



The Spirit of 68

The 1968 student movement left a deep mark on Mexican society and opened up a path for the following generation's fights.

Carlos Monsiváis understood the importance of this social phenomenon and supported the National Strike Council (Consejo Nacional de Huelga ,CNH) in many different ways. Years later he wrote about this moment and its consequences; as a collector, he systematically collected valuable objects that have enriched our understanding of that movement.

Thus, organizing an exhibition at the Museo del Estanquillo 50 years after the fact is an act of historical justice and public interest, one that presents the photographs, pamphlets, posters and cartoons collected by the writer. These objects permit a new reading of the backstory, the context, the stages, actors and ideas participating in this rebellion.

There is a tradition of resistance behind the 1968 student movement and it goes back to the rural and factory workers' struggles of post Revolutionary Mexico. The movement is heir to the fights of the rail workers led by Valentín Campa and Demetrio Vallejo in 1958, the teacher protest lead by Othón Salazar that same year and the doctor movement in 1964 – 1965.

The student feat was a response to the crisis and depletion of the Mexican political system lead by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). It happened during the Cold War and was surrounded by international events as iconic as the Cuban Revolution (and el Che's guerrilla journey), the Vietnam War and McCarthyism.

In his many writings, Monsiváis contends that the 1968 student movement was, most of all, a moral and antiauthoritarian insurrection in favor of human rights, and also the first modern rebellion that upheld the defense of democratic liberties. Several of the posters, photographs, magazines, cartoons and works of graphic art gathered here reveal a nonconformist youth who found that irreverence, scorn and parody were weapons for this fight. Humor was a countercultural response to the abuses coming from an authoritarian, antidemocratic and repressive power, and against the horrors of Stalinist regimes. These expressions helped transform our national political culture and have become a part of our civic culture.

In those years the regime did everything in its power to hide the October 2nd massacre. Students and a handful of intellectuals, among them Elena Poniatowska (with her journalistic book *La Noche de Tlatelolco*), Eduardo del Río *Rius*, and Carlos Monsiváis, managed to place the visions and ideas of the repressed youth front and center.

The 1968 student movement was a social and culturally modernizing movement that continues to have political, social and cultural repercussions in contemporary Mexico. It was the detonating factor that lead to a political reform that opened up



legal, democratic avenues for the Left. It forced progressive sectors of society to be critical with their own ideas, canons and paradigms; it promoted the massification of higher education, the resurgence of an independent labor union movement and opened new causeways for political participation. Culturally it stimulated the emergence of new artistic and aesthetic currents, of important political publications and several critical and countercultural movements.

The 1968 student movement is at the center of the regime's crack-up.

Rafael Barajas

BACKGROUND

Agrarian and Worker Struggles

The 1968 Student Movement is a direct heir of several historic struggles of the Mexican people: 19th Century Radical Liberalism, Magonism, the agrarian revolts, the Mexican Revolution, the great strikes of the beginning of 20th Century, the cultural ebullience of the Post Revolution, Cardenism, the railworkers strike led by Demetrio Vallejo and Valentín Campa, the revolutionary movement of teachers and Jaramillismo.

Rafael Barajas

BACKGROUND

The Agrarian Fight/The Railroadworker Movement

1958 is the year of confrontation. From June 26 to 29, rail workers go on strike, and on August 13, Demetrio Vallejo Partido Obrero Campesino Mexicano (POCM) member, a small group of former communists, is chosen as general secretary of the Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la República Mexicana with 56 thousand votes in favor, nine against. At the same time, the Movimiento Revolucionario del Magisterio (MRM) is gaining strength, lead by a young communist from the state of Guerrero, Othón Salazar, who had been elected in 1958 as general secretary of the Ninth Section of the SNTE. Authorities do not recognize him as leader. He is jailed on September 6, and inside prison, he wins the election again by more that 12 thousand votes against 33. Othón demands wage dignity and union autonomy for a union that had been crucial for the construction of the Mexican State and burdened since the 1940s with every thinning wages.

Carlos Monsiváis, 1968, *The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*



INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Post War, Nuclear Age and The Cold War

1968 is, both in reality and mythology, a key year for the whole world. There are student rebellions in the US against the Vietnam War, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., are assassinated, huge racial insurrections, the May French uprising, with students facing off against Charles de Gaulle happens, there are student mobilizations in Japan, rock becomes the new language of youth, drugs, specifically marijuana, begins opening up the doors of perception, feminist and sexual minorities movements are on the horizon, the Soviet Union invades Czechoslovakia and crushes the Dubcek regime, Maoism announces the Cultural Revolution, massive reading and writing occurs, films are once again the harbingers of the future (Godard, Bergman), theater is a locus of great experimentation... What has much more impact on the Mexican 68 movement, however, at least in a visible way, is the death of Che Guevara in Bolivia, not the Fidel Castro regime but the “romantic adventure”.

Carlos Monsiváis, 1968, *The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*

In Latin America, the success of the Cold War is impressive. It is part of popular culture, it efficiently disseminates images of shadowy conspiracies, makes communists out to be traitors, enemies of God, dehumanized in the worst possible ways (*they chose that condition*). And all this is complemented by a political and police offensive: the left in general and communists in particular are denied the right to talk back, their clarifications and refutations are not printed, and the masses who they want to rescue from the capitalist inferno, are in turn afraid of, abhor or ridicule them.

Carlos Monsiváis, 1968, *The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*



INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Cuba

In the period between the presidency of Ávila Camacho to López Mateos, anti-communism continues its triumphant implantation. By 1959, however, the Cuban Revolution's victory puts the dominance of this mass ideology under siege. Castrism, before it petrified into a dictatorship, fans the hopes of change in Latin America, since it made possible the conquest of power barely 90 miles away from the US. Castro is the shining hero at this stage, about to quell criticism for rigidity in his government, for the firing squads, for the mass exodus out of the island, for political prisoners, for the police duties adopted by the Popular Defense committees, Cuba practicing becoming a police State, the creation of concentration camps (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción), populated by Jehovah's Witnesses, "antisocial people", and homosexuals. None of that tapers the enthusiasm for such a liberating novelty.

Carlos Monsiváis, 1968, *The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*

The Vietnam War

The growing contradictions that built up during the Cold War reached a tipping point during the second half of the 20th century and laid out new challenges and problems; and with them, came new concerns, cultural expressions and battles. Among many other, counterculture, rock, hippie movement, several anticolonial rebellions and pacifist protests against the Vietnam War made themselves present.

The 1960s was rich in ideas and proposals; many of them were created within universities. In 1968, important student movements erupted in the US (the Civil Rights movement and pacifism), France (Red May), Czechoslovakia (Prague Spring), Spain (anti-Franco expressions) and México.

Rafael Barajas



NATIONAL CONTEXT

Díaz Ordaz by Rius

During 1968, the presidentialist system of government was at its highest point. With president Díaz Ordaz, everything is a part of the government, and the opposition is nearly non-existent. Centered on a few publications, criticism of the government is barely head-on and free of consequences. At the start of 1968, without the ability to challenge authoritarianism, Mexican society reproduces the dogmatic behavior to scale (the head of the family is a miniature President; the President is the most prolific head of all families).

[...]

Carlos Monsiváis, 1968, *The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*

NATIONAL CONTEXT

PRI's Obsolescence

PRI governments and “modern” regimes are unconcerned with civic attitudes, they are only interested in getting rid of the nuisance of dissidence and with making induced “amnesia” another of their coercive instruments. And 1968, they were almost flawless in their elimination of all evidence...

Carlos Monsiváis, 1968, *The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*

NATIONAL CONTEXT

McCarthyism and Graphic Arts Against McCarthyism

At the end of the Second World War, and within the confrontation between the Socialist Block headed by Moscow, and the so-called Free World, headed by Washington, many countries of the Western World –Mexico among them– created Welfare States that allowed for a lengthy period of stability and economic growth. Millions of young people from all social classes had access to higher education. The universities spread out and stopped being the stronghold of an exclusive elite.

Political and social conflict, however, did not disappear, and instead, fearing an expansion of communism, all around the Free World dictatorships and authoritarian regimes –such as Mexico’s– propped up.

Rafael Barajas



1968 IN MEXICO **The XIX Olympic Games**

To tidy up the nation's image and promoting the Olympic games, the Mexican Olympic Committee (COM), presided by the architect Pedro Ramírez Vázquez began a modern and efficient marketing campaign. Among other things, it hired graphic designer Lance Wyman, who created a high quality system of images that helped lift up the nation's image and later on became a model for international graphic design.

Rafael Barajas

1968 IN MEXICO **The XIX Olympic Games According to Photojournalists**

1968 is a moral, antiauthoritarian and judicial insurrection. It is not a fight between Díaz Ordaz's State against the Consejo Nacional de Huelga; instead it is a show of outdated force against energetic weakness. During August and September, practically every higher education institution, many collegiate bodies and an impressively large part of public opinion (the concept of civil society is not talked about yet) is in favor of the strike, or more specifically, has made the reasons behind the strike their own. Human rights defense is not yet at hand, so the arguments seem extremely programmatic, but the impulse is anything but, and it starts congregating a part of the public school system and a part of the private school system, a fair amount of regional polytechnics and universities, a group of young Jesuits...

Carlos Monsiváis, 1968, *The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*



1968 IN MEXICO

The XIX Olympic Games According to Cartoonists

To tell the graphic story of the Olympics around 150,000 feet of photographic roll were spent, as well as 750,000 feet of cinematographic film; 1,550 photographers were accredited for the event, 50 of them were Mexican or worked for the Mexican Olympic Committee. Lázaro Blanco was in charge of coordinating national photographers. Every photographer received four rolls daily, and they were developed that same day in the huge laboratories housed in most of the sporting venues and press centers [...] Among the photographers who captured those days we must mention the Mayo brothers, Antonio Reynoso, Pablo Méndez, Héctor García, Duane Michals, Mariana Yampolsky, Ray Davis and Michel Zabé, among many others. Alberto Isaac was in charge of filming the event.

Itala Schmelz, "Mexico 68. The New Fire", in *Luna Córnea* 16. Deportes

1968 IN MEXICO

Protests, Posters and Repression of the 1968 Student Movement

The most memorable propaganda and agitation pieces from the 1968 student movement are those that include humor; those that parody Olympic propaganda. The official COM logo was a peace dove over a black background was the number 68 was visible. The students took this image and added a bayonet striking the dove.

Rafael Barajas

In general, those student movements were heirs of the struggles of the Enlightenment and Socialism. They were libertarian and had a clear sense of social commitment. They were identified with the historical fights fought by the progressive sectors, but their approaches went far beyond the logic of the Stalinist Left, which in those days was a very powerful ideology.

The students' proposals were so fecund that they heralded a change of epoch. They set the stage for causes that many political and social movements are still fighting for: feminism, ecology, free speech, among others.

Rafael Barajas



...the TGP's influence can be seen in the 1968 Movement's propaganda, because in a sense it continued in Mexico's graphic tradition by responding to its circumstances. Let's remember that during May of that year, French students had organized a similar action, and its propaganda production had different characteristics and was almost unknown in our country.

Grupo Mira. *Graphic Arts in 68. A Tribute to the Student Movement (La gráfica del 68. Homenaje al Movimiento Estudiantil.)*

The brigades were the Movement's great invention, the most memorable fact during the coming decades. They worked on buses, trains, movie lobbies, markets, streets, plazas, and denounced those things that were so evident that seemed nonexistent: the demagogy, the fierce lack of fulfillment of the government's promises, the absence of democratic life, unions aligned with the regime, the PRI party's frauds, repressions and corruption. Passengers and passersby watched the brigade members with amusement and mostly sympathy, and supported with laughter their attacks against the "sold-out press". At the end of the speeches, there is clapping and also challenges "Go back to school, slackers / Damn communists!" A feeling of fear is constant, the eyes are peeled in case cops climb onto the bus or arrive at the market to "pacify" the scene; there are also words of advice, encouragement and (a small amount) of money, coming from what is not yet called civil society.

Carlos Monsiváis, *1968, The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*

Mexican Stalinists were closer to the regime than to the rebels. On the contrary, young communists (like Pablo Gómez), some well prepared, older members of the Left (like José Revueltas) and other emerging intellectuals (like Carlos Monsiváis and Elena Poniatowska), supported the university's strike wholeheartedly.

Rafael Barajas

THE 1968 STUDENT MOVEMENT WAS A DEFINITIVE WATERSHED, AS ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY HAS SHOWN: NO ONE HAS FORGOTTEN A THING, YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY ARE AWARE OF WHAT HAPPENED.

ELENA PONIATOWSKA/JOURNALIST



Graphic expression developed from student bodies as a necessary and spontaneous response to the smear campaign in mass media against the Movement, as well as a tool for the dissemination of their own side of events to the public; we are talking about flyers, posters, street paintings, stickers, banners, effigies, cartoons and several other ingenious occurrences like dressing up dogs to use them as political propaganda [...] The production of graphic propaganda took place specially in the striking schools, but the images that went beyond the propagandist meaning were coming from the art schools of San Carlos and La Esmeralda.

Arnulfo Aquino. *Epic Images in Contemporary Mexico. From Graphic Arts to Graffiti 1968-2011* (*Imágenes épicas en el México contemporáneo. De la gráfica al graffiti. 1968-2011*)

¿Quién no tiene madraz?

¡Díaz Ordaz!

¿Quién no tiene madriz?

¡Pedro Ferriz!

¿Quién no tiene madrovski?

¡Zabludovski!

Students soon realized that those in power and their spokespersons had no defense for humor. They faced off against a status quo that sought deference and respect for all its forms, figures and protocols by being unruly. They made mockery, parody, derision, and satire their tools for rebellion. By doing so, they opened up a space for new ways of being political.

Rafael Barajas

In Mexico, students rebelled against authoritarianism and lack of democracy. After going through the Consejo Nacional de Huelga's (CNH) demands, essayist Carlos Monsiváis summarized them in *El 68. La tradición de la resistencia*:



Go through each demand and each one expresses the proclamation of human and civil rights, a concept that will take hold explicitly a decade later. Free political prisoners, fire the repressors, abolish a police body whose only function was fierce repression, excise from the body of laws an instrument for judicial terror, compensating the dead's families and the victims of aggressions, all of this basically means doing justice and forcing the State to be self-critical...

1. Freedom for political prisoners.
2. Fire generals Luis Cueto Ramírez and Raúl Mendiola [of the police force], as well as lieutenant colonel Armando Frías chief of the [granaderos corps].
3. Disappearance of the granaderos corps, an instrument for repression, as well as the assurance of not creating similar corporations.
4. Abolition of articles 145 and 145 bis from the Penal Code, [which concerned the crime of "social dissolution"] judicial instruments of aggression.
5. Compensating of the dead's families, as well as persons injured, victims of the July 26 aggression and all others after that.
6. Assigning responsibilities for repressive acts and vandalism coming from the authorities, be it police, granaderos or the military.

1968 IN MEXICO

The October 2nd Massacre

When he imagines the Great Punishment of October 2nd (he does not make the decision on his own, he does not make it by committee either) he does it because for him, to allow protests is to share command, and in even if in his own mind he is a simple person, his position as an Exceptional Mexican –because that was the will of the common people– forces him to transcend the individual condition (law graduate and politician, loyal friend, man who is not lacking as one), and turns him, as long as he is in charge, into the living representation of the deepest part of the Nation's entrails.

Carlos Monsiváis, 1968, *The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*



1968 CHANGED THE WORLD: IT TRANSFORMED MINDS, AS WELL AS CULTURE, PEOPLE'S VALUES AND MENTALITIES. IN MEXICO IN PARTICULAR A BATTLE TOOK PLACE BETWEEN AN EMERGING SOCIETY, LEAD BY FREE-SPIRITED, ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN YOUNG PEOPLE AND A TRADITIONAL REGIME, WHICH HELD AUTHORITY AS ITS HIGHEST PRINCIPLE.

JESÚS RAMÍREZ CUEVAS/JOURNALIST

By documenting dissidence, photojournalists become the great political chroniclers of contemporary Mexico, from the 1958-59 labor union struggles, to the countless occupations of the Zocalo in 2006 [...]. In terms of repression, photographs tell what has been forgotten, they isolate an image in terms of movement.

Any history of the Mexican century, should use similar photographs, of workers and farmers, and students surprised by the repression, of those who were executed for exercising their dissidence or because they were there at the wrong moment. The "might use" refers to the confiscated photographic rolls, the photos that were not taken because of police or military intimidation, the government's ideal: repression without witnesses.

Carlos Monsiváis. *Marvels that Are, Shadows that Were (Maravillas que son, sombras que fueron)*



No one knows the exact number of the dead
Not even the killers
Not even the criminal
(Alas, this man, small on every side
has reached history
incapable of everything but rancor.)

Tlatelolco will be mentioned in years to come
As we talk about Río Blanco and Cananea,
But this one was worse,
Here they've killed the people...

(Nadie sabe el número exacto de los muertos,
ni siquiera los asesinos,
ni siquiera el criminal.
(Ciertamente, ya llegó a la historia
este hombre pequeño por todas partes,
incapaz de todo menos del rencor.)

Tlatelolco será mencionado en los años que vienen
como hoy hablamos de Río Blanco y Cananea,
pero esto fue peor,
aquí han matado al pueblo...)

Jaime Sabines. Fragment of "Tlatelolco 68" poem.

1968 IN MEXICO

Rius and the Chronology of The night of Tlatelolco

Raucous language used by Rius in his cartoons was a perfect match for the antiauthoritarian spirit of the Student Movement. Maybe because of this, one of the first nationally distributed publications that gave a voice to the dissident movement was the first issue (a special one) of Rius cartoon *Los Agachados* published on November 1968. (Image 8. *Los Agachados* cover) There, the cartoonist expressed the youths' vision and denounced government's brutality. The cartoonist's daring did not go unpunished, and a few months later agents of the law kidnapped him and took him to the Nevado de Toluca mountain and staged a mock execution by firing squad.

Rafael Barajas



1968 IN MEXICO Portraits of Díaz Ordaz

Facing the students, Díaz Ordaz does not doubt. They despise him (them, who live in the shadows) because he is the personification of decorum and the law, and it would be unconscionable to even consider the demands expressed by the Consejo Nacional de Huelga. If he were to free the political prisoners involved in unions (Vallejo, Campa and the rest), he would strengthen independent labor unions; if he accepts (even by omission) the most minuscule injustice and fires the chief of police or compensates the victims, he would endanger the health of the Republic; if he punishes the guilty parties in the repression he would be admitting self-criticism... and the solution for this conflict is being inflexible.

Carlos Monsiváis, 1968, *The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*

WHAT HAPPENED IN 1968 WAS A HISTORY OF RESISTANCE. THE DIAZ ORDAZ GOVERNMENT GAVE ITS HISTORICAL TRUTH THAT SAYS: STUDENTS WERE PART OF A COMMUNIST CABAL AND WERE BEING MANIPULATED BY EITHER CUBA OR THE CIA. WHAT HAPPENED IN TLATELOLCO –THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND THE ARMY– WAS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE. AND MEMORY’S RESISTANCE BEGINS WITH ELENA PONIATWSKA AND CARLOS MONSIVÁIS IN *LA NOCHE DE TLATELOLCO*, AND *DÍAS DE GUARDAR*, WITH *PARTE DE GUERRA*, JULIO SCHERER AND MONSIVÁIS’ BOOK, AS WELL AS *LA ESTELA DE TLATELOLCO* BY RAÚL ÁLVAREZ GARÍN. THOSE FOUR CRUCIAL BOOKS ARE ALSO A HISTORY OF RESISTANCE: ALL OF US ARE GOING TO TELL THE STORY OF WHAT THAT MOVEMENT WAS.

FABRIZIO MEJÍA MADRID/ WRITER

MEXICO AFTER 68

Luis Echeverría Álvarez and the *Halconazo* massacre

His [Gustavo Díaz Ordaz’s] successor, Luis Echeverría Álvarez, who came to his own within the bureaucracy, sees in patriotism an administrative disposition, and because of it, focused in eliminating the negative associations of the 1968 events, at the halfway point of his term he adopts the Third World as banner and platform. However, the almost solemn burial of any positive characteristics of the Mexican Revolution is something that has happened once before: in 1968.

Carlos Monsiváis, 1968, *The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*



Echeverría takes some time conquering the forces that decried his predecessor, among them a large part of the middle class and almost the entire intellectual class. But during a time without alternatives, the Presidency dissolves any past, and if they could, all of Echeverría's courtiers would have sworn he never occupied the post of Secretary of State. And this orchestrated forgetfulness helps Echeverría and hides the methods through which he came to the Presidency, among them his adherence to the Cold War. If I can say something obvious: if Echeverría had not been a crusader of the hard line, he would not have kept his job nor would he have been chosen to be the successor. To repress, during 1968, was to have voice and influence from the presidential point of view.

Carlos Monsiváis, 1968, *The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*

MEXICO AFTER 68 **Avándaro**

[...] Avándaro arises from the possibility of imbuing the masses with the orgiastic and communitarian shivers rock culture transmits, from extending the circle of internal revelation. Avandaro, for the La Onda movement, is History concentrated in an only point that makes images and sensations everlasting, and this interpretation is not as arbitrary as it may seem given the thousands of testimonies gathered about this. That is way a crucial aspect of the Festival is the struggle against sexual repression expressed in the strip-tease, nudity and the apparent indifference to it, in "obscene" language and the vindication of vital content.

Carlos Monsiváis, *Lost Love (Amor perdido)*

MEXICO AFTER 68 **The Guerrilla**

In the regions, perhaps the most despicable happens in Guerrero, from Miguel Alemán's regime onwards, where among other deadly occurrences, the agrarian leaders opposed to the unfair sale of their lands or the unconditional vote for the PRI party are killed; feudal lords (governors, union leaders and landowners) are supported, those who carry out massacres are protected (the coconut producers massacre in Acapulco in 1967 is an example), and, most decisive of all, there were two episodes of opening machine gun fire on defenseless crowds in public squares, which in turn lead two rural teachers, Genaro Vázquez Rojas and Lucio Cabañas to guerilla war.

Carlos Monsiváis, 1968, *The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*



The Left in Mexico

1968, the Year of the Second Internationalization.

If we were to give a final reckoning of the 1968 Student Movement, we might say that it was a great heroic mobilization in defense of human and civil rights whose political orientation, heavily influenced by the Communist Party and other leftist political entities, gave it a confrontational tone against the bourgeois State. This was the case, undoubtedly, in the beginning and through the high point of the Movement; however, its rejection of authoritarianism and irrationality, the recognition of all victims, the generation's desire to take to the streets and inaugurate or formalize the first real enjoyment of freedoms were the things that truly mattered. Without knowing, those who were part of the 1968 Movement were guided by something Marx had said: the radical impulse exists in humans so they can be truly free.

1968 is an truly leftist occurrence that though its frenzy and flights of fancy achieved the unthinkable: to give the Left its modern prestige back, which it had lost several decades before; it managed to push it towards a position on the vanguard that was not only rhetorical. In 1968 a siege that the Cold War so efficiently had put in place crumbled and suddenly being a dissident was no longer akin to living in the shadows. The Left speaks feverishly, it takes to the streets, it incorporates women, exhibiting a certain machismo at first and, something that is key, it distanced itself from its own insistence on failure and its halo of victimization by incorporating without indoctrinating young people who were guided by anti-authoritarianism and by a desire for freedom. I am not alluding to the orgy those on the Right imagined –physical experimentation–, I am not talking about onanism, nor reading novels and poems as if they were prophetic texts. I came to the demonstration because they told me my father, Pedro Paramo, would be here. It was because of their deep commitment with political engagement and with losing control. The October 2nd Massacre seems to cancel all of these advances, but soon enough it is clear that the dynamics of change are much more powerful and that the process continues. We ought to say, though, that as it happens in a centralist country, Mexico City concentrates most of the 1968 Movement's energy. The Left is centralist as well, but in this case it is simply because most of the time, the fiercest repressions are the ones that happen regionally.



The Critic's Timidity and the Main Rival

The October 2nd Massacre both provokes and breaks down activists' groups, many of which are fearful they will consider all democratic avenues have been closed off. During the 1960s and 1970s, encouraged by Che Guevara's example and the regime's impunity, a regime that coldly locked up its own victims, several guerrilla groups arise and try in vain to stir up the population and transform into the bourgeoisie's nightmare. Rural guerrillas are destroyed and in the devastation of this dirty war, urban guerrillas fall as well. The latter contributed to their own destruction because of their suicidal impulses that come to a head with the frenzy of urban development. A lot of the gains of the 68 Movement are frozen by sectarianism and the inability to make far-reaching judgments, although there are noble attitudes and honest concern for the country's tragic realities, extreme poverty in the first place. But it being a relentless model, the adherence to the USSR directive is maintained till the end. However progressive an emancipation of criteria, the Communist Party is condemned for the Czechoslovakia Invasion in 1968, soviet manuals are abandoned, and several well-worn dogmas are critically reexamined –the Mexican Revolution was a democratic and bourgeois revolution, art is a superstructure, etc. The relentless model is still Soviet.

-Carlos Monsiváis

**WHAT WE SHOULD RECOVER IS THE SPIRIT OF 68, THE FIGHTING SPIRIT,
THE CONSCIOUSNESS IT AWOKED AND WE'VE SEEN FLOURISH
ARIEL ROSALES/ EDITOR**

1968 and Carlos Monsiváis: An Exhibit

Gerardo Estrada

Just as it happens with wrestlers' or football players' stamps, one of the Mexican propaganda collections most often displayed are press materials about the 1968 Student Movement.

Each one of us who lived through it has his or her own personal 1968, and in the same way these anthologies we considered unique, in truth existed by the hundreds, perhaps thousands. An example of this fondness for keeping these records came about with the multitudinous response to the Centro Cultural Tlatelolco's call for these types of documents to compile and digitize.

Of course Monsiváis' collection on the 1968 Student Movement deserves to be considered on its own. Here we find mainly photographs that did not receive the



attention they merited in their time except by the sensibility and the perceptive eye of our chronicler. Also, given the many different circles where our keen collector hung around one can expect he had access to documents other people would not have.

Among the most significant experiences I had during 1968 was having the pleasure and privilege of meeting Monsiváis: a character who was admired and respected by young people then, an indispensable and irreplaceable figure, and a representative of new Mexican intellectuals. He was the archetype of the modern and engaged intellectual who, with his chronicles in the pages of the cultural supplement of *Siempre!* Magazine and other publications, took us deep into the world of modern culture and what we would now call global culture. He disassembled our prejudices against expressions of North American culture, for example: films and comedy, which were by then the new horizons opening up to our imagination.

I was thrilled to meet Monsiváis because of his stunning *Autobiografía precoz*, published thanks to Emmanuel Carballo, along with other young writers like José Agustín, where he confessed that at 30 years old he “had not been to Europe”. I was close friends with several of his like Gustavo Sainz, Gabriel Careaga, Víctor Flores Olea and Enrique González Pedrero, and waited for the first opportunity to meet him.

After the Tlatelolco tragedy we were able to get in touch with him through a student at the Political Science School, Cristina Puga. Monsiváis spontaneously offered us food, clothes and books for the students who were locked up at Lecumberri prison. He told us to meet him on Saturday at noon in a café at the famous Zona Rosa, where he used to hang out.

Exceptionally on time, as if we were fans or groupies, we waited there for an hour, two, four, until we concluded we’d been stood up. The following Monday we found out through the press that our admired writer had travelled to Acapulco to the famous film festival; instead of getting mad with him, we admired him even more. A few days later, and with the corresponding apologies, he honored his promise of getting us the help for our schoolmates, victims of repression.

From then on, I had the privilege of being Carlos’ friend and of having long conversations with him about 1968, an occurrence we interpreted in similar ways. He was the one who pushed me to publish my work on the subject and was very generous in writing an epilogue to my book.

One of the most important coincidences was, undoubtedly, recognizing the enormous cultural content that the Student Movement had, as well as the



importance ideas, imagination and art had in it. Also, the joyful and irreverent nature of the youth's protests all around the world, particularly in France, were important, especially given the almost anarchic demystification of institutions, political parties and political ideologies which had been one of its main riches. All of that without forgoing the deep political connections with the political situations of each countries, and in Mexico's case in particular, its authoritarian political system without civil liberties and a real electoral system.

El espíritu del 68 exhibition reveals and confirms many of the aspects Carlos Monsiváis perceived and was able to distinguish as the most important and representative of the Student Movement. The amazing graphic material gathered here is not only valuable because of what it represented as propaganda, but also in aesthetic terms.

Some of the photographs of the collection were not shown when they were taken because of political censorship. However, they represent very considerable revelations.

I could not hide my emotion when I walked through the exhibition and remembered all the conversations I had with Carlos about this and other subjects in 40 years of friendship. We shared much more ideas than political differences, something that is always present in intelligent conversation.

If Carlos' contemporaries, when they visit the exhibition, can find solace in the nostalgia we feel for that utopia in which he never stopped believing, then the young people will have the opportunity to experience not only a clearheaded testimony but also one of the keenest and most perceptive sensibilities of the time and one of the most authentic representatives of the spirit of 1968.

WHAT WERE THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE 68 MOVEMENT IN MEXICO? PAVING A REAL PATH TOWARDS DEMOCRACY. SOMEONE DEFINED IT AS THE APPEARANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN MEXICO, AS THE BIRTH OF CIVIL SOCIETY.

GERARDO ESTRADA/ SCHOLAR AND PARTICIPANT IN THE 1968 MOVEMENT



To explain to everyone
Our student fight,
We took to the streets,
We worked as brigades,
And the people were able to hear.

Judith Reyes

When the student movement broke out, the government panicked. Because it was a new phenomenon, the Mexican political elite did not understand it and reacted stringent and clumsily. According to several testimonies, president Díaz Ordaz thought it was an international communist plot to cancel the Olympics and ridicule its government terribly. The president reacted furiously. Among other things, he set in motion the State's repressive machinery and the propaganda machine against agitators. It was a relentless campaign and the regime's spokespersons did not spare any strategy of discredit, lies, nor condemnation.

Rafael Barajas

In his memoirs, General Luis Gutiérrez Oropeza, head of the Estado Mayor Presidencial during Díaz Ordaz's regime, reproduces the genuine conviction of his boss: "Since the beginning of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's presidency, the radical Left which had rebelling since the previous regime, received precise orders from international communism to take advantage of the preparations for the Olympics to foster in Mexico that part of World Revolution it had to play. Díaz Ordaz had no other option but use force to contain the violence that threatened to engulf us". Lacking facts, crazy hearsay works as well.

Carlos Monsiváis, 1968, *The Tradition of Resistance (El 68. La tradición de la resistencia)*