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Staging *indianización*/staging *indigenismo*: artistic expression, representation of the 'Indian' and the inter-American *indigenista* movement

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ABSTRACT

This special issue—'Indigenismo on Stage: Artistic Expression and the Inter-American Indigenista Movement in the Mid-Twentieth Century'—aims to present the staging of indigenismo by analyzing its 'indianizing' side. The process we call 'indianization' consists of promoting the recognition of indigenous cultural and especially artistic 'specificities', as determined by the inter-American indigenismo that consolidated in Pátzcuaro, Mexico, starting with the first Inter-American Conference on Indian Life in 1940. Concretely, this special issue addresses the staging of indigenist indianization in two crucial domains: 1) 'indigenous' artistic expression as it was promoted by indigenismo; and 2) the abstraction/generalization of 'indigeneity' and 'indigenous people' that operationalized and successfully spread this indigenismo. These two concerns bring together the contributions to this issue (articles, a review essay, and a collective dialogue), which explicitly adopt a transnational perspective or, when they focus on specific countries, consider their indigenist connections to the rest of the Americas. Grounded on the analysis of a notable variety of objects of study (statuary, music, handicrafts, photography, engraving, and theatre), this special issue follows an itinerary that runs from the early twentieth century to the present.

RESUMEN

El número especial que aquí introducimos —'Indigenismo on Stage: Artistic Expression and the Inter-American Indigenista Movement in the Mid-Twentieth Century'— se propone mostrar la puesta en escena del indigenismo mediante el análisis de su vertiente de indianización. Entendemos por 'indianización' la promoción del reconocimiento de determinadas 'especificidades culturales indígenas', especialmente las artísticas, que caracterizó el indigenismo interamericano consolidado en Pátzcuaro, México, a raíz del Primer Congreso Indigenista Interamericano, celebrado en 1940. Concretamente, este número especial aborda la puesta en escena de la indianización indigenista desde dos ámbitos cruciales: a) la expresión artística 'indígena' en la forma en la que se promueve desde el indigenismo, y b) la abstracción/generalización de 'lo indígena' y del 'indígena' que opera y difunde exitosamente este

KEYWORDS

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PALABRAS CLAVE

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Instituto Indigenista
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indigenismo. Estas dos cuestiones recorren el conjunto de contribuciones (artículos, reseña y diálogo colectivo), que adoptan explícitamente una perspectiva transnacional o, cuando se acercan a casos nacionales, consideran sus conexiones indigenistas continentales. Desde el análisis de una significativa pluralidad de objetos de estudio (estatuaría, música, artesanía, fotografía, grabado o teatro), este número especial propone un recorrido que nos conduce desde los inicios del siglo XX hasta nuestros días.

[The First Inter-American Conference on Indian Life recommends] that protection be given to all visual, musical, and dramatic Indian folk arts, since they represent cultural values and sources of income for their producers. This protection should aim at the conservation of their artistic authenticity and the improvement of their production and distribution.

("Recommendation XIII: Protection of Indian Folk Arts;" "Acta Final," 1940 as cited in "Protection and stimulation," 1941, 18)

From April 14 to 24, 1940, the rooms where the sessions of the First Inter-American Conference on Indian Life ('Pátzcuaro First Conference' from now on) were held must have resounded – as the buildings where the attendees were staying, and the streets of the small town of Pátzcuaro, in the state of Michoacán, Mexico, might have done, too – with such expressions as 'indigenous folk arts', 'native music, dances, and theatre', 'indigenous culture', 'cultural archives', and 'indigenous heroes'. In some cases, these would have been associated with other words like 'industries', 'market', 'trade', and 'tourism', as well as 'authenticity', 'improvement', and 'development'.

As the contributions to this special issue show, the meanings of these terms were not at all obvious or univocal, but they do all appear in the 'Acta Final' (1940) approved by attendees to the conference, an event that took on an important, foundational symbolic meaning for an indigenista project that encompassed the Americas and involved around 250 people, including guests and delegates from almost every country in the Americas. This conference gave birth to the Inter-American Indian Institute (Instituto Indigenista Interamericano or IAll in English) and to national indigenista agencies in many countries. Ultimately, it would lead to the consolidation of an international, continent-wide 'indigenista field' whose future would involve different actors, both individual and collective, whose effects would be felt, in one way or another, even into the subsequent period of multiculturalism and neoliberalism (Giraudó and Martín-Sánchez 2011; Giraudó and Lewis 2012; Martín-Sánchez and Calavia Sáez 2017; Martín-Sánchez and Giraudó 2020).

The indigenismo that was consolidated in Pátzcuaro and came to prominence in the mid-twentieth century was characterized by propounding the transformation of the material life that was presumed to be representative of 'indigenous backwardness' (hygiene, housing, nutrition, health, etc.). At the same time, its objectives included the so-called salvation and defense of 'cultural' characteristics and institutions regarded as specific to the indigenous peoples of the Americas (collective ownership, traditions, customs, and institutions, languages and education, art and culture, etc.). Elsewhere, we have defined this duality of objectives as a profound ambivalence between socio-economic modernization and 'indianization', i.e. the promotion and recognition of certain 'cultural specificities' (Giraudó 2012, 22).

Most studies and interpretations of twentieth-century indigenismo have focused on its modernizing aspect, which regarded that transformation as indispensable to the ‘assimilation’, ‘integration’, or ‘incorporation’ of indigenous groups into the so-called ‘national society’. The current renovating trend of indigenismo studies has opted to rethink this phenomenon through a transnational lens. It has succeeded in partially revising the images and clichés of indigenismo across the Americas, while also paying better attention to individual national contexts. However, there is still much work to be done on the facet we have called ‘indianization’, especially on its artistic aspects. Those have remained almost entirely under-studied, at the exception of the indigenista literary production and critical essays about it: already in the 1980s, these filled the greater part of a bibliographic anthology that understood indigenismo as a ‘cultural manifestation’ (Foster 1984, 587–620).

This special issue responds to this situation by delving into the least attended side of the indigenista ambivalence that clearly emerged in Pátzcuaro in 1940. It offers contributions about projects and artistic practices that include statuary, music, handicrafts, photography, engraving, and theatre. Whether promoting arts or handicrafts, music or textiles, or even drawing on the figures of indigenous heroes, these endeavors aimed at recuperating characteristics that were regarded as ‘properly indigenous’, vindicating their value for national (and pan-American) identities, and providing the opportunity to defend and protect them. Thanks to their role in constructing indigenous typicality, these activities likewise contributed, especially in the middle decades of the twentieth century, to the nationalization of cultural expressions for both internal use and export, and for the marketplace, while shaping a certain idea of an international or pan-American indigenous identity. This is why we privilege a transnational point of view; indeed, the contributions that focus on national cases (Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia), are to be read within the framework of pan-American indigenismo, and the consideration of earlier indigenista projects and orientations and their legacies.

With this complex interweaving of elements and implications in mind, we tease out below how this issue’s articles contribute to the construction of knowledge about that process of ‘indianization’ in two crucial domains: (a) the ‘indigenous’ artistic expressions themselves, as promoted by indigenismo; and (b) the abstraction/generalization, at a pan-American as well as national scale, of ‘indigeneity’ and of indigenous people that operationalized and successfully spread this indigenismo.

‘Indigenous’ artistic expression: preservation, support, and exhibition

Taking the Pátzcuaro First Conference as a critical moment in the indigenista debate in the Americas, the contributions take different approaches in their explorations and discussions of the artistic expressions in focus. Depending on their respective cases and contexts, they highlight the projects of preserving, supporting, and exhibiting the ‘indigenous arts’ promoted by indigenismo. They are all informed by research findings in the historical archive of the IAI (among other sources). Although previous scholarship has left the specific theme of this special issue largely unexplored, a few studies have shaped our definition of the historical context and the formulation of our analytic perspective. (In addition to the works cited in each contribution, we must highlight Pernet 2008; Minks 2014; Casas 2020; Ramos 2020).

The transnational dimension proper to inter-American indigenismo, which this special issue aims to underscore, is made clear in the articles by Laura Giraudó, Amanda Minks, and Deborah Dorotinsky, which address ideas that arose in Pátzcuaro and projects undertaken by the IALL: viz., the celebration of the 'Day of the Indian', the project of recording 'indigenous music', and the field of publication.

Analyzing the indigenista celebration of the 'Day of the Indian' in Brazil at the zenith of this pan-American movement, Giraudó shows how the public exhibition of 'indigenous heroes' on this Brazilian holiday was interwoven with the institutionalization of inter-American indigenismo at the IALL as well as with the reconfiguration of national Brazilian indigenismo. At both the transnational and Brazilian national scales, various actors and institutions staked claims – not always harmoniously – about their roles and their legitimacy. In tandem with celebrations such as the Day of the Indian, bronze and stone statues materialized the conception of 'indianness' that came out of Pátzcuaro, paying necessary homage to indigenous resistance to European conquest and colonization. These Brazilian *mises-en-scène*—featuring the figure of Cuauhtémoc, now cast as an 'Amerindian hero'—refer to a narrative of recuperation and vindication in which the Day of the Indian could even be understood as acknowledging a historical debt and beginning a just process of reparation. These mythical evocations of indigenous heroism nevertheless took place in a specific contemporary context in which they participated in a symbolic representation of (Brazilian and inter-American) indigenismo that, although it did not become univocal, did have the effect of exalting not so much indigenous people as the indigenistas themselves.

Public promotion by the IALL was also at the origin of the approach to indigenous music, a theme addressed in Minks's contribution, which especially recuperates the work of Henrietta Yurchenco and the introduction of modern recording techniques in Mexico. Although emphasis is on the personal and professional agency of this U.S. ethnomusicologist, Minks analyzes her figure in terms of her relations to inter-American indigenismo from her leading role in the projects of recording indigenous music and producing radio programs for the IALL. From its start in Pátzcuaro First Conference, the IALL regarded music as a valuable resource that needed to be preserved and studied, prefiguring the idea of cultural heritage but also contributing to new 'ideologies of authenticity' that affected the meanings associated with indigenous communities and cultures as well as those related to technologies of recording and technical reproduction. The IALL's intervention in this field was characterized by a debate about the 'authenticity' of indigenous music (recorded or transcribed *in situ*) and indigenista music (resulting from arrangements by 'educated' composers), and about the legitimacy of the role of its makers, whether indigenous people themselves or white-mestizo indigenistas. It contributed to the construction of typicality and the promotion of cultural difference in a positive sense. But its legacy was also ambivalent because it distanced the idea of authenticity from concrete indigenous communities, displacing it to the laboratory and the archive, where music became an authorized source of national heritage.

Publications were another important tool in the diffusion of indigenismo, which Dorotinsky addresses in an analysis of the establishment of an 'inter-American indigenist visuality' in the first decade of *América Indígena*, the official journal of the IALL that stood out among social science publications of the era for – among other things – its transnational character. Dorotinsky deals with three different kinds of images: the emblem of the

IAll, engravings, and photographs. She introduces readers to several key actors behind the consolidation of an indigenista visual language, including the Guatemalan painter Carlos Mérida, the creator of the emblem that was designed to bestow an institutional identity on the IAll, and the artists Alfredo Zalce, Gustavo Savin, and Alberto Beltrán, authors of many engravings and members of the Taller de Gráfica Popular. The origins of the photographs, a significant sample of which Dorotinsky analyzes, were much more varied and uneven: they came from exploratory and ethnographic trips, from state and international offices, and even from tourist agencies and transportation companies. Clearly emerging from this heterogeneous corpus is the complexity of the relationship (not necessarily a coherent one) between textual and visual narrative, as well as the different effect of the graphic elements. On the one hand, Mérida's IAll emblem offered symbolic unity, while the other artists' engravings lent the journal a certain graphic unity and aesthetic homogeneity. On the other, the conceptual variety of the postures and definitions of this fledgling indigenismo returned in the diversity and heterogeneity of photographic materials, once again making visible ambiguities and contradictions.

This connection to the transnational approach and to the foundational acts of inter-American indigenismo is also present in the contributions of Emilio J. Gallardo-Saborido, Haydée López Hernández, and María Elena Bedoya. These cases are not about specific projects supported and carried out by the IAll, but rather about key questions that were discussed in Pátzcuaro, such as theatre, folk/indigenous art, and folklore. Even as they focus on an earlier period (Gallardo-Saborido) or on a specific country (Bolivia, Mexico, and Ecuador), these contributions also emphasize the importance of inter-American indigenismo, thanks to the communion of actors, ideas, and projects. Similarly, all these artistic expressions, just like the rituals, music, and illustrations discussed above, constituted resources that, from an indigenista point of view, should not only be conserved (or even be discovered or recuperated), but could also equally 'be improved' to promote economic development and tourism, and the articulation with international trade networks. It is no accident that it was the socioeconomic section of the Pátzcuaro First Conference that was dedicated to discussing different 'indigenous folk arts'. The closing act of the event presented the duality assigned to indigenous artistic productions as both 'cultural value' and 'source of income', as made evident in the epigraph to this introduction.

Gallardo-Saborido's text reminds us how the modernizing side of indigenismo, which entailed a certain push for denunciation and reform, was palpable in much indigenista literature, in addition to marking the identity of one of the most understudied bodies of dramatic work in Latin America: namely, Bolivian theatre. Specifically, Gallardo-Saborido emphasizes how a selection of playwrights showed a concern to improve the living conditions of indigenous people in Bolivia and analyzed the causes of their subaltern position. It is interesting to go back to the 1920s – an especially important decade in Bolivian theatre – not only because this allows us to recognize the earlier trajectories (with their national peculiarities) of ideas that became prominent in Pátzcuaro, but also because it shows how the desire for material transformation could also present itself as being on the side of protecting and promoting the arts. A key figure here was Antonio Díaz Villamil, who participated in the 'new Bolivian national theatre' of the 1920s, and then, twenty years later, attended the Pátzcuaro First Conference as an official delegate of his country, contributing directly to the creation of the IAll.

The debate around folk arts and folklore, featured in the articles by López Hernández and Bedoya on Mexico and Ecuador, alerts us to the diverse designations and the many understandings and values attached to the products of indigenous/folk material culture. López Hernández takes us through the construction of folk arts in Mexico from the 1920s to the mid-twentieth century, revealing the conceptual tensions between the labels 'indigenous' and 'folk'. She examines different projects that shuttled between art and folklore, pre-Hispanic roots and industrial innovation, and the conservation and transformation of indigenous and Mexican identities. Instead of a linear, homogeneous history, López Hernández's analysis reveals a complex process in which these projects were permeated by different ways of ascribing aesthetic, cultural, and identitarian values to objects, as well as by the need to conserve them in the face of their transformation. It was only in the mid-twentieth century that a certain consensus emerged, engendered by the modernization of the Mexican state and by the inter-American indigenista project founded on an association of handicrafts exclusively with the indigenous population, and on the idea of the need to preserve and protect the 'authenticity' of indigenous folk arts.

The final stop on López Hernández's itinerary in the 1940s coincides with the start of the chronological arc of Bedoya's work on the relationships between art, folklore, and cultural institutions: namely, the founding of the Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana (CCE) in 1944. This fact is especially important considering that in 1929, the institution that had served as a 'national' museum had burned down. Another important fact provides a closing date for Bedoya's text: the Fifth Inter-American Indigenista Conference held in Quito in 1964. This latter period gave birth to institutions and journals dedicated to folklore, at a time when what had initially been regarded as 'handmade' or 'indigenous arts' evolved into notions of 'handicrafts' or 'folklore', establishing folklore as a 'selective tradition'. Bedoya thus underscores how some artists, who saw themselves as 'folklorists' (*folclorólogos*), played an active role in processes of socializing folklore associated with handmade arts, from their conception, promotion, and maintenance to their spread and commercialization. Starting with the First 'Gran Exposición de Artes Manuales y Plásticas Indígenas e Indigenistas', held in 1948, there arose tensions and fractures that contrasted with the concomitant development of the notion of *national culture* in its relation to indigeneity and the configuration of folklore as an official state discourse. Here we find figures and institutions – in addition to the CCE, the Instituto Indigenista Ecuatoriano, the Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios, and international agencies – that debated the differences between the arts 'made' by indigenous people, and those that were 'inspired' by them.¹

The question of authorship and creation, together with the notion of 'artistic-aesthetic tutelage', taken up explicitly in Bedoya's article, is a thread that unites several of the contributions to this special issue: it is a fundamental tension in the discourses and practices related to folk/indigenous arts, which is related to the meaning of authenticity, originality, the copy, and repetition, in their different personal and institutional understandings. It is here that the legacies of indigenismo are also part of a current debate that reflects on how cultural institutions have implemented folklorizing processes on indigenous artistic practices, which can now be reviewed critically from the visual arts, textiles, poetry, music, and film. This is the topic of the collective dialogue or *Yuyarinchik ninchink*,

in which Bedoya and José Luis Macas converse with Angélica Alomoto, Elvira Espejo, and Alberto Muenala about their artistic experiences in the field of art and cultural institutions in Ecuador and Bolivia.

Imaginaries of indigeneity: practices, experiences, and representations

The other aspect of Indianization that we identified above – the abstraction/generalization of indigeneity and the indigenous person – is part of a line of work that strives to show how the analysis of the indigenista trajectory (across the Americas, transnationally, and nationally) makes it possible to better understand the long duration of the processes of collective representation of ‘indigeneity’ and ‘indigenous people’ (see Giraudo 2020), while also acknowledging the visual and material devices used, in the wake of Poole (1997) pioneering work, and in dialogue with more recent proposals (see Dorotinsky 2013; Pérez, Carolina, and Martínez 2017; Bigenho, Stobart, and Mújica Angulo 2018; Hirsch, Kivland, and Stainova 2020).

It is worth emphasizing that this approach regards ‘indigeneity’ more as a position than as an identity or fixed category, something that acquires a precise meaning in a specific (historical, geographical, cultural, political, and social) conjuncture, and which, therefore, is constantly redefined and transformed through active appropriation, on the part of different actors, in the performative play of identity (Eiss 2016).

Analyzing practices, experiences, and representations, whether in a transnational or national setting, the texts that make up this special issue resolve to broaden our knowledge of indigenista contributions to these ways of consolidating imaginaries of the ‘indigenous subject’. Through this exercise, we attempt to avoid attributing either a flattened historical continuity or absolute novelty to the ways in which these imaginaries were shaped in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

Giraudo’s analysis of indigenista discourse in the Day of the Indian in Brazil thus uncovers the exaltation of the ‘heroic indianness’ of the past – leaving contemporary indigenous people as passive subjects of the work of ‘indigenista redemption’—as well as divergent interpretations of indigenous heroism, epitomized by the figures of Cuauhtémoc and Araribóia. The contrast between the ‘Amerindian hero’ and the ‘local native hero’, and moreover between the double staging of Brazil’s national celebration and its regional ones, is indicative of the implications of this representation in inter-American and national indigenista politics. Nevertheless, the repertoire of images and of the material and symbolic elements in the stagings of the Day of the Indian was available to be used – and indeed was used – for other purposes and by other actors.

Other graphic repertoires appeared on the pages of *América Indígena*, conveying different visual canons of ‘indigeneity’. The ‘new trinity’ of the IAll’s emblem – the three-headed logo designed by Mérida – materialized the idea of an inter-American indigenismo in which the pre-Hispanic, colonial, and contemporary indigenous spirits were united for the realization of a future. In its engravings one could find the idealized, stylized, and at times stereotyped (as a fixation of a mythical figure) indigenous person, but also an avant-garde aesthetic and a certain social and political approach. The most diversity, Dorotinsky points out, was in the photographs, in which the effort to find an appropriate visual language was unable to establish a strict criterion about the type or style of material to be published. Nevertheless, indigenista visuality would be diverted

increasingly into photography. In the broadest sense, Dorotinsky's work makes manifest indigenismo's continuous shuttling back and forth between the creation of an abstract, generalized vision of indigenous people (i.e. the 'American Indian' as analyzed by Giraudo 2020, drawing on textual narrative) and ways of approaching concrete indigenous realities, their material cultures, and cultural practices, which tended to emphasize, and 'represent' hemispheric, national, and local indigenous diversity.

This is clear in the different artistic expressions studied in this special issue, in which we find, at the same time, a search for general characteristics with pan-American pretensions and a quest for national and local specificities in music, art, handicrafts, folklore, and theatre. This is why the articles by Minks, López Hernández, Bedoya, and Gallardo-Saborido, in their respective analyses of these artistic practices, not only move between local, national, pan-American, and international scales of the discussion about the arts, but also consider all these dimensions by addressing the conceptualizations and abstractions of indigeneity.

López Hernández's apt conclusive assertion about the Mexican debate on folk/indigenous arts and industries could well be paraphrased to fit this special issue as a whole: alongside the arts, the indigenous subject was being defined in a process that was equally full of contradictions and ambiguities, and although these were born of essentialism and primitivism, they careened between the conservation of the ethnic tradition and the desire for national modernity. The discussion around protecting, supporting, exhibiting, and even deriving economic benefit from art objects entailed a reflection on indigenous subjecthood, and its relationships to the pre-Hispanic and colonial past, to the modernizing present, and to states and international agencies and organizations. Between pan-American pretensions and national visions, the indigenous subject could nevertheless be vindicated from the standpoint of contemporaneity and modernity, as was the case with the figures of the new Bolivian theatre studied by Gallardo-Saborido. Rather than being linked to the evocation of the historical past, the indigenous protagonists represented in those plays appeared to vindicate their current rights (be they labor, sexual, educational, etc.). In other contexts, like the Ecuadorian one Bedoya analyzes in her article, together with general and particular abstractions that tended to trap indigeneity in fixed visual and experiential images, indigenous people themselves recovered embodiment and agency in their artistic and political positionings, albeit always in a complex relationship between that which is lived, that which is narrated, and that which is represented, as we are reminded in the collective dialogue, *Yuyarinchik ninchik*.

Concluding this special issue, Juan Martín-Sánchez reviews the content of, and debates surrounding three books by Cecilia Wahren, Jorge Coronado, and Raúl H. Asensio. His text points toward a foundational element in the history of indigenismo during its initial formation, sociocultural expansion, and limitation in the construction of national societies: the production of 'indigeneity' as a form of capital, in Bourdieu's sense, specific to indigenismo. As the articles of this special issue show, this process has two inseparable faces: the production and use of symbolic realities related to the differential character of 'indigeneity'; and the representational milieu in which ruins, musical traditions, photographs, and statues are recognized as symbolic capital of the indigenista field – a symbolic capital and repertoire of images and representations that remained available for other uses, which could even be foreign or opposed to their origin and purpose.

Note

1. Due to spatial constraints, the article by María Elena Bedoya, "Artists, Folklorists, and Cultural Institutions in Ecuador (1944–1964)" will appear in the next issue of LACES.

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