

Anne Rubenstein
History Department
Allegheny College
North Main St.
Meadville, PA 16335
arubens@alleg.edu

Bodies, Cities, Cinema: Pedro Infante's Death as Political Spectacle

In 1992 the Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes offered Mexico City museum-goers an exhibit on city life and popular culture in the twentieth century. It included thousands of artifacts of all kinds, but the crowds who made the show a surprise hit mostly came to see a single photograph: a snapshot of the singer and movie star Pedro Infante taking a shower. More charming than scandalous — soapsuds partially covered the great national hero — the photograph nonetheless created a sensation.¹ From the minute the museum opened every day until instant it closed, large groups of solemn museum-goers gathered before it, either keeping silent or conversing in respectful whispers, before politely giving way to the next group. And so it went for entire run of the exhibit. Thirty-five years after his death, Pedro Infante's body still mattered.

Pedro Infante's Invisible Body

Pedro Infante sang on the radio, made records, acted in dozens of movies, grew famous, behaved scandalously and got his name in the papers, piloted airplanes and rode motorcycles, made and spent quite a lot of money for the time, and died young, in a plane crash, in 1957. At the time he was a controversial figure, notorious for a legal tangle with his first wife and, more generally, as a womanizer. Infante was among the two or three most important male movie stars of the day, but hardly anyone would have predicted the lasting importance of his figure. In the days and decades following his sudden, shocking death, his reputation changed. Infante ceased to be a more or less charming rascal for whom few respectable persons would express admiration in public, and became a kind of secular saint. Along with the masked wrestler El Santo, Pedro

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Infante is now perhaps the most important male figure in the iconography of Mexican commercial culture, portraying moral and physical perfection as well as deep national pride.² He personifies several masculine ideals at once: the charro (cowboy) who is also a modern urban man, the macho with a tender heart, the working stiff and the rich guy too. But in all of his guises, Infante represents a living vision of what it might mean to be Mexican.

In the summer of 1998, every Mexican to whom I mentioned the topic I was researching - dozens of people -- responded with the same line: “Oh? The death of Pedro Infante? Is he really dead?” This joke, or half-joke, reflected a rumor that has achieved the status of myth. Some people probably do believe that Infante lives on, but everyone believes that somebody believes it. In the 1970s the popular story ran that El Santo *was* Pedro Infante (which helped to explain why the heroic wrestler never took off his silver mask).³ Thus Infante lives on in Mexicans’ imaginations.

Whether or not his fans truly are convinced that Infante is still alive, they do participate in maintaining a sort of posthumous existence for him. Fans visit Infante’s grave and home town (sometimes dressed in approximations of his outfits from one or another of his movie roles), buy video copies of his movies or watch them re-run on television, purchase new CDs of his old records, read books and watch documentaries about their hero, and listen to his songs on the radio. A few people have convinced themselves that they are Infante’s mother, or one of his wives, or his child, or the idol himself; more make their livings as Infante imitators.

The tale of Infante’s life after death can be explained, at least in part, by the fact that his corpse was not displayed at his wake, since the accident that killed him had mangled his remains too badly: the invisibility of Infante’s body allowed people to argue that he was not actually present at his funeral, that the whole sad series of events was instead an elaborate conspiracy. The manner of his death, including the violent public reaction to it, helped to create the figure that Infante became only after the accident that claimed his life. And a careful examination of the events around Infante’s death and burial can reveal much, not only about the star’s place in Mexican culture, but also about the intersections of class and gender in Mexico City at the time — and today.

Funeral/Riot

On April 14, 1957, Infante was co-piloting a flight from Mérida, Yucatán — where he had been vacationing at a house he owned near there — to Mexico City, where some urgent legal business awaited him. The four-engine plane (which belonged to a company Infante partially owned) fell from the sky shortly after takeoff, killing all its passengers. Within an hour, Infante’s fans were crowding the streets near the accident site; by the next day, greater numbers had camped outside his house in Mérida and the city morgue; meanwhile in Mexico City thousands of people were flocking to his house, his mother’s house, and his first wife’s house, while across the country mourners gathered at movie theaters.

The next day a still larger group accompanied his body from the Meridá morgue to the airport, while somewhere between fifty and a hundred thousand people met the plane carrying his remains at the Mexico City airport when it arrived, just before noon. Newspapers described these mourners, as they characterized all the crowds which gathered this week, as belonging to “the proletarian class,” including “children of various ages, peddlers, workers, peasants.”⁴ **[photo one]** The police had to force their way through this mob to clear a path for the coffin to be carried from

a plane to the waiting hearse by

frequently using their night-sticks. They did not strike only at particular persons. At times, they swung wildly, hitting whoever they could. Thus it was that women and children whose only crime was anxiety to attend the funeral of a much-loved actor, wound up driven to their knees on the pavement among screams of pain.⁵

And the hearse could barely move through the crowd. (One of the injuries reported in this day's events was caused by this car actually running over one onlooker). **[photo two]** Outside the airport, the streets too were clogged with mourning fans. That afternoon and throughout the night, perhaps fifty thousand people filed by his closed casket while even more tried and failed to get in to the theater where Infante lay. Some members of the crowd waited for more than twenty-four hours. They prayed, sang, wept, bought and sold snacks and souvenirs, suffered a few cases of sunstroke and -- ominously -- resisted police attempts to create an orderly line.

The next morning, the day of Infante's funeral, thousands more were still waiting to pay their last respects to the fallen idol when the hearse arrived to bear his casket to the cemetery. Again, they tried to impede its arrival and departure, and again the police intervened violently. The multitude lining the route between the theater and the cemetery made the occasion "seem like a fair," and photos of the day show people hanging out of windows, standing on parked cars and sitting in trees; but as Infante's body passed by, "an impressive silence fell."⁶ Most of the hearse's roughly 12-kilometer trip south-west from the theater passed peacefully.

Members of the crowd knew where to go to bid Infante farewell for several reasons. They could assume that his coffin would follow the route taken, three years earlier, by the cortege of Infante's friend and rival, singer/actor Jorge Negrete. In any case there was only one logical route southward from the theater where Infante had lain, which belonged to the actors' union ANDA, to ANDA's special section of Mexico City's finest cemetery. (As it happened, Infante was to be buried near but not in the ANDA plot of the Panteon Jardin. But it seems unlikely that many people were aware of this on the morning of his funeral; the newspapers did not report this fact until the next day.) Some people who tried to attend the funeral probably lived at some distance or were new to the city, and therefore would not have had access to all this information. But they could learn by radio where to go, how to get there, and when to be there: at least one station, the extremely popular XEQ, broadcast non-stop coverage of the events following Infante's death from the moment news of his plane crash reached them until the evening following his funeral, reporting that included detailed information on the sites where his coffin could be glimpsed. All over the city, in stores, restaurants, bars, and the courtyards of apartment buildings, people kept their radios playing to follow these events and join in the collective sorrow and excitement.⁷

The cortege was bearing Infante's body to the Panteón Jardin, where he would be buried in the center of the relatively new cemetery, just downhill from Blanca Estela Pavón, the actress who had co-starred in his biggest hit Nosotros los Pobres and its sequel Ustedes los Ricos. (Pavón, as all the papers remarked in their reporting on Infante's demise, may or may not have been Infante's lover; by morbid coincidence she also had perished in a plane crash.) The cemetery, built in the late Porfirian era, suited the needs of Mexico City's dignitaries and wealthy elite. Designed for the public ceremonials of that era, its wide central boulevard led straight up a long hill from the grand, pillared fake-Greek entrance, while smaller paths branching off into neatly arrayed rows of impressive tombs. But it was not nearly large enough to accommodate the huge numbers of mourners who had begun gathering there hours before Infante's casket was due

to arrive. They clung to fences, trampled shrubbery, climbed trees and even perched on tombstones to find space for themselves. In the end, at least 150,000 people attempted to witness the burial in the cemetery, in addition to the people who had attended Infante's body from the airport to the wake, visited his body at the ANDA theater, and lined the route between the theater and the graveyard.

The police tried to keep a small space open for the official mourning party. These mourners included mariachi bands with whom Infante had sung, representatives of the motorcycle police with whom Infante had associated himself, various members of the Mexican film industry, some of whom had been Infante's close friends, others his long-term colleagues, and still others who barely knew him but needed the publicity. And, of course, his family all came: Infante's mother, all his living siblings, their various spouses and children, and some of Infante's young children. Infante's legal spouse, María Luisa León de Infante, attended, but so did the woman whose marriage to Infante had only just been annulled by the Supreme Court as bigamous, Irma Dorantes. Infante's oldest living brother, Angel, carefully kept the two women on opposite sides of the grave.

The crowd knew all about the legal quarrel between Infante's wives, and they had chosen sides. Less than a week earlier, the popular tabloid *La Prensa*'s coverage of the bigamy trial had slanted heavily toward María Luisa León, with headlines shouting "Pedro Will Go to Jail" and "Pedro's Wife [meaning María Luisa] Willing to Forgive"⁸; so this newspaper displayed particular disgust in reporting that the crowd at the funeral had clearly indicated their preference for Irma Dorantes. It gave an entire article over to the first wife's treatment by the funeral-goers, describing how

various women, above all those from humble backgrounds, besieged [María Luisa Leon] ... as they considered her 'a usurper, and responsible for Pedro's problems.' As she walked into the cemetery, María Luisa Leon heard epithets that were lacerating and cruel. Many women shouted "hypocrite" at her. Others, more daringly, called her "shameless."⁹

When President Ruiz Cortines sent a note of condolence on Infante's death, he sent it to neither Irma Dorantes nor María Luisa León, but to Infante's brother Angel; this, too, indicates the strength of public sentiment about Infante's two wives, its volatility, and its politicized nature.¹⁰

In response to the police shoving members of the crowd away from Infante's grave and the official members of the mourning party, a melee broke out while the service was still in progress. As a mariachi group continued playing and singing an Infante hit, the police began clubbing funeral-goers and shouting -- and the funeral-goers hit back. Soon enough, much of the crowd was fighting the police or each other. "Thousands of women, children, adults and old people tirelessly battled," according to newspaper accounts, while more attempted to flee and hurt each other in their panic.¹¹ The riot injured at least 140 people — some newspapers put the number as high as 210 injured funeral-goers — and caused seven people to be hurt seriously enough to require hospitalization. (Most, though, were treated at the scene by the Red Cross medics whom the Mayor of Mexico City had requested to attend the funeral; these medics also attended to numerous people suffering from sunstroke and a number of young starlets who staged publicity-catching hysterical fits.) The worst injuries were caused by police night-sticks, but at least one policeman also suffered a beating "at the hands of the multitude."¹² The police arrested twenty-one people, accusing them of "delinquency" but also claiming that they were pick-pockets

and thieves.¹³ Other would-be funeral-goers were “trampled” and “pushed into open graves” by the police, or by people running away from the police.¹⁴ The cemetery itself was badly damaged, as angry members of the crowd toppled gravestones and destroyed statuary while others knocked down fences and trampled gardens in their flight. Most newspapers referred to these events as a riot; one called it a “battle.”¹⁵

Mexican elites expressed horror at these events. Perhaps expecting trouble, President Ruiz Cortines and his family, and other high-ranking government officials, had stayed away from the funeral, while ensuring an ample police presence. Afterwards, Salvador Novo (a poet, playwright, and director whose weekly magazine column “*Cartas a un amigo*” gave voice to Mexico City’s high society in this era) sourly punned “for almost a week, as you will have noticed, we all behaved like complete infants.”¹⁶ Novo usually marked the deaths of notables with long, emotional reminiscences in his column, so this comment — his only word on the death of Mexico’s biggest star — was all the more remarkable. Similarly, *Tiempo* magazine, the Spanish-language edition of the conservative US weekly *Time*, scolded

at the moment that the coffin was lowered from the airplane ... there began a demonstration of grief in which fervor, hysteria and mass emotion mixed to offer a spectacle that, if it was enormous in its magnitude, was not at all edifying in its results... .. As the remains were being moved to the Panteón Jardín, there began fainting fits, inexplicably violent behavior and the excesses of the crowd, which was stirred up by collective hysteria. It was truly lamentable that an open display of grief ... should degenerate into riot and disorder.¹⁷

Four years later, when a fan magazine published an article on the anniversary of Infante’s death, it made special note of the chaotic violence that marked his funeral and of the social status of those taking part in it: “The death of Pedro Infante moved all classes of society. But it was, especially, the masses who wept for him.”¹⁸

Meanwhile, other people expressed rage and grief in more isolated ways. They wrote dozens of memorial songs and poems, for example. Some song lyrics bordered on hagiography, like one that emphasized Infante’s Christ-like “vocation as a carpenter” and promised him that “heaven is waiting for you.”¹⁹ Many memorial ballads described Infante as the ideal Mexican, like the one that praised his “noble Mexican heart,” while a few glorified Infante’s status as a national representative to the world, underlining his “international fame”²⁰ Fans carried his picture around with them, put it in their family photo albums, or tacked it up on their walls.²¹ And in the most extreme reactions, in the week that followed Infante’s death at least two suicide notes claimed that the victims could not live without their idol.

Why did Infante’s fans mourn him with such violence? To understand these strange, sad events requires a context: we have to understand what made Infante so important to those who mourned him, and who they believed Infante to be.

Pedro Infante’s Real and Imaginary Life

Pedro Infante’s fans knew his life story as well as they knew the biographies of the saints, or of their neighbors. The story that fans knew may or may not have been entirely true — like fans everywhere, they probably did not always distinguish between the person himself, the

publicity about the person, and the dramatic roles he played as a singer and actor — but that need not concern us here. Informed by gossip columns, biographical photo-novels, scandal sheets, movie magazines and rumor as well as by Infante's movies and songs, audiences developed their own ideas about Infante's life and character. These beliefs, in turn, made them into fans and motivated their intense emotions at his death.²²

Pedro Infante was born to a large, poor, loving family in a small town in Sinaloa in 1917, and began working as a carpenter at an early age. At the same time he was studying with his father, a musician; he took a job as a drummer with a local dance orchestra in 1932, at age fifteen. By 1937 he had migrated, like so many young people of the time, to Mexico City. He left a one-year-old daughter behind in Sinaloa. (By the time he died, he was supporting fourteen sons and daughters, children of four women; at least another three women would claim that their children were Infante's in the aftermath of his death.) In the city, Infante met and married his first wife, María Luisa León, who — depending on which version of the story fans decided to believe — either encouraged Infante to look for more lucrative work as a musician or shrewishly insisted on it. In either case, soon enough Infante joined a multitude of singers working in the booming radio business, with its insatiable demand for new voices. The most popular station in Mexico City, XEW, offered him a contract, beginning an association with the singer that culminated in their broadcast of his funeral, which earned extraordinarily high ratings.

The 200-kilowatt station -- the most powerful in the Western Hemisphere when it began transmitting in 1930 — reached well beyond the capital's boundaries; listeners tuned in all over the country and as far away as Havana. XEW belonged to the U.S.-based RCA network but carried very little network programming, partly because the technology of simultaneous transmission was not yet reliable enough to make network-wide broadcasting cheap or easy, but also because the Mexican government had promulgated laws between 1932-36 that traded fifty-year concessions of the broadcast spectrum for a requirement that at least a quarter of all radio programming consist of “typically Mexican” songs. (At the same time the government also was promoting national — if not nationalist — content in film and periodicals with price supports and controls on foreign media, among other measures.) XEW's owner Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta made a virtue of necessity: by tirelessly advertising the station's mexicanidad, he helped to call his audience into being. As new singers became XEW regulars, they developed personas that fit within a relatively narrow range of possible “Mexican” roles: the urban bum, the fallen woman, the cheery rustic, and so forth. Pedro Infante quickly adopted the image of the charro, the heroic cowboy of the north, and specialized in canciones rancheras, the melodramatic ballads that fit the charro role.²³

Ranchera songs can be understood as a socially conservative rebuke — both in their musical form and their lyrical content — to the more directly sexual boleros that were just as popular at the time. Boleros, most of all those by Agustín Lara, recorded the melodramas of urban life and modernity rather than those of the countryside and the mythic past. To oversimplify, the world of the bolero was the world of the city at night, populated by prostitutes, blind musicians, thieves and murderers; boleros spoke of ruined lives. Ranchera music, while frequently sad, was set in the warmth, sunlight and comfort of northern Mexico in some impossibly prosperous past; it spoke of ruined loves — with the implication that all parties would live to love another day — when it spoke of ruin at all.

Infante's audience certainly understood the political differences among song genres, because both the government and commercial culture had made a series of gestures to underline

those difference. In 1936 the Secretary of Public Education in the relatively radical administration of Lázaro Cárdenas administration made a conciliatory gesture to the right (after a long series of violent conflicts over the content of public education) by banning Lara's songs from being performed in Mexican schools. Ten years later, radio station XEX — struggling to define itself in a market dominated by the Azcárraga family's network — hit on the notion of advertising itself as the clean alternative to racy popular music, an idea that soon did make the station a huge success. XEX distributed a list of songs, soon reprinted throughout the country, which it called "obscene" and vowed never to broadcast. Prominent among the blacklisted tunes were some of Agustín Lara's most popular compositions; none of Infante's hits appeared on this list.

Yet Infante did not make inoffensive or apolitical music. His biggest hits were love songs, but they were not often addressed to an individual woman. Frequently, they praised the land instead, or the nation, or a region of the nation. Sometimes they asserted the singer's manly mexicanidad by denigrating -- in a jocular fashion -- a former love. The songs he recorded in the five years before his death (not all of them rancheras, but all sharing the spirit and tone of the ranchera genre) often took a defiant, even boastful stance. In 1956 Infante's hit "Morir Soñando" proclaimed that "it's better to die while dreaming than to live in reality."²⁴ A year later another hit, "La Verdolaga," let Infante make much of his reputation as a Don Juan:

I gave them love and money
and then when it was least expected
they got me into trouble
that's why I live free
without trusting in women ...
Don't make commitments
in matters of the heart.²⁵

In 1953 another hit love song, "Ni por favor!" allowed Infante to sound both heartbroken and proud at the same time:

If you don't love me, so what,
Of love I will not die
One suffers when one loves
But one learns to forget, too ...
If you think that because of my tender feelings
I will have to come plead with you
My love, you've made a mistake
This I will not do, not even if you say please.²⁶

Many of these songs were fast-paced and cheery in their sound, making a witty contrast with their sometimes glum or bitter lyrics. Others — including some whose words were gentle and loving, like "Te quiero así" — sounded slow and sad. But all used Infante's untrained but pure tenor to great effect.²⁷ His instantly recognizable voice made it sound as though he were singing from the heart, whether he was mourning the passing of a happier past, praising a new love, or declaring that his mother, his nation or his northern region was the true object of all his affections.

In 1940 Infante entered the movies with a bit part for which another actor dubbed the

words. Using the film-business connections he had made through his work as a nightclub singer to help get himself better roles, and taking speech classes to modulate his strong northern accent, he quickly became a leading man. By 1943 he was a star, with a recording contract, weekly appearances on XEW, and a series of hit movies. Many of these movies extended his charro persona: he made comedies like Dicen que soy mujeriego (1948), Los Tres García and its sequel Vuelven los García (both 1946), and Cuidado con el amor (1954) but also melodramatic cowboy romances like Los gavilanes (1954). In them he sang the same, or similar, songs as radio listeners could hear him perform; he wore the same huge spangled sombrero, gunbelt, and tight, embroidered suit that he sported on his record covers and publicity photos; but the films put this static figure into action. They shifted the focus of audience attention from the elaboration of the myth of the rural past to the behavior (and thus the character) of the individual charro.

In his charro film roles Infante exuded authority through displays of physical ability: not only his strength and grace but also his talent as a singer and musician proved his masculinity. Scenes which displayed him as irresistibly attractive to women — but not entirely conscious of his own power over them — underlined both his manly appearance and his good character. The conflicts which shaped these films' plots pitted loyalty to kin or (less frequently) male friends against romance, but as they were comedies the screen-writers always found some way to end the story with Infante's relationships to friends, lovers, and above all to family still intact, or strengthened: through virtue and effort, the hero protected all who depended on him.²⁸ So Infante's public persona came to include such traits as "his generosity without limits, [and] his enormous kindness," as a photonovel written immediately after his death put it.²⁹ In the eyes of his audience, both before and after his death, Infante's appeal lay in the excellence, but also the ordinariness, of his character: the loyal son, the good father, the trustworthy friend, the devout Catholic. To be a charro, as Infante portrayed the role, was to be a Mexican that every Mexican could dream of being.³⁰

Fans required and received constant reassurance that success had not changed Infante's humble, honest, hard-working, and loyal nature. So the press reported that as soon as he could afford to, Infante moved his mother and some of his ten brothers and sisters into a large new house in Mexico City. Meanwhile the star built a huge new house for himself, but this well-publicized building included a gym and a carpentry workshop. Infante's daily exercise underscored his manliness and the difficulty of his job as a movie star. Movie magazines published a seemingly infinite number of publicity stills showing Infante lifting weights in his gym, while almost every movie he made after 1950 included at least one scene in which Infante displayed his unclothed torso, making visible the results of so much effort.³¹ **[photo nine]**

Fans were even more attached to the idea that Infante continued to practice carpentry, his first trade, as this indicated his humility and connection to his past. Thus a biographical photonovel imagined that after death Infante would most want to be in his carpentry shop; every installment of the narrative was bracketed with scenes showing the star making toys for children at his workbench in heaven.³² And it is not at all accidental that in three of his most popular movies — Nosotros los pobres (1947) and its sequels Ustedes los ricos (1948), and Pepe el Toro (1952) — Infante played a carpenter. In these melodramas, Infante moved from playing a rural to an urban figure, while still representing the height of masculine perfection in appearance, behavior, and character.³³

In many of the last films he made, Infante played a character in the midst of this rural-urban transition — often one who was caught up in class mobility as well — but he played this

role for laughs. Movies like Escuela de vagabundos (1954), Escuela de música (1955), El Inocente (1955), and Escuela de rateros (1956) were comedies of mistaken identity or double identity. In El Inocente, Infante played a poor but honest singing automobile mechanic forced to act like a wealthy playboy in order to win the heart of the rich girl who married him by mistake. In Escuela de vagabundos, Infante played a successful rural songwriter who takes on the role of a butler to a rich urban family in order to win the heart of the spoiled daughter of the house. In Escuela de música, Infante played a humble but upwardly mobile urban businessman who can only express himself through song when he gets drunk enough to be possessed by the spirit of his irascible rural grandmother; this confusion of identities extends to a pretended engagement with a woman he does not like in order to provoke the jealousy of the woman he loves. And in Escuela de rateros, as a reviewer put it, “Pedro has two very different roles, the one is an unscrupulous type full of offensive vanity, and the other is a poor baker who, due to his surprising resemblance to the first, gets caught up in a horrible crime.”³⁴

As Gustavo García has written, scripts like these — along with the titles of other Infante movies like El mil amores (“the thousand loves,” 1954) and Cuidado con el amor (“be careful with love,” 1954) -- seemed to make an ironic commentary on Infante’s public image, particularly his long-standing legal first marriage to the “wrong” woman, María Luisa León.³⁵ But the multiplicity of Infante’s public persona had other meanings too.³⁶ Carlos Monsiváis has identified this ability to slide among cinematic archetypes — to knit them together into a single image of idealized Mexican manhood — as the source of Infante’s power over the audience:

these multiple crossings ... from the rural to the urban, from the machismo of the caudillo to a machismo able to cry, from the arrogant generosity of the social bandit to the sympathy of the humble carpenter ... [demonstrate that] for the Mexican audience this actor-singer has been a bridge of understanding between the old and the new: his biography is the ideal of the collective.³⁷

Indeed, his audience seemed willing to forgive him almost anything. The charro role located the possibility of goodness in an imaginary rural past; so, as Infante took on film roles set in cities in the present day, as his wealth grew increasingly visible, and as he took up activities — especially motorcycle riding and piloting small planes — that symbolized a risky modernity, he was also putting his public persona at risk. But his roles as a barrio carpenter and as a motorcycle-riding traffic cop (in the hit comedy A Todo Maquina), like the songs he sang boasting of his romantic exploits, only increased his popularity.

Infante’s public persona also slid between male archetypes: sometimes he seemed the devoted son and father, the happy stay-at-home husband, but sometimes he appeared as a rake, drinking with his male friends and flirting — at least — with women to whom he was not married. He did marry twice and had well-known liaisons with at least three other women. He did this in an era when formal divorce was both a contentious political issue (its legalization had been one of the chief complaints of the Catholic church against the revolutionary state from the 1920s through the 1950s) and exceedingly rare. Indeed, three days before his death the Supreme Court had ruled that Infante never had gotten a legal divorce from his first wife, so that his subsequent marriages were annulled. Headlines declaring the star a bigamist had made the front pages all over the country.

This marked the apparent end of a highly public legal battle among the star and his wives

that began four years earlier, when María Luisa León opened her lawsuit. This had made Infante's womanizing public: gossip columns and cartoons referred to it constantly, men joked about it, and for a period before his death respectable women avoided mentioning any admiration they had for Infante.³⁸ Fan magazines even made oblique references to the rumor that the daughter María Luisa and Pedro had adopted was actually his child by another woman.³⁹ Apparently, all this had little or no effect on the sales of his records, nor did it make his movies less popular.

Newspaper coverage of the events surrounding Infante's death carefully described the appearance and behavior of María Luisa León de Infante, his first wife, and Irma Dorantes, his partner in his suddenly annulled marriage of the time. Newspapers hinted at the authenticity of Dorantes' grief and the tragedy of her plight. They reported that the young woman would be *forced* to work as an actress in order to support Pedro's baby daughter, while also noting approvingly that she had repeatedly exclaimed that Infante's death was "all my fault!" because Infante perished during a flight back to Mexico City, a trip intended to persuade Dorante to stay with him despite the sudden delegitimization of their marriage by the Supreme Court.⁴⁰ At the same time the papers made León's sorrow seem phony with constant references to her failed singing career and dramatic appearances at the public gatherings occasioned by Infante's death. Thus the papers shifted the blame for the failure of Infante's first marriage and the subsequent legal tangle to his first wife, giving fans a means to forgive Infante even this. And the day before the funeral, the archbishop of Mexico City felt it necessary to issue a statement to the press reassuring parishioners that Infante may not have died in a state of mortal sin even though he did not receive last rites due to the nature of his accident: "Merely an instant of repentance, and the infinite goodness of God, would suffice for the pardon of sins."⁴¹

The constant emphasis after his death on the virtue of Infante's nature, despite all evidence to the contrary, is even more surprising considering the place of cinema in public life. Movie-going was a relatively new form of behavior, and a highly contested one, though it was extremely popular.⁴² Mexicans in the 1950s had not completely settled on proper movie-house etiquette: one fan magazine reported on a 1956 controversy over whether or not to applaud, for example.⁴³ At the same time, the division of the cinema audience along class lines had long since been accepted. Different seats within the movie houses cost different amounts, creating a spacial gulf between poorer and richer viewers to match the economic gap between them. And the movie houses themselves each developed a kind of class identity, marked by location but also by the range of ticket prices, how recently the films shown at each theater had opened, and other factors. Salvador Novo even commented that he could tell who went to which Mexico City movie theater by the kinds of food sold outside each one, from chicharrones to the cuisine of Oaxaca and "a menudo worthy of a sonnet."⁴⁴

But the pleasures of movie-going could also be dangerous. Not only did many actors seem to be sinners, but movies themselves could threaten the soul and movie theaters were, famously, sites of transgressive behavior. The Catholic church regarded cinema with such suspicion that it distributed leaflets at Sunday mass which contained ratings of every movie showing in the diocese, sorted by the type and degree of sin visible in each picture. (This publication, *Apreciaciones*, often placed Pedro Infante's movies into such categories as "Reserved for those with well-developed moral standards" or even "absolutely unadvisable for all" because of their "lack of respect for women, as is seen in movies from other countries" or their "scenes of drunkenness ... [and] of vengence, acts of cruelty, seductions, and approval of dueling."⁴⁵) Some

parishes organized boycotts of movie theaters that persistently offered “immoral” films, and at least one town — Coyoacán, in the 1940s — set up an alternative neighborhood cinema to show “clean” pictures.

At secular cinemas, film sometimes seemed to be the last thing on anyone’s mind. Movie houses were designed as architectural tributes to the ideas of modernity and the exotic. More prosaically, they were one of the rare locations in urban Mexico where young couples could find some privacy. In his recent memoir of the 1940s in Mexico City, journalist Manuel Magaña Contreras described this as a polite, decorous form of socializing:

How many of us who now have grey hair had the opportunity to enjoy movies of good quality with our girlfriends, in an atmosphere of good taste? Of course, the spectators ... attended in our Sunday best, which in those days meant a suit and hat as well as an overcoat and perhaps gloves, and for the ladies a well-cut dress, gloves, hat and fur stole.⁴⁶

But many city-dwellers did not treat movie-going as a way to be seen and be seen by their peers, choosing instead to treat the cinemas as though couples could be alone together in them. (As humorist Abel Quezada put it in 1953, “you can learn a lot about love at the movies, as long as you don’t watch the screen.”⁴⁷) Oscar Lewis quotes one of the “Sanchez” boys describing a date: “I took her to the movies where we could kiss and embrace.” And that was not all that went on at the movies, according to Lewis. When a local gang, “the terror of the neighborhood,” visited the local cinema, “they sat up on the balcony and smoked marijuana ... and if the movie were a daring one, you could hear them saying dirty things.”⁴⁸ Moreover, over the decades movie theaters had housed union meetings and political rallies, and had been the sites of parties, riots, demonstrations and all kinds of disturbances.⁴⁹

Mexicans came to associate movie-going, and thus the movies themselves, with sinful or dangerous (but modern) behavior; they may also have seen a connection between going to movies — a foreign art-form, and of course most movies available to Mexicans in 1957 were foreign too — and opposition to the government in its more nationalist or puritanical phases.⁵⁰ All of these associations had to be considered, and rejected, in order for fans to see Pedro Infante as the perfect Mexican man.

The images and stories that Infante’s life and art had produced hung in the air over the riot that marked his funeral. They gave meaning to his posthumous career, in which his movies seem to repeat constantly on television throughout the Spanish-speaking world and his records still play on radios and jukeboxes — a career that began immediately after his death with memorial newsreels and photonovels and continues into the present with the headline-producing announcement of Infante’s primary director Ismael Rodríguez’s plan to make a new movie memorializing the fallen idol.⁵¹ Infante also had — so to speak — an imaginary career in transnational culture industries after his death. The stories went that he had been on the verge of signing contracts with Hollywood studios, of starring in plays with Broadway actresses, of cutting records in France or Germany. This was supposed to heighten the pathos of his loss: he had been on the verge of international stardom, he might have represented Mexico to the world.

Indeed, one way to understand the intensity of public response to Infante’s death would be to describe it as a reaction to the sudden collapse of the Mexican film industry, which had been a source of national pride up through the middle of the 1950s. Another singing cowboy star, Jorge

Negrete, had died — at a similarly young age — a few years earlier. Infante had become at that point, not only the most important male movie star of the day, but the pillar on which the entire national entertainment industry rested. Fan magazines reported breathlessly on the progress of each new recording project, movie-making venture, or concert tour. Every week — in a few cases, every day — they detailed the sales of his records, of the sheet music for the songs he popularized, and of the tickets for his movies at home and abroad. Infante's success was the whole industry's success, and the industry's success was a point of Mexican honor. With Infante's death, the possibility of a Mexican cinema that could be at once nationalist, popular, competitive with Hollywood and European products, and esthetically satisfying seemed to have reached an sudden, horrible end.

All of this suggests the context in which the riot at Infante's funeral might be understood, but none of it provides an explanation. I am going to suggest three angles from which this event might make more sense: gender anxieties, a tension between the discourses of modernity and tradition, and working-class fury. All of these emotional modes, I will argue, were specific to Mexico City and its geography; and all of them belonged to an overarching contest over the meaning of nation and citizenship in the post-Revolutionary era.

Deadly Modernity, the Moving City, and Machismo's Double

The violence that marked public response to Pedro Infante's death grew from frustration: this riot was political speech in a situation where such speech was not otherwise possible. These events could be read, specifically, as an intervention in a national debate over citizenship and nation, a longstanding argument which took place in several modes. In one mode, the debate used words, metaphors and ideas related to change (especially technological development) and stability. In another, the debate used words, metaphors and ideas related to class identity and daily life, especially in Mexico City. And in a third mode, this debate was couched as a series of arguments over gender roles. In this section, I will suggest the ways in which we can read Infante's funeral and the events surrounding it as intelligible speech in all of these three modes.

The difficult categories of "tradition" and "modernity" provided one language in which Infante's fans seemed to speak. Infante's movie career drew a kind of arc between the two sets of ideas. It began with him playing a character from an imagined past, an invented tradition of the rural north, but it ended in a series of comic and equivocal depictions of modern city life.⁵² He associated himself specifically with the machinery of modernity though his well-publicized interest in motorcycles and airplanes. His last movies celebrated the possibilities of technological progress. In them, Infante played roles such as an automobile mechanic, a chauffeur and, twice, a motorcycle cop. In his last movies, viewers saw Infante singing into a telephone, kissing a girl in an airport, driving a tow-truck, piloting a speedboat, and peddling bread from a bicycle.

But Infante's late movies — and even more, the tension between his "modern" movies and the invented-tradition genres of the songs he continued recording up until his death — recognized that few in his audience experienced technological change and modernity as an uncomplicated source of pleasure. The comedy in these films frequently relied on the untrustworthy nature of modern machinery: messages get garbled, buses break down, cars run out of gas. Even when machines worked, they could cause trouble: in Escuela de Rateros a clever thief uses a phonograph to aid his getaway from a jewelry store heist. Moreover, Infante frequently played a

humble working man whose modern profession brought him into association with wealthy people, so the ultimate source of humor was not machinery but the class relations around machinery. And in his “real” life, Infante both had as much wealth as any member of Mexico’s elite, and spent it very publically on more modern machinery, from motorcycles and airplanes to kitchen gadgets.

In this context, Infante’s slipping among roles — within his movies, between his movies, and between his movies and his “real” public life — helped reassure his audience about the possibilities of their own lives. Like most of them, he had left behind a rural life which looked happier and happier in retrospect. Like most of them, he had enthusiastically adapted the styles and practices of urban, mechanized “modernity.” Like the nation itself, he was inventing a past and a future as he went along. His films both celebrated the possibilities of these collective acts of invention and, however mildly, criticized their shortcomings. His artistic work seen in conjunction with his public persona did more: it suggested that Mexicans would not have to choose between being rural and urban, traditional and modern. They could be both at once.

Infante’s death foreclosed that possibility by leaving Infante’s imagined body trapped forever in the modern. It was an airplane — his own airplane — that killed him, and on a flight from a distant, small, quiet provincial town to the booming capital city. It was another airplane that brought his body back, and from the moment he returned to the city Infante’s body was accompanied by an honor guard of motorcycle policemen who claimed him as one of their own. Most of the sites in which Infante’s fans mourned him implicated technological modernity in their idol’s disappearance: the site of the plane crash, airports in Merida and Mexico City, movie theaters, and the streets of the cities themselves. The minute-to-minute coverage of the whole sequence of events by radio, the flickering light of flashbulbs on the scene, and the obtrusive presence of newsreel cameramen all combined to call attention to mass media technologies in the midst of the mourning crowd. From there, it was a logical step to blame those responsible for modernity for the loss of the idol himself: thus, the crowd turned on the police, who were the nearest representatives of the state, in place of turning on the state itself. It was Mexico’s “revolutionary” government, after all, which had most loudly and insistently demanded credit for the modernization of Mexico. Thus, as in other moments of national disaster, it would also have to take its share of the blame.

Urban space and social class provide the second mode of argument over citizenship and nation which emerges into view with the riot at Infante’s funeral. If the federal government of Mexico had done much, beginning with the Cardenista nationalization of the petroleum industry, to associate itself with modern technology, it also had begun more recently to assert itself as the ultimate authority in urban matters, particularly in Mexico City. In the 1950s, urban space began a long process of reorganization, with wealthy and powerful people migrating away from the centers of Mexican cities as poor migrants from the countryside crammed into them.⁵³ The state took several steps to supervise, control, and identify itself with this change; these steps included making huge physical changes in the cities themselves to support the reorganization processes, and making smaller gestures at ameliorating the worst effects of this process on the citizens left behind in the center of the cities.

President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines made a point of inviting citizens to address their complaints to him personally, and from 1952 onward a surprisingly large number of hopeful or desperate city-dwellers took him up on it. From the very neighborhood through which Infante’s funeral procession had passed, one man wrote to the president complaining of a gang of thieves whom they suspected were “sons of policemen.”⁵⁴ Other youth in a nearby neighborhood were,

as another letter-writer told the president, making it impossible for “people to live in peace ... as they have formed more or less organized groups which create a scandal ...[by] breaking windows and deliberately bothering us with their crude jokes and lack of respect.”⁵⁵ Frequently, complaints about city life focused on conditions related to the crowding and anonymity of central Mexico City, where “decent families” might find themselves living uncomfortably close to “houses of assignation,” overhearing “petty quarrels of the fallen women ... gunshots, foul language” and worse.⁵⁶

Complaints about vice, crime, and corruption frequently shaded over into complaints against mass media or popular culture. Brothels often called themselves dance-halls, and some commercial institutions confused the matter even further by combining the two functions: thus, many people wanted dance halls, along with “cabarets, beer halls, etc.” shut down because they were “centers of vice.”⁵⁷ But recorded music by itself could seem “infernal”, as two Veracruz women told the President. They wrote that it was

worse than intolerable that ... without the slightest scruple, without the least concern for any invalid, for any of those unfortunate families who happen to live close to a bar or pool hall, nor even for the exhausted working man who leaves his heavy labor wanting only to get some sleep to regain his strength to return eight hours later to his job, those JUKE BOXES, RECORD PLAYERS, AND RADIOS ... play at TOP VOLUME all night.⁵⁸

In other words, citizens might complain about Mexico’s cities because of two spacial juxtapositions in them: first, the overlap of moral categories (home/whorehouse, or policeman/thief), and second, the overlap of sonic categories (music/noise, decent talk/foul language, or uproar/peace).

The Mexican state rarely acted to address citizen’s complaints directly.⁵⁹ Instead — and above all in Mexico City — it acted on policies designed to separate those spacial juxtapositions. In choosing where to dig sewers and place electric lines, which streets to pave, where to build new government office buildings, how to site new avenues and highways, and especially where to construct the huge, modern, new campus of the National Autonomous University, the government supported and encouraged an enormous change in the organization of the capital city. Mexico City’s commercial and artistic hub moved rapidly southward, aided by all the new infrastructure the government provided, and leaving the center of the city to a combination of historical monuments and poor people’s housing.⁶⁰ The government left the central barrios to molder, neglected, while it rapidly met the needs of the richer and better-connected citizens who had set themselves up just to the south.⁶¹ And those left behind understood this process well, as newspapers and magazines depicted the elite’s daring adaptations of the antique structures of Coyoacán and the sleek modernity of the new colony called Navarte.

Pedro Infante’s life and death both rang with uncomfortable echoes of the spacial transformation of Mexico City. As a struggling young singer, Infante had come from the countryside to the very center of Mexico City. When he could afford to, he brought his mother and other relatives to live in a new house Navarte, installing his first wife nearby. Eventually he moved even further south, to the very outskirts of the city. All these moves were, of course, well documented in the papers. Furthermore -- as everyone knew -- the movie studios where he worked were also well to the south of the city center. But Infante kept returning to central Mexico City, and again, this was well understood by his local fans. Not only were his movies

showing there almost constantly, but also he performed live in theaters there, cut his records in studios there, and broadcast his radio shows from there. The center of the city remained his workplace and so long as it did, Infante's fans could feel as though he still belonged to them.

When Infante died, his body came into the center from the east, where the airport was. And this was where most of his fans first found him in order to bid farewell. They took him from there — relatively peacefully — into the central location of the ANDA theater. But all too soon, the motorcycle police arrived to take his body away from the crowd again. And when they did, they took it due south, for a very long trip along a relatively new and very prosperous thoroughfare, through some of Mexico's newer and richer sections, up to the cemetery. Thus, Infante's poor and working-class fans must have felt his loss as a double blow. Not only was Infante being removed from their midst forever, but also he was being taken by the state along the same route that the prosperous had already fled, leaving Infante's audience behind, while Infante entered an area which they knew would never welcome them. Surely their objections to this spacial arrangement can be heard in the riot that ensued.

Gender is the last of the three languages in which I have suggested reading this event. There are two reasons why attention to gender categories help us hear what the rioters were saying. First — and relatively straightforwardly — Infante's life and death both entangled themselves with contemporary debates over proper feminine behavior: he seemed to have the power to make women behave badly. Second, Infante's life suggested a new, syncretic style of Mexican manliness which the manner of his death seemed to contradict. Both of these factors, but especially the second, fueled the anger behind this riot and helped to explicate its meaning.

The reports of Infante's funeral all imply, or explicitly state, that the majority of those in attendance (and thus, presumably, the majority of the rioters) were women, though photos reveal that, in fact, the majority of people attending the public events related to Infante's demise were male. So why did reporters seem to see the women in attendance more clearly than they could see the men? Perhaps because women in public at all — let alone women in crowds in the middle of the city, raising their voices and even fighting — were far more upsetting a sight than men were when they did the same things. Perhaps, though, women seemed more likely to be there, and that was why those witnessing the events believed they saw them.

Women were supposed to be Infante's primary audience. Most of his songs were addressed to a group of admiring male friends (represented by the mariachi band backing him up on the record, or sometimes by a set of crooning male character actors in his movies' singing scenes) but his image, especially the photos and movie scenes that showed him shirtless, was supposed to be designed for female viewers. Furthermore, Infante rarely appeared in public — either as "himself" or in his movies — without a female partner of some kind. If not with one of his wives or his mother, his fans saw him in conjunction with stars like Sylvia Pinal or María Félix. In an effort to improve his public image as the bigamy scandal began in 1953, Infante also made a point of his Catholicism. But rather than having himself pictured with a cross or kneeling in prayer, Infante portrayed himself as a devotee of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This enabled him to appear at once as a good Catholic, a Mexican nationalist, and a respecter of all womanhood.

While his mother and the Virgin appear in fan magazine stories and song lyrics as good women, every other woman with whom Infante associated himself fit, sooner or later, into some pattern of stereotypically bad behavior: overly sexual, or domineering and shrewish, or faithless. But they fit these stereotypes in a very particular way, one that belonged more to the realm of bolero than ranchera songs. The women in Infante's story, as the public understood it, were like

characters from a melodrama; they behaved badly *because they had no choice*. Like the essentially good women of the bolero lyrics, driven to prostitution from desperation, these women — both the real people as the public saw them, and the fictional characters in Infante's songs and films — were driven into unwomanly actions by their love for Infante. (The epitome of this was, of course, the long-drawn-out fight over who could claim the legal status of being Infante's wife.) No wonder that the women who did appear at Infante's funeral might have been expected to act in unusual, frightening, or immoral ways, or that those who did riot at Infante's funeral would be portrayed as women.

In death and life, Infante's figure disturbed settled ideas about femininity. But even more urgently, Infante helped shape and reshape the meaning of masculinity in this era. The single word most frequently attached to Infante, both before and after his death, was "macho." This most gendered of all terms described him pejoratively before his death and became, almost instantly, an affectionate characterization once he was gone. Machismo is a difficult word and a hotly debated subject. But we could begin with an insightful observation made by Manuel Fernández Perera: macho behavior, which he writes is best exemplified by the charro cantantes like Infante, is "pure theater," a recently invented social fiction, a "twentieth century myth."⁶² Similarly, anthropologist Matthew Gutmann found recently that members of Mexico City's elite ascribe the characteristics of machismo to men of the working class, and vice versa: the word always describes somebody else.⁶³

"Macho," in Gutmann's formulation, does not paint an altogether flattering portrait of the other. A macho is brave to the point of being foolhardy and commanding to the point of being violent; his uncontrolled (perhaps uncontrollable) appetites for women, alcohol, action and emotion can cause terrible harm to the people around him. Perhaps the ultimate macho — at least in myth — was the revolutionary Pancho Villa, and as Ilene O'Malley has pointed out, we can see the political uses of the macho stereotype in Villa's official rehabilitation during the 1950s, as the state appropriated his memory for its own purposes by shifting from describing him as a criminal to describing him as a real man and true patriot.⁶⁴ The valorization of the macho — perhaps even the construction of this stereotype — dates from this post-Revolutionary period rather than the mythologized past from which this imaginary man was supposed to spring.

Interestingly, Mexican politicians of the 1940-1960 period were not eager, generally speaking, to see themselves described as macho men. Rather, they projected an image of calm self-control, as president Adolfo Ruiz Cortines did. Former president Manuel Avila Camacho makes an even better example of this counter-macho identity. His persona — the self-contained, somewhat prudish family man, the good Catholic, the compromiser — deliberately made a sharp contrast with that of his pistol-waving brother, the General, with his exotic mistresses, horses, many out-of-wedlock offspring, powerful physique, and well-known ill fortune in his political career.⁶⁵ Power lay in rejecting the macho stereotype and instead deploying a counter-image, the equally stereotypical post-Revolutionary patriarch, the technocrat, the bureaucrat, the modern man. This iteration of the virtuous Mexican man is self-controlled while the macho is impulsive; he is orderly while the macho is unruly; he is celibate or monogamous while the macho has many women (though perhaps only one true love); he is sober while the macho is drunk, and modest where the macho is boastful. The anti-macho is also a mature man: he must rely on — and display — a certain authority which would sit oddly on the shoulders of a teenager. And this authority is both the essence and the political function of the stereotype.

This imagery, in turn, supported two related, central political aims of Avila Camacho's

1940-1946 presidency. He hoped to convince Mexicans that the Revolution was over (even in the relatively peaceful form it took in the Cárdenas years); and he had to show that his government was the legitimate heir to the Revolution. Thus the figure of the charismatic General could be deployed to remind the citizenry that such macho revolutionaries can also be unpredictable, violent, and dangerous: an admirable man, perhaps, but one best left slightly to the side of contemporary politics. The President's social and political conservatism, by contrast, looked modern (and safe). Yet the familial relationship and political partnership between the two men also reminded Mexicans of the connection between the two styles of politician, suggesting that this form of the post-Revolutionary did draw from a Revolutionary heritage. The macho, in other words, is always receding into the past. Almost by definition he is a figment of a historicizing imagination. The counter-macho, conversely, lives in the future — perhaps a Revolutionary future of perfect justice, perhaps a modernized future of technological progress and material abundance.⁶⁶ So, as Infante added the trappings of a technological modernity to his persona — the motorcycles, the airplanes, even his famous, immense fortune — he also opened up the definition of machismo.

Here Monsiváis' remark about the importance of Pedro Infante as a bridging figure takes on a deeper meaning. Infante, in his public persona and his film roles, enacted both the macho and the counter-macho. He was both the womanizer and the devoted husband, both the self-contained businessman and the tearful drunk. Similarly, Infante's figure synthesized sets of opposed terms from the other two languages deployed in the debate over power and nation in Mexico. He was at once a hardworking northerner and an elite Mexico City dweller, the enthusiastic participant in modern technology and the old-fashioned cowboy. Up until his death, Infante was both a powerful and contradictory force in ordinary Mexican's imaginations because he suggested that the differences — the languages — that defined what it was to be Mexican (and thus, in the post-Revolutionary world, to have political power) could be transcended. His death ended that possibility, as it ended so many others.

Thus it was not only Infante's sudden, shocking death, but the manner of it — so soon after his legal defeat by the government in the matter of his divorce, far outside the capital city, and through the means of that most modern of all machines, the airplane — that created the despair and the rage which fueled the riot of April 17, 1957. Through these events, Infante had been removed from the future and from power, and placed in the same honored, heroic, and impotent past as Avila Camacho's brother, or as Pancho Villa. Infante's death closed off the possibility that "modernity" (the oldest of Mexican political goals) and "tradition" (a post-Revolutionary construction) could be bridged in a way that made sense to his fans. It condemned them to remain in the decaying center of the cities while the elite margins thrived. It forced them to pick between opposing gender definitions, rather than pick and chose among them. The fans violently objected. In doing so, they told the police — and by extension the state and the entertainment industry which supported it — that they were growing tired of a national narrative in which they did not yet have a speaking part.

Endnotes

1. The photograph is reprinted in the catalog of the exhibition: Alfonso Morales Carrillo et al., Asamblea de Ciudades (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes/Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1992), p. 210.
2. Verenice Naranjo has observed that “not every Mexican loves El Santo, and not every Mexican loves Pedro Infante, but every Mexican loves one or the other” (personal communication, July 31, 1998). Gustavo García, Infante’s biographer, jokes that Infante is such an important national figure that he is “the Virgin of Guadalupe’s husband” (personal communication, August 15, 1998).
3. Gustavo García, personal communication, August 15, 1998.
4. “Duelo y Simpatía en Torno al Féretro del Actor Pedro Infante, Llorosa y Compacta Multitud en el Aeropuerto Central,” El Universal April 17, 1957, p. 1-B. Another newspaper article took the size and composition of these crowds as a sign that there were too many unemployed people in Mérida and Mexico City (“Recibimiento Puso de Manifiesto Grave Problema del Desempleo, Mucho Gente Faltó a su Trabajo, Pero la Mayoría Eran Cesantes,” El Excelsior, 17 April 1957, p. 1). In general, description of these events relies on reports from periodicals: the Mexico City papers El Universal and El Excelsior, along with the much less respectable tabloid La Prensa; the provincial papers Diario de Yucatán and La Opinión of Veracruz; and the magazines Revista de Revistas, Hoy, Siempre!, Tiempo, Cinelandia, Cinema Reporter, Jueves de Excelsior, Todo, and Melodías Mexicanas. Except for differing estimates on crowd size and numbers of people injured or arrested, all these sources display a surprising degree of similarity: they tell exactly the same story.
5. “Golpes y Destrozos por ver de cerca el Ataúd,” El Excelsior, 17 April 1957, p. 12A.
6. “Tumultoso entierro fue el de Pedro Infante en la metropoli,” Diario de Yucatán, 18 April 1957, p. 1. The unpublished photographs are in the Hermanos Mayo and Enrique Díaz collections of fototeca of the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City. Some of them are reproduced here.
7. “La Radio en el Duelo por la Muerte de Pedro,” La Prensa, 17 April 1957, p. 24.
8. “Pedro Infante Irá a la Cárcel,” La Prensa, 10 April 1957, p. 30; “La Esposa de Infante [sic] Dispuesta a Perdonar,” 11 April 1957, p. 30.
9. “María Luisa León fué Objeto de Cruelles Expresiones Populares,” La Prensa, 17 April 1957, p. 3. This was not the first time that women “of the popular classes” had expressed disdain for Infante’s first wife: four years earlier, at the beginning of María Luisa’s bigamy suit against Pedro Infante, a gossip column reported that she had been accosted while trying to enter a radio station by a woman who yelled “Get out of here, now we know that you’ve been replaced by Irma Dorantes” (Enrique Rosado, “Cine mexicano,” Melodías Mexicanas #75, Sept. 5, 1953, p. 15).

10. For the family's polite response, in a telegram, see, Angel Infante to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, 24 April 1957, Expediente 132.1/305, Ramo Ruiz Cortines, Archivo General de la Nación.
11. "Con Canciones y Sollozos Despidió el Pueblo a Pedro Infante," El Universal, April 18, 1957, p. 16.
12. Ibid.
13. "El Público se Amontinó e Intervino la Policía," El Excelsior 18 April 1957, p.1
14. Ibid.
15. "Con Canciones y Sollozos Despidió el Pueblo a Pedro Infante," El Universal, April 18, 1957, p. 16.
16. Salvador Novo, "Cartas a un amigo," Hoy 11 May 1957, #1055, p. 27; see also Salvador Novo, La vida en México en el periodo presidencial de Adolfo Ruiz Cortines vol. III (Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994) p. 83.
17. "Murió Trágicamente," Tiempo 22 April 1957, vol. XXX #781. P. 25.
18. "Pedro Infante, Un Astro sin Ocaso," Cine Novelas May 1961, p. 59.
19. Lyrics of such songs appeared in the magazines which reprinted popular ballads, some written by professionals, others amateur efforts. This one is L. and M. de Juan Alcantara H., "Mi Pedro Infante," Canciones de América #68, May 11, 1957, p. 4.
20. David González Martínez, "Tragedia de Pedro Infante," Estrellas y canciones, October 1957, p. 87; Ray Pérez y Soto, "Corrido a Pedro Infante," Canciones de América #67, April 27, 1957, p. 4.
21. Advertisements for such photos, roughly wallet-sized "to be put in your family photo album," were still running in movie magazines as late as 1961 (Cine Novelas May 1961, p. 67). One fan magazine gave away a 3-D picture of Infante in his airplane pilot's outfit ("Pedro Infante en Tercera Dimensión," Radiolandia XVI #448, Sept. 26, 1953, p. 2).
22. Again, it should be clear here that I am not making any claims of factual accuracy in this passage, but trying to come up with a general version of what a fan in 1957 might have believed to be true about Infante. Sources for this include photo-novels (La Vida y los Amores de Pedro Infante, 1957-58, and Pedro Infante el Muchacho Travieso del Cine 1955-56); newspaper obituaries ("De Humilde Carpintero a Idoló del Pueblo," El Excelsior 16 April 1957, p. 1, p. 11-A; "Pedro Infante pereció en un accidente," El Dictamen 16 April 1957, p. 1, p. 9; "La Carrera de Pedro Infante," Diario de Yucatán, 16 April 1957, p. 1; and "Los 2 Grandes Amores de Pedro Infante: Su Madre y la Aviación, De Aprendiz de Panadero a Estrella del Cine, la Radio y la Televisión" El Universal, 16 April 1957, p. 31) and other newspaper, movie magazine, and periodical coverage of Infante's death and funeral as cited for the previous section. Other important sources for this section were Infante's films and records as mentioned in the text of this

article, and of course gossip repeated to me as I told people of my plans to write this article.

23. The discussion in this paragraph is based on A. Rubenstein, "Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Twentieth Century," The Oxford History of Mexico, ed. W. Beezley and M. Meyer (New York: Oxford University press, forthcoming.)

24. Lyrics reprinted in Música y notas #9, April 1956, p. 45.

25. Lyrics reprinted in Música y notas #14, March 1957, p. 47.

26. Lyrics reprinted in Melodías mexicanas #68, May 5, 1953, p. 57.

27. Infante was a fine, well-trained violinist and guitarist, but he had received little singing instruction (in contrast to his friend and rival Jorge Negrete, who studied opera before beginning a film career.) Sound recordist, editor and composer Manuel Esperón recalled that of all the actors he had worked with in his long and distinguished career in Mexican cinema, Infante was the only true musician: "the only [actor] who actually played the violin in the movies was Pedro Infante, he played quite well." Unpublished transcript of an interview conducted by Martha Rocha, file PHO/2/49, Archivo de la palabra/Proyecto de historia oral, Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Historia [hereafter AP/INAH], p. 42

28. Cartoonist Abel Quezada mocked the standard lead male role of this film genre in these words: "the guy is very drunk, but sings well ... and sings well ... and, once again, sings well." (Abel Quezada, "Especialidades," Cine Mundial, September 26, 1953, p.2.)

29. La Vida y los Amores de Pedro Infante #1, 29 April 1957, p. 1.

30. A similar analysis could be made of Infante's participation in historical dramas in which he did not play a charro, most of all Mexicanos al grito de guerra (1943).

31. The excellence of Infante's body mattered so much to his fans that they objected vehemently when Gustavo's García's biography of their idol discussed their idol's diabetic condition: this was a fact they preferred to deny for the sake of maintaining the image of Infante as physically perfect. (Gustavo García, personal communication, Aug. 15, 1998).

32. See for example La Vida y los Amores de Pedro Infante, #1, 29 April 1957, pp.2-6.

33. The quality of these movies has been much debated. One critic holds Nosotros los pobres responsible for the subsequent "decadence of Mexican cinema." (Carmen de la Peza, Cine, melodrama y cultura de masas: estética de la antiestética. Mexico City: Punto de Fuga/Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1998, p. 13).

34. Hamlet, "Sensacional estreno nacional," Guía Cinematográfica (Mérida, Yuc.) #27, March 1958, p. 13. Most of these films are readily available on video; these four are also in the collection of the Filmoteca de la UNAM in Mexico City. For more complete plot summaries and production histories, see the indispensable chronology by Emilio García Riera, Historia documental del cine mexicano, vols. 6-9 (Guadalajara, Jalisco: Universidad de Gaudalajara,

1993).

35. Gustavo García, No me parezco a nadie, la vida de Pedro Infante vol. III (Mexico City: Editorial Clío, 1994) p. 7.

36. The movie that Infante was planning to make next at the time of his death, El museo de cera, would have wildly extended Infante's enactment of multiple roles, but does not appear to respond in any way to the public story of his love life. In the unmade film, he was to have played the curator of a wax museum while also starring in vignettes from the lives of the wax figures, including Juan Diego, Benito Juárez, Pancho Villa, Cuauhtémoc, and Christ.

37. Carlos Monsiváis, "Mythologies," trans. Ana López, in Mexican Cinema, ed. Paulo Antonio Paranaguá (London: British Film Institute, 1995) p. 125.

38. For example, a cartoon on the occasion of the May Day parade showed Infante as a revolutionary soldier on horseback followed by four bedraggled "soldaderas" on foot, with two children apiece (Abel Quezada, "Especialidades," Cine Mundial, May 2, 1953, p. 7) while a gossip column in the same movie magazine gibed that Infante might not know exactly "how many ladies he finds himself married to at the moment" ("Ultima Hora!" Cine Mundial, May 20, 1953, p. 11).

39. As one put it, the little girl "looks extraordinarily like Pedro." See Hylida Pino Desandoval, "Confidencias de María Luisa León de Infante de mujer a mujer," Cinelandia #8, June 1957, p. 18.

40. One version even had Dorantes ascribing the blame for Infante's death both to herself and to "social prejudices." Arturo R. Blanco, "Pedro Infante Murió en Aras del Amor," Cinema Reporter XXVI, #980, May 1, 1957, p. 8.

41. "Nadie Puede Asegurar que Infante Murió en Pecado, Declara la Mitra," El Excelsior, 17 April 1957, p.1. The press release went on to remind Infante's fans of his enthusiastic support for the campaign to rebuild the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe, implying ecclesiastic approval (if not guaranteeing salvation) to the star while borrowing a little of his prestige for the Church.

42. Ordinary movie-goers visited cinemas once or twice a week between the 1920s and the 1950s. For instance, in 1955 Salvador Novo described the "spectacle of the fat married couples who come to the center [of Mexico City] for the movies" every Sunday (Novo, La vida en México en el periodo presidencial de Adolfo Ruiz Cortines vol. II. Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1996, p. 133). But some fans -- like film editor Gloria Schoemann's grandmother -- went twice a day. See Gloria Schoemann's transcribed interview, by María Alba Pastor, PHO 2/26, AP/INAH, p. 3.

43. "Debe Aplaudirse en el Cine?" El Cine Gráfico #1,216, 25 March 1956, p. 11.

44. Novo, La vida en México en el periodo presidencial de Adolfo Ruiz Cortines vol. II. Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1996, p. 334.

45. "Cuando habla el corazon," Apreciaciones 43, October 23, 1943, p.1; "El Ametralladora," Apreciaciones 40, October 2, 1943, p.1.

46. Manuel Magaña Contreras, Ciudad abierta, Los Años de Oro (Mexico City: Análisis y Evaluación de Prensa, 1996) p. 167.
47. Abel Quezada, "Especialidades," Cine Mundial, April 25, 1953, p. 7.
48. Oscar Lewis, The Children of Sanchez (New York: Vintage, 1963) 31, 147. The continued use of cinemas as spots for illicit sexual behavior can be seen in Luis Zapata's novel of teenage street life during the 1970s in Mexico City, El Vampiro de la Colonia Roma (Mexico: Grijalbo, 1979).
49. For protests and other disturbances in movie theaters, see A. Rubenstein, "Raised Voices at the Cine Montecarlo," Journal of Family History, forthcoming; Eric Zolov, "Rebeldismo in the Revolutionary Family: Rock'n'Roll's Early Challenges to State and Society in Mexico," Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies 6:2, 1997 (201-216); and "El Conflicto entre los estudiantes y la empresa 'Cines de Yucatán,'" Diario de Yucatán, 26 May 1955, p. 11 (thanks to Jeff Pilcher for this reference).
50. Material in this paragraph taken from A. Rubenstein, "Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Twentieth Century."
51. "Pedro volverá al cine," La Nación, 22 April 1997, p. B-1. Rodríguez has already made two other documentaries in tribute to Infante.
52. His very last movie, Tizoc (released posthumously) actually returned to this imagined past, this time the late nineteenth century in central Mexico. But in Tizoc, Infante played an oppressed Indian and left the role of the heroic white would-be savior of the endangered white woman, who rides to her rescue at the very last minute, to the villain. For this and other reasons this eccentric film could have represented a whole new stage in Infante's career.
53. Mexico City had undergone many highly politicized transformations already, of course, beginning with the Spanish transformation of the newly conquered zone from a lake to swamp, and continuing with the pseudo-Parisian reforms of [] that created the broad, magnificent Paseo de la Reforma. This was a new type of change in city space, however, in which the elite moved for the first time away from what they continued to perceive as the center of the city (and the nation.)
54. R. Sandoval to President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, Sept. 20, 1957. Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Presidencial, Ruiz Cortines, [hereafter AGN/RC] vol. 44.94, exp. 128.
55. Gabriel Jiménez M. and 49 other signatories to Ruiz Cortines, April 12, 1957. AGN/RC vol. 444.94, exp. 12.
56. Arturo del Rio to Ruiz Cortines, Oct. 20, 1957. AGN/RC vol. 425.3, exp. 26.
57. Alfonso R. Castrojón and 38 other signatoris to Ruiz Cortines, June 6, 1953. AGN/RC vol. 425.3, exp. 12.

58. Carmen Lindaly de Ruiz and Candelaria Delgado to Ruiz Cortines, January 18, 1956. AGN/RC vol. 415.1, exp. 29. Capitalization is in the original.
59. Action on such complaints addressed to the President was rare enough that it received front-page newspaper coverage when it did happen, and that such stories were carefully preserved in the President's files. See for instance "Las Autoridades cerraran el garito 'El Emir' para impedir que se siga violando las leyes," El Comentario (Jalapa, Ver.) March 7, 1958, p. 1, in AGN/RC vol. 415.1, exp. 1.
60. This process was clear while it was going on to almost all concerned, and to readers who did not live in Mexico City. For example, Salvador Novo's home and the theater he ran, both located in the southern neighborhood of Coyoacán, both benefitted greatly from this process, and Novo recorded numerous examples of this change in his magazine column. See [reference to come]
61. For complaints about decaying housing in central Mexico City — including buildings without running water, buildings without connection to sewers, and whole blocks plagued by rats or regular floods — see AGN/RC vol. 424, exp. 13; vol. 425, exp.s 1, 16, 17, 18, 28, 29; and exp. 424.1, exp. 162.
62. Manuel Fernández Perera, "El macho y el machismo," in Enrique Florescano, ed., Mitos mexicanos (Mexico City: Editorial Aguilar, 1995) p. 182.
63. M. Gutmann, The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996). Similarly, Alma Guillermoprieto describes macho behavior among Mexicans — specifically, groups of men getting together to get drunk and weep — as a more or less self-conscious ritual of middle-class men who understand themselves to be playing a slightly ridiculous role. See her The Heart the Bleeds: Latin America Now (New York: Knopf, 1994) pp. 237-258.
64. Ilene O'Malley, The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1986).
65. For the public image of the "gentleman president," see Manuel Magaña Contreras, Ciudad abierta, Los Años de Oro (Mexico City: Análisis y Evaluación de Prensa, 1996) pp. 213-216. On the contrast between the two brothers, see Enrique Krauze, Mexico: Biography of Power (New York: Harper Collins, 1997) pp. 491-500.
66. Elsewhere I have argued that commercial culture embodied the "counter-macho" in the figure of El Santo, the wrestler/photonoel character/movie star whose fame rivaled Infante's. See A. Rubenstein, "El Santo versus El Santo, or, Mediated Visions of Mexican Masculinity in the Post-Revolutionary Era," The Mexico Reader, ed. G. Joseph, forthcoming.