Portrait of a Young Painter

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Published by Duke University Press


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I first met Pepe José Zúñiga in 2001. Friends introduced me to him as a distinguished painter with a fascinating background—from childhood he had lived in the Colonia Guerrero, a popular barrio in central Mexico City of legendary fame for its music and dance, its nightlife, its color, its violence and violations. For many, the Colonia Guerrero was a nostalgic site, a reminder of popular artistic effervescence, of romantic intimacy, and of gritty solidarity from the 1930s into the 1950s. To live there still, as Pepe does, was proof of the strength of his roots in this barrio of tenements (vecindades) that had housed so many migrants pouring into Mexico City in those decades. He cut a commanding figure with his thick shock of white hair. He exuded an air of achievement and confidence: he was certainly comfortable in his skin.

My friends told me he had been director of the La Esmeralda, the school of painting and sculpture established by Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, and Antonio M. Ruíz in 1943 as a popular, more flexible alternative to the Academia de San Carlos. He told me of the wonderful years he had spent in Paris in the 1970s on a French government scholarship and in the 1980s completing his master’s thesis at the École des Artes Decoratifs. I went to his exhibits and visited his studio in the vecindad on Soto Street—walking up two flights of uneven cement stairs, dodging hanging laundry and barking dogs. Painted canvases, piles of books and albums and old LP records covered his studio’s tables and the creaking floor of faded wood. On the walls hung paintings, photos of French cathedrals, James Dean,
Elizabeth Taylor, family members, and himself with friends, lovers, and the famous—the painter Rufino Tamayo and art critic Antonio Rodríguez. The smog-filtered sunlight flooded through a large window with its view of the dusty gray leaves of trees that lined the sidewalk below. Pepe’s paintings immediately captivated me—I saw them as musical pieces of undulating sensuous human forms in carefully crafted composition and color. He painted an aesthetics of sexuality—not a brutal sexuality but an affectionate one. Not one that objectified women. Rather, he painted a refined rhythm of tender, gender-neutral, erotic pleasure.

As we talked, I recognized he had a photographic memory befitting a painter. He could remember the shots, scenes, plots, and stars of every movie he had seen. He had a refined ear as well—not surprising for a man who began his career as a radio technician specializing in high fidelity and stereo sound. He remembered every song, classical composition, and much radio programming he had heard as a child. Of course, many Mexican children remember the playful songs of the cricket Cri-Cri, but those of the risqué popular singer María Luisa Landín? Only Carlos Monsiváis seemed to know more than Pepe, and it was after an evening with Carlos, reminiscing about and singing the songs of the U.S. Hit Parade they had heard on the radio in the 1950s, that Pepe asked me to write his biography. “I have a lot to say,” he told me. He knew that I was searching at the time for a group of individuals, veterans of the Mexico City student movement of 1968, who would share their stories with me. Although Pepe was slightly older than most ’68ers (he was born in 1937 and was no longer a student in 1968), I knew from our discussions that he had participated in the broader youth rebellion of which the 1968 protests formed a part. I decided he would be an ideal partner in my project—the more so because of his openness and willingness to discuss his emotional history. Generally considered private by Mexican men, emotional experience was precisely what I wanted to probe.

As a historian of education, I sought to understand learning experiences of a generation of Mexico City youth, particularly represented in higher education, that rebelled in the 1960s against social and political authoritarianism, hierarchies, convention, and repression. I expanded a narrow definition of education to include multiple learning sites: the family, schools, neighborhood, church, movies, radio, theater, sports, work, leisure activities, professional, social, and political associations. As the Mexican youth movement had much in common with other rebellions in Berlin, Paris, Turin, New York, Madison, Tokyo, and elsewhere, I took as a guide Norbert Elias’s foundational story of the 1960s, his essay in The
Elias suggested that rebellious middle-class and working-class youth coming of age in the 1960s shared certain experiences that influenced the contagious protest that swept the globe in 1968. Born into a world marked by war and scarcity, they moved into one of unprecedented prosperity, consumption, and mobility facilitated by market and technological development and the protection of the welfare state. Their basic needs for food, security, and protection satisfied, they could become concerned with personal meaning. Their parents, argued Elias, were more liberal and permissive with their children than their grandparents. The children shared a prolonged period of formal schooling through which they bonded in a youth culture, assisted by the proliferating mass media that catered to their angst, their exploding libidos, and their ability to spend a little money. In the postwar, Cold War context, their education was highly ideological: it promised democracy, freedom, peace, racial equality, and well-being. They moved into expanded sites of higher education with great personal, social, and political expectations. They chafed at the repressive structures that contained them, clashed with their values, and dashed their hopes.

If these were key shared factors across borders, what distinguished particular national, local, and personal experiences? What was at stake in this broad social movement was subjectivity—the cognitive, active, feeling, experiencing self. I already knew that a critical, freedom-seeking, libidinous subjectivity flourished in the Mexican youth movement. We know it from literature, testimonials and autobiography, studies of music and art movements, from analysis of gender openings and conflicts within a still very patriarchal, heteronormative society. We know it from participants’ historical reflections and from accounts and analysis of transformative social relations in the festive street democracy that reigned in the summer of 1968.

To this dialogue, biography can bring insight into the socializing, educational experiences that produced the subjectivities of this generation. Unlike traditional biography, new biography is less interested in a person for his or her unique contribution to history or the arts and more interested in how an individual life reflects and illuminates historical processes. New biography pushes back against cultural history’s tendency to inscribe onto the individual a set of social discourses and representations already embedded in society. It probes the principle that individuals are situated “within but not imprisoned in social structures and discursive regimes.” What defines human beings for phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty is “the capacity of going beyond created structures in or-
der to create others.” Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Michel de Certeau, Anthony Giddens, and Andreas Reckwitz, Gabrielle Spiegel has suggested a neophenomenological approach “founded on the re-evaluation of the individual as historical subject . . . a belief in individual perception as the agent’s own structure of knowledge about and action in the world—a perception mediated and perhaps constrained but not wholly controlled by the cultural scaffolding or conceptual schemes within which it takes place.”

We are talking about subjectivity as a condition of subjection, that is, being subjected to the power of prevailing institutions, messages, and specific events, and the individual capacity to appropriate messages and experiences intellectually, affectively, physically. Biography allows us to see how individuals negotiate educational encounters. Individuals are not simply written upon by external texts: they become authors of their own text as they move through multiple experiences, bringing their accumulation of prior experiences to their interpretation of new ones. Scholars usually examine a single institution (cinema, the school, the juvenile court) and deduce its messages from analysis of formal texts or programs. Few venture into the complicated field of reception, and even fewer explore how the individual appropriates and combines messages from multiple institutions, reflects, and acts upon them. Biography can bring to light a surprising heterogeneity of discourses (dominant, residual, marginal, and spatially circumscribed) that an individual encounters; the complicated ways in which he/she combines them to constitute subjectivity; and the conditions through which new, often subversive discourses emerge to become dominant, to join the polyphony, or to be relegated to the margins. Through intimate, detailed focus on one individual, biography gives us insight into the sociocultural conflicts that gnaw at established structures and conventions and can produce enormous creativity and historical change, even when that change is tempered by the strength of existing structures and conventions. Of course, examination of one individual life can never achieve a level of generalization. Yet this approach to biography as educational process tackles a gamut of institutions and events that affected (in different combinations, levels of exposure, and intensity) a sector of society scholars have deemed significant for historical analysis—in this case, a generation of youth that in their decade of rebellion played a critical role in Mexico’s movement toward a more democratic and pluralist politics in public and private life, in art, culture, and affairs of state.

I use this introduction to point out both the general and the specific
in Pepe Zúñiga’s growing-up and coming-of-age experience. First, I describe how we constructed this story. I begin by noting a discourse of self that Pepe and I likely share with many who came of age in the 1960s. How formative for us was a notion of some special intrinsic creativity we strove to realize through a combination of self-discipline, rational learning, and libidinal intensity. Pepe and I come from different countries. We are of distinct social background and gender. Yet we broadly share an affective-intellectual framework and experience. By listening to Pepe’s story, I became more aware of how shaped we were by post–World War II notions of child and personality development that formed part of modernization theory and politics and how moved we were by the idea of the artistic self, promoted by the movies and neohumanism in higher education. The movies and neohumanism are much more connected in this period than scholars have noted because we are so accustomed to dividing elite from popular culture.

Pepe’s memory is the major source for constructing his biography. Memory is part of one’s subjectivity. It is clearly an extraction from experience. I am referring here to conscious memory as an intellectualization and selection of experience. Such memory is as necessary for the constitution and day-to-day continuity of the human being as it is subject to revision, forgetting, amplification, embellishment, as well as adjustment to any particular audience. Obviously, it is not about what exactly happened—neither the historian nor the subject can entirely re-create what was once experienced. But that does not negate memory’s value as a historical source. Every historical source, whether an archival document or oral reminiscence, is an interpretation of what “really” happened and becomes more so in the hands of the historian. My purpose in writing this book is not to submit Pepe’s memory to discourse analysis, as Daniel James brilliantly did in his story of Doña María, the Peronist militant. Rather, I explore his memory as a source for understanding his participation in historical processes and his negotiation of contradictory discourses he encountered in distinct educating sites. As he was so generous in sharing his experiences with me, I respect as well his silences and his desire not to move into print certain intimacies of his life. They do not detract from the richness of his educational narrative.

His narrative is itself an intertwining of socioeconomic process with learned discourses for interpreting that process. Pepe tells the story of a poor boy brought in 1943 from Oaxaca by his mother, a seamstress, to join his father, a tailor, in a vecindad at 17 Lerdo Street in Mexico City’s Colonia Guerrero. The poor boy was determined to superar (overcome)
his poverty, to develop his talent and skills—or, better said, his creative potential, a sacralized idea and quest he absorbed from Hollywood movies, his primary school experience, and his education at La Esmeralda painting school. His mother and father helped him, as did particular members of the extended family, benefactors, friends, and teachers and the distinguished painters and art critics he met through his experience at La Esmeralda. Pepe embellished this narrative of upward mobility with stories of marvelous encounters with the movies and radio, with popular and classical music, with the mambo, danzón, lucha libre wrestlers, James Dean, Chavela Vargas, and Celia Cruz, with sexually charged practical jokes played at family gatherings, with discourses on hygiene, with sometimes unbearable tension and exploding conflict between his parents and within the extended family, and with bitter experiences of betrayal, fraud, and cruelty in the public world of work. As he tells his story of “moving up,” he weaves together residual, dominant, and emergent discourses. He appropriated messages and cultural goods which helped him to express opposition to certain values and conduct that he associated with his parents and a social environment he found to be repressive and constraining. He sought “freedom to be himself;” a discourse of the late 1950s and the 1960s that was at once humanist and libidinous. In seeking his unique creative path, he also longed to “communicate” openly and freely, to express himself affectively, sexually, and in painting, to find “tenderness” and to be “tender.”

As I was interested in exploring his encounter with educational sites, I used secondary materials (art, education, music, urban, sports histories, essays on popular culture, biographies of his artist friends) and primary sources (song lyrics and melodies, movies and theater productions, school textbooks, books and magazines, and newspaper reviews of his exhibits and of the spectacles he saw). An avid collector, Pepe supplied many photographs, books, catalogs, press clippings, postcards, and other memorabilia that sparked more memories and more dialogue between us, enriching and sometimes reshaping the story. Sharing these materials with him sometimes as much as sixty years after he had first experienced them amplified and sharpened recall, although such recall was necessarily marked by subsequent events and perhaps by the narrative he himself was constructing.

Filling out the story required lateral interviewing, that is, talks with surviving members of Pepe’s family, with friends and neighbors from his childhood, and with distinguished artists, intellectuals, and the widows of his mentors at La Esmeralda painting school in the tumultuous 1960s.
Particularly critical for understanding his childhood were interviews with Pepe’s brothers Jesús (Chucho) and Efrén. Efrén’s growing-up experience was significantly different from that of his older brothers. Born in 1946, he grew up at a time when both the family and the urban society had a bit more wealth and opportunity to share. He was the only one to go to secondary, preparatory school, and the university. Unlike Pepe, he was a direct participant rather than a sympathetic onlooker in the student rebellion of 1968. By contrast, although born four years apart, Chucho (b. 1933) and Pepe (b. 1937) shared their childhood in Oaxaca, their migration to the city, and years of scarcity, struggle, and exploration in the metropolis. Pepe introduced Chucho to me as his “childhood protector” who knew “more about the family.” Indeed, Chucho’s narrative—earthy, unpretentious, apparently unscripted, full of his own wounds and pleasures—proved an important complement to Pepe’s. As he did not plot his story as one of “moving up,” Chucho’s testimony served to illuminate the sometimes sanitized character of Pepe’s. In the text, I register the difference in opinion between the two brothers about events and personalities when these discrepancies surged in the interviews.

We walked as well through the neighborhood. We spoke with residents who remembered things Pepe had forgotten or never known. At the huge vecindad at Lerdo 20, razed after the 1986 earthquake and now rebuilt, we chatted with Elvia “La Boogie” Martínez Figueroa, who provided rich details about the dances Pepe had enjoyed there as a child and adolescent and about the many vendors who had sold from their shops or their homes on Lerdo Street. We visited Manuel Buendía’s carpentry shop he had passed every day on his way to school and reminisced with his son Juan, the current owner. We sat in the pews of the church of Santa María la Redonda Pepe had attended as a boy. We visited the Plaza Garibaldi, where family members had enjoyed so much entertainment—not just the still ubiquitous mariachi singers but the mambo of Dámaso Pérez Prado, the boleros of María Luisa Landín, the “exotic” dancing of Tongolele, and the political parodies of the comic El Palillo. As we sat at a table in the Tenampa bar, we remembered the stories about José Alfredo Jiménez and Chavela Vargas singing tragic ballads as they drank into the dawn. We looked up to read a poem of composer Pepe Guizar inscribed in a wall mural. “We would see him walking to the Martínez de La Torre market. We went to the xew studios across the Alameda to hear him sing. They called him El Pintor Musical. We used to laugh because he wrote very macho patriotic songs like Guadalajara! and Como México no hay dos!, and he was very gay.”
If biography or life history can elucidate processes at work in society that are not so immediately perceived at the macro level, these can complicate, complement, or contradict prevailing narratives. When Luis González y González published his now classic microhistory *Pueblo en Vilo* in 1968, his story of San José de Gracia broke the accepted narrative of the Mexican Revolution. The village of San José moved to rhythms and rules distinct from the dominant story of the prerevolutionary period as one of exploitation, land expropriation, material suffering, and religious oppression. José Zúñiga’s story—while lacking the explanatory power of an entire village’s history—also tells of lives removed from the prevailing historical narrative of political repression, worker and campesino resistance, sprawling poverty and state neglect that has come to dominate our understanding of Mexican history between 1940 and 1968. Even though Pepe’s experiences take place just blocks away from the Buena Vista railroad yards where the period’s most significant labor struggle unfolded in 1957–58 and although he lived near the Puente de Nonoalco, the poverty belt (cinturón) made famous by Luis Buñuel’s film *Los olvidados* and the prints of the Taller de Gráfica Popular, his experiences register with neither. Pepe’s story should not and cannot bear the burden of a reinterpretation of Mexico City history. He could have told other stories, I could have asked other questions, and thousands in his age cohort have other memories.

Yet the experiences he relates elucidate four processes which were to some degree shared by a significant sector of youth coming of age in the 1960s. These are 1) a post–World War II mobilization for child welfare and self-development transnational in scope and in Mexico fed by political stability, economic growth, and state investment; 2) the flourishing of entertainment (particularly the mass media) in the city’s public sphere that shaped the subjectivity of children as well as adults; 3) the domestication of violent masculinity related to social policy and political change, shifting economic, social, and commercial structures, and the mass media; and 4) the formation of a critical public of youth in the 1960s that catalyzed the emergence of a more democratic public sphere of political discussion, artistic expression, and entertainment after 1970. That increasingly democratic public sphere shaped and has been shaped by the opening of the political and social regimes and by movements of markets and technologies. Current scholarly trends helped me to detect and flesh out these processes as I pursued the biography of a particular individual. They in turn provided a conceptual context for interpreting Pepe’s story. While each has its own separate, discrete bibliography,
Pepe’s story threads them together and illuminates them in ways that macro approaches cannot. As my goal in narrating Pepe’s story is to free it from extensive analytical commentary, I here lay out my understanding of these processes.

The Mobilization for Children

I detect from Pepe’s story a broad didactic mobilization orchestrated by the state and private institutions on behalf of children’s welfare and development. We uncover this agenda (sometimes tightly, sometimes loosely shared among dominant actors) by looking at a multiplicity of institutions and efforts—radio programming, the movies, schools, churches, clinics, health campaigns, and hospitals, toy manufacturers and vendors, producers of special foods and health enhancers (from chocolate milk to cod liver oil), parks and playgrounds, museums, juvenile courts, sports facilities and promotion, and subsidized housing. Even when social policy focused on workers, it gave special consideration to their children. New housing projects, like the Conjunto Miguel Alemán, created spaces for play and sports, and the Instituto de Seguro Social provided health care for all members’ children, legitimate and natural.14

When Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank examine images of childhood in the transition from nineteenth- to twentieth-century British literature, they note the displacement of Dickens’s destitute, abandoned children by Christopher Robin, the playful boy loved, cared for, watched over, and disciplined by his nanny and his mother.15 In Mexican popular culture, the child as Christopher Robin became visible and audible to millions of children with access to radio through the songs of the cricket Cri-Cri, broadcast every weekend from 1934 over XEW, “La Voz de América Latina desde México.” It is not that the image of the destitute, abandoned child disappeared in Mexico City from discourse, the media, or the streets but rather that the loved child who delights in the adventures of Cri-Cri’s animals (akin to Christopher Robin’s friends Winnie the Pooh, Tigger, and Eeyore) came to occupy a central, instructive position—a kind of discursive mandate, a rush of affect, and a claim to entitlement.16

We may explain the mobilization for children in several ways. A post–World War I focus on child welfare became evident in pan American congresses, League of Nations meetings, and in the educational, health, and social policies of Mexico’s postrevolutionary governments from 1920.17 As Elena Jackson Albarran persuasively shows, the federal
government’s drive for education, intensified by the church-state struggle, privileged the child as the product of the revolution.\textsuperscript{18} During World War II and in its immediate aftermath, the project linked to a reinvigorated transnational campaign for children’s rights, articulated by the United Nations.\textsuperscript{19} With greater technical and financial capacity, the PRI state (referring to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional) after 1940 could flesh out particular social and cultural programs to complement its embrace of a Fordist model of industrialization. This model, embellished in these years by theories of modernization and development (personal as well as social and economic), depended upon the nurturing of healthy, productive, disciplined workers and their consuming families. One can argue that the programs were insufficient and benefited only a portion of the population. But in Mexico City, with its concentration of public and private resources, critical beneficiaries of the mobilization came from broad sectors of an urban society burgeoning with migrants and animated by social peace and the promise of economic opportunity.

Most educators, including parents, sought to nurture the development of a modern subject, clean, healthy, self-disciplined, responsible in work and family life, and an enthusiastic participant in the nation’s march toward progress. However, the interinstitutional matrix of socialization encouraged children to play, to imagine, and to take initiative. It prompted them to cultivate their minds, hearts, senses, and bodies, to consume increasingly available market goods, to think critically, and to seek greater affection and freedom. In other words, as Elias wrote, it allowed children and youth to focus on themselves. How widespread this sensibility was over a cross section of Mexico City youth in the 1960s we do not yet know. Current evidence for it is in the protests of youth—mostly associated with postsecondary education—who rebelled against authoritarianism, convention, and violence and in favor of greater personal and political freedom, governmental transparency, and social responsibility. While dissident youth often identified with previous struggles for collective rights of groups privileged by the Mexican revolutionary process and postrevolutionary state (organized workers, campesinos, teachers, and other government employees), rebel youth of the 1960s spoke for the common good in defense of the rights of all citizens: they called for the opening of the autocratic system of the PRI.

Several factors influenced Pepe’s participation in this mobilization. If the first was location in Mexico City’s center, where resources were many, location was not determinate, as we know from Oscar Lewis’s study of the children of Jesús Sánchez, residents of the barrio of Tepito, adjacent
to the Colonia Guerrero. Lewis saw the Sánchez children as victims of an emotionally absent father and a succession of erstwhile, inattentive stepmothers. In Lewis’s reading, the children drifted into a culture of violence and violation, of social and moral poverty, accessible to them in Tepito. Critical for Pepe were his migrant parents’ enthusiasm and energy to struggle—in the midst of material scarcity and unsteady income—for survival and a better life. To do so, they often utilized “traditional” means for enabling “modernity”—as, for example, their extensive deployment of Oaxaca networks of family and friends to access goods, work, workers, educational opportunities, and legal assistance. In a city with little public trust, the protection and facility afforded by such networks cannot be overestimated. They were committed, vigilant parents concerned with their children’s education and health. They also gave them freedom to move in a city they did not regard as particularly dangerous. They came from a provincial city that gave them tools for negotiating the metropolis. The Zúñiga family experience demonstrates the futility of reducing poverty to pathology, analyzing it exclusively in terms of monetary income, or homogenizing its social behavior across a particular physical space. One must consider the social, cultural, and affective capital with which families (of many different sorts) and individuals work and with which they engage the messages and opportunities offered by dominant institutions and processes.

**Entertainment in Mexico City’s Public Sphere**

In the Zúñiga parents’ marshaling of “traditional” means to enable “modernity,” none was as spectaculously important to Pepe as his father’s enthusiastic engagement of entertainment in Mexico City’s public sphere. Oaxaca’s public world of religious celebration, sacred and profane—the processions with their giant puppets, wind bands, and ornately clothed saints reverently carried on their pedestals, the churches’ sumptuous, gold-painted altars wrapped in clouds of incense and adorned with thickets of flowers in honor of the Virgin, the Christmas posadas with their solemn pilgrimage followed by “la hora romántica” of song, ponche, and chocolate—all of these hailed the senses of sight, hearing, and smell in seductive synchronization. If they engaged body and soul in devotion, they had always engaged them in more earthly pleasures as well—increasingly in the twentieth century, in intimate romantic song and body-liberating dance. Pepe’s mother, Lupe Delgado de Zúñiga, sang in church and at the horas románticas. After sacred devotion and ritual masses, his father, José
Zúñiga Sr., sponsored dances of the tango, the shimmy, and the Charleston, with music he had heard in the movies brought to life by his musician friends. In Mexico City, José Zúñiga Sr. practiced his faith in prayer at home and energetically embraced the public world of entertainment. Just a short walk from the apartment on Lerdo Street were new radio station, dozens of movie theaters, the lucha libre arena, boxing and bull rings, nightclubs, and burlesque and musical theaters.

Students of the public sphere in Mexico City in this period generally look at its explicitly political dimension and define it as a space for rational discussion generated by the print media. In doing so, they follow its classical theorist, Jürgen Habermas. They stress censorship in the print media. Although they may include street demonstrations as part of the political public sphere, have begun to uncover more critical press opinion in the 1950s and 1960s, and point to a diversity of publics, they have not looked at the nonprint mass media or entertainment as part of the public sphere.21

Habermas argued that in the bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, entertainment or what he called cultural production and commodification (literature, art, theater, and music) forged—among bourgeois men—subjectivities appropriate to rational participation in the public sphere’s political realm.22 Although he did not elaborate, such formation would refer to conduct, sentiment, sensibility, clothing, bodily habits, comportment, and the like. Seeing twentieth-century developments as destructive of rational, independent political debate, Habermas particularly singled out the mass media, a new stage of cultural commodification. Controlled by monopolies, censored, and commercialized, the media reached a public broader than the bourgeoisie but served to privatize sentiment and reason in order to promote consumption and political quiescence. The media, he argued, created disdain for and apathy toward public institutions and political life.23

His treatise, first published in 1962, has much in common with other pessimistic, totalizing academic critiques of those years.24 He understood modern capitalist society and its welfare state as an interlocking network of corporate bureaucracies—the state, entrepreneurs, unions, political parties, and the mass media—that allegedly made citizens’ rational intervention difficult or impossible. Subsequently, scholars, including Habermas, have pushed back against such theories of impenetrable structures and narrow interpretations of the media.25 Indeed, in many places, television, radio, film, and the recording industry publicized the youth
protests of the 1960s in ways that provoked widespread political debate and enabled discussion about, permeation of, and reaction against new discourses, behaviors, and rights.

Miriam Hansen and Jason Lovigilio, among others, have argued that mass media technologies (principally photography, cinema, radio, and recorded music) provoked sensorial, affective revolutions and enabled the creation of new, inclusive communities—national, local, and transnational. The media fostered bonds of empathy and mutual recognition that razed barriers and formed the basis for political and social discussion. Further, by making private life public, they created or broadcast discourses, practices, and feelings for navigating processes of modernization—migration, urbanization, mobility, changing patterns and places of work, family life, courting and romance, fashion, consumption, and gender roles. Most media from the 1930s into the 1950s were censored and didactic. They were so in pathological (consider Nazi Germany in the 1930s and early 1940s) or constructive ways, as I argue for Mexico. Despite their didactic moralizing, they necessarily contained transgressive dimensions. As Pepe’s story illustrates, they presented immensely appealing sinful characters (e.g., the beautiful prostitute with the heart of gold), impure sentiments and desires relished by thousands (e.g., Agustín Lara’s music), and narratives that deliberately complicated and contradicted dominant moral paradigms (e.g., rhumberas films).

As many illuminating works on Mexico City have argued, the media mimicked existing conduct and feeling while opening to audiences new ways of behaving and viewing themselves and each other. In other words, from the 1920s into the 1950s, the media participated in the creation of publics and subjects and, indeed, a shared notion of the city they lived in. In many of his writings, Carlos Monsiváis, the extraordinary analyst of the city’s entertainment world, suggested the emergence of a public that was vibrant, active, increasingly conscious of itself and its engagement with urban life, yet politically disengaged and compatible with authoritarian rule. In this thesis, he might seem to have been in agreement with Habermas. Yet in the interest of his global argument, he necessarily overlooked the complexity of individual members of this public, as we shall see in the case of José Zúñiga Sr. and his wife, Lupe. And clearly he was not writing about their son Pepe or other children who grew up with this media only to rebel against the authoritarian regime. Pepe’s story shows how the mass media, its messages, and technologies suggest the formation of a more critical and demanding subjectivity and a new notion of rights—quite the opposite of what Habermas predicted.
and more in tune with Elias’s notion of a qualitative space for personal development and communication in the immediate postwar period.

As detailed in chapter 4, José Zúñiga Sr. introduced his family to many sites of entertainment. For Pepe, the most fun were the lucha libre matches, but the most memorable formative messages came from the radio, recorded and broadcast music, and the movies. His father purchased a Philco radio that played all day and into the night in the apartment that served both for family life and his workshop. Radio programming—soap operas (*radionovelas*), advice programs, and romantic music—promoted affectionately bonded and respectfully ordered families, as well as non-violent amorous intimacy within and outside of marriage. Children’s programming, particularly the songs of Cri-Cri, opened a world of fantasy, humor, and musical pleasure to the Zúñiga boys. Cri-Cri celebrated the old values of *civismo*—work, respect, order, discipline, self-control, and liberty—that their parents taught them but in a modern paradigm of productivity that insisted upon study and cleanliness but also affection, imagination, initiative, aesthetic beauty, movement, and freedom. Cri-Cri echoed but turned the paradigm of the primary school into something more enchanting, rhythmic, and playful. Both promoted the notion of a child’s right to care, love, health, personal development, and consumption. While both Cri-Cri’s songs and primary school textbooks encouraged a certain privatization of sentiment within the family and among friends, the primary school, like much radio programming and Mexican Golden Age cinema, also sowed bonds of empathy among Mexicans with the potential to mitigate discrimination, abuse, and violence in social relations. Because the songs of Cri-Cri and the school programs were messages Pepe shared with thousands of other children, I devote space to examining their content in chapters 2 and 3.

These children went to the movies. As detailed in chapter 4, José Zúñiga Sr. introduced Pepe to film. From his father, Pepe grasped and internalized the Hollywood genre of success—the individual struggling to break out of poverty, confronting a world of change and challenge, not simply to have a more comfortable material life but to “become someone”—to develop one’s special “talent” or “gift.” Every Sunday at the movie matinee and without his father, Pepe joined a critical public of children taking in, commenting upon, and judging with their feet, cries, sighs, whistles, sniffles, and singing seemingly endless films from Mexico, Hollywood, Latin America, and Europe. Moviegoing was a distinctly international and cosmopolitan experience. Movies were increasingly made for children or for their viewing and spoke to them of their rights to
Introduction

self-expression, affection, and protection. We here meet such characters as Flash Gordon, model of modern virility, deploying the most advanced space technology to liberate the people of the planet Mongo from the tyranny of the emperor Ming, and Snow White, the beautiful little girl rescued by a band of kindly dwarfs from her wicked stepmother and delivered into the arms of a handsome prince. The gender dichotomy of male agency and female passivity was present but increasingly complicated. Snow White’s story moved little boys like Pepe. Pepe’s friends Elva Garma and Elizabeth del Castillo loved Flash Gordon, Superman, cowboy and war films. Elva recalls how she thought she could be Superman and fly right off the street.30

What each child sees in a film or hears in a song and learns from it varies. Variation may have a lot to do with what adults allow them to see, what is available to be seen, what else is going on in their lives, and what other educational experiences engage them. Pepe’s childhood formation took place in a variegated milieu of old and new educating sites. One imagines his milieu to have been a more heterogeneous mixture of the officially proper and officially risqué than that of middle-class children growing up on the city’s expanding residential south side. Pepe’s was certainly an environment distinct in its urban openness and diversity from the family homes with gardens and gates depicted in primary school textbooks.

Every Sunday morning before running off to the matinee, Pepe attended mass at the church of Santa María la Redonda, constructed in 1524. If his school and doctors’ offices were around the corner from Santa María, the Momia nightclub faced the church. Across the street, the mariachi bands trumpeted and gay vendors sold tacos in Garibaldi Plaza, where the Teatro Margot featured Pérez Prado’s mambo, condemned from the pulpit by the priest at Santa María la Redonda. Near the church as well were the carpas, the tent theaters full of off-color humor and political criticism, where the comedian Cantinflas got his start before becoming one of the biggest stars of Pepe’s childhood. Nearby too were the prostitutes of the Calle Chueco. For Pepe and his cousin Nicolás, watching the prostitutes and the gay vendors was like going to the movies. But if these boys wished, they could climb to the rooftop of their vecindad and watch a movie being filmed in the tenement next door. More frequently Pepe and Nicolás crossed the Alameda Park to attend the live radio broadcasts at XEW studios, where they heard Pepe Guizar sing of México bravo, took in Agustín Lara’s latest bolero dedicated to a lady of the night, and heard the mystery show Nick Carter, Detective. On one
occasion, they saw Pedro Infante dressed up as a traffic cop to advertise his latest film, ATM.31

While many children of Pepe’s age on Lerdo Street joined the lines waiting to enter the new studios and never missed a Sunday matinee, they likely differed in the messages they took away and the experiences they had with child-development institutions. They were not likely to be as steeped in such institutions as middle-class children living on the south side. They were for the most part of very humble background. Their parents came from the countryside, provincial cities, or generations of urban residence and worked at different things in distinct places—as independent artisans, factory workers, low-level government employees, technicians in the entertainment industry, and practitioners of mil usos, a lower social category of work that implied both the absence of an oficio (learned skill) and impermanence and was often associated with men’s fondness for the bottle and their wives’ need to cope with such fondness. In any case, as much as children bonded through play, mischief, sports, the movies, radio, or dance, new messages of child development together with old ones encouraged them to distinguish among themselves: between those who were clean and kempt and those who were slovenly, between those who wore store-bought clothes and those obliged to wear pants their mothers stitched, between those who got metal skates and those who had to borrow them, between those who went regularly to school and those who played hooky, between those teenage boys who pursued a skilled trade and those condemned to the work of mil usos, between children who continued on to secondary school and those who went to work after completing primary school, between those with light skin and those with darker skin, between girls focused on getting married and those who enjoyed or were coerced into more casual, often commercial sexual relations. For instance, on the block lived Lucha “La Loca,” a beautiful, naive girl who reminded the children on Lerdo Street of Silvana Mangano, whom they had seen in the Italian neorealist film Bitter Rice. “La Loca” loved gringos and particularly their dollars. She solicited in the Alameda Park. More than once, she walked into the clinic of Dr. Luis Valiente Plascencia. After he delivered her baby, she walked out without the infant. Whatever child-development messages she had received, neither she nor her parents had likely taken them very seriously.
The Domestication of Violent Masculinity

Clearly then, the mobilization for child welfare took place within a variegated milieu, and any single child’s exposure to it or parts of it depended upon specific circumstances and experiences, as did the child’s internalization of its messages. One of the particular trends within this mobilization that we detect through listening to Pepe’s story is the domestication of violent masculinity, the softening of masculine hardness, and the feminization of male sensibility. This I believe we can link to the Mexican student movement of 1968, for if the movement had a particular program, it was not to end the war in Vietnam, to realize a Cuban Revolution in Mexico, or to transform higher education. It was originally a movement against violence—state, police, and military violence against Mexican citizens. What animated many of its participants and grew through the experience was a joy in love. Novels, testimonials, memoirs, and theater productions expressed this sentiment significantly more than the plastic arts, where Pepe chose to express it. I do not discount private acts of violence in personal relationships or public violence in the political protests of 1968 or the violence of armed groups that came out of 1968 convinced of Che Guevara’s notion of foco-based revolution. But in 1968, Pepe joined throngs of young people who lined up and crowded the aisles to see the student-produced play *El cementerio de los automóviles*, in which Che Guevara symbolized love. Che was perhaps the first revolutionary hero after Christ to do so, and in the play Che is likened to Christ.

In three generations of Zúñiga men, we see a change in the armas que portan (the weapons they bear). Pepe’s grandfather, José Zúñiga Heredia, born around 1880, carried a knife, the arm of choice for men of the popular sectors prior to the Mexican Revolution. He used it for shoemaking, one of his several trades. He also drew it to defend his honor. He had the proud reputation of having killed at least one man in his barrio in Oaxaca. By no means did he invest his honor in defending the family he created: he left his wife and five children without support and went to Orizaba to form another family and engage in other amorous escapades. His son José Zúñiga Pérez (b. 1914), Pepe’s father, chose as his arm a pair of scissors with which he made elegant suits for fashionable men and women in the city of Mexico. These scissors and a silver thimble cherished by his sons helped him to sustain his family. His son Pepe took as his weapon a brush with which he created paintings that expressed affectionate, tender, sexual intimacy within a framework of gender neutrality. As an adolescent, Chucho chose as his arms a pair of boxing gloves, because, like many, he
believed that organized sports disciplined masculine violence. Eventually Chucho inherited his father’s scissors and worked as a tailor. Their brother Efrén took up a pencil and slide rule to work as an architect.

Although today Mexican society appears enveloped in violence stemming from the drug trade and its persecution by the state, the transition in arms over three generations of Zúñiga men is no aberration. It was a social project. We can identify the processes that facilitated it. From the late nineteenth century, Mexican psychologists, employers, military officers, sociologists, novelists, hygienists, doctors, social workers, educators, journalists, Catholic activists, and sundry public intellectuals expressed concern about what they viewed as a lower-class masculinity, prone to social, political, and familial violence, irresponsibility, alcoholism, and sexually transmitted disease. If in the Porfiriato, criminologists viewed this “condition” as a product of biological degeneracy and a sordid environment of poverty best isolated from decent society, the postrevolutionary state focused concerted social policy on reform and integration, health and education. From the late 1930s, when a good part of the world was entering an intense and devastating period of war, Mexico began a prolonged period of demilitarization, social peace, and economic growth. In 1946, the PRI abolished its military sector. Overt and violent social conflict decreased. Such conflict had positioned organized workers for considerable material improvement. After 1940, possibilities for legal, protected employment grew, particularly in cities.

The economic model of Fordism rested on family formation and the male worker’s garnering of a wage to support that family. Mexico took part in a broad trend of rising marriage rates in large Latin American countries with welfare states. Criticism mounted against male domestic violence, long considered an acceptable practice. Adoption, as Ann Blum has shown, increasingly focused on affective family formation rather than the use of adopted children for labor. Sociophysical conditions of daily life improved for many in Mexico City so as to facilitate family life. Although the Zúñigas occupied a very small apartment in a vecindad, their access to running water, a toilet, drainage, a kitchen, and garbage collection contrasted starkly with the almost complete absence of services that made private life difficult in the popular barrios during the Porfiriato. They benefited as well from the rent control law passed by the government in 1942.

Consumption, generally identified in the literature with women, engaged men as well and trended toward sentimental domestication and family responsibility. It linked to personal presentation (lotions, soaps,
shampoos, clothing, hats, shoes) and to prestige (the purchase of a radio, later a TV, still later a car—and of items used by their wives such as a refrigerator or a stove). It linked particularly to entertainment. Although it suggested family responsibility, it did not necessarily demand fidelity. As Ageeth Sluis has argued, the new “modernist male subject,” shaped by the beauty, health, and entertainment industries, maintained his long-standing right to “step out.”

As noted, for men as well as women, radio programs stressed sentiments of love, affection, and responsibility, and, in advice programs, rational resolution of disputes. School textbooks dropped their presentation of destitute children rescued by charitable rich men for representations of those diligently cared for by father and mother, who never resorted to physical punishment. Children were to learn nonviolent, affectionate parenting in their care of pets. Formally, the school banned corporal punishment. Even if Mexican film entertained with violent criminals, cowboys, and revolutionaries, the premier icons—Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante—captured a masculinity in transition from the 1940s into the 1950s. Jorge Negrete personified authoritarian, aristocratic male privilege and bravado. He was a charming conquistador; not a family man but rather an elegant, singing Hispanic horseman ensconced in the disappeared world of the hacienda. Pedro Infante was an ordinary guy, a muscle-bound worker and athlete. For all the rural roles he played, he was quintessentially urban. He seduced many women, but he loved them tenderly and showed special care and affection toward children. He was, for all his occasional outbursts of temper, a soft, vulnerable romantic and a good dad. José Zúñiga Sr. loved Negrete and thought Infante a punk. Pepe liked Pedro Infante and learned all his songs.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, Oscar Lewis articulated new trends in psychology and personality development in his focus on Jesús Sánchez’s emotional abuse of his children. Octavio Paz, in *Laberinto de la soledad* (1950), psychologized the Mexican man as enclosed in deep insecurity, prone to uncontrollable drunken eruptions of violence, and not mature enough to embrace a universal humanism. Psychologist Erich Fromm, who made his home in Cuernavaca, confirmed a patriarchal paradigm in his *Art of Loving*, published in 1956: the mother owed unconditional love, while the father was to guide the child into the ways of the world. However, he called for a more emotionally open and mature masculinity. These intellectuals gave voice to an ongoing, multifaceted, moral and social project.

The same critique came through in the films Pepe Zúñiga watched.
as an adolescent in the 1950s while he trained and worked as a radio technician. The Hollywood bildungsroman shifted from the rags-to-riches stories that had animated Jose Zúñiga Sr. to youths caught up in affective turbulence, struggling to express their inner feelings and sense of justice, pitted against male adults and fathers who were closed, cold, corrupt, often violent, and emotionally clueless. The characters played by James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause* and *East of Eden*, by Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*, and by John Kerr in *Tea and Sympathy* resolved their conflicts in tender—if precarious and fleeting—solidarity with deeply sympathetic women and sometimes with one another. Indeed, *ternura* (tenderness), the word Gustavo Sainz chooses for the emotional awakening and subduing of his wild delinquent hero *Compadre Lobo*, seems an emerging sentiment among Mexico City youth from the late 1950s.44

Tenderness could move in many directions—companionate marriage or partnerships, spontaneous love affairs, homosexual intimacy, platonic friendships, literary or artistic creativity. Tenderness does not necessarily spell the end of patriarchy: most of its expression stayed within this frame well into the 1970s. Rather, tenderness speaks to a certain feminization of male sensibility which punctuates Pepe’s story. By linking tenderness to female sensibility, I do not wish to essentialize femininity but rather call attention to the images, symbols, and discourses of the time that played with the Enlightenment dichotomy between male rationality and female sentiment. From the late nineteenth century and particularly from the initial years of postrevolutionary government, the elite preoccupation with violent and dissolute masculinity had its counterpart in assigning responsibility and affective care to the mother.45 Whether we are listening to a song from Cri-Cri, watching Sara García in *Cuando los niños se van* or Bambi’s mother in the movies, or beholding in a Mexican mural or official sculpture the essential mother—full-bodied, nursing a baby, protecting her children, washing clothes, making tortillas—the spectator learns that the mother was the source of care and tenderness toward now cherished children, a tenderness intended to permeate male as well as female children.

The ideal twentieth-century Mexican mother was more than tender. She was also responsible for her family’s well-being and her children’s health, education, discipline, and future, duties assigned to her by and shared with a somewhat “feminized” state (consider its nurturing, curing, and educating dimensions). In this endeavor, she assumed some tasks historically assigned to men. Although such active motherhood has deep
historical roots in Mexico, mid-twentieth-century discourse and practice reified and amplified it. A social type emerged in popular culture in these years. La Borola, heroine of the *Familia Burrón* comic series; *La Bartola*, of Chava Flores’s song; and *La Patita*, of Gabilondo Soler’s Cri-Cri were all energetic promoters and protectors of their families and, in the case of La Bartola and La Patita, were hampered by irresponsible husbands.

As noted in chapters 5 and 6, Pepe’s mother, Lupe Zúñiga, was fiercely responsible. It was she who struggled in the public world of commerce to make ends meet. It was she who stitched the children’s clothes, made good meals out of little, found the children doctors, dentists, and barbers, and fed them nasty cod liver oil. She assumed responsibility for their formal education and job training. Supremely responsible, she was not very tender. Her violent streak will immediately strike the reader. Her children accepted it as part of her service in defense of their education, her family, and herself, for in Pepe’s opinion, his father and his father’s female relatives abused her.

Pepe was more critical of his father’s violence. Pepe’s father was the direct source and object of the boy’s love. It was José Zúñiga Sr. who taught Pepe how to see the movies. Although he had only three years of formal schooling, José Zúñiga Sr. was a connoisseur of cinema, a maestro and student of exquisite sensibility and perception. Particularly because he had grown up with silent film, he understood the camera’s affective deployment to highlight the aesthetic or athletic plasticity, the emotion, the subtle sexuality of the human body and face. It was his perception of cinema that informed his impressive, seductive self-presentation and his son’s artistic sensibility. Cinema, treated by U.S. film studies scholars as the genre of female sentiment, formed and affected both Pepe and his father. And in moments of deep despondence outside of cinema, it was often Pepe’s father who consoled him.

But his father could also be hard and distant, occasionally abusive and violent toward his wife and children, financially and morally irresponsible, and passive in the face of the aggression his mother and sisters showed toward Lupe. He also insisted in a traditional manner that his son follow him into the tailor’s trade, a position Pepe rejected with his mother’s support. Multiple messages appropriated from school, the movies, radio programs, and daily life informed the son’s critique of his father. In it, Pepe identified with his mother and with the abused women and children he had seen in the movies. Against what he perceived to be negative elements in his father’s character, he rebelled as a teenager and a young man—identifying, as did many of his friends, with the iconic
James Dean, the misunderstood, emotionally deprived adolescent rebel in search of love, recognition, and his own voice.

**From a Critical Public of Youth to a More Democratic Public Sphere**

Shortly after he embraced James Dean and purchased readily available Dean paraphernalia—a red sweater and a red vest (he could not afford the jacket)—Pepe signed up for an evening class in drawing at the Esmeralda painting school on San Fernando Street in the Colonia Guerrero. It was the mission of his teacher, the painter Benito Messeguer, to encourage the artist in each of his students—mostly young men of modest background who worked in the day. He had them read the biographies of famous painters who had painstakingly struggled to discover and express their inner soul. In recent years, Pepe had drawn the portraits of James Dean and Marlon Brando, of Elizabeth Taylor and Grace Kelly. Now in night class, Messeguer took note of his portrait of the Esmeralda model Timoteo. In its expressive power, Messeguer told him, the painting reminded him of José Clemente Orozco, about whom Pepe Zúñiga knew very little.

Pepe continued working as a radio technician, taking night classes until the milieu completely absorbed him and he entered the degree-granting day program. Through the Esmeralda, Pepe joined and participated in a new critical public of youth in Mexico City, a diverse group mostly concentrated in postsecondary education that began to take shape at the end of the 1950s. We now know a great deal about this movement. We generally learn about one of its several dimensions—in politics, art, literature and poetry, music, theater, or hippy-inspired counterculture. In different degrees, these overlapped in the lives of participants. The movement is usually defined as middle class. The term is vague and underestimates the presence of hundreds who had joined the middle class in these years of economic growth or gained access to it through higher education. It excludes participants from the popular sectors—among them, the militant students of the vocational schools and many rock musicians.\(^46\) Overall, this public was predominantly male with a significant, growing female presence that raised gender questions at the level of practice and everyday life but not yet at the level of politics, theory, or analytical reflection.\(^47\)

Reaching back to the late 1950s and spilling into the 1970s, the new public included minigenerations. Pepe belonged to the early wave raised on radio and the movies. Those just a few years younger had watched more television. Pepe was out of school and struggling to establish his career.
as a painter when students took to the streets in 1968. Many of the youth who undertook radical activity in politics and the arts in the 1970s were barely in preparatory school in 1968.

Further, the movement was not sui generis. Its critique developed in dialogue with extensive consumption of national and transnational cultural goods and information and with more seasoned adult mentors. It likely would not have reached the drama and political impact it achieved had it not been fed by a very public quarrel within the ruling PRI, as ex-president Lázaro Cárdenas formed the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional in support of the Cuban Revolution and the party’s powerful conservative faction recoiled. The tension fed the communicative and political opening, its effervescence, and its repression.

What does Pepe Zúñiga’s experience tell us about this critical public information? His story, related in chapters 7, 8, and 9, tells less about the political actions of 1968 and more about a prior period of neohumanism—a transnationally shared humanism that permeated the classrooms, workshops, corridors, campuses, theaters, and galleries associated with the vastly expanded sphere of higher education in Mexico City—particularly the art schools and the national university. It was a critical humanism, full of existential angst in a world threatened by nuclear war, perplexed by capitalist materialism and growing technocratization (much as Habermas presented it in 1962). It was a humanism equally disillusioned by Stalinism in the socialist world and alarmed by colonial violence being perpetrated against people of color in search of their liberation. It was full of sociopolitical criticism, whether it was to subvert the stultifying censorship of entertainment imposed by Uruchurtu, the mayor of Mexico City, to marvel at the Cuban Revolution as a new possibility for the redemption of the oppressed, to fault the Mexican government for revolutionary promises unfulfilled, or to insist on pushing the limits of press censorship. It was rebellious—in painting, José Luis Cuevas, Juan Soriano, Mathias Goeritz, Lilia Carillo, and Manuel Felguérez from the early 1950s led the Ruptura, declaring war against the Mexican school of social realist painting.48 Pepe’s teachers at La Esmeralda, a redoubt of the Mexican school, encouraged individual expression as did new theater and literary movements. In psychic matters, Alejandro Jodorowsky’s Teatro Pánico staged shattering therapy sessions in schools and cafés to engage young spectators in what they did not want to see for the sake of their own liberation from society’s constraints and distortions.49 It was spiritual—moved by Bach’s masses, the new vernacular Misa Criolla from Argentina and Missa Luba from the Congo, and Paolini’s film The Gospel according
to St. Matthew. The music of the Beatles captured its libidinal exuberance, its exhilarating embrace of freedom and experimentation and sense of generational uniqueness, for the Beatles were a totally new sound.

It was a cosmopolitan world, as Carlos Monsiváis eloquently described it. For Monsiváis, its epicenter was the new campus of the National University on the far south side of the city. In the 1930s the university had held out in favor of freedom of thought against pressure from the government and the labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano to submit to a singular social-political agenda. In the 1960s that independence bore fruit. The new campus, with its modernist architecture and wide open spaces, became a place for critical thought, international exchange, and vanguards of all sorts. It was a site from which came the new word (magazines like *La Revista de la Universidad de Mexico*); new sounds (stereo sound recordings of classical music and jazz broadcast over Radio Universidad); new visions (art exhibits, cine clubs, and experimental theater). We explore these through Pepe’s experience in the city’s center, where theaters debuted the works of young playwrights and directors Hector Azar, Juan Ibañez, and Julio Castillo with stunningly expressive student actors and haunting scenography. Pepe took in the new cinema—Fellini, Pasolini, Bergman—at downtown movie houses or the cine club of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional closer to his neighborhood. He was certainly not alone here. The major art schools, La Esmeralda and the Academia de San Carlos, were located in the center, and here the young painters, sculptors, and graphic artists wove an intoxicating milieu of creativity, questioning, and revelry.

As much as it was a moment of cosmopolitan awakening, it was also an experience of learning more about Mexico. Exposés of Mexican poverty, injustice, and official corruption proliferated. In 1962 Carlos Fuentes published *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, reinterpreting the Mexican Revolution not as a movement of liberation accomplished by a benevolent state but through the life of an excessively corrupt official who enriched himself at the expense of society. In 1964 Fondo de Cultura Económica published the Spanish edition of Oscar Lewis’s *Children of Sanchez*. His shockingly detailed exposure of urban poverty in the barrio of Tepito elicited enormous public response and sold out immediately. In 1965, UNAM professor Pablo González Casanova published his iconic critique *Democracy in Mexico*. Rodolfo Stavenhagen’s key essays on sociology and underdevelopment appeared in *El Día* in June 1965. Fernando Benítez began to publish his culturally affirmative and politically denunciatory series *Los indios de México*. In 1962 Benítez, always a daring journalist,
brought his México en la Cultura, the repressed cultural supplement of the newspaper Novedades, to Siempre!, the decade’s most enduring magazine of plural political and cultural opinion. In 1961, in the aftermath of protests against the U.S.-backed invasion of Cuba, the government permitted the publication of the more radical magazine Política. It enjoyed an avid readership until it shut down in 1967, in part because the government paper monopoly would not supply it.

Journalist and art historian Antonio Rodríguez published articles in Siempre! detailing the disastrous results of agrarian reform in the henequen industry in Yucatán. Introduced to Pepe by Benito Messeguer, Rodríguez became a mentor. He gave Pepe his articles and his books and secured him exhibiting opportunities. Rodríguez was one of several distinguished figures connecting Pepe to a broader world of art, history, and politics and one of many older professors, artists, and intellectuals delighted to share their politics, art, literature, and music with open and eager youth. Together they constituted the new critical public. In the effervescence of the period, hierarchies held and dissolved at the same time in a creative exuberance that profoundly marked the subjectivity of youth. Pepe, in particular, found in this communicative network of peers and mentors a trust and confidence that had often eluded him in the world of work. In this network, he learned new languages, altering his sense of self and his possibilities.

Long ashamed of his dark Oaxacan skin and enamored of modern urban ways, Pepe learned the value of pre-Colombian civilization (aesthetic and grand) and contemporary indigenous culture (artistic, culturally “authentic,” unjustly neglected) through the high modernist language of his mentors and teachers—Antonio Rodríguez, Benito Messeguer, sculptor Francisco Zúñiga, and painter Raul Anguiano. In 1964 he joined Anguiano’s team, one of many made up of scores of young artists led by established painters and sculptors executing murals, walls, maps, and archaeological replicas for the new Museum of Anthropology. For all, it was a profound learning experience creating a new dimension of self-identity, linking their youthful energy and search for artistic freedom with an overwhelming diversity of Mesoamerican aesthetic expression about which they had known little or nothing. Intellectuals have treated the museum’s construction and design critically—in part, because state repression of the 1968 protests came on the heels of its opening in 1964 and made it vulnerable to scathing critiques of cultural expropriation and popular manipulation. But for the young artists who worked to bring it to life, the many artists and scholars who would use it as a source for their
work, and thousands upon thousands of its visitors, it was much more than the monument of an authoritarian state.

The young painters at the Museo de Antropología created there a space linked to others (cafés, theaters, galleries, pánicos, private studios, and their professors’ homes and apartments) to foster critical dialogue and cultural experimentation. This new extended space constructed itself in varying degrees against society and against the state, in part because its critique led it into opposition and in part because the government and some sectors of society reacted against it.55 As Pepe remembers, students were badly seen and likely to be picked up by the police on any pretext. At the unconventional fashions (long hair and beards for men, miniskirts for women, peasant garb and sandals) and behavior (new dances, marijuana smoking, new romantic activity, insolence toward authority), the government, the press, fellow citizens, and many parents recoiled. After all, they had provided these children with every advantage to become healthy, productive, compliant adults. Pepe’s father could not figure out why he wanted to become an artist, associated as that profession was with irresponsibility, poverty, drunkenness, and homosexuality. Pepe could resist his father’s opposition because his own critical public affirmed his choice. State anxiety produced police raids and repression that in turn fueled youth’s defiance, experimentation, and solidarity.

But the understandable critique of state repression tended to minimize the degree to which the government had made the rebellion possible through its social and cultural policies and its own internal conflicts. It had constructed the expanded educational system that was virtually tuition free. Between 1942 and 1965, enrollments at UNAM and the Instituto Politécnico Nacional had quadrupled, from 27,059 students to 115,523.56 Its funds had built or refurbished the theaters where young directors and actors staged experimental works for other students admitted at discount rates. It had subsidized the publication of new literature. In its art galleries and competitions, Pepe Zúñiga and his friends—boys and some girls from modest backgrounds with no social, political, or cultural connections except those forged with their professors—got their first opportunities to exhibit.

Youth also expressed a certain disdain toward capitalism, technology, and markets. Pepe read and took to heart the treatise of Herbert Read, Cartas a un joven pintor, in which the English critic defined the artist as a solitary genius struggling to find “a new land,” discovering new symbols to express his emotions, and “widening the space of coherent consciousness in a world in which the majority of our civilization [are] alienated
beings, slaves of the machine, robots in a demolished land, deprived of
the joy of creation.” Pepe’s professors, who held teaching jobs in public
institutions and public works contracts, suggested to their students that
to produce art for commercial purposes was contaminating and cor-
rupt. They seemed not to consider their own dependence on a state they
criticized as corrupt. Further, perhaps because young people in higher
education and their mentors made a distinction between high-brow and
low-brow consumption, they seemed reluctant to recognize how much
they participated in material consumption—particularly in the exploding
market for transnationally shared cultural goods in the form of books,
magazines, music, and film developed through new market-based com-
munications technologies—stereo and FM sound, the LP record, the tran-
sistor radio, the paperback book, the television, and the jet plane. Along
with youth, an expanded middle and upper class enlarged the market for
cultural goods and helped to explain the new art galleries and exhibiting
opportunities that opened for Pepe and his friends. In fact, in the 1960s,
state largesse, new prosperity, and proliferating markets pegged to inno-
vative and deepening sensorial technologies catalyzed the social move-
ments that challenged political, social, and aesthetic authority.

As this book treats the education of a young painter, its narrative ends
in 1972 with Pepe’s departure for Paris on a French government scholar-
ship. Yet the major argument of this biography, that of a freedom-seeking
subjectivity animating Pepe and the youth movement of the 1960s, re-
mains abstract unless we examine its impact on the subsequent period.
The student protests of 1968 and the broader critical public of the 1960s
spoke for the common good (not a special corporate group within soci-
ety) and demanded a fundamental change in authoritarian, repressive,
corrupt politics at the level of the state, society, and private life. They did
not immediately nor did they fully achieve these goals. Nonetheless, they
catalyzed the expansion, liberalization, and diversification of political,
social, and cultural opinion in the public sphere that worked in tandem
with the opening of the political system and social relations after 1970.
Not fully liberated from the behaviors and conventions they decried, the
rebels of the 1960s nonetheless contributed to a transformation that has
necessarily engaged subsequent generations and a much broader Mexico
City public. Propelling it have been major events: the collapse of the Ford-
ist import-substitution development model in 1982 and the introduction
of neoliberal economics and politics; the earthquake of 1985, which dev-
astated the central city; the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s; the vic-
tory of the Partido Revolucionario Democrático over the PRI in Federal
District elections in 1997; and the defeat of the PRI at the national level in 2000. From the 1990s full-blown globalization and a communications revolution, similar to but very different from the revolutions of the 1960s, have further transformed the public sphere.

In effect, the classically Habermasian bourgeois public sphere conducive to critical exchange and rational debate that has come to operate in Mexico City owes much to the 1960s movement. It is a far more inclusive, democratic, and diverse sphere than that described by Habermas for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It includes the mass media and ironically grew out of the media Habermas so deplored in 1962 for their alleged privatization of sentiment and curtailment of interest in public life and politics. Further, the public sphere opened with permission, guidance, and funding from the PRI state whose rule it critiqued and undermined. Today, the vigorous state-society dialogue sustained in Mexico City’s public sphere translates into citizen participation and policy that capitalizes upon globalization’s positive dimensions and helps to mitigate some of its harsher aspects. If it is a city of greater economic inequality, it is one of diverse publics, conscious of their right to speak, object, and propose.

In the final chapter of the book, we explore Pepe Zúñiga’s mature painting, that of his friends, and his age cohort as part of Mexico City’s public sphere in the 1980s and 1990s. We explore how art has reflected and contributed to changing social relations, state-society relations, and the recognition of basic individual rights within a state of law. We do so with particular focus on Pepe’s representations of the body as the repository for affection, sexuality, rational reflection, and solidarity. We look at his paintings, their content and composition, their reception, and their place of exhibition to understand how intimate subjectivity has linked to changes in the public sphere and politics in Mexico City.