Contemporary Art and Community Altruism in Oaxaca

Contemporary Art and Community Altruism in Oaxaca:

Hybrid Agency

By

Neil Pyatt

Dedication

For my parents and my sister.

I love Duval.

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PREFACE

The present work is the result of research that grew from seeds planted in October 1996, during what I believe was my first conversation with an Oaxacan academic. Dr Marcos Figueroa, a lecturer in human rights law at the 'Benito Juárez' Autonomous University of Oaxaca (UABJO), told me that the Zapatista insurgence of 1994 constituted a postmodern war and not one of real military action. Dr Figueroa said that evidence for this was the visit by American film director Oliver Stone to Subcommandante Marcos's jungle hideout amid rumours that he was buying the film rights to the Chiapas-based rebellion.

I had sought to escape another postmodern reading of a contemporary cultural phenomenon, but one had found me in a tiny cantina in a small city in Mexico within weeks of submitting a thesis that attempted such a task as part of the final requirements of an M.Phil. in Social Anthropology at Cambridge.

During the time that passed before I made any positive move to further investigate the culture of my new surroundings, I repeatedly noticed a single work of graffiti that read '500 years of repression' scrawled in black paint on a white garage door located along what I much later learnt is the typical route for southerly protest marches entering the city of Oaxaca. For a naïve, fluent Spanish speaker who learnt the language by living in and visiting the Old Spain from a very young age, this graffiti provided the harsh realisation that many sectors of postcolonial societies continue to hold rancour towards their conquerors and the previous and prevailing conditions they have caused.

The combination of these episodes left me with an initial desire to study pre-Hispanic cultures in Oaxaca. Dominated in number by the Zapotec and Mixtec populations, these cultures remain as strong influences on everyday Oaxacan life, from the conspicuous tourism industry based on the equally visible ancient ruins of Monte Albán, Mitla and Yagúl to the indigenous people and languages seen and heard on almost every street and definitely in every marketplace. (See Figures 1.1 and 1.2)

However, to an urban anthropologist intent on unravelling the mystery of how popular culture, advertising and the mass media could be cemented into a globalising force by postmodernism, the primitivist artworks that

represented Oaxaca and its powerful connection to its own history were difficult to comprehend. Reporting on local culture as the founding editor of an English-language newspaper supplement created a concrete reason to concentrate on Oaxacan contemporary art.

FOREWORD

Neil Pyatt writes a compelling view of contemporary art from Oaxaca, Mexico: paradoxically perhaps the most indigenous, economically depressed, yet culturally rich region of Latin America.

Firmly entrenched in ethnohistorical and art historical discourse, Pyatt eloquently reveals how Oaxacan art today can be viewed as a visual Phoenix, grounded in touristic folk art of the end of the last century, to rise out of the ashes of the notorious 2006 social "Conflict" that had placed Oaxaca on the map as one of those increasingly numerous "trouble spots," yet with a pictorial production much richer and nobler than its socio-economic-political matrix.

The work charts the development of major Oaxacan artists from the end of the last century into the current one, revealing how their personal and professional search for identity took on positive connotations by transforming repetitive modernist mongrel images into emergent postmodernist "hybrid" ones.

This book is a classic that will stand as a record of a major artistic tradition in Latin America, with an international resonance yet to be recognized.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALCA	Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas Free Trade Agreement of the Americas
AMLO	Andrés Manuel López Obrador, mayor of Mexico City (2000-2005) and presidential candidate in 2006 and 2012
APPO	Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca
COCEI	Coordinadora Obrera Campesina Estudiantil del Istmo Worker, Peasant and Student Coalition of The Isthmus
CODEP	Consejo de Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo Advisory Board in Defence of the Rights of the People
COMPA	Coordinación Oaxaca Magonista Popular Antineoliberal Anti-neoliberal Popular Magonist Organisation
CROC	Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants
EZLN	Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional Zapatista National Liberation Army
Mercosur	Mercado Común del Cono del Sur (de las Américas) Common Market of the Southern Cone (of the Americas)
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional National Action Party
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática Democratic Revolution Party
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional Institutional Revolutionary Party
PUNCN	Promotora por la Unidad Nacional contra el Neoliberalism Promoter of National Unity against Neoliberalism
UABJO	Universidad Autónoma 'Benito Juárez' de Oaxaca 'Benito Juárez' Autonomous University of Oaxaca
UAM	Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Autonomous Metropolitan University
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México National Autonomous University of Mexico
URO	Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, governor of Oaxaca (2004-2010)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The state of Oaxaca is in the South of Mexico, an important region due to its highly varied racial, political and economic past and present. The primary feature of the relationship between this location and its peoples is its physical geography (see Figure 1.1). A very mountainous region of extreme climatic conditions is responsible for a lack of farmable land and the creation of a very large number of very small settlements, in turn forming numerous tribal and distinct language groups. The state of Oaxaca consists of 570 municipalities, almost one quarter of the total number of municipalities that comprise the nation's 32 federative entities. The reduced level of poverty and development caused by such a low amount of agricultural production and the lack of a conglomerate society were further exasperated by the Spanish colonisation of the Americas.

The contemporary human geography of the state of Oaxaca is due, in the most reductionist of terms, to this harsh physical geography combined with Mexico's predicament as the only developing nation to share a border with the United States of America (U.S.). Mexico is the U.S.' second-largest export market and third-largest trading partner, almost 80 percent of Mexico's exports were to the U.S. in 2011.[1] The cultural mixing due to the colonial rule of Mexico by Spain had been the subject and major preoccupation of Mexico, Mexicans and Mexican culture until the major Latino population shifts characteristic of the last third of the twentieth century.

The material wealth of Mexico's northern neighbour has created a landscape blotted by migration, has done little to combat economic instability and induced the creation of a globe-topping illegal drug industry and criminal culture that is organised and institutionalised at levels that have traditionally relied on intricate ties with corrupt governmental bodies and law enforcement agencies. These authorities have only recently been subject to a committed policy of investigation and the serving of justice

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[1] U.S. State Department Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, *Relations With Mexico*, 25 June 2012, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35749.htm [12 April 2013].

enforced during the presidential term of Felipe Calderón Hinojosa from 1 December 2006.

Limited local development of infrastructure and the related sporadic foreign investment leaves going to work *en el otro lado* 'on the other side [of the border]' as the only option for economic well-being for a large section of the population. In 2007, Oaxacan migrants residing in the U.S. sent back 1.272 billion dollars to their families still residing in the state. That same year, Mexico as a nation received 24 billion dollars[2] from the working sector of the 24 million Mexicans and Mexican-Americans[3] living in the U.S., the second largest source of the nation's income after the revenue created by its troubled, state-owned petroleum sector, Petroleos Méxicanos (PEMEX).[4]

Migration is one means of influx of American popular culture and the American-English language that gives a boost of primary energy to the late, consumer capitalism piped in to Mexico through mass media channels, the execution of so-called neoliberal economic strategies and globalisation. Rapid evolution in information and communications technology far outweighs growth in any other sector and is a causal factor in an accelerating, self-alimenting process of development in a nation that has never had control of its own resources in order to industrialise or modernise in the sense signified by traditional historical models.

The present research tests the theory that postmodernity provides new tools and modes of expression to discuss human thought and behaviour, as a response to similar conditions Colin Rhodes refers to as the 'growing disjunction between a rapidly increasing technological and scientific complexity and the ability of the individual to comprehend these changes' that combined with the 'decline of humanitarian values in European culture' and caused 'the rise of Primitivism at the turn of the twentieth century.'[5]

An introductory use of Fredric Jameson's focus on architecture to analyse postmodernism from which he figuratively generalises on the

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[2] Instituto Oaxaqueño de Atención al Migrante,
http://migrantes.oaxaca.gob.mx/suplemeto_feb/remesas.html [2 May 2008].
[3] Embassy of Mexico in Washington,
http://portal.sre.gob.mx/usa/index.php?option=displaypage&Itemid=93&op=page &SubMenu= 1547 [12 September 2008].
[4] 'Nearly 80 percent of Mexico's exports in 2011 went to the United States. […] In 2011, Mexico was the second-largest supplier of oil to the United States.' U.S. State Department, *Relations with Mexico*.
[5] Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994), p. 135.

postmodern condition, connects the hypothesis proposed here with the conditions Rhodes describes:

> My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution [a mutation to a postmodernist space]; there has been a mutation in the object unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject. We do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as I will call it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism.[6]

The present research identifies, in the Oaxacan contemporary art studied, the presence of the 'tools' as the author labels them, or the 'perceptual equipment' under a Jameson label, that human subjects require in order to understand the space into which we have happened. The hypothesis tests how postmodernism, as the cultural model Jameson proposes, 'foregrounds the cognitive and pedagogical dimensions of political art and culture'[7] and how those dimensions are fundamental to the contemporary art studied.

The postmodernist space the present research investigates, Oaxaca, Mexico, requires considerable introduction and a recounting of its history that the latter part of this chapter undertakes; to develop the research hypothesis formulated above into the research question, a more succinct course is momentarily taken.

Mexico's advanced Amerindian civilisations that created cultures dependent on aesthetics and respectful of artistic merit present a highly complex relationship between aesthetics and meaning. As cultural heritage, this relationship has been recognised as being present in the contemporary art created in Oaxaca in the last decades of the twentieth century. The recognition of a level of similitude in Oaxacan cultural output, in particular painting, caused the creation of a critically-identified Oaxaca School.

Oaxaca is the birthplace of leading Mexican artists Rufino Tamayo (1899-1991), Rodolfo Morales (1925-2000), Rodolfo Nieto (1936-1985) and Francisco Toledo (b. 1940). The work of these artists can be generally and briefly described as possessing a primitivist style, abundant fauna in its iconography and infantile drawing towards paradisiacal representations. The Oaxaca School was defined as producing and attracting artists that

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[6] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*, *Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 38.
[7] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 50.

purposefully copied and perpetuated the styles and use of techniques of these Oaxacan Masters, in particular Tamayo, Morales and Toledo, without accomplishing or innovating any new development in formal or conceptual terms.

Important to the establishment of the present study, was how Toledo's considerable investment in community altruism was brought into the limelight on a national scale in 1998. The term 'community altruism' has been chosen over the favoured one of 'activism' for two significant reasons:

1) its greater power in referring to a range of action through interaction:
    a. by an individual participating in group action or actions,
    b. group action to benefit *that* group as a community,
    c. the action of a group or community for the benefit of a larger group or complex grouping of groups or communities such as that denoted as 'civil society';
2) the definition of the term 'activism' as direct political protest or reaction to political events or policies does not cover the range of altruistic projects Oaxacan artists engage with as individuals and as a community, although it is accepted that many of these altruistic projects are designed to make up for a perceived lack of local development or implementation of political policy.

In the 1998 case used here, Toledo had been attracting and coordinating private and public investment towards the renovation of the seventeenth century former convent in the heart of Oaxaca that would create a monumental cultural centre. Upon completion of the renovation, Toledo threatened to boycott the opening ceremony in protest of how the 'spirit' of the project had been hijacked and reworked to create a propaganda vehicle for the state and Federal governments, including President Ernesto Zedillo, who was to officiate at the opening ceremony.

Toledo did appear at the ceremony but immediately criticised the procedure by contesting the slight he perceived on the part of governor Diodoro Carrasco's state Government in removing the name of his organisation, the Patronato Pro-Defensa y Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural de Oaxaca (ProOax) 'Board for the Defence and Conservation of the Patrimony of Oaxaca', from the list of founding entities on the official invitation. To prove his point and make his protest, the artist revealed the inauguration plaque for the renovated building building over 30 minutes before the Mexican president was due to officially do so, thereby engraving ProOax's involvement into the history of the event and highlighting its crucial influence on the project's realization. Interviews given by Toledo to the national and local press were most thoroughly and

fairly reported by powerful left-wing weekly magazine *Proceso*[8] and left-wing daily newspaper *La Jornada:*

> We hope that in the future the relationship between the government and civil society will be on an equal footing. Even though it is true that the hurried inclusion of ProOax was undertaken by the government to extricate itself from the embarrassment it had created, I think there was some rectification and they did consent to invite us to a small part of the party. It was no bad thing making them lower their heads and recognise civic participation.[9]

The powerful, political intervention of the artist, who had invested considerably in the $11.9-million, four-and-a-half-year project, had an impact on the author. As a journalist experiencing a growing level of engagement with the local artistic community, encounters with young artists, including Guillermo Olguín Mitchell (b. 1969, Mexico City, Distrito Federal, Mexico) and Soid Pastrana Vera (b. 1970, Juchitán, Oaxaca, Mexico), were significant. Their work was based on recent study and travel abroad and its composition and elements were easier for me to read. These younger artists were also practitioners of community altruism.

The breakthrough came early in 2003 upon meeting Demián Flores Cortés (b. 1971, Juchitán, Oaxaca, Mexico), a painter who had lived his childhood in a rural, coastal region of the state of Oaxaca but as a teenager and adult had resided in Mexico City. Flores had used the impact of his formative years in the then largest city in the world, his undergraduate degree at the National School of Plastic Arts and the early years of his career, to forge a unique and acclaimed Pop Art style.

With a developing nation's desire to create capital, and a unique geographical situation as poor neighbour to the United States of America, the global force of consumer capitalism, Mexico and especially Mexico City allow themselves to be awash with unbridled forms and magnitudes of advertising materials. Flores had used his Zapotec descendancy and personal immersion in an image-and-text-filled urban jungle to found a visual soapbox from which to discuss Americanisation, globalisation and their effects on his native country and its native peoples. He had created a new visual argument for Mexican art, one that focuses intelligently on

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[8] Proceso, 'Francisco Toledo y Sergio Hernández denuncian: "Nunca se sentaron a discutir un proyecto general"', *Proceso*, 1 August 1998,
<http://hemeroteca.proceso.com.mx> [8 June 2007].
[9] Angélica Abelleyra and Rosa Elvira Vargas, 'Calenda y Sandunga en la apertura del Centro Cultural Santo Domingo', *La Jornada*, 24 July 1998,
<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/1998/07/25/calenda.html> [8 June 2007].

both national and international politics whilst in true Pop Art style uses over-familiar logotypes, slogans and street-level popular culture to make its point. Postmodernism was prevalent in Flores's work: creating discussion of identity, territory and memory by confusing time, space, cultural references, techniques and media within a series and even within a single work. Alongside his business-like attitude to cultural production, painting on a rigorous nine-to-five office schedule and networking at every possible opportunity, Flores also practised community altruism primarily, but not exclusively, through cultural promotion.

As predicted by postmodernism, there existed a community that held a similar worldview to the author's, one that simultaneously embraced and analysed a globalising media culture, but was of wholly distinct ethnic and geographical descent and, as representative of the colonised, far removed from the attitude and upbringing of coloniser that was embedded within the continent in which the author had lived and studied. This community actively engaged in expressing and promoting this worldview in local terms while reflecting and often mocking the global picture.

The research question of the present study asks how the young members of this community use their cultural heritage, a real-time knowledge of the changing world around them and positive attempts at community altruism that reinforce their ideas, to create visual representations of contemporary Mexico that are simultaneously worthy and conscious of global consumption. The resulting knowledge facilitates analysis of the trends and directions taken by cultural producers in a postcolonial location affected at an accelerating rate by forces the present study recognises as characteristic of the postmodern condition and in particular globalisation.

The methodology to be used was to be one founded on the integration I had constructed with the community in question. This chapter firstly introduces this methodology before reviewing and implementing the theoretical essence of the research, beginning with the development of the concepts of postmodernity and postmodernism which are then discussed in direct relation to Latin America, Mexico and Oaxaca.

1.1 A postmodern ethnography

The research was undertaken in the field of the history of art and visual communication, with significant attention given to the application and development of methodologies and knowledge derived from social anthropology. This conjunction was important in forming a proper understanding of the values and conditions created by the contemporary set of cultural, philosophical, political, and ethical ideas that create

postmodern society as generally understood; it is related to the specific cultural conditions, individual and group practices in the area under investigation. Following Nestor García Canclini's defining model that is also specific to the geographical area under investigation this approach can be categorised as transdisciplinary.

The international character of the modern art 'industry' and the related necessity for artists, including those focused upon by the research, to operate as international subjects, created the need for an understanding of the mass media as the global communication system responsible for modern-day learning. The specific local, regional, and global political content of all types of media source playing a direct part in both the resulting visual expression and community altruism of the artists studied.

The research focuses on the work of contemporary young Mexican artists Demián Florés and Soid Pastrana, who are recognised as important representatives of a new generation of painters from the Southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. Other artists were studied in varying degrees. The creation and operation of the Oaxacan art community in its present form is attributed to Francisco Toledo (b. 1940, Mexico City, Distrito Federal, Mexico) and therefore his life and work is analysed in relation to the hypothesis in Chapter 2, with particular emphasis on early political associations and continued endeavours in community altruism that take many forms on many scales. The impact of Toledo's life and work on the lives and works of the artists studied, particular places, events important in the interpretation of these artists' work, and their own recognizably-similar investments in community altruism are also documented in the resulting analysis.

Based on existing professional and personal relationships with the artists studied and a number of the members of the Oaxacan art community, the research is primarily based on information obtained through participant observation and the continued cross-referencing of that primary material with the content of relevant mass media sources within a framework of theoretical analysis defined as postmodern through its simultaneous use and identification of the tools of postmodernism.

An example can be given to clarify this facet of the research: Demián Flores arrived in England on the very first day the present research began. This posed an immediate precedent and highlighted the challenges and rewards that the real-time study of a developing, contemporary phenomenon itself poses. Launched immediately into ethnography mode, the form of participant observation being undertaken was therefore questioned by the study itself. Such questions have been addressed by postmodern ethnographers. From the work of John Brewer, the

ethnography undertaken by the research can be classified as being based
on the humanistic model of social research: based on naturalism, the study
of social life in real, naturally-occurring settings.[10] Brewer presents his
concept of the 'ethnographic imagination'[11] to respond to the postmodern
critique of ethnography. The three dimensions Brewer gives to this concept
provide some responses to questions with which the present research
engages:

1) the belief that fragments [of primary data] can reliably represent a
   social world which cannot be completely described in the restricted
   spatial confines of an ethnographic text;
2) the belief that small-scale, micro-events in everyday life have at least
   common features with the broader social world; and,
3) the belief that people make sense of their everyday lives […]
   involving a complex reasoning process, which must be analysed if that
   social world is to be understood in the round, although members'
   accounts should not be taken at face value.[12]

Following the classification criteria of Colin Robson, the present
research can be categorised as exploratory and descriptive in terms of the
purposes of its enquiry, and as a case study in terms of a research strategy
that has been designed to be as flexible as possible.[13] Practically all of the
research was conducted on qualitative data.

Once these ways of defining the research had been assimilated into the
design of the ethnography to be undertaken, the artistic output, community
altruism, the lives of the cultural producers and of the author changed
drastically due to the eruption of the Oaxaca Conflict on 14 June 2006.
Before this event, it had been planned to examine the Oaxacan and
Mexican cultural sectors' involvement in the federal election of 2006 that
had generated enormous amounts of mediatic quarreling and controversy
for a number of years as the neo-conservative right were facing the
potential loss of power over Mexico for the first time in the nation's
history. After a highly controversial campaign battle and defeat for the left
by only 0.56% of the vote, the author spent one month living in Mexico
City, only a few blocks from where the defeated candidate and his
supporters had staged a sit-in that lasted five months from July to
November 2006.

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[10] John Brewer, *Ethnography* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), p. 31.
[11] John Brewer, *Ethnography*, p. 53.
[12] John Brewer, *Ethnography*, p. 53.
[13] Colin Robson, *Real-world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), p. 135.

An evolving media industry, increasing creation of citizen and independent digital news media and a developing transparency in Mexico promoted by President Vicente Fox's 'Transparency Law' implemented in June 2003, were all factors in creating a real-time, multi-faceted investigative and media-combative arena that continues to unearth, present and discuss political parties' ideologies, spending, and actions.

In Oaxaca, public reaction to increased levels of corruption and violent repression exhibited by the state government converted the annual teachers' strike into a localised revolution that saw the creation of the Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (APPO) 'Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca' control the centre of the state capital and introducing a state of 'non-governabililty' across the city and state towards the destitution of the state governor, Ulises Ruíz Ortiz. Documentation and analysis of how the art community was forced to engage with and articulate the Oaxaca Conflict to the point of mediating dialogues for the resolution of the historical insurgency is presented in Chapter 4. The predicted violent end to this situation, an occurrence the Oaxacan art community worked hard to prevent to then itself become persecuted in the process, came on 25 November 2006.

Towards the collection of more comparable qualitative and quantitative data, a survey of how artists in the Oaxacan art community interpreted and considered postmodernism in their work or that of members of their community and direct investigation into their experience of the effects of the Oaxaca Conflict on their artistic output and livelihoods, was attempted.[14] Only a very limited response to the survey was obtained. Reasons for the relative failure of this attempt included:

1) an observed 'I'm too busy' attitude of many Oaxacan artists in response to any general request for information or assistance that is not about *only* their own work or directly relevant to their career, its betterment or a project they are already committed to;
2) a reluctance to participate in a survey in a form that would require some investment of time in the use of information technology (typing answers to questions). It was hoped that this factor could have been reduced by the author's offer to receive artists' responses in any form, including during interview.
3) highly subjective questions in the survey, labelled as 'leading' by Oaxaca-resident American painter Jonathan Barbieri (b. 1955, Washington, D.C., U.S.A.). It was hoped that this factor could also have been reduced by including an open invitation to interpret the questions in any relevant manner and provide any information thought beneficial.

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[14] The questionnaire used in the survey is presented in Appendix I.

The survey was based on an original investigation of Oaxacan art to be discussed in detail in Chapter 2 undertaken by English poet and writer Robert Valerio, whose study, undertaken in the late 1990s is the only existing analysis and criticism of Oaxacan art. The survey distributed by the present research included an additional, optional section that repeated Valerio's original questions.

The most detailed response to the survey was provided by Demián Flores, whose answers supported the data collected over the fieldwork period and through a number of years of professional and personal association with him. The subjective nature of the subject matter of the present research was reflected by the almost sole reliance on informal interviewing and the cross-referencing of actual and media events in both the present and the past to obtain a comprehensive way to interpret and analyse the sample group.

The nature of the deep integration with the local culture and of the participant observation created their own difficulties, not least of all the vulnerable nature of the collection and storage of information on the part of the author and of many of the sources used. For example, the Oaxacan Left-leaning newspaper *Noticias Voz e Imagen de Oaxaca* was victim of a prolonged siege from June 2005 that included an invasion in July 2005 that caused the loss of its entire on-line resources, digital archives and part of its print archive. The author's own resources were subjected to many changes of address within the city of Oaxaca, the state of Oaxaca, the country of Mexico, and globally.

1.2 Postmodernism as an analytical framework

The primary aim of the present research is to investigate the expression of postmodern thought in the contemporary culture of a particular group embedded in a poor, rapidly-evolving population that is geographically located within a postcolonial society. The group under examination consists of a generation of young artists; the culture they exhibit is the cultural output in terms of the works of art they produce and also the nature of their altruistic actions in aid of the wider community to which their group belongs.

The assumption is made that postmodernism is the cultural and intellectual phenomenon deemed responsible for discussing the social and historical conditions known collectively as postmodernity and prevalent in the late twentieth century. The present research demarcates and introduces the two concepts using the work of Andreas Huyssen, who argues that 'the adversary and critical element in the notion of postmodernism can only be

fully grasped if one takes the late 1950s as the starting point of a mapping of the postmodern.' [15] This statement concludes Huyssen's detailed discussion of postmodernism as originally an American phenomenon that he posits as an avant-garde movement that included 'an iconoclastic attack'[16] on what Peter Bürger has termed 'institution art'[17] to refer to 'the ways in which art's role in society is perceived and defined, and […] to ways in which art is produced, marketed, distributed and consumed.'[18]

Bürger's argument that the avant-garde of the nineteenth century[19] was a separation with aesthetic tradition that attempted to reintegrate art and life is seen by Huyssen as suggesting 'useful distinctions between modernism and the avant-garde, distinctions which in turn can help us place the American avant-garde of the 1960s.' This perspective, according to Huyssen, makes it possible to discern that political contradiction with the avant-garde's major goal: 'to undermine, attack and transform the bourgeois institution art and its ideology of autonomy rather than only changing artistic and literary modes of representation.'[20]

Oppositional to modernism's traditional notion of form and meaning that upheld 'cultural institutions and traditional modes of representation […] in a society in which high art played an essential role in legitimizing hegemony' was the 'specific radicalism' of the avant-garde that Huyssen sees as 'directed against the institutionalisation of high art as a discourse of hegemony' and, in turn, 'recommended itself as a source of energy and inspiration to the American postmodernists of the 1960s.'[21]

Regarding postmodernism as being primarily an American movement of the 1960s that had 'some of the makings of a genuine avant-garde movement',[22] was also confirmed from a European perspective, by Jean-Francoise Lyotard:

> The word is in current use on the American continent among sociologists and critics; it designates the state of our culture following the transformations

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[15] Andreas Huyssen, 'Mapping the Postmodern', *New German Critique*, 33 Modernity and Postmodernity (Autumn, 1984), 5-52 (p. 24).

[16] Huyssen, 'Mapping', p. 20.

[17] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). Originally published as *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974).

[18] Huyssen, 'Mapping', p. 20.

[19] Bürger's *Theory* principally connects the historical European avantgarde to three movements: Dada, early surrealism and the postrevolutionary Russian avantgarde.

[20] Huyssen, 'Mapping', p. 20.

[21] Huyssen, 'Mapping', p. 21.

[22] Huyssen, 'Mapping', p. 20.

which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature and the arts.[23]

Vital to the hypothesis being tested by the present work is Huyssen's identification of a variation of postmodernism over time that allows the categorisation of a series of postmodernisms. The present research connects the early career and temporally related aspects of the life and work of Francisco Toledo to Huyssen's 1960s postmodernism, characterised by:

1) new cultural energies;
2) a sense of a fundamentally new situation;
3) a temporal imagination which displayed a powerful sense of the future and of new frontiers, of rupture and discontinuity, of crisis, and generational conflict;
4) the attack on institution art was always also an attack on hegemonic social institutions;
5) a technological optimism […] What photography and film had been in the 1920s, television, video and the computer were for the prophets of a technological aesthetic in the 1960s;
6) an uncritical attempt to validate popular culture as a challenge to the canon of high art, modernist or traditional. This 'populist' trend of the 1960s with its celebration of rock 'n roll and folk music, of the imagery of everyday life and of the multiple forms of popular literature gained much of its energy in the context of the counter-culture and by a next to total abandonment of an earlier American tradition of a critique of modern mass culture.[24]

Huyssen discusses the critical view of Daniel Bell and others that he summarises thus: 'demonstrators of the 1960s were practising modernism in the streets',[25] but criticises this very positively in terms of the current hypothesis:

> [My] point here is precisely that high modernism had never seen fit to be in the streets in the first place, that its earlier undeniably adversary role was superseded in the 1960s revolt against that version of modernism

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[23] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Foreword by Fredric Jameson. Translation by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 3. Originally published as *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Les editions de Minuit, 1979).
[24] Huyssen, 'Mapping', pp. 17-22.
[25] Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 51. Cited in Huyssen, 'Mapping', p. 18.

which had been domesticated in the 1950s, become part of the liberal-conservative consensus of the times, and which had even been turned into a propaganda weapon in the cultural-political arsenal of Cold War anti-communism.[26]

The present author posits that postmodernism suffered a similar fate as that of high modernism described here, during the approximate period 1970-1990, whereby postmodernism was commandeered and 'turned into a propaganda weapon in the cultural-political arsenal' of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. It is this 1970s and 1980s version of postmodernism that was initially received, analysed and unsuccessfully rejected by Latin America, in both academic and non-academic spheres. Confounding this importation of political, aesthetic and social perspectives, was this continent's experience in the 1990s, along with the rest of the world, of a 'reduction in the attractiveness of postmodern thought and [that] placed globalization at the centre of the social sciences.'[27]

The 'cut-throat' capitalist strategies of the 1970s and 1980s, still being applied and confounded during the 1990s and beyond, in Latin America as elsewhere, correspond to the generation of artists in Oaxaca who created weak reflections of Toledo and other painters' successful projects. The new generation of painters studied by the present research, born around 1970, comprise a younger strata eager to emulate iconic styles of art and behaviour but from a different standpoint, based on the importance of a global education and a globalised manner to package and market themselves, their work and their ideals in a hyper-real but under-achieving economy.

Research the author undertook before the present research revealed that were far less than 1000 total Internet users in the city of Oaxaca in 1997, with the largest Internet service provider having contracted only 490 clients, of which only 350 were current users in August of that year.[28] This service provider was the only small enterprise, an innovative start-up called Antequera Red, amongst four service providers available. The other

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[26] Huyssen, 'Mapping', p. 18.
[27] Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for entering and leaving modernity* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. xxxv. This English edition includes a new introduction: 'Hybrid Cultures in Globalized Times', that was first published in the 2001 Spanish edition: Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad Néstor García Canclini* (Buenos Aires: Ediciónes Paidós, 2001). Originally published in Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1990.
[28] Neil Pyatt, 'Information superhighway, Junction 97 Oaxaca, Oaxaca', *Noticias Voz e imagen de Oaxaca*, The Grasshopper, 24 August 1997, p. 16.

three enterprises were: the IT department of the local technological college, the Instituto Tecnológico de Oaxaca (ITO); a local branch of American Internet service pioneer, Compuserve; and the Mexican nationalised telephone company, Telmex.

These four companies provided a basic 56KB dial-up modem connection to all the major businesses, academic and government institutions in Oaxaca. The lack of market necessity, the lack of affordable technology to effectively cover the distance from Mexico City and McAllen, Texas, the location of the closest hub of the internet backbone,[29] meant that Telmex did not physically connect Oaxaca to any form of high-speed Internet until 2000. That development required placing large-scale transmission and receiving equipment on the Fortín Hill that physically delimits the city to the northeast, towards Mexico City.

Exemplifying the highly commercial nature of the increasing investment made and emphasising the incredible power of this monopolistic entity bound to grow exponentially in an unregulated environment or market, in 2001, Telmex announced a national campaign in conjunction with American software corporation Microsoft. The T1msn Spanish-language portal was automatically delivered to new and undiscerning users of Telmex's Internet service, who in turn had its content automatically delivered onto their browsers and computers. The Internet service, called Infinitum, continued to be promoted using the absolutist slogan *Infinitum es Internet* 'Infinitum is the Internet'.

Jean-François Lyotard

In his milestone work, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984), Lyotard underlines the transavantgardism of the foundations of postmodernism:

> Artists and writers must be brought back into the bosom of the community, or at least, if the latter is considered to be ill, must be assigned the task of healing it.[30]

The promotion of this 'task' and the illness suffered by 'the community' were most clearly analysed and presented by Lyotard, and in the works: *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) by Jean Baudrillard; and *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1984) by Frederic Jameson.

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[29] In real terms, Latin America remains physically unconnected from the internet, relying on advances in, and now vital use of, satellite technology.
[30] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 73.

Derrida's deconstruction is key and therefore briefly explained here, but it is important to examine the accelerating nature of change induced by the social and historical conditions referred to above and not postpone that examination by dwelling on the formation of a theoretical position already having been accepted in the present hypothesis.

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard posits that advances in technology, specifically the use of computers in the communication of information, what we now refer to as information technology, create new developments in knowledge and its distribution. Lyotard exemplifies this advancement with the changing role of the university but assures that it is visible in all of society's arenas where society is defined as a 'unified totality',[31] or 'giant machine'.[32] This definition makes it unnecessary to choose 'between the homogeneity and the intrinsic duality of the social',[33] as long as knowledge is being communicated and the aim is to study that knowledge but also address that the communication component of society 'is becoming more prominent day by day, both as a reality and as an issue.'[34]

The outcome of this increased use of communication, diffusion of information and development of knowledge is an increment in the individual's capacity to make his or her own decisions that have the potential to be better informed and of greater impact on, or greater relation to, decisions of other individuals. Lyotard concedes that knowledge has become the principal form of production and could become the major stake in the worldwide competition for power and that this is already the defining factor between developed and developing-world nations. Globalisation, which he calls 'the new forms of circulation of capital that go by the generic name of *multi-national corporations,*'[35] are overpowering the nation-states, pioneers in a rewriting of rules and terms that has no choice but to accept the redrawing of borders and the nature of groupings.

The 'breaking up of grand narratives'[36] is how Lyotard articulates the mode and meaning of the change he sees as 'societies enter […] the post-industrial age and cultures the postmodern one.'[37] The metaphysical nature

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[31] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 12.
[32] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition,* p. 13. Lyotard cites Mumford, L. *Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development* (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1971), as the innovator of the idea of society as a machine.
[33] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 13.
[34] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 16.
[35] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 5. Emphasis in the original.
[36] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 15.
[37] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 1.

of metanarratives leads to incredulity in those narratives, commonly exemplified using the historic fates of Christianity and Marxism. Failing to fulfil their promise and being exposed to promote the interests of traditional power-mongers most often seen as white or Western, heterosexual and middle-class males, causes such mighty narratives to lose their legitimating functions.[38]

Lyotard interprets this decline of master narratives as a positive thing, notably he forwards the surfacing or resurfacing of successful micronarratives; the related promotion of alterity and difference that gives marginal voices new outlets could occur by default or result from the wars, scandals and crises viewed as generated by what are now viewed as modernist metanarratives.

Lyotard developed his theory further using sociolinguistic analyses in the tradition of post-structuralism postulated by Jacques Derrida, who used the structuralist focus on linguistics to develop Heidegger's idea of '*Destruktion*.'[39] *Destruktion* was further defined by Heidegger as an *Abbau* 'dismantling, lit. unbuilding', thus:

> There necessarily belongs to the conceptual interpretation of being and its structures, that is, to the reductive construction of being, a destruction - a critical process in which the traditional concepts, which at first must necessarily be employed, are de-constructed down to the sources from which they were drawn. Only by means of this destruction can ontology fully assure itself in a phenomenological way of the genuine character of its concepts.[40]

This can be simply defined as the intellectual exercise of a negative analysis: that to live authentically one must escape from the average everyday ordinariness of life and contemplate his/her own death (non-being, or nothingness); in turn this exercise creates a positive analysis of history through an attempt to discern authenticity through a rigorous questioning of accepted authority. Structuralism theorised that meaning was created by systems of signs working together; a sign being an object,

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[38] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. xxiv.
[39] Iain D. Thomson, 'Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger's Deconstruction of Metaphysics', in Iain D. Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 7-43.
[40] Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Translation, introduction and lexicon by Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, c1982), p. 23. Originally published as *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1975).