

**PHILOSOPHY IN MEXICO:  
THE OPIUM OF THE INTELLECTUALS  
OR A PROPHEPIC INSIGHT?**

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In Mexico the public word, since the *Cartas de Relación* by Cortéz to the latest State of the Union Address, has been sequestered by power.

Carlos Fuentes.

Taking philosophy in twentieth century Mexico as a case in point, this paper will describe the process through which the intellectual labor of Mexican intellectuals was appropriated in order to minimize its material impact on society. It is often argued that the works of Mexican intellectuals manifests a critical gap between theory and practice, between the expressed desire to solve national problems and the meager impact on the material realities of the nation. One might conclude, then, that philosophy was in effect an opium for Mexican intellectuals. But, on the contrary, recent research indicates that Mexican philosophers have made a significant contribution to the discussion of problems faced by post-industrial societies.<sup>1</sup> Dreamers or prophets? This is a question that must be resolved in order to fully appreciate the intellectual production of Mexican thinkers and to gain an understanding of the process by which language, as a material condition, affects the will, nay, the consciousness of man.

A principal assumption underlying the following discussion is that language is viewed as a material entity, a material condition. In effect, the property of discourse is defined as the ability to understand statements, to elicit an immediate access to the body of already formulated statements and as the capacity to invest discourse on decisions, institutions and practices. If language is material and it can be turned into property, then it is also subject to a political economy of discourse. In every society discourse is controlled, selected, organized and redistributed in order to avert the power inherent in its materiality. To illustrate this notion it is pertinent to consider what happened to the Friar Francisco de la Cruz after the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire: he was burned at the stake in 1578 for expounding the idea that Mexican Indians were God's chosen people. There is also the nun-philosopher-poet Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz, one of the great minds of colonial Mexico. This woman who has been credited with saving the colonial period from silence, died in 1695, shortly after church authorities forbade her to write anymore. Taken at random from Mexican history these examples reveal that

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it is precisely the restrictions and prohibitions applied to words that manifest the power of language.<sup>2</sup>

A body of knowledge (e.g. psychiatry in the nineteenth century or Mexican philosophy in the twentieth century) appropriates the intellectual labor of major thinkers in the sense that it engenders certain positions which are then occupied by specific individuals. These positions (hereafter termed "subjective positions") are occupied according to the dictates of the political economy of discourse. This notion can be understood by recalling José Ortega y Gasset's contention that man's self or ego is neither material nor spiritual but instead, a task or a project. This ego-project, moreover, is not self-determined according to the individual's will since it imposes itself "as a necessity of being this or that particular self."<sup>3</sup> The necessity to which Ortega refers is imposed precisely by the political economy of knowledge. It follows then, that individuals are not at liberty to speak of anything at anytime. To speak against the rules of discourse, to speak the words of an emergent knowledge against an established paradigm, is to risk being declared mad, if not physical injury.

The subjective positions that Mexican philosophers are allowed to occupy will be ascertained from three major perspectives. The first perspective provides a chronological background in which, with reference to various domains, an individual is defined as a questioning, listening, seeing or observing subject. Secondly, the subjective position of the philosopher is defined by a) establishing the criteria of competence applied to the philosopher, b) the relationship between the philosopher and other philosophers, c) the characteristics that define the function of the philosopher in relation to society as a whole and d) the institutional sites which legitimize his statements. The final section deals with the subjective position that the philosopher can occupy in the information networks. Three corresponding questions can serve as a guide: Have Mexican philosophers been able to invest their discourse in decisions, institutions and practices? Has the power inherent in the materiality of their discourse been averted? Have these philosophers had immediate access to the body of already formulated statements?

### I

It was noted that according to a certain *program of information* a particular individual becomes the *listening subject*. At the beginning of the twentieth century this program of information was rather gloomy. There was no interest in popular culture, the educated minority had no contact with the people, European philosophies were ostentatiously imitated, there existed a sterile, almost pompous art and ignorance of the country's popular traditions. In the face of such a program of information a subjective position is created which functions as a vacuum that attracts intellectuals to a nationalist, anti-

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materialist stand. Being nationalist, this position leads to a concern with the socio-economic realities of the country; but being anti-materialist as well, this position encouraged serious intellectual contradictions. Then, with respect to a *grid of explicit or implicit questions*, the individual becomes the *questioning subject*. The question of identity, which is ultimately tied to the emergence of philosophy of *lo mexicano* (that which is Mexican) becomes a major concern after the collapse of the Porfiriato (as the regime of Porfirio Diaz is known). "The intellectual then sees how the real Mexico, previously stuffed under a stiff collar and leggings, undresses before his eyes," writes Luis Villoro.<sup>5</sup> An emergent concern with the problem of identity leads in two directions: *indigenismo* and *hispano-americanismo*. Painters, musicians, and even architects attempt to derive inspiration from indigenous forms. There thus emerges a concern over the previous exclusion of the indigenous races and the announcement of projects to achieve their integration into the Mexican state. This particular feature is important because the myth of the indigenous serves in the post-Mexican Revolution period as a symbol of originality. The question of hispano-americanism, again, is a parallel concern, the assertion of the emergent knowledge against the universal claim of the European paradigm.

According to a *table of characteristic features* the individual occupies the position of the *seeing subject*. During the time of the Mexican Revolution the characteristics appear, as the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos indicates, "in the midst of fatigue and the confusion of our time." In the same work, *Indología*, he makes reference to the reason: ". . . it is not enough to imagine answers, since what is lacking is to improvise solutions. Improvisation is our calamity because it is our fatality. Life has rushed us. This is the continent of no waiting."<sup>6</sup> Similar characteristic features are perceived by other seeing subjects. The novel of the revolution, for example, does not emerge as "revolutionary", but rather as a narration, as a chronicle. Appropriately, in the midst of the rush of events, the Mexican poet José Juan Tablada introduces the haiku, the poetic formed designed to capture a vision, a poetic moment. It is no wonder that painting became the best form of expression of the times; the painter that best expressed the drama of the revolution, José Clement Orozco, also stated that "*la Revolución fue para mí el mas alegre y divertido de los carnavales*" (the Revolution was for me the most joyous and fun of all carnivals).<sup>7</sup> If the Revolution was "an explosion of reality and a groping search" as Paz states in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, then the characteristic features will require that the philosopher, as a seeing subject, transform his philosophy into poetry. And that is precisely what Vasconcelos did: he considered philosophy poetry with a system.

After the denouement of the initial enthusiasm regarding the Mexican Revolution, the individual becomes the observing subject with respect to certain descriptive types. By the 1930's the members of the intellectual class,

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the "generation that was sacrificed" as Alfonso Reyes used to call it, were in exile, in embassies, or in the bureaucracy. By the time Lazaro Cárdenas came to the Presidency, the intelligentsia was too fragmented to carry out the plans made the previous decade. If immediately after the Revolution the subjective positions were limited to a table of characteristic features about the new world of *lo mexicano* which are immediately described, inscribed, and transcribed into different forms of artistic expression, the observing subject, on the contrary, goes beyond mere features. The descriptive type according to which the *observing subject* is positioned now deals with the *mode of living* that world: the subject turns the gaze inward. Thus, in 1934, Samuel Ramos introduced his social psychoanalysis of the Mexican, in which he observes that Mexican culture had relied upon imitation of foreign cultural models and that these models are not adequate for Mexican reality.<sup>8</sup> This imitation of what is foreign, furthermore, indicates that the Mexican people suffer from an inferiority complex. The significance of his analysis lies in the theoretical shift from placing the blame for alienation of the Mexican on outside forces, to locating the origins of alienation within the Mexican. It now becomes necessary to discover the man who hides behind an attitude of imitation. Thus, Martín Luis Guzmán published *La Sombra del Caudillo*, which is the first novel to denounce barbarian tactics and political lies. Vasconcelos held a similar attitude in his autobiography, which began to appear in 1935. And, in later years, Rodolfo Usigli wrote *El gesticulador* (1934) which examines a social and individual behavior among Mexicans: the hiding behind a gesture or rhetoric. Also in painting there was a profound change. Beginning in 1934 the paintings of Orozco revealed the desire to an exorcism of the elements which alienate the Mexican: the empty word, the symbols of irrationality, the grotesque gesture, the circus of demagogues. They also indicated a solution: rip off the mask. This is most eloquently demonstrated in *The Catharsis*, the highest peak of tension expressed in Orozco's paintings.<sup>9</sup>

The observation of *lo mexicano* became more refined by 1950, a year which also saw the stabilization of the country and the formation of the paradoxical *Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)*. The treatment of philosophical themes and problems became then a program or a theory. Leopoldo Zea proposed to build an original culture and through it reach universal culture. This original philosophy would, accordingly, emerge in two forms: as a reflection on Mexican themes from the Mexican perspective and as a meditation upon universal themes from the same perspective. Thus, the History of Ideas in Mexico was constituted. Some of the studies included in this emergent discipline are those of Edmundo O'Gorman who traces the Idea of America in Western consciousness, and those of Emilio Uranga who attempts an analysis of *lo mexicano*. A similar approach is found in *Al filo del agua* by Agustín Yanez and *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo: these are novels that no longer limit themselves to description of events but, rather, conduct an

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exploration of the Mexican psyche. In painting, Rufino Tamayo (who according to Leopoldo Zea, is racked by two national characteristics: unrest and anguish) explores the world of the unconscious encountering at times mythical elements.<sup>10</sup> By the middle of the century, the different descriptive types have taken the observing subject from a consideration of the subject's own psychological make up to the exploration of the universal:

If we tear off those masks, if we open up, if, in brief, we face ourselves, we will begin to live and to really think. Nakedness and abandonment await us. There, in the open solitude transcendence also awaits us: the hands of other solitary beings. We are, for the first time in our history, contemporary of all men.<sup>11</sup>

These descriptive types which are directed toward the subject itself, have remained constant to some extent, but their very nature has limited them: far from becoming institutionalized, they were exercises in introspection, not in construction, criticism or creation.

According to contemporary Mexican thought it is not the Mexican who hides behind gestures and rhetoric: it is language itself. Thus, it is said that the renaissance features of the conquest hide the medieval impact of the colonization; the language of the enlightenment hides the retention of feudalism; the language of liberal positivism hides financial imperialism; the language of the Mexican Revolution hides the realities of counter-revolution. Consequently, at present,

. . . our true language (perceived by Darío and Neruda, Reyes and Paz, Borges and Huidobro, Vallejo and Lezama, Lima, Cortázar and Carpentier) is in the process of discovering and creating itself and, in the same act of its discovery and creation, it places in check, revolutionarily, a whole economic, political, and social structure founded in a language that is vertically false.<sup>12</sup>

The political economy of language thus functions as a device to keep the subject away from the respective social, political and economic realities of the time.

II

In addition to the mystification of language, which blocks the realization of words into praxis, there is the manipulation of the status given (or denied) to Mexican philosophers in order to avert the material effect of their discourse. At this point a brief historical note is in order. At the request of president Benito Juárez, Gabino Barreda introduced the positivist philosophy of August Comte in 1867 with the expressed intention of providing a remedy for political anarchy. Barreda, one of the leading Mexican intellectuals of his time, believed that only a neutral science such as mathematics could provide a foundation for common agreement. Eventually, though, positivism became the official philosophy of the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. On March 22, 1908, Justo Sierra, Mexican educator and political philosopher, delivered an address in honor of Barreda in which he dared question the "unquestionable" status of science and mathematics. It is said that the effect of this speech was like "an invisible crack, a small opening through which the outside air suddenly rushed into that rarefied chamber which, incapable of oxygenation, exploded like a bomb."<sup>13</sup> But it was on September 18, 1910, at Sierra's request, that the government reopened the University of Mexico (its predecessor, incidentally, was the Pontifical University of Mexico which antedates Harvard by eighty-five years). Two months later the Mexican Revolution signaled the end of the Porfiriato and with it the dominance of positivism in Mexican philosophy. The establishment of the *Escuela Nacional de Altos Estudios*, which later became the *Facultad de Filosofía y Letras*, resulted in the reinstatement of philosophy in state schools after more than seventy-five years. Before this event, philosophy proper was considered metaphysics and it had no place in the positivist Comtean vision of society.<sup>14</sup>

Once this institutional site was established, subjective positions emerged in which competence, in a general sense, was demonstrated by an adherence to, among others, the vitalism of Henri Bergson and the historicism of Wilhelm Dilthey. One of these subjective positions was adopted by Antonio Caso who was known as "jefe de la revolución filosófica" (chief of the philosophical revolution) and "maestro completo" (total teacher). Caso, appointed professor of philosophy after the revolt that overthrew Díaz, spent most of his life in one or another post within the university. However, once established, anti-positivism, in the form of the *filosofía de lo mexicano*, systematically excluded critical ideas. Thus, when president Lázaro Cárdenas introduced a law requiring support for socialist education, Caso opposed it. Cárdenas dismissed Caso but protests from students and intellectuals forced him to reverse his decision. Allegedly, the philosophy of *lo mexicano* did not allow for socialism or marxism for the same reason that it did not allow for positivism: it excluded a materialistic philosophy built on science. At the same

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time, the discourse of *lo mexicano* had as a major premise the rule that no foreign ideas should be borrowed. There were to be no subjective positions for those who did not adhere to the paradigm of *lo mexicano*. For example the intellectual labor of Ricardo and Manuel Flores Magón, who espoused radical ideas such as marxism and anarcho-syndicalism, was eliminated. The Magon brothers were forced out of the country by the Diaz regime during the early stages of the Mexican Revolution; their statements made considerable impact, however, in the labor organizing of Mexicans (Chicanos) in the United States. Not so incidentally, Ricardo chose to spend his days in an American prison rather than accept a pardon which required him to admit that he had violated the law. Thus, the power of his words was averted. The overall effect of the criteria of competence set by the *filosofía de lo mexicano* was the exclusion of social criticism at a time of social revolution.

In relation to international philosophy, it is no secret that the subjective position occupied by Mexican philosophers is a subordinate one. Thus, one of the few but growing number of books written in English, has the following prologue:

If the 'Good Neighbor Policy' were a fact rather than a political slogan or at best a pious wish, the life, work, and death of one of the great thinkers, writers, and teachers of the Western Hemisphere (Antonio Caso) could hardly have passed almost without being noticed in the Anglo-Saxon part of the American continent.<sup>15</sup>

José Gaos, Spanish philosopher exiled in Mexico, notes that not only are the names of Mexican philosophers excluded from the history of philosophy (i.e. Western European philosophy) but even the Mexicans themselves had accepted as a part of their intellectual self-evaluation, the ignorance of others. For example, according to Carlos Monsivais, Mexican philosophers move between snobbery and anti-intellectualism in their relation to other individuals. One formula is the belief that Mexican philosophy has now achieved intellectual maturity or a cosmopolitan level; the other is a rejection of rigorous knowledge on the ground that it is too "bookish", not sufficiently vital or intuitive.<sup>16</sup> According to him, this was a way of compensating for their lack of rigorous training. A similar judgement is expressed by another Latin American thinker, namely, that in Latin America "methodical explanation is substituted by emotional explosions," or "philosophy is reduced to the exercise of verbal ingenuities or a reclaim based on the arguments of purely instinctive beliefs."<sup>17</sup> But these associations depend on the assumption that man is free to speak of anything at anytime. When philosophical discourse is viewed as what it *actually* is — a political economy of language — one is

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inclined to agree with Risieri Frondizi, the Argentinian philosopher who stated:

We can offer an inexhaustible source of emotion, a bleeding humanity, men who have not become philosophers because life has not let them.<sup>18</sup>

More specifically, the questioning of a paradigm involves, necessarily, the use of intuition and faith. To clarify this point it helps to recall Kuhn's notion that in the period between paradigms scientific convictions are suspended and adherence to a particular paradigm is based on faith, which is to say intuition. This illustrates what happens to Mexican philosophers who question and confront the European paradigm. This confrontation creates an impossible situation for the Mexican philosopher. In questioning the European paradigm Mexican philosophers resort to intuition but in doing so they are excluded from the position of philosopher — a position which is necessary for them to "validly" question the paradigm. So if the same philosopher is faithful to the rules of the European discourse, he must exclude his own perception of the problematic. And, again, if he is faithful to his perception of the problematic he is no longer considered a "legitimate" philosopher. Chicano scholars, incidentally, find themselves in a similar position when, in their search for adequate approaches to the solution of socio-economic problems of the Chicano population, they challenge the traditional disciplines in which they have been trained.

Alfonso Reyes, the most cosmopolitan of all the Mexican thinkers makes the following observation regarding the formative years in the life of intellectuals:

The European writer is born as if in the highest floor of the Eiffel tower. A small effort of a few meters, and he excels over the mental peaks. The (Latin) American is born as if in the region of the central fire (the core of the Earth). After a colossal effort, to which contributes an exacerbated vitality, that almost resembles genius, he is barely able to peep out of the surface of the ground.<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, claims Reyes, this experience allows the Latin American to understand intellectual labor "as a public service and civilizing duty." In Mexico as in the rest of Latin America intellectuals play a very important role in the life of the nation. In effect, the relations among the intellectual and groups such as the state or its representatives are characterized by an implicit

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assumption that the role of the state is to educate and that the task of the intellectual is to guide the country. One of the consequences of this event is that there has been up to recent times, a symbiotic relationship between state representatives and intellectuals. At times this subjective position may involve some obvious contradictions: Antonio Caso, for example, was a member of the anti-positivist *Ateneo de la juventud* and at the same time director of the Club Reelccionista of Mexico City which had as its purpose the reelection of Diaz and Corral in 1910; another member of the *Ateneo*, Alfonso Reyes, was active after 1900 in promoting the political interests of his father, the Porfirian General Bernardo Reyes. A prototype of the scholar-activist was the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos who, in 1929, ran for president against Pascual Ortiz Rubio. On the other hand, there are also radical intellectuals such as Camilo Arriaga who, having studied Proudhon, Marx, Engels, and Bakunin, joined forces with the anarchists Antonio Diaz Soto Y Gama and Ricardo Flores Magón in their struggle against the *Porfiriato*.<sup>20</sup> More recently, the president of the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, Javier Baros Sierra, had previously occupied the position of Secretary of State; equally, Enrique Gonzalez Pedrero, chairman of political and social sciences was later nominated for senator of his state by the ever-ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).<sup>21</sup>

The image of the activist-scholar who sees intellectual labor as a public service is valued by Mexican and Chicano intellectuals. However, the student movement in Mexico as well as some members of the intelligentsia have denounced the inconsistencies between the promises and the realities of the present situation. Of course this challenge to the political economy of language does not take place without paying a heavy price in human lives and suffering, as indicated by the 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco.<sup>22</sup> The role that the intellectual must play in society is now denounced because it allows and, in fact, encourages the intervention of outside interests (e.g. the governing elites) in the affairs of the university. The protests of students, workers and the peasants who support them, however, has produced paradoxical results regarding the appropriation of language. Considering that the regime of Porfirio Diaz tried to establish a positivist society led by scientists, and considering also that one of the projects was to somehow alter what was believed to be the "anomalous" mind of the common Mexican, it is important to note that in response to student protests president Luis Echeverría increased subsidies for the support of schools that emphasize scientific principles.<sup>23</sup> Then, in his 1974 State of the Union Address, echoing the early twentieth century positivists, Echeverría expressed his intention to "change the mental structures of the Mexican people." Understandably, the disciplines in most demand are those which respond to the requirements of an industrialized country. Most Mexican students enroll in the schools of medicine, the National School of Business and Administration and the School

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of Engineering while the Schools of Plastic Arts, Music and the School of Philosophy and Letters experience the least attendance. Thus, the designs of the *científicos*, the leading intellectuals of the Diaz regime, are being continued by their historical antagonists, the heirs of the Mexican Revolution. The result is, of course, the same: the appropriation of language, the stifling of criticism.

As a discipline, philosophy is by no means in trouble in Mexico. The philosophical discourse that specifically lacks an institutional site is the philosophy of *lo mexicano*. Luis Villoro, a contemporary Mexican historian and philosopher, notes in his "*Perspectivas de la filosofía en México para 1980*,"<sup>24</sup> that Mexican youth does not care for such "ideological" philosophy; youth demonstrates rather an interest in a more technical and scientific philosophy as well as a tendency towards Marxism. Just as Gabino Barreda once considered positivism a neutral science with which to correct the problems of the country, technical philosophy is now viewed as having a certain neutrality. Analytical philosophy, moreover, "serves to critique, it serves as a terrible weapon to unmask the mystifying ideologies. This is the greatness of philosophy, its Socratic mission."<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Marxism is perceived as an answer to the problems of social and political sciences and philosophy of history "just as long as it reaches a more rigorous precision in its analysis," just as long as it becomes more "scientific." Villoro, then, sees the desired institutional site emerging by 1980:

(By) 1980 the genuine philosophical production will not be the property of a few isolated thinkers anymore but of an incipient professional community that will constitute itself as a school.<sup>26</sup>

A genuine or authentic philosophy is for Villoro one that does not confuse cultural preoccupations with the main philosophical task, "although it will be open to external influences." So, the philosophical discourse of *lo mexicano* which appropriated the intellectual production of Mexican thinkers for half a century has now come to an end, and a new paradigm — a more scientific discourse — has replaced it.

### III

It is now pertinent to consider the subjective positions available for Mexican philosophers in the information network. One of the key positions in this network is occupied by José Gaos, a philosopher who is not Mexican but has done as much as any Mexican to advance the philosophy of *lo mexicano*

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Thus, from his seminar for the Study of Thought in the Spanish-Speaking Countries have come the best works on the history of Hispanic American ideas: Leopoldo Zea, (*El positivismo en México* and *Apogeo y decadencia del positivismo en México*), Luis Villoro, (*Los grandes momentos del indigenismo en México*), Bernabé Navarro (*La introducción de la filosofía moderna en México*), Monelisa Lina Perez-Marchand, (*Dos etapas ideológicas del siglo XVIII*), Olga Victoria Quiroz Martínez (*La introducción de la filosofía moderna en España*), Vera Yamuni (*Concepto e imágenes en pensadores de lengua española*), Francisco López Cámara, (*La génesis de la conciencia liberal en México*), and Carmen Rovira (*Eclecticos portugueses del siglo XVIII*). Since his arrival in México, José Gaos, a disciple of José Ortega y Gasset, was provided with the resources both material and human necessary to continue his work. He was always grateful to Lazaro Cárdenas, the Mexican president at the time (1939) as well as to prominent intellectuals (Antonio Caso, Alfonso Reyes, Daniel Coño Villegas, Jesús Silva Herzog) who made it possible for him to work at institutions such as the *Facultad de Filosofía y Letras* of the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, the *Casa de España en México* (founded by the president exclusively for the exiled Spaniards which later became *El Colegio de México*), the *Fondo de Cultura Económica*, *Cuadernos Americanos* and others.<sup>27</sup>

It is understandable, then, that his presence was considered "a sober catalyst" within the intellectual climate in which the teaching of philosophy was understood as "a more or less literary rhetoric among some, as a passionate defense of a doctrine and unceasing polemic for others, and as a demonstration of a lack of rigour and information for almost everyone."<sup>28</sup> Before the arrival of Gaos, this intellectual situation had existed for almost a decade. For example, Samuel Ramos notes:

An intellectual generation which began to act publicly between 1925 and 1930 felt dissatisfied with the philosophical romanticism of Caso and Vasconcelos. After a critical revision of their doctrines, they found their anti-intellectualism groundless, but they did not wish to return to classical rationalism. In this perplexity, the books of José Ortega y Gasset began to arrive in Mexico . . .<sup>29</sup>

No doubt the *Revista de Occidente*, edited by Ortega in 1922, played a large role in alleviating this dissatisfaction. At any rate, Gaos enjoyed a reputation as a disciple of Ortega, translator of several philosophical texts published by the *Revista de Occidente*, professor of philosophy in several universities in Spain and once rector of the University of Madrid.

Once Gaos' important status in the information network is understood it is

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necessary to consider his role in the teaching of philosophy. He considered his task to be that of a commentator rather than a critic: he would choose a work and would manipulate it as if it were a rare work of art, a vase that must be described in the most insignificant detail, an ancient document to be deciphered. The emphasis lay on the material composition of the book, (e.g., its organization in sections, chapters, paragraphs, sentences) and the appearance of an idea at a particular section and its emergence in a later section.<sup>30</sup> For Gaos, the only reality is the act of thought, and such an act can be communicated only through a verbal expression; these ideas point to a present concern of philosophy, namely linguistics and conceptual analysis, but given Gaos' treatment, they served to exclude a critical analysis of the work. In the atmosphere of rhetoric and passionate defense of ideas, however, his method was indeed a virtue: the emphasis on the reading of works in the original language, the utilization of the right sources, the historical erudition, the use of good editions and commentaries. In some cases these methods, however, served as a deterrent to learning, like the occasion when some students asked him to teach a course on Marx, and Gaos announced that the works would be read in German; no one showed up for the class.<sup>31</sup>

Given Gaos' key position in the information network it is important to note that his work is characterized by a lack of exchange of information with other individuals or professional bodies. Thus, his logical-semantic studies were developed and maintained within the boundaries of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. When Russel and Wittgenstein, and analytical philosophy in general, developed in another direction, Gaos continued within the phenomenological tradition. As Alejandro Rossi tragically put it; "The child had aged and the father was not aware of it."<sup>32</sup> The subjective position that Gaos occupied disappeared with the death of the philosophy of *lo mexicano* and its two main supportive statements: 1) the concern with the circumstance, the identity of the national entity; and 2) the historicist discursive practice that considers man an empirico-transcendental synthesis, and which leads to the simultaneous attempt to separate the empirical and the transcendental while being directed at both.

Gaos' preoccupation with the relation between the concept and its verbal formulation points to a contemporary concern with the role of language; a preoccupation that has emerged in the form of *la nueva novela* in Latin America. Although Mexican and Chicano intellectuals are forced, as it were, to speak the language required by a paradigm (philosophy and social science respectively) their concern lies in a problematic that transcends the paradigm. Their true interest seems to be with "the correction of a moral injustice," to use Gaos' ethical tone, but given the conditions imposed by the political economy of language, their statements cannot be invested in decisions, institutions or practices. Furthermore, for Gaos the historical-spiritual sciences (socio-cultural or what Foucault calls the human sciences) which deal with the

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concrete, cannot reach the intersubjectivity of the *a priori* statements. This situation cannot be resolved, according to Gaos, because the only recourse, mathematization, would never reach the concrete matter of knowledge, only the abstract form of the object. For Gaos, therefore, philosophy and history cannot be reduced; but even though they are not "universally valid, or the same truth for everyone, they have genuine validity."<sup>33</sup> Unlike the problem of identity and historicism, the concern with the appropriation of language as a form of oppression and the concern with the concrete matter of knowledge have survived the death of the philosophy of *lo mexicano*.

It can now be asserted that the philosophy of *lo mexicano* has served as an opium in the sense that it has appropriated the intellectual labor of Mexican thinkers, thus averting their impact on the material conditions of the country. This appropriation has been determined by subjective positions typified by an avoidance of critical thought, rejection of foreign ideas, low status in international academic circles, a symbiotic relationship with the government, lack of institutional support and isolation from current philosophical practices. Nevertheless, while philosophical discourse was steered away from the Mexican material condition, it dealt with a problematic that has emerged in post-industrial societies. Thus, Gaos' insistence that the historical-philosophical sciences cannot be universally valid because they must deal with the concrete matter of knowledge is, given his status in the information network, symptomatic of a prophetic element in the philosophy of *lo mexicano*.

For more than three generations Mexican philosophers, social theorists and critics have been developing a political and intellectual critique of technocracy, a critique which has surfaced only recently in North America. In his book, *The Polarity of Mexican Thought*, Weinstein notes:

Their dissatisfaction with technocratic materialism and their concern to make a distinctively moral contribution to world civilization make them forbearers of discontented intellectuals throughout the world who are frustrated by mechanistic and exploitative organizations.<sup>34</sup>

The philosophy of *lo mexicano* serves as an example of the subtle processes through which authority and power impose themselves on the consciousness of individuals. As Daniel Cosío Villegas, a noted Mexican intellectual, admits, given the power of the Mexican government coupled with the general adherence to the myth-dogma of the Mexican Revolution, the intellectual is excluded from participation in political criticism. "Logically," he argues, "the Mexican intellectual, nor any other rational being, enjoys being a martyr or a

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preacher in the desert.”<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the philosophy of *lo mexicano* is relevant to contemporary concerns about the increased mechanization of life. To conclude, a statement by Michael Weinstein:

The Mexican antipositivists deserve a hearing from contemporary intellectuals sensitive to the crises of freedom and honest human relations in the complex organizations of today. Cultural chauvinism, primarily a belief that Mexicans have not created serious and original philosophy should not stand in the way of such a hearing. If it does, the losers will not be the Mexicans but ourselves.<sup>36</sup>

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### Notes

1. See Michael A. Weinstein, *The Polarity of Mexican thought: Instrumentalism and Finalism* University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976.
2. The studies of the French scholar Michel Foucault on the emergence and development of specific bodies of knowledge such as psychiatry (*Madness and Civilization*) and medicine (*The Birth of the Clinic*) as well as his attempt at a methodology (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*) have been useful in this study.
3. *Goya* Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1966, third edition, pp. 71-79 (my translation).
4. To minimize repetitiveness “political economy of language” and “paradigm” will be used interchangeably to mean the distribution of socially and politically accepted knowledge. These terms are contrasted with an “emergent knowledge” and that is the intellectual labor that has not been accepted or legitimized by the socio-political structures.
5. “La cultura mexicana de 1910 a 1960”, *Historia Mexicana* (October-December, 1960), p. 200.
6. *Indología*. Barcelona: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1927, p. 202.
7. Quoted in Villoro’s “La Cultura Mexicana de 1910 a 1960,” p. 203.
8. It is worth noting that almost simultaneously the first editions of two other significant essays in Latin American man and culture were published: Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves* (Brazil); Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, *X-Ray of the Pampa* (Argentina); *El Perfil del Hombre y la Cultura en México*, México: Impresa Mundial, 1934. It suggests the possible cultural and geographical extension of specific discursive practices.
9. Leopoldo Castedo, *A History of Latin America Art and Architecture*, tr. and ed. by Phyllis Freeman, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969, p. 228.
10. *Ibid.* p. 235.
11. Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad* México: Cuadernos Mexicanos, 1950, p. 192 (my translation).
12. Carlos Fuentes, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*. México: Cuadernos de Joaquín Montez, 1974, pp. 94-95 (my translation).
13. Alfonso Reyes, *Pasado inmediato y otros ensayos*, México: Colegio de Mexico, 1941, p. 14.
14. Patrick Romanell, *The Making of the Mexican Mind*, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971, second edition, p. 65.

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15. John Haddox, *Antonio Caso, Philosopher of Mexico*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971.
  16. Carlos Monsivais, "Clasismo y novela", *Latin American Perspectives*, Summer, 1975, p. 178.
  17. Eurylo Cannabrava, "Present Tendencies in Latin American Philosophy, *The Journal of Philosophy* (March 3, 1949), p. 117.
  18. "Tipo de unidad y diferencia entre el filosofar en Latino América y Norte América," *Filosofía y Letras* (April-June) 1950, p. 377 (my translation).
  19. *Ultima Tule*, México: Imprenta universitaria, 1942, pp. 138-139.
  20. William Raat "Ideas and Society In Don Porfirio's México," *The Americas* July, 1973, pp. 34-35.
  21. Alfonso Pulle-Goyry, "El movimiento estudiantil en México después de 1968," paper presented at "Popular Struggles in Mexico and the U.S. Southwest" conference at California State University, Los Angeles, February 17-19, 1977.
  22. Elene Poniatowska, *La noche de Tlatelolco*, México: Biblioteca Era, 1971, second edition.
  23. Pulle-Goyry, "El movimiento estudiantil."
  24. *El perfil de México en 1980*, México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, S.A., and the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, UNAM, 1974.
  25. *Ibid.* pp. 614-617, *passim*.
  26. *Ibid.* p. 617.
  27. Jose Gaos, *Antología del pensamiento de lengua española de la edad contemporanea*, México: Editorial Seneca, 1945.
  28. Luis Villoro, "Dos notas sobre Gaos," *Revista de la Universidad de México* (May) 1970, p. 8.
  29. *Historia de la filosofía en México*, México: Imprenta Universitaria, 1943. p. 149, (my translation).
  30. Alejandro Rossi, "Una imagen de Gaos," p. 14.
  31. Justino Fernández, "Los cursos del doctor José Gaos," *Revista de la Universidad de México*, (May), 1970, p. 5.
  32. "Una imagen de Gaos", *Revista de la Universidad de México* (May) 1971, p. 16.
  33. José Gaos, *Confesiones profesionales*, México: Tezontle, 1958, p. 142.
  34. Weinstein, *The Polarity of Mexican Thought*, p. 1.
  35. Stanley R. Ross, "La protesta de los intelectuales ante México y su revolución," *Historia Mexicana* (January-March) 1977, p. 431.
  36. Weinstein, *The Polarity of Mexican Thought*, pp. 1-2.
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