5 Protest Artifacts in the Mexican Social Movement Sector: Reflections on the "Stepchild" of Cultural Analysis

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Social science perspectives on culture that predominated in the past stressed the interconnectedness of symbols, categories, and beliefs. Culture was a vast net and its influence was seen in the coordination of everyday behaviors and rituals. This view was built upon a "myth of cultural integration" (Archer 1996, p. 2) that highlighted consistency of ideational orientations in social groups, specifically ones that speak the same language. Two generations of social scientists, nourished by Durkheim, Kroeber, Boas, Benedict, and Parsons, mostly adhered to this view of a uniform cultural fabric. Applied to politics and protest, a cultural emphasis typically took the form of looking at beliefs, attitudes, and predispositions among different populations, taking measures of how these meanings were distributed, and linking them with political behaviors (Inglehart 1990, 1997; Willdavsky 2006; Rochon 1998; Jasper 1997). The presumption was that because all social action is preceded by ideations, knowing how these meanings cluster can tell the analyst much about patterns of behaviors such as voting or joining a social movement.

In protest studies, somewhat different approaches to culture entered the field via the notion of framing as an element in recruitment and participation, first through social psychology (Gamson et al. 1982) and then symbolic interactionism (Snow et al. 1986). For about a decade, the framing perspective, especially in the elaborations of David Snow, Robert Benford, and colleagues (Benford 1993, 1997; Snow and Benford 1988), and a renewed interest in the concept of collective identity, which was kindled by European research in new social movements, were the main carriers of cultural analysis in the field of social movement and protest research. Then, the publication of *Social Movements and Culture* (Johnston and Klandermans 1995), brought together the US and European perspectives to present several new analytical approaches from various social science fields: rhetorical analysis, sociology of culture, narrative analysis, social psychology, and cognitive science. Since that time, there have been important additions to the cultural canon that have moved beyond framing: Jasper (1997), Rochon (1998), Steinberg (1999); Davis (2002); Young (2002); Stryker et al. (2000); Ewick and Silbey (2003); Goodwin and Jasper (2004), Polletta (2006), to name a few. A thread that was discernible among these studies was that there is an inherent diversity and conflict in the production of culture, directing analytical attention away from culture's standard ideational components toward the *diversity* of cultural production, discourses, and frames, and how these are reflected in what gets produced: texts, talk, narratives, and cultural performances.

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In recent years, developments in cultural sociology have further torn apart the intricately woven cultural fabric of decades past. They have politicized it, contextualized it, relativized it, and deconstructed it to further lay stress on culture's inherent diversity and to emphasize the conflict-driven processes by which it is produced. These new research foci questioned linear approaches to culture that measured attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or frame content as causes of movement participation. Ann Norton, in her manifesto of cultural analysis in politics, states, "Culture is not a 'dependent' or 'independent' variable. Culture is not a variable at all" (Norton 2004, p. 2). Her position is that because nothing is outside of culture, any given society, social process, social institution, or social movement organization cannot have more or less culture. This view undermines standard approaches to social movements that seek to identify general models of their development and trajectories. For a long time, the watchwords of modern cultural analysis such as narratives, text, discourse, metaphor, rituals, actors, and performances fell outside the commonly practiced research methods in the field. What is a student of social movements to do in this situation? How can we view protest mobilization in ways informed by three decades of theoretical work that redefines culture processes as ubiquitous and relativizing, yet diverse, fragmented, and conflicted?

Dimensions of Cultural Analysis

To help sort through these questions, we begin with three basic dimensions of culture: ideations, performances, and artifacts. They are closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing in contemporary approaches to culture. In fact, they come as a package—if there is intentional social action, you do not get one without the other two. Ideations are the traditional stuff of cultural analysis such as ideologies, frames, values, beliefs, mentalités, social representations, habitus, or more specific norms of behavior, including understandings of normative forms of protest—the modern social movement repertoire. We can also include here recent cognitive reformulations of these concepts, such as schemata, algorithms, and grammars that are collectively shared (DiMaggio 1997; Johnston 1995, 2010). Packaged as "ideologies" and/or frames, ideational elements have always been key components of what a social movement is. The key theme of postmodern cultural analysis, however, is that there is always diversity and conflict in these ideas, rather than seeing them mainly as an integrating and coordinating force.

The second dimension of cultural analysis is that of the performance. As a reflection of the influence of cultural sociology, protest events are increasingly seen as protest performances—a subtle recasting of perspective that captures the dynamic unfolding of actions of diverse protagonists (the protesting groups) and antagonists (police, bystanders, countermovement protesters). Briefly, performances are where the ideational elements of the first dimension are acted out and given life. Most analysts today take as axiomatic that culture is not simply the sum total of individually held beliefs, values, and understandings, but rather is a reflection of how they are played out in social performance or social action, stressing the agentic and collective aspects of culture as well as its ongoing production and diversity of interpretation. Moreover, a cultural performance is where artifacts are produced and/or interpreted. But also—and this is a central tenet of contemporary cultural analysis—performances themselves are "artifactual" in varying degrees because they are "read as texts" and given significance by those also present at the action—their audiences. Stated simply, performances are locations where culture is accomplished (Alexander 2006, pp. 32–34). They represent both the pervasive nodes of diversity and contention in culture as well as knots in the cultural net that binds individuals and groups together as interpretations converge.

Given the centrality of the performative focus in current cultural thinking, and the hegemony of ideations on cultural theorizing of the past, it is fair to say that the third analytical dimension—the cultural artifact—is the "stepchild" of cultural analysis. Like shards of pottery or funerary relics, the presumption seems to be that they can tell

us about a culture, but not too much. Artifacts are produced either individually or collectively, such as music, art, literature, speeches, narratives, videos, recruitment tracts, and other movement texts. Whether a product of one person's creativity or a collective endeavor, artifacts take on significance because they are *always* interpreted socially by their audiences and constitute part of the ongoing *creation of culture* through subsequent interpretation, although they have already been "materialized" in their initial creation. They are closely linked with ideations because ideas usually stand behind the production of an artifact, or the expropriation of one, as we will discuss. However, artifacts are unique because, unlike ideas, they are concrete, material objects. They are important to social movement participants because, insofar as they invoke shared interpretations, they help bridge the inevitable diversity of a movement. They also can foster collective identity around these shared meanings so that coordinated movement activities can occur. Their materiality means the analyst can point to them as evidence of his or her interpretation, to be judged by others.

A shadow cast behind this chapter's discussion of cultural analysis is its relation to structurally based, political process approaches that predominate in analyses of social movement development. On the one hand, we hold that this well-known and widely discussed division between culture and politics is really artificial in the sense that all politics—the interests that drive them, the structural relations that constrain them, and the conflicts that define them—are cultural. Political contention obviously has its artifacts, ideologies, and performances, all of which means that contentious politics can be analyzed with cultural tools and concepts. On the other hand, setting up the opposition between politics and culture can also be useful, as we will see. It is not uncommon that certain instances of political contention *need* the tools of cultural analysis more than others. To the extent that interests, political power, and structure are more central in a social movement's appearance and development, they may constrain it more, rendering the interpretation of performances, ideologies, and artifacts relatively less open-ended, less subject to social processes of interpretation, and therefore less necessary. The other side of the coin, and especially for our purposes in thinking about Latin American movements, is that there are political contexts where—although interests, power, and organization are present—they are less determining of mobilization trajectories in relation to cultural factors because of historical structural barriers and current political institutions. We especially have in mind cases where democratic political institutions and organizations of civic engagement might be less elaborated.

Our focus on Mexico is guided in part by this hiatus between political-process and cultural approaches to social movements. There are, of course, no perfect democracies, and state regimes vary on how they fulfill basic democratic requirements. Primary among these, and central to the appearance of social movements, is responsiveness to citizens. When political channels are closed, citizens will choose extra-institutional means to voice demands and grievances. Especially among emerging democracies of Latin America, democratic structures of state administration are stained by the past, and political elites are often less responsive to citizen demands. Other residues of the undemocratic past are patronage networks and corruption, which citizens see as violations of equal access, and lavish lifestyles of elected politicians. It is not surprising that in the summer of 2013, issues of corruption and misapplication of taxes to soccer stadiums ignited a wave of mass protests in Brazil. In another context—another time, place, and historical memory, protests might have been localized as simple, circumscribed policy demands to roll back bus fare increases. Similarly, it is not surprising that the construction of a multimillion dollar monument in Mexico City became an icon of governmental corruption and unresponsiveness for several Mexican movements and for Mexican society at large—more on this shortly.

We build our presentation on the proposition that, where residues of a less democratic past persist, as is the case in Mexico and several other Latin American states, cultural insights to mobilization processes can be especially instructive.

We say this based on research on mobilization processes in repressive regimes, where symbolism, *double entendre*, duplicitious organization, and reliance on dissident networks among intellectuals take primary roles in oppositional organization. The reason of course is that in repressive states, channels of more direct contentious action are closed by the unresponsiveness of political institutions. We suggest that it is a plausible proposition that, in the balance between political-process factors of interest articulation and political institutions and cultural factors of performance, artifactual definition, and social construction, the latter—cultural elements of mobilization—may have significant weight. Not that political process elements are not relevant, but that important insights come from balancing them with cultural analysis.

To draw this paradox out completely, the present chapter focuses on several mobilization sites and moments drawn from the contemporary Mexican social movement sector, where the tools of cultural analysis—and especially the "stepchild" of cultural analysis, cultural artifacts—are relatively more important. However, as we will see, our analysis rarely loses sight of politics completely. Indeed, even the most unlikely candidates, those cases that ostensibly focus on cultural concerns—"high culture" such as intellectual discussions and poetics—frequently are but symbolic representations of contentious politics.

Culture as Artifact

The question we pose is if there are instances where cultural artifacts move into more primary locations in the mobilization trajectories of social movements. In previous research in polities with less open channels of claim making, it has been noted that movements often lay claim to material artifacts—places, music, iconic images, flags, and monuments. These often become central sites of oppositional symbolism because other channels are closed. This is a proposition that we are developing, in general, with regards to the role of culture, but here we refer specifically to those concrete cultural productions, typically heavy with symbolism, that we identify as material and textual artifacts.

There are "high cultural" artifacts of protest, such as the plastic arts, poetry, literature, theater, music, even opera, and their counterparts in popular culture: rhymes, music, jokes, masks (Guy Fawkes), iconic symbols to name a few. It is fair to say that although social movement researchers widely recognize that cultural artifacts play a role somewhere in the mobilizing equation, they are often relegated to a secondary status—interesting but peripheral. Yet, the songs of the civil rights movement, the strong and chiseled images of workers in the labor movement's posters, the ubiquitous graffiti of the South American Left, not only represent movement ideologies and shared injustices that animate their original production, but once "artifactualized" they invoke wide-ranging responses among the collectivities where they come into play. More importantly, it is hard to conceive of movement mobilization occurring without them. Is their ubiquity simply coincidental, or are analysts missing something fundamental about their constitution? The point is—and one of the insights cultural sociology can offer protest studies—that such artifacts have their own central place in the matrix of a social movement, one that is more than a mere reflection of important political and ideological forces. The producers of these cultural artifacts, and the social embeddedness of the artifacts themselves, and the diverse ways that audiences respond to them, mean that the artifacts themselves can play key roles in mobilization trajectories, as social actors encounter them, appropriate them, discuss them, modify them, and perhaps further enhance their role. This means that the analyst is well-served to consider cultural artifacts in ways that go beyond thinking of them as simply "powerful symbols." Highly relevant to a handbook on Latin American social movements, they may play especially prominent roles in less open political regimes where the expression of claims is restricted.

In what follows, we will consider two protest campaigns in the recent social movement sector in Mexico that illustrate the centrality of a set of cultural processes that demonstrate the

complex and reticulated character of interpretation that centers on cultural artifacts when they are seized (and produced) by social movement actors. We begin our discussion with a cultural artifact of monumental materiality, which, nevertheless, triggers a wide diversity of interpretations as points of mobilization. We then focus on the complex intertwining of performances, audiences, and cultural artifacts in the #YoSoy132 student campaign. We conclude by pointing to several ways in which cultural sociology gives the social movement researcher a more elaborated way of thinking about artifacts and protest when the standard repertoire functions under limited constraints.

La Estela de Luz

The Estela de Luz (the Stela, or Monument of Light) is a 341-foot tall quartz-inlaid monument built in Mexico City by the federal government to commemorate the bicentennial of Mexico's independence (see Fig. 5.1). Since its official—and delayed—inauguration in January 2012, it has become a magnet for protests and symbol of the corrupt and unresponsive regime of President Felipe Calderón. Its history not only affirms the importance of artifacts in mobilization trajectories, but also highlights the contestation that sometimes surrounds their representation, in this case, conflict between the Estela's official signification and the one attributed to it by regime critics and, especially the broad-based movement, Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad (MPJD). For the government, in its own words, the Estela was intended as "A monument to look to the future, based on the memory of our struggles. A stela to commemorate our nation's most important men and their acts. Located on Paseo de la Reforma, a place that is full history. Stela of light. Commemorative Monument. Two hundred years of proudly being Mexicans."[1]

Fig. 5.1 The Estela de Luz, Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico DF

In contrast, to the MPJD movement and many Mexican citizens critical of the government, the Estela represents the corruption, ineptitude, and unresponsiveness of the Mexican state. This interpretation was first introduced by critical sectors of the mass media in 2011, and gained foothold in public opinion as revelations about increasing costs, secrecy, and sweetheart deals in its construction came to light. "All this represents something about what we Mexicans have observed regarding the obscure, clumsy and offensive governmental procedure, leaving today a very clear Stela of Darkness".[2]

The architect that designed the Estela reported pressure from the secretary of education to keep silent about the corruption in its construction. "Monumento a la corrupción" was the phrase used by the media to capture the essence of this resignification. But the narrative put forth by the MPJD movement recast these criticisms more

[1] It is interesting to note that whereas the Mexican government stressed the orientation of the Estela toward the future, the movement wanted to bring the past forward into the present through the resignification of the Estela.

[2] http://nuestromedio.mx/colaboradores/el-mirador/3618-una-estela-de-oscuridad.

broadly, placing them in the light of the government's policy failures, in particular, choosing to build a monument at a cost of $ 83 million dollars, over focusing on waging in earnest the war against *narcotraficantes*, which has claimed the lives of 60,000 Mexican citizens[3]. The war itself is a major challenge to the regime's legitimacy and reflects a crisis of state capacity within its own borders. The MPJD has grown significantly in recent years as a voice, not only for the families of the victims but also all who live in fear and insecurity throughout Mexico. By situating the Estela's significance in this broader context, the movement generalized the oppositional significance of the monument from corruption to state failure. This shift helped make it a potent symbol in the social movement milieu in Mexico in recent years.

The MPJD is one of several instances of "pain and loss activism" that have emerged in Mexico in the last years.[4] It was triggered by the assassination in March 2011 of Juan Francisco Sicilia, the son of poet and writer Javier Sicilia, three of his friends, and two of his friends' relatives. The movement has been extremely successful in mobilizing parents, relatives, and friends of the thousands of victims who had been killed, kidnapped, disappeared, or arrested on trumped-up charges since the beginning of Calderón's "war on drugs." It has organized Caravans to the North and South of Mexico and to the USA, has held an unlikely meeting with President Felipe Calderón to discuss the latter's war on drugs, held a meeting with 2012 presidential candidates, and actively participated in the passing of the General Law of Victims, a law that compensates victims of organized crime.

At this point, social-movements specialists might be asking if our discussion goes beyond the observation that artifacts can be symbols that strike powerfully resonant chords among the public. If that were all we are offering, a fair criticism would be that we have accomplished nothing more than renaming the idea of "mobilizing symbolism," which already is widely recognized, although generally accorded a secondary role in movement development. What is gained by calling potent symbols "cultural artifacts" and situating them in contemporary cultural approaches to politics and sociology? Is it one more addition to the litany of terms that often confuses the dialogue between social movement research and cultural sociology? What exactly are we offering here that is new?

Applied to social movements and from the perspective of cultural sociology, the keys to the cultural artifact concept lie, first, in the temporal process of how an object becomes an artifact; second, the diversity of interpretations that surround it; third, the ongoing process of its multifaceted redefinition that concentrates more and more on widely shared representations; and fourth, its central role in mobilization as a trigger of these interpretations, which in the lexicon of protest studies are called collective action frames. Traditional approaches might trace the emerging oppositional significance of the Estela as a shift in public opinion given impetus through the media. The materiality of the Estela on Paseo de la Reforma and the ongoing public debate reinforced these oppositional and critical interpretations among sectors of the population such that there was contestation over the meanings—the official and the oppositional. From a perspective of 30,000 ft, this view is not incorrect, strictly speaking, but for an accurate social science of how artifacts affect mobilization, we need to be closer to the ground. Otherwise, the analyst will miss live processes by which social actors create culture *through* interaction *around* artifacts. Here is where cultural sociology can help us.

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[3] http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/calderon-finishes-his-six-year-drug-war-at-stalemate/2012/11/26/82c90a94-31eb-11e2-92f0-496af208bf23_story_1.html.

[4] Other instances of political action motivated by personal tragedies are: the kidnapping and murder of Fernando Martí, the 14-year-old son of Alejandro Martí co-owner of one of Mexico's largest sporting goods chain and founder of Mexico SOS, a civil organization for security and justice. Another instance is the kidnapping and killing of Hugo Alberto Wallace Miranda, son of Isabel Miranda de Wallace who personally carried out the investigations that led to the capture of his son's killers and later founded the association Alto al Secuestro and has actively participated with Martí and Sicilia in the drafting of the General Law of Victims.

The emergence of oppositional signification around a cultural artifact is a complex and multifaceted process. Cultural sociology informs us that we cannot treat it as a singular collective manifestation at the level of "public debate." Rather, artifacts generate multiple *symbolisms* that ripple through networks of personal relations where discussion occurs and understandings are collectively shaped situationally and interactionally. Unlike the monument itself, which is austere in its singular materiality in the heart of the Distrito Federal, analyzing the emergence of its oppositional significance directs analytical attention to multitudinous smaller sites. These are places where microlevel collective performances of personal understandings occur. These performances are also public tests—sometimes tentative, sometimes assertive—of those understandings. They are floated delicately on the waters of others' understandings, perceptions, confirmations, modifications, and rejections thereof. All these microperformances are made known through collective exchange, discourse, storytelling, questioning, and so on. It is axiomatic that in interaction and talk, culture is made and artifacts given their influence.

For the analyst, any collective interpretation of an artifact at the aggregate level must begin as a groundswell here, an initial *matrix effect*, to coin a term, whereby interpretations are given life as they diffuse through networks of interpersonal interaction through microperformances of the actor's own understandings around an artifact. Only later, when varied-but-convergent oppositional significations coalesce in larger performance sites, can they be further elaborated in larger collective gatherings—protests at the Estela itself, for example—which occur frequently. When that happens, collective interpretations concretize even more as the sites of collective performance become larger and more widely shared.

This last process is nicely demonstrated in recent mass protests in Brazil in which multimillion-dollar soccer stadiums became artifacts of protest. The huge popular mobilizations in Brazil, the largest in 20 years, were precipitated in June 2013 by a 10% fare increase for bus riders in Sao Paulo—a relatively straightforward municipal policy issue—but it quickly morphed in a nationwide protest movement that, like the Mexican case, combined grievances against official corruption, the unresponsiveness and venality of the political elite, and challenges that went to the heart of the regime's legitimacy. One protester spoke of Brazil's political elites in words that reflect how the stadiums—like the Estela—were triggers for much deeper grievances: "They don't invest in education, and they keep putting makeup on the city to show the world that we can host the World Cup and Olympics…. We work 4 months of the year just to pay taxes and get nothing in return" (Romero and Neuman 2013). Likewise, commenting on the Estela, a protester said: "It could have been used elsewhere on things we need, like public safety. It was a bad investment."[5]

The starkly material monuments of soccer stadiums, especially in the context of Brazil's history as a soccer power and plans for the World Cup, became triggers for a reservoir of diverse meanings that coalesced around the accumulating illegitimacy of the government—again, like the Mexico's Estela. In Mexico, multiple oppositional meanings were given the Estela by different branches in the cultural matrix it generated. As a general observation, the official imagery of a pillar of light carries very heavy irony indeed for many Mexican citizens, first, for those who see its construction as shrouded in darkness, secrecy, and corruption. Second, commemorating 200 years of the independent Mexican state with the metaphor of light contrasts with the "darkness" of federal and local officials on the payroll of drug cartels and distrust and illegitimacy that many citizens hold for the officials prosecuting the war on drugs. But also, different groups have offered competing imagery. The false light of the Estela has been contrasted with the small lights of the numerous vigil candles—*velas*—lit in remembrance of those lost in the war on drugs. Their families have paid the highest cost imaginable, and their losses are often compensated with feeble investigations by the police,

[5] http://articles.latimes.com/2012/feb/07/world/la-fg-mexico-monument-20120207.

obstructionism and a paucity of information, and frequent blaming-the-victim insinuations instead of empathy.

Another alternative imagery is captured by the word *esquela* rather than *estela*. The elongated form of the monument is said to represent the elongated columns of death notices placed in newspapers or gravestones. Emilio Alvarez Icaza, former president of the Commission of Human Rights for the Distrito Federal has spoken of the Estela as the "Esquela de Luz" to represent the association of the government's policies with death. Due to its yellowish/greenish color and in allusion to the putrefaction of the political system, the Estela has also been called "Estela of Pus."[6] In a more humorous tone the Estela is also known, especially among the youth, as the "suavicrema" in reference to a famous vanilla cookie. By contrast with how activists widely accord the Estela's monumental presence with darkness, it even provided the student movement #YoSoy132 with a symbol for their actions of resistance, where they were the beacon of light, not the government, at a protest held at the base of the monument. On that occasion a speaker said: "We have ignited a light in the country's let us keep silent no more."[7] In clear reference to the Estela, the movement has chosen as one of its leitmotifs: "If we do not burn together, who will lighten up this darkness for a genuine democracy?"[8]

As when Brazilian protesters see the stadiums, or the Estela's piercing shape seen from surrounding streets in Mexico City, cultural artifacts act as entry points to diverse oppositional interpretations that define what is going on: corruption, venality, injustice, illegitimacy, state failure, and so on. Here, cultural artifacts trigger collective action frames, in the lexicon of the framing perspective, the diagnostic frame that shapes interpretations of "what's going on here." The concept of framing has not animated cultural sociology in the same way that it has protest studies, even though "primary frameworks" are cultural productions par excellence (Goffman 1974). In protest studies, the framing perspective has been applied by deemphasizing the microprocesses discussed here, even though the symbolic interactionist basis of framing stresses their ongoing definition in ways that parallel the cultural matrix. In fact, as applied to mobilization issues, frames are mostly conceived not in their dynamic sense, but rather in terms of strategy: how a movement's message is framed, by leaders and activists, so as to maximize its impact on audiences (see Snow 2004, 2013; Snow et al. 2014). We close this section by pointing out that the matrix perspective developed here is able to: (1) reinvigorate framing as a microprocess based on cultural accomplishment; and (2) indicate how cultural artifacts such as stadiums and monuments function as triggers that activate certain framings. It is entirely plausible that every Mexican critic of the Estela has a slightly different schema of understanding of it, but its artifactual materiality prompts them to initiate the interaction performances that, ultimately, redefine and coalesce the interpretations such that the successive framings lead to collective actions.

The Video "131 Students from the Ibero"

Jeffery Alexander has noted that the development of highly complex, diverse, and differentiated societies create the conditions for—and even the necessity of—the transformation of rituals into performances (2004, p. 540). In less developed societies, rituals are acted out according to well-defined scripts, and their interpretations tend to be constrained and closed to debate and contention. Contemporary public performances, on the other hand, are more contingent processes of symbolic communication, where actors have greater flexibility and various audiences take greater liberty in interpretation. In cultural theory, performances are everywhere: in politics, religion, economic transactions, finances, and international relations (Alexander 2006). They comprise the web

[6] http://lastresyuncuarto.wordpress.com/2012/01/11/la-suavicrema-de-luz/.

[7] http://www.adnpolitico.com/ciudadanos/2012/05/23/universitarios-del-movimiento-yosoy132-marchan-por-reforma.

[8] http://www.yosoy132media.org/.

of meaning creation and basis of contemporary cultural analysis via narrative performances and reading social action as text. In the field of protest studies, it is not surprising that Tilly's classic (1995) work on repertoires traces the transformation of well-defined ritualistic collective actions of rural villages and urban *sans culottes* characteristic of traditional societies, to more flexible, diverse, and audience-conscious contentious actions characteristic of modern society—the modern social movement repertoire.

Protest events in the modern repertoire are fundamentally complex performances as well. They have diverse actors, audiences—of which the mass media play a central role—and multifaceted interpretations based on perspective and context (Johnston 2014). Their contingent elements are often seen in the ways that they unfold in directions far from how their organizers originally planned them. But Alexander's original observations on the topic were penned at a time when researchers were just beginning to probe in earnest the mobilization functions of the internet—let alone Web 2.0. At that time, Facebook was just being introduced and Twitter had not yet appeared. Alexander could not have foreseen the way that social media could transform the cultural analysis of performance and artifacts, indeed, how performances can be "artifactualized" and—as we will discuss shortly—vice versa, how artifacts can take on qualities of performances by being digitized and posted on a Facebook page or blog. The Mexican student movement, #YoSoy132, offers us a unique and contemporary opportunity to reflect upon the effects of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, smartphones, instant communication and digital recording, as well as the theoretical relationship between performances and artifacts in the context of cultural analysis of protests. Importantly, for a handbook on Latin American social movements, it does this in a context that is generalizable: the Mexican state is a political regime still in a transition process, characterized by limited responsiveness and constrained openness to popular input to governance. Moreover, the case of #YoSoy132 can shed light on movements for increased democratic participation and political transparency, not only in Latin America, but also in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.

#YoSoy132 is the most dynamic student mobilization Mexico has witnessed since the 1968 student movement. It started as a protest action against the manipulation of information by the mass media and politicians—in particular members of the PRI and PVEM—and quickly developed into a broadly based student movement for democratization of the media, free, fair, and informed elections, and opposition to the government's neoliberal policies and human rights violations. It is the first nonpartisan national movement to have emerged in the midst of an electoral campaign, and the first to have organized a debate with presidential candidates.[9] It is a leaderless, horizontal movement for real democracy reminiscent of predominately youth-based movements in Spain (M-15 or *los indignados*), the USA (Occupy Wall Street), Turkey (Taksim Square), and elsewhere that all supported heavy use of the internet's networking functions via social media. At the theoretical level, the origins of #YoSoy132 lie at the intersection of performances, audiences, and cultural artifacts. In empirical terms, its origins can be traced to the PRI–PVEM's presidential candidate Enrique Peña Nieto's visit to the Universidad Iberoamericana, a private Catholic university in Mexico City.

On Friday May 11, 2012, the candidate of the PRI–PVEM to the presidency of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, went to the Universidad Iberoamericana as part of the "Forum of the Good Citizen," which included individual lectures by presidential candidates.[10] He was received with hostility,

[9] The debate was posted online and *was viewed over 1.3 million times.*

[10] Candidate Manuel Andrés López Obrador was the first to visit the Iberoamericana on April 22, 2012 and left the University amidst shoutings of President! President! http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=305260.Josefina Vazquez Mota visited the Iberoamericana on June 4, 2012, after the movement #YoSoy132 had taken off. Members of the movement carried photographs of children's ABC daycare center killed by a fire in Sonora, Mexico in 2009. Forty nine children were died and 76 others were injured. The tragedy triggered another "pain and loss movement", "Manos Unidas por Nuestros Hijos" (Hands together for our children). According to investigations by the move-

and during his speech was severely questioned about the repression exercised on May 3 and 4, 2006, against the people of Atenco, members of the Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra (FPDT) and sympathizers of La Otra Campaña and the EZLN, while he was governor of the state of Mexico.[11] Just before he left the auditorium, Peña Nieto decided to answer this questioning. With no hesitation he referred to the brutal repression at Atenco as "…an act of authority, that I personally assume, in order to restore order and peace, within the Mexican state's legitimate right to make use of the public force. This decision was validated by the nation's Supreme Court of Justice."[12] The audience strongly reacted to his authoritarian response. On his way out of the university, Peña was chased by students who shouted,"Ibero doesn't like you!"; "Out, out, out!"; "Coward!" and "Assassin!" and other expressions of rejection.[13] His other activities at the university were called off and Peña Nieto left the university through a side door.

Apropos of Alexander's (2012) observation about the contingency of performances, suffice it to say that Peña Nieto had no idea of the full drama that was in store for him that day. He may have anticipated such questions, but the heckling and lack of respect shown by students, and his rapid and less-than-decorous retreat were certainly not foreseen. Also, from the students' perspective, their plans may have developed in unexpected directions. While students, in particular from the Communications department, had discussed Peña Nieto's record and had planned to question him about it, they could not have anticipated the direction events would develop. Beforehand, Peña Nieto's appearance at the university could have hardly been anticipated as a risky event. The Universidad Iberoamericana is an educational institution where political opposition has been rare. And yet, in spite of attempts by his staff at preventing such oppositional performances through bribing and intimidation (Muñoz 2011; Figueiras 2012), his appearance at the Iberoamericana unfolded in such a way that his visit became a turning point, not only for his campaign and the entire electoral process, but also for the Mexican social movement sector.

The protest performance of Ibero students was strongly condemned by some commentators, ignored by others, and—especially significant for the movement's development—purposefully distorted by high-profile representatives of the PRI and the PVEM, and major TV networks and newspapers. Among the politicians, the speaker of the PVEM, the president of the PRI, and the leader of the PRI's National Confederation of Popular Organizations, all called into question the identity of the protesters, casting doubts on whether they were university students at all, with the implication that they were present as *agent provocateurs* from other parties. Such statements undermined the autonomy of the students, minimized the genuineness of their questions, and the authenticity of their protest performance. The events at the university were also undermined by the media sectors that either did not cover the event or edited out the demonstrations. In addition, newspapers linked to the official Mexican Editorial Organization, the largest media organization in Mexico,[14] reported a successful and

ment, the fire that killed the children was set intentionally with the purpose to destroy documents related to the debt of $ 10,000.000.000.00 (Ten Billion Pesos) generated during the administration of former Governor of Sonora, Eduardo Bours Castelo, in implementing his development project program called "Plan Sonora Proyecta," http://mexico.cnn.com/fotogalerias/2012/06/04/josefina-vazquez-mota-visita-la-universidad-iberoamericana; http://www.sandiegored.com/noticias/37984/ABC-day-care-fire-was-started-on-purpose/.

[11] According to the National Human Rights Commission, repression at Atenco, where the rights of 209 persons were violated, 206 people were harmed and tortured, 26 women were sexually assaulted and two males aged 14 and 20, were killed, and is one of harshest in the history of social movements.

[12] Rosa Elvira Vargas, La Jornada, sábado 12 de mayo de 2012, p. 5.

[13] See, for example, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCa1QwwwF6s; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlqS1abNCkw.

[14] La Organización Editorial Mexicana publishes 70 newspapers at the local, regional, and national levels, and owns 24 radio stations, one press agency, one TV channel and 44 internet sites.

congenial performance by Peña Nieto—just the opposite of what happened.

The president of the PRI, Pedro Joaquín Coldwell, referred to the students as "a group of intolerant youth" as "a bunch of young people who were not representative of the Ibero community."[15] The leader of the National Confederation of Popular Organizations of the PRI, Emilio Gamboa Patrón, declared that it was a responsibility of the authorities of the Ibero to investigate "who had been behind the students" who exactly had protested against Peña Nieto's visit to the Ibero.[16] Finally, the speaker for the Green Party, Arturo Escobar, while narrating what was occurring at the university, said that protesters were not young, but were between 30 and 35 years old; that there were "no more than 20" and that "they were groups close to López Obrador".[17] In an even blunter misrepresentation of the performance at the Ibero, newspapers such as *El Sol de México* and *La Crónica de Hoy* published on their main page, **"**Éxito de Peña en la Ibero, pese a intento orquestado de boicot." At one point, and in ways similar to what occurred in Egypt with Al Jazeera's Arabic and English channels (Alexander 2012, p. 68), videos were shown on YouTube that juxtaposed the relatively peaceful, supportive, and friendly scenes broadcasted by Televisa with images of students shouting at Peña Nieto. As one observer put it: "It was just incredible. If you compare what happened with what was presented on TV, it's just two different worlds."[18]

The students of Iberoamericana were offended by the media's negative characterization of them, by the incorrect reporting of the protest, and by the general acceptance of PRI's script for the events. In fact, without the officially coordinated campaign of misrepresentation, and without the students' dramatic answer to it, the protest at the Ibero probably would have been soon forgotten as the media's attention cycle moved on to other topics. Yet public policy research shows that the public image of a group is crucial to how its positions are accepted (Donovan 2001; Schneider and Ingram 1993; Itkonen 2007), and protesters with an unfavorable public image are more likely to be ignored and discredited. The students were not willing to let the official narrative attack go uncontested. Compounding their challenge, the battle for media coverage was played on a tilted playing field. On the one hand, protesters need the media more than the media need them (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). On the other, the acceptance of the official storyline for the protests reflects how public officials, political candidates, and party representatives receive automatic media standing, while movement actors must struggle to establish it. More so than in other state regimes, mainstream media are not autonomous and neutral actors in Mexico, but are often agents and handmaidens of the dominant groups that movements challenge.

To this mix of protest performance and audience contestation, enter Facebook, Twitter, and smartphones into the mix. Social media hold the potential to drastically decrease the need of traditional media coverage by protesting groups. Performances artifactualized through digital technologies can play a decisive role in shaping audience's perceptions, and can become integral elements in the unfolding of the protest performance. Consider the images of the slain body of Neda Agah-Soltan, shot by security forces on June 22, 2009, during street protests as part of the Iranian Green mobilizations against fraudulent elections. The poignant image went viral worldwide, becoming an artifact representing the regime's brutality and unresponsiveness. Such images can challenge the regime's self-characterizations as moderate defenders of public order, as uploads of Syrian security sweeps in Homs and Aleppo do, and, conversely, can play a key role in challenging unfavorable characterizations of protesters by powerful opponents, disputing distorted media coverage and creating alternative

[15] Figueiras Tapia (coord.) 2012.

[16] http://mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2012/05/11/el-pri-llama-intolerantes-a-los-jovenes-que-abucearon-a-pena-en-la-ibero.

[17] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hca6lzoE2z8. López Obrador was the presidential candidate of the Left.

[18] http://classwaru.org/2012/06/11/yosoy132-student-led-uprising-in-mexico-an-interview-with-patrick-cunninghame-professor-mexico-city/.

interpretations of events and persons. In addition, they can contribute to disclosing in an unambiguous way the biased, partisan, and engaged role of mainstream media. Audio/video recording is a technology that presents opportunities for widely dispersed performance artifactualization.

YouTube videos are seen by millions and discussed by media commentators, citizens, and activists, making them available for new categories of culture making. Regardless of the form which artifactualized performances take, their original production occurs in contexts different from their subsequent reading and/or playback, and they become the focus of new performances and give rise to different interpretations. An artifactualized performance has a cultural life different from the original, and invokes the active cultural practice of subsequent participants (Johnston 2009, 2010).

Outraged by the media misrepresentation of the events at the Universidad Iberoamericana, and in direct response to PRI and PVEM's high-ranking members' attempt at denigrating their public image, students put together a video to prove that the official narrative of events was false. Framed as an assertion of the students' basic right to answer charges against them, the video begins with a cover-letter introduction format directly addressing the politicians linked to the PRI and PVEM who had aimed at constructing a negative public image of the protesters.

> Dear Joaquín Coldwell, Arturo Escobar, Emilio Gamboa as well as media of dubious neutrality. We use our right to answer to a charge, to refute you. We are students of the Ibero, we are not *acarreados* [paid participants] we are not *porros* [thugs] and nobody trained us for anything, and nobody trained us for anything, and nobody trained us for anything. And nobody trained us for anything.

This initial presentation is followed by an 11 min sequence of 131 young women and men facing the camera, keeping still and simply holding their university IDs and pronouncing their names and ID number. No demands, no mobilization calls, no requests for support. Protesters simply stressed, in a dramatic form, their identities as students, and not outside agitators sent by opposition parties.

Through the consequential creation of a "digital identity artifact," students were able to tell their side of their story. By showing who they really were, students also made clear to the audience that they had been unfairly accused by PRI and PVEM representatives and that media representations were not bona fide, to say the least. In this way, they were able to actively participate in the construction of their public image: no small victory given the concentration of traditional media in Mexico and their enormous political influence. In addition, by exhibiting their "true identity," students simultaneously displayed in an unambiguous way the biased, partisan, and engaged role of mainstream media.

The video "131 Ibero Students" was widely diffused through digital networks. It was posted on YouTube on May 14 at 14:25 and by 8:30 it had already been seen by 21,747 users. On Twitter, it rapidly became a trending topic; the theme "131 Ibero Students" occupied the first place in the trending topic list until 19:00 h.[19] Among the multiple interpretations that the video elicited, one in particular stood out. In the midst of conversations with friends, some of them from the Ibero, a student from the Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico City, came up with the idea of creating the hashtag and a website titled "#YoSoy132"—I am the 132nd (Figueiras 2012; Muñoz and Desinformémonos 2011). Through this microperformance, digitized and artifactualized, the student symbolically joined the 131 Ibero students who appeared in the video. In so doing, he did not just express his personal support for their cause, but more importantly, he expanded the cultural artifact by symbolically creating the slot 132, an empty space, a vacant position, an unoccupied spot, to be appropriated by anyone sympathizing with the students' protest at the Iberoamericana. Symbolically, number 132 is a citizen of Mexico who is outraged, most immediately, by the misleading public declarations that followed the protest and/or enraged by the biased, partial, and interested media coverage of the events. It is an artifact with diverse inter-

[19] http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=307494; Figueiras Tapia (coord.) 2012.

pretations. But also, and more broadly, no. 132 is outraged by the unresponsiveness and corruption characteristic of institutional politics in their country, by the deficit of democracy that reigns there, and by the entrenched interests that block political reform. These interpretations of the cultural artifact further enhanced its role in a way that proved to be decisive for the mobilization trajectory of the student movement.

In the following days, mobilizations under the hash tag #YoSoy 132 and under similar ones like "#marcha YoSoy132" were called together. On May 23th, between 15,000 and 20, 000 students from private and public universities, young people, and ordinary citizens rallied at the base of the Estela de Luz, and that's when the #YoSoy132 movement took off. Since then, the movement expanded at the national level. Student assemblies were regularly held, and just about every single university in the country set up its own branch. With an estimated 3.5 million people voting for the first time in the 2012 election, the student movement radically changed the electoral process by organizing a public debate with all presidential candidates—except Peña Nieto who declined the invitation to participate—and by reintroducing uncertainty to the contest, which until the appearance of the movement was perceived as a sure win for the PRI by large sectors of Mexican society. The movement went on after the July 1st elections, held national meetings regularly, and pronounced itself on every important debate on the public agenda such as the reform to the educational system and the energy sector, and of course, the democratization of the media.[20]

This brief chronicle of how the roots of the #YoSoy132 movement are set in a social-media-based, digital artifact that resonated broadly among Mexican youth shows that, rather than a ostracized stepchild in cultural analysis, cultural artifacts—their production, their social embeddedness, and the ways audiences responded to them—can play key roles in the trajectory of a movement. Indeed, the roots of #YoSoy 132 in a much-watched online video and in the social-media responses that it elicited show that digital artifacts can be instrumental in bringing a movement into existence. They attract diverse populations, drawing them by the drama their presence as artifacts represents, and then plugs visitors into spaces where information is passed and discussions hosted. This stands in contrast to relatively fixed relations of the mobilization structures of foregone movements. This particular case nicely illustrates how cultural artifacts can be used in the production of oppositional meanings and how the unfolding events and actions around them can become central to the identity and to the genesis of the movement. What we would like to stress at this point is that this occurred not by a movement group plotting mobilization and framing strategies, but rather by the complex and extensive intertwining of performances, audiences, and cultural artifacts.

Just as individual performances can be artifactualized and become a new kind of performance that produces a "cultural artifact," the latter can also serve as the focus of further interpretations and performances. Since they are concrete, material objects, cultural artifacts can be discussed, resignified, amplified, or expropriated for further actions both by movement members and by nonmembers alike. As noted earlier, artifacts take on significance because they are *always* interpreted by their audiences. Interpretations are given life as they diffuse through networks of interpersonal interaction through microperformances of actors' own understandings. Artifacts become the fodder of oppositional microperformances as bystanders discuss them among themselves, commenting on their meaning and audacity, and reacting, in some instances, with new performances that, in turn, may enhance the oppositional role of cultural artifacts.

Conclusion

This chapter has been built on the proposition that where residues of a less democratic past persist, as is the case in Mexico and other Latin American countries, cultural insights to social protest can be particularly useful because direct

[20] For more information see http://www.yosoy132media.org.

channels of political access are less open. This proposition implies that in order to have a better comprehension of social movements we need to recognize culture as internally constitutive of politics, warning us against the view permeating much current work on social movements whether from the political process perspective or the new social movements approach, of culture and politics as two opposed spheres and joining recent work on the cultural analysis of social movements.

Three basic elements of cultural sociology have been identified to be particularly relevant to the study of social protest: cultural artifacts, performances, and audiences. Regarding cultural artifacts, we have argued that they give the social movement researcher a more elaborated way of thinking about mobilization processes. Rather than the stepchild of cultural analysis, or, as applied to social movement research, just "potent mobilizing symbols," we see;

- The diversity of interpretations that surround them. Regarding the Estela, there is not only the official interpretation, the official and the oppositional, but also multiple variant interpretations according to matrix branches
- The movement of these various interpretations through branches of the cultural matrix, where, through microperformances, they are reinforced, elaborated, tested, and proven worthy, and then
- Their coalescence around themes of general illegitimacy of the state as larger collective performances, such as protests, marches, demonstrations speeches, and so on, create sites of additional meaning making for participants, and provide for more broadly shared common experiences.
- Cultural artifacts trigger the application of collective action frames, which, although highly variable (as they are individually held and stored in memory according to past experience), are "collectivized" in microperformances as individual actors discuss their interpretations with others—the collective process by which frames are congealed around shared interpretations.

In sum, a fuller understanding of framing processes requires us to go beyond: (1) the ideational and writings bias in the study of framing processes and (2) the tendency to study framing processes from an instrumental movement-centered perspective.

Our two cases have also shown that staging a resonant protest performance can be in itself a major achievement in less democratic regimes, either by state obstruction, repression, or media manipulation. These cases have also demonstrated that with the artifactualization of performances, either through digital technologies or creativity in the interpretation of symbolism, social movements can increase their oppositional capacity. This has enabled movements to challenge unfavorable interpretations by powerful opponents, dispute distorted media coverage, influence audiences' perceptions of the situation, and circumvent surveillance and outright repression.

To close, we see this in a point of convergence between the two movements described in this chapter. Just like students at Iberoamericana were outraged, members of the MPJD have been profoundly offended by governmental attempts at characterizing victims of organized crime as "daños colaterales," "mere numbers," or "statistics." They have also been outraged by statements undermining the innocence of the victims, suggesting that those who are killed or disappeared "must have done something" or "must have been involved in crime related activities." The tendency of Mexican authorities to assume that victims are themselves criminals or are people related to criminals has become a grievance that MPJD and its founder, Javier Sicilia, have fought against throughout the campaign.

Also like #YoSoy132, the MPJD movement has been very successful at showing that this is not true. Its success has not been based on digital artifacts but rather, on simple performative acts such as the pronunciation of the names of the victims and on small cultural artifacts. For example, in spite of being inaugurated almost in secret, the opening ceremony of the Estela was disrupted by a performance by the MPJD in which, in addition to candle lights, a speaker cried out the full name of a victim while the audience responded "Should

not have died!" In addition to such performances, the movement has resorted to cultural artifacts that aim at transforming the bold and cold numbers of Calderón's war against drugs into particular, unique, human beings, with a name and a family surname. It has placed plates—similar to the commemorative plates found on streets, monuments, and other public places and reminiscent of the nameplates at gravestones—on plazas, buildings, and even at the Estela. The placing of the plates has not been uncontested, and local as well as institutional authorities have removed them, only in some instances to be later replaced by the movement or by the authorities themselves. When an ordinary citizen, a member of the neighborhood, or a visitor sees the nameplate he or she is reminded that Calderón's strategy against drug dealers has cost a life, has destroyed a family and has caused communities deep pain. The nameplates trigger the application of collective action frames that help build oppositional interpretations to Calderón's official discourse, which forced him to change it and publicly acknowledge the high social cost of his strategy against drugs, transforming also media coverage and public debate on organized crime, narcotráfico and state capacity.

By focusing on the complex and extensive interplay between performances, cultural artifacts, and audiences we have presented a compelling explanation of contemporary social movements in Mexico that goes beyond strategic approaches to protest, demonstrating the centrality of cultural artifacts, and cultural analysis in general, in explaining protest movements and their development.

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