

## De cómo la mandala de *The Brick People* se inspiraba en una escena del poema de Villagrá

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the enigma or the question of inspiration. In *Historia de la nueva México*, 1610, Gaspar de Villagrá includes an episode that features an encounter with Mómpil an indigenous man who sweeps the ground with his hand or his foot to make a space in which he creates a directional mandala. Approximately 372 years later Alejandro Morales reads Villagrá's poem and is struck by Mómpil and the gesture of clearing the ground. This scene and Mómpil's gesture is reminiscent of a childhood event where Delfino Morales, Morales' father, makes the same gesture to clear the ground to make a similar mandala. These three gestures and events separated by time and space are linked together to inspire Morales to create his character Rosendo who makes the same gesture for the directional mandala that appears in *The Brick People* (1988). Morales looks at three theories that suggest a reservoir of collective unconscious knowledge that breaks through to daily life to inspire individuals to accomplish magnificent artistic feats that connect the human experience beyond time and space. Mómpil's primordial gesture of "Y barriendo del suelo cierta parte" (And sweeping on the ground a certain space) to create a space for a mandala is part of that reservoir of collective unconscious knowledge that perpetually links Mómpil, Rosendo, Villagrá, Morales and Delfino.

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RESUMEN

El art culo explora el enigma o la cuesti n de la inspiraci n. En *Historia de la nueva M xico*, 1610, Gaspar de Villagr  incluye un episodio de un encuentro con M mpil, hombre nativo que barre la tierra con la mano o con el pie para hacer un espacio en donde dibuja una mandala direccional. Aproximadamente 372 a os despu s, Alejandro Morales lee el poema de Villagr  y queda impresionado con M mpil y el gesto de barrer la tierra. La escena y el gesto de M mpil evocan en Morales un evento de la ni ez cuando Delfino Morales, el padre de Morales, hace el mismo gesto de limpiar el suelo para hacer una mandala semejante. Estos tres gestos y sucesos separados por el tiempo y el espacio son conectados para inspirar a Morales a crear el personaje de Rosendo, quien hace el mismo gesto para realizar la mandala que aparece en *The Brick People* (1988). Morales considera tres teor as que sugieren una fuente de conocimiento inconsciente colectivo que trasciende la vida cotidiana para inspirar a individuos, a logros art sticos magn ficos que vinculan la experiencia humana a trav s del tiempo y el espacio. El gesto arquet pico primordial de M mpil de "Y barriendo del suelo cierta parte" para preparar un espacio para la mandala es parte de la mina de conocimiento inconsciente colectivo que vincula perpetuamente a M mpil, a Rosendo, a Villagr , a Morales y a Delfino.

Palabras clave: Gaspar de Villagr , inspiraci n, conocimiento subconsciente, mandala, intertextualidad.

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In 2006 at a Chicano literature conference in Alcal  de Henares, Spain, I attended a plenary lecture on *Historia de la nueva Mexico* by Gaspar de Villagr  presented by Professor Manuel M. Mart n Rodr guez. After the lecture in a private conversation Professor Mart n Rodr guez and I spoke about "de c mo la mandala de *The Brick People* se inspiraba en una escena del poema *Historia de la nueva Mexico* de Villagr ." I commented to Professor Mart n Rodr guez that I had read Villagr 's poem for my dissertation and that I believed that the scene in Canto 12 of M mpil drawing a mandala had a definite inspirational influence on my including a mandala in the beginning of my novel *The Brick People*. Professor Mart n Rodr guez later wrote about Villagr 's *Historia* as an inspirational source for Chicano writers.

Por último, Villagr  y su *Historia* aparecen tambi n como fuente de inspiraci n en la literatura creativa: el poema figura entre los libros que Sonny Baca (el protagonista de *Shaman Winter*, de Rudolfo A. Anaya) saca de la biblioteca para investigar, y Alejandro Morales me indic  en una conversaci n personal que se inspir  (inconscientemente) en el episodio de M mpil para el de la mandala que aparece en su novela *The Brick People*<sup>1</sup>. (Mart n Rodr guez 235)

How did this inspiration happen? Part of the answer to the questions can be found in the relationship between five individuals. The first in the inspirational equation is Gaspar de Villagr , a Criollo and author of *Historia de la nueva Mexico*, born in Mexico in 1555. Consequently, in the eyes of Spaniards at the time, his birthplace makes him a Criollo and therefore considered a second-class citizen of the Colony. Although, Villagr  is from a privileged family, highly educated in Spain and a man of military and legal rank, he encounters discrimination in Mexico and in Spain. Like other Criollos, he is alienated “from all economic, legal, political, religious and social matters affecting them in everyday life. *Criollos* simultaneously carried the burden of fulfilling Spanish demands in the New World and were denied the rights, privileges, honors, charges, offices and prizes reserved for their Spanish-born relatives” (P rez-Linggi 667). The second link in the mandala chain, M mpil, an Acoma Indian, draws a topographical mandala that contains a map. To create his mandala he uses geographical, astrological and mathematical strategies that he learns from the elders of his native community. As a warrior in the Acoma social order he roams the territorial peripheries guarding Acoma settlements from invaders. Performing his duties requires him to travel throughout the territory surrounding the pueblos; consequently, these journeys enable him to develop a precise geographical knowledge of the region. His knowledge distinguishes him from other native men. Rosendo, the third actant in the chain, is a Mexican immigrant. Rosendo draws a mandala that contains a building plan for the Simons brick factory in Pasadena, California. After the brutal murder of his parents, Rosendo journeys to California where he works for the entrepreneur Joseph Simons at the Simons Brick Company. Rosendo, although uneducated, turns out to be a natural architect capable of producing complex construction plans for the brick company, including the layout of the location of buildings, machinery, and drying racks. The fourth protagonist in the mandala progression, Delfino Morales, a Mexican immigrant, a self taught planner and builder, sketches a series of detailed mandalas that contain a construction plan for his home in Montebello, California. The fifth link in the inspiration chain is me, Alejandro Morales, a Chicano author, writer of *The Brick People*. I was born in 1944 in Montebello, California to Mexican immigrants from the state of Guanajuato. I lived in a segregated

company town. My first educational experience was the segregated Mexican school in Montebello, California. By the time I completed high school in 1963 the Chicano Movement began. I identified immediately with the Chicano's ongoing struggle for respect, justice and social rights. Although I have attained a high level of education, I have always seen myself as alienated. I have always considered myself as different, constantly negotiating multiple spaces and identities.

The point here is that there is an affinity, an experiential link between Villagr  and me. Although we achieve relative success in education and employment we are still on the margin, members of ethnic, cultural groups, Criollo and Chicano respectively, who deal with overt and institutionalized racism and discrimination. Villagr , for example, had to consider the cast system of Colonial Mexico, and the treatment of New World Criollos in Mexico and in Spain. I attended a segregated school, lived in a segregated company town and experienced a racism and discrimination that I did not understand while growing up. Today I have to deal with the habitually ingrained anti Mexican immigrant hysteria plaguing United States society. I also feel an affinity between M mpil's and Rosendo's experience. In particular, M mpil's learning from his elders and Rosendo's learning from his parents are reminiscent of my home and family education of being taught by my grandparents, my mother, Juana Morales Contreras, and my father, Delfino Morales Mart nez.

M mpil, Rosendo and Delfino employ the soil of the earth as their canvas to frame their mandalas, which connects them through time and space. Villagr  and I use language and the page to frame the mandalas we describe in our respective texts.

## 1. M MPIL'S AND ROSENDO'S MANDALAS AS INSPIRATIONAL AGENTS

Two key words, "mandala" and "inspiraba," require comment. A mandala is a graphic symbol of a circle representing wholeness, the universe and all things in it. The designs of the mandala are encyclopedic. It has many spiritual and empirical functions. It is a tool for exploring human production and life itself. It is the Aleph containing all things simultaneously. Mandalas are ancient symbols and are found in cultures worldwide.

The word "inspiraba" (inspired) has several meanings; one is "to affect, guide, or arouse by divine influence;" another is "of such surpassing brilliance or excellence as to suggest divine inspiration." (*The American Heritage College Dictionary* 704). "Inspirar" also suggests a linkage between the inspirer and the inspired entities. Inspiration can be initiated by the human senses or it can occur upon the recognition of ancient collective

symbolic images and/or gestures. Inspiration can happen in an instant, at an epiphanic moment, an instinctive leap accompanied by overwhelming emotion. Also, it can be an unemotional event without any kind of euphoric experience. In this case the writer simply proceeds to incorporate the interpretation of the symbol into the narrative being written.

At the moment of inspiration connections between the inspirer and the inspired are passed on through time and space and culminate in the five interconnected mandalas created by Mómopil, Rosendo, Delfino, Villagr a and me that appear in the *Historia de la nueva Mexico* and in *The Brick People*. M mopil and Rosendo draw similar mandalas that have at least two equal functions: orientation and creation. Their similarities are made apparent by applying the Tibetan Buddhists' belief that a mandala is made up of five "excellencies": teacher, message, audience, site, time, and the absolute necessity of an audience. M mopil's and Rosendo's mandalas originate in Asia. The practice of Asian mandala painting and sculpturing has been present in the Western Hemisphere for thousands of years. Intuitively and unconsciously Villagr a recognizes the science of the Asian mandala in M mopil's cartography. In Canto II Villagr a mentions that he believes that all first nations people of the New World are of Asian origin.

Cerrando nuestro canto mal cantado  
 Con aber entonado todo aquello  
 Que de los m s antiguos naturales  
 Ha podido alcanzarse y descubrirse  
 Acerca de la antigua decendencia,  
 Venida y poblaci n de Mexicanos,  
 Que para m  yo tengo que salieron  
 De la gran China todos los que habitan  
 Lo que llamamos Indias. Mas no importa  
 Que aquesto por agora aqu  dexemos.  
 (Canto II, 291-300)

M mopil's and Rosendo's mandalas contain all five of the "excellencies" and both have at least one viewer. In the *Historia de la nueva Mexico*, the teacher is M mopil, the composer of the mandala; the message is a map that provides Villagr a and his men a sense of security and a direction to follow in the wilderness; the audience is Villagr a, so impressed by what he recognizes that he is inspired to include its detailed recreation of the encounter and the mandala in the *Historia*; the site is the space on the earth for the mandala that M mopil clears somewhere in the Spanish northern territories; the time is the instant of recognition and connection of what Villagr a and his men see in Mompil's mandala that occurs in 1598 and the inspirational linkage experienced sometime around 1973 when I first saw M mopil's mandala in Villagr a's poem.

In *The Brick People* the teacher is Rosendo, who experiences two mandalas: one that he sees and follows, and another that he creates; the message is the lay of the land, a construction plan for the Simons Brick factory; the audience is first Rosendo himself and, shortly after, Joseph Simons, the owner of the Simons Brick Company; the site is a clearing on the earth that Rosendo makes for the mandala in Pasadena, California in 1892; the time is 1984, the moment I related my father's gesture of clearing a space for his mandala used to build our family home in 1949 with Mómpil's gesture to clear a space for his mandala in 1598 in Villagrá's poem. These two events merge to move me to write the Rosendo scene in *The Brick People*.

Mómpil and Rosendo are everyday men who possess a specialized knowledge that allows them to create similar mandalas that have or symbolize at least two equal functions: orientation and creation. Both Mómpil and Rosendo are cartographers and designers of space. Their autodidactic knowledge makes them valuable, respectively, to Villagrá's expedition and to Joseph Simons's brick manufacturing venture.

Mómpil's mandala is directional and expresses his precise familiarity of the vast territory into which Villagrá and his men have ventured and find themselves disoriented in an unfamiliar space where they are unable to advance in any direction with any assurance that they will be safe. It is Mómpil's mandala that brings order to chaos and provides the geographic information needed for Villagrá to establish his location in order to advance. Mómpil's cartography, his mapping of the territory, enhances Villagrá's troops psychological confidence to carry them on to their next objective and gives them a sense of security and some comfort about where they are and with whom they are dealing.

Mómpil's mandala also expresses the process of creation. By constructing a map he recreates his known world that symbolizes the unknown world to Villagrá. Mómpil details the geography and pinpoints the location of water sources, mountains, villages and most importantly his map is enlightenment in the darkness of Villagrá's ignorance. His map makes them understand "Poniendo y dándose a entender en todo" "Making us understand it all" (460). Villagrá sees Mómpil as indispensable, as a man of knowledge similar to his. Consequently, Mómpil is unwillingly recruited as a guide.

Villagrá was so amazed by the knowledge of mathematics and science in Mómpil's cartographical, astronomical and geographical mandala that he was moved to record the events:

Por cuia causa el otro en pie se puso,  
Que Mompil dixo a todos se llamaba,  
Y era el que el proveedor abía prendido,  
Y barriendo del suelo cierta parte

Que toda a caso deservada estaba,  
 Desarrollando el brazo poderoso  
 Tomó la punta de una larga flecha  
 Y así, como si bien cursado fuera  
 En nuestra mathemática más cierta,  
 Casi quiso a todos figurarnos  
 La línea y el Zodíaco y los signos,  
 En largo cada qual de treinta grados,  
 Los poderosos círculos y el exe.  
 Y así como cosmógrafo excelente,  
 Respecto al Cielo quiso dibujarnos  
 Algunas partes de la baja tierra  
 Puso del Sur y Norte los dos mares,  
 Con islas, fuentes, montes y lagunas  
 Y otros assientos, puestos y estalages.  
 Pintonos la circunvezina tierra  
 Y el asiento del caudaloso Río  
 Por quien tantos trabajos se sufrieron,  
 Y todos los aguages y jornadas  
 Que era fuerza tener en el camino  
 Por aber de beber sus turbias aguas.  
 Pintonos vna boca muy estrecha  
 Por la qual era fuerza se passase,  
 Y fuera della no nos dio vereda  
 Que por ella pudiesse ser posible  
 Que saliesse el ejército marchando,  
 Por ser aquella tierra en sí fragosa  
 Y muy pobre de aguage en todas partes.  
 Allí pintó también las poblaciones  
 De nuestra nueva México y sus tierras,  
 Poniendo y dándose a entender en todo  
 Como si muy sagaz piloto fuera.  
 No se movió pestaña, porque juntos,  
 Todos oyendo al bárbaro gallardo,  
 De gran contento y gozo no cabían  
 Y por la mucha parte que me cupo,  
 Será bien que celebre la grandeza  
 De la más alta bárbara, gallarda  
 De pecho y corazón el más rendido,  
 Que en bárbara nación se a conocido.

(Canto XII, 424-469)

Rosendo's directional mandala resides in his mind. It appears after the horrific deaths of his parents and siblings. It is a mandala of escape that consists of Aztec spatial coordinates that he learned from his parents' teachings. Unconsciously he follows the

brilliance of the Flint Knife symbol. The coordinate's symbols and colors are hidden deep in his mind. He doesn't understand exactly why but like in a dream he knows to follow the brilliantly sharp Flint Knife coordinate leading north:

For many days, perhaps weeks, there was only blackness before his eyes. He kept advancing on the Flint Knife of the Northern axis of the ancient Aztec coordinates his parents had taught him. He could not go toward the Red Reed axis of the East, nor to the White House of the West, nor dare to look back at Blue Rabbit of the South. At this time, these colors and images were hidden deep in his mind. Traveling through the pure blackness for seven years, Rosendo followed the brilliantly sharp Flint Knife that opened a path to the North.

Rosendo arrived in Los Angeles to realize that most of his young life had been spent journeying to a place that he knew nothing about. He had followed a directional mandala that his parents had inculcated in his psyche. (Morales 9)

Rosendo retains an extraordinary knowledge of the ancient Aztec directional mandala that he learned from his mother and father. He possesses a talent to envision a ground plan, to learn and to teach the different aspects of the brick business. For Rosendo, an innate builder, the directional mandala that he draws on the clay in Pasadena, California in 1892 also functions as a mandala of creation:

At the Simons Brickyard in Pasadena in 1892, he now traced the directional mandala in the soft red earth. The morning was one of complete loneliness as he finished the last oval figure of the mandala, which consisted of a center and four ovals interrelated in a continuous unwinding infinite spiral of energy, time and space. The figure symbolized Rosendo's perception of the cosmos. It represented the pattern Rosendo would follow to construct the buildings on the six acres where the brickyard evolved. (9-10)

The mandala that provided the paths of escape from Mexico to Los Angeles also brings Rosendo in contact with the Simons family and eventually with Joseph Simons, an entrepreneur and manufacturer of brick, the main building material of that time. Rosendo worked for John V. Simons, Joseph's cousin, and learned by observation and experience the different aspects of the brick making process and of the construction materials business. In time he takes on the role of mentor to Joseph Simons:

For the first year and a half, he [Joseph] labored side by side with Rosendo and the workers. He built molds, trays, and long-drying racks; mixed, poured and formed red mud into bricks; dried and stacked the bricks into monolithic kilns for firing. Joseph acquired knowledge and business sense from Rosendo, whom he recognized as a business mentor. (10)

The mandala is a plan of spatial order that he will follow to organize and construct the brick yard in Pasadena. “In architecture the mandala also plays an important part — but one that often passes unnoticed. It forms the ground plan both of secular and sacred buildings in nearly all civilizations; it enters into classical, medieval, and even modern town planning” (Jung 1968: 269). The mandala provides an architectural and engineering ground plan passed on from people to people, from generation to generation. With this talent Rosendo becomes essential for the success of Joseph Simons’s brick manufacturing company.

## 2. MÓMPIL’S, ROSENDO’S AND DELFINO’S INSPIRATIONAL GESTURE

I read Villagrá’s poem, around 1972, when I was doing research and gathering material for my dissertation. Mómpil and his mandala remained in my mind more than any other person or event in the poem. Mómpil impressed me as a knowledgeable and prudent man willing to help these strangers. What I recall most in the scene is Mómpil’s act of sweeping clean, either with his hand or foot, a clearing for his mandala, “Y barriendo del suelo cierta parte” (And sweeping on the ground a certain space). The clearing is a space that frames the future represented in the map of the territory that he draws with an arrow. The clearing and the detailed map constitute Mómpil’s mandala.

Mómpil’s gesture of sweeping the ground and with the point of an arrow drawing out a map seemed intensely familiar to me. I do not know when I finally made the connection. But I recognized that I had seen this gesture many times before as a child especially when my father built our house on the barranca overlooking Simons Brick Company # 3. I remember him clearing the ground with his foot or hand and sometimes with a piece of wood, and then in that space with a stick he carved out construction plans for the house’s foundation. As the house progressed he repeated the same gesture, the clearing of a space, to draw architectural plans for the building of the house. When my father arrived in the mornings he found a flat area on the site and started to clear a space. When the men helping him saw this gesture they immediately responded and gathered standing or squatting around him expecting to learn the work details of the day. My father was like Mómpil, like Rosendo, a man who knew the lay of the land, mathematics and architecture. He knew how to build and had the skill and knowledge to construct our family’s home. I don’t know where he obtained this knowledge, since he never attended school in Mexico or in the United States. I think that like Mómpil and Rosendo, he learned from experience, on the job experience and from observing other workers and from people in general. “Fíjate bien para que aprendas

cómo se hace,” he always advised. The primeval gesture of “Y barriendo del suelo cierta parte” (And sweeping on the ground a certain space) to create a space for a mandala links Mómpil, Rosendo, Villagrá, my father and me.

### 3. A PRIMORDIAL MENTAL RESERVOIR OF MEMORY

Where does the linkage of these events occur? The encounter between Villagrá and Mómpil and the meeting between Rosendo and me are intra-historical events. The idea of recognizing the important historical role of ordinary people is the core of Miguel de Unamuno’s theory of Intra-history. Unamuno emphasizes the daily life, knowledge and power of ordinary folk, who are the backbone of history and whose contributions remain unnoticed.

Mómpil, Rosendo, Delfino, Villagrá and I, can be considered examples of “Esa vida intra-histórica, silenciosa y continua como el fondo mismo del mar, [que] es la sustancia del progreso, la verdadera tradición, la tradición eterna . . .” (Unamuno 41-42). These five men are intra-historical individuals who, to a more or lesser degree, lived and live respectively, at the margin of their society but who benefit from the collective intra-history memory of the common fold.

Similar to Unamuno’s intra-history is Carl G. Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious, a reservoir of memory common to all humans. Jung explains the content of the collective unconscious as follows: “its contents are not personal but collective; that is, they do not belong to one individual alone but to a whole group of individuals, and generally to a whole nation, or even to the whole of mankind. These contents are not acquired during the individual’s lifetime but are products of innate forms and instincts. . . . In the brain the instincts are preformed, and so are the primordial images which have always been the basis of man’s thinking” ( 310-311).

Ancient memory manifests itself in innate forms, like a mandala, and a gesture, like the sweeping clean of a space on the ground. These innate forms and images appear regularly in life but are usually not recognized. Another way to explain human linkages is Jean Gebser’s theory of the structures of consciousness presented in his book *The Ever-Present Origin*. Gebser theorized that consciousness has evolved through four previous structures: archaic, magical, mythic, and mental-rational. Each structure moving further and further away and becoming distinct from the atemporal, immaterial, spiritual source that he called “origin,” Gebser concluded that at this time in human existence humanity is “experiencing the rise of a new form of consciousness which he called the ‘integral’” (Lachman 60). According to Gebser, as quoted by Lachman: “As its name suggest, in this structure, the previous four structures are integrated” (67). The previous

structures are still present and remain active today. The previous structures active in the integral structure represent the presence of an immeasurable bank of knowledge and memory. This ancient collective memory appears serendipitously as sudden sites or potential links of human action collected in one or more of the previous structures of consciousness and inspire individuals to perform and produce in unique and extraordinary ways.

These three theories suggest an unconscious reservoir of knowledge that breaks through to daily life to inspire individuals to accomplish magnificent artistic feats that connect the human experience beyond time and space. Mómpil's primeval gesture of "Y barriendo del suelo cierta parte" (And sweeping on the ground a certain space) to create a space for a mandala is part of that reservoir of knowledge that links Mómpil, Rosendo, Villagrá, my father and me.

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## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> [Note from Martín Rodríguez's text] "Conversación privada con el autor en Alcalá de Henares, 22 de mayo de 2006. Morales me comunicó que había leído la *Historia* mientras preparaba su tesis doctoral y que, después de escuchar una conferencia mía sobre el autor el día de nuestra conversación, llegó a la conclusión de que inconscientemente se había inspirado en ella para el episodio mencionado de su novela" (235).