RE-MEMBERING THE PAST:
Memory-Theatre and Tlatelolco

Jacqueline E. Bixler
Virginia Tech

Abstract: This study discusses the responses of Mexican intellectuals to the 1968 massacre in the Plaza de Tlatelolco. Several published studies and anthologies have covered the poetry, narrative, and essays written on the subject, but no such consideration has been given to the theatrical works written and staged since 1968. Jeanette Malkin's theory on memory-theatre, Pierre Nora's "lieux de mémoire," *and Michel Foucault's concept of countermemories all shed light on how these dramatic works function in a changing Mexico, now moving toward authentic democracy and ready to revive a segment of history suppressed and distorted but never forgotten. Of the many plays commemorating the events of 1968, four that focus on the process of memory are analyzed in this essay. Because of the slow democratization of Mexico, the growing maturity of former participants and witnesses, and the postmodern craving for testimony, the repressed memories of Tlatelolco have not faded into oblivion but continue to inspire the dramatic imagination.*

The past is a thing
which cannot be eradicated,
which accumulates and impinges.
Graham Swift, *Waterland*

Over thirty years have passed since "la noche triste" on 2 October 1968, when Mexican troops suddenly opened fire on thousands of protesters, supporters, and innocent bystanders in the Plaza de Tlatelolco. Rather than admit responsibility, the Mexican government blamed the deaths on outside agitators, reported the number of dead as thirty-two rather than the hundreds commonly believed to have been gunned down, and did everything possible to suppress any official recording of the event. As Rosario Castellanos warned in her poem "Memorial a Tlatelolco," "No hurgues en los archivos pues nada consta en actas." With the opening of the Olympics and the concomitant showcasing of a modern Mexico just days away, the government-controlled media helped to sweep the massacre into the dustbin of unofficial history by making virtually no mention of the episode in newspapers or on radio or television stations. Yet despite the "Operation Amnesia" launched by the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), that date in October was to change Mexico forever and in ways that are only now beginning to be understood. Carlos Fuentes identified that night as "the deep trench that divides the contemporary consciousness of Mexico" (1997, 76), while Octavio Paz characterized it as the end of an era: "El 2 de octubre terminó el movimiento estudiantil. También terminó una época de la historia de México" (1970, 38). As a statement by one of Mexico's leading intellectuals, Paz's response to the slaughter resounded throughout the world. In protest, he promptly resigned his post as Mexico's ambassador to India and went into self-exile in the United States. He then wrote a collection of critical essays entitled *Posdata*, which serves as a postscript to *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950) but even more importantly as a postscript to the massacre itself.[1]

Indignant at the Mexican government's steadfast refusal to engage in any dialogue, many Mexican intellectuals followed Paz's lead and wrote various works that refer explicitly to the massacre. These works include poems by Rosario Castellanos and Emilio Pacheco; novels by Juan García Ponce, Fernando del Paso, and Jorge Aguilar Mora; essays by Carlos Monsiváis, Gabriel Zaid, Ramón Ramírez, and José Revueltas; and Elena Poniatowska's testimonial *La noche de Tlatelolco*.

In a 1985 essay in this journal, Dolly Young summarized the copious literary response to the events of 1968. She cited several purposes for which this "Tlatelolco literature" was written: "to describe and chronicle the event; to denounce repressive government actions; to attempt to legitimize government action; to analyze and interpret the student movement in its historical, political, and social context; to denounce the movement as a communist-inspired plot to undermine the government; to sensationalize and capitalize on the bloody tragedy as a backdrop for fiction; and to perpetuate the memory of Tlatelolco" (Young 1985, 73). It seems odd, however, that while Young described a number of essays, documentary texts, poems, and novels, she failed to mention the dramatic works written in response to the massacre. A recent and more extensive study by Jorge Volpi likewise ignored Mexico's dramatists in discussing the reaction of Mexican intellectuals to the events of 1968 (Volpi 1998). The time has come to recognize the important and unique role played by Mexican dramatists in remembering and re-creating the events that culminated on 2 October 1968.

1. In fact, Paz's first written response to Tlatelolco was not *Posdata* but a poem, "México: Olimpiada de 1968." Here he equated the cleansing of the Plaza de Tlatelolco with the government's attempt to erase the record: "(Los empleados/ municipales lavan la sangre/ en la Plaza de los Sacrificios)/ Mira ahora,/ Manchada/ Antes de haber dicho algo/ Que valga la pena,/ La limpidez."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A Brief History of Writings on Tlatelolco

Mexico's dramatists were quick to stage a historical episode that official history was determined to hide or at least distort. The earliest examples of "teatro sesentaiochero" include Enrique Ballesté's *Vida y obra de Dalomismo*, Pilar Campesino's *Octubre terminó hace mucho tiempo*, and Jesús González Dávilas's *La Fábrica de los Juguetes*, all written in 1969 and 1970.[2] Although censorship does not exist in any official form in Mexico, the unofficial censorship wielded by the cultural institutions that grant theatre spaces and staging permits made it difficult if not impossible to stage plays treating such a taboo topic. Pilar Campesino's piece, for example, was banned from the stage due to what the government vaguely termed "cuestiones de índole moral y política" (Carballido 1983, 199). Consequently, the memories of Tlatelolco remained relatively unstaged until the 1980s, when Emilio Carballido, Adam Guevara, and Gabriela Ynclán produced new plays that put those images onstage. More recently, a cycle of Tlatelolco plays was staged in Mexico City in October 1998 to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the massacre.[3] Soon afterward, dramatist and editor Felipe Galván published an anthology entitled *Teatro del 68*, which includes the plays staged in 1998 as well as several other dramatic re-creations of that fatal and fateful day.[4]

2. Felipe Galván chose to begin his anthology of *Teatro del 68* with *Vida y obra de Dalomismo*, which was first staged in May 1969. Although the play never mentions the student movement or the events at Tlatelolco, Galván maintains that "la cercanía en fechas y el contenido simbólico en esta obra . . . no deja lugar a dudas" (1999, 8).

3. The Tlatelolco cycle included several plays that were later published in the Galván anthology: *Octubre terminó hace mucho tiempo, Vida y obra de Dalomismo, La Fábrica de los Juguetes, No más que salgamos, Idos de octubre*, and *Triágono habitacional o de Tlatelolco a Tlatelolco*. To these six plays should be added separate productions of Miguel Angel Tenorio's *68: Las heridas y los recuerdos*, Emilio Carballido's *Conmemorantes*, Ismael Colmenares's *Sólo sí, sólo mí, mejor hasta mañana*, and Arturo Amaro and Alexandro Celia's *Rastro de restos*. Despite the fact that they were being staged on the thirtieth anniversary of the slaughter (or perhaps because of the fact), these plays received little attention from either the government or the critics. Dramatist Tenorio found the lack of official and critical attention inexplicable and offered fear as a possible explanation: "Pienso que las autoridades, incluyendo las del D.F., que son de izquierda y que algunos de sus integrantes fueron protagonistas del 68, tienen miedo de que se hable del 68. ¿Por qué? Todavía no lo sé. Estas obras se programaron en lugares con difícil acceso de público, poca promoción. . . . Lo que no es tan claro es por parte de los medios. ¿Por qué? No lo sé. Continuamente les he enviado información de lo que estoy haciendo en las escuelas, pero ni siquiera lo han consignado. A mí me quedan muchas interrogantes, actitudes que no me explico." Personal E-mail communication to the author, 19 Apr. 2001.

4. In his introduction, Galván notes the impossibility of collecting all the Tlatelolco plays in one volume. Due to problems of length, inaccessibility, or lack of very recent manuscripts, Galván was unable to include a number of plays: Rodolfo Usigli's *¡Buenos días, Señor Presidente!*, Juan Miguel de Mora's *Plaza de las Tres Culturas*, Juan Tovar's *Luz del norte*, Jorge Eugenio Ortiz's *Urías en Tlatelolco*, Fernando del Paso's *Palinuro en la escalera*, Joel López Arriaga's *Rosas*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This recent proliferation of Tlatelolco plays has arisen from a number of factors, the most obvious being that the complete truth about the massacre has yet to be told. As Galván noted, "Los cientos de muertos aún alcanzan en su vergüenza a los herederos políticos de quienes ordenaron y ejecutaron una de las mayores matanzas del siglo en nuestro país; los actuales gobernantes y sus mandos supremos militares esconden los archivos todavía, a treinta años de los hechos" (1999, 7). Because of the government's longstanding refusal to disclose the facts, Tlatelolco has remained an open wound in the Mexican consciousness. After an initial flurry of poetry, novels, essays, and plays during the late 1970s, the production of Tlatelolco literature dropped off, due not only to censorship but to the fact that Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's successor, Luis Echeverría (1970–1976), realized that the main threat to the government came not from student protests but from Mexican intellectuals, who were constantly reminding the public of his complicity in the slaughter as Díaz Ordaz's right-hand man. While preserving the status quo, Echeverria pretended to change it by expressing concern over social justice, espousing Marxist ideology, and filling his cabinet with UNAM graduates and other intellectuals. Echeverría's presidential successors virtually washed their hands of Tlatelolco, as Volpi has pointed out: "Los siguientes gobiernos decidieron desvincularse del espíritu de Tlatelolco, como si fuese una herencia, que ya no les correspondía" (1998, 424).

Recent Interest in Tlatelolco

With the advent of a new millennium, Mexicans seemed to feel the need to bring closure to this event through remembrance and reconciliation rather than oblivion. As Geoffrey Hartman has explained, in the politics of memory, "this kind of recollection encourages a healing and sometimes politically inspired form of closure" (1994, 7). Plays about Tlatelolco thus offer therapy at both the personal and national levels, to the guilty as well as to the victims, through what theorist Herbert Lindenberger has termed

---

azules, José Luis Morales's *2 de octubre bajo la tierra*, Héctor Martínez Tamez's *1988: En las tinieblas húmedas*, Alfonso Martínez Zúñiga's *Los 68*, Hugo Salcedo's *Uno de octubre*, Eugenio Casto Cruz's *El taller de ciencias sociales*, and Misaél Martínez's *El siguiente*. In discussing the generation of '68, Reyes Palacio mentioned two other plays not included in Galván's anthology: his own play, *Los colmillos de la ballena*, and *Muchacha del alma* by Jesús González Dávila. Although Galván's collection is not exhaustive, it provides access to a considerable number of texts that deal with the memories of Tlatelolco. This publication marks the first time that Tlatelolco plays have been published in one edition, whereas collections of poetry, narrative, and periodistic accounts related to 1968 have existed for some time. See *Poesía del movimiento estudiantil de 1968*, edited by Marco Antonio Campos (Puebla: Moderna, 1980); *Narrativa del movimiento estudiantil mexicano de 1968*, edited by Marco Antonio Campos and Alejandro Toledo (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1986); and *1968: Antología periodística*, edited by Aurora Cano Andaluz (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1993).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a "working-out" of buried or suppressed memories (1975, 21). As Mexico inched its way toward authentic democracy, the possibilities of recall were vastly increased. The gradual "apertura" of Mexico's democratic system during the presidencies of Carlos Salinas de Gortari and Ernesto Zedillo gave rise to several publications that have resurrected the issue of Tlatelolco. The most notable was the 1999 release of *Parte de guerra*, in which former Secretary of Defense Marcelino García Barragán shared documents that prove beyond a doubt that troops were indeed ordered to kill protesters and put an end to the movement.[5]

Another possible explanation for the recent surge of interest in Tlatelolco is that those who experienced it as idealistic young students have now reached full maturity as artists or have finally come to grips with this painful memory of their youth. As Elena Poniatowska observed in *La noche de Tlatelolco*, the massacre left behind not only hundreds of dead victims but thousands of survivors who were scarred for life: "muchos jóvenes marcados de por vida, muchos se quedaron para siempre rumiando los recuerdos del 68" (1971, 59). When asked why it took him three decades to write a play about his experience of 1968, playwright Miguel Angel Tenorio responded: "Creo que se necesitaba distancia. La cercanía opacaba el entendimiento. Ahora me interesa que 68 no se vuelva un mito, una entelequia, sino algo que nos permita adquirir una experiencia . . . que Tlatelolco no se vuelva a repetir."[6] According to Enrique Krauze, the remembering of 1968 responds as much to the present political context as to the past: "The great majority of the leaders of the Student Movement of 1968—now in their fifties—are seeking some way to change the life of Mexico in the direction of democracy, so as to give meaning to the sacrifice that 'broke' them. Many of them—and their generation—will also bear profound scars, but they have mended themselves, and they are acting 'for Mexico'" (Krauze 1997, 731).

Finally, in a more universal sense, the insistent remembering and "re-membering" (reconstruction) of Tlatelolco reflects the postmodern obsession with marginal testimonies and with collective memories long repressed and usurped by official history.[7] As Jeanette Malkin explained in

5. Volpi notes that following the highly fraudulent elections of 1988, Mexican society steadily increased pressure on the ruling PRI to carry out a substantial political reform. Among the historical events that revived, albeit briefly, the spirit of 1968, Volpi mentions, in addition to the elections of 1988, the earthquake of 1985, the 1994 assassination of PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio, the outbreak of the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, and the elections of 1997, in which opposition parties won several important state-level elections.

6. Personal E-mail to the author, 3 Mar. 2000.

7. I use the term *postmodern* in accordance with the theory of Linda Hutcheon. In both *The Poetics of Postmodernism* and *The Politics of Postmodernism*, she describes this literary movement as not so much an ideology as a style characterized by indeterminacy, discontinuity, fragmentation, and transgression, a style that in its nature questions the dominant mode of thought. For a more thorough discussion of Mexican theatre's postmodern treatment of official history, see my recent essay (Bixler 1997).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

her study on memory-theatre, traumas, taboos, and repression are the stuff of postmodernism: "Postmodernism is crucially bound up with agendas of remembrance and forgetting, serving, at least in part, to re-call the past from repression or from its canonized 'shape' in order to renegotiate the traumas, oppressions, and exclusions of the past" (Malkin 1999, 1). Because of the slow democratization of Mexico, the growing maturity of former participants and witnesses, and the postmodern craving for testimony, the long-repressed memories of Tlatelolco have not faded into oblivion but continued to inspire dramatic imaginations in seeking both an audience and an answer.

Although a considerable number of novels, poems, chronicles, and essays have addressed the issue of Tlatelolco, the theatre offers additional dimensions in its eternal present, its social immediacy, and its direct link with the audience. Memories take place live on stage as the characters relive them in their minds. Moreover, direct contact is made with an audience who directly or indirectly is made to feel a part of the past and present action. Whether experienced on the page or on the stage, theatre is relatively simple and direct, yet it provides a sense of immediacy and a metaphorical quality not normally a part of essays or documentaries. Furthermore, most of the dramas of the *sesentaiocheros* were written in the 1980s and 1990s, whereas poetic and novelistic treatment of the events of 1968 virtually ceased by the end of the 1970s. This difference among genres suggests that the theatre, with its ability to maintain an eternal present, is a more effective medium in keeping the memories of Tlatelolco alive.

Memory, History, and Memory-Theatre

Galván's anthology, *Teatro del 68*, contains thirteen plays that re-create these memories in diverse dramatic forms while exhibiting certain common features: a focus on the student movement and its tragic climax; a fragmented mixture of past and present, of history and fiction; an emphasis on the family as a microcosm of the state; integration of music, poetry, slogans, and official discourse from the 1960s; and themes centering on youthful love, generational conflict, and the loss of innocence and ideals. In addition to these technical and thematic similarities, several of the plays also fit into the parameters of what Malkin terms *memory-theatre*. Its intent is to "evoke erased memories of national pasts, to recontextualize, reopen canonized memory-'narratives,' rethink taboo discourses, intervene in the politics of memory and repression, and to engage (and occasionally enrage) the memoried consciousness of its audience—with whose memory, and repression, these plays are in constant dialogue" (Malkin 1999, 3). While all the plays in the anthology refer explicitly or implicitly to the events of 1968, four of them foreground the act of remembering: Emilio Carballido's *Conmemorantes* (1981); Adam Guevara's *Me enseñaste a querer* (1988); José Vásquez Torres's *Idos de octubre* (1993); and Miguel Angel Tenorio's *68: Las heridas y los recuerdos* (1998).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

These pieces share the common purpose of rescuing the past from repression and oblivion and renegotiating the traumas produced first by the massacre and then by its official silencing. The span of time over which these four works appeared, from 1981 to 1998, also affords an opportunity to consider the changing nature of the memories themselves and their relationship to the present, the dramatic form in which they are presented, and the audience for whom they were written.

Unlike the documentary theatre of Vicente Leñero or the antihistorical *Coronas* of Rodolfo Usigli, what might be called the Tlatelolco cycle is concerned not with revising history but with making sure that history is not forgotten. As French historian Pierre Nora observed, the transition from the actual history to the process of memory obviates the issue of factuality by requiring a shift from "the historical to the psychological, from the social to the individual, from the objective message to its subjective reception, from repetition to rememoration" (1989, 15). Thus the documented actual events of 1968 serve merely as a historical backdrop against which the dramatists reenact, re-create, and fictionalize memories of the massacre and its aftermath. What makes these works so intriguing is not the Tlatelolco experience itself, which is familiar to all Mexicans in the form of popular knowledge, but the shaping and reshaping of memory. They form part of what Volpi calls "la historia intelectual," not the official history fabricated and maintained by the government yet also not the unofficial history provided in the documentary texts of Poniatowska, Ramírez, and others. In the end, Tlatelolco is neither fact nor fiction but an inextricable blend of fact, memory, myth, and emotion. As Tlatelolco participant Gilberto Guevara Niebla has explained:

> El estudiantil de 1968 fue un gran movimiento. Cambió la historia del México moderno. Pero en la textura de su evocación se mezclan, no siempre discernibles, la política y el mito. La política es el componente racional, inteligente, que se mide con la relación de fines y medios. El mito, en cambio, es un relato estructurado simbólicamente que se vincula emotivamente con el hecho histórico. La sola mención de *el Movimiento* evoca entre los sesentayocheros imágenes múltiples: despierta un sentimiento de nostalgia, suscita una emoción heroica compartida. El Movimiento es un estereotipo que condensa muchas cosas, fuertes todas ellas: impresiones imborrables en el alma. (Guevara Niebla 1995, 81)

Flashbacks, evocations, apparitions, and nostalgic monologues bring the past into the present, as the characters willingly or unwillingly remember the days of 1968. This kind of theatre is in essence a "theatre of the mind," for the mind is the stage on which the memories appear and historical events are replayed. In turn, these performed memories become dialogues with the knowledge and memory of the audience, as the spectators' own personal memories or knowledge of the events of 2 October surge forth and mingle with those of the characters and actors.

Memory and its representations are currently part of a much larger

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

critical debate spurred by the postmodern obsession with historical revisionism and marginal testimonies but also by the nightmarish events of the twentieth century—the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, the Dirty War in Argentina, and the thousands of *desaparecidos* and other victims of military repression in the Southern Cone, to mention just a few. As Kerwin Lee Klein noted recently, "Academics speak incessantly of memory because our epoch has been uniquely structured by trauma" (2000, 138). "'Memory' is the new critical conjunction of history and theory . . . [and] has become the leading term in our new cultural history" (Klein 2000, 128). Although memory and history were once regarded as irreconcilable forms of knowledge, postmodern theorists—in their zeal to erase boundaries—have proposed that memory and history are indeed interdependent.

Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, for example, claimed that memory acts as a safeguard by challenging "the biases, omissions, exclusions, generalizations, and abstractions of history" (Davis and Starn 1989, 5). In a similar attempt to reconcile history and memory, Pierre Nora proposed the concept of "*lieux de mémoire*" or sites of memory. These sites are cultural and historical remnants that grant a sense of historical continuity while informing our collective memory and identity. They are usually sites of trauma, that produced by the original historical episode as well as that produced by recalling it. Davis and Starn described them as "'places' where memories converge, condense, conflict and define relationships between past, present, and future" (1989, 3).

One of Mexico's most notable lieux de mémoire is the Plaza de Tlatelolco, whose historical continuity is evident in the mixture of architecture from pre-Hispanic, colonial, and modern days and in the unfortunate continuity of the practice of human sacrifice, from the Aztec *tlatoani* (rulers) to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional on 2 October 1968. For Octavio Paz, contemporary events in Tlatelolco are nothing but a metaphor of the past: "la relación entre la antigua Plaza de Tlatelolco y la Plaza Mayor de México se repite ahora en la conexión entre la nueva Plaza de las Tres Culturas y el Zócalo con su Palacio Nacional" (1970, 149–50). Tlatelolco exemplifies the curious ambiguity of the Spanish word *sitio*, which means both place and siege. Accordingly, the Plaza de Tlatelolco is a place of physical as well as spiritual resistance, marking the spot of the 1968 massacre as well as the last place surrendered by the Aztecs to the Spanish conquerors. Today, Tlatelolco serves not only a material function as a concrete marker of momentous historical events but also a symbolic and ritual function as the site of the silent candle-lighting ceremony that takes place every year on 2 October, when thousands appear in the plaza to remember those who fell.[8]

8. In a highly symbolic gesture in 1998, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, mayor of Mexico City and member of the opposition Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), declared 2 October a day of national mourning and ordered flags to be flown at half-mast. This act marked the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

While the Plaza de Tlatelolco serves as the site of memory, the plays themselves perform as countermemories by contradicting the official history maintained by the government, which continues to be "Aquí no pasó nada." Michel Foucault employed the term *countermemories* to refer to residual or resistant forms of knowledge that withstand the official versions of history. As Davis and Starn commented, the term "suggests that memory operates under the pressure of challenges and alternatives" (1989, 2). Suggestibility, censorship, hindsight, conflicting recollections, and the pressures of interests are just a few of the obstacles that impede faithful remembrance. As Nora explained, "Memory is life. . . . It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting . . . , vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation" (1989, 8). Yet as a repository of knowledge, of lived experiences (however undocumented they may be), memory is nonetheless a form of power that can be used collectively against other forms of knowledge.

Four Examples of Tlatelolco Memory-Theatre

A brief discussion of four examples of "el teatro sesentaiochero" will help to illustrate the different ways in which Mexico's dramatists have both remembered and re-membered (reconstructed) the memories of Tlatelolco. These particular plays have been selected for their focus on the act of remembering and because they span seventeen years and thus reflect a changing cultural debate regarding the events of 1968. As the title of Emilio Carballido's one-act play suggests, the objective of *Conmemorantes* is precisely to *conmemorar*, not merely to remember but to remember with intensity.[9] Unlike most of Carballido's theatre, this piece is highly ceremonial and devoid of humor. The uncharacteristic seriousness derives from the subject matter as well as from the influence of Japanese Noh drama, which the author acknowledges on the title page: "Concebida a partir de *Sumida Gawa*, drama Noh." Accordingly, *Conmemorantes* relies on ritual, dance, music, simple suggestion, stylization, and a small cast to foreground the act of memory and to evoke a highly emotional atmosphere.

In relating ceremonial drama to the more general notion of histori-

first official commemoration of that fateful day. It is also exemplifies what Hartman calls "collective memory," which "shapes a gradually formalized agreement to transmit the meaning of intensely shared events in a way that does not have to be individually struggled for. Canonical interpretation takes over, ceremonies develop, monuments are built. An event is given a memory-place (*lieu de mémoire*) in the form of statue, museum or concentration camp site, and annually repeated day. The repetition involves public rituals that merge individual sorrow or joy with communally prescribed forms of observance" (1994, 15–16).

9. Carballido wrote two other short plays that also relate to the events of 1968: *Unete pueblo* and *La pesadilla*. Both were written in 1977 and published in the fourth edition of Carballido's anthology of one-act plays, *D.F.* (Carballido 1978).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

cal drama, Herbert Lindenberger observed that although ceremonial drama "elevates the general over the particular, to the extent that it celebrates a single nation or a national tradition, it cultivates one type of particular, namely that of place" (1975, 83). Carballido foregrounds both the act and the site of memory in *Conmemorantes* when a nameless mother, an embodied memory, returns to the Plaza de Tlatelolco on the second of October to remember her dead son. Her personal journey into the past becomes a collective memory when other actors join her on the dark, empty stage. As part of the yearly ritual, they light candles, which provide the sole source of lighting and also serve a symbolic purpose in that each flame represents one of the fallen. In their anonymity, the actors play multiple roles as victims, survivors, and those too young to have been there. Yet they all revolve around the mother, the archetypal *madre sufrida* who has spent years silently waiting outside jails, morgues, and bureaucratic offices in hopes of discovering the truth about her son. *Conmemorantes* plays on the truth and lies of the historical record as the mother recalls her futile attempts to obtain information. Her nameless son represents both an irreplaceable individual and one of the masses: "Conmemoramos tu ausencia, que es la de todos. Tu vida, que es la de muchos" (p. 104).

This act of collective remembering occurs not freely but amidst soldiers, tanks, and the forces of official history: "Quieren reprimir hasta la sombra de los muertos, hasta el recuerdo. ¡Que disparen contra el recuerdo!" (p. 103). In a 1997 performance in Puebla, the use of a former prison as a staging area created an atmosphere of repression while re-creating the entrapment of the actual victims. Gunshots and sirens pierced the night while projectors cast shadows and scenes from 1968 on the walls.

Through the use of dance, poetry, and repetition, Carballido condenses, stylizes, and ritualizes the act of memory, juxtaposing young and old, past and present, life and death, hope and hopelessness. A lasting and beautiful tribute to those who died in the Plaza de Tlatelolco, *Conmemorantes* rekindles the flames of lives prematurely snuffed out. At one point, a group of young people explain their presence in the plaza, "No olvidamos," to which the mother responds, "No, no lo olviden," a mandate clearly designed to extend to the audience as well (p. 103).

Whereas *Conmemorantes* is concerned with combating the suppression of memory at the national level, Adam Guevara's *Me enseñaste a querer* counters a more personal form of amnesia, that of family survivors.[10] In de-

10. Born in 1941, Guevara was enrolled as a theatre student at the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes when the student movement started. As he explained, he was just one of the masses, but as part of that generation, he has continued to speak and to protest: "Yo no fui [protagonista], fui uno más . . . muchos hemos permanecido en distintas áreas y no tenemos miedo a hablar, a expresarnos, a decir; pienso que a veces somos una especie de francotiradores, no somos capaces de crear un ejército, pero estamos constantemente hablando, no hemos perdido esa capacidad, la necesidad de manifestarnos" (Reyes Palacios 1998, 69).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

scribing the relationship that exists between historical drama and the concept of power, Lindenberger noted an "analogy between family relationships and those that define society as a whole" (1975, 155). Guevara's play portrays in one long act an entire family struggling with memories of 1968. The family in turn serves as a microcosm of the Mexican state, wherein each member represents a particular aspect of present or past politics.

As in *Conmemorantes*, the present action of *Me enseñaste a querer* occurs on the second of October, but twenty years after the massacre. Three generations of women, all related to Tlatelolco victim Santiago, plan to spend the day commemorating his death and participating in public demonstrations. Frequent flashbacks explain the characters' current feelings of pain and guilt, as each relives memories of the past. The family's home, like the city itself, provides no protection or respite from the past: "Espacio abierto: evocaciones, sugerencias, todo como una cárcel, la ciudad" (p. 108). Santiago's father, haunted by memories of his own passivity during the earlier labor strikes of the 1950s, suffers silently while maintaining aloud that the victims of Tlatelolco got only what they deserved. Son-in-law Javier is a wealthy Priísta who has spent the last two decades working the system and nullifying the past beliefs of Susana, his wife and Santiago's sister. Javier's discourse shows that the ruling party has not changed since 1968: "Lo único necesario en este país es conservar el orden y la tranquilidad" (p. 116). All hope for the future resides in the granddaughter. Despite her father's authoritarian control and her grandfather's self-imposed amnesia, Alma insists that the answer to the future lies in the past: "Lo que vivimos hoy es el resultado de muchos años atrás y no es ignorándolo, como se va a resolver" (p. 130). Guevara reinforces this message through the continuous onstage presence of a cadaver, a victim of contemporary street violence as well as a constant reminder of the slain Santiago. As the curtain falls, Susana inquires as to what they should do with the body. Javier answers, "Ahí se queda. No es el momento de andar reviviendo muertos." And Susana adds, "Hasta que sepamos qué hacer con él" (p. 145). These closing lines suggest that even two decades later, Mexicans remain uncertain about how to deal with their memories of Tlatelolco and its "muertos."

Music from the 1960s combines with a creative use of the stage space and rapid costume changes to allow for free movement between past and present in *Me enseñaste a querer*. Alternation between the two time frames is further complicated by metatheatrical scenes in which the actors rebel against their assigned roles and momentarily abandon them to reenact their personal participation in the movement of 1968.[11] In portraying three different

11. This play set the stage for Guevara's 1991 play *¿Que si me duele? ¡Sí!* and also deals with Tlatelolco in a multilayered historical context with a heavy dose of metatheatrical role-playing. In the later play, however, the characters play the roles of actors who are portraying historical roles (like Zapata, Carranza, Calles, and Obregón) in a movie being filmed at the begin-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

generations, Guevara situates the play within a historical context that includes events before and after Tlatelolco, such as the labor strikes of the 1950s, the earthquake of 1985, and today's narcoterrorism. The overlapping scenes of past and present corruption, extortion, and violence confuse even the characters at times, but these scenes ultimately suggest that the events of 1968 are simply part of a larger pattern of repression and injustice. Alma was not even born when the massacre took place, yet her recollections of the 1985 earthquake could be equally applied to the events of 1968: "Era urgente olvidarlo, tragarse la memoria, reconstruir la ciudad y borrar todo rastro" (p. 142). The levels of contextualization expand as time goes by, for the remembered events are framed by the historical milieu in which the play was written and by more recent events such as the Zapatista movement, prolonged university strikes, and daily protests in the Zócalo.

The third play, *Idos de octubre* by José Vásquez Torres, is short but surprisingly complex in its fusion of past and present, young and old, euphoria and cynicism. Víctor is a middle-aged contemporary Secretary of State, alone in his luxurious government office and expecting at any moment the *destape* (public announcement) that will designate him as the presidential pre-candidate for the ruling party. The only other character is seventeen-year-old Lourdes, who appears as part of a memoried past that interrupts and disrupts his daily routine.[12] With liberal use of music from the 1960s and the poetry of Jaime Sabines, Vásquez Torres sets these flashbacks in an atmosphere of youthful passion and idealism. The alternation of past and present scenes reveals that the young man who in 1968 vowed to become president and change the country has since sold his soul to the Mexican political system. As Víctor anxiously awaits the big phone call, he is haunted by memories of Lourdes and a loud Zapatista protest in the Zócalo, both of which ultimately force him to acknowledge his betrayal of the ideals of the movement. Each time Victor tries to dispel these images and memories, a strong wind enters the office and knocks a large poster of the Plaza de Tlatelolco off the wall. Whereas the "idos" of the past were the "locos" of the plaza, carried away by their youthful passion, the "idos" of the present are those like Víctor who have turned their back on the past. Although he clings to the idea of changing the system, Lourdes informs him, "Es el mismo [sistema] que nos ha negado un lugar en la historia" (p. 207). The elegant suit hanging beside him in anticipation of the destape is as empty as the façade

ning of October 1968. The mixture of past and present, Tlatelolco and film, and movie roles and real-life roles makes for a complex commentary on how the past lives on and continues to haunt the present.

12. José Vásquez has explained that the past level of action is entirely autobiographical, from the fact that he saved himself by hiding in a water tank to the list of the desaparecidos, which included his girlfriend as well as several close friends. Personal E-mail communication to the author, 18 Apr. 2001.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the man who once promised to change Mexico. Forced by Lourdes to recognize his own betrayal, he confesses: "El tiempo te cambia. La edad te toma. El medio te infesta de tumores malignos. De pronto, te ves rodeado de cadáveres de ilusiones. Tus ideales transmutan en piltrafas que arrastras muchos años, hasta que un día sin darte cuenta te desgajan de tu cuerpo para quedar tendidas en el camino" (p. 204).

When Víctor finally learns that he is not the *destapado* (chosen one) after all, he leaps from the window to his death, but not before sending the media photos implicating the current president in the Tlatelolco slaughter. As the lights dim, projected images show scenes of the massacre and its aftermath, while a hand wipes the dust from a government file labeled "1968," an image suggesting that the time has come to uncover the truth. Meanwhile, a voice offstage quotes poet Sabines: "Habría que lavar no sólo el piso: la memoria. Habría que quitarles los ojos a los que vimos asesinar, también a los deudos, que nadie llore, que no haya más testigos. Pero la sangre echa raíces y crece como un árbol en el tiempo" (p. 210). As this memory-play suggests, self-deception and empty promises are useless weapons against the powerful memories of Tlatelolco.

Miguel Angel Tenorio's *68: Las heridas y los recuerdos* is the most recent piece in the Galván anthology. Somewhat autobiographical, the play may also be the most postmodern in its fragmented mixing of past and present, music, football, television, and documentary footage.[13] In this work, middle-aged Pedro and Gloria are forced to recall the events of 1968 when their respective children are arrested for participating in a fight between opposing university groups. Thrust together again after decades of separation, Pedro and Gloria evoke memories of their own youthful passion and participation in the student movement.

In the few scenes that occur in the present, Pedro and Gloria acknowledge having experienced feelings of disillusionment, betrayal, and helplessness in the years following the massacre. Besieged by the past and a sense of futility, Pedro decides that it is finally time to do something with their memories: "Algo hay que hacer, no dejar que nuestra memoria se empolve, que se pierda con el tiempo" (p. 284). The play suggests the cyclical nature of history, as the younger generation (like Alma in *Me enseñaste a querer*) prepares to carry out the task that Gloria and Pedro were forced to leave undone. Just before the final curtain falls, their two children express a desire to "juntar recuerdos" by filming the audience and soliciting their collective memories.

13. In a letter to the author, Miguel Angel Tenorio admitted that his play is based on his own personal experiences in the student movement. Like Pedro, Tenorio played U.S. football, participated in the movement, realized too late that some of the student leaders were colluding with the government, and unwittingly avoided a possible early demise on 2 October when he accompanied his father to Manzanillo, where he stayed until things cooled down in Mexico City. Like Pedro, Tenorio went on to work in television and to write about his youthful experiences with the student movement.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

One of them comments, "Tengo la impresión de que muchos de ellos también tienen algo que decir" (p. 287). According to Malkin, the primary goal of memory-theatre is to provoke audience participation by unleashing repressed memories: "These plays prevail upon the audience to actively coproduce the spectacle being seen and perhaps 'work through' a collective historical wound" (1999, 31). Just as the dramatist has worked through his own personal memories, Tenorio now invites the spectators to follow suit and share buried memories with the actors and other members of the audience.

Levels of Audience

To carry out its political agenda, memory-theatre tends to stage traumatic memories that produce complex audience responses. As Malkin has explained, "The political effect of postmodern (memoried) art depends crucially on its interaction with the (memoried) audience for whom it is meant at a given time" (1999, 214). Yet while the audiences of these Tlatelolco plays are likely to be complicitous, they are not likely to be unidimensional but a mixture of various ages, each one experiencing the play and remembering in a different way. Some of the older spectators, like the grandfather in *Me enseñaste a querer*, may recall unwillingly in the belief that Tlatelolco is better forgotten, while middle-aged spectators are more likely to experience the traumatic resurgence of memories long suppressed or buried in their subconscious, or at least to feel nostalgia for a lost era of love and idealism. Still others, the so-called "epigones," like Alma and the children of Pedro and Gloria, will experience the anxiety of having been born too late and the desire to know the truth and understand the events of 1968. José Vásquez, author of *Idos de octubre*, has observed that both young and old experience sadness and indignation:

> . . . he observado que en efecto asisten muchos jóvenes con ese afán de conocimiento de la antithistoria. Con esa empatía natural por su edad y por supuesto que la obra . . . les mueve fibras muy finas que tienen que ver con el compromiso con el amor (que tanta falta les hace), con la libertad, con el idealismo. . . . La mayoría de la gente que va es gente que en alguna forma estuvo conectada al Movimiento Estudiantil y, en un menor porcentaje, es gente curiosa que no vivió el 68. . . . De las reacciones: lo que más me impresionó fue que en algunas funciones, al encenderse la luz, descubría yo rostros con lágrimas pero con la inconfundible marca de la indignación.[14]

Guevara's *Me enseñaste a querer*, with its multigenerational cast, reflects particularly well the different levels of audience to which these works play and the different reactions that they provoke. But whatever the personal expe-

14. E-mail to the author, 18 Apr. 2001.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

rience of the individual spectator may have been, these dramatic revisitings prompt the audience to search for answers to questions, either personal or political, that have remained uncontested or buried for over thirty years.

Conclusions

While all four works foreground the act of remembrance by staging memories, whether factual or fictitious, of the events of 1968, their composition spans seventeen years and therefore represents a gradual shift in the ways the memories of Tlatelolco have been staged and the reasons for doing so. Three of the four dramatists—Guevara, Vásquez Torres, and Tenorio—belong to what Enrique Krauze calls "la Generación del 1968," those born between 1936 and 1950. Their membership in this generation increases the likelihood that they experienced firsthand the euphoria and chaos of 1968, while their plays contain flashbacks and recollections that are to varying degrees autobiographical. Carballido's earlier birthdate (1925) and stylized representation of a mother's memories suggest that he was not as directly involved as the others in the movement per se or its tragic conclusion. This observation does not imply, however, that he was any less distraught or enraged than those who experienced the massacre directly. The longing lament of the mother of *Conmemorantes* in an ongoing atmosphere of repression conveys the sad fact that there was little that Mexicans could do in the 1970s and 1980s but light candles and remember the fallen. Guevara's *Me ensenaste a querer*, written on the twentieth anniversary of the massacre, adds a new dimension to the audience and to Mexican society by creating a new generation (represented by Alma) born after Tlatelolco but committed nonetheless to seeking the truth and keeping the memory alive. *Idos de octubre* and *1968: Las heridas y los recuerdos* mark respectively the twenty-fifth and thirtieth anniversaries of the massacre. Written during the crisis-ridden 1990s, both plays appeal to more nostalgic members of the audience by relying heavily on music, slogans, and political discourse of the 1960s to re-create the atmosphere and spirit of Tlatelolco. Both plays juxtapose past and present scenes in an immediate way to convey the idea that the images of Tlatelolco continue to haunt the protagonists in the form of "ghosts" from the past. In sum, these four dramatists have tackled the topic of Tlatelolco with increasing boldness, ranging from the sad yet passive longing of Carballido's 1981 play to the full frontal attack on the Mexican government that Vásquez stages in both the past and present levels of action in his *Idos de octubre*.

As Freddie Rokem recently explained, the performance of history erases the separation that the audience inevitably feels from past events: "The theatre 'performing history' seeks to overcome both the separation and the exclusion from the past, striving to create a community where the events from this past will matter again" (2000, xii). The past is undoubtedly

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

remembered according to the needs of the present, especially in times of crisis and change. Consequently, the flood of memory-plays about Tlatelolco is hardly surprising during a "crisis" that has included the Zapatista movement, university strikes, and student protests as well as a growing list of governmental crimes and cover-ups. The audiences attending the 1998 Tlatelolco cycle could not help but draw a parallel with the seemingly endless student strikes at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and fear that the ruling party (the same one in power in 1968) would stage an encore of its brutal performance at Tlatelolco.

The repeated dramatic re-creation of the events that led up to 2 October 1968 are part of a larger intellectual effort initiated by Octavio Paz to undermine the base of the pyramid, the pyramidal PRI that continues to exact human sacrifices in order to perpetuate itself. As Paz observed, "La crítica es el ácido que disuelve las imágenes petrificadas [de la pirámide]. . . . En nuestra época la imaginación es crítica" (1970, 155). Years ago dramatist Rodolfo Usigli posed the dilemma in his "teatro anti-histórico": "¿O teatro o silencio?" In apparent response, the dramatists of the Tlatelolco cycle have answered with words, which were the only arms borne by the students at Tlatelolco in 1968.

The dramatic revival of Tlatelolco pertains to a more general trend in current Mexican politics—the politics of remembering, a process that reopens and ultimately rewrites chapters both recent and remote, such as the conquest of Tenochtitlán, the Porfiriato, and the assassination of presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio. Even though PRI officials spent over thirty years hoping that "la noche de Tlatelolco" would slip into oblivion, this unmastered past has yet to fade away. To the contrary, as Carlos Monsiváis pointed out, "El 2 de octubre no se olvida" has become a slogan with incessant reverberations (Scherer García and Monsiváis 1999, 257). Monsiváis is echoed by Volpi: "Esta proliferación de historias de una misma historia . . . constituye una auténtica victoria sobre la manipulación y el olvido" (1998, 431). Tlatelolco simply will not go away because the true and complete story, "la verdad de la verdad," has yet to be told but also because the memories themselves are permanently engraved on Mexico's collective consciousness. Although the plaza was cleansed of stains by the next morning, the memories can never be erased.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIXLER, JACQUELINE E.

1997 "The Postmodernization of History in the Theatre of Sabina Berman." *Latin American Theatre Review* 30, no. 2 (Spring):45–60.

CARBALLIDO, EMILIO

1978 *D.F.* 4th ed. Mexico City: Grijalbo.

1983 *Más teatro joven.* Second edition. Mexico City: Editores Mexicanos Unidos.

1999 *Conmemorantes.* In GALVAN 1999, 101–5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

DAVIS, NATALIE ZEMON, AND RANDOLPH STARN
1989 "Introduction." *Representations* 26:1–6.
FLORESCANO, ENRIQUE
1991 *El nuevo pasado mexicano.* Mexico City: Cal y Arena.
FOUCAULT, MICHEL
1977 *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
FUENTES, CARLOS
1997 *A New Time for Mexico.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
GALVAN, FELIPE, ED.
1999 *Teatro del 68: Antología.* Puebla: Tablado Iberoamericano.
GUEVARA, ADAM
1999 *Me enseñaste a querer.* In GALVAN 1999, 107–45.
GUEVARA NIEBLA, GILBERTO
1995 "1968: Política y mito." In *Mitos mexicanos*, edited by Enrique Florescano, 81–86. Mexico City: Nuevo Siglo Aguilar.
HARTMAN, GEOFFREY H., ED.
1994 *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory.* Oxford: Blackwell.
HUTCHEON, LINDA
1988 *The Poetics of Postmodernism.* New York: Routledge.
1989 *The Politics of Postmodernism.* New York: Routledge.
HUTTON, PATRICK H.
1993 *History as an Art of Memory.* Burlington: University of Vermont Press.
KLEIN, KERWIN LEE
2000 "On the Emergence of 'Memory' in Historical Discourse." *Representations* 69:127–50.
KRAUZE, ENRIQUE
1996 *Tiempo contado.* Mexico City: Océano.
1997 *Mexico, Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810–1996.* Translated by Hank Heifetz. New York: Harper-Collins.
1998 *La historia cuenta.* Mexico City: Tusquets.
LINDENBERGER, HERBERT
1975 *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality.* Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press.
MALKIN, JEANETTE
1999 *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
NORA, PIERRE
1989 "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations* 26:7–25.
PAZ, OCTAVIO
1970 *Posdata.* Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno.
PONIATOWSKA, ELENA
1971 *La noche de Tlatelolco.* Mexico City: Biblioteca Era.
REYES PALACIOS, FELIPE
1998 "Ideología y grotesco en dos obras recientes de Adam Guevara." *Latin American Theatre Review* 32, no. 1 (Fall):69–79.
ROKEM, FREDDIE
2000 *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre.* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
SCHERER GARCIA, JULIO, AND CARLOS MONSIVAIS
1999 *Parte de guerra: Tlatelolco 1968.* Mexico City: Aguilar.
TENORIO, MIGUEL ANGEL
1999 *68: Las heridas y los recuerdos.* In GALVAN 1999, 257–87.
VASQUEZ TORRES, JOSE
1999 *Idos de octubre.* In GALVAN 1999, 193–210.
VOLPI, JORGE
1998 *La imaginación y el poder: Una historia intelectual de 1968.* Mexico City: Era.
YOUNG, DOLLY
1981 "Tlatelolco Literature." M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin.
1985 "Mexican Literary Reactions to Tlatelolco 1968." *LARR* 20, no. 2:71–85.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0023879100019543 Published online by Cambridge University Press