

THE MEXICAN AS SEEN BY
CONTEMPORARY ESSAYISTS

by

Martha Schweich

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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SIGNED:

Martha Schwach

APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

Renato Rosaldo

DR. RENATO ROSALDO

Head, Department of Romance Languages

10/29/65

Date

PREFACE

The publication of El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México in 1934 marked the beginning of a series of essays dealing with the character of the Mexican as opposed to that of other peoples. This study attempts to review some of the principal essayists dealing with the problem of the Mexican. It is possible to note an evolution of the theme from the beginnings of the awareness of a sense of nationality in the Mexican to a description of his characteristics and finally to a discussion of the validity of the results of the studies as philosophy. These essays signal the awareness of Mexico as a nation--they also reflect a movement among the Mexican people to know themselves and consciously plan their future. For the first time, a nation tried to develop a personal philosophy without universal pretensions. As such, the studies have value to the Mexicans themselves as guidelines to their own future, and to others as descriptions of a way of life unique to Mexico and similar to that of other Latin American nations. They also help to explain the Mexican, his character, and his way of life.

This study has no intentions of being complete: the problem could not be covered thoroughly without a discussion of several other essayists whose names appear at the end of the introduction. It is merely a sampling of the types of philosophies to come out of the discussions of the Mexican with himself.

I would like to acknowledge the guidance and assistance of Dr. Renato Rosaldo, whose many helpful suggestions aided me in the

preparation of this thesis. Special thanks also go to the members of my committee, Drs. Ruth Lee Kennedy and R. C. Allen.

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ABSTRACT

"The Mexican as seen by Contemporary Essayists" briefly reviews the development of the discovery of the uniqueness of the Mexican by Mexican writers.

Positivism, prevalent until the Mexican Revolution, was replaced in Mexico by emphasis on man's spiritual qualities.

Historicism affirmed that man's essence came from his interaction with his circumstances. Existentialism freed man from universal values and made him responsible for his own development.

Later Mexican writers who opposed Positivism based their theories first on Historicism and then on Existentialism. They described the Mexican character as produced by the interaction of man and his life situation, the essence of the Mexican, his possibilities for the future, and the place of Mexican philosophy in the modern world. They found, in general, that the Mexican tends toward a sense of inferiority, lack of will, suspicion of and withdrawal from others, and an inability to be sincere with himself. He has no essence, but lives by chance. He must be honest with himself before he can react effectively with his circumstances. A philosophy of the Mexican exists and describes a unique type of man. The lessons learned from him will be valid for all men in similar life situations.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Since the time of the Social Revolution in Mexico (1910-1920), the problem of Mexico's identity as a nation and the characteristics of her people have been treated by many of her poets, essayists, and philosophers. Often dismissed as a literary fad, the preoccupation with the problem of the Mexican character has remained alive and pertinent throughout most of the thirty years since the publication of the first important book on the subject, El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México,¹ by Samuel Ramos, in 1934.

The basis for the philosophy of the Mexican and the Mexican way of life can be found in the philosophies of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, Comte, and more recently, in the Existentialism of Heidegger and Sartre, and in Historicism as expressed by José Ortega y Gasset. Ortega y Gasset states that all philosophical systems are determined by the circumstances in which they are developed, and that they are only valid in these circumstances. They have circumstantial but not universal validity. Historicism rejects the idea that there are absolute truths in the traditional sense. The only absolute is the truth derived from man within his relative situation.² The basic problem of Mexican

1. Samuel Ramos, El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México, (México: Imprenta Mundial, 1934).

2. Abelardo Villegas, La filosofía de lo mexicano, (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960) The general outline of this chapter and the names of philosophers who influenced the Mexican essayists come from Villegas.

philosophy has become the necessity to determine whether or not philosophy can obtain truths of universal validity or only of historical or circumstantial validity. In other words, is it possible to describe the Mexican as different from any other man on earth? If so, what are his salient characteristics? If not, what can one affirm about the Mexican? Is it possible to develop a Mexican philosophy, and if so, what will be its relation to other philosophies of the world?

These questions and their answers have evolved slowly since Fray Diego Durán first wrote about the Mexican as such, from a Mexican rather than a peninsular point of view. The first man to apply a philosophical theory to Mexican culture was Gabino Barreda, who gave a speech in Guanajuato in 1867 in which he proposed to organize the education of Mexico according to the three stages of thought in the spiritual evolution of society, as explained by Auguste Comte.

Justo Sierra initiated the modern philosophical period in about 1910, when in a speech at the inauguration of the National University, he stressed the importance of adapting knowledge derived from other sources to the specific situation or circumstance of Mexico. He later defined the goals of Mexican culture as, (1) investigation of Mexican reality in relation to universal reality, and (2) use of results of the investigation to shape this reality to fit the situation of the Mexican.

During and in the years immediately following the Mexican Revolution, Mexico became increasingly aware of itself as a unique cultural entity. Then, in the 1930's, Mexico became mature enough to begin to define her goals and ideals accurately. It became evident that she had

been living in accord with foreign philosophies, but that it was necessary to live by Mexican standards if the country was to progress physically and spiritually.

The first group to occupy itself with the problems of Mexico was the Ateneo de la Juventud. Among its members was Antonio Caso, a young philosopher who attempted to steer Mexico along a course which would emphasize the role of the spirit in Mexican life. He began his work in a world preoccupied only with resolving biological problems, and based his system upon a rejection of the Positivism predominant during the time of Porfirio Díaz.

To Caso, the Revolution marked the transition between the old order of things and the new realization that Mexico must throw off the imposed culture of Positivism and develop a Mexican philosophy in which the desires of the spirit would be more important than those of the body. He urged that the Mexicans stop imitating the social and political regimes of Europe and direct their efforts toward the task of understanding the geographic, political, and artistic realities of their country. Even though the Mexican was not ready to create at this point, he should at least learn to copy with imagination.

In La existencia como economía, como desinterés y como caridad,³ he says that in the time of Porfirio Díaz existence was conceived as economy: by 'existence as economy' one understands a system in which all efforts are directed toward achieving a maximum return for a minimum

3. Antonio Caso, La existencia como economía, como desinterés y como caridad, (México: Ediciones México Moderno, 1919).

investment. The prime values of a society under this system are the acquisition of the goods necessary to feed, clothe, and shelter the members of the society; the purpose of each man to acquire as much as possible for himself without regard for others. In place of existence as economy, Caso suggests existence as charity or altruism, the qualities which exalt the human nature of man and give him complete dominion over himself. Egotism and charity seem to him the positive and the negative of existence: "En tanto la caridad es una actividad que vence al dolor, el egoísmo es el triunfo del dolor y la muerte; en tanto la caridad es ... explosión de fuerza que vence a la ley económica, el egoísmo es debilidad que se deja llevar por ella; ... [el egoísmo es] suprema falsedad, mientras que la caridad es suprema verdad."⁴ Through total altruism, man may come to know himself and to be truly the master of his own destiny.

José Vasconcelos also initiated his philosophical career fighting against Positivism. He believed that it was necessary for Mexico to form a philosophy able to save Mexico from the Anglo-Saxon invasion and the evils of Positivism. This new philosophy would be universally valid and would be based on the past experience of Mexico. Vasconcelos interpreted and personified the sentiments of an awakening people, whom he envisioned as conquering their oppressors through a greater spirituality based in the greater capacity of the Latin American to live in accord with his instincts and emotions rather than through rationalism or reason. The essence of man, in his view, was dynamic; it was all

4. Villegas, 56.

action, energy. God created this energy which then began to disintegrate, to disperse of its own accord. This great body of energy is like "... el cuerpo inmenso del demonio que va cayendo, descendiendo hacia la nada, pero en el cual la misericordia divina hace surgir ejes o estructuras que en espiral reintegran la energía al Creador."⁵ Our senses put us into contact with the concrete in our world, and reason, basing itself on the observations of the senses, puts us in contact with the universal. Through art we achieve a synthesis of the two.

Emotion is the supreme value of man; the Latin American is more emotional than most men; therefore, the Latin American is a superior human being. He is the prototype of the Cosmic Race, which eventually will achieve union and live by emotion alone. Every action which comes from sentiment will be correct. One will do as he pleases, united with his fellow men by a regard founded on love.

The philosophy of Vasconcelos is almost a Latin American mysticism exalting the spirit above all other values. The motto of the National University, supplied by Vasconcelos, is, "The spirit will speak with my voice." (Por mi raza hablará el espíritu.)

Vasconcelos and Caso both agree that a new type of Mexican society and philosophy are necessary because the old, with its emphasis on reason and science, did not fill the needs or aspirations of the Mexican. He must find his own spiritual way in the world, without imitation of others. He must seek the higher human values of love, truth,

5. Ibid., 77.

union and charity. For these two philosophers, the future of Mexico was limited only by the vision of individual men. They failed to realize that man's circumstances limit his possibilities for action, that their dreams could not be converted to reality.

Gradually, the optimism of the years immediately after the Revolution turned to pessimism as it became clear that the goals of the Revolution were far from realization. Graft and inefficiency in government led to the popular belief that government in general was inherently bad, and that the only possible attitude in the face of a hopeless situation was indifference. A defeated Mexico began to ask herself if there were not some inherent deficiency in the Mexican himself which would account for so many years of failure. Samuel Ramos published his book El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México in 1934, as an answer. He attempted to find the causes for the failure of the Mexican to develop himself and his country, his failure to close the gap between Mexican possibilities and Mexican reality. He rejected the idealistic solutions of Caso and Vasconcelos to describe the Mexican situation at that particular moment, exactly as it was and not as the Mexican saw himself or desired to be. For Ramos, the most important task of his time was to awaken somehow the consciousness of the Mexican to himself as an autonomous being. He found that the Mexican suffered from a feeling of inferiority with relation to the rest of the world, which he tended to hide under an axiological system which made virility the highest value. The Mexican realized that the Europeans were more cultured than he, and that the North Americans had more money, but he

was braver and more virile. Ramos states that the most important task facing the Mexican is to know himself--knowing his character and his worth as measured by a Mexican scale of values, he can go on to the more important task of building a more effective national life. Agustín Yáñez, in a prologue to El pensador mexicano,⁶ defines the pelado, the primitive man whose prime value is virility, in an entirely different way. The Mestizo, who is often a pelado, is a mixture of Indian and European blood. His conflict comes from the fact that he is neither American nor European. The two parts of him are in constant conflict, and this eternal struggle manifests itself in hermeticism and suspicion of others. His peladismo comes not from an attempt to cover up an inferiority complex but from his split personality and his desire to be true to himself, and to the nature of his surroundings.

The opposite of the pelado is the decent man, the bourgeois, who was described by Rodolfo Usigli, in the epilogue to El gesticulador.⁷ The man of the Mexican middle class is a hypocritical being. He is afraid of the truth, and uses every means at his disposal--mimicry or gesturing, pretending to be something he is not, and covering his inadequacies with violence to others--to keep the truth away. Usigli does not explain why the truth is so painful to the Mexican; he merely explains the process of keeping it away. A national theater could bring

6. José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, El pensador mexicano, edición y prólogo de Agustín Yáñez, (México: Ediciones de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma, 1940).

7. Rodolfo Usigli, El gesticulador, pieza para demagogos, (México: Ediciones Letras de México, 1944).

the truth out in the open, but it will not be developed while the Mexican acts constantly in real life. One can hope that the Mexican will learn to be sincere; but, meanwhile, the possibilities for a better Mexican life are left entirely to chance.

Leopoldo Zea has, from the time he began to write, been preoccupied with the problem of defining Mexican culture and analyzing it so that the lessons learned from it can be of use to other cultures. When he began to write, the phenomenological philosophies of Husserl and Scheler had been brought into view by Antonio Caso; Samuel Ramos had derived considerable material from Ortega y Gasset; José Gaos and others had expounded on the theories of Dilthey, and Existentialism as explained by Heidegger and Sartre. Positivism was well known since Barreda and the time of Porfirio Díaz. The philosophy of Zea ably sought its way among all the opposing philosophical trends of the time. His principal sources are Spanish and German Historicism, Existentialism and the Mexican philosophers before him.

Zea believes, as did Vasconcelos, that universality consists in being open to the ways of others, in receiving and giving different experiences. Before any philosophical interchange is possible, it is necessary for each nation to understand and define its own way of life. Thus, the Mexican, upon defining his way of life, contributes to the store of knowledge about man in general. Man has been thrown into a world in which he must act and react and in which he is responsible to others for his actions. His only freedom is a freedom of attitude. While Ramos tended to blame the ills of his country on its ancestors,

Zea feels that man is responsible for his past as well as for the present. He must accept the past, and the limitations on his freedom of action which it imposes, and with this as a background, analyze the possibilities for the future.

Emilio Uranga searches primarily for two things in the Mexican: his uniqueness, the characteristics or qualities which make him different from men of other cultures, and his essence, the foundations of his being.

The "being" or essence of the Mexican is accidental: that is, his essence and his task is to live by chance, open to all possibilities. His characteristics are; sentimentality and emotionalism; lack of will; preoccupation with a personal sense of dignity; a sense of fragility, of being too open to the world; and melancholy and introspection. These characteristics come from his accidental nature, which leaves him without a center for his being, with a void where his substance should be. The European sees himself as substantial, and gives himself universal values. However, Uranga seriously doubts that there are universal values.

Octavio Paz, in his El laberinto de la soledad,⁸ makes a character study of the Mexican and discusses the history of Mexico in a manner similar to that of Ramos, with less objectivity, but much more beauty of style. He speaks on practical and ideal levels, and in the appendix of the book "Dialéctica de la soledad", suggests that man must

8. Octavio Paz, El laberinto de la soledad, (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959).

reject the world of reason and return to a life based on instinct in which time will be suppressed, and man will be able to live in contact with the natural world. He shares with Vasconcelos, Caso, and Uranga a desire to base life on instinct more than on reason. In contrast, Ramos and Usigli seem to side with reason and Zea takes no stand.

José Gaos, a Spanish exile who was a major historian of the movement to define the character of the Mexican, both explained and criticized the positions taken by the various writers treated here. He believed that man in general, and the Mexican in particular, should be approached as a historical being and not through the definition of his characteristics or way of life. The historical nature of man, the fact that he lives within the limits of time, makes an analysis of him on the basis of perdurable essences or substances of questionable validity. "[Los hombres] ... no serían definibles, sino historiables."⁹ Rather than try to develop a phenomenological study of the Mexican, one should make a historical description of him. This method is probably more valid than that of simple definition, because, in order to write about man's history, one must use certain generic terms expressing characteristics of groups, bringing together history and universal values.

The purpose of the analyses of the Mexican is not to try to make him static, but to define him dynamically, actively. This means that the essence of the Mexican is constantly being formed, and forming

9. José Gaos, En torno a la filosofía mexicana, (México: Porrúa y Obregón, 1953), 28.

and constructing itself. There is a noticeable will to produce, to create the Mexican.

Abelardo Villegas, the most recent historian of the movement to discover the character of the Mexican who has come to this writer's attention, analyzes the previous writers and finds that they all stumble over the problem of circumstantial versus universal truths, over what qualities, if any, are peculiar to the Mexican and which are common to all men. In order to avoid completely the problem of man's circumstantiality, and, therefore, the problem of whether or not there can be a Mexican philosophy, Villegas, in La filosofía de lo mexicano, takes the point of view that history is formed by men who are more original than others. The degree of existence of a man depends on his creative abilities, which are different in each man, and the origin or root of individuality of man is based on his ability to create. History is concerned only with those men who possess more originality and, therefore, have a more outstanding existence. Each man forms his own life; his originality is what makes him human. A philosophy of the Mexican should strive to define the peculiarities of the Mexican, the qualities which make him different from other peoples. Every man has the duty to give to humanity the knowledge of life which he has gleaned from his own experiences, the creations for which he is responsible by virtue of his own personal characteristics. Turning inward upon himself to discover the creativeness he possesses and making known the products of his own unique mind, the Mexican will contribute to the rich store of knowledge which mankind has acquired about himself.

A thorough study of the movement to discover the character of the Mexican should mention such men as Justo Sierra, Xavier Villaurrutia, Edmundo O'Gorman, Jesús Silva Herzog, Jorge Carrión, Alfonso Reyes, Salvador Reyes Nevarez, Daniel Cosío Villegas, José Iturriaga, and many others. However, the writer believes that a more detailed study of the ideas of six of the authors mentioned in this chapter and a comparison of their writings will give a fairly complete study of the movement within the prescribed limits of time and space.

CHAPTER II

Samuel Ramos:

El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México.

Samuel Ramos was the first of the post-revolutionary philosophers to discuss the characteristics of the Mexican in a logical and realistic manner. In contrast to Vasconcelos and Caso, who looked for the ideal in the Mexican, Ramos searched for the defects which made him incapable of developing an effective national life. El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México, first published in 1934, was for many years a solitary voice in the wilderness, as Ramos himself has pointed out.¹ His ambition was to discuss the characteristics which make the Mexican different from other peoples. Rodolfo Usigli writes that Ramos found it necessary to open a way for himself between the two great Mexican philosophers of the day, Caso and Vasconcelos; a considerable task for a young and unknown philosopher with a distasteful message for his people.

"Filósofo de línea Vasconcelista primero, de personalísima originalidad y honda percepción en El Perfil del Hombre, no fue Samuel una figura fulgurante como su maestro, cosa por demás difícil, pero combatió toda su vida por la cultura -- combate activo --, atento a todos los desenvolvimientos filosóficos de su tiempo, precursor de una brillante línea de la filosofía mexicana contemporánea, humanista modelo."²

1. Samuel Ramos, "En torno a las ideas sobre el mexicano," Cuadernos Americanos, LVII, (May-June, 1951), 103-14.

2. Nuestro Samuel Ramos, homenaje, recopilación de Adela Palacios, "Y ahora, Samuel Ramos," de Rodolfo Usigli, (México: A. del Bosque, 1960), 114.

In the first part of the book, Ramos analyzes the history of Mexico to obtain the principal characteristics of the Mexican and the development of his culture. The historical framework established, Ramos fills in with an analysis of the man who has formed and been formed by his history. The book ends with suggestions of what man and culture in Mexico should be in light of past experiences and future possibilities. The central ideas of the book are that Mexico has always had a culture of imitation and that the Mexican has an inferiority complex which must be eradicated if he is to fulfill his destiny.

Ramos believes that man, given a specific set of circumstances and a specific history, will necessarily develop character traits based on these two factors. The history of Mexico holds many factors which degrade the Mexican and make him feel inferior. The environment of Mexico is hostile to man. Therefore, Mexican culture will reflect a sense of inferiority.

Ramos gives nine factors which have formed the character of the Mexican.

1. Self-denigration. The culture of Mexico is not original. It was not derived from the evolutive capacity of the native population, but from a melding of indigenous and European cultures, with the latter dominant. European culture has served as a refuge for those who wish to deny origins they consider inferior. This self-denigration, with the failures resulting from excessive imitation of foreign ways of life not readily adaptable to Mexico, has resulted in a defensive spirit of nationalism in Mexico in recent times.

2. Imitation. Mexicans have long unconsciously imitated the cultures of other countries in order to hide the supposed inferiority of the indigenous culture. The imitation serves as a defense mechanism, but an insufficient one, since the Mexican has not the patience or the calm necessary to assimilate more than the image or surface of foreign culture. "La cultura desde este momento pierde su significado espiritual y sólo interesa como una droga excitante para aliviar la penosa depresión íntima."³ One sees the best example of unwise imitation of foreign culture in the adaptation of the North American Constitution to Mexico with the resultant disunity of a country previously united.

The imitation of ideas has led to a lamentable division between ideological goals and reality. Because of too-idealistic laws which cannot be effectively enforced, reality becomes illegal; when we add to this necessity to flaunt the law in daily life and a tendency to blind rebellion, the long series of revolutions in Mexico is easily understood.

3. Lack of historical evolution. History is formed by events rising from social necessities and following an orderly progression. In Mexico, "history" tends to be an endless repetition of events leaving the country and its people no better off than before. This is due to the blind force of individualism which has no goal but the affirmation of itself. Thus, Mexico has an anti-history which blocks progress.

4. Spanish civilization in Mexico. Mexico's derived culture should come from assimilation, not from imitation. Transplanting and

3. Samuel Ramos, El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México, (2nd ed., México: Editorial Pedro Robredo, 1938), 13.

assimilation are the two stages in the development of a derived culture. The two most important vehicles of transportation were language and religion. The Catholic leaders, in order to keep the New World's Catholics in the path of orthodoxy, eliminated all sources of culture but their own. The Church thus prescribed both the social and religious codes of the Creole culture, which now predominates and gives a conservative tone to the middle class.

The more individualistic a Spaniard is, the more Spanish he is considered to be. He has passed his individualism on to the Mexican.

5. Influence of the environment. Spanish individualism and other characteristics have been modified by three environmental factors which are: (a) Upon the arrival of the Spaniards a civilization already existed. Its members readily adopted Spanish ways because their own civilization was no longer serving their needs. (b) The vast expanses of Latin America were an obstacle to effective colonization. Man became all too aware of his insignificance in the face of a formidable environment. (c) Racial mixture produced a man who was neither Indian nor European, who felt lost between two opposing cultures, a member of neither.

6. Colonial servitude. The colonial social order suppressed the will and initiative of the native peoples, who were forced to work to maintain the living standards of the conquerors and colonizers. Commerce was monopolized by small shopkeepers who concentrated on getting rich quick and returning to Spain. The benefits of mining and agriculture went to Spain. The educated man became either a lawyer or

a priest. The middle class lived on bureaucracy. The masses were reduced to living at a near or below subsistence level, in perpetual inactivity and poverty. The monotonous life perpetuated the inertia of will and destroyed any impetus toward renovation.

7. Indigenous "Egyptianism." The Indian before the conquest was conservative and lived in rigid conformity to his traditions. "En el estilo de su cultura quedó estampada la voluntad de lo inmutable."⁴ Indian art, for example, follows specific patterns which accentuate the static and unchanging, the internal apathy and insensibility to the flux of life. Thus, the Indian does not comprehend a society whose law is flux or change. This static spirit has penetrated all aspects of Mexican society.

8. Beginning of independent life. The Mexican after Independence wanted to change his hermetic way of existence, but did not know how to do so. His will was too weak to help him carry out his dreams, which at the same time were too ambitious and not in accord with the Mexican manner of life. The resultant failures and difficulties brought a sense of inferiority. Reality, at the beginning of the nineteenth century was: (1) a heterogeneous race divided by the geography of Mexico; and (2) an economically poor and uncultured mass of people; the Indian passive and indifferent; and the active minority obsessed with an exaggerated individualism resulting from a sense of inferiority and in rebellion against unaccustomed order and discipline. The major problems were the lack of education of the people and the faltering economy.

4. Ibid., 36.

However, the political problem became the most important to the country's leaders, with the unfortunate result of chaos in other areas.

9. Influence of France in the nineteenth century. Without a doubt, foreign cultures have penetrated to the soul of the Mexican in some cases. The Mestizo is very fond of politics. He tends to imitate the things he admires, and he admires France. The passion for French political ideas made attractive the assimilation of French culture in general. The French political ideology included liberalism as opposed to political oppression, democracy as against monarchy, Jacobinism and lay government instead of clericalism. Thus, the active politicians or statesmen in Mexico used the French ideology as a weapon against the traditional institutions of Spain.

Although the results may seem disagreeable to some, the psychoanalysis of the Mexican must be made, because the character of the Mexican as it is prevents him from fulfilling his destiny. He must change, but this change cannot take place until he is able to see himself clearly.

This psychoanalysis is based on the ideas of Alfred Adler. "Debe suponerse la existencia de un complejo de inferioridad en todos los individuos que manifiestan una exagerada preocupación por afirmar su personalidad; que se interesan vivamente por todas las cosas o situaciones que significan poder, y que tienen un afán inmoderado de predominar, de ser en todo los primeros."⁵

5. Ibid., 73.

Adler maintains that the inferiority complex appears in the child when he realizes his relative lack of power or force in contrast to that of his parents. When Mexico was born, she found herself in a position approximately equal to that of a child to his parents. From this very unfavorable circumstance, the conquest, racial mixing, and the overwhelming geography of Mexico, was born a sense of inferiority. One should not infer, however, that the Mexican is in any way inferior to other peoples. He only feels inferior because he measures himself according to a scale of values which is far beyond his reach.

The Mexican collectively imitates the European culture in order to cover up his sense of inferiority about his own culture. In his private life, he creates a "self" to take the place of the real self which to him appears inferior. The pelado is the best example of the process. His name describes him well; he discovers or reveals the elemental impulses which other men try to hide. In the economic hierarchy, he is less than proletarian, and in intellectual life virtually a primitive. Life has been hostile to him in every aspect; and his attitude toward it is one of bitter, black resentment. "Es un ser de naturaleza explosiva cuyo trato es peligroso, porque estalla al roce más leve. Sus explosiones son verbales, y tienen como tema la afirmación de sí mismo en un lenguaje grosero y agresivo. Es un animal que se entrega a pantominas de ferocidad para asustar a los demás, haciéndoles creer que es el más fuerte y decidido."⁶

6. Ibid., 78.

The realization that this feigned strength does not exist tries to work its way into consciousness, but is suppressed by the mind's own self-preserving instinct. For the same reason, every exterior circumstance which may lead to a sense of inferiority meets with a violent reaction from the embattled self. This instability and lack of confidence in himself explain the pelado's constant irritability. He looks for situations in which he can bolster his faith in himself.

The terminology of the pelado abounds in allusions to the male sexual organ as a symbol of masculine power. In verbal combat, he assigns the feminine role to his opponent, thus maintaining or affirming his superior strength.

Since the pelado is, in effect, a being without substantial content, "... trata de llenar su vacío con el único valor que está a su alcance: el del macho."⁷ This exaltation of "machismo" above all other values, is no more than a camouflage to confound the pelado and all who deal with him. Thus, he must constantly maintain his image in his world. He trusts no one, and is suspicious of every man who approaches him.

In summary, the pelado has two personalities: one real, wherein lies the inferiority complex; and one fictitious, which attempts to compensate for the sense of worthlessness by maintaining the value of the "macho." Since the pelado is forced to live a constant lie, to pretend to be something he is not, his position in the world is always unstable,

7. Ibid., 80.

and he must constantly defend his adopted "self" at the expense of his real "self."

Distrust and lack of confidence in others is the most obvious Mexican character trait; the Mexican mistrusts everything that is and happens. He denies or blindly rejects everything because he is negation personified. With no real impulse or reason to live, he merely exists, without plan or pattern to his life. So one understands the disinterest of the Mexican for all but the projects with immediate goals or ends. He has sublimated one of the most important dimensions of life: the future. In a life bound by the present, passion is the controlling force. Intelligent reflection requires time, dispassionate contemplation; a realization of the past, present, and future. The Mexican lives at the mercy of the winds in, as has been stated before, a society whose norm is the flux of life. "Es natural que, sin disciplina ni organización, la sociedad mexicana sea un caos en el que los individuos gravitan al azar como átomos dispersos."⁸ Man thus finds himself in a primitive jungle in which he must fight for his life at every moment.

The Mexican is passionate and aggressive through weakness rather than strength. His vitality, for various reasons such as poor diet and disease, is low. His restlessness and excitability can be explained only as the result of his lack of psychic equilibrium.

8. Ibid., 87.

In summary, the Mexican tries to dominate others by his bravura and power. He always acts in accord with the image or "self" he has created to put himself above others, and in the end, comes to believe in the reality of the image he has created.

The sense of worthlessness in the Mexican bourgeoisie, the most intelligent and cultured group in Mexican society, derives not from an intellectual, economic, or social inferiority, but from the mere circumstance of being Mexican. He differs from the pelado only in the degree of his reactions to his inferiority complex, which he hides more successfully from the world.

The Mexican superimposes the image of what he wants to be over his real self, and then assumes that the image has become the real "self." Thus, he loses interest in reality. It is absolutely necessary that other men believe in the image in order to bolster the faith of the image-maker in his product. When the Mexican is satisfied with his image, he abandons his efforts toward self-improvement and remains static throughout his life.

Podemos representarnos al mexicano como un hombre que huye de sí mismo para refugiarse en un mundo ficticio [donde] nadie puede tocarle sin herirse. Tiene una susceptibilidad extraordinaria a la crítica ... por la misma razón la autocrítica queda paralizada. Necesita convencerse de que los otros son inferiores a él. No admite, por tanto, superioridad ninguna y no conoce la veneración, el respeto y la disciplina.⁹

...

9. Ibid., 96.

El culto del ego es tan sanguinario como el de los antiguos aztecas; se alimenta de víctimas humanas.¹⁰

The Mexican must learn to know himself if he is to eradicate his sense of inferiority. With the aid of a collective psychoanalysis, he will be able to discover who and what he is. His recovery will, then, take care of itself.

The Mexican philosophers planned a future Mexican way of life as though they were free to choose any possibility which appeared interesting, without realizing that the possibilities were limited by circumstances. Historical inheritance, the ethnic mental structure and the environment as a whole fix the destiny of a people. The Mexican has consistently acted in opposition to his destiny. He has finally become aware of his ultimate failure, which he attributes not to his attempts to transplant parts of a foreign culture, but to defects in the foreign culture itself. So he has decided to create a Mexican or indigenous culture, a patently impossible feat. The Mexican must turn to sincerity, not to another mask of his own supposed worthlessness.

Mexican culture is basically European, but the Mexican has not been able to harmonize the European spirit with conditions in the New World. Europeanism in Mexico is more than a servile imitation of another way of life. It is also a representation of Mexican belief in a universal culture and desire to enter into this culture.

The history of Mexico, above all on a spiritual plane, is the affirmation or denial of the religious spirit, which gives meaning to

10. Ibid., 97.

life. This feeling is the center of energy which nourishes the creative spirit. The conquerors and priests represented the active religious spirit which predominated until the second half of the nineteenth century. Even then, the political leaders used the same frames of thought, although the content was somewhat different. Apparently belief or religious passion in Mexico is on the wane, although the external ceremonies continue through social inertia.

The lack of a religion caused the enlightened classes to put science in the place of God. On the other hand, the religious feeling transferred to a higher plane resulted in an idealism among nineteenth century writers, the most notable of whom was José Enrique Rodó. Although Positivism had adverse effects in Mexico, it was also a factor in the liberation of Mexico from old ideas and a step toward a greater interest in the sciences.

After the regime of Porfirio Díaz, during which Positivism reached its highest point, the Ateneo de la Juventud began the work of rejuvenating the intellectual atmosphere and raising the spiritual level of Mexico.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Positivism was the dominant philosophy. The Ateneo de la Juventud temporarily created interest in culture, but this enthusiasm quickly died out. The initiation of the program to provide an education for all (1919) resulted in a faith in education as a practical necessity and the corresponding distaste or even contempt for higher education which did not produce immediate results.

Until the years 1910-1920, Mexico remained a colonial country. Its bourgeoisie dreamed of going to Europe, often to remain there for the rest of their lives. Gradually, the Mexicans gained interest in their own country; at the same time, their reverence for Europe, which was then embroiled in the First World War, diminished.

The awakening of consciousness in Mexico resulted in a rejection of European ways and a greater sense of nationalism.

El fracaso de múltiples tentativas de imitar sin discernimiento una civilización extranjera, nos ha enseñado con dolor que tenemos un carácter propio y un destino singular, que no es posible seguir desconociendo. Como reacción emanada del nuevo sentimiento nacional, nace la voluntad de formar una cultura nuestra, en contraposición de la europea. Para volver la espalda a Europa, México se ha acogido al nacionalismo ... que es una idea europea.¹¹

Mexican nationalism is negative in character, without purpose, except the denial of European influence; its result is isolation from the outside world.

European cultural norms which once predominated are being supplanted by North American ideas. "El trabajo práctico, el dinero, las máquinas, la velocidad, son los objetos que provocan las más grandes pasiones en los hombres nuevos."¹²

Modern Mexican education is based on an instrumental concept of man, in which the individual is devoured by a technically-oriented civilization; but education should be conceived as life's effort to defend itself against a civilization which prepares man to live as a perfect

11. Ibid., 137.

12. Ibid., 140.

automaton, without will, intelligence, or sentiment; in other words, without spirit or soul.

The type of culture which is created in a given region depends upon the characteristics of the race and the environment. The profile of Mexican culture can be deduced from the structure or composition of man and society, and the history of Mexico. Mexico is not the land of the "serape" and the "china poblana," and this false conception of Mexico should be discouraged. The Mexican should heed the call to live sincerely, to accept the culture predestined for Mexico, without being ashamed of its seeming poverty. In order to deny who and what they are, the Mexicans have surrounded themselves with a chaotic environment. In moments of disorientation, the Mexican should turn himself inward, return to his origins in order to renew himself there.

Culture is a function of the spirit, the purpose of which is to humanize reality. To orient themselves within the complexities of European culture, the Mexicans must understand themselves. For this, they must use scientific methods of study. Then, it may be possible to make a conscientious and thorough study of the forms of European culture which can be adopted in Mexico.

Mexico should have a Mexican culture: that is, a universal culture made Mexican, which can live with and express the Mexican spirit. It is necessary to prepare students by means of a severe education oriented toward discipline of mind and will. Concrete learning is the least important part of culture. Armed with a humanistic preparation, the student will be more likely to understand and hold Mexican

reality in high esteem, without disdaining the culture of his native land.

The theme of these essays is the destiny of the culture of Mexico. The culture of a people is not education for something: rather it exists to aid the development of a more perfect man.

There are two types of Mexican culture: (1) universal culture without roots in Mexico, and (2) picturesque and local "Mexicanism." The Mexican has yet to find himself because his development at home and in the schools has not obeyed a conscious and reflective discipline. The atmosphere of peace and tranquility necessary for normal development has been lacking.

The most important task facing Mexico is not to do good works, but to form men. To do that, it is necessary to free the Mexican from the unconscious complexes which have stunted his natural growth. These complexes come from an unreasonable self-abasement brought about by his attempts to measure himself by the standards of another culture. The Mexican should project his own possibilities, his own potential, to determine what he personally is capable of achieving instead of trying to reach the goals of other people. When the inferiority complex is relieved, the Mexican will be truly free to seek his destiny.

CHAPTER III

Rodolfo Usigli:

Epílogo sobre la hipocresía en México.

Rodolfo Usigli wrote El gesticulador, pieza para demagogos, in 1938. The play had not been presented as of 1944 because of official disapproval of its theme, which deals with the creation of a national revolutionary hero. In the play, César Rubio, the university professor, is transformed by an American university professor, his own delusions, and the Mexican people, into César Rubio the Revolutionary War general, a great hero and precursor of the Revolution who had been believed dead. Mistakenly identified as a hero by the American, Rubio, the professor, gradually takes on the attributes of the dead general, and eventually runs for governor of his state. He is killed, and immediately acclaimed as a martyr of the Revolution, an immortal hero who died defending revolutionary ideals. His own identity erased, he has become the property of the people, created to fill their need to distort and enlarge reality.

The epilogue to El gesticulador was written in order to explain the play and as a call to the Mexicans to abandon their hypocrisy, to look at themselves and their environment as they were in reality. It originated in a speech given by Usigli before the Ateneo which was not well received. The speech dealt with the incapacity of the Mexican actor to present his role effectively and the lack of a strong Mexican national theater.

Usigli began a defense of his speech with a section called "There are many ways to beat your wife." ("Hay muchas maneras de golpear a vuestra esposa.") (P. 165) To him, the Mexican is proud, egotistical, as jealous as a Moor and a Spaniard together, and possessed of a positive genius for avoiding the truth. He prides himself upon telling the truth at all times but will not allow anyone to tell the truth to him. If someone dares be truthful, he responds with brute force. He strikes out, without realizing that he is striking at the truth. The Mexican beats his wife through all the forms of his possessiveness--by his jealousy, by his masculine dominance, by his control over his salary, and by the numerous children he forces her to bear. He beats his sons by sending them to outdated private schools, his daughters by denying them the small things which are a part of growing up, such as movies and cosmetics.

The Mexican wraps his wife in a cloak which suffocates her under the guise of protecting her. She, in turn, beats her husband in multiple ways, from not sewing the buttons on his shirts to betraying him with his best friend. In the last analysis, she comes out ahead. On the one hand, she satisfies the tradition which makes the Mexican woman a sacrificing domestic heroine, proud of her slavery and her wounds; on the other, she prejudices the social and official life of her husband, with lamentable results. "Consecuencia: una multiplicación de los golpes."¹

1. Usigli, 170.

The "truth" of Mexico has been created by a long history of Mexican lies. As Samuel Ramos pointed out in El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México, the Mexican is not capable of looking at himself objectively. Throughout Mexican history, hypocrisy has been nourished. The Revolution liberated the truth for a moment; but without having reached maturity, it was hidden again. Each of the Revolutionary leaders had his own individual lie, which he attempted to make universal. "A la gran mentira colectiva de todos los tiempos --la esperanza-- se suma entonces en los caminos de la revolución un procedimiento destinado a inflar, a decorar y a publicar las mentiras individuales."² Demagogy was the means of publishing individual lies. Demagogy is Mexican hypocrisy systematized in politics. Applying Hegel's theory to Mexico, Usigli finds that from the thesis of the Revolution, hope for a better future, and from its antithesis, demagogy, comes the synthesis: the hope that some day demagogy will end.

One can almost say that the only aim of revolutions is to create heroes. The Revolution did not produce one great hero; so César Rubio, grand hero of the Revolution, as created by Usigli, remedies a grave oversight on the part of the Mexican people.

The lamentable state of the National University is the result of the disintegration of the Revolution through demagogy and hypocrisy. The lies of the Revolution are the heritage from the hypocrisy rampant during colonial times. The Spaniard, in spite of his many good and bad qualities, was not able to mold the Mexican in his image. He only

2. Ibid., 177.

managed to make him more introverted than he was before. The Mexican culture is primarily composed of essences of Spanish culture which the Mexican has never been able to bring to life without the collaboration of other cultures, primarily the French culture.

The Mexican has an infinite capacity for making himself into something he is not. The gesturing or imitation of others is a flight from all that is rhythmic and continuous. It is always opposed to reality; it is the Mexican's way of eluding reality and avoiding the truth. It lacks nobility and inspiration, becomes mere mimicry and posturing.

Mexico needs a strong Theater to be a manifestation of unity of feeling in a country. But to have a strong national theatrical movement, a country must first have racial and political unity, things which Mexico does not possess. She is capable, however, of learning to be sincere. If Mexico can abandon both the Spanish habit of living in the past and the dream of Vasconcelos of forming a Cosmic Race, she can dedicate herself to the present. The time has come to decide what Mexico is going to do in the future.

If the Mexican were conscious of his limitations and his possibilities, he would be a complete being, consciously satisfied and even proud of his destiny. But the Mexican lives by chance, and depends only upon destiny. His life is based on accidental happenings, and his hope is that the accidents be good rather than bad for him.

CHAPTER IV

Agustín Yáñez:

Prologue to El pensador mexicano.

Agustín Yáñez wrote his exposition of the pelado as opposed to the "decent man" in a preliminary study to a series of articles written by J. Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi for his newspaper, El pensador mexicano. He first explains that the national character of a people and of a culture comes from the relationship between man and his surroundings. He then makes the distinction between two types of people who have developed in Mexico and who react to their surroundings in opposite ways. The pelado is a primitive, disdainful of any factor which limits his personal freedom, and contemptuous of the educated man whose life is based on posturings and hypocrisy. These two types, the pelado and the decent man, are in implacable opposition to one another.

The pelado is a combination of Spanish ancestry and Indian origins. He feels split between the two, part of neither. The constant struggle with the two parts of himself make the Mestizo a hermetic and suspicious being. He becomes a fatalist because no other avenues of escape are open to him.

Yáñez explains in the book that the division which puts educated people on one side of a deep chasm, and pelados, the primitive and uneducated examples of brute force on the other, is a common one.

The word 'pelado' is used by the educated man to designate not only social inferiors but reformers of all types, and, generally, everyone who happens to have the audacity to think and act with spontaneity and freedom, heedless of the habits, prejudices and conventions of the educated people. The lower the social class of a person, the greater his crime if he steps outside the boundaries established for him by the upper classes. Anyone who lives in poverty may find himself the object of scorn from those above him, who call him a pelado in order to wound him and put him in his place. 'Pelado' may be a stronger or weaker term, depending on the circumstances and the character of the person using the word. It is spoken in surprise in the face of any rebellious or unexpected movement by others. "El explotador, el conservador, el hombre con fuero y privilegios no pueden aceptar ni creer que el postergado pueda alzarse y reclamar derechos, porque es un infra-hombre."¹ Any man who tries to destroy privileges, raise taxes, or help the Indians is a pelado. The worker who resorts to strikes to force a raise in wages, the servant who complains to the courts of mistreatment or reproaches his employers, the writer who comes too close to the truth or points out areas of corruption: any man whose frankness is painfully abrupt, who gives free rein to spontaneous movements or feelings which offend the sensibilities of the educated man, will be called a pelado by way of reproach for his temerity.

The educated man, the "hombre decente" or "hombre de buena educación," lives as a slave to form. He wears a mask constantly, and his

1. Yáñez, xxiii.

environment requires a conscious and continual effort toward dissimulation and hypocrisy. The mental conditioning necessary to effect the masking of his true being reduces him to a part of a man, a fragment, characterized by adherence to artificial limitations, lack of will, inability to experience true joy or happiness, frivolousness, nervousness, and susceptibility to moral asphyxiation. His unity as a human being, his true self, is destroyed by continual inhibition of a part of himself. This man calls those unlike him "pelados."

The pelado, on the other hand, feels uncomfortable within any sort of restriction, physical or moral. He searches for a physical and moral nakedness, and disdains and fights against false heroism, the deceptive kindness and hypocrisy of society, the mask of politeness, any aspect of bourgeois life and values. The pelado embodies the spirit of individualism.

The decent man and the pelado represent two mutually opposing types of human beings: one tries to mask and modify reality, while the other is more spontaneous and natural and embraces reality in all of its aspects.

The pelado reacts to all situations in the light of a strong will to be free and independent, a desire to make his own will felt by those above him socially, and his pride. He feels called upon to defend his type of existence and his wish to be free of all restraint. He is valiant and sincere in his search for freedom. He demands respect and recognition through physical violence, strong language and rude and eloquent gestures, or through a stubborn and passive resistance.

All the elements of the pelado's world, his mother and his wife and children, his district, and his city are defended with alacrity.

The pelado is more common in the city, where he establishes contact with civilization. His counterpart in the country is passive rather than active. Reserved and retiring, he tends toward a hostile pride in his poverty and his nakedness.

The pelado is the Mexican in his natural state, the representative type of the Mestizo.

Predominando en sus venas la sangre indígena, actualiza las vivencias aborígenes; por otra parte, la sangre extranjera lo induce a nuevos territorios de la vida y de la cultura; lo español le ha injertado el cristianismo, pero también la soberbia y la predisposición picaresca, ansias desconocidas de libertad, un sentido del decoro muy inmediato al concepto castellano de honor, voliciones de atuendo y rebeldía, sutilezas y anarquismo, complejidad y vagabundeo, intuición de la dignidad personal y agudizamiento del realismo como forma 'a priori' de la conciencia.²

Thus, two personalities fight in the primitive nature of the pelado. This constant struggle causes him to be suspicious of others, hermetic, and pugnacious. He rejects the part of him that is foreign, and resents the impulses which direct him to contrary modes of action; he feels deeply his hybrid state, and finds it uncomfortable to live with himself. His suspicion grows when he must deal with those like him, and even more so when he associates with creoles and foreigners.

Esta es la nota aguda de su tragedia y el motivo de sus reacciones violentas; quiere ser él solo, de una pieza, mundo, 'pelado,' sin vocaciones múltiples o con capacidad para seguir los diversos reclamos del destino. Y como no puede arrancarse la sangre extranjera o unificar el doble atavismo, suele ir a la deriva, se hace fatalista, acentúa su desasimiento y erige

2. Yáñez, xxviii.

como lema un 'lo mismo me da' actitud en que, por lo demás, confluyen lo español y lo indígena, como confluyen en el sentido realista de la experiencia.³

Realistic, skeptical, pessimistic and undisciplined, the pelado is only capable of the minimum efforts to satisfy his basic necessities. He has no sense of order. He is willful and stubborn without the ability or desire to curb his primitive impulses, and implacably cruel, with a double cruelty inherited from both of his parent races.

3. Yáñez, xxix.

CHAPTER V

Octavio Paz :

El laberinto de la soledad.

El laberinto de la soledad is probably the best-known of the books about Mexico and the Mexican. Primarily a poet, Paz explains the Mexican with remarkable images and beautiful prose. His study has no scientific pretensions, but was written in response to a need to write about his country, "... como el adolescente no puede olvidarse de sí mismo --pues apenas lo consigue deja de serlo-- nosotros no podemos sustraernos a la necesidad de interrogarnos y contemplarnos."¹

Andrés Iduarte, in a review of the book, praises its rich prose and clear thought, and states that it places its author in the first rank of interpreters of the Mexican spirit.² In the first five essays, Paz delves into the soul or the essence of the Mexican; in the last three he makes a historical analysis of Mexico. His historical expositions could, according to Iduarte, form a complete system or theory of Mexican history. In the Laberinto Paz, in effect, searches for and finds himself in discovering the Mexican in general. Luis Leal reviewed the second edition of the book, revised and published in 1959. Of one of the additional sections, "Nuestros Días," he says that it is

1. Paz, 10.

2. Andres Iduarte, El laberinto de la soledad, by Octavio Paz, Revista Hispánica Moderna, XVII (1951), 146-147.

a "... brillante exposición de los problemas (sobre todo económicos) de México, vistos desde una perspectiva internacional."³ Leal notes the influence of the book on such writers as Carlos Fuentes, who has one of the characters of his book, La región más transparente (1958), carry El laberinto de la soledad under his arm wherever he goes. The character, Tamacona, also has a personal philosophy reminiscent of that of Paz. Leal also believes that the book is a description of the search of Paz for himself.

Octavio Paz seeks the solution to Mexico's problems, the greatest of which is the personal solitude of each man which denies the existence of all others, on two levels. On one, the practical level, he puts forth the necessity to create a society which will allow the Mexican to live sincerely and without the need to wear a mask of hypocrisy and formality and, at the same time, save him from a technology which tends to make man into just another machine. On the other, the idealistic side, he longs for a return to the center of life, to the center of the labyrinth where man can be reunited with his origins, free of time, and submerged in a world that is pure essence or becoming.

The Mexican has embarked on a search for identity. Becoming aware of history means the acquisition of a consciousness of uniqueness. The questions that Mexico asks herself now will have no relevancy in fifty years; but as the country enters into adolescence, it must, upon

3. Luis Leal, El laberinto de la soledad, by Octavio Paz, Revista Iberoamericana, XXV (1960), 185.

encountering its uniqueness, stop and reflect a while before going on to the tasks at hand.

The Mexican can be distinguished from the men of other countries not from his seeming differences of character, which may change, but from his creations. As Samuel Ramos has said, the predilection of the Mexican to analyze himself, and the scarcity of original creations may be explained by an instinctive lack of confidence in his ability to create.

The history of Mexico is that of a man in search of his origins, from which one day — perhaps at the moment of conquest or Independence -- he was alienated. He vaguely understands that he has been torn from his beginnings, and tries to reestablish contact with his creation.

The Mexican wears a mask. Old man or boy, Creole or Mestizo, general, worker, or peasant, the Mexican seems to be shut up within himself, preserved from the eyes of others.

"Plantado en su arisca soledad, espinoso y cortés a un tiempo, todo le sirve para defenderse: el silencio y la palabra, la cortesía y el desprecio, la ironía y la resignación. Tan celoso de su intimidad como de la ajena, ni siquiera se atreve a rozar con los ojos al vecino: una mirada puede desencadenar la cólera de esas almas cargadas de electricidad."⁴ The face and smile of the Mexican are masks, establishing a wall between himself and others. He believes that those who open

4. Paz, 26.

themselves up to others are weaklings and cowards. This hermeticism is a result of suspicion and lack of confidence in others, and shows that the Mexican considers the world hostile to him. His attitude can be justified in the light of history and the culture Mexico has created. The harshness and hostility of the environment make it necessary for the Mexican to close himself off from others, but this attitude has become so automatic with time that, faced with sympathy and compassion, he reacts with extreme reserve without being able to ascertain his real feelings. The masculine integrity, the masculine image is as much in danger before tenderness as it is before hostility.

If a Mexican dares to confide in another, he is disdained for his weakness, and, at the same time, despises himself for having allowed someone to enter the fortified castle of his innermost self. A preference for the closed rather than the open leads to a love of form. The preference for existing forms, even when they are without content, can be seen in the entire history of art, literature, and politics.

To the Mexican, the woman is an instrument to fulfill the desires of men and the society in which they live, uses for which no one has ever asked her consent and in which she has taken part only passively, as a depository of certain values. In a world made by man in his own image, the woman is merely a reflection of his will and desire. Femininity is never an end in itself, as is masculinity. For the Mexican, the woman is an obscure being, secretive and passive. She has no desires of her own. The ideal of womanhood tends to accentuate her passivity and the defensive aspects of her personality: from modesty

and "decency" to stoicism, resignation and impassiveness. The Mexican woman strangely accepts that view of herself, at least in public. She represents the stability and continuity of the race: in everyday life she upholds law and order, piety and tenderness. On the other hand, the "mujer mala" is almost always presented together with the concept of constant activity. Like her male equivalent, the macho, she is hard, impious, and independent.

The Mexican lies frequently in order to preserve himself from others and from himself. In lying, he takes part in a tragic game in which he risks a part of his being. He tries to become what he is not:

A cada minuto hay que rehacer, recrear, modificar el personaje que fingimos, hasta que llega un momento en que realidad y apariencia, mentira y verdad, se confunden. De tejido de invenciones para deslumbrar al prójimo, la simulación se trueca en una forma superior, por artística, de la realidad.⁵

The lie which the Mexican forms about himself reflects what he is not and what he desires to be.

The Mexican often views love as full of deceptions and lies. Love is the attempt to penetrate the self of another being, but this goal can only be realized if the feeling is mutual. Because of his character, his reluctance to open himself, the Mexican conceives of love as fight and conquest, in which he uses his sentiments, real, exaggerated or simulated, to satisfy his desire without giving of himself.

The Mexican excels in hiding his passions. Afraid of the attentions of others, he contracts himself; he becomes a shadow, an echo. He does not walk; he unobtrusively glides or slinks along his path. He

5. Ibid., 36.

does not propose openly; he insinuates. His self-abnegation leads to a sort of miniaturism. The Indian blends in with his surroundings. He becomes another stone, a wall, silence, space.

He denies not only himself but everyone else as well. "El Ninguneo" is the process which makes Someone into No one. "Don Nadie, padre español de ninguno, posee don, vientre, honra, cuenta en el banco y habla con voz fuerte y segura. Don Nadie llena al mundo con su vacía y vocinglera presencia."⁶ When Don Nadie tries to talk, he confronts a wall of silence. It would be wrong to say that no one lets him live; one merely acts as though he did not exist. Nevertheless, Don Nadie is always present. He is the crime and shame of Mexico.

In the chapter, "All Saints' Day, day of the dead," Paz points out that in fiestas and ceremonies, the Mexican opens himself to the outside world. On certain days, in the most remote parts of the country as well as in the city, all of Mexico prays, yells, eats, gets drunk and kills in honor of the Virgen of Guadalupe or General Zaragoza. For the poor, these fiestas are the only compensation for a life of misery and poverty. Accented by lightning and delirium, the fiesta is the glittering opposite of the usual silence and apathy, reserve and hostility. Order disappears and Chaos returns: everything is permitted, in a breathtaking immersion in the Formless, in the flow of life. People come forth purified by their bath of Chaos, recreated by their contact with the fountain of energy and creation.

6. Ibid., 40.

For Catholics, death is the bridge between two lives, the temporal and the eternal. For the Aztecs, it was the path to participation in the continuous regeneration of the creative forces. In both systems, death and life were two parts of the same reality.

Modern death is simply the inevitable end of a natural process. In European countries people pretend that death does not exist because it is disagreeable to them. The Mexican, in contrast, seeks death, jokes with it, caresses it, sleeps with it and gives fiestas in death's honor. "Si me han de matar mañana, que me maten de una vez" is the last line of a popular Mexican song. The indifference of the Mexican to death stems from his indifference to life. Only when he plays with death can he feel the vibrant presence of life which otherwise is not apparent to him.

The Mexican is unable to transcend his solitude. On the contrary, he uses it to close himself off from the world. "Oscilamos entre la entrega y la reserva, entre el grito y el silencio, entre la fiesta y el velorio, sin entregarnos jamás."⁷ Thus the Mexican closes himself off from both life and death by refusing to accept either the one or the other.

The worker symbolizes the death of the old society and the birth of another. He has no individuality. He is only an impersonal figure in a world of instruments, of machines, of technicians. Nothing but an unexpected and highly unlikely historical accident can impede

7. Ibid., 58.

the transformation of the Mexican from a problem, an enigmatic individual being, to just one more insignificant abstraction in an impersonal technical world.

The lack of confidence, dissimulation, and courteous reserve with which the Mexican covers himself are characteristics of a dominated and servile people. All relations with others are poisoned by fear and resentment. Only in solitude can the Mexican dare to be himself.

The history of Mexico is a history of serfdom: it is the foundation of the closed and unstable attitude of the people. Even after Independence, the inability of the government to overcome poverty and the differences in social class have tended to perpetuate the attitude of fear and resentment. The use of violence to settle disputes, the abuse of authority by those in power, the skepticism and resignation of the people add to the historical problem.

The Mexican struggles constantly with imaginary shadows, vestiges of the past, and ghosts engendered within himself. The fantasies inside the Mexican have a powerful ally: the fear of the Mexican to confront himself, to become himself.

In daily language there is a group of words used only when the Mexican is not in control of himself. "Toda la angustiosa tensión que nos habita se expresa en una frase que nos viene a la boca cuando la cólera, la alegría o el entusiasmo nos llevan a exaltar nuestra condición de mexicanos: ¡Viva México, hijos de la chingada!"⁸ With this

8. Ibid., 68.

cry the Mexican affirms himself and his country against, and in spite of, everyone else--foreigners, enemies or rivals--"others." La Chingada is the mythical mother who has been violated. The verb 'chingar' means to do violence to another. It is masculine, active and cruel, and it provokes a bitter satisfaction in its agent. It defines a great part of the life of the Mexican, including his relations with his friends and compatriots. "Para el mexicano, la vida es una posibilidad de chingar o ser chingado. Es decir, de humillar, castigar y ofender. O a la inversa."⁹ Thus, society is divided between the weak and the strong. In a world of "chingones," ideas and work count for little. The only possible thing of value is masculinity, "machismo," capable of imposing itself upon the world.

In summary, the Macho possesses a force or a capacity to wound, to open, to humiliate. As a father figure, he is not the founder of a social group: he is neither judge, king, nor chief of a clan. He is pure individuality, pure solitude which devours itself and all that it touches. It would be impossible not to notice the similarity between the image of the Macho and the conquistador.

The Mexican does not worship God as much as he does a bleeding and persecuted Christ, in whom he sees an image of himself and his destiny. Mexican Catholicism is centered around the Virgen of Guadalupe. She is the refuge of the helpless, the consolation of the poor, the mother of orphans. She is pure passivity, pure receptiveness: she consoles, dries tears, calms passions. La Chingada, her opposite, is

9. Ibid., 71.

even more passive. She offers no resistance to violence; she is an inert heap of blood, bones and dust. In Mexico no goddess is aggressive or cruel.

Doña Marina, the consort of Cortés, is the symbol of the Indian woman seduced by the conqueror, whom the Mexican can never forgive for her treason to her people. Both La Malinche and Cortés have remained in the minds of the Mexican as symbols of a past he would prefer to forget. "El mexicano no quiere ser ni indio, ni español. Tampoco quiere descender de ellos. Los niega. ... se vuelve hijo de la nada. El empieza en sí mismo."¹⁰

Independence cut Mexico's political ties with Spain; the Reform broke with colonial traditions. The Reform was the natural and necessary break with the mother, with the old way of life. The break was painful for Mexico, and each Mexican still considers himself an orphan. He defines himself as rupture and as negation, but also as the will to transcend his isolated state.

Any contact with the Mexican people will soon show that the old forms and beliefs are still alive, continuing testimony to the vitality of the pre-Colombian cultures. These cultures were impregnated with religion, and religious unity came long before political unity. When Cortés came, he was aided by states previously conquered by the Aztecs. Moctezuma and others around him felt that the gods had abandoned them, and the conquest cannot be explained without referring to the suicide

10. Ibid., 79.

of the Aztec state. Upon a people separated by language, race, political organizations and gods, the Spaniards imposed one language, one God, one King. The colonial world was a projection of a society which had already achieved maturity and stability in Europe; as such, it tended toward atrophy and paralysis. It was a world closed to the future.

After Independence, those in power consolidated themselves as the inheritors of the old Spanish order. They were not capable of creating a modern society. For a quarter of a century, Mexico's Liberals fought to impose reforms. With the Reform, Mexico denied her Spanish inheritance, her indigenous past, and her Catholicism. The growth of a strong middle class, in which the Liberals had placed their hopes for a new social order, did not materialize, and Mexico fell into the waiting hands of Porfirio Díaz. The ever-increasing poverty of the Mexican lower classes and their hunger for land set the stage for the Revolution. The absence of ideological precursors and the lack of ties with a universal ideology were the source of many conflicts and much confusion. The incapacity of the Mexican intelligentsia to gather popular aspirations into a coherent system converted the Revolution from an instinctive act to a controlled regime. Since it was impossible to return to the indigenous culture, and any return to the colonial system was out of the question, the new government was Liberal by default. The Liberal program, with its false (for Mexico) division of powers, its federalism and blindness to the realities of Mexico, opened the door once again to imitation and hypocrisy.

The Revolution tried to reconquer the past, assimilate it and make it alive in the present. Thanks to the Revolution, the Mexican wants to be reconciled with his history. "Por la Revolución el pueblo mexicano se adentra en sí mismo, en su pasado y en su sustancia, para extraer de su intimidad, de su entraña, su filiación."¹¹ The Revolution is the sudden and shocking immersion of the Mexican in his own being. From inside himself, he extracted the foundations for the new state. "México se atreve a ser."¹²

The entire history of Mexico, from the conquest to the Revolution, can be seen as a search for the Mexican reality, deformed or masked by foreign institutions, and for a form of culture which expresses the Mexican and will leave him free to fulfill his destiny. A Mexican philosophy of history should not only describe the past but also offer concrete solutions to the problems of the present. This philosophy would be Mexican only to the extent that it examines tradition and ideas in Mexico. Since Mexican history is only a fragment of universal history, it must place Mexico within universal history and explain how Mexico has lived universal (and European) ideas.

The alienation of dependent countries from European philosophy is a modern phenomenon. Philosophy has ceased to reflect regional values; the philosophy of Mexico must be part of that philosophy of man in general. The old plurality of cultures in which each produced

11. Ibid., 133.

12. Ibid., 134.

diverse and contrary ideas about man and his situation has been replaced by one situation and one future common to all. For this reason, any attempt to make purely Mexican philosophy will be condemned beforehand to sterility. Since World War II, the Mexican has realized that he lives disinherited from the past and facing a future yet to be invented, a realization he has in common with the other countries of the world.

The Revolution made of itself the principal agent of social transformation. It also proposed to renationalize the natural resources of the country. Little by little, Mexico began to change. The middle class grew stronger until it was able to obtain control of the government. Bankers succeeded generals, and industrialists took the place of old-style politicians. "La Revolución mexicana desemboca en la historia universal."¹³ The Mexican philosopher must ask himself how he is to create a society that does not deny the universal in man but which, at the same time, allows for differences in a way of life which includes technical elements but does not lead to a rule of machines instead of man.

Todo nuestro malestar, la violencia contradictoria de nuestras reacciones, los estallidos de nuestra intimidad y las bruscas explosiones de nuestra historia, que fueron primero ruptura y negación de las formas petrificadas que nos oprimían, tienden a resolverse en búsqueda y tentativa por crear un mundo en donde no imperen ya la mentira, la mala fe, el disimulo, la avidez sin escrúpulos, la violencia y la simulación. Una

13. Ibid., 171.

sociedad, también, que no haga del hombre un instrumento y una dehesa de la Ciudad. Una sociedad humana.¹⁴

All men at times feel alone. 'Man' is nostalgia and search for communion with others. All his efforts are directed toward transcending his solitude. The man who is alone "está dejado de la mano de Dios."¹⁵ It is a punishment, but also a promise of salvation, a promise of an end to exile. Birth and death are suffered by man alone with himself. Through love he is able to transcend his solitude, but everything in Mexican society discourages love.

The feeling of solitude, nostalgia for a body from which we were torn, is nostalgia for the center of our origins, of our being, usually represented as the 'navel' or center of the world. The myth of the Labyrinth supposes the existence, in the center of the sacred labyrinth, of a talisman or similar object capable of restoring health or liberty to a people. We have not only been expelled from the center of the world and compelled to search for it continually, but have become slaves to time, which once was not succession of moments, but the continuous flow of a fixed "present" in which all time--past, present and future--were contained. The moment man turns to an artificial conception of time, he separates himself from the flow of reality. Modern man presumes to think while he is awake, to value reason over instinct, but reason has led him through the corridors of a deceptive and destructive labyrinth, "... en donde los espejos de la razón multiplican las

14. Ibid., 173.

15. Ibid., 176.

cámaras de la tortura."¹⁶ Perhaps some day Man will learn that the dreams of reason are atrocious, and will again begin to dream with his eyes closed.

16. Ibid., 191.

CHAPTER VI

Emilio Uranga:

"Ensayo de una ontología del mexicano."¹

The writer had expected to write this chapter on the book of Uranga, Análisis del ser del mexicano.² However, reading of the book is enormously complicated by the fact that Uranga attempts to make an ontological study of the Mexican without defining his terms and is not consistent in the way he uses the same terms. For the purpose of comparing Uranga with the writers already treated, an essay written prior to the book, "Ensayo de una ontología del mexicano," will be used. Uranga explains that a self-diagnosis should be made of the Mexican because he must know himself in order to act effectively in the world. In order to discover what unique qualities he has, the Mexican should try to take from a list of human characteristics all those which apply to him specifically, or which he possesses in greater degree. This will lead to an atomization, but a justifiable one, of the Mexican character. Besides this atomization of character, a search should be made for the center of the Mexican, for the foundation on which he bases his characteristics.

1. Emilio Uranga, "Ensayo de una ontología del mexicano," Cuadernos Americanos, (Mar.-Apr., 1949), 135-148.

2. Emilio Uranga, Análisis del ser del mexicano, (México: Porrúa y Obregón, 1952).

The Mexican is sentimental by nature. He is emotional, disposed to inactivity and introspection. Since he is emotional and, therefore, easily wounded, he feels weak and fragile inside. "Ha aprendido desde su infancia que su fuero interno es vulnerable y henedible, de aquí todas estas técnicas de preservación y protección que el mexicano se construye en su torno para impedir que los impactos del mundo le alcancen y hieran. De aquí también su delicadeza, las formas finas de su trato, el evitar las brusquedades, las expresiones groseras."³ The Mexican also is characterized by a constant preoccupation for passing unnoticed through the world, and the need to hide his inner feelings from others, which gives rise to the dissimulation and hypocrisy which are the results of an incurable fragility.

This fragility comes from the threat of nothingness, the fear of falling into non-being. The man who lives menaced by destruction feels destructible and tends either to protect himself or to invite destruction. Mexican culture provides both padding to soften the blows to the ego and violent, brutal threats of destruction.

Lack of will appears whenever the Mexican is forced to leave his protected world and make a decision--any decision--and to live by its consequences. Being incapable of deciding is the same as deciding for irresponsibility. Lack of will (desgana) is the opposite of generosity, for it avoids the outside world. The Mexican does not want to know himself. He avoids a feeling of insufficiency by electing to call himself inferior to other races of culture. Thus, his insufficiency

3. Uranga, "Ensayo," 136.

results in an inferiority complex which removes for him the disagreeable possibility of having to know himself.

The Mexican is always dignified. Instead of trying to solve a problem or correct an error, he runs from it in order to save his dignity from failure. The Mexican zealously guards his dignity. Since this depends upon not being caught in compromising situations, inactivity is a virtue.

The Mexican tends to introspection and reflection upon his past life. "Detrás de todos esos rostros que huyen de la actividad y del amago, hállase la vida interior, lo que cada quién ha vivido, sus recuerdos, sus padecimientos, sus alegrías, un caudal que todo mexicano acaricia y recuenta."⁴

The Mexican is by nature melancholy. He lacks a foundation, a center of life, a base upon which to build his personality. The essence of the Mexican has no foundation--he is perfectly free to act, and it is this perfect freedom which makes him melancholy. The man who lives on dreams must some day look into himself and observe that his life is based on nothing but imagination: that it is, in essence, based on nothing. Melancholy is the result of the intimacy between man, non-being (la nada), and dreams.

The Mexican is always at the mercy of the winds, unable to make decisions between action and inaction, as well as between actions. He may be fragile or strong by turn. Only an accident of nature, an unexpected exterior change, can bring either calm and confidence or

4. Ibid., 141.

destruction and death to the Mexican. In other words, the Mexican will not initiate an action, and will react only when absolutely necessary. This reaction will produce either positive or negative results, but the Mexican does not control the process. He is by nature accidental: that is, he lives by chance.

At this point, having understood the structure of the character of the Mexican, having atomized his character, it is possible to proceed to an ontological search for his essence.⁵

At the time of the conquest, it is true that, as Samuel Ramos says, there was a father-to-son relationship between the American and the European. But by the time of Independence the relationship is one of teacher-to-pupil. The pupil feels his insufficiency, but not his inferiority. He feels the need to learn, but does not feel incapable of learning. Inferiority is one of the possible ways of feeling insufficient. One can be inferior only to the extent that one has an idol which is superior. A feeling of inferiority also includes a desire to be saved by the superior.

The Mexican Indian has been accepted as a substantial being by Europeans and North Americans. He has content, essence, which is recognized by others. Thus, the Mexican tries to fill the void within himself in his ties with the Indian. "El mestizo es un accidente del indio, una nada adherida al ser-en-sí del indio, que al ser amado,

5. Considerable liberty in explaining Uranga's ideas has been taken by the writer in revising and filling in concepts which Uranga hinted at but did not fully develop.

justificado, por el europeo o norteamericano, recibirá también justificación."⁶ The Mestizo, the Mexican in general, is a form without content. He is a wheel without spokes. Outside, he goes through the motions of life, but inside is only a void, which he tries to fill with the content recognized by the outside world as being the substance of the Indian. He is not a non-being. He has at least the ability to know that he exists and is in a precarious state, that he lives constantly on the abyss of non-being, between life and death, between fragility and strength, between will and lack of will. From this agonizing position he can choose his way of life; he can dip into the wellsprings of life to take from it; he is perfectly free and open to all possibilities. The Mexican must realize that his nature is to remain on the abyss, open to all the possible experiences of life. The essence of the Mexican is accidental.

6. Ibid., 147.

CHAPTER VII

Leopoldo Zea:

Conciencia y posibilidad del mexicano.¹

Leopoldo Zea is the clearest and most concise of all the writers here represented. His thought was well developed from the time he began to write, and his theories have undergone little or no change.

Writing on the reason for philosophy, Zea states that men philosophize because of the admiration and amazement they feel upon contemplating the world around them.² This world, which comprehends reality for man, is in its richness and variety both a problem and a question without solution. Men create philosophical systems to help them understand their world, but these systems are merely amputations of reality, simple points of view. Being trapped within a philosophical system is equal to renouncing knowledge of authentic reality.

Zea says that man is always situated in a determined set of circumstances, or environment.³ These circumstances are a problem which he must resolve by modifying both the circumstances and himself.

1. Leopoldo Zea, Conciencia y posibilidad del mexicano, (México: Porrúa y Obregón, 1952).

2. Antonio Caso, El problema de México y la ideología nacional, prólogo de Leopoldo Zea, (México: Ediciones Libro-Mex, 1955).

3. Leopoldo Zea, América como conciencia, (México: Cuadernos Americanos, 1953).

The environment is an obstacle to man, but also contains possibilities to use in surmounting the obstacles. Culture is the process by which man adapts himself and his circumstances. A history of culture is a history of man and his struggle with his environment. Philosophy attempts to find solutions to the problems man encounters when his personality and his circumstances conflict.

Man must become aware of other men.⁴ Existing is living with others. Consciousness is knowledge in common. Developing a knowledge in common, a sense of "togetherness," is the permanent human task. Man must learn to be aware of and respect the existence of other men. When he is aware of other men as human beings like himself, man's prejudices and discrimination against others will disappear.

Zea called upon the American people to create a philosophy to take the place of that of Europe, the effectiveness of which had been put in doubt by World War II.⁵

De golpe, nuestra América se encuentra ante la alternativa de dejarse arrastrar por el caos en espera de una nueva solución que de tal caos resulte, o bien enfrentarse a ésta buscando en sus propias entrañas una solución que lo anule. Lo segundo implica haber alcanzado un sentido de responsabilidad, haber llegado a lo que Alfonso Reyes llama 'mayoría de edad'. América puede ser llamada a ofrecer una nueva síntesis cultural. Europa misma ha visto en esta América el futuro de su propia realización cultural, aunque sólo fuese como un ideal que parecía no realizarse nunca.⁶

4. Leopoldo Zea, "Dialéctica de la conciencia en México," Cuadernos Americanos, LVII, (May-June, 1951), 87-103.

5. Leopoldo Zea, "América como Problema," Cuadernos Americanos, XVIII, (Nov.-Dec., 1944), 126-130.

6. Ibid., 126.

In Conciencia y posibilidad de lo mexicano Zea analyzes the Mexican development of consciousness of itself and Mexico's tasks for the future.

In the last few years the Mexican has passed from a deep pessimism and self-degradation to a positive and optimistic view of himself and his situation. He has acquired confidence in his ability to express himself freely, without fear or timidity.

The theme of Mexican reality has a long history. At the time of the conquest, the European was convinced that his culture was universally valid and that any different culture was simply primitive and without value. Thus the indigenous culture of Mexico, instead of being accepted and understood, was condemned in the light of the supposed universality which the European had relegated exclusively to his culture, way of life and conception of the world. Men of America have slowly realized that they have an undisputable right to consider their culture universal to the degree that it represents an aspect of the human condition.

Likewise, the Mexican has fought for recognition of his right to the only true universality, his humanity, equal to that of every other man. The Independence movement, the Reform, and the Revolution are ever more significant manifestations of this desire for recognition.

At the same time, the European, after the catastrophic wars which have shaken his confidence in his culture, has finally realized that his pretensions to universal culture were presumptuous at best. Upon realizing his right to call his culture universal also, the Mexican

must beware against in turn judging and condemning the same countries who before condemned him. He must confront one of the most difficult human tasks, the objective understanding of all cultures. For this reason, all rampant nationalism must be avoided. In order to have significance, the search for the Mexican essence, for "lo mexicano," in which so many Mexican writers are engaged, must be but one more stage in the search for the universal man, for man a concrete being and not as an abstraction: in this case, for the man who resides in the circumstance called Mexico.

Mexican philosophy in the last few years has dedicated itself to the search for the essence of the Mexican, (la esencia del ser del mexicano). Contemporary philosophy has denied the traditional belief that man has a determined nature or essence, the search for which is a legitimate philosophical pursuit. "Su naturaleza (del hombre) es precisamente no tener naturaleza en el sentido tradicional; su esencia carecer de esencia."⁷ Man is not a person already formed but rather a being who must form his own essence. One may not discuss Man, but only man in a specific situation, under determined circumstances, which give man his authentic reality. Obviously, the more men we can describe under various circumstances, the more we will know about man in general. If we are able to understand the points of view of men in their separate life situations, we will have increased our knowledge of man. Whatever we can learn from his life should be valid for any other man in similar circumstances.

7. Zea, Conciencia y posibilidad del mexicano, 19.

This is the philosophical attitude on which are based the studies of the Mexican in order to justify their orientation as philosophical and not historical or anthropological studies.

The Mexican, because his situation is unique and original, has much to add to the life experiences of the Europeans. "Los mexicanos nos sabemos, como todos los pueblos de esta América, poseedores de una serie de experiencias humanas originales cuyo análisis podría ir formando los perfiles de un aspecto de lo humano que, posiblemente, no ha sido todavía captado por filósofo alguno."⁸

The thematic and cultural orientation of Mexico has as a basis the historical event known as the Revolution. During this revolution, the Mexican was forced to come face to face with himself. The Revolution has very little similarity with the other two great revolutions of the world, the French in 1789 and the Russian in 1917. Both of these are considered universal revolutions, justifying themselves in the name of Humanity. The Mexican Revolution, in contrast, was just the opposite. None of the heroes of the Revolution proposed to do other than correct a series of specific problems which plagued the nation at the time. Men of widely varying social and political ideals fought together against a self-centered and despotic oligarchy which was blocking all roads, denying all aspirations and hopes. The men who fought in the Revolution were motivated by a general discontent, without concrete plans or hopes for the future. "La Revolución se presentó como una

8. Ibid., 22.

oportunidad para poner fin a un estado de cosas en el que cada mexicano se sentía menoscabado."⁹

During the Revolution, the Mexican discovered many facets of his character which before had been hidden from him. An ancestral world appeared as though by enchantment, destroying the ridiculous and fictitious world which Porfirio Díaz had insisted in bringing to Mexico. All the theories imported from Europe were not sufficient to capture the sense of what was now happening in Mexico. The country turned toward itself, and a strong nationalism manifested itself in all forms of expression.

Nationalism in itself should not be condemned. Every culture now considered universal began as the most authentic expression of the essence or way of life of a specific nation which, precisely for its authenticity, was able to describe concrete (as opposed to abstract) characteristics which were comprehensible to others in spite of their different circumstances. The return to its specific reality after the Revolution signifies Mexico's awareness of the authenticity of its culture, with all the duties and responsibilities that this realization implies. With this awareness has come a sense of nationalism.

The maturity of Mexico as a nation and the responsibility it includes will become reality if the Mexican nation is capable of becoming aware of itself.

The influence of the Revolution can be noted in other Latin American countries which--because of similar origins and circumstances--

9. Ibid., 27.

have to an extent seen themselves reflected in the Mexican experience.

The plans and projects of the Revolution have always been of a circumstantial character--the results of expediency, the necessity to resolve the specific problem at hand. Those who say that the Revolution has died are mistaken; it will have died only when it is no longer able to form plans to solve the problems of the country.

The Revolution was a social movement in which the nation returned to the starting point of its history as the only opportunity to undo four centuries of errors and misconceptions. The Mexicans united under their common hunger for land. The Revolution dedicated itself to the problem of land ownership and land cultivation, with all the difficulties implied therein.

Mexico has always been conscious of itself, but this consciousness was veiled by foreign ideas and prejudices which hid it from view until the Revolution. The first to become aware of Mexico were the politicians and the artists. The novelists also became aware and described "lo mexicano" in their books. But a general awareness did not come until the Revolution had begun to stabilize itself under Calles. During this time, the country was definitely unified physically and mentally as a country; chaos was converted to order; and practical solutions to Mexico's problems were carried out. The morality dominant at this time was one of expediency. Order and stability were achieved by a violence which exceeded necessity, cynicism and hypocrisy were normal parts of life. Purely practical politics were the order of the day. The Intellectuals soon reacted against the brutal realities of

the Calles regime. José Vasconcelos and others attempted reforms, but their efforts were frustrated by their inability to reconcile their dreams with the reality of the situation. Their ideals came, not from Mexico, but from Europe and were not adaptable to Mexico. Upon becoming aware of Mexico, the intellectual discovered a negative environment, contrary to the spirit of man, in which the intellectual had no part. In reaction, he turned his eyes from the reality of his country to close himself up in academicism which the real world could not penetrate. Some of the intellectuals tried to understand the world of Mexico in order to reform it. They were Samuel Ramos, Agustín Yáñez and Rodolfo Usigli. Their main preoccupation was to expose and define the ills of Mexico in order to eradicate them. They take as a basis for their search three Europeans, Adler; Scheler and Freud; and apply their theories to the Mexican situation. Thus, although they are searching for the Mexican, they already have a supposition of how this man will be, a system of values from Europe to which the Mexican will merely conform or not conform. The answer to their question, "What is the Mexican?", has already been implied. Their study is basically negative. According to them, Mexico's ills can be remedied through psychoanalytic introspection, the catharsis of a theatrical production, or consciousness of the origin of the feeling of resentment. If the Mexican is able to know himself, he is more than halfway on the road to recovery. "La conciencia de la realidad mexicana dará al hombre de México la conciencia de sus posibilidades, y, con ella, la conciencia de todo su posible hacer."¹⁰

10. Ibid., 63.

Ramos, Usigli and Yáñez arrived at an authentic "reality" of Mexico, but they only saw its negative aspects.

With the beginning of the decade of war in Europe, from 1936 to 1945, Mexico and the other Latin American countries realized that they were not as backward or as void of cultural and moral values as they had previously supposed. With the seeming failure of European culture, the European became just another man among men, with a culture no better and no worse than that of other men. Europeans and Americans adopted a way of explaining man which searched, not for universal values, but for the essence of each man within his determined geographical habitat, in a social and cultural setting which could also be determined, and with a specific historical legacy. As previously explained, this theory in no way denied universality to philosophy; it merely attempted to define man in terms of his situation, and not by means of certain characteristics presumed to be inherent in every human being. In Mexico, this new attitude toward the Mexican and his being is represented by the "Grupo Hiperion," which used the basic methods of Existentialism to define the reality of the Mexican. The "Grupo Hiperión" has been mainly preoccupied with showing the Mexican that he may select from the possibilities open to him for improvement those which best fit the circumstances of Mexico.¹¹

11. Further information on the Grupo Hiperión may be found in José Gaos, En torno a la filosofía mexicana, vol. 2, (México: Porrúa y Obregón, 1953), 59-66.

Speaking of the possibilities of the Mexican is the same as speaking of the possibilities of man which, in our day, have become universal due to the undeniable interrelation of all the countries in the world: an interrelation which no country, not even the most remote, can escape. For this reason, if one wishes to be realistic and not abstract as in a traditional philosophy, one must study a concrete being, a man in a given set of circumstances. This man may be the Mexican.

He is a man in a limited situation, balanced on a wire between culture and barbarity, capable of going either way or of being cultured and uncultured at the same time.

En nuestro pueblo se encuentran todos los extremos sin que prevalezca ninguno de ellos. Podemos, por un lado, comprender los más altos valores universales, y, por el otro, ser estrechamente provincianos. Dentro de la línea en que nos encontramos se confunde aún lo mágico con lo científico, lo imaginario con lo real, el tabú con el obstáculo natural, la comunidad con la sociedad, la ley con la voluntad, lo mítico con lo religioso, la muerte con la vida.¹²

Along this line of possibilities, chance is the most important deciding factor. "La suerte" is the common norm of Mexican life, and forms an integral part of the attitude of the people. With the impossibility to predict the future comes the tremendous helplessness and the insecurity and irresponsibility considered characteristic of the Mexican. For him, there is no question of faithful adherence to law as a way of life, because his life is governed not by reason but irrationally, by chance. He feels no sense of duty, does not do what he ought to do, but rather what he wants to do. "... no vale el 'deber ser' que

12. Zea, Conciencia y posibilidad ..., 89.

caracteriza a todas las éticas; todo depende de un 'querer ser'; esto o lo otro sin causa, sin motivo, porque sí."¹³ The Mexican outwardly adheres to a code of values equal to that of the most advanced cultures, but he follows his code only when he wants to, never because he should. Law is not effective unless people agree to act in conformity to it, through personal belief in the rule of law or affection or respect for other people. For law to be meaningful, man must have confidence in the good will of himself and others, but the Mexican is distrustful, and his confidence in others must be reinforced at every moment. The Mexican has yet to learn to live within a society. "Aun no hemos podido salir plenamente de lo circunstancial e inmediato ... a un mundo que puede ser previsible por nuestra voluntad de construirlo, por la seguridad de nuestros proyectos."¹⁴ The Mexican moves through a world of opportunities. He should not let any of them pass him by if he is to make his situation in the world more secure, but he should try to avoid simply choosing the most immediate opportunities without determining their merit. Because the Mexican tends to choose the easiest way out of a situation, he is particularly susceptible to opportunism. The entire existence of the Mexican takes place in this world of opportunism. He lives by chance, according to the latest opportunity. Nevertheless, in this opportunism it is possible to see an unconscious effort to make life more permanent. The Mexican tries to take advantage of all opportunities; he tries to be everything at once. He would like

13. Ibid., 90.

14. Ibid., 91.

to grasp all opportunities, without renouncing any, bringing together contradicting ones as a bulwark against any possible event in the future. His failure to do so impedes his task of understanding and improving himself.

After centuries of importing philosophies from other countries and trying to make them fit a completely different Mexico, the Mexican has learned that he must derive his philosophy from the circumstances which surround him. He must learn to understand the world in which he lives in order to develop the instruments to transform it. It is possible to notice in the Mexican situation certain ways of being which are common to all men, such as hopelessness and insecurity. These are the salient characteristics of contemporary man, who lives in a world of constant crisis. Hopelessness, insecurity, and inconsistency have been experienced by all men at various times in their lives, but never as permanent characteristics as they are in Mexico. The Mexican has lived with his insecurity since the days of the conquest. Nevertheless, permanent insecurity has never been able to destroy his desire for life and his creative ability, which manifests itself even within the circumstantial and transitory. One may even observe a change in the situation, a certain progress, where all progress would seem inconceivable. "Viviendo a pesar de todo; viviendo al día, pero viviendo siempre, el mexicano puede ya ofrecer un mundo, a ese mundo que nuevamente se siente inseguro y zozobante, una gran experiencia."¹⁵ The experience of Mexico may perhaps give the world the solution to many of the problems

15. Ibid., 96.

it now faces, example or experience to a world which has to learn to live from day to day.

The Mexican has traditionally been considered incapable of maintaining a technical society efficiently. During the time of Porfirio Díaz, much was made of technical progress, but it was in the hands of foreigners. Only since the Revolution, when it became obvious that the Mexican would have to use technology to solve his problems, has he shown his ability to put modern technology to good use. Obligated to confront a hostile environment and ever-changing circumstances with practically primitive instruments, the Mexican has been able to acquire technical ability that could be an example to other countries.

In many countries, technology has put man at its service, and man has become merely one more part in the machines which should be at his service. For him, a failure of his equipment leaves him unable to continue his work. Having become a machine himself, he has lost his sense of originality. The Mexican, however, has not become a slave of the machine and will use his ingenuity to repair the machine and continue his work. In other countries, the machine mechanizes the man; but in Mexico, man humanizes the machine. The Mexican has shown little interest in the accumulation of goods and money. He is content with the necessities of life and prefers to live from day to day, according to what fortune and his circumstances have in store for him. Material goods he also sees as benefits which come to him one day, and the next may very well disappear. Contemporary Occidental society has converted its members into automatons. Liberty, the capacity to act in an

unexpected and unplanned manner, has almost become extinct. Chance, improvisation, the sudden and gratuitous gesture, which until now have been the source of all creative effort, no longer exist. The individual cannot survive in a world which surrounds him with labels and numbers, in which he becomes just one more statistic. "El hombre despersonalizado de estas sociedades es ese mismo hombre que sólo la novela contemporánea, en un esfuerzo por reivindicar su humanidad, presenta con todas sus angustias ante un mundo contra el cual lucha inútilmente. Ese hombre que es el Proceso de Kafka, se ve obligado a aceptar una condena de un juez que nunca ha visto y de una culpa cuyo origen ignora."¹⁶ In striking contrast to this hyperorganized world is the almost primitive Mexican society, tormented by insecurity, in which social order is based on no ties but those of family: a society without citizens, with only relatives and friends who can be trusted, in which law depends entirely on individual will. A society based on "amiguismo." This society, in spite of its faults, can produce a truly human community without becoming overly mechanized or falling into anarchy--a community which would link men with other men, not with abstract, uncontrollable and dehumanized beings.

Since the Revolution, the Mexican has evolved a way of life in which he is in permanent and conscious struggle with his circumstances. He finds himself well trained for this type of life, better prepared to cope with the unexpected or unforeseen, because he has, throughout his

16. Ibid., 103.

history, acquired the ability to act even when his future is unpredictable. Nevertheless, the Mexican has failed to develop a conscience, a loyalty to society in general, to neutralize his tendency to act for action's sake without using reason, according to his instincts but not to his duties to other men.

The task of Mexican philosophy should be to help shape this awareness of others, this conscience. "A nuestra filosoffa corresponde dotar de sentido a todas estas expresiones de nuestro, hasta ahora, cotidiano modo de ser."¹⁷ Philosophy should try to articulate, to define the way of living of the circumstantial being who is the Mexican, in order to develop a morality which will be relevant not only to Mexico but to all men in similar situations.

17. Ibid., 107.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

It is impossible to draw specific conclusions about the character of the Mexican from the essays treated here, but several general trends may be noted. Most of the essayists note a sense of insufficiency or inferiority in the Mexican as a result of his history, his environment and his relations with other Mexicans, Europeans and North Americans. They agree on the necessity of formulating a philosophy which will allow the Mexican to develop himself fully, insisting that this philosophy must have roots in Mexico. They notice that the Mexican wears a mask of politeness or hypocrisy in order to shield himself from a hostile world. Beyond this, the writers differ, sometimes only on definitions of the same problems, and sometimes because of differing philosophical orientations.

The basic areas of discussion are the following: religion, politics, characteristics of the Mexican, the role of the Revolution, and the purpose of a Mexican philosophy.

Samuel Ramos saw in religion the moving force for the creative spirit in man, and in the history of Mexico a history of the affirmation or denial of the religious spirit. He noted, however, that religion had been reduced to external ceremony. The characteristics of the Mexican were formed by his history and the character inherited from the Spaniard and the Mexican, with external forms furnished by French and

later the technical societies of Europe and the United States. He is a being possessed by a sense of inferiority brought about by his failures at imitating the societies of others and his inability to measure up to the cultural standards set by other countries. His salvation is in a realization of his own worth, in the psychoanalysis of himself which will reveal the false sense of inferiority and allow him to be sincere without fear. The purpose of culture is to form better men, and Mexican philosophy should try to direct culture toward a new humanism which will give him understanding of himself and show him his possibilities for development.

Rodolfo Usigli, along with the majority of the writers treated here, gives religion no part in the life of the Mexican. He puts the blame for the hypocrisy he sees in Mexico squarely on the shoulders of the Revolutionary leaders, who through demagoguery spread their own personal lies, designed to cover a too-uninspiring Mexican reality. The Mexican is well versed in the art of avoiding himself. His gestures and posturings all serve to cover a reality which is distasteful for him. Mexico must abandon both the habit of living in the glorious past (which is really only glorious as seen from the distorted perspective of the present) and the dreams of becoming a Cosmic Race, directing herself to the more mundane present. The Mexican tends to live by chance, but he must learn to live by plan, within the limits of his possibilities.

Agustín Yáñez mentions neither religion nor politics in his prologue to El pensador mexicano. He mainly deals with the character

of the two types of Mexican which have developed from the Mexican circumstances. The "decent man" is very close to the hypocrite of Usigli-- he is a slave to form, and destroys his real "self" by suppressing it. He calls all those unlike him pelados. The pelado is the supreme individualist. He disdains form and lives open, exposed to the world. He is the Mexican, the Mestizo in his natural state, torn between his Indian and Spanish origins, unable to synthesize them into one whole human being. His violence and his fatalism come from the frustration he feels upon being unable to reconcile the two parts of himself.

Octavio Paz discusses a religion based not on the spirit but on the needs of the people. The Virgen is no more than a comforter, a soft lap upon which to sit as one pours out his troubles and asks for assistance. Christ, beaten and bleeding, represents the Mexican to himself. Religious festivals are times to unite with Chaos, not with God. The Mexican is like an adolescent who for the first time is conscious of his uniqueness. His self-analysis reveals an alienation from the world and from other Mexicans, a withdrawal from everything that could hurt him. He is a closed being, suspicious of others because of his experiences with a harsh and hostile environment. Independence cut Mexico's political ties with Spain, and the Reform broke with colonial traditions. The Revolution was the result of poverty among the lower classes. It was based on no political ideology, and became Liberal by default. Thanks to the Revolution, the Mexican faced himself for the first time, and came closer to discovering his own reality. A philosophy of Mexico should not be regional in a world where regional

differences are ever smaller. It should aim toward the development of a society in which the Mexican will be able to be himself without fear, either of other people or of an overly mechanized way of life.

Emilio Uranga stated that he started his philosophy where Ramos left off. However, he disagreed with Ramos in several areas, and defended his own ideas on two levels; after proving himself right, he called those who disagreed with him naive fools and megalomaniacs.¹ He sustained, in a series of lectures given at the University in January and February of 1951, that the Mexican suffered from a sense of insufficiency, not inferiority, and that the inferiority was just another way of covering up the insufficiency. Ramos, who was not above an occasional gibe himself, replied that insufficiency and inferiority were about the same thing anyway, and that perhaps Uranga was just trying to cover up his own sense of inferiority by calling it something else. Ramos implied that Uranga was trying to fit the Mexican into ontology and not vice versa, that he should "... hacer una ontología a partir del mexicano y no subsumir a éste en una ontología ya hecha con el fin de comprobar esta última."² Uranga replied that Ramos had just fitted the Mexican into Adler's ideas on psychoanalysis. José Gaos also had objections to people who "... tan sólo parecen más filósofos por infundada persistencia del predominio de ciertas notas tradicionales

1. See the articles published under the title "México en busca de lo mexicano," Cuadernos Americanos, (May-June, 1951), 87-128.

2. Samuel Ramos, "En torno a las ideas sobre el mexicano," in "México y lo mexicano," Cuadernos Americanos, (May-June, 1951), 113.

de la filosofía en la representación más corriente aun de ésta."³

Uranga wrote no more about the Mexican after the publication of his Análisis del ser del mexicano, perhaps because he felt he had exhausted the possibilities of explaining the Mexican from an ontological point of view. Uranga wrote that the Mexican is sentimental, melancholy, prone to inactivity in order to save his dignity, cruel, introspective and emotional. His essence is to be accidental: that is, he lives by chance. He feels fragile, he has a fear of being nothing, of non-being. He tends to try to find substance by accentuating his Indian background, but instead of searching for an essence he should remain free and vulnerable, open to all possibilities.

Leopoldo Zea sees the Mexican as a man in search for his essence: but man has no essence, and must be studied in conjunction with his situation or his circumstances. The Mexican is a result of unique circumstances and so has something to add to the world's knowledge of man. The Mexican discovered himself in a Revolution which, unlike that of other countries, had no universal pretensions. It was purely circumstantial, responding to the needs of the people at the time, and will continue to live as long as it continues to fill those needs. The Mexican is balanced between culture and barbarism, and alternates freely between the two, due to the working of chance. He is irrational and obeys the law, the codification of reason, only if he feels like it, if

3. José Gaos, "México, tema y responsabilidad," Cuadernos Americanos, LXV, (Nov.-Dec., 1953), 116.

it suits him, and never out of a sense of duty. The Mexican has not learned to live inside of society, and the task of the philosopher is to foment the feeling of otherness in the Mexican, the conscience or sense of duty which will free the Mexican from prejudice and make him aware of the existence and rights of others. This philosophy of the Mexican would be applicable not only to him, but also to all other men in situations similar to his.

In conclusion, the theme of the Mexican in search of himself has undergone an evolution from the initial attempts to describe him as a being who felt himself inferior, to a man still on the brink between culture and barbarism; and from the original solution of a new humanism which would give him a sense of humanity, to essentially the same conclusion, stated more clearly by Zea and also proposed by Octavio Paz. The task of the Mexican, and of man in general, is, then, to develop the sense of otherness, the feeling of communion between men.

It may be said that the Mexican is different from other men to the extent that his circumstances and history are different, and that Mexican philosophy helps the Mexican to understand and improve himself, and can help him and other men in similar situations to adapt themselves to their circumstances and to other men.

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