

“Revolution in the Streets,  
Changing Nomenclature, Changing Form in Mexico City’s Centro Histórico  
and the Revision of Public Memory”

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# **Revolution in the Streets, Changing Nomenclature, Changing the Form in Mexico's City's Centro Histórico and the Revision of Public Memory**

Patrice Elizabeth Olsen

## "I Speak of the City"

a novelty today, tomorrow a ruin from the past, buried and  
resurrected every day,  
lived together in streets, plazas, taxis, movie houses, theaters, bars,  
hotels, pigeon coops and catacombs,  
...  
the city that dreams us all, that all of us build and unbuild and  
unbuild and rebuild as we dream,  
...  
I speak of the buildings of stone and marble, of cement, glass and  
steel, of the people in the lobbies and doorways,  
...  
I speak of our public history, and of our secret history, yours and  
mine.<sup>1</sup>

In this poem Octavio Paz considers the city to be a complex entity, simultaneously creating dreams and manifesting them. It is a product of repeated conquests and uneasy coexistence, of varied textures and content. The city is a place in which public and private histories intersect, where the latter reveals fundamental flaws within the "official stories" contained in the former. Above all, the city speaks of its change to those who will listen; its buildings and monuments reveal its history, both public and secret, and the stories of its citizens -- and

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<sup>1</sup> Octavio Paz, "I Speak of the City," in *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz, 1957-1987*, ed. and trans. Eliot Weinberger, (New York: New Directions Books, 1987), 511-517.

expresses the divisions within public memory<sup>2</sup> pertaining to the Revolutionary nation itself.

From 1928 to 1940, Mexico City speaks of the difficulties in governing and imposing a structure upon a revolution, which is, by its nature, against the rules. It depicts the tensions between those who sought to preserve the city's colonial character as key element in national identity and those who rejected it as manifestation of exploitation of an imperial power. Moreover, the city's streets and buildings along those streets allow the observer to see what Mexicans chose to retain, and what they discarded. Thus within the city are accounts of a nation and its people attempting to modernize, and searching for a vehicle which would serve to rectify past injustice - and its public memory of that experience. In this period too the nation sought the essence of *Mexicanidad*, while attempting to achieve a better society through better design, and chose to borrow again from exotic sources, from the Bauhaus functionalists, Le Corbusier, the California-Colonial, and the North American skyscraper. As the city illustrated so clearly, there were few guidelines on how to reconstruct a society following the chaos of prolonged civil war. Evidence of

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<sup>2</sup> This study employs John Bodnar's and Michael Kammen's formulations of public memory. As defined by Bodnar, public memory is seen to be the "body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or a society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future. It is fashioned ideally in a public sphere in which various parts of the social structure exchange views. The major focus of this communicative and cognitive process is not the past, however, but serious matters in the present such as the nature of power and the question of loyalty to both official and vernacular cultures. Public memory speaks primarily about the structure of power in society because that power is always in question in a world of polarities and contradictions and because cultural understanding is always grounded in the material structure of society itself. Memory adds perspective and authenticity to the views articulated in this exchange; defenders of official and vernacular interests are selectively retrieved from the past to perform similar functions in the present." Bodnar, *Remaking America, Public Memory, Commemoration and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 15.

To Kammen, "public memory, which contains a slowly shifting configuration of traditions, is ideologically important because it shapes a nation's ethos and sense of identity. That explains, at least in part, why memory is always selective and is so often confused." Michael Kammen, *The Mystic Chords of Memory, The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 13.

the contradictory or incompatible impulses embedded in the revolutionary agenda were visible in nearly every colonia or neighborhood, and in particular, in the city's

*Centro Histórico.*

This study thus presents a layered examination of the city, beginning with a consideration of the first steps taken to “modernize” it -- the renaming of certain streets, and the commemoration of street names long past. The *Centro Histórico* experienced several efforts to revise the memories embedded in those streets, which continued initiatives made during the final years of the *Porfiriato* to impose new order upon the often chaotic city center. New street names, commemorating revolutionary heroes and events, announced the presence of a new power in this site which had served as the locus of authority for centuries. Streets, then, are carriers of meaning, evoking memories of conquest, tragedy, triumph, and burgeoning nationalism.

An analysis of the next layer, of what the streets contain, illustrates the problems in consolidating and exercising revolutionary power. If the street is considered to be more than a means of providing a corridor for motorized and pedestrian traffic, its significance in the construction of public memory becomes apparent. According to architectural historian Spiro Kostof, while the street is a public thoroughfare, it is at the same time a “complex civil institution. Its fundamental reality. . .as with all public space, is political. . . .The street, furthermore, structures community. It puts on display the workings of the city, and supplies a backdrop for its common rituals.”<sup>3</sup> The street also carries those workings of the city, in the commercial, governmental, and residential structures which are built upon it and thus provides visual cues as to the content of public memory

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<sup>3</sup> Spiro Kostof, *The City Assembled, The Elements of urban Form Through History*, Bulfinch Press, Little, Brown and Co., 1992), 194, 220.

pertaining to the Revolution, and to the society itself. Colonial structures gained a new significance as the Mexican government sought to prevent encroachment of modernism in the city center which might erase elements of national identity which still resonated with many Mexicans. Yet at the same time, increased population and governmental programs which encouraged capitalist development distanced the city further from the period and culture which had produced those baroque palaces. Buildings thus illustrate the inherent conflict between ideal and reality, between an abstract assembly of elements of national identity, and the construction of a functioning nationalism.

In the conclusion of this work the city streets as considered in aggregate, as part of the fabric of revolutionary Mexico. A “revolution” had occurred in its streets in the period from 1928 to 1940. On this occasion, the battle was not fought with brigantines or guns, but with steam shovels and pickaxes. Its impact would be significant, however, just as previous conquests of the city center had been.

*“A novelty today. . . ”*

On 11 January 1928 Excélsior reported actions by Mexico City’s *Ayuntamiento* the previous evening to allocate 8000 pesos to the *Dirección de Obras Públicas*, for the placement of new colonial-style *azulejo* commemorative plaques on selected streets of “Old Mexico.” These plaques would bear the names which the streets carried in 1867. This action did not involve a return to legal usage of the former names. Instead, this was a juxtaposition of names used in the colonial and early national periods with those of current period. Not every street was to be re-labeled; the *Ayuntamiento* made a noteworthy distinction: “colonial-style

commemorative plaques will be placed on each street that has some history or legend that merits remembrance by means of their old names.”<sup>4</sup>

This was hardly front-page news. In the crush of activity during the last year of Plutarco Elías Calles’ administration, in which the president sought to consolidate power in the central government and to engineer the re-election of Alvaro Obregón, such notice was buried in the newspaper’s advertising section, amid other reports of the city council’s approval of new street names in other areas of the city, and the naming of the city’s new open-air theater after Col. Charles Lindbergh. Yet this was a significant action, indicative of the government’s attempts to regulate the content of this rapidly changing city and to direct the public memory of the Revolution. With the passage of this seemingly innocuous act the *Ayuntamiento*, or bureaus and committees acting on its behalf, would now interpret for the public what was considered to be worthy of commemoration or remembrance - which legends, events, and individuals were still relevant, or usable - and what should pass into oblivion. The act also calls attention to the use of street names as a tool to commemorate the contributions of various individuals in the construction of Revolutionary Mexico, as well as to remind the public of the martyrdom of Francisco Madero and José María Pino Suárez, and to reconcile opposing figures such as Emiliano Zapata and Venustiano Carranza who, now placed in linear form, could be reclaimed for the pantheon of revolutionary leaders. Their service to the *patria* was beyond question, and was formally enshrined in official accounts, commemorated in monuments, and became a vital part of public memory of the Revolution.

As Manuel Orozco y Berra observed in the mid-nineteenth century, “the names of the streets have changed with the times. In few of these times did the

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<sup>4</sup> “Las Calles del México Viejo Van a Ostentas sus Antiguos Nombres,” *Excélsior* 11 January 1928.

authorities intervene; the changes were made by the customs, circumstances, and caprice of the inhabitants.”<sup>5</sup> Attempts were made during the eighteenth century to bring order to the streets’ nomenclature and numbering, which as José Cossío interpreted, yielded a city in which everything “was in perfect order.” He found that “anarchy began with our independent life, which disturbed much of the nomenclature,” particularly with plans in 1887 introduced by engineer Roberto Gayol to substitute numbers for the *Calles de Dios* and others in the *Centro Histórico*. Fortunately, such scheme proved unworkable<sup>6</sup>; in his opinion the most serious threat to the integrity of the city center would be posed by revolutionary leaders, who proceeded to attempt to recast the city in their own images. To Cossío, “nothing had been as prejudicial for the city as the actions of the men of the latest revolution, as due to their limited mentality, all has been changed, in that they claim that the life of the city begins with them, as if to create heroes through a simple *azulejo* placed on a corner.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet the renaming undertaken by those “men of the latest revolution” was by no means a major revision of the memory of the capital. In 1921, during the celebrations of the centennial of Mexican independence, several streets in the oldest section of the city were recast in the image of the Revolution. Notable among these were the transformations of the Calle de Capuchinas into Avenida Venustiano Carranza, conversion of the Calles de Plateros and San Francisco into Avenida

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<sup>5</sup> Manuel Orozco y Berra, “La Ciudad de México,” in *Diccionario Universal de Geografía y Historia*, (México, D.F.: Imprenta de F. Escalante y Cía., 1854), 633-634.

<sup>6</sup> One of the most prominent critics of such scheme was José Limantour, who argued that the introduction of numbered streets would be “prejudicial and impractical.” Although many modern cities had such systems which allowed a “regularization” of streets, to do so in the *Centro Histórico* would remove important “traditions and secular customs” from the city. “Moción que presenta el C. Regidor José I. Limantour, a la consideracion que se reforme la nomenclatura y numeración de las calles de la Capital,” *Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad de México*, vol. 484, exp. 17.

<sup>7</sup> José L. Cossío, *Guía Retropectiva de la Ciudad de Meexico*, 2d ed., (México, D.F.: Espejo de Obsidiana Ediciones, 1990), 125.

Francisco I. Madero, and the Calle del Parque del Conde into Avenida José María Pino Suárez. And in the following decade, the Revolution itself also entered the city's nomenclature, as the Cárdenas government terminated work on a new major roadway entering the Zócalo from the south, Avenida 20 de Noviembre.

With these alterations, the revolutionaries were continuing a process of revision of public memory begun during *La Reforma*, and accelerated under Díaz. Thus, the new "revolutionary" streets entered an urban fabric in which commemorations of nationalist figures were commonplace, and the value of representing patriotic events on the landscape recognized. In this respect, then, the luminaries of the Revolution join illustrious nineteenth-century figures such as Benito Juárez, Miguel Hidalgo, Juan Alvarez, Diodoro Carella, Ignacio Allende, Pedro Aranda, José María Morelos, Leona Vicario, Pedro María Anaya, Lucas Balderas, Juan Ruiz de Alarcón and Ponciano Arriaga, in a seamless web of history, united on the urban grid. Further, a selective linkage with the pre-Colonial past was encouraged, with the retention of Aztec names such as Netzahualcoyotl and Xicotencatl, while others, such as Chiquis, Tizapán, Tlacoaque, Tlaperos, Pipis and Huacalco, among others, were allowed to fade.

The continuation of the process of historical revision via changing nomenclature of the city's streets in the 1920s and early 1930s indicated the government's perception that the capital city could serve as an element of national unification and as a manifestation of the new revolutionary national identity. The new content of those streets, particularly in the 1930s, would indicate the difficulty of achieving both.

*"Of the buildings of stone and marble, of cement, glass and steel. . ."*

During the *Maximato*, Abelardo Rodríguez' brief government encouraged capitalist development, manifest in the construction of modern office buildings,



apartment houses, the first large-scale public housing projects, schools, as well as a growth in hotels and other industries related to tourism, which the government encouraged as a means of increasing revenue.<sup>8</sup> Highways begun in 1925 and extending from Laredo to Puebla connected the city with the country and with the United States. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s tourist travel to Mexico increased, thus creating a greater demand for hotels, restaurants and services. To encourage the tourist trade, it was necessary for the government and the private sector to define what elements were present in Mexico City that would be of interest to visitors, such as its colonial era “palaces,” the Alameda, Xochimilco, Chapultepec Park, and the Cathedral as well as to identify what deficiencies existed in provisions for these visitors, such as restaurants, night clubs, shops, and lodging on a par with that in United States and Europe.<sup>9</sup> Thus the cityscape revealed the objectives and successes of the government and private initiative in courting this potentially lucrative trade. Similarly, implementing this policy irrevocably changed the cityscape, particularly in the *Centro Histórico*. Further, the active pursuit of tourism involved an assessment of the city center in aggregate: what image it conveyed, as well as what image should be conveyed to this wider, exotic audience.

One of the most active proponents of tourism was former Treasury Secretary Alberto Pani, who believed that it had the capacity to “repeat the miracle of Lázaro, resuscitating dead epochs and civilizations.” The development of tourism would “impel progress and permanently elevate the well-being of the people, under the

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<sup>8</sup> Nora Hamilton argued that the Rodríguez government used positions in the tourism industry as a means of providing benefits to the elite who were threatened by new reforms proposed in accordance with the Constitution. Thus expropriations could be postponed or prolonged indefinitely. Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 82.

<sup>9</sup> For a description of sites deemed interesting to tourists, see the popular guidebook by T. Philip Terry, *Terry’s Guide to Mexico, the New Standard Guidebook to the Mexican Republic*, (Boston: Geo. A. Ellis Co., 1927, 1935).

form of a continual demand for services and commodities, with the consequent breadth to commerce and national production.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, as Pani recalled,

it came to me, as a consequence, the idea of promoting the construction of two hotels: one in the commercial zone, large, cheap and destined to for the portion of tourists already established and for whom so many of the "first class" hotels were unapproachable due to their high prices. . .and another in the residential zone, of less capacity and of *quality comparable to the best of the great cities of the civilized world* [his italics] with the goal of elevating the category of the capital of the Republic and to offer comforts and to attract, not the poor tourism of the fixed price excursions that already visit us, but the tourists that truly spend and invest money and can contribute positively to the national prosperity.<sup>11</sup>

Pani perceived that tourism had the ability to contribute valuable foreign exchange to the depleted Mexican economy, as well as to convey to the “developed” nations a clear message of Mexican political stability and cultural advancement. Yet the costs of developing such projects appeared prohibitive, as he stated, “the difficulty in consummating this operation was in the property register value of the land, adding to the cost of constructing the building and the acquisition of the equipment and furniture.” Measured against meager projected financial returns, the costs made it very difficult to attract investors. In the end Pani formed a group which shared the financial obligation for the purchase of land and the construction of the hotels. Upon his resignation from the Finance Ministry in 1933, he became the director of the Compañía Explotadora de Hoteles, S.A.<sup>12</sup> Delays ensued with

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<sup>10</sup> Alberto J. Pani, *Tres Monografías*, III. La Industria Nacional de Turismo, (México, D.F.: Editorial Atlante, S.A., 1941), p. 224:

<sup>11</sup> Pani, *Tres Monografías*, 238-239.

<sup>12</sup> Pani, *Apuntes Autobiográficos*, 349. The company which constructed the Hotel Reforma, Edificios Modernos, S.A., was formed on 15 December 1933, and at that time Pani assumed the direction of that enterprise.

his first project on Avenida Juárez;<sup>13</sup> Pani then devoted his energies to the construction of the first class Hotel Reforma, on the Paseo de la Reforma midway between the equestrian statue of Charles IV and Chapultepec Park, which opened in December 1936.

The Hotel Reforma represented the beginning of a new era of incipient cosmopolitanism in Mexico City.<sup>14</sup> Further, in the construction of a twelve-story building on the Paseo de la Reforma, bastion of the aristocracy where the lands were exclusively for individual development and use, architectural expression corresponding to the social and economic change engendered by the Revolution began. It should be noted that few buildings in the capital exceeded four floors, and several of those were hotels constructed to court the tourist: the Hotel Imperial, of five stories, the Hotel Francis, and the Hotel Regis, originally designed for *El Imparcial*, a Porfirian periodical. As summarized by architectural historian Manuel Larrosa, “seen thusly, the Hotel Reforma remains as an urban node that marks, for good and for bad, the North Americanization of the lifestyle of the city of Mexico.”<sup>15</sup>

These new developments on the streets of Mexico City did mark the beginning of a new stage of North American cultural penetration of Mexico, which would further alter the content of the Centro Histórico. As the city’s oldest quarters were being “packaged” for foreign consumption, the Mexican government sought to

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<sup>13</sup> Construction progressed, with the metal structure and the greater part of the slabs of ferro-concrete of floors and the covering of column completed, when an “imbecile intrigue”, according to Pani, “hatched by the representative [later accused of fraud] of the Ferrocarriles Nacionales in the last Asamblea General Ordinaria de Accionistas -- eliminated from the Consejo de Administración the two of its members . . . who considered the possibilities of the financing of the enterprise.” The Consejo disintegrated and the work was suspended at the end of 1936. Had this incident not occurred, Pani argued, the hotel would have been functioning for some years. The Dirección de Pensiones Civiles de Retiro acquired the whole or the majority of these shares and the construction of the building resumed several years later. Pani, *Tres Monografías*, 241.

<sup>14</sup> Manuel Larrosa, *Mario Pani, Arquitecto de su Epoca*, (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Impr. Universitaria, 1985), 29.

<sup>15</sup> Larrosa, 31.

conceal the city's discordant memories and contested present. Tourists wanted to see picturesque, pre-colonial or colonial Mexico - a static version of a kinetic society. To provide this for the anticipated tens of thousands of visitors arriving following the completion of the Pan American Highway from Laredo to Mexico City, Pani and others in government drew on a portion of public memory of those distant epochs, and sought to broaden it to encompass current Mexican realities. This interpretation of contemporary Mexico held significant shortcomings. The society and government which had constructed those picturesque buildings in the city center was long passed; efforts to rekindle it for a foreign audience would amount to a regression in time, an action not consonant with official revolutionary rhetoric as well as with the government's fledgling social justice programs. These shortcomings would be clearly manifested during the Cárdenas administration.

### Incomplete Modernity

Upon assuming the presidency in November 1934, Lázaro Cárdenas was faced with serious economic, social and political problems as well as a troubled capital city which manifested serious problems of congestion, sprawl, and inadequate city services. Mexico City had always been a city of contrasts, providing physical evidence of the existence, struggle and competition among what Lesley B. Simpson and Luis Cabrera described as the "many Mexicos." In aggregate the city appeared to be "well paved and in a fever of reconstruction and modernization," while the rest of the nation remained "in its immense sterility and poverty, and . . . isolation."<sup>16</sup> Yet within Mexico City there were as striking contrasts, providing physical evidence of severe disparities in wealth and facility, in which one would see

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<sup>16</sup> Hubert Herring, "Introduction" in Herring and Herbert Weinstock, eds., *Renascent Mexico* (New York: Covici Frede Publishers, 1935), 12.

bare-footed, pyjama-clad Indians, trotting patiently along under their man-killing loads, elegant women, whose clothes come from the Rue de la Paix, kneeling devoutly in prayer on the floor of the same church with the most ragged and poverty stricken of pelados; palaces and hovels, and scores of buildings redolent of a storied and violent past stand side by side in a city that seems by turns Spanish, French and American, depending upon the section in which you find yourself.<sup>17</sup>

As R.H.K. Marett, a British investor residing in the city in the mid-1930s witnessed, this was a city in which the new “La Nacional” skyscraper “which might have been imported ready-made from New York, clashed with the marble monstrosity of the National Theater,” a monument he believed to be more suitable to the “prosperity and complaisance of the Díaz period.” Further jarring the senses, in the immediate surroundings, “the theatre in turn clashed with the Sanborn building (Casa de los Azulejos), a perfect example of Colonial elegance, with its exterior covered by lovely Puebla tiles.” Such architectural chaos was amplified by diversity on the street level. Severe congestion existed as the capital’s narrow cobblestone streets were not designed to carry two-way motorized traffic. And,

on the crowded pavements the well-dressed mingled with peasants in their picturesque costumed, and workmen in blue overalls; for even in this capital of one million inhabitants the primitive intruded to some extent. In front of an ultra-fashionable shop there would be, as likely as not, a dirty wooden stall with a ragged Indian squatting beside the gutter. It was as though the old and the new were engaged in their age-long struggle, with modernity victorious in the main engagement, but with the primitive still carrying on a relentless guerrilla warfare on the outskirts. Away from the main streets the Indian still held the field, and it was modernity that intruded.<sup>18</sup>

Marett’s description yields several points. For one, despite governmental policies to integrate the Indian into national life, a significant socioeconomic and cultural gap still existed, and in fact was widening. Secondly, the city had always

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<sup>17</sup> "Mexico City -- The Most Exotic Capital of the Americas," House Beautiful, 86.

<sup>18</sup> R.H.K. Marett, *An Eyewitness of Mexico*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 160.

been a negotiated product -- of the privileged and less so, particularly in the meeting on the street level of these groups, as the wooden stall touched the exclusive shop. Slums and mansions, wooden shacks and expensive stores coexisted, albeit uneasily, on the streets of the Centro Histórico and in the public memory. Each was Mexican. Each was a product of the Revolution.

And although some of the city's contrasts formed picturesque landscapes such as those seen in Santo Domingo, where modern construction met viceregal structures of the Aduana (customs house) and Escuela de Medicina (School of Medicine), others were manifestations of deeper problems in Mexican society. *Excélsior* found that alongside "skyscrapers of marble" there existed "moth-eaten pigsties without architecture or archaeology," women in dresses of the richest manufacture, next to "barefoot peasants covered with sores."<sup>19</sup> The poor continued to inhabit the *vecindades* of the Centro Histórico, the viceregal era blocks now lacking their ancient comforts of elegance and denying their occupants access to educational, health care or hygienic facilities. Another segment of society, those to whom the "revolution brought justice," lived a world away from this squalor, in new subdivisions to the west and south-west, in modern functionalist or California-colonial homes.<sup>20</sup>

Recalling Paz' observations of the city "lived together in streets. . .", if Mexico City is considered to be a negotiated product of those who govern, live, work and in it, then it can be expected to mirror the social and economic inequities of society, the existence and rate of social change, as well as the divisions in public memory pertaining to the city and the wider context of the Revolution. Traces of conspicuous consumption by the rich and middle classes were apparent, as well as the bare

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<sup>19</sup> Editorial "La Ciudad de los Contrastes," *Excélsior*, 24 May 1934.

<sup>20</sup> The colonias Lomas de Chapultepec, Anzures, Polanco and Romas were popular among the wealthier classes. See real estate advertisements, *Excélsior*, December 1934.

existence of the poor on a variety of levels. This consumption was visible in new construction to satisfy demands for consumer goods and diversions. The economically advantaged patronized splendid new theaters constructed during the Cárdenas regime, including Emilio Aczcárraga's lavish neo-colonial Teatro Alameda<sup>21</sup>, the art-decò Cine Hipódromo Segura, with a facade of black and white marble accentuated with neon decoration, the Cine Encanto, whose "majestic facade" was seen to be a "source of pride for the city," and the Teatro Chino, whose pagodas replaced a crumbling eighteenth-century mansion, and whose advertising promised it "would soon be one of the greatest prides of the city."<sup>22</sup> Such structures as these, the new Academia Metropolitana at Plaza Santos Degollado, or Ciro's nightclub at the Reforma, were quite distant in social space from pulquerias such as the Glories of Obregón, the Celebrating Monkeys, Let's See What Happens, or the Men Wise Without Studying, near the vecindades to the east of the Zócalo, where "the forgotten man can reach the heights and the lowest depths, taste the fruits of heaven and of hell."<sup>23</sup>

The divisions in Mexican society did not disappear during Cárdenas' term. Their persistence was manifest in architecture -- in commercial, governmental and residential construction in Mexico City. Lázaro Cárdenas began his term amid considerable optimism that the Revolution could be extended to the masses. Yet the city continued to manifest as many, if not more, troublesome contrasts and divisions. One cause of the contrasts in Mexico City lay in the rapid population

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<sup>21</sup> Carlos Obregón Santacilia, "Cuatro Tiempos en la Fisonomía de la Ciudad de México," *Revista de Difusión Cultural* 1 (September/October 1957) 7.

<sup>22</sup> "Se Inaugura el Cine "Encanto," *Excélsior*, 5 May 1937. Teatro China advertising, *Excélsior*, 28 May 1939.

<sup>23</sup> J.H. Plenn, *Mexico Marches*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1939), 327. Pulqueria names from Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars: The Story of the Mexican Spirit*, (New York: Payson & Clarke Ltd., 1929), 174. Brenner observed that the names themselves of pulquerias offer a "haphazard. . .commentary on the national scene."

growth throughout Cárdenas' term. Metropolitan growth increased at a rate of 4 percent per year, with an increase from 1,229,000 inhabitants in 1930, to 1,757,000 in 1940.<sup>24</sup> And the 1940 census indicated that about half the people currently residing in Mexico City had been born elsewhere. Some of this population growth can be attributed to natural increase.<sup>25</sup> Yet a significant amount was due to migration from rural areas, as well as from abroad, adding new elements to the cityscape, and further diluting its "traditional" character.

As journalist J.H. Plenn observed, the largest "foreign" colonies in the city were composed of Mexicans from the states who had relocated to the city.<sup>26</sup> The cityscape also yields evidence of increasing numbers of foreign nationals residing in Mexico City. While United States and European nationals left the greatest imprint, and thus were the most visible, immigration from areas as diverse as Guatemala and China also served to increase the city's population and alter its fabric.<sup>27</sup> As Luis González noted, a good number of the Europeans and North

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<sup>24</sup> Hector Sánchez Campero, 'Demografía de la Cuenca de México,' in Simposio sobre el Valle y la Ciudad de México, Latin American Conference, International Geographical Union, (México, 1966) IV, 184-196] Centro de Estudios Económicos y Demográficos, *Dinámica de la Población de México*, 106.

<sup>25</sup> Concerning population growth, Luis Unikel found migration to be an "important factor although its relative weight is often overstated. During the early decades of the city's growth, when the demand from industry for labor was high, migration flows accounted for around 60 per cent of population expansion, with the remainder the result of natural increase." Unikel, "La Dinámica del Crecimiento de la Ciudad de México," in *Ensayos sobre el Desarrollo Urbano de México*, (México, D.F.: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1974), 176. See also Gilberto Loyo, "Notas Sobre La Evolución Demográfica de la Ciudad de México," *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística* 45 (1936), 219.

<sup>26</sup> Plenn, 326

<sup>27</sup> Some 150,000 foreign nationals resided in the nation, approximately one-third in the capital city. Among them were, 8,000 Canadians, 6000 French, and 50,000 Spanish, 17,000 Guatemalans, 19,000 Chinese and 12,000 US citizens. Dirección General de Estadística, *Quinto Censo de la Población*, 103-106. In 1937, the Confederación Nacional de Izquierdas presented an initiative to Cárdenas to form a "barrio judeo" in the city, "with boundaries of the calle Correo Mayor, the quadrants of La Soledad from east to west, and of calle Regina to that of calle Moneda." In this area, "all of the small commerce of the Jews would be located." The Confederation argued that this measure was



Americans “figured in the local aristocracy, although the majority enlarged the ranks of the middle classes.”<sup>28</sup> As they tended not to live in segregated areas, their presence was felt throughout the city, and lend it “a definite cosmopolitan air,”<sup>29</sup> if not a particularly nationalistic one. Moreover, they irrevocably altered the city’s landscape. Verna Millan somewhat cynically remarked that in Colonia Roma, or in Lomas de Chapultepec, these individuals built “beautiful homes, exquisite replicas of those they left behind in Boston, Stockholm, Geneva or Liverpool, and here they try to pretend, for brief moments, that they have not broken completely with the past.”<sup>30</sup>

And the city accommodated them well, whether at the Ritz bar, as the English language column of *Excelsior* advised, “you don’t even have to think, because all the attendants speak English,” or at the roof-garden of the new Hotel Reforma, where “residents or ‘extranjeros’ . . . sip and chat and enjoy themselves.” New or enlarged department stores catered to their needs as well as those of the native middle and upper classes: the High Life, the Puerto de Liverpool, the Palacio de Hierro.<sup>31</sup> The art-decò facade of the Palacio de Liverpool introduced corporate iconography to the centro histórico, just one block south of the Zócalo.

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necessary, as other cities also provided Jews with their own quarter, and that Jewish commerce was expanding too rapidly, contributing to further congestion, and was “bad for other established commerce.” Further, the Confederation found that foreigners were “invading” the capital, particularly Jews, and appealed to Cárdenas’ sense of nationalism to halt such activity. “Un Ghetto en Esta Capital,” *Excelsior*, 29 March 1937.

<sup>28</sup> Luis González y González, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana, Período 1934-1940*, Núm. 14, *Los Artífices del Cardenismo*, (México, D.F.: Colegio de México, 1979), 42.

<sup>29</sup> Plenn, 325.

<sup>30</sup> Verna Carleton Millan, *Mexico Reborn*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939), 149.

<sup>31</sup> Debonair, “The Stroller,” *Excelsior*, 18 March 1937.

On lands in the Centro Histórico which had been subject to a series of conquests during the past several hundred years, there now appeared evidence of the most recent contest for supremacy. Though non-violent in nature, the conquest represented by the proliferation of foreign enterprises and icons in the historic district is a sign of the changing direction of the Revolution. The 1930s witnessed an increase in the numbers of foreign enterprises operating in Mexico City. Amidst nationalist proclamations and the continual search for a national identity, the cityscape saw new instances of European and North American penetration. To cite but a few: the Servicio Bosch at Palma 33, and ubiquitous Bayer advertising on store fronts, both of which would pose some problems with the coming of World War II. North American companies expanded their markets in Mexico: General Electric had lavish showrooms at the Electromotores, S.A. on Isabel la Católica 43 and at Artículo 123 and San Juan de Letrán, Federal Tires was located at Guerrero 255, and Norge appliances and RCA radios were offered for sale at the corner of Avenida Juárez and Balderas.

More visible perhaps were the auto dealerships, among them the Graham showroom at Insurgentes 116, Autos Universales at Paseo de la Reforma 20 for Chevrolet, the Casa Azcárraga at Reforma 96 for Dodge, Plymouth and DeSoto models, the Casa Guajarda at Avenida. Morelos 16 for Chevrolets, Compañía Metropolitana, S.A. at General Prim 90 for Studebaker, Miller Motors at Bucareli 4 for Buick, Durkin REO Motors at Lafragua 15 for the REO Speedwagon, and Automotriz O’Farrill at Bucareli 18 for Packards.

The appearance of these new showrooms on the urban landscape supported claims of a widening socio-economic gap despite presidential efforts to the contrary. In 1938, prices for cars ranged from 5,400 pesos for a Chevrolet “modelo master” to 9,500 pesos for a La Salle. Those who had money could drive and not have to take trams or other public conveyance, and thus not have to “mix” with the popular

classes. They could live away from the city center and places of employment, a factor which contributed to further development of new colonias in the southwestern sections of the city, to residential segregation and to the gradual devolution of economic power away from the city center.

By means of such evidence, the capital illustrated the growth of the gap between revolutionary rhetoric and reality. While Cárdenas pledged social reforms which would serve as “purifying fires,”<sup>32</sup> there were all too few individuals in the city who could afford a new La Salle, given daily wages of three to four pesos. The gap between rhetoric and reality would widen throughout the 1930s, as the cityscape revealed distinct worlds, the existence of which indicated that the Revolution had not erased the fundamental inequities of Mexican society. Further, while replacing a street name which represented the imposition of an alien, colonial power with one which signified revolutionary valor, as in the case of Calles Aquiles Serdan, Luis Mora, Gabriel Leyva, or Francisco I. Madero, serves in the creation of a mythic basis for a new Mexican nationalism, the gesture is weakened over time if the contents of the street consist largely of foreign manufacture, for an elite segment of the population.

### The City as Caricature

In response to the new levels of intensity with which foreigners were leaving their mark, particularly the North Americans, certain observers feared that the city was beginning to lose its individuality and integrity. In an *Excelsior* editorial Manuel Horta warned that Mexico City was becoming a caricature of a North American city. While acknowledging that “the exigencies of modern life” and aspirations of modern life “have made the construction of spacious, well-illuminated

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<sup>32</sup> Lázaro Cárdenas, “Mensaje radiofónico desde la ciudad de México,” 2 November 1935. In Leonel Duran, ed. Lázaro Cárdenas, *Ideario Público*, (México, D.F.: Serie Popular Era, 1972), 20.

buildings,” he noted with dismay the passing “of traditional things, perfumed of legend, that the demolishing pickax pulverizes before the exigencies of city traffic,” the construction of gothic palaces in the first quarter of the city, and the “ridiculous ‘Hollywood’ imitations” in the stylish suburbs, which were now viewed as the ultimate in style, the spread of the “Quick-Luncha” and businesses with foreign names emblazoned in gaudy neon, all serving “to kill the spirit of our metropolis.” The Churrigueresque facade of an old church now stood near the “caricature of the New York skyscraper and the apartment house copied from German magazines.” Horta saw these developments as acts of disrespect against the city’s heritage - acts of “violence against its colonial and august palaces.” Noting with some dread the “current of tourists that will inundate the city when the highway to Laredo opens,” he sought to conserve remaining historical monuments and proposed that the government place on the Consejo Consultivo “competent men with authority and strength to impede the absurd transformation of Mexico.” Horta suggested that artists, historians and architects -- those “without political shading nor compromising interests” step forth to serve as “caretakers of the capital.”<sup>33</sup>

Horta was aware of the difficulties inherent in historic preservation. The city could not be turned into a museum, given that urban life was a process. It could not be frozen in a given moment of time, such as the viceregal. Addressing this point, he stated,

we are not optimists. Nothing can make a clear plan before the push of business and the urgencies of moving civilization. New men will follow, eroding the traces of another epoch. In place of dark tezontle and sculptures stone, reinforced concrete and steel skeletons. Capricious names of disputed characters cap poetic reminiscences of passages and palaces.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Manuel Horta, “México, Caricatura de Ciudad Norteamericana,” *Excélsior*, 10 May 1935.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

However discordant new structures might be with the traditional urban fabric, the city would contain them, evidence of the most recent competition for urban space and primacy. And as a result of this process, the city was shifting away from its former identification as “city of palaces.” The society which had built the palaces was long passed, and now the city had to meet contemporary needs, and express the identity of modern Mexico. Further, as the city continued to grow far beyond its colonial boundaries to encompass new territory in each direction, and its government and private enterprise constructed new buildings on vacant land in these areas, the city’s center of gravity shifted. By the end of the Cárdenas era, as British real estate investor R.H.K. Marett witnessed,

most of the fine buildings of the colonial epoch were now in a semi-slum area. One could still visit them, and through massive portals obtain fascinating glimpses of shady patios within, but in the bustle of everyday life one seldom found time to do so. The result was that to all intents and purposes the Colonial Capital -- the old “City of Palaces” -- was just as dead as Tenochtitlán.<sup>35</sup>

While teocallis and temples were long gone, victims of previous conquest, and although its colonial form was gradually eroding, the “City of Palaces” continued to hold vital place in the public memory. Governments and individuals sought to forge a national identity throughout this period. Perhaps, as many asserted, a portion of the city’s colonial character could be retained, and now reworked to fit a modern, secular, revolutionary identity.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> R.H.K. Marett, *An Eye-Witness of Mexico*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 20-21.

<sup>36</sup> Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power, A History of Modern Mexico 1810-1996*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 19.

## Regulating the Urban Form

While Horta's statements may appear quixotic, others shared his perception that the city was beginning to lose its essence in the current wave of growth and thus tried to control its content. Without some new regulation and strict enforcement mechanisms, precious monuments would be lost to "the pickax of modern civilization," as one critic stated. The Cárdenas administration's solution was the promulgation of planning and zoning legislation in 1936 and 1937, specifically the "Ley de Planificación y Zonificación para el Distrito Federal," the "Reglamento de la Ley de Planificación y Zonificación para el Distrito Federal," the "Acuerdo que Reglamenta el Funcionamiento del Consejo de Arquitectura," and the "Reglamentación de la Zonificación de las Arterias Principales de la Ciudad." Given the failure of measures to regulate urban growth promulgated during the Maximato which had largely relied on voluntary compliance and submission of blueprints prior to the commencement of construction, and had neglected to provide adequate resources to ensure enforcement of the law, the new legislation contained specific provisions which established a new system of oversight, timetables for submission of plans prior to receipt of construction permits, and listed punitive measures which could be taken against violators.

Underlying the rationale of this law was the administration's belief that the planning process could be conducted apolitically and impartially, by disinterested professionals. The 1936 "Ley de Planificación y Zonificación para el Distrito Federal" and its "Reglamento" created the Comisión de Planificación del Distrito Federal (Planning Commission of the Federal District) as the "regulating organism for all the planning functions in the District," charging it with achieving "the harmonious development of planning." Members of this commission, including the head of the Federal District, the secretaries of Finance and Public Credit and of Communications and Public Works, would be assisted by the Comisión Mixta de

Planificación (Mixed Planning Commission). This commission was composed of the Director de Servicios Urbanos y Obras Públicas del DDF, (Director of Urban Service and Public Works for the DDF), the Director General de Crédito de la Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público (Managing Director of Credit of the Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit) and the general director of the Banco de México (Bank of Mexico). Joining them would be nine others, named by the Confederación de Cámaras de Comercio (Confederation of Chambers of Commerce), the Confederación de Industriales (Confederation of Industries), the Sociedad de Ingenieros y Arquitectos (Society of Engineers and Architects), the Asociaciones de Propietarios de Bienes Raíces del DF (Associations of Property Owners of the DF), and the Asociación de Banqueros (Association of Bankers).

Professionals serving on these committees were expected to place their knowledge “at the disposition of the collective interest.” The commissions were constructed to be inclusive; that is, to ensure representation from most major professional groups and government departments which had interests in the development of the capital. Presumably, conflicts were to be managed within the group, thus ensuring more feasible and coherent zoning and planning. As their salaries were to be paid from the DDF budget and members were prohibited from accepting payments from other sources, the law insured their accountability to the DDF and to the public interest. These particular provisions were intended to remedy problems of corruption in public office, as in past administrations several individuals entrusted with oversight of the planning process and evaluation of new construction saw the potential for personal enrichment via land speculation and seized the opportunities.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> “Ley de Planificación y Zonificación para el Distrito Federal,” *Diario Oficial*, 31 August 1936; “Reglamento de la Ley de Planificación y Zonificación para el Distrito Federal,” *Diario Oficial*, 31 August 1936.

A recurring theme throughout this legislation was the Le Corbusian faith in rational, scientific method and evaluation to resolve complex socio-economic problems, which gained currency in Mexico City in the late 1920s and early 1930s due to the efforts of young socialist architects Juan Legarreta, Alvaro Aburto and Juan O’Gorman. Blueprints, designs and models were to be submitted for study, along with statements as to the practical and aesthetic advantages to be gained by the execution of a given project. But this responsibility for evaluation necessarily involved subjective interpretation, for there was no absolute measure for aesthetic beauty. Nor were there standards to assess “fitness,” “harmony” or other criteria under which proposals were to be judged. Little consensus existed in the architectural community as to a preferred style of construction in Mexico City, as the city’s streets indicate, with the simultaneous use of neo-colonial, art-decò, California-colonial, and functionalist styles.

The Cárdenas government made an attempt to forge such consensus in 1936, with the “Acuerdo que Reglamenta el Funcionamiento del Consejo Consultivo de Arquitectura.” This measure, promulgated by the president in October, 1936, established a Consejo Consultivo, or Consultative Council, with responsibility for studying construction plans “exclusively from the aesthetic point of view.” Members of the panel, composed of an architect from the Oficina de Planificación in the Dirección de Obras Públicas, and two architect designated by the latter office, were to give their opinions as to “whether these projects are adequate or inadequate in relation to the buildings which one would find in the area of their proposed positions.” Thus they were in a position to determine what memories the Centro Histórico would hold, as they studied and classified all proposed projects approved by the sanitation and construction authorities “which had aesthetic interest” in the



DF.<sup>38</sup> This measure specified the procedures for review and amendment of proposals, yet significant problems remained pertaining to the composition of the Consejo itself, made up exclusively by those with connections to the Dirección de Obras Públicas and thus not representative of the wider architectural community in the city. Further, the three-member committee lacked the resources in which to study the large number of projects submitted for its approval. Although Cárdenas' stated intent was to provide the means to achieve a harmonization of styles in the city, the Consejo was not able to forge a consensus, as evidence of the reigning "architectural chaos" suggested, with architect continuing to build in often discordant styles.

The Cárdenas government discovered, in time, that it could not legislate away the chaos which existed in the capital's form, as long as different styles retained their ability to represent various interpretations of identity and status, and respond to the needs of those who built in the capital. The government made further attempts to do so, however, through the "Reglamentación de Zonificación de las Arterias Principales de la Ciudad," promulgated in January 1938. Under this measure the government attempted to regulate what types of businesses could build in certain locations, thus controlling which forms would be allowed in the city. The Comisión de Planificación was to designate which streets were "principal arteries," subject to stringent regulation. Thus on streets such as San Juan de Letrán, Avenidas Juárez, Madero, Hidalgo and 16 de Septiembre, among others, the construction of new buildings for factories, gas stations, warehouses, pulquerías, coalyards and "unhealthy businesses and temporary construction" was prohibited. New construction in these areas had to comply with specific guidelines as developed by the Consejo de Arquitectura (Architecture Council) which related to building

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<sup>38</sup> "Acuerdo que Reglamenta el Funcionamiento del Consejo Consultivo de Arquitectura," *Diario Oficial*, 2 October 1936.

height, alignment with neighboring buildings, and side streets. Building facades had to employ “material of the first quality, such as natural rock or well-made imitations,” with finish work to be “of the best that can be obtained in Mexico.” The law also contained provisions for the Consejo Consultivo de Arquitectura to determine condemnation and demolition of properties when deemed necessary, and timetables for the submission of plans to the Consejo and the Comisión de Planificación, as well as a schedule of fines assessed for non-compliance.<sup>39</sup>

Framers of this law were careful so as not to confer official status to a particular architectural style. Only Article 4 addressed this issue, in its prohibition of the use of the Mansard roof, a symbol to many of pre-revolutionary culture and Porfirian dictatorship. Yet in wording which required new construction to harmonize with existing structures from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, the law attempted to exclude modern styles, as well as the messages contained therein. There was little in a Le Corbusian “concrete box” which would harmonize with the tezontle and chiluca construction of the Casa de los Condes de Calimaya, the Palacio de Iturbide, or other viceregal buildings in the area. As will be discussed subsequently, to some more left-leaning members of the architectural community, this represented a silencing, or a denial, of the message of modernity and progress, if not of the Revolution itself, which modern styles such as functionalism carried. Their objections gave way to new debate on the image of the city.

The Cárdenas government along with many prominent architects agreed with Horta that the city was in danger of losing part of its vital heritage. Yet at the same time Cárdenas also pursued policies which directly placed that heritage in danger. And in the end, as Kostof found in cities elsewhere, the truth was in the

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<sup>39</sup> “Reglamentación de Zonificación de las Arterias Principales de la Ciudad de México,” *Diario Oficial*, 4 January 1938.

process: a city cannot stagnate, frozen in a given moment of time. However much it might have wanted to, the Cárdenas government could not halt this process of transformation in the city, once it chose to pursue a program of capitalist development, a policy which aided both native and foreign enterprises. Further, this policy contributed to the emergence of “a new set of Mexican industrialists,” who also left their mark on the cityscape at this early date. Among them were Carlos Trouyet, Romulo O’Farrill of the Banco Comercial Mexicano, and Emilio Azcárraga in the radio and motion picture industries.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, the image of the city would not be determined by such carefully crafted legislation. Instead, it would continue to be negotiated, chaotic, a product of a Revolution and of its various components acting in concert, as well as in opposition.

#### “Hágase Rico!” -- The Capitalist City

During the Cárdenas years, a new fixture on the urban skyline appeared, competing with the church dome and spire. Courtesy of the popular National Lottery, the neon sign blazed in confident red letters, “Hágase Rico!”<sup>41</sup> Though in the experience of many a migrant to Mexico City the sign might well have read

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<sup>40</sup> Frank Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 267. As Brandenburg commented on this period, “the 1930s witnessed the entrance of the state into ownership of such important industries as electric power and petroleum, but contrary to some detractors of Cárdenas, who tried to represent him as a Communist, his economic policies harmed few Mexican industrialists. . . who survived and in most cases expanded their industries, while dozens of large and hundreds of medium-sized industries date their origin to the Cárdenas epoch. Cárdenas opposed traditional foreign capital shackling Mexico’s basic industries, but he did not oppose Mexican industrialists manufacturing for the domestic market or foreign capital of non-traditional types.”

<sup>41</sup> The National Lottery had itself constructed a new, bold building in an art-deco vein. At 26 stories, it was the highest attempted in Mexico City to date. Like the La Nacional building, it featured an innovative foundation which “floated” on the subsoil; the dynamics of which were presented by the structure’s engineer, José A. Cuevas, at the International Conference on Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering at Harvard University, in June, 1935.

“Hágase Pobre,” to others optimism seemed to outweigh conditions of economic hardship, particularly if one was skilled in the construction trades. As Plenn found,

a new tempo stirs the forgotten man in Mexico City, new social ideas, new buildings--a construction boom. . . . Syncopated rhythms from the land of syncopation: a steam-powered pile-driver, hammering forty-foot poles down into the earth, right into the heart of Mexico City, for the new Banco de Mexico building. Sixteen hours a day, for months . . . . Machine-age music by the Raymond Concrete Pile Company of New Jersey.

And so, all over Mexico City--from Article 123 Street to November 20 Avenue, from the Street of Bitterness to the Street of the Lost Child -- this symphony of construction was being heard in 1938: steam shovels, pavement-breakers, riveting hammers, welders, a melody of today, with an accompaniment of yesterday, Mexico's song of tomorrow.<sup>42</sup>

How did this “song of tomorrow” resonate with the record of the past, still so visible on the city streets? A tour of the city center in 1936, to 1940 would reveal this sort of activity on almost every street. Construction projects for government offices included Antonio Muñoz García’s designs of the new building for the Suprema Corte de Justicia, (Supreme Court of Justice) located on the site of the former Plaza del Volador, on Avenida 16 de Septiembre across from the Palacio Nacional, whose addition of a third story was now complete.<sup>43</sup> The Edificio para el Sindicato de Cinematografistas (Union of Cinema Workers Building) at Calle Orozco y Berra, designed by Juan O’Gorman, was perceived as “eloquent testimony of the architecture of the Cárdenist period.” Considered with the Edificio del

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<sup>42</sup> Plenn, 322.

<sup>43</sup> The first stone for the Supreme Court building was laid on 20 November 1936, as part of the government’s commemoration of the anniversary of the Revolution. As such, the building’s construction served as a reclamation of civic space in the name of the Revolution, and as a sign of the achievements of the government emanating from that Revolution. For the design competition results, see “Proyectos para la Suprema Corte de Justicia,” *Obras Públicas* 1 (May 1934), 14-25; on the ground-breaking ceremonies, see “Primer Piedra de un Edificio,” *Excélsior*, 20 November 1936.

Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas (Mexican Electricians' Union Building) by Enrique Yáñez and Ricardo Rivas, these buildings provided

testimony of the new plastic language assumed by the working class, not only in their dwellings, but also in their public meeting places, presenting themselves as a consequence of the full support that the State, headed by Cárdenas, gave to the free organization of workers. In this manner, functionalism, which in earlier years had been cunningly manipulated by large capital, was perceived in the Cárdenas years to hold a symbolic value as an architecture of transformation, identified with the most revolutionary and progressive sectors of society.<sup>44</sup>

Other unions received new quarters as well, providing concrete evidence of Cárdenas' support for the organization of labor and of the significance of labor to the governing party. The Edificio de Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la República Mexicana (Union of Railway Workers) on Avenida Hidalgo, provided "all the comforts which exist in our time," in a "completely modern building."<sup>45</sup> And in 1938 the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (Confederation of Mexican Workers) moved into its new headquarters, located in a former convent on Avenida Madero 74. And planning was underway in 1939 on a social center for CTM members, consisting of a seven-story building with assembly rooms, a hotel, and a four-thousand seat auditorium, clinic and other facilities.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Marisol Aja, "Juan O'Gorman." in *Apuntes para la Historia y Crítica de la Arquitectura Mexicana del Siglo XX: 1900-1980*, vol. 2, (México, D.F.: Secretaria de Educación Pública, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1982), 36. See also plans in "Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas," *Arquitectura/Mexicana* 6 (July 1940), 47-50; José Luis Benlliure, "Sobre la Arquitectura y su Enseñanza en México en la Década de las Cuarentas," in *La Práctica de la Arquitectura y su Enseñanza en México*, Secretaria de Educación Pública, Cuadernos de Arquitectura y Conservación del Patrimonio Artístico Series, (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1983), 27.

<sup>45</sup> "Nuevo Edificio para el Sindicato de Trabajadores de Ferrocarrileros," *Excélsior*, 2 February 1936.

<sup>46</sup> "Edificio de una Central," *Excélsior*, 10 January 1939.

Carlos Obregón Santacilia executed his art-decò-inspired design for the nine-story Edificio Guardiola, intended to serve as annex for the Banco de México, across San Juan de Letrán from the Palacio de Bellas Artes. To those who saw the addition of functionalism to the cityscape as a sign of Mexican achievement, the building served as a symbol of the realization of the Cárdenas government's objective to provide the country with a banking system independent of foreign interest.<sup>47</sup> Other observers, such as José Cossío, who equated the presence of modern architecture in the area with the obliteration of the past, lamented the passing of a colonial gem, "demolished to make room for an ugly building."<sup>48</sup> A few blocks away, Emilio Méndez constructed the art-decò Banco Aboumrad at Isabel la Católica 33, in which he began a trend in the capital for the construction of massive banking buildings, with this appearing to be "a strong-box of noble stone, whose interior is a liturgical sequence, that in the manner of oriental boxes, culminates in the door of the safe, and repeats those themes of stone in metal."<sup>49</sup> José Villagrán García built a new commercial building at Palma 30, with five floors of space for offices and commercial enterprises. As *Arquitectura/México* praised his achievement, where "the metal covering of the facade walls of this property

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<sup>47</sup> Gilberto Bosques, ed., *The National Revolutionary Party of Mexico and the Six-Year Plan*, (Mexico, D.F.: Bureau of Foreign Information of the National Revolutionary Party, 1937), 27. As Bosques related, the Cárdenas government hoped "through this independence Mexico shall be able to carry out without fetters, transforming its system of land tenure and of capital investment along lines making for human betterment rather than for private profits." Cárdenas also stressed the significance of these innovations in banking in achieving Mexican economic development free from foreign control. Further to this point, Lorenzo Meyer argued that between 1934 and 1935, through legal actions combined with political pressure, "almost all the foreign banking interests were eliminated." He added, "Credit, then, was Mexicanized and with that the Banking Revolution was consolidated." Meyer, *El Conflicto Social y los Gobiernos del Maximato*, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana Series*, (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1978), 69. See also "Informe del General de División Lázaro Cárdenas, presidente de la República Mexicana, ante el H. Congreso de la Unión, corresponde al Ejercicio comprendido entre el 1 de Septiembre de 1936 y el 31 de agosto de 1937."

<sup>48</sup> Cossío, 78.

<sup>49</sup> "El Banco Aboumrad," *Arquitectura/México* 7 (August 1940), 37.

contributes to express the artistic transposition of the industrial spirit to human habitation, with all restrained splendor that it is suited for.”<sup>50</sup>

Enrique de la Mora and José Creixell constructed an office building at Avenida Juárez 30, featuring a novel use of a deep lot with narrow frontage on the main street. Its rounded corners and setbacks minimized the disadvantages of the lot, and offered most offices a view of the Alameda. The architects designed this building to be erected in three sections, thus allowing each to settle and move past another, minimizing stresses to the structure, an innovation which would be copied by other architects in the 1940s and 1950s. Several multi-use buildings were constructed in this period, based on the precedent of Juan Segura’s Edificio Ermita, among them the Edificio Beaumont at Balderas 32, which functioned as an office building and Dodge showroom.<sup>51</sup>

Another significant portion of the capital’s new commercial construction was that of hotels. Before 1935 accommodations for tourists in Mexico City were scant. When the city hosted 5000 members of Rotary International at a conference in 1935, it had to prepare a “Ciudad Pullman” to accommodate its guests in a specially constructed rail station for 175 Pullman cars.<sup>52</sup> For the enterprising, opportunities existed to develop hotel properties, particularly following the opening of the Pan

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<sup>50</sup> “La Arquitectura de José Villagrán García,” *Arquitectura/México* 55 (September 1952), 158-59.

<sup>51</sup> Several new buildings combined apartment and office space, such as those for the Compañía de Seguros “La Nacional” at Paseo de la Reforma 27, and Francisco Martínez Negrete’s building at Reforma and el Ejido. Rafael García Granados, “Nuestra Ciudad,” *Excélsior*, 16 January 1939.

<sup>52</sup> “Se Construya a Toda Prisa la Ciudad Pullman,” *Excélsior*, 9 December 1934; “México Contará en Breve Plazo con una Gran Estación que se Destinará Únicamente a Cargas,” *Excélsior*, 24 December 1934; “Medio Millón se ha Invertido en la Ciudad Pullman,” *Excélsior*, 5 May 1935.

American Highway from Laredo to Mexico City.<sup>53</sup> Thus during the Cárdenas years the first large-scale developments of the city for travelers began.

Entrepreneurs built new hotels in the Centro Histórico, thus irreversibly altering the content of those streets. Among them was the Hotel Ontario, at Calles Uruguay and 5 de Febrero, designed with “all the healthful and comfortable conditions which the most exacting person might enjoy in his own home,” from which one could see “against the background of the deep blue sky the Popo and Ixtaccihuatl [volcanoes] standing out like sentinels. . .”<sup>54</sup> In November 1936, Alberto Pani opened his twelve-story “centro social y de negocios,” the Hotel Reforma, at Reforma and Paris, amid considerable fanfare. Press releases proclaimed it to be “majestuoso” -- the mark of “a new era in the activities of tourism in our country.”<sup>55</sup> In competition for the tourist peso, several new hotels vied for the honor of being the most elegant, comfortable, and beautiful. Among them was the Hotel Majestic, which proclaimed itself “without doubt the most elegant and important building to the west of the beautiful Plaza de la

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<sup>53</sup> Though more than one observer expressed dismay over this impending event and its likely impact on traditional Mexican life. See for example economist Stuart Chase’s observations: “We note the Ritz, the Regis, and the Geneve are all in the throes of endeavoring to superimpose Statler standards upon the slippery foundations of normal Mexican innkeeping. The two systems have nothing in common save board and bedding. When the stream of Buicks arrives over the new Laredo road, I prophesy piteous outcries from Americans deprived of their usual quota of steam heat, hot water and snappy service.” Chase, *Mexico, A Study of Two Americas*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), 265.

<sup>54</sup> *Excélsior* supplement, “Mexico City Travel and Tourist Edition,” December 1934.

<sup>55</sup> “El Elegante Hotel ‘Reforma’ Próximo a Inaugurarse,” *Excélsior*, 7 November 1936; “México Tiene ya un Hermoso Hotel Hecho Exprofeso para la Ciudad y sus Visitantes,” *Excélsior*, November 21, 1936. Some controversy also occurred with the opening of this hotel. In the later stages of construction, Pani dismissed his architect, Carlos Obregón Santacilia, with whom he had worked on several projects. Pani then placed his nephew Mario in charge of the project, and gave credit to Mario for the design’s execution and completion, Obregón Santacilia responded with a full-page advertisement in *Excélsior* offering proof that he was the original designer of the building and had in fact brought the project nearly to completion, and voiced his resentment at Alberto Pani for taking him off the project, a move “which brought dishonor to Alberto Pani.” “Los Planos del ‘Hotel Reforma’ Son del Arquitecto Carlos Obregón Santacilia,” *Excélsior*, 7 November 1936.



Constitución,” where visitors could “admire the plaza from their balcony or terrace. . . and gather a pleasant impression of our Mexico.”<sup>56</sup> The Hotel Ambassador, at Avenida México 77 and Michoacán, believed their enterprise to “represent the progress of the nation’s hotel industry and the enthusiastic effort of businessmen who did not scrimp in giving to Mexico a modern hotel, magnificently installing all of the necessities for national or international tourism.”<sup>57</sup> Similarly, proprietors Ignacio González Polo and Francisco Posada of the Hotel Lida at Calle Brasil 8 claimed that “in its preparation and arrangement no money or effort was spared in converting it into a hotel worthy of our metropolis and of the present day,”<sup>58</sup> a recognition that travelers were demanding amenities which had to be provided in order for the Mexican industry to be competitive in relation to the best hotels in Europe and the United States. The Hotel Regis, at Avenida Juárez 77, therefore possessed “all the requisites of a modern hotel,” offering guests entertainment at the Don Quixote Night Club, “for high class entertainment,” in its “Typical Mexican Floor Show.”

Other recently built or renovated properties included the Hotel Geneve, “the largest and most complete hostelry south of the Rio Grande”, the Hotel Isabel, opposite the National Library at Isabel la Católica , the Hotel Coliseo, at Bolívar 28, “a place of distinction and of businesses”; the Mayfair, at Calle Serapio Rendón 114, “an exclusive hotel in the Heart of Mexico City,”<sup>59</sup> the neo-colonial María Cristina at Calle de Lerma 31, and the Hotel Gillow, a “sumptuous building,” cited by

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<sup>56</sup> Advertisement in *Excélsior*, 7 March 1936.

<sup>57</sup> Advertisement in *Excélsior*, 29 March 1936.

<sup>58</sup> Advertisement in *Excélsior*, 14 November 1935.

<sup>59</sup> “Travel and Hotel Edition,” supplement to *Excélsior*, November 1935.

Excélsior as “another triumph in the advancement of our country.”<sup>60</sup> And construction began on the ambitious Hotel Palace, a project by Alberto Pani’s Compañía Explotadora de Hoteles, S.A., who with architects Carlos Obregón Santacilia and Mario Pani, aimed to make this property “one of the showplaces of the capital,” with 542 rooms, facing the Alameda.<sup>61</sup>

If “the hotel is a mirror of the city,” and in it is reflected the city’s “degree of culture and refinement,” as advertising for the Hotel Majestic proclaimed, then these structures contain valuable information on the direction of the revolution during Cárdenas’ tenure. Developments in hotel construction reveal a policy pursued by the Cárdenas government to promote tourism as a national business and thus a means of economic development along revolutionary and nationalist terms. The formation of the Departamento de Turismo under the direction of the Secretaría de Gobernación provided an institutional framework for the development of policy initiatives aimed at increasing the numbers of visitors to Mexico, as well as increasing their spending within the nation.<sup>62</sup> And Cárdenas established the Banco de Crédito Hotelero, whose public bonds would be used to fund the construction and adaptation of hotel properties.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> “Inauguración del Hotel Gillow,” Excélsior, 19 December 1937.

<sup>61</sup> “Palace Hotel to be the Finest in Mexico,” Supplement to Excélsior, “Mexico City Travel and Hotel Edition,” November 1935. This property was later renamed the Hotel Del Prado. For the history of its construction, see Carlos Obregón Santacilia, *Historia Folletinesca del Hotel del Prado: Un Episodio Técnico-Pintoresco-Irónico-Trágico-Bochornoso de la Revolución Mexicana*, (México, D.F.: Impr. Nuevo Mundo, 1951).

<sup>62</sup> “Pasará a Gobernación El Departamento de Turismo,” Excélsior, 15 December 1934.

<sup>63</sup> “Informe del General de División Lázaro Cárdenas, presidente de la República Mexicana, ante el H. Congreso de la Unión, corresponde al Ejercicio comprendido entre el 1 de Septiembre de 1936 y el 31 de agosto de 1937.”

At Cárdenas' request, this department considered various initiatives which would make the city more appealing to visitors, including new regulations against noise (particularly the use of klaxons) in the first quarter of the city, and measures to alleviate congestion and improve the hygiene of city streets by reducing the numbers of beggars in the city and to enforce licensing requirements of street vendors, both of whom the committee believed to be detractions to tourism.<sup>64</sup>

The provision of comfortable accommodations was one thing; yet as Excélsior noted, the city government needed to create an environment which would welcome and be of interest to them. Further, the editorial writers believed

tourists, whoever they are -- Rotarians or Lions-- well learned, or simply curious, do not wish to hear the 'International' nor see strikes or agitation. They want the true and only Mexico of history and tradition and, in passing, but very carefully, to calculate the possibilities that the country offers for the development of industry and commerce.<sup>65</sup>

What was defined as the "true and only Mexico"? To Alberto Pani and other developers, it was the Mexico of colonial era palaces, a perception which led them to continue a campaign for a city beautification plan, centered in the Zócalo, or Plaza de la Constitución. Pani also advocated the establishment of "an aesthetic dictatorship" which would control "the height and architectural style, naturally the Spanish Colonial, for all buildings which delimit the Plaza."<sup>66</sup> But this definition of the city clearly excluded the Mexico of the Revolution. It was as if the period from 1910 to 1934 had been erased, or would be erased from the landscape, thus

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<sup>64</sup> "Menos Vendedores Ambulantes en las Calles de México," Excélsior, 31 March 1937; "Ha Iniciado sus Trabajos con Sincero Entusiasmo el Departamento del Turismo," Excélsior, 18 October 1936.

<sup>65</sup> Editorial, "Al Margen del Turismo en Grande Escala," Excélsior, 13 June 1935. See also "México Se Han Embellecido por el Impulso de los que Forman la Rama de Constructores," Excelsior, April 16, 1936 which explored similar themes of preservation of a valuable colonial past; and "Temas Metropolitanos," -- "Salvajismo Contra Turismo," Excélsior, 5 June 1937.

<sup>66</sup> Alberto J. Pani, *Tres Monografías*, III. La Industria Nacional de Turismo, 226.

presenting no jarring evidence of the changes wrought by the Revolution nor of disparities existing in contemporary Mexican society. This identification of the city with the colonial era as a means of attracting revenue spurred new, heated debate on the conservation of historical structures, the use of the neo-colonial and modern styles, and the questions of whether it was possible to mandate a single official style for the city, and if so, which style that should be. At the heart of this debate were persistent questions: in whose image is the city made? and what memories should the streets carry?

### Architecture as a Political Act

The creation of architecture is not a value-free action. As a container of meaning, architecture engenders varied responses. The planning of architectural space, or of groups of buildings and streets composing a cityscape is also replete with meaning and symbolic content. Perceptions of that meaning may evoke intense responses to planning legislation and to campaigns such as Pani's. Those who agreed with Pani that the true nature of Mexico could only be represented by colonial and neo-colonial styles were able to employ the arguments in favor of historic preservation in order to prevent the erection of modern styles in the city center. *Excélsior's* editorials gave extensive support to the new planning and zoning legislation, agreeing that these measures were necessary to "prevent buildings which would, through their style, be in disagreement with the traditional physiognomy of Mexico."<sup>67</sup> Its writers clearly favored the colonial; in decrying the current "architectural anachronisms," the paper praised presidential initiatives aimed at enforcing stylistic unity, and stated

it is never too late. . . to impede at least the continuation of this contempt, and for that the President of the Republic is prepared to

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<sup>67</sup> "Fuera Pochismo Arquitectónico," *Excélsior*, 29 July 1936.

intervene in the matter. The official dependency in charge of carrying out the practice of this doctrine of the presidential decree . . . will prohibit the continued construction in the city of those “official boxes” as some of those buildings have been called with wisdom. . . . Tourism - a source of investment -- comes to find the country’s own style. “México viejo” interests them with its large houses of the viceregal epoch, and it pleases them that the modern architecture follows the other courses channels. We possess, which no one can doubt, a style which characterizes us and gives us an international personality. Why deny it? In what other nationalism can one find a seed of similar dissolution?

Large and powerful cities of these times will be unable to show a typical architectural style. They do not have it for the simple reason that they did not inherit it. Meanwhile we, with the mentality of privateers before art demolish the authentic . . . to copy absurdly that which does not correspond to us and causes us to be artificial and which makes us a joke. It is hoped that the presidential decree, although a bit late, will modify this situation.<sup>68</sup>

The pursuit of such policies and programs exacerbated divisions in the architectural community. A group of young architects, backed by the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (League of Revolutionary Artists and Writers, or LEAR) issued a harsh protest against the adoption of the neo-colonial as an official style.<sup>69</sup> Questioning the sincerity which the neo-colonial exhibited and resenting both the message that the style carried and its inability to adapt to the exigencies of modern life, this group argued in support of functionalism as the only true expression of modern Mexico and of the strength and progressivism of the new Mexican government, and protested its exclusion from the most visible, symbolic area of the city. They found the Distrito Federal’s definition and characterization of

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<sup>68</sup> “Cada País Tiene su Arquitectura,” *Excélsior*, 31 July 1936.

<sup>69</sup> This group consisted of architects Juan O’Gorman, Carlos Le Duc, Ramón Marcos, Ricardo Rivas, Fernando Beltrán y Puga, Alfonso Hurtado, Luis Cuevas Barrera, Estanislao Jiménez, Alberto T. Arai, Raúl Cacho, Domingo García Ramos, Balbino H. Sanz, C. Torres Ortega, Alvaro Aburto and Enrique Yáñez. “El Departamento Central, Inquisidor de la Nueva Arquitectura” *Frente a Frente* 5 (August 1936), 22.

what was beautiful in architecture to be deficient, as “by beauty it only understands that of the convent or archaic feudal past.” Juan O’Gorman, a spokesman for this group, ridiculed the official policies when he stated, “the people who have made these declarations . . . do not know what can be called beautiful in a modern navy or in an airplane, and probably, if the construction of navies were dependent on the Dirección de Obras Públicas, they would be copying the colonial brigantines of the era of Cortés.” To these individuals, the answer to rhetorical questions relating to the modern use of colonial forms was obvious:

should we prefer a colonial dwelling, lacking in sun and shade, to a modern house with large windows, bath and comforts? Should the somber offices still exist, where the employees remain nothing more than blind people, because the place where they work is a ‘jewel’, constructed by a person in the colonial era? And finally, is there beauty in modern architecture or not?<sup>70</sup>

To these architects, the use of the neo-colonial style implied a desire to emulate the environment that had produced that style. Their memory of the viceregal period involved the destruction of native societies, bloody inquisition, and decimation of native peoples. Colonial architecture thus represented a heritage of exploitation, and was, in their view, “an efficient manner of subjecting the people. . . of disposing the consciences of the workers to accept the exploitation of man by man.”<sup>71</sup> They believed proponents of the neo-colonial to be little more than modern day encomenderos. To insist that architect, planners and builders adhere to this outmoded style was to replicate the misery of past centuries, and to deny both the promise for modernity present in functionalism and the achievements and

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<sup>70</sup> “Vigorousa Catalinaria de los Arquitectos Jovenes,” *Excelsior*, 18 August 1936; “El Departamento Central, Inquisidor de la Nueva Arquitectura” *Frente a Frente* 5 (August 1936), 22.

<sup>71</sup> “El Departamento Central, Inquisidor de la Nueva Arquitectura” *Frente a Frente* 5 (August 1936), 22.

potential of the Revolution. Further, in their view such policies had certain elements worthy of ridicule. As O’Gorman wrote,

the Dirección de Planificación del Departamento del Distrito Federal insists that it is necessary to conserve the so-called character of the city and by character it understands only the antique colonial houses of Old Mexico, converted, in great majority, into squalid casas de vecindad (tenements), where the people live miserably. For the persons who declare themselves in favor of the so-called colonial character of the city, this famous character is more important than the very miserable life of its proletarian inhabitants. But, meanwhile, as this is about conserving the colonial character to be very beautiful, it will be necessary to prohibit the passage of automobiles and trams through the streets, except those who attempt to impose colonial trams and colonial automobiles; then (and only thus) will the famous colonial character of the city remain. Also it will be very necessary to prohibit all classes of illuminated advertising, except that which is thought to be convenient to make illuminated colonial advertising, although to this date I have not heard that this had been a practice in old Mexico.<sup>72</sup>

Members of the LEAR considered the DDF policy of idealizing and recreating colonial Mexico City to be reactionary. They sought to discredit this policy by highlighting the more absurd aspects of the promotion of a neo-colonial city. Their biting criticism demonstrated a fundamental truth: that the city had changed over the passage of time, due to the actions and requirements of its residents. It was one thing, they argued, to preserve valuable colonial or pre-Columbian monuments. It was another to be expected to replicate them as if no aspect of life had changed for several centuries, or attempt to erase the recent experience of Revolution. Certainly no observer of the Revolution nor of the two decades immediately following it would argue that point. Eventually, the LEAR’s views would prevail in relation to construction sponsored by the State. While in public pronouncements Cárdenas and others would support neo-colonial construction, when it came time to build large-

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

scale government projects, whether workers housing, hospitals or schools, economics dictated the use of modern styles. Yet in the private sector, when individuals and businesses -- particularly real estate developers-- sought to convey a message of prosperity and stability, they continued to choose the neo-colonial. Thus the symbolic language of architecture continued to be as fragmented as it had been in the 1920s. Beneath that symbolism remained a nation still questioning the meaning and direction of its Revolution, as its governments sought to construct the basis for a new national identity.

“Tomorrow a ruin from the past. . . “

In his “Latin Dialogues,” published in 1554, Francisco Cervantes de Salazar invited his readers to accompany him on a walk through Mexico City, in order to “admire the grandeur of so illustrious a city.” Walking through the city allowed the observer to see the city in a new light, literally as well as figuratively, as Charles Flandrau commented. Then, one could observe “the great, unsympathetic capital,” and pause in the Zócalo, “in front of the majestic cathedral, and listen to the echoed sob of history.”<sup>73</sup> The centro histórico also offered the pedestrian of 1940 a picturesque scene, the equal of any in France, according to the latest guidebook by T. Philip Terry.<sup>74</sup> But it was hardly, as Sydney Clark and so many other writers in this period observed, “the Paris of Mexico.”<sup>75</sup> Instead the city was a product of centuries of negotiation among diverse groups; its buildings, many of which by 1940 bore scars of more violent aspects of this process, testify to its uniqueness, as well as the fact that negotiation does not always have a fair outcome, not even under a

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<sup>73</sup> Charles Macomb Flandrau, *Viva México!*, ed. C. Harvey Gardiner, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964), 289-90.

<sup>74</sup> T. Philip Terry, *Terry's Guide to Mexico, The New Standard Guidebook to the Mexican Republic*, rev. ed., (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis Co., 1938), 258.

<sup>75</sup> Sydney A. Clark, *Mexico's Magnetic Southland*, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1945), 10



Revolution. While the city carries messages of revolutionary triumph and materialization of certain goals, it is also, as Carlos Fuentes observed in *Where the Air Is Clear*, “witness to all we forget” - or wish we could.

At the end of 1940, there were ten streets that terminated at the Zócalo, or Plaza de la Constitución.<sup>76</sup> This square had served as the ceremonial center of power since the Aztec empire; the Spanish conquest continued the pattern in which new authority successfully exerted claims to the accrued legitimacy of the site. Successive waves of urbanization did not diminish the cultural meaning of this site. The site’s power continued through the colonial into the republican eras of Mexican history, to its revolution. A “reading” of surrounding buildings indicated how this is so: standing in the center of the square, it is possible to see the physical manifestations of the public memory of defeat and triumph. This is manifest in monumental structures which commemorate secular and religious authority, in the form of the Metropolitan Cathedral and Sagrario to the north and the Palacio Nacional to the east, with a third floor added due to Calles’ initiatives. The new offices of the Departamento del Distrito Federal nearly matched the colonial architecture of the Ayuntamiento, (municipal government offices) with which it shared the southern perimeter. At this time, elements of public memory were constantly being reconfigured in this space, as governments from Calles to Cárdenas broadened the Revolution to encompass disparate groups.

To the west were the Parian, or arcade of shops, the Hotel Majestic, and the Monte de Piedad, or National Pawnshop, providing solid linkage of colonial and neo-colonial styles and meaning. And to the north of the Palacio Nacional, capitalinos were beginning to retrieve additional remnants of their pre-Hispanic

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<sup>76</sup> Beginning at the northeast corner and proceeding clockwise, these were: Monte de Piedad, Seminario, Moneda, Corregidora, Pino Suárez, 20 de Noviembre, 5 de Febrero, 16 de Septiembre, Madero, and 5 de Mayo.

past. In a series of excavations in 1913-1914, Manuel Gamio had located the southwest corner of the Aztec Templo Mayor, and fragments of other Aztec treasures, an important pursuit in the context of a search for a unifying national identity. Work continued at a slow pace, in the recovery of Las Escalerillas, (The Stairways), whose significance as part of the Templo Mayor would be confirmed decades later by archeologist Eduardo Matos Moctezuma.

“Lived together in streets, plazas, taxis, movie houses. . .”

A brief “tour” of the Centro Histórico allows the observer to consider the street as part of the fabric of revolutionary Mexico, as well as to understand the cumulative effects of incremental changes on the streets. From the Zócalo, it is possible to reach the Monument to the Revolution by several streets. One could head north along Monte de Piedad to Tacuba, following the ancient path of the Tacuba causeway, crossing the Paseo de la Reforma to follow along the Puente de Alvarado, turning south at Bucareli to watch the hopeful await the drawing of the National Lottery, before turning west along the Avenida de la República to the Monument. This path would afford the opportunity to see Tolsa’s magnificent classical structures, particularly the Palacio de Minería, now home to UNAM’s School of Mining Engineering, and the Museo Nacional de Arte, juxtaposed with innumerable market stalls and vendedores ambulantes (sidewalk peddlers) selling fresh fruits, vegetables, used clothing, and odd gadgets from worn packs and wooden carts. A flower market, moved from north of the Zócalo to Avenida Hidalgo above the Alameda, offered another attraction; there was also the opportunity to travel down the same path as Pedro de Alvarado, without re-creating his famous causeway leap, tracing history back through the centuries, and gaining insights into the changes wrought in the city by the Revolution, particularly as one turned the corner to the Paseo de la Reforma. Its new functionalist buildings contrasted

sharply with the colonial cityscape just experienced. And here too the pace of city life had quickened -- the Paseo de la Reforma, constructed by Maximilian for ease of transit between his palatial residence in Chapultepec Park and the seat of government in the Palacio Nacional, now served as a major corridor for those residing in the new subdivisions of Lomas de Chapultepec, Chapultepec-Polanco, and Hipódromo Condesa, among others.

Another option would be to head west along Avenida Cinco de Mayo, until it came to an end at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, then join with Hidalgo to the north, or Juárez to the south, to meet with the Avenida de la Revolución. Along Cinco de Mayo one saw further evidence of the growing economic penetration by the United States. Railway, steamship, airline and insurance company offices clustered at its west end; the middle sections of the street from Isabel la Católica to Gante were given to chic restaurants and bars, and the confectionery “Dulcería de Celaya,” notable for its “Day of the Dead” skulls artfully crafted in spun sugar. Along Cinco de Mayo one gained the impression of a prosperous, energetic city; poverty and slums were still a few blocks north, or south. Here, at least for another decade, colonial era buildings retained their structural and visual integrity, the erosion would occur in later years.

In sum, the Centro Histórico contained several streets made by the Revolution, some bisecting former Church lands, or carved from old haciendas and vacant lands on the city’s periphery. Their paths too represent the course and direction of the Revolution, and weave their way through many of its signal achievements. Streets such as the Avenida 20 de Noviembre, San Juan de Letrán and Comonfort, to name a few of the most prominent of such public works during the Cárdenas administration, also manifest the nation’s progress, and its drive to modernize and industrialize. However, the best path to the Monument to the Revolution lies along Avenida Madero. Other streets might attest more to the city’s

modernity or to its colonial identity. Avenida Madero, forged from fragments of the former calles of San Francisco, Profesa and Plateros into a unified whole, is less grand than Reforma, but more Mexican. It illustrates the series of conquests and cultural invasions which comprise Mexican history, as well as the introspection arising from a decade of violence, as intellectuals and government officials, among others, considered issues of revolutionary and cultural nationalism, and the content of public memory.

The entrance of the Hotel Majestic, located at Madero 78, affords eastern and western vantage points. To the east is one direction of the Revolution: the Zócalo, traditional center of political power with its enormous flag, is the setting for presidential addresses each May 5, September 15 and November 20, speeches which contain official statements as to the direction and accomplishments of the revolutionary state. To the west lay another direction of the Revolution. Looking straight west past the hotels, store fronts and offices along Madero, leading into Avenida Juárez, one can distinguish the copper dome of the Monument to the Revolution, a fitting culmination to this Revolution-made corridor.

Avenida Francisco I. Madero was considered by many contemporary observers to be the most Americanized of the capital's streets. Indeed, extensive services now available to the tourist, particularly the new hotels, recalled former Treasury Secretary Alberto Pani's initiatives to improve tourism in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Further, the street had function as a shopping district since the 17th century; in 1940 it drew large numbers of tourists given the hundreds of metal smiths who plied their trades in the arcades which opened onto Madero. Most prominent among these was the Joyería la Esmeralda at Madero and Isabel la Católica, built in 1890 by J. Francisco Serrano and Eleuterio Méndez. Executed with immense mirror-like dormers and a Mansard roof, this structure typified the Porfirian tendency to excess

ornamentation, and contrasted sharply with the 18th century baroque masterwork of the La Profesa Church. Other businesses directed toward the foreign visitor included offices of the National City Bank of New York, across the street from La Profesa, the American Book Store at Madero 25, for the latest in maps, guidebooks and magazines, and the American Photo Supply, at Madero 42. Like the hotels, their prices reflected North American rather than Mexican pocketbooks.

If one focused on the neon signs and lavish window displays along the street featuring names such as Norge, RCA, Dodge, or Delaware Punch, it would have appeared that governments from Calles to Cárdenas had been successful in their pursuit of foreign investment into Mexico. Such investment had left a considerable imprint on the city. But Madero was not yet a United States street, nor was the capital at risk of becoming a caricature of a United States city, as some feared. Nor was it a street in a “city of palaces.” In between the new steel and glass functionalist buildings, or the marble-faced hotel with its “expres lunch” signboard there was a city touched by cultural penetration, yet retaining some of its historic character. In this respect, one sees La Profesa, San Francisco and San Felipe de Jesús, and notable private homes from the 18th century, such as the Casa del Marqués del Prado Alegre, the Casa Borda, located at Madero 27--33 and 39, respectively, and the Casa del Marqués de Jaral de Berrio (Hotel Iturbide), across the street from the new “High Life” department store.

This is not to say that these buildings were untouched by the Revolution, or by decades of urban life and modifications by generations of capitalinos. Modernity, albeit an “uncompleted modernity,” as Charles Flandrau noted in his observations of the city years earlier, intruded in unexpected ways. Here it took the form of newspapers stuck in the grilles of La Profesa’s fence, product of an organized, enterprising vendor who served hurried travelers without missing a step. And modernity mixed with the time-worn, in the form of beggars and flower vendors

already taking up positions early in the morning in front of San Felipe de Jesús, a particularly choice spot given its location directly across the street from the august 18th century Casa del Conde del Valle de Orizaba, now Sanborn's, or as capitalinos knew it, "La Casa de los Azulejos," (The House of Tiles), near one of the busiest intersections of the capital.

The House of Tiles provides an interesting point in relation to survival, or resilience, of certain colonial structures. Many of those which survived in good repair had been converted to new uses, reflecting the needs of a changing society. Private homes and mansions now served as a restaurant and drug store in the case of the House of Tiles, and a hotel, as the Casa del Marqués de Jaral de Berrio, closed in 1928, and later converted into a Banamex office, with art gallery. However, in the midst of change, there is continuity. The saints maybe missing from upper story niches, forced disappearances during la Reforma, the Decena Trágica, or another episode of urban violence, but the essence of the old continues in the remaining structure, and when it is recycled for new owners and purposes, it carries a distinct message: this cityscape is the product of centuries of competing visions and negotiation. The Revolution did not change that fact.

Further, Avenida Madero reveals that the urban process was continuous, as architectural historian Spiro Kostof theorized. A city is never stagnant, but continues to change, and efforts to "freeze" it in a given moment of time prove fruitless. Avenida Madero also revealed that the process of negotiation and the difficulties which exist within it. While many government officials sought to recast the nation along functionalist lines, extending the Revolution to the popular classes, the street illustrated the difficulties in executing such a plan, as well as the persistence of public memories of the colonial era, and the benefits which it had conferred upon the Mexican people.

While a constitution begins with a blank piece of paper, the city did not. Architects beginning to design “for the Revolution” had no such *tabula rasa*. They had to work within the existing context, which effectively constrained their actions in several areas. Their protracted battles with more conservative members of the profession indicate that the messages contained within the colonial buildings continued to resonate with many people. Further, as Mexicans searched for their national identity in the 1920s and 1930s, these colonial structures served as touchstones to an apparently more civilized, ordered past. The demolition of colonial-era structures, whether for new streets such as 20 de Noviembre, which cut through stone and nostalgia in order to provide a new entrance to the Zócalo from the south, or for San Juan de Letrán, just ahead after Sanborn’s, was fraught with difficulty. Here, self-interest collided with abstract notions of the public good, perhaps given the economic climate of the time, in which the nation fought to recover from the devastation of war only to find itself skirting around a global depression. Landowners frequently complained of inadequate compensation offered by the government, but rarely questioned the government’s authority to undertake such action, signaling a lasting impact of the Revolution, as the public accepted and encouraged its more activist role.<sup>77</sup> Further, the replacement of colonial buildings for functionalist structures of reinforced concrete and steel provoked protest for the loss of irreplaceable historic structures.

Ultimately, questions of ownership and vision had to be resolved. Who “owned” the city, particularly in the wake of a revolution fought for social justice? Was the socio-economic hierarchy of the colonial era, which extended through the

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<sup>77</sup> For example, concerning the small compensation offered by the government to property owners whose holdings were affected by the opening of Avenida 20 de Noviembre, see Luz Aramburu and Soledad A. Vda de Noriega to Lázaro Cárdenas, 3 May 1935, expediente 412.1/3; and the government’s explanation for low prices, see the case of Maria Luisa and Berta Domínguez, Lic. José Benítez, Secretario General del DDF to Maria Luisa and Berta Domínguez, 15 March 1935, exp. 412.1/3, RamoPresidentes, Fondo Lázaro Cárdenas, AGN.

Porfiriato, to be reaffirmed and continued through the cityscape, in allowing the church and wealthy families to retain large urban land holdings, when the public good dictated other uses? And in whose vision would the city be made? Should a people be defined by their past, as conservatives argued, or by their future, as the LEAR asserted? José Vasconcelos' educational and proselytizing efforts aside, Avenida Madero reveals in microcosm the complexities of this struggle, and the difficulties in reaching a satisfactory compromise. Thus, in 1940 legislation was in place which protected the façade of the Centro Histórico, yet extended little benefit to those who lived and worked within it, as scant capital was reinvested in those structures, but instead found more fertile ground in the southwestern areas of the city. The "spirit" may have spoken for Vasconcelos's Cosmic Race, but the message delivered may have been less than egalitarian. The outcome certainly was, as revealed in the cityscape.

"... that all of us build and unbuild. . . and rebuild"

Avenida Madero ends at the intersection with San Juan de Letrán, which had been widened during the Cárdenas administration to alleviate congestion in the centro histórico. In the process of enlarging this street, the SCOP approved the demolition of numerous colonial buildings, a decision which necessitated considerable negotiation among property owners and the government, as well as the Architecture Council. Of all the city's crossroads, this intersection perhaps best summarizes the cultural impulses of the period from 1920 to 1940, as well as the progress made in building technology. As Terry summarized in his guide, from the steps of the city's first skyscraper, the Edificio La Nacional, a building which represented "the replacing of the obsolescent colonial style with the efficient modern," it was possible to see

beyond the Palacio de las Bellas Artes, is the street (now the Calle Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla) down which Cortés and his sorely harassed



soldiers slowly retreated before Aztec wrath on the memorable Sad Night of July 2, 1520. Facing this calle from the North is the old Church of Santa Vera Cruz, founded by Cortés in 1527, hence in the 16th century style. To the right, on the Ave. Madero, glinting in the sunlight, is the famed Casa de los Azulejos, erected in 1596, but in pure Mudejar style. . .

At the right of the Palacio is the Central Post Office, the best example in Mexico of the pictorial Gothic, better known as the Estilo Plateresco, and often referred to as Italian Renaissance -- a combination of architectonic concepts which reached an extravagant culmination in Spain in the 17th and 18th centuries . . . The palacio itself is fin de siecle in its manifestations, while the Edificio La Nacional is the last word in popular modernism. Roundabout are scores of houses in pure Spanish Colonial style, dating from various years in the 18th century.<sup>78</sup>

Here at the corner of San Juan de Letrán and Madero, the Edificio Guardiola, with its sheer mass, art decó bronze trim and marble-clad façade, effectively balanced the Edificio La Nacional to its diagonal on the southwest corner, and formed a counterpoint to the Beaux-Arts Palacio de las Bellas Artes, (Palace of Fine Arts) at the northeast corner. The Palace offered an example of the reclamation of Porfirian excess, and the revolutionary popularization of Mexican culture, within a shell which had originally carried a distinctly non-egalitarian message. La Nacional represented a victory by Mexican engineers over the city's unstable subsoil; it would now be possible for revolutionary governments to build vertically as well as horizontally, although fifteen years would pass before architects Manuel de la Colima and Augusto Alvarez, with engineers Leonardo and Adolfo Zeevaert, completed the 44-story Torre Latinoamericana ("Latinoamericano" Tower), ushering in the period of skyscraper construction, irrevocably altering its skyline. Soon thereafter, what Salvador Novo called the new "crystalline pyramids of aluminum" would appear on the landscape without apology to the vice-regal or

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<sup>78</sup> Terry, 328-29.

pre-hispanic structures below, and announce a new process of conquest, this time commercial, in this ancient city, further revising public memory.<sup>79</sup>

“I speak of our public history, and of our secret history. . .”

And looking ahead along Avenida Juárez, one would see the immense semicircle Monument to Benito Juárez. As interpreted by Brazilian diplomat Erico Verissimo, this “horrifying” structure and “masterpiece of bad taste” did a disservice to the memory of one of Mexico’s finest leaders. He continued his critique,

that Indian, so serious, silent and Spartan, deserved a simpler homage. There he is in the Alameda, sitting in his chair, in a kind of parody of the monument to Lincoln, the gringo he so much admired. Behind Don Benito rises a figure I cannot discern clearly, and an angel with wings spread, in the act of crowning the hero. The chair rests upon a tall pedestal of white marble, much ornamented, and in the centre of a gallery of Doric columns. Mounting guard on the pedestal are two lions, seated but with heads lifted in the alert look of beasts on the point of leaping at any moment to the defense of the statue. The whole seems a rather pompous mausoleum; an idea, this, accentuated by the gilded wreaths and garlands in relief on the marble.<sup>80</sup>

Commemorative architecture, as is seen in the Monument to Juárez, is often less inspired by the actual character of the subject. Rather, it is a product of the time which creates it. This monument was erected in the final year of the Porfiriato, as part of the celebrations of the hundredth anniversary of Mexican independence. Such occasion excuses the grandeur of materials employed, and explains this particular stylistic interpretation of Juárez on such a grand scale. By 1910, it was “safe” to commemorate the actions of Mexico’s first full-blooded Indian president; memories of the more controversial aspects of La Reforma had faded sufficiently,

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<sup>79</sup> Salvador Novo, *México, Imagen de una Ciudad*, (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1967), 38.

<sup>80</sup> Erico Verissimo, *México*, trans. Linton Barrett, (New York: Orin Press, 1960), 72-73.

and what remained had been largely been rewritten over the course of a thirty year dictatorship led by Porfirio Díaz. A revolutionary government seeking to remove symbols of the Díaz regime could leave such a monument in place, as it represented another potential source of identity, as well as an exaltation of the Indian, one half of the Cosmic Race.

Further west, Avenida Juárez meets the Paseo de la Reforma, a fitting intersection of statesman and objective. Straight ahead lies the Monument to the Revolution, on the avenue of the same name. As self-commemoration, it is one of the most visible statements made by governments between 1928 and 1940. But it contained no representations of the Revolution's guiding forces, as yet. Images of Francisco Madero, Plutarco Elías Calles, Lázaro Cárdenas, Venustiano Carranza, and Francisco Villa would be added decades later, as would their mortal remains. It is a somber structure even in a strong morning light, carrying a message not of triumph in war, nor of individual glory, but of tenacity. By its sheer weight, it imposes upon its viewers the gravity of the recent civil war, and the perception of the permanence of dislocations wrought by the conflict. No garlands or wreaths decorated its façade, as in the case of the Juárez monument, nor crowning Angel to mark its pinnacle, as in the Monument to Independence.

But, as noted earlier, monuments are products of the era which creates them, which assigns meaning to a particular event and chooses to mark a given interpretation of that event indelibly on the landscape. And this era called for a different iconography than had the Porfiriato. The message imposed by Carlos Obregón Santacilia's winning design for the monument was that of permanence. There would be no return to the Díaz era, as if indeed it were possible to reverse time. The Revolution had been fought for a purpose. The monument's walls provided no friezes which might interpret that purpose, nor were there, as in the case of Diego Rivera's murals, revolutionary slogans which stated government

policy emblazoned on the walls. Interpretation of the Revolution was left to the individual. Thus the structure could hold an infinite number of meanings and memories.

And in its hollow center, the monument affords the space which allows observers to confront the intersection of public history -- the “official stories” of the experience of consolidating a government from the ruins of civil war and the record of an activist state promoting social justice and equality -- with the private history of lives lost, fortunes made, aspirations fulfilled, goals deferred. What happened to the Revolution? Was it continuing, “inexorably, to its fulfillment,” as Cárdenas stated in a radio address to the nation in 1935?<sup>81</sup> What did the city which surrounded these monuments indicate?

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<sup>81</sup> Lázaro Cárdenas, “Mensaje radiofónico desde la ciudad de México,” 2 November 1935. In Leonel Duran, ed. Lázaro Cárdenas, *Ideario Público*, (México, D.F.: Serie Popular Era, 1972),

The skyline of the Centro Histórico recorded fundamental changes introduced by the Revolution and its governments. While ecclesiastical structures still dominated the city's profile, most notably San Francisco, Santo Domingo, and Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación, several of these buildings were religious in façade only. Seventeenth and eighteenth century edifices such as San Ildefonso, Santiago Tlatelolco and the Hospital Real were pressed into service as schools, libraries, offices of revolutionary government departments, and tenements. Governments sought to etch into the public consciousness their achievements under the revolutionary mandate, with eponymous structures such as the Mercado Abelardo Rodríguez and the Colonia Plutarco Elías Calles, a housing development for state employees, both completed at the end of 1934. Iconography of the Revolution entered the capital in other areas as well, as in the Centro Deportivo Venustiano Carranza and in sports fields 18 de Marzo and Plan Sexenal, and the Centro Escolar Revolución. In the case of these large scale projects, the development itself represented the dedication of the government to the Revolution and its legitimacy. On smaller scale projects, such as clinics or primary schools, plaques and signs, not of azulejos but of bronze or steel, heralded the achievement, as well as the dominance of the new civil power.

By 1940, taller commercial buildings had begun to compete for primacy in the Centro Histórico, a sign of a new power configuration emerging in the city and the nation. New architectural styles had also emerged, and with them the development of new construction techniques and materials, which allowed architects and governments to reach upward, designing their version of the new Mexico. Traditional building materials such as tezontle and chiluca were replaced by reinforced concrete, structural steel, brick, and bright tiles. The simultaneous use of diverse styles created discord in the cityscape, as the asymmetrical modern functionalist home conflicted with the ordered rhythm of the colonial, as well as

with the California-colonial, the Swiss chalet, and the English Tudor. And each marked the landscape with a definition of identity.

The Revolution had brought about a new Constitution and government, and a new sense of national identity. But presidents during these formative years were faced with a significant problem. How can a revolution, fought against the established rules, be converted into a coherent, positive force? That is, how can a revolution evolve into a government? Presidents Rodríguez and Cárdenas employed a variety of strategies to do so. They sought unity, and tried to bridge gaps among prominent revolutionary leaders: public ceremonies reconciled Carranza, Zapata, and Madero, and placed their names on streets, markets, schools, and colonias. Indeed, by 1940 every action undertaken by the government and its representatives was labeled “revolutionary,” regardless of whether the action was derived from the Constitution of 1917, or defined as in the public good.

The capital city’s streets manifested a public memory now full of contradictory elements. Further, the city demonstrated that significant differences in perceptions of Mexican reality existed. The street names delineate neat intersections of the Revolution and its leaders on the urban grid, recalling those in official histories and public memory derived from the commemoration of that history. However, the content of those streets indicates that this was contested space, and thus contested history.