

that it is difficult to gauge when to stop sleuthing. Only other researchers know the satisfaction of discovering new information.

Bolaño asks us to ponder not just the process of doing research but its purpose. Belano and Lima are such unsympathetic characters at times that it is difficult to become invested in their movement. What makes real visceralismo worthy of remembrance? Though that is not a question that I am equipped to answer, I offer this book as evidence of why Estridentismo and ¡30-30! should be remembered. These avant-garde groups were not mere local curiosities, producers of a minor art; they carry a weight similar to that which Deleuze and Guattari assign to minor literature, “positively charged with the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation,” producing “an active solidarity in spite of skepticism” and “the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility.”¹⁰ In other words, these “minor” movements from a “peripheral” country carry within them the potential to change deeply entrenched perspectives and even to cause a paradigm shift within the study of modernism.¹¹ The Eurocentric narrative has exhausted itself, and it is time to recognize the potential of other locales to the production of knowledge. Though the process by which such reconsideration of Mexico’s contribution to avant-garde thought has come about has been tedious, painstaking, and lengthy—as with Bolaño’s silent narrator, who conducts interviews over decades—the resulting study aims to shift the geography of modernism.¹² To quote Walter D.Mignolo, “knowledge is not only accumulated in Europe and the US and, from there, spread all over the world. Knowledge is produced, accumulated, and critically used everywhere.”¹³

If the example of *The Savage Detectives* leads to a metacritical reflection on the nature of this study, the art of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (b. 1967) shows us how the estridentistas’ dream of a technological modernity has been fully realized. Nothing would have pleased Manuel Maples Arce more than to witness the celebration of the turn of the millennium in Mexico City, validating, as it did, his predictions in *Actual No. 1* that technology would shrink the world, making possible the “psychological unity of the century.”¹⁴ For this symbolic date, Mexico’s most emblematic public space, the Zócalo, played host to a light show quite unlike the spectacular fireworks on view in every other major city at the stroke of midnight. Lozano-Hemmer presented the interactive installation *Vectorial Elevation: Relational Architecture 4* (fig. 1), consisting of eighteen searchlights placed around the perimeter of the plaza, which projected beams from 7,000-watt xenon lamps into the night sky.¹⁵ The lights could be seen from a radius of fifteen kilometers, but they could be designed from anywhere in the world through an Internet site.¹⁶ Web users employed an online interface to create and view designs through three-dimensional simulation. Once these had been programmed, they would be placed in a queue, waiting their turn to be projected in real time and space. The user had no idea when his or her pattern would appear. A new design became visible every six seconds, and each would be held long enough to be photographed. The photographs would then be posted on the Internet, alongside the original prototypes.

Figure 1.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Vectorial Elevation, Relational Architecture 4*, 2000. Zócalo Square, Mexico City. Xenon 7kW robotic searchlights, four webcams, Linux servers, GPS, Java 3D DMX interface. Photograph by Martín Vargas.

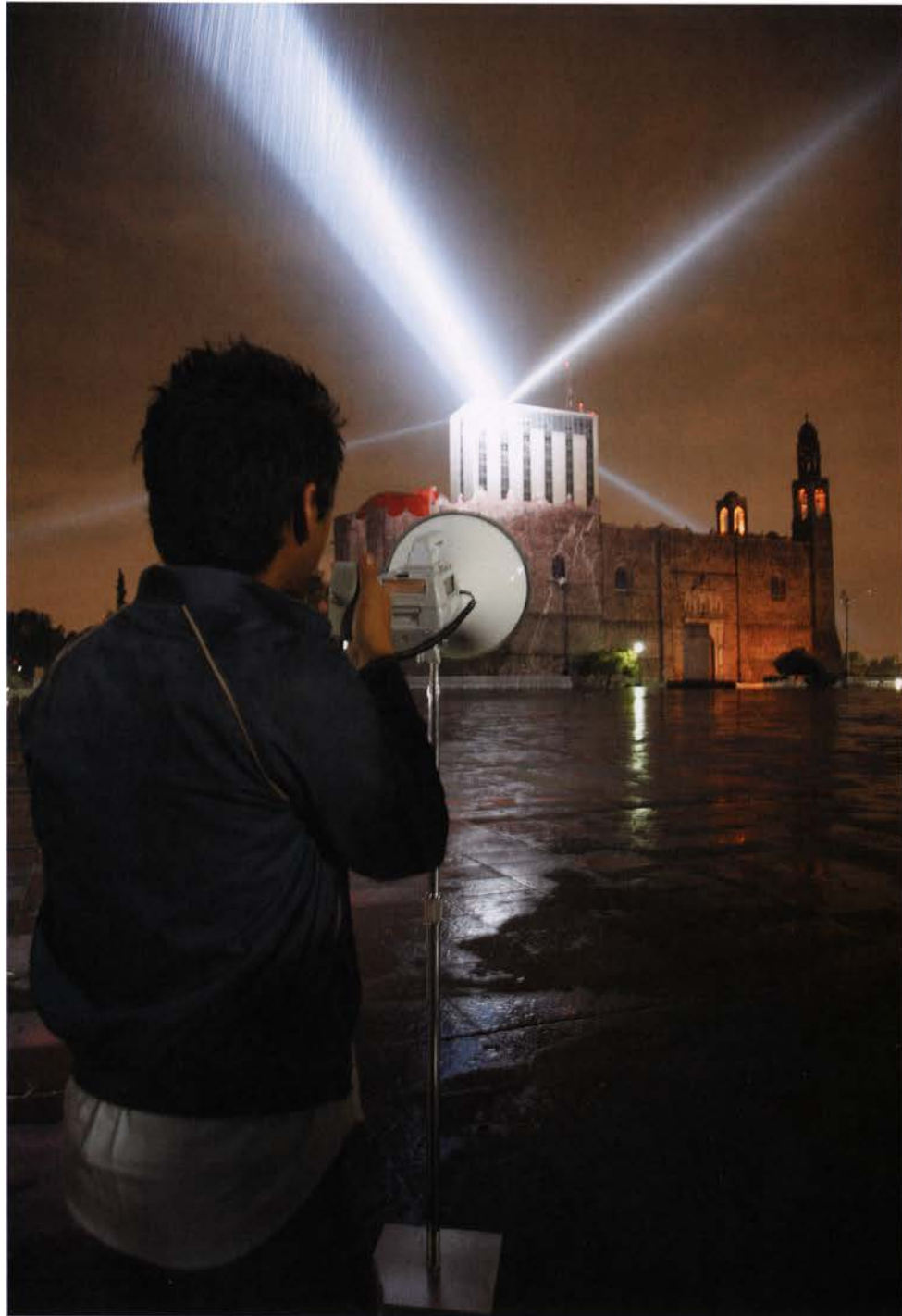


Through its sophisticated technology, Lozano-Hemmer's project provided a spectatorial experience that could be both real and virtual. Passersby witnessed a unique light show, most of them unexpectedly, and Internet users were able to try their hand at programming and later examine the results. By the end of its two-week run, over 700,000 people from eighty-nine countries had designed light patterns for the installation, and countless others had viewed it from the ground. In his engagement both of masses of locals and a global audience, Lozano-Hemmer achieved a milestone in Mexican art. Not only did he demonstrate the relationship that Maples Arce had established between technology and globalization, he was also able to address and connect to a mass audience in a manner that had eluded the artists of the post-revolutionary Mexican avant-garde.

With this use of cutting-edge technology, technical prowess, and his ability to conceive of and execute projects on a global scale, Lozano-Hemmer has expanded the boundaries of the visual arts in unexpected and unprecedented ways. Though certainly breaking new ground, his projects also engage—consciously or not—with significant historical models. These connections add depth and nuance to his work while transforming our very understanding of the past. When he received the commission for *Vectorial Elevation*, he was asked to “refer to a chapter of Mexican history.”¹⁷ Well aware of the historical weight of muralism in narratives of Mexican art, he noted, “Perhaps what could have been expected is to have a new kind of virtual muralism, consisting of projections of parading national heroes.”¹⁸ Instead he turned to geometric abstraction as one means of making his art as democratic as possible. The rejection of the dogmatism that came to be associated with Social Realism in favor of a socially conscious abstract visual language has been a familiar tactic in Latin American art, beginning with the work of Joaquín Torres-García. Before the consolidation of muralism, however, other aesthetic proposals existed in Mexico that addressed the experience of an urban modernity, stylistic innovations inspired by models in European art, and socially conscious concerns. Unbeknownst to him, Lozano-Hemmer was fulfilling the promise of a text, *Actual No. 1*, that had circulated one late December almost eighty years prior.

Lozano-Hemmer's *Voz Alta* (2008) unwittingly recalled another estridentista text—Xavier Icaza's broadsheet *Magnavoz* (1926)—in a way that was nothing short of uncanny.¹⁹ It was commissioned as a memorial for the 1968 student massacre at Tlatelolco, a traumatic event seared into the national consciousness, where government security forces shot and killed dozens of student protesters who had gathered at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas to protest violations of university autonomy.²⁰ Lozano-Hemmer's work consisted of a megaphone placed on the plaza into which visitors could say anything they wanted (fig. 2).²¹ Their words were broadcast over the university radio station, and they were also transformed into beams of light that flashed according to their enunciations. The light would hit a nearby building, the former Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and was then relayed by three powerful searchlights to significant points in the city, where they could be seen over a nine-mile radius. *Voz*

Figure 2.
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Voz Alta*, *Relational Architecture* 15, 2008. Memorial for the Tlatelolco student massacre, Mexico City, Mexico. 4x10kW Xenon robotic searchlights, modified megaphone, computers, DMX distribution, live FM radio transmission. Photograph by Antimodular Research.



Alta is an extraordinary anti-monument that empowers Mexicans to speak for themselves. Some of the participants remembered the massacre with moving words, while others made no reference to it in their speeches. The artist employed elements associated with surveillance—the searchlights—and demagoguery—the radio discourse—and inverted their associations by placing them in the hands of his audience. Eight decades earlier, Xavier Icaza's avant-garde text also used the trope of the megaphone (*magnavoz*), combined with the radio (fig. 3). Part manifesto, part theatrical script, *Magnavoz* presents competing discourses on what should be the direction of Mexico in the post-revolutionary period through three megaphones projecting radio transmissions. Like the megaphone in *Voz Alta*, these are placed at strategic points—the two volcanoes of the Valley of Mexico, Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl, and the Pico de Orizaba, the country's tallest peaks. The speeches that emanate from them give the masses different perspectives on their priorities as citizens. The public remains an abstraction, restless and bored. It isn't until the painter Diego Rivera makes an appearance and, speaking with his own booming voice from the top of the Pyramid of the Sun, urges creation instead of speechmaking that the crowd gets excited.

Typically, Lozano-Hemmer's use of technology is far from utopic. He employs it to make his art accessible to the greatest numbers of people and approaches the work as an open text to be infused with meaning by the spectators, and which exists only in relation to them. But once the viewers animate the work, they often lack control over it, and engaging with it is not necessarily an uplifting experience. Themes of surveillance, uneven power relations, and loss of privacy recur in his work. Rather than being a vehicle toward utopia, technology is simply a medium through which to express the contemporary condition of a globalized world. Forcing the questions of whether technology equals progress and challenging the utopic ideals of collectivism, Lozano-Hemmer underscores the failure of the historical avant-gardes from a twenty-first-century perspective. Nevertheless, *Voz Alta* empowers the audience in a way that many of the artist's other works do not.²² The guarantee that the members of the audience are absolutely free to speak their minds offers the possibility of catharsis in the declarations made through the megaphone. Their speech is broadcast symbolically through the lights and literally through the radio, making the “masses” gain a presence that is both visible and audible.

With Icaza, the inverse holds true. Whereas the expectation is that the estridentista text constitutes a celebration of technology and a blind belief in its utopic potential, *Magnavoz* shows us that this was not always the case. The author calls attention to the radio as a tool for demagoguery and the manipulation of mass mentality. The masses are always just that, never individuals with hopes, dreams, or opinions. They are skeptical of the radio, however, refusing to listen to the disembodied voices; only when Diego Rivera makes an appearance do they become animated. Icaza's text poses the question of how to create avant-garde art that is socially conscious, relevant, and engages the Mexican public (*pueblo*). Lozano-Hemmer demonstrates that these concerns continue to be central in the twenty-first century.

