

## **The Pen is Mightier than the Sword**

### **Rius and the Combat Caricaturists**

Eduardo del Río, or Rius as he is known by his pseudonym, is one of the contemporary caricaturists who continued the struggle throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the 19<sup>th</sup> century *caricaturistas de combate* began over a century and a half ago. Rius is among the most popular of the Mexican caricaturists, and has published close to one hundred book-length comics in addition to two series, “Los Supermachos” and “Los Agachados”, as well as published *historietas* and caricature in many of Mexico's major national newspapers. We may view Rius' work in this context as an example of cultural reconversion, whereby the past heritage of caricaturing is transferred to the *historieta*. To analyze Rius, we will first discuss the notion of cultural reconversion and review the essential characteristics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century tradition of the *historieta* and the 19<sup>th</sup> century tradition of caricature. Secondly, we will examine Rius and his work, including a discussion of the text published in 2005, “Osama Tío Sam”. Finally, we will discuss the decline of the *historieta*, a consequence of the invention of the television and American imperialism, and its resurgence with a new generation of caricaturists.

### **Cultural Reconversion**

The transference of the symbolic heritage of the *caricaturistas de combate*, or combat caricaturists, to the *historieta*, or comic strip, can be viewed as an example of a concept Canclini describes as cultural reconversion. The combat caricaturists were liberals that sought to raise political consciousness with the publication of caricature and prose condemning the conservative regime (Pruneda, 351). The notion of cultural reconversion implies transference of the symbolic heritage from temporal, physical locations, or otherwise to another “to conserve it, increase its yields, and better the position of those who practice it” (Canclini, “Cultural Reconversion” 31-2). A corollary concept to cultural reconversion is *hybridization*, implying a fusion between genres

where none was expected (Canclini “Hybrid Cultures” 2). Hybridization reflects in the confluence of forms, incorporating the past in unconventional ways, and renewing the artistic field without claiming to offer something radically innovative (Canclini, “Hybrid Cultures” 26). We can view contemporary comic artists that revitalize the tradition of combat caricature of their 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors as practicing cultural reconversion, and hybridization as the creation of a new genre. Cultural reconversion is evident in Rius' work through his employment of caricature as a *concientizadora*, with an explicit agenda to raise the political consciousness of the masses. Likewise, Rius' merger of caricature with narrative, his 'cut-and-paste' aesthetic is an example of hybridization.

### **Comics: a hybrid genre**

Prior to preceding, it is necessary to revisit the frequently reiterated cliché that comic art is marginalized in global popular culture. Canclini states that comics are a constitutionally hybrid genre, an imperfect intersection between the visual and the literary, the cultured and the popular, which relocate the artisanal nearer to industrial production and mass circulation (“Hybrid Cultures” 249). It is precisely this hybridity that provokes the majority of discourses against comic art. Comics origins in caricature likewise condemns the genre (Groensteen, 35). Arguments which place comics within a rubric of high or low culture, however, should be considered of little consequence to an active community of artists and scholars. The existence of academic journals, such as the “International Journal of Comic Art” and “Image & Narrative”, attest to the increasing significance of comic art studies. Arguments denigrating comics as artistically impoverished are especially weak in Mexico, considering that renowned artists including Guadalupe José Posada, José Clemente Orozco, and Miguel Covarrubias were recognized caricaturists prior to receiving artistic recognition (Lindstrom, 210). Likewise,

relegating comics to the margin of cultural studies, neglects the true function of the genre as a medium for mass communication (Herner, 17).

### **The 20<sup>th</sup> century historieta**

The Mexican historieta can be conceived of as a composite of foreign and domestic influences, and is in this respect an example of spatial as well as temporal hybridization, as the Mexican tradition melded with U.S. and European influences. Herner defines the *historieta*: “the historieta is an art in miniature, the historieta is a great industry, the historieta is a medium of mass communication” (Herner, 78). The Golden Age of historieta production in Mexico was during the 1930s through the 1950s. The importance of the genre is evident in the fact that the volume and value of historieta sales were historically in excess of billions and exceeded that of both books and magazines combined (Canclini, 252). The significance of the historieta is underscored by the fact that Japan is the only other country to approach Mexico in terms of comic consumption. Hinds and Tatum, two of the most prolific scholars studying comic art, cite Monsavaís in attributing the growth and importance in the publications to the increasing inclusion of Mexican content in historietas, including such topics as poverty, lack of development, and the inability of technology to solve Mexico's problems. The authors also identify that Monsavaís contends that following the 1950s the historieta declined as a genre, as Mexican cartoonists imported U.S. material became dominant and Mexican artists or was otherwise imitated (Hinds and Tatum “Not Just for Children” 3).

### **Caricature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

The development of caricature paralleled the development of the state. In 1836 the freedom to print and circulate political ideas without prior censorship was included in the Mexican constitution (Barajas, “Caricatura mexicana” 41). Nevertheless, caricaturists and

journalists continued to suffer prison imprisonment, persecution, and punishment (Barajas, “Caricatura Mexicana” 57-8). Without freedom of the press, political caricature became a weapon for the 19<sup>th</sup> century caricaturists of Mexico who were able to express with caricature what could not be expressed directly through prose (Acevedo, 8-9). Within the biting vignette and burlesque text of caricature the 19<sup>th</sup> century liberals satirized the conservative regime (Aurrecoechea and Bartra, 56). Although their political statements were biased, the views they expressed were in accordance with their perception of reality. Their statements can not be considered false. For caricaturists disseminating political propaganda truth is a malleable concept. Press describes that “Real caricature distorts [the truth] to hammer home what the artist regards as the essential truth” (63).

José Guadalupe Posada was one of the most prominent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century combat caricaturists. Rius highlights that Posadas' criticism of the totalitarian regime of Porfirio Díaz and advocacy of violent structural change and the succession of Díaz gained the artist enormous popularity (Rius, “Números agotados de Los Agachados III(78): La moderna caricatura” 123; see also “La revolucioncita mexicana”). The hallmark of Posada was the *calavera*, drawings of “dance-of-death” skeletons that acted out satiric comments on society. According to Press this was a statement by Posada, “that the society in which he lived was a dying one and beyond saving...a world of disembodied skeletons” (130). The calavera has inspired a generation of caricaturists, including Rius, and is an example of cultural reconversion in and of itself.

### **Juxtaposing censorship**

Díaz effectively institutionalized censorship during the Porfiriato (Pruneda, 112). The Mexican press was completely co opted or censored, with the greatest newspapers, such as El Universal, El País, El Imparcial, El Mundo, and La Voz de México posing no criticism to the

totalitarian dictator (Rodríguez and Doorantes, 23). The combat caricaturists published their weekly and semiweekly publications with the knowledge that even the most insignificant criticism against Díaz could lead to their incarceration in the infamous Carcel de Belén in Mexico City (Pruneda, 323). The caricaturists would be imprisoned in a narrowly confining cell, poorly treated by their guards, and were threatened by debilitating disease that shattered their bodies. Díaz however could not break their spirits. Salvador Pruneda, whose father was housed in the prison and continued to publish with the assistance of a prison guard states, “No hay arma asesina para la fe de los hombres que tienen el alma fuerte y el corazón bien puesto. A ninguno de estos viejos periodistas revolucionarios se les pudo matar el entusiasmo y la esperanza de un México mejor” (Pruneda, 323).

The Mexico of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in which Rius conducted his work usually upheld freedom of the press. Mexican bureaucracy became more complex and the Carcel de Belén could no longer be used against the combat caricaturists as a threat of reprisal. Instead, censorship in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was influenced by a political dichotomy whereby conservative forces advocating censorship were placated by a government institution, the *comisión calificadora*. (Rubenstein, 109-12). The role of the *comisión calificadora* was to ensure censorship of inappropriate material in comic books. However, the notorious inefficiency of Mexican bureaucracy ensured that the *comisión calificadora* lacked powers to enforce its rulings against all but the most offensive and pornographic material (Rubenstein, 118). The agency was successful only in maintaining the pretense of government attention to the concerns posed by the church and other interest groups. The most potent, and unforeseen, contribution of the agency was to engender the production of domestic content, “raising barriers to translated U.S. magazines that were slightly higher than those faced by local publications” (Rubenstein, 127).

Although clearly in violation of its guidelines, Rius did not contend with censorship from the agency (Agnew, 16-7). Rather, censorship was precipitated by Rius' own editors, as attested by the quantity of rejected caricatures and comics (see Rius, "Caricaturas rechazadas"). Similar to his 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors Rius also suffered injustice at the hands of the conservative regime. In 1968, Rius was abducted by the police and suffered through a simulacrum of an execution by the military following his scathing criticism of Mexican president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. Despite the death threat, Rius would not compromise his principles.

Realmente no le vi caso dejar de hacer mi trabajo pues lo consideraba una parte de mi vida y no iba a renunciar un trabajo que yo veía útil a toda la población. Y además me satisfacía a mí personalmente pues era mi vida la historieta, la caricatura (Hinds and Tatum, "Interview" 12).

Rius' irreverence to the repercussions of his criticisms also led to his condemnation abroad. His 1994 publication of "Lastima de Cuba" criticizing Fidel Castro reversed his elevated position as a guest of honor of the regime to one of absolute ostracization (Priego "History of Mankind for Beginners"). Rius had long been a supporter of the socialist project in Cuba, and patterned numerous issues of "Los Supermachos" and "Los Agachados" as well as his text "Cuba para principiantes" in support of the regime. Rius however was not one to ignore corruption. In this sense, Rius can be viewed as not only sustaining the tradition of 19<sup>th</sup> century combat caricature, but embodying it.

Parte de la grandeza de los periodistas y caricaturistas de combate del siglo pasado eestriba en que siempre están a la altura de sus opiniones. Salir a la defensa de sus principios, criticar lo que consideran criticable y nunca dejar de luchar por las libertades, son afanes que aseguran la coherencia de su compromiso político y los convierten en modelo de honestidad intelectual (Barajas, "Caricatura mexicana" 117) .

### **Eduardo del Río (Rius)**

Eduardo del Río began his career as a cartoonist in 1964 at age 29. "By highlighting the

ways in which the Mexican people were controlled by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the Catholic Church, and U.S. capitalism, Rius attempted to increase the political awareness of his readership” (Agnew, 2). Formative influences included grade school studies in Mexico City, exposing the artist to the rural-urban dichotomies which would become a recurrent theme, seminary studies in a monastery as a teenager, from which Rius would gain an irreverence for Catholic faith, and the subsequent barring from further studies because of the seminary education was deemed unsuitable. This jaded the artist to societal advancement possibilities. As a functionary for the Mexican Department of Census, the cartoonist had the opportunity to develop a sharp sarcasm for government bureaucracy. Impudence and irreverence were gained in mortuary position, where he was intended to pursue the career of mortician before a friend impelled him to submit his drawings to the publication *Ja-Ja*. He later obtained full-time employment with *Ovaciones* with the reference of one of Mexico's foremost cartoonists Abel Quezada (Hinds and Tatum, “Not Just for Children” 69-70).

In 1966 Rius published “Los Supermachos” through Editorial Meridiano “transforming himself from cartoonist to comic book writer” (Hinds and Tatum, “Not Just for Children” 69-70). The relationship would later expose censorship and copyright issues which obliged the cartoonist to publish independently. The editors of Editorial Meridiano had been censoring Rius' work without his knowledge, and when Rius resigned Editorial Meridiano retained the rights to “Los Supermachos” (Hinds and Tatum, “Not Just for Children” 72). The Mexican comic publishers usually required the creator to “forfeit all current and future rights, despite Mexican law, which grants copyright to creators” (Hinds and Tatum, “Not Just for Children” 10). “A typical pay receipt states “al firmar doy por enajenada mi producción a la empresa” (Hinds and Tatum, “Not Just for Children” 10). In Rius' words, Editorial Meridiano was interested only in money, “era

gente interesada nada más en hacer historietas para ganar dinero y no les interesaba para nada el aspecto político” (Hinds and Tatum, “Interview” 11). Rius' successor strip, “Los Agachados”, would incorporate many of “Los Supermachos” defining characteristics, but later abandoned the strip in 1971 to write more lengthy texts published yearly, beginning with the “For beginners” series, rather than continue production of the shorter semi daily comic strips (Hinds and Tatum, “Not Just for Children” 72). While not explicit the rationale for Rius' becoming an independent can be considered as partially a consequence of the lack of publishers where Rius could continue to work. Rius states that, “me habían corrido de todos y los que quedaban eran de derecha completamente”, such that no editorial would continue to employ him (Hinds and Tatum, “Interview” 10).

Upon conclusion of “Los Agachados” the government sought to employ Rius. However, Rius refused wishing no involvement in politics (Hemer, 150). In an interview with the cartoonist, Herner discusses the possibility of employing the historieta to educate Mexico's rural population about nutrition. Rius retorted that this was impossible, “[el gobierno] me limitarían mucho...hubo un intento...dedicada a mejorar la nutrición....Los primeros que se opusieron a esto fueron los que lo habían pedido...porque cuestionaba ahí muchísimas cosas de la medicina” (Herner, 151). Considering the diatribe Rius levied against the Mexican health care system in various issues of “Los Agachados” which relate the causes of malnutrition to policies of medical practitioners and the government (see “Los Agachados 84: El seguro social según sus víctimas” in particular), and his comparisons with the efficacy of the Cuban system, it is no wonder that Rius and the government would have difficulty collaborating in an educational initiative.

Rius' gained international popularity internationally with the translation of some of books in his “Para principiantes” or “For beginners” series, with some of the texts even finding their



way into university curriculums. “Cuba para principiantes” was the first to be published. “Marx para principiantes” was undoubtedly Rius' most successful of Rius' texts, and in a single year was translated into English, French and German following the first Mexican publication (Rubenstein, 155). Other titles followed, with nearly a hundred book-length comics published to date. Rius' remarks on his readership reveal that the texts influenced a generation of readers.

The only way of knowing what kind of readers I have is when I go to book fairs or when I make an appearance in a university...Or when I discovered that Subcomandante Marcos said he was one of my most advanced students; or the case of the Sandinistas, who declared that my books had turned them onto Marxism (Rius qtd. Priego "History of Mankind for Beginners").

The breadth of topics extends beyond his favored triumvirate of politics, religion, and capitalism. Rius has sought converts on other matters including health care, the environment, sex, feminism, and homosexuality. Feminism in particular as a topic appears tough to broach. Images of women in Rius' work are negligible, and when they are evident they tend towards the ridiculous and orient themselves towards the masochistic stereotypes that characterize the Mexican comic genre (Hinds and Tatum, “Images of Women”). “Cuba para principiantes” for example is male-dominated containing few female characters, and those few are typified by such gender specific activities as prostitute, wife, and teacher. However, despite their omission there is no doubt of the foremost rank Rius ascribes to women given the publication of texts such as “La revolución femenina de las mujeres”, in which equality of the sexes is advocated, and “El aborto, sexo, y otros pecados”, which sustains woman's right to choice.

### **Style**

In describing his abilities Rius demeans himself. His considerable skills are hidden by a screen of amateurishness. He is a minimalist and strives only to make his subjects recognizable, incorporating extensive whitespace (Rubenstein, 154). His simplistic style bears a close

semblance to that of the European artist Saul Steinberg. Other European artists whom Rius admires including Bosc from France, Muzlinger from Germany, Adolf Born from Czechoslovakia, the Swede Karlsson (see “Los Agachados 78: La moderna caricatura”). Rius' work can be viewed as evolving over time, beginning with “Los Supermachos” and “Los Agachados” where color is employed judiciously, but is noticeably absent from the book-length texts (compare Appendix B, Figure I & II). Rius also began to employ the graphics of other artists extensively, frequently embellishing the appropriated material with word balloons to guide the reading of the text. Not producing many of his own drawings permits Rius to invest his creative energies in the more productive realm of diffusion of his ideas (Agnew, 15). Rius' decontextualizing of other artists work is an example of hybridization, as borrowed graphics coexist with his characters and narrative voice in pastiche.

As his countercultural ideas matured, his style reappropriated the French Situationist aesthetics of Xeroxing and mechanized reproduction. Rius is a master recycler, archivist, collector, artisan, and, in a way, pop aesthete. He constantly breaks every imaginable rule by sampling, copying, distorting, altering, and reconfiguring even the most sacred texts and images in a way that would scare even the most avant-garde "First World" free thinkers (Priego “The History of Mankind for Beginners”).

The interplay in Rius' texts occurs mostly through narrative voice, rather than through graphics as is the norm in the comic medium. Rius' didactic storytelling style uses a device whereby characters and anonymous commentators interact to explain political concepts (Priego “History of Mankind for Beginners”). Rius is approachable and describes himself as communicating at the eighth grade level (See Rius “Los dictaduros: El militarismo en América Latina”). Most characters can be described as caricatures in the dictionary definition of the word, being developed only to the extent necessary to fulfill their function. They speak for the reader, demanding clarification from the narrator, acting as a break to the monotony, and serving to

heighten the level of satirical humor (Hinds and Tatum, “Not Just for Children” 74). This is considerate given Rius' propensity to digress into monologue (Jones).

### **Osama Tío Sam**

A comparison of the first of the book-length comics published by Rius, “Cuba para principiantes” (1965), and the most recent, “Osama Tío Sam” (2005), reveals the changing nature of Rius' work over time. The analysis will be necessarily circumspect of specific content of each text, and will instead entail an overview of principal thematic elements. Both texts borrow heavily from the work that preceded them. “Cuba para principiantes” is a distillation of Rius' thoughts post “Los Supermachos” and “Los Agachados”, while “Osama Tío Sam” can be conceived a distillation of the sum of Rius' earlier texts on the subject of U.S. imperialism. The texts are related to the extent that “Cuba para principiantes” disparages U.S. imperialism while endorsing Cuban socialism and “Osama Tío Sam” is merciless in its denouncement of the U.S.

It is informative to examine the exterior of each text prior to examining the content within. “Cuba para principiantes” measures approximately 20x13cm whereas, “Osama Tío Sam” has dimensions of 22x15cm. The greater amount of space available on each page in “Osama Tío Sam” permits Rius to appropriate the more sizable graphics of other artists in vis-à-vis “Cuba para principiantes”. The cover illustration of each text serves to foreshadow the material contained within. “Cuba para principiantes” is simplistic, and merely depicts an anxiety stricken 'Uncle Sam' compressed between the portraits of José Martí and Che Guevara with no recourse to extricate himself from this unpleasant scenario. “Osama Tío Sam” reproduces a skull reminiscent of a *calavera*, which is the severed head of the Statue of Liberty. The allegoric meaning is that liberty is dead. The antagonist is Uncle Sam, who has been 'pumped-up' with the assistance of a bicycle pump. The title “Osama Tío Sam” is a play on words. Osama Bin Laden is a modern day

terrorist. When read as “Os Ama Tío Sam” the title translates to English as “Uncle Sam Loves Us” while at the same time implying that Uncle Sam is a terrorist.

Uncle Sam is archetypal of U.S. interests and foreign policy. As might be ascertained by their covers, the character figures prominently in both works. The character was well developed character prior to the publication “Cuba para principiantes”. “Los Agachados 88, El dólar ...y otras porquerías”, contains one of Rius' earliest accounts of Uncle Sam in a mini narrative entitled “La verdadera, sucinta y pachanguera history del Tío Sam”. Uncle Sam is described as the illegitimate child of a Mr. Monroe (referring of course to the Monroe Doctrine) and an unknown mother and heir to manifest destiny, “to overspread the continent allotted [to the U.S.] by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions” (McCall, 18). Rius' interpretation of the character is not a misuse. This depiction of the character is consistent with Uncle Sam's first appearance in the U.S. War of 1812, when the character was used to negatively portray U.S. policy (Press, 218-9). The current popularized representation of Uncle Sam representation originates from the U.S. army recruitment poster in World War I which presented Uncle Sam and the statement “I Wants You”. The notion was thus grafted into the popular imagination of Uncle Sam as a benevolent, if somewhat overbearing, patriarch. Within Rius' texts, the character is usually a freckle-faced, hand-wringing, and morally bankrupt character, who appropriately fills the role of, if not precisely the villain in the usual sense, then as the character toward whom we are to feel animosity (see Appendix B, Figure III).

With the advent of computing technology Rius has made increasing use of computer type rather than the block lettering that typified “Cuba para principiantes”, and the “Los Agachados” and “Los Supermachos” comic strips (contrast Appendix B, Figures I & II with Figures III & IV). “Osama Tío Sam” contains computer type exclusively, with the exception of excerpts from

Rius' earlier works (see “Los dictaduros: El militarismo en América Latina” in particular), and text supplementing the graphics of other artists. Rius initially rejected computers for their homogenizing tendency (Priego “The History of Mankind for Beginners”). Computer type permits Rius to compose content in less time than is required to print the text of each page individually, and the time saving are likely worth the loss of originality. However, the gentle lines of Rius' hand lettering provided an aesthetic that made his work seem less perfunctory and more conducive to communicating his ideologically charged statements.

In “Cuba para principiantes” the text complements the graphics and the meaning is only understandable through a dual reading. The hand drawn characters Rius employed to express ironic statements and humorize otherwise dry and difficult subjects are replaced in “Osama Tío Sam” by graphics decontextualized from the text and frequently deliberately rendered parody. On one page for example, an image of one of the U.S. founding fathers expresses a perverted entreaty of “God save the queen” (Rius, “Osama Tío Sam” Cartoon 16). The image 'complements' discussion of the War of American Independence and is just one of a great number of graphics that Rius has parodied. The graphic merely denigrates the U.S. and would induce the same reaction viewed in isolation as through their inclusion within the pages of “Osama Tío Sam”. Instead of by the use of hand drawn characters the narrative in “Osama Tío Sam” is sustained by devices such as time lines, which are merely factual lists of the dates and places of U.S. atrocities.

The malleable nature of the truth for the caricaturist has already been discussed. Nevertheless, there is reason to question some of Rius' statements. Unfortunately, a bibliography is frequently lacking or woefully incomplete in his works. “Cuba para principiantes” is without one and the bibliography of “Osama Tío Sam”, although adequate, includes the notion of

“cientos de páginas web propocionadas por mi Doña Tecla Computer”, suggesting we may attribute origin unknown for many of his statements. The absence of parenthetical citations likewise complicates critical analysis. Although without citations of any kind, “Cuba para principiantes”, as a description of the events leading to Cuba's socialist project is mostly incontestable. By contrast, the content of “Osama Tío Sam” is questionable in numerous cases, and attribution within the body of the text is given solely to artists from whom Rius has appropriated material, and not all are attributed. In earlier texts artists would at best gain an honorary mention, so even the most rudimentary of attribution should be viewed as a positive progression. Examination of one of the sources provided in the bibliography of “Osama Tío Sam” reveals the occasionally grievous factual errors in Rius' work. The statement is made that the U.S. organized a 'separatist' war between the province of Panamá and Colombia to commence the Panama Canal. The tone of the caricature (see Appendix B, Figure III) is distinctly anti-American. However, a text provided in Rius' bibliography that is the likely source of this statement Panamá is described as desiring to accede from Colombia.

In the fifty-seven years before Panama finally achieved its independence in 1903, the United States intervened thirteen times to restore order in Panama...'The U.S. suddenly reversing its earlier policies, refused to send troops to Colombia's aid. Instead, American warships prevented Colombian vessels from landing soldiers to regain control...Construction began the next year (McCall, 20-1).

### **Cultural Imperialism**

“Osama Tío Sam” is primarily concerned with U.S. warmongering; however, near the conclusion of the text cultural imperialism is discussed. Rius describes the role of cultural imperialism as being to maintain ideological control (Rius, “Osama Tío Sam” 173). A character, who we can presume by his lack of pants to represent the underclasses, is squatted reading an issue of “Superman” while Uncle Scrooge is broadcast on a nearby television (see Appendix B,

Figure III). The appearance of an issue of “Superman” in the hands of this character in the margins of the page is revealing. Rius considers that the creation of “Superman” in 1938 was the onset of decadence and degeneration for the *historieta* (See Appendix B, Figure I). With “Superman” the comic medium quickly became converted into a weapon at the service of U.S. democracy, against Nazi fascism, and later communism. (Rodríguez and Doorantes, 17). The comic book heroes that rose to prominence with Superman had “close ties to the dominant cultural discourses of the time”. Murray relates how propaganda influenced popular culture, becoming 'myth' whereby complex values and beliefs were substituted for common sense meanings, those values that seem to 'go without saying' (for example, that American troops are good and the enemy is inferior and evil) concealed a highly political agenda (142). Murray elaborates that “people don't work, fight and die for complex ideologies, or even for economic systems, they are motivated by myths, myths that simplify and package ideology into forms that are emotionally stirring [such as the impetus characters such as Superman gave a generation of men to fight the Axis]” (151). In the present day, Bosch describes the U.S. as shaping a doctrine of terror, with a system with as its axis military terrorism, requiring U.S. citizens to send to war and to their deaths (90).

The broadcast of Scrooge McDuck on the nearby television alludes to Dorfman and Mattelart's seminal text “How to Read Donald Duck”, written under the auspices of Salvador Allende's democratically elected socialist government in Chile. During the time of its publication state involvement in the dissemination of comic media was perceived as a means of fomenting acceptance of ideological principles (Flora, 168). Dorfman and Mattelart's deconstruction of the Disney comic led the authors to conclude that the Duckburgh universe occupied by Uncle Scrooge, Donald Duck, and company was an instrument instructing the Third World periphery of

appropriate relations with the First World capitalist core according to the rules of U.S. imperialism (54-5). The Disney Ducks were the 'natural' superiors of the foreign cultures they encountered (Dorfman and Mattelart, 49-53). This parallels the popular conception of numerous authors on U.S. diplomacy abroad, and well articulated by the Monroe Doctrine, to view the foreign, and especially Latin America, as a source of exploitable resources and labor. Likewise, the consumptionist logic of the Ducks is perpetrated on to its readers.

Rius believes that a counterattack against the insipid message of global capitalism and U.S. cultural imperialism in U.S. comics is possible through the construction of a uniquely Mexican genre (Rius "La vida de cuadritos", qtd in Jones).

La libertad como producto del mercado, es una concepción de libertad muy especial: se encuentra en la mercancía, en la compra de los productos. La posesión se convierte en fetiche, la libertad en mito. Mi libertad depende de mis posibilidades económicas; pero aun ahí aparece la mentira: compro lo que me venden; lo que unos cuantos deciden producir para mi consumo. No creo, ni invento nada, todo está dado para mí a cambio de las muchas o pocas monedas de que disponga. Recibimos la libertad en un acto de compra-venta. Nos consumimos consumiendo libertad (Herner, 82).

### **Epilogue**

Television precipitated the downfall of the *historieta*. Carlos Monsiváis sustains that popular culture is a dominant class project, most purely expressed by the introduction of television, and the transmission of U.S. broadcasts, a precursor to evaporation of popular culture expressions of indigenous and Hispanic origins (Monsiváis, 98-9). This is coincident with events of national importance such as the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, which was to devastate the Mexican cultural industry. Rodríguez and Doorantes identified a strong declining trend in the domestic production of the Mexican *historieta* in both value and quantity following the NAFTA (21). This trend has continued in the new millennium (see Appendix A, Figure I), with television superseding the *historieta* as the preeminent means of



mass communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The capacity of art to permit its viewers to perceive clearly his or her subjugated state is subsumed by art for corporate sake. The senses are dulled by corporate propaganda and desensitized to the impact of imagery which contend to expose the misdirection of the deluge of images the viewer has acquired from exposure to the popular media. Bosch elucidates that “once the realm of television as the seller of any product was consolidated, this gave the final touch to mass society as a consumer's market...Television freed the average American from the task of choosing; it made him accustomed to obeying, on the level of his deepest motivations (Bosch, 63-4). The polarization of comics is identified as complicit in the downfall of the medium, yet given the preponderance of television sets, and the expense required to purchase a comic vis a vis the intellectual and economic outlay required to view a television program, it is not surprising that comics have been relegated to the underground. Priego, for one, concedes that “historietas, doomed to pornography by the almost unstoppable alienating power of television and the blindness and stupidity of their own editors, lost, by the beginning of the 90's, 9 out of 10 readers” (Priego, “Between Borders” 3-4).

To remain culturally relevant the historieta must reinvent itself. Canclini sustains that, “the transnationalization of culture brought about by communications technologies, their reach, and their efficacy are better appreciated as part of the recomposition of urban cultures” (“Hybrid Cultures” 10). However, Rius considers it unlikely, if not impossible, to adapt the historieta to television and film. Alfonso Arua, the Mexican director who adapted such Mexican classics as “Like Water for Chocolate”, written by his wife Laura Esquivel, to film, acted and directed in the 1973 film “Calzonzin Inspector” an adaptation of Rius' “Los Supermachos”, which won two Ariel awards. An attempt was also made to adapt “Los Supermachos” to television. Rius disproved. Rius explains that, “En la televisión tendríamos que ajustarnos a un código que es

parecido al de los Estado Unidos en el que la historieta resultaría una telenovela” (Hinds and Tatum, “Eduardo del Río” 15).

### **21<sup>st</sup> century resurgence**

Combat caricature in Mexico is an unflagging tradition and is likely to transform once more in the present century. For as Rius describes, "Sometimes one thinks the genre will disappear, but suddenly, somehow, cartooning renews itself...There are always crazy people willing to do anything, to take chances" (Priego, “History of Mankind for Beginners”). As the most influential of cartoonists to continue the tradition of combat caricature in the prior century Rius has provided an example of things to come (Herner, 147). The artist recognizes a new generation of cartoonists who have followed him including Helioflores, Magú, El Fisgón, and Antonio Ahumada; however, he is critical that they are “not reaching the masses as once he did” (Priego, “History of Mankind for Beginners”). However, this is an unnecessary criticism given that the work of these cartoonists is no less visceral and the historieta was already in decline. It should not be considered a surprise that these liberal caricaturists all contribute to *La Jornada*, Mexico's left-wing newspaper published by the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de México. Few other employers exist for the fiercely liberal Mexican caricaturists in the present century.

Rafael Barajas' (El Fisgón) is perhaps the most successful of his contemporaries. His publication of the didactic book-length comic “Hacia un despiorre global de excelencia y calidad”, although not garnering him the fame Rius gained through the publication of the “Para principiantes” series, has achieved the cartoonist international notoriety with its translation into English. The text is largely a composite of caricatures by the artist to have appeared in “La Jornada” and parallels Rius' “Osama Tío Sam” to the extent that it is concerned with modern manifestations of U.S. imperialism, juxtaposing a roadside vendors quest to become an industrial

magnate with a journey in time with the emergence of capitalism to the rise of the U.S. and its doctrine of terror. Rius' style is a clear influence upon the work. Caricature combines with text in a didactic narrative that is sustained through the interaction of two characters, and complementary graphics have are appropriated from other artists. El Fisgón demonstrates with the publication of this text that the tradition Rius established is no less vital. Rius meanwhile seeks to reestablish himself in the U.S. and entreats on the back cover of “Osama Tío Sam” that his own work be translated and known in the U.S. “Mi mayor deseo para este libro sería que fuera traducido y conocido en Estados Unidos” (“Osama Tío Sam”). Let the U.S. be forewarned that the combat caricaturists are within their midst.

## Appendix A

### Historietas

Period	Volume (in thousands)	Value (thousands of pesos)
2002	83,760	387,363
2003	41,432	274,949
2004	22,022	212,811

Table I. INEGI, “Encuesta Industrial Mensual”.

## Appendix B



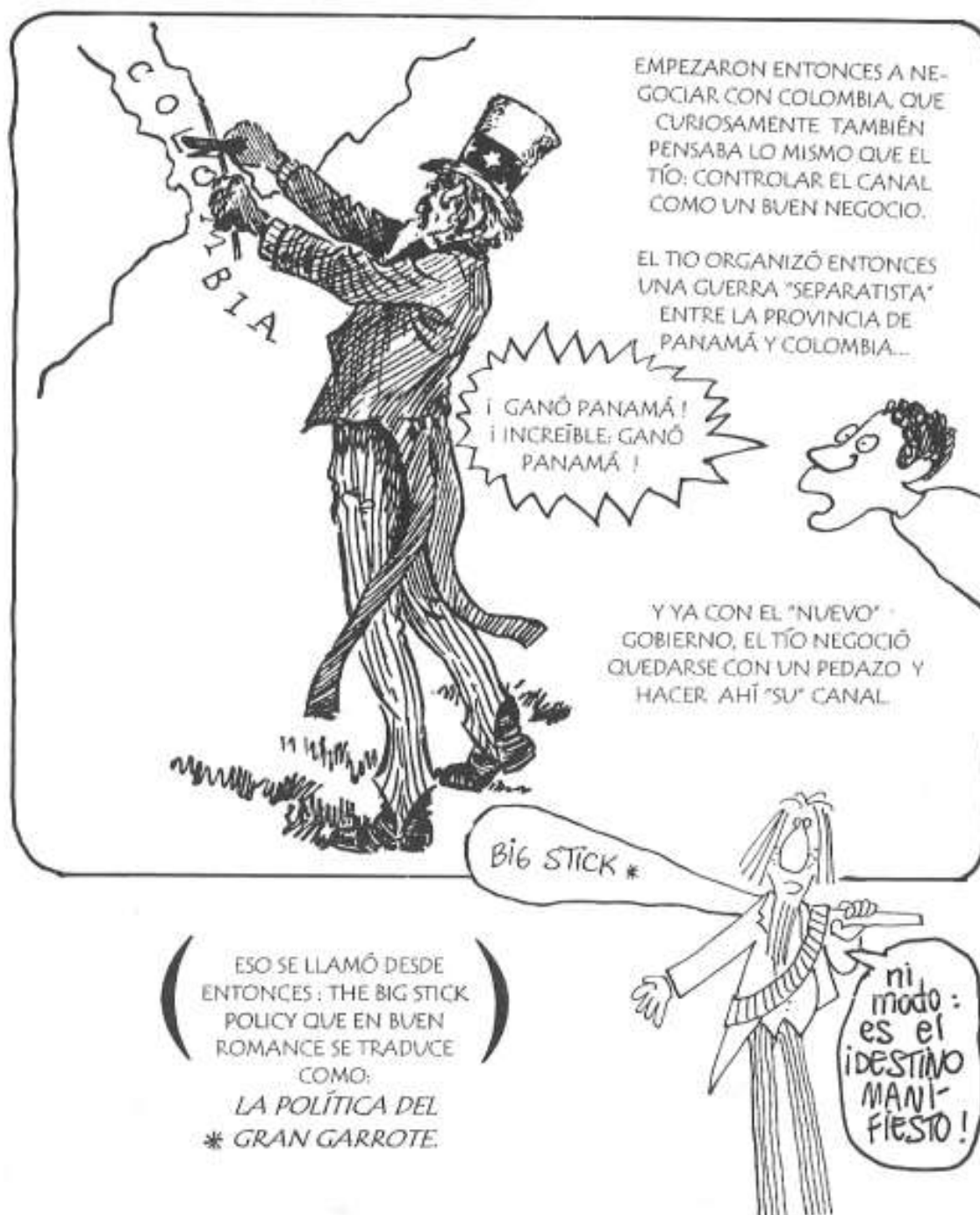
Figure I. Rius, "Números agotados de Los Agachados II (66): Las historietas", 27





Figure II. Rius, "Cuba para principiantes" 7

# EL ROBO DE PANAMÁ A COLOMBIA Y SU PARTIDA EN CANAL

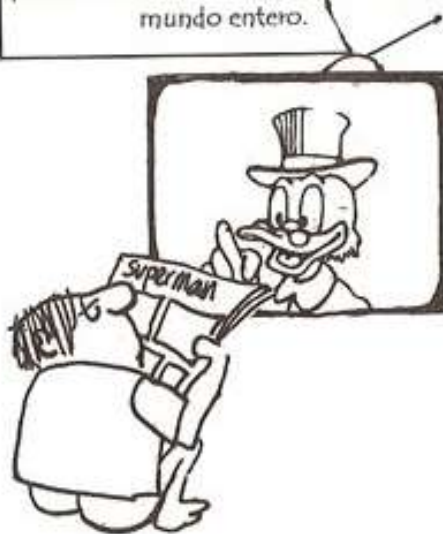


La tremenda ofensiva ideológica de los Estados Unidos se apoyó principalmente en el CONTROL de las comunicaciones internacionales por medio de los SATÉLITES ESPACIALES.

Nadie está a salvo de recibir por esa forma la información que *ellos* quieren mandarnos... y nadie está a salvo de ser espiado y localizado aunque se meta debajo de la tierra.

Así, los gringos han convertido a las telecomunicaciones en un instrumento de política exterior.

Las telecomunicaciones han hecho triunfar a "su" cultura sobre la cultura de los demás países. Ha triunfado el IMPERIALISMO CULTURAL y la cultura gringa —sí es que a esa mierda se le puede llamar así— se ha posesionado del mundo entero.



La televisión de todos los países del mundo, quizá sólo con la excepción de países como Cuba, Corea del Norte, Vietnam y algunos más que se han escapado de la globalización estupidizante gringa, (aunque tienen sus propios sistemas estupidizantes), se ha convertido en el mejor medio de propaganda norteamericana que pueda imaginarse. Si bien es cierto que en muchos países se han creado sistemas independientes (es decir, que no forman parte de las grandes cadenas comerciales, subsidiarias de las pode-

rosas cadenas gringas como ABC, NBC y CBS), son canales cuya programación —nacionalista y cultural— NO cuenta con una programación que guste a las grandes masas consumidoras de la bazofia de las grandes cadenas.

Esto lo vemos en México y otros países latinoamericanos como Brasil, Chile o Argentina, donde empresas como Televisa o TVAzteca acaparan con sus programas cursis y de mal gusto, combinados con los peores ejemplos de series gringas y noticieros oficialistas, el "gusto" del auditorio.

Figure IV. Rius, "Osama Tío Sam" 173

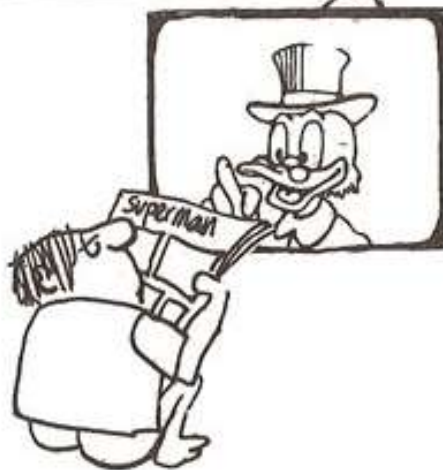


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Figure IV. Rius, "Osama Tío Sam" 173

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