CONTEMPORANEITY AND COMPOSITION IN MEXICAN DESIGN

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21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
#2-2023, pp. 259–272

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2023.2.96034

ABSTRACT

This essay tracks a series of ethnographic episodes at the intersections of heritage and design in Mexico today. Rather than draw conclusions about the present and future of Mexico's cultural patrimony, these moments instead illustrate key tensions around the country's cultural politics in practice, the histories that condition them, and strategies for grappling with this landscape today. Drawing on the concept of contemporaneity and the idea of composition as a critical and creative technique, it outlines emerging formations within the world of design that seek to articulate new possibilities within a cultural field historically dominated by official interests and policies.

KEYWORDS

Design; Cultural heritage; Mexico.

I. *TEXTO*, Casa Prieto-López, Jardines del Pedregal, Mexico City, February 2020

On a cool winter evening, I joined a large audience assembled outdoors in the southwest of Mexico City. We were gathered behind the stark facade of Luis Barragán's Casa Prieto-López, seated between the home's swimming pool and the rough outcroppings of Pedregal's lava fields. The evening's agenda was to consider the future of artisanal textile practice – and cultural heritage more broadly – in Mexico and around the world. Those in the audience reflected the country's status as a highly visible center of artisanship as well as an increasingly important hub within the international art and design worlds. Some attendees dressed in their local *trajes* and whispered translations of the evening's remarks (delivered in Spanish and English) to one another. Others snapped photographs to document one of the most buzz-worthy events in a week full of openings, fairs, and parties across the city catering to the international art world, many of them dressed in textiles purchased at the outdoor market that formed the heart of the week-long event. The Jardines del Pedregal was an evocative context for these tensions – an elite housing development launched in the 1940s that promised to reinvigorate a site of ancient importance through modern design, "oscillating between the registers of the local and national pre-Columbian past and international modernist aesthetics".[1]

Before the evening's keynote address, Susana Harp – a well-known singer and recently elected member of the Mexican senate – took to the stage. Her presentation had been the subject of anticipation – the début of recently enacted changes to the country's copyright laws with implications for many in the audience. After greeting those gathered, Harp began by revisiting a string of recent controversies involving major global design brands. On a screen that glowed in the yard as the evening darkened, Harp navigated a slide presentation that juxtaposed "original" traditional motifs and designs with products by the likes of Carolina Herrera, Louis Vuitton, and Zara. Bold text labeled these latter objects copies, appropriations, and plagiarism and documented the steep prices they fetched on the global market. A purse that mimicked the plaid patterns and boxy form of common plastic market bags; a chair upholstered in the patterns of Tenango embroidery; dresses printed in the banded, neon colors of commercial *serapes*. These thefts, Harp argued, illustrated the need to recast the elements of Mexico's *arte popular* – previously understood as a common heritage subject to free use – as intellectual property held by communities to be protected and preserved.

In a floor speech to the Mexican senate weeks earlier, Harp had framed the reforms as a matter of urgent cultural preservation: "textiles [...] are codices the Spanish were unable to burn." An

[1] Jennifer Josten, *Mathias Goeritz. Modernist Art and Architecture in Cold War Mexico*, New Haven, CT 2018, 74.

extension of copyright to acknowledge cultural knowledge as communal property would "limit the use and commercialization of elements of Indigenous cultures without compensation or attribution". Under the reforms, state agencies would work to review proposed designs and, if possible, involve source communities in decision making about their viability and terms in keeping with practices of local governance. In cases where agencies determined such communities were "extinct" or when the cultural heritage under consideration was understood to be broadly held, the state would manage the use of elements of this (national) patrimony.[2]

In this essay, I track a series of ethnographic episodes at the intersections of heritage and design in Mexico today. Rather than draw conclusions about the present and future of Mexico's cultural patrimony, these moments instead illustrate key tensions around the country's cultural politics in practice, the histories that condition them, and strategies for grappling with this landscape today. Drawing on the concept of contemporaneity and the idea of composition as a critical and creative technique, I outline emerging formations within the world of design that seek to articulate new possibilities within a cultural field historically dominated by official interests and policies.

In the wake of the event at the Casa Prieto-López, I heard anxiety about the reforms in discussions among designers and design experts. Mexico's design discourse has centered on the promise of generating opportunity through various forms of collaboration between artisanal manufacturers and those formally trained in design fields in recent years, framing these dialogues as a path to both a new national aesthetics as well as economic viability for the design offices, craft workshops, and communities involved. To them, the proposed policy seemed to impose overwhelming – and potentially capricious – barriers to an increasingly important mode of design production. Indigenous activists have also expressed concerns, including over the limited role of their communities in crafting the regulations and lingering questions concerning how community ownership will be determined, agreements negotiated, and funds distributed in practice. They also note the irony that the law places the management and commercialization of Indigenous heritage in the hands of the state – an entity historically understood as a primary appropriator of Indigenous cultural heritage.[3]

The reforms seemed to reverse longstanding, antagonistic state postures toward Indigenous and marginalized communities and

2 Senado de México, Proteger uso no consentido de expresiones de culturas indígenas: Sen. Susana Harp (Morena), *YouTube* (January 15, 2021). Author's transcription and translation.

3 Chantal Flores, Mexico's Cultural Appropriation Ban Is Off to a Messy Start, in: *The Verge*, February 12, 2022 (February 18, 2022). The country has recently witnessed broad debate over tensions between recent cultural policies in Mexico and histories of cultural appropriation on the part of the state. For example, see Daniel Hernandez, Mexico's New Culture War. Did a Pyramid Light Show 'Decolonize' or Rewrite History?, in: *Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 2021 (October 18, 2021).

communally held property as a lesson in the need for cultural respect and market restraint.[4] What remained in question, however, was whether such an assertion of rights through law and an associated bureaucratization of cultural heritage would translate to new autonomies for source communities or more equitable collaborations in the world of design. As Haidy Geismar has demonstrated in her ethnography of efforts to square Indigenous worlds in the Pacific with the logics of Western copyright regimes, the application of standards of property to Indigenous cultural production can be "empowering for Indigenous people" but can also "merely recreate the existing power relations that so often subordinate them".[5] Others have shown how avenues of state recognition of Indigenous and marginalized peoples – though in theory working to correct historical inequities – can both subject communities to overwhelming standards of cultural "authenticity" and subsume sovereign cultural struggles within discourses of national cohesion.[6]

In Mexico, such efforts take place on historical terrain overdetermined by the cultural politics of the post-Revolutionary state. In reporting on the design appropriations Harp invoked, the fashion critic for *The New York Times* expressed surprise at the unprecedented involvement of government ministries in lodging formal complaints with the brands involved.[7] Yet, such gestures are part of habitus in a country which has witnessed extensive state involvement in the management of what has been defined as national patrimony.[8] The proposed policy seemed to extend this history of state management into the twenty-first century, in particular around those objects that reflect "common" heritage (e.g., the plastic market bag) or around the management of ancient Indigenous heritage for which the state does not acknowledge contemporary descendants. The lat-

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Since his election in 2018, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his administration have made a concerted effort to project a new relationship between the Mexican state and the country's Indigenous peoples. He has also been outspoken in denouncing past neoliberal efforts to dismantle the *ejido* – Mexico's most visible form of common property. However, the reality of the administration's relations with the *ejidos* has been more complicated, in particular with respect to popular opposition to the president's signature tourist infrastructure initiative, the so-called "Tren Maya".

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Haidy Geismar, *Treasured Possessions. Indigenous Interventions into Cultural and Intellectual Property*, Durham, NC 2013, 3.

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For example, see Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition*, Durham, NC 2002; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, MA 1988; Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.*, Chicago 2009.

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Vanessa Friedman, Homage or Theft? Carolina Herrera Called Out by Mexican Minister, in: *The New York Times*, June 13, 2019.

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See, for instance, Rick A. López's account of the concerted "ethnicization" of Mexican official culture in the post-Revolutionary period and Mary Coffey's account of the officialization of the purportedly revolutionary work of the Mexican muralists. Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico. Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution*, Durham, NC 2010; Mary Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture. Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State*, Durham, NC 2012.

ter problem is of particular difficulty in Mexico, where (post)colonial policies both celebrated the *mestizx* descendants of the colonial encounter and worked to disrupt practices of Indigenous knowledge transmission.

Looking past the immediate preservation or celebration of patrimony through state sponsorship, anthropologist Néstor García Canclini sees such involvement as a symptom of the persistence of "the ideology of the oligarchic sectors", what he terms "substantialist traditionalism". This traditionalism is substantialist in its quest for cultural stasis realized by establishing and "guarding aesthetic and symbolic models", an attachment to "unaltered conservation" that resists processes of historical change.[9] In this urge to "celebrate redundancy" (i.e., the continued veneration of a settled cultural canon and the maintenance of its associated social relations) García Canclini sees a fundamental conservatism which verges on the authoritarian. While state administration of patrimony can at its best safeguard cultural practices, support collective historical awareness, and facilitate public access, at its worst it serves to perpetuate "the founding cut" of the colonial condition, managing the boundary between settled (Indigenous) heritage and forward-looking, modern aspirations in ways that mirror the divides between the politically and culturally (dis)empowered.[10]

In this, Mexico's cultural policy echoes a modern problematic writ large. As Bruno Latour has argued, modernity is characterized by an "illness of historicism" which works to document and manage modernity's others (the "past") in order to enable logics of progress: "They want to keep everything, date everything, because they think they have definitively broken with their past. The more they accumulate revolutions, the more they save; the more they capitalize, the more they put on display in museums. Maniacal destruction is counterbalanced by an equally maniacal conservation."[11]

These critiques center on the authoritarian threat of a repertoire of cultural patrimony posited and policed by the state, but a similar attention to the management of cultural, racial, and temporal boundaries can shed light on the world of design. The field's growth in twentieth-century Mexico invited readings of hybridity, regionalism, and syncretism as Euroamerican disciplines met local contexts, but within Mexico itself design has functioned as one of the most visible conduits for the importation of aesthetic regimes con-

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Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures. Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. by Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. Lopez, Minneapolis, MN 1995, 108–109.

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Ibid., 111–112.

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Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter, Cambridge, MA 1993, 69.

sonant with elite national aspirations.[12] The field's prestige means designers are experts similarly empowered to mediate (and define) the worlds of tradition and innovation, a fact which has invited debate around the field's place in the country's cultural politics.

II. *Pop, Populista, Popular. El diseño del pueblo*, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, October 2019

As the evening in Pedregal brought to mind longstanding patterns in the place of patrimony in Mexican cultural politics, I thought back to another gathering several months earlier. Like the textile fair, the opening of *Pop, Populista, Popular. El diseño del pueblo* took place at a site thick with associations. On view in the upper galleries of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, only a slim wall separated the exhibition from some of the most significant statements of the official culture of twentieth-century Mexico – iconic murals by *Los Tres Grandes* and the art deco decorative program of Federico Mariscal that translated Maya motifs into the institutional aesthetics of his day.

Beyond the wall, however, the gallery bore more resemblance to the streets of the Centro's everyday periphery than the curated sites of national identity sanctioned by the state and frequented by tourists. Dominated by acid green, the exhibition's museography was an assemblage of steel scaffolding, shiny printed tarps, and floor mats made up of curly plastic hairs.

As the exhibition's title implied, its curators – Mario Ballesteros and the collective Tony Macarena – sought to revisit the concept of *lo popular* as a thread to survey Mexico's contemporary design landscape. The exhibition opened with a genealogy of *lo popular*, underlining its use in post-Revolutionary official culture to "cancel out conflict between the native (or the Indigenous), the foreign (or the colonialist) and the universal (or the modern)". Like related discourses of *mestizaje* that ultimately worked to repress colonial traumas, these uses of *lo popular* as a unifying national imaginary, the curators argued, remained "exoticist, classist, and racist".[13]

Yet, they also identified possibility in *lo popular*, working to use the term – and its more recent identification with the products of pop culture – to facilitate a dialogue between "what 'the people design'" and "design for the people". Under this framework, *lo popular* became a guide for "introspection about design and its role in Mexico today" and a means "to push design off of its comfortable and plush seat to embrace cultural openness, diversity of practices,

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Keith L. Eggener, for instance, has argued that critical lenses like critical regionalism may speak more to critics' imaginaries of design in non-Euroamerican settings than to the work of the designers they study: id., Placing Resistance. A Critique of Critical Regionalism, in: *Journal of Architectural Education* 55/4, 2002, 228–237.

13
Exhibition wall text, *Pop, Populista, Popular. El diseño del pueblo*, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City.

empowering of the non-experts, and inclusion of sectors typically marginalized by the discipline and profession".[14]

The display opened with a figurative (re)grounding of *lo popular* in the ancient and contemporary practices of Mexico's Indigenous peoples, including a series of utilitarian and decorative objects from the collection of the Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas. From there, it made what the curators described as "a quantum leap to broaden our traditional idea of popular art and to conceive of popular design". Subsequent vitrines included the mainstays of *arte popular* – plaited vessels, carved chairs, painted masks – but staged them next to very different kinds of artifacts. Anonymous designs for banquet chairs, neon soccer jerseys, plastic *molcajetes*, and elaborately decorated press-on nails joined works by celebrated furniture, textile, and fashion designers drawing on ancient techniques and the visual culture of the everyday to fundamentally recontextualize the traditional canon of *arte popular*.

One corner made the exhibition's stake on the temporal politics of Mexico's popular traditions particularly clear. Set immediately next to the Indigenous works at the exhibition's opening, it juxtaposed some of these objects with selections from *Fingerprints of the Gods* by the design collective SANGREE – cell phone cases that applied ancient American mosaic techniques and motifs including the world tree and the profiled faces of pre-colonial codices to everyday accessories. The display's backdrop was a printed tarp, itself a mosaic of close-cropped photo portraits depicting candidates – a neon grocery store-style label indicated – for casting with the modeling agency Guerxs. The agency's name purposefully invokes the slang term for pale-faced friends. However, the mosaic showed how deeply the agency queers this term, first at the level of language (*Güeros* becomes *Guerxs*) but also in presenting a grid of faces that deliberately disrupt the Euroamerican and heteronormative aspirations of common commercial imagery in Latin America.[15] As the agency describes, their mission is to forward an "inclusive perspective" and "cultivate careers that were never imagined" through an embrace of "everyday Mexican reality".[16]

These faces that framed the view of ancient artifacts and contemporary experiments in folk art and design seemed to present heirs to the Mexican popular tradition. However, like Guerxs's queer approach to the model, these heirs resisted easy identifica-

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Ibid.

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The persistence of battles over beauty standards, race, and identity have been on clear display in the recent featuring of *muxe* model Estrella Vazquez and Indigenous actress Yalitza Aparicio on the cover of Mexican *Vogue* and subsequent racist responses. David Agren, 'We Can Do It': Yalitza Aparicio's *Vogue* Cover Hailed by Indigenous Women, in: *The Guardian*, December 21, 2018 (May 3, 2023). See also Mónica G. Moreno Figueroa and Megan Rivers Moore, Introduction, in: *Feminist Theory* 14/2, 2013, 131–136; Peter Wade, *Race and Sex in Latin America*, London 2009.

16
Guerxs, About (February 2, 2021).

tion, neither subscribing to legible ethnic or social categories nor celebrating any myth of unity through diversity.[17]

Rather than "acknowledge" and incorporate ancient, artisanal, and popular practices through the tools of modern design, the exhibition's juxtapositions and the projects it contained sought to invite a reckoning with design's own positionality. Design has benefited from the essentialist categories that lurked beneath post-Revolutionary social life, occupying a privileged position for wielding the expertise of a fundamentally Euroamerican discipline while also leveraging and translating local imaginaries. Like state cultural policy, it has also been led by national elites divorced – often purposefully – from both Mexico's Indigenous peoples as well as the worlds of *lo popular*. As the racialized and classed encounters at the *TEXTO* fair made clear, existing approaches to design and state policy can often exist comfortably within these hierarchies.

The alternative strategies outlined by *Pop, Populista, Popular* sought to counter the maniacal historicism of official culture with a commitment instead to the fundamental contemporaneity of popular culture and varied practices of making. As Paul Rabinow has noted, contrary to common conceptions, "the contemporary is not especially concerned with 'the new' or with distinguishing itself from tradition". Instead, contemporaneity is marked by an ongoing "process of declusterings and reconfigurations", the construction of temporal assemblages that explore and reframe relations rather than determine them.[18] These are what the curators described as "dirty, precarious and tentative objects" that forgo "cultural purity" in favor of "the tense complexity of contemporary interconnection".[19]

III. SketchUp 3D Warehouse, 2014–2017

What does this contemporaneity look like in practice? A closer look at one of the works included in *Pop, Populista, Popular* can give purchase on the intentions – not only of the exhibition's curators – but of a rising generation of Mexican designers interested in disrupting their discipline's usual practices.

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Guerxs's linguistic and discursive practices resonate with both colonial and contemporary instances of the productive embrace of the ambiguities of identity as a strategy of resistance. In her reading of the concept of Latinx, for instance, Claudia Milian identifies a project of "speculative subjectivity" that works through "unexpected linkages". In his analysis of the much earlier encounters of Jesuit missionaries and the Tupi people of what is now Brazil, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro locates purposeful strategies of "inconstancy" that point to a model of identity "conceived not as a boundary to be maintained but as a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject". Claudia Milian, *Latinx*, Minneapolis, MN 2019, 3; Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul. The Encounter of Catholics and Cannibals in 16th-Century Brazil*, Chicago 2011, 18.

18
Paul Rabinow, George E. Marcus, James D. Faubion, and Tobias Rees, *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary*, Durham, NC 2008, 58.

19
Exhibition wall text, *Pop, Populista, Popular*.

Andrés Souto's micro documentary *El Grand Tour* does not take its viewers to Greece or Rome but instead through the virtual collections of the SketchUp 3D Warehouse, a free, online library of user-contributed models.[20] This tour is motivated less by the generic possibilities of this technical platform, but by its use as a site for the celebration, reproduction, and manipulation of Mexican patrimony. As Souto describes, his title (like the transformation of *Güeros* to *Guerxs*) is a purposeful undermining of colonialist and classificatory pretensions and the notion that expertise can properly order the complex traffic of creative practice and everyday life. Instead, it celebrates the fall of "good taste" and the democratization of access to aesthetic travel, whether virtual or physical.[21]

The video's main protagonist is César, a SketchUp "superuser" who is unidentifiable beyond his location somewhere on the outskirts of Naucalpan, a neighborhood Souto had been studying for its "real world" self-building practices. Set to Frank Zappa's synthesizer renditions of the Baroque compositions of Francesco Zappa, Souto tours César's SketchUp library, which includes *metates* and *molcajetes* rendered in virtual basalt; models of the Mexico City metro and his own home; fantastical architectures of domed cities; and a space elevator built upon a stepped pyramidal foundation. While César's "real" identity lives somewhere behind his internet persona, Souto's investigation shows his digital designs imbued with historical and inventive reality. As the architect reflects, César is representative of many who though "young or 'undisciplined' are already using the language and tools of design" within the framework of their own lives and cultural imaginaries.[22]

The video ends with a tour of one of Souto's own contributions to the Warehouse: *La Más Nueva Basílica de Guadalupe / The Newest Basilica of Guadalupe*, an architectural composite of some of the most popular models on the platform [Fig. 1]. Assembled on a base of drastically enlarged cinderblocks, the basilica rotates in a digital void to the sounds of Handel to reveal its facets: self-built chapels, Romanesque buttresses, corbel arches, and brightly colored iron balustrades. The composition is crowned by the Virgin herself, her mantle made up of a patchwork of repeated tiles of emerald ground and golden stars and her interior hollowed to make space for a series of bright pink balconies.

Souto's choice of subject matter purposefully engages one of the most quotidian elements of Mexico's cultural history, "something everyone could relate to".[23] His approach also evokes García

20
Andrés Souto, *El Grand Tour*, 2017 (also online).

21
Conversation with the designer, video call, January 25, 2021.

22
Ibid.

23
Ibid.

[Fig. 1]
Andrés Souto, Still from *El Grand Tour*, 2017, digital video, 05:32 min, 04:35. Courtesy of the designer.

Canclini's reading of the threat posed to traditionalist official culture by an embrace of contemporaneity. As García Canclini argues,

> the worst adversary [of traditionalism] is not the one who does not go to museums or understand art but the painter who wants to transgress the inheritance by putting an actress's face on the virgin, the intellectual who questions whether the heroes celebrated in patriotic festivals really were heroes, the musician specialized in the baroque who mixes it with jazz and rock in his compositions.[24]

Souto's project – unlike the collaborations that fuel much of today's design economy – does not seek to "buy or sell César's work" but instead to help others "know he exists and take his work seriously".[25] Rather than commodify or "elevate" César's work through his own, Souto instead opens an engagement with César's methods and concerns. Like César's library, Souto's basilica now lives in the SketchUp 3D Warehouse. *El Grand Tour* closes by wondering "How will Mexicans interpret and appropriate it?" Elsewhere, Souto has continued this effort to empower everyday designers in the popular appropriation of physical and virtual space, creating playful tutorial videos in the style of public television that outline methods for imposing popular visions developed online in the real world (for example, through the DIY transfer of SketchUp patterns to real building facades).

This posture posits a vision of design as subordinate to preexisting popular concerns and subject to commentary, transformation, and reuse. It also models an active and creative relation between the citizen and national patrimony that challenges the "unaltered conservation" of official culture. This reading of popular appropriation as a strategy of resistance is at the heart of García Canclini's vision of the contemporary as a path to a more robust and equitable *public* culture: "A patrimony that is reformulated by taking into account its social uses – not with a defensive attitude, of simple rescue, but with a more complex vision of how society appropriates its history – can involve diverse sectors."[26] Patrimony, he argues, should be viewed as "a *social process*" and "a space of material and symbolic struggle".[27]

This perception has gained broad sympathy with young designers in Mexico today. APRDELESP, an experimental architectural firm in Mexico City, has similarly declared the new role of the

[24] Garcia Canclini, Hybrid Cultures, 135.

[25] Conversation with the designer.

[26] Garcia Canclini, Hybrid Cultures, 142.

[27] Ibid., 136.

designer as one who works to "maximize opportunities for appropriation" within the projects they create, decentering the authorship of the building in architecture or the object in design in favor of an emphasis on preexisting context and the social processes that immediately decenter designers' intent.[28] Together, these impulses insist on the social immanence of both patrimony and design as real-time strategies of cultural orientation and imagination, offering stages for the "declusterings and reconfigurations" key to Rabinow's contemporaneity.

Souto's conscious adoption of a strategy of composition in the creation of his basilica offers a path for enacting this view of design and patrimony as distributed social processes. Bruno Latour has suggested the possibilities that lie in compositionism as an avenue for the construction of a "common world", a politics that sidesteps the enforced boundaries of modern and traditionalist thinking without denying the differences and conflicts of the contemporary. As he describes,

> from universalism [compositionism] takes up the task of building a common world; from relativism, the certainty that this common world has to be built from utterly heterogenous parts that will never make a whole, but at best a fragile, revisable, and diverse composite material.[29]

In place of unifying mythologies, the common world is made possible through an embrace of the mundane, a commitment to continuous deliberation, and the assumption that collective life is as disjointed as it is shared.[30]

Much like the broad assertion of Indigenous ownership of *arte popular* through policy, this embrace of the popular and associated strategies of popular appropriation does not resolve questions of privilege and power. Behind these developments in policy and discourse lie persistent tensions within the political and cultural economy of heritage and design which determine (and constrain) the ability of communities to participate actively and equitably in negotiating the future of Mexican patrimony.

These contrasting ethnographic episodes – witnessing the intensified state management of heritage in response to cultural appropriation on the one hand and the rediscovery of popular

28
APRDELESP, *A Manifesto on the Appropriation of Space. A Methodology for Making Architectural Projects*, Mexico City 2019, 8.

29
Bruno Latour, *An Attempt at a "Compositionist Manifesto"*, Mexico City 2016, 13 (also online).

30
An earlier theorization of the concept of composition by anthropologists Jane I. Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belinga similarly framed compositional strategies as social alternatives to logics of accumulation or control. Guyer and Eno Belinga, Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge. Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa, in: *The Journal of African History* 36/1, 1995, 91–120.

appropriation as a creative strategy in light of histories of hegemonic official culture on the other – outline distinct stakes within contemporary problematics concerning the relation of design, heritage, and public culture in Mexico: How can everyday Mexican reality make use of and transform design for its own purposes? Can Mexican design distinguish itself from a nationalism that reifies tradition without conforming to Euroamerican markets, aesthetics, and aspirations? What does an anti-colonial but non-essentialist (design) future look like? And what is required to cultivate broad-based, popular governance of the conditions and discourses of heritage and design?

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