotiations with the government and the sit-in encampment was lifted. However, in the early hours of the 14th of June of 2006, Ulises sent police forces to remove the encampment. Teachers and their sleeping families were awoken by tear gas, firearms, and by the force of thousands of police in riot gear and forced to flee. Word spread quickly and, a few hours later, when the teachers had gotten organized and began to confront the armed police forces, they were not alone. In the course of the next few days, what had started as an annual sit-in by teachers had become a social movement composed of various organizations and members who demanded that Ulises resign his post. This assemblage of students, housewives, left-leaning groups, street crews, unions and professionals, indigenous groups, teachers, and the Oaxacan population in general came to be known as the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, or APPO. The APPO erected a massive encampment in the center, took control of local radio and television stations, and used the walls of this World Heritage Site to disseminate their message. Hastily constructing barricades to defend themselves from incursions by paramilitary groups and by the police, confrontations between the APPO and various armed groups that backed Ulises frequently became violent, with street battles occurring in the center, the university, and in other public

spaces. In communities around the state, various municipal palaces were taken over by the people of the same towns and were deemed autonomous communities.

More than revolutionary or reformist, the APPO was truly composed of a great variety of political expressions. Since many saw the government structure precisely as a great part of the problem, the APPO was not planning to take over the government but was rather looking for a way in which to open up a dialogue within society in general in all its diversity that would bring about a more equitable relationship within society and between those that governed and the governed. And, for six months, the barricades, the encampment, the marches, the graffiti in the streets, and the assemblies really did transform the city and society.

And that is how we met one another. We began to recognize each other while doing political graffiti and stencils in the streets during marches. The Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca, or ASARO, was born in the face of the APPO's call for all sectors of society to organize and join the movement. It was the selfsame movement of 2006 that not only brought us together, but which also impelled us to create art with a socio-political content. Its effervescent call to social struggle and strong emotions of the possibility of coming change pushed us to create images with a social content. The movement made us look, reflect on, and change, and it is because of this that it no longer seemed possible to us to paint a bowl of fruit. The selfsame political movement provided us the model and led us to make a commitment to make images that would help or promote what was being proposed in that moment and until today.

Art flourished in the trenches where the people were taking refuge and, through graffiti and stencil, it came out onto the streets where the people were openly manifesting. We are talking, then, of a social revolution that also had its artistic component. Before 2006, what you saw in the streets was almost exclusively graffiti and the great majority of it was composed of the tags of youth who were looking to demarcate their territory. Its public was limited to urban street crews and to youths in general. The transition to stencil and to an art made by and for society occurred during the movement's evolution and was not something that was planned or thought through but was something that happened in practice and evolved aesthetically and politically during the duration of the struggle. Now, it is important to state that, then as now, the evolution or aesthetic question was never the most important. It might have been the case that they were aesthetically beautiful or well done, but the main idea was to find images that helped the people to struggle and to continue to find a social and personal transformation. Definitively, aesthetics were of a second order after the social and political question. When people took to the streets to create graffiti and stencil, they were not taking to the streets with the thought of putting forth something aesthetic but rather were looking to put forward a message that would reach people. In ASARO, the socio-political message that an artwork or action has is what defines its importance, not if the technique is precise or posits an artistic evolution. Be they members of artistic collectives or housewives that had a complaint and wanted to express it, this was also the case for the great majority of those that placed their images in the streets. Moreover, without a doubt the images fulfilled various functions.

One of its most important functions was that of being a reflection of the historical process that the social struggle was generating. This in two senses. The first, and most basic, is that of being a graphic register or record of what people lived through. That is to say, the images narrated what was happening. At the same time, as they expressed the voice of the oppressed masses—their worries,

demands, their repression, and their aspirations—the images also reflected the manner in which the people's thinking was transforming or changing. Whether through placing an image or seeing an image, many people became aware or could reflect upon the conditions in which the majority of the Oaxacan and Mexican people live. They could, as well, not only express their anxieties, but also their desires for other futures.

Let me see if I can be a bit more clear. During the 2006 movement, the people became aware of how profoundly the government and the interests of the upper classes of society controlled the means of communication. The streets served thus not only as a space of expression, but also as a means of communication and of organization for the people in general. Being easy to reproduce in many places, stencil played an important role as an alternative means of information. Walking through the streets, when people saw a stencil that beckoned their attention or that spoke of an important issue that the media did not dare speak of or broadcast, the people would speak with neighbors, with the teachers or with those they knew to investigate or inform themselves about what was happening. And, while some images had their impact upon being digested by the mind, many others also caused feelings in those that saw them that moved people through their heart and soul or even through their gut. Located throughout the entire city but especially in spaces frequented by people, with their high contrast images, forceful impact, and direct message, these images attracted the attention of individuals and caused them to reflect and converse with others. In this manner, then and now, through images in the streets the people maintain a conversation about what is happening and what they wish to happen.

Stencil was important not only in disseminating information and thoughts and in this manner generating a dialogue in the street, but also was important insofar as it enlivened people to struggle. To see an image and to know that it can be accomplished by means of stencil, without having to go to a fine art school, inspired many people to do their own and to help out in one way or another. In this way, many people experienced the satisfaction of placing something in the street and of being part of one's environment. From passive or resigned individuals who accepted their hard reality as not easily changeable, many of us became participants and protagonists of a personal and social change. This is still reflected in the interior of ASARO, where many do not have so much time using stencil or other techniques, but they do have the interest in learning and of going out to the street to participate in this dialogue.

Furthermore, as some have commented, given that the movement was composed of an enormous diversity, the images on the streets gave this movement an image and identity. Because the people saw their sentiments and thoughts reflected there, and because they covered the streets for such a long time, the people and the movement—in Oaxaca and abroad—identified with the images and today is also identified by them.

Today, although those that go out to do art in the streets has been largely reduced to art collectives, whether it be Zapata, Benito Juárez, military personnel or a peasant, new and old images continue to emerge on the walls and in this way form a part of daily life in the city. Although for many the images continue to be relevant as much for their message as for being a reminder that everyone has the right to express themselves freely, some have indiscriminately classified everyone who paints in the streets as a vandal while others have criticized the images as being merely recycled icons that demonstrate that urban art and the Oaxacan movement did not aspire to something new or had any creativity. Apparently, the reason why historical figures are used has not been clearly understood by some.

To start with, both for those that know them as well as for those that learn about them through these images, historical figures such as Pancho Villa or Flores Magón serve to remind us of those that fought for their ideals and for profound social and political change. However, their relevancy does not remain that of being a historical lesson about the past for, in large part, these icons of Mexican history and of the Mexican revolution are not simply reproduced as is (as for example the famous image of Che Guevara taken by Alberto Korda) but are actualized. A Zapata with a punk hairstyle or a Juárez with a beret and red star has a contemporary visual charge that transforms or actualizes them. It is not the case, then, that through these images we seek to return to the past but rather that through them we seek to incite, provoke, and mobilize people today to fight for a better present and future—the revolution has yet to be made. Further, if you are compelled to find contemporary revolutionaries, there are none that have defined themselves as such and can today be easily recognized by people—one cannot forget that the Zapatistas and subcomandante Marcos have themselves stated that they are not revolutionaries.

It is also worth mentioning that those who critique these images have not really recognized that the images that have had the most impact have been those of everyday people. A young boy drawing his thoughts and dreams out on the street, a youth defiantly looking towards the horizon as he carries a boy in a shawl, a youth with a slingshot… These and other images have been as important as Juárez or Zapata. In the end, as the APPO has demonstrated, a real social and political revolution depends on all of us and not on some, no matter how charismatic or able they may be. Whether an artist, street sweeper, merchant, housewife, or a retiree, change depends upon our participation, unity, and organization.

If you look back to Mexican history, artists have often actively participated in movements or in moments of social transformation. From the muralists to the Workshop for Popular Graphic Art, from the groups that participated in the ‘68 movement to the SUMA collective in the 70s and 80s, social tremors have been accompanied by people from the artistic community. At the same time, this does not imply that all artists or art collectives seek social change or are committed to support social transformation movements. Furthermore, unlike other artistic collectives that have arisen in the past, ASARO was born from the selfsame social movement. Although perhaps in an unreflexive, or spontaneous way, the influence of the Workshop for Graphic Art or the muralists is present in our work insofar as this tradition has left a graphic legacy of social struggle that ASARO now takes to contemporary struggles. As has been said before, the importance of this artistic legacy is in part aesthetic, but more importantly is in the example of art that is socially committed. Today, ASARO retakes this legacy and the APPO’s call and continues to look for more artists and cultural creators to join us and to take on or commit themselves to create socio-political art.

But, at this point you are surely asking yourself who we are, if we are many, few, tall, ugly, young or old, if we do other things besides stencil and perhaps what we wish for from the future. I don’t know, surely you can imagine other things. Well, to start with, if you don’t have one, imagine a large family—ours is around 24 people. However, there is no father or mother; instead of defining ourselves through a hierarchical structure, decisions are taken by everyone together. Our structure is not vertical but horizontal. This manner of organizing ourselves is based on the APPO’s example, an example which itself retook the model and method of organization of the indigenous communities of Oaxaca. For us, this way of organizing ourselves works in the following way: when there are important

issues to discuss, a meeting is convened and all members who can participate come to our workshop and sit in a circle. Due to time or family constraints, all of us never manage to gather together at the same time, but we do have meetings of around 20 or so people. Moreover, you might say that there are two categories of members, those that form the core of the group and assist and vote at the assemblies—and this is the majority—and those that collaborate with the group and whom we invite to participate in our activities but whom nevertheless are not obliged to participate.

In order to make our jobs easier, we have formed commissions who are in charge of various tasks inside ASARO. The principal commissions are those of organization, press and propaganda, political formation, and finances. In general, someone from these commissions convenes the assembly. Once together, information is shared topic by topic and what to do and how to do it is discussed for each issue. At the assembly, everyone has a right to speak and to give their opinion until, in the end, when all proposals for a particular issue have been opened up, we vote for each proposal and the one that has the most votes defines our subsequent course of action. Whether a new or old member, each vote counts equally. Decisions made are thus those of everybody and the resulting art is everyone's—that is one of the reasons why the art is signed as ASARO and not individually (security is another). This does not always work out well, for there are a great diversity of ages, experiences, and thoughts within and between everyone and there are times when someone does not agree with the final decision—in some occasions this has resulted in individuals separating from the group. It has not been easy, for the majority of members of ASARO do not come from a culture in which you are accustomed or learn to listen, speak, vote, and take decisions as a group; however, we have learned much from the practice of the assembly and it has for the most part been a means to unite us and not to divide us. The practice of gathering at an assembly has forced us to learn to take into account the opinions of others and up to this moment we have more than a year and a half organizing us in this way. And the reality is that this diversity of opinions and experiences is one of our great advantages since through these we have learned each from the other and have had a diversity of projects surface as well.

The diversity of our members and our policy of looking for and having an open door for new people has meant that we have members who have gone through fine arts schooling and also those who have learned in the streets or that, in reality, do not know how to handle artistic techniques and want to learn with us. Without any labor of recruitment, upon seeing our work in public space, people have come forward to see if they can join—and from an initial 4 or 6 members we have grown to over 20. Desiring to involve more individuals and with a policy of participation, this has led us to open up internal workshops in stencil, woodcut engraving, painting, and silkscreen—which are the four principal artistic techniques that we use, although recently we have also begun a theater workshop. In this way, a person who has done stencils in the street but who has learned to create her images projecting them against a wall can learn how to draw by hand and thereby further develop their artistic abilities of expression. As it is in regards to our lines of thought, there is a great variety and diversity in our graphic production and it cannot be said that we follow one aesthetic line; although, with each learning from the other, there are some graphic tendencies that perhaps unite some to others beyond the socio-political themes that are the groundwork for all else and which interest us all.

Thus, what interests the artists that make up ASARO is an art that is committed to the people, an art that has and wants to maintain a dialogue and exchange with society. This commitment is reflected not only in our art, but also through the various projects that we

have initiated or in which we have participated. For example, there is the Tianguis Cultural "Libertad y Resistencia" (Freedom and Resistance Cultural Market) that takes place every Saturday in the Plazuela del Carmen Alto since February of 2008. Here we have looked to bring together artists and creators with a range of Oaxacan social sectors through art exhibits, debates, music of various genres, painting workshops for kids, chess, and the sale and exchange of artistic products. With cultural and artistic products such as handmade jewelry, clothes, books, films, music, and woodcut engravings, among others, and with products that range from 5 pesos up to 200 pesos, we seek to bring art closer to the people and in this way to make art part of their daily lives. In this way, the Saturday market looks to open up a space where everyday individuals who in general do not dare to enter a gallery or museum may appreciate art.

Be it in the Saturday market or through stencils on the streets, we want ASARO's art to open up a dialogue that does not really exist. If we are proposing art in and for open spaces it is because we feel that it speaks the voice of the people and is meant to be shared with the people. In general, those who do graffiti or urban art are against the idea of exhibiting their art in a gallery or museum because they do not see their art as being directed towards that social sector. Few museums are truly spaces of interaction with art, now it is the street that plays this role. Although it may have open doors, although daily more museums and galleries open up to exhibit Oaxacan art, in the end the Oaxacan public does not feel these spaces as their own. In Oaxaca there is an art that addresses the people and another that is directed towards a reduced social sector and largely insular discourse. It is not for anything that in 2007 the most visited exhibit in the renown Graphic Art Institute of Oaxaca was about the stencils of the 2006 movement. At the same time as the museum was opened up to the streets and to the people, ASARO sought to not only question social reality through this exhibit but also to question its actors and spaces. We should not have, nor do we have, fear of closed spaces such as galleries or museums. We feel that we have to go there and to debate in all spaces and with all social actors. Because museums and galleries by their evolution are generally elitist and commercial spaces, ASARO looks to and is betting on open spaces such as the plazuela del Carmen Alto in order to open up a dialogue between art and society. After all, through posters, stencils, stickers, and the everyday dialogue that takes place there, the streets are—or should be—not only the gallery or voice of the people, but also a registry of the different social layers that together make up our community.

We have participated as well in other projects such as painting the wall at the border in Tijuana at the start of this year as a protest to further incursions by the Free Trade Agreement; we have created stencil murals for the World Social Forum that took place in Mexico City; as is customary during the day of the dead celebrations, we have done various sand paintings as a protest and as a tribute to those who were murdered by the government during the social movement of 2006; we have painted murals as well in various schools and cultural centers in Oaxaca; we have created allusive figures relating to the movement during the Night of the Radishes that the APPO organized—the Night of the Radishes is a popular celebration from Oaxaca where various communities make scenes and figures composed entirely of giant radishes; we have also produced a variety of paintings, stencils, and woodcut engravings around the themes of fascism, the day of the dead, Emiliano Zapata, militarization, and recently on the theme of those who have been disappeared by the government in Oaxaca.

Fortunately, through these projects we have met many people who have become interested in our art. And, to this date, even at prices

that are accessible for the people of Oaxaca, it has been through the sale of reproductions of our woodcut engravings (and in some occasions our paintings), that we have been able to be self-sufficient. Although our economic reserves go up and down like a yo-yo, we have never looked for nor had to seek institutional support. This has allowed us to not only rent a workshop and to buy art materials for everyone to use, but has also allowed us to continue to define our own path. Recently, thus, we have succeeded in obtaining two portable presses and we hope to soon be able to begin giving woodcut engraving workshops in marginalized communities.

Recently, with fellow artists we met at the World Social Forum, we have also been able to push forward *Revuelta Cultural Mexicana* (Mexican Cultural Revolt), or RCM. This is an effort to unite artists at the national level that aims to articulate a movement of socially committed art and—as has been our experience in Oaxaca—with which we seek to share and learn as much from our differences as from our similarities. RCM will open a space that facilitates a dialogue between artists and the people. The call for artists has as of this moment achieved uniting the work of groups from the State of Mexico, Yucatan, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Mexico City, Morelos, Veracruz, San Luis Potosi, and Oaxaca. As a fundamental strategy of this effort, all the artists that participate in RCM exhibit their art in the streets in a coordinated fashion; as such, we seek the impact that broad coverage of conjunctural themes related to national and global politics produces. Through these coordinated actions where the whole country may wake up from one night to the next with images that touch on everyday themes, we hope that *Revuelta Cultural Mexicana* can serve as a space to denounce the repressive and marginalizing policies that are the norm in our nation.

In RCM, we manifest that today art has lost its roots, its reason, and its heart. That, destined to adorn the walls of wealthy socialites or the conservative cemeteries that are the galleries and museums, art today has distanced itself from the people. In this Mexico where the official culture wants to enclose popular art and identity in folkloric tones—that is to say, as a pretty spectacle—we manifest that if art is not going to make the revolution, art is and should express a commitment with the realities of our people and our social surroundings. As part of *Revuelta Cultural Mexicana*, we are convinced that art is this, and not principally an aesthetic work or spiritual refuge. As the muralists manifested before us, those who are making the Mexican Cultural Revolt put ourselves at the disposal of the cause, which is the people's cause, in whichever way we are needed.

We expect much from the future and we know it will not be easy. Within the group we continue to confront the problem of unstable participation and we continue to seek the way in which we can all participate actively and consistently. In the streets, repression in Oaxaca is as ardent as ever and it is difficult and at times risky to go out to the streets to manifest our opinion. It is not only that political images in the streets are wiped clean by fresh paint almost the same day as they are placed, but also that one can feel and see the increase in police and military with heavy arms that have begun to patrol the city. In the historic center, there is a network of cameras that monitor the streets 24 hours a day. There is much fear. But there is also much courage.

As I told you at the beginning, here beauty and poverty, joy and misery are the faces of the same coin. Mexico is a country of high contrasts where hope grew and continues to grow in the in between spaces that border everyday repression. And there have been many achievements. The APPO transformed the urban and social landscape through their encampment, assemblies, the take over of the media, marches, street art, and the barricades. For almost six

months Oaxaca experienced the coming closer of different sectors of the population. For almost six months people found new means to express their worries as well as their dreams. For almost six months the streets served for the first time as a truly public space and as a forum for free expression. Although almost two years since the start of the 2006 movement, much that seemed possible in that moment today looks remote or utopian, however, Oaxaca today *is* another society. And, although there are no guarantees, the struggle continues. As such, we invite you to join us.

— ASARO, May 27, 2008

Appendix B – Revolutionary Figures: Oaxacan Stencils and the Historical Imaginary

Virgen de Guadalupe

After first appearing on the clothing of Juan Diego upon her visitation to him on the hills near Mexico City in 1531, this icon has since become synonymous with Mexico.

CRONOS
POR LA SANGRE DE LOS CAIDOS HASTA LA VICTORIA SIEMPRE.
STENCIL ZONE
Yo vivo, por que mi espiritu esta con sus ideales mis hermanos oaxaqueños, viva la APPO
Hasta la Victoria siempre
RELOJERIA JOYAS Y REGALOS
APPO
AÑO DE LA REVOLUCION SOCIAL
CENTRO ASESINO
APP

Ernesto Che Guevara (1928 - 1967)

Famed Argentinian doctor turned revolutionary. Executed after being captured in Bolivia in 1967, his legend and status as a countercultural icon has only grown since being martyred at age 39. For more, and in his own words, see the *Che Guevara Reader: Writings on Politics & Revolution*.

Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1753 - 1811)

Priest credited with sparking the start of the war for Mexican Independence in 1810. Captured in battle and executed, he remains a symbolic figure as the Father of the Nation today. For a recent look at his legacy, see *Miguel Hidalgo: ensayos sobre el mito y el hombre*.

Subcomandante Marcos

Famed member of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or EZLN. The Zapatista insurrection began on January 1, 1994 to coincide with the first day of the North American Free Trade Agreement and since then has captured the global imagination of the left and the attention of the right. Though suffering great military repression since 1994, the Zapatistas continue to carve out autonomous space in Chiapas, México. The Zapatista's most recent communiqué can be found in *The other campaign: the Zapatista call for change from below*.

Pedro Infante (1917 - 1957)

A Mexican actor and singer, this heartthrob made more than 50 movies from the 1940s to the late 1950s and died in a plane crash. My father's favorite three films of his are *Nosotros los Pobres, Ustedes los Ricos* (1948), *Los Tres Garcia* (1946), and *Los Tres Huastecos* (1948).

Adolf Hitler (1889 - 1945)

Synonymous with Fascism, Hitler's image has found its way from Germany onto Oaxaca's walls.

Lucio Cabañas Barrientos (1938 - 1974)

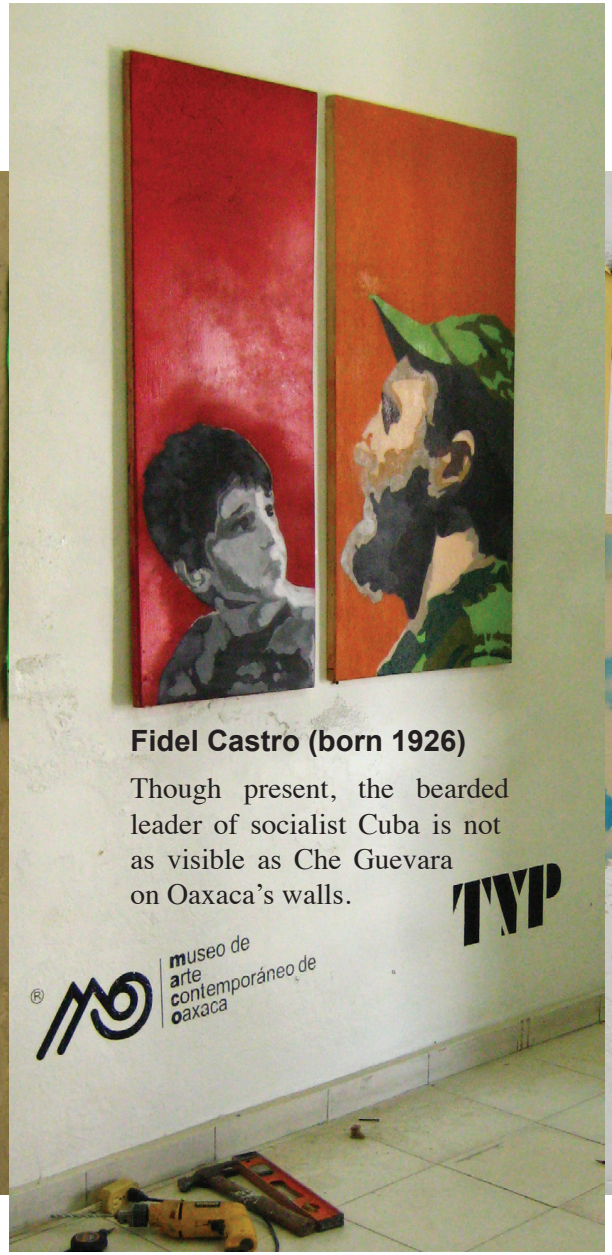
Mexican teacher turned guerilla fighter, Cabañas led a revolutionary group fighting in the hills of Guerrero, neighboring state to Oaxaca. He is rumored to have committed suicide in 1974 when government troops closed in on him. His legacy in fighting for better conditions for the poor both as a teacher and guerilla inspire many in Oaxaca today. The documentary *El edén bajo el fusil* from 1986 provides good context for his struggle.

Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1911 - 1979)

Mexican president from 1964 to 1970, during his time as Mexico's leader the repression of social movements would find its grimmest expression in the Tlatelolco Massacre where hundreds of students were gunned down by government troops on the 2nd of October in 1968, just before the start of the Olympics in Mexico City. Elena Poniatowska's *Massacre in Mexico* tells this story to great effect.

Bradley Roland Will (1970 - 2006)

Journalist with Indymedia, Brad was covering the events in Oaxaca in 2006 when he was shot and killed at the barricade of Calicanto by government supporters firing on the barricade. For a moving account of his life and work in the context of contemporary struggles, see *Brad: Una noche mas en las barricadas*, a documentary by Miguel.



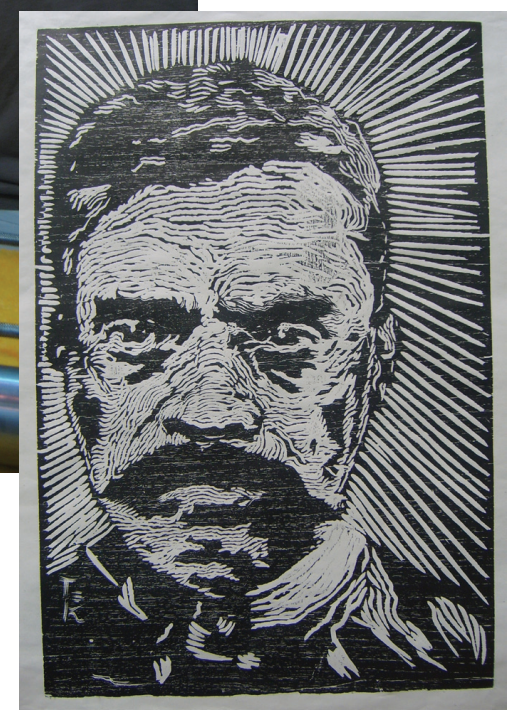
Frida Kahlo (1907 - 1954)

Though known best during her life for her marriage to Diego Rivera, Frida's artistic work and difficult life have recently garnered much attention. For her life story, see Malka Drucker's *Frida Kahlo*.

SONY
RCM

LIBERTAD POLITICA

OXIMAMENT
ROXIMAMEN



CAMPESINOS OBREROS
ESTUDIANTES Y MAESTROS
TODOS SOMOS APPO

proletariado
ASARO
RCM

Emiliano Zapata (1879 - 1919)

Famed leader of the Revolution Army of the South during the Mexican revolution, Zapata's influence, ideals, and his struggle for agrarian rights and justice for the poor continue to have political importance and a hold on the Mexican imagination. Falling out with the government after the success of the Mexican Revolution, he was killed by government troops in 1919. *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* follows his life and *¡Zapata Lives! Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico* his legacy in Oaxaca and Chiapas today.

YO TAMBIEN
SOY GUERRILLERO

Benito Pablo Juárez García (1806 - 1872)

Though he did not begin schooling until the age of 12, this orphan, Zapotec, and Oaxaqueño managed to get a law degree and became one of Mexico's most illustrious presidents. He is a revered figure not just in Oaxaca but in the country. *Sons of the Sierra* puts his time and achievements in the context of a broader political and geographical landscape.

ABRIENDO CONCIENCIA
ABRIENDO CONCIENCIA
ABRIENDO CONCIENCIA
somos pueblo
somos pueblo
Por detras de mi voz, escucha, escucha....
ASAR-o

Ricardo Flores Magón (1873 - 1922)

Born on Mexican Independence day, and dying in a Leavenworth Prison under charges of sedition, Magón's life as Mexico's leading anarchist and his role in feeding Mexican Revolutionary fervor are the stuff of legend but not well known outside of Mexico or anarchist circles. *Dreams of Freedom* gives English readers access to his work and life.

Josef Stalin (1878 - 1953)

Controversial leader of the Soviet Union, Stalin's visage and legacy provides a point of contention and hatred for anarchist groups in Oaxaca and is at the same time upheld by Marxist-Leninist groups who see him as an example of a unifying leader.

Pancho Villa (1878 - 1923)

Leader of the Northern Division of the Mexican Revolutionary Army, Villa has a mixed record as a thief, unofficial governor of Chihuahua, and caudillo strongman who led attacks into the United States. He was gunned down though it is unclear if the government was involved. His life is covered in exhaustive detail in Katz's *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa*.