

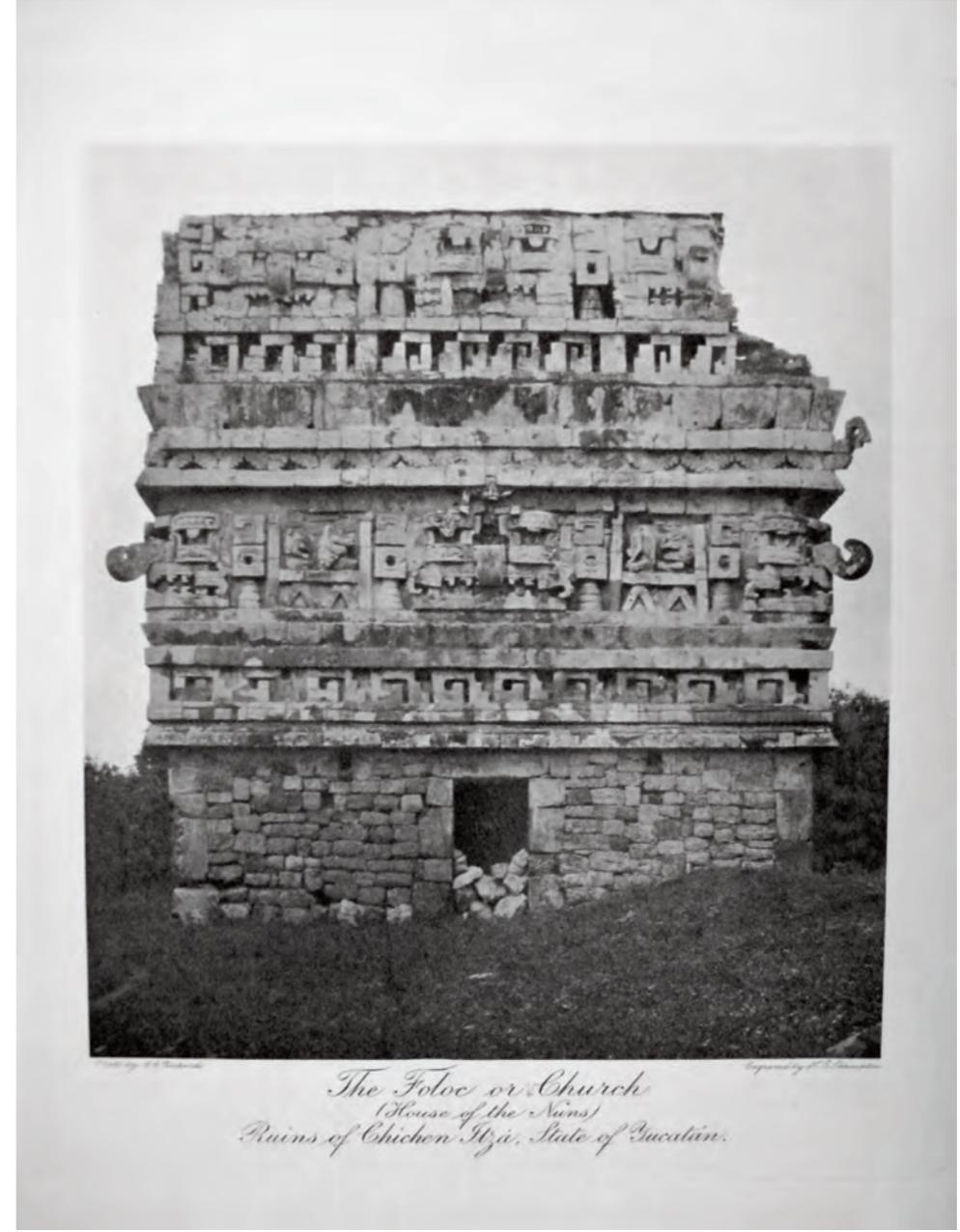




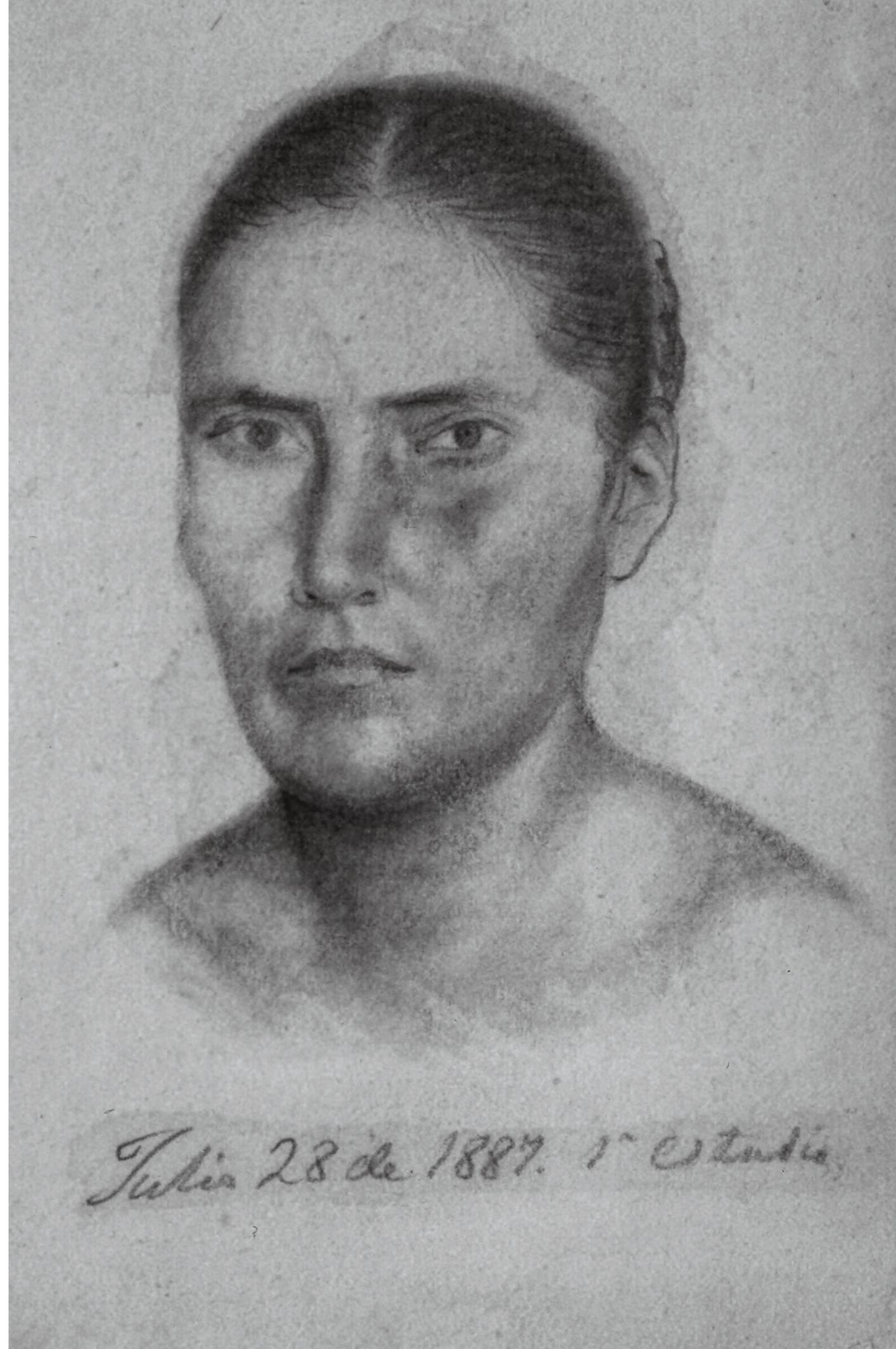
XVI



XVII



*The Fotoc or Church
(House of the Nuns)
Ruins of Chichen Itza, State of Yucatan.*



Julia 28 de 1887. 1º Estudio



THE RUINS OF MEXICO

CONSTANTINE GEORGE RICKARDS



VOLUME I

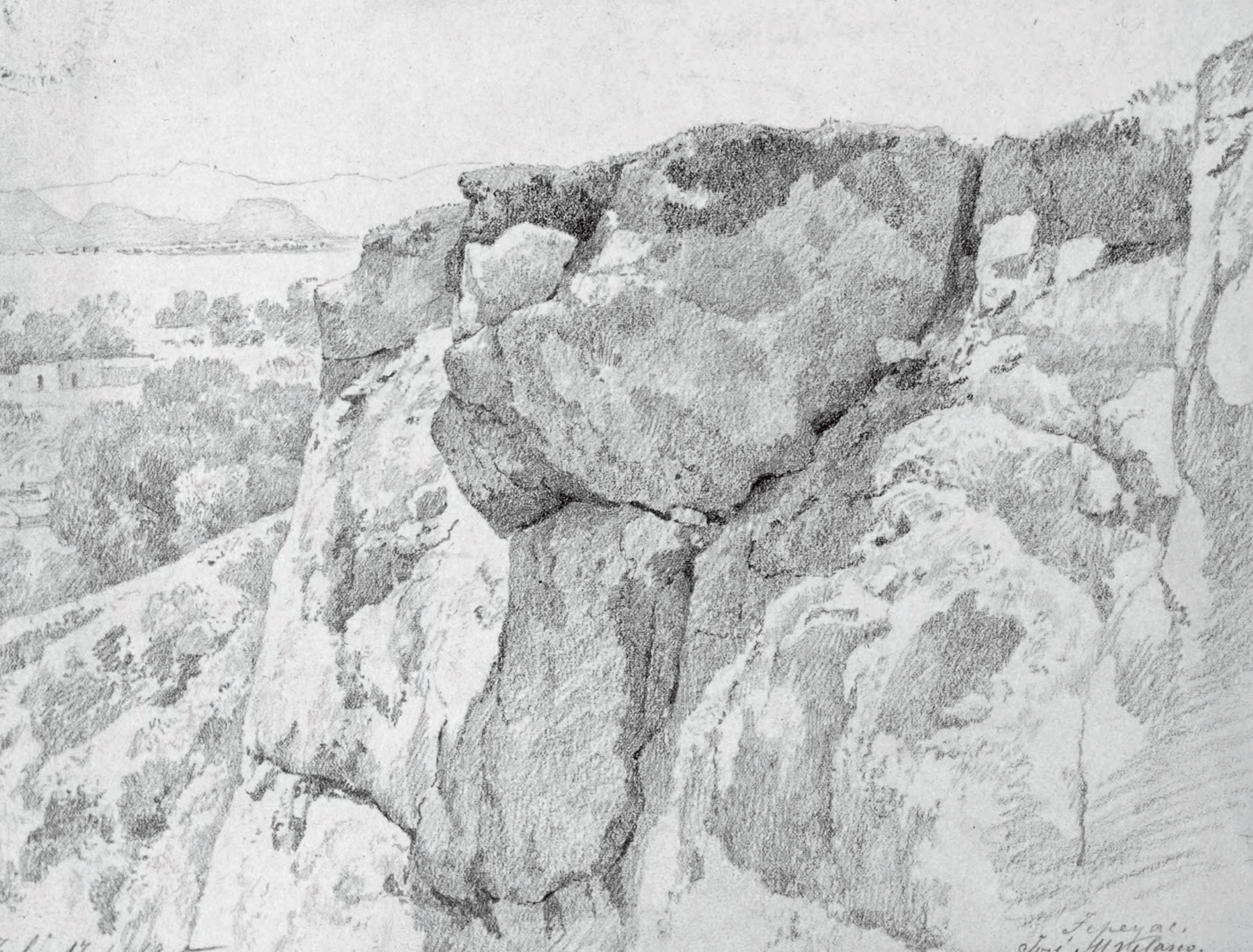
The Ruins of Mexico.
STATE OF YUCATÁN.

THE RUINS OF YUCATÁN.
The Palace of Layil.

Antiquities from the Ruins of Yucatán.

Site of the walls of the ancient Maya city of T'ho, now Mérida,
the capital of Yucatán.





Sepeyal,
Isti. Al. Vilasov.

AD
CANOS
INTE
WENTARLOS



Julio 17/81

¡PRIMERO DE MAYO 1952!
DÍA DE LUCHA

Por la Paz,
Por la Democracia,
Por la Libertad de Prensa y de Expresión Nacional,
Por el Respeto a las Libertades Democráticas

Tobajadores de MEXICO

El Comité Central del Partido Obrero

¡MIRADLOS Y DEJADLOS

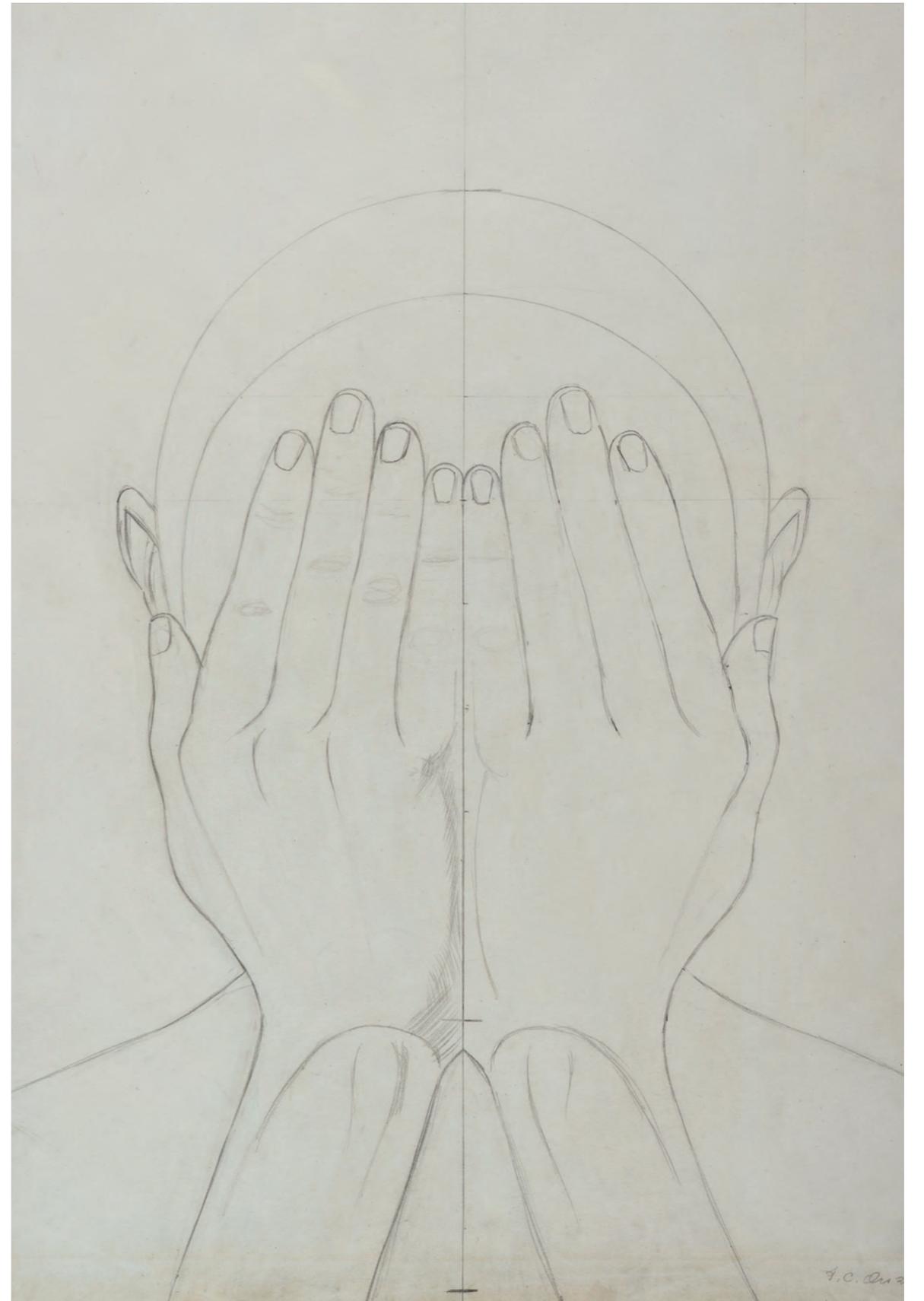
"El Norte" en el Rancho Blanco

1943

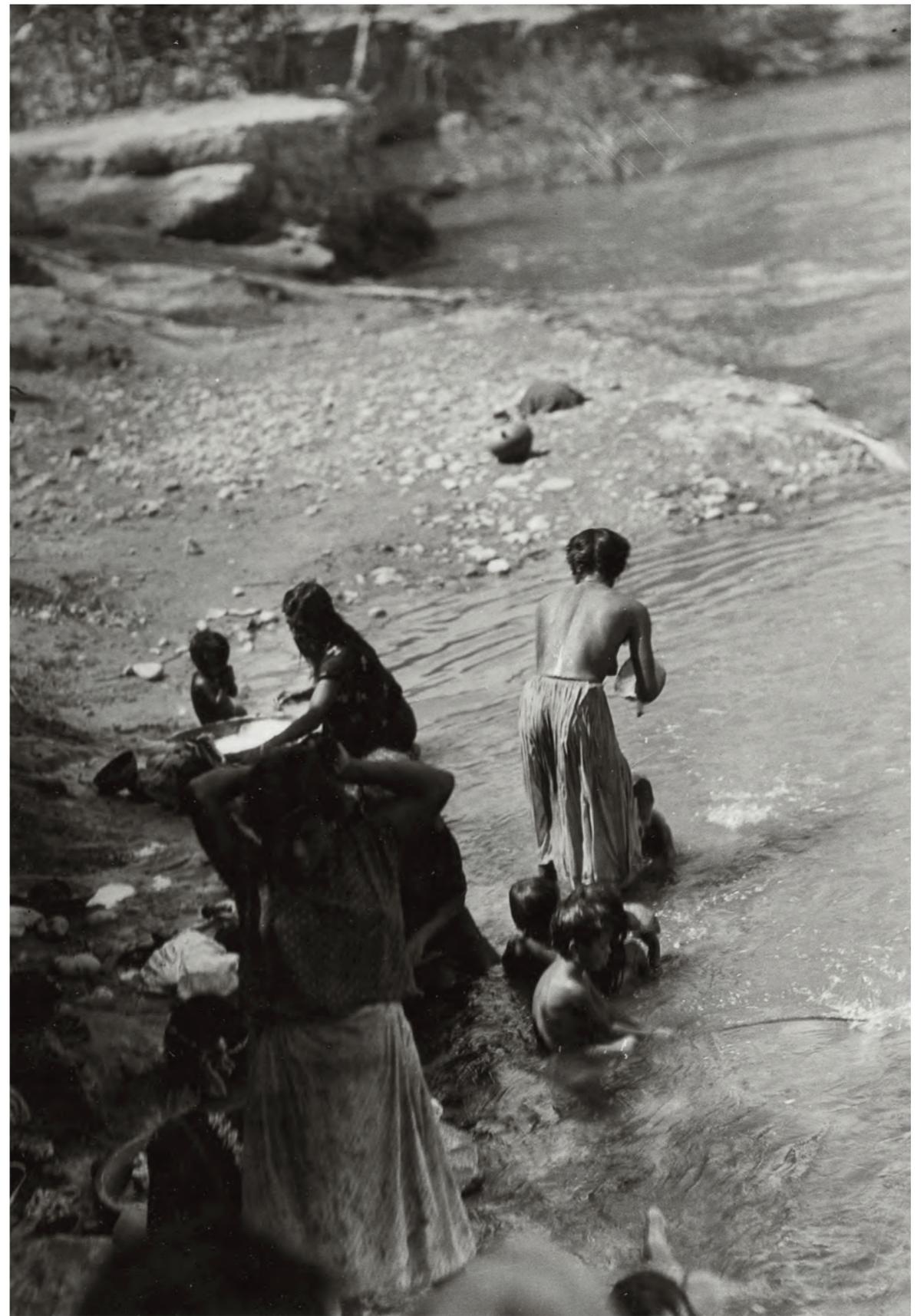


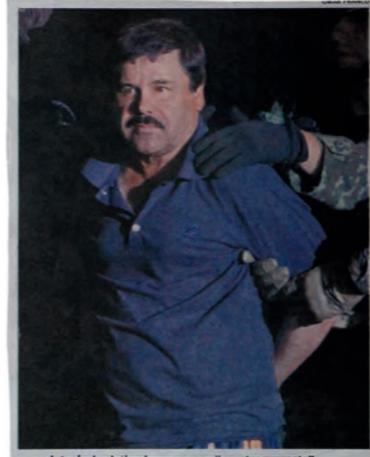
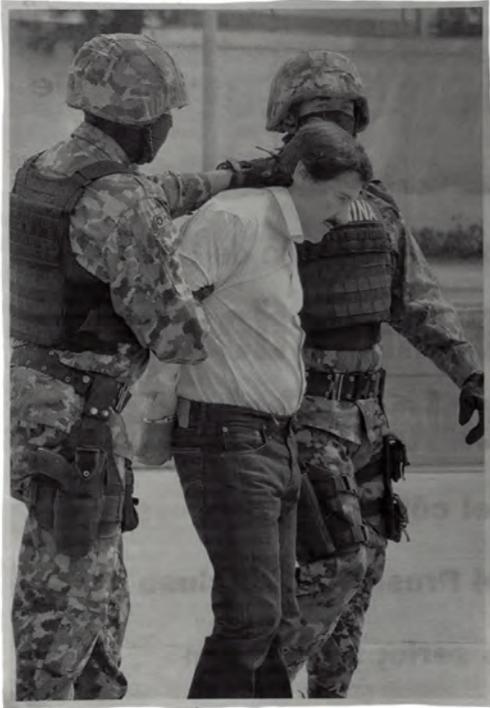
Rancho Blanco

18-4-43













FM

$$\frac{16700}{1200} = 1.39$$

$$32 \times 1.11 = 35.2$$

$$32 \div 1.11 = 29.09$$

F.L.

1.39

$$y^3(1 \div 3) = 1.11$$









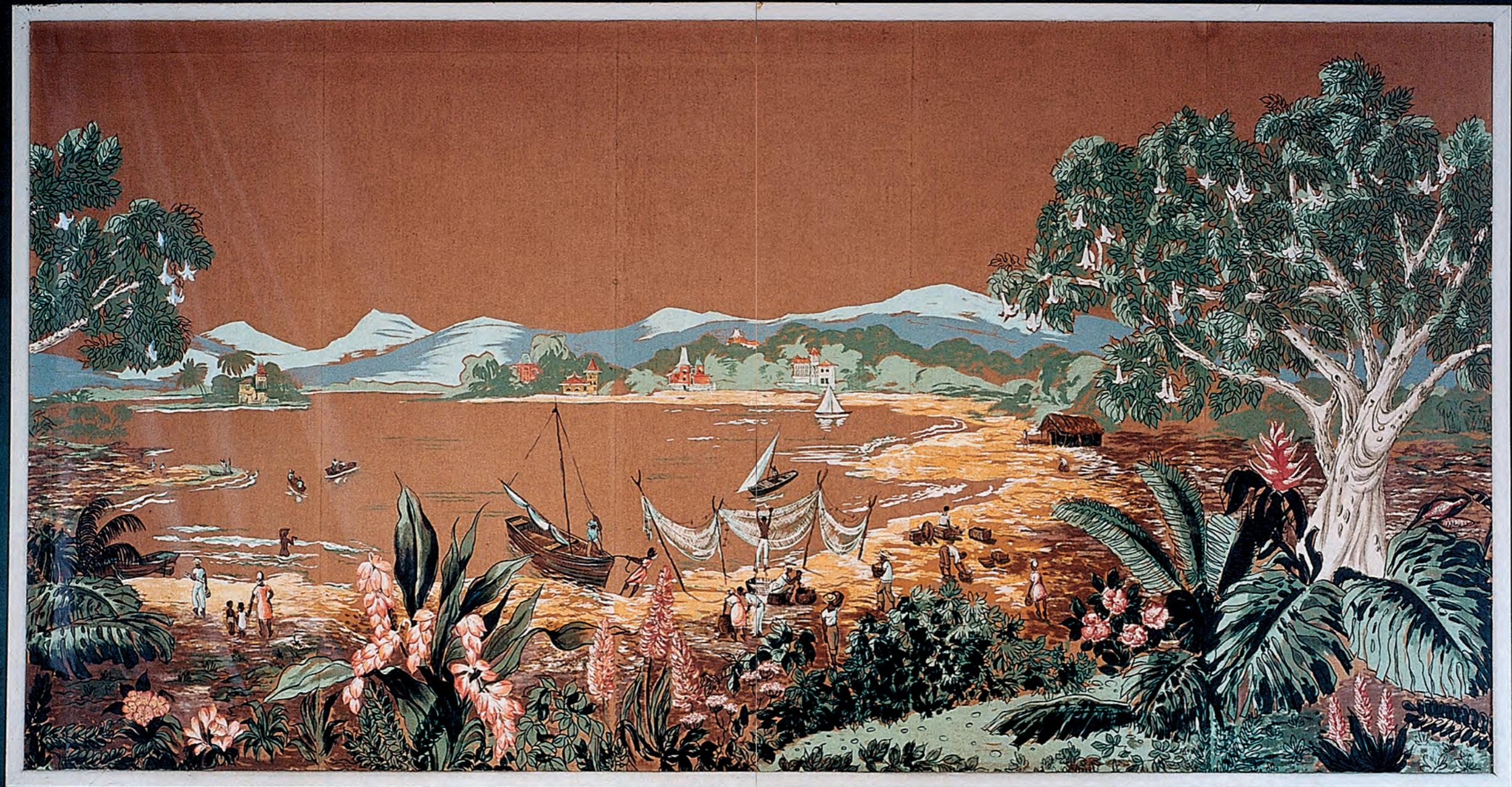






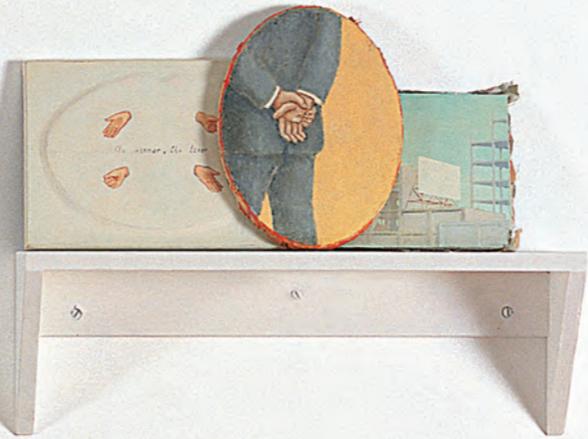












nada que perder

algo que perder

todo que perder

















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EDITED BY
MARÍA VIRGINIA JAUA

MEXICO:
ESSAYS
ON
A
MYTH

«WE CANNOT HAVE
AN IMAGE OF OURSELVES.
CAN WE HAVE ONE OF OTHERS?
NO DOUBT,
BUT WE NEVER KNOW,
ALAS, IF IT IS THE RIGHT ONE.»
Dread of One Single End, EDMOND JABÈS

«WHAT CAN WE DO?
BUILD A STAGE FOR THE MYTHS
THAT TORMENT US TO DANCE ON.»
The Conquest of Mexico, ANTONIN ARTAUD

THIS BOOK FORMS PART OF THE EXHIBITION
VARIATIONS ON A MEXICAN THEME
AT TORRE IBERDROLA, CURATED BY GUILLERMO PANEQUE

It gives me great satisfaction to present to you *Mexico: Essays on a Myth*, a book that started out as an exhibition held at Iberdrola corporate headquarters in Bilbao from April 4 to June 30, 2016. Named after a book of poetry in prose published by Luis Cernuda in 1952, *Variations on a Mexican Theme* forms part of an ongoing effort to delve deeper into our understanding of countries where we have a presence and to promote the dissemination of their cultural heritage.

The mission of Iberdrola in Mexico, having contributed to the development of energy there for nearly twenty years, is an endeavor inseparable –given our way of doing business– from our involvement in local economic, social, and cultural development and our willingness to form part of the community by sharing its concerns, interests, and expectations. Especially in this case, given the strong historic and cultural ties that bind our two countries together.

This mission has motivated us to embark on an initiative to comprehend Mexican identity: a goal that cannot be attained unless we first gain an understanding of the artistic, literary, and cultural manifestations that have endeavored to define and represent it. Moreover, any attempt to synthesize this identity turns out to be enormously complex, given that the essence of «Mexicanness» lies in a cultural crucible, in which different historical eras belonging to diverse groups of people coexist simultaneously.

This plurality is a dimension that *Variations of a Mexican Theme* has chosen to contemplate by adopting a variegated vision –ranging from pre-Colombian to contemporary art– that encompasses different media and techniques: paintings, objects, installations, photographs, books, cinema, video...

The volume the reader now holds is an extension of this exhibition, a complement that strikes up a conversation by including, together with imagery related to the works on display, a series of readings that put the idea of Mexico as myth to the test.

I hereby express my sincerest gratitude to María Virginia Jaua, editor of this book and to Guillermo Paneque, curator of the exhibition, as well as the artists, museums, collectors, and galleries that made all of this possible through loans of their works. Without them, we would have been unable to envisage such an approach to what Octavio Paz called «finding Mexicanness, an invisible substance that resides somewhere or other. We know not what it consists of or what path may lead us to it; we do know, vaguely, that it has not yet been revealed.»

Ignacio S. Galán,
President of Iberdrola



When we were asked to *present* Mexico, that is to say, to make *present* an idea of what this enormous, complex, and surprising country could mean in today's imagery, we found ourselves facing something far greater than a challenge. How to offer up –in the brief space afforded by a small volume– the full experience of a tale complete, accurate, and intelligible enough to tell the development of a nation over the course of so many centuries of history and culture?

To accomplish this would necessitate intensifying said *present* in order to activate its existence, producing thus a desire to *see* more, to *see* all. At the very least, all that is and all that may be. Which begs the question: can *all* of Mexico be seen? If one were to answer in the affirmative, we would have to recognize ours as an insurmountable task, given that any country, no matter how small or recently ordained, is enough to inspire a great library. How then to see a nation so vast that its origin is lost in time, a nation that unfolds and branches out into cultures, languages, landscapes, gestures, and ways of being in the world, now and forever?

We may find our desire to see all suddenly frustrated. Or on the contrary, set on fire by our gaze, like the view of an erupting volcano. Knowing that there will not be time enough to observe each of its changes, leaving us hypnotized forever by an infinite desire to see, to follow that transformation of landscape through fire and quake; so that through our eyes, we may succeed in appropriating some small remnant, proof, or souvenir of that experience.

In light of our irrepressible desire to bring a bit of Mexico to these pages, the volume the reader now holds reflects a rather humble yearning –which does not make it any less demanding or ambitious– to invoke ashes, fragments, those small traces that, no matter how slight, can provide an account of the volcano all the way from inception to full-blown apogee. These are made *present* by means of a series of readings dedicated to the constant, obsessive, and ongoing transformation of the elaboration of what Mexico can come to mean as an intimate, personal myth.

We consider the myth, in the broader sense of the term Barthes provided, to be a system of communication that conjoins signifier and sense, something that goes far beyond words, discourse, or even language. The myth reveals a certain knowledge of the «real» while at the same time concealing it, almost always going hand-in-hand with a change in the course of history, in which the past converges with the projection of a future that, in turn, lends meaning to the present where we now stand. There, in the search for such knowledge, is where we may perhaps inscribe the zeal that has motivated us to attempt an (im)possible reading of the idea of Mexico as myth.

Perhaps the myth of Mexico, so malleable and hard to contain, gestated from the moment this country was first «seen» by other eyes, continues –even today– its quest in search of a form. Indeed, the discovery of such a form would be swiftly adopted by this rereading and presented here, as a symphony of voices and registers. The re-elaboration of this myth demands absolute editorial freedom, if we may define edition as a form of writing. An invisible



or, if you prefer, «silenced» form of writing, perhaps, implicit in the selection of texts and the way they have been arranged.

Mexico: Essays on a myth thus becomes a complex, subtle composition not only of writers and writings from different eras, but of diverse genres that range from the poetic dialogue to the chronicle, from the literary essay, poem, and anthropological or philosophical reflection to the sort of highly refined narrative fiction with which writers have sought to compose a conceivable tale, one that desires to attain, in all its polyphony, the cadence of a single voice.

The reader will also find here a selection of themes associated with how Mexicans have written on landscape and national culture, in the case of Alfonso Reyes, Octavio Paz, José Revueltas, Fernando Benítez, Sergio González Rodríguez, Alfredo López Austin, Luigi Amara, and Mario Bellatin; not to mention the voices of foreign writers such as Gonzalo Rojas of Chile or Malcolm Lowry of Great Britain, Georges Bataille and Jacques Derrida of France, or the exiles Luis Cernuda and Luis Cardoza y Aragón.

The first chapter of this book, «How to carry Mexico on one's back?» relates the importance held by Mexico for so many intellectuals and artists for whom this country has become more than a home, an inspiration: a reason to move forward and continue creating; the vision they extend –by means of fiction– of Mexican hospitality could, in a utopian dream, have saved the life of Walter Benjamin. The second chapter, «Under the volcano», presents on the other hand the Mexican writer's idealization of his country's landscape, in the case of Reyes, or the inspiration of its Nature, in that of Paz; the social awareness and tragic presence of the telluric latent in every volcanic blast, according to Revueltas; or the «archeological» study of the present of Mexico City and the habits of its inhabitants, according to Luigi Amara.

The third chapter is articulated as a postulate of this book in which the promise of our *offering* is fulfilled, that is to say, the *present* of the texts themselves. But also the rite through which the myth is activated and renovated, that is to say, the research and composition of the tale being told, the work with language that permeates the entire book. To this end, we have proposed excerpts from two French thinkers, Georges Bataille and Jacques Derrida. The first introduces the theme of human sacrifice as a condition necessary for the emergence of life; while the second portrays the offering as both means and end for the researcher who, in turn, takes on the shape of the critical reader and producer of these pages and, as you receive their *offering*, may very likely adopt the reader's as well. To the voices of Bataille and Derrida we add Sergio González Rodríguez's exploration of the magical and metaphorical use of sacrificial blood in different cultures. We conclude with a fiction inspired by Salvador Elizondo regarding the night and its realm of creation, concealed and engendered by time itself.

From this nocturnal domain, so vital to creativity, we proceed to that of «The sacred game.» In this section, we have included an Aztec poem that draws a direct relationship between play and the balance of man's life on Earth; and an excerpt from Alfredo López Austin that relates the myth of Mesoamerican cosmogony related to the ball game, intervened so that the reader may choose

to play along. To this introduction to the concept of play, we add Antonio Caso's reflection in which the Mexican philosopher establishes a relationship, from the perspective of aesthetic theory, between play and art, a tension that underlies what he calls *the goal with no objective*, whereby the liberating principle of the game –inherent to animals– is set free and attains its highest station as the immanent condition of art.

It is through this interplay of connections that we seek to conduct a self-aware exercise into the artistic praxis that governs this book, thanks to its close-knit relationship with the only thing that cannot make its presence known: the work of art. Taking into account another aporia of representation, the exhibition, that cannot be altogether overlooked, we recall here that the work speaks of itself, telling its own tale, but without ever truly coming into being. Hence the text «Variations on a Mexican theme», named after the exhibition that took place under the auspices of Guillermo Paneque, who enables it to «speak,» even though it is not present here.

The fifth chapter, perhaps one of the most complex, is titled «The accursed share». Here we go back to Bataille for another excerpt, this time presenting the conceptualization of sacrifice by the Aztecs, whose ideas of consumption, expenditure, usufruct, and ultimately, victim were diametrically opposed to ours given that, underlying pre-Hispanic sacrifice, we find a renunciation of wealth impossible to comprehend in today's world. And yet the French thinker's approach to Aztec human sacrifice gives rise to a precise analysis regarding how the meaning of life and the spending of energy have been transformed, bound as they are to an economy based strictly on utility. The texts that complete this section, both Cardoza y Aragón's and Mario Bellatin's, describe the power relations between master and slave that still subsist, relations that have governed and continue to govern a great many labor transactions and correspondences, not to mention the exchange of energy so vital to our existence, with its burden of violence, in today's society.

The sixth and final chapter, «Divine Laughter», delves more deeply into the primordial relationship between play and art through the liberating influence of laughter, made necessary thanks to humor. Laughter, the vibration that emerges from the depths of our souls and suspends all time, recalls the ecstasy and hallucination that enable man to connect freely to the gods (who have no need to *believe*, only to *create*). Gods who, moreover, introduce through laughter a dismantling element that corrodes the very foundation of their own creations. We find ourselves witnessing the way in which euphoria and delirium burst into language, alluded to by Fernando Benítez in his experience with mushrooms; one pursued, on other trips, by artists such as Robert Smithson or Gabriel Orozco. This chapter also deals with man's stubborn insistence on attaining divinity and the power hidden in the contradiction that underlies an almost nihilistic laughter that destroys and creates and that –as Octavio Paz rightly observes– predates the world. Because laughter is inaugural, giving rise to the universe of labor and sacrifice inherent to the rite, the myth, and also, therefore, the written word and all that we offer up to the reader in this book.

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How to carry M e x i c o on one's back?

[ONE]

—Who is asking for your affection here? When human beings have put such distance between them, affection cannot breach it.

—Because separation exists, that is the reason why such sincere and deep sympathy can blossom now.

—You find reasons for everything.

—In love, they are never lacking.

Hungry
for
M e x i c o

Every day at dawn, as I leap from the sheets out into the world, I say *M e x i c o* out loud. *M e x i c o* : not out of habit or fixation, but out of enchantment. Not because of the enigmatic X that so fascinated Valle-Inclán, or the unknown factor in algebra; I prefer the genetic crossing of two dissimilar sticks, pointing this way and that, two arrows shot, then bound at the midsection like sex, an almost bestial crossing, East and West, as children illustrate the great accord by which we live and breathe the world, my world. I saw it before it actually became visible, like the rising sun. Long before its mother, who was half a choke away from fleeing in tears. Although our beloved *M e x i c o* is not and has never been asphyxia, but rather Oxygen, another word that boasts an X, perhaps the only air we may give ourselves. Not unlike *amor*, the only myth we have left, with an M just as capital despite its unfathomable murmuring tongue.

Mexico with an X, just so. And why not with that other phoneme, from that other prosody, the J or *yod* of eternity? Why not that other *Méjico* that defines all the rest of us, from the Rio Grande all the way down to Antarctica?

We swim deep down, under the same tide. So, you think you're Chilean because you read Mistral? Argentinean because of Borges, is that what you said? That you're Peruvian because of Vallejo, that Darío made you Antillean; Martí, Cuban; Guimarães, born in Rio; Lautréamont, from Montevideo? That you are coastal or Andean by mere chance, travel-

ing by horse or burro, just another peasant among the peasantry of all these fatherlands torn to pieces, wouldn't you agree?

—No, my lord, you have been carrying **Mexico** around on your back since the great, harried days of three millennia ago, **Mexico** on your mind and in your heart, the **Mexico** that continues to be born out of us even today, the one that taught its rhythm to the World, the one that learned from the very stars its own number, its primordial zero; a **Mexico** unique in imagination and courage, courage and imagination, that painting painted like no other, whose eye, whose hand, whose ear, guitar and all, remade the planet a thousand times over from tradition to innovation. A nose like the Ionians' that always discerns between the unique and the varied and —laughable as it may seem— a palette, moreover, that taught the flavor of sustenance to other newcomers, social climbers from above: for once, let the vile merchants eat well!

Nostalgia isn't my cup of tea, but there are many great Mexican figures who will always walk with me. Just now, three of them have appeared as if they were standing here before me, writing with my hand, or breathing down my neck:

[1]

Reyes of Monterrey, back in that fleeting April of '59, when he opened the great door of his home to me, on Benjamín Hill Street in **M e x i c o** City, and I

[034]

started to climb the Alfonsine staircase. Then he up and died on us that same year, in dark December!

Let us speak at greater length this time. I returned from China fascinated by my discourse with Mao Tse Tung, just as robust and glorious as his was at the time. I told him not of my adhesion, but rather my addiction to his powerful work. «We will never have such a one in our Chile,» I thought to myself in a flash. Reading Alfonso Reyes (Borges *dixit*) is to learn how to write. What more do I owe Reyes, beyond his courtesy and that state of grace that was his conversation and his mentorship? I think of it today: pruning, *l'ostinato rigore*, as Leonardo used to say.

[2]

It was my privilege to spot Rivera, Diego Rivera, tall and dilapidated, at a seafood market in Concepción, Chile. Then something incredible had to happen: as we were standing there, tasting the delights of *piures* and sparkling spider crabs and other seafood from the handcrafted dishes, the din of an earthquake came (one of those convulsions beyond belief that shake the geology of Chile), and everything became a back-and-forth of knives and glass everywhere. «Let's go out into the street to get a better look,» the great voyeur told me.

Of course, the street was another unending, unyielding shake-up, a fearsome serpent of the ilk of that other one in **M e x i c o** City, *circa* 1985.

[035]

And Octavio! How to forget Octavio, more oxygen and more *M e x i c o* than any other? No one spells us out like his *Parole*.

Mexico! The fact is, it has not yet been discovered. Not to mention interpreted. Poets, painters, musicians are born to it, but its great mystery has not been deciphered. Although clearly, no other region can be more transparent, or more secretive. I commend myself to her every day.

I once heard that of all the *global village* on the planet, this and no other was the most global village. I am not certain and what one doesn't know for certain, it is better to not say. Artaud knew more, the rest are mere apprentices and I am speaking here of the foreigners, the outsiders, the *pajueranos*, as we jokingly say in Chile.

These poor lines of mine. I was not born here, I did not deserve to be here. Other volcanoes were bestowed on me. But this is where I reside and as for surrealism, why bother? As Breton once said. Everything has already set foot here, from the dragon to the snail, from the labyrinth of solitude to the monstrousness of the unforgiving masses, who already require another galaxy.

Until next time, consider me diaphanous.

The
final
destination
of
Walter
Benjamin

There are those who still believe that Walter Benjamin committed suicide in the month of September at Portbou, and they flock to that craggy place in futile pilgrimage in order to read a strange, but critical epigraph: yet another irony of the «summer» economies. Not without a certain audaciousness, Tackels (his biographer) claims that given the chance, Benjamin would have fled to South America, «a place where catastrophe has never extinguished the promise of another world.» But there are also those even more daring who say –and some even claim to have proof– that Walter Benjamin managed to escape the horror and continue to search for the home of his dreams. A home where he could finally divest himself of the wanderer’s uniform. A quest that would have led him all the way to **M e x i c o**, following in Trotsky’s footsteps. And even though they say the maritime passage was very long and that during the voyage, news came of Trotsky’s assassination by Catalanian communists, this did not discourage him. On the contrary, it lent renewed impetus to his desire –already frustrated– to meet with the ideologue of the permanent revolution.

They say he disembarked in Veracruz and before arriving to **M e x i c o** City, wandered around different places, cutting across a great swath of Mexican territory. They say that for a time, he traversed desert landscapes, following the trail blazed by some philosopher or some visionary poet, experimenting with implausible drugs, allowing himself to be dragged into alternative ways to experience reality. They also

say that his limitless curiosity and imperious desire to confront all knowledge seduced him until a few years later, he finally succeeded in reaching the infinite city. His pace as an experienced *flâneur* led him to Trotsky’s home in Coyoacán. By then, the house had already become a museum: that is to say, a dead building, extracted from the course of history. At the front gate, next to the main entrance –still open to the public– a clumsily lettered sign read: «Closed.» But after much insistence, Benjamin managed to gain entry together with his companion, a woman, although no one has ever been able to confirm this. We should not find his incredulity strange. But upon seeing such a bizarre and yet, attractive combination, the museum that is not a museum, but rather a house suspended in the contemplation of its own wild interior garden in the midst of the great metropolis, one that conceals a failed refuge, where the footsteps of the attack, of that violent death still echo: a place without a name and without a niche in time. Walter Benjamin is alleged to have entered this house as if it were one of his well-known passages. He is said to have stopped before each object, to have deciphered every detail, every garment, every sign of wear and tear, and to have heard the muted echo of dreams and conversations. It is even possible that he may have felt a great tranquility, as if standing before the peaceful tomb of a friend, and that he read therein –half smilingly– the irony of his own epitaph. Perhaps upon reaching the end of the tour, he carefully placed his hat next to

the ideologue's. Perhaps, out of respect for what he considered to be a sacred place, he made it his own. Or perhaps he felt the urge to remain forever in that house abandoned to silence,

to eternally heartbreaking
exile, and only then became whole.

Anáhuac

When once again, I had to decide where to confront my situation, I chose *M e x i c o* immediately with joy and great certainty for several reasons, emotional, and sentimental; moreover, I had friends there and would feel at home thanks to their proximity and customs, their analogous nature and pre-Colombian forms of expression.

I trod the soil of *M e x i c o* for the first time in 1930 and from that touristic encounter, conserved nostalgic memories. Now I was back at maximum exposure, with no needs other than a bit of work, enough to make a modest living. The doors of my fatherland remained closed to me. And so simply and naturally engaged have I lived that my Mexican friends were surprised when in October of 1944, I promptly crossed the border in order to join the efforts of my people. Out of fraternity, they had forgotten or failed to recall that I was born in Guatemala.

(

And more than a decade later, hemmed in by hunger in my own land, in 1953, when adversity prevented me from living there once again, accompanied this time by Lya, **M e x i c o** became my home, and I cannot say that I reencountered it, given that my bond ran so deep, I consider my return to be a fortunate misfortune. Here, I have spent more than half my years, merged with my friends, their traditions, their battles; I recall also my friends who have died. How can I express what I feel? In the heaven of our mythologies, I am a Guatemalan with no Suchiate.

)

(

I am frequently discouraged and stop writing these
pages;

then I regress. The fear of ridicule is one of the worst forms of cowardice... but one need not be so very brave. Memory is germinal and fertile, and it is no fictional fiction, but mystifying and heavenly; we are always remembering, submerged in our memorial archives, conversing with life more than death, finding our origins in the navel of Adam. As if in death, already awakened, we were to speak while dreaming.

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Under the

[TWO]

v o l c a n o

A black shroud over the landscape

Dionisio Pulido, the only person in the world who can boast that he owns a **v o l c a n o** , is the owner of nothing. He has enough to live on: his hard feet, mangy, black, and bare, with which he walks the face of the earth; he has his hands, absolutely filthy, poor at present, that till the land here, where he has found shelter. That is all he has: his feeble body, his dust-filled soul, covered in black ash.

Cuiyútziro –eagle, in Tarascan– once cultivated the land that was his property; today, he no longer exists; his ancient «plot» of fine, good earth has died beneath the sand, beneath the fire of a small, yet beautiful volcanic monster.

Today, Pulido still lives on in his miserable hut in Paricutín, that desolate, frightful little town. He is the owner of a **v o l c a n o** : he owns nothing in this world.

The Valley of Mexico

The senior «geologist» observes the **v o l c a n o** from the northern side. As for us, we decide to admire it from the northeast, up to an approximate distance of one hundred and fifty meters from its base.

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— 0 It took some daring to withstand —as we fled in terror— a terrible hailstorm of thick gravel that nearly made one of our guides —Manuel Mateo or Delfino Rangel— abandon us to our fate.

The admirable Mayo, in his zeal to capture the best photographs, burned his feet –not seriously, fortunately– while attempting to climb a slope that was doubtless burning hot.

When on the evening of Day Six, having seen the Valley of Mexico and the glittering gems of the metropolis, I asked him, «Don't you find Mexico City, at moments like these, with its millions of lights, resembles the foothills of the Paricutín after an eruption of flame?» Mayo nodded his head silently.

Yes. Now we must ask ourselves: those gems, that luminous gravel of the palaces of our city, of our rich both new and old, will they not be extinguished, like the fields and land of the others, their flowers culled, our vast fatherland covered with unstoppable ash?

Vision
of
Anáhuac

What is ours and of Anáhuac is a far better thing and more bracing. At least, for those who enjoy having at all times their resolve alert and their thinking, clear. The most typical vision of our nature is found in the regions of the central plateau: there the rough and heraldic flora, the orderly landscape, the atmosphere of extreme clarity in which the colors themselves are drowned –compensating for the general harmony of the drawing, the luminous ether through which objects advance with distinctive highlights; and, in the end, to say it once and for all in the words of the modest and perceptive Friar Manuel de Navarrete: a radiant light that makes the mask of the heavens gleam.

This observation had already been made by a great reveler, one who has sanctioned with his name the pride of New Spain; a classic, universal man like those raised by the Renaissance who revived in his century the ancient way of acquiring wisdom, through travel, and the habit of writing exclusively about the memories and meditations of his own life: in his *Political Essay*, the Baron von Humboldt noted the strange reverberation of the solar rays on the mountainous mass of the central high plains, where the air is pure.

In a landscape not void of a certain aristocratic sterility, where the gaze wanders discerningly, the mind deciphers every line and caresses every wave; underneath that glowing air, in its general freshness and placidity, countless men have cast their broad and pensive spiritual gazes. Ecstatic before the cactus of the eagle and the serpent —the happy compendium

waters has been interrogated in an attempt to establish patterns of conduct among visitors to the park, their habits during that lapse of recreation during which they may consent to a few lazy hours of meditation or escape, either rowing about in unstable boats or walking aimlessly under the gaze of some bird, or reclining in the shade of a centenary tree while doing nothing at all, or playing soccer.

The Forest of Chapultepec -together with its renowned zoo- is today a recreational area, thanks to which the assessment and analysis of submerged garbage will allow us not only to understand the behavior of a representative segment of the population with regards to waste —thus enabling us to better prevent pollution in the park— but more importantly, to track

their way of life, the practices and attitudes that revolve around the notion of enjoying an agreeable afternoon. Archeology is the study of any cultural manifestation through material objects from any era. In the case of Chapultepec, the most ancient vestiges encountered date back to 1250 B.C., and although very ancient remains have also been found in the lakes (a tezontle ball from the Aztec period, for example), most of the garbage is recent, almost entirely from the 1960s to the present. With the purpose of evaluating the usage of space and culture among the inhabitants of Mexico City through the artifacts they have tossed into the lake, a systematic classification of found objects began, one that lays the foundation for the first X-ray of a typical visitor to the park.

Outstanding among these found objects are:

shoes, tennis shoes, jackets, shirts, socks, sandals, cosmetics, pencils, cans of sardines and tuna, beer, plastic bottles, coins, sunglasses and prescription glasses, rulers and protractors, cell phones, wallets, coin purses, portable recorders, earphones, keys and keychains, bottles of champagne and cognac, soda cans, toys, plastic animals, skates, tricycles, IDs, credit cards,

packages of condoms and Viagra, bags of potato chips and Bimbo bread, the remains of oars, fans, visors, costume jewelry, diapers, underwear, batteries, cutlery, cosmetics, umbrellas and parasols, clothespins, scissors, mirrors, masks and automotive parts,

among other items that were impossible to identify.

The most frequent artifacts are 2-liter plastic bottles with a perforation and a shoelace tied to both the neck and a rod, used to fish what little aquatic fauna remains in Chapultepec: minnows, crayfish, axolotls... a total of 45,382 different kinds of artifacts were recovered, among which bottles account for more than 20,000; this is already an important indicator, not only because of the kind of recreational activity implied, but because their industrial usage is relatively recent, dating back approximately only 22 years.

Among the most peculiar finds are fetishes used in witchcraft, nearly all of them related to love spells, which speaks to the lake also being used as a place of worship. Likewise, dolls in the shape of trolls have been found that are associated with luck, nearly all of

them burned, as well as photographs of lovers coated in beeswax and honey.

Although the exact date of the construction of the artificial lakes of Chapultepec is unknown, we do know that by the Porfirio Díaz era they already existed, first as excavations or islands within the stone basin itself and later on, featuring drop-offs and piers. There is no reliable information regarding any dragging operations previous to the one carried out recently, but found among the dated items rescued from the sediment are a bag of Bimbo sandwich bread from 1968, the year of the Olympics; a junior high school student ID from 1972; and bottles of Dr. Brown (barrel-shaped) and Jugosito soda discarded sometime during the 1960s. There is a plastic bot-

tle labeled Mello-Yello, a brand not sold in Mexico. There is a particularly enigmatic can of «Chilanga» beer, a brand whose registration remains unconfirmed to date. Starting in the 1970s, such artifacts abound, reflecting the change in the sort of people who frequent the park; no longer exclusively for the major outings of lower-class communities, it gradually became a prime location for popular recreation.

Aside from all the findings with sexual connotations –such as condoms, underwear, or Viagra, all of which indicate more daring uses of the park– one in particular turns out to be emblematic of the kind of function performed by a few hectares of vegetation and tranquility in the midst of a great metropolis: a supermarket bag containing over 500 advertisement

flyers. This leads us to imagine a fellow who was literally freed from fulfilling his slave labor of leafleting and who, in order to conceal his mischief, opted to launch the bag filled with the sheets of paper charged to him into the water, asking himself and answering himself at the same time: who will ever know?

The items harvested from the lake can be divided into three categories:

A) objects that fell in by accident: money, for example, or glasses;

B) objects that were thrown away on purpose, with the object of hiding something –a .38-caliber bullet was found, for example– or as a prank, such as a group of friends playing hooky from school who toss the shoe belonging to one of them into the water;

c) objects most curious, albeit fewer in number, submerged with ritualistic intent as part of a spell of witchcraft or *santería*.

According to official data, there were no macabre findings related to unsolved crimes. There were plenty of bones and skeletons belonging to ducks, or rodents and hares, as well as an animal or two that had escaped from the zoo or was attacked by a bird of prey; things of that nature abounded, but there was no evidence of sacrifice, such as a human body or remains.

And
) a bird (
sang

In clear silence
the day rested for a moment:
the clarity of space
became the clarity of silence.
The immobile light
of the heavens
soothed the growing grass.
The earthly insects among the stones
were as stones beneath
that same light.
Time was gluttoned by the moment.
Among the engrossed stillness,
midday was fulfilled.

And a bird sang: a slender arrow.
Its wounded silver breast
shook the sky,
the leaves rustled,
the grass awoke...
and I felt death was an arrow
that knows not who shoots it,
and in the blink of an eye,
we die.

Sacrificial r i t e s

[THREE]

Consumption in the Aztec worldview

The Aztecs, of whom I shall speak first, are morally situated at our antipodes. If a civilization can be measured by its works, theirs seem miserable to us. Despite the fact that they did make use of writing and possessed astronomical knowledge, their most important advances were useless: their architectural science was used to construct pyramids on top of which they would immolate human beings.

Their conception of the world is opposed, diametrically and singularly, to the one in play according to our views on action. Consumption was no less privileged in their minds than production is in ours. They were no less preoccupied by *sacrifice* than we are by *labor*.

In their eyes, the sun itself was an expression of sacrifice. It was a god similar to a man, who had become a sun by plunging into the flames of a brazier.

The Spanish Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún, an author from the mid-16th century, narrates what he was told by Aztec elders as follows:

It is said that before the day came, the gods met in a place called Teotihuacán (...) and they asked one another: who will be in charge of illuminating the world? A god called Tecuciztécatl answered: It is I who will be in charge of illuminating it. Then the gods spoke a second time and said: who else? After which they looked at one another, seeking out who would be the other one, but none of them dared to volunteer to perform that task; they were

all afraid, and excused themselves. One of the gods who was not taken into account, for he had open sores, remained silent and listened to the words of the others. Until they gave him the floor and said to him: let it be you, o blistered one. Strong-headed, he obeyed their command and responded: I receive this order from you as a grace, let it be so. Immediately, the two chosen ones began a penitence that lasted four days. Then they lit a bonfire prepared on top of a rock (...) The god called Tecuciztécatl offered only precious things since instead of bouquets, he made rich offerings of feathers called *quetzalli* and instead of balls of hay, he offered spheres of gold; thorns made with precious stones instead of maguey thorns; thorns of red coral instead of bloody thorns. Moreover, the copal that he used to make the offering was of the finest incense. The *blistered one*, whose name was Nanauatzin, offered nine green canes bound three-by-three, instead of ordinary branches. He offered balls of hay and maguey thorns bloodied with his own blood and, instead of copal, he made his offering out of the scabs from his sores. A tower was built in the shape of a mound for each of these two gods. There they made their penitence, for four days and four nights. At the end of their four nights of penitence, they tossed the branches all around, also the bouquets and all the other objects they had used. The following night, just after midnight, when the **r i t e s** were to begin,

the ornament of Tecuciztécatl, which consisted of plumage called *aztacomitl* and a habit made of light cloth, was brought to him. As for Nanauatzin, the *blistered one*, they covered his head with a paper headdress called *anatzontli* and draped him with a stole, also made of paper. When midnight came, all the gods took their places around the bonfire, called *teotexcalli*, where the flames had burned for four days.

«The gods were separated in two rows and positioned on either side of the fire. The two chosen ones took their places near the bonfire, facing the flames, between the two rows of gods who remained standing and, addressing Tecuciztécatl, told him: Come now, Tecuciztécatl, throw yourself into the bonfire! He tried to pitch himself into the flames but, as they were great and burned hotly, fear invaded him and, upon feeling the heat, he backed away. He summoned his courage a second time and tried to throw himself into the fire, but he stopped short and dared no more. Moreover, it was commanded that no one could make the attempt more than four times. So, after the four attempts had been made, the gods addressed Nanauatzin and told him, come now, Nanauatzin, it is your turn! Hardly had they said these words when he gathered his strength, closed his eyes, and threw himself into the fire. Right away, he began to crackle like something being roasted. Tecuciztécatl, upon seeing that

he had thrown himself into the bonfire and that he was burning, immediately gained momentum and plunged into the embers. It is said that at the same moment, an eagle entered the bonfire and was burned, which is why that bird now has blackened feathers.

«Soon after, the kneeling gods saw Nanauatzin ‘transformed into a sun’ coming up in the east. ‘The vivid red appeared, swaying from side to side. No one could fix their gaze upon him because he was blinding, he glowed so from the emanation of his rays expanding in all directions.’ In due time, the moon rose over the horizon. Tecuciztécatl, because he had hesitated, shone less brightly. And after that, the gods had to die; the wind, Quetzalcóatl, killed them all: the wind tore out their hearts and used them to bring the newborn stars to life.»

It is necessary to approach this myth’s belief, according to which men, and not only men, but also wars, were created «so that there would be people from whom hearts could be harvested and blood, so that the sun might eat.»^{*} Evidently, this belief holds the meaning, just as the myth does, of the extreme value of consumption. Every year, the Mexicans honored the sun by observing four days of fasting, as prescribed by the gods. Then they would immolate lepers like the *blistered one*, all those with sicknesses of the skin. To them, reflection was no more than the manifestation of their acts.

^{*}
Bernardino
de Sahagún,
*Historia
de las cosas de
la Nueva
España.*

The oblique offering

Let us imagine a researcher. A specialist in the analysis of rituals who studies these endeavors, yet no one will ever know that the offering was dedicated to him. No matter: he makes this his goal, he believes he recognizes therein the ritualized development of a ceremony, or even a liturgy, and he transforms it into a theme, an object of analysis. The *r i t e*, incidentally, does not define the field. *R i t e s* are found everywhere. Without them there would be no society, no institutions, no history. We are not interested in those who specialize in the analysis of rituals: this is not a career. Our researcher, or shall we say our analyst, may also be a sociologist, for example, or an anthropologist, a historian, an art or a literature critic; he may even be a philosopher. Someone like you or I. To a certain degree, through experience and more or less spontaneously, each of us may perform the role of analyst or critic of rituals, and no one can entirely be free of it. On the other hand, in order to perform a role in this task, to perform a role anywhere, it is necessary at the same time to be inscribed within the logic of the *r i t e* and indeed, to behave properly, to avoid faults and transgressions, to be, up to a certain point, capable of analyzing it.

It is also necessary to comprehend its norms and interpret its rules of engagement.

No matter the distance or the differences between actor and analyst, the borders seem ambiguous.

They are always permeable. They must be transposed so that analysis may occur, but also so that an appropriate, normally ritualized behavior may take place.

A «critical reader» with just cause will object that not all analyses are equivalent: is there not an essential difference between the analysis of someone who, with the goal of participating in a *r i t e* *comme il faut*, must consequently comprehend its norms, and that of another who does not seek to conform to the *r i t e* but rather to explain it, to «objectify it», to relate its beginning and its end? And strictly speaking, are we not dealing with a critical difference? Because if the participant absolutely must analyze, read, and interpret, he must also maintain a certain critical distance. And in an «objectifying» manner. Even if his activity is quite often closer to passivity, if not passion, it nonetheless proceeds according to critical and criteriological acts. A vigilant discrimination is required of one who, with some title or other, becomes a performer in a ritual process (the agent, the beneficiary, the priest, the sacrifice, the property master, and also the excluded one, the victim, the villain or the *pharmakos*, which may be the offering itself, since the offering is never a simple thing but rather a discourse,

or at least the possibility of a discourse, an act of symbolicity). The participant must choose, distinguish, differentiate, evaluate. He must proceed according to certain *krinein*. And the «spectator» (here, the reader, within this volume or without) finds himself in the same situation. Instead of confronting the critic with the non-critic, instead of choosing or deciding between the critical and the non-critical, objectivity and its opposite, it becomes necessary, to point out the differences between critics on one hand, and on the other, to situate the non-critics somewhere that is no longer opposable, nor even perhaps alien, to the critic. The critic and the non-critic are not identical, by the way, but in the end, perhaps they partake of the same things

...

Of blood and sun



. . . From ancient times, the blood offered in sacrifice has been considered a magical element. The living blood of the sacrifice is the transmitter of energies invoked by the priest or mage. If someone is anointed or bathed with such blood, he will be in a position to receive special powers or personal benefits. Our belief in vampires is adjacent to this, given that their legend originates in the Christian and Carolingian Europe of those Piero Camporesi alluded to in his essay *La sève de la vie*, born damned and rejected out of the corruption of blood, because ecclesiastical culture retains pagan taboos in order to endow them with renewed virulence.

Johannes Abbas states that «the idea of sacrifices, both animal and human, has been present at some point in history in nearly all cultures: Aztec, Mayan, Caribbean, African Bushman, and of course, in the ancient world. Likewise, refined cultures such as the Greeks and Etruscans practiced it.»

With regards to the ritual blood of Christianity, Abbas himself comments that «the important point in the sacrifice of Jesus hinges on this being about a new alliance in opposition to another alliance, malignant in character, that must be overcome.» He refers to the Mosaic sacrifice and circumstances that are offered to the «Creator or Demiurge Yaldabaoth (Mastema), the malignant spirit of Yahweh.»

The symbolic validity of blood in film or literary texts has little to do with a public «accustomed» to the saturation of violent content, or immersed in

the critical incapacity of the plane of reception, but rather with those symbolic fulfillments that transcend immediacy in the realm of faith. Symbols appeal to people's unconscious plane as much as to their powers of reason.

In a world of immaterial urgencies in which energy tends to turn invisible, where the organic body starts to coexist with the inorganic body as a grim prosthesis, and where representations of reality would like to become more important than reality itself, or where the imperative toward communicative interconnections otherwise expresses a drive toward multiple crossroads, the mystery of blood persists as the necessary and essential foundation of life in its absolute state.

The Catholic philosopher Jean Guitton specified that the symbol of blood, like all other symbols, is enigmatic, ambiguous and lends itself to misunderstandings, and he asked himself what wealth may be stored in the whirlwind liquid of blood that joins us to the cosmos, to our race, to our heritage.

David Herbert Lawrence approached said mystery in his masterful tale of 1928, *The Woman Who Rode Away* –reviewed by Octavio Paz in 1939, when he took it upon himself to examine *The Plumed Serpent*—regarding an American paleface who surrenders to a tribe of coppery Indians in the mountains of Chihuahua, northern Mexico, who in turn sacrifice her to their gods in compliance with their worldview of incessant rebirth:

When she was fumigated, they laid her on a large flat stone, the four powerful men holding her by the outstretched arms and legs. Behind stood the aged man, like a skeleton covered with dark glass, holding a knife and transfixedly watching the sun; and behind him again was another naked priest, with a knife. She felt little sensation, though she knew all that was happening. [...] Only the eyes of that oldest man were not anxious. Black, and fixed, and as if sightless, they watched the sun, seeing beyond the sun. And in their black, empty concentration there was power, power intensely abstract and remote, but deep, deep to the heart of the earth, and the heart of the sun. In absolute motionlessness he watched till the red sun should send his ray through the column of ice. Then the old man would strike, and strike home, accomplish the sacrifice and achieve the power. The mastery that man must hold, and that passes from race to race.

Through this ending lives on yet another way of naming the geopolitics of symbols, their expansionism of the spirit on our planet which must be interrogated time and time again from that which is most most cultural, most textual, most personal: the world as book and the book as world. Myth, festival, *r i t e* . In a desacralized era, the perspective of the sacred in its various forms will find always a presence and place,

given that it entails the sustenance of the present that is the future. Original blood: a double-edged sword.

Considerable arrogance is what leads people to think that their true lives take place in public and profane zones. From the realm of politics to that of entertainment, the acts undertaken are only parodic extensions of some dream, of some clandestine underground, or hope, or intimate discouragement that pulsates from a zone always closer to the ineffable because it is compromising or transparent, because it is indicative of a past, rather than common conceit.

What zone could this be? Its perimeter is elusive and moveable, not unlike the material that composes it: memory, fleshed out in an instant. There is no one who does not include infancy and its trembling, its presentiments, or the intimate *r i t e s* inherent to the collective actions found among its consecrations: the abandonment of that luminous threshold between life and death. Nor is there anyone who does not recall a spherical moment with a loved one in which an endless wound opened up. A smile, the glimpse of that zone of an alien body that will become perverse rage. Or a door half-open on an afternoon that pitched a ray of sun onto the mirror, the brush of a rainbow, and released a question still unanswered. Or lost objects, such as bloodless battles and games previous to the breath of reading, which out of an admonitory error has been labeled innocence. The certainty of the otherness that approaches us little by little. The patriarchal hats, their feathers, their tools

and disconnected machines made for a gaze blind to all utility. The smell of the clothing of a dead mother, the empty chambers and parallel pleasure of ice on one's teeth or ice water on one's arms.

Modesty blinds this sort of affections, replacing them with the contemporary zeal for endowing functionalism, calculation, and advantage down to the last detail, decisively in the end, in order to move the quotidian, that which becomes invisible once betrayed, that is drained and corrodes the frailty of the public and profane storyline and, of course, surpasses the dogmatic frontier that wishes to enclose it within a term, the «private»: sacred zones that lead an intermittent, lateral existence, a network of diagonals in which we meet again: symbols that are actions, acts that symbolize.

Certain objects and unexpected circumstances, such as memories for example, awaken a fear and attachment undiscernible in a substance that endlessly unfolds and joins personal experience to the world. Therein can be read the ambiguity of the danger and fear that, once perceived, are silenced or denounced, but that take on a life of their own and transcend those who perceive them, to be recovered perhaps by someone sooner or later. For example, Louis Aragon, Michel Leiris and Walter Benjamin recorded whorehouses and cabarets as chambers of the sacred in everyday life. They prolonged the surrealist project of founding a modern mythology: who knows if they achieved this in the end? We can be sure that they gathered up the splinters that announced war, death

camps, and the totalitarian will of *technos*: the black byproducts of modernity. History insists on raining on the parade of the well-laid plans of reason and its deceitful idols: the new and efficient, the maximization of gains and advantage; *technos* and its secular instrumentality transformed into an expansive goal of inverted faith.

At the crossroads of our mysteries and those of others emerge signs that attract us with their fleeting nature and brilliance. And that is why one returns to wander through certain streets and places (everyone has their own) where, if luck is on our side, the reward of the ongoing awaits us: lingerie shop windows, cemeteries fenced in by urban growth, landscapes of herbs and liturgical objects, workshops of taxidermy, studios of portrait photographers, used bookstores and contemporary bookstores, corner stationary shops; ephemeral hangars that are bastions of model airplanes and illusions, repertoires of musical instruments, temples, a forest or a museum, love hotels, certain old cinemas and the décor from others, a cantina or bar and a building, the pale shadow of one that no longer exists, but that is all the more likeable because of it: because it is new. In these zones desire is revived, our fascination with the accidental, our morbid interest in the disgrace of others, and our laughter before sins. Peering through its chinks procures the unveiling of beauty in all its nudity, that vessel of fantastical tales, and it can even be observed how the conjectures of gentlemen of the evening are

forged in a nightmare of harm, treacherous violence, and secret passwords.

J. W. Von Goethe noted in a story that outlines the essence of symbols: «With astonishment and awe, she raised her eyes to an illumined niche, in which stood the statue of a venerable King, of pure gold. In size the statue was colossal, but the figure was rather that of a little than of a great man. His well-turned limbs were covered with a simple robe, and his head was encircled by an oaken garland. Scarcely had the Dragon beheld this venerable form, when the King found utterance, and said, ‘How comest thou hither?’ ‘Through the cleft,’ answered the Dragon, ‘in which the gold abides.’ ‘What is nobler than gold?’ asked the King. ‘Light,’ replied the Dragon. ‘And what is more vivid than light?’ continued the Monarch. ‘Speech,’ said the Serpent.»

Hence wisdom, splendor, strength. A route at the end of a rebirth that has been deferred.

Demarcating the world implies creating a reminder of the zone that exorcizes iniquity from time and destiny, from the exasperations of death, chaos, catastrophe and its commands: creation itself in its profundity, which includes adversity, a glimpse into the dual glow that scintillates beyond the final gateway into the night...

Episode from a reading *about the night*

«I believe that I dream that I die. I do not know whether this is a dream or a thought. I recall that Chinese story of the man who dreams he is a butterfly, etc. I write that I believe that I dream that I die. And then I see myself die. I cross the threshold –shadow thin– between the same things. Everything is just as I remembered it when I was alive, especially in my final days, occupied with enormous avidity in the registration of my remotest memories. I did not know then where this eminently scenic game took place, in which men and women from long ago also appear to be seen at a distance, like an album of photographs taken before I was born. I wonder whether this isn't the world of death, made vulgar out of familiarity. There is nothing in this world that is familiar to us and that is not something recalled within the lifetime of memory –immortal memory, inextinguishable vestige of Eternal Desire. I imagine life beyond the threshold, in another world, after the end...»

The writer fell silent, and once his reading had ended, scattered applause was heard.

At the microphone, a voice addressed the public in attendance: «If anyone would like to ask Salvador Elizondo a question, you may have the floor.»

Following a brief silence, a man sitting in the audience raised his hand and said:

«Thank you very much, maestro, it has been an honor to be able to attend the reading of your 'Noctuaries.' I have a question. In your experience as a poet, is the night good, bad, or in between?»

«My dear friend, it would be both impossible and vain to simplify the night. Something so vast, so filled with possibilities not only for poetry... but for mankind... the night is unfathomable...»

«But, maestro,» interjected his interlocutor, «what I want to know is quite simple: is the night good, bad, or in between?»

«My dear friend, I prefer not to disappoint you with an answer. The night is like poetry itself: irreducible, infinite. One cannot say that poetry is bad or good, much less in between, because we unintentionally come across a nightmarish verse or an insomniac poem written over the course of an agitated night, after a bender...»

Stubbornly, the conference attendee insisted, «But maestro, I must know: is the night good, bad, or in between?»

The writer, fed up, got to his feet, bringing the reading to an end. And as he left the room, he said:

«All right, then. It is good. The night is good...»

The sacred g a m e

[FOUR]

The
funereal
ball
g a m e

Huémac played ball. He played with the gods of rain and earth.

The Tlaloque said to him: «Should we win, what shall we win?»

Huémac responded: «My jade stones, my quetzal plumage.»

Then the gods said: «That is what you shall win: our green stones, our quetzal feathers.»

Now they play ball: Huémac wins the **g a m e**.

Now the gods arrive and alter what they were to give to Huémac: instead of quetzal feathers, they give him tender ears of corn, instead of fine feathers, they give him corn cobs with green leaves and all that they contain inside.

Huémac did not wish to receive this: «It is not what I wagered! Were they not to be jades? Was it not to be quetzal plumage? Take all this away from here!»

The gods said: «Fine, give him jade stones, give him feathers.»

And they took their gifts, and their treasures were taken away.

And along the way, they said: «For four years, we hid our jewels: hunger and anguish shall they suffer.»

And ice fell knee-deep; their harvest was lost and in mid-summer, ice fell. And such was the burning of the sun that everything was left dry: trees, cacti, agaves, and even the stones were broken, bursting open under the reverberation of the sun.

A
g a m e
in
the
underworld * The rules
of the game
are simple.
The reader, you
for example,
fills in the blank
spaces with
the names
of twins from
Mesoamerican
mythology,
or of other gods
from regions
known as
«the underworld»
considered
to be more
appropriate.
«inframundo»

_____ and _____ overexert-
ed themselves in the ball g a m e . Their leaps
and rebounds made the earth tremble. Annoyed
at the racket, the terrible lords of _____
challenged them to descend to their realm and
face them there on the court. The twins took
along their g a m e equipment and descend-
ed the steep stairway that led to the subterra-
nean world until reaching the shore of a river
with a narrow cliff. They passed the waters of
thorny gourds. They reached the shore of the
river first of blood, then of water. They were
subdued once they arrived at the crossing of
four roads –red, black, white, and yellow– for
they followed the sign of the black road that
told them it would guide them. Thus, when they
entered the council room, the lords they expect-
ed to find were only wooden dolls. Confused,
the twins greeted the dolls, setting off peals of
laughter among the true lords of _____,
who watched them from where they were hiding.
Then more mockery and torments ensued: the
lords sat the twins down on hot stone benches to
burn their buttocks; they put them inside a dark-
ened house; then a house of unbearable icy wind;

then another of jaguars that roared and mocked the two brothers; then of bats that squeaked and flapped about; then of cutting and scraping knives. _____ and _____ passed these tests as they went along; but in the end they were bested and sacrificed. The decapitated head of _____ was left behind under a gourd that bears no fruit. Then the tree produced abundant fruit and one of the gourds, hidden in the foliage, was the reborn head of _____. The damsel _____, daughter of _____, wished to pick the fruit. The gourd spit into the open palm of her hand and the damsel was impregnated. A second set of twins were born to her, _____ and _____.

The descent of those first twins into the realm of death was the prelude to a long, mythic feat that culminated in the apotheosis of the second twins. The cosmic drama demanded that the heroes travel into the depths of the earth. The men would follow that same terrible road after their lives ended. Not these men in their entirety: only one of their souls traveled, the one stored in the heart. Death caused their bodily components to desegregate, then the identifying soul started

its journey down the cold path that would lead to cleanliness. Their whole story, any vestige of their individuality would remain among the torments of the road. The *mictécah* –such was the name that Nahuas gave to the dead who traveled into the depths– existed for four years, dedicated also to aiding agriculture and guiding the Sun through the underworld. Once they had reached the bottom, the ancient documents say, total loss occurred. And thus, the man of corn returned to his former condition as a seed.

Art and game

[...]

A cosmological introduction to aesthetics demonstrates, or so we believe, the possibility that artistic activity is a corollary to the energetic overabundance of life. Art is made possible from the moment in which life becomes a force susceptible to new creations, upon finding itself constantly urged on by external obstacles that it fails to succeed in overcoming, of course, but that in the end it may avoid by self-accumulating, by organizing itself internally. Any persistent impediment worth consideration acts as a form of stimulation that at the end of the day, makes its mark on the organism, modifying its composition and form, contributing thus to its future victory. It would be impossible to understand organization without obstacles: without the artistic power, primarily and fundamentally, of every living being. Life invents new and victorious aptitudes, but it takes a long time to invent them. Root, hand, tongue, and thought are stages in the same endeavor. Daring, and even more daring! Those who tire, die; yet life keeps on working.

It would be difficult to find in the history of literature a poetic nature more devoted to the sense of freedom and more zealous of the decisive attributes of humanity than the poet Schiller, a great thinker and at the same time, a great bard. He has bequeathed to us in his book *Ueber die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* [*Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*], above all in the fourteenth and twenty-seventh letters, the principles of a theory regarding art that has become increasingly important in philosophical literature.

Schiller proposes on the following terms the dilemma created by the animal condition of man and his subsequent submission to natural laws on one hand, and on the other, the moral dictates of reason, imperative and absolute.

It is only in conformity with this idea that he is a man in the full sense of the word; but he cannot be convinced of this so long as he gives himself up exclusively to one of these two impulsions, or only satisfies them one after the other. For as long as he only feels, his absolute personality and existence remain a mystery to him, and as long as he only thinks, his condition or existence in time escapes him. [...] It results from this that the instinct of play, which unites the double action of the two other instincts, will content the mind at once morally and physically. Hence, as it suppresses all that is contingent, it will also suppress all coercion, and will set man free physically and morally. [...] The instinct of play, in which both act in concert, will render both our formal and our material constitution contingent; accordingly, our perfection and our happiness in like manner.

Schiller's reflection may be formulated by stating that the soul floats, through play, between rational law and organic necessity. Once it has been distributed among both, it is freed from its twofold empire and creates, out of itself and its freedom, a new world.

This positioning of the art world as an intermediary between the physical and the moral world, was doubtless derived by Schiller from Kantian philosophy. The aesthetic sense forms a bond between intelligence and will. It has no theoretical or practical scope. The *Critique of Judgment* marks an intermediate point

between the theory of reason that in the Kantian opus was called the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the theory of will, denominated *Critique of Practical Reason*.

But the same idea of relating art to play that Schiller borrowed from Kant and developed extensively, appears for the first time in these concise terms in the aforementioned book: free play of the imagination, in keeping with the laws of reason. This dictum encloses, surely, one of the main characteristics of aesthetic pleasure. Man, Schiller declares, is not complete unless he is at play.

Consequently, when we find in man the signs of a pure and disinterested esteem, we can infer that this revolution has taken place in his nature, and that humanity has really begun in him. [...] When the lion is not tormented by hunger, and when no wild beast challenges him to a fight, his unemployed energy creates an object for himself; full of ardor, he fills the re-echoing desert with his terrible roars, and his exuberant force rejoices in itself, showing itself without an object.

Kant had already given us a characteristic of aesthetic judgment in one of his famous definitions as that of an action freely completed, an endless objective or one which, at first glance, seems completely indifferent: play, an activity that is enacted *to be enacted*, merely to be fulfilled, without ulterior motives.

In the selfsame excellent Letter XXVII, Schiller counterbalances the activity of the animal that works with the one that plays. If he works, it is because he is missing something and tends to procure it for himself; if he plays, it is because he is motivated by richness,

the abundance of strengths, or, as the poet says, «when an exuberant life is excited to action.»

The ideas of Kant and of Schiller were developed and mutilated, at the same time, in the philosophical opus of Herbert Spencer. According to the English thinker, the acts we call «play» and name «aesthetic» are intimately closely bound by that fundamental trait: neither one nor the others serve, by any direct means, any useful purpose in life.

Superior animals do not find themselves exclusively devoted to the demands of their immediate needs. Mental faculties find themselves subject to the law according to which their organs, after having rested for longer than usual, awaken exceptionally ready for action, and it so happens that with great ease, they can be committed to simulated activities should the circumstance arise, rather than embarking on another that is real. Thus proceeds play of all kinds, and the tendency toward superfluous and useless dedication to activities that have remained dormant. Whence also the fact that movements without any object are manifested, more often than not, by the same faculties that perform a dominant role in the life of the animal.

This same principal rules over the combination of sensations that arises from the idea and sense of beauty. The movements of the body, agreeable to all those who execute them, are of such an ilk that they awaken many muscles in order to moderate our action, but without violently fatiguing any of them. Therefore, *it can be thought that beauty is any formal*

disposition that exercises, efficiently, the greatest number of nervous elements that collaborate in our perception, but do not overload more than a minimum of those same elements. It is proper for complex visual sets to present real objects or representations of objects with their light, shadow and particular coloring. The highest aesthetic sentiment will be that which has the greatest volume, engendered through the normal exercise of the greatest number of energies, but without any of these being exercised in an abnormal fashion; or rather, the sensation resulting from the complete, but not excessive, exercise of our full emotional faculties.

At the depths of Spencerian thought lies the theory of the animal that works and plays, the same we have seen developed in the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*; but, as we already argued, the idea was mutilated in the process, because the English thinker, faithful to his agnostic principles, was obliged to strip it of any transcendental sense of creation and liberty, of any causal joy of being, of that supreme *joy in being able to act* (*Freude am kommen*), that adorns in such high bas-relief the pages of Schiller. It is the English spirit, pruning German ideas from his exclusive, *insular* point of view, but one cannot deny that once the Britain no longer understands a certain aspect of the Kant-Schiller theory, he ingeniously combines the practical portion accessible to him via positivism, with the un-failing concept of cosmic evolution that has explained so many things satisfactorily in the books of Spencer and the other evolutionists that were his disciples, and

that has dissimulated or obscured so many others by attempting to shed light on them.

The generous theory of Schiller is reduced, *in summa*, by Spencer to these bare bones of the Tolstoy formula that appears in his pamphlet titled *What is Art*: «In the lower animals all the energy of life is expended in life-maintenance and race-maintenance; in man however there remains, after these needs are satisfied, some superfluous strength. This excess is used in play, which passes over into art.» How much weight does this hypothesis carry?

Of course, language itself and common sense corroborate the theory of the arts as play, as as diversion. It can be said that every great aesthetic theory –and we shall gradually prove this, given the chance– that common knowledge confirms the speculation of this point of view.

It is obvious that neither art nor play are conceivable without an excess of *energies* (overflow). Both are the result of the overabundance of life; but many other derivative formations could be compared by virtue of their selfsame origin. Art and play would represent –and this is the true meaning of their positive intimacy–an endless goal, as it were, as Kant would say; that is, an action that does not transcend albeit indirectly, and that would implicitly convey, in and of itself, its goal. A true man would play «for the sake» of playing, not «for the sake» of winning; that would be tantamount to admitting a spurious interpretation of the animus that guides all those who

consecrate themselves to this exercise. The true artist would also act out of the selfsame fatality of his nature, not in order to fulfill other, extrinsic ends. On this particular, both fruits of life would coincide.

But while the *modalities* of art and play seem, at first sight, to be equivalent, their *quality* differs. All games or, at least, most of them are a substitute for struggle both in animals and in man; they are acts with sexual undertones or that simulate attack and defense; in summary, they reflect the great biological law that states: «to be is to struggle, to live is to conquer.»

Any animal, superior or inferior, human or non-human, obeys by virtue of its own vital economy the principle that makes a fighter of every living creature. If there is an overflow, a surplus, that extra strength is spent in the same habitual manner of being burned and spent. Among animals, no principle of *disinterest* can prevail; indeed, as Karl Groos sustains, a *g a m e instinct* is formed. In the end, the theory of Groos and that of Spencer do not seem to us to be contrary but rather, complementary; such is the opinion of the French psychologist Theodule Ribot. To speak of disinterested play, according to Souriau, is to have no idea what one is talking about: when we play, we are always concerned over the result of the *g a m e* . Finally, Groos teaches us:

Play stands as a connecting link between practical and aesthetic attainment. It is distinguished from art by the fact that it strives constantly for the attainment of some external aim, and from work in that its satisfaction arises not from the

value of its results, but from the achievement itself. The relation of the three can be illustrated by calling work a line, play a spiral, and art a circle.

In our opinion, practical attainment, play, and art are three different things; but, as Groos expresses very well, there are more similarities between art and play than between art and practical attainment.

By virtue of their origins, art and play proceed from organic surplus; yet this surplus is not the sole cause of art. The opinions of Soriau and of Groos clearly show us how in play, a certain goal continues to subsist, larva-like; this gives us cause to correct the absolute statements we formulated previously. On the other hand, art is disinterested; it is founded not on a gaming instinct, but on an intuition that is recreated by seeing in order to see, by hearing in order to hear.

Play betrays in its forms its biological nature; art, in its forms, clearly speaks to us of the contingency of biological law and triumphant spirituality. The artist, if he truly is such, intuits and expresses in his creation not things in relation with our desire, but in and of themselves; not just any individual, being, animal, or situation *that serves an end*, but the individual, being, animal, or situation considered *in and of themselves*.

Most men do not know how to intuit reality unless they associate it with a purpose, we lose no time on something except to the degree in which an end can be satisfied. Indeed, therefore we do not understand existence. Our selfishness prevents it.

In summary: *play, in the evolution of life, provides us with*

a principle of liberation, as Schiller realized; but it also betrays our animal and biological origin. How? Because it is neither wholly disinterested (except when it signifies by the overabundance of energy that sustains it an ignorance, or at least a disregard, of any selfish or economic end) nor does it stop constantly recalling in its episodes sexual conflict or the brutish struggle for existence. The *play instinct* is what leads the girl to rock her doll to sleep, or to recreate this by putting her little brother to bed; the laborious **g a m e** of chess played by two international champions before an expectant civilized world are two substitutes, two simulations of the biological struggle and in both, their nature is neither corrupted or made spurious upon perceiving *the exterior goal* that Groos speaks of. Artistic strength does lead toward ideals, but it still cannot function, in terms of productive quality, in accordance with its own laws.

Art means total disinterestedness, an absolute *goal with no objective*, the breaking of the animal law thanks to the transformation of the *play instinct* into a new faculty: *aesthetic intuition*. The artistic force has attained its ideal and moves now in its own world. Beauty fills us with joy without making us envy the things that give us pleasure. Pure art –sonata, poem, statue, temple, dance, etc. – never has any demonstrative or practical goal. It is enough in and of itself.

Variations on a mexican theme

[104]

The a c c u r s e d share

[FIVE]

The *a c c u r s e d*, sacred victim

The victim is a surplus taken from the mass of *productive* wealth and cannot be extracted for anything other than to be consumed without gain and consequently, destroyed forever. From the moment he is chosen, he is the *a c c u r s e d* share engaged for violent consumption. But this accursedness tears the victim away from the *order of things* and makes his figure recognizable, so that it may illuminate forever more the intimacy, anguish, and profundity of living beings.

Nothing is more striking than the care surrounding the victim. As an object, he cannot truly be withdrawn from the ordered reality that imprisons him, more so if this destruction eliminates the character of the object and suppresses for ever its utility. From the moment the victim is consecrated and during the interval that separates his consecration from death, he enters the intimacy of the sacrificed and participates in their consumptions: he is one of them and during the festival where he will perish he sings, dances, and enjoys all of the pleasures with them. There is no servility in this, he may even be granted garments, weapons, and combat. He is lost in the vast confusion of the festival: that is to say, in precisely what loses him.

The victim, indeed, will be the only one to completely escape ordered reality, given that only he is taken all the way to the end by the impetus of the festival. The sacrifice is only reluctantly divine. The future is heavily reserved in him, it lends him weight

as an object. The authentic theologians whose tradition Sahagún recovered perceived this very well; they prized the sacrifice of Nanahuatzin* above all others, they glorified warriors once they were consumed by the gods, endowing divinity with the meaning of consumption.

*
Recall the *blistered*
one sacrificed
to illuminate
the world
who was transformed
into the sun.

We cannot know the degree to which those sacrificed in Mexico accepted their fate. It is possible that to a certain point, some of them may have «considered it an honor» to be offered up to the gods. But their immolation was not voluntary. It is even known that during the era of Sahagún's informants, these orgies of death were tolerated only because of their effect on foreigners. The Mexicans immolated children whom they picked out among their own. But they were compelled to adopt severe penalties against those who distanced themselves from the entourage as it made its way to the altars. Sacrifice is a blend of anguish and frenzy. Or something more powerful than anguish, but only on the condition its effects are deflected externally, toward a foreign captive. It is enough for the sacrifice to renounce any riches the victim could have represented.

However, this comprehensible absence of rigor does not alter the significance of the rite. Only an excess that surpassed the limits was valid, thus consumption would seem worthy of the gods. Men escaped their own failure at a price, they raised the stakes instigated by the greed and cold calculation of ordered reality at a price.

I have spoken of the poets and painters. Now I shall speak of the maids. Above the roof tiles of homes in Mexico, well into the second half of the century, the ivory towers of servitude are raised. The maids, domestic servants, are called «cats,» because cats reside on rooftops.

would go through my pants whenever I was bathing. She could hear the shower from the rooftop, and then she would come down to prepare breakfast and visit my bedroom. Once I noted the depletion of my pocket money, on one occasion when she notoriously intervened, I started taking my shower wallet in hand. She was quiet, and a good woman, and aside from that particular temptation gave no cause for complaint. I did not fire her. She was somewhat anxious over my discovery.

With
Lya

before we moved to Coyoacán, we had Ramoncita. She must have been around fifteen when she arrived. She was barely literate, lovely, discreet, and kind. She whiled away the hours scratching the water heater in the kitchen with a nail. We noticed the removal of an entire strip of enamel after she had been at it for some time. We bought her textbooks and notebooks in order to improve her literacy.

Ramoncita

was with us for several years. Then she fell in love with a construction worker who carried her off and loaded her with children. She would frequently come by the house with some plight. It has been years since she last visited, who knows what has become of her. This is the case with thousands, millions of girls from the countryside, launched by hunger into a city where they are burned at the stake. Some of them end up as prostitutes; others share Ramoncita's fate. Perhaps she has been abandoned, perhaps she has died. I did not recognize her the last time she came to see us. She said, «I'm Ramoncita, don't you remember me?»

There was another illiterate servant in the house, from Mezquital, one of the zones where farmers have been exploited most by multi-millionaire bigwigs. They have been evicted from their land under gunfire, they have been hanged from the trees. She saw our house in Coyoacán. The main avenue fifty yards from our front door, known at the time as Tasqueña, was rather sad, with just one or two automobiles passing every now and then. Today, it is one of the most clogged arteries of the city. She explained to us that she had not left her hometown just to come and live in another town. Although she was very happy with us, she would try to find a job in more bustling zones with transit and shops with windows. She had become metropolitan.

[...]

The maid's room is painted every time the resident changes. Girls paper the walls with newspaper clippings: athletes, bullfighters, singers, soccer players, charros, stars from the movies and the soap operas they enjoy watching so much. Boys, with girls in varying states of undress. Through them, we learn a little more about the times we live in. Pedrito is studying to become an engineer. Will he join the PRI, the congressional Chamber of Deputies?

Chona

does not know her last name, but she says it is English; she works for a few hours every day, then returns home to her husband, who lives at her expense along with who knows how many others. Kind, gentle, very honorable and obliging. She wanted to continue her studies beyond elementary school, but her mother wouldn't allow it as she planned to put her to work. She cried a lot over not having been allowed to go to school. She is from the proletariat lumpen of Coyoacán and has never even been to the Villa de Guadalupe, where the great Mexican totem is venerated: something even more surprising than not knowing the Castle of Chapultepec. I suppose she doesn't lack curiosity, only time. Enslaved as she is, she never loses her sense of humor.

These glimpses into servitude may perhaps shed light on many thousands more in Mexico City, in the countryside, and something of what they have told me, as the poets do, about Mexican culture as expressed through them.

Maids, like nearly all poets, know nothing of national politics.

The proper tools of my trade

My slave has rebelled against me. Will there be another willing to play the role? Where and at what point does pain reside? I ask myself these questions over and over again. It's true, my slave has fled. He took advantage of my being far away. In other shires. With an ocean between us. Perhaps I had failed, lately, to be, radical enough in my usual approach. I may have faltered in certain areas. For example, I recall that after returning from a previous voyage, I made him a gift of a handkerchief I had found accidentally tossed on the ground. Someone very close to me, another bird of prey, called my attention to it. He told me that such a gift would imply taking a step backwards in the relationship we had built. That handkerchief -manufactured with a blend of cotton and polyester that, no doubt, someone had let fall almost undetected- could become cause for confusion regarding the nature of the bond that held us together. Could it have been I, with this clumsy offering, who had brought about the current state of affairs? My slave had maintained his status for several years in a row. The system we began to establish the moment we met passed, as is customary, through different stages. First came acceptance, on his part, of my excessive indulgence in surrounding myself with the largest possible quantity of dogs. There, from my favorite branch, I would observe him every morning. Or rather, hear him from a distance, like a vague buzzing sound, as he walked all six of the dogs I owned at the time. He tended to perform this act of going out into the street with

the animals several times a day. On most occasions, he took them to a nearby park where they could run around. I would remain behind, sunbathing with the other birds of prey who, like me, had succeeded in enslaving a human ruled by what was more than obviously an inferiority complex. My slave took charge of the vaccinations, baths, and brushing of fur that the dogs required. Not to mention the purchase -almost always wholesale and from different stores- of the dehydrated food and ringworm medicine that had to be administered to these animals at least every three months. Aside from taking care of them, his mission was to come to deeply love each one of the animals he looked after. I could see from my bird's eye view -as I have already pointed out- how fond he was growing of those canines. The way, many times, his love was reciprocated. Although he allowed this exchange to take place only up to a certain point. Neither party, nor dogs nor slave, could form relationships was a higher degree than the love that both dogs and slave were obliged to profess to me. To me, the bird of prey that had elected to keep both species under his dominion. I can only imagine the mechanisms the slave would employ to keep the situation within the necessary limits. He seemed to be a slave with experience. From birth, one might say. But what was in the canine psyche that caused them to show such fidelity to a bird perched on a tree branch who never took its eyes off them was truly a mystery to me. I ignore how the dogs knew, without hesitation and despite the shows of affection

the slave showered on them, who their true master was. Making my slave care for and grow fond of the dogs, so that he would love them deeply, was one of the simplest steps. What impressed me also was the stoicism shown by that same slave when the moment came for me to make the decision to gradually disencumber myself from each of the dogs. I, as bird of prey, for the same strange reason I had felt suddenly obliged to live surrounded by dogs, found myself compelled by a similar impulse, from one moment to the next, to get rid of each one of these specimens. The slave never said a word, either for or against. Thus my impulse to surround myself with the greatest possible quantity of dogs -down there, in the world of pedestrian creatures- was guaranteed as always by my slave under the best of all possible conditions. And, so, my sudden decision to make them disappear overnight was also guaranteed. I find it important to note how I came across such a slave. It happened in a fairly vulgar fashion. Through *Facebook*, which, as you know, is a social network in constant decadence. As I recall, out of nowhere, a certain person began to insistently leave comments on my wall. He started sending me photos he had taken of himself. These images, as anyone could have guessed, did not bear any actual resemblance to his true appearance. They were photos that, moreover, reflected the physical image the slave possessed of himself. All the images, or nearly all of them, dated back to a time when the slave wore his hair long, and it curled in such a way that

he bore some resemblance to a pre-Colombian version of Dürer's self-portraits. I found it curious that someone of his description -from the first message he sent, he made his role as slave clear- would dare exhibit such an image: that of a Renaissance painter. It caught my attention, moreover: me, a bird of prey in the fullest sense of the word, finding myself disposed to comment on the figures that gradually presented themselves now and again on my computer screen. In those days, I considered myself to be in control of my feelings and impulses. I found myself in a state that sometimes, I seem to forget, causing me to descend into the most abject mental chaos. It is at such times I must fly with greater haste than usual, I must take off in flight and seek by any means necessary some prey to kill by applying the force of my claws around its neck. It is perhaps because of a similar situation, my constant forgetting of the state in which I feel like I am in control of myself, that surely I am now suffering the bewilderment typical of someone who, all of a sudden, has to face the absolute rebellion of a slave.

Since I found myself relatively lucid at the time, I asked him via the network what he had to offer me; what he thought might be of interest to an older writer, like myself. «I can offer you my body», he replied quick as a wink. «His body?» I thought. Would it perhaps actually be interesting to become involved, on that level, with this particular indigenous copy of Dürer? With a student of literature enrolled in a public university? Is this slave unfamiliar, perchance, with

the dozens of ways, almost instantaneous in fact, that a city possesses to concert at any time, day or night, all of the sexual relations one desires? I am certain that he knew this to perfection. That he was aware of the fact his argument -that of offering his body- was not going to jar me in the slightest. However, the fact that he had expressed this -with an innocence that was, apparently, false- made me note -vaguely at first- his condition as a slave by nature and conviction. I believe that was what led me to take an interest in his proposal. And so, we agreed to meet. I remember that he made a vain attempt to keep -at the moment of our agreement, neither before nor after- a certain distance. He attempted to introduce a modicum of doubt in our first meeting with regards to time and place. He wanted to make a certain show of dignity. Further incitement to fulfill his plans? I comprehended then that he was putting me to the test. I must, at that very moment and no other, establish who was the master and who, the slave. In fact, I must make clear to him what sort of master I am. So I indicated a time and date that would be exclusive to our encounter. Either he would make his presence known then and there, or our fledging communication was over and out. Of course, having perceived the forcefulness of my words, this autochthonous copy of Dürer put aside his allegedly pressing obligations and there he was, sitting at the table I had stipulated several minutes before the hour I had set. Not too early, though, for over-eagerness could have been interpreted as a

sign of rebelliousness. Our conversation was relatively brief. Not much was needed to seal our agreement. Neither time, nor unnecessary words. We headed straight back to my place and began, that very day, the routine I had gleaned from our messages. Since then, nearly three years have gone by. Time enough for the rules of exchange to have been subjected to a series of modifications, albeit remaining the same in essence. At nearly that precise moment, dogs began to appear in the house, and I discovered that same night a fundamental fact: the professional talent of the slave consisted of acting as an assistant to renowned academics. He had already expressed this to me. Not only did he study at a public university, but he was dedicated, no less, to the study of nuns. A slave and a convent scholar, what more could a bird of prey ask? Especially one who, in addition to spending nearly all day long on his tree branch, was not just a bird of prey, but a writer as well? I couldn't have come up with anything better if I 'd tried. For the past several years, I had suffered from the lack of someone who could take charge of the administrative aspects of my intellectual endeavors. And so, after physically getting to know the slave, I had a person whom I could not only treat like a servant on a daily basis -he was always willing to satisfy my every whim- but also someone who, in addition to taking care of the dogs and other affairs, would advance the more tedious aspects of my profession as a bird of prey dedicated to being a writer. From that moment on, I confirmed that the

relationship would not be all about sex. I am certain that something of that nature would have depreciated, all too soon, the nature of the bond we were in the process of establishing. With the usual intercourse in the mix, I knew that his budding slavery would have gone down a tedious, clichéd path. I believe that -besides the fact that this particular subject did not awaken any extraordinary libido in me- the exchange would have lasted only the amount of time in which my interest in the unknown, in the sexuality of the other confronted with my own, was satisfied. On the other hand, I could not imagine my great eagle's body of extended wings copulating, with that small, naked man who, hunched over slightly, offered his back to me. My bond with the slave gave me the impression that it was destined to become something more important. It seemed to bear the essence -beyond anything as accidental as sex may be deemed- the essence of what is required to achieve absolute submission.

At some point no one explicitly specified, before I would go on trips both as a bird of prey and as a normal, ordinary citizen, the slave started to pack my bags, nearly to perfection. Likewise, and with extraordinary swiftness, he ordered the files of my literary texts. He managed not only to resolve the internal affairs of my profession, but also those that involved other people and institutions. Especially the national zoo, which constantly made requests that I reside in their facilities with the objective of turning me into one of their greatest attractions. The slave car-

ried signed documents, certified by notaries, proving that it was more valuable to the nation that I remain on my tree branch, rather than establish a presence in the most important cage of the national zoo. Socially, the slave had a tendency to introduce himself to others as my personal assistant. On one occasion -the two of us were in a city in the central region of the country, where I had bought a bicycle- I returned by plane and he ferried home the vehicle I had just acquired in the belly of an interstate bus. He made the uncomfortable journey of over 48 hours while I placidly traveled first class in an airplane. The slave had to do this because, against all logic, I had decided that the bicycle used by a bird of prey ought to be ferried by bus. However, despite this apparent clarity in our roles, very soon it was no longer apparent who was the master and who, the slave. Little by little, as I have already noted, he began to make himself indispensable. Aside from packing my luggage or knowing the numbers and keys to my bank accounts, not to mention my computer passwords, he also knew the exact place where the scissors or pencil sharpeners were kept, or the recently purchased light bulbs, or the pair of socks I had searched for *ad nauseum*. Also, the location of the burrows of the hares whose hunt not only entertained me, but granted me upon tasting them the pleasure I required in order to consider myself a true bird of prey. At some point, his compensation -aside from the obvious- was to publicly announce his condition as slave to someone as important as me. He seemed to

derive extreme pleasure from showing others that I had chosen him to be my slave. He would share this, moreover, with great pride among all the other convent scholars he came across. At first, the situation did not merit my attention. I thought that something so out of place might inclusively enhance the myth I have become accustomed to structuring around my person, both as a human and in my facet as bird of prey. Curiously, it was precisely then that I suffered one of the most severe emotional crises of my whole lifetime. It came as a surprise to me that it would happen just then, given that at the time, I wielded symbolic leadership over every tree I inhabited, much less a slave wdedicated, down to the last detail, to six dogs that owed their loyalty and love exclusively to my person.

I repeat: my slave rebelled against me. Will there be another willing to fulfill his role? Where and at what point does pain reside? I asked myself over and over again. It's true, my slave has fled. He took advantage of my being far away. In other shires. With an ocean between us. Perhaps I had not, in recent times, been radical enough in my usual approach. I may have faltered in certain areas. For example, I recall that after returning from a previous trip, I made him a gift of a handkerchief I had found accidentally tossed on the ground. I was in full flight, skimming the ground, my wingtips extended to their greatest span when, all of a sudden, I noted the scrap of cloth that had fallen in the middle of the street. Someone very close to me

pointed it out. He maintained that such a gift could represent a step backwards in the relationship we had allegedly constructed. That handkerchief -manufactured out of I don't recall what material- would very well become a source of confusion as to the nature of the bond that held us together. Perhaps it was I, with this clumsy gift, who had propitiated the current state of affairs. My slave had maintained his status for several years in a row. The system established from the moment we met had passed through several stages.

The first may have been acceptance on the part of the slave of the boundless pleasure I took in surrounding myself with the greatest possible quantity of dogs. There, from the branch of my tree, I would watch him on those mornings I had chosen not to travel. Or rather, I listened from afar -given that I, in general, had gone out hunting the night before and at that hour, found myself a bit drowsy- to the noises he made, like a vague buzzing sound, while taking all six dogs for a walk. The act of going outside with the animals was one he tended to perform several times a day. Mostly, he would take them for a run at a nearby park. He likewise concerned himself with the appointments for vaccinations, baths, and brushing of fur that the animals required. Also the purchase -nearly always wholesale and at specialty stores- of the dehydrated food and ringworm medicine that had to be administered at least every three months. However, despite the calm I exuded from my branch, I was attacked unexpectedly by one of

the worst emotional crises I had ever suffered in my lifetime. I began, little by little, to suffer growing depression and to experience panic attacks every night that kept me from venturing out in search of even a hare, much less a mouse lost somewhere in the depths of the local park. Luckily, I had my slave by my side to take charge not only of the dogs, but also the organization of the tasks characteristic of my profession as a writer, helping me follow through -despite my emotional condition- on my instincts as a hunter of night birds, while at the same time procuring the psychiatric treatments I was going to need in order to overcome the crisis that loomed. And so, together we began to visit professionals of considerable prestige, who began to prescribe a series of medicines that deteriorated not only my mental, but also my physical state. I suddenly grew fat. I began to wear clothing in special sizes. My wings were no longer of any use to me, not even to flit from one branch to another on my habitual tree. Curiously enough, the doctors began to show themselves to be more and more inept. I remember how the slave would consult them by telephone, harvesting the name of some new medication that he would hasten to buy. Once the stage of those doctors had passed, we recurred to different hospitals specializing in mental health located in the city. That is why I had a slave. So that he could ready, a day in advance, the clothes I would wear the following morning. The alarms that would awaken us at the precise hour, the routes we would follow in plenty of time to ensure

we reached the respective sanitariums. The personal documents they would surely require at each of the institutions we visited. And so, we toured dozens of hospitals where no doctor seemed to comprehend the cause of my malady. I never saw my slave fulfill more diligently his role as my true master. Perhaps I had caught a glimpse of this when he prohibited me from continuing to use my Facebook account, or when he confronted the officials of the national zoo in order to put an end to my exhibition. The components of his behavior, now evident under the circumstances, were impressive. There were moments -and I believe they were ecstatic ones- when he seemed to forget himself in his devotion to his mission as my enslaved master. Finally, realizing that none of the treatments was taking effect, I asked a scientific researcher whom I trusted what he would do if he were to find himself in a similar situation. He answered me that there was an agreement of sorts among doctors in the area. If any of them were to present symptoms of a similar nature, they would not fall back on the treatments they routinely offered their patients -it was obvious to me that these methods had failed to obtain the slightest results- and they would subject themselves, without hesitation, to one of the latest advances of science to treat this sort of disorder: electroconvulsive therapy. He warned me that it sounded somewhat extreme -the renowned and despised electroshock treatment- but that, as time passed, it had come to be considered a benign method, especially when applied to pregnant

women and people with hepatic conditions who were unable to withstand the medicines that were more commonly prescribed. This researcher directed a psychiatric hospital and was also a writer, but not a bird of prey like me. I immediately accepted his offer. They informed me that they could subject me to such treatment only with my written consent, if I signed an official document to that effect. So I asked the slave to prepare my lighter suitcase for travel and afterwards, to clear the branch of the tree where I slept. To undergo the electroshock therapy, I had to check into a hospital, the same one directed by the scientific friend I had consulted. He informed me that following my signature, I would be subjected to a series of sessions for which they would employ a cot of sorts, outfitted with two electrodes, designed to be placed over the patient's temples. Having observed more thoroughly my physical characteristics, the scientist felt I had nothing to worry about, that he himself would take charge of manufacturing electromagnetic pacifiers especially tailored to my eagle brain. Three patients slept in my room, located across the hall from the one occupied by the women. To the right of my bed was a young man who gave the impression of being autistic, and to the left, a construction worker who seemed to have suffered a heavy blow of some sort while he was working at a construction site, one that had severely affected his powers of reason. I never saw anyone come to visit the young mute. On the other hand, the wife of the construction worker showed up every

day during visiting hours, bringing along a full menu of home cooked meals. It was the only hour during which patients were allowed to go out into the hospital gardens. The rest of the day, we were secluded in a kind of patio covered with a ceiling of transparent acrylic. At the time, my slave's mission seemed to reach a kind of fulfillment. I thought that while I was a patient there, I would not feel badly for having no desire to envelop, with my great blackened bird body, that diminutive slave who would turn his naked back and, slightly hunched over, offer himself to me as if he were about to submit to a sacrificial **r i t e**. Despite, or rather precisely because of the fact I had fully abandoned any order of a sexual kind, from then on he became the epitome of someone indispensable. He took care of the bureaucratic red tape, he procured the necessary medical exams for my voluntary commitment. Very early in the morning, he would look after all six dogs, then arrive at the hospital every day during visiting hours.

I ought to clarify that my slave is not a mentally challenged person. On the contrary, he possesses an enviable intellect and an almost photographic memory, which allows him to dedicate himself to the study of the secret lives of nuns- although, due to a series of problems -associated with his personality, I believe- it is fairly unlikely that he will ever become an important person. As either slave or citizen. And this is why, because we are dealing with an individual of somewhat superior consciousness, I can't help but

notice that at no time did he question any of my wishes. As far as medical therapy was concerned, it was me, not the doctors, who requested that such radical treatment be applied. In the case of the dogs, who first arrived and then were exchanged, one after another, the same thing happened. Everything was done of my own accord, and the slave did nothing to stop me. He didn't seem to care about any of the consequences my acts might have, no matter how scatter-brained they were. What was my slave thinking? Was it his mission to obey my every whim with extreme, blind diligence? It may sound absurd to propose something of the sort at this point, but, of course, such was the pact he had established with his master: to fully obey any of my commands. Otherwise, it seems inexplicable that someone with his capacities would have consented not only to live with six dogs but, above all, to my internment in a mental institution as such. Was my slave actually seeking out the annihilation of his master? Of course, his obsession to serve me had to reach the point of devouring the very element being served. He must serve and be served in an incessant exchange, until the master were no longer master but rather damaged goods, enabling him thus to find another master, someone he can serve the same way up until the moment of his destruction. Once I realized how absurd and dangerous it was to find myself there, inside that hospital, I decided to leave immediately. I spoke to the director, I adduced that I had been committed out of my own free will, and

I obtained an immediate discharge. When the slave arrived during the usual visiting hours, he employed his habitual diligence in taking me back home. He found me there, in that patio covered with a layer of opaque acrylic that formed part of the pavilion where I was committed, on the verge of suffering an attack of claustrophobia. Not having my Facebook account at my disposition anymore, I attempted to fly and smashed, precipitously, against that invisible ceiling. The other patients, not to mention the medical personnel, were terrified at the racket my behavior made. By then, I had already been subjected to four sessions of electric discharges. The first two had taken place almost without my noticing. They laid me down on the stretcher, applied the anesthesia, and then I awoke as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. By the third, things were different, though I regained consciousness ahead of time and, apparently, the muscle relaxant they applied had not yet taken effect. In other words, I found myself rigid and unable to breathe. Then I learned that during the sessions, I was given artificial respiration by means of a bellows that rapidly opened and closed. On that occasion, I awoke and realized that the movement of said apparatus did not coincide with my need for air, much less with my respiratory pattern. Despite everything, now I can recall, with an intensity that seems almost abnormal, the occasion on which the slave, without any discussion, started to pack my luggage to perfection. With extraordinary swiftness, moreover,

he ordered my literary files and started introducing himself to everyone as my personal assistant.

On that occasion, my slave had come to the hospital to complete his daily visit. He brought with him only his bag filled with books, dedicated mostly to the lives of nuns, which he studied constantly. At the time, my slave was on the verge of earning his degree and he had set for himself the goal of surpassing his other classmates, and to use my name in his thesis dedication thus giving the impression, to any outside observers, that his need for dependence on someone else was more than satisfied by the relationship he maintained with his master, in this case a bird of prey. It would seem that this exclusive submission gave him the necessary strength to appear outstanding -even though it would be proven false by anyone who took the time to inspect his credentials- in other aspects of his life. I believe that this is why I accepted the relationship from the beginning: because despite the appearances, it was not going to be exclusive. My slave was going to continue his academic research. The intensity with which he displayed his slavery to me would have been exasperating, if not for that vanishing point of sorts.

And yet, my slave fled. He took advantage of the fact that I was far away. On a trip. To other shires. With an ocean between us. Perhaps recently, I had not been radical enough in my usual treatment. I may have weakened on several points. Among other things, I recall that upon returning from a previous trip I had given him a handkerchief that I had picked up off the ground

as a gift. Someone very close to me had brought it to my attention. He observed that such a gift on my part would only imply a step backwards in the relationship I had allegedly constructed. That handkerchief, a bit dirty from being underfoot, could cause confusion regarding the nature of the bond that held us together. Today, the telephone rang several times. I find myself in Kassel, Germany as a guest of Documenta 13, both in my capacity as bird of prey and as a common, ordinary citizen. It is midnight. I hesitate. The number is unknown. Still, I answer. I hear a kind of breathing. At that very moment I understand that the slave, during the times I was incapacitated to act as his master -that is to say, my commitment to the hospital, my travels, all those nights dedicated entirely to writing or hunting nocturnal animals- someone who, like him, resembled a pre-Colombian Dürer, would immediately seek out the presence of other masters. That breathing over the telephone line

When I am in ecstasy, I am never alone. I am like children or dogs, outdoing themselves whenever there is someone around to watch them perform. A player in need of an audience.

To be in ecstasy is to be poisoned
To be a god is to be poisoned.

Poison is the substance of which gods are made. «If the poison be ready, let it be brought in.»

Poison as euphoria
as flight,
as strength,
as madness.

A labyrinth. I hold the thread to exit the labyrinth. Fish tank. Aquarium. Am I the fish? Am I visiting the aquarium? I laugh. How do I know that I laugh?

Because I laugh by making bubbles,
because I myself am a bubble,
a bubble
like a soap bubble,
an iridescent bubble
a plastic bubble, a translucent balloon, a retort, a sphere of glass that rolls on a glass sleigh, that rolls,
that rolls with other spheres,
thousands of spheres,
millions of spheres and they fall,
they endlessly fall,
they endlessly slide into the darkness.

Divine l a u g h t e r

A dialogue between critic (BENJAMIN BUCHLOH) and artist(GABRIEL OROZCO)

You have used the word «game» a lot. Is this playful dimension an aesthetic concern once more? Is it the definition of how your artwork ultimately functions? I find the word «playful» too simple. I don't like the idea.

What is the motivation, according to you, underlying the work of artists, taking previous models into account? Production as an analogy for scientific exploration? No.

Spirituality? No.

Creativity? Well...

Revelation of truths? Yes.

Obviously, we find ourselves in a crisis where none of the above is believable. Art as a form of expression, or staging of a spectacle? No.

None of that really works anymore. Science? Science? No; of course not.

Humor? I believe humor is still possible.

Sex? It seems to me that is always the case...

What remains for us, what remains for you?
All of the above, something of the above? The humor, maybe; the sex, maybe...

The language of divinity

Out of all of María Sabina's poetry, that is to say, her shamanistic chants, we have only an ill-timed recording made by Wasson –María was uninspired that particular evening– and the translation by Miss Pike. This translation presents enormous gaps that I attempted to fill in with my second interview of María Sabina, but minor rectifications aside, I was unable to clarify the American linguist's texts. Her incapacity to translate numerous passages, similar to that of Professor Herlinda, is perhaps due less to phonetic difficulties than to the fact that María created a language all her own, incomprehensible even for the inhabitants of Huautla.

This esoteric language is employed by Asiatic shamans and Mexican healers and priests who call it *nabualtocaitl*, the idiom of divinity. What María Sabina has created is not precisely an esoteric language, but rather a poetic tongue where the incessant reiterations of the psalm and the litany are linked to a series of metaphors that range from frequently dark to licenses and puns shared by great poets, not to mention herbs and animals unknown that multiply the already considerable difficulties of the Mazateca tonal idiom.

María's chants act as a shamanic drum, which does not keep her from recurring now and again to percussive elements. The scattered, undulating images of ecstasy, supremely imprecise, seem to order themselves

and take on meaning thanks to her singsong voice. During my third session, I recall that upon exiting our trance, after a silence, María chanted again and created a melody of such gentleness, so inciting –every sound opened up my flesh, saturating it with an infinite complacency– that when she was done, unable to contain myself, as if it were a concerto executed with a masterful hand, I cried out, «Bravo, María!»

Heim, ^{* Roger Jean Heim, french mycologist} referring to the power of mushrooms, claims that they lift the silence. There is a veil of silence between the ear and the world of sound, just as between light and eye an atmosphere exists to absorb the rays of wavelengths that are either too long or too short. Mushrooms push aside that veil. Sounds take on a peculiar vibration; the deafened world recovers the plenitude of its orchestration and the slightest vocal intonations, the most imperceptible brushstrokes, are magnified, transposed onto a plane that is no longer the typical one, as if the terrestrial atmosphere had disappeared from view and it were granted to us to contemplate without harm the solar coronas of X-rays.

The world becomes melodious, or rather, we recover our lost ear. The language of divinity. Eternal wanderers. Silences as perfect as the melody itself. The universe as a single voice. Tactile music, music that can be felt, music that can be seen. The hallucinations of a man accused of eating peyote, who declared before the judges of the Holy Office to have seen «many little moths like fireflies, and over the body, drops

of water fell, like drizzling rain.» (Aguirre Beltrán). Luminous moths by the thousands furrowing through space; music transformed into rain falling onto a nude body. The flight of moths, of fireflies, of liquid diamonds, of beads that are green, yellow, red; Cubism, Tachisme, making, remaking, birth, death, musical motifs expressed in these tangible, visible images felt by each of the pores of our skin, each of our raised hairs, each hair, each muscle, and by our galvanized, electrified gray matter, receiving and transmitting at the same time that ineffable, universal melody.

The experience of mushrooms

[...]

I would
like
to speak,
to register
these
images

—why,
out
stupid
insistence
on
registering
everything?

showing
them
to
posterity,
bequeathing
that
incomparable
legacy,
and
being able
to say
only

that
makes
me
laugh
foolishly.

a single
word,
a foolish
word

The entropic
power
of laughter

Smithson in Mexico

We know that in 1969, Robert Smithson, his wife Nancy Holt and their friend, Virginia Dwan, spent time somewhere in the heart of the Chiapas rainforest, located in southern Mexico. Smithson himself gave a conference to architecture students at the University of Utah in 1972 describing their stay, accompanied by a series of 31 photographs also taken by him.

What is none too clear is how these travelers succeeded in abandoning the East Coast of the United States and crossing thousands of miles of very poorly paved roads under the endless skies of western desert, sowing their route with mirrors all the way to a hidden place, lost in the vegetation and humidity near the ruins of the Mayan city of Palenque.

Beyond the peyote pathways and the faux pas of some of his compatriots who belonged to the beat generation, it is suspected that Smithson and his companions had a genuine interest in understanding Mayan culture and its worldview that justified their voyage, their residence, and their rather odd decision to stay at a half-finished inn bearing an enormous sign that read Hotel Palenque.

«We live,» says the author of *Spiral Jetty*, «in frameworks, and are surrounded by frames of refer-

ences, yet nature dismantles them and returns them to a state where they no longer have integrity.» Hence the ruinous state of the hotel and Smithson's interest in obsessively exploring it, then going back over it in order to trace its layout, running the risk of losing himself in its «dismantled» architecture, explaining its unfinished structure and taking the next step, a fairly risky one without which his artistic career may never have been complete.

Smithson immediately recognized that, despite all his efforts, the hotel was «a place impossible to understand.» Hotel Palenque is a building located in a dead zone between construction and ruin: «*a sort of Mexican geologic, man-made wonder.*» *It was impossible to learn when its construction had begun, and even more difficult to find out when it had ended or whether it ever would:* «The whole hotel is just interlacing on interlacing. A kind of great mass of filigree just winding all around itself.»

Drawn by the powerful, stagnant energy of the jungle, which led him to spend long hours in deep meditation, he confessed: «My feeling is that this hotel is built with the same spirit that the Mayans built their temples.» This phrase is actually quite curious, given that one of the mysteries that remain unsolved is why Smithson chose that hotel in ruins for his conference instead of the wondrous archeological site located next door. Even so, he goes on to encourage his audience: «I hope that you go to the Hotel Palenque so that you learn something about how the Mayans

are still building. The structure has all of the convolution and terror, in a sense, that you would find in a typical Mayan temple –especially of the Uxmal variety which is very, very... it's called Mayan Baroque and made out of serpentine façades loaded with spirals and rocks carved in the shape of woven twigs and things; it's quite nice.»

Always fascinated by the inertia of the spiral, Smithson warns us later on with a glint of humor: «There is something about Mexico, an overall hidden concealed violence about the landscape itself. Many artists and writers have gone to Mexico and been completely destroyed, you know. It happened to Hart Crane after he left Mexico. He jumped off the back of a boat into the propellers and was completely cut to ribbons*. So you have to be careful when you go to Mexico that you are not caught up in this—in any of this kind of unconscious, dangerous violence that is really lurking in every patch of earth.»

* Before taking the final leap, the poet of *White Buildings* took his leave and waved goodbye to all the passengers traveling to New York.

Among the architectural elements, Smithson praises the columns with no roof, the hallways leading nowhere, the cement, the sheaves, the bricks, the ironwork and other construction materials piled up on all sides, the crack filled with plaster, the tower and its square spiral staircase that form part of both the building and the enigma. Everything in the hotel seems to be a consequence of some accident, or ready for ritual sacrifice, even the deserted dance hall, or the empty

pool with its hanging bridge, or the bar in the bottom of a crypt. Suddenly, signs of life appear: a chair, a door, a drooping palm tree in a stony garden, a stairway, and a turtle pond; but the man who bears witness to all this, Smithson, who took the photographs and drafted a comment for each one, finds in this «de-architecturized» architecture, this non-place, a perfect analogy for entropic mechanics that allows him to give another turn of the screw: he manages to draw a line that leads from the operation of the physical laws of energy to the Mayan worldview and the construction of today's world and its ruin, from whence evolves one of the initial conclusions of the conference: that ruins are the secret soul of all constructions.

In an exercise of direct observation, Smithson exemplifies the dislocation of meaning, the demolition crew of space-time. A new kind of spiral vision, one that connects the image of the window suspended without the safety of an interior, impossible to see through, eroded and stripped nude by its surroundings, that sustains nonetheless an invisible connection to the hotel door with which Smithson ends the conference, opening up shutters that lead to contemplation, to reflection regarding limits and their gradual disappearance: from the other side of the Hotel Palenque door, he makes the leap back to the conference room. End of trip.

At that intermediate point between memory and oblivion, I recall having read that irony is a sterile path, whereas humor can be a bit more fertile when it

comes to building an effective discourse. The humor that some have been able to perceive in this conference reaffirms Smithson's thesis of so-called entropic verbalization: *l a u g h t e r* and its power. «The order and disorder of the fourth dimension could be set between *l a u g h t e r* and crystal-structure, as a device for unlimited speculation.» It would seem pre-Hispanic cultures were aware of this; one need only cast a glance into an anthropological museum and take in the countless shelves holding figurines that adopt a wide variety of poses without ever losing their smiles of stone, smiles that perhaps also were spread across the expressions, between enchanted and incredulous, of all those who filled the auditorium.

L a u g h t e r
and
penitence

The *l a u g h t e r* of figurines is what starts to reveal all their nonsensical wisdom (and I use those two words deliberately); they somehow recall certain ceremonies in which Xochipilli intervenes. First, decapitation. Beyond a doubt, we are dealing here with a solar ritual. On that appears as early as the «Olmec» era, on a stele from Tres Zapotes. As for the rest, the image of the sun as a head separated from its trunk spontaneously represents all of the spirits. (Did Apollinaire know that he was borrowing an ancient metaphor when he ended his renowned poem with the phrase: *Soleil cou coupé?*) A few examples: the Nuttall Codex depicts Xochiquetzal being beheaded during a ball game, and at the festival consecrated to Xilonen, a woman, the incarnation of a goddess, was decapitated on the very altar of Cintéotl. Decapitation was not the only rite. A lunar goddess, an archer and huntress like Diana, albeit less chaste, Tlazoltéotl was the patron of human sacrifice by arrow piercing. We know that this rite originated on the coast, in

the region of the Huasteca and Totonaca, to be precise. It seems useless, finally, to stop at the sacrifices made to Xipe the Flayed One, * it is worthwhile, on the other hand, to point out that this kind of sacrifice also formed part of the cult to Xochipilli: the Magliabecchiano Codex portrayed the god of dance and joy dressed in the skin of a monkey.

During sacrifices associated with Xipetotec «they would kill and flay many slaves and captives... and wear their skins» (Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia de las cosas de la Nueva España*, Book II.)

Thus, it is not far-fetched to assume that the figurines laugh and shake their magic rattles at the moment of sacrifice. Their superhuman joy celebrates the union of two vertices of existence, like the jet of blood from the decapitated that is transformed into seven serpents.

The Ball Game provided the setting for a rite that culminated in sacrifice by decapitation. But we run the risk of failing to comprehend its meaning if we forget that this rite was, in effect, a game. In all rites there is a playful element. One might even say that rites are rooted in play. The reason is in plain sight: creation itself is a game; that is to say, contrary to work. Gods are, by essence, playful. By playing, they create. What separates gods from men is that they play, while we work. The world is a cruel game played by the gods, and we are their playthings. In all the mythologies of the world, we find creation: a gratuitous act. Men are unnecessary; they are not self-sustaining, but owe their existence to alien will:

they are a creation, a game. The rite destined to preserve the continuity of the world and of men is an imitation of that divine game, a representation of the original creative act. The borderline between profane and sacred coincides with the line separating work from play, **l a u g h t e r** from gravitas, creation from productive labor. Originally, all games were rites and even today, they obey ceremony, whereas work distances itself from all rituals: during the workday, there is no time or room for play. During the rite, the game paradox reigns: the last will be first, the gods will pluck the world out of nothingness, life will be gained through death; in the realm of work, there are no paradoxes. In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread, each man is the child of his own labor. There is an inexorable relationship between effort and its fruit: work, in order to be considered cost-effective, must be productive; the usefulness of the rite lies in the fact that it is a huge waste of time and existence, but one that ensures cosmic continuity. The rite assumes all the risks of the game and its gains, just as its losses are incalculable. Sacrifice naturally inserts itself in the logic of the game; that is why it is both center and consummation of the ceremony: there is no game without loss, no rite without an offering or victim. The gods sacrifice themselves upon creating the world, because all creation is a game.

The relationship between **l a u g h t e r** and sacrifice is as ancient as the rite itself. The bleeding violence of Bacchanals and Saturnalia are nearly

always accompanied by great shouts and peals of **l a u g h t e r**. **L a u g h t e r** shakes the universe, spinning it out of control, exposing its entrails. Terrible **l a u g h t e r** is a divine manifestation. Like sacrifice, **l a u g h t e r** denies work. And not only because it is an interruption of the task at hand, but because it casts doubt on its seriousness. **L a u g h t e r** is a suspension and, occasionally, a loss of judgment. Thus it wrests all meaningfulness from work and ultimately, the world itself. Indeed, work is what lends meaning to Nature; it transforms its indifference or its hostility into fruit by making it productive. Work humanizes the world, and this humanization is what lends the world meaning. **L a u g h t e r** returns the universe to its original indifference and strangeness: if it has any meaning at all, it is divine, not human. Through **l a u g h t e r**, the world goes back to being a place of games; a sacred realm, not one of labor. The nihilism of the **l a u g h t e r** of the gods. Its purpose is no different than that of human sacrifice: to reestablish the divinity of nature, its radical inhumanity. The world was not made for man; the world and man were made for the gods. Work is serious: death and **l a u g h t e r** rip away its mask of gravitas. Through death and **l a u g h t e r**, the world and men become playthings again.

There is an infinite distance between men and gods. Time and time again, through ritual and sacrifice, man gains access to the divine realm –but only

to fall, after an instant, into his original contingency. Men may resemble the gods; they never resemble us. Alien and strange, the god is «otherness». He manifests his presence among men as a tremendous *mystery*, to borrow the expression coined by Otto. Incarnations of an inaccessible great beyond, the representations of the gods are terrible. Elsewhere, however, I have tried to distinguish between the terrifying character of numen and the experience, perhaps more profound, of sacred horror.* *El arco y la lira* (pp. 123-131), Mexico, 1956. The tremendous and the terrible are attributes of divine power, of its authority and sublimity. But the nucleus of divinity is its mystery, its radical «otherness». Now then, this «otherness» in and of itself does not produce fear, but rather fascination. It is a repulsive or, to be more precise, revulsive experience: it consists of opening up the entrails of the cosmos, exposing the organs of gestation as those of destruction as well and revealing that, from a certain point of view (that of divinity), life and death are the same thing. Horror is an experience sentimentally equivalent to paradox and the antinomy of the spirit: the god is total presence and yet, bottomless absence. In divine presence all presences are manifest and therefore, everything is present; yet at the same time, everything is empty, as if it were a game. The *apparition* shows the obverse and reverse of being. Coatlicue is overfull and overflowing with all the attributes of existence, in her presence the totality of the universe is concentrated; and this plethora of symbols, significations, and signs

is also an abyss, the great maternal mouth of the void. Stripping the Mexican gods of their terrible and horrible character, as our art critics attempt to do now and again, is the equivalent of doubly amputating them as creations of religious genius and as works of art. All divinity is tremendous; all gods are sources of horror. And the gods of the ancient Mexicans possess a charge of sacred energy that deserves to be rated as nothing less than fulmination. That is why they fascinate us so.

A tremendous presence, the god is inaccessible; a fascinating mystery, he is unknowable. Both attributes meld into impassivity. (*Passion* belongs to gods who are humanized, like Christ). Gods are beyond the seriousness of labor and that is why their activity is play, but it is impassive play. Of course the Greek gods of antiquity era smile; that smile is the expression of their indifference. They are privy to secrecy, they know that the world, men, and even themselves amount to nothing except as figures of Fate; for the Greek gods, good and evil, life and death, are but words. That smile is the sign of their impassivity, one that signals their infinite distance from men. They smile: nothing can upset them. We know not whether the gods of Mexico laugh or smile: they are covered by masks. The function of the mask is dual; like a fan, it both hides and reveals divinity. Better said, the masks hides their essence, yet manifests their terrible attributes. Either way, an unsurmountable distance interposes itself between man and deity. In this game of impassive divinities, what place does *laughter* hold?



Laughter predates the gods. At times, the gods laugh. Mockery, threat, or delirium, their strident *laughter* terrifies us: it either sets creation in motion or tears it apart. On other occasions, their *laughter* is the echo or nostalgia of lost unity, that is to say, of the magical world. In order to tempt the sun-goddess, who was hiding in her cave, the goddess Uzumé «revealed her breasts, raised her skirts, and danced. The gods began to laugh and their *laughter* made the pillars of the sky tremble.» The dance of a Japanese goddess makes the sun rise. In the beginning, there was *laughter*; the world begins with an indecent dance and peals of *laughter*. Cosmic *laughter* is puerile *laughter*. Today, only children laugh with a *laughter* that recalls that of the Totonaca figurines. The *laughter* of the first day, a savage *laughter* still akin to our first tears: an agreement with the world, a dialogue without words, pleasure. It is enough to stretch out one's hand and pluck the fruit from the tree, it is enough to laugh so that the world may laugh with us. The restoration of unity between world and man, puerile *laughter* also announces our final separation. Children play by staring at each other face to face: whoever laughs first, loses the game. *Laughter* is not free. It is no longer contagious. The world has turned a deaf ear and from now on, it can only be conquered through effort or sacrifice, through labor or rituals.



The spirit that determines this moment in time is necessarily consumed and integrally expanded, for it desires said consumption. The myth and the possibility of the myth are undone: there subsists only an immense void, beloved and miserable. The absence of the myth is perhaps that ground, constant beneath my feet and yet unexpectedly, that ground may disappear.

The *absence of God* is not closure: it is the opening up of the infinite. The *absence of God* is more vast, more divine than God (I no longer am I, therefore, but *the absence of I*: I had awaited that act of disappearance and am now joyful and boundless).

In the white and incongruent void of absence, myths that are no longer myths innocently endure and are unmade. Their selfsame duration reveals their precariousness. At least the pale transparency of possibility makes perfect sense: like rivers in the sea, all myths, lasting or fleeting, are lost in the *absence of myth*, which is both their sorrow and their ultimate truth.

The decisive absence of faith is unbreakable faith. The fact that a universe without myths is a universe in ruins—reduced to nothingness—depriving us of these things equates privation to the revelation of the universe. If by suppressing the mythic universe, we have lost the universe, this in and of itself adds to the death of myths the action of a loss that is revealing. Today, because a myth has died or is dying, we see through it better than if it had lived: dispossession is what perfects its transparency, and suffering is what makes us joyful.

«The night is also a sun,» and the absence of myth
is also a myth: the coldest, purest,

and only *true myth*.

No matter what historic doctrine you profess (and I am not one of those who dream of the absurd prolongation of indigenous traditions, nor I do not even put much faith in those that are Spanish), said doctrine connects you to the race of yesteryear, not to mention its blood, or our joint efforts to dominate its brave and thunderous nature, efforts that form the brute foundation of history. We are also joined together by a community that is much more profound, composed of the everyday emotions we feel when confronted by the same natural goal.

This clash between our sensitivity and the world itself forges, or engenders, a common soul. But when neither one nor the other are accepted –neither the work of collective action, nor the work of collective contemplation–historic emotion conveniently becomes part of contemporary life and, without its glow, our valleys and our mountains would seem like a theater with all the lights turned off. The poet sees, by the moon reverberating across the snow-capped volcanoes, the specter of Doña Marina silhouetted against the sky, stalked by the shadow of the Archer of Stars; or he dreams of a copper axe, the heavens resting on its edge; or he believes that he hears, in the clearing, the mournful weeping of the twins carried on her back by the goddess dressed in white: let us not deny him the power of evocation, let us not waste our legends. If this tradition is foreign to us, no matter: it has fallen into our hands, and only we can dispose of it. We shall not renounce –oh, Keats– any object of beauty, any begetter of lasting joy.

Let us visualize once again the researcher, analyst of rituals, poet, bird of prey, or «critic» who has taken it upon himself to prepare this offering. His desire goes above and beyond the call of duty, therefore he delivers a brief list of works, insufficient and capricious, so that the curious reader –should he so desire– may accomplish an *almost* impossible task: that of gaining an understanding of the entire sense of something that reaches far beyond any territory, that of satisfying his hunger for Mexico. This offering does not consist of a reference bibliography or, in the strictest sense, an encyclopedia; rather, the researcher shares a humble compendium of titles and authors fundamental to those who wish to delve into the culture of a complex land.

As you can see, this compendium is composed of a brief catalog of texts in which Mexican literature predominates as a field of knowledge, while at the same time including the vision of foreign writers who, in different eras, have succumbed to the fascination for this country and its culture. Also quoted are some of the most notable historic, ethnographic, anthropological, artistic, lexical, and gastronomic investigations that have been completed by many men and women at different times, without which any desire to grasp Mexico and the Mexican –within the unstable, subjective, but always powerful realm of «fiction» – would doubtless result, like any sacrifice or expenditure of energy, in the incomplete fulfillment of the mission at hand.

HISTORY, ANTHROPOLOGY,
ETHNOGRAPHY AND LEXICOGRAPHY

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Hernán Cortés
002. *The True Story of the Conquest of New Spain*
Bernal Díaz del Castillo
003. *General History of the Things of New Spain*
Bernardino de Sahagún
004. *Cortés*
Christian Duverger
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An indigenous woman in the conquest of Mexico
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Christian Duverger
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Edmundo O'Gorman
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Miguel León-Portilla
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Serge Gruzinski
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Edmundo O'Gorman
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Daniel Cosío Villegas *et al.*
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Fernando Benítez
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Samuel Ramos

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Claudio Lomnitz
017. *Anatomía del mexicano*
Roger Bartra
018. *El salvaje en el espejo*
Roger Bartra
019. *Diccionario del español de México*
El Colegio de México
020. *Diccionario del náhuatl en el español de México*
Enrique García Escamilla
and Carlos Montemayor
021. *Diccionario de la lengua náhuatl o mexicana*
Rémy Siméon

MEXICAN LITERATURE

022. *The Bandits from Río Frío*
Manuel Payno
023. *The Underdogs*
Mariano Azuela
024. *The Eagle and the Serpent*
Martín Luis Guzmán
025. *Poems of Ramón López Velarde*
Ramón López Velarde
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José Vasconcelos
027. *México en una nuez y otras nueces*
Alfonso Reyes
028. *Visión de Anáhuac*
Alfonso Reyes
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Julio Torri
030. *Al filo del agua*
Agustín Yáñez

- 031. *Pedro Páramo*
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- 032. *El llano en llamas*
Juan Rulfo
- 033. *Confabulario*
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José Gorostiza
- 035. *Nueva grandeza mexicana*
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José Juan Tablada
122. *México /Gastronomía*
Margarita Carrillo Arronte
123. *The Art of Mexican Cooking*
Diana Kennedy

THE PLAGIARIST

[...]

... See the wound the upturned stone has left
In the earth! How doubly tragic is the hollowed shape –
It is a miracle that I may use such words
As shape. But the analogy has escaped.
Crawling on hands and sinews to the grave.
I found certain pamphlets on the way.
Said they were mine. For they explained a pilgrimage
That otherwise was meaningless as day
But twice as difficult, to explain away...



[...]

BIOGRAPHICAL MASKS
THE AUTHORS

LUIGI AMARA
Mexico City, 1971



A writer and editor –although he prefers to describe himself as a drifter with a taste for chess– Luigi Amara has dedicated his foray through literature to crossing the borderline between poetry and essays, two of the genres he enjoys most. Among other books, he has published *El peatón inmóvil*, *Sombras sueltas* (Rousset Banda Literary Criticism Prize, 2008), *A pie*, *Los disidentes del universo*, *Cuaderno flotante* and *La escuela del aburrimiento*. He has also written books for children: *Las aventuras de Max y su ojo submarino* (Hispanic American Poetry for Children Prize, 2006) and *Los calcetines solitarios*. His recent publications include the book of poetry *Nu)n(ca* and the essays *Los disidentes del universo*, both edited by Sexto Piso. His curiosity and taste for literature have also led him to venture down editorial pathways: over a decade ago, together with other writers and artists he launched Tumbona Ediciones, which continues to survive independently despite the numerous avatars and setbacks of the publishing world in Mexico.

GEORGES BATAILLE
Billom, 1897-París, 1962



A French thinker, anthropologist, and writer, Bataille worked as a librarian at the National Library of France. Together with Roger Caillois and Michel Leiris, he founded the College of Sociology and in 1946, he founded the magazine *Critique*, acting as its director until the time of his death. One of Bataille's greatest talents was his multi-disciplinary approach and although he never considered himself a philosopher, his work influenced French post-structuralism, above all thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Bataille was fascinated by human sacrifice and founded the secret society Acéphale, whose symbol portrayed a decapitated man and the sun: his intent was to found a religion, sacrificing one of its members at the inaugural ceremony in order to create an indestructible bond. Several of those he invited to join good-humoredly agreed to be victims of this ritual, but none were willing to accept the role of sacrificial priest and executioner; thus, his fledgling secret society came apart and was dissolved. Among his books translated into English are found: *Story of the Eye*, *The Tears of Eros*, *Guilty*, *My Mother*, *Madame Edwarda*, *Erotism: Death and sensuality*, *Literature and Evil*, and *The Accursed Share*.

MARIO BELLATIN

Mexico City, 1960



A Peruvian-Mexican writer, Bellatin is considered to be one of the most audacious and experimental creators of contemporary literature. His work has been amply translated into many languages. In his books, he proposes a playful exchange between reality and fiction through apocryphal protocols, chronicles, biographies, or scientific documents that inspire situations that are far-fetched, disconcerting, and even amusing at times. His novels contain no biographical references, as the author believes that the text must sustain itself and literature is best developed with as little intervention as possible from the author. His books translated into English include: *Beauty Salon*, *The Large Glass*, *Jacob the Mutant*, *Chinese Checkers*, and *Shiki Nagoaka: A nose for fiction*. The dates of publication have been omitted, given that rewriting and republication are key to Bellatin, sometimes under the same title, sometimes under a different one or a different publishing house, or using his own seal, or better yet, his own thumbprint: the same one that defines his ambitious project, *The One Hundred Thousand Books of Mario Bellatin*. According to Alan Pauls, «More than once, this writer has said that the key is to create 'worlds of one's own, closed universes that have to account solely for the fiction that sustains them.' All of his books obey this law to the letter. The first thing they do, without fail, is to establish coordinates and outline territories, mapping with precision the material they are about to tackle. As if the only way to break the silence were to say, 'things are just so, they happen in such and such a zone, under such and such a name, they are governed by the following rules, and they demand that these specific conditions be fulfilled.' Such is, more or less, the opening gesture of Bellatin's fictions: a way to inaugurate the game, the despotic excitement, the administrative monotony of contractualism, and the somewhat unwholesome fruition of experimental protocols.»

FERNANDO BENÍTEZ

Mexico City 1912-2000



Writer, editor, journalist, anthropologist, ethnologist, and historian. A man of notable culture, Benítez was also a tireless explorer of Mexican geography. From these forays he extracted (through countless interviews) the first-hand information he gradually wove into his books. The most important of these is, beyond a doubt, *Los indios de México*, a compilation in four volumes of the daily life and worldviews of different Mexican Indian cultures. From this work have been extracted in supplementary form tales describing his encounters with the world of shamans, such as the Huichol route to collect *péyotl*, or his encounter with María Sabina, or the magical mushrooms of Huautla de Jiménez. We have selected excerpts from his experiences with substances to which many other writers, from Thomas de Quincey to Walter Benjamin, have also surrendered themselves. His writing on ethnography and anthropology is characterized by a great forcefulness and passion that approach poetry. His reference works encompass diverse genres and fields of knowledge, ranging from historical essay: *La ruta de Hernán Cortés, 1992 qué celebramos, qué lamentamos?*, to chronicle: *Viaje a la Tarabumara*; or anthropology: *Los bongos alucinantes*, *Los indios de México*, or even the novel: *El rey viejo* and *El agua envenenada* and the biography: *Juárez, Morelos* and *Cristóbal Colón*. Available in English are: *In the Magic Land of Peyote* and *The Poisoned Water*.

BENJAMIN BUCHLOH

Cologne, 1941



An art historian who, after actively participating as a critic within the context of European conceptual art –as director of the final issues of the influential magazine *Interfunktionen* in the mid-1970s– moved in 1977 to the United States, where he has acted as one of the editors of the magazine *October*, without which it would be virtually impossible to compose a reading of art from the second half of the now defunct 20th century. He currently teaches at Harvard University and, having trained several generations of artists and critics, now works at the University of Columbia as well. In 2004, he co-authored the book *Art since 1900* together with Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, and Yves-Alain Bois as well as *Formalism and Historicity: Models and methods in twentieth-century art*. In his book *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry*, he has published diverse essays regarding post-war artists ranging from the new French realism (Arman, Yves Klein, Jacques Villeglé) to German art (Joseph Beuys, Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter), Fluxus and Pop Art (Robert Watts and Andy Warhol), minimalism and post-minimalism (Michael Asher and Richard Serra), as well as conceptual art in America and Europe (Daniel Buren and Dan Graham). In February 2015, a second volume of essays was published under the same title regarding themes and historical issues in 20th century art; such as the Soviet «call to order,» or the «factography» and «repetition of paradigms» of the neo-avantgarde movements.

LUIS CARDOZA Y ARAGÓN

Antigua, 1901

Mexico City, 1992



A Guatemalan poet, essayist, narrator, and art critic, Cardoza y Aragón was one of the most important intellectuals of 20th century Latin America. He was exceptional in all that he accomplished throughout his life, both as a writer and as a citizen committed to democracy and justice in his country. In addition to his capacity for profound reflection, he received the gift of writing. He once said, «poetry is the sole proof of the existence of man.» A political exile in Mexico, Cardoza y Aragón was not only the embodiment of hospitality for many Guatemalans who were persecuted for their ideas, but a friend who also welcomed figures such as Antonin Artaud during their visits to Mexico. Among those who passionately dedicated themselves to the study of art produced in Mexico in the early and mid-20th century, he wrote major monographic works on Rufino Tamayo and Carlos Mérida. Many of his essays on art remain unsurpassed. His stunning published works include: *Luna Park* (1923), *Apolo y Coatlicue, ensayos mexicanos de espina y flor* (1944), *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* (1955), *El río: novelas de caballería* (1986) and *Miguel Ángel Asturias, casi novela* (1991).

ANTONIO CASO
Mexico City, 1883-1946



A philosopher and writer, his work unfolds in several directions: divulgation, teaching, university politics, and publication. In 1909, he became a founding member and the first president of the Ateneo de la Juventud group of intellectuals, together with José Vasconcelos, Alfonso Reyes, and Pedro Henríquez Ureña. He launched a crusade of cultural renewal in Mexico that would culminate with the rejection of positivist education and the restoration of philosophical studies in the classroom. In 1913, he inaugurated the department of philosophy of the recently founded Escuela de Altos Estudios –which he was appointed to direct on several occasions– and began to give conferences programmed by the Universidad Popular –created that same year by the Ateneo with the objective of conveying the rudiments of culture to the people. These conferences were given at workshops and community centers and were complemented with excursions and visits to museums. In 1943, he became a founding member of El Colegio Nacional, where he combined writing and teaching. For thirty-five years, he taught, successively: Ethics, Aesthetics, Epistemology, History of Philosophy, and Philosophy of History at the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature; Sociology at the Faculty of Law; and Logic and Methodology at other institutions. A defender of academic freedom and ideological pluralism, Caso fought for university autonomy and against any one, official philosophy. He was an eminent professor and in light of his career, may be considered one of the «fathers» of philosophy in Mexico. *Problemas filosóficos* (1915), *La existencia como economía, como desinterés y como caridad* (1916), *El problema de México y la ideología nacional* (1924) and *El peligro del hombre* (1942) are just some of his books.

LUIS CERNUDA
Sevilla, 1902
Mexico City, 1963



A poet and literary critic, Cernuda was a member of the Generation of '27 and one of the great Spanish poets who lived in exile after the Civil War. After several years in Madrid dedicated to various literary endeavors, he learned of the death of his friend Federico García Lorca in 1936 and dedicated a moving elegy to him. Two years later, he abandoned Spain. From 1938 to 1947 he lived in England, where he taught and tutored Basque children who were also Civil War refugees. In 1947, his exile led him to the United States, where he continued to teach classes. Finally, in 1953, he decided to relocate to Mexico, where he would reside until the time of his death. The poetry of Cernuda is one of deep meditation and according to Octavio Paz, evolved in four stages: apprenticeship, youth, maturity, and the start of old age. To the initial stage belongs his early poetry, published in 1937 under the titles *Perfil del aire* –revealing a poet elegant in his elegiac contemplation of the world– and *Égloga, elegía, oda* –written from 1937 to 1938, in which he pays homage to the classical tradition while at the same time touching upon themes such as love and Eros. The cycle of youth begins with *Un río, un amor* and *Los placeres prohibidos*, written from 1929 to 1931. Both books reveal Cernuda's adhesion to surrealism. *Invocaciones*, from 1934-1935, introduces the neo-Romantic, expanding into broad poems that celebrate the glories of the world and exalt the mission of the poet. In 1936, Cernuda publishes his first volume of complete poetry: *La realidad y el deseo*. The period of maturity starts off with *Las nubes* (1940 y 1943), one of the most beautiful books of poetry written about the Spanish Civil War. Under the stimulation of English lyricism, it includes dramatic monologues. His final stage of life took place in Mexico. There, he composed the books *Variaciones sobre tema mexicano* (1952), *Vivir sin estar viviendo* (1944-1949) and *Con las horas contadas*, from 1950-1956. In these poems we may perceive the substitution of a former elegant, Garcilaso-inspired musicality with a dry, harsh rhythm and the renunciation of all ornamentation in favor of conceptualism. This style attains its maximum expression in *Desolación de la Quimera* (1962). Available in English are *Written in Water*, *Forbidden Pleasures*, and *Selected Poems*.

JACQUES DERRIDA
El-Bihar, 1930
París, 2004



A French philosopher of Jewish origin whose work gave rise to the deconstruction school, an analytical methodology that has been applied to literature, linguistics, philosophy, law, and architecture. At the age of nineteen, Derrida arrived in Paris. In 1952, he began his study of philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure, where he would later teach from 1965 to 1984. From 1960 to 1964, he gave classes at the Sorbonne. In 1967, he published three books: *Voice and Phenomenon* (1973), *Of Grammatology* (1977), and *Writing and Difference* (1978), which introduced his deconstructionist focus on the reading of texts. As someone who resists classification according to culturalist criteria, Derrida's later works continued to redefine his thought. From the early 1970s, he divided his time between Paris and the United States, where he taught classes at universities such as John Hopkins, Yale, and the University of California, Irvine. His other works include *Glas* (1974) and *The Post Card* (1980). Derrida's work centers on language. He states that the traditional or metaphysical way of reading imposes a number of false suppositions on the nature of texts. A traditional reader believes that language is capable of expressing ideas without changing them, which in the hierarchy of language means that writing is secondary with regards to discourse and that the author of a text is the origin of its meaning. Derrida's deconstructive style of reading inverts these suppositions and questions the idea that a text has a sole, inalterable meaning. Deconstruction reveals the numerous semantic strata that operate in language. Upon deconstructing the work of former scholars, Derrida tries to demonstrate that language is constantly changing. Although his thought is, at times, described by his critics as the liquidation of philosophy, deconstruction can be better understood as the display of unavoidable tensions between the ideals of clarity and coherence that guide philosophy and the defects that inevitably accompany its production.

SALVADOR ELIZONDO
Mexico City, 1932-2006



One of the most surprisingly original Mexican writers. His first novel, *Farabeuf o la crónica del instante* (1965) marked a watershed in literature by creating an unusual verbal language that employed the principles of cinematographic montage while incorporating his knowledge of Chinese and French. The novel *Farabeuf* was very well received by the critics and readers at the time; it merited the Xavier Villaurrutia Prize in 1965 and was translated into numerous languages. It is worthwhile to point out that Elizondo's work was heavily influenced by the works and thinking of Georges Bataille, above all that which concerns the relationship between works of art and cruelty –also a major influence, by the way, on a great many other contemporary writers, including Mario Bellatin. *Farabeuf* was followed by: *Narda o el verano* (1966), *El hipogeo secreto* (1968), *Cuaderno de escritura* (1969), *El retrato de Zoe y otras mentiras* (1969), *El grafógrafo* (1972), *Miscast* (1981), *Camera lúcida* (1983), *Elsinore, un cuaderno* (1988), *Estanquillo* (1992), *Teoría del infierno* (1993), *Neocosmos* (1999) and *Pasado anterior* (2007). Aside from bequeathing us his unique prose, for several years Elizondo dedicated himself to writing in secret his voluminous diaries, of which the Fondo de Cultura Económica has published a selection titled *Diarios 1945-1985*. He also dedicated himself, so they say, to two of his favorite hobbies: conversation and the practice of archery.

**SERGIO GONZÁLEZ
RODRÍGUEZ**

Mexico City, 1950



A journalist, writer, critic, and rock musician, Sergio González is known for his books investigating the tragic cases of femicide in Ciudad Juárez and the growing violence that implicates not only drug traffickers, but political, economic, and business institutions as well. An example of this are his books of chronicles *Huesos en el desierto* (2002) and *El hombre sin cabeza* (2009). During the time he spent researching feminicides in northern Mexico, an endeavor that nearly cost him his life, the Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño was working on his novel *2666*. Bolaño maintained close contact with González Rodríguez, who contributed much of the information Bolaño used to sustain his narrative. In 2014, González Rodríguez won the Heralde Essay Prize for his book *Campo de Guerra*. However, this writer has also dedicated a considerable amount of time to writing on less thorny subjects, to wit: the essays *Los bajos fondos, el antro, la bohemia y el café* (1988), *El centauro en el paisaje* (1992), and *De sangre y de sol* (2006); and the novels *La noche oculta* (1990), *El triángulo imperfecto* (2003), *El plan Schreber* (2004), *La pandilla cósmica* (2005), *El vuelo* (2008), and *El artista adolescente que confundía el mundo con un cómic* (2014). He was awarded the Fernando Benítez National Prize for Cultural Journalism to honor his vast contributions to journalistic investigation as a writer, editor, and teacher. He is also one of the writers who has delved most profoundly into the night life and cantinas of Mexico City.

ALFREDO LÓPEZ AUSTIN
Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, 1936



One of Mexico's most respected historians to specialize in pre-Colombian Mexico, López Austin is an expert in the study of indigenous peoples. He is currently Researcher Emeritus at the Instituto de Investigación Antropológica of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, and a professor of Mesoamerican Worldviews at the faculty of Philosophy and Literature of the same university. His main area of research is Mesoamerican history and thought, especially worldviews, religion, the body, mythology, magic, and iconography. His many publications include: *Mito y realidad de Zuyúá. Serpiente Emplumada y las transformaciones mesoamericanas del clásico al posclásico* (1999); *Dioses del norte, dioses del sur. Religiones y cosmovisión en Mesoamérica y los Andes* (2008), *Monte sagrado – Templo Mayor* (2009), and *Las razones del mito* (2015). English translations include *Mexico's Indigenous Past, Tamoanchan, Tlalocan: Places of mist (Mesoamerican worlds)*, *Human Body and Ideology Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, and *The Myths of the Opossum: Pathways of Mesoamerican Mythology*.

MALCOLM LOWRY
Cheshire, 1909-Ripe, 1957



«Malcolm Lowry, who liked to contemplate the universe as something arcane, a cryptogram filled with 'magical correspondences' or 'mysterious and fatal coincidences,' saw his life marked by two women, three men, and a country. The women were his wives, Jan Gabriel and Margerie Conner; the men were the U.S. American writer Conrad Aiken, who acted as his tutor, guardian, teacher, tutor, adoptive father, accomplice, doppelgänger and rival; Nordhal Grieg, a Norwegian novelist with whom he identified due to his maritime experience, and Albert Erskine, the U.S. editor of *Under the Volcano* and a loyal friend, who believed in his talent as no one else did. The country was, of course, Mexico or more specifically, Cuernavaca or Quauhnhuac, as he liked to call it, the scenario of his great novel.» In 1936, Malcolm left the United States to renew his visa and, accompanied by Jan, his first wife, headed for Mexico following in the footsteps of one of his greatest heroes: D. H. Lawrence. What followed configures the complex history of the writing of *Under the Volcano*, a masterpiece of world literature. The novel begins the same way as the short story «Fiesta at Chapultepec»; the first draft opening with the phrase, «It was the day of the dead.» The following versions cost Lowry years of work, countless rewrites, Jan's final abandonment, a brutal fall into the «dark night of the soul» in Oaxaca, his expulsion from Mexico, his encounter in Hollywood with Margerie Bonner, his *intermezzo* in the paradise of his cabin at Eridanus in Vancouver, his temporary recovery from alcoholism, his divorce and marriage to Margerie, the fire at his cabin in Dollarton and the heroic recovery of the umpteenth draft of *Under the Volcano* by Margerie, the conclusion of the novel in 1944, his return to Mexico, the scene of the crime, the rejection of editor Jonathan Cape, Lowry's fiery letter in defense of his novel and finally, the almost simultaneous publication in 1947 of *Under the Volcano* in England and the United States. Lowry's life was, like his book, intense, brutal, and painful. As for his death at the age of 47, it is and will no doubt continue to be an unsolved mystery.

GABRIEL OROZCO
Jalapa, Veracruz 1962



In the early 1990s, Orozco's exploration of drawing, photography, sculpture, and installation began to stand out. At first, this artist took his practice outside the studio in order to create works along his walks through different cities. In 1998, Francesco Bonami referred to him as «one of the most influential artists of this decade, and probably the next one too.» Some of his most emblematic pieces are: *Recaptured Nature* (1991), one of the artist's first sculptural works, constructed entirely of vulcanized rubber produced to manufacture the inner tubes of tires used for semi trucks; *My Hands Are My Heart* (1991), a small sculptural work in the shape of a heart made by the artist who, upon exerting pressure with his fingers over a piece of clay, imprinted his fingers in the shape of a heart; *Yielding Stone* (1992), a ball of gray modeling clay that Orozco rolled through the streets of Monterrey, picking up earth, debris, and stones on its surface; and *The DS* (1993), which reflects his interest in the mental and physical aspects of sculpted space and establishes playful relations with the spectator –in order to create this work, he cut an automobile in half and remounted both sections so that the car would maintain its formal qualities and the illusion of «functionality; that is to say, the car may be driven.» In *Empty Shoe Box* (1993), created for the Venice Biennale that same year, Orozco simply placed an empty shoe box on the floor. Regarding this work Benjamin Buchloh said, «The reasons for the quietly compelling attraction of an utterly banal object are of course manifold, yet one primary explanation could be found in the fact that the presentation of an empty container, rather than the object itself, traces the very shift from use value to exhibition value that has occurred in the culture at large.»

OCTAVIO PAZ

Mexico City, 1914-1998



Renowned poet, essayist, editor and diplomat who in 1990 won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Considered to be the universal Mexican, Paz is one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. In an interview regarding his initiation in literature, he said: «the mystery of vocation —because it is a mystery— has to do with childhood. Vocation manifests itself in youth, but there is also a period of imitation, shall we say, of family models. In my case, the presence of my grandfather, Ireneo Paz, who was a writer, was decisive. I saw him read and write every day. I knew that he had written memoirs and novels, so he was a bit of a role model. In my house, when I was a boy, the world of literature exerted a great deal of influence. My grandfather had a decent library. But he also had easels bearing photographs of authors from his era. There you could find photos, or rather prints, of Victor Hugo and other French writers. But not only French: there were also Hispanic-Americans, Mexicans... Pérez Galdós, who was one of his own models, was there.» The countless interests of Paz were not limited to poetry but also encompassed politics, art, both Eastern and Western thought, and the construction of a modern and democratic Mexico without denying its past. His poetic and intellectual work as a writer and editor of magazines and books led him into numerous adventures, one of which was that of studying ancient Mexican cultures and their artistic forms of expression. As he said on one occasion, «all works of art are composed before two great powers: the idea of life, or the idea of death. Eros or Thanatos.» His works, like his interests, are boundless. His books of poetry include: *Libertad bajo palabra*, *Águila o sol*, *Piedra de sol*, *Blanco*, *Árbol adentro*; and his essays: *El laberinto de la soledad*, *El arco y la lira*, *El mono gramático* and *La llama doble*, among many others. His complete works were prepared by the author himself and published by Círculo de Lectores and by the Fondo de Cultura Económica in several volumes. Titles in English include *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, *The Double Flame: Love and eroticism*, *Sor Juana: Or, the traps of faith*, *Sunstone*, and *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz*.

JOSÉ REVUELTAS

Santiago Papasquiari, Durango, 1914
Mexico City, 1976



A Mexican writer and political activist, Revueltas was born into a family of artists. His brother, Silvestre, was a great musician and Fermín, a painter, while his sister Rosaura was dedicated to an acting career. He was a militant in the Communist Party of Mexico, from which he was expelled due to his criticism of bureaucratic practices. He was, moreover, harshly critical of Stalinist and Maoist offshoots. More akin to the ideas of Trotsky, he remained ever faithful in his defense of workers' causes. One might say that Revueltas was the most critical revolutionary the left has ever had in Mexico. He was imprisoned on many occasions for his political activism; he was practically a boy when he was sent for the first time to the maximum security island prison, Islas Marías. He was later arrested for participating in the Railroad Workers' Movement in 1958. And he was accused of being the «mastermind» of the student movement of Mexico in 1968 that culminated in the Massacre at Tlatelolco, for which he was imprisoned once again and sent to Lecumberri, a prison also known as the Black Palace. There he wrote one of his most refined novels, *El apando*. Aside from that novel, his masterpieces include: *Los muros del agua* (1941) and *El luto humano*, which merited the National Prize for Literature in 1943. In addition to fiction, he produced books of profound political reflection such as: *Escritos políticos I, II y III*, *México: una democracia bárbara*, *Ensayo sobre un proletariado sin cabeza*, and *México 68: juventud y revolución*. His staunch political commitment and his writing have positioned him as one of Mexico's most important realist writers. Available in English are *Human Mourning*, *On the Edge* and *Vision of Paricutin*.

ALFONSO REYES

Nuevo León, 1889
Mexico City, 1959



A Mexican writer and thinker, Reyes was the son of a Porfirian general. Together with Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Antonio Caso, and José Vasconcelos he founded the Ateneo de la Juventud, a group of intellectuals dedicated to rereading the Greek classics. In 1910, he published his first book, *Cuestiones Estéticas*. Following the death of his father, Bernardo Reyes, and the triumph of the Mexican Revolution he was exiled in Spain (1914-1924). There, he joined the school of Menéndez Pidal and later on, became a follower of the aesthetics of Benedetto Croce. He published numerous essays regarding poetry from the Golden Age of Spain, outstanding among which are «Barroco» and «Góngora»; moreover, he was one of the first writers to study Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Dating from that era are *Cartones de Madrid* (1917) and his brief but masterful work *Visión de Anáhuac* (1917). In Spain, he dedicated himself wholly to literature and journalism; he worked at the Centro de Estudios Históricos in Madrid under the direction of Ramón Menéndez Pidal. In June 1920, he was named assistant secretary of the Mexican Delegation to Spain. From then until February 1939, when he returned finally to Mexico, he occupied various posts in the diplomatic service. In April 1939, he was named President of the Casa de España in Mexico, which later became El Colegio de México. He was a numbered member of the Mexican Academy correspondent to Spain, and a founding professor of El Colegio Nacional. In 1945, he obtained the National Prize for Literature in Mexico. Due to his enormous performance, this writer has become an essential figure in Spanish and Latin American culture. As Octavio Paz once said, «The love of Reyes for language, its problems and its mysteries, is something more than exemplary: it is miraculous. Upon teaching us to write, he taught us to think.»

GONZALO ROJAS

Lebu, 1916
Santiago de Chile, 2011



Considered one of the great Latin American poets of the 20th century, Rojas obtained the National Prize for Literature in 1992 and the Miguel de Cervantes Prize in 2003, among other distinctions. The son of a mining engineer, he lost his father at age four, an experience from which he «learned more than from all the manifestos.» He studied law and literature at the Instituto Pedagógico of the Universidad de Chile, where he later performed academic work at Valparaíso y Concepción, a city where he gave classes in literary aesthetics at the university and was appointed director of the Spanish Department. Together with Nicanor Parra, he is one of the last Chilean poets of great relevance. A member of the Literary Generation of 1938, he was also close to the Mandrágora group in its beginnings. In many of his texts, he reveals his affinity to surrealist aesthetics; his work traces a continuity with Chilean and Latin American avant-garde movements of the 20th century. His first book, *La miseria del hombre* (1948), reveals an enormous existential burden that, together with eroticism, social commitment, and the sonorous power of language, are elements continually present in his poetic works. Following the coup d'état in 1973, he was obliged to embark on a long exile, first in Germany and then in Venezuela, where he taught at the Universidad Simón Bolívar. From that painful era date poems such as «Cifrado en octubre», dedicated to the death of the leader of the Revolutionary Leftist Movement, Miguel Enríquez, which expresses in verse his vision of the times: «These are the worst of days, the most bitter, days / to which we shall never long to return.» Later on, he moved to the United States, where he lived until 1994, the year that marked his return to Chile. Chile's Department of Libraries, Archives, and Museums published a trilogy featuring the best of Gonzalo Rojas's work, a set that includes *Qué se ama cuando se ama* (2000), *Réquiem de la mariposa* (2001), and *Al Silencio* (2002). In addition to his beautiful verse, Rojas will always be remembered for his simplicity, his powerful voice, and the unique way he had of reading poetry. An anthology of his work translated into English was titled *Concert:*

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