

Sergio Rodríguez Blanco*

MEXICO CITY, SEPTEMBER 19 FIST HELD HIGH, HAND IN HAND

These photographs take a chronological look at the September 19, 2017, Mexico City earthquake through the scenes captured by a group of photo-journalists from the IberoAmerican University Press and Democracy (PRENDE) program. In contrast with what is broadcast on national television, the protagonists of these images are not the rubble, nor shots from far away, nor the authorities; they are people in action taken from up close, see through a journalist's eyes. There are people of all ages, all occupations, all layers of Mexican society, but also present is the legacy that great painting and cinema have left to the visual culture, and above all, the eye of a professional who seeks to create photographic thinking with his/her work. I made this selection from a file of more than 500 images published minute by minute in the perrocronico.com digital magazine during the earthquake and the days after it. More than offering answers, they prompt questions about the empowerment of civil society that spontaneously organized, but also about the ephemeral, localized nature of its strength.

* Researcher and critic specialized in photography; sergio.rodriiguez@ibero.mx.

September 19, 2017, 1:32 p.m.

Photo: Daniel Ojeda



Three civilians help a senior who had been inside the building at 122 San Antonio Abad, in the Tránsito Neighborhood, at the corner of Chavero Street. The shot was taken by Daniel Ojeda only 18 minutes after the 7.1-magnitude quake. The area had already been cordoned off and was quickly being evacuated because the building continued to creak, indicating its imminent collapse.



September 19, 2017, 2 p.m.

Photo: Daniel Ojeda

This shot was taken a few moments after the previous photo; it shows what was happening behind the grey building at 122 San Antonio Abad at precisely the moment in which the fourth floor collapsed like a sandwich. A woman who had been inside the building at the time of the earthquake is looking for her co-workers. Her colleague prevents her from advancing.

September 19, 2017, 3:26 p.m.

Photo: Fernando Brito

After two hours of removing debris, members of the public and construction workers get a woman out of the rubble at the corner of Escocia and Edimburgo Streets in the Del Valle Centro Neighborhood. Fernando Brito's overhead shot, taken from the roof of a car, shows the moment when the rescued woman takes a deep breath. Her injured hands are reminiscent of the stigma that Christian iconography attributes to the Christ risen from the dead.



September 19, 2017, 3:50 p.m.

Photo: Nora Hinojo

At 241 Enrique Rébsamen Street in the Narvarte Neighborhood, passersby stop to take snapshots of the green building whose ground floor had collapsed. Nora Hinojo's image shows a street open to anyone who happens by, with no barriers. No Civil Protection personal or people clearing away the rubble are in evidence. Days later it would be made public that a woman had been trapped in the ground floor rubble. The body of Laura Ramos would be recovered on the morning of September 24.



September 19, 2017, 4:10 p.m.

Photo: Nora Hinojo

A human chain was formed on Torreón Street to carry off the rubble from the five-story building that had collapsed on the corner of the Alemán Viaduct. To the left side can be seen the frame of the billboard that had been on top of the building, while in the background, the vanishing point shows the silhouettes of Civil Protection personnel doing rescue work. There is no space available for placing debris or the garbage trucks needed to dispose of it. The chunks of concrete are deposited at the end of the street as more people arrive.





September 19, 2017, 4:26 p.m.

Photo: Fernando Brito

At the corner of Escocia and Gabriel Mancera Streets, civil society and the authorities have organized the use of buckets for carrying debris and getting it away from the disaster site. The ruins look like a huge, toothless monster. There are not enough people there to take away the debris because another building has collapsed on Escocia Street. At the moment the photo was taken, it was known that there were five people trapped under the ruins. They were later all found dead.

September 20, 2017, 10:16 a.m.

Photo: Fernando Brito

Navy personnel bring out the first of the bodies found in the building at 107 Amsterdam, at the corner of Laredo Street, in the Condesa Neighborhood. It is one of the relatives of 30-year-old, freelance photographer Sergio Ruiz, who was rescued alive a few minutes later. The position of his deceased relatives made a small recess that saved his life. The angle of the photograph evokes the Christian iconography of the descent from the cross, while the position of the body reminds us of Mantegna's *Dead Christ*.





September 20, 2017, 3:00 p.m.

Photo: Alexis Nolasco

Half a block from the collapsed office building at 286 Álvaro Obregón Avenue, in the Roma Neighborhood, one day after the earthquake, civil society has organized to lend support. Not everyone can carry rubble, but food and fuel are needed, too. The right fist in the air, the signal for silence to facilitate the rescue, has become a daily sight that contrasts with the classical coldness of the sculpture in the background, and reminds us of *Freedom Guiding the People*, the allegorical canvas of the 1830 Paris uprising against the restriction of freedom of the press. This was where the highest number of dead were found: 49 people. Some bodies recovered by the authorities were taken away in secret without informing their relatives waiting in front of the building.

September 21, 2017, 5:30 a.m.

Photo: José Luna

José Luna's photo captures a teenage girl cleaning debris from around the building at the corner of Bolívar and Chimalpopoca Streets in the Obrera Neighborhood. Several companies had installations there, including the New Fashion textile factory, the SEO Young Internacional costume jewelry firm, and Dashcam System, which installs automobile security cameras. The building collapsed completely, killing 21; only two people were rescued alive.



September 21, 2017, 5:50 a.m.

Photo: José Luna



“Orizaba is here: you’re not alone, Mexico City.” Rescue workers from around the country spend the whole night supporting clean-up at 168 Bolívar Street. Dawn is approaching. In 2004, paradoxically, this building was the headquarters of the Agrarian Prosecutor’s Offices. That year, the National Center for Disaster Prevention (Cenapred) did a study and determined that the building was at risk. Given the landlords’ refusal to offer a document attesting to its structural safety, the government offices were moved. The building continued in use.

September 20, 2017, 1:30 p.m.

Photo: Pablo Martínez Zárate



At the foot of an Our Lady of Guadalupe graffiti, volunteers, workers, and soldiers deployed by the DNIII Plan remove rubble from the collapsed building at 10 Coahuila Street, in the Roma Neighborhood. The building did not completely collapse, making it possible for the people trapped inside to escape on foot with minor injuries. There were no dead. A miracle?



September 21, 2017, 5:17 p.m.

Photo: Axel Rosas

Like an impressionist painting, this image by Axel Rosas captures the moment in which a group of brigade members pull hard on piece of debris in the area around the collapsed building at Bolívar and Chimalpopoca Streets in the hope of finding survivors alive. From a distance, the photograph allows the viewer to see the spirit of cooperation that emerged spontaneously in civil society; that same spirit faded little by little once the emergency passed. Today, all the cases of corruption unearthed by the quake continue unresolved. Of all the damaged buildings, some have already been demolished, wiped off the face of the map. Others remain standing. **MM**