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Beyond the paint and ink: ASAR Oaxaca resistance and getting up Arte Pal Pueblo

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“Beyond the paint and ink: ASAR Oaxaca resistance and getting up *Arte Pal Pueblo*”

by

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THESIS

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Trabajo en bruto pero con orgullo,
Aquí se comparte, lo mío es tuyo.
Este pueblo no se ahoga con marullos,
Y si se derrumba yo lo reconstruyo.
Tampoco pestañeo cuando te miro,
Para que te acuerdes de mi apellido.
La operación cóndor invadiendo mi nido,
¡Perdono pero nunca olvido!

-Calle 13 "Latinoamérica"

Agradezco mi esposa, mi familia, mis amigos, mis maestros y mis santos. Con tus brazos me levantaron para ver y entender nuestro amor, nuestras luchas y nuestras realidades. Este logro se hizo gracias a las bendiciones de todos.

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“Beyond the paint and ink: ASAR Oaxaca resistance and getting up *Arte Pal Pueblo*”

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to address the ways in Oaxacan street artists frame alternative realities within art and interviews about their art. Asamblea de Artistas Revolucionarios de Oaxaca or ASARO, is a revolutionary artist collective that currently works in Oaxaca Mexico. They place their art in publically accessible areas and comment on local, national and international social issues. Through ethnographic interviews and participant observation with members of ASARO along with critical discourse analysis of their images, I explore the ways *getting up* is accomplished. The combination of ethnographic field work paired with a critical approach deepens an understanding of what influences modern communication production through art in a

marginalized area of Mexico's periphery. In this thesis ideas of art as transformative, legible, accessible are explored. Also Mexican local and global issues such as immigration, iconography, collective action, women's and human rights, exploitation of workers and natural resources are also analyzed within images created by ASARO.

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CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

ASARO is a collective that uses art as a form of resistance in an attempt to revitalize their community by speaking alongside community members in public spaces. The contemporary Mexican artists' collective known as ASARO employs resistant modes of communication that challenge and reconstruct dominant constructions of Mexican society. By doing so, this collective of Mexican youths is opening spaces in their community within Oaxaca's subculture to create dialogue in the wake of a dominant state that tends to overlook issues that ASARO deems important. The ASARO collective uses printing and graffiti techniques that are highly reproducible and places their work in highly visible areas. In this thesis, I analyze the ways in which ASARO reconstruct meanings of the poor and working class people and issues they face that are already established in Mexican society using visual and spoken language in order to resist and create dialogue that resists and talks back to dominant discourses. Their work is a rebellion in paint and ink that fights for inclusion in the decision making processes and a voice that came from the poor and working classes of Oaxaca. In this study, the data I analyze contain 165 prints from the *Asamblea de Artistas Revolucionarios de Oaxaca Pictoral Collection* at the Center for Southwest Research housed at the University of New Mexico. I also use ASARO's web presence as a corpus of data. Within this study I am weaving in analysis of ethnographic data I collected after 100 hours of participant observation and interviews in order to be able to situate and contextualize the resistant reconstructions of discourses in their visual forms with the ways the art is produced and talked about by its creators.

The action of getting up, briefly defined here as placing ones marks to be seen in public, plays the social function of communicating the lived realities and ideas of poor and working class Oaxacan in order to inspire their poor and working class communities to become involved

in a discussion and social action. The artist collective ASARO also defines that characteristics of what *Arte Pal Pueblo* (art for the people) as interactive, transformative, legible and accessible. The artists use these characteristics of their art in order to talk about issues of collective action and historical events, defense of natural resources, human rights, women's rights, icons and immigration within their visual vocabulary. They also evolved out of the social movements of 2006 in which hundreds of thousands of people attempted to create an assembly of democratic government in Oaxaca de Juarez. Instead of have an assembly of governance, these young artists envisioned an assembly of artists dedicated to socially responsible and revolutionary art.

Espacio Zapata is ASARO's gallery and artists' studio and sits only a few blocks from the central *Zócalo* in the historic center of Oaxaca de Juárez in the Southern part of Mexico. As well as being a political capital, this city sits in the meeting point of two large valleys, and serves as a cultural capital of the states' 16 distinct indigenous regions, including the Zapotecas who have inhabited the area for more than 2000 years. Their present customs are seen as the essence of "authentic" Mexican culture (visitmexico.com) (Also personal interviews with ASARO members) In July every year, the Oaxacan government profits from this framing of Oaxaca as a "authentic" during the largest indigenous gathering in the Americas. Indeed, Oaxaca is presented as a "purer" form of Mexican culture by tourist agencies, movies and national discourses alike. (Brolotte, 2012) It is seen as a place with many traditions that are praised for being uniquely authentic. (*Ibid*) Though modern people move about Oaxaca's central space on daily business, the colorfully painted colonial spaces, limestone walls, and artisans selling their handmade regional *típico* goods along these sidewalks, enables Oaxaca to radiate a charm that appeals to hip tourists looking for "authentic" experiences. There are colonial vestiges that loom over the hustle and bustle. Near the Santo Domingo church and historic house of Mexico's first

indigenous president, Benito Juárez, Espacio Zapata is located – the place which is where ASARO convenes to work, play and interact with other members of the community. The ever changing walls add to the dynamic texture to one of Mexico’s peripheral southern cities. Espacio Zapata’s ever-changing walls and exhibited work takes on a life of its own as art is added, sold, made refined, designed, engraved, stenciled, printed and distributed.

When I visited the *taller*/gallery in the fall of 2012, Mexico had recently held elections and the wall facing the street depicted an immense dinosaur with the head of Mexico’s new President elect, Enrique Peña Nieto, with tiny T-rex arms placing a ballot in a box. The Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) that had dominated the Mexican political system since the end of the Mexican Revolution for 71 years would come back to power again once Enrique Peña Nieto was inaugurated into office on December 1st. Many of the PRI’s opponents nicknamed the political party “the dinosaurs” for their unevolved forceful ways, predation against the weak, ancient policies and predatory nature (Otálora Montenegro, 2012). During the 1990s, as the rest of Latinamerica wrestled against dictatorships Mario Vargas Llosa dubbed the PRI “the perfect dictatorship” (1990) as it was controlled by a single party apparatus under the guise of a multi-party democratic system. Octavio Paz speaks out against the PRI’s control of discourse in the introduction to Elena Poniatowska’s pivotal book *Massacre in Mexico* (1984). “Accostomed as they are to delivering monologues ... our presidents and leaders find it well-nigh impossible to believe that aspirations and opinions that are different from their own even exist.” (x)The Institutional Revolutionary Party is not a majority political party: it is Unanimity itself...” It could defend its legitimacy by claiming that the PRI has been in power because the people of the nation elected them. Walking amongst the colorful colonial buildings of the historic center, this dinosaur metaphor comes to life for passerby – a reminder that Mexico’s

devolution continues due to inflation, corrupt government, and inaction against violence. The mural seen in the street is an intervention done in paint and is representative of ASARO's collective work. In Espacio Zapata, the picturesque image of Oaxaca is transformed to reveal a community that is continually in struggle against social, economical and political challenges brought about by many structures in the government and capitalist endeavors.

ASARO and Oaxaca 2006

The *Asamblea de Artistas Revolucionarios de Oaxaca* (or ASARO) is an artist collective from the city of Oaxaca de Juárez in Southern Mexico. In 2006 and 2007, there were more than 50 members. Currently the number of members fluctuate around seven, are mostly male, and continue to create prints, stencils, paintings, wheat pastes, shirts and internet blogs. Some of their productions are sold in galleries or market spaces. More importantly, other sets of their productions are dedicated to being physically adhered or painted onto surfaces in the city streets of Oaxaca de Juárez. These images are placed throughout the city and its outskirts. In order to reach out beyond the limits of Oaxaca, many of ASARO's members create internet blogs and social media profiles to share their recent work and to network with individuals around the globe. Though ASARO's focus is local, they are presented with opportunities to exhibit globally. Many of the artists collaborate with other artists' collectives or set up *talleres* of their own. However when they are together ASARO claims their collective work is *pal Pueblo*, or for the people, and they explore themes they deem relevant to Oaxaca's resistance movement. Thus

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¹ Exhibits containing ASARO's work include *The Art of Dissent WOODCUT PRINTS FROM THE ASARO* COLLECTIVE OF OAXACA MEXICO* In the Grass Gallery in North Adams, MA (2011), *Getting up for the People: ASAR Oaxaca prints and stencils* at the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque New Mexico (2014) and *ASARO—ASAMBLEA DE ARTISTAS REVOLUCIONARIOS DE OAXACA* at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art in Eugene Oregon.

²

Their definition of what the people means to ASARO is one of the most important bit of analysis and are examined in Chapter 4.

ASARO's collective work is made to be accessible, interactive, and legible. Their work does not rely on ambiguity but ideas are instead made as explicit as possible to/for the viewer.

Though its core members may be the "original" ASARO members who have been in the collective for almost 8 years, they are constantly collaborating. At times it is hard to distinguish what is made by ASARO members and what is made by other contributing artists. At Espacio Zapata, in the fall of 2012 while president elect Enrique Peña Nieto's dinosaur body dominated the wall space, other artists from Oaxaca and around the globe also had their work shown. The wall included a stray wolf stencil, a depiction of LL Cool J with a ghetto blaster on his shoulder, a spray-painted image of Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros dressed in hip hop style clothes and cap, and Emiliano Zapata on a low-rider bike. When I asked several members who did the work, they told me it was by many *compañeros*, a term that goes beyond just workmates but includes artists who are in solidarity with ASARO. The wall at Espacio Zapata had taken in all the vibrant colors that Oaxaca is known for and reconfigured its shapes to make its own meaning. This process of taking and reconfiguring or remixing is the way that ASARO is resourceful in its rebellion. However their rebellion is a constant response to events that happened in 2006 that continue to inspire these young artists to change their community.

Though this next section briefly discusses the conditions, history and the chasm between law, concepts of human rights, and government practices that exists (Arenas, 250), this thesis is limited and cannot fully express the emotional charge of the lived experiences of many Oaxacans during this time that people stood up and spoke en masse and were subsequently attacked afterwards. For the reader it may be difficult to imagine the fear that many felt, the sadness and anger that many faced for their fallen and injured comrades, or the sense of responsibility to act that took hold of people in 2006. For many involved in protests there is an emotional swaying of

one's feeling or an indescribable thickness in the air that lingers. However only some know what it feels like to be physically attacked and experience the dread, terror or other negative associations. Just talking to many people who lived through movements and the violence in 2006, there are truths that come in the form of frustration, hope, loss, and achievement that are not explicit but implied and very important to this study.

In 2006 economic and social conditions in Oaxaca ignited into a popular movement that lasted from July until November. Oaxaca is the second poorest state within the Mexican republic with 73% of its residents living in extreme poverty (Denham, 27). Only half of Oaxacans have access to electricity and water. As three fourths of Oaxaca's residents rely on agricultural work. The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 which flooded Mexico with cheaper food grown in the US, the deflated the market caused many farmers to go out of business. (Nadal, 2001) At the same time, government regulation of food prices for the consumer has resulted in big business for intermediaries while denying Mexican consumers at the end of the line any the benefits from lower food costs. (Nadal, 2001) Thus when teachers held protests in May of 2006, it was no surprise that many non-teachers joined the call to action.

Navaer in *Protest Grafitti: Oaxaca* (2009) outlines how the relationship between the Revolutionary Institutional Party and public teachers has changed over time from mutual partners in the era after the revolution (approximately 1920 - 1940) to political adversaries in recent times (2009). Mary Kay Vaughn (1997) describes the post-revolutionary patriotic spectacle of public official, students, and teachers parading in the public squares while "teachers eulogized patriot heroes" and "schoolchildren sang songs" (82, 1997). Vaughn notes that "Officials seized upon fiesta theatrics to enact the historical march of progress" (*ibid*). In 2006 as many students were facing hunger, illiteracy, parental abandonment and insufficient resources to

learn, modern Oaxacan teachers reacted to the complete cessation of the “progress” that was imagined by the PRI almost a century before (Denham, 43). The May celebrations of patriotism and PRI, evolved into annual teacher protests and strikes in the *Zócalo* of Oaxaca’s central district.

By 2006, the PRI amassed a long history of oppressing dissent via force, corruption, and exclusion of its own constituents. Outside of the boisterous urban city of Oaxaca, the many PRI leaders have used violence and corruption to rule marginalized and indigenous people which comprise 34.2 percent of the state’s population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2010). In Oaxaca there are 16 distinct indigenous regions that are governed by the PRI’s official government. Since the mid 20th century, when the PRI replaced indigenous governance, the 16 regions have fought to maintain their traditional assembly of governance known as *usos y costumbres* (Denham, 100) which is a traditional indigenous form of governance in Oaxaca that is defined as a collective governance based on an elders council. Traditional collective lands that were governed collectively in the community were put in the hands of the PRI and dominated by *caciques* or local political bosses. Since the PRI’s occupation of Triqui lands in San Juan Copala, a subgroup in the Mixteca region to the east of the capital city of Oaxaca, government sponsored paramilitants have assassinated, sexually assaulted, and disappeared dozens of Triqui peoples. (*San Juan Copala “Chuma’a Autónimo, 2009*). Until this day the Triqui peoples as well as other Oaxacan indigenous communities continue their fight against PRI’s dominance. Within urban centers journalists also were faced with having to fight for their autonomy.

In 2005, many of Oaxaca’s journalists experienced the abuses of violence and corruption. Ulises Ruíz Ortíz was commonly believed to have come into the Governorship through a fraudulent election and began his term with an attempt to control local media sources (Matías,

Scherer Ibarra, 2005). Though other deals with other local news outlets have not been documented, the case of local paper *Noticias* is a poignant example of how the governor began his position in office. When Oaxaca's leading newspaper, *Noticias*, refused to let PRI control the material being produced within the news, the new governor had hired police in plain clothes disguised as "agitators" to keep *Noticias* workers hostage at their jobs for a month (Denham, 234). Eventually international pressure pushed the government to disband the governor's agitators. However in 2008, journalist Pedro Matias, who collaborated with Dianne Denham and the C.A.S.A. Collective to tell his story, was kidnapped and tortured for a day. He was also a victim of the 2005 hostage situation of *Noticias* and was vocal about the event in 2005. Though official reports say it was carried out by the Zetas gang, his position as an outspoken writer led many to believe it was government involvement (Reporteros Sin Fronteras, 2008). The Zetas is a gang that came about after soldiers from the Mexican army's elite force decided to create a group of organized crime. Their dominance is characterized by the extreme use of violence, murder, and are often pinned as a scapegoat when violence occurs in Mexico.

On May 22, 2006, the 22nd section of the National Education Workers Union (*Sección XXII del SNTE*) in Oaxaca held their annual *plantón*, or strike and sit in, within Oaxaca's central *Zócalo* that contained the main government building on the south side. The teachers demanded better wages and more resources for their students. Oaxaca has one of the lowest salaries for teachers in the country and only 40% of students have the opportunity to study beyond primary school (Denham, 27). Also only three days prior to the *plantón*, Priista *caciques* who had threatened indigenous leader and activist Moisés Cruz Sánchez, shot and assassinated him in public during the day while at breakfast. The teachers had hoped to negotiate with Oaxaca's

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³ Balboa, Juan & Velez, Octavio. "Matan a tiros a activista del sol azteca" *La Jornada*. May 20, 2006

new governor. However, Ulises Ruíz Ortíz who had begun to show his use of brute force, and previously publicly announced his position with protesters as “*Ni Marcha, Ni Plantón*” or “No marches, No sit-ins” (Stephen 43, 2013) . Instead of negotiating with the public school teachers, on June 14th, 2006 Governor Ruíz ordered local police to disband the *plantón* by force. Police attacked the striking teachers with teargas, firearms and clubs. By the end of the day there were 92 seriously injured and 4 dead. The city’s residents were outraged by the events and many came to the aide the teachers. This ASARO member recounts how people in Oaxaca held the police at bay after the attack.

Se quiso... mover al magisterio de este tipo de plantón que tenía y que no pudo la policía al final de cuentas porque había una gran unión del pueblo que defendió a los maestros en ese entonces. Yo me acuerdo porque totalmente todos salíamos de la colonias que eran muy cercanas al centro cuando se dieron cuenta de que las policías empezaron invadir y a golpear a pegar le a los maestros. La mayor parte de los pobladores de colonos a ayudar a poner también rostro junto con quien alguna vez les enseñó algo⁴. (ASARO member Henri, July 2013)

On the 15th of June 2006, only a day after police had attacked people, 500,000 supporters participated in a mega march to protest the violence against the teachers, and the fraudulent election of Ulises Ruíz Ortíz amongst many other concerns. What is impressive about this number is that there are about 250,000 residents in the city of Oaxaca de Juárez and about 3 million in the entire state (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2012). That means that one sixth to nearly one quarter of all people in the state of Oaxaca participated in the mega-marches. During this and subsequent marches, many participants had given young people spray

⁴ “When they wanted to remove the teachers from the sit in, and the police couldn’t in the end because there was a great unity of the people the defended the teachers. I remember because absolutely everybody came out from the *colonias* that were close to downtown when they noticed that the police began to beat up the teachers. The majority of the residents from the *colonias* helped to unite themselves with the teachers that at one point [in their lives] had taught them.”

cans to express what was happening. As an ASARO member noted, “*Las paredes se convirtieron en un libro que contaba nuestro lucha.*”⁵ (ASARO member Marcos, July 2013)

Three days after police attacked the teachers, the teachers union encouraged many to participate in the Popular People’s Assembly of Oaxaca (APPO). 300 distinct indigenous groups, workers unions, women’s groups, student groups, neighborhood associations and other unions joined the assembly. The APPO proposed itself as an alternative governing body based on democratic assembly. (Osorno, 65) At the same time that APPO held central talks. The APPO issued a call for all Oaxacans to organize at different levels and areas. As the movement continued to secure more spaces in Oaxaca’s central district, people organized barricades to keep police at bay, while others took over television and radio stations. Other residents claimed the rich hotel spaces and government buildings for the *pueblo* or the people. The state government had to reconvene just outside of the city. ASARO began its meetings at the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca and created its own assembly with the same democratic organization and cause, but it was mostly comprised of artists and art students (Marcos, Personal Interview, 2013).

As Oaxaca’s center had been appropriated by the popular movement for the next few months, writers and journalists dubbed Oaxaca de Juárez, “*La comuna de Oaxaca,*” (Navarro, 2006) or “The commune of Oaxaca”. In July, as the biggest indigenous celebration in the Americas called la Guelaguetza which brings in 100 million pesos (around \$7.6 million US) annually, the teacher’s union along with the APPO boycotted the official state celebration and

⁵ The walls turned into a book that narrated our struggle.”

sponsored its own “popular alternative Guelaguetza” (Ascencio, 2006). Enrique Rueda Pacheco who was the general secretary of the seccion 22 de SNTE said the official celebration only benefits the rich and not the people (*ibid*). Figure 1 shows ASARO’s visual response to the commune of Oaxaca creating its own Guelaguetza celebration. In a black stencil placed on a wall, a figure wearing the most iconic *Danzante de la Pluma* or Feather Dancer traditional Oaxacan outfit. The red spray-paint letters read “bienvenidos” or “welcome” and “Fuera Ulises” or “Ulises begone” Jirón describes his visual presence on the street.

“The individual here tilts his head up with pride; pride for his cultural identity and for willingness to fight for his rights... The gun that he is holding is a symbol for insurgency and revolution; it represents the strength and capability of the insurgent socialist group.” (2013)

Throughout the next few months, police attempted to dismantle the commune of Oaxaca and violent confrontations ensued. A community member I talked to mentioned how people fought. “*Había unos de nosotros que luchábamos con pintura, y otros como yo que hacíamos la lucha con molotov*” (Anonymous, Personal Interview, 2013) While both APPO and Ulises Ruíz Ortíz continued to seek help from Mexico City – many APPO members marched to seek justice and take Ruíz Ortíz out of office while. Eventually near the end of October, President Vicente Fox sent thousands of Federal Preventative Police (PFP) with an arsenal including tanks and helicopters in order to reestablish official government in Oaxaca. As *Día de los Muertos* approached, state sponsored violence intensified as PFP forces occupied Oaxaca. By *Día de los Muertos* on November 2nd, there were 17 civilian fatalities. Though the commune of Oaxaca had been dismantled, ASARO continues to work to this day. Figure 2 is a picture by Itandehui Franco Ortíz and shows an ASARO member creating a traditional *Día de los Muertos tapete* or sand painting right up to the feet of a phalanx of PFP forces. This regional ritual normally

⁶ “There were some of us that fought with spray-paint, and others that fought with Molotov cocktails.”

practiced during the annual celebrations is injected here with a symbolic defiance that is rooted in preexisting forms in Oaxacan *Día de los Muertos* traditions, begins to define ASARO's discursive resourcefulness. It becomes a statement that reinforces Oaxaca's collective identity and regional sovereignty despite official state intervention. This is different from the illegal forms they use to get up.

Getting up

I define graffiti as the act of placing a mark that is either painted on or adhered to a physical surface such as a wall without permission and with the intention of being seen. ASARO defines their art as accessible, legible, transformative, and interactive. Being accessible means that it is placed in spaces where people moving about their community can see it readily. The legibility of their art allows ASARO to portray ideas through the use of explicit images that can be understood through their visual forms. The art is also transformative because it turns a space into a challenge to the dominant structures and creates the everyday political to be visible. It is interactive because allows viewers to think about and engage with ideas. It is also interactive because it is placed in spaces where community members can engage and make markings. Such is the case when the government interacts and erases or paints over these marks. The surfaces in Oaxaca thus become alive when different interactions of marking, responding, erasing, remarking, and altering as time passes. These interactions can give deeper meanings and ideas to the discourses that ASARO is setting forth. Though there is an art that embodies a graffiti *style* that many times, like graffiti, is done in spray-paint, the moment that permission is given, it ceases to be what I am calling graffiti. In my work with the exhibit *Getting Up Pal Pueblo: ASAR Oaxaca* at the National Hispanic Cultural Center and exhibition catalogue *Getting up for the People: ASAR Oaxaca's Visual Revolution* (2014), ASARO, Suzanne Schadl and I proposed

that ASARO *gets up*. We borrowed this term from U.S. graffiti terminology that designates the act of being seen by putting a mark or many marks in places visible by others. 1970s New York graffiti artist TAKI 183 elaborates on the art of *getting up*, “You wrote it once and a hundred people saw it, you wrote it twice and a thousand people saw it. By your hand, you were known” (quoted in Gastman and Neelon, 56). The more your marks are placed and seen the more you get up. Though getting up is a graffiti term that defines the act of placing a mark illegally without consent of the property owner, ASARO uses both illegal and legal means of being seen, adopting a by-any-means-necessary attitude. We have extended the meaning to getting up in other spaces such as ASARO’s murals in marketplaces, donated prints that are seen inside the offices of the *sección 22 de SNTE*, the *Tianguis* or marketplace stall that sells their works on paper and t-shirts to passerby, online posts, protest picket signs and in the white spaces of museums at home and abroad. Though many of their works compete for attention on private and public walls in and around Oaxaca, many of their other works are placed in other easily accessed spaces.

In Mexico where the gray concrete block is the most used building material, giant gray walls are erected in cities and small towns. Places such as houses and businesses are closed off from roads and public space by these vast expanses of wall. Government and businesses have long used these expanses to sell their candidates, and products. There is competition to be seen in the same surfaces. Graffiti is thus born in this “yelling contest. It is the very act of *overwhelming* turned into an art” (Gastman and Neelon, 4). ASARO not only participates in this “yelling contest” on walls but takes advantage of many ways to create be heard and seen.

Getting up also takes into account what Gastman and Neelon refer to as the yin and yang balance of graffiti which is quality and quantity. In popular culture, originating from Chinese philosophy, yin yang is a balance of contrary forces that are connected and interdependent.

Whereas many artists may “throw up” in or “bomb” a space, which is defined by making a quick mark often a taggers name or in this case a political message, it often does not have the same visual quality as something that has taken an artist more time to produce. On the other hand, a one-of-a-kind work of art that takes hours to produce a single copy cannot be seen in more than one place. ASARO balances both quality and quantity by using techniques such as printing and stencil making. Using these techniques the artist is able to work on an image once by carving or burning an image on a flat surface or cutting a form out for a stencil, and either printing it or spray painting it repeatedly. Printmaking and stencil work are mediums that lend themselves to being highly reproduced. When an ASARO member etches an image on to a piece of wood or linoleum, the product is a stamp that can be covered in ink and printed on paper hundreds of times before the etching breaks. A single etching can be placed in hundreds of places. Stencils are also used made from cut paper. Much like print making, a single stencil can be used to spray-paint an image many times until the weight of the spray-paint on the paper warps the image. This means that one single image can be placed through out many surfaces. This echoes TAKI 183’s idea that placing the same mark over and over is seen by many and that getting up is a numbers game where the more you create and put up, the more it is seen. Also, besides the printing press itself, many of these materials are relatively inexpensive to create over and over again. ASARO is able to place images both illegally through graffiti and legally by participating in exhibition spaces, selling their art on shirts and prints, and sharing images of their work on the internet. Tere Romo points out that printing is a hybrid type of communication that combines mass communication (quantity) with the aesthetics of a single piece of art (quality) (92, 2002). In this manner ASARO is able to *get up* in ways allow artists to create an easily read language in images, and broadcast their messages in visual ways.

Getting up uses both legal and extra-legal ways of getting their information out there. By doing so, they pose many questions we must consider in the analysis of their artistic production. Due to Oaxaca's recent history of struggle, their work asks questions such as: What spaces are public and which are private? What are the claims towards legitimacy that the official government has to decide what constitutes private and public? And, are these claims based on sound reasons?

Arte Pal Pueblo

Gastman and Neelon (2010) note the complexity of attempting to document the history of any particular subject but graffiti is especially difficult to describe. Graffiti has been defined as a public expression of love such as when lovers mark their initials, a marker that designates gang territory (Sanchez-Tranquilino, 1995), a controversial sentiment on a bathroom stall (Madero, 2012), or a writer showing off her/his wild style, but for the purposes of this paper the images examined here fall into the category of political graffiti art. Political graffiti is different from other types of graffiti because it is created to be legible by most of society. Images carry a political message and also seek to claim spaces much like gangs use graffiti to claim turf. Instead of claiming space for select group of people, ASARO extends to claim a space for *el pueblo*: a term that claims solidarity with the poor and working class people. I argue the images produced by ASARO seek to express disgust, hope, anger, strength, whimsy, frustration, and inspiration within society. They are marks made by people who are inspired to create dialogue and seek to inspire others in the same way. Unlike the abstract letters of traditional Wild Style or Cryptic graffiti which is characterized by abstraction of letters to the point that it is "difficult for insiders and outsider to read the writing on the walls" (as cited in Botey 26, 2011), ASARO's graffiti is meant to be read and understood. Their form is direct and conveys, as well as elicits, emotion for

those who are able to discern its cultural significance. These images are directed to the people of Mexico who have experienced the effect of Mexican politics and economy. In this sense it is legible by people who have an understanding of the current Mexican condition. On the other hand, because of the explicit nature of images, it is still legible outside of this Mexican community in different ways based on the many universalities that the images express. Additionally, the subtle implications and overt references might not be understood completely. In Figure 3, a socialist or communist protest is symbolized by the figures with banners, raised fists, and raised hammers and sickles. A person with general knowledge might be able to see the protesters, their faces of anger and strength. They might be able to pick up on the tone that refers to workers fighting for their rights. On the other hand there are deeper levels of understanding. There are references to specific popular movements and state massacres in recent Mexican history such as “EZLN” “Atenco” and “UNAM”. One does not need a lived experience of these events in order to comprehend these works, media depictions and scholarly publications, enable viewers to make the connections ASARO is representing. Memory and/or knowledge of the Mexican experience are employed, in order make meaning within the images. Stochetti suggests that much of the power of political images lies within their emotive and “undomesticated” awakening of power that provokes us. (2013) An ASARO member describes the goals of ASARO as “injecting” morale into the spectators of their art.

“El arte no solamente debe cumplir esa función de que el espectador solamente lo contemple y no tenga una función utilitaria como antes lo tenía pues... En ese sentido cuando decimos pueblos es a ellos nos debemos, a ellos nos dirigimos a levantar le a su moral. A inspirar les pa’ seguir luchando – que la obra gráfica que nosotros o lo que hacemos, te inspire seguir luchando.”⁷ (Marcos, July 2013)

⁷ “The art shouldn’t only accomplish that function the viewer should only contemplate it and [doesn’t] have that utile function like it used to have. In this sense when we say people/community, it’s them we are indebted to them we are directed to lift their morale. To inspire to keep fighting – that the graphic work we do inspires you to keep fighting.”

These printing and graffiti techniques are also distributed in other ways besides being painted on a wall. By selling and trading artwork ASARO members can sustain themselves on the distribution of their works while simultaneously creating more in order to *get up* more. When I talked to members of the Oaxacan community in contact with ASARO, they questioned the commodification of art for private consumption, but many ASARO members affirmed that by selling their art, it is distributed more and farther, materials are compensated and artists are free to earn a living from the sale of their art and spend more time making more images and reproductions.

“Hay algunos aquí en Oaxaca que vienen de un modo de pensar que es más anarquista dicen que no se debe vender la obra y participar en ese sistema capitalista. Yo lo veo de un punto de vista que además de poner esta obra en lugares que nuestro pueblo lo vea, una persona puede comprar una obra y llevarlo a su casa o donde sea y así las ideas se difunden y nosotros como trabajadores cumplimos en hacer algo que tal vez contribuye de una manera al bien estar de nuestro pueblo.”⁸ (Yescka, July, 2013)

“Vemos como los anuncios venden sus productos. Nosotros decimos, ‘vas a consumir, pues aquí estamos con un producto también, consume este cambio.’”⁹ (Yescka, July, 2013)

Identity and ASARO’s getting up.

Jesús Martín Barbero is a philosopher born in Spain that works in Latin America and discusses Latin America and postmodernism. For this essay, his insights and examination of postmodern formation of identity are examined. He proposed that meaning making processes that were considered traditional and thus suitable for that community are being eroded by the presence of both global markets and global information (2002). Barbero contends that young

⁸ “There are some people in Oaxaca that come from an anarchist perspective that say that images should not be sold and should be used to participate in this capitalist system. I see it from a perspective that besides putting images in places that our people will see it, someone can buy a work and take it home or wherever and doing so the ideas are spread out and we as workers accomplish making something that might contribute in some way to the well being of our community.”

⁹ “We see how the advertisements sell their products. We say, ‘You’re going to consume, well here we also have a product, consume this change’”

people in Latin America are losing their connections to their traditional identities. Instead of finding sameness in the regional geography, they are increasingly finding their sameness in global forms such as Techno and Metal music. Barbero saw information and market as the crux of the loss of traditional modes of identity making process. Though Martin Barbero points out that capitalism and global information thwarts traditional meaning making processes and a sense of local identity, ASARO uses global meaning making processes in order to respond to a global audience and address their own experiences of being young in Mexico. In present times new identity formation is done through negotiation of various “cultural universes”. ASARO’s inspiration is shown by their use of diverse cultural universes such as local traditions, Mexican history, lived experience being poor and or working class in Oaxaca, neo tribal affiliations such as cumbia, hip hop and rock and drawing from Mexican artist collective such as the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* and *Los Grupos* as well as international stencil graffiti artists such as Banksy. The very act of graffiti to represent oneself in its current forms and types is a global phenomenon existing all over the world. By playing with globally recognized tropes such as The Beatles’ *Abbey Way* album art, DaVinci’s *Last Supper*, or a punk rock iconic hairdo, ASARO can inject local meanings such as indigenous dress, a local landmark, an Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) ski mask, or Mexican icon to give new meanings to familiar objects. The collective’s manifesto positions their group as a countercultural entity that “uses artistic expression which the *pueblo* for Oaxaca has originally you to revitalize itself” (ASARO, 2008). This juxtaposition of traditional with the global is a way for ASARO to remain relevant in its own community and abroad. The collective sells its work and effectively participates in a global market, effectively profiting off the participation for the advancement of their own local community goals.

ASARO says that they are a countercultural movement that uses art to revitalize their community. Paul Willis argues that “the symbolic creativity of the youth is based on their everyday informal life and infuses with the meaning the entirety of the world as they see it.” (98 1990) This counter-community imagines itself through their everyday activities and interaction with outside community members. Imagining is a group effort, it is not only about putting out images in the streets but the process of what is done before these the marks on paper are made. From the time Espacio Zapata opens its doors at 9 am, many students and teachers from the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca come to have coffee and breakfast and talk about events, presentations, music, and *el mitote*. When I asked many of the community members who frequented the *talleres* if they ever talked about politics, they responded that everybody really knew what was going on.

“Nosotros lo vemos todos los días. De hecho a veces me vengo aquí porque todos ya saben cómo es el asunto aquí en Oaxaca y México... A partir de ahí casi no hablamos de las problemas, aquí se habla de soluciones. Y no te miento aquí conozco estos *cabrones* desde hace mucho tiempo, a veces estoy aquí para hacharme una chela.¹¹ (Anonymous, July 2013) ”

Much like Mexico’s prolific singer Juan Gabriel’s famous comment that “*lo que se sabe, no se pregunta* ” the community surrounding ASARO is drawn to these spaces based on shared political understandings. It is not an attempt to closet their protests about social, economical and political topics of conversation but rather a way to move forward with similar understandings and opinion held by ASARO and surrounding community members to create and talk about change. Throughout the day, many people come from all walks of life from Hip Hop producers

¹⁰

El mitote translates roughly to gossip. Where gossip in English implies and idleness and waste of talk. I think that mitote can be constructive in that it informs individuals about other community members. Many times el mitote talks about intrapersonal politics and relations and is also a way of engaging a community.

¹¹ “We see it happen every day. To be honest I come here because everybody already knows what the deal is in Oaxaca and Mexico... From there we almost never talk about the problem, here we talk about solutions. And I’m not gonna lie, I know lot of these *cabrones* since a long time ago and sometimes I’m here to drink a beer.”

¹² “What is already known is not asked/mentioned.”

to *anarcho punks*, from dreadlocks to mohawks, from Oaxacans to tourists, gangsters and business men, all come to be in a welcoming space. Some come to produce original work using presses. Some come to help sell ASAROs work in the streets. Others come to ask for banners and picket signs, and as noted before, some come to enjoy a coffee or beer. This counterculture movement and community revitalization is visible when ASARO interacts with the community. Raymond Williams was an early cultural theorist from England. While many of his colleagues and anthropologists were looking at what they called “primitive” cultures to look for the secrets of how culture is formed, Williams looked at the mirror instead and found that his own experiences were worthy of looking at and studying (1958). He noted that culture is ordinary and that every day experiences are important (*Ibid*). It is not only rituals or in this case popular movement that exhibit meaning making, but the everyday experiences are important for understanding a community and its culture. At the same time, Hanisch (1970) pronounces that the personal is political, meaning that interactions in “private” spaces are directly linked to public politics. In the wake of the state violence that continues in Mexico, it is not a stretch to understand that these everyday autonomous actions are counter to the state hegemony. These spaces foster difference as well as unity. Hall and Ghazoul note that identity is fragmented and fractured and a fluid understanding of self-difference and or sameness to others. Herein lies a dialectical tension, that identity is not a single entity. Rather is split and contains many parts and functions for each individual. Conceptually, it is similar to Barbero’s idea of cultural universes. An individual finds a sameness to others in one aspect while rejecting others and this being fluid is always changing in response to the individual. The ASARO and the people they interact with have a shared understanding and build their identity on these unspoken understanding. The anonymous commenter in Espacio Zapata also acknowledges that their unification is based on

the personal relationships he has with many of the ASARO members but also is there to talk about solutions. These interactions with the creation of art creates an identity that is based on change. Though the “R” in ASARO is revolutionary it is also central their identity formation.

Mexican Grand Narrative and the Role of Arts and Education in Nation Building

The post 1910 revolutionary central state of Mexico wanted to create a story or a narrative of who and what Mexico was. This narrative is told on street names, metro stops, elementary school and even murals. The government wanted to unite a Mexico that was left broken into many pieces after ten years of war had ravaged the newly imagined nation. The grand narrative of Mexico has been constructed for almost 100 years and it frames Mexico as a nation and a people that exhibits modern development on par with the rest of the western world, yet is based on ancient culture as well as European and Indigenous hybridity (Vasconcelos, 1979). When the fighting during the 1910 Mexican Revolution lasted nearly 10 years Mexico’s new leaders were faced with uniting a nation with different factions fighting for different outcomes from very distinct cultural areas. Intellectual Jose Vasconcelos who wrote “*La Raza Cosmica*” (1979) praised the biological and cultural makeup of the Mexican as a superior race based on *his* mix of “white”, “black”, “Indian”, and “Asian” blood while creating a hierarchy of white at the top and black at the bottom that ultimately reinforced a view of race and class established during the colonial era. Vasconcelos, working as the Secretary of the nation’s Ministry of education, hired artists such Rivera, Orozco and Siquieros among many others to paint this Mexican identity in state public spheres. Artists such as Rivera intended to articulate a progression of the Mexican peoples by depicting the *Pueblo* as simultaneously traditional and modern, many classes who were not included in this discourse formation were effectively erased. This problem of integrating indigenous peoples into the national project was referred to as “*El*

Problema del Indio” and it effectively placed responsibility of non-assimilation on the shoulders of the indigenous population and not the state. Mexico portrayed itself as a nation that emerged from great Indian civilizations such as the Mexica (later given the name Aztec by outsiders) and Mayan while effectively ignoring the diaspora presently living within the nation’s borders. The PRI formulated this grand narrative and still continues to employ this vision. One needs only to look at the Aztec, Zapotec, and Mayan motifs on printed money or the national flag to see that the state still reproduces this idea.

Chimamanda Adichie who is a contemporary Nigerian writer warns that the production of the single story – I am applying it here to the single story of the Mestizo nation evolving from ancient civilizations and western development – does not allow for other variations of lived experience to exist (TEDGlobal). Diversity is stifled or unintelligible within this construct. For *Oaxaqueños* who have diverse cultures within its eight indigenous regions and/or who might not participate in an economy of western development, the state model of what it is to be Mexican is very different. On the other hand Oaxaca’s industry is based on agriculture and tourism. Mexico’s state tourism department portrays Oaxaca as emphasizes Oaxaca’s traditional construct within the grand narrative. “Oaxaca is a fascinating destination where you can appreciate ancient civilizations, colonial art and architecture and vibrant cultural traditions.” (visitmexico.com) In my experience of working with ASARO and the community that is in contact with the collective, Oaxacans have *orgullo*, or pride, in their traditions, however this view of Oaxaca as a living vestige of the past without addressing its current diaspora of peoples presents single story of how Oaxaca is supposed to be. Adiche comments “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes, is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make

one story become the only story.” (2009) ASARO thus is constructing Oaxaca’s story outside of this grand narrative.

ASARO’s reimagining of the *pueblo* seeks to represent a grand narrative of Mexican people united by its distinct difference. Though chapter 4 examines how ASARO rearticulates *pueblo* for its own mission, it is important to note that ASARO sees individuals as interactive interpreters of meaning, they are also united as members of a community.

In the following chapters of this paper, I analyze how ASARO creates artistic works that are resistant to and reconstruct social discourses through visual and spoken communication. Though the works themselves are rich in discursive information, I use participant observation gathered while working in Oaxaca for a month interviewing artists in order to further the understanding of how they view their productions and processes. Pairing spoken utterances with an in depth look at the Oaxacan constructs in art offers the opportunity deepen the knowledge about Revolutionary Oaxacan Art. Though many scholars and journalists describe the history and make up of contemporary Oaxacan Artist collectives, this thesis is an attempt to describe getting up, supplemented by the words of the artists themselves. It was important to see the actual space of Oaxaca and how everyday life occurs because as an artist collective that creates art for its community, it is essential to see the community in action. Pairing both ethnographic data and visual analysis illuminates the ways in which the process of creating echoes the products themselves and vice versa. My attempt to combine two communicative phenomena – visual and spoken – within the analysis of how ASARO communication is resistant to dominant discourses that negate the reality of poor and working class peoples allows me to frame their resistant art as a viewer while using the ethnographic experience deepen the analysis of ASARO’s meaning making practices.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

ASARO's visual work is a communicative phenomenon but I also address the speech that *they* use to describe their work in order to see how both are interrelated. The authors in this literature review look many themes and theories and histories that are essential to framing a way to look at ASARO's resistance in visual art and spoken communication. They provide a theoretical and historical frameworks and contexts that can be used to address the main point in this thesis. Even though the literature is situated in many disciplines, I attempt to organize the literature review in two segments. The first segment deals with authors who have focused their attention on themes surrounding events before, during and after the 2006 Oaxaca Movement. The second part of this literature review deals with Art History situating ASARO's art within Pan American traditions of graffiti and making. My goal in examining these texts is to show that they can be put in conversation with each other in order to show that ASARO's work is important and incorporates many themes at the same time that it is exemplary of many themes these scholars are using to describe historical and communicative phenomena.

2006 Social Movements

The movements of 2006 happened eight years ago. During that time, only a few scholars and writers have addressed social movements in Oaxaca. Though there have been many movements in Mexico in recent times, Oaxaca's movement is an anomaly because of the strong unity of the people and many of the effects it had on Oaxacan society which includes the creation of ASARO and other similar public spheres of inclusion. The literature of contemporary Oaxacan rebellious art is even more uncommon. People addressing Oaxaca's movement and its art production come from a variety of disciplines from Anthropology, History, Political Science and even Library studies. There are many online journals and resources such as

casacollective.com and indymedia.org that address Oaxaca from 2005 and beyond. Though these sources are indispensable for the diffusion of knowledge about Oaxaca's movements, they address a general audience. These online reports provide up to date coverage of the events that unfolded during the 2006 movements and continue to cover Oaxacan issues after the initial movement subsided. These are scattered throughout the paper in reference to specific events. This literature review is a reflection of this checkered production of knowledge about contemporary Oaxaca. The 2006 Oaxacan Social Movement also plays a role within the bigger picture of Mexican movements and art production, I will also draw on literature from other events that have similar resemblance in Mexican and US history in order to contextualize where this paper fits into that trajectory. Also the theoretical structure of my analysis and my arguments will be outlined at the end in order give a better understanding of the ways they inform this project.

Beginning in 2006, writers like Diego Osorno, Carlos Ramírez, and writers from the C.A.S.A. Collective began to record the daily events that were happening from 2006 to 2007. Osorno's *Oaxaca Sitiada* (2007) – with a prologue by Mexico's most critical historian: Lorenzo Meyer – is a compilation of events in 2006 and 2007 that like the title suggests situates the Oaxacan context. Meyer points out that the original title contained the word "*crónica*" which is a common term in Mexican scholarship that refers to a chronological collection of facts and events. Osorno's book contextualizes as well as provides interviews with different leaders and participants in the 2006 APPO movement. Much like Elena Poniatowska's accounts of the 1968 student massacre at Tlatelolco, and the 1986 Mexico City earthquake, Osorno allows his interviewees, found news reports, and radio and television transmissions, to narrate the story of the 2006 social movement. The effectiveness of the book is the representation of a multivoiced

narrative and the nuances and diaspora of Oaxacan peoples. This book is useful because it shows how different the people involved in the 2006 movements were. Taking ASARO into consideration we also see a lot of difference and stories. To understand ASARO one must consider the different walks of life that exist in Oaxaca and how many approach change in their communities in different ways. This book does not just survey the people of Oaxaca but it surveys the people in Oaxaca who are actively engaged.

In a very similar style, Denham and the C.A.S.A collective's book *Teaching Rebellion* organizes chapters based on interviews of witnesses, participants and victims during the movements. Unlike *Oaxaca Sitiada*, the long monologues that *Teaching Rebellion* affords its informants allows readers to get a "feel" of the personality of the people involved. Because of this attention to each informant as different types of people like school teachers, tourists, grandmothers, journalists, neighbors, workers students and even Yescka from ASARO. The events of 2006 unfold almost chronologically as the monologues are read. It is also important to note that *Teaching Rebellion* also captures the moods of the different informants and shows the grounded human aspect of the Movements as people were effected deeply.

Carlos Ramírez, professor at the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez (UACJ) and Oaxaca's native son also takes on the style of the journalistic *cronica* in *La Comuna de Oaxaca* (2010). What sets his work apart – besides using his own original corpus of data – is his attention to the political actors on both sides of the divide between the APPO and the PRI. He uses the term "la crisis de Oaxaca" to refer to the bad government of the PRI as a catalyst for the rupture and crystallization of the APPO and the *Comuna de Oaxaca*. Though Osorno and *Teaching Rebellion* highlight instances of the abuses the PRI's rule, Ramírez's investigation highlights political rings within the PRI and the conservative National Action Party (PAN) that

are responsible for Oaxaca's crisis. Ramirez dissects the "*Anotomía de la Crisis*". Later in the book Ramírez by detailing the decision making processes and actors involved in the APPO and the organization of the popular assembly. He includes firsthand documents which outline the APPO's direction and then the crisis of the APPO as federal troops were deployed to attack the commune of Oaxaca.

One of the common themes that these three books echo is the general abuse and violence against Oaxaca's people including teachers, indigenous peoples, journalists, and movement leaders. These books also chronicle government clientelism, corruption, and fraud. They employ terms such as "*autoritarismo*", "*dictadores*", "*feudalismo*" and "*colonialismo*" to describe the characteristics of the PRI. There is a sense of exclusion by the state of non – state and non – elite agents such as the poor, indigenous and working class peoples. On the other hand, taken all together, these books also convey the array of emotion, including frustration, fear, anxiety, determination, and hope during the events of 2006. Most of all there is a sense of hope that is created when these participants and informants realize what is possible when they are united by the respect for their differences. The interviewees and informants describe their involvement in participatory democracy whether by taking over radio and TV stations, erecting barricades, participating in the APPO, or painting. The tone of these books is not defeat nor the end of the *Comuna de Oaxaca* but rather they frame the movements as a very important achievement in Oaxacan society. These books are essential to undersanting many of the issues that ASARO talks about in their visual communication. In all of these books the common problems of being excluded/repressed in an economic, social and political sense create problems that manifest itself in different ways. Problems such as exploitation of natural resources, economic favoritism, authoritarian rule over traditionally autonomous peoples, and marginalization of women, poor,

indigenous peoples are symptoms of the bigger pathology that is the PRI's exclusion/repression and exploitation in Oaxaca. What is important about ASARO in the context of these scholars is that they address many of the same issues that are brought up in these books in visual forms. Though they might not have the same degree of depth in one way, they do provide a wealth of information in other ways. In other words just as academia and journalism seek to deepen humanity's knowledge, ASARO's images attempt to do the same in a way that does not involve reading hundreds or thousands of pages but involves reading into a visual vocabulary.

Lynn Stephen takes a similar approach as Osorno, Ramírez and Denham. Stephen has spent the past couple decades visiting Oaxaca and Lynn decided to collect her own corpus of data in 2007. Much like Denham, Lynn focuses on human rights abuses while providing some social and political context going back to 1974 when local labor unions achieved negotiations with the government. In her interviews she talks to informants who stated that for the past decade or so, the police have dissuaded the traditional autonomous government of *usos y costumbres* by kidnapping, torturing and incarcerating many of Oaxaca's indigenous leaders as well as journalists and other political opponents. Also, Lynn's last chapter "From Barricades to Autonomy and Art: Youth Organizing in Oaxaca" describes ASARO's history from their formation in 2006 at the UABJO, to their street stencils, exhibitions and creation of their *talleres*. However this chapter and the accompanying videos of MARIO, ITA, CESAR and LINE from ASARO at <http://faceofoxaca.uoregon.edu> provide a basic history of the collective. Lynn argues that ASARO is an exemplar of different modes of expression used by youth in order to experiment with the concept of autonomy and the fusion of urban popular culture with indigeneity.

Other scholars such as Ivan Arenas and Jens Kastner have looked at Oaxaca's art from a more academic point of view. Jens Kastner's "Insurrection and Symbolic Work: Graffiti in Oaxaca (Mexico) 2006/2007 as Subversion" (2011). looks at how symbolic subversion manifested itself through graffiti in Oaxaca during 2006 and 2007. Kastner illustrates that collectives such as Arte Jaguar from Oaxaca use art to take a physical space and convert it - using art that undermines official authority - symbolically into a political space. Here the "everyday" spaces in Oaxaca - such as places people journey to go to their work, school, or errands - are not politically charged until subversive art is placed in everyday public spaces that questions the State's authority. Political and social issues are woven into otherwise neutral experience being in the space. During the months between June and November of 2006 these spaces were politically active where everyday interactions were replaced by barricades, marches and sit-ins and Kaster contends that art, after this time period, reverts that everyday space back to what many writers described as "The commune of Oaxaca". As an ASARO member noted , you must change the context in order to give new meanings, here the art symbolically changes the space itself. Taking this concept of symbolic work, and applying it to looking specifically at ASARO, ASARO not only symbolically changes spaces but they also take popular "everyday" images and give them new symbolic meanings as well. This is also important in interpreting what *Arte Pal Pueblo* means to ASARO members. They also echo the fact that their art is transformative in that it can transform a space into a political one at the same time they seek to translate visual language into actions.

Louis E.V. Navaer juxtaposes images of street art in Oaxaca with the political and social underpinnings to explain how these images and stencils are a response to social conditions and events. Where Navaer's project is different from other literature is that it focuses attention to

how the artists fit in to the social contexts. From describing the role of scribes in pre-Colombian societies as the keepers of knowledge, to showing how artists and writers have been the voice of their people in present times, Navaer connects the significance of graffiti and how it connects to historical events such as Benito Juárez's presidency in the 19th century to the revolution to the relationship between the Mexican government and its teachers. Though Navaer is effective at showing how historical conditions created the need to express in subversive ways, it misses many of the important nuances and modes of expression that I refer to in *Getting Up*. His book looks at graffiti as spray paint and stencils without looking at the other ways that artists choose to communicate such as wheat pastes, murals, pamphlets and blogs and even key chains. Navaer is also looking at the big scale and lumping all collectives into the same category. Though there are many collectives in Oaxaca that do graffiti, they are organized differently and each have their own characteristics. In relation to this thesis, I see Navaer's work as important to understand how ASARO's art emerges as a response to state and popular action. His work situates ASARO's work by providing an overview of Oaxacan graffiti and show how many collectives in Oaxaca work.

ASARO, Suzanne Schadl and I worked on an exhibition catalogue for the 2014 ASARO exhibition in Albuquerque, New Mexico called *Getting Up Pal Pueblo: ASAR Oaxaca prints and stencils*. In the exhibition catalogue called *Getting Up For the People: ASAR Oaxaca's Visual Revolution*, we tackled many of the distinct ways that ASARO used to get up. Using ASARO's manifesto as a guide, *Getting Up* elaborates upon the various themes brought up by ASARO members. Using divergent and diverse viewpoints of its different authors, *Getting Up* establishes that there is not a single way to interpret ASARO and their work is rather interpreted by many people. Though the process of publishing has an effect of "setting facts in stone" it was

important to establish contexts, motivations and events that are relevant to reading ASARO's prints. This book was intended to be a guide or introduction to ASARO's work. The publisher, PM Press, wanted to create a picture book that would accompany the exhibition. However ASARO, Schadl and I felt that the book and the images should not be merely consumed without addressing the contexts and various orientations of scholars and artists. Over the summer of 2013, we all worked together across national borders to produce a bricolage of different perspectives. Though this is our collective work and many of my ideas are shaped and can be seen within the book, this thesis provides a more cohesive analysis of the work that the general public might not want to delve into. The focus of this thesis examines how ASARO uses communicative phenomena of co-constructing discourses within an already established visual language to reassign and construct alternative meanings. Though *Getting Up* addresses these issues, the theoretical underpinnings of our work are not explicitly addressed as they are in this thesis. This thesis also presents an opportunity to expand the ideas within *Getting Up* that were not possible due to the constraints of being an exhibition catalogue marketed towards a general audience.

Ivan Arena's dissertation is based on an 18 month ethnography as part of ASARO, actively working with them in 2007 and 2008. Many ASARO members I talked to consider Ivan a "*compañero*" which is a term that designates him as a member of the group. As a scholar of architecture and ethnography, Arena's project looks at how the experience of being in the space of the city and of marginalization and political exclusion of poor and working class peoples create shared experiences and struggles. Being an ASARO member, he describes how the collective encounters and interacts in the community as they attempt to take advantage of opportunities to express the "*pueblo's*" shared experience in public spaces including the streets,

museums, and cyberspaces. He asserts that these interactions and encounter helped to create a political subjectivity where people who were not politically active became engaged when they came into contact with these spaces where ASARO made its presence visible.

Art History

There is a trajectory of relevant art historic perspectives that also look at graffiti and prints in relation to community unification and construction. Itandehui Franco Ortíz 's thesis "El Delite de la Trangresión: Graffiti y Gráfica Política Callejera en la Ciudad de Oaxaca" furthers the understanding of political street art produced in 2006 within the long history of spray-painting and printmaking at from micro level - looking at Oaxaca's graffiti production in the past couple decades - to the macro level - seeing the history of Global Modern Graffiti. The word "glocal" (global + local) is used to show that Oaxacan graffiti is not isolated but simultaneously connected to a larger trajectory of graffiti making. Franco Ortíz traces Mexican graffiti's lineage from Kampen's study of Mayan graffiti in Tikal to the graffiti of the "*injurias y demandas* "

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Painted on Hernan Cortes's residence and later to David Alfaro Siqueiros's use of stencils in Argentina to give historical context of Oaxaca's graffiti. Simultaneously she describes modern graffiti's evolution on a global scenes in its modern forms in Oaxaca. Since the 1980s in Oaxaca there has been a long lineage of *grupos culturales* doing graffiti. These include *pandillas* (youth gangs) *barrios* (neighborhood youth) and *crews* (groups of graffiti writers). All these groups produce graffiti for different reasons all are united by their drive to get up. As Sanchez – Tranquilino (1995 points out, gangs create *placas* and *roll calls* in order for members of the gang to be represented and to demarcate which turf symbolically belongs to whom. For graffiti writing

¹³ "Name calling and demands"

groups or *Crews*, *writing* or placing graffiti is an aesthetic exercise reflecting Franco Ortíz 's idea of the delight behind writing. Gastaman and Neelon affirm that modern graffiti in the Americas has its roots in gang cultures. Albuquerque writer AMEN identifies that the purpose of gang graffiti “[...] was to get up! Without *cholo* writing you wouldn't have a lot of traditions.” (Quoted in Gastaman and Neelon, 44)

Franco Ortíz , Gastman and Neelon all affirm that since modern graffiti's embryonic state, the purpose of placing a mark on a wall, what ASARO calls *Pintas* – is an act of transgression against a dominant culture and hegemony as well as an investment in symbolic capital. “El Graffiti puede ser entendido como una práctica social específica, una acción simbólica que a su vez forma parte de una cultura, y por lo tanto se encuentra en una relación intercultural respecto a la cultura dominante.”¹⁴ (Franco Ortíz , 16, 2011) In addition, the delight that is experienced illustrates an appreciation of the creation of graffiti and end product. It is an act of freedom. It breaks the restraints of dominant society. As mentioned in the introduction, graffiti involves placing a mark upon a surface where permission is *not* granted. Though there is graffiti style that exists outside of this paradigm where permission is granted and at times it is even commodified, an examination of the art that is not given permission tells us a lot about graffiti as an expression. It is important to note that graffiti also contains a value to the producer of it. Pierre Bourdieu coined the term *symbolic capital* that is a metaphoric currency that is “exchanged between agents vying for status and power.” (Ferguson, 97) Artists who are not given permission to throw marks on the wall must finance their paint and time to be able to complete their works. If getting up then multiplies the amount of times work is placed upon

¹⁴ “Graffiti can be understood as a specific social practice, a symbolic action that in its way is part of a culture and can be found in an intercultural relation in respects to the dominant culture.”

surfaces then this also multiplies the amount of resources needed to represent. However the symbolic capital received in return for the work makes it worth it for artists to continue to produce work. During the process of placing marks in public creates a sense of satisfaction in being able to show people that pass through these marked spaces their skill and their ideas. For ASARO who posit their art as *para el pueblo*. This symbolic capital is their metaphoric currency of being able to speak through and to their communities. Working doubly is also an act of transgression, Kastner agrees that ASARO's marks on privately owned spaces opens these spaces for public interaction. The symbolic capital acts not only to give the agents (ASARO) status and power but to create political subjectivities, as Arenas would point out, to the participant who interact and engage in these spaces.

Franco Ortíz 's thesis is effective because it examines in depth the 2006 graffiti movements and the ways in which Oaxacan graffiti production is created with the purpose of being used to communicate the ideas that were being talked about and acted out in the social movements of 2006. Though Franco Ortíz 's thesis is in depth, my thesis also analyzes the ways in which ASARO talks about its art. Which I believe is essential to understanding the ways getting up is enacted Also I am bringing in broad issues besides protest that ASARO is putting into conversation with its images.

Perez Rubio's "Arte y política. Nuevas experiencias estéticas y producción de subjetividades" (2013) examines these political subjectivities produced by new emancipatory Latin American arts. New arts such as those that are found in "public" spaces are meant to engage and not merely be seen. Whereas "modern" art places art on a hierarchy of high and low culture (Baker, 189), postmodern art is more focused on the interaction between the spectator and the art. Ranciere using the stage as site of examination also documents agency in seeing a

spectacle (2009). He lauds the emancipation of the spectator as an active contributor to meaning. The spectator transcends the role of a passive viewer “to take that of a scientist who observes phenomena and seeks their cause” (ibid.) Though Ranciere talks about performance art, I believe that ASARO art can be seen as performative, which I explain in chapter 4 ASARO thus creates art in public places to emancipate the spectator. Each individual spectator is not passive but rather an agent of the meaning making process. Perez Rubio comments that this agency thus transcends the act of the art and creates agents who can individually make meaning within their society because of their political subjectivity. In traditional bourgeoisie settings of art, only those who have the resources are able to access to the spectacle, whether it is play, music or gallery. Within public spaces, agents do not have to pay-to-play in order to become a spectator, but rather the intervention of art *invites* participation and meaning making. Rodrigues while talking about Cuban revolutionary art also pointed out a desire by the Cuban government to create an art that would be highly interactive and unite the chasm between working class people and art that the capitalist system is believed to create. For ASARO placing art in highly visual spaces allows for this interactivity to flourish.

So far I have mostly examined literature that focuses on graffiti. The other mediums that ASARO uses to get up include printmaking and the internet. Franco Ortíz in the same thesis, outlines the long tradition of revolutionary and political print making in Mexico. ASARO’s work echoes older revolutionary printmakers such as the Flores-Magón brothers whose prerevolutionary anarchist newspaper *Regeneración* voiced dissent against and could have contributed a hand in ousting Oaxacan-born dictator Porfirio Diaz. From the 1930s to the 1990s the Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP) from Mexico City became world renowned for their print expression against fascism, exploitation of the poor and rural Mexicans and created support for

the world's leftist governments and parties and workers. (Oles, 285, 2013) *El Machete* and publications by *La Estampa Mexicana* were socialist newspapers that were circulated gratuitously in Mexico. Also much like the contemporary *pegas* or wheat pastes of today, many of the TGP's linoleum and lithographs were destined to be adhered to the walls of Mexico city. Leopoldo Méndez was a central figure within the TGP's early years and liked to both distribute free circulating newspapers and wheat paste prints (now known as *pegas*) because it provided an easy way to communicate with the people. (Franco Ortíz , 53, 2009) Franco Ortíz also points out that these acts of *pegas* were illegal and required lookouts to execute and not be arrested. (Prignitz, 57) Though consciously or unconsciously it is important to note that ASARO is not an isolated entity but rather weaved into the leftist social consciousness of the 20th and even 19th century. David Craven notes that many Latin American prints in the 20th century were not designed to be propaganda in the sense that they do not illicit a reflexive behavior for immediate gain of the producer or sponsor but to "appeal us to think in a more self-critical mode about the social consequences of our actions." (16, 2006)

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As mentioned in the introduction prints straddle the line between a mass communication and a single production of art. On the other side of the Mexico - US border, Mexican descendants, like ASARO used printing as a method to unite their community and make it visible within and outside. This reflects Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities whereby producing discourses about a community makes it exist. McKerrow notes "They [the people] are called into existence by discourse, and from that moment forward, are 'real' to those whose lives

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David Craven, "Latin American posters: public aesthetics and mass politics." *Latin American posters: public aesthetics and mass politics*. Museum of New Mexico Press. Santa Fe, 2006.

their discourse affects- the boundaries of their membership can have ‘real’ economic indexes and socio-political connections” (95)

ASARO follows the tradition of popular printmakers in the midcentury, but is also inspired directly by the artist’s collectives of the 1970s in Mexico. Much like 2006 was a definitive date for ASARO, October 2nd, 1968 also has major significance for many in Mexico. On this date the *Movimiento Estudiantil* had rallied in the Tlatelolco square in México D.F. to protest against the authoritarian rule of the PRI as well attempt to change the structure of decision making in Mexico. (Elena, Poniatowska ed, 1998) President Luis Echeverria Álvarez ordered military to disband the students. Once there, the military fired into the square killing between 200 and 2000 people (NPR, 2008). Though the *Movimiento Estudiantil* was damaged, the 1970s ushered in a movement of independent artists collectives now referred to as *Los Grupos* or the groups. Álvaro Vázquez Mantecón comments that these artists’ collectives were interested in doing collective work instead of promotion of the individual artist (2007). Many of these groups such as TAI, TACO, MIRA and El Colectivo worked on political art that could serve social and political movements (198, *Ibid*). Diego Osorno (2007) and Navaer (2009) note the direct connection of the 1968 and 2006 social movements. Many of the people who were involved in student protests of the 1960s in Mexico soon became teachers afterward. The movements of 2006 were motivated by the striking teachers. Also within interviews and working with ASARO, many of the members noted that their history is much more than just a reaction to the events of 2006 but many had been thinking of these movements of students and artists in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of the teachers in Oaxaca were present in México D.F. during that time. ASARO draws from this cultural history. They are the artistic decedents of *Los Grupos* and through their social participation with the APPO and the Teachers Union, they are descendants

of that student movement. Another interconnection is the fact that many Mexican descendant artists on the US side of the border and artists from *Los Grupos* claimed solidarity across the border. (197, *Ibid*). The Chicano movement also had roots in the powerful student movement that pushed to government into massacring their voices and their bodies.

Whereas the *Movimiento Estudiantil* was a movement based on (predominantly middle class) students, the Chicano Movement included a minority in a country where the dominant structure was composed of an Anglo majority. This Chicano Movement was parallel to the civil rights movements and anti – war movements by US minorities that swept the nation in the 1960s and 1970s. The Chicano Movement wanted to better the lives and conditions of people of Mexican and Latin@ ancestry and nationality. ASARO on the other hand propose the inclusion of poor and working classes into the political structures. Though both are based on a type of identification, the Chicano Movement was in solidarity mainly with a minority group, ASARO includes a majority within their discourse.

During the Chicano movement, descendants of Mexicans who were on society's periphery used their identity as a way to get into the center to get to recognized by the mainstream of American society starting from the 60s to present day. As farmworkers in California began to mobilize, posters were created by community artist to reinforce the movement of civil rights for Mexican decedents and be able to move. In a conversation I had with Santiago Vaquera, a second wave Chicano Studies professor, he presented the Chicano movement as a *movement* because actual prints, literature, poems and people *moved* from one place to the other telling each other news and sharing ideas. The print was the ideal medium for carrying ideas because of its reproducibility, use of powerful images such as Aztec royalty, raised fists, Zapata, Cholas, and other subjects that ethnically insensitive art specialists did not

recognize. (Romo, 94). Much like ASARO challenges a grand narrative of the Mexican nation, Chicanos¹⁶ faced a racist discourse of nation that effectively worked to erase many ethnicities and impose a single dominant culture. However Chicano printmakers were able to define what their community was through images. Lipsitz comments “Rather than thinking about Chicano poster art as ‘community-based’ art making, it is more productive to view it as a form of art based community making [...] the term Chicano expressed a collective project of self-definition.” (84) Indeed Chicanos created a sense of self through their creative engagement. This sense of self was not quite Mexican and not quite American. Chicano intellectual Juan Bruce Novoa comments on the space of being in between Mexicaness and Americanness, “we are the space (not the hyphen) between the two [Mexican-American] ... the intercultural possibilities of that space. We continually expand the space, pushing the two influences out and apart as we claim more area for our reality.” (quoted in Padilla 14, 2013). Chicano prints voiced the claiming of more area for Chicano reality just as they constructed identity, struggle, tradition, culture, memory and icons. (Williams, 2012) Though ASARO is both separated by geography and time, ASARO can be compared to the constructs of Chicano formation. In ASARO’s case it is also a counter hegemonic production. Though the Chicano movement had a name, ASARO’s unifying term is *Pueblo* and within their discourses, the *Pueblo* is not specifically defined as a certain group of people but each member being a cultural agent defines *pueblo* in her/ his own way, from their perspective and everyday experience. In doing so they open that word *Pueblo* to be defined and constructed by their spectators.

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Chicano comes from a Spanish word. As a descriptor, the male form ending in -o can be plural gendered and includes chicanas. From my point of view, there are more than 2 genders and using “Chicano” with both male and female endings erases many more genders that exist. Therefore I use the all-encompassing term “Chicano” that includes all forms of gender even though at its conception, the term Chicano was limited to male empowerment.

Theoretical Review

In order to understand how art functions within the space of Oaxaca, I decided to examine what the artists defined the purposes of their own art. Instead of using only my own interpretations of ASARO's art it was important that this project investigate the artists' own perspectives. In order to do so I employed an Ethnography of Communication framework. This framework as first proposed by Dell Hymes assumes that the norms and beliefs of a speech community can be rendered visible through investigation of their communication. By spending enough time with a speech community, a researcher is able to gain understanding of what their communication means to them. This is what is referred to as indigenous meanings. I chose Junacosa's interpretation of ethnography of communication because he is working within a Latin American context and reflects a Latin American understanding of a western theory. For this same reason I also use the work of Patricia Covarrubias because of the fact that much of her work is based in Mexican communication. Another advantage of using Ethnography of Communication is that the SPEAKING mnemonic allows a researcher to get detailed notes in order to investigate how participants define their actions, and their norms within the context of a lived experience wherein the researcher is afforded the opportunity to experience many of the same contextual situations. Here it is important to note that the body is an important instrument of researcher. A researcher notes the emotion, the feelings, the smells the tastes and the sights in order to be able to begin to describe how communication is contextualized within a physical space.

Another theoretical construct I use is a critical approach. Theorists such as Foucault, Habermas, Hall and Anderson describe how communication constructs reality in a spaces where individuals imagine their connections to others in public spaces and vie for attention. In a

country where a dominant discourse does not accept or acknowledge alternative voices, it is important to see how different voices are framed and relate to each other. These ideas are discussed in the next chapter. However I would like to reveal how these fit into this project. I believe that a critical approach allows researchers to see where power lies. In this project discourses or the way we describe the world and think of it through words, are plural. There are discourses that define the world from a perspective of government and capital but more importantly there are discourses that are formed within groups where people are different and have different opinions and beliefs. I chose a critical approach because I am comparing those two, the government and capital which is visible by tuning on the television or seen in advertisements throughout the Mexican landscape on advertisements. The other is not so wide spread. However there is a relation happening within the two that is possible to dissect with a critical viewpoint.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY / METHODS

I have organized this section in order to address the two sets of data, interviews and visual communication, and how I collected and analyzed this diverse corpus of data. The first section addresses methods and concepts in acquiring and analyzing spoken data from participant observation and interviews. The second section addresses methods and concepts used in addressing ASARO's visual production.

Selection of Communities / Sampling for Ethnographic Work

This research uses Criterion Sampling and Snowball Sampling as defined by Lindlof and Taylor (2010 p.112-114) based loosely around a community of six artists. The focus of the study of ASARO's speech is based primarily on six interviews with individuals who self-identified as ASARO members (criterion sampling). When talking to these participants, I asked who else they considered to be an ASARO member who I could later connect with - which is consistent for snowball sampling. These artists work with different people in their space and these others are included in the data. Clifford Geertz was an American anthropologist that borrowed the term thick description from Gilbert Ryle which is a description of the background information needed to understand communicative phenomena. (1973) In order to be able to understand what members of a certain community are saying through words, gestures and other symbolic communication, it is essential to spend a lot of time within that speech community. In attempt to create thick descriptions the best that I could (given the time constraint), I spent two and a half weeks in July 2013 in Oaxaca de Juárez and employed participant observation in Espacio Zapata – which is ASARO's studio, gallery, and site of the Café “Atila del Sur”. Other sites where participant observation was conducted included: Taller Siqueiros which is the independent galley

of Yescka, an ASARO member, and the areas around the Historic Center of Oaxaca de Juárez at large. It must be mentioned that ASARO was at their peak membership around 2006 and 2007. After seven years only seven original members remained working. Being in this space I was also able to interact with members of the community who are in direct contact with ASARO members. These spaces where ASARO interacts on many levels with its community. Though one of the central aims looks at how ASARO defines *Arte Pal Pueblo* by spending time at these spaces, I can also address how the collective's interaction *actually happens*.

The two and a half weeks of participant observation and two years of communication with ASARO members serve to give the context in which the art they talk about is made, sold and traded. Alongside an analysis of their art, this thesis addresses how the producers of this art discuss the intended use and employment of these images. It is also important to note that it has been seven years since the popularist movements shook Oaxaca de Juárez's streets. Since then, many artists have opened their own *talleres* or workshops, found other jobs to supplement their income and had families. This means that the time dedicated to the ASARO project has dwindled for many. I was very fortunate to be able to schedule and spend time interviewing many of the members of ASARO. In the end, I was only able to meet with six of the seven members still in Oaxaca. The interviews only represent a small portion in my corpus of data but they reveal artists intentions that are not easily accessed by being there.

Selection of Participants

I selected participants based on their affiliation with ASARO. They had to self-identify as an ASARO member in order for me to ask for an interview. Others represented in this study are those who work and came often to Espacio Zapata the two and a half weeks I was there. Many of

these participants are not part of ASARO but are acquainted or have known people in ASARO for a long time and they add a measure of ASARO's contact with their community in this research. Though their representation is minimal, their voices represent important part of ASARO's definition of *Arte Pal Pueblo* because they constitute a part of that *pueblo* that ASARO creates a solidarity with.

Participant Protections

Though the themes in this research talk about artistic activities deemed to be illegal by the Oaxacan government, none of my participant observation involved or witnessed any activities that broke any of the laws. Also in accordance with the Institutional Board Review I have protected participants by not using legal names but rather their pseudonyms, such as street names. Also any personal or interpersonal information that did not have anything to do with the research question were not included in my data set. This also insures that my participants have complete confidentiality. The goal of this is confidentiality in my research is to not harm interrelations within the group and to protect the participants from legal repercussions.

As required by the IRB, Espacio Zapata sent a formal invitation to come to the space and pursue my research. Also, anytime I met a person when I was jotting notes I told them I was doing research and asked for permission to write notes about them. Before I tape recorded any interviews, I had the interview participants sign a consent form detailing their rights as participants including the right to confidentiality, the right to end the interview, the right to see the data that pertained to them, and the right to leave the interview and have all the data of their interview destroyed. This included permission to use data in publications, conferences, and public educational settings.

Another important protection I followed in this investigation is that the placement of art considered illegal would be withheld. This was included in the IRB protocol in order to protect the subjects from any legal repercussions if authorities were able to use this thesis as evidence against ASARO members. What is included is pictures of graffiti that ASARO has made publically available as well as art that is exhibited in the streets through sales, in Espacio Zapata and through other legal ways.

Collection of ethnographic data

I collected my data while doing two and a half weeks of participant observation and interviews in Oaxaca de Juárez in July 2013. For my participant observation, I jotted notes on a notepad in the ways outlined by Emerson *et al.* (2011). This included jotting quick notes for points of reference for later recollection, noting sensory feelings, impression, key events and incidents, reaction of others. After 4 hour intervals I recorded all my field observations while staying in Atila Del Sur (which teasingly earned me the nickname *el espía* as they saw and asked me what I was writing) I was at Espacio Zapata for more than a hundred hours. The notes were transcribed immediately after each session of note taking (between four and five hour intervals) along with other subjective impressions and insights. These notes were then stored on the University of New Mexico's Secure Shell Server (SSH) for safe keeping. The notepads have been destroyed and the ethnographic data will be kept until May, 2017 when it will be erased.

I interviewed ASARO members with an Android application called Easy Recorder on my Casio G'zone Commando 4 phone. These recorded files were then stored on UNM Safe Shell Server until I could transcribe them. Using the program Listen N' Write Free, I transcribed the

interviews and saved these transcriptions on UNM's Safe Shell Server. The interview transcriptions will be secured until May 2017, when they will be erased.

Conceptual Framework

Critical approaches in communication and the ethnography of communication (EOC) are the methodological approaches informing and guiding this research. For this paper I borrow from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and approaches in Critical Rhetoric. These similar foci of communication assume that discourses and knowledge and power are intertwined by employing the Foucauldian notion that knowledge is produced by *people* and is not innately a “natural” consequence. Edward Said supports a notion that these constructions of knowledge or discourses, “create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe.” (Said, 1979 p 94) Edward Said coined the term contrapuntuality in order to consider the perspectives of the colonized (bottom) *and* the colonizers (top). (Said, 1993 p 51) I will address contrapuntuality and agent driven meaning making by looking at discourses that are not produced at a structural level but by a relatively small group of agents. In order to examine their perspectives, I worked ethnographically with ASARO to analyze the formation of discourses and how they establish power in their community from the bottom. This is not to say that “bottom” is synonymous with inferior but I use the term “bottom” to refer to the non-elite individuals of society not affiliated with the official state structures. There are many more levels involved than just the dichotomy of “top” and “bottom” as McKerrow notes, “There are a variety of positions which the dominated and dominant can take at any moment.” (1989 p 96) Though ASARO uses subversive art to question power and politics, looking at their speech acts is a way to address

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CDA scholars have common tendencies in their work; two of which are foci on social problems and “weighing in politically on the side of the underdog for progressive interests” (Tracy et al. 2011 p 245)

different levels of agency and contrapuntuality in addition to their marks left in public spaces. These speech acts can further inform their artistic production and *sacar le jugo*, which is literally “get the juice out of it” meaning to get the most out of their art and their existence as outspoken voices. This analysis pairs *what* these artists are communicating with *how* they imagine these messages are interacting in the community. In order to frame and examine what these artists are saying I also employ what is called in communication a crucial ethnography of communication.

Covarrubias (2008) and Huspek (1991) have demonstrated that power within discourse can be studied when ethnographic data in a study reveal itself. “Power is accounted for when its hearing is made inspectable by speech community themselves.” (Covarrubias, 2009 p 923) This approach addresses critiques of critical approaches that “claims must be made on the basis of what matters to and is oriented to participants ” (*ibid*, 260) while accounting for power created through employment of language. (Tracy *et al.*, 2008 p) I will examine how ASARO producers define “*Arte Pal Pueblo*” or “Art for the people”. Using EOC techniques I analyze the speech acts and also the “social activity” (Juncosa. 2005 p 16) in which the speech is produced. This social activity paired with Dell Hymes framework (1974) of being within a speech community to be able describe a) the physical and emotional settings, b) participants, c) functions of speech such as purpose and outcomes, d) the order in which things are said e) the emotion or spirit behind the speech e) linguistic varieties, f) modes and norms of speech and g) genres or types of speech (*ibid* p. 14) in order to generate a thick description (Geertz, 1973). These thick descriptions enable a researcher to understand what ASARO’s speech and their contexts of what is happening when they are talking (Emerson *et al* 2011 p 16). I believe that finding out what *Arte Pal Pueblo* means to them is a key construct which allows me to examine how ASARO envisions itself and its work in the community. Phillipsen, Coutu, and Covarrubias have stated

that “the analyst uses what she or he has noticed in order to construct a hypothesis as to the existence and nature of a system of resources that these participants use.” (57, 2005) Therefore by examining a single detection of ASARO’s spoken and written expression – which I believe is central to expressing how what they do – I am afforded the opportunity to be able to examine how ASARO talks about getting up in their community.

I must reveal my own positionality and orientation in order to address the limits of my analysis of what ASARO’s speech “means to them”. What is familiar to me are the space or spaces impressed upon my own body, which is my instrument of research (Ahmed, 2006 p 7). I am a Mexican and also citizen of the United States, my first language is Spanish. I also have been a member in the different Mexican and American countercultures such as local hip hop and Latino youth communities in the Southwest United States as well as a graffiti artist. Parallel counterculture movements have existed and continue to prosper in youth settings in Oaxaca. Many of the ASARO members are near my same age and are mostly male. These are my familiarities that position me “from the inside” (Covarrubias and Baillet, 2009 p 257) while simultaneously being on the outside in order to achieve a perspective that balances the line between emic and etic. For example, in the interviews words like “*pegas*”, “*a huevo*” and “*banda*” were used and I was able to understand their meanings past their literal definitions of “sticking”, “to egg”, and “band” to understand “a type of graffiti that is adhered to walls using wheat paste”, “by any means possible”, and “a group of friends”. This is not to say there is one universal code employed but rather individuals use various codes in this speech community which I have the ability to understand.

Before I went to do ethnographic field work, I had worked archiving ASARO’s prints at the Center for Southwest Research for 3 years. I spent a lot of time looking at ASARO’s Myspace,

Facebook and BlogSpot profiles in order to complete research in order to curate an exhibition of ASARO's work at the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I had called and emailed and was able to work with them, albeit long distance. In November 2012 I visited ASARO in the Espacio Zapata in Oaxaca de Juárez, in order to work with ASARO members on our collaborative exhibition. Finally, when I arrived in July of 2013 to do this research I had already been working with ASARO. Even though I was only there doing participant observation and interviews for three weeks, my position as an outsider working with the group gave me a vantage point to understand a lot in my short time with them. Additionally, many members of ASARO are people I consider friends and people I admire and keep in touch with on a weekly basis. Though the Ethnography of Communication requires more time than three weeks to establish relationships of trust, my positionality allowed me to make the most out of my resources.

Participant observation allowed me to get a feel of the space in Espacio Zapata and how ASARO connects with its community. In my two and half weeks of being in the space and spending time with members along with their friends and visitors, I noticed that the art or politics were not talked about much. I feel as if the art and the space itself was pretext to connect with the community. Many were there to grab something to eat together, drink beer, tell jokes and talk *mitoteos*¹⁸ and interpersonal business matters. Though these on goings are not the focus of this research it illustrates that "*Arte Pal Pueblo*" is situated in ordinary situations where highly

¹⁸ *Mitoteo* comes from the Aztec word *mitotiqui* for "dancer". In modern times this work means to talk or talk about someone or in other words gossip. In Mexican and Hispanic US communities *mitote* is a tradition where people gather informally to speak about others current affairs and news. I believe it is a way for individuals to stay in touch with the happenings in the community.

politicized speech acts are not typically prevalent. Espacio Zapata fosters a common understanding where more pressing matters to implementing are vocalized.

Rana: “¿Entonces qué, me vas a hacer ese paro con las latas?”

(“Are you going to make me a deal regarding the [spray paint] cans?”)

Yescka: “¿Qué colores quieres?”

(“What colors do you want?”)

Rana: “Vamos a ver cuales tienes.”

(“Let’s go see what you have.”)

ASARO established their goals seven years ago. These goals are normalized and not easily visible most of the time within speech acts. Raymond Williams (1958) notes that it is an oversimplification for scholars to look at the most visible meanings of culture because “culture is ordinary”. Like any other speech community, ASARO’s goals are not always present within their conversations. A *taquero* will not usually talk about how tacos are delicious in conversation though it is his or her job to make them every day, just as Oaxacan revolutionary artists do not talk about art for the people *ad nauseum*. In order to extract these invisible understandings that are part of the art rather than the speech acts, I am using interviews as the main source of data informing how ASARO talks about “*Arte Pal Pueblo*”. This does not cast aside importance of participant observation. As a Mexicano-Chicano, I understand that spending time with someone can build *confianza* which drives me to be ethical as researcher. Also I consider many ASARO members to be friends of mine. We spent a lot of time getting to know each other is the two and a half weeks I was there. Their friendship and *confianza* comes first.

There are limitations to this study which I must disclose. Firstly, the EOC requires prolonged contact with the community in order to really access what their activities mean to

¹⁹ Confianza is defined by Covarrubias as “a blend of trust in self, trust in another person, familiarity, confidentiality and hope.” (2002 p 42)

them. Two and a half weeks is not sufficient amount of time to see community interaction, even staying in these spaces for 12-15 hours a day! Though ASARO and I did work together on our Albuquerque exhibition and catalogue, this work was done over Skype, Facebook and email. This is important because it demonstrates that ASARO works with international communities. However for this thesis I am focused with how they view their engagement with their *pueblo*. If I am working under the assumption that knowledge is constructed by communicative acts than I place my personal view of ASARO upon them. My work with UNM and the NHCC in Albuquerque positions their construction of *Pueblo* in an international and pan-American context it is something they might or might not have importance *to them*. I see them in this context within their global communication where many just try to focus on their local participation with Oaxacan society. Also, the EOC and employment of speech codes theory requires that researchers spend a long time with participants and create a hypothesis around a specific communicative phenomena after conducting interviews. While the scholar makes his observations she/he, is constantly checking and rechecking these what participants meant when something they said struck the scholar as important to see if it significant in the meaning making process of communication (Phillipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005). Indeed, I did not spend a lot of time with all group members and did not built that sense of trust among many of the *compañeros* (group members) because of my own and their limited time. I try to work with these limitations the best that I can. Using ASARO's manifesto (2011) under their Bio on their website, I looked at terms that were recurring. The most recurring words that caught my attention were "*pueblo*" and "*nuestro pueblo*". In their manifesto (*ibid*) at the bottom of the page, the words "ARTE DEL PUEBLO Y PARA EL PUEBLO" in all capital letters caught my attention. Using this articulate bio and manifesto, I decided to ask questions that were inspired by these

digital documents. Though I did not spend time in order to find key words in how ASARO expresses what they do, I found documents created collaboratively that unites all these producers. These documents were indispensable to carrying out a fruitful investigation. Though I carried out this ethnography of communication in a manner that is uncommon, the fact that ASARO had already articulated their mission made it possible to access their ways of communicating about themselves.

Selection of Images / Sampling

For the selection of images, I began to work with the ASARO archive at the Center for Southwest Research (CSWR) at Zimmerman Library at the University of New Mexico in 2010. During my archival work cataloguing these images for the CSWR and their site econtent.unm.edu. I spent a lot of time getting to know the collection. This collection includes around 170 prints and stencils created by ASARO. In 2011 seeing that these works were kept in cabinets away from the public eye, I proposed an exhibition of this work at the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico to which director of visual arts Tey Marianna Nun agreed. I coded the images for recurring themes. Looking to the *Latin American Poster* exhibition catalogue for guidance, edited by Russ Davidson, which includes a diverse corpus of data, I created themes that I believed echoed general themes in ASARO's work. The themes include: historic events and collective action, natural resources to defend, icons, importance of women, human rights, immigration and labor issues. These terms are fluid and one image can simultaneously be part of several categories. This demonstrates that all these categories are interrelated and as such show that they are all in dialogue with the bigger picture of experiences in Oaxaca, Mexico and abroad. In this thesis, I use a systematic sampling as defined by Rose (89, 2012) that analyzes an example from each aforementioned subgroup. The intention of this

analysis in not to analyze all of ASARO's work but to look at a few samples in order to assess resistance in the co-construction of meaning in ASARO's work. As stated before, ASARO is comprised of a different individuals who express a wide range of personal opinions united by their goals to communicate so...?.

Collection of visual data

A large part of the corpus of visual data includes the prints that belong to the Center for South West Research. Many other images include those that are shared on their website, and ASARO and Espacio Zapata's public Facebook profiles. These images show much more of ASARO's street art that is actually placed within the street. These internet resources provide an archive of the collective's work throughout the past 8 years. Though the sampling categories were created to place the CSWR collection into subgroups, these categories still hold true within ASARO's production of street art that are depicted in photographs. What is not included within this data set are sanctioned murals and *tapetes*, or traditional Day of the Dead sand and flower petal "paintings". These are not included in the corpus of data because their large format on the ground in the case of *tapetes*, and in large scale on walls in the case of murals makes it difficult to document in their entirety and it is difficult to discern what the forms represent on a digital photograph. Though these formats do fit within the categories I have created, and are legible to those who can physically see them firsthand, the documentation of these productions cannot replicate their entirety.

Theoretical Framework

I use the term discourse as set out by Foucault that discourses (what people communicate) and knowledge (what people think as truth) and power (the ability to produce

discourse and associated knowledge) are intertwined. Knowledge is produced by people and is not innately a “natural” consequence (Foucault, 1984). Edward Said supports a notion that these constructions of knowledges or discourses, “create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe.” (Said, 1979 p 94). “Truth” is created by those that control discourse. Foucault acknowledges that those who control the discourse create the preferred meanings. However interpretation at all levels of society gives individuals the agency to construct their own truths. Power pushes or pulls on an individual to think or behave in a way. Much like atomic particles that are never at a standstill, power moves individuals in small ways and big ways. Not in a straight line from people higher on the hierarchy power works in a three dimensional space. This lies at the heart of postmodernism and assumes that agents can and do create their own truths and knowledges. In doing so, it eliminates the dichotomies between top / bottom, high / low, colonizers / colonized, and actor/ spectator. I argue that ASARO plays with this idea that there is not an inherent truth in order to challenge the idea that only official dominant structures are producers of truth. An ASARO member comments:

“Cuando se trabaja en colectivo estas en la mentalidad de que trabajan otras personas y que no va ser llegar y poner tus ideas. Todos tenemos propios modos de ver el asunto²⁰”

Arenas notes that while the events of 2006 in Oaxaca produced a political social ambivalence at the same time that it produced collective subjects that responded en masse to the tensions inflicted by the PRI and capitalist enterprises that still have resonance today (2011). I argue that ASARO taps into this collective subjectivity which is visible within reconstructed

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“When you work in a collective, you are in the mindset that other people are working [too] and it’s not going to be about coming and imposing your ideas. We all have our own ways of seeing it.”

discourses through the use of resistant meanings. Here discourses and truths are various and polyvoiced and can be expressed and be visible within the collective's communication.

Resistance is not a substitution of one role in society for another but a change in the meanings within knowledge. Stuart Hall contends that resistance happens when there exists “the disarticulation and rearticulation of different ideological accentings within the same sign” (1996, 294). A sign, let us take the image of Emiliano Zapata, can have many meanings. In his original essence he was a general within the Mexican revolution fighting for the freedom of *campesinos* to be able to control the land they farm. After the revolution ended the state, institutionalizing the revolution in to a monolithic political party, adopted that sign of what Zapata was. Hall explains that a meaning to that sign cannot be completely fixed. Hall cites Vilosinov to explain that the meaning of a sign can become an object or an allegory (195, *Ibid*). This is a disarticulation of Zapata as a sign for “*campesino* autonomy in the state of Guerrero” and given a new meaning or a accenting to show that Zapata fought for this “revolutionary” state currently in power. National currency, monuments, murals, street names and metro stations are all examples of this reaccenting in action. What is notable is that it is the same sign only the meaning attributed to this sign has changed. A similar transition can be seen with the meanings attributed to the swastika symbol. It meant many things before World War II, now its meanings or accentings now refer to Nazis and fascism. Since meanings attributed to symbols are always in flux, ASARO uses these accenting's to change or reinvigorate an image.. An ASARO member, recalls this sentiment when talking about their work. “The trick is changing the context and transforming it into something else. You don't change the natural state of the thing, but you change the context in which it is framed” (ASARO, Graham de la Rosa, Schadl, 18 2014) Going back to the sign of Zapata, ASARO takes the meaning or accenting from the state in mind with

its original significance and applies it to Oaxacan struggle and experience. If a stencil of Zapata is spray-painted illegally, that Zapata also used by the state is being used against the state in a resistant form. Also I would like to extend the definition of accenting for looking at ASARO's work. Though Hall thought of resistance in changing the meaning of a sign though an accenting where it was the meaning behind the sign that changed, I also believe that the sign can be altered in order to create a different and resistant meanings. By tweaking an image, new meanings are created that can respond to a dominant accenting of a sign. Here accenting can be the change of meanings of a sign, or a altering of the sign in order to express an alternative meaning. In Hip Hop music and art the term "sampling" is used to refer to an intertextuality citation. Sampling allows artists to work with a preexisting form and alter it in order to expand and create new and resistant meanings.

Benedict Anderson stressed that people imagined they were essentially connected (2010). Within these imaginings of a united peoples, many members might not know all of the members of their community, but through their imagination they coalesce. Anderson notes how this happens at a national level. Indeed when the US president uses "My fellow Americans" to address the nation there is an imagined community at play. This can happen at a macro level (such as a nation) but play at a micro level as well (such as an imagining of their *pueblo* by a local entity). Individuals can also collectively connect based on shared visions, experiences, and/or societal goals.

Habermas, Lennox, and Lennox (1974) describe the coalition of private individuals into a public body that, up until the popular movements of the 18th and 19th century, served as a social contract between the bourgeoisie and the common people. Indeed, Gramsci's concept of hegemony is upheld in society through a combination of force and consent. (Barker, 2003 p 503).

However, Habermas Lennox, and Lennox (*ibid*) contend that the creation of the Social Welfare State in the 19th and 20th centuries, expanded the public body beyond the limitations of the bourgeoisie which allows other agents to redefine their own terms and consent to hegemony at the same time state and capitalistic structures continue to struggle to assert themselves into their traditional roles as the *only* or *most powerful* public body. Stroud paraphrases Habermas's "ideal public sphere" one that "engages freely in a rational-critical debate over vital political issues of the day, and such an ideal can be thwarted by the presence of money, staged politics and manipulative endeavors." (148, 2012) This struggle for who is included in the public sphere is explicit within the Oaxaca 2006 Movements and the art that ASARO produces. The very instance of the local and federal government using violence against the APPO that was in the process of forging proposal for self-governance based on assembly and collective decision making (Ramírez, 246) shows how the two opposing structures vied for control of the public sphere. ASARO asserts itself as a participant of that public sphere.

Methods and other considerations

I employ a CDA framework and methods to look at images produced by ASARO. Fairclough's three interrelated dimensions of discourse include text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation), and social analysis (explanation) (Janks, 1997, p. 329). This approach is useful because it allows the researcher to take the signifiers (images and text) and arrive at a socio-historical context in which the signifiers are created as well as document power. Since I am looking at how *interdiscursivity* and *contrapuntuality* as represented in the visual communication, it is also important to examine the dominant discourses and events in order to arrive at the social analysis. However, these are brought in minimally as this project privileges the counter and resistant discourses by ASARO's art. For a person who lives or has spent an

extended amount of time in Mexico, it is hard not to notice the dominant discourse of advertisements and state representation in rural, urban and even domestic spaces. Invading homes, work and schools, these dominant texts pretend to erase the reality of life in Mexico by privileging only ideal representations of Mexican society. These texts are brought in to illuminate discursive conversations and not a re-presentation of them.

I am also using methods of looking at art as proposed by Barnet in *A Short Guide to Writing About Art* (1981), which outlines ways that form and content are interdependent and create the meanings in the art. It also includes how the analyst's individual perspective and reaction is an important aspect of finding and echoing meanings in the images. As people exist within their corporeal and psychological limitations, it is important also to address that the analyst uses her/ his own body as an instrument of investigation.

Rose proposes that semiology, the study of signs, is a way of "taking the image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning." In ASARO's work, an effective way for representing something is to use a visual sign to represent it. As an example, ASARO uses Animals at times to represent certain people. The use of a Vulture for example alludes to a scavenger and a bird that is attracted to death. Many bats are used when describing capitalist exploitation because bats have the popular association of being blood drinkers and parasites that survive off of living beings. Taking these images apart to look at how they are seen in a social contexts allow the researcher to examine meanings behind that sign. Saussure proposes that a sign is a basic unit of language that has a form and an internal meaning attached to that form whether is it visual, aural, or in the case of braille, physical feeling. In the analysis, I examine how one of the characteristics ASARO provides for *Arte Pal Pueblo* is that the art is legible. Therefore, signs have meanings which can be read. Roland Barthes (1957) in *Mythologies* notes,

“Human culture is made. Each sign with stands for something other than itself, and the people inhabiting culture busy themselves making sense of those signs.” (Bal and Bryson 174, 1991) As an Exercise of meaning making, we must also understand how metaphors are at play within visual and spoken languages. Lakoff and Johnson maintained that some metaphors are used to make sense of our experiences in terms of objects. (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p.25) At times, ASARO employs the use of a dog to portray police officers. A dog follows his master’s orders and is blindly follows commands in return for food and shelter. They are also not human and incapable of understanding human emotion. These communicative systems that include signs, metaphors allow ASARO communicate in visual and spoken ways. Understanding that these systems are in play I examine and deconstruct these meanings along with Faircloughs 3 modes of interpretation in order to examine the data.

On Translation

When translating – much like reading an image or examining a vocal statement – one’s own contact with the language will change from each individual. Villa notes that there as is a “standard” version of language but that there is no quotidian use. (Villa, 1996) When I was doing interviews, the members of ASARO (all of which I had familiar relations) did not speak to me in a standard Spanish. Rather they spoke in familiar tones with their own personal rhetoric that represents a way that young people talk in Mexico. For example, right away at meeting them we were familiar pronoun terms such as the *tú* form of speaking to each other. Also I was on *güey* terms meaning we would often call each other by the term “güey” which is a term used by youth in order to express trust and equality. I am young and grew up my whole life around this type of familiar language with my family here and in Mexico. When translating the words from Spanish in this thesis, I attempted to capture the essence of meaning rather that the literal meanings. In

cases where metaphor was used I kept these literal translations. This can be tricky to try to try to convey the essence while preserving some of the original vocabulary. I believe I translated to the best of my ability as a native English and Spanish speaker. However, I keep the statements of ASARO and community members in their original state and it is those utterances in Spanish that I am analyzing. The translations are provided for those who do not read fluently in Spanish in order to understand the analysis. I believe my English translations are adequate for that function. At the same time, my analyses takes into account these original statements in order to find meanings.

CHAPTER 4 – ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter I examine the categories within ASARO's definition of *Arte Pal Pueblo*. Firstly, the words *Arte*, *Pal*, and *Pueblo* are examined to see how these words are defined. Afterwards, characteristics of how *Arte Pal Pueblo* gets up are examined by looking at how ASARO and Oaxaca community members talk about ASARO's work. The characteristics of getting up of *Arte Pal Pueblo* were coded and fell within these categories: interactive, transformative, accessible. I also received information about what it does: these were coded as *Arte Pal Pueblo* communicates the *pueblo's* reality and inspires change. These categories of how ASARO talks about their works comes from the questions associated about what they do and how they do it. Later I explain how these actions of getting up are designed to inspire change within the construct of *pueblo*. Intertwined with these definitions categories and goals of getting up, I provide discursive analysis of the different categories of their visual repertoire that I have coded in the data set of visual images. These include: 1) historical events and collective action, 2) iconography, 3) Mexico's natural resources, 4) human rights issues 5) women in struggle and 6) border issues. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, these categories are fluid and bleed

into each other. Notable examples are women and human rights issues which are present in all groups. These categories allow us to see many of the “big picture” arguments that ASARO is addressing. While these issues might be framed at the local level, a global level, or both simultaneously, they were patterns that formed when I looked at ASARO’s work. As noted before these issues and visual conversations are part of a larger multispective of discussion of Mexico’s economic and political governance. These discussions with the definitions, characteristics and goals of *Arte Pal Pueblo* illustrate how the way ASARO talks about its art and the conversations within the visual communication are resistant and provide alternative ways we can think of art, communication, and the end result of all of this, social change.

Defining *Pueblo*

“Es interesante escuchar como los turistas que se quejan del pueblo. Como el otro día que unos que estaban aquí se quejaban de que todos en la calenda se estaban aprovechando de todo [los dulces, frutas, artesanías y el mezcal] que daban gratis. Que había unos que empezaron a pelear. No están acostumbrados a ver eso. Pero para mí eso lo hace *más* divertido. Porque para mí, así es nuestro pueblo. Yo no digo ‘no deben hacer eso’. Así se ponen las fiestas, es la tradición que hemos tenido por siglos y siglos. ¿no?”²¹ (Yescka, June 2013)

The word *pueblo* has had a long history even before ASARO used it to describe who they make their art for. In order to understand how ASARO defines *Arte Pal Pueblo*, it is important to examine *Pueblo*. *Pueblo* is a word that connotes a sense solidarity in all of its meanings. In English it is clumsily translated as “the people” but can also mean “community”, “town”, “city”, “nation”, “indigenous people”, or “sovereign entity”. Before Spanish contact, the indigenous Nahuatl word *Altepetl* and Mixteca word *Ñuu* were used to express ethnically or locally based political entity. (Lockhart, 1992; Kowalewski *et al.*, 2009) Lockhart notes that these political entities could be independent, part of a larger confederacy or tributes to another larger political

²¹ “It’s interesting to hear how tourists complain about the pueblo. Like the other day that some that were here were complaining that everybody at the calenda was taking advantage of getting candy and mezcal that they gave away for free. That some had begun to fight. They are not used to seeing that but for me it makes it more fun. Because for me, that’s our pueblo. I don’t say ‘you shouldn’t do that’. That’s how the parties are, it’s the tradition we have had for centuries. Right?”

entity. Lockhart notes that the Spanish upon arrival called these political entities of *Altepel* and *Ñuu* as “*pueblos*”. It was later used in colonial New Spain at the dawn of Mexican independence, it designated towns and cities that expressed solidarity with the independence movement and has been used since to mean more than its original Spanish signifier of “town” (Restrepo Mejia, 2004). Here its early usage is encoded with connotations of indigeneity, solidarity and independence. It can have different connotations depending on its context but there is always an agent that constructs its meaning and reality. A person using the word *pueblo* is engaging in a process of imagining their community whether it is in microcontext a local or regional distinction or in a macro context of national or international context. For example, state sponsored muralist Diego Rivera created the Anahuacalli Museum in Mexico City with his stated purpose, “Devuelvo al pueblo lo que de la herencia artística de sus ancestros pude rescatar”²² (Museo Anahuacalli) This museum houses thousands of years of precolombian art. The *pueblo* is in this case, all people who have indigenous Mexican ancestry. Compared to what Yescka of ASARO says, the *pueblo* in Diego Riveras statement cuts across ethnicities to present a museums that is pan – indigenous whereas Yescka’s example is centered locally. However both are considered *pueblo*. In Yescka’s use of *pueblo* above he defines it as those who are not tourists, who have traditionally celebrated *calendas* or street celebrations for a long time. Solidarity with the *pueblo* by the speaker is evident by the use of “*nuestro*” or “our”. When “*Arte Pal Pueblo*” is brought up in the conversation during an interview, the definitions of *pueblo* are employed for different scopes of imagining a community at the same time that it is a word that in all its forms works to unite people together under the same term. In Yescka’s quote, a dichotomy is created where ASARO sets up boundaries between us – the *pueblo* and them –

²² “I return to the pueblo all the artistic heritage of their ancestors that I could rescue.”

those who abuse the *pueblo*. Much like the barricades that separated the 2006 Movement's supporters from the state entities, both words and images create boundaries between who "we" are and who "they" are. These distinctions of who is and who is not *pueblo* can be very explicit:

Rita: "No nos dirigimos nuestro trabajo a los ricos. Ellos explotan a la gente. Al fin de cuenta es esencial comunicar con nuestro pueblo: los pueblos marginados y la gente en las calles que mueve las cosas."

Marcos: ²³ "Pueblo' decimos excluyendo al rico, al poderoso pues. Cuando decimos pueblo, decimos al pueblo trabajador pues, al campesino, al obrero, al ama de casa, digamos, al estudiante, proletario etc."

²⁴ Here the dominant classes are excluded from the definition of *pueblo*. In Rita's example, she refers to the dominated as those who are on the periphery and not the center of power. There is another problem with translation of "*la gente que mueve las cosas*". Literally it means "the people who move things" but could also contain the metaphor or Spanish idiom for "making things happen" ²⁵ in the streets. There are people in Oaxaca who carry their businesses to and from work every day. Many have bikes with grills attached, others carry their wares on the street to sell. Other people carry fruit, grasshoppers, and large tortillas called *tlayudas* in baskets on their heads to sell to hungry passersby. ASARO even sells their art in a *tianguis* at the Plaza Carmen. ASARO members carry the prints in stacks along with metal grates to stand up and hang work and shirts on clothes pins. To say the people that move things implies both people who move

²³

"We do not devote our work to the rich. They exploit people. To sum it up, it is essential to communicate with our pueblo, marginalized peoples and people in the streets that move things."

²⁴ "We say 'pueblo' excluding the rich, or the powerful. When we say pueblo, we're talking about the worker, the peasant, the laborer, the housewife, we're talking about the student, the proletarian etc."

²⁵

Before the sun rises every day in and around Oaxaca and nearby urban centers, stalls, stands, carts, and blankets are set up along sidewalks, plazas, churches and roads. Lugged on carts, wheel barrels, and on human backs. Most of these street merchants and artisans make a daily trip on foot or if their load is small enough they can travel by bus. Selling their wares to passerby to make a living, they remain until well after sunset when everything is packed and taken back to their houses. When Rita talks about the people that move things she could be referring to the people who literally move things day in and day out.

society forward and the people who physically move things around the city of Oaxaca thus moving a local economy. This is very distinct from people who don't move things. Those people who work in the hotels, offices, banks and schools do not move a lot besides themselves. The poor however who make their business on the streets are burdened by the daily load. This could also be seen as an acknowledgement of the people who might be seen and an inanimate fixture on the urban landscape of Oaxaca de Juárez's hustle and bustle. Instead of framing people as objects that are unmoving, Rita animates and appreciates them for their hard work everyday.

Marcos references Marxist ideology by creating a dichotomy of the rich and *el trabajador* (the worker), *el obrador* (the laborer), and *proletario* (proletarian). From a Marxist perspective, the rural and working classes within a capitalist system are exploited for their work while capitalists become rich which echoes both Marcos's and Rita's utterances. Also from a Marxist perspective, people become objectified and lose their humanness as they are bought and sold for their labor. The idea that the power of the masses, the people, the communities outnumber the capitalists in charge of industry and agriculture has been echoed in Mexico by Ricardo Flores Magon's *Regeneracion* in the 1900s, and can be seen in the US with the "We are the 99%" slogan. Marcos's discourse constructs his relation within the *pueblo*. He excludes the rich and mentioning workers, he places himself in sovereignty with the working class using economical these indexes such as wage laborers and farm workers. ASARO situates *pueblo* within defined a distinction of class. It is by knowing and meeting Marcos that I understand his involvement in the community. He is involved in many grassroots organizations. Almost every day, I would find him working on large scale banners and print murals for various organizations as well as printing many of ASARO's prints. I understand his speech in connection to his active involvement in community development outside of just creating conscious art. This lived

experience of getting to know Marcos provides insight that shows he is really aligning himself laterally with other poor and working class community members. His is not doing so just to create solidarity, he is part of the *pueblo*. Many days after spending time in Espacio Zapata, I would see Marcos sitting after his work was done red eyed and his hands covered in paint sitting quietly in a relaxed and pensive state, engaged with his family members, or joking around with the *camaradas* in Espacio Zapata. Marcos in every sense embodies the hard worker that expends his energy both physically making prints every day and mentally by thinking of how to engage within social art.

Marcos's depiction of pueblo also captures a diverse group of people from students, to stay at home parents, from wage laborers to farm workers. For me this creates a sense of heterogeneity. That the *pueblo* is not only one type of person but all of these people that make their lives in different ways. Though Marxism in its original manifestos mostly depicted male wage workers, Marcos's definition of *pueblo* captures the diversity of Oaxaca de Juárez's people who are not rich. On my way to Espacio Zapata I had the funds to be able to take taxis every day. Rather I chose to walk to see the Oaxaca de Juárez's people. Much goes on the small colonial sidewalks. Families, students, workers, businessmen, pass by tightly packed businesses that have displays pouring out of their shops and into the streets. Though Oaxaca de Juárez is a relatively small city, the amount of activity within the streets makes it feel larger than life. The *pueblo* is present here every day in droves and crowds. Even taking a casual stroll through Oaxaca in its Centro Historico is a hectic experience for those not accustomed to the heavy presence of people moving. Step one foot onto the street and there is no imagining of the *pueblo* because they are there at your door stop.

Images of Community Action and Historical Events

Figure 4 shows *Oaxaca Libre, Zapata Vive* which I have placed in historic events and collective action category. In this category there are many depictions of both historical events such as those that shook Oaxaca in 2006. Simultaneously, many of these prints place historical events with the theme of collective action. Sometimes only the event is depicted and at times only the theme of collective action is shown. I see collective action prints as a call to arms for the *pueblo* to unite and to make their voices heard. When ASARO depicts crowds, they are strong defiant people marching in the streets to remind the *pueblo* of the amount of strength they have and can exercise. The old union metaphor of being able to break a single stick easily but not a bundle applies visually in this category. In Figure 4 the difference between the *pueblo* and the state is literally black and white. On the left side of the image white figures raise their fists. The print also shows figures in crowded space by depicting a perspective that shows the sheer multitude of people in this small print. On the right side in black, which is the color that local and federal police wear, a smaller crowd of riot police with large shields face the approaching crowd. Unlike the crowd which exhibit faces and moving forward stances, the police are faceless and almost robotic in their uniform static appearance. In the foreground with the police stands a depiction of a satanic satyr with the iconic face of corrupt Governor Ulises Ruíz Ortíz standing on a coffin marked PRI. The demonic satyr with berserk wide open eyes holds a shot gun with the initials of the Federal Preventative Police: PFP. The interpretation of this image shows a dichotomy of the *pueblo* and the state and the chasm between the two. On the side of the *pueblo* that is nonviolently protesting is shown in white. Hugo in *Teaching Rebellion* (2008) states that during the protest, state media had depicted the movement as being comprised of armed and violent guerrillas. To show their innocence of violence, many painted their hands white and

raised their open hands in front of the troops and said “look, here are our arms, here are the guerrillas” (166). Another dichotomy created is between human and non-human entities. Here the *pueblo* is actually shown as people or human beings whereas the police and the state are shown as non-human entities. They seem as they are robots or clones that are mass produced in a fascist uniformity. Lastly the dichotomy of violence/non-violence and evil/good is established within the print. The colors serve to establish difference and the dichotomy, the white is pure innocent and nonviolent human beings while the black is evil, subhuman, demonic, and violent.

In both the spoken and visual samples defining *pueblo*, there is resistance at play. By changing the meanings of what it means to be *pueblo* from the state definition that includes all Mestizos in the Mexican nation, ASARO places a counter accentuation in the meaning of *pueblo* within the poor, working class and/ or working classes. Those that are rich, exploit people, use violence, use force to create order are not *pueblo*. They are in this case the other. This othering of the state and the rich is also present in their manifesto.

“The assembly of revolutionary artists arises from the need to reject and transcend authoritarian forms of governance and institutional culture and societal structures which have been characterized as discriminatory and dehumanizing for seeking to impose a single version of reality and morality or simulacrum.” (ASARO, 2011)

For ASARO the definition of *Pueblo* includes the working, exploited and marginalized people instead of Pueblo’s literal original Spanish colonial meaning of town or township. Here however, the limits of “pueblo” are not confined geographically to Oaxaca. While doing fieldwork, I heard “*pueblo de Oaxaca*,” and “*pueblos de los Estados Unidos*” so *pueblo* with *de* signifies specificity. The piece, *Somos Pueblo* (Figure 5), states we are all *pueblo* superimposed upon a mostly black woodblock print. What looks like squares actually depicts an image of Oaxaca’s Centro Historico. A dotted outline that is barely visible shows the Central and South American landmasses. Showing these super imposed maps exhibits a glocal (global + local)

quality. It establishes the *pueblo* as Oaxacan and people of the Americas. The idea of space and who it belongs to is questioned here. It does not say “*Es de los Ricos*”. Here the community is imposed upon the space. Making a claim to the cartographic representation on the print, ASARO does not ask if you belong, it states the spectator is part of this place. For those who see the map and immediately recognize the shape and layout of the map on the image potentially has more impact than for a spectator that sees merely black squares or a white net. A person that sees this print knows the space intimately. It could be a space where their grandmother took them to buy a school uniform when they were four, a place someone received their first kiss, a place they got tear gassed by the police, a place where someone works, someone’s church, or a place to dance with friends on Friday night. Seeing this everyday place that connects so many people laced with a sense of political responsibility is powerful. It might make a connection to someone and they might say, “yeah, that’s my town, those black squares are our *pueblo*.” Here Habermas’s ideal public sphere is actually imposed upon the space of Oaxaca and Latin America. As examined before, Habermas outlined how a public sphere evolved as nations became welfare states. Instead of being a place where the rich or the powerful communicated with leaders, it became spaces that everybody used and where government and society was discussed by all members of a society. Here in this picture the actual space of the map is claimed by the Pueblo. Henri Lefebvre proposed described the 19th century renovation of urban spaces to include places where all walks of life could gather and see each other and that collective power in these physical spaces could effectively transform society for the better. (Harvey, 2008). Perhaps it is political claim to ASARO’s home. This image can be put into conversation of rapper Mos Def’s definition of a home.

“Home: a place where someone lives, a residence, the physical structure within which one lives, such as a house, a dwelling place with the social unit that occupies it, a household, an

environment offering security and happiness, a valued place, a native habitat, a place where something is discovered, founded, developed or promoted, a source, a headquarters, a home-base, of or relating to a team's place of origin, on or into the point at which something is directed to the center or the heart." (Mos Def, 1999)

As a place of home there is a personal connection to the pattern. Oaxaca de Juárez has also been a cultural and economic capital of the region for thousands of years in its various manifestations. As well as being a depiction of map, it illustrates how Oaxaca's Centro Historico as the heart of a simultaneous Oaxacan and Latin American body. Looking to Rita's quote about the people that move things, the lines in this image also shows the *pueblo* as the life blood of arterial movement needed for this society to be alive. In this sense the words *Todos Somos Pueblos* enlivens an otherwise portrayal of black squares as an active space of Oaxacans home. It is also the space where the 2006 Social Movements occurred. During 2006 this map became a place for *pueblo* unification and action.

All of Latin America is shown in this print. It is almost subliminal in effect and cannot be seen within reproductions. In person, the pop of the black is impressive but this small detail of the Latin American landmass and Carribean adds a lot of information. ASARO is claiming Oaxacan solidarity with the *pueblos* of the continents including the similar notion of *povo* in Brazil. This print is similar to Calle 13's "Latinoamérica" (2010) which has lyrics describing a Pan Latin American experience. This lyric echoes much of the degree of sharing a common Latin American experience of being the left overs of what foreign colonialism and capitalism has left. It shows solidarity for sharing and the motivation to stand united to reconstruct what left.

"Soy lo que dejaron. Soy toda la sobra de lo que se robaron... Aquí se comparte, lo mio es tuyo. Este pueblo no se ahoga con marullos. Y si se derrumba, yo lo reconstruyo."²⁶

²⁶

I am what is left. I am all the leftovers that that were stolen. Here we share. What is mine is yours. This *pueblo* doesn't drown in the waves. And if it falls apart, I will reconstruct it.

ASARO situates itself in a local and a hemispheric level. Their struggles and their *pueblo* is not isolated but part of a much bigger picture. José Martí who was a Cuban revolutionary philosopher, poet and essayist in the 19th century proposed a unification of Latin America against US imperialism and world elites. His echoes are evident in ASARO's print. I chose the category collective action because it is vague enough to include a print depicting a local protest or a hemispheric unification of *pueblo*. This particular ASARO artist sees their world as part of a bigger place and also understand that even though Oaxaca might be marginalized in its own nation by its own government, it is no less important.

¿Qué es el Arte?

When I talked to ASARO about their art, there was a sense of criticism of what high class society might call fine art. In these interviews I asked what art was for them and these criticisms arose. In order to describe what *Arte Pal Pueblo* was they had to create a dichotomy categorizing what dominant and rich society called art in order to give context of what ASARO wanted to do. The clash between what an art should do can be traced back to the post revolutionary era (1920s) to Mexico's Golden age (1950s) and beyond. What is interesting is that ASARO, (many coming from UABJO's *Bellas Artes*) might have already studied these dialogues in Mexican art. ASARO also gives insight into how the Mexican government influences Mexican and Oaxacan artists (and vice versa).

Oaxacan Artists such as modern Mexican artists Rufino Tamayo and Fransisco Toledo are from Oaxaca and have put Oaxaca on the art radar. Their styles are regarded as some "of the greatest colorists of the 20th century" (Sothebys.com). Their use of modern expressions of cubism, futurism and geometric abstractions are not readily legible or understood for someone

who does not study or collect art. That is not to indicate that they cannot be appreciated as such. Recently, Tamayo's most important mural *America*, was auctioned off to a private collector for almost US\$7 million (Associated Press, 2008). In Oaxaca, hundreds of galleries compete against one another, and popular art and crafts are sold on the street by vendors working in stands side by side. Here art is sold for private consumption. Though places like the *Instituto de Artes Graficas de Oaxaca* (IAGO) and the *Museo de Arte Contemporanea de Oaxaca* (MACO) are free students every day and free for the general public on Sundays, most art in the Historic *Centro* has a price tag on it. Though ASARO art is also sold to those who want to take their art with them to a private space, ASARO's *arte pa'l pueblo* is circulated publically as well in spaces that are not out of the way.

“El arte en un sistema capitalista solamente debe cumplir esa función de que el espectador solamente lo contemple pues - y no tenga una función utilitaria como antes lo tenía pues. Digamos - y a partir de ahí y como digamos - que el arte se desarrolla en Oaxaca o Mexico en la cual el arte solamente tiene acceso para quien tiene un poder adquisitivo. ¿Verda'? Tiene dinero, en pocas palabras.” (Chichas, July 2013)

²⁷
The art that this ASARO member refers to does not have a utilitarian purpose. This comment exacerbates a tension in defining Mexican art that has resounded since the 1920s. On one side resides modern art that Tamayo and his colleagues referred to as “*arte puro*” (Zavala, 210) that reflects an art for art sake definition that embraces an aesthetic experience drawn from Romanticism and individual experience of continual excitement (Barker, 169 -189). Many of Tamayo's art was based on a metaphysical anxiety that at times seeks meaning outside of the physical world and human perception. Murals that were publically exhibited such as *America* and *Nacimiento de Nuestra Nacionalidad* contains abstract ideas and forms that cannot be

²⁷ “Art in a capitalist system should fulfill this role only that the spectator only contemplate it and then not have a utilitarian function as it did before, then. Let's say - and from there - that art develops in Oaxaca or Mexico in which art is accessible only to those who have purchasing power. Right? He or she has money, in other words.”

explicitly stated or understood. Rather the experience of seeing these murals give the spectator a sense or a feeling that is difficult to explicitly articulate. When asked if he wanted to open a museum of his prints in Oaxaca, he stated that “...there is no way Oaxacans are going to appreciate something like that.” (Tamayo Book). Indeed even Ades agrees that compared to other artists in the 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s, Tamayo’s work is harder to read.

On the other side of the discursive chasm are artists collectives that produce what is called “*arte socializado*” (Zavala, 207) done such as Leopoldo Mendez and the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* and David Alfaro Siqueiros and the *Sindicato* which proposed that “our primary aesthetic aim is to propagate arte that will help destroy all traces of bourgeois individualism.” (quoted in Zavala 207, 2010) In 1927 and in retaliation, Oaxacan artist Tamayo stated that *arte socializado* turned art into “an unrefined political – social instrument” (quoted in Zavala 209, 2010) ASARO aligns their art within the “arte socializado” trajectory of art production as witnessed in Chicha’s comment. This is evident in ASARO member Yescka’s private *taller* called Taller Siqueiros in reference to the muralist who spent as much time in prison for his socialist activism as he did in his studio.

The word “*espectador*” can translate to “spectator” or “viewer”. Though the spectator is an active agent of meaning making in art for art’s sake, the agency stops at the individual and does not produce an agent within society. According to Ranciere and Pérez Rubio the liberated spectator, through the process of interacting with the art, becomes an active agent within civil society. “*Todo ello se produce en un contexto social signado por un discurso que enfatiza la participación de la sociedad civil como estrategia privilegiada para avanzar hacia procesos de radicalización de la democracia, profundización de la ciudadanía y construcción de sujetos*

*emancipados*²⁸ (Perez Rubio 193, 2013). Though these scholars are talking about theatrical performance, I argue that ASARO art is also a performance because the artists are acting out subordination and resistance when they place marks on property without permission. Though what is left is a mark or impression it must happen within a processes of resistance to the law. One day a person walks the same street everyday to get to work or school and the next day there is an image that wasn't there before. When it is painted over it is erased again only for another stencil or wheat paste to take its place. These hotspots enact a theatricality over time where resistant discourses are placed, erased and placed again. It is almost representative of the discursive battle actually happening between Oaxaca's *pueblo* and the state. Franco Ortíz examines that artistic acts of transgression such as wheat-pasting and spray-painting are a "delight" to those who perform these acts and the finished product of this act is are a result of that interaction between space and body. (2011). Additionally, the word represent has been appropriated for a self-aware performative meaning in Hip Hop slang. Urban dictionary which allows users to propose meanings for slang and allows other users to vote thumbs up for positive feedback and thumbs down for a negative response to the definitions provided. The most user acclaimed definition proposes "Go and be a good example to the others of your group or in your position." This definition implies a unification of peoples much like *pueblo* with words like "of your group". So in other words to represent is to perform a good example of your group in public space. A Spanish definition of *representar* also includes this performativity. One can represent a play as one could visually represent in art. In ASARO's case of getting up within the public eye both definitions of representing image as performing and as means of visually expressing ideas.

²⁸ "All this is produced in a social context marked by a discourse that emphasizes the participation of civil society as a preferred strategy to advance the radicalization processes of democracy, strengthening of citizenship and the construction of emancipated subjects"

Much like Phife and Q – Tip acknowledge their neighborhoods and are active agents giving visibility to their communities within chorus of the song *Steven Biko (Stir it up)*²⁹ saying “Lindon Boulevard, represent”, ASARO represents their *pueblo*. This can be seen in the print *Todos Somos Pueblo*, where ASARO gives visibility to the actual layout of space of their community epicenter and continental existence.

This ASARO member uses a definition of what the art is not in order to give the context of its production. The ASARO manifesto gives a more positive definition of what it does do and illustrates the participatory nature of the work illustrating Perez Rubio’s point. “*ASARO se manifiesta a favor de la inclusión y en la lucha por generar nuevas reglas de participación social...*” (ASARO, 2011) Here ASARO’s representation, echoing Pérez Rubio, proposes to perform a strengthening of citizenship as well as making processes of struggle visual through their depiction.

To add a degree of separation to a bourgeois definition of art are the many artists who do not refer to themselves as artists or their art as “art”. Even though ASARO includes *artistas* in the name, many of the artists refer to themselves as “*productores*” or producers at the same time that many times they refer to their work as *gráfica*. Herbert Gans explores the tension between high and popular arts. Many working class peoples do not go to the art museums due to the discomfort and alienation they feel from the art in the museum rather than the museum itself. (8, 2008). *Gráfica* or graphics is defined by its relation to printing arts but also has the connotation of being a communicative pictorial representation that is not a fine art. ASARO exhibits a

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This song is also interesting while Tribe Called Quest is giving proper respect to their neighborhoods, Steven Biko is an iconic liberation martyr that was active during South African apartheid. This juxtaposition of an icon of liberation with a representation of one’s place of belonging and community

consciousness of both definitions inherent in the term graphics as well as an understanding between popular aesthetics and high aesthetics. In our collaboration with ASARO to produce *Getting Up for the People* (2014) ASARO contributed this quote “...our language is western. Sometimes we use that word art and we don’t define its meaning. Every individual gives it meaning and that’s what’s important.” Here artists are challenging, much like the *Sindicato* and Siqueiros, this dominant western hierarchical categorization of art. By calling themselves producers who make graphics (as opposed to “artists” who make “art”) ASARO members are interacting with the poor and working class peoples by saying: “*Mira, tal vez no nos educaron como ver el arte en las escuelas pero esto, además de ser arte en algún sentido, es gráfica que comunica nuestra historia, y nuestra lucha.*” Here the “art” sheds its hierarchal judgment and becomes an experience of communication. Just as *Radio Plantón* – the name which the Autonomous Benito Juárez University of Oaxaca nicknamed its radio station – kept Oaxacans in the loop as to what was happening on the streets during 2006. Thus the graphic art is communicative of ideas and events.

Como es lo que hace, la secretaria de cultura, de aquí de Oaxaca, que hace que la mayor parte de los productores caigan dentro de un vicio. ¿No? Caigan dentro de esa cuestión donde el gobierno les tiene que mantener "Si, vas a llegar a interferir en un espacio con tu lenguaje pero lo que yo quiero" dice el gobierno. El mayor parte de artista accede porque artista aquí es muy pobre, francamente es muy necesitado. Son muy poco los artistas que tienen un gran experiencia. Quienes se han sabido manejar bien pueden renumerar algo de economía. Por los demás son totalmente jodidos entonces tú tienes que aceptar lo dice el gobierno porque gobierno te va dar a ti mensualmente tal vez este 7 mil pesos o te va dar una beca de 70 mil o 80 mil. Está bien pero entonces gobierno siempre decir que vas a pintar. Tú vas a decir "Voy a pintar revolución." "No, tú tienes que pintar primavera. Si no, no te doy dinero." Entonces tú dices "bueno está bien" Mayor parte de artistas son así. Aquí en Oaxaca hay muchas artistas que tienen mucha trayectoria. Que se sienten muy famosos pero realmente económicamente están muy jodidos. Por eso tienen que correr con gobierno para agarrar ayuda y empezar a producir otras cosas que no les

³⁰ “Look maybe they didn’t teach us how to look at art in school but this aside from being art in a sense, it is graphic that communicates our history and our struggle.” (Marcos, July 2013)

interesan. Ellos siempre se mantienen como un productor bacillo. No lo hace un verdadero productor creo que lo hace otra cosa³¹. (Henri, ASARO member, 2014)

Henri's comments provide a narrative as he tell the story of what it is like to be an artist and producer in Oaxaca. His speech even includes dialogue between the artist and the government. What is telling in this narrative of the artist is that government exploits artistic production that it funds. Art in Mexico in the early to mid - 20th century art was used and supported by the central government in order to create an art that defined what it meant to be Mexican. (Ades 2011, Oles, 2013) In this sense the government used artists to portray its identity of the nation. This identity was Mestizo and those that were outside of this Mestizo construct of the Mexican nation were effectively erased. In this tradition Mexico's government is invested in funding artists that celebrate this Mezitizo and traditional identity while leaving other artists with different ideas out. José Cueva's talks about how the state of Mexico forces artists to conform to a certain type of artistic production whereas those that that do not conform are blocked by a metaphoric cactus curtain. (1959) The 50s, 60s and 70s became a time of rupture from the national definition of what art is and should do. Groups and collectives of artists began to fund their own art based on their interests. Though ASARO still holds art as important social communication of liberation and justice like *El Sindicato* they too are also independent

³¹ "The secretary of culture, here in Oaxaca, which makes the majority of producers fall into a habit. They fall into that matter where the government has to provide for them. "You'll get to intervene in a space with your language but represent what I want" says the government. The artist accepts because the artist here is very poor, very frankly he is needy. There are very artists who have a lot of experience. Those who have been known manage well can gain some profit. On the others are totally fucked then you have to accept what the government says that government will give to you this month maybe 7000 pesos or will give you a scholarship of 70 thousand or 80 thousand. Is ok but then government always tells you what you're going to paint. You're going to say "I'm going to paint revolution." "No, you have to paint spring. Otherwise, if not I will not give you money." Then you say "alright that is fine" The majority of artists are like that. Here in Oaxaca there are many artists who have had a long career. They are very famous but are really very economically fucked. So they have to run with the government to attain support and start producing other things that do not interest them. They always remain as an empty producer. It doesn't make them true producer I think that makes them something else.

Both Marcos's and Henri comments imply that ASARO is supported by a grassroots foundation. On the one hand there is an aesthetic that sells to higher classes and an aesthetic that the government controls. ASARO's art thus takes a third path much like the groups or *los grupos* in the 60s and 70s. Through community and collector support such as the University of New Mexico Center for South West Research show that their art is alternative and popular enough to keep the collective still running for eight years after Oaxaca's 2006 movement. This illustrates a strategy of community organized based in the community that represents and performs for its community for mutual benefit. This idea that art is for the people or for the *pueblo* is actually based in that community and for that community. It is important to note that while I was looking how art for the *pueblo* was defined, the responses I got were more aligned with an art *with* the people. Though the group is not as big as it was eight years ago, a member commented to me, "*Pues...a lo largo, ya somos más dispersos. Muchos compañeros empezaron sus propios talleres, otros se mudaron a otros lugares... como el D.F. y los Estados Unidos... pero siempre continuamos a reproducir y repartir sus grabados hasta que se quiebran... es porque ese producción no tiene dueño... es de todos.*"³² Whoever joins ASARO and works within the collective gains experience and develops technique and ideas by working within the organization outside of having to compromise their work to fit a market or government standard. Being within the space of Espacio Zapata there is an artistic mingling that occurs.

The implication that ASARO has been around for 8 years is a testament that they have broken with former structures of artistic communication "...to generate new rules of

³² Well, nowadays we are more disperse. A lot of *compañeros* started their own workshops or they moved to somewhere else ... like México D.F. and the US... but we continue to produce and distribute their prints until the master breaks...that's why the production doesn't have an owner.. it is everybody's.

participation.” (ASARO, 2011) This not only happens in the structure of ASARO creating images but their organization is a model community participation echoing the idea of an emancipated spectator. This sentiment is easily understood within the confines of Espacio Zapata and other ASARO affiliated community spaces where people from all over the community (sometimes all over the world) come and engage with ASARO members to create art, cook food and even sit down to have a discussion. When people get together in these spaces the subject of talk is not political. I refer to political in this sense in talking about regional, national and global politics. If it were political in this sense, it would be very exhausting to spend a lot of time in there. Rather, many community members come and discuss other things while teaching others techniques and just communicating about how things are done. I found myself talking describing Southwest US and northern Mexico traditions. The atmosphere of Espacio Zapata is welcoming. Though artists are at work spraying and sending media through the hand crank and screen presses, they will stop to talk to you. I saw that the artists were constantly interrupted. On occasions community members would come and ask for help with printing their own work or asking ASARO to do work for them. From 9 am to 11 pm, ASARO’s generation of new rules of social participation were not extreme or radical but happened in the everyday interactions. Resistance is not always clashing with police on the streets or creating barricades but happens within the nuances. Looking at ASARO’s work there is an energy that is not reflected in the space. Rather the space is silent powerhouse for resistance. Their prints do remove politicians from their office or rewrite laws but the action within these spaces allow many people in the communicate and interact in ways that might not be possible otherwise. Also this space embodies Habermas’s ideal public sphere where the poor and working classes can effectively answer and talk back to dominant public discourse. In essence it talks back to

rulership. Though Espacio Zapata is a private space that has a landlord, ASARO's presence as people their images invites public participation in the everyday. Here the everyday experience of turning a private space into a public space is resistant because it is an inversion of what a private space must be. Even otherwise seemingly public spaces like cafes and bars exist because of their patronage and many of these exclusive spaces in Oaxaca will not allow your presence if you are not buying anything whereas in Espacio Zapata, the opposite is the case.

Defining "Pa'l"- "Asi Hablamos Nosotros. Asi habla nuestro pueblo." (Chapo, July 2013) ³³

These next categories use the definitions of "*arte*" and "*pueblo*" to describe the characteristics of *arte pa'l pueblo* as described by ASARO and are put in conversation with an analysis of visual images to put the issues in perspective with the construction of how ASARO talks about what they do. Before looking at these analyses, it is important to examine the word *pa'l*. Pa'l is a phonetic contraction of *para el*. whereas contractions in English such as "isn't", "don't", and "it's" are considered acceptable in formal situations including news reports and presidential speeches, contractions in Spanish are not considered appropriate in all situations. A participant in Oaxaca told me this after I asked about the usage of "pa'l" after seeing it in many stencils, graffiti, prints, and internet posts by ASARO.

"Son personas estas que son como menos educadas que dice "pa'l". No es ignorante pero al mismo tiempo no se debe usar dentro del lenguaje escrita. Tal vez lo usa personas analfabetas sin saber que no se debe usar así en las situaciones formales" ³⁴ (Oaxaca community member, August, 2013)

Calling it *pa'l pueblo* signifies a solidarity to working class vernacular and creates solidarity in its usage. Yescka's quote at the beginning of this chapter shows how the *pueblo* is resistant to

³³ "That is how we talk, that is how our *pueblo* talks."

³⁴"These are people who are less educated that say "pa'l". It's not ignorant at the same time should not be used in the written language. Maybe illiterate people use it without knowing it shouldn't be used in formal contexts.

outsider critiques “Because for me, that’s our *pueblo*. I don’t say ‘you shouldn’t do that’”. ASARO is a part of this community they speak to their community. The usage of “*pa’l*” completes what ASARO’s manifesto claims to “be a form of communication that permits dialogue with all the sectors of society and makes possible visualization of the real conditions of our existence”³⁵ They situate themselves laterally with the *pueblo* because they are a part of it. When *pueblo* is defined they are defining their experience as a part of a poor and working class majority in Oaxaca. That is to say communicative moves within the *pueblo* do not make the artist’s ideas superior but are situated in common usage of the *pueblo*’s everyday speech.

Arte pal Pueblo es accesible y transformativo.

“Vivimos en una sociedad en la cual los espacios no están socializados pues sino tienen dueños. Entonces cuando las paredes en este caso se vuelven un espacio público porque ahí es donde transita nuestro pueblo, nuestra gente y es cuando nosotros decimos ‘Bueno, vamos a tomar esas paredes.’” (Marcos July, 2013)

³⁶ “Proponemos, iniciar un movimiento artístico, donde en fin sea el contacto directo con la gente, en las calles y espacios públicos.” (ASARO, 2011)

In the quote above, the ASARO member refers to the fact that much of their art is placed on privately owned walls. Here, “están” poses a problem in the translation to English. There are two verbs in Spanish for “to be” which is *ser* that conveys a sense of permanence, and “estar” which is more temporary state of being. *No están socializados* conveys a temporary affliction or perhaps a point of transition that they are not socialized yet. To get around, the *pueblo* passes through these spaces that have walls that are temporarily private. However, when art dedicated to the *pueblo* is placed on a wall, the wall is “taken” in terms of possession, or appropriated through

³⁵

Here is the original form of that statement in Spanish: “necesita ser una forma de comunicación que permita el dialogo con todos los sectores de la sociedad y haga posible la visualización de las condiciones reales de existencia.”

³⁶ My translation “We live in a society in which spaces are not socialized but rather they have owners. So the walls in this case turn into a public space because that is where our pueblo, our people transit and that’s when we say ‘Alright, let’s take those walls.’”

that action and, the space changes symbolic ownership from a private entity to a public space. In Oaxaca, since institutional bargaining was not allowed by the state, artistic practices consolidated collective social power relations in public spaces. (Kastner, 2011) Meaning that since the state prohibited popular participation in the decision making process, these appropriated public spaces become sites for *pueblo* solidarity and socialization. In the street spaces when the *pueblo* comes in contact with each other. ASARO provides images that can be accessed in these contact sites. By doing so, these places of contact are transformed. What was once a wall next to a sidewalk is now a place where communication accessed. The wall becomes a message, a sentiment, an idea or a feeling. Though not everyone who passes by will notice (or care) but in the instant that someone engages by looking and interpreting, this former wall is site of dialogue.

Another theme that is poignant here is that the art intervenes. The art is not placed in spaces where spectators can leisurely see it on their own time. Many of the poor and working class people, the people who *move things* often go the same place to work every day, 7 days a week, and then go back to their houses with their families. Many do not have time (much less the money) to be able go to a museum or a gallery. One night as I was getting a *tlayuda* from a street cart I asked the lady in charge if she ever saw the art that was put around the Centro Historico.

“Señora: ..cada dia me vengo aquí a cocinar. Este negocio si paga pero para que paga bien se necesita estar aquí... Lo que dice usted sobre los carteles, si los veo. Hay siempre muchos carteles y anuncios siempre aquí pero había una de la Virgen que tenía mascara que pusieron los maestros. Yo siempre voy a la misa los domingos y cuando ví la Virgen ahí puesta con mascara, dije ‘hay dios mío que hacen estos ingratos que hasta la Virgen le están tirando gas.’”

Mike: *“¿Cuáles son los ingratos?”*

Señora: *“Pues, los policías. ¿Verda’?”*

Mike: *“¿Y cuando vio el cartel?”*

Señora: “Pos, eso yo lo vi hace años por aquí cuando andaba de compras o algo pero si lo recuerdo era una Virgen. Y no es el único, son muchos que los maestros ponen... no me acuerdo que tenían los demás.”³⁷

Here we can see a degree of interaction with the *pueblo*. The *señora* is there cooking every day in her portable *tlayuda* and taco stall and out of all the advertisements, she was able to identify a poster or print. Even though it happened years ago, she still remembers that the Virgin had on a gas mask.

The poster or print she is talking about is a poster I would consider under the category of icons. The images I have classified under the Icons category portray historical, religious and mythical figures. They often portray figures in Mexican history that the Mexican state or other dominant institutions have appropriated for itself. Many of these images place these historical icons on the side of the *pueblo*. They are appropriated in style, location or historical events. Figure 6 shows this print. It is Virgin de Guadalupe wearing a gas mask. The traditional stars that are usually depicted on her shawl are replaced with symbols of Oaxaca’s barricades – burning tires. During the occupation of police and people in Oaxaca’s central district during 2006, barricades were erected. In addition to keeping the state police at bay they provided meeting spaces and were the nuclei of resistance. Leyla, a participant in the Oaxacan Movement clarifies this notion:

“Even though they were neighbors, they didn’t know each other before. They’ll even say... “now that we’re at the barricade together, he’s *compañero*. So the barricades weren’t just traffic

³⁷ My Translation: Señora: “Well, do not I’m not sure if you know but I am here everyday and I come afternoon to cook. This business pays well but you need to be here for it to pay well ... What you say about the posters, I see them. There are always many posters and ads always here but there was one of the Virgin with a [gas] mask that the teachers who put up. I always go to church on Sunday and when I saw the Virgin placed there with mask, I said ‘oh god what are these ingrates doing that they are even [tear] gassing the Virgin.”

Mike: “Who are the ingrates?”

Señora: “Well, the police. Right?”

Mike: “And when did you see the print?”

Señora: “Well, I saw that years ago when I was shopping but I remember that it was a Virgin. And that wasn’t the only one, there are a bunch that that teachers but up I don’t remember what the other ones had.”

barriers, but became spaces where neighbors could chat and communities could connect. Barricades became a way that communities empowered themselves” (quoted in Denham ed. 95, 2008).

This print is not done within the umbrella of ASARO.

“Es de un compañero de ASARO que lo hizo con un otro de otro colectivo, como el compañero si era integrante de ASARO, pues todo mundo lo confunden... y está bien aquí entre los colectivos siempre nos apoyamos uno de otro y hacemos trabajos entre colectivos también”

This is illustrative of how ASARO is not isolated or fixed but is fluid and works collaboratively³⁸ with other artista communities.

The *señora* at the food stand also mentions that she believes it is the teachers who put up the posters and images. Though ASARO supports and works closely at times with the teachers unions, it shows that the *señora* is drawing connections between the 2006 events and the art that is being produced. This echoes Ivan Arenas argument that within Oaxaca’s spaces, this woman who was out shopping was so taken aback by the fact that the Virgin of Guadalupe was wearing a gas mask that she remembered she had seen it years after the fact and then called the police as “*ingratos*”. Though this is a small instance. It provides evidence of what Arenas identifies as the creation of political subjects within public space.

It is astounding to think that while randomly talking to people of why a Chicano was running around Oaxaca asking people about graffiti that I found a woman who had remembered seeing this image. I couldn’t tell you what I saw this morning as I was skating to school this morning. Was she astounded that she was wearing a gas mask. She mentions that does go to church on Sundays. Could the use of a beloved catholic image take her attention. Was she offended by the use of alternative symbols? I was taken aback by her comments and didn’t have

³⁸ My translation: “It’s by a *compañero* in ASARO that made it with another [person] from another collective. The *compañero* was a constituent of ASARO, everybody gets confused... and that’s fine here within the collectives we support each other and we work with other collectives too.”

the foresight to press the issue (Also she had other people ordering while she grilled meat.) This shows that within the streets there are contact zones. A shopping errand around the *centro* was transformed into a reminder of police brutality. What is also astounding is that she is a working class person middle aged read as a woman which is much different than a person that is connected to ASARO which are usually (/not exclusively) male, young, and might have studied for some years at a university.

Figure 6 contains a lot of religious connotation while keeping its sanctity. Guadalupe is a very important spiritual deity in the Mexican Catholic pantheon. Her namesake basilica in Tepeyac in México D.F. received almost 7 million visitors during her saint day (December 12)th in 2013. (Notimex, 2013) According to legend, she appeared at the site of the Modern Day basilica to a Mexica peasant. Since then she has been venerated. Those who put up this wheat paste are aligning the *pueblos* to them. It makes a large statement to say that the Mother of God is on their side. Whoever opposes the *pueblo* is evil. To act violently against the *pueblo* is the same as acting violently towards divine figures, if not *the most* divine figure in Mexico. This might have left an impression of the food stand *señora* and might be able to explain the intense impression she got from it years later.

The women are transformed

Another category within the data set of ASARO art was women's issues. This diptych in Figure 7 is shown on ASARO's official Facebook page. What is interesting is the diptych provides two images of women that are both facing to the left. The women on the left is adhered to a wall with wheat paste with a pan in the air and a yellow dress. She wears an angry expression as well as a traditional Mexican *rebozo* – which is used by many indigenous women. The words on the wall say in Spanish: “March 8 International Women's Day.” On the right side

of the diptych a woman in profile with long hair in profile wearing a striped long sleeve shirt in black paint on a white wall. The writing on the wall says “ASARO Familia”. The constructed normative role of Mexican women assigns them as the guardian of children, the house, and alimentering the family. Vivero Marín illustrates that the Mexican construction of women “idealized the figure of the woman by referring to her as the ‘Angel of the home’; to such an extent that those who did not conform to the ideal of being a ‘good mother’ were considered witches, demons, prostitutes, in other words, ‘bad women ’” Psychologists Rocha-Sanchez and Díaz-Loving studied attitudes towards women’s roles from interviews conducted in 2005 and found that the majority of the Mexican population surveyed (2/3 of which were women) still valued gender roles of women that ascribed them to be good mothers, good cleaners and cooks, sexually modest, a better caregiver than the father and dedicated to caring for husband and children within the home . These constructions of women place their value within the household and implies that any role outside of this sphere to be outside of the ideal woman.

Though women enjoy public lives, ASARO uses these gender roles to construct revolutionary images of women. Placing a woman or an image of a woman in the street is symbolic. I am not trying to say that women do not enjoy public lives but rather traditional framing of women in Mexico places importance on domestic roles. I.E. in the house. ASARO resists this meaning and gives it a revision. Instead of placing women in a domestic setting in a family setting, their family is the *pueblo* and their family is with ASARO. Instead of having a woman play a gendered role in the kitchen, the kitchen cooking tools becomes a weapon that can feed social change. In 2006, thousands of women took to the streets and took over TV stations and other buildings in Oaxaca.

We encouraged women to bring out pots, pans, and eggs... The eggs were symbolic, we hadn’t intended for anyone to throw them. The idea was to show the hotel owners and the representatives

that we had more *huevos* than they did, that we women had more balls. But our indignation was so great that we ended up throwing all the eggs against the hotel door³⁹

Leyla – a participant in the grassroots mobilization of Oaxaca in 2006 – illustrates how women were actively engaged in public spheres within the city. With a resourceful attitude, they employed symbols of women’s gendered roles – tools for cooking and food itself – to show that women had a voice that shattered their traditional domestic marginality. They wanted to show more courage than the men in office by symbolically showing the men that women had *huevos* (eggs synonymous with testes in Mexico). In this case the eggs allude to the metaphoric trope that big testes equates to having strength and courage whereas having no *huevos* makes one weak and docile. The women who were throwing their literal eggs at politicians not only broke eggshells, but also shattered gender barriers of invisibility and notions about who gets to participate. The events of 2006 ushered in a new discourse that would champion social justice and inclusion.

Another image has the silhouette of a woman in stencil juxtaposed with the words “ASARO family.” This move to include women is essential in the act of social transformation. That a woman’s family also include the society she lives in and her membership in collective cultures that exists with ASARO’s definition of “*pueblo*”. It is notable that while the mass media depict the teacher’s movement of 2006 as male centric, 40,000 of the teachers in Oaxaca were women. (Stephen 101, 2007) Not only that but these women are working class women. They are not portrayed with the same elaborate dresses that ASARO uses to portray bourgeoisie women. Using a local visual vocabulary and portrayal of traditional gendered object, these woman are projected as assertive participants in society. Instead of having women as paramount part of

³⁹Denham, Diana. p 89 *Teaching rebellion: Stories from the grassroots mobilization in Oaxaca*. Pm Press, 2008

domestic life, ASARO resists and transforms this domestic role and applies it to public setting. Here her role is not to be hidden or objectified but to have a voice and an active role within society. In this instance the pan releases her from her domestic role and projects her into the public streets in an episode of protest. The presence of these women is both revolutionary and reinvents the gender role of women as an integral part of public society. This image constructs a discourse that accepts revolutionary women as valuable and necessary. Against the picturesque backdrop of Oaxaca the recurrent themes, much like those seen in this illustration, resist the notion in dominant paternalistic discourses that would keep women to the private domestic shadows of society.

In Mexico, especially in advertisement, novelas, and print media. Poor and working class women are sold cleaning products, and are shown cooking. When males do help “around the house” they are framed as inexperienced and foolish and are aided by the experts, the women of the house. These ideas are so ingrained into dominant constructions of women. To portray these women in public actively participating changes this meaning not of women but what domesticity means. In the case of many ASARO images, domesticity is transposed upon a community setting. Unlike the *soldaderas* that provided that domestic role on the battlefield during the Mexican revolution, these images of women are active fighters. Yes they do have a pan in hand but it is a pan to participate, to dominate and to be on equal terms with men.

ASARO's art is also accessible. Being so, there is a possibility to see an idea get up be erased and the walls come alive in a dramatic sense. When seen during the span of several days, a narrative ensues.

“Aquí en Oaxaca, los paredes pueden hablar. Ese lenguaje en que participa el pueblo se vuelve como una narrativa que se ve por la ciudad. Cuando veo algo que un compañero pone - un estencil o una pega, después viene el gobierno y lo pinta pero siempre ahí deja una mancha –

como una huella... Pero si hay una interacción que tal vez refleja la relación entre el pueblo y gobierno. ” (Henri, July 2013)

⁴⁰
The walls document the erasure of ideas and action and in their wake they leave a *huella* - which can be interpreted as an impression or a footprint - that cannot be totally erased. The walls then take on a metaphoric human attribute of a story teller that talks about a relationship with the relationship with the *pueblo* and the government. In all probability the images of women painted are probably erased by now replaced with a mark where they existed before. This interaction also tells a story that might be stronger if the stencil and wheat paste had stayed. One day there is a woman depicted in public space. The next day she is erased and in her wake there is an eerie phantom of where she existed before. Like many of the actual women that go missing or are placed under erasure in their domestic spheres in Mexico, the representations of women existence are reduced to her footprint. Mexicans know too well that too many women (especially poor and working class) go missing. Whether it is on the border or within conflicting states such as Oaxaca. Inaction is the culprit of these disappearances. Whether it is the Mexican state structures such as the military or police force or cartels or independent killers that disappear women, it does not take away from the fact that women are there one day and gone the next without so much as a clue.

Arte P’al Pueblo es legible e interactivo.

“A mi punto de vista, o como yo lo trate de descifrar en esos años, creo que no hay un arte para el pueblo. Hay un arte que se hace con el pueblo. Sino el mismo pueblo participa dentro de este tipo de lenguaje visual que va ayudar a comunicar lo que está pasando.” (Henri , July 2013)⁴¹

⁴⁰ “Here in Oaxaca... the walls can talk. That language in which the *pueblo* participates becomes a narrative that is seen throughout the city. When I see that a *compañero* put up a stencil or a wheatpaste, later the government comes and paints over it. But there is always a stain – like an impression... But there is an interaction that maybe reflects the relation between the *pueblo* and the government.”

⁴¹ “From my point of view, how I tried to decipher [Arte P’al Pueblo] in those years, I don’t think that there is an art for the pueblo. There is an art that in done with the pueblo. Rather the same people participate within that type of visual language.”

“Si te das cuenta aquí en Oaxaca hay mucha gente que no sabe leer... Y un imagen es mas potente que cualquier texto. ⁴²” (Chapo, July 2013)

Susan Phillips in *Wallbanging* (1999) notes that visual communication within in a group uses signs and codes legible only to that group. Sanchez – Tranquilino (1995) notes how *placas* or *tag names* are pseudonyms of individuals placed in high visibility areas to demarcate turfs and their meanings are legible to those who understand the their signs and symbols. On the other hand, graffiti aimed at communicating about politics of the “larger state” (Phillips 59, 1999) uses signs that are legible to the greater populace. Other artists around the world such as Banksy and ABOVE have become almost household names in youth cultures using signs and symbols in stencils that can be deciphered by many groups in publically accessible areas. Gans notes that poor and working class peoples tend to dislike art that is abstract in favor of representations that are more direct. (113, 2008) On the other end of the popular/ high culture tension, “higher” is framed in such a way by dominant classes that art appreciation requires a degree of education and/or training to be able to decipher meanings. ASARO creates non-abstract signs within its works in order to engage a broader audience. As ASARO member Chapo states, many in the *pueblo* do not know how to read. Though I believe he was referring to the written language, we can expand not being able to read in the sense of understanding an abstract picture conveying metaphysical ideas or ambiguous concepts. Also making the art in explicit language allows the spectator to be able to engage quickly. This makes the images interactive. They see it and their minds are free to think of the implications of such an image. Rather than have an abstract picture

⁴² “If you notice here in Oaxaca there are a lot of people that don’t know how to read... And an image is more effective than any text.”

express an idea that requires training and specific knowledges to understand, an explicit picture can ignite interaction within a particular focused meaning with a *pueblo* member in an instant.

I asked Henri what he mean when the *pueblo* participates in the language and he responded:

“Si, por ejemplo yo cuando hago mis obras bajo mi nombre me gusta trabajar con cuestiones que a mí me interesan. Tal vez son obras que yo entiendo y que vienen de mi experiencia y cuando hago obras por ASARO - ósea para o con el pueblo - son temas que pertenecen al pueblo. Tiene que ser formas que cualquier persona lo puede ver y sacarle algún significado.”⁴³ (Henri, July 2013)

The last sentence is important. To *sacarle* means to take away or extract. It is used with many Spanish idioms such as *sacarle jugo* or extract the juice. Aside from this literal translation it means to get the most out of something. Though a viewer of this art might not take away the whole essence of what the artists is representing, Henri suggests that they at least take away some meaning. Whereas one person might see something another might not get the same managing. It is this interaction with the *pueblo* that ASARO attempts to elicit. In conjunction with Chapo’s comment that a picture is more potent than any text, raises the old cliché that a picture is worth a thousand words, Henri comment shows that each individual can access her/his own meaning. The thus helps to co-construct resistant meanings not for the *pueblo* but more importantly with the *pueblo*. In all my interviews and work with ASARO, Henri was the most adamant in saying it is an art with the people - which also resists the idea that the artist is not the sole authority but rather the art is made in such a way that it is personal to each spectator that gives it meaning.

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Yeah, for example, when I make my works under my own name, I like to work with issues that I am interested in. They might be works that I understand and that come from my experiences and when I do work for ASARO – as in for the *pueblo* – they are themes that pertain to the *pueblo*. They have to be forms that any person can see it and take away (or extract) some meaning.

Art with the *pueblo* is a very important construct within ASARO. In my opinion this collective of individuals is not a collective that is creating art for their benefit. Yes it does allow them to work and be paid in a for their labor by collectors and community members. However their issues are not personal but issues that affect Oaxacans. To be and create art with the people that language is paramount to being in that space of imagined *pueblo*. To make it interactive does not mean that the communication stops when the *pueblo* sees it. It is interactive because it is created in such a way that when paired up with dominant discourses from governmental and capitalistic sector it interacts with those discourses at the same time that it uses a language that is legible.

Legibility and Interaction within conversation of Oaxaca's Natural Resources

Oaxaca has a richness of natural resources including tillable soil, petroleum and minerals. The state of Mexico attempts to define itself as a nation based on the many of the promises of the revolution. During the 1910 Mexican revolution, ideas of democratic and autonomous rule based on the public distribution of land, petroleum and other natural resources gave many a reason to fight during the ten year civil war. The name of the Institutionalized Revolutionary Party shows how the state has appropriated the Revolution of 1910. The revolution of 1910 promoted the rights of *campesinos*, or farm workers, that had promised to give landless peasants land at the same time that the government promised that the Mexican oil was nationalized for the people. This official discourse is reproduced for public school children, while sculptures, metro stops, street names, and Mexican currency tell the story of how the revolution for the people was won by including important dates such as battles, treaties as well as visual depictions of its leaders. However the fundamental principles collective ownership of Mexico's resources fails to reach the poor and working class. As noted in the introduction, there has been a thuggish control of

these resources by the government that alienates the *pueblo* in ways that are even fatal at times. ASARO addresses these revolutionary promises and does not show the romanticized versions that the state produces. Rather, it changes meanings to show how these promises leave much to be desired and how foreign actors, and corrupt clientelism robs the *pueblo* of any benefit the revolution was *supposed* to have. These images show the twisting of meaning that the state proposes when dealing with Mexico's natural resources and the access the *pueblo* has to these resources.

Figure 8 shows a grasshopper in profile wearing a gas mask. As the insect braces itself on a field of maize, three bomb shaped corn cobs fall from the sky. The sky is depicted with swirling hash marks. The gas mask on the grasshoppers face conveys toxicity whereas the bombs convey a sense of impending destruction. To protect itself the grasshopper must use an apparatus normally used by humans. Nothing in this print besides the field and cornstalks portrayed in the background is of natural occurrence. It is as if the world has been turned upside down and a food source has become a deadly weapon. The feeling elicited within the image is toxic and corrosive. This image takes the quiet and beautiful landscape of Oaxaca and turns its into a scene of chaos where death and destructions threatens an annihilation.

This image simultaneously speaks on many levels. Here the idea of the “glocal” sphere can be employed to see these levels in action. On a global level a chasm between people and food has widening to the point that to know where your food comes from and what it actually is made out is becoming a great mystery. Pesticides and chemicals are introduced that are toxic to our bodies as well as the bodies of other species. The urban poor of the world that rely on highly processed foods also suffer from health issues. Others starve including the worlds “developed” countries. On a local level this image sites the destruction due to the North American Free Trade

Agreement. Replacement of indigenous varieties of local foods, the introduction of pesticides in Mexico and the grueling work of *campesinos* with and without land.

In Mexico, recent attacks on traditional ways of farming corn have created many negative consequences for farmers and the general population. Mexico is dependent on corn and has been for thousands of years. Taking to my family in Mexico, they noted how the when there wasn't enough food like meat and other vegetables to go around the table, the tortilla was always there to keep us from going hungry. Living in the US nowadays with many of of meals containing corn in one form another, it is hard to deny corn's importance in our society. We (both Mexicans and to an extent US residents) almost literally bleed and sweat corn, and recent changes in foreign policy has led to dramatic changes that are metaphorically choking farmers and consumers. Alejandro Nadal's (2001) study on the impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) details the negative consequences of state and international intervention on traditional farming ways. The flood of corn from the USA has made the price of corn drop thus saturating the market and ensuring that farmers must sell their harvests for lower prices. Simultaneously, the Mexican government controls the increasing tortilla prices. This has led many farmers to adopt US practices of using pesticides and genetically modified organisms in order to increase yields. Additionally this problem is furthered by the diminutive effects of genetic diversity of traditional crop types that ensure survival through varying climates.

The grasshopper is also a staple food in Oaxaca. Historically, the business of insect trade has been a major part of Oaxaca's economy. The cochineal bug that is used for its red coloration is prominent in Oaxaca. As pesticides are introduced to the Oaxacan environment ASARO points out that these abundant critters are dwindling. Whereas corn is carbohydrate full of energy, grasshoppers are an important source of protein that is currently valued at almost \$10-12 USD a

pound (for tourists like me as at a central market). As these creatures and food continue to dwindle not only does food disappear but also sales that could benefit bug sellers are also at risk.

A food source is metaphorically transformed into a destructive force in the *milpas* . It kills the health of wild animals. It “kills” commerce. New innovations in agriculture do not work in Mexico or Oaxaca. These innovations destroy life ways that have been traditionally kept since cities began to develop thousands of years ago. An ASARO member recounts these experiences in an interview:

“¿Por qué dirigimos nuestro trabajo a los campesinos? Pues ese pueblo ha estado en lucha desde muy antes del tiempo de Zapata. ¿No? Y peor ahora que los megaproyectos de la industria alimentaria capitalista que les está quitando tierra a los que sembraban y vendían como tradicionalmente lo hacían pues.” (Cesár, July 2013)

Symbolically the image of corn is very ancient and very central symbol for Mexicans. For others it is a way of life that is being lost and evokes a sense of nostalgia for a traditional way that is erased by the urban landscape. Many of the people that live in Oaxaca come from rural settings. As more *campesinos* are left landless, they migrate into the city to find jobs and labor to make their livings. This grasshopper also represents the indigenous Oaxacan. The corn bombs can be seen as foreign intervention in indigenous ways of living. Many are forced off their land and find themselves into the city. Living in an urban landscape erases many of the realities of those living outside the center. This paradigm of center/periphery experience is illuminated by this seemingly simple image. In Oaxaca and its regions the *tianguis* or markets are held in different regions on different days of the week. As vendors move from place to place, this image speaks to

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45 Traditional farming plots of corn.

My translation: “Why do we address our work to the campesinos? Well, that community has been fighting since even before Zapata. Right? And it is worse now that the capitalist megaprojects of the food industry are taking land from those who used traditionally grow and sell [food] like they used to do before.”

many of these *campesinos* and says ‘look, the city and the *campos* are interconnected. Our troubles here and there are part of the bigger problem.’ This interpretation cites and undermines the official discourse by the PRI that highlights how new forms of corn production increases yield, more jobs and savings for the consumer. (Nadal, 2001 p.3) However the realities as exposed in this image are much different.

It is not only in Oaxaca that traditional farmers are losing their lands and control of their farms. As governments and private companies step in to take control of the land, what is valued is profit. Workers, quality, livelihoods and health of a food product are pushed aside in order to create a product with the most potential for company or government profit. What ensues is destruction on many levels. While governments and corporations diffuse information regarding the many benefits of new products and ways of farming, it has taken thousands of years of fine tuning in places like Oaxaca to raise food in a way that is beneficial to the local community. ASARO in this image and many others like it, depict a sacredness of the land and the sacredness of that intimate connection with it through their bodies and their cultural dignity.

This picture also highlights the interconnectedness of the problems within the urban center and Oaxaca’s peripheries. As noted earlier Oaxaca is an important cultural, governmental and economic center of its eight distinct regions. As such it is important to engage dialogue within the urban center about its peripheral communities. Change must happen simultaneously at different sites. The sheer numbers of participants in the 2006 megamarches following the attack on teachers by police shows how peripheral agents were engaged within the city of Oaxaca itself. Many of ASARO’s family members came originally from the periphery, from the small towns

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Fields

outside of the city. As such ASARO acknowledges issues such as collective ownership of natural resources as interconnected. They are all symptoms of the same pathology: state corruption, violence and favor of clientelistic practices that keep the *pueblo* outside of the public sphere of decision making.

In Figure 9 an oil drum is depicted with the Pemex (Petroleros Mexicanos) symbol in the middle. Figures of people dressed in black suits are depicted with battered looking facial expressions surrounding the drum. Their monstrous glares look on to one of the figures who stands on the head of another and siphons oil from a tube into his mouth. A child with an anxious expression reaches out to the tube.

The figures in this image are read as old males as shown by the lack of hair. They wear black clothes that are reminiscent of suits. The use of a suit in this image is synonymous with people of high status. The image dehumanizes these suit wearing figures. They are rendered in as zombies. This undead metaphor illuminates how these subhumans cannot exist without their precious oil. Their undead status feeds on the living. Those citizens who work for their money are deprived by those who steal and cheat. The *pueblo*'s oil is taken by those who control everything else. They are taken by those who lost their humanity long ago. As they look on in envious stares, the one who is a cutthroat must sacrifice others in order to become the victor. They are the ones that get possession of the hose.

After the 1910 Revolution, creators of the Mexican constitution included article 27 which guarantees that all oil in Mexico is exclusive to the nation. (Talamantes, and Culotta, 2013) Today, everyday citizens fail to reap the benefits of collective ownership of the nationalized oil industry. The state owned oil company is called Petroleros Mexicanos or Pemex. Economic

prioritization of extractive industries such as oil further intensifies the plight of landless peoples and small landowners. Within the Wikiruta lands in Oaxaca, considered a sacred pilgrimage site for the Huichol peoples since the beginning of time, destructive and constitutionally illegal mining continues while the Mexican government looks the other way. Other oil companies such as state owned Pemex (Petroleros Mexicanos) extract and refine oil in southern Mexico offering in return persistent ecological damage. The possibilities for dangerous accidents threaten family homes sitting above underground pipes that funnel raw petroleum out of their communities.

The government sells 34% of the nation's oil to the US and the rest is sold back to the Mexican populous. (Talamantes, and Culotta, 2013). Mexican officials have personally profited from national oil instead of investing in outdated infrastructure. (Rohter, 1988; Talamantes, and Culotta, 2013) This has resulted in an oil crisis in which Congress hopes to alleviate by privatizing oil rights thus effectively nulling collective rights to oil. PRI details some positive aspects of oil reform:

La renta petrolera de México aumentará; esto significa que habrá recursos adicionales para destinar a la construcción de más y mejores escuelas, hospitales, carreteras y servicios de agua, entre muchos otros beneficios para los mexicanos⁴⁷. (pri.org, 2013)

If the proposed education reform in Oaxaca in 2006 and current (and illegal) clientelistic exploitation of natural resources are any indications of how promises will be fulfilled, we are left to question just how serious this discourse will be taken into action.

The artist of this piece comments on the emotional edge he uses takes to convey Oaxacan realities.

⁴⁷ "Mexico's petroleum revenue will increase; this means that there will be more resources allocated to the construction of more and better schools, hospitals, roads and water services along with other benefits for Mexicans."

“Yo crecí en una colonia de Oaxaca que era muy violenta... Y como muchos, mi abuela no sabía leer entonces me ponía a leer le esos periódicos que se producían ahí en la colonia. Desde ahí empecé a ver la realidad violenta en mi colonia... En el caso de los petroleros que mencionaste, pues ahí esta corrupción de los políticos que causa pobreza y violencia en los pueblos. El acto de robar algo que pertenece al pueblo es violencia. Unos los pueden ver unos monitos feos. No? Pero trato de producir esa violencia dentro de sus expresiones y también en sus actos de pisar uno a otro.”⁴⁸ (ASARO member, July, 2013)

This image and comment by the same ASARO member connects this ASARO member’s lived experience of violence of poverty to government action exclusion of the poor peoples. The figures are an embodiment of violence. Their appearances transcend human form to reveal their violent actions.

Figure 10 uses another animal metaphor to comment on the death of the *pueblo’s* collective ownership of oil. This stencil rendered in black and red upon a white wall shows a vulture with the head of a gas pump. The scavenger is perched upon a drum of oil that like Figure 10 shows the logo for PEMEX. Here resistance is shown through meanings that are changed with the use of a dehumanization and zoomorphism of Mexico’s oil industry. Furthermore the animal itself is a hybrid form of both animal and machine. This vulture is simple and straightforward in form. The metaphoric language allows viewers to extract meaning. The vulture is a scavenger that is drawn to death. It feeds on the corpses of the living. The vulture’s strategy within the wild is not to hunt for itself but often times it relies on the work of others for its sustenance. If this metaphor is further extended into the context of PEMEX, the state company is then feeding on the death of collective ownership of oil. In this case PEMEX is not

⁴⁸ “I grew up in a colonia in Oaxaca that was very violent... And like a lot of people, my grandmother did not know how to read so she make me read her those newspapers that were made in the colonia. From there I started to realize the violent reality of my colonia... In the case of the oilmen you mentioned, well there is the political corruption that causes poverty and violence in the pueblos. The act of robbing something that is the pueblo’s is violence. Some may see ugly figures right? But I try to reproduce that violence in their expression and also their acts of stepping on one another.”

seen as a benevolent company that is constructing and developing the nation as state discourses construct, but rather it is an opportunist feeding off the misfortune of others.

In Mexico everything is connected to oil. From getting to work and school to being able to eat it is all transported. As the former national PEMEX raise prices, living becomes more expensive. At the same time wages remain low as everything else rises in price. Those jobs that could be used in developing, updating and reinvigorating the outdated and degraded oil industry that could pay for the rising costs of living are inexistent because like food production, oil extraction must fulfil a profit in the short run. In the global sense, as petroleum dwindles, wars are fought for natural resources. Resources that were once controlled by local polities are being taken by large conglomerates without any benefit to that local community.

In these images depicting the ownership of natural resources, the symbols and metaphors are simple: a grasshopper wears a gas mask in a corn field, and old vampire men suck oil from a drum and a vulture hoards its bounty. These images are legible though one might need to understand Oaxacan history to ascertain the context. They are also interactive because they provide a level of interaction with the symbolic language that is being introduced. This is because there are clues that allow the spectator to decide on her/his own what this means and what this implies. Much like a political cartoon uses a sense of whimsy and satire, these symbolic gestures are at work in interpreting ASARO's work. They can be taken literally and figuratively to convey different levels of interpretation, to arouse emotion, and to connect with the spectator. Rather than having letters that convey the words "The rich are stealing the nation's oil" or "Foreign action is stifling the subsistence farmer," ASARO invites the spectator to become an agent in that interpretation via symbol and metaphor. In these interpretations many questions are set forth. Who profits and who is left out of the picture? Who is not shown? How

do these representations differ from discourses that are seen on state controlled tv, commercials, and advertisement?

Arte P'al Pueblo comunica la realidad de los Pueblos e inspira cambio.

In *Getting Up for the People: The Visual Revolution of ASAR Oaxaca*, an ASARO member explains the essence of what *Arte Pal Pueblo*.

“Queremos crear núcleos de resistencia. Crear espacios en la cual los jóvenes puedan atreves del arte, visibilizar su realidad en las regiones... Lo que hacemos para nuestro pueblo que está en lucha. O aquel pueblo que todavía está dormido y que queremos inyectar ese sentido de luchar, de quitar se sus cadenas de explotado. ”

In 2013 ASARO began work to teach Oaxaca's youth from the eight regions printmaking and stenciling techniques. ASARO's messages are not just those made by art but through actions as well. Their *talleres* or workshops show youth how they can become visible to their *pueblos*. In a state where political participation is repressed and justified by the pretenses of order and stability, the *pueblo*'s invisibility is shattered when images depicting their struggles can be seen and made. A material space is required and through their action they open spaces.

There is rupture of passivity and a sense of agency within this speech act. *Lucha* can translate to a fight or a struggle but it also a fight for a political cause. *Lucha* is paired with the metaphor of injection. The fight for a cause is not introduced lightly but forced under one's skin and becomes a part of their body and mind. Exploitation here is a chain that enslaves the *pueblo*. Though the *pueblo* is not physically chained they are enslaved and silenced by state violence and capitalist exclusion. These metaphoric chains are “broken” when reality and a sense of struggle become visible within the *pueblo*. This speech act is rife with action verbs: create, take off, visualize, inject. Taking all the characteristics of “*arte pal pueblo*” together like accessibility, transformability, and interactivity, it conveys the reality of the *pueblos* and inspire change. *Arte*

⁴⁹ “We want to create nuclei of resistance. Create spaces that the youth can, through art, visualize their reality in the regions... What we do for our pueblo that is in struggle. Or that pueblo that is still dormant and that we want to inject that sense of struggle, to take off their chains of exploitation.”

pal pueblo employs these characteristics in order to achieve its purpose: “transforming a creative language into actions” ASARO, Graham De La Rosa, Schadl, 7 2014) By using these characteristics to get up *Arte P’al Pueblo* can be effective in inspiring change and illustrating the realities that the official government would rather cover up. If it was not accessible, it would serve the dominant capitalist system it proposes is a root of many of the *Pueblo*’s problems. If it was not interactive, it would not even be able to communicate with the *pueblo*. If it did not transform private places into a public spaces, the *pueblo* would not feel as if this art belonged to them.

[Re]presenting realities and inspiring change in Iconography and Immigration.

As stated in the Methods section, Mckerrow states that when a people are called into discourse, they are united. Though ASARO employs many mythic, historic, political, religious icons, they privilege the unification of the *pueblo* using revolutionary icons. Even the name of ASARO’s space – Espacio Zapata – brings to mind the 1910 revolution as well as the recent Chiapas uprisings of the Zapatistas (which also appropriated Emiliano Zapata’s revolutionary legacy). These images use images from the state to proclaim its institutionalization of the revolution and inject them with a sense of struggle, reinvigorating them in fresh new contexts and illustrating Hall’s sense of resistance being a change of accentuation in meaning rather than a reversal of societal roles.

In Figure 12, nopales are depicted growing from the bottom of this woodblock print. Instead of the prickly pads that normally constitute this plant, heads of various sizes wearing black ski masks are superimposed upon the shape of the plant. Some of the heads have *tuna* fruits spouting at the top. A human fist clenching olive branches springs from the top of the ski mask head nopal. Hash marks radiate out from the top of the print.

The nopal cactus is synonymous with Mexico as a nation. It is the official seal of the Mexican government and is seen on the national flag. Its origins harken back to the legend of the

establishment of the Mexica (known commonly today as “Aztec”) empire when a prophecy of an eagle with a serpent in its beak would mark the place where the Aztecs would establish their civilization, which now lies under Mexico City. In the 18th century as *Criollos* or American born Spanish elite, imagined their identities based in Mexico/Tenochtitlan, they adopted this cactus/eagle/ serpent motif as their own. After the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the government placed the cactus and eagle on the national flag. The PRI (established after the Revolution) began to promote *indigenismo* as José Vasconcelos disseminated the idea that the Mestizo was a superior race thus erasing indigenous peoples from national inclusion. This simultaneous appropriation of indigenous symbols and exclusion of indigenous peoples is challenged and injected with a newer and resistant symbol of indigeneity.

The black ski mask in Mexico is a signifier for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) movement of 1994. The state that is mostly indigenous and one of the poorest in the nation is also a state that is rich in raw petroleum. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) passed on the first day of 1994 and endangered the already weak economy of working class and poor Chiapanecos. The Zapatistas, which consisted mostly of indigenous Maya, organized in Mexico City to protest their political and economic exclusion. Their ski masks became a symbol of their movement as many of the Zapatistas wore them along with carrying homemade rifles in the name solidarity and anonymity in case of negative repercussions.

As part of being a Mestizo/a in Mexico, indigenous identity is accepted only in its national Spanish speaking mixed raced hegemony. It is a hegemony that makes claims to past empires while erasing the present exclusion of pure indigenous communities. Being Mestizo in this dominant sense, indigeneity holds no space except for our traditional celebrations of

multiculturalism in food, dance, artisanship, and practices that are seen as inherited from the past.

Figure 12 plays with meanings and creates new national symbols. It takes the national symbol of the *nopal* (the same symbol that is placed on the presidential podium and the Mexican flag) and reinterprets it. ASARO's reinterpretation of discourse through metaphoric symbolism however places the indigenous (Zapatista Army) resistance and inclusion back into the national discourse. It inspires those who are indigenous (and who make up a large portion of working and poorer people) to take a look at the origins of our hegemonic national symbols and place the emphasis on our original inhabitants. This is also there is comment on the privileging of the center and marginalizing the periphery by the state. Since the times of the Mexica, Tenochtitlan/México D.F. has been the center of the Mexican imagination that places itself as the most/only important part of Mexico. The state uses this national symbol of the mythic place where an eagle once stood on a cactus to base itself as a dominant center. It says that the modern Mexican state is legitimate because it is a reiteration of the massive indigenous empires from before the conquest. In this case those that are excluded are other indigenous groups. The Zapatistas who continue to rebel come from Mayan and Mixtec backgrounds. Symbolically the placement of face masked heads is an ethnic shift in meaning of the national symbol. The central axis of Mexican power, first the Mexica and now the PRI are substituted by a different indigenous identity which not only resists but works against peripheral erasure of peoples. "As one EZLN soldier puts it, when he wears the mask he is a Zapatista rather than just another Indian." (ASARO *et al* 45, 2014)

Though the city of Oaxaca is more mixed than the rural townships, the exclusion of indigenous politics in 2006 is still emblazoned by this image that was posted in several public

spaces at one point. It claims that indigeneity and struggle are not only a part of the nation, but also indigenous people and marginalized people *are* the nation. This stops the erasure and renders everybody's struggle as visible and of important national concern. Though Televisa and the state government render a Mexico that is stable and moving forward, ASARO uses its metaphor to pack a symbolic punch that intervenes and tugs on the emotions of passerby thus provoking critical thought.

“Aunque a veces no van a gustar lo que estás diciendo o el imagen, estas generando en ellos una critica, un pensamiento.” (Chapo, July 2013) (*Although sometimes they are not going to like what you are saying or the image itself, you are generating in a critique, [or] a thought within them.*”)

This image also creates a solidarity across time and space. Though the EZLN were active throughout the state of Oaxaca. ASARO is *giving props* to that movement and creating a sense of solidarity with their cause. Oaxaca borders the state of Chiapas and much like Oaxaca, Chiapas has a large indigenous and marginalized presence. In keeping with a glocal (global + local) formation of *pueblo* identity in figure 12 addresses many of Oaxaca issues by creating solidarity as well as inverting the state visual discourse to resist. It also illustrates how introducing and mixing forms gives the national symbol of indigeneity and nationhood fresh new meanings.

Transposing the symbol of the Zapatistas upon the symbol of the nation is a resistant creation meaning. As noted in the introduction, the PRI's use of force in indigenous communities is fatal at times. To want self determination, to keep a traditional way of government, and to speak out against injustice is dangerous. Many indigenous leaders and supporters have gone missing or found dead. The olive branch above the heads of the Zapatista nopal indicates a desire for peace and a desire to transform Mexico into a place where indigenous people have leadership roles in their community without fear.

Another image that injects a sense of peoples struggle is that of Emiliano Zapata. Marcos (the ASARO member) comments on how Zapata is perceived by the Mexican population.

“Hace poco que hicieron una encuesta sobre con cual figura histórica se identificaban los Mexicanos y casi el 80 por ciento se identificaban con Zapata. Ya sabíamos lo enigmático de esta figura. Entonces pensamos que Zapata sería una pauta que usáramos para comunicar con el pueblo. Y de ahí, pos lo fuimos representado de varios modos sabiendo que el pueblo reconocía esa figura.”⁵⁰

(Marcos, July 2013)

Figure 13 is a stencil placed on a wall. Upon the stencil is an image of Zapata, reminiscent of Hugo Brehme’s iconic studio photograph of him holding a rifle in his *charro* uniform. A large pencil replaces the rifle. On the brim of his sombrero is scrawled the word “defiende,” below his belly where his portrait is cut off reads the words “la educacion!!”. The wall he is placed on exhibits signs of fading graffiti creating accents of pink and blue within his visage. An announcement for some sort of *taller* is to the left of him showing this is a place with a lot of graffiti and posting activity. These signs imply a public place where people with access have made their mark.

Emiliano Zapata is known as a fighter for *campesinos*, or agrarian workers and farmers. His slogan of “tierra y libertad” has reverberated throughout history. In New Mexico his saying became “tierra o muerte” by the Hispano/Chicano land grant movement spearheaded by Reies Lopez Tijerina. In the 1950s the sugar unions in Guerrero fought against the PRI and adopted Zapata as their Icon. (Padilla 26, 2008). He is appropriated and re-appropriated time and time again. For example he is quoted as saying “It is better to die standing than to live on your knees”, which has been used in Hollywood movies not pertaining to Mexico like *300: Rise of an Empire*

⁵⁰ “Its been recently that they did a poll about which historic figure Mexicans identified with and almost 80 percent identified with Zapata. We already knew how enigmatic this figure was. So we thought that Zapata would be a model that we use to communicate with the pueblo. And from there, well, we started to represent him in various contexts knowing the pueblo would recognize that image.”

(2014). This stencil is not any different. Instead of championing for agricultural workers, he is defending education. It is easy to see why some would confuse ASARO's work as coming from the teachers unions. By changing and adding symbolic elements of education this stencil transforms the space and everyday confrontation with a wall into a political encounter. The events of 2006 shook Oaxaca profoundly and to see this stencil created in 2013, seven years after, would take one back to that time and reevaluate what progress has been made (if any at all). Also there is a rally cry here within the signs. Since many Mexicans identify with Zapata, many might see this image and push to reform Oaxaca education as a personal responsibility. This image also reflects a reality that the underfunded education system leaves much to be desired.

Another category where ASARO seeks to represent the reality and lived experience is by creating a visual conversation about immigration. This category within ASARO images deal with immigration along Mexico's southern border as well as the US Mexico border. They include the difficulties that immigrants face when going to and living in a different country. Denham notes that while education and jobs are limited, many of Oaxaca's youth opt to move to the USA and the northern border region of Mexico, while at the same time many Central Americans come into Mexico from the south. Though immigration is a mixed bag of hope, violence, alienation, and opportunity, it is the negative experiences that ASARO expresses.

Figure 14 depicts animals crossing into the US. A couple of coyotes survey the chickens that follow them into a dark hole. The American flag waves behind a fence where there are police in the form of dogs with batons. The chickens are much smaller than any of the canines depicted and peer anxiously into the hole where the unknown lies hidden in the dark. Here cactuses are depicted along the landscape.

The immigrants are represented by chickens while coyotes, which is a nickname given to professional illegal border crossers, represent the predatory human traffickers. Along these journeys, the lives of the chickens lie in the hands of their carnivorous leaders. The canines on the other side of the border also pose a livelihood to these vulnerable helpless birds. This image uses a play on colloquial terms of border crossers. As well as coyotes since these professional border crossers are also known as *polleros* or chicken keeper. This implies that those people they wrangle and herd across the desert into US territory are their chickens. The effect comments on how during the process of crossing the border, people are dehumanized. On the other side equally dehumanizing terms are applied to immigrants as they are called simply “illegals” or “aliens”. Even our term for peoples going from one side of the border to the other conjure the activities of animals. Just as buffalo, birds, and butterflies are migrants so are Latin Americans. Mendoza comments in *A Journey Around our America* (2012) that these terms keep the US new residents out of the conversation of immigration reform. ASARO commentary in this print shows immigrants as powerless animals upon which the US and the coyotes feed.

This play on words and use of symbolic metaphor is injected with a sense of comic relief albeit a sad reality immigrant’s face. It invokes a sense of fear and helplessness inspires those not to be chickens (pun intended) but stand up and speak up. ASARO also addresses lawmaking decisions that further dehumanize and kill human beings.

The discourses on immigration in the US are dehumanizing and confusing. On the one hand the US is seen as a melting pot where the hands of immigrants have ushered in modernity and progress at the same time that only immigrants from Europe are seen as legitimate. When farmworkers came to help in the US war effort, Mexican *braceros* were treated as chattel whose labor became property. Alex Rivera’s Sci Fi movie *Sleep Dealer* (2008) comments on how the

US values the labor within a product but alienates the worker. Along the border lives are dispensable. Many lose their lives crossing in between the spots that have not had the large iron wall erected. Many people disappear and are kidnapped and sold into human trafficking. In the grand scheme of things these people seeking refuge, and seeking a way to live life as a human are treated less than that. The discourse that surrounds immigration places crossers at fault even at times they are desperate or helpless enough to put themselves in this danger.

Figure 15 shows a deathly scene. A family of four calveras or skeletons wear rebozos or shawls wrapped about them. The smallest calavera holds a balloon that says in Spanish “Arizona Law SB1070”. A stylized black crow sits on one of the calavera’s heads. In front of them a death cart with a corpse seems to get her/his soul sucked out by crow in a swastika top hat. The word on the cart spells out “Capitalismo,” hash marks on the woodblock print gives the background texture. The use of two colors dark red and neutral green swirl around the images giving the print an acrid feeling. These are the colors of the Mexican flag if they were slowly decaying.

Since 2006 on Arizona’s border there have been 36,000 homicides along the border since 2006 (*The State of Arizona*, 2013). At the same time, SB1070 is a bill that passed which gave Arizona police the right to racially profile minorities and check the legal status of residents if they “look” Mexican. The print enters this conservation of death and profiling of Mexicans. Unlike the other print that portrays humans as animals this one shows another emphasis. The Independent Lens documentary *The State of Arizona* on PBS explores how Mexican families must face radical peoples (many of which are also new to Arizona from other states), persecution by Sherriff Arpaio and other Arizona police at the same time that many take advantage of illegal status to pay their employers less and gain an edge on the competition. This print echoes how capitalist structures and competition victimize and take advantage of people. Like Alex Rivera

commented, US capitalism sucks the labor from the immigrant while wanting to discard the container or the body that the labor comes in. Here a crow or raven which can be a sly scavenger and opportunist takes the life juice from these immigrants. What is left is not human but the bodies of immigrants. This law further puts people at risk. Business owners, families, and people of color in Arizona can be taken advantage of with this law. For many their crime is not looking white or “American”.

Again these symbolic metaphors render realities for many people that are usually invisible, visible. These could be images that disinter corpses as well as realities. Many immigrants in Arizona are forced to live in the shadows and keep a low profile (*Ibid*). In this instance their invisibility is shattered not at strong living human beings but as skeletons of their former selves. These metaphoric signs create a sense of mourning a sense of loss for the viewer. The cart is almost reminiscent of plague death carts. A lot of death is taking place for many vulnerable people along the border. It is difficult for the viewer to come into this scene and not be emotionally swayed. Even those who oppose immigration reform might be able to see their families, their fatality and their own death reflected in the cadaver’s emotions.

From what I gathered in Oaxaca, people had many friends and family in the United States and at the same time that they were happy that they were “making their life” there was a general sense that they had feared for them. In Mexico there is an anxiety for young people that they have no place in their community because there are not a lot of opportunities in many places. Those whose families have worked in agriculture are facing issues of debt due to NAFTA or worse yet loss of their ancestral farming lands. In a place like Oaxaca there is Agriculture and Tourism that drive the economy. (Denham, 2008) Many do not feel the need to study because there are no jobs and they are going to have to leave anyways. (*Ibid*) Many young people scrape

by living with their parents and are often called “Ni-Nis” (Ni Trabaja, Ni estudia) or NEET “Not Employed Education or Training” (Negere Prieto & Leyva Parra, 2013) For young women the amount of NiNis is much higher (*ibid*) this makes their work in the domestic sphere much more prevalent in Mexico. It is hard to get out of the house when there is no place to go except for north of the border.

Chapter 5: CONCLUSION

ASARO understands that the issues they depict are all interrelated and seeing them in bulk by the hundreds, I have gained an appreciation of the interconnectedness from one to the other. They create a narrative that does communicate the realities of Oaxacans. Government and capitalistic structures in Mexico actively keep the poor and working class out of the dialogue of rulership but ASARO forces an organic *pueblo* voice to be seen and to be heard. There is power in their words and images and can be seen by government actions painting over them time after time. Even if votes can't be bought, structures and political corrupt relations can take care of elections year after year. When I was doing my research a mayor known as "alcalde zombi" or "zombie mayor" was found to have faked his own death after a political scandal in one Oaxacan town and became mayor of another town with a new name. (El Universal, 2013) When poor and working class people try to join the dialogue and move rulership and change this corruption for the perfect ideal sphere where all levels of society create dialogues or multilogues, the consequences can be fatal. State aggression instills fear and complicity. Rather than fight with violence, ASARO fights back with forms of communication that are accessible, legible and have the ability to transform ideas into action. As state and capitalistic structures seek profit to fill their pockets, people at the bottom, the poor and the indigenous suffer. If they suffer all people become expendable. Peoples' labor is bought and sold for almost nothing in Mexico and abroad. Death soon follows.

ASARO offers the chance to create dialogue and talk back and to break invisibility. Oaxaca, Mexico, and Latin America is not just a colorful destination. Here, there is suffering. Thanks to resistant communication there is hope, there is dialogue, there is unity and communal action between individuals. Many of ASARO's images show strength of people paired with

victims and injustice. Placed in and on the streets, getting up sometimes gets seen and in that imaginary space of dialogue. People are able to see a broad range of ideas and framings of their pueblo. Instead of the telenovelas and news channels that portray the *pueblo* as violent, ignorant, and unimportant to the nation, the pueblo is shown as essential, powerful, active and seeking justice. This action of using images from the *pueblo* and talking back to dominant discourses gives the *pueblo* a value that is otherwise are not shown or appreciated. When ASARO speaks to and with their community, alternative voices become visible. People are seen not as animals but as humans. Getting up in ink and paint is so much more than stating opinions about the government, it is about becoming human, becoming strong, becoming united in the minds of your neighbors, your coworkers, your families, your friends, and your community. *Pueblo* is not something to be taken lightly. Your *pueblo* is everyone you have known that hasn't exploited you or others. Getting up for your *pueblo* is not about personal gain. It is about working together.

Though images might not have the power to change the law, bring politicians and people that discriminate others and exploit others to justice they do have the power to unite. It might not unite the whole community but it is a start. It is one aspect of fighting and communicating. For the food vendor I talked to, *la señora*, she is just one person that was able to remember *La Virgen* street intervention. If you multiply this one opportunity to speak with someone through an image by the various collectives in Oaxaca working since 2006 or earlier by the amount of communicative art that gets up, what results is many spaces and sites of contact. Even those that work painting over stencils and graffiti are working class people. Every day they must see how the walls speak as much as people who move from point A to point B in their daily routine. The first step of making change is changing the way we talk about our community, ourselves and

questioning the hallucinations proposed by the dominant structures. Even this is a struggle. In getting up in paint and ink, you paint the road for people to march upon.

Art can be used as a medium through which structural changes can happen. It is also a reflection of popular attitudes that continue to be resistant and skeptical about what the government and what mega business say. Without art such as ASARO's that is dispersed and can be seen, understood, and engaged with, it is sometimes difficult to have a voice or to be seen. Having art like ASARO's transforms an interaction with an image into a realization that a person's unique voice is important in society even if that voice is contrary. By including the *pueblo*, ASARO calls out to their community members and illuminates that they are many. Being part of an active pueblo in spaces where they are able to define their own realities breaks their perceived invisibility and imagines them as important. Art can be an impetus for a person to see and compare their realities with others in order to change their structures. What ensues in this collective communication is the realization that their realities are intertwined, that they are not the only ones suffering and that collectively, people can be much more organized than they the government might frame them to be. Not all collective action is chaos. In 2006 after many were murdered by federal forces, I think there was a realization that change was possible. However that change could not come about by facing the government head on but by finding ways to organize. Many decided that they would not use the same weapons of violence but the weapon of communication. ASARO gave new meanings and illuminated alternative realities through their resistant communication. Whereas the Social Movements of 2006 demonstrated what poor and working class Oaxacans are capable of, ASARO's work is a reminder that creative action is still possible.

Indeed the structures of law in society are not *directly* influenced by creative expression. However, as I have examined, an important part of that society can see itself struggle and define itself on its own terms. Art can represent and foster that dialogue that *can* lead to action and lead to structural change as a result. Getting up boradcasts that struggle to the *pueblo*.

Though Oaxaca might not be considered important on a global scale by many, it is representative of many urban centers with a large number of marginalized people. As communication and globalization becomes more intimate across a global scale, it is important to see, analyze and understand voices like ASARO. They are the voices of a new kind of youth: a youth based simultaneously on tradition and modernity who are finding a place where they can uplift their community through new forms of communication. There is an eagerness to share lived experience and alternative perspectives. Though some people abuse this ability to share, in the case of ASARO we must not only pay attention but think critically about our own actions. In a world where power and capital is so concentrated within the hands of so few, ASARO demonstrates that getting up is a way to unite our *pueblos* to express lived realities from *our* perspectives and *our* lived realities.



Figure 1 ASARO Dazante de la Pluma with Rifle



Figure 2 Itandehui Franco Ortiz ASARO Ni Perdon Ni Olvido Tapete y PFP

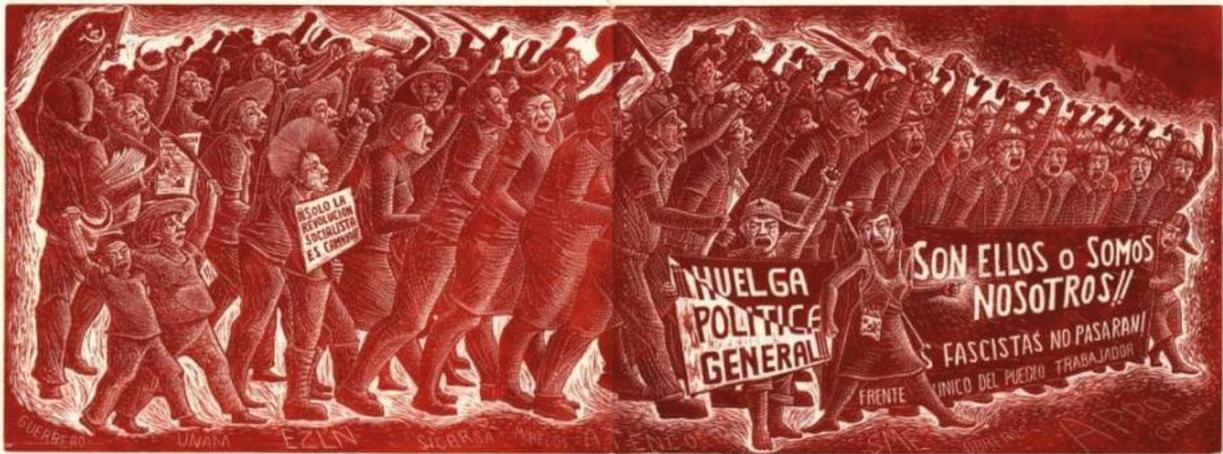


Figure 3 ASARO *Son Ellos o Somos Nosotros*. woodblock print



Figure 4 ASARO *Oaxaca Libre, Zapata Vive*, Woodblock print

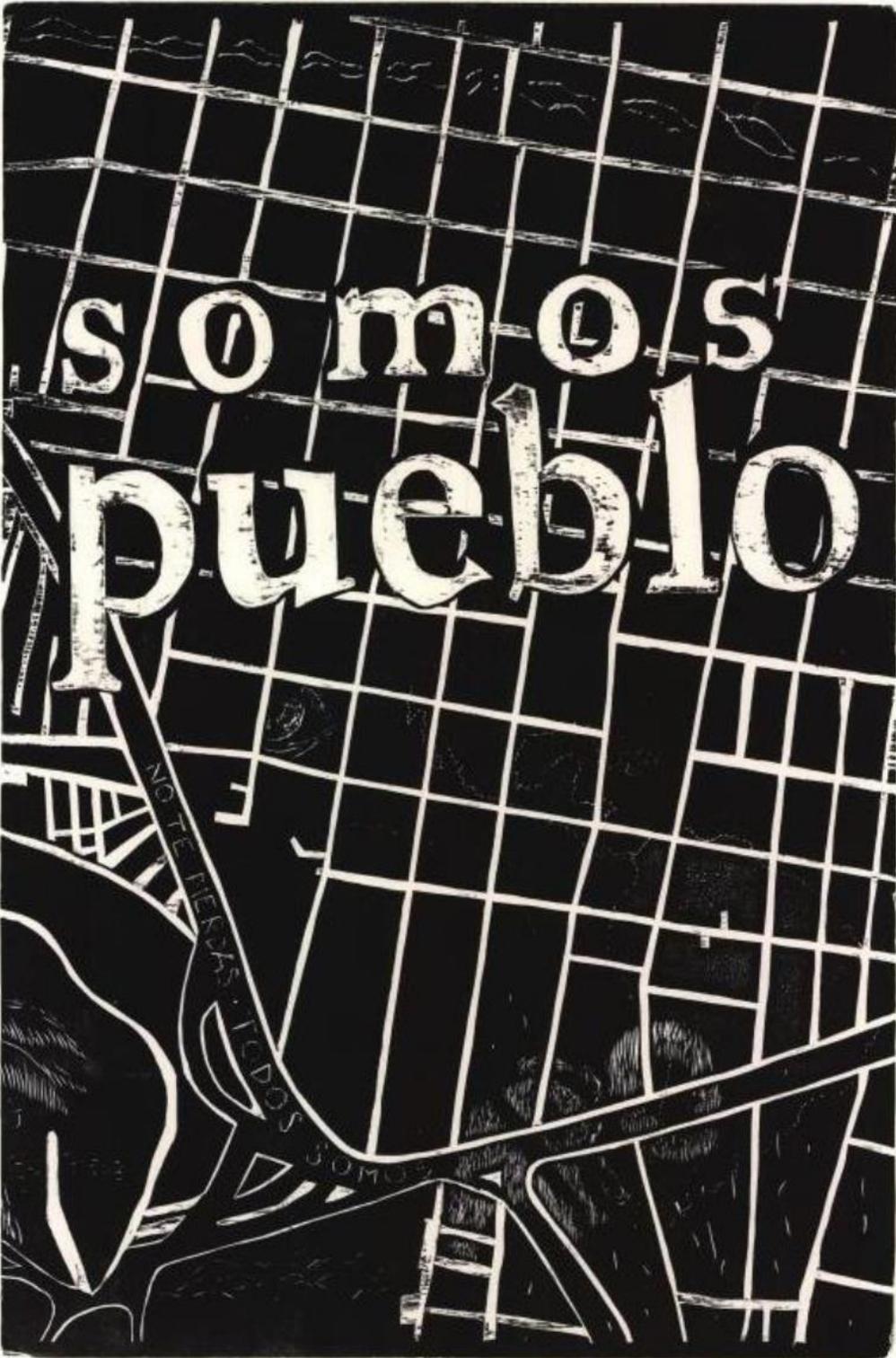


Figure 5 ASARO. Somos Pueblo Woodblock Print



Figure 6 LINE from ASARO and other contributors." *Protegenos Santisima Virgen de las Barrikadas*" wheat paste on wall



Figure 7 ASARO Women Diptych, wheat paste (left) stencil (right)



Figure 8 ASARO Transgénico Woodblock Print econtent.unm.edu



Figure 9 ASARO Petroleum Drinkers. Woodblock Print



Figure 10 ASARO PEMEX Vulture. Spraypaint on wall

Figure 11 ASARO Defiende La Educación Spraypaint on wall

Figure 12 ASARO Coyotes and Chickens Woodblock print

Interview Protocol

¿Qué es tu Apodo?

¿Qué es tu relación con el arte?

¿Cómo espesaste a trabajar con u organizar ASARO?

¿En tu opinión que significa arte p'al pueblo?

¿Cómo crees que los medios grandes representan al pueblo?

¿Para ti que es una intervención?

¿Por qué usan los medios que usan?

¿Qué es el efecto de Arte P'al Pueblo?

ASARO MANIFESTO

ASARO es una asamblea de artistas de diversas disciplinas artísticas para crear un arte público y restituirle su fin social.

La capacidad creativa, es una estrategia que históricamente ha usado el pueblo de Oaxaca, para sobrevivir y revitalizarse. La asamblea de artistas revolucionarios, surge de la necesidad de rechazar y trascender las formas autoritarias de ejercicio del poder y la cultura institucional que se ha caracterizado por ser discriminadora y deshumanizante, al buscar imponer una única versión de la realidad y una moral basada en el simulacro.

ASARO busca crear imágenes que sintetizan la fuerza crítica que nace desde la periferia, desde los barrios y los pueblos.

Retomamos la forma de la asamblea, porque creemos en la posibilidad de recuperación de la fuerza comunitaria en el arte y porque la asamblea es la forma en que los pueblos dialogamos y tomamos decisiones basadas en los intereses colectivos.

ASARO se manifiesta a favor de la inclusión y en la lucha por generar nuevas reglas de participación social y un cambio profundo en la conciencia de los oaxaqueños. Somos un movimiento contracultural, de creación artística.

Proponemos, iniciar un movimiento artístico, donde en fin sea el contacto directo con la gente, en las calles y espacios públicos.

Creemos que la expresión artística, necesita ser una forma de comunicación que permita el dialogo con todos los sectores de la sociedad y haga posible la visualización de las condiciones reales de existencia, las normas y contradicciones de la sociedad que habitamos.

ASARO busca crear conciencia y generar ideas que ayuden a consolidar una nueva corriente ideológica contemporánea, que tenga como centro de los valores humanistas, para lograr romper los esquemas impuestos por el sistema y generar una sociedad libre de la enajenación y un arte revolucionario, es decir, que transforma, promueve el cambio y la innovación.

Convocamos a todos los artistas que auténticamente busquen la transformación social, a organizarse para ampliar el movimiento creativo de resistencia y acercar el arte a todos los sectores de la sociedad.

TRANSLATION

ASARO is a gathering of artists from various artistic disciplines to create a public art and restore its social purpose.

Creative ability is a strategy that has historically used the people of Oaxaca, to survive and revitalize themselves. The assembly of revolutionary artists, arises from the need to reject and transcend authoritarian forms of governance and institutional culture has been characterized as discriminatory and dehumanizing, seeking to impose a single version of reality and morality based on the drill.

ASARO seeks to create images that summarize the critical force that comes from the periphery, from the districts and villages.

We resume the shape of the assembly, because we believe in the possibility of recovery of force in the art community and because the assembly is the way people dialoguing and make decisions based on collective interests.

ASARO is in favor of the inclusion and the fight to attract new rules of social participation and a profound change in the consciousness of the Oaxacan. We are a counterculture movement of artistic creation.

We propose to start an art movement, where in order to be direct contact with people in the streets and public spaces.

We believe that artistic expression needs to be a form of communication that allows dialogue with all sectors of society and enables the visualization of the real conditions of existence, rules and contradictions of society we inhabit.

ASARO seeks to create awareness and generate ideas to help build a new contemporary ideological current , which has the center of humanist values , in order to break the mold set by the system and create a society free of alienation and revolutionary art , i.e. which transforms , advocating for change and innovation.

We call on all artistes who genuinely seek social transformation, organizing to expand the creative resistance movement and bring art to all sectors of society.

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Figure 1451
ASARO EZLN
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Woodblock
print