

Por eso resulta ridícula la pretensión de ciertos propietarios, que piden a sus arquitectos la utilización de elementos que han visto en tal o cual lado. . . nuestro deber es crear una arquitectura nacional, propia de nuestro régimen climatológico y de las modalidades de nuestros espíritus.<sup>1</sup>

Mexican architects, urban planners and politicians as well as their clients and constituents have sought for decades to create an architecture which is authentic to national conditions and to varying definitions of the national spirit. At few times in modern Mexican history was the expression of *Mexicanidad* through architecture more diverse as in the period immediately following the upheaval of the Mexican Revolution. The period of reconstruction from 1920 to 1930 witnessed the early political consolidation of the Mexican Revolution as well as the search for means of expressing the new sense of nationality emerging from it of expression. Architects experimented throughout this period, employing often contradictory methodologies, on occasion in the same building. Their work reveals the existence of many Mexicos: the Mexico that built in the neo-colonial and California-colonial styles; the Mexico which sought to recapture its indigenous culture of the pre-conquest era, and the modernist, idealist Mexico, which stripped itself of past ornament and beliefs, embracing a new faith in progress and technology in order to design a better nation through functionalist architecture.

The Revolution of 1910 provided a radical severance from the prior dominance of European styles. Works such as Silvio Contri's Italian Renaissance Palacio de Comunicaciones, Adamo Boari's pseudo-Gothic Palacio de Correos and residences built in Tudor, Victorian-Romanesque and Italian Baroque styles were perceived by many as grandiose representations of all that was corrupt in the Díaz regime; these were "inherited

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<sup>1</sup>Excélsior, January 25, 1925.

architectural forms which had little or no meaning in this new era.”<sup>2</sup> As the Revolution expanded beyond the overthrow of Díaz and the affirmation of principles of no re-election to include goals of social justice and a restructuring of Mexican society and economy along more egalitarian lines, the search for a national architectural expression began. This new architecture would be authentic to the spirit of the Revolution and the society which created it --the architectural equivalent of “the songs and novels of the Revolution, the serapes and ceramics of Tlalquepaque.”<sup>3</sup>

Those who sought to “redesign” Mexico in this period had many options. Although the faculty at the Academy of San Carlos continued to train architects in the mannerist style, material on the latest architectural innovations in the United States and Europe was widely available to the students, as its library subscribed to the latest journals providing information on Art Decó, the Bauhaus, Le Corbusier, Wright, among others. Several distinct paths were taken from 1920 to 1930, among them the neo-colonial, art deco, functionalist, and California-colonial. This pluralism in architectural expression is not a unique phenomenon. As architectural historian Spiro Kostof determined, “All periods of architectural history have been pluralist.”<sup>4</sup> Thus cases in Mexico City’s architectural history in which Louis XV works are made at the same time as nationalist structures are not odd.<sup>5</sup> Equally significant is the timing of the use of these styles, and the information which timing provides about various interpretations of the Revolution and the sense of national identity emerging from it as the governments consolidated power. The nation

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<sup>2</sup>Israel Katzman, La Arquitectura Contemporanea Mexicana, Precedentes y Desarrollo, (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1963), 77.

<sup>3</sup>Katzman, 81.

<sup>4</sup>Spiro Kostof, A History of Architecture, Settings and Rituals, rev. by Greg Castillo, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 758.

<sup>5</sup>Many architects tried to remain as flexible as possible, designing to suit a variety of tastes so as to secure as much work as possible, particularly in periods of economic difficulty. Miguel de la Torre’s work contains ample examples of this strategy. In 1921 he designed commercial buildings with two facades for clients to choose, one French, and another neo-colonial.

which emerged from the turmoil of prolonged civil war looked for an architecture which drew on the nation's heritage, namely its colonial experience and its pre-conquest history. This led to the use of indigenous elements in architecture, and to new interpretations of the colonial styles and its use of regional materials, including tezontle, azulejos and chiluca.<sup>6</sup> These early efforts were the first expression of nationalism derived from the Revolution, as architect Israel Katzman stated, "in architecture, nationalism existed primarily in the adaptation of ornaments and general forms corresponding to the pre-hispanic and neo-hispanic constructions" and as combinations of the two.<sup>7</sup> Initially, then, the Revolution provided the nation searching for its identity with the opportunity to consider its past.

Beginning in the mid 1920s, following the revolt against European academism by painters including Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, changes in technology, new building materials including structural iron and steel and reinforced concrete, allows for innovation in design; moreover, an awakening sense of social justice and belief that the neo-colonial did not adequately convey the essence of modern Mexico, combined to lead a significant number of architects to reject the neo-colonial style as a means of expressing the new nationalism. Their perception of the Revolution as an access to modernity led them to embrace functionalism.

Underlying the employment of these diverse styles was the notion that cultural and artistic independence from past European dominance was indispensable as a means of achieving national unity. Somehow native expression would be discovered and cultivated, and this essence would serve to unify the devastated nation. In the initial rejection of Porfirian styles, this dominance appeared to be diminished. But a serious question remained: given its past invasions and cultural penetrations what was authentically Mexican? In the course of the 1920s, architects, engineers, government officials, and others

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<sup>6</sup>Raquel Tibol, Historia General del Arte Mexicana, VI, Epoca Moderna y Contemporanea, (México, D.F.: Editorial Hermes, 1981), 397.

<sup>7</sup>Israel Katzman, La Arquitectura Contemporanea Mexicana. Precedentes y Desarrollo, (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1963), 77.

would attempt to answer that question, thus employing a variety of styles which they believed would represent, and further the new national identity.

### *Destruction, and Initial Recovery*

According to Alfonso Vásquez Mellado, "The Revolution, with Madero, looked for the greatness of the country. "the Brawl" -- the Revolution -- smashed it into pieces."<sup>8</sup> As former President Emilio Portes Gil later recalled, speaking "from the serenity of my seventy years, without passion and attached to historical truth in all its purity," the causes of the Revolution originated in

the lack of liberty and the violation of human rights, the wicked plundering of the campesinos' lands, the disregard of the rights of workers, the violation of the public vote, the open and unlimited protection of foreign interests and the supremacy of a privileged class of rich people (instruments of imperialist capitalism) over 12 million human beings, provoked the violent outbreak of the people, . . . which began the armed movement of 1910 and served as inspiration for the multitudes to take up arms and break the oppressive regime. . .<sup>9</sup>

Certainly the capital showed little signs of revolutionary greatness from 1911 to 1920. These were the times of "institutionalized disorder" and lost security, of the Decena Trágica, the crimes of the Huerta government and the coining of a new verb "*carrancear*" which reflected the propensity of certain revolutionary soldiers, followers of the First Chief, to rob and steal.<sup>10</sup> Victorious generals and their supporters occupied houses of Díaz supporters; some individuals acquired automobiles, horses, and household furnishings under a variety of means, while others destroyed or hid valuables.<sup>11</sup> Given such chaotic

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<sup>8</sup>Alfonso Vásquez Mellado, La Ciudad de los Palacios. Imágenes de Cinco Siglos. (México, D.F.: Diana, 1988), 289.

<sup>9</sup>Emilio Portes Gil, "Sentido y Destino de la Revolución Mexicana" in México. Cincuenta Años de Revolución, vol. III, La Política, (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1961), 479.

<sup>10</sup>Vásquez Mellado, 290; Arturo Sotomayor, "México, Donde Nací, . . ." Biografía de una Ciudad, (México, D.F.: Librería de Manuel Porrúa, S.A., 1968), 296.

<sup>11</sup>Carlos Obregón Santacilia noted that many valuables surfaced thirty years later, in the homes of the newly rich. See his Cincuenta Años de Arquitectura Mexicana (1900-1950), (México, D.F.: Editorial Patria, 1952), 34. Architect Juan O'Gorman noted that his family was able to acquire an "enormous house" on calle Santísimo with very little money. Interview with Olga Sáenz, 1970, in

conditions, this was not the time for construction or architectural innovation. Development of State building projects halted for much of this period.<sup>12</sup> Monumental structures begun by Porfirio Díaz, notably the Palacio Legislativo and the Teatro Nacional remained incomplete rusting shells, ironic signs of the former power and prestige of the Díaz dictatorship. Architect Juan Segura, who completed his studies in 1921, recalled the disorder of this period and its effect on his classmates who had hoped to be in professional practice: “When we left the school in that time, it was an awful thing because we finished in 1921 and in Mexico there wasn't a cent, there was no capital, there were no banks . . . it is the epoch of the Revolution, a very interesting time; although you wanted to build, there was no money . . . construction in Mexico was suspended.”<sup>13</sup>

The amount of destruction inflicted during the prolonged civil war also precluded architectural innovation and construction. The civil war damaged rail lines, the pride of Limantour and Díaz, ruined bridges and telegraph lines, destroyed valuable mines and drastically decreased agricultural production and income. Very little could be built. It became increasingly difficult to get the necessary steel from the Fundidora de Fierro y Acero de Monterrey or cement from the Cruz Azul plant in Jasso, Hidalgo to Mexico City. Cementos Hidalgo halted operations for the entire decade; Cruz Azul sustained such losses that it passed into receivership and Cemento Tolteca continued by operating under a heavy debt. And as Frank Brandenburg noted, while prices rose dramatically, the war made debt collection difficult or impossible.<sup>14</sup>

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Ida Rodríguez Prampolini, Olga Sáenz and Elizabeth Fuentes Rojas, eds, La Palabra de Juan O'Gorman, Selección de textos, (México, D.F.: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 1983), 10.

<sup>12</sup>Pedro Rojas Rodríguez, The Art and Architecture of Mexico: From 10,000 B.C. to the Present Day, (Feltham, Middlesex: Hamlyn, 1968), 41.

<sup>13</sup>Interview with Segura, Lilia Gómez and Miguel Angel Quevedo, Testimonios Vivos, 20 Arquitectos, Cuadernos de Arquitectura y Conservación del Patrimonio Artístico, series: Documentos, número 15-16, (México, D.F.: Secretaría de Educación Pública, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1981), 18. Segura was in better circumstances himself, as his relatives had founded the Fundación Mier y Pasado, and he was able to build several projects for the Fundación.

<sup>14</sup>Frank Brandenburg, The Making of Modern Mexico, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 282.

Yet somehow the city was not entirely a scene of devastation and despair, according to Carlos Obregón Santacilia, who had been a student at the Academy of San Carlos in 1916. He recalled,

At the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, nationalism was transformed into the dominant tendency. . . aware that besides political and economic independence, cultural and artistic independence were indispensable as the only way to achieve national unity, that is to say, the identification of the citizen with his country and its traditions.<sup>15</sup>

The first step toward achieving this identification was the rejection of the exotic eclecticism so prevalent under the regime of Porfirio Díaz. Amidst the disorder of the Revolution, architects began to look forward. At conferences at the Universidad Popular Mexicana in 1913 and 1914 architect Jesús T. Acevedo discussed the possibility of a return to colonial architecture as the legitimate expression of national identity. Describing with great admiration the Sagrario, La Enseñanza, Santo Domingo, and the beauty of viceregal combinations of stonework and tezontle, Acevedo found

passing through the streets of the city of my birth, in the silence of the nights, when one better perceives the silhouettes of the constructions, I have asked myself if our colonial style, made of remnants, could constitute in its turn an exemplar style. Exchanging ideas with my friends, we have arrived slowly to understand that these are the roots of the Mexican tree in whose cultivation we should take great pains. The tradition of so much excellence had been sleeping in the conscience of all, but it is not dead.<sup>16</sup>

To Acevedo, architects who supported the Revolution now were compelled to awaken that tradition and infuse it with the vigor of the Revolution. In the same year, Federico Mariscal also promoted the neo-colonial style as a means of expressing the revolutionary nation in his summary of the 1913-1914 conferences contained in La Patria y la Arquitectura Nacional. Mariscal, who with Acevedo and other members of the Ateneo de la Juventud determined national culture to be the sum of the historical actions of Mexican society, defined contemporary Mexican citizens as “the result of a moral and intellectual mix

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<sup>15</sup>Graciela de Garay Arellano, La Obra de Carlos Obregón Santacilia, Arquitecto, (México, D.F.: Secretaria de Educación Pública, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1982), 19.

<sup>16</sup>As quoted in Katzman, 80-81.

of the Spanish race and the aboriginal races.”<sup>17</sup> The architecture which would represent them authentically had to be a composition of the two races: the style would be that which had evolved from native materials and styles during the three centuries of colonial rule. This was the authentic style of Mexico -- a style whose evolution had been long delayed due to the importation of exotic influences during the mid- and late-nineteenth century. With Díaz’ overthrow, Mexico now possessed the opportunity to resume that evolution. Further, Venustiano Carranza provided the backing of the State for this interpretation of Mexican nationalism, as he decreed tax exemptions for those who built homes in this style.

As the decade closed, “the first stage of the post-revolutionary state unfolded in a climate of redemptive nationalism.”<sup>18</sup> While this nationalist resurgence involved a violent reaction against the dictatorship, it also had “a profoundly creative and positive aspect -- the affirmation of “Mexicanism and the rebirth of the national spirit in all its aspects” as the Sociedad de Arquitectos Mexicanos later explained.<sup>19</sup> Contemporaries noted a sense of nation and destiny in the air which had not been felt in Mexico since 1857. Verna Carleton Millan, a new resident of the city, saw artists asserting their independence from European art in their beautiful renditions of native glory, which evolved into a thematic approach later called pictorial realism. Signs of change were evident throughout the city, as

upon the walls of the old buildings of Mexico City, posters that proclaimed the virtues of the new art, new poetry and everything else that was new. Chaotic days were these, when Mexico paused a brief spell, in the midst of civil warfare, to take cognizance of its new culture, which seemed to have awakened overnight, though its roots penetrated back to the Pre-Conquest. . . . <sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Federico Mariscal, La Patria y la Arquitectura Nacional: Resúmenes de las Conferencias dadas en la Casa de la Universidad Popular Mexicana del 21 de Octubre de 1913 al 29 de Julio de 1914, (México, D.F., 1915), 14.

<sup>18</sup>Ramón Vargas Salguero and Rafael López Rangel, “The Current Crisis in Latin American Architecture,” in Roberto Segre and Fernando Kusnetzoff, eds., Latin America in Its Architecture, trans. Edith Grossman, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1975), 132.

<sup>19</sup>Sociedad de Arquitectos Mexicanos, 4000 (Cuatro Mil) Años de Arquitectura Mexicana, (México, D.F.: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1956), 134.

<sup>20</sup> Verna Carleton Millan, Mexico Reborn, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939), p. 4-5

Obregón Santacilia also felt a sense of mission emanating from the Revolution. He witnessed the rejection of the nation's past and resolved to understand the new social environment for which he would work to resolve architectural problems “without prejudice of forms and styles,”<sup>21</sup> particularly those so closely associated with the Díaz regime. Like Acevedo and Mariscal, Obregón Santacilia believed the neo-colonial style appeared to be the best choice to express national identity. This style, with various permutations, had persisted for centuries because it continued to answer the esthetic needs of a segment of the capital's population. According to architectural historian Spiro Kostof, in general the built domain can “carry a sense of ourselves, what we aspire to be and should therefore be able to uplift our spirits.”<sup>22</sup> Within that domain, viceregal architecture carried the message of identity and historical destiny. It was a familiar convention to most Mexicans; it was also an intelligible symbol of Spanish identity those who welcomed such association. To construct in the neocolonial style signified for the first governments following the Revolution's armed phase the recuperation of artistic essences native to Mexico, particularly those of New Spain, and initiated with them the process of affirmation of nationality as a force capable of sustaining the affirmation of Mexico's value and the beginning of an architecture derived from local traditions.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, the neocolonial style served as aesthetic expression of an emerging nationalism which was “struggling to define itself,”<sup>24</sup> as well as a means of reclaiming the nation from past European dominance. To Obregón Santacilia, the rejection of Porfirian architectural styles implied in the use of the neocolonial came to represent “the first

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<sup>21</sup>Carlos Obregón Santacilia, Cinuenta Años de Arquitectura Mexicana, 1900-1950, (México, D.F.: Editorial Patria, 1952), 34.

<sup>22</sup> Kostof, A History of Architecture, 623.

<sup>23</sup>Enrique X .De Anda Alanís, Evolución de la Arquitectura en México: Epocas Prehispánica, Virreinal, Moderna y Contemporánea, (México, D.F.: Panorama Editorial, 1987), 166.

<sup>24</sup>Peter Ward, Mexico City, The Production and Reproduction of an Urban Environment, (London: Belhaven Press, 1990), 199.



effective conquest of the Revolution.”<sup>25</sup> Architects and private and public sector clients looked to this style as a way to express legitimacy for a government whose Constitution provided a sound blueprint for action, but whose civil institutions were still in infancy and whose authority was still questioned by rival claims to power. In the use of these symbols, Mexico once again turned to Europe; the irony of expressing a nation's freedom from recent French aesthetic dominance by resurrecting the colonial style apparently remained unacknowledged by most contemporaries.<sup>26</sup> Instead, as Mexican architects and contractors had “an acute capacity to interpret imported styles in their own manner,” they had faith in the belief that “all that which is built loses its seal of exact European reproduction, even though the intent was that.”<sup>27</sup> The neocolonial style thus could be a true expression of *Mexicanidad*.

#### *Obregón and the Neo-colonial*

Carlos Obregón Santacilia observed

Passing the first years of the Revolution, of tragic struggles, disorder, and misfortunes the governments emanating from it began to establish themselves and could think of constructive things. Architecture, like always, was intimately linked with power and politics, oscillating, almost disappearing in the period of agitation, or flowering well in those of calm.<sup>28</sup>

The Obregón government “emanating from the Revolution,” or “Revolution-made government”<sup>29</sup> created the first signs of calm and thus provided the climate for a new

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<sup>25</sup>Address of Carlos Obregón Santacilia, “La Revolución Mexicana y la Arquitectura,” at the conference at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, series: “La Revolución Mexicana y las Artes,” Mexico City, October 4, 1960, [mimeo, 5-6]

<sup>26</sup>On this issue architect Eduardo Macedo y Arbeu expressed a commonly held view that “it is better to copy the reality than to copy the plans of the Medallas de Paris,” but advised architects to consider the origins of this style, as it too was an import, a collection of classical and Moorish elements. Katzman, 79.

<sup>27</sup>Carlos Obregón Santacilia, México como Eje de las Antiguas Arquitecturas de América, (México, D.F.: INBA, 1954), 76.

<sup>28</sup>Carlos Obregón Santacilia, Cinquenta Años, 42.

<sup>29</sup>These two terms, widely used by Obregón’s cabinet, served to confer additional legitimacy upon that government, as it claimed direct descent from the heroism of the Revolution. See

architectural expression to develop. Obregón wanted, as he stated shortly after his election, “to show the world either that we are capable of reconstructing the country we have half-destroyed, to guide it into new paths, or that we are only able to destroy and not to reconstruct the country of the future.”<sup>30</sup> Yet his resources were limited. He would not be able to implement many of the reforms expressed in the Constitution of 1917, yet somehow he had to convince the nation that a revolution in their benefit had occurred, and that one day its promises would be sustained. Until concrete programs could be implemented, “inculcating a new nationalism and a sense of pride in the Revolution would have to substitute for action.”<sup>31</sup> And Obregón could inculcate this new nationalism in part via the employment of nationalist messages in State architecture.

The first building projects did not focus on the materialization of the revolutionary rhetoric of social justice, but of the reconstruction of legitimate government itself, and on its representation in the built environment. In 1922, Secretary of Foreign Relations Alberto J. Pani asked Carlos Obregón Santacilia to develop a plan for the renovation and expansion of his ministry’s building.<sup>32</sup> This action was a recognition of the growing prominence of this ministry, as well as Mexico's emergence from revolutionary conflict and the importance of international ties to the nation’s recovery. Pani sought to enlarge and remodel the existing building, originally a residence designed by architect Nicolas Mariscal y Piña and one of the first in Mexico City to employ reinforced concrete. Obregón Santacilia completed the remodeling of this Louis XIV structure in the neocolonial style in November 1924. He also

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statements by Alberto Pani, who served as Secretary of Foreign Relations and as Secretary of the Treasury in the Obregón government, in his La Historia Agredida, Polvareda que Alzó un Discurso entre el Monumento del General Obregón, (México, D.F.: Editorial Polis, 1950), 40.

<sup>30</sup>Linda B. Hall, Alvaro Obregón: Power and Revolution in Mexico, 1911-1920, (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1981) 247.

<sup>31</sup>Jonathan Kandell, La Capital: The Biography of Mexico City, (New York: Random House, 1988), 443.

<sup>32</sup>Obregón Santacilia, Cinquenta Años, 23. In this project Obregón Santacilia and Alberto Pani established a working relationship which continued until 1934, producing several significant projects, among them the Monument to Obregón and the Hotel Reforma.

began the enlargement of the Palacio Nacional, former residence of the viceroys and “the most important building in the capital for its location,” as it occupied the entire eastern block of the Plaza de la Constitución.<sup>33</sup> Along with the construction of the neo-colonial Hotel Majestic, the two men took the first steps towards their goal of beautifying the appearance of the Plaza de la Constitución. Other State neo-colonial building projects included the renovation of the Cámara de Senadores de la República at Paseo de la Reforma 8, modernization of the Rastro de la Ciudad de México (1923), and construction of the Biblioteca Cervantes (1923), the Fray Bartolome de las Casas fountain (1923), the Talleres Tostado (1922), designed by Federico Mariscal.

Private sector residential and commercial construction increased at a moderate pace during the Obregón administration. In these areas contractors most frequently chose the neo-colonial style, building these works “based on their cultural development, idiosyncrasy and political and social inclinations.”<sup>34</sup> In response to growing middle class demand for apartments, Angel Torres Torija designed the Departamentos Gaona on Calle Bucareli (1922), Manuel Ortiz Monasterio offered his building at Vizcaínas 12, and Salvador Vertiz Hornedo built apartments at Puente de Alvarado 66.

The neo-colonial style also enjoyed considerable popularity in residential construction, with a boom in such building occurring between 1923 and 1926. Notable examples include the residence on the corner of Insurgentes and Coahuila by engineers Francisco Martínez Negrete and Agustín de la Barra, and homes at Génova 33, by Carlos Greenham, Varsovia and Londres, by José Villagrán García and José Espinosa, at San Miguel 81 and 83 by Carlos Obregón Santacilia and José Villagrán García, and at Insurgentes and Sonora, by Rodolfo Weber. In this manner these developments in the

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<sup>33</sup>Alberto Pani, *Apuntes Autobiográficos*. vol. II, 2d ed., (México, D.F. Librería de Manuel Porrúa, 1950), 60-61.

<sup>34</sup>Obregón Santacilia, *Cinquenta Años*, 51.

private sector mirrored governmental preferences for the neo-colonial, thus serving to reaffirm this official expression of Mexican nationalism via a return to the viceregal era.

*Building for "La Raza C3smica"*

The neocolonial style also gained acceptance through the resolute support of Jos3 Vasconcelos, whose actions "began the decolonization of Mexico" in this epoch of "the denunciation of the European and the exaltation of the originality of our culture."<sup>35</sup> As Secretary of Public Education, he headed one of the strongest institutions in a government just beginning to consolidate its power. In this official capacity he actively promoted the neocolonial style to be a reflection of the true *Mexicanidad*.

As Octavio Paz hypothesized, "If the revolution was a search and an immersion of ourselves in our own origins and being, no one embodied this fertile, desperate search better than Jos3 Vasconcelos, the founder of modern education in Mexico." <sup>36</sup> Vasconcelos sought a new education founded on "our blood, our language, our people."<sup>37</sup> Following the violent upheaval of the Revolution, an intensified search for a national identity led to the idealization of indigenous peoples and a reinterpretation of the conquest and the society emerging from it, illustrated in the murals of Jos3 Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera and David Siqueiros. In his sponsorship of this artistic activity, Vasconcelos recognized the significance of indigenous peoples in the creation of a uniquely Mexican identity. He expressed this insight in the concept of a "cosmic race" - *La Raza C3smica* - which was forming in Mexico. This new race was of Indian blood and soul, with Spanish language and civilization; a unique race with a destiny of its own. According to Paz,

the philosophy of the "cosmic race" (that is, of the new American man who would resolve all racial conflicts and the great opposition between East

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<sup>35</sup>Garay Arellano, 32.

<sup>36</sup>Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, trans. Lysander Kemp, (New York: Grove Press, 1972), 152.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

and West) was the natural and ultimate consequence of Spanish universality. The idea expounded by Vasconcelos had little or no relation to the caste-conscious traditionalism of the Mexican conservatives: he saw our continent, as did the founders of America, as futurity and newness. 'Spanish America is magnificently new, not only as a geographical region but also as a realm for the spirit.' His traditionalism did not look to the past for support: it was to be justified in and by the future.<sup>38</sup>

Vasconcelos was not the only one to express sentiments on racial fusion. Fellow Atenista Federico Mariscal had done so in 1914, as had priest José Cantú Cosso, who affirmed the use of neo-colonial architecture in Mexico as a means of achieving “a reconciliation of all of us who form the great Hispanic-American race.”<sup>39</sup> In drawing on these sentiments Vasconcelos was able to take them one step further, as he expressed the need for the nation to gain its cultural independence -- to reclaim the nation from French cultural dominance and to cease its emulation of foreign nations. At that point the nation would achieve its spiritual emancipation, a corollary of political emancipation.<sup>40</sup> The fusion of previously disparate races would provide a means of achieving national identity, incorporating all Mexicans into this new sense of nationality economically as well as spiritually.<sup>41</sup> With this powerful concept of the cosmic race, Vasconcelos “gave many young intellectuals. . . a sense of confidence by affirming the mixed blood of Latin America as the stock of a great future race.” And as Minister of Public Education, “nurtured by the idealism of the Ateneo de la Juventud, he set a nation, numb from a decade of unrestricted violence,” to the task of educating the *raza cósmica*.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Octavio Paz, The labyrinth of Solitude, trans. Lysander Kemp, (New York: Grove Press 1961), 154

<sup>39</sup>As cited by Katzman, 81.

<sup>40</sup>José Vasconcelos, La Raza Cósmica, Misión de la Raza Iberoamericana, (México, D.F.: Colección Austral, Espasa-Calpe Mexicana, S.A., 1948), 136.

<sup>41</sup> Emilio Uribe Romo, "México y las implicaciones demográficas de la postguerra," Revista Mexicana de Sociología, 9 (sept/dec 1947), 340.

<sup>42</sup>Howard T. Young, introduction to José Vasconcelos, A Mexican Ulysses, An Autobiography, trans. by W. Rex Crawford, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 9.

Vasconcelos had considerable support in this venture. President Obregón provided his department with record-level budgets; many talented young architects who could give physical form to his dream were employed in government departments such as the Departamento de Construcción de Escuelas de la Secretaría de Educación Pública, including José Villagrán García, Manuel Ortiz Monasterio, Eduardo Macedo y Arbeu, José Villagrán García, Vicente Mendiola, Fernando Dávila and Carlos Obregón Santacilia. For its ambitious school construction program, the Obregón government needed an architectural style which would respond to the new necessities of the national culture. To Vasconcelos, in determining which style to employ, "we should find inspiration in our glorious past."<sup>43</sup> Within that "glorious past" lay several options, among them the pre-hispanic, classical and colonial. His identification of the new Hispanic-American spirit led Vasconcelos to promote the neocolonial and pre-hispanic styles, derived from each of the historical components of the cosmic race. As architect Juan O'Gorman recalled the activities

in the period of Vasconcelos, ornamental buildings were made, colonial style and which in reality were a species of prolonging of the architectural styles of the Colony. It was a more or less crude prolongation but, finally, it was what Vasconcelos wanted. . . he had the idea that schools, the buildings themselves, were an education for the students and teachers and certainly the architects made them in accord with what was then considered to be the national style.<sup>44</sup>

One of Vasconcelos' most enduring contributions to Mexican architecture was his insistence that buildings themselves could convey meaning, and that it was imperative for the revolutionary governments to construct buildings which accurately conveyed the desired message. In subjecting the Mexican capital strictly to tradition, Vasconcelos ran the risk, according to architect Manuel M. Ituarte, "of converting architecture into archaeology."<sup>45</sup> But to a Vasconcelista the neo-colonial posed no such danger: instead it signaled the

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<sup>43</sup>Vasconcelos, Mexican Ulysses, 39.

<sup>44</sup>Interview with Architect Juan O'Gorman, Lilia Gómez and Miguel Angel Quevedo, Testimonios Vivos, 20 Arquitectos, 132

<sup>45</sup>Ruben Ortiz Torres, "La Arquitectura de la Postmodernidad," México en el Arte, 16 (Spring 1987), 35.

emergence of a new Mexico, a style “representative of a Mexico which had departed from barbarism.”<sup>46</sup> Obregón Santacilia saw no problem either, as he explained “in dealing with the revival of architectural forms and solutions of other times, we pay attention to what was archaeology and therefore inapplicable to the architecture that naturally we create for the new necessities of our time.”<sup>47</sup>

These neocolonial forms often featured crests in the form of crowns and flowers, quatrefoil windows and terraced profiles cut into series of ascending and descending rhythms, formed by combinations alternating with right angles and semi-circumferences. Generally builders used reinforced concrete or a combination of stone and tezontle; at times the latter was mandated by government decree. This revival of eighteenth-century style was a deliberate attempt to employ symbols of the past to confer legitimacy and stability to the present. As Kostof explained in general terms, “Behind what we call *architectural revivals* lies the desire to emulate the architectural mode of another place and time, not only to show esteem for the older tradition, but also in order to associate ourselves with the spirit and values that we think were prevalent there and then.”<sup>48</sup>

And Vasconcelos apparently was in accord, as he stated his objective was “to make Mexico City the metropolis of the Latin American continent; an Athens, not because of a ridiculous desire to emulate ancient Athens, but a city renowned for its love of culture, for its liberality and hospitality toward alien talent.”<sup>49</sup> No detail was too insignificant for Vasconcelos in his effort to achieve a Mexican Renaissance. As he later recalled his proposals for school architecture,

one of the things I insisted on with the engineers of the Secretariat was that they resume the custom of making the entrances of all the buildings we

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<sup>46</sup>Garay Arellano, 26.

<sup>47</sup>Carlos Obregón Santacilia, “Cuatro Tiempos en la Fisonomía de la Ciudad de México,” Revista de Difusión Cultural 1, (September/October 1957), 7.

<sup>48</sup> Kostof, 18.

<sup>49</sup>Vasconcelos, Mexican Ulysses, 183.

put up as generously wide as in the old days when we were a country of gentlemen. We did not want schools of the Swiss type, like those that Justo Sierra hastily threw together, nor schools of the Chicago type, like some few that were perpetrated later.<sup>50</sup>

From his work with Carlos Tarditi on the pedestal for the Monument to Cuauhtémoc, Obregón Santacilia became acquainted with Vasconcelos, who asked him to design the Escuela Benito Juárez, the largest primary school to be built by the Obregón government. Vasconcelos instructed him to represent the new nationalist tendency of the Obregón regime therein. The school, located in Colonia Roma on part of the land occupied by the old Panteón de la Piedad, and surrounded by the newly formed colonias Hipódromo Condesa, Del Valle, Nápoles, Escandón and Roma, was inaugurated in 1925. In Obregón Santacilia's design, one gains a first impression of the facade as a convent from its terraced profile and tile roofs. A central axis divided the structure into two halves, providing separate classrooms for boys and girls. In addition, in its use of the central patio and other characteristics of viceregal construction, the school "reflects plastically the moral concepts of Vasconcelos."<sup>51</sup> It garnered high praise from contemporaries: "From the foundations to the roofs . . . all this enormous construction is of concrete and therefore, it is made for the centuries, constituting a undying monument for future generations."<sup>52</sup>

Acknowledging the need for a trained workforce to participate in Mexican reconstruction and economic development, in 1922 Obregón created the Escuela Técnica de Maestros Constructores for the teaching of the professional theory and practice of construction, and the Escuela Técnica para Maestros, to train industrial education teachers. In 1923 three schools opened: the Escuela "Gabriela Mistral" for young women, to impart domestic and commercial education; the Instituto Técnico Industrial, to prepare workers and subprofessional technicians for industrial work; and the Centro Industrial Nocturno

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<sup>50</sup>Vasconcelos, Mexican Ulysses, 181.

<sup>51</sup>Garay Arellano, 27.

<sup>52</sup>"Escuela Benito Juárez," Cemento, 16, (1926), 13.



para Obreros, a night school which offered industrial and commercial courses. Each was constructed in the neo-colonial style, thus carrying the Vasconcelos message of nationalism. Obregón's initiatives in technical and primary education received considerable praise, yet there were drawbacks. The cost of constructing in the neocolonial manner was exceptionally high: Vasconcelos spent approximately 52 million pesos to build eight schools in this style.<sup>53</sup>

A resurgence of pre-hispanic Maya, Toltec and Aztec elements appeared in Obregonista State architecture also. In 1920 Manuel Amabilis built a fountain in the Glorieta Riviera with serpents at the base reminiscent of those at Chichen Itza, providing an unusual combination of classic proportions with Mayan glyphs. The new Estadio Nacional, one of the largest public works of the Obregón administration, with seating for over 30,000 and thus a grand statement of the communication its nationalist sentiments, also featured a fusion of apparently disparate architectural styles. At this site, José Villagrán García "dared to combine the Aztec and the conquerors in rendition to architectural neoclassicism."<sup>54</sup>

In this type of architectural fusion as practiced during the Obregón administration, little concern was manifest pertaining to the appropriateness of combining symbols of indigenous peoples with those of their conquerors. These works of fusion imply a smooth mixing of the races into the modern mestizo, apparent in Vasconcelos' formulation of the concept of the cosmic race. The result from this was the addition of the notion of racial

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<sup>53</sup>According to Finance Minister Alberto J. Pani, Mexico's financial problems were quite grave at this time. In 1923, the nation had a budget deficit of 42 million pesos, necessitating the elimination of 2000 government jobs; a presidential decree mandated 10% salary reductions for all employees, including the military. *Memoria de la Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público*, 1923 and 1924. It thus became apparent to Pani and Obregón that the government could not afford Vasconcelos' extensive construction campaign.

<sup>54</sup>Salvador Novo, "Imágenes de México", *Artes de México* 58/59, (1964), 7. At the inauguration of this stadium, Obregón, Vasconcelos and other government officials joined 60,000 people, "watching games and exercises; they heard a chorus of 12,000 children, which was followed by dancing by 1000 couples in national dress." Noticing an unfinished staircase, Vasconcelos cynically remarked to President Obregón, "Those who follow us will not have the ability even to finish that staircase."

harmony among indigenous peoples and Spaniards to the national identity, a reworking of the “Black Legend” in consonance with Vasconcelos’ interpretation of the Revolution.

### *The Colonial versus the Neo-Colonial*

In this period of experimentation, restoration of order and consolidation of power, the search for an authentic Mexican style left an indelible imprint on the built environment, in the form of José Clemente Orozco's and Diego Rivera's murals, hostels for the indigent, pediatric clinics, serum laboratories, libraries and recreational areas. Some of these were housed with enthusiastic symbolism in nationalized churches. This activity provides the observer with an ironic note: while the Obregón and Calles governments and members of the architectural community pursued the neo-colonial style, authentic colonial structures were destroyed or altered severely.

Destruction of Church property was not an exclusive action of the Obregón or Calles administrations. Their activities in assigning new uses to Church property continued a process begun in the mid-nineteenth century. The political, social, and economic reasons for this process differed over time, but as art historian Guillermo Tovar de Teresa lamented, "Destruction has not been the private sport of a single group, but the pastime of almost all Mexicans."<sup>55</sup> Such destruction was possible, he claimed, "given the attitudes that modern Mexican society held regarding its past and its future."<sup>56</sup> And it was also possible during the 1920s given a changing national identity and a government which no longer claimed the Catholic religion as one of its defining characteristics. This was a society which could build in a neo-colonial style to represent its sense of nationalism emanating from its Revolution, but could also demolish authentic colonial structures when their backing symbolism was incompatible with the Revolution's aims. Both the Obregón and Calles governments condoned this activity in their objectives to diminish the power of and assert civil government supremacy over the Catholic Church. A survey of the destruction of church

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<sup>55</sup>Guillermo Tovar de Teresa, The City of Palaces, Chronicle of a Lost Heritage, (México, D.F.: Vuelta, 1990), vol. 2, 85.

<sup>56</sup>Tovar de Teresa, vol. 1, xxi.

property provides evidence of the diminished presence of the Church in nationalist expression.

During the Obregón administration, the Jesús María Convent, at Jesús María, Soledad, Academia and Corregidora streets, retained its neoclassic portal, but in the 1920s its great cloister served as a dance hall, then housed the Mundial Cinema.<sup>57</sup> In the late nineteenth century La Encarnación had been reduced to a garbage dump; José Vasconcelos ordered its restoration as his department's central offices in 1922, then expanded the structure, and offered its walls to Diego Rivera and other muralists.<sup>58</sup> The destruction of the Dolores Church in the 1920s made way for the Ideal Theater, famous for the comic performances of the Blanch sisters.<sup>59</sup> Obregón infuriated Catholic public opinion when he permitted the Casa del Obrero Mundial to reopen, using the Church of Santa Brígida and the adjacent Colegio Josefino as headquarters. And the Royal Monastery of Jesus María, at Corregidora, La Soledad and Estampa de Jesús, saw use as a movie house, billiards hall, tenement, and held the archives of the Ministry of Defense. Later it housed a furniture and home appliance store.<sup>60</sup>

Such practices continued during Plutarco Elías Calles' administration. Unlike his predecessor, Calles chose to implement the restrictive provisions of the Constitution of 1917 pertaining to religious institutions. In his message to Congress in 1926, Calles said that the Executive branch, in enforcing the nation's laws, had closed "129 Catholic Schools, 42 churches, 7 convents and 7 centers of religious propaganda."<sup>61</sup> The resulting alteration and destruction of Church properties left an indelible mark on Mexico City, but also revealed the emergence of a new secular power. In the assignment of new functions to church properties

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<sup>57</sup>Tovar de Teresa, vol. 1, xiv.

<sup>58</sup>Tovar de Teresa, vol. 2, 95.

<sup>59</sup>Tovar de Teresa, vol. 1, xvii.

<sup>60</sup>Tovar de Teresa, vol. 2, 113.

<sup>61</sup>"Informe de Gobierno del 1 de septiembre de 1926," Excélsior, September 2, 1926.

as well as in their demolition, the government and those acting on its behalf removed symbols of the Church's past dominance, thus irrevocably altering the city's skyline. Also apparent in these actions were the changing needs of the government and the population, as well as a lack of recognition for artistic value and architectural heritage of these structures now converted to new uses. Throughout Calles remaining years in office, the Cathedral remained the tallest structure on the city's skyline. Yet new North American-influenced skyscrapers would soon compete for prominence, signs of the emergence of an equally potent power and of further revisions in national identity.

### *A Search for Simplicity and Honesty*

As the neo-colonial style was being employed with such enthusiasm, other architects began to see its limitations in terms of functional and representational ability. The style possessed some serious drawbacks: as an evocation of the viceregal past, it had no peer, yet its high cost of construction made its widespread application questionable. In addition, it is primarily a horizontal style. As urban land prices began to rise, clients asked architects for solutions which would make greater use of the land. In the background, too, questions remained. Could the meaning of modern Mexican identity be expressed by looking backwards? Simultaneous with the government sponsorship of the neo-colonial style, then, there appeared in the capital a number of transitional works. These structures alluded to a type of fusion beginning in Mexican architecture, in which structures were less linked to the traditional forms and interpretations of the neo-colonial, such as crests, terraced profiles, and the use of stone and tezontle, and more related to the simplicity of the new architecture beginning to emerge in Europe in the early 1920s. While the neo-colonial the result of a distinct esthetic preference and a volition to regain an authentic Mexican architecture, the architecture of this transition was the result of economy as well as self-imposed restrictions of simplicity and "honesty" drawn from perceived flaws in the neo-colonial style. This is not to say that these works were functionalist; this style had not yet been transferred to

Mexico.<sup>62</sup> Instead, these works illustrate the flaws in the prevailing style, and serve to facilitate subsequent acceptance of the considerably more radical doctrine of functionalism.

Simplicity was an important element in transitional works. In their evaluations of these works, contemporary journals often commented that the architect had not made archaeology [a sin!] nor did he pursue sterile extremes. In brief, the ideal work was held to be “an architecture that would not come to be ‘extravagant’, nor one that would ‘forsake the past.’”<sup>63</sup> The desire for simplification found its first expression in residential construction as the first neo-colonial homes were completed. Among those structures which emphasized simplicity were the apartments on Alzate 44 by Guillermo Pallares, (1921); the house at Reforma 188, by Bernardo Calderón y Caso (1922); Benjamín Orvañanos’ houses on Orizaba 78 and Pimentel 42, (1923); and in designs by Vicente Mendiola and Juan Galindo for the Colonia Algarín (1925) and the project for a building at the Plaza de la Constitución, by Alfonso Pallares (1926). To architect Israel Katzman, these structures “give the impression of Porfirian houses to which someone passed an electric shaver over all their ornaments.”<sup>64</sup>

Commercial clients also perceived the value in simplification. They asked architects for structures which would allow greater ventilation and illumination and more flexible use of interior space. In these new projects for department stores, office buildings and factories, architects had the opportunity to design in a more simple, streamlines manner, a development which provided Mexico with an approach to contemporary architecture through a channel in addition to that of European functionalism. Architects were further aided by the development and refinement of new construction materials such as structural iron, steel and reinforced concrete, which allowed them greater options in design.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Le Corbusier did not publish his landmark Toward a New Architecture until 1923, while copies in French were available in Mexico City in 1924, the book was not translated into Spanish until 1925, by architect and engineer José L. Cuevas.

<sup>63</sup>Katzman, 100.

<sup>64</sup>Katzman, 106.

<sup>65</sup> The use of structural iron was not unique to the 1920s; it had been used in numerous structures built during the later years of the Porfiriato, such as the El Buen Tono factory, the Museo

Examples of this construction included the new Palacio de Hierro by Paul Dubois (1921), the department store El Correo Frances (1926) and the Edificio Cidosa (1924) by Dubois and Fernando Marcon, and the Edificio Woodrow (1922) by Albert Pepper. Given the simplicity of the independent structure, the rhythm of large rectangular windows, and the lack of ornamentation in these buildings, these buildings were among the first contemporary works in Mexico.

Along with simplicity, the notion of “honesty” in materials and construction was very important in these transitional works. Architect José de la Lama, who claimed to have built more than one thousand houses in the capital, summarized this view in his declaration that “I never imitate material. The characteristics of the materials are not concealed or put forth as something they are not -- that wood would be wood, that the brick would be brick.” If brick or stone or wood had to be covered, the cover should function only as a protective layer, and not “with the pretension of feigning a better material.”<sup>66</sup> In sum, nothing should be hidden, or concealed.

In this transitional period the influence of Art Decó is also apparent. Vicente Mendiola made a series of models for the trade journal Cemento in 1925. While none of these structures were executed in the 1920s, Mendiola did provide design elements which were employed in 1936 by Fernando Puga in his design for the city’s new airport terminal, and in the Banco Aboumrad in 1937. Javier Státoli used this style in his design of the open air theater in Colonia Hipódromo (1927), as did José Gómez Echeverría in the Estación del Ferrocarril Infantil de Chapultepec (1928).

The most significant work of this period of transition was Carlos Obregón Santacilia’s project for the Edificio de la Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia. As Calles’

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de Historia Natural and the Rastro. Its use became more widespread in the 1920s, following the creation of the Compañía de Aceros de Monterrey in 1917 and the use of structural iron in the Hilados y Tejidos La Victoria (1922), the Edificio de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores and in the factories of San Rafael, La Hormiga, and the Cervecería Modelo.

<sup>66</sup>As quoted by Katzman, 107.

land program slowed and the number of cars, houses and other signs of material wealth grew blatant, José Villagrán García, then serving as architect for the Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia, sought to “take steps into the morass of disease submerging all but the very rich.”<sup>67</sup> In 1926, at Villagrán García's request, Carlos Obregón Santacilia designed and began construction of Edificio de la Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia at Paseo de la Reforma and Lieja. It consisted of three great blocks, with its distribution analogous to the human form. As Obregón Santacilia described his work, the principal part, or head, contained the offices of the directors and meetings rooms. The central segment held laboratories; the sides formed classroom sections which represented “arms extended to carry those services to the public.”<sup>68</sup> This building was not a faithful copy of the neocolonial style nor a derivation from pre-hispanic tradition. Instead, it featured the application of new forms to traditional materials. The structure denoted “a more free interpretation of what the professionals of the era understood as modern Mexican style; in turn reflecting their anxiety to move away from foreign influences and depict the true national spirit.”<sup>69</sup> And with its interior murals by Diego Rivera, William Spratling defined it as “the most Mexican building made in Mexico since the Conquest.”<sup>70</sup>

Common to all the works of the transitional period is the notion of simplicity. Architects creating structures in this manner believed that they too had developed a style which truly reflected Mexican reality and identity, while fulfilling the needs of their clients. While ornamentation still existed, it clearly played a secondary role.

Although the variations in architecture [represented changing concepts of national identity, architectural solutions themselves proposed and employed during Obregón's

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<sup>67</sup>José Villagrán García, “Ideas Regentes en la Arquitectura Actual,” Arquitectura/México 10, (December 1954), 195.

<sup>68</sup>Obregón Santacilia, Cinquenta Años, 87.

<sup>69</sup>Garay Arellano, 46.

<sup>70</sup>William Spratling, “Mexican Innovation,” Architectural Forum, 21 (November 1931) 13.



administration did not present a radical change to the city's contour. The Revolution itself did not introduce a new architecture. Instead, until the late 1920s, many looked to the past for inspiration and definition of national identity. It was not until people began to perceive the Revolution as a means of effecting social change and of entering modern life that a significant change in architectural styles occurred. In seeking to explain the origins of modern Mexican architecture, architect Mauricio Gómez Mayorga argued

present Mexican architecture does not spring tellurically from the bursting desire of the cosmic race in its social awakening, as some would like to have it explained, but it is simply the practical and reasonable result of the needs of a country in the process of developing and assimilating a doctrine and a technology already refined in Northern Europe, which made possible the phenomenon which we call modern architecture throughout the world, including Mexico.<sup>71</sup>

Gómez Mayorga explained that after the armed rebellion diminished and the Revolution extended beyond the overthrow of Díaz and the idea of no-reelection to include concern for social justice, the nation reached the requisite “cultural and spiritual climate, propitious for assimilating what European masters were thinking and doing, we were able, owing to an undeniably active mentality, to make ours the greatest European movement and to join its current.”<sup>72</sup> As Obregón made the federal government the legitimate authority in socioeconomic matters, he created the basis for widespread government intervention in the society. In the following years, this intervention frequently took the form of construction of schools, clinics, housing, among others.

*“To Give Form to Our New Civilization”*

At the beginning of 1925, two new elements which supported the development of a new type of architecture in Mexico became prominent. One was the increase in the demand for construction in both the private and public sectors. The capital needed more schools,

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<sup>71</sup>Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, "La Arquitectura Contemporánea en México," Artes de México, 36, año IX, (1961), 15.

<sup>72</sup>Gómez Mayorga, Artes, 16.

hospitals, housing, office buildings and factories to produce goods for the demands of an ever increasing population. Given the high costs and limits to functionality of the neo-colonial style, it appeared that the architectural solution to this problem would be located outside the realm of this style. It was at this point that the second element, those who believed that other styles could better represent the identity of revolutionary Mexico and who wanted to build “in a direct, rational manner, without the dead weight of traditional forms and heavy ornamentation,”<sup>73</sup> found their opportunity.

A small but vocal group of intellectuals, architects and engineers composed this second element. They wanted to develop an architectural style which provided the Revolution with the means to achieve its central objective: to modernize the nation. These individuals recognized that the problems of contemporary Mexico were very different than those of the colonial era, and certainly dramatically different than those of the pre-conquest civilizations. Further, the society itself had changed. While its character was certainly mestizo, modern Mexico was something more than simply the product of the conquest and miscegenation. Its passage through revolution had changed the nation irrevocably, as previously marginalized groups began to participate in civil society and government began to assume more responsibility for socio-economic development and public assistance.

Among the most active of this informal group were former San Carlos classmates Juan O’Gorman, Alvaro Aburto and Juan Legarreta. These men made the first strident criticism against the orientation that Mexican architecture had taken. Heeding the view of professor Guillermo Zárraga, who advised them that “in the real world it was not possible to apply the architectural precepts of palaces or of the Renaissance: today it is necessary to make an architecture in accord with the necessities and the means of production of our own country.”<sup>74</sup> They began to fight against European eclecticism and “the formalism that had

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<sup>73</sup>Katzman, 87.

<sup>74</sup>Interview with Juan O’Gorman, Lilia Gómez and Miguel Angel Quevedo, Testimonios Vivos, 20 Arquitectos, 129.

characterized the last years of the Porfiriato.”<sup>75</sup> Judging the value of new Mexican construction from its incapacity to resolve the social grievances of the Revolution, they decried its total indifference to the popular movement that had made the Revolution of 1910. In opposing the neocolonial style, they claimed that it was incongruent with the contents of the revolutionary programs, and unable to assimilate the new culture that called for transformations not only of the built environment, but also of the substantive bases of Mexican society.

Many architects in Mexico perceived that the neocolonial style did not communicate the contemporary message of Mexican national identity. Instead, they believed it was an inappropriate exercise which replaced one set of symbols embedded in the exotic eclecticism of the Díaz era, for another, equally irrelevant to current conditions. Zárraga believed such works to be abominations, and was grieved “to see how the architects are the most determined in making that cheap architecture.” Antonio Muñoz G., viewing the latest neocolonial works in 1923, found them to be absurd, as those executing such styles “are insisting in reviving a dead architecture.” José Gómez Echeverría decried the trite rendition of colonial architecture appearing throughout the capital, as architects “thought they had given *colonial flavor* to buildings by splashing the facade with red or placing some blue tiles.” This architecture carried no meaning; when contemplating it he felt “a vacuum in the spirit.” Alfonso Pallares offered the harshest criticism of the era, as he stated in 1926, “there exists no group of Mexican cultural realities which give as a natural and simple result a Mexican architectural style.”<sup>76</sup>

These architects witnessed the rejection of traditional styles elsewhere by movements such as Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau and abstract art, and read works by architects in Europe who were increasingly vocal in condemning “useless styles.” Viennese

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<sup>75</sup>Juan Urquiaga, “La Arquitectura en México: Porfiriato y Movimiento Moderno, 1882-1950,” *México en el Arte*, 1 (1983), 44.

<sup>76</sup>Katzman, 98-99.

architect Adolf Loos, who stated that “ornament is a crime,”<sup>77</sup> and saw the slightest trace of ornamentation in a building as proof of criminal tendency on the part of the designer, gave appealing ideas to Mexicans who, when regarding some of the flagrant architecture of the Porfirian *científicos*, may have linked criminal conduct with such ostentatious display. Loos claimed that “The progress of civilization is synonymous with the stripping of all ornament from objects of everyday use.”<sup>78</sup> To Mexicans opposed to ornamentation, this was a welcome reversal of the Porfirian equating of progress with ornate architecture, and a means for the nation to rid itself of European domination of Mexican culture.

In place of the neocolonial style, O’Gorman and others proposed the functionalist [or rationalist, as it was frequently labeled in Mexico] architecture as expressed by Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier. Its central premise was the notion of form generated by the specific function of the architectural object. That is, “form does not determine function, but function determines the form; more precisely, the human behavior with the space is that which determines the form within the architectural structure.”<sup>79</sup> This realization was not new. As Obregón Santacilia observed,

Functionalism has always existed in good architecture. . . the secret for an architecture to be functional is this simple formula: man-place-time-program. If the results of integrating these components is good, the architecture will be functional. But if it is made for man and not for place, if it not for time nor resolved the problem established, then it is not functional.<sup>80</sup>

Functionalism might have been a simple intellectual exercise were it not for its inherent social character, its ability as interpreted by its supporters to express new

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<sup>77</sup>Loos' 1898 essay, "Ornament and Crime," as cited by Wayne Andrews, Architecture, Ambition and Americans, A Social History of American Architecture, rev. ed., (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 268.

<sup>78</sup>Wayne Andrews, Architecture, Ambition and Americans, A Social History of American Architecture, 2d ed., (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 278-79.

<sup>79</sup>Marisol Aja, "Juan O’Gorman," in Apuntes para la Historia y Crítica de la Arquitectura Mexicana del Siglo XX: 1900-1980, (México, D.F.: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1981), 9.

<sup>80</sup>Obregón Santacilia, Cinuenta Años, 79.

nationalism and its value to those who perceived the Revolution as providing an access to modernity. The recognition of societal and technological changes due to the industrial revolution inherent in functionalism was significant; yet it was when this recognition was fused to the heightened social awareness and sense of moral imperative of the post-World War I era, that a new architecture became possible. Thus architecture gained a sense of social mission, and the movement gained momentum and strength. Socialism, which defined the ideological climate of the early 1900s, as architectural historian John Peter claimed,

was not just a background to modern architecture; it was a critical maturing force. The desire among architects to make life better for people was genuine and compelling -- so compelling that it inspired a missionary zeal, with accompanying sense of rectitude. Architecture developed a new morality.<sup>81</sup>

Functionalism involved a new conception of building, which corresponded to the new technology of the age, and was based on local realities and freed from borrowed styles of antiquity. Structures were to be built of monotone, subdued color, comprised of geometric shapes and plain surfaces. The simpler the lines and form, the better they could symbolize the modern machine era. "Dishonest" components must be replaced, among them thick masonry and false fronts, pediments, lintels, ornate entablatures and capitals. Such ornamentation, if not the crime that Loos claimed it to be, masked the true social and physical reality of the building, and more significantly, the true social and physical reality of the society which built it. Instead, architects employed steel and concrete or iron skeletons to support their buildings; with walls relieved of their load-bearing responsibilities, they could be thin skins of glass or stucco, and windows could be placed at will, thus creating structures which allowed more natural light and ventilation.

As expressed by Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus, functionalist proclamations and exhortations found a wide audience in Mexico, which faced the challenge of recovery from

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<sup>81</sup>John Peter, The Oral History of Modern Architecture, Interviews with the Greatest Architects of the Twentieth Century. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 44-45.

the devastation of war. The proclamations held the promise of reconstruction, and served as a symbol for a new faith stronger than that existing in the profession before: the affirmation that good design could change societies for the better. Mexican architects who believed that the problems of the nation were social and the answers to these problems structural found much in the writings of Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier to apply in Mexico City. In proclaiming architecture to be “one of the most urgent needs of man,” Le Corbusier provided his Mexican audiences with an appealing message.<sup>82</sup> Even if architects and planners did not agree with his recommended modes of building, they could be motivated by these words. And in his rejection of styles, with strong statements such as “the styles of Louis XIV, XV, XVI or Gothic are to architecture what a feather is to a woman’s head; it is sometimes pretty, though not always, and never more,”<sup>83</sup> Le Corbusier provided those in Mexico who were already seeking simplicity in their work with additional support for their stance. With his counsel to design in accord with the “true and profound laws of architecture which are established on mass, rhythm and proportion,” and not in terms of “parasitic” styles,<sup>84</sup> Le Corbusier liberated Mexican architects from past facile copying of French or other styles, a freedom which would allow them to assert a Mexican identity in architecture.

O’Gorman, Aburto and Legarreta enthusiastically adopted Le Corbusier’s credo of “the house as machine for living” and became vocal opponents of the prevailing design in Mexico, which in their assessment did not resolve spatial problems or make use of the advantages of new materials such as reinforced concrete, nor did it constitute a reflection of social changes. Neocolonial buildings such as the immense house on the corner of Insurgentes and Coahuila by Francisco Martínez Negrete and Agustín de la Barra (1924) ,

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<sup>82</sup>Charles Edouard Jeanneret Gris (Le Corbusier), Towards a New Architecture, trans. Frederick Etchells, (New York: Praeger, 1970), 13.

<sup>83</sup>Le Corbusier, 25.

<sup>84</sup>Le Corbusier, 286.

Manuel Ortiz Monasterio's house at Reforma 234 (1922) and Rafael Goyenexhe's Hotel Majestic (1925) represented the persistence of archaic, wasteful, irrelevant design. Instead of such pursuits, the three architects wanted to focus the architectural community's attention on the resolution of grave social problems, as they perceived that these problems had provoked the Revolution. A failure to act would deny Mexicans the access to modernity that the Revolution promised, moreover, as Le Corbusier had cautioned in his conclusion, it could lead once more to revolution.<sup>85</sup> Their dedication to the construction of hospitals, schools and popular housing throughout the 1930s arose from this conviction, as well as their advocacy of professional teaching and technical preparation to reflect this new agenda.<sup>86</sup> At this time, their faith in technology and progress was absolute. Solutions inevitably followed correct statements of problems, regardless of scale, ranging from the problem of the house to the problem of the city, to the problems of the nation.

Could architecture truly include all those who had been excluded from full social, economic and political participation for centuries? Could better, more inclusive design rectify long-standing social inequities? Functionalism encompassed overly sweeping, untested assertions of faith in progress, in technology, standardization and the machine and an interpretation of function in terms not only of structure but of performance. Derived from the machine, this interpretation of function was a restricted one. As Federico Sánchez Fogarty pointed out, "As a definition, the 'house as machine' was quite deficient, but it did possess valuable precipitating qualities against that excessive sentimentality toward past architecture that had practically destroyed every incentive among architects to do any truly creative work."<sup>87</sup> To Juan O'Gorman, functionalism promised the possibility "of producing .

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<sup>85</sup>Le Corbusier believed that "we are dealing with an urgent problem of our epoch, nay more, with *the* problem of our epoch. The balance of society comes down to a question of building. We conclude with these justifiable alternatives: *Architecture or Revolution.*" Le Corbusier, 265.

<sup>86</sup>Jorge Medellín, "Arquitectura" in Pablo González Casanova, ed., México, Cincuenta Años de Revolución, IV: La Cultura, (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1962), 295.

<sup>87</sup>Federico Sánchez Fogarty "Architect as Contractor in Mexico," in Esther Born, ed., The New Architecture in Mexico, (New York: The Architectural Record, 1937), 13.

. . . a new architecture, of our own time and without having to resort to the anachronistic.”<sup>88</sup> And to individuals involved in the reconstruction of society and government in accord with revolutionary ideals, the sweeping claims by Gropius and Le Corbusier which assured moral health and better societies for all through the imposition of mass-produced functional buildings seemed heroic.

Functionalism quickly proved practical in nations such as Mexico where functionalist construction proved to be dramatically less expensive. Throughout the 1930s, governments and the private sector built schools, housing, factories, office buildings and other facilities quickly and on limited budgets. But perhaps just as significant was the hope implied in functionalist theory. Its powerful, creative declarations of architecture's practical aspects appealed to idealistic young Mexican architects such as O’Gorman, Aburto and Legarreta, Del Moral, and later Yáñez and de la Mora, who saw the continued suffering and injustice in the capital and wanted to ameliorate the conditions of poverty and misery “at minimal cost and with maximum efficiency.”<sup>89</sup> They believed that the new European architecture provided “the formalization of revolutionary ideals with which to construct a new society.”<sup>90</sup>

The application of functionalism met with considerable resistance from several quarters, among them the so-called “*momios*” of the Mexican architectural profession, several of whom believed functionalism to be imposed on Mexico by imperialist interests working through the Tolteca cement company and its hyperkinetic spokesman, Federico Sánchez Fogarty. In their insistence on an architecture that would express the national spirit, the conservatives continued to execute what architectural historian Irving Myers

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<sup>88</sup>Juan O’Gorman, “Notas sobre Arquitectura,” Archivo de la Academia de Artes.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Antonio Toca, “El Ornamento No Es un Crimen,” México en el Arte, 6 (Fall 1984), 46.



described as “as decadent Colonialism, sometimes introducing Aztec or Mayan decorative elements, as if these echoes of the past could express the spirit of Modern Mexico.”<sup>91</sup>

Conservatives also found fault with functionalism’s emphasis on internationalism, as well as its consideration of localism as regressive. Functionalist houses, they claimed, such as O’Gorman’s house and studio for Diego Rivera in San Angel, could have been built anywhere in the world. If form was based on function, they wondered, why couldn’t structures reflect local differences in how a building had to function with relation to climate, social conditions, and materials? Moreover, detractors argued, this emphasis on universal application distracted from its potential usefulness as a carrier of a unique Mexican identity.

Functionalism experienced permutations, as architects and planners adapted it to meet Mexican needs. In later decades, even its strongest proponents in Mexico came to reject its most strident theoretical assumptions, while they continued to employ and refine architectural construction along modern lines.<sup>92</sup> And as Kostof pointed out, architecture alone “does not bring about social change. Instead, powerful political, economic and social forces do that, and without a concurrence of those forces the architect is helpless to affect society.”<sup>93</sup> But for a time, the functionalist architects tried, and these works invoked in them a sense of mission. As Mexican architect Vladimir Kasper observed from Le Corbusier, “To furnish the country with that which is necessary and sufficient. Opportune, urgent theme, whose immediate solution is indispensable.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Irving E. Myers (in cooperation with the National Institute of Fine Arts of Mexico), Mexico’s Modern Architecture, (New York: Architectural Book Company, 1952), 46-47

<sup>92</sup>For example, as architect Enrique Yáñez observed in the early 1950s, “. . . Functionalism as a doctrine was incongruous with the actual state of affairs. It was incapable of meeting the desires of those who paid for private construction, who often wanted something warmer than the cold logic of the radical architects.” Yáñez, “Forward,” in Myers, 12.

<sup>93</sup>Kostof, History of Architecture, 745.

<sup>94</sup>Vladimir Kasper, “Tiempos de Estudiante con Mario Pani,” Arquitectura/México, XV (September 1959), 152.

Functionalism also gained strength due to the vigorous promotion activities by Mexican cement companies. The use of cement and concrete was not due to functionalism; in the early 1920s factories in Mexico City and Monterrey were already producing ashlar, concrete columns of all sizes and styles, as well as I-beams and other structural innovations. Juan Galindo y Pimental, one of the editors of Excélsior's architecture section, noted in 1924 that reinforced concrete "can be understood to carry a seal definitely ours, using as the source our traditional architecture."<sup>95</sup>

In the latter years of the decade, the cement industry pursued an aggressive strategy to increase the demand for its products. One company in particular, the Cementos Tolteca S.A., published the trade journal Cemento; with its monthly circulation of 12,000 copies delivered throughout the nation the company provided the means for non-specialists as well as those in the building trades to become familiar with its products. In this journal the company promoted the use of reinforced concrete through articles and photographs of notable buildings in the United States and Europe, and explanations of concrete's utility in pipes, paving, lampposts, among other uses. Publicity director Federico Sánchez Fogarty, as his readers learned, believed "Concrete is forever" and "Concrete is the letter, the verb of contemporary architecture." Architects took note of the new design possibilities available to them from this product, said to be "el polvo mágico."<sup>96</sup> Tolteca also sponsored design competitions, with prizes awarded to projects featuring the best commercial and residential uses of its product, as well as artistic competitions which awarded prizes for the best representation of the Company's works. Even children were not spared: at the Estación del Ferrocarril Infantil in Chapultepec, a placard read "this station will last many centuries

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<sup>95</sup> Juan Galindo y Pimental, "En México aún no se han Abordado los Problemas Constructivas con Espíritu Moderno," Excélsior, October 19, 1924.

<sup>96</sup> In this article Sánchez Fogarty placed concrete at the top of modern discoveries, "equivalent in its field to that of the automobile, the railroad, and the airplane together in that of communications." Federico Sánchez Fogarty, "El Polvo Mágico," Cemento, 21, (January 1928), 17.

because the concrete is made with cement. When you are big, you will make your palaces of concrete.”<sup>97</sup>

In sum, this campaign exerted a significant influence upon Mexican designers,<sup>98</sup> particularly due to the legitimization that it gave to functionalism as a synonym of progress and modernity, in addition to its advocacy of the full acceptance of cement understood under the commercial intention of the producers: the only possibility for the creation of modern architecture. And Mexican architects began to incorporate cement in increasing numbers of buildings and to perceive concrete to be the panacea of revolutionary Mexico, “providing the backbone of all its visions . . . to be and to act as architecture.”<sup>99</sup>

Certain architects quickly perceived the plastic virtues of cement, particularly its malleability, potential to be a true spatial innovation, and utility as a substitute for masonry and brick. One of the most significant works was that of José Villagrán García’s Instituto de Higiene and Granja Sanitaria in Popotla, D.F. In his work with Vasconcelos at the Departamento de Conservación de Escuelas of the Secretaría de Educación Pública after his graduation in 1923, he had the opportunity to meet Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco. Of this period he recalled,

I began to feel the obligation that architects and future architects must promote work similar to that of the Renaissance: that is to say, as those of the Renaissance began to work in other lines of conduct, departing precisely from that which existed and had been behind what they did -- creating anew! - . . . producing work which pertained authentically to its time, thus I

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<sup>97</sup>As cited by Katzman, 109.

<sup>98</sup>Architect Mauricio Gómez Mayorga described the influence of Cemento’s successor Tolteca upon his own early career in an interview in 1980. He recalled of his education in the early 1930s, “. . . I discovered in the library of the school some Italian magazines, then modern, with futurist architecture, Italian futurist and functionalist. It was for me a true impact and in that moment I discovered that there were other distinct things and that the classic-romantic questions of the school now did not have any validity and that Europe had made something completely different and that was very interesting. The Italian magazines and the famous Tolteca magazine. . . opened my eyes to what was a new world that was not a world of classic order of the watercolors and bare drawings and clay models, that there were other things and that was the way I went, naturally.” Interview with Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, Lilia Gómez and Miguel Angel Quevedo, Testimonios Vivos, 20 Arquitectos, 142.

<sup>99</sup>Enrique X. De Anda Alanís, Evolución de la Arquitectura en México: Epocas Prehispanica, Virreinal, Moderna y Contemporánea, (México, D.F.: Panorama Editorial, 1987), 51.

considered that we had to do the same --in Mexico! But under conditions of the economy and idiosyncrasy of all of that is Mexican.<sup>100</sup>

Villagrán García did not set out to copy Le Corbusier.<sup>101</sup> From this belief in the need "to produce authentically for the time" he set out on his first work, the Instituto de Higiene and Granja Sanitaria in Popotla [begun in 1925, completed in 1926] which was influenced by articles on the new European architecture in articles appearing in the Sunday Excelsior.<sup>102</sup> The Instituto consisted of a series of eight simply conceived pavilions, the majority of one floor, with a minimum of ornamentation. O'Gorman, del Moral, Campos, Arce and Vergara worked with Villagrán García on this project, which formed an integral part of the structural revolution in Mexican architecture. As described by architectural historian Ramón Vargas Salguero, this work represented

the movement of an architecture restricted to the satisfaction of the necessities of the land-owning oligarchy to an architecture for the spatial requirements of the working class. . . <sup>103</sup>

This structure served pragmatic as well as symbolic functions. It was a sign of the Calles government efforts to ameliorate serious public health problems. Further, as Villagrán García's colleague Enrique del Moral interpreted, the Instituto was "the first example of the *modern* spirit constructed in the country, and therefore of a fundamental importance."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Interview with José Villagrán García, in Lilia Gómez and Miguel Angel Quevedo, Testimonios Vivos, 20 Arquitectos, 63.

<sup>101</sup>Ricardo Robina, "Arquitectura" in Pablo González Casanova, ed., México, Cincuenta Años de Revolución, IV: La Cultura, (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1962), 302.

<sup>102</sup>Interview with José Villagrán García, in Lilia Gómez and Miguel Angel Quevedo, Testimonios Vivos, 20 Arquitectos, 63.

<sup>103</sup>Ramón Vargas Salguera, "José Villagrán" in José Villagrán García, (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1986), Documentos para la Historia de la Arquitectura en México, n. 2, 255.

<sup>104</sup>Enrique del Moral, "Villagrán García y la Evolución de Nuestra Arquitectura," Arquitectura/México XII, number 55, September 1956, 131-132.

Juan O’Gorman also made extensive use of reinforced concrete in his new designs; the houses which he built in San Angel for his father [at Palmas 81] for himself [at Jardín 88] and for Diego Rivera [at Altavista 81] in 1929 were the most notable of his early efforts in residential construction. Rivera’s house attracted the most attention of the three, in part due to the artist’s own promotion of the uniqueness of his home, the first purely functional house in Mexico. O’Gorman’s houses were unconventional structures, “directly and obviously derived from Le Corbusier, although the planar surfaces were sometimes relieved by cantilever projections and exterior spiral stairways, and the glass area offset by planes of blue, red, yellow or brown.”<sup>105</sup> O’Gorman built these homes with scant concern for the opposition voiced in conservative circles, who looked with scorn at the garish colors which he applied to exteriors, and considered his lack of ornamentation as artistic poverty and not “as a sign of spiritual strength and maturity.”<sup>106</sup>

Cement and reinforced concrete also made other types of construction possible, most notably the high-rise or skyscraper, a symbol of progress and modernity. These materials lend the possibility of “verticalizing” construction in the city for the first time. This process had begun with the construction of Albert Pepper’s six-story Edificio Woodrow in 1922, and Juan Segura’s eight-story, Edificio Ermita-Hipódromo in 1930. Perhaps fearing the imposition of skyscrapers built with inappropriate elements, Sánchez Fogarty stated,

there is nothing in a skyscraper to be ashamed of, and there is much in these buildings demanding new architectural expression. A modern building is *skeletal* in structure and, as a rule, *asymmetrical* in function, and somehow or other architecture must find expression for both of these characteristics. A modern building is made of steel, concrete, and glass, and new materials have always called for new treatments. A modern building is no longer a semi-dead mass of stone and mortar; it is a quasi-organic structure throbbing with the life of charged wires, conditioned air, and running water. Skyscrapers are the outcome of a mechanized system of production. Roman pillars cannot withstand, still less symbolize, the conflict of forces in our dynamic buildings. Gothic finials cannot crown them and

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<sup>105</sup>Clive Bamford Smith, Builders in the Sun, Five Mexican Architects, (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Company, 1967), 18.

<sup>106</sup>Max Cetto, Modern Architecture in Mexico, trans. D.Q. Stephenson, (New York: Praeger, 1961), 24.

leave any hint to future generations of the soul that animated the giant builders of our time.<sup>107</sup>

Nor could the spirit of the 'twenties or 'thirties be adequately represented or supported by Roman pillars or Gothic finials. The nation required this new type of building, built in functionalist style, wrought of new materials. The potential value of the skyscraper to convey the message of revolutionary vigor, achievement and promise was apparent to Sánchez Fogarty. However, Mexico was not able to build these structures at once. Achievements in the construction of tall buildings were limited in the 1920s; in 1930 the tallest building was only eight stories. It was not until 1934 that engineers began to solve the problem of constructing high-rise buildings upon Mexico City's sponge-like subsoil. Nor were urban land prices sufficiently high to make such constructions cost effective.

*"The Paradise of the Potentates"*

Expressions of the new nationalism via the neo-colonial and functionalist styles do not explain all of what was transpiring in Mexico City. As the nation recovered from a decade of war, the capital also manifested a disparity in standards of living between the upper and "popular" classes which resembled that of the Porfiriato.

Chronicler of Mexico City Salvador Novo found the city had experienced "violent and growing transformations" throughout the 1920s. He saw that

the provinces invaded it, more than the provinces, the active north, from where, (like the Aztecs in their time), the generals arrived to govern: Obregón and Calles. It was the years of the bungalow and of the shape of the 'Colonial California' style, propagated towards the sudden growth that the city gave toward the west with the first demolition of Porfirian palaces of the Reforma, with the creation of their substitutes in Colonia Cuauhtémoc, with the transformation of the old Condesa Racetrack in Colonia Condesa, and with the sale of Chapultepec Heights, that an ashamed nationalism translated to Lomas.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>Federico Sánchez Fogarty, "Architect as Contractor in Mexico," in Esther Born, ed. The New Architecture in Mexico, (New York: The Architectural Record, and William Morrow & Company, 1937), 13.

<sup>108</sup>Salvador Novo, "Imágenes de México," 7.

By the end of Calles' term, those who had enjoyed the favor of the government under Obregón and Calles and thus developed into a wealthy class bought properties which communicated their new-found status through residential segregation and design. Some settled in Colonia Juárez, where the Porfirian aristocracy had built their residences, preferring European models, particularly the Mansard, with streets after European cities or non-nationalist generals such as Prim. At the beginning of 1923, other former revolutionaries moved to Chapultepec Heights, or Lomas de Chapultepec, which earned the name "paradise of the potentates," from its new population composed of diplomats, highly-placed bureaucrats and the old aristocrats.<sup>109</sup> This apparently counter-revolutionary social stratification continued throughout the 1920s. Verna Millan, searching for accommodations in Mexico City in the mid 1920s, described Chapultepec Heights as "overlooking the city like a miniature stage set." Here, she found

Abelardo Rodríguez, Luis L. Leon and other notables of the Calles regime had built themselves extraordinary villas in that scalloped, candy-box type of architecture, all pink and fretted and covered with whatnots, that Hollywood bequeathed to the world and to the newly rich. . . <sup>110</sup>

The propensity of the newly-rich to build extraordinary homes modeled after medieval castles, gothic cathedrals or English country houses, all with lavish appointments, occasioned considerable alarm in some circles as early as 1923. An editorial in the first issue of El Arquitecto stated,

thousands of houses have emerged, but where is the Mexican house, the house by Mexicans for Mexicans? All of the styles have been imitated, the patio has been killed, substituting it for the hall, the dimensions of the rooms have been reduced to the minimum possible, the flowerpots have been eliminated, substituted for caricatures of gardens. In a word, a major effort has been made to abdicate what is ours; in our history, if in politics it was a tradition to offer the throne to Maximilian of Austria, in our cultural and artistic history the movement for the American-type house also constitutes a

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<sup>109</sup>Jorge Prieto Laurens noted wryly upon his return from exile that former revolutionaries were now "owners of castles in Lomas de Chapultepec." Prieto Laurens, Cincuenta Años de Política Mexicana, Memorias Políticas, (México, D.F.: Editoria Mexicana de Periódicos, Libros y Revistas, 1968), 158.

<sup>110</sup>Millan, 12.

betrayal to our ground, our sky, our flowers, our social possibilities, our most peculiar idiosyncrasies.<sup>111</sup>

The style subject to the most heated criticism, however, was what contemporaries somewhat pejoratively labeled the California-colonial or Hollywood style. Arturo Sotomayor found little to commend about it, viewing its as “a species of excema on the urban skin of the city.”<sup>112</sup> Vázquez Mellado was harsher still, labeling them “enormous antifunctional, uncomfortable, antiesthetic and anti-everything houses” in which “those who made them would perceive themselves to be as Louis XIV was in Versailles.”<sup>113</sup> Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, at that time an architecture student, noted with exasperation that this style spread between 1926 and 1930 “like a cancer all around the Hipódromo suburbs.” Mexico, he thought, could have turned its attention to the new European architecture; instead, it embraced “the amusing sophistication of a colonial style invented by the vulgar and uncultured prosperity of Hollywood.”<sup>114</sup> Obregón Santacilia offered the following scathing attack on this style,

it is the most hybrid and disgraceful style that has been used in Mexico; it proceeds from the Mexican architecture of the hacienda and pueblo homes, it went to the South of the United States, and it was smartened up in California. . . there mixed with Italian and Spanish styles for whose fabrication existed large workshops in which are made casts of Salamancan keystones with fawns' heads, niches, *remates* of all sizes, more or less overloaded according to the piece and with all the vivid compositions were made in San Diego and Santa Monica; from there it returned to Mexico and the Latinos dedicated themselves to copying it. . . from magazines instead of making a trip to the Mexican pueblos and identifying with the real thing.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>El Arquitecto, 1 (1923), 5.

<sup>112</sup>Sotomayor, 297.

<sup>113</sup>Vázquez Mellado, 299

<sup>114</sup>Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, “La Arquitectura Contemporánea en México,” Artes de México, 36, año IX, 1961, 15.

<sup>115</sup>Obregón Santacilia, Cinuenta Años, 76.



In brief, these development announced the emergence of a new capitalist class,<sup>116</sup> whose actions would alter expressions of national identity. The styles in which they chose to build and thus leave their mark on the built environment had none of the historical links of the neo-colonial, nor the notion that the Revolution provided the nation with the opportunity to look back into its past for a true national essence. Their choices did not reflect the concern for social justice or desire for sincerity and honesty in construction inherent in Mexican functionalism, nor its perception that the Revolution had provided the nation with an access to modernity. Instead, what was happening in Lomas de Chapultepec and other settlements of the newly rich seemed to mirror the process of personal enrichment so prevalent during the Porfiriato. Further, the popularity of the California-colonial home indicated that the upper class was consuming another imported product, indicative of its propensity to identify with foreign tastes and identities.

#### *Another Invasion from the North*

The construction of a national identity in the aftermath of revolution is not an easy task. The former consensus had been forcibly removed, and a new tacit agreement as to how the new nationalism should be constituted had not yet been achieved. The Mexico of the 1920s was no longer the same society which had celebrated the centennial of its independence with elaborate banquets, with foreign dignitaries toasting Porfirian order, peace and progress with Cordon Rouge champagne and Martell cognac by the hundreds of cases.<sup>117</sup> Yet a new identity was slow to form. As seen in this essay, efforts to construct a new identity which would give meaning to the Revolution involved explorations into the nation's past and the retrieval of fragments of culture thought to represent a true Mexican identity, untouched by foreign penetration. It also involved inquiry into what sort of

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<sup>116</sup>Lesley B. Simpson, *Many Mexicos*, rev. ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 316.

<sup>117</sup>Artemio del Valle Arizpe, *Calle Vieja y Calle Nueva*, (México, D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1949), 298.

modern life the nation wanted to have, given the access to modernity which the Revolution provided.-

Underlying these searches was the notion that national identity would be forged as the nation rejected the foreign domination of its culture -- as it no longer wanted or felt the need to emulate other cultures, nor had them imposed upon it. However, Mexican history indicates that the boundaries of national identity have always been permeable. Throughout its history, as a colony of Spain and as a politically independent nation, it had been the object of foreign penetration. The styles employed to represent national identity were, in past centuries, cultural imports. Political nationalism emanating from the Revolution assumed "that all contacts with Europe inevitably led to alien and, therefore, inauthentic expressions."<sup>118</sup> But in the modern era it was not possible to enforce the sort of isolation which would allow the formation of a purely indigenous cultural expression.

And by the end of the decade, it was getting progressively harder to do so, particularly as the Calles government pursued policies to welcome capital and foreign investment into Mexico, if it were "inspired in morality"; that is, if foreign investors could be humanitarian and act with Mexican law.<sup>119</sup> In this regard the nation began to experience the cultural penetration of the United States, a companion of imported capital and the beginning of a process which would increasingly alter the appearance and content of Mexico City in following years. In these "Roaring Twenties" which Ramón Eduardo Ruiz summarized as a period in which "the newly rich aped the dress and lifestyles of Hollywood stars," Mexico's traditional isolation was collapsing. By the late 1920s tourists "made their appearance, lured by low prices and exotic scenes. . . . The Yankee cultural invasion had started. . . ." <sup>120</sup> And if one overlooked the burgeoning slums and *vecindades*, one saw, as

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<sup>118</sup>Francisco Bullrich, New Directions in Latin American Architecture, (New York: George Braziller, 1969), 18.

<sup>119</sup>El Democrata, May 14, 1924.

<sup>120</sup>Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, Triumphs and Tragedy: A History of the Mexican People, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), 382-383.

contemporary observer Anita Brenner recalled, “the capital took on the Coolidge-era outlook. Factories were being started and growing, stores installed big plate glass windows, electric advertising signs flashed up, American trade names became as well known as the names of movie stars.”<sup>121</sup> One could watch Greta Garbo at the Cine “ Iris,” dance the Charleston, or listen to the Symphony of Mexico playing European classical works.

Consumption patterns also changed to reflect the North American presence: on “Redeemer's Row” the upper class fondness for big automobiles such as Packard, Essex or Hudson contributed to further changes in Mexico City. Parking lots and garages were built, streets were extended and widened to accommodate more automobile traffic; auto dealerships and filling stations appeared on the urban landscape, in uneasy proximity to colonial era structures. Calles summed up the situation neatly: “The Mexican Revolution. . . like all revolutions, has had its destructive phase. But the State has successfully eliminated those elements of conflict and Calles announced, “the Revolution has entered its constructive phase.”<sup>122</sup> And in this “constructive phase,” the search for an authentic Mexican style continued, amid greater cultural penetration by the “Colossus of the North.”

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<sup>121</sup>Anita Brenner, The Wind That Swept Mexico, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 80.

<sup>122</sup>Plutarco Elías Calles. Pensamiento Político y Social, Antología (1913-1936), with prologue and notes by Carlos Macías, (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982), ix.