



Susana Draper. *1968 Mexico: Constellations of Freedom and Democracy.* Radical América Series. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018. 272 pp. \$25.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4780-0143-0.

Reviewed by Matthew Maletz

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Commissioned by Zachary J. Lechner (Centenary College of Louisiana)

There is a photograph of a rioter, taken from behind, in the *Chicago Tribune's* morning edition for August 28, 1968, during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. The caption reads "Hippie Attacks Policeman: Fighting in Lincoln park includes hippie throwing bottle at policeman who had moved in to quell demonstrators. Widespread violence occurred after hippies challenged police lines." The fourteen-year-old boy throwing an emptied bottle of Rumble Minze in the photo is my father. He had gone to the park that day out of curiosity, not in a spirit of political protest. He was not, as he was described, a hippie, but a member of a different, easily identified, and longer-lived subculture, greasers. His anti-authoritarianism exceeded even that of the yippies and hippies, which is why he joined in the melee that followed the Chicago police's attempt to disperse the crowd. My father's friends had been drafted and sent to kill and die in Vietnam, and so, if asked, he would have said he favored an end to the war, despite his lack of political conviction. But he was not asked by the author of the accompanying article or the paper's editors. Instead, they used his image and misidentified him as an older member of a different subculture, in order to sell a version of events in which supposedly peaceful hippies inflicted violence on the police; national guardsmen; and, as depicted in another accompanying

photograph, innocent bystanders, women and children among them.

In her new book, *1968 Mexico: Constellations of Freedom and Democracy*, Susana Draper seeks to analyze the experiences and historical memories of people who, like my father, were on the periphery of the main events of 1968. Draper argues that the radical events of 1968 in Mexico were less a part of an organized political movement and more a political opening, a moment in which politics were made real in the lives of many in society. She invokes the slogan "the personal is political" but argues that critical theory should account for more than this, and contends that in 1968, the obverse also became true: the political became personal. Everyday experience became politicized. The book, though not represented as such, is a collection of essays connected thematically by the sense of opening that 1968 represented and the philosophy of José Revueltas, whose works are the subject of the first chapter.

Draper argues that the writings Revueltas produced during the student protests of 1968, while imprisoned for his participation in those events and the short time after his release from prison before his death, represent a chronicle of 1968, and that in them we can best see the spirit of the movement. Draper argues that the autodidact, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

(UNAM) professor, and public intellectual was not a leader of the student protests in the sense that the heads of the Strike Council were, but rather that he provided the intellectual heft for the movement. She is especially concerned with three of his principles: theoretical acts, self-management, and cognitive democracy. Each of these concepts is reflective of the fact that the protests of 1968 began with and were led by students.

Draper defines theoretical acts as actions taken by everyday people in full understanding that they are historical actors who can effect real political and social change. They understand their position as reformers because they have studied history, the social sciences, and philosophy, presumably in a way that earlier reformers had not, though Draper does not demonstrate this. Revueltas extended the protestors' demands for autonomy in the university to self-management in political and social affairs. The protestors in 1968 practiced self-management in the way they conducted their affairs, which was through egalitarian participation. Women were represented in equal numbers in the leadership. Men did work usually assigned to women, such as doing dishes and cooking. Everyone in the movement was given a voice, not just the rich, powerful, or connected. This way of doing things led the protestors to believe that they could continue to behave in this manner after the protests ceased. In doing so, they could refashion society to be more just. Cognitive democracy can be understood as equal access to knowledge. This would be achieved by greater access to books and higher education through traditional and unconventional means, including by having university students teach free classes for workers.

The second chapter examines the effects of 1968 on cinema. Draper argues that the creation and editing of *History of a Document* (1971) and the films produced by the Cooperative of Marginal Cinema (1971-75) that focused on union strikes reflect Revueltas's three principles. The filmmakers

saw themselves as documenting the history of the movement, whether in the case of political prisoners in Lecumberri prison after the Tlatelolco massacre or in the case of unions not recognized by the Mexican state, fulfilling Revueltas's theoretical act criteria. The creation of the films was cooperative and egalitarian: prisoners in Lecumberri were smuggled Super 8 cameras, which they used as they saw fit to document their treatment, and union members, likewise, were allowed to document their strikes. These actions fulfilled the self-management criteria. Finally, using cinema as a medium was revolutionary in that it allowed for the mass communication of the ideas of the movement, meeting the criteria for cognitive democracy. Furthermore, the act of documenting the movement, and the manner in which the documentation occurred, allowed the principles of 1968 to survive the repression that it provoked. In the case of *History of a Document*, the film invalidated the Mexican state's official position that there were no political prisoners in Lecumberri prison by showing those prisoners on screen demanding that they be considered dissenters rather than common criminals.

The third chapter examines women and gender and presents two arguments. The first is that women participated in the events of 1968, as already stated, and that the manner of women's participation led Mexicans who participated to believe that gender equality could be achieved. The second is that after 1968, women were written out of the history of 1968. Though they appeared in Elena Poniatowska's famous *La Noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), the only major book about the events of 1968 to be in wide circulation in Mexico for twenty years after the events, women's roles in the events were minimized in histories of the events in favor of their male counterparts, especially members of the National Strike Council, many of whom published memoirs. Draper argues that the minimization of women's roles in histories of the movement is in part explained by a resurgence of machismo in the intervening

years. She examines the work of several women in Mexico who have made strides in correcting this male-dominated narrative of 1968, including Fernanda Navarro and Sonia del Valle.

The final chapter examines Roberta Avedaño's *Of Freedom and Imprisonment* (1998) and G. Gladys López Hernández's *Ovarimony: Me, a Guerilla Fighter?* (2013). Draper argues that these works share two important stances: neither fetishizes the massacre in Tlateloco nor gives any quarter to the argument that the strikes represented a naive, spontaneous demonstration on the part of young people. Rather, each treats the students and other actors in the events of 1968 with respect for their social and political commitments and makes them the center of their narratives. By doing so, each endeavors to rescue the truth of the past from a crystalizing—and false—narrative of history.

1968 Mexico is best suited to an audience already familiar with the events of 1968 in Mexico, as it is more concerned with analysis than a foundation in facts. This is perhaps best illustrated in the chapter on Revueltas's work, when we are told that Revueltas was found guilty of "ten crimes" and sentenced to sixteen years in prison, that this sentence amounted to a death sentence given his age and physical condition, and that the sentence constituted criminalizing dissent, but the ten crimes against which he was defending himself are never stipulated (p. 74). It can be argued that this amounts to a critical stance: naming the crimes would give further voice to the official government position and eliding them brings focus to Revueltas's defense. If intended, though, this choice serves to confuse the reader and robs Revueltas's defense of its context.

Despite this qualm, the student of the 1968 events in Mexico will find Draper's framing of the movement instructive. The book joins other recent works on these events, such as Elaine Carey's *Plaza of Sacrifice: Gender Power and Terror in 1968* (2005) and Ilán Semo's edited volume *La*

transición interrumpida: México 1968-1988 (1993), in reexamining both 1968 and its aftermath with the tools of critical theory, gender studies, and literary criticism. Draper refocuses attention on those whose participation in the protests had a profound effect on the way they perceived social justice, organizing, and their relationship to the state. Draper recognizes that a figure shouting through a bullhorn is made formidable only by the presence of a crowd. The reasons why each member of the crowd chose to show up are important. Just ask my father.

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