

Memory and representations: photography and the 1968 student movement in Mexico¹

Memória e representações: a fotografia e o movimento estudantil de 1968 no México

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RESUMO

A história recente do movimento dos estudantes de 1968 no México indica que este acontecimento tem um peso importante para entendermos as atuais condições políticas do país. Neste capítulo são analisadas as complexas relações entre a imprensa e o poder daqueles anos e se amostam alguns exemplos relevantes em torno de como a fotografia desempenhou um papel estratégico ao longo de alguns dos episódios mais importantes desse capítulo da história do México, tais como a realização de marchas nas ruas, à tomada violenta das universidades por militares e a massacre de população civil em Tlatelolco por conta do Estado. Em todos estes acontecimentos tiveram lugar uma disputa simbólica pelas imagens entre os estudantes e o governo mexicano. A pouco mais de 40 anos pode-se analisar esta questão e dar-lhe um papel relevante ao uso político e cultural das fotografias por parte dos diferentes setores. Palavras-chave: movimento estudantil; fotojornalismo; democracia.

ABSTRACT

Recent history of the Mexican student movement of 1968 shows that this event has a central significance to understanding the existing political conditions of the country. This article analyzes the complex relations between the press and the political powers of that time and relevant examples are presented which centre around the way in which photography played a strategic role covering some of the most relevant episodes of that chapter of Mexican history. For example, the multitudinous street demonstrations, the army's violent seizure of the universities and the State's slaughter of the civil population in Tlatelolco. In all those events, a symbolic dispute between the students and the Mexican government arose for the appropriation of the images. At a distance of a little more than 40 years, it's possible to examine these problems and give a leading role to the political and cultural use of photographs by the different groups. Keywords: student movement; photojournalism; democracy.

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The 1968 Mexican student movement constitutes a key reference in studying the country's contemporary history. Those young people most important contribution was the citizens' vindication of the defense of a rule of law at a time when the country was governed by a single-party State, represented by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). The party had headed a government emanated from the Mexican Revolution, and had ruled the country for several decades with certain political stability based on the corporative control of labor unions and peasant head offices, but without democratic counterweights.

More than 40 years ago, the student movement was rejected based on the governmental theory that assured the existence of a communist boycott to impede the carrying out of the XIX Olympic Games. Nevertheless, in recent years the 1968 political movement entered the aseptic horizon of the 'politically correct' and its name has been inscribed in gold letters on initiative of the very same Congress that had previously repudiated it. The former 'rioters' and 'terrorists' are now considered as martyrs and founders of democracy in Mexico. This is a universal process also occurring at other latitudes and that should be taken into account for these episodes' historical analysis so that we do not recycle myths and end up creating new idols.²

Photography and its editorial management has been present in the record of facts and in its later conversion into the construction of collective memory; first, from the journalistic coverage of the student's events and, subsequently, in all important publications on the subject. Despite this, photos have barely been mentioned in the historical reflection of this important episode for the country's political life, and it can be indicated that the different approaches to this subject have almost always underestimated the role of images and have mainly focused on other type of oral and written documents.

It is not that images have been absent in the reflection of chroniclers, writers, *literati*, and academics for the last forty years. The problem lies in the secondary role that has been given to images, almost decorative, to illustrate the analysts' reflections and approaches.³

In this article we will develop a very particular exercise and will follow these 'canonical' coordinates for the 1968 student movement, but we will reverse the conventional parameters in order to give voice to the photographers'

testimonial and to the editorial use of their images. This interpretation is of great importance in order to comprehend the different angles of perception through which the student movement was registered, and to understand the way in which a collective imaginary was built, one that influenced large social sectors and that was recycled for forty years until it transformed in a few icons.⁴

A vast photojournalistic coverage was present in 1968, and it revolved around the orbit of a self-censorship with implicit political and cultural rules which are mainly expressed in the editorial use of the images. The press was subordinated to the political coordinates of a single-party State regime in 1968. The discrepancy of citizens was not tolerated by the *priista* governments, characterized by an authoritarian and corporative nature. Nevertheless, such discrepancy did not represent a claim supported by the majority of citizens. Because of this, the photographers' work is of great importance in order to comprehend the different shades of the relationship between the press and the power during those years.

From July 22 to October 2, 1968, neither the press nor the illustrated magazines behaved in a homogeneous manner. On the contrary, there were different nuances and shades that encompassed diverse political positions, from the anticommunist business-right groups to the far-left radical group, and a variety of moderated options. In most cases, subordination and alignment to the State and to factual powers reflected, among others aspects, in the control over the provision and distribution of the paper used for printing magazines and newspapers, as well as over the contents of commercial advertising, an important financial support both for newspapers and magazines. This marked the different levels of behavior that even reflected inside every newspaper.

From a complex and varied map, I extract some examples to illustrate the former approach. *Excélsior*, the most important progressive newspaper of the country, which hosted in its pages the informed critics of liberal historian Daniel Cosío Villegas and a pleiad of distinguished collaborators like Froylán López Narváez, Enrique Maza and Hugo Hiriart among others, who dismantled the authoritarian nature of Díaz Ordaz' regime with their reflections, was characterized for publishing cautious and moderate institutional editorials, very close to the official perspective, with the notorious exceptions of the

military takeover of Ciudad Universitaria and the violent events that took place on October 2. In such context, the photographic coverage of the newspaper, carried out by photographers such as Aarón Sánchez, Miguel Castillo, and Carlos González – who, by the way, was hurt with a bayonet in Tlatelolco – responded to this type of interests and contradictions, and it is from these coordinates and parameters that we must conduct the reading of its images.⁵

The magazine *Tiempo* was directed by the prize-winning writer Martín Luis Guzmán, who had formerly been coopted by the State, and who became one of the bitterest enemies of the student movement. The magazine had the official commission to condemn the students and to foster the theory of an antigovernment conspiracy throughout those months. The paradox lies in that the magazine's editor in chief hired the services of the Mayo Brothers (Hermanos Mayo), the collective of republican photographers who became a legend in the history of the national photojournalism, and who had a left-wing political background which diluted itself through the ferocious anticommunist captions foisted by the magazine's editor in chief.⁶

The magazine *Life en español* rescued the great illustrated magazine's iconographic tradition and fostered the editorial construction of narrative sequences that relied upon the sights of efficient Mexican photographers like José Dávila Arellano y Jesús Díaz, and upon the signature of informed correspondents like Bernard Diederich, who kept a critical position concerning the official arguments and established bonds with some American public opinion sectors and with the not-dismissed fact of a certain settlement between the northern country and the Mexican foreign affairs politics of the time.

THE DISPUTE OVER THE IMAGES

The first stage of what we currently identify as the 1968 student movement encompasses the last week of July and graphically characterizes itself by two elements: the excess of repression, materialized through police abuse and the army's presence in the capital's first block, and, also, by the prominence of teenagers who were high school and post-school vocational training students and who confronted government's agents in a violent way, cornered in their schools, with some exceptions, at the University square in the city's downtown. The intense chronicle of those ten days full with violent confrontations

Figure 1 – Journalist Oriana Fallaci at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, Tlatelolco, Oct. 2, 1968.



Life en español Nov. 1st, 1968. Private collection.

can be read in Ramón Ramírez' (1969) classic work and in Daniel Cazés' (1993) later compilation.

During this period, authorities vertiginously devised the conspiracy theory as the official base from which the movement was going to be interpreted, that is, as forming part of an international communist complot financed from abroad in order to boycott the Olympic Games.

In general terms, the press quickly aligned itself with the official discourse and reproduced bulletins and authorities' declarations. In this first stage two military figures predominated: the city's Regent, Alfonso Corona del Rosal, and the chief of the city police, Luis Cueto.

From the diversity of this period's photographic material, contained in newspapers and magazines, various elements should be emphasized: the urban event in the city's first block and the stress upon the street as a privileged setting of the revolt and the confrontation, but also of the illegal arrests of young persons by civilians and uniformed; the early age of the students that played a leading role in this first period, and who were cannon fodder for the official raids, a subject which should not be underestimated because the movement's rapid grow is based upon this first stage; the militarization of the urban space previously mentioned and the population's first reactions of curiosity about the tanks and motorized military vehicles; the repression as the

modus operandi of the armies, represented by the so called *bazucazo* with which the army destroyed the baroque entrance door of the San Ildefonso UNAM's building, an event systematically denied by the authorities, but which found an immediate echo through the diverse photographic sights published the next day after the event, in an initial moment in which confiscations of photographers' rolls had not yet operated in a systematic way as an official slogan between civilian and military commands.

Almost all the evidence collected with the photographers of the time agree in placing this episode as the most representative symbolic moment of this first stage, which marks a qualitative leap in the use of violence by the State. The students picked this situation as one of the founding events that justified the existence of the movement, and they incorporated the photos taken at that time in their posters, banners, and wall newspapers in the following days.

Among many other examples, I highlight some nuances present in the narrative of *El Herald de México*, led by the *poblano* businessman Gabriel Alarcón, who was very close to Díaz Ordaz and who was a bearer of an entire graphic modernity reflected in the breadth of its coverage. These contradictory coordinates would remain over the next months: on the one hand, the conservatism expressed in the reproduction of the anticommunist and xenophobia theses, focusing on the figure of the alleged foreign rioters, among whom the beautiful New Yorker Nika Seeger, daughter of one of the most famous protest singers of the time, outstands; and, on the other, the modernity reflected in the diversity of perspectives from an attentive coverage of the different scenarios and efficiently represented by a group of about ten photographers who even acted together in some episodes.

Magazines found the necessary pause for the narration of facts as the distinctive element, something that, for example, occurs in *Life en español* and in its testimonial monitoring of a harassment of a student, with captions that denounce the arrogance of the soldiers, and an editorial proposal that represents a suggestive visual dialogue of police persecutions in Mexico and France, which demonstrates the will to read the events from a wider perspective; in *La cultura en México* and the balance that it achieved between the images of María and Héctor García and the chronicle of Monsiváis; and, finally, on the cover and inside pages of *Por qué?*, led by controversial journalist Mario Menéndez, who ignored the photo credits but meticulously recorded

the repression and incarceration of young people from a very particular perspective, in which he assumed himself as the sole spokesman of truth.

The construction of the paranoid script for the conspiracy theory elaborated the last week of July by government authorities, whose existence has been confirmed by recent research based on the opening of declassified local and foreign official documents, did not count with a piece of the puzzle that did not fit in the days which followed the predictable patterns of 'politically correct' politicians' behavior and its predictable alignment with the government's guidelines.

This refers to the performance of UNAM's rector Javier Barrios Sierra, who a few hours after the attack on San Ildefonso raised the flag at half mast at Ciudad Universitaria (CU) and led the first march organized by university and polytechnic students which allowed the emergence of the CNH as the national leader organ and sole government's interlocutor. The rector's political action in the early days of August was so effective that it stopped for a few days the government and media lynching against young people, orchestrated in the press pages, and it opened a brief period of truce in the anti-student coverage of various media, which in turn allowed the political space for the organization of university students.

As a result, this episode is one of the most important links in the struggle for the control and dissemination of images that took place in 1968. The symbolism of the images that represented UNAM's most important official in the country conducting a peaceful march through the streets of the city, launched the student revolt from the narrow confines of sensationalistic press releases to the forefront of national discussion.

Photographic coverage of newspapers as conservative as *El Heraldo de México* stopped in to record in its captions details as significant as the cascade of applause with which the residents of *multifamiliar* Miguel Alemán, in Félix Cuevas street, welcomed the march from the balconies of their apartments.⁷ Other media, ruled by similar political coordinates, stressed the dignity of Barrios Sierra and the peaceful and civilized course of students huddled under his leadership. Such is the case of *La Prensa*, which left aside for once the official government bulletins in order to insist on its front page that "Thousands of students and teachers led by the rector carried out yesterday one of the largest, most peaceful and organized demonstrations in living memory".⁸ A distinction to the students which will not be repeated in the following weeks.

The exception did not come from business groups, traditionally aligned with the government, but from some sectors of the extreme left, represented in magazines *Sucesos* and *Por qué?* The latter proposed a graphic coverage of the march which reviled the rector's figure and which denounced in the captions the 'opportunism' of Barros Sierra, supposedly reflected in his decision of not leading the demonstration all the way to the *Zócalo* but, instead, to turn over in avenue Félix Cuevas back to the university campus.⁹

Figure 2 – The August 1st 1968 March led by UNAM's Rector Barros Sierra.



Por qué? Revista Independiente, Aug. 15, 1968. Private collection.

Based on the existence of such similarities between this magazine and the authorities' stance, leaders of the movement like Gilberto Guevara Niebla suggested a link between the magazine's editor in chief and the State Department.¹⁰ Personally, and acting inside the limits of photographic edition, I think that beyond the alleged government infiltration in the pages of *Por qué?* what really matters is to emphasize the similarity between the positions of the most radical sectors with the official discourse. A disturbing coincidence that was kept over the following weeks, as well as a key factor in CNH's decisions. That, indeed, is one of the possible readings emerging from the editorial management of some of the photographs published in the magazine ran by Mario Menéndez.

THE AUGUST 13 MARCH

The demonstration on August 13 represents the best of the irreverent, lively and rebellious spirit of 1968. This was the first massive demonstration of the CNH, set up just a week before and, therefore, outside the corporate control of government and away, at the time, of its intelligence apparatus.

It is hard to imagine now, forty years away, the implicit subversion in the fact that a non-official letterhead organization organized a demonstration of one hundred and fifty thousand people without asking for a permit from the authorities, addressed in their leaflets to the people of Mexico, ignoring the figure of the Executive and, to top it off, pretended to lead the march into the sacred space of the *Zócalo*, always reserved for marches in support of 'Mr. President'.

The photographic coverage was extensive and encompassed the whole press. The corresponding truce of the rector's march had already passed, and business newspapers such as *El Sol de México*, *El Herald*, and others closer to the official view, like *La Prensa*, returned to the expected coordinates seeking to discredit the movement and to link it with communist and foreign interests. However, the nuances and differences abound, and so we also have coverage of newspapers like *Excelsior* and *El Día*, which reported the event with less obvious ideological bias and had an extensive photographic coverage, in which the formal reading of the facts has not yet been imposed.

In recent years significant photographic evidence was found in the documentary field that had remained hidden for a long time and is now available in public archives by any citizen. Among all, there are two important records, designed, developed and implemented by two leading candidates for the presidency in 1968: the Government Secretary (Secretario de Gobernación), Luis Echeverría, and the Regent of the Federal District Department (DDF), Alfonso Corona del Rosal. The symbolic dispute for the images was part of the underground struggle of the ones who were 'covered' by presidential favor.

The first case was acquired by UNAM's Instituto de Investigación sobre la Universidad y la Educación (UNAM's and Education Research Institute – IISUE) a few years ago, when the widow of the photographer put his archive to sale, a process apparently ignored by some news media more focused on the creation of myths than on a professional investigation of the facts. The identity of the author is now known: Manuel Gutiérrez who, following Echeverría's orders, registered the student marches with a camera located on the third floor of the Hotel Del Prado. Those are probably the remains of a much larger file, which could be in the maze of government's warehouse or perhaps was opportunely destroyed by an official when the course of power began to change at the end of the century (García, 1998).

The second archive was found a couple of years ago on a rooftop, among shoe boxes and the bureaucratic and administrative remnants of an office of the former DDF, today Gobierno de la Ciudad de México. Unlike the previous case, the identity of the photographer remains unknown. However, the documentary record is also very important and covers some of the conflict's most important chapters (Ancira, 2008).

Both records (or what remains of them) show a clear concern from the law enforcement officers in Mexico City for the registration and eventual control of a number of urban demonstrations that escaped their corporate governance and put at risk the governmental stability based on the management of a political puzzle that functioned in a reasonable manner for decades, but that showed clear signs of expiration in the late sixties. The fact that the photographic *corpus* of these two collections was used in the short term by Mexican intelligence services and that it currently represents the best visual option for the study of the student conflict, constitutes a paradox.

Figure 3 – The August 13, 1968 March.



Manuel Gutiérrez Paredes, UNAM's Historical Archive.

THE AUGUST 27 MARCH

The spectacular march of August 27 marked the highest point in the organizational capacity of the student movement. It also dramatically exhibited its limits and fissures, the early mistakes in the CNH's command, the shadow of government intelligence services, and media strategy of the authorities, who opted for more direct control of daily photographic coverage and allowed the existence of alternative spaces through the publication of some images in some weekly illustrated magazines of limited scope.

The last week of August seemed propitious for negotiation between the government and the CNH. The first had communicated by telephone – on the 22 of that month and through the Secretaría de Gobernación – with a representative of CNH to express their willingness to discuss some of the aspects of the list of demands. The response of the highest student body was to convene a second massive march on the 27 and require the performance of a public dialogue between government representatives and a committee of 36

representatives from the CNH, six by each of the matters on the list of demands, with news and live radio coverage of the event.

The expectation of the meeting was present in the public sphere for several days and disappeared on the early morning of the 28 with the intervention of armed forces to disperse the students who had decided to set up a guard on the *Zócalo* to demand public dialogue with Díaz Ordaz on the day of his report, and with the evident articulation of a repressive government strategy executed in the hours after the evacuation.

The march of the 27 started from the National Museum of Anthropology,¹¹ the reference *par excellence* of modern PRI governments, and led to the *Zócalo*. It brought together nearly three hundred thousand people and passed off peacefully, displaying the tremendous CNH's power of call with just three weeks of existence. At the meeting several speeches were read, and during its course a red and black cloth was hoisted on the flagpole to replace the native labarum. At the end, Sócrates Campos Lemus, a student leader, harangued the crowd and proposed the provocative idea of leaving a guard of three thousand students to demand public dialogue with Díaz Ordaz in the *Zócalo* on the day of the presidential report. At about one o'clock in the morning, the army intervened to disperse the students and to gain control of the square.¹²

The media coverage on this march showed up its official profile in a more clear and convincing way and, with stronger ties of cooperation with the government, aligned itself with government strategy and the conspiracy theory.

The first thing one notices is that most newspapers gave priority to the chapter of the evacuation of students from the *Zócalo* at one o'clock in the morning as the main note, placing the march's graphical information in the inside pages. Thus, the government capitalized on the clumsy CNH decision about the permanence of a guard of students in the *Zócalo*. As in a previous operation arranged between the press and the State, the political weight of the huge demonstration was minimized and the attention was focused on the students' taunts. If we consider that the closure of photo addition was normally performed at eleven o'clock at night, the willingness of the press in general to use a material which recorded actions that occurred between one and three o'clock in the morning calls our attention. This fact can only be explained by

the preeminence of particular political factors and by the instructions based on specific government guidelines, given to media managers and owners.

The extreme case that illustrates this confluence of interests is the one that refers to the episode of inclusion, on the front page, of the photograph of the evening meeting with the flagpole wearing the red and black cloth, which was published by almost all the press as part of an operation induced from the Presidency of the Republic, as shown by the correspondence about this subject established between Gabriel Alarcón, editor in chief of *El Heraldo*, and Díaz Ordaz, in which Alarcón informs the President that he has communicated to other newspapers' chief editors about the relevance of using that image to counteract the influence of the movement, among other measures agreed as part of an anti-student media strategy, as recorded in documents open for public consultation in the last years at the Archivo General de la Nación.

An alternative space can be found in some illustrated magazines, with different ideological modes. *Life en español* distanced itself from the official perspectives, noting that Latin American governments immediately disqualified social mobilizations by labeling them as 'communists', and, instead, indicated that the real motive of the rebellion should be found in the authoritarian nature of a 'single revolutionary party regime'. Based on this logic, the magazine published a panoramic photograph of the march as it passed through Juárez Avenue, captured from the Torre Latinoamericana, which allowed it to dimension a civic protest civic of two hundred thousand people.¹³

For its part, *La Cultura en México*, supplement of the magazine *Siempre!*, published a sequence of several Hector Garcia's images of the march, which highlighted both the crowd and different aspects of the demonstration, recovering its civic and purposeful character, with a documentary look of its own. This visual chronicle was contextualized by Carlos Monsiváis' ironic look, who interspersed paragraphs with arguments and different opinions about the movement, among which could be the found the government's servile defense by journalist Carlos Denegri, together with stances much more insightful and accurate such as those of Daniel Cosío Villegas, who questioned with great clarity the politicization and the students' real academic level.¹⁴

THE GOVERNMENT'S OFFENSIVE

The military evacuation of the student guard mounted on the *Zócalo* the morning of August 28 marks the beginning of the government's offensive. Statements made by Fidel Velázquez, the eternal leader of the Confederación de Trabajadores (CTM), announcing that repression was 'urgently needed,' or the beating received by professor Heberto Castillo at the gates of his house, were just some of signs of the new times.¹⁵

Figure 4 – The August 27, 1968 March.



Among many others we will highlight the three following episodes: the struggle for control of national symbols; the snipers and the deployment of tanks, and the media incorporation of women into the student conflict.

The first relates to the atonement ceremony organized by the government and executed by thousands of workers employed by the State. The coverage of the episode was recorded accurately by most newspapers. The front pages of *La Prensa* and *El Heraldo* synthesized the nationalist bias that was printed at that moment.

Life en español Magazine, Sept. 2, 1968. Private collection.

It was intended to project the image of a mass meeting opposed to the one of the previous night, in which the figure of the President was exalted to the loyalist workers, defined as the 'authentic' representatives of the people, and the rescue of the national labor as opposed to students and union 'trouble-makers' and their illegitimate use of the red and black strike logo. The captions highlight the presidential statements and the military defense regarding the existence of 'a sole flag' for Mexicans, which aimed to identify students and union supporters as traitors, who followed symbols that were alien to the national idiosyncrasy.¹⁶

The patriotic context was given with the presence, that same day, of the President of the Republic at a conference conducted by the Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC) in the Palacio de Bellas Artes. There, Augusto Gómez Villanueva, the PRI leader of the organization, delivered a speech stressing the fact that Mexican peasants supported the national flag with a steady hand and distinguishing students as traitors to the country, outlining the parameters from which the government qualified the political dissent.

The photograph published in newspapers of Díaz Ordaz posing with the leaders of the Mexican political class under the mural of Bellas Artes is one of the images with a more expressive symbolism, which provides the key to decipher the political mood of the moment: the ruling party considered itself as the sole heir of the Mexican Revolution and, among its attributes, assumed the legitimate exercise of violence against its enemies. A couple of days later, the President would put these ideas into words for his government report.

The second episode that we will address concerns the different photo features published in the press about the confrontation between the students and civilians with soldiers and tanks in the *Zócalo*, in what was one of the events with a greater number of images published about the 1968 student movement. As never before, photography alone gave way to the iconographic sequence and what we have today is a broad and diverse visual chronicle of the events. The emphasis of the time, expressed through captions, lies in denouncing the rioters and the military's efforts to impose order.¹⁷

Four decades later, these same images represent a stark testimony of the militarization of the capital's first square and of the will of the power to overstep the bounds of legality and to project an atmosphere of fear among the population. The filmmakers Oscar Menéndez and Carlos Mendoza have

Figure 5 – President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz
at the Fine Arts Palace, Aug. 28, 1968.



Excélsior, Aug. 29, 1968. Private collection.

eloquently documented the existence of government snipers stationed on the building of the Supreme Court and on the Hotel Majestic, among other strategic points of the city's first square, which transform the macabre spectacle in a shooting target practice announcing the terrible days of September and October.

The outlined levels of the visual chronicle announce a shift in the festive days of August and foreshadow an increase in repression by government forces and increased social polarization. The precarious possibility of dialogue outlined the previous days definitely faded with the use of armed forces, snipers, and the appropriation of national symbols by a government moving toward the celebration of the Olympic Games and wrapped up with the shield of a defensive nationalist ideology which challenged its rhetorical claims of cosmopolitanism and modernity.

The ceremony of the *IV Informe* (IV Presidential Address) became the more conducive media space to exalt the President and to highlight the legitimacy of a political system that had been challenged as never before in the

previous weeks. Across the press, the strength and security features of Díaz Ordaz were stressed, associating them with the need to restore order, providing all sorts of visual and written details about the President's speech festive reception by the political class, that cheered and interrupted him with applause on numerous occasions. This is the same speech he gave during an hour, ignoring student conflict causes, denigrating its leaders, and definitively canceling any possibility of dialogue.

THE SILENCE MARCH

The silence demonstration is the last mass public event organized by the movement that put at risk the repressive strategy of Díaz Ordaz. It was conceived and planned by the CNH as a response to the threatening Presidential Address and the campaign of fear and lynching implemented as an echo chamber for the President Address in almost every media. The march started at the National Museum of Anthropology, in front of an impressive police operation and gathered about 250 000 people. The distinguishing mark of the episode consisted in the absence of cries and slogans, which some protesters stressed by the use of adhesive tape and bandages. In the view of its organizers, it was about contrasting a dignified silence with the empty rhetoric displayed in the last two weeks by the government and its allies. Forty years later, it is considered as the most important symbolic act of movement, that which best represents the defense and civic vindication of the rule of law.

The strategy of the vast majority of newspapers was to minimize the importance of the march and to narrow it down into a fairly low profile, in which the photographic coverage significantly decreased and even was displaced to the inside pages; and, in some cases, the episode was significantly linked with the violent arrival of the cyclone "Naomi", which caused severe damage in the coastal state of Sinaloa.

The most notable exception is represented by Mario Menéndez' magazine *Por qué?*, which assigned to the event an ample photographic article with thirty images that depict the participation of various contingents – among which outstand various approaches to the group Unión Nacional de Mujeres Mexicanas (National Union of Mexican Women) – and that narrate, step by step, the civic course that ended up in the *Zócalo*. The graphic *corpus* is

properly contextualized by a text from Heberto Castillo, who with a didactic and measured tone provides a defense for the movement with constant references to the Constitution, which defines the legal coordinates from which these images can be read. In mid-September, amid government media lynching, this article represents the most significant alternative point of view of everything that was published about this important episode in its time.¹⁸

Figure 6 – The Silence March, September 13, 1968.



Por qué? Revista Independiente, Oct. 5, 1968. Private collection.

THE MILITARY OCCUPATION OF CIUDAD UNIVERSITARIA

The occupation of CU by the army occurred on September 19 and was justified as a painful but necessary measure by most of the city's press. Reactions among the *intelligentsia* were diverse. While Salvador Novo said he had breakfast “with the best news received in a long time”, Daniel Cosío Villegas wrote that it was an irrational and counterproductive measure, for forcing young people to go out into the streets of a city virtually taken by armed forces “was an absurd action bordering on stupidity”. In the Chamber of Deputies, Luis M. Farías, President of the Great Commission, congratulated the rector and wryly declared that Mr. Barros Sierra should be grateful

to the government for having recovered the University's facilities. Barros Sierra himself declared that the occupation had meant a disproportionate use of force that the UNAM did not deserve, and a couple of days later resigned, saying that he did not care about the criticism of some minor people, lacking moral authority, but that unmistakably obey the will of the President.

Photojournalist coverage of the occupation of CU shows the degree of interference on the part of the Mexican State in the contents of the press, and it was produced at a time in which repressive output had won in the will of the President and in his closest entourages. Subsequent episodes of the violent seizures of Zacatenco¹⁹ and the Politécnico prove it. The editorial uses of photographs were usually limited to the coordinates of this repression strategy.

Awkward images were omitted (some have been published in recent years), and the rest were presented with captions appropriate and suitable for the official script, but the alternative space represented by some illustrated magazines that took some distance from government parameters, should also be considered.

An emblematic example of the above is represented by some of the images of the republican group of Mayo Brothers, which were published by the official magazine *Tiempo*, headed by Martin Luis Guzmán, the award-winning writer of the Mexican Revolution who applauded the military intervention in Ciudad Universitaria, and which were taken up in larger sequences by the journal *Por qué?* The editor's perspective was immediately imposed to the imprint of the photographers and strengthened the official version in the first case, while the editorial choice of a sequence of images of the same event contextualized by critical captions allowed another reading in the second example. Forty years later, this important body of images can be read from different perspectives.

THE NIGHT OF TLATELOLCO

The 1968 student movement does not confine itself to October 2 and, at the same time, it is impossible to narrate the student events without mentioning it. The date is one of the most important references in the contemporary history of Mexico. Some left-wing sectors have made it an out-of-context fetish that has displaced the contributions recorded in the previous stages of the

movement, while the conservative right-wing pretends to erase it from the civic calendar.

The documented fact consists in that the massacre marked the end of the movement and had a negative impact on the country's political life during the next decade, closing the political participation for some social sectors that decided to join the guerrilla, and which ended up strengthening the impunity of a government that instigated State terror through a dirty war over the seventies, whose unfortunate effects have been recorded by historians in recent years.

The front pages of newspapers the day after the killing are an important indicator that shows the narrow margins of press maneuver in this extreme situation and the parameters of subordination to the coordinates set by the single-party State regime, which imposed the version of the conspiracy theory and built a scenario in which the snipers on the roofs of some buildings and apartments of the Tlatelolco housing unit were immediately denounced as part of the student plot which had been duly announced by the General Corona del Rosal... two months earlier.

Against all those who believe that everything is said about October 2, it is convenient to indicate in this text the existence of some photographers' testimonies who were present at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas that afternoon, and that have decided to talk at four decades of distance. They all confirm the existence of the State operation and enrich in different ways the existing information of the facts.

Enrique Metinides had to walk several miles to get to Tlatelolco. Once there he accomplished, in his peculiar style which marked an era in *La Prensa*, compelling images of the effects of the action areas of sniper fire and its traces in the bodies of some soldiers; Jesús Fonseca, from *El Universal*, describes the dangerous challenges he had to face in his personal ordeal that took him from the Chihuahua building to the one of Foreign Affairs, passing through the pile of corpses that confirms the young reporter Joaquín López Dóriga, who told those facts and only saw them published in his newspaper *El Heraldo* thirty-five years after the massacre, while Aarón Sánchez, from *Excélsior*, recorded the beatings and humiliation with which the students were subjected by the army in the terrible hours of the arrests after the shooting.

Figure 7 – The October 2, 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco.



Por qué? Revista Independiente, 2nd extraordinary edition. Oct., 1968. Private collection.

All these authors continued to work in their newspapers and saw the silence imposed by the government in those hours of distress and helplessness, and the McCarthyist campaign of harassment of dissidents, which increased in the following months.

One of the few exceptions is represented by the magazine *Por qué?*, fully identified with the movement in previous weeks. It is of great interest to approach the contents of the keys facts from the 'extraordinary' edition dedicated to Tlatelolco and published in October that year, as it represents the point of view of the left on the tragic events, predominant in the following two decades and which is the exact antithesis of the government's conspiracy

theory. In this version the army massacred hundreds of people in an operation coordinated perfectly with government intelligence. The photographic record of the magazine far exceeds everything published to that time and employs without giving credit images of Héctor García, the Mayo Brothers, Armando Salgado, Carlos González, and Oscar Menéndez, among many others.

Since 1988, this monolithic scheme started to fragment. Documentary makers such as Carlos Mendoza, historians such as Sergio Aguayo, and journalists such as Jacinto Rodríguez have revised various collections and domestic and foreign declassified archives and have documented new clues to interpret the massacre, which demonstrate the lack of coordination between government armed forces, different intelligence services and the elite troops of the Presidential Staff. Despite the above, no independent investigation has denied the existence of a government operation carried out that afternoon, with historical responsibilities as concrete as unpunished: they all conclude that it was a State crime.²⁰

Forty years later not everything is said about October 2 and about the 1968 student movement. By contrast, it can be said that, in a sense, research of new documentary collections has just begun and that the critical rethinking of the existing is constantly renewed. Among other areas that are waiting to receive critic attention, there are textbooks of the high school's history and museum exhibitions.

A first analysis of the 1968 photojournalist coverage opens interesting angles and perspectives. On the one hand, it allows to follow up the government strategy about the conspiracy and to decipher the key facts about the media lynching to which the student movement was subjected for about three months in a very important part of the press, with different moments and aspects; and, on the other, it provides break and turning points through the proposal of some magazines with a slightly larger margin of independence.

In his IV Presidential Address, Díaz Ordaz announced the close end of the student revolt in the historical memory of the following years and interpreted its origins under the premises of the international plot and conspiracy. The stubborn facts have proven quite the opposite; and in the following decades, the authoritarian regime that characterized the PRI of the sixties collapsed in order to recycle itself under other parameters, not less vertical, while

the 1968 and its mark on politics and national culture has been explored from different angles and approaches by historians and social scientists. The dispute over symbols continues in the new millennium.

FINAL REMARKS

In the introduction to one of his most recent works, *A Contemporary History of Mexico*, historian Lorenzo Meyer begins the first paragraph with a quote from the CIA that contradicts the conspiracy theory of the Díaz Ordaz regime, noting that the Mexican regime was being questioned by students as part of a movement which responded to real interests. Thus, there is a consensus in historical research in pointing to 1968 as a turning point in the political and cultural evolution of Mexico today, that questions and introduces a number of standards and guidelines that would gradually change the reality of the country.

The consecration of the movement by part of the political class constitutes the formulation of a myth which is away from the intentions and the daily actions of hundreds of thousands of young people who shook the country in the unrepeatable days of August and September of the year 1968.

The photographic images in 1968 played a prominent role, given the almost complete closure of the various media, like radio and television, and occupied a symbolic place of prime importance, so they were used and manipulated from the political positions various social groups.

Such imagery created in the pages of the print media circulated widely in national and international levels, permeated the consciousness and thought of different social sectors, and provided key visual references for the construction of a collective memory that would feed from some of these photographs transformed into icons over several years.²¹

The key elements of the staging are represented by the photographic synthesis consisting of images published in the press that we have presented in this article. This forms a *site of memory* that condenses different views about the facts while it provides references and starting points for reading to the new generations, as we conceive memory not only as the preservation of previously retained ideas; but, above all, as the construction and elaboration of symbolic meanings of the past.

Forty years away, a museum named *Memorial 68*, commemorating the student movement has been created in the Tlatelolco square, by the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

Opposite to the indifference of different conservative groups seeking to erase the date of October 2 from the civic calendar, and to the demands of some sectors of the orthodox left, which want to limit what occurred in that date of 1968, the *Memorial* has developed a museum critical proposal about the events of 1968, which left unsatisfied both Tyrian and Trojan, since October 2 was framed with the critical and argumentative perspective of the previous months, and it also contextualized the Mexican 1968 as an event that responded to the dynamics of the sixties.

Among other of its objectives, which later would be included in its making, was the fact of not confining the contents of the *Memorial* to the events of October 2; developing a bold audiovisual proposal that would not be enclosed within the boundaries of conventional museum discourse; linking the Mexican 1968 student protest with the student movements produced in the rest of the world; exploring the historical memory from a broad perspective, that went beyond the limits of political vision in its traditional sense; promoting a critical perspective that would be set aside from idealizing apologies; recognizing the innovative scopes of the movement, and trying to approach the logic of events without making use of the dynamics of communist conspiracies and international intrigue in order to present the 1968 as a local process, understandable and explainable by a set of internal factors.

For all the above, I consider that *Memorial's* vitally contributes to recovery of memory as a dimension that goes beyond the private and that rescues the vision of social actors. The historical coordinates are changing and this will, with no doubt, foster new approaches to the theme of Mexican 1968.

NOTES

¹ This article is part of a wider research the author conducts at Instituto Mora in Mexico City, with a grant from the Fondo Sectorial de Investigación para la Educación of the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología. I appreciate the comments and remarks of the researchers John Mraz and Rebeca Monroy. Other texts: DEL CASTILLO TRONCOSO, Alberto. *Rodrigo Moya: una visión crítica de la modernidad*. México: Conaculta, 2006; DEL

CASTILLO TRONCOSO, Alberto. La frontera imaginaria: usos y manipulaciones de la fotografía en la investigación histórica. *Cuicuilco*, México: Enah, v.14, n.41, p.193-215, 2007.

² The most recent chapter of this 180 degree turn was protagonized by President Felipe Calderón who in October 2010 pronounced an eulogy for the 1968 student movement during the centennial of UNAM in which he referred to the army's violent intervention in San Ildefonso as "the *bazucazo* of intolerance".

³ Some examples are Elena Poniatowska's pioneer chronicle (1971), which includes a *dossier* of photographs in an illustrative manner and, more recently: ÁLVAREZ GARÍN, Raúl. *La estela de Tlatelolco: una reconstrucción histórica del movimiento estudiantil del 68*. México: Itaca, 2002; GUEVARA NIEBLA, Gilberto. *La libertad nunca se olvida. Memoria del 68*. México: Cal y Arena, 1998b, which incorporate two separate photographic records on which the authors omit any type of comments.

⁴ We refer to the fact that the photojournalistic coverage of the Mexican 1968 encompassed several thousands of photographs. However, the memory of the event is recycled every anniversary through the circulation of few images, which have been transformed into emblematic icons of the movement.

⁵ Alberto del Castillo's interview with Aarón Sánchez. Aug. 15, 2008.

⁶ Martín Luis Guzmán was one of the most important twentieth century Mexican writers. Author of some of the most celebrated novels and chronicles of the Revolution, like *El águila y la serpiente*, and *La sombra del caudillo*. His cooptation in the official ranks represented to the Mexican State the appropriation of the Revolution's cultural heritage, in its dispute for the national symbols against the student claims.

⁷ *El Heraldo de México*, Aug. 2, 1968.

⁸ *La Prensa*, Aug. 2, 1968.

⁹ *Por qué?* Magazine First extraordinary edition, Aug. 1968, p.27.

¹⁰ GUEVARA NIEBLA, Gilberto. *La democracia en la calle: crónica del movimiento estudiantil mexicano*. México: Siglo XXI, 1998a. p.69.

¹¹ The National Museum of Anthropology was designed by architect Pedro Ramirez Vazquez and opened in 1964. In the sixties, it represented the convergence of revolutionary nationalism and its claims of cosmopolitanism and modernity.

¹² Over several decades, Campos Lemus has been linked with government intelligence. In this regard see Guevara Niebla (1998b, p.27, 42, 78, 79).

¹³ *Life en español*, Sept. 7, 1968, p.19.

¹⁴ See *La cultura en México*, Sept. 7, 1968, p.12-15.

¹⁵ Mr. Heberto Castillo was one of the academics with a major role in the student conflict. He was jailed for two years in Lecumberri and later became one of the most important leaders of the democratic transition in the country.

¹⁶ *El Heraldo de México*, Aug. 29, 1968.

¹⁷ *La Prensa*, Aug. 29, 1968.

¹⁸ *Por qué?* Magazine, Sept. 25, 1968.

¹⁹ An IPN's *campus*.

²⁰ MENDOZA, Carlos. *Tlatelolco: las claves de la masacre*. Documentário produzido pelo Canal 6 de Julio e por *La Jornada*, 1998; AGUAYO, Sergio. *Los archivos de la violencia*. México: Grijalbo, 2000.

²¹ The Olympics context built an international media platform for the student episode, especially in regard to the massacre of October 2, covered by various reporters and photographers associated with major media worldwide. All this, just 10 days before the opening of the Olympic Games.