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Mediating Marginality Through Photography: Kent Klich's *El niño*:

Children of the Streets, Mexico City

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This article considers the book *El niño: Children of the Streets, Mexico City*, a text and image project by Swedish photographer Kent Klich and Elena Poniatowska published in New York in 1999 after an attempt to publish it in the Mexican capital failed. A comparative approach is taken as the themes of *El niño*'s photographic narrative are considered in the light of an earlier foreign project that confronted marginality in Mexico: Oscar Lewis' *The Children of Sanchez*. The role of the photographs and possible interpretations of them are explored. Analysis of the photographic contacts permits discussion on the development of visual representation and reveals Klich's nuancing in his portrayal of the street children.

Key Words: Kent Klich, Mexican photography, visual culture, Elena Poniatowska, street children

During my research as a doctoral student at University College London who was analyzing the writings of Elena Poniatowska (Gardner 2005); in the Latin American Studies collection of Senate House Library, just across the street from the British Museum, I encountered an unusually large volume entitled *El niño: Children of the streets, Mexico City*, which had been published in New York by Syracuse University Press (Klich and Poniatowska 1999).² I later learned that this book, whose photos by Kent Klich and written text by Poniatowska, had not been published in the Mexico, where Klich had originally hoped to publish it.

El niño is a large dimension book that contains seventy-six photographs that the former Magnum photographer Kent Klich (b. 1952) took during his repeated two to three-month visits to Mexico City between 1986 and 1996. Though his knowledge of Spanish and keen interest in the Mexican cinema of Luis Buñuel were factors that motivated him to carry out his photographic project that documents the lives of street children in Mexico, he had more profound reasons why he decided to work there on this undertaking. Several elements from Klich's background combined to inspire him to work with children in crisis. In part, it was due to the direct influence of his father who was a Polish survivor of a WWII German concentration camp. Having been imprisoned as a youth, (which later led him to seek asylum in Sweden), Klich's father taught him to lend support to children in need by helping abandoned children in Poland throughout his life. This desire to help young people led Kent Klich to study a degree in psychology at the University of Gothenburg and work closely as a social worker with children living in difficult situations in his native Sweden before he travelled to Mexico after learning to be a professional photographer at the International Center of Photography in New York. Though advised by Sebastião Salgado to travel the world taking photographs of street children to create a global narrative on them (Klich personal communication with Nathaniel Gardner, spring 2016), Klich opted to study Mexican street children over a longer period to obtain a nuanced understanding of one context and develop a relationship of trust with the street children that would allow him to document their lives over a longer stretch of time. His desire was to create a photo narrative that would provoke a rethinking of the situation by those in stronger positions to promote social change (Klich personal communication with Nathaniel Gardner, spring 2016). This he did by working closely with the charity *Save the Children* while in Mexico, helping in their shelter for

homeless children: *Hogar Providencia*, and only photographing children who were willing to allow him to take their pictures, which he would do during his free time from his charity work. In line with Parvati Nair's evaluation of Sebastião Salgado's photography, Klich's photos are meant to provoke debate and change in addition to being a source of empowerment and representation for those who are not normally represented (2012, 97 and 104).

The resulting book project arranges the photographs of the children into its own visual narrative with a pair of minor interjections from the written essays on street children in Mexico City by Elena Poniatowska that are situated at the end of the visual narrative. The images do not have cut-lines (though there is a two-page explanatory index of them at the end of the book). In addition to the brief quotes mentioned, Klich has also placed four written pages within the visual essay that appear designed to help the reader view the street children as individuals who are at risk by listing their names and by providing an incomplete list of homeless children who died on the streets of Mexico City between 1992 and 1998. Poniatowska's essays attempt to provide a brief written context to the issues of homeless children in Mexico that enable more nuanced reading of the images. The first of her two bilingual essays on street children in Mexico City is entitled "Children of the Streets," and is approximately 5,000 words long and offers a more panoramic view of the plight of street children in Mexico City. Her second essay, entitled "Epilogue", is approximately 3,600 words long and offers an up-close account of the reformation of one child thanks to the work of the late Padre Alejandro García Durán, the director of *Hogares Providencia*, mentioned earlier. Padre Alejandro García Durán (García-Sedas and Turón 2008), an established figure regarding the defence of street children

in Mexico, lent his full support to the project and allowed Klich to work on his behalf, even extending him an official letter confirming that Klich had permission to carry out his work on behalf of *Hogares Providencia* and providing satisfactory answers to authority figures that might have questioned his motives.

Even some time after my initial contact with it, the uncommon topic of homelessness among children as the subject of this book remained unforgotten. John Mraz has noted that some of Mexico's key photographers, such as Manuel Álvarez Bravo, have employed anti-picturesque images to represent Mexico (2008, 8), and Klich's work seems to fall in that category. Pictures of an impoverished, miserable, gritty, and violent Mexico, as depicted by Klich, stayed with me. The only comparable Mexican narrative from that relative time period I had experienced previously were the written narratives by Emiliano Pérez Cruz that portrayed poverty and violence in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl in the 1980s (1988).³ It was not until several years later when, for my research processes, I was speaking with Elena Poniatowska about the various photographers with whom she had collaborated over the course of her career, that *El Niño* came to the forefront again. On that occasion, she related how Kent Klich had recruited her to be the writer for his photographic project on the street children. At that time, she described the book as one of the most significant photographic projects in which she had participated. When I noted that I was familiar with the book and asked her which publishing house had printed and distributed the volume in Mexico, the author informed me that the book was never published in Mexico as it would have been impossible to do so (Poniatowska personal communication with Nathaniel Gardner, summer 2013). In a later conversation with Kent Klich, he also confirmed the same. Though he had been in process with a major Mexican publisher to publish it, when the editor viewed the final version of *El niño*,

the publisher cancelled the publishing deal (along with a major museum exhibition in Mexico City that was to accompany it) without any formal explanation and stopped returning Klich's calls. Another publisher in Mexico was not obtained. In the end, the book was only published in the USA, Sweden, and Denmark.

Poniatowska is no stranger to publishing on topics that have struggled on occasion to find a place in national newspapers or were even strongly opposed. Among those topics are the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, the 2006 presidential elections; the 2014 Ayotzinapa incident; and the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre. For example, as she was concluding her seminal piece on the 1968 student massacre, Ediciones Era, the publishing house that was to publish *La noche de Tlatelolco*, was issued with a bomb threat (Ascencio 1997, 44). A pioneer for and champion of promoting unsung heroes and unveiling taboo topics in Mexico, Poniatowska can be held up as one who has pushed the limits of what can be written about in Mexico.⁴ For this reason it is relevant to ask: Why might *El niño* have not been published in Mexico? What can be learned from this text's approach regarding the topic of marginality?⁵ Additionally, this article considers how Klich's photographic contact sheets from the Mexico project, located in the photographer's personal archives in Copenhagen, add to our understanding of the formation of this documentary project on street children in Mexico City, and how they evidence that he attempted to portray the street children in a more favorable manner than what the visual narrative from the book offers.

The field of photography studies offers useful approaches to analyzing Klich's photographs and processes. From Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, I take the approach of considering photographs as evidence of the past (Barthes 2010, 79). They

are visual proof of what has been, or rather the “this has been” (Coleman 2015, 484). Visual historian Kevin Coleman refers to the power of photography as that of “acting as a witness” of events, which is useful in discussions on these children (Coleman 2015, 484). One of the ways in which Ariella Azoulay engages with photography is to understand it as a civil contract in which those who participate in the act of photography engage in what she has termed the “citizenry of photography” (2008, 117).” Azoulay asserts that “Anyone who stands in any relation whatsoever to photography has membership in the citizenry of photography – by virtue of the fact that she is a photographer; that she views photographs; comments on or interprets them; displays them to others or is herself photographed” (2015, 69). In *Civil Imagination*, Azoulay explains how photography possesses the special ability to offer a type of visual citizenship to everyone that engages in the event of photography, be it as producer, subject, or spectator; a citizenship that “evades all forms of sovereignty” (2015, 27).⁶ With this in mind, it is possible to consider the case of *El niño* as an instance in which an attempt to subvert or limit the civil contract of photography has occurred precisely because while Klich and his subjects have participated in creating a narrative made up of visual evidences of “events that have been”, a publisher attempted to reduce its number of potential spectators by withdrawing the opportunity for it to circulate.

In considering some possible reasons why the publisher decided not to publish Klich’s book, comparisons with the work of Oscar Lewis, another foreigner whose field work confronted marginality in Mexico and who was a source of inspiration for Klich’s work, offers useful points of comparison (notwithstanding obvious differences between the two projects as well that will be noted).⁷ Lewis studied patterns of

migration from rural to urban areas in Mexico and worked in many urban slums in Mexico City, allowing him to take a keen interest in poverty in large cities. This avenue of research inspired his social theory he named “the culture of poverty.” As we shall see, while there are overlapping issues between the two projects. However, Lewis’ work portrayed a softer view of poverty that incorporated big questions on society and history while making evident the effects of poverty on the lives of his highly-engaging ethnographic participants. His approach led to noted commercial success. Lewis’ more broad-viewed research on poverty was published in English by Random House in the form of an “autobiography” entitled *The Children of Sánchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* and his literary-anthropological approach soon resulted in a profitable success as the book became a best-seller. Nonetheless, when his seminal book was published in Mexico, it was soon fraught with certain difficulty.⁸

The Children of Sánchez follows the lives of the four children of Jesús Sánchez. The father had migrated from poverty in rural Veracruz to Mexico City as a young man and established a home for himself and his family in a tenement neighborhood renamed Casa Grande by the anthropologist. Although Lewis changed the name of the tenement and those of his subjects, he left street names and other references unchanged, so those with knowledge of Mexico City could identify the family as living in the Tepito district. Sánchez introduces his children’s narratives by telling of his own early life and how he became established in the capital and concludes the book by offering his own observations on his children and on living in poverty in general in Mexico. Sánchez’s text is in stark contrast with his children’s narratives. In them, there is no shortage of tales of early initiation into sexual activity

(153), teen pregnancy (265), paedophilia (146), academic underachievement (67), crime (213), migration (335), suffering (193), abuse (142), violence (409), hunger (329), and abandonment (141). Though Lewis' book was praised by scholars such as Jean Franco for allowing the subaltern to speak (1986, 160), the portrayal of poverty was severe, though perhaps not as severe as Klich's.

The court case against the Spanish version of the Lewis' study suggests that his book had touched a nerve.⁹ Although Lewis successfully published his work in English, he wanted to produce an impact in the source country of his material. His archives reveal his ample correspondence with Carlos Fuentes and others such as Luis Buñuel and Carolina Luján.¹⁰ He wanted their opinion on his work before it reached the Mexican public. Lewis even requested that Buñuel create a film inspired by his material.¹¹ When *Los hijos de Sánchez* was published in Mexico in 1964 by Fondo de la Cultura Económica, there was an attempt to halt the circulation of the book as a lawsuit was taken out against the anthropologist and the book's publishing house.¹² The case was taken to court and ultimately the court determined that the charge against Lewis, the publishing house, and its director Arnaldo Orfilia Reyna did not have merit (Rigdon, 1988, 165 and Lewis, 1983, 521). However, the publication with Fondo de la Cultura Económica ceased (and a new publisher in the private sector was obtained), Arnaldo Orfilia Reyna was dismissed from his post as head of FCE and Lewis was deemed a *persona non grata* and his research in Mexico dwindled considerably (Rigdon 1988, 105).

In comparison, one word that I suggest might describe the themes present in Klich's work is crisis. As is evidenced in his website that exhibits the body of Kent Kilch's work, he has photographed the conflict in Gaza, an HIV epidemic among

Romanian orphans, drug abuse, and homelessness (<http://www.kentklich.com/>). For example, in *The Book of Beth* Klich chronicles his work with a drug user and sex worker named Beth. His work not only documents the lives of those dealing with addiction, but also asks the question which is stated on the back cover of the publication just mentioned: “By combining his intimate and disturbing photographs with police and hospital records, handwritten notes left behind by Beth, and other texts, author Kent Klich searches for a rationale: what could cause this intelligent child to end up as a prostitute and drug addict?” (1989, backcover).

As with Lewis’ study, much of Klich’s work points to a crisis within one of the base institutions of society: the notion of family. Given Klich’s documented interest in how events in childhood appear to guide one’s development in later life, it is normal that in Mexico Klich explores childhood and considers what a child’s life is like when he or she is obliged to live outside a conventional family unit. Unlike Lewis, his work more strongly underscores a darker side of poverty as he allows his work to center on the ill effects it generates. As he investigates this with his photography, different themes emerge that we will now explore.

Revisiting the Mexican Revolution

While Oscar Lewis designed his book *The Children of Sánchez* to be definitive proof of his theory on the “culture of poverty”, and this is what has attracted the most critical attention of his work over the years, Lewis also set up his study as a test case as to whether the Mexican Revolution had delivered on its promise of greater social justice as he suggests in this quote from his introduction:

The persistence of poverty in the first city of the nation fifty years after the great Mexican Revolution raises serious concerns about the extent to which the Revolution has achieved its social objectives. Judging from the Sánchez family, their friends, neighbours, and relatives, the essential promise of the Revolution has yet to be fulfilled (1983, xxviii).

As is plainly evident in the previous quote, Lewis suggested the Mexican Revolution had yet to fulfil some of its promises and used his participant's lives to provide evidence of his conclusions. Kent Klich makes no written mention of the Mexican Revolution, nor does Elena Poniatowska. Yet several of his photographs make clear reference to the notion that the Mexican Revolution still needs to further address the issue of children living on the streets of its capital. This idea is developed via images that both portray the city and its relation to more immediate historical events via its statues and monuments – one of the themes he develops within the visual essay. His work contrasts official visual discourse (the monuments) with the lives of the homeless children he intended to assist. For example, one photo includes a partial picture of the Monument to the Revolution. Originally planned to be the structure to support the dome of a large building reminiscent of the White House in the United States of America; this building, planned during the tenure of Porfirio Díaz, was intended to be the new home of the Mexican Senate. This plan was later abandoned during the Mexican Revolution and converted into a monument that commemorates the triumph of the Mexican Revolution (Obregón Santacilica, 1960). Indeed, it is one of the most prominent examples of official visual discourse on the Mexican Revolution in Mexico City. At that site Klich captures a street child, in the foreground playing near the monument. The boy's thin body and mismatched clothing

underline the strong contrast between him and another abundantly-nourished and well-dressed individual who is playing badminton underneath the structure. [Figure 1] The theme of abandonment may also be interpreted via the empty buildings and half-constructed edifices that are visible in the background, also suggesting unfinished business. Klich has commented that one of the great ironies of this image is that the homeless children lived in an abandoned underground structure very close to both the monument pictured here and a large police station nearby; hence, they lived virtually undetected by the group of individuals that most often policed them in the streets (Klich, personal communication with Nathaniel Gardner winter 2015). Klich and Poniatowska underline conflict with the law as well. On pages 92-93 of Klich's visual narrative we observe a member of the police manhandling a street child and Poniatowska details episodes of police abuse of the children on page 161 all offering effective contrast to the proposal of triumph suggested by the official monument in central Mexico City.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

While street names which remind us of the Mexican Revolution and monuments that were erected to celebrate its protagonists and events are ubiquitous throughout the whole country as a part of extending the official discourse on Mexican Revolution throughout the country, Klich has chosen a monument along Lázaro Cardenas Avenue (not far from the one just mentioned) to make another statement on the Mexican Revolution. [Figure 2] Here we observe a statue of Aquiles Serdán. Serdán is one of the Revolution's original protagonists who has also been viewed as a defender of the poor and the downtrodden. In his partial view of the monument that celebrates

Serdán, Klich captures a homeless boy sleeping at the statue's feet. The large statue dwarfs the boy. His presence adds comment to the official visual narrative represented by the statue. There are many possible interpretations of the image of the sleeping boy: the boy lies imploring at the feet of the Mexican Revolution; or perhaps it means that as the statue appears to march forward, the boy is in danger of getting left behind. His mere presence underlines the poverty the street children experience and contrasts it to the success of the Mexican Revolution suggested by the monument. After reviewing the photographic contacts, a convincing interpretation involves the role of the two faces on the façade of a theater in the background. The classic comedy/tragedy costume masks that are often used to represent theater generally are present. The mask that represents Thalia the Greek Muse of comedy leans toward Serdán. This, of course could be viewed as one way of suggesting that it is making light of the Mexican Revolution by associating it with comedy. At the same time, the mask that represents the Greek Muse associated with tragedy: Melpomene hangs over the sleeping boy and could be read as suggesting the modern tragedy that this boy's life represents by his symbolic leaders passing him by. Hence, both masks play a role in developing a critique of the presented by the photograph. A review of Klich's photographic contacts held in his personal archive lead us to underscore the mask's importance because they show that the images that precede the picture included in *El niño* evidence several angles through which Klich attempted to capture the street child sleeping next to the statue. As the image/idea of "what has been" develops over the course of the contact sheet, it becomes evident that the selected frame is the one that clearly frames the theater mask in the portrayal of the child and the monument, the one element that is not present in most other takes. This observation extracted from the contact sheets not only evidences the development of the visual narrative, but also

suggests careful inclusion of certain elements in the final message that lend the image to a more critical interpretation that contrasts the official visual discourse offered by the monument. [INSERT FIGURE 2]

Klich uses the images of trains to develop the narrative of his photo essay as they had an important role in the industrialization of the 1800s and are an integral part of the iconography of the Mexican Revolution. One photograph from *El niño* is from the area of the Buenavista train station, another near Metro Moctezuma and Metro San Lázaro. In his notes, Klich explains briefly that many street children lived near the Buenavista train station in a school that was abandoned after it was partially destroyed in the 1985 Mexico City earthquake (1999, 166).¹³ These children sit on the engine looking out as if they were travelling on some imaginary journey, offering similarities to the iconic photographs soldiers during the revolution – ubiquitous in the official graphic histories of the Mexican Revolution. [Figures 3 and 4] The ragtag group of children in Klich's photograph may be interpreted as a comment that all the benefits of the Revolution have not yet had the desired impact on some of society's most vulnerable members, creating an image that goes against the grain of the official narrative of the Mexican Revolution. In another photograph that works in a similar vein was taken in front of the Buenavista train station. In it, homeless adults sleep in the sun whilst some homeless children play in the shadows. Like the children on the train in the previously commented photograph, these individuals have also been figuratively left at the station whilst the proverbial train of progress brought on by the Mexican Revolution has apparently departed without them: further developing Klich's notion of critique of the Mexican Revolution.

[INSERT FIGURES 3 and 4 HERE]

Violence and Sexuality

Klich's photo project contains images that depict scenarios of violence and sexuality which can be read as other manifestations of poverty. In other projects, this is also the case. For example, his project on the Gaza strip exhibits buildings scarred by war, and in his work with Beth, a drug addict and sex worker, he shows a type of slow and constant violence as the photos depict Beth become ravaged by the violence of addiction: bruises recurrently appear, teeth decay and fall out, a finger is lost from an infection caused by injecting it with a narcotic. She seems to have a decaying body, and is a victim of the violence inflicted upon her by herself and others she encountered during her activities as a sex worker. Generally speaking, Klich's work portrays violence by photographing the tangible and physical evidence of the effects of violent physical action. While poverty can often portrayed as absence, his work evidences instead what this force produces.

In *El niño* Klich exposes viewers to these effects along with suggestions of physical violence itself. Most of the violence in the photo essay is inflicted by some children on other children. The bulk of this evidences young boys inflicting violence others. While a first reflection upon this might suggest that Klich's view is a chauvinistic one; in reality, it underscores two issues evidenced in the text: the fact that the vast majority of the children on the street are indeed male and that the young women among the group are protected by them (1999, 151). As Klich is attempting to provide evidence of his concerns regarding difficulties during childhood, marginality, abandonment, and about the family in crisis via this photo essay; the photos underline to the animal pack-like behavior that becomes evident among the street children. The alpha male attempts to manifest his superiority by measuring out violence on his

subordinates. The weaker males are kicked, punched, or put in headlocks by the stronger males. In almost every photograph of this type, the individuals are abstracted as the identity of the attackers are obscured because the photographs hide their faces or they fall outside of the photographic frame (23, 80-81, 90-91, 120). For example, in a photo exhibiting violence on pages 90-91, partial views of four individuals are shown. A standing attacker is about to kick a victim seated on the ground in the groin. The person on the ground shows defensive movements: the individual has one hand to their side (perhaps reeling from another blow) and the other arm is raised as if to defend against the oncoming kick. Another child is behind the individual on the ground, possibly holding the victim up, holding the victim still, or simply looking on. Another child appears to be looking on. Though their faces are located outside of the frame, or are hidden behind other objects within the photograph; from their stances, parts of their body and the clothing they appear to be boys. However, the photographic contacts provide additional visual information that help us to understand the visual narrative with greater depth. The contacts reveal that the victim is a woman who had been needling the boys until they retaliated with physical violence (Klich, personal communication with Nathaniel Gardner spring 2016). This more complete understanding of the context of the violence in this particular image that is found via the photographic contacts, offers a stronger critique of the reality the street children face as well as evidencing Klich's decision to portray a more benevolent version of the children in his published portrayal of them suggesting a softer treatment of a harsh manifestation of their poverty as well as a protecting the identity when evidencing their misdeeds.

Another consideration to bear in mind concerning the role of violence in this photo essay is that most of the images of simple roughhousing violence will tend to

include other children observing the action.¹⁴ However, there is one key exception to the portrayal of violence that demands our consideration: sexual violence.

One of the elements cited in the court case brought against the publication in the Mexican publication of Lewis' *The Children of Sánchez* are the "escenas impúdicas" (1983, 513). Though the court case found in the appendix of the Mexican edition mentions obscene and lewd content without mentioning specific examples; even taking into account that the text was found innocent of being criminally obscene, it is not difficult to find examples of violence and sexually explicit (though not pornographic) material within the Sánchez family narrative.

While several photographs in *El niño* and a large volume of Klich's photographic contacts depict what appears to be a reoccurring theme of roughhousing, further analysis suggests that they are occasional imitations of sexual violence. One image includes one of the larger boys trapping a smaller boy under his own body in what seems to be a position of dominance (30-31). He has pinned him down on a bed. The posturing of the larger boy suggests that this dominance is not only one of physical detainment, but also one of a simulation of sexual violation. A second and third photograph depicting similar scenes hint that these images might be a re-enactment of past sexual experiences, because of what is mentioned in Elena Poniatowska's essay that makes direct reference to the violation of street children being a common reason for the drug use among them (160). Most of the scenes that depict violence, sexual or otherwise, show a larger child exercising his dominance over another smaller one reinforcing the notion of abuse and victimization as well as the lack of protection their poverty imposes upon them. Klich's photographic contacts depict scenarios of actual spontaneous violence (which abruptly stop, suggesting that the photographer intervened). These images and their context via the photographic

contacts raise questions as to the possible ubiquity of violence within the reality of the street children he was documenting and underline an important difference between Lewis' narrative which exhibits threats of violence, but surprisingly little depiction of them.

[INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE]

But how might these images relate to the rest of this book and why might the publisher in Mexico have decided against its publication? Poniatowska, in her epilogue to *El niño* recounts a case in which a social worker attempts to allow a homeless boy in a shelter to feel some sense of justice for the abuses he has suffered. He does this by allowing the boy to kick him, spit on him, and whip him with a belt without resistance (1999, 156). The social worker believed that by allowing the child to act out abuses that had occurred to him, he would be able to feel a greater sense of justice with regard to the abuse he had suffered and then enable the child to progress past those negative experiences (1999, 156). Hence, Klich's essay could be read as suggesting that the children simulating violation, executing violence on others, becoming victims of diverse types of violence, and manifesting other socially deviant behaviors are simply mimicking what has already occurred to them as they search for justice or catharsis. If this is truly the case, then these images of sexuality and violence are possibly the most damning criticism this book issues, adding to the possible motives why this "book that almost was" ultimately was not circulated among its potential Mexican audience.

Squalor and abandon

In *The Children of Sánchez*, Lewis described the poor tenement housing within which his subjects lived, in relation to what the home contained in terms of material wealth (food, a bed, a radio, and so forth) and what it lacked in terms of physical items and included less information in terms of notions of cleanliness. Lewis seemed to describe poverty more in terms of possessions than of the general space in which they lived, and this focus on material possessions was common in Lewis' early studies on poverty (1951, pxviii).

In Klich's study, which could be regarded in terms of more extreme poverty and marginality, seems to be more focused on exposing the dirt, grime, and detritus in which the children in his photographs live. Again, Klich's view of poverty tends to underscore what poverty produces. La Casona, a school building that the authorities had condemned and supposedly sealed off after the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, was used by the street children as a type of refuge; as it not only provided protection from the elements, but also had unusual amenities for an abandoned building, such as running water and electricity (Klich personal communication with Nathaniel Gardner, winter 2015). Klich foregrounds this space more than any other in his photo narrative, including it fourteen times in his book. However, although this space offered shelter, Klich's photographs portray it as anything but welcoming, "homely," or safe, unlike Lewis' narrative which tended to portray the home as a location where the Sánchez family would bond and rest from their labors. Indeed, most photographs of La Casona show that it is a building in ruins, falling in on itself, with missing floorboards and cracked walls. Perhaps the most striking of these photos depicts an area of floor in one of the rooms, entirely occupied by detritus: dirty clothing, broken toys, a ruined suitcase, empty food and drink containers, and general rubbish (34-35) (See Figure 6). Reminiscent of the 1943 photograph "Glass" by Fredrick Somner which is described

by Stephen Shore as having a “shallow depictive space, but a deep mental space” (Shore 2007, 102); Klich’s equally opaque photograph confronts the viewer with a barrage of objects that also invite reflection because of their metonymic portrayal of the homeless children’s life (travel, childhood, nourishment, and shelter) via the items that have been haphazardly discarded onto the floor: products of their physical and educational poverty. The fact that the visual narrative focuses on the elements that have been thrown away suggests negative possessions and might seem a harsh portrayal of the children, but this view also hints at the immediacy of the lives of Kent Klich’s subjects who literally live from hand to mouth with the clothes on their backs and do not really have a room of their own, temporally occupying furtive or abandoned spaces as places of refuge.

In other scenes, Klich attempts to humanize his subject and create connections between the spectator and the street children such as when they are depicted playing with their pets (1999, 74-75, 108, 152-153). However, this photo does not include any human subjects and invites reflection on one of the elements of their reality that most societies attempt to distance themselves from: their rubbish. However, in a very literal sense, this photograph depicts the once possessions of the de-possessed. In contemplating this visual image, it is important to remember the role of the spectator in the civil contract of photography. The images of filth and squalor were not captured to be shown to those who were living in it, as the only photos Klich gave to the children as mementos of their participation in the photographic project were portraits (Klich personal communication with Nathaniel Gardner, spring 2016.); but rather for other inhabitants of Mexico, with the expectation that they engage in the civil contract of photography as spectators. Hence, it was anticipated that the plight of the children who Klich had been documenting would bring them new, more intimate, knowledge

regarding the lives of the children which would create a conscious-raising experience for them and motivate them to decide for themselves how best to react to this new information.

[INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE]

Though he has emphasized that he would not photograph children who had not previously agreed to be photographed, in some of Klich's photographs it appears that the children he photographed did not want to be captured. These images merit further consideration. For example, there are moments when the children actively attempt to hide their activities from the camera. This is evident in some photographs of close-ups of children's hands as they attempt to cover up Klich's camera lens that do make it into the published book. For example, through the fingers of one boy who tries to block Klich's camera lens, the photograph evidences one child hitting another child. The actions of the children remind the reader of the self-censorship that surrounds the representation of marginality. In effect, his "no" indicates his "knowing": knowing his social transgression of hurting others and knowing the power of the photographic image. Hence, the children seem to avoid participating in the civil contract of photograph, exercising their "right not to be looked at": an important consideration recently explored by Kevin Coleman as he contemplates the visual representation of the subaltern in Central America (2015, 43-63). Klich's contacts make clear that he respected that particular boy's desire, for he stopped taking photographs after the youth tried to block the camera lens. This action also underlines a topic of debate connected to testimonial literature produced in Latin America: to limit what is shown to the hegemonic - the image suggests that it is not a tactic solely used within written

texts. Consequently, this allows the reader to contemplate Klich's text with questions regarding the representation of the marginal (ie representation and the Rigoberta Menchú *testimonio*) within the field of photography (Stoll 2007). When considering this, it is important to remember that not only can one not be sure of what the artist has shown the viewer, it is also impossible to be entirely sure what the children might have withheld from the artist. Klich's photographs which candidly exhibit both violence and surroundings that evidence visible urban decay provoke the question: why do the children try to cover up these aspects of their lives and withhold them from the photographer? In effect, what more do the photographs teach us regarding their "no" and their "knowing"?

In the instance of the boy who asks to exercise his right not to be seen, the contact images reveal that Klich attempted to capture violence, but the youth did not allow him to do so and the photographer respected that act. Here we could consider that the subject is making his citizenship of photography more active as he engages directly with us the spectator (and with Klich). This has a point of comparison with one of the sources that inspired Klich to work in Mexico: Luis Buñuel's Mexican cinema. The scene to which I am referring is when Pedro smashes a raw egg against the camera lens in *Los olvidados*. While a major difference between both exists in that Buñuel created his effect for the cinema and Klich captured his spontaneously, in the two instances the subaltern subject exercising his right not to be seen is evident. In another image in Klich's contact sheets, a homeless youth randomly sticks his middle finger up at the camera. It is a boy who appears in several photographs within *El niño*. The child actively expresses his citizenry within the civil contract of photography to send an aggressive message to his spectators via Klich's documentary narrative.

(Similar as well to the incident with Pedro and the egg from the scene in Buñuel's film just mentioned.) The fact that Klich did not include this photo from the contacts not only evidences how he kept back more aggressive photographs from his final portrayal of the children, but it also demonstrates how the child breaks the fourth wall within this visual image to communicate more directly with the viewers of the image, strongly suggesting his knowing of the potential power of photography. This tactic used here is also mirrored in *The Children of Sánchez* when Lewis encourages his participants to reflect more widely on Mexican society and its institutions, criticizing them, which was one of points brought against the book during the attempt to censure it.

Glimpses of normalcy within the margins

The use of "no" also comments on the notion of normalcy within the visual narrative. Transgressions, such as the ones previously discussed, are evident as are adherences to societal rules of conduct. Consequently, Klich's essay also focuses on points of contact between these street children and other aspects of Mexico City's diverse society, offering a more nuanced portrayal of marginality and its voice. In the photos, some conventional/traditional aspects of culture are referenced: for example, an undecorated Christmas tree presides in a room in La Casona; and a Day of the Dead¹⁵ altar exhibits food that has been collected and consecrated for the event and contains the picture of a deceased member of the group of street children.¹⁶ As this photo remembers one member of their group, The Day of the Dead image in particular also points clearly to an element at the core of human nature: we are social beings who organize themselves into groups and units. The same point is

reemphasized when considering what has become perhaps the best-recognized photograph of Klich's images of homeless children in Mexico: *Maíz y Sal* on pages 66-67. (see Figure 7). This image depicts an improvised grill which is roasting pieces of tender corn in La Casona.¹⁷ The hand of one of the street children is dabbing his finger in a small plastic bag of salt, perhaps with the intention of dabbing it onto the corn. The image is also a direct reference to one of the most basic shared events of the human experience: cooking and partaking of food. At the same time, this makeshift grill and the corn cooking on it are references to normalcy, tradition, and continuity as they are both common foods stuffs and cooking instruments – an experience the street children share with the rest of their compatriots.

[INSERT FIGURE 7 HERE]

Another photograph depicts a section of a wall exhibiting graffiti within La Casona that contains references to hard rock and heavy metal bands (Guns N' Roses, Bon Jovi, Metallica) that seemingly suggest revealing connections between the children and international rock music (See Figure 8) (p 138-139). The photograph evidences that the children Klich captures, though subaltern due to their homelessness, can clearly evidence their knowledge of popular culture: a feature that shows their "knowing" of mainstream culture, partially bridging the gap between them and the rest of society. The photograph includes references to international rock music such as the title of the song "Vientos de Cambio" (1991) by German rock band the Scorpions and others that provide not only references to international pop culture, but also indicate a vital timeline that strongly argues that the street children were those who created that graffiti, evidencing their "knowing" of literacy. Examples

include a reference to the song “Vuela vuela” (1991) by Magneto (whose lyrics also make certain references to the possibility of escaping one’s present reality into a better world), as well as references to other popular musical groups of the day such as Pink Floyd. The song represented in the Mexican graffiti “Vientos de Cambio”, aside from being released in English and Russian “Winds of Change”/ “Ветер перемен” (1991) and showing their knowledge of global musical trends, offers important critical material that the viewer can reflect upon as well. The fact that both “Vientos de Cambio” and “Vuela vuela” found in the graffiti were released after the 1985 Mexico City earthquake that damaged the building, strongly suggests that the graffiti belongs to the homeless children. Consequently, this wall with graffiti that mirrors others that one might encounter in any high school of the 1990s foregrounds references of normalcy found within the lives of these subaltern children and offers evidence of their literacy by suggesting that they possess writing skills. Additionally, it offers their personal tastes for popular youth culture at the time as well as their reflections upon music that contains positive messages both of which suggest the possibility of change and escape. They are important references that give voice to the homeless children in Klich’s photo essay, offering insights into the reflections of the marginal on the world that they experience.

Klich originally intended his audience to be the Mexican reading public of his book. However, in the end Klich sold his project to readers in the USA who might engage in the civil contract of photograph with his material. Klich says that he knew that the readers in the USA would participate in the citizenry of photography, value his work, and initiate dialogues – a manifest effort of the book in question (Klich personal communication with Nathaniel Gardner, winter 2015). This of course, is one

of the artist's overarching themes in his photography: a desire to create awareness that provokes a rethinking, and a modification of behavior and attitude.

[INSERT FIGURE 8 HERE]

Klich's Mexican narrative seeks to inform and increase understanding regarding marginality via his photographs. His work offers a nuanced portrayal of the lives of street children in Mexico City. Intended by the documentarian to be a visual narrative that raises the conscious of his readers, it reveals aspects of these children's lives that go beyond causal observations of encounters with street children in various capitals of the world. Just as the only picture of the street children participating in what might arguably be their most visible activity to the public: busking, reveals a hidden element of their lives: a new born baby in their midst (p 48-49); Klich's Mexican narrative also makes evident other topics from their reality he encountered as he documented their lives. His work attempts to engage potential spectators on topics he deemed relevant and intimately connected to the lives of the street children he photographed in Mexico City. A careful study of these images reveals the creation of a narrative that discusses topics such as criticism of the Mexican Revolution, violence, and sexuality all of which were also decried in Lewis' earlier portrayal of marginality that served as inspiration for the photographer. Klich's narratives also takes a step in a new direction by offering evidence of the marginal's "knowing" via their "no" and other lesser-explored evidences on the topics of poverty such as graffiti. This article has also made evident that Klich differed from Lewis. Klich's photos focused on showing a grittier version of poverty with even more biting social criticism as well as producing images of the negative products of poverty over putting

forth efforts to create a test case that evidences cultural traits within more socially acceptable visions of poverty such as shown by Lewis' best-selling study. However, additional information gleaned from the photographic contact sheets also reveal that Klich clearly attempted to portray the street children's reality in a manner that did not reveal the harshest material he encountered during the creation of his unique Mexican narrative. This approach suggests his intimate knowledge of the street children's lives afflicted by poverty and marginality and; ultimately, it underlines Klich's benevolence towards the children with whom he worked.

¹ This article is linked to the research network "Traducción, Ideología, Cultura" based at the Universidad de Salamanca and forms a part of the research project "Violencia simbólica y traducción: retos en la representación de identidades fragmentadas en la sociedad global" (FFI2015-66516-P; MINECO/FEDER, UE), which operates thanks to grant from the Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad del Gobierno de España and the Fondo Europeo de Desarrollo Regional.

² This book was also published in Sweden and Denmark.

³ Studies from the social sciences on marginality in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl also underscore difficulties encountered in that urban area (García Ortega 1992, Prieur 2007).

⁴ Her biography of the painter Juan Soriano is an evidence of this as it boldly promotes his work notwithstanding the overt images of male homoerotic art. Poniatowska (1998).

⁵ Klich confirmed that he considers that the book was written mainly for the Mexican reading public (Klich personal communication with Nathaniel Gardner, Feb. 2015).

⁶ For further application of Azoulay's theory to Latin American photography see Kevin Coleman, *A Camera in the Garden of Eden* (2016) and Coleman, "The Photos We Don't Get to See: Sovereignties, Archives, and the 1928 Massacre of Banana Workers in Colombia," (2015, 104-136).

⁷ Coincidentally, Lewis has a connection to Poniatowska, as one of her early mentors.

⁸ Luis Buñuel, a friend and contemporary of Lewis, adopted a different approach when making his film that was critical of Mexico: *Los olvidados*. He naturalized as a Mexican citizen before he released his movie classic, which won prizes at Cannes but also resulted in threats of deportation (Hart 2004, 69).

⁹ Oscar Lewis, *Los hijos de Sánchez*, (1983). The court case (whose resolution is found in the appendix of the 1983 edition in Mexico) cites: "Denuncia de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística contra Oscar Lewis y Fondo de Cultura Económica, por los delitos previstos en los artículos 145, 200, y 360 del Código Penal Federal y 2 Fracción I de la Ley de Imprenta."

¹⁰ He was also in contact with Margaret Mead, see Susan M. Rigdon, *The Cultural Façade: Art, Science, and Politics in the Work of Oscar Lewis* (1988, 145-146, 223, 235).

¹¹ The request was refused (Rigdon 1988, 146).

¹² In the court case, the book was described by the plaintiff as offensive due to its inclusion of: “lenguaje obsceno y soez, descripciones denigrantes contra el pueblo y el gobierno mexicano, opiniones calumniosas y difamatorias” (Lewis 1983, 513-521).

¹³ Klich has also mentioned that the 1985 earthquake that devastated the capital was a positive happening for the children because it both provided them with abandoned buildings where they could stay and fomented a spirit of solidarity on behalf of the public towards the children as the earthquake had appeared to sensitize the general public towards suffering in the capital (Klich, personal communication with Nathaniel Gardner winter 2015).

¹⁴ Among the vast collection of Klich’s Mexico City photographic contacts of the street children, one of the most commonly repeated images is that of roughhousing among the street children.

¹⁵ *Día de los Muertos*, or Day of the Dead is a Mexican holiday celebrated every Nov 2 and combines both Catholic tradition from All Saint Day as well as pre-Colombian traditions that remember family members and loved ones who have passed away. Altars are temporarily constructed to commemorate those that have died.

¹⁶ This photograph of one of the youths who had recently died of AIDS was given to the children by Klich (Klich personal communication with Nathaniel Gardner, winter 2015).

¹⁷ Aside from being a key food staple in Mexico and other areas of Latin America, corn is also believed to have been the building material of human life itself by the Gods as detailed in the sacred pre-Colombian text *Popul Vuh*. Hence, a possible symbolic reading of the image could create parallels between the small and tender irregular-shaped corn which is roasting over the grill and the difficult lives the homeless children face in their furnace of affliction that life on the street has created for them.