

not overcome the bias in the source materials themselves—their over-representation of middle-class urban children, and their neglect of rural, poorer, and indigenous children who did not have the time or means to mail in answers to radio quizzes, submit their drawings for possible publication, or attend gatherings in the capital that reinforced the sense of children’s community.

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Samuel Steinberg, *Photopoetics at Tlatelolco: Afterimages of Mexico, 1968*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016. Pp. 266. \$80.00 cloth; \$27.95 paper.  
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Samuel Steinberg examines the artistic commemorations of the Tlatelolco Massacre, a government-led slaughter of student protesters on October 2, 1968. Against the recent specter of the 2014 assassination of 43 students from Ayotzinapa the publication of Steinberg’s monograph feels especially urgent. Today, at nearly 50 years’ distance, the Tlatelolco Massacre is a singular trauma in Mexico’s history even as the issues raised by the event—Mexico’s stifling civil society, a press bolstered by payola, and state-sanctioned violence—remain salient.

Steinberg’s nuanced, theoretically rigorous, and historically astute readings of artists’ creative responses to Tlatelolco will interest cultural historians, literary scholars, and media specialists of Mexico. His study provides a fruitful dialogue with Gareth Williams’s *The Mexican Exception* and Bruno Bosteels’s *Marx and Freud in Latin America*: it is most suited to those concerned with the interplay between photographic memory, political subjectivization, and literature. This sharp analysis is indebted to Roger Bartra’s crusade against the enduring shibboleths of “Mexicanism”—defined by Steinberg as “the philosophical and aesthetic counterpart to the logic of the Mexican state” (182).

Steinberg attempts to wrest the visual and narrative archive of 1968 from the sycophantic behemoth of the Mexican state and its phalanx of intellectuals. Read against current understandings of canonical texts inspired by the Tlatelolco Massacre—Carlos Monsiváis’s *Días de guardar* (1970), Elena Poniatowska’s *La noche de Tlatelolco: testimonios de historia oral* (1971), and director Jorge Fons’s film *Rojo amanecer* (1990), among others—Steinberg’s work overturns many “high pieties in Latin Americanism and beyond, among them, the maudlin and Christological affair called La noche de Tlatelolco” (84). His incisive readings subvert top-down, state-endorsed interpretations of the mass killing, which melodramatically cast the perished student protesters as sacrificial lambs whose death regenerated the social contract between state and citizenry. Concerned with how the complex historical and political processes surrounding 1968

have been oversimplified, Steinberg thus hopes to “open thinking worthy of 1968” (15). The state’s act of archiving at Tlatelolco, argues Steinberg, has allowed it, ruled as it was during most of the twentieth century by a single party, to spin a disingenuous tale of before and after: students were slaughtered in exchange for Mexico’s democratization, a form of memory-making that both perverts and occludes students’ authentic political motivations.

Chapter 1 examines the state’s political subjectivization in light of the occurrences at Tlatelolco. Culling from a wide range of theorists, Steinberg acknowledges that “the book’s theoretical engagement is likely susceptible to charges of a certain promiscuousness, and that is possibly justified” (15). Ultimately, approaching the gnarled events of the Tlatelolco Massacre from a politically engaged perspective demands such a balancing act. In Chapter 2, Steinberg focuses on Monsiváis’s *Días*. For Steinberg, Monsiváis’s “dual gesture of deferral . . . obscures the very thing he would seek to rescue” (51): by refusing to call out unambiguously the Tlatelolco tragedy amid *Días*’s cavalcade of memories, Monsiváis paradoxically recapitulates the centrality of the slaughter within Mexico’s collective memory of the left, and thus reaffirms the state’s politically blinding narration of events.

Although his claim is compelling, we should interrogate the extent to which Monsiváis actually attempts a descriptive deferral of the Tlatelolco Massacre, thus granting the mass killing—according to Steinberg—“the status of absent center” (52). Indeed, the very first passage in *Días* is taken from Octavio Paz’s *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, a text that epitomizes how the national mythology of Mexico is built (unconvincingly) upon transhistorical tales of martyrdom. Monsiváis’s text thus seems to support a reading of the October 2 slaughter that incarnates what Steinberg disdains as a “canonization of disaster” (54).

Chapter 3 casts another canonical text of Mexico ’68, Poniatowska’s *La noche de Tlatelolco*, as an overwrought response to the Tlatelolco Massacre that is easily subsumed into the overreaching narratives of martyrdom central to hegemonic notions of Mexican identity (111). Steinberg’s sharp, politically engaged, and compelling argument characterizes Poniatowska’s compendium of testimonies as effectively cancelling more fulfilling means of subjectivizing the events of 1968, and may provide a means to open up other texts dealing with state-sponsored mass killing.

Chapter 4 will be the most intriguing to the greatest number of scholars. It is also the most polemical. Like his interpretation of Poniatowska’s text, Steinberg characterizes Fons’s *Rojo amanecer* as “non-ruptural” (131). Highly melodramatic and riddled with clichés, the film is swallowed up by “the state’s version of 1968” (136), and is thus little more than political bromide “concealed beneath a surface of rupture . . . a screen, the secret archive of continuity and transition pierces through” (131). This brave reading of *Rojo amanecer* creates new possibilities for understanding Mexican cinema after 1968, and does what Andrés de Luna’s half-hearted critique of Fons’s film failed to do: counterbalance the proliferation of laudatory but facile readings of its

message. Although Steinberg's scene-by-scene analysis (130–138) exhibits a keen filmic sensitivity, various of his criticisms of the film are overblown. Particularly injudicious is the mention of the film's "poor lighting, which gives little sense of the passing of time" (124). The interpretation could have been further tempered (and nuanced) with some discussion of popular culture's unique role in Latin America. This reviewer wonders how Steinberg would incorporate the work of Jesús Martín-Barbero, who attempts to disarticulate Manichaean distinctions between cultural production and mass manipulation.

While Chapters 2, 3, and 4 offer pointed leftist critiques of texts traditionally understood as leftist, Steinberg explores in the final two chapters some texts that evince a different awareness of Mexico in 1968—an awareness that accounts for the weight of memory and possible subsumption by the Mexican intelligentsia. In Chapter 5, Steinberg analyzes Jorge Volpi's 2003 novel *El fin de la locura* "as a kind of archive that captures 1968" (150) and yet proves unable to look beyond the political horizons of the 1960s. Chapter 6 explores the work of Francis Alÿs, a Belgian-born performance artist residing in Mexico City. Steinberg interprets Alÿs's art, which includes such actions as pushing an ice block through the streets of Mexico City until it melts, as evincing a type of hypothetical, expressive politics. This chapter successfully situates Alÿs's art within the context of post-1968 Mexico and suggests that the artist's work ultimately evades the martyrological fetters of the Tlatelolco Massacre.

Steinberg's text is an important contribution to our understanding of visual culture, narrative, and politics in post-1968 Mexico that evinces a deep knowledge of political theory, philosophy, and history. Interpretations found in this volume will inevitably be touchstones for future scholarship.

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