➲ Social Critique and the Politics of *Patrimonio Cultural* in Edgar Clement's *Los perros salvajes*

Bruce D. Campbell
St. John's University/College of St. Benedict, EE. UU.

Abstract: This essay argues that analysis of Mexico's visual culture generally, and the graphic novels of Edgar Clement specifically, can be usefully situated within the politics of *patrimonio cultural.* Mexico's 20th century graphic arts heritage has undergone a transformation during the past several decades, elevating the commercial comic book tradition to a greater position of prestige and public visibility than the more politically engaged revolutionary art forms inherited from the same period. In this context, Clement's *Los perros salvajes* (2012) appropriates the comic book character *Memín Pingüín* in the service of social and political critique.

Keywords: Edgar Clement; Visual culture; Graphic novel; Cultural heritage; Social critique; Mexico; 20th-21st Century.

Resumen: La cultura visual de México y, por ende, las novelas gráficas de Edgar Clement, pueden ubicarse de manera útil dentro de la política del '*patrimonio cultural*'. La herencia gráfica mexicana del siglo xx ha experimentado una transformación durante las décadas más recientes, elevando la tradición comercial de la historieta a una posición de prestigio y de visibilidad pública mayor que la de las formas revolucionarias heredadas del mismo período. Dentro de este contexto, *Los perros salvajes* (2012) de Clement se apropia de la figura de la historieta *Memín Pingüín* para plantear una crítica social y política de las condiciones nacionales.

Palabras clave: Edgar Clement; Cultura visual; Novela gráfica; Patrimonio cultural; Crítica social; México, Siglos xx-xxi.

Mexico's 20th century popular graphic arts tradition, which took shape alongside the consolidation of the corporatist state in the 1930s and beyond, can be seen at work in interesting ways in Edgar Clement's recently published graphic novel *Los perros salvajes* (issue number 1 was released in November 2012 by Balazo).[1] Like many of his 20th century predecessors, Clement draws upon and contributes to popular visual culture in a graphic narrative language aimed at commenting upon and critiquing social and political realities in Mexico. I would like to suggest an analysis of Clement's graphic novel framed by two broad, and related questions that I believe can productively guide graphic arts research in the Mexican context:

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[1] For a sample of reviews of *Los perros salvajes*, see Martínez (2013), Mexicón (2012) or Mendiola (2013).

1) What is the fate of Mexico's 20th century graphic arts cultural heritage in the post-NAFTA period?

2) What is the relevance of those popular cultural forms inherited from the nation's pre-*NAFTA* modernity for the critical representation of social and political reality in the post-NAFTA period?

While these questions are admittedly each too large and complex to adequately address here, together they suggest a framework for cultural research and analysis that can be fruitfully applied in critical examination of contemporary Mexican visual culture, a framework which, I will argue, Clement's most recent graphic novel validates in important ways.

The framework implicit to these questions is the politics of *patrimonio cultural*. The term *patrimonio cultural* is both a legal term of art (*patrimonio cultural* or cultural heritage as an institutional, curatorial and property management concern), and the name of a social and political problematic confronted by students of culture (most prominently amongst anthropologists). The term refers to the historically accumulated set of materials, knowledges and practices that are associated with a particular collective "identity".[2] Importantly, this collectively meaningful aggregate of cultural elements does not accumulate in a simply additive fashion, but through cultural production, social and political processes, official resource allocation, and interpretation and contestation of meanings. In other words, cultural patrimony is itself an artifact of cultural politics. And what constitutes cultural patrimony—whether legally or informally, officially or unofficially—is simultaneously a work-in-progress and a resource for engagement with the conditions of the present (Bonfil Batalla 1993: 19-39).

In this sense, the first research question centers on the contemporary status of the graphic arts past, on how it is accented, interpreted and conserved, and by whom. The second research question seeks to understand the present day agency for critique of those historical materials, whether and how they are put into play as public discourse directed at exposing problems of common concern and mobilizing to confront those problems. Stated differently, the first question seeks to understand the latter-day position of inherited cultural materials within the broader cultural field, while the second question aims to discern the deployment of those materials as a resource for public engagement.

The circumstances of Clement's work are quite different from those of his 20th century predecessors. Mexican graphic artists of the 1930s through the end of the 20th century had practiced their art in the political context of a one-party corporatist state that sought legitimacy in hegemonic discourses that accented nation, *lo popular*, and modernization, to varying degrees and in varying combinations. In that context, artists created visual idioms and narratives that drew upon these same symbolic points of reference for public discourse, thereby leveraging into popular media a social and political commentary on Mexican national realities.

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[2]   See, for example, Néstor García Canclini (1999: 16-33) or, the context of the politics of globalization offered by Manuel Castells who distinguishes, three types of identities: *identidades legitimadoras* (or official constructs managed by the nation-state), *identidades de resistencia* (constructed from the margins of the official order) and *identidades proyecto* (collective meaning production linked to transformative projects) (Castells 2010: 254-262.)

Thus, for example, the work of the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* famously radicalized the popular poster and pamphlet arts previously associated with José Guadalupe Posada, projecting a militant national-popular imagery into the Mexican public sphere during the period of consolidation of revolutionary nationalist state institutions in the 1930s. The TGP project would later experience a revival in the 1960s, as youth and student rebellions against official power gave new purpose to the graphic arts as a medium of public discourse. Later decades witnessed a continuation of politically-engaged graphic artistry, with the *grupos* phenomenon of collective artistic production emerging from the 1970s and re-appearing most publicly in response to the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, and subsequently in dialogue with the neo-Zapatista project from 1994 onward. The politics of this long trajectory of graphic art for popular communication and public critique was grounded in visual constructs aimed at activating collective memory and *el rescate de valores* dating to the revolutionary period, the critical representation of social conditions (such as poverty and labor exploitation), the symbolic elevation of popular sectors to historical agency, the dramatization of protest against state power, and, of course, the caricature and satirizing of official power.[3]

In a similar manner, though in a distinct graphic medium governed by the commercial entertainment culture industry, cartoonists such as Gabriel Vargas would participate in the creation of the country's vibrant 20th century comics culture by authoring characters and developing narratives that accented nation, popular social experience, and the official project of modernization, often in ironic and critical fashion, albeit in less overtly political fashion than the work of the TGP and its legatees. Vargas' *La Familia Burrón* comic offered, for popular consumption at newsstands throughout the country from the late 1930s onward, an irreverent and often corrosive representation of working class life, modernization and the imagined space of Mexico.[4] Also dating to the 1940s is the Afro-Mexican comic book character *Memín Pinguín*, created by Yolanda Vargas Dulche, originally drawn by Alberto Cabrera, and subsequently popularized in the comic book format by cartoonist Sixto Valencia. Like *La Familia Burrón*, *Memín* became a kind of popular cultural institution (at its peak selling over two hundred thousands copies per week in Mexico;—Hernández Cuevas 2003: 52—). Despite its much-criticized racially stereotyped depictions of Afro-descendent characters, the comic effectively emphasized urban working class experience, perspective and values.[5]

While not explicitly political in the manner, for example, of Eduardo del Río's (Rius) adaptation of cartooning to ideology critique, these popular comics referenced and represented popular experience—poverty in particular—in ways that contradicted and satirized

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[3] Edward McCaughan (2012) provides an excellent inventory of some of this visual discourse, from the student movement of 1968 through the *grupos phenomenon*, and notes that much of the imagery was characterized by heroic masculinist rhetoric, in representations of both the nation and of protest.

[4] I outline the character of Vargas' critiques of the official discourse of modernization in a chapter dedicated to *La Familia Burrón* in my book *¡Viva la historieta!* (Campbell 2009: 118-141)

[5] In the words of Mexican cultural critic Carlos Monsivais, "El tema central del cómic no es la epidermis 'quemada' sino la clase social" (Monsivais 2008). For Mexican historian Enrique Krauze, "To Americans, the figure, with his exaggerated 'African' features, appears to be a copy of racist American cartoons. To Mexicans, he is a thoroughly likable character, rich in sparkling wisecracks, and is felt to represent not any sense of racial discrimination but rather the egalitarian possibility that all groups can live together in peace. During the 1970s and '80s, his *historietas* sold over a million and a half copies because they touched an authentic chord of sympathy and tenderness among poorer people, who identified with Memin Pinguin" (Krauze 2005).

the official discourse of modernization from the 1940s onward, and/or critically accented nationalist symbology with working class sentiment. One can see this class-specific accenting of nation, for example, in *Memín Pingüín* number 183 ("¡Mano negra!," April 1990). Memín's mother, Doña Eufrosina, wakes him up early one day, explaining that "Antes de ir a la escuela, daremos gracias a la patrona" (Before going to school, we will give thanks to our *patrona*, or patroness), referring to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Memín responds by asking innocently "¿A cuál de todas tus patronas, ma' linda? Porque a muchas les lavas la ropa" (Which one of your patronas—meaning employers or bosses—momma? Because you wash clothes for so many.) When Doña Eufrosina explains who the "patrona" is, Memín responds with another question: "¿Y ella también te va a dar un sueldo?" [And will she give you a wage too?] (*Memín Pingüín,* n° 183, "¡Mano negra!," April 1990: 14).

In short, Mexican popular graphic art emerged in the 20th century as a prominent medium of popular culture AND as a cultural space for social commentary and representation of popular experience. Significantly, this occurred both in the graphic narrative generated by the culture industries and in the non-commercial and more artist-centered graphic arts production of the so-called Fine Arts. The public cultural context for this was a corporatist politics that articulated together populist and nationalist discourses with a program of state-led capitalist modernization, which included public subventions to support artistic production and the development of a domestic cultural market. Publicly funded Fine Arts education and commissions supported the non-commercial side of Mexican visual culture. At the same time, the government supported low-cost access to newsprint through the state-run *Productora e Importadora de Papel, Sociedad Anónima* (PIPSA), allowing Mexican publishers to develop a national comic book industry on the commercial side of Mexican visual culture, alongside the development of a mass entertainment culture centered around film and television.

In contrast, the circumstances for Edgar Clement's work—beginning with his ground-breaking graphic novel *Operación Bolívar*, published serially in the mid-1990s—are conditioned by the post-NAFTA landscape: a globalized cultural market (facilitated by the explosion of Internet and social media communication), the privatization of public goods, reduced state supports for popular consumption, a broad crisis in the nation's institutional order, legal and extra-legal assaults on organized popular interests, and the proliferation of profit-motivated armed actors in Mexican society. While the graphic arts tradition of the TGP retains its formal institutional status as *patrimonio cultural* through the curatorial efforts of official agencies, its status as public discourse (i.e., *patrimonio* as a collective resource used to address collective problems, such as Mexico's drug war, electoral legitimacy crises, etc.) is much diminished in the post-NAFTA period. Unsurprisingly, political campaigns and official discourse have made deliberate use of the commercial tradition of popular graphic narrative[6], but have mostly avoided association

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[6]   The Vicente Fox administration (2000-2006), for example, published its *State of the Republic* reports in a comic book format, the narrative and artwork for which was contracted out to Kaboom Studios. The Andrés Manuel López Obrador administration in the Distrito Federal used a telenovela-like comic book format to publicize key items of its policy agenda during the same period. Using a common campaign tool for Mexican politicians, presidential candidate for the Partido de Acción Nacional, Josefina Vázquez Mota, distributed a comic book *(¿Quién es Josefina?)* to introduce herself to popular sectors in 2012. In early 2013, López Obrador, two-time presidential candidate for the Partido de la Revolución Democrática, launched a short comic (conceived by political cartoonist El Fisgón) in defense of public control of the petroleum industry.

with the more explicitly political Fine Arts tradition of popular communication, to say nothing of its militant messaging.

The 20th century culture industry heritage has received higher profile emphasis as *patrimonio cultural* in the early 21st century, as witnessed by, among other things, the creation of a series of *Memín Pingüín* postage stamps by the *Servicio Postal Mexicano* in 2005, and the recreation of the *vecindad* of *La Familia Burrón* in the *Museo del Estanquillo* in Mexico City in 2007. In celebrating the bicentenary of Mexico's national independence, Editorial Vid distributed a special issue (*Memín Pingüín Bicentenario*, 2010) in which the titular character recounts the story of Mexico's independence struggle. *Memín Pingüín Centenario* featured on its cover the diminutive and stereotyped figure of Memín, sporting a large sombrero with the words "¡Viva México!" on the brim, accompanied by Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and Francisco Madero. Making clear his recently established status as a spokesman for Mexican collective experience and collective meaning, Memín informs the reader, "¡Les voy a contar cómo se hizo nuestra revolución!" (Aviña 2010).

In other words, in the shifting latter-day fates of Mexico's 20th century graphic arts one can see a reshaping of the meanings of the nation's cultural heritage underway in the post-NAFTA period. This is an unavoidable part of the context for reading Clement's novels. Clement's graphic critique of Mexican reality articulates a relationship to Mexican cultural patrimony that differs sharply from both the populist recycling of the country's 20th century comic book heritage for the 21st century electoral campaign, and from the conservation of the cultural past as reliquary. Of greatest interest for situating his work in the politics of *patrimonio cultural* is the particular way in which Clement's *Los perros salvajes* reanimates Mexico's 20th century graphic arts and comics legacy as critical public discourse in the current conjuncture.

In *Los perros salvajes*, Clement undertakes to depict the synergy between neoliberalism as official policy doctrine, state authoritarianism and corruption, drug trafficking, and U.S. imperial hegemony in Mexico. In this sense, *Los perros salvajes* serves as a kind of sequel to Clement's *Operación Bolívar* (1999), which tells a dark tale of the commercial cannibalizing of angels in U.S.-led free market globalization and the development of the regional drug trade. *Los perros* recounts the trials of a small guerrilla cell that sets out to "change a system that we view as unfair and that refuses to change for the better."

As with *Operación Bolívar*, the indigenous past is an omnipresent touchstone for resistance in the form of *nahuales*, powerful animal spirits that link the characters to a pre-Colombian ancestry. As with *Operación Bolívar*, indigenous cultural heritage is carefully revived through the artist's contemporary interpretations of the nation's indigenous visual patrimony. The story opens with a full-page splash panel presentation of Coatlicue, the Aztec mother earth goddess, accompanied by a prayer of devotion and collective origin: "Esta es nuestra madre." The image serves also as an emblem of Clement's posture toward the nation's visual traditions: the dynamism of the artwork frees the figure of Coatlicue from the archaic immobility of the stone statue of the deity housed in the National Museum of Anthropology and History in Mexico City.

But *Los perros* deploys its bleak portrait of contemporary Mexico in a much more totalizing and analytical fashion than *Operación Bolívar*, elaborating its critique on the basis of an effectively sociological account of the key social actors and forces shaping the nation's prospects. The visual support for this is an interwoven use of several distinct page-formatting strategies:

- Conventional panel sequencing accompanied by dialogue serves to move forward the narrative of exploits and tribulations of Saulo and his guerrilla cell.

- Rhythmically interspersed with these action and dialogue panel sequences are half-page to full-page panels, with little or no accompanying text, which serve to visually introduce key actors and geographical settings for the story, and to mark the end or the beginning of an action sequence.

- A third formatting technique deployed by Clement is an inset panel, highlighted visually by a filigreed panel border, with an ironic Hallmark card-like advertising message that indexes U.S. commercial culture (on pages 4, 15, and 23). These interruptions of the narrative dramatize, and seek to eliminate, the radical distance between U.S.-style consumerist habit and ideology propagated outward from the imperial economic North, on the one hand, and the abject conditions of life endured in the economic South.

It is a fourth format element, however, that grounds what might be called the socio-gra-phic discourse of the novel—that is, its representation of the key social actors, geography and dynamics of contemporary Mexican society. Where the novel's text turns away from narrative event toward description of societal context, Clement dispenses with panel frames entirely. The sequential language of comics gives way to the didactic presenta-tion of illustration, although Clement's fluid arrangements of text and image encourages reading both elements in combination, calling the eye to meander freely down the page. Here, we can appreciate one of the special strengths of graphic narrative in representing the social world: visual discourse allows for the economical deployment of text, while textual discourse extends the referentiality of the image beyond the merely indexical.

From these socio-graphic excursions, we learn that Saulo and his band of guerrillas are not the only armed actors on the stage. In addition to the army, the *federales*, and the drug-traffickers, the guerrillas' transformative project has to contend with the local *caci-ques*, whose traditional role as rural powerbroker is now enmeshed not only with gover-nment corruption but also with struggle for control over the drug market. The bloody victimization of rural indigenous communities, visualized on p. 5, displayed beneath the supervisory gaze of the authoritarian governor of the state of Oaxaca, Ulises Ruiz, is thus explained as a consequence of a local exercise in corrupt official power. The imagery that follows on p. 6 (see figure 1) is drawn from a variety of national news items familiar to the Mexican reader: indigenous women accused of kidnapping federal police, indige-nous owners of highly valued forest lands arrested on trumped-up federal charges, human rights activists murdered; legal and illegal deforestation of communally-owned lands, and mass migration of young people north to the U.S. to escape violence and impoveri-shment.[7] The corruption and violence are of a piece with neoliberal doctrine. "The judges sell themselves to the highest bidder," the text observes, "All rights go to free enterprise."

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[7]   The image in the upper left corner of the page is derived from press clippings of the high-profile case of three Otomí women accused in 2006 of kidnapping six federal police agents. The image in the upper right corner of the page is derived from photographs of Digna Ochoa, a human rights activist murdered in her office in 2001. Ochoa is considered to be the first documented case of what subsequently became a wave of assassinations of human rights workers in Mexico.

Figure 1

On pages 8 and 9, the novel's sociography of rural Mexico continues. The country's rural economy—employment, income, and modernization—are organized around drug trafficking. Even the meager income paid to the *campesinos* by the cartels for growing marijuana and poppy ("Pagan una madre, pero para él que no tiene nada..." the text reminds) allows rural communities to pay for access to electricity, potable water, and television. Caciques large and small come out winners, and the political system absorbs the infrastructure monies saved by the drug economy's privatization of rural modernization. In this environment, the guerrilla project ceases to be viable as violent repression increases and local interests are enmeshed with the interests of the narcos. The storyline recommences and eventually the action is transported from the rural provinces to the mega-city.

Following their capture by the Mexican army, and subsequent escape, the guerrillas retreat into the urban environment (p. 16). As the characters move into the urban landscape, the novel's imagery and text present a new set of characters, among them the economically marginal spaces of urban modernity. It is here where Clement offers to the reader a popular cultural figure that, in an important sense, requires no introduction. When the character Memo first appears on page 16 of issue number one, the reader encounters a symbolically laden character from the nation's popular culture—one enshrined by the Mexican Postal Service on a postage stamp in 2005. Precisely for this reason, Clement's introduction and development of the character represents a critical appropriation and re-animation of the country's popular cultural heritage, one that bends received culture in the direction of renewed social and political meaning.

This is no facile parody of commercial culture for comic effect. In fact, the first appearance of the child is not immediately recognizable as Memín Pingüín. The original character's absurdly stereotyped racial features are erased, and Memín's appropriately child-like innocence and happy visage have been replaced by the hardened, suspicious outlook of a drug cartel informant. Memín's exaggerated *negritud* has also been mitigated by a more nuanced use of color. The center of aesthetic gravity for Clement's drawings is black and white or sepia, the realist mode of which is occasionally reinforced through the integration of photographic images to the visual texture of the page. Clement reserves a muted color palette for stressing certain characters in the visual field, and as a kind of modal marker that distinguishes the supernatural status of the *nahuales* from everyday life reality. Significantly, this selective use of color is also applied to the introduction of the figure of the *halcón*, bestowing upon this particular one both the mark of individuality and the color-coded signifiers (red and white striped shirt and blue and white baseball cap) that associate him with the comic book character.

It is not until page 23 [see figure 2], seven pages later, that this individuality, and the reader's nagging sense that there is something familiar about this child, will be confirmed by the narrative. Whereas rural Mexico's political economy is represented as a social totality through an illustrated mapping of social actors, power and interests, Clement's depiction of the violence and injustice of the urban context uses Sixto Valencia's Memín Pingüín as a prism. The social actors in this case are not "real," but cartoon characters from a different historical moment, stripped of nostalgia and thrust into the violence and degradation of contemporary Mexico's political economy.

Figure 2
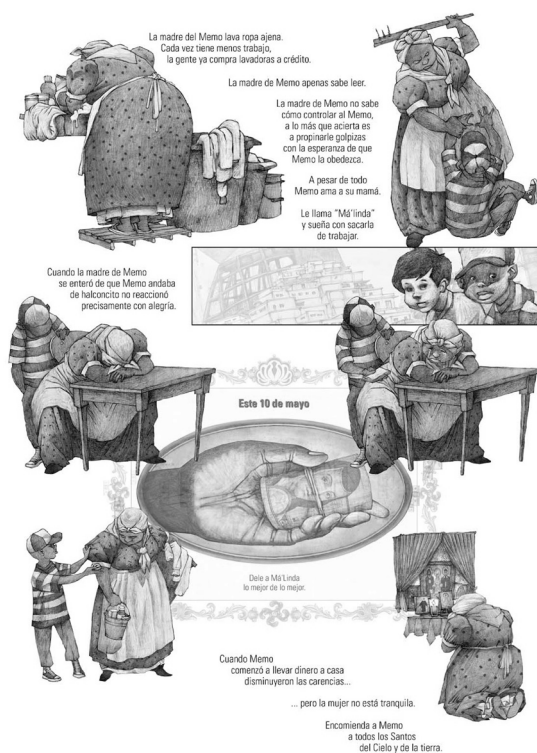
In a full-page socio-graphic display, Clement leaves the reader with no doubt about the identity of the familiar-looking child *halcón*. We learn that Memo is the child's name, that he calls his mother "Má'linda" and "dreams of freeing her from having to work." Má'linda's name, stout physique, *pañuelo*, and religious devotion are drawn directly from Sixto Valencia's comic book. The sociography of the narrative has moved from the rural theater of guerrilla resistance, to the urban landscape of the mega-city, and now delves into the personal, interior space of Mexico's crisis. And that interiority looks almost exactly like the world of *Memín Pingüín*.

Clement's representation of Memo and his mother, however, operates on the comic book character in two ways. First, by erasing the cartoonishness of the original (the exaggeration of the characters' physical features and the humorous dimensions of their speech and action), Clement submits the comic book to a serious reading aimed at rendering explicit the social and political reality implicit in the original characters. Memo's mother labors on the outskirts of modernity; she washes other people's clothes, but is losing clients to washing machines bought on credit. Memo's loving desire for his mother's liberation is a utopian one, a class-specific desire channeled and tamed by commercial discourse (note the Mother's Day admonition to "give Má'linda the best of the best"; Clement 2012: 23).

In addition to this re-reading of the comic book, Clement re-contextualizes Memo, Má'linda, and their relationship, within the current national conjuncture. The savage free market logic of drug trade provides Memo with the means for realizing his dream. Má'linda's moral authority is debilitated by Memo's employment, and her religious devotion—one notes in the detail at the bottom right of the page—is now centered not on the Virgin of Guadalupe but on la Santa Muerte, the patron saint of the narco trade's *sicario*. On the next page, Memo explains his future plans for personal and professional development to one of his associates: "I'll finish high school, join the army, become a sniper, then join the drug cartel." "Don't you want to work at the maquiladora?" his associate asks him. "Nah," says Memo, "it's boring and they pay shit" (Clement 2012: 23.)

The realist substrate of the graphic artwork co-habits in the novel with visual idioms that range from political caricature, hagiography, commercial imagery, the technologically mediated image (satellite and surveillance, and night vision), and *nota roja*-style news photography. But it is the polemically construed and re-contextualized image of Memín Pingüín that most effectively depicts the prevailing structural conditions in which the Mexican working class finds itself. Although the visual constructs of *Los perros salvajes* foreground violence—horrifically physical, bloody, and at one and the same time interpersonal and depersonalizing—it is his recycling of Memín Pingüín that allows Clement to give visual representation to *structural* violence. The novel depicts structural violence—harm perpetrated by economic, social or institutional systems—by allowing the combined logics of neoliberal policy and the drug trade to operate directly and visibly on an element of the nation's cultural patrimony. Memín Pingüín, officially consecrated as a populist and nationalist icon by the issuing of a postage stamp in 2005 and by his narration in comic book form of both the country's struggle for national independence and its early 20th century revolution, is re-imagined as victim and foot soldier in the narco wars, a casualty of the same institutional order that canonized him. Thus, more than a simple story of individual victimization, the story of Memo and his mother is the story of violence perpetrated against the working class, and against the nation imagined as a construct of *lo popular*, against features of the nation's *patrimonio cultural*.

These aesthetic and rhetorical features of Clements' graphic novel are illustrative of the ways in which the graphic novel in general appears to be uniquely positioned for critical cultural work. Santiago García has argued that the emergence in recent years of the graphic novel as the dominant format of comics art is best understood not solely as the latest development in the long history of an artistic form, but as an institutional development, a result of "publishing enterprises and their economic crises, of distribution networks and their proponents, of the decline of the newsstands and the emergence of specialty bookstores, of the readers' practices and rituals, of comics collectors and festivals, of the variations in formats and of the effect these have had and the reasons for creating them, of the self-awareness or lack thereof exercised by the professional authors" (Santiago García 2010: 266).

The graphic novel, broadly speaking, emerges as a narrative and artistic form from the confluence of its Fine Arts and culture industry predecessors in Mexican graphic art. The attenuation, and even elimination, of government supports for the domestic comic book industry has meant the increased importance of the web comic, and of the self-published author's comic. This state of affairs poses new challenges for today's graphic artists—access to publishing resources and distribution networks in particular—but also positions the graphic novelist to undertake critical and independent work, outside the official controls earlier exercised through government supports, and outside the commercial editorial controls exercised by the culture industries. Whereas the Mexican comic book industry took shape in relation to adjacent culture industries, most prominently television, which established a melodramatic affinity between the *telenovela* and the *historieta semanal*, graphic novelists enter into dialogue with a broader spectrum of national and global visual culture and are more likely to lampoon narrative formulas than hew to them.

Importantly, the Internet and social media—cultural and technological components of globalization, accompaniments of both Mexico's complex political conjuncture and of the emergence of the graphic novel—have served Clement and his graphic novelist contemporaries in this respect.[8] These technological supports for cultural global access, communication, and conservation have also served in the development of Clement's narrative, in effect allowing him to integrate to the "high art" complexity of his work the readability required of a mass cultural medium. Online reader feedback has been useful "especially for detecting where the storyline wasn't being understood."[9]

The contextual features of the development of the graphic novel format and of its globalization have combined to create the conditions for independent authorship, new author-audience relationships, and a more circumspect relationship to the visual environment for artistic production and reception. As a consequence, as Santiago García has noted, graphic novel production has included strong currents in the areas of history and journalism, marking an unprecedented relationship between comics art and reality (García 2010: 241). Clement's work demonstrates, in the Mexican context, the potential of the independent graphic novel as a space for critical engagement, more precisely, with the politics of the nation's *patrimonio cultural*.

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8   See Fernández L'Hoeste's (2012) discussion of the development of the webcomic as an alternative
     medium for Clement and other Mexican cartoonists.
9   Author's correspondence with Edgar Clement, August 29, 2012.

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