

Afterlives of Tlatelolco: Memory, Contested Space, and Collective Imagination

PAULINA LANZ¹

University of Southern California, USA

Ten days before the 1968 Summer Olympics began in Mexico City, a pivotal student rally took place in the Square of the Three Cultures at the city's Tlatelolco Plaza. The Mexican army opened fire on the crowd, killing more than 300 protesters. The massacre remains a crucial flashpoint in the country's long history of political repression. In recent decades, the state has taken part in commemorating the massacre, helping to convert Tlatelolco itself into a site and a symbol of civic memorialization. Drawing upon personal narratives, visual art, artifacts, film, and music, the essay intertwines official national commemorations with the collectivized memories of the massacre. It introduces newcomers to violence, silence, and memory in Latin America, engaging with different materializations of memory. By analyzing Tlatelolco as a space of historical reckoning and imagination, the essay evidences how the contested production of Tlatelolco simultaneously fosters historical memory and historical amnesia.

Keywords: Tlatelolco massacre, collective memory, remembrance, imagination

On October 2, 1968, in the Tlatelolco Plaza Square of the Three Cultures in the heart of Mexico City, Mexican Armed Forces opened fire on hundreds of unarmed civilian protesters, most of them students. Ten days before the 1968 Summer Olympics began in Estadio Olímpico Universitario. All summer, the media coverage for the Olympics allowed the Mexican students to become visible worldwide—and as a part of the global 1968 uprisings—subverting the international illusion of Mexican domestic stability and making themselves part of the visual legacy of global 1968 uprisings. This mobilization had already culminated in violent clashes between students and the Mexican army on September 23 at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). By October 2, the Tlatelolco protesters identified as the voice of an entire postrevolutionary student and worker-activist society fed up with a repressive regime. As Jaime Pensado (2021) clarifies, journalists were encouraged to use certain adjectives to describe the protesters, such as “adjured, terrorist, guerrillero, agitator, anarchist, unpatriotic, mercenary, traitor, foreigner, and villainous” (p. 357). Their demands were simple: repeal laws that penalized public gatherings with imprisonment,

Paulina Lanz: paulina.lanz@usc.edu

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abolish tactical police corps ("granaderos"), free political prisoners, and identify and dismiss state officials responsible for previous repression and bloodshed.

The protest, led by the National Strike Council (CNH), brought together more than 75 schools represented by 250 student members. The rally would have taken place elsewhere (the city's main square, Plaza de la Constitución, UNAM), but the government barricaded other spaces to prevent large gatherings. According to a 2002 discussion by David Bacon (2018) with Raúl Álvarez Garín, a survivor of the 1968 student massacre, there were three barricades at Tlatelolco.

The first barricade was around the Chihuahua building which was put in place on orders of Ernesto Gutiérrez Gómez Tagle. He was responsible for blocking access to the building and for the strategically-placed officers in civilian wear. That was a crime. The second barricade was around the entire plaza and led by Commander José Gómez Toledo. They had three battalions of military officers, which totaled 4,000 to 4,500 soldiers. The third barricade was around the entire property of Tlatelolco, which was led by Cristóforo Mazón Pineda, the leader of the First Brigade in the Mexican military. (paras. 23–24)

So Tlatelolco was selected in a spur-of-the-moment decision—as was described by a survivor of the 1968 student protest during an informal interview. The paramilitary forces of the Batallón Olimpia fired upon the military surrounding the plaza minutes after 5:00 p.m., also aiming at demonstrators and passersby alike—snipers and provocateurs played a crucial role in the confrontation, according to Julio Scherer and Carlos Monsiváis (1999). After the massacre, there was despair: raided apartments, some of the injured imprisoned, and lifeless bodies piled into military trucks. The following morning, Tlatelolco was empty and silent, rinsed during the night; only light refracted from the recently blood-soaked square.

A Critical Cartography of Tlatelolco

Tlatelolco sits less than 10 miles north of the city's historical center: a large public square where a rusted sundial rests on an uneven esplanade. Its history of violence all but predicted the events of 1968. Tlatelolco is the site of multiple colonial conquests, physical domination, and literal architectural takeover. Since 1968, it has become a heavily mediated civic construct of a battleground that condenses the state violence at Tlatelolco. The space sheds light on all that came before 1968. By no means is the intent of the article to solely place the onus on 2 de Octubre. The date is a rhetorical signifier of the consummation of all that came before that date. Just as any other storyline, 2 de Octubre is the climax—or the catharsis—of the 1968 student protests in Mexico and another storyline to the long history of political repression in the country. This historical space of violence and erasure hosts monuments to the erased memorials of the massacred. In this way, Tlatelolco is a central battleground in elaborating Mexican collective consciousness. Its image is invoked repeatedly in media of all kinds. Mexican audiences easily recognize the site and its significance. As Josh Kun (2005) reminds us, images of news coverage from the Tlatelolco massacre resonated powerfully during a 1994 Jaguares concert when paired with the beloved song "*Antes de que nos olviden*" ("Before They Forget About Us"; pp. 184–218); this song has become an anthem for social protest and forced disappearances in Mexico, including the 43 students from Ayotzinapa. It has become a symbol

of collective memory and remembrance, a site of resistance and hope, a marker of death and disappearance, and a reminder of the complex traces that temporal events etch upon the physical world.

In this essay, I draw from personal narratives, visual art and artifacts, and popular film and music to analyze the collective memory of Tlatelolco 50 years after 1968. This essay also serves as an introductory overview of the pivotal year of 1968 in Mexico. It expands on the impactful role of student uprisings as a marker of history. By confabulating these intertwined analyses, Tlatelolco sets the stage for providing an overview of the enduring significance of this crucial historical flashpoint. It becomes clear that the square itself, in both physical and symbolic forms, fosters historical memory and, at the same time, historical amnesia—and that these parallel processes come about by a collective past that dates back centuries before the 1968 massacre.

Plaza de las Tres Culturas

Tlatelolco has seen many battles. Founded by the Tlatelolcas—a Mexica tribe separated from the founders of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the Tenochcas—the specific site is known today as the Plaza of the Three Cultures. The place was once an isle in the Texcoco lake, located North of Tenochtitlan (Umberger, 2007). *Tlatelolco* means *sand dune* in Nahuatl, the Uto-Aztecan language. This pre-Hispanic Mexica-Tloltteca era represents the first of the three cultures superimposed upon the site, represented architecturally by a cluster of pyramids and ruins. This archeological site is where Cuauhtémoc allegedly defended Tlatelolco from Hernán Cortés on August 13, 1521—a massacre memorialized as the rebirth of civilization and a new era of mestizo society. The memory of 1521 echoed loudly in 1968 as a product of modernity and globalization. This memory recognizes multidimensional modernity—a radicalized memory described by Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen (2003) as "modernist dualities of spirit/matter and mind/body" (p. 614). This radicalized modernity can suppress the duality of the state and society by repressing and invisibilizing disagreements (Draper, 2018) through what Carlos Monsiváis observes as "acts of individual and collective feelings of solidarity and political imagination" (as cited in Draper, 2018, p. 27) because it is a clear distinction from the past and invites the possibility of a different tomorrow.

Towering over the ruins is the Temple of Santiago, the primary structural representation of the Colonial period, the second culture. It is a monument of conquest and part of the function of the historical systems where cyclical rhythms of expansion and contraction transform global/local cultures (Wallerstein, 1990). Walls built with stolen stones sit atop the same site where Tlatelolco rituals once took place; one temple displaces another. From the Hispanic conquest to the independence of Mexico, the Colonial era also finds expression in the Catholic convent adjoining the temple. The convent is home to the School of Santa Cruz Tlatelolco, known for being led by historical figures such as Bernardino de Sahagún and Juan de Zumárraga (Umberger, 2007).

Modern Mexico, the third culture, is primarily represented in the structural periphery of Tlatelolco. Framing the square is a train station along one side; modern streets and buildings are on the other three sides. The Tower of Tlatelolco overlooks the square on one side; it housed the Office of Foreign Affairs until 2005 and is now home to the Tlatelolco Cultural University Center and a memorial of 1968. However, the most emblematic of this third culture is Mexican architect and urbanist Mario Pani's Nonoalco Tlatelolco Urban Complex: a multifamily building that sharply contrasts the church's façade and the pre-Columbian

archeological site. The Mexican government commissioned the complex in 1957 as an effort at urban regeneration. More extensive than 100 acres, the complex was meant to comprise 102 residential towers among large blocks, interspersed with public plazas—approximating Swiss-French architect le Corbusier's concept of towers in the park (Mumford, 1995, p. 25). The complex was designed to host 70,000 inhabitants in buildings with different structures, going from four to 22 stories high, which adds up to more than 11,000 apartments. Nonoalco Tlatelolco opened on November 21, 1964, as an architectural homage to the aspiration for Europeanness. Intended to rehabilitate social ills and revamp degraded urban zones that had become home to irregular settlements, the reconceived square was a place to heal and work toward social justice (Álvarez, 1994). Thus, another colonial presence took its toll in the name of regeneration, stability, and progress, destroying many vestiges of the Mexica-Tloltteca ruins and the Temple of Santiago. Through this modern destructive process, the colloquial designation Plaza de las Tres Culturas was bestowed upon the space, denoting the simultaneous presence of pre-Columbian Aztecs, Colonial Spaniards, and modern Mexicans.

Every concept and conceptualization of "culture" is rooted in modernity and is bloody and violent (Dussel, 2000). In Plaza de las Tres Culturas, the word *culturas* evokes a structure of feeling akin to the sensation of seeing a ghost. It was officially meant to serve the memory of the displaced, but it has become a familiar vernacular that compounds the displacement.

1968 and Collective Consciousness

In Mexico, the mention of the number 68 instantly conjures images. It triggers memories of the imaginary constructs of Tlatelolco, of a prominent national history that, in turn, has mythicized the student movement (Allier-Montañón, 2016, p. 20). It is not the only number affixed by history to the collective memory of photographic representations of an authoritarian relationship between the government and the press.

The number 132 conjures the 2012 student movement #YoSoy132. It opposed a presidential candidate for his implication in the violent civil unrest in Salvador Atenco, a municipality in the State of Mexico.

The number 43 evokes the mass kidnapping and disappearance of 43 students from the College of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, in 2014. The identification of political criminals is needed.

However, from the beginning of the Dirty War in 1968 to the end of the 1980s, social demands tended to lack legal responses, and memory kept facing oblivion. Even as survivors and victims' relatives should be able to be disclosed by the sociopolitical Mexican system's Truth Commission, the truth remains hidden to protect those responsible for crimes against humanity (Fournier & Herrera, 2009). The collective assimilated these horrors into the national consciousness as recurring events. Impunity displays that "a sovereign exception is a constitutive form of modern Mexican history" (Draper, 2018, p. 192). It might be shocking, but it is eerily familiar. It prompts indignation expected to fade because the democratic content of the 1968 student movement is still idealized (Markarian, 2004). Indeed, six months before the 50th anniversary of the 1968 student movement, three film students went missing in Jalisco on March 19, 2018. Mexican officials determined they had been killed and dissolved in acid (Associated Press, 2018a). In Mexico,

these tragedies constellate organically: Three students went missing in 2018, and their memory was immediately bound to the lost lives of more than 300 peaceful demonstrators in 1968. Moreover, the numbers only grow. According to the National Registry of Missing Persons (for which UNAM's Corriente Alterna holds copied records), at least 19,204 people disappeared in Mexico from December 1, 2018, through March 20, 2021. In addition, since the beginning of the census on March 15, 1964, 100,000 people have disappeared or have gone missing in the country.

Like the numerical, the temporal is a crucial element of collective consciousness. A glimpse at a single moment from the past can open multiple channels and networks of memory. The afterlife of Tlatelolco exists in a tangled web of historical recollection and narrative invention. Beyond simply a space or a cartographic representation, Tlatelolco is the product of borrowed and invented memory produced through the repeated telling of stories. Generations of communal relationships define Tlatelolco. So does my father. Even after 50 years, his continued attempt to erase October 2, 1968, from his mind fails. The storyteller in him needs to retell that afternoon efficiently. He revisits defeat, fear, and repression. He recalls restrictions on public assembly, which dissuaded many students who had come to previous rallies from going to Tlatelolco, leaving those who showed up more vulnerable.

Each *testimonio*, like my father's, helps build and validate a collective narrative of Tlatelolco. Their history affirms repressed truths about the people who gathered that day, the flares used to start the attacks, the crowd dispersing, and the bodies on the ground. *Testimonio*, predominantly distant from the legal term of *testimony*,² is violent and forceful because it forces us to feel that "nothing in it can be refused or transformed unless we refuse to look" (Steinberg, 2015, p. 85). We bear witness through testimonios. We do so by drawing from the autoethnographic approach of theory and practice of *testimonio*, claimed by subaltern communities in Latin America concerning state power, according to John Beverley (2004) and George Yúdice (1991). I take from George Yúdice's (1991) notion of *testimonio*, as a performativity of culture, invoked through calculation, "for determining the value of an action, in this case, a speech act, a *testimonio*" (p. 38). Testimonios enable us to draw threads from the past to imagine the story's absences collectively.

Such testimonios form the material basis for radicalizing the official state narrative of 1968 and the records that offer different bifurcations. Although not particularly a counternarrative, I stray from the binaries of "contested"/"imagined" narratives. An array of readings turns into overlapping "third spaces," with ambivalence on the disarticulated margins. These recollections animate various objects in and about Tlatelolco as tools for remembering the confrontation: a poem engraved into a concrete stele that rises from the floor of the plaza; an art installation of light and geometric figures on the façade of one of the buildings surrounding the square; a rock song that has become an anthem; Jorge Fons's film *Rojo Amanecer* (Trujillo, Bonilla, & Fons, 1989); Elena Poniatowska's (1971) textual testimonies in *La Noche de Tlatelolco*; Carlos Monsiváis's (1970)

² Whereas a testimony is a legal statement of a witness that is usually presented as evidence of truth toward the legal system, a *testimonio* represents an act of civic participation that goes beyond the legalities of a system and the power structures it conveys. Hence, by using a *testimonio*, the grassroots practice affords noncitizens, the undocumented, and the oppressed the possibility to express themselves in the public domain.

reflections in *Días de Guardar*.³ Each mediated object has become part of the collective memory of Tlatelolco. They validate—or invalidate—each other. These varied forms create competing narratives of the event. According to Maurice Halbwachs (1992), such records produce their social cohesions.

Nostalgic Commemoration, Idealization, and Erasure

Commemorative forms and practices can become the basis for divergent narratives of the same event. Consider the 1993 Stela of Tlatelolco, a structure that sits on a small staircase in the plaza where street vendors often exhibit 1968 memorabilia. Inscribed are the (alleged)⁴ names and ages of the fallen. Imprinted are the images of two doves. The structure reads, "*Adelante!! A los compañeros caídos el 2 de octubre de 1968 en esta plaza. . . . Y muchos otros compañeros cuyos nombres y edades aún no conocemos*" [Ahead!! To the comrades fallen on October 2, 1968, in this square. And many other colleagues whose names and ages we still do not know] (Tlatelolco Stella, 1993). These words come after a fragment from Rosario Castellanos's poem *Memorial de Tlatelolco*:

*¿Quién? ¿quiénes? Nadie.
Al día siguiente nadie.
La plaza amaneció barrida;
Los periódicos dieron como noticia
Principal el estado del tiempo
Y en la televisión, en el radio, en el cine
No hubo ningún cambio en el programa.
Ningún anuncio intercalado
Ni un minuto de silencio en el banquete
(Pues prosiguió el banquete).*

[Who? Who? No one. / The next day, nobody. / The plaza arose cleaned; / The newspapers shared as main news / the weather / And on television, on the radio, at the cinema / There was no change in the programming. / No ad interspersed / Not a minute of silence at the banquet / (As the banquet continued).]

(Castellanos, 1972, p. 298; translated by the author)

The stela is an explicit reminder to passersby of the massacre's repression, impunity, and disappearances. At the same time, the poem and inscription fall within that pattern of nostalgic commemoration, which Paul Gilroy has famously analyzed as the ideal form of suffering (Gilroy, 1993). It represents the performance of mourning. The narrative of the poesis reverberates with the emptiness each verse describes. "Who? No one. The next day, nobody. The plaza arose cleaned." The poem reenacts

³ Considered some of the "classics" of the 1968 student movement in Mexico, according to Allier-Montañón (2016, p. 10).

⁴ According to Jaime M. Pensado (2021), in his analysis of the unnamed dead in 1968, "In a 1977 televised interview, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz denied that more than 100 people had been killed, alleged that the numbers instead ranged between 30 and 40, and encouraged civil society to make public a list detailing the names of the dead" (p. 358).

absence, the sonic representation of silence, of an empty, silenced square. The spatial resonance becomes the storyteller of what is deemed unthinkable, of what is no longer there and can no longer be seen.

A similar idealization finds expression in the memorial slogan "2 de octubre, no se olvida" [October 2 will not be forgotten]. Protesters chant the cry at each of the commemorations of the Tlatelolco massacre. The forces of an authoritarian state in 1968 repressed the demands for greater civil and political freedom. "2 de octubre no se olvida" is a response, a social demand to know the truth about the events of the massacre and to give justice to the victims of an authoritarian government that chose slaughter over dialogue. Children learn this slogan in school as an homage—that is where I heard it first. Scherer and Monsiváis (1999) refer to it as an incessant reverberating slogan that became part of the historical parade. It becomes the transformation of a myth into a moral victory over impunity and authoritarianism. The saying is a practice of remembrance intended to give voice to those who would otherwise remain voiceless; through these rewritings of history, oppositional stories become documents of historical reconstruction. However, they also preserve the social recollection of once silenced narratives (Connerton, 1989, p. 15). These sonic experiences also represent the collective memory from which Mexican society draws to reconstruct a remembrance of a date that "should not be forgotten." However, historical memory can only be known from without (Halbwachs, 1992), from an idea of the unspeakable that draws from trauma where only some things can be recalled through the collective, taking from recognition and refusal, grouping consciousness to remember.

Some literary narratives rooted in orality may even be idealized when struggles have impacted the community in petrifying ways. Langer (1991) bridges trauma and ordinary life oral testimonies by Holocaust survivors, whereas Walter J. Ong and John Hartley (2012) explore narrative as verbal art, exploring the connection of violence to orality. Facing terror, those "unthinkable realities to which traumatic experience bears witness" (Caruth, 1995, p. ix) can be the only way to provide conditions for change. However, there is a blurry distinction between reality and fiction when facing horrors—mostly when we are the keenest to remember. According to Ernst Renan, where memories are intrinsic to the formation of the nation, "griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort" (Renan, 2013, p. 19).

The idealization of suffering equates to that of domination. The student movement also received considerable attention because the international press prepared to cover the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. Some coverage seemed to legitimize the army's use of force and even downplay it. Here, testimonios show their true character as weapons of the weak. They provide a contradictory account to sow doubt about what precisely had happened. Consider this account of one of the students present that day.

It was just over 5 o'clock, and the plaza was almost full. You could see members of the army all around Tlatelolco. Young adults were listening to the rally organizers when they saw two flare lights. That's when the shooting started. We ran towards the Voca 7, a military company found us and held us at gunpoint, but they let us go. (Raúl Cuellar Salinas, 1968 student activist, as cited in Miranda, 2018, para. 3)

Even as a testimonio exonerates some soldiers, it becomes an object for contestation—testimonio of/on the battlefield, as survivors suppress their memories and the collective trauma of 1968. There are other accounts

where the testimonio takes the place of the pictures that document the moment before the army opened fire. Oral history conveys reality. It makes us reckon with the past through the recollection of survivors. Their voice suffocated as the army opened the way through to the Chihuahua building:

We went to the rally. There were thousands of people. When I arrived I felt chills. There was a lot of police, the Army. We went to the center of the square. We tried to go to the third floor (of the Chihuahua building), where the leaders were, but they wouldn't let us enter. . . . In any case, you know what happened. (Selma Beraud, 1968 CUT student, as cited in Vázquez Mantecon & Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007, p. 131)

Although these instants are presented as spartan chronicles of the events, the testimonies were adapted in 1968 to legitimize narratives of power. Stories that include such idealizing distortions strengthen the state's myth about what transpired. This myth became the official collective memory of the Tlatelolco massacre, and it, too, resounds in commemorative forms, like the stela, that seems so indelibly righteous.

Testimonios were silenced. Exacerbated patterns of idealization highlight the many silences that animate commemorative efforts. The dissenting collective memory of 1968 defines the students and activists as marginalized members of society oppressed by their government. The military was prepared to annihilate any form of resistance. Protesters in Tlatelolco are remembered as defenders of the rights to protest and free speech against the military, government officials, and paramilitary. Most photographic documentation of the massacre, classified archives, and undeveloped film negatives were destroyed. The evidence was wiped like the blood from the cobblestones in Tlatelolco (personal communication with a survivor of the 1968 student protest). "*Don't search in the archives because no records have been kept,*" wrote poet Rosario Castellanos (Steinberg, 2015, p. 45, emphasis in original).

Today, this material finds expression through references the disappearance itself in music, film, and other art forms. Collective memory relies upon those individuals who struggle to keep that memory alive. In this spirit, Saúl Hernández, popular Mexican rock musician and lead singer of Caifanes and Jaguares, sings "in the voice of a massacred student at Tlatelolco, he pledges that he will not be forgotten," (Kun, 2015, pp. 90–91).

*Antes de que nos olviden
Haremos historia
No andaremos de rodillas
El alma no tiene la culpa
Antes de que nos olviden
Rasgaremos paredes
Y buscaremos restos
No importa si fue nuestra vida*

[Before they forget us / We will make history / We will not walk on our knees / The soul is not to blame / Before they forget us / We will tear walls / And we will search for remains / It doesn't matter if it was our life].

(Hernández, 1990, 0:33; translated by the author)

Taken from Caifanes' *Antes de que nos olviden* (1990), these lyrics are written extensively onto the concrete structures of the plaza. The same walls have been painted repeatedly with murals denouncing the disappearances and the state's impunity. "Desaparecer un estudiante es desaparecer tu futuro" [To disappear a student is to disappear your future], one mural reads in the photograph of an ephemeral space captured by Manuel Gutiérrez Paredes (1965–1970). "Cuando un granadero sepa leer y escribir, México será más grande" [When a *granadero* learns to read and write, Mexico will be greater], reads another. In each case, the murals were painted over. The voices were muffled. The afterlives of 1968 now lie within the very walls of Tlatelolco.

Memory and Spatial Imagination

Against the state's orchestrated forgetting, commemorative practices help keep the memory of the disappeared alive—and visual commemorations of 1968 cannot help but invoke Tlatelolco while finding more democratic spaces paired with gateways for the imagination. Indeed, the work of making history is inseparable from a kind of spatial imagination. Specifically, spatial forms and interventions in Tlatelolco stimulate memory to bring the past into tension with the present. Such is the aim of Israeli artist Yael Bartana's (2018) *Monumento a la Ausencia* [Monument to Absence]. The production of this tribute to the disappeared involved a coordinated act of collective reparation. Survivors and their families marked their shoe prints by walking upon a large sheet of concrete, in any direction they wanted, with tracks on top of tracks. Although the installation is permanent, its symbolic power arises from its invocation of oblivion; the footpaths resignify and weave together, conjuring the disappeared only to let them disappear. Here, the collectiveness gives way to another amnesia: forgetting the individuals for the crowd. After all, the impressions lack a name, and the tracks are muddled. To encounter any one person among the disappeared requires imagination.

Tlatelolco Plaza is a public visually segmented space into four quarters. In one quarter is the Centro Cultural Tlatelolco [Tlatelolco Cultural University Center], formerly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is now a visual representation of a juxtaposed collective memory. On the façade of the building is *Xipe Totec*, a luminous public art installation that responds directly to the overlapping cultural myths that enliven the space with tension and strange synthesis and to how each myth transforms into art. The installation takes after an Aztec deity of violence and rebirth, venerating imaginative possibility. *Xipe Totec* is the permanent element of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's (2008) installation "Voz Alta" (Loud Voice), a memorial for the Tlatelolco student massacre. As part of this installation, participants exercised their right to free speech by using a megaphone placed on the Plaza de las Tres Culturas. The amplification of each voice activated a searchlight that then brightened and dimmed with the volume and intensity of the voice. The searchlight traced to the top of the Centro Cultural Tlatelolco building, where it triggered three additional searchlights pointing to other monuments in Mexico City. A sonic one then replaced this visual effect. Archival recordings of survivors played back, interspersed with the voices of intellectuals, artists, and politicians recounting their memories, with music and radio art pieces that date back to 1968.

In this same building, at the Centro Cultural Universitario Tlatelolco, the permanent exhibit that evidences the legacy of the 1968 Student Movement includes "M68, Ciudadanías en Movimiento" [M68, Citizenships in Movement], comprising more than 1,000 objects clustered in 32 thematic nodes, alongside art pieces and historical and digital artifacts curated by Luis Vargas Santiago, a permanent researcher at the Institute of Aesthetic Research at UNAM. Both through ephemera and fleeting moments captured

through things, physical and digital archives create discourses of resistance. The tendency is to see the unthinkable (Trouillot, 2015) through things that haunt. The interconnectedness between the unthinkable and those silences that haunt become present before the reader's eyes. Their buried inscription is now bolded, highlighted, and magnified.

These voices can be noises of quietness and meaningfulness (Camp, 2017) or signals representing something other than disappearance or erasure. In these noises, there are disruptive patterns of obfuscation (Brunton & Nissenbaum, 2015), visualizing the asymmetries of contracted power. This digital collection becomes the interstice of melancholy and recovery (Best, 2018), where social life is expressed through the digital representation of an object, expanding the boundaries of its meaning and creating new associations within the capabilities of the digital realm. Through the visual and the sonic, the emotions vibrate and feel the authenticity in the absence, where the "spiritual deposit" lies in these digital realms (Benjamin, 2016). Whereas the searchlight luminosity was ephemeral, *Xipe Totec's* red and blue LED crystals remain an object that has become a defining structure in Tlatelolco. The building is, by extension, a constitutive element of the collective memory of 1968. Like the other commemorative artifacts I have mentioned, this one demonstrates how memory necessarily gives way to inquiry. Tlatelolco is a sociological text that draws from and prompts the search for others, from literature to photography to diaries in the archive.

Tlatelolco risks being a space that is oversignified. For Henri Lefebvre (1991), some spaces cannot communicate when they are "overburdened with meaning . . . Oversignifying a space serves to scramble all the messages and make decoding impossible" (p. 160); such conditions are undesirable precisely because they make the decoding process incoherent. This risk is always present when creating art about forgotten events or forgotten spaces. Sites of reflection, even when not limited, embrace "the voice of the witness, the search for evidence, or even the cynical assertion of our present's continuity with 1968" (Steinberg, 2015, p. 180) invisibly or as lower registers (Gilroy, 1993). The attempt of having art as a representation of a voice, as a voice-over as a form of political action, recollects the reparation. Art as the surroundings and as the mournful aftermath constructs the possibility of the future. These conversations overflow the afterward of absence. In this way, oversignification exacerbates amnesia. Moreover, as seen, the case of Tlatelolco demonstrates that even as the production of space fosters memory, so too can it erase memory.

Future Afterlives of 1968

The production of Tlatelolco, at once a site and a symbol, simultaneously fosters historical memory and propagates historical amnesia. What, then, are the defining practices that guide toward one or the other, memory or amnesia? Moreover, for those seeking to honor the memory of the students of 1968, what is the best way to use Tlatelolco and its constitutive contradictions or such contested sites more generally?

Tlatelolco becomes part of an anachronic constellation of memories where past and present coincide because the past is not gone, only materialized through its recalling. Every moment that took place in Tlatelolco becomes a node in this constellation. Each instance comes with intricate elements of the recollection of the temporal disjunction, invisible and silent. According to what Paul Gilroy (1993) would call a "slightly different sense of time" (p. 202), flowing offbeat nodes of the constellation slip through its fragments, imperceptible but never lost. Alternatively, as Walter Benjamin (2016) would explain, "only for

a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments” (p. 2). The past remains incomplete. The past can imagine the present and the nodes of unredeemed histories. To forge material connections to the past’s fragments, those who live in the collective imagination need to awaken the affective afterlives of all whose absented presence. Connections need to be uncovered within the cobblestones of Tlatelolco.

Just as afterlives have life after death, when referring to afterthoughts, these can be explained as postmortem memories—those with an afterlife rooted in collective memory. Building new identities on memory requires those remembered and those forgotten. Where a cultural replacement of memories materializes the practice of the erasure of memory, archiving of its past builds from the erasure of a particular cultural memory. The unthinkable is narrated in written form with each object, with no intermediaries—the (re)placing of memory objects and the dismantling of others. A need for erasure dismantled President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz’s commemorative plaque for the Mexico City subway inauguration (Associated Press, 2018b). In this case, the government that silenced violence, which made it invisible and unthinkable, faces moments of intervention to listen to what once haunted. The removal of the plaque is encountering an object and making it obsolete. These counterhistories extinguish the voices of power, which undeveloped an archive into its obsolescence through a different signifier.

This afterthought prompts collective amnesia when reverting space to a previous form. The new canvas will encourage the imagination as a direct response to rewriting material history. Listen attentively. One can still hear the echoes of the contestation against a repressive Mexican state. Silence. After the storm comes a calm, they say. Nevertheless, what comes after a series of infamous atrocities, where numbers become symbols of oppression, as an outraged signifier of human rights violations? It is through aftermemories that history repeats itself. Fragments of the past inform our present: The 2014 disappearance of the 43 students from a rural teacher’s college in Ayotzinapa was preceded by the disappearance of students during the massacre of 1968, followed by the disappearance of the three film students in Jalisco in 2018. However, aftermemories, distorted and transformed, are also collective amnesia. The moment is not forgotten. Repression permeates through stories, creating amnesia out of impunity.

At 50 years from Tlatelolco (Poniatowska, 1971), these aftermemories evoke an affective and collective narrative that connects to the sites that reimagine their relationship to a defined place. The tradition of oral and visual testimonios focuses on how the past (Bagnall, 2003) enables the rewriting of history, of memory landmarks, where passersby make sense of the place only as they embody the space and its past. The collective memory finds new narratives to reimagine itself and creates alternative spaces for communal imagination by evoking a remembrance. The collective memory finds new narratives to reimagine itself. It creates alternative spaces for communal imagination by evoking a remembrance when oppression, death, and violence frame the memories, the reopened wounds, and the trauma of 1968 every time a student, teacher, or activist disappears. Tlatelolco’s commemorative structure is a reminder that before we are forgotten, our testimonios need witnessing. Embracing the afterlives’ memory and postmemory as a half-forgotten, half-borrowed collective story is to make history. With 68, 132, and 43 as symbols of pervading and mythical violence, afterlives and aftermemories are necessary to heal and to imagine once more.

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