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Exhibiting Mexicanidad:
The National Museum of Anthropology and Mexico City in the Mexican Imaginary

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**Exhibiting Mexicanidad:
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**Exhibiting Mexicanidad:
The National Museum of Anthropology and Mexico City in the Mexican Imaginary**

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This dissertation provides an ethnographic account of the ongoing and evolving relations between the construction of nation and cultural production at the Museo Nacional de Antropología (MNA, or the Museo) in Mexico City. The MNA plays a key role in the production, reproduction, and dissemination of representations of Mexico's pre-colonial past and its existing indigenous populations as components of contemporary Mexican nationhood. Historically, the Mexican state has used anthropological knowledge to inform and implement policies enacted to cement the ties of an ethnically diverse population to the nation, define and preserve national patrimony, and promote heritage as an economic resource. The dissertation explores the MNA as an arena for the expression of the tensions generated by these sometimes disparate agendas. I argue that the MNA, rather than simply reproducing and maintaining official understandings of the

relationships between citizens and nation, also provides a space for the negotiation and transformation of these relationships.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation investigates manners of using culture—tracing how the concept is used as an official ideological construct, and how people understand it on a more quotidian basis—by providing an account of the ongoing and evolving relations between the construction of nation and cultural production at the *Museo Nacional de Antropología* (hereafter, the Museo) in Mexico City. In Claudio Lomnitz’s examination of Mexican nationalism, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico*, he describes nationalism as a “productive discourse that allows subjects to rework various connections between social institutions, including, prominently, the relationship between state institutions and other social organizational forms” (2001: 13). He then goes on to say that nationalism provides “interactive frames” for the negotiations between “various and diverse social relationships” (2001:14) and state institutions. One of those interactive frames is the idea of a national culture.

My work in the Museo provides one means of understanding some of the ways in which such a frame functions. The Museo plays a key role in the production, reproduction, and dissemination of representations of Mexico’s pre-colonial past and its existing indigenous populations as components of contemporary Mexican nationhood. Historically, the Mexican state has used anthropological knowledge to inform and implement policies enacted to cement the ties of an ethnically diverse population to the nation, define and preserve national patrimony, and promote heritage as an economic resource. The dissertation explores the Museo as an arena for the expression of the

tensions generated by these sometimes disparate agendas. I argue that the Museo, rather than simply reproducing and maintaining official understandings of the relationships between citizens and nation, also provides a space for the negotiation and transformation of these relationships.

I consider the Museo as both a specific physical site in Mexico City, and as a space in the national imaginary of Mexico. Many studies of the Museo rely primarily on textual readings of the buildings and exhibits, sometimes in combination with visitor questionnaires (Alonso 2008, 2004; Coffey 2003; Pérez Ruiz 1999; Errington, 1998; Canclini 1995). My research departs from this by combining archival research with participation in museum work, and detailed observations of, and informal interviews with, visitors and museum personnel. My work engages with the multiple terrains of museum spaces: workplace; educational site; leisure or recreation spot for local populations; the location of particular collections or objects of interest to scholars, specialists, and the general public; purveyor of images that appear in textbooks and souvenir publications; landmark in the urban geography of Mexico City; and point of interest on a tourist map or in a guidebook. This approach allows me to recognize the Museo as a “contested terrain” (Lowe 2000: 103), a nexus of competing and shifting notions of history, nation, and national identity.

The dissertation consists of an introduction, followed by five chapters. The introduction describes the theoretical parameters of the research, and the methodology I employed. It provides context for my intellectual engagement with the Museo. The first chapter, “Knowing Your Place,” situates the development of my research questions and analysis within the frames of my field experiences. The second chapter “Measures of

Modernity,” describes the expansion of Mexico City and the institutional history of the Museo within the context of changing conceptions of nation in Mexico. It follows the way Museo *Servicios Educativos* (Educational Services, Servicios from now on) guides rely on “local knowledges” when giving school tours, and traces those knowledges as they diverge from and intersect with dominant narratives of national history.

The third chapter, “Practicing Death,” investigates the ways in which narratives of place, nation, and *mexicanidad* circulate and are transformed during school tours and workshops. It accomplishes this by focusing on the role of death in the staging and production of *mexicanidad* in Museo exhibits and educational programs. Death, especially in the celebration of *Días de los Muertos* (Days of the Dead), occupies a special place in the creation of a post-Revolutionary mestizo Mexico (Lomnitz 2005), and my observations at the Museo support this claim. The chapter’s analysis of these events illuminates moments of congruence and tensions between the “structuring structures” (Bourdieu 1984) of Museo displays and staff presentations, and those that visitors bring with them.

The fourth chapter, “Objectifying the Nation,” shifts the frame of analysis from activities designed specifically for schoolchildren and families to consider more fully the relationships between objects, people, and museum space. It interrogates the narrative relationship between archeological past and ethnographic present at the Museo through a discussion of scale and the notion of the fragment (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, García Canclini 1989, Stewart 1984). The concluding analysis suggests that objects and displays already entered into the representational and interpretive frames of museum space remain viable outside of that space.

The final chapter, “The Ends of History,” brings together two accounts of the uses of history within and outside the Museo. It examines a training session held for Mexico City teachers one Saturday, and the tour given to a school group from a small town in Oaxaca coupled with my visit to their Oaxaca classroom. These accounts illustrate manners in which publics navigate the constraints imposed by institutions and technologies of the state and transform sanctioned uses of public space and officially recognized discourses (Bourdieu 1984, de Certeau 1984). It locates the museum as a space, both physical and imaginary, in which Mexicans confirm and contest official accounts of nation and national identity. The analysis understands location as an extension of the physical parameters of place that includes temporality, the demarcation of a national culture, and the definition of a national public that embodies the nation. The dissertation concludes with an expansion of the discussion to include Mexican cultural policy, as evidenced in the laws governing patrimony, and changes implemented to the national history curriculum at the primary and secondary levels of school.

II. Methodology

I began fieldwork in July of 2002 and continued through August 2003.¹ I employed a variety of methods when gathering material for the dissertation. Archival work in the collection of the *Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología* (National Anthropology Library), housed in the Museo, and in the archives of the *Secretaría de Educación*

¹ Though the bulk of the material presented in the dissertation was collected during my fourteen months of residence in Mexico City, I made regular visits to the Museo during the writing of the dissertation. I visited in November 2003; November 2005; January 2008; July 2008; July 2009; August 2009; July 2010; and November 2010.

Pública (Department of Public Education, SEP) informs the discussion of the Museo's development as a public institution. As a participant observer, I worked closely with two departments, Servicios Educativos and the *Subdirección de Etnografía* (Ethnography Department, Etnografía from now on). Tuesday through Saturday, I typically spent eight to ten hours a day at the Museo. I divided my time between observations in the public spaces of the Museo, and work within each department. On Sundays, when Mexican citizens enter the museum for free, I observed for four to six hours in the public areas.

My fieldwork took place while renovations to the Museo, begun in 1998, were underway.² Both public space, such as the galleries and orientation areas, and staff areas, such as the storage areas and offices, changed significantly. These were the first substantial changes to the displays since the Museo's 1964 opening. The renovations, in part, addressed changes in anthropological knowledge and museographic practice. Display space was reconfigured, in order to permit more pieces to be included; wall text was rewritten. The archeological galleries dedicated to the Mayan cultures and the Gulf Coast of Mexico, and the ethnographic galleries displaying Mayan cultures and the cultures of Oaxaca remained closed for the majority of my fieldwork. The Mayan archeological gallery reopened in July 2003, during the last weeks of my stay. The remaining galleries opened after I returned to Austin.

I began my participant observation in Servicios Educativos by accompanying the teaching staff as they led school groups on tours of the Museo galleries. I continued observing the tours as I began to participate more actively in the work of the department: answering questions and selling pamphlets at the reception desk, registering school

² Renovations to non-exhibitionary sections of the Museo continue.

groups, and, after several months, being given the opportunity to lead groups on my own. Servicios also conducts weekend family activities centered on the celebrations of Días de los Muertos and Christmas. I observed and participated in the tours and assisted with the crafts workshops during the November and December 2002 activities. In July 2003, I participated in the summer program and workshops the Museo provides for children and families. I directly assisted the asesores with the preschool age group, setting up materials and working with the children.

Because of the acoustics in the galleries, and the number of visitors typically present when tours occurred, I opted not to tape record the tours. For similar reasons, I did not mechanically record the workshops. Both my experience as an early childhood teacher, which required making observational reports of children in classroom settings, and the four years I spent working as an ethnographer in family settings prior to my fieldwork prepared me for the particular sort of participant observation I undertook in Servicios. I knew how to attend to multiple conversations and activities at one time; I learned how to record my observations rapidly, as events occurred; and I was accustomed to observing groups in public spaces.

When observing the Servicios tours, I stayed with one particular *asesora*, as the Servicios staff members are called, and the group to which she was assigned through an entire gallery tour.³ There is not a standard interpretive script for each gallery. Instead, the asesores develop their own materials and adjust their presentations according to a number of factors. By familiarizing myself with the presentations of the asesores, I learned which gallery features each asesora thought most important, how she gauged the knowledge base

³ At the time of my fieldwork, there were eleven asesores, including one who was on sabbatical. Of the ten working daily, eight were women, and two were men.

of the group she was guiding, and how she managed challenges, such as crowded galleries, or unruly students. After a tour, I used the time to informally discuss the experience with the asesora in charge. I could also share observations I made of the group: points at which students expressed whispered confusion, for example, or comments that indicated particular interest. These conversations provided a nuanced and detailed view of the asesoras' own accounts of their practices. I observed each asesora multiple times, and learned which features of gallery presentations were common to all of the asesores, and which were unique. In addition, observing the tours served as training for leading tours myself.⁴

Most of the school tours conducted by Servicios I observed took place in the archeological galleries; I had ample opportunity to observe structured and unstructured visits there. I had fewer opportunities to observe structured tours in the ethnographic galleries. For the first weeks of my fieldwork, I spent time in the ethnographic section independently, noting which exhibits attracted the most visitor attention and comment. After familiarizing myself with the exhibits and some typical visitor viewing patterns, I developed tracking guides that I added to my observational repertoire. Tracking entails observing visitors as they move through galleries, noting which displays draw their attention, their paths through the galleries, and timing how long they spend at individual exhibits (Hein 1998). I also recorded remarks or conversations that occurred during the

⁴ I explore the role of the asesores further in Chapter 2, Measures of Modernity. There was no formal orientation or training program for the asesores at the time I was at the Museo. Trainees—primarily public university students fulfilling their required social service hours—observed, much as I did, picking up tour management and discipline strategies, and noting the varied styles of the asesores.

visit if they pertained to the exhibits or the Museo.⁵

In Etnografía, I participated in a variety of small projects. I helped catalog photographs from the departmental photo archives; I aided in preparing an exhibit for one of the Metro station displays. In fall of 2002, the department sponsored the visit of a group from Michoacán to construct a Days of the Dead ofrenda on the patio of the Museo. I assisted the Etnografía staff before, during, and after the visit. With the director of the Department, I designed a visitor survey aimed at Mexican visitors to the ethnographic galleries, particularly children and youths from age six to sixteen. Staff from Etnografía and I implemented the study in March-May 2003. Findings from this study and from the tracking guides, which I also shared with the Director, supported the department in the preparation of didactic materials for primary and secondary students.

Though I worked primarily in Servicios Educativos and Etnografía, over the course of my fieldwork I came to know members of various departments and other Museo workers. I learned much about the ethnographic holdings from one of the collections managers, who granted me the permissions necessary to visit the ethnographic collections area. Helping with the set-up for special events introduced me to members of the publicity staff and technical workers. I often ate in the staff canteen, and attended internal functions when invited. I also regularly interacted with the Museo guards, both those routinely assigned to Servicios, as well those assigned to the ethnographic galleries. These conversations and interactions enriched the more formal research I did in the Museo, giving me insight into relationships between departments and categories of workers, and a variety of perspectives on the Museo.

⁵ The tracking guides are included as Appendix I.

One of the objectives of my fieldwork was to contextualize the Museo within a collection of practices and “processes of displaying, framing, [and] interpreting culture” (Handler 1988: 195). I made use of a variety of opportunities to broaden my frames of reference. Along with some of the staff of Servicios Educativos, I attended the first National Gathering of Educational Services of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (National Institute of Anthropology and History, INAH) in November 2002, in San Luis Potosí. Here I met museum educators from across the republic and took part in roundtable discussions, workshops, and informal talk focused on both the pragmatic and theoretical issues of interest to Mexican museum educators. During Spring 2003, I joined the “Museum Pedagogy” class taught at the National Autonomous University by one of the Museo asesoras for special excursions to other Mexico City museums and, when possible, for class meetings. This enabled me to have behind the scenes experiences at a variety of public and private museums, and to see what approaches practicing museum educators used, and how they explained their choices to students.

At the time of my research, Mexico’s then-president, Vicente Fox, had been in office for two years. Fox belongs to the Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party, PAN). His election marked the first time in over 70 years that the president was not a member of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI).⁶ Fox proposed a wave of structural changes that affected cultural policy and the management of cultural patrimony, including the restructuring of the Consejo Nacional

⁶ The antecedents of the PRI emerged in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. Plutarco Elías Calles, president from 1924-1928, founded the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party) in 1929. Calles played kingmaker in the subsequent elections, until the 1934 election of Lázaro Cárdenas. Cárdenas broke with Calles in 1936, renaming the party the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (Party of the Mexican Revolution). His successor, Manuel Ávila Camacho, gave the party its present name.

para la Cultura y las Artes (National Council for Culture and the Arts, CONACULTA), the organism that oversees cultural institutions and policies.⁷ Many of the Museo staff expressed disdain for both the policy directions and the political appointments made by the administration, with particular vitriol expressed towards CONACULTA's president, Sari Bermúdez. To them, Bermúdez—a journalist who worked for the Fox presidential campaign and was especially close to his wife, Marta Sahagún—represented what was often termed “*cultura lite*,” culture as a profit-driven, superficial enterprise.

Opposition to administration policies extended beyond disgruntled commentary by individual workers. Sectors of both unions active in the Museo hung banners decrying the proposed changes in the library and office areas, organized marches, and hosted teach-in style meetings at the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (National School of Anthropology and History, ENAH). I was aware of two unions functioning at the Museo, divided according to categories of employment: one for the research units of the Museo, and another for administrative, technical and other staff. The asesores fell into the second category. Union rules prevented me from attending regular union meetings, but I noted publicly posted calls to action, agendas, and meeting summaries. Through one of the public announcements, I learned of a series of Spring 2003 lectures at the ENAH on the preservation of cultural patrimony and the effects of globalization on local cultures, which I attended. Presented by ENAH faculty, and primarily attended by ENAH graduate students, the lectures helped me understand the role that some faculty and students thought the ENAH and INAH should play in formulating cultural policy.

I went to the field with the advantage of speaking near-fluent Spanish. My father

⁷ Discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, “The Ends of History.”

worked for a civilian branch of the U.S. Navy; my family lived in Spain when I was young, and I graduated from high school in Panama. Both of my parents and my siblings speak Spanish, and I was first literate in Spanish. Though I no longer lisp my c or z, I retain certain traces of a southern Spanish accent. Over various research and personal trips to Mexico, I acquired a more Mexican vocabulary, substituting “*cerillo*” for “*fósforo*” when I needed a match, and “*chabacano*” for “*albaricoque*” when asking for apricots. I know I do not sound like a Mexican, but to my own ears, I don’t really sound like a Spaniard, either. When in Mexico, I am accustomed to being taken for one in brief interactions, such as with shopkeepers, but I never hide my nationality from anyone who asks. It is not necessarily an asset to be taken for a Spaniard in Mexico. A person with whom I fell into casual conversation outside the Museo one morning told me “You Spaniards spit the language; we Mexicans make it sing!”

Most of my friends at the Museo took to referring to me as “*chilangola--con el acento español, pero el corazón chilango*” (a Spanish accent with a chilango heart). A chilango is a person from Mexico City, though what a Mexico City native is properly called is a matter of debate. My friends refer to themselves as chilangos, though the word originally had a pejorative connotation (and in some places still does). During a July 2008 visit, a taxi driver informed me that the proper term for a Mexico City native is “*defeño*,” derived from DF (*Distrito Federal*, the Federal District, as Mexico City is often referred to in Mexico). Chilangos are people whose families moved to the city “*de provincia*,” from the provinces, he said, with obvious disdain. Another word I sometimes hear and see is “*capitalino*,” though usually in a journalistic context. I would not claim chilanga status for myself, though it is unquestionably true that my experience and vocabulary—

particularly my food vocabulary—favor Mexico City.

When I introduced myself to Museo personnel, I made my university affiliation and (I thought) my nationality clear. Several weeks into my research, I was very surprised to learn that at least a few members of the Servicios staff thought I was Spanish. The question arose during a casual conversation, when the asesora with whom I was talking asked me what part of Spain my family was from. I must have looked startled, because she hurriedly corrected herself: “I mean Argentina!” I told her I wasn’t Argentinian, either, and then, out of curiosity, asked her from where else she thought I might be. She ran through several possibilities, including Belgium, but not the United States. When I told her I am from the U.S., she expressed a great deal of surprise: “but you don’t seem like them!” I pressed her to tell me in what ways, aside from my accent, I didn’t “seem like them.” She listed off several characteristics, including that I ate food from street carts, am very animated when I speak and don’t make space between myself and other people when standing or sitting, and am “*calida*,” warm.

My fieldwork was sprinkled with moments like that. After the U.S. invasion of Iraq, in March 2003, I was repeatedly asked my opinion “as a Spaniard” of the Spanish decision to support Bush’s policies. Sometimes it was more personal. When I helped with the summer camp activities, I was surprised to find myself singing along to songs and chants I sang as a girl. I had forgotten I ever learned them. Perhaps the most revealing thing about these conversations and moments for me was the realization that my sense of myself as *estadounidensa*, from the United States, was such a taken-for-granted part of my self-presentation. It seemed a fitting place from which to begin thinking about the premises and understandings built into the construction of national identities.

A brief note about the way I have represented conversation in the dissertation.

When I first began taking field notes, I wrote most of my own observations and remarks in English, while recording what others said in the language in which it was spoken. By the fifth or sixth week, my own notes were a jumble of Spanish and English, and by mid-November, I recorded everything in Spanish, except for the occasional overheard comments made in English. I did not use any recording devices in the Museo, as I was usually accompanying a group or observing visitors in the galleries, where the acoustics would have made any recording useless.

Anything that appears in quotation marks in this manuscript was written down between quotation remarks in my field notes. At times, I choose to convey more of a sense of the exchange that occurred, rather than verbatim quotes. Usually this is because I could not accurately write down in full what was being said at the time. In these instances, the comments are not placed between quotation marks. Though in most cases, I render everything in English, I do at times incorporate the original phrases or sentences, to give an idea of how individuals expressed themselves. All translations are my own, as are any errors in recording.

III. Research Questions

I first began full-time anthropology studies while working as a preschool teacher. One of the central curricular movements in early childhood education at the time was anti-bias education. The early childhood education version of multicultural education, anti-bias education promotes diversity and encourages teachers to examine the assumptions they, and the families and children they work with, bring into the classroom with them. As the

title of the basic curriculum guide for the movement—*Anti-Bias Education: Tools for Empowering Young Children*—indicates, the developers of the curriculum advocate an activist stance on the part of teachers.⁸ The authors warn against taking “a tourist approach, which trivializes and frequently stereotypes the cultures being studied” (1989:57). They remind their readers that “[L]earning the cultural attributes of one’s own ethnic identity takes time. Even more so does learning about someone else’s culture” (1989: 66). But what, exactly, did the authors mean when they wrote about culture? I began to attend to the ways in which the idea of culture was used, in curricular guides and teacher workshops, and in everyday interactions I observed in the school setting. As I moved from a career in early childhood education to one as an anthropologist, I retained my focus on tracing the concept of culture as it moved through academic, bureaucratic, and educational sites, and threaded through everyday life.

The Museo provides an especially rich site in which to investigate the repositioning of culture as “something that is invoked rather than something that is” (Dominguez 1992: 23). National museums provide a narrative that links material objects to the nation-state. Through techniques of display, they define the people who compromise the nation, racially, demographically, and linguistically. Certain languages are designated “official,” certain populations labeled “minority” or “marginal.” As part of the move to consolidate culture, national museums often incorporate the attributes of subjugated groups under the rubric of multiculturalism, or, in some instances, the archaic or quaint. This enables the state to draw from these practices traits that might contribute

⁸ *Anti-Bias Education: Tools for Empowering Young Children*. Louise Derman-Sparks and the ABC Collective. National Association for the Education of Young Children. Washington, D.C.: 1989.

an interesting thread to the national fabric, while leaving aside those that might interfere with efforts to present the nation as modern and developing.

Theories of nationalism discuss the means through which ties to nation, and the nation itself, become taken for granted (Anderson 1983; Handler 1988). The identification of the political boundaries of territory with certain cultural forms and practices acquires a timeless and unquestioned quality. Bourdieu describes these naturalizing processes as ‘doxa’: the ways in which the order of the social world comes to be considered so obvious as to require no explanation. Doxa operates at both an internal and an external level. Individuals participate in a social order structured, in part, by their own thoughts and actions. As Bourdieu states, “the manner in which culture has been acquired lives on in the manner of using it”(1984: 11).

The strategies of nation-building rely on the creation of a variety of cultural technologies dedicated to purveying official accounts of national origin and a particularized national identity: institutions such as schools and museums, for example, or spectacles such as parades and festivals. These techniques serve not only to reproduce and display bodies of knowledge, but also to produce and maintain certain modes of perception and specific bodily practices intended to govern individual beliefs about, and ways of being in, the world. These dispositions shape the manner in which individuals understand, experience, and respond to social structures. The state and these attendant technologies transform the nation and national culture into products offered to an audience conditioned to receive them.

The commodification of the nation and its associated accoutrements makes possible the establishment of a citizenry predisposed to participate in the maintenance of

existing social orders. However, cultural production rarely functions seamlessly. The presentation of nationhood and national culture as artifacts permits citizens to act as consumers, picking and choosing which cultural products and practices they will make their own. Navigating the constraints imposed by institutions and technologies of the state, cultural consumers “trace out the ruses of other interests that are neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they operate” (de Certeau 1984: xviii). Or, to return to Bourdieu, “between conditions of existence and practices or representations there intervenes the structuring activity of the agents, who, far from reacting mechanically to mechanical stimulations, respond to the invitations or threats of a world they have helped produce” (1984: 471). As de Certeau and Bourdieu recognize, people often transform the strictures of power in unexpected ways. For instance, museum visitors circumvent the efforts of museum staff to “exert strong cognitive control” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 21) over the objects on display by evading attempts to control their movements within museum spaces and to mandate certain forms of attention.

As concepts of culture circulate, alternatives to the official interpretations flourish. Brackette Williams notes: “Taking into consideration particular configurations of nationalist precepts and the nation-building processes of social and cultural interchange within and across groupings they entail provides a means by which to approach the concept of culture through the politics of the struggle over meaning as power” (1993: 152). I understand the Museo’s public as more than passive consumers of officially produced representations. Following de Certeau, I conceive of the Museo as a locus of images that allows for interpretations unrelated to curatorial intent. Though Museo visitors move through a space in which “they remain subordinated to the prescribed syntactical

forms (temporal modes of schedules, paradigmatic orders of spaces, etc.), [their] trajectories trace out the ruses of other interest and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop” (1984: 34).

This observation seems particularly apt when applied to museum visitors. As John H. Falk notes “people in museums rarely spend time reflecting upon or synthesizing their experiences” (1999: 260). He continues: “most learning, but certainly most learning that occurs in museums, has more to do with consolidation and reinforcement of previously understood ideas than with the creation of new knowledge structures” (1999: 260). In the context of the Museo, which is simultaneously a “node in a network of attractions that form the recreational geography of a region” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 132) for foreign as well as domestic tourists and a “narrative machinery” that attempts to “inveigle the general [in this instance, Mexican] populace into complicity with power by placing them on this side of a power which is represented to it as its own,” (Bennett 1995: 95) an exploration of the slippage between official attempts to consolidate a particular reading of an object or practice and individual perceptions of those objects offers a particularly rich source through which to explore the use of the term “culture” in the manner called for by both Williams and Dominguez.

These theoretical preoccupations combined with the observations I carried out in the Museo over time led to the three central questions that guided my research:

1. Historically, how has the Museo, through its participation in the generation, reproduction, and circulation of anthropological knowledge, fostered efforts by the Mexican state to create an educated citizenry?
2. How do educational materials and services available in the Museo support or complicate state-sanctioned accounts of the relationship of nation, race, and culture in contemporary Mexico?

3. In what ways does the active engagement of Museo visitors with exhibits and educational materials coincide with or disrupt Museo attempts to promote particular understandings of Mexican nationhood and national identity, most specifically the place of present-day indigenous peoples in the presentation of a unified cultural identity recognized as Mexican?

IV. In the Museo, 1997-2000

I first visited the Museo regularly in the summer of 1997, while undertaking preliminary research for a previous project. Though I had visited Mexico several times before, 1997 was the first year I arrived for an extended stay, and with plans that required navigating outside of the city's Centro Histórico. In the introduction to a recent anthology of writings about Mexico City, Rubén Gallo writes that it "has become a monster, an urban disaster, a planner's nightmare" (2004: 5).⁹ Learning how to get around the city is no small feat. My hosts handed me the *Guía Roji*—the thick red street guide to Mexico City, the constant companion of taxi cab drivers and other city residents—and sent me on my way, believing I would learn best on my own.

I began slowly, familiarizing myself with the streets of the Centro Histórico, which I identified by their principal commercial establishments rather than by their actual names. For instance, to arrive at the Mercado San Juan, I crossed over to the Parque Alameda, went down Calle Chino, home to several Chinese restaurants and businesses, turned onto Calle Lámparas (the street featuring light fixtures), then again on Chicken Street, where butchers sold chickens in various states of kitchen readiness. Even with my own mnemonic devices and the *Guía Roji* in hand, I spent many frustrated hours searching for the library I expected to find just around the next corner, or so intent on the guidebook

⁹ *The Mexico City Reader*, edited by Rubén Gallo. Translated by Lorna Scott Fox and Rubén Gallo. UWisconsin Press. Madison, WI: 2004.

I missed the sign identifying the office for which I was searching. I made myself notes for the Metro, carefully writing the lines, directions, and names of my stops.

I reserved Sundays for less directed exploring. I left the apartment early, by nine at the latest. I rarely met anyone in the stairwell—sometimes one of the mariachis from the apartment across the hall, staggering in after an all-night party, sometimes a child sent by his or her mother to buy *pan dulce* or tamales. At that hour, the street vendors just begin to set out their wares, rows of plastic combs, nail clippers, candy, gum, cigarettes and other sundries arranged on low tables or brightly colored plastic mats. I passed them on my way to the Metro, which took me along the back of the enormous Palace of Fine Arts. Mexico City rests on the remains of a lake; the entire city sinks a bit more each year. The weight of the Palace, built from many tons of imported marble, causes it to sink more rapidly than other buildings. The rear of the building, constructed without the ornate architectural detail that adorns the front, reveals the building's tilt. I tried not to wonder how these shifts affected the Metro tunnels connecting the pieces of the city I frequented.

Some years before, I had discovered the detective novels of Paco Ignacio Taibo II, set in a minutely described Mexico City. Occasionally, I set off with a list of locations from one of the novels, learning the Metro routes and connecting streets by following in the fictional detective's footsteps. Most Sundays, however, found me joining the crowds of residents and tourists in Chapultepec Park. Like so many other spaces in Mexico City, Chapultepec claims a tripartite history: first, as a recreational area for the Mexica nobility, then as the retreat of Spanish and other colonial rulers, and finally, as a public park. Its three sections encompass museums, a botanical garden, a zoo, an amusement park, lakes, restaurants, performance spaces, almost every conceivable recreational attraction. On

weekends, the Metro lines approaching the park fill with families and groups of friends burdened by bags jammed with picnic supplies and sports equipment. The stop designated “Chapultepec” deposits riders in an underground station that serves as a mini shopping center. The crowds browsing bins of tennis shoes, or stopping to purchase a CD or disposable camera eventually emerge onto a path lined by the plastic and plywood stalls of a multitude of vendors: hats, sunglasses, toys, and an array of foods suitable for eating out of hand. Gradually, the beaten dirt of the path leads to the paved walkways of the Paseo de la Reforma and the park itself.¹⁰

Chapultepec appealed to me for many of the same reasons it attracts residents. It is green and cool, and provides a respite from the asphalt and stone of the city. Soot black squirrels dart between the trees and beg for bites of tortilla or fruit; hummingbirds flit among the flowers. I had my own reasons for preferring the park, too. With my family far away in Austin, I enjoyed the chance to be around children, and Chapultepec is certainly full of them, careening down the path on tricycles or scooters, trailing balloons and shards of candied apple, cajoling their parents, *abuelos*, and *tías* to buy Styrofoam marionettes, or superhero sunhats, or to allow them to have their faces painted. I also enjoyed a certain nostalgia as I ambled. Walking through the park, stopping for a cup of fruit with lime and chile or a roasted ear of corn reminded me of similar Sunday *paseos* of my childhood, full of adult conversation and indulgences intended to keep the children at bay.

The Museo occupies a central spot in the oldest section of the park. The section that includes the anthropology museum also includes the National History Museum, the

¹⁰ This description reflects the park at the time of my fieldwork, in 2002-2003. Beginning in 2004, the park was given an extensive makeover. Some of what I describe no longer exists.

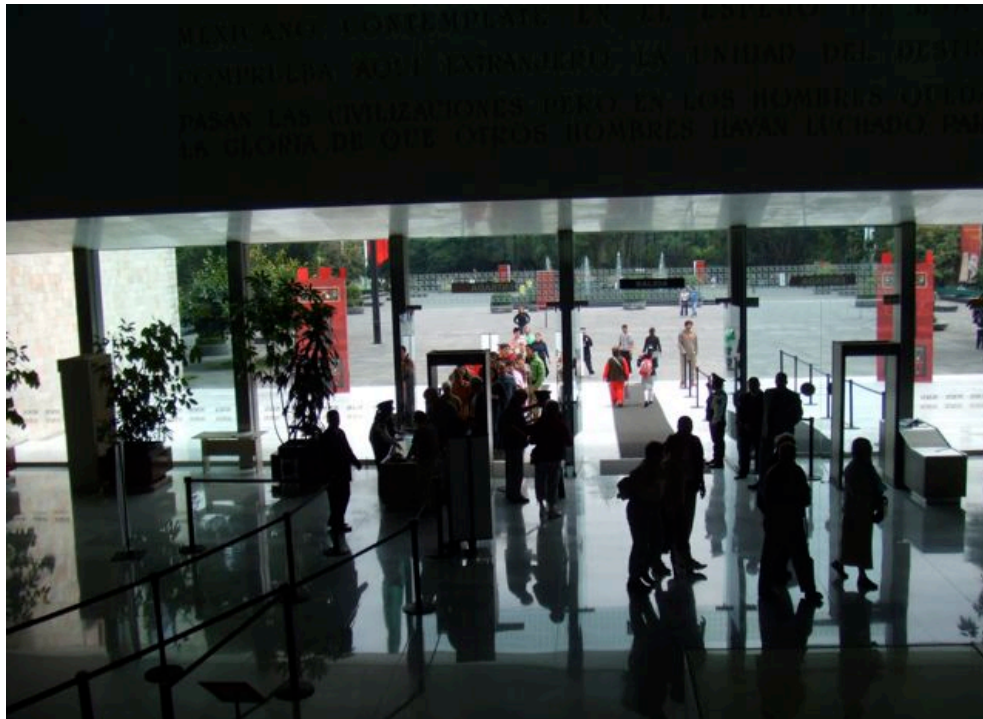
Museum of Natural History, and two art museums, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Tamayo Museum. It is flanked on one end by *Los Pinos*, the residence of the Mexican president, and on the other by the monument to “*Los niños héroes*,” six young cadets who, as the story goes, wrapped themselves in the Mexican flag and leapt from the parapets of the national military academy (now the National Museum of History) rather than allow themselves and the flag to be captured by invading U.S. forces in 1847.

Visitors approach the Museo by crossing an expansive esplanade, dominated by one of the largest Mexican flags in the republic. Once inside, they pass through the soaring lobby to the patio, which opens to the galleries. The permanent exhibit space is divided between a ground floor dedicated to archeological galleries, and an upper floor of ethnology halls. In 1964, when the Museo was opened, the intent of its architect, Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, was “to offer a scientifically exact presentation, that was at the same time so visually attractive that a visit to the Museum would be considered a true spectacle” (Ramírez Vázquez 1968: 29). The resulting complex is 45,000 square meters, encompassing 25 galleries, workshops, laboratories, research facilities, a library and archives, a theater, a cafeteria, and two gift shops. Much of this remains out of public view. The lobby floor extends to incorporate all visitor services, the gift shops, an orientation gallery,¹¹ temporary exhibit space, an auditorium, and the offices of the director and other managerial staff. There are two staircases in the lobby area, flanking the entrance. One set leads up to the library, and down to Educational Services. The other

¹¹ Closed for renovation during the time of my fieldwork, and reopened in 2007.

goes up to research and office space,¹² and down to the curatorial, storage, and construction wing.

¹² Until 1979, the National School of Anthropology and History (ENAH) occupied the upstairs space opposite the library. It is now in the southern area of the city, near the archeological site of Cuicuilco.



Entrance from the esplanade (top) and the lobby (bottom)

An immense statue of the rain god, Tláloc, excavated from a riverbed in the town of Coatlinchán, in the state of Mexico, marks the approach to the Museo from Reforma. It is ascribed to Teotihuacán culture of the Classic period. According to several staff members at the Museo, the statue actually represents Chalchiuhtlicue, “She of the jade skirt,” Tláloc’s consort, who rules over rivers, lakes, and ponds. As evidence that the statue is not Tláloc, the people who told me this pointed out the lack of the headdress, fangs, and goggles characteristic of images of Tláloc, and noted that the figure appears to be wearing a skirt and headdress much like the ones carved on a figure identified as Chalchiuhtlicue in the Teotihuacán gallery. They claimed that more current archeology supports this identification.



Figure known as Tláloc, facing Paseo de la Reforma

Debate over the identity of the figure is not new. The people of Coatlinchán knew it as *la piedra de los tecomates*, because when it was still embedded in the ground the pocked surface collected water, just as the *tecomate* (a hollowed gourd) does.¹³ In 1899, José María Velasco painted a figure from the area of Coatlinchán that he identified as Chalchiuhtlicue.¹⁴ Five years later, Leopoldo Batres argued that it was actually Tláloc; at the 1905 International Congress of Americanists, Alfredo Chavero reaffirmed its identity as Chalchiuhtlicue.¹⁵ The plaque on the statue does not specify its identity, describing it instead as “a monolith” which the people of Coatlinchán “generously donated to this Museum in 1964.” It further states that the statue is “unfinished and represents the water deity” of the Teotihuacanos. Printed materials associated with the Museo offer no consensus. In *The National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico: Art Architecture Archeology Ethnography*, a coffee table volume coordinated by Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, the chief architect of the Museo, the piece is identified as “the rain god Tláloc” (1968: 14); the guide prepared by Ignacio Bernal, the Museo’s first director, and first published in 1968, doesn’t picture or mention it all; the 1999 *National Museum of Anthropology: An Essential Guide* refers to it as a sculpture “known as” Tláloc, but really representing Chalchiuhtlicue. On the other hand, Felipe Solís, the Museo’s director from 2000-2009 said unequivocally that it was Tláloc (Ponce 2004: 78).

Ramírez Vázquez decided that the principal entrance to the Museo should not face the street, as the Museo “is not a commercial establishment” (Ponce 2004: 76). However,

¹³ “*Tláloc no era Tláloc*” Armando Ponce, *Proceso*, September 26, 2004, Mexico, DF.

¹⁴ Velasco (1840-1912) was particularly known for his depictions of Mexican landscapes.

¹⁵ Chavero (1841-1906) served as director of the Museo Nacional, the Museo’s precursor. Batres (1852-1956) worked for the Museo Nacional from 1884-1888. He is primarily known for his work at Teotihuacán, where he founded the first site museum in Mexico. It opened in 1910, as part of the commemorations of the Centennial of Independence.

he and other members of the Museo's Executive Planning and Implementation Committee wanted something eye-catching on the Reforma side to mark the Museo's presence. Members of the committee made a variety of suggestions: one of the Atlantes from Tula, perhaps a Mayan stela, even the Sun Stone. Ramírez Vázquez settled on one of the gigantic Olmec heads from La Venta. But when a scale model of an Olmec head was placed on the maquette of the Museo, it looked, in the words of one committee member, "like a ping pong ball" next to the building. When that failed, Ramírez Vázquez claims that then-President Adolfo López Mateos suggested the "*monolito de Coatlinchán*" (Ponce 2004: 77). At the time, the piece remained half-buried. Though it was obviously huge, no one knew its exact size. Architects and archeologists were not sure how, or even if, it could be moved. When they voiced their doubts to the President, Ramírez Vázquez reports, he challenged them to marshal their technical expertise (Ponce 2004: 77).

After the selection of the Coatlinchán piece, federal representatives were sent to meet with town officials and teachers from the local school. At the initial meeting, the town leaders reluctantly agreed to allow the removal of the monolith. A few days later, crews arrived and began the technical work necessary to transport the piece: the Texcoco-Mexico highway was widened and fortified, a trailer designed to hold the incredible weight of such a piece was built, and a system of cables was attached to the stone. The night before it was to be moved, townspeople opposed to its removal cut the cables, slashed the tires of the trailer, and, armed with machetes, rifles, and stones, turned the excavation team back three times. Ramírez Vázquez, describes the conflict thusly: "[D]uring the night, the local inhabitants cut the wires and sabotaged the trailer. To avoid

further resistance, federal forces were called in, delicate negotiations carried on, and the age-old struggle between tradition and change was resolved” (1968: 36). In exchange for surrendering the *piedra*, the town received “a road, a school, a medical center, and electricity” (Ramírez Vázquez 1968: 37). According to newspaper accounts, the townspeople marked the removal of the statue with “weeping, music, and firecrackers.”¹⁶ In Mexico City—prepared “as if for a fiesta” (Ramírez Vázquez 1968:37)—thousands lined the streets and packed the Zócalo, celebrating Tláloc’s arrival.

The acquisition history of the piece calls attention to the narratives of national progress and tradition, the tensions between official and unofficial versions of history, and the frictions between national and local claims that underlie the 1964 Museo project. As a marker of modern Mexico’s emergence from the “fusion of two old and diverse cultures,” the Museo was “absolutely essential” and part of “a broader endeavor, one of truly national self-identity” (Bernal 1968: 12). The ability to construct a museum that “required the utmost in technical resources and innovation” (Ramírez Vázquez 1968: 29) demonstrated Mexico’s right to be considered a modern nation. The technological prowess of the engineers and other professionals who designed and built systems to move massive archeological pieces over long distances—the Coatlinchán figure weighs 167 tons, other items, such as stelea from the Yucatán are similarly sized—provided evidence of Mexican technical mastery. For residents of Coatlinchán, the possibility of gaining access to the material fruits of this progress, such as electricity and improved transportation, medical, and educational services, required that they relinquish a material

¹⁶ “*Tláloc vuelve a su casa en Coatlinchán*,” Laura Cortés, *Milenio* online, November 16, 2008. Accessed March 15, 2010. In early 2008, a full-sized replica of the piece was inaugurated in Coatlinchán. This fulfilled a promise made to residents when the piece was removed.

claim to their past. As a further reward for their contribution to the project of national unity, they are the only community whose members have free entrance to the Museo for life (Ponce 2004: 79).

V. Introduction to Anthropology

Part of the dissertation project I envisioned when I first began spending time in the Museo included an exploration of the development of anthropology in both the US and Mexico. I planned to examine a summer culture camp sponsored by the Mexican government and directed at Mexican-American adolescents. I believed the program drew inspiration from the Cultural Missions programs sponsored by the post-Revolutionary government, in which anthropology played a key role. These programs, under the auspices of the SEP, were designed to “weave a civilization out of the varied cultural strands of Mexico” (Sáenz 1932).¹⁷ I understood time spent in the Museo as an opportunity to explore ways in which nationalist discourse transforms tradition and culture into “objects to be scrutinized, identified, revitalized, and consumed” (Handler 1988: 16). I paid particular attention to the gallery devoted to the “Introduction to Anthropology,” as it provided an example of how the discipline defined itself to the general public.

The purpose of the introductory hall was “to explain what this science [anthropology] is, the various branches it covers, its aims and methods of work, and what has been achieved in its study of man” and to “present a universal framework into which

¹⁷ Though mostly directed toward indigenous populations, the archival work I was doing that summer revealed that schools located near the Mexico-U.S. border also implemented specialized curriculums, designed to reinforce a sense of Mexican identity and discourage parents from sending their children to U.S. schools. For more on the educational policies of post-Revolutionary Mexico, see *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940*. Mary Kay Vaughan. Tucson. University of Arizona Press: 1997.

the Mexican cultures could be fitted in space and time, as well as allowing visitors to compare their cultural contributions with those of other peoples” (Bernal 1968: 14). In the following section, I describe the gallery as I first encountered it. The description is not comprehensive. At the time of my initial visits, I did not regard the Museo as a primary research site. My notes reflect this: I describe in great detail the mural that hung in the gallery’s entryway, and the physical anthropology and ethnology displays, but skim over the murals inside the hall, and the archeology and linguistics exhibits. As the gallery I describe no longer exists, description is in the past tense.

On one side of the vestibule leading into the hall stood an unidentified carving, which I recognized as belonging to one of the Pacific Northwestern indigenous groups. A mural painted by Jorge González Camarena,¹⁸ “*La cultura como obra de todas las razas del mundo*” (Culture as a work of all the world’s races) dominated the opposite wall. The mural reminded me of James Boone’s observation that “the nature of museumgoing enmeshes the seemingly serious and the apparently voyeuresque” (1991: 260). It depicts nude women representing the races of the world standing with objects symbolizing human ingenuity: buildings, artifacts, and agricultural products. The array of women emblemizes particular phenotypical characteristics; each wears some article of clothing or adornment identifying her cultural “type,” a veil, or a headdress, or jewelry, for example. Three figures, larger than the others, command special attention. On the far left, a “European” woman with flowing blonde hair turns her back to the viewer; on the far right, an “African” woman with cropped hair turns her torso toward the viewer, exposing her breasts and pudendum. A mestiza occupies the center of the mural, facing the viewer

¹⁸ Camarena (1908-1980), part of the second generation of Mexican muralists, also painted murals for the Palace of Fine Arts, the Mexican Senate, and the National Museum of History.

directly. She wears a spiky golden headdress. Both of the other principal figures turn their faces and stretch their right hands toward her. Her body emerges from a pool of light, bringing to mind the crucible from which Vasconcelos' "cosmic race" materialized.

In a guide published a shortly after the Museo opened, Ignacio Bernal writes: "In recent years, Mexico has progressed in a remarkable way...it has come to realize what it means to be the heir of two civilizations and to belong to a culture that is a combination of both; just as it is impossible to deny either a father or a mother, so the country must fulfill its destiny by a proud affirmation of this hybrid civilization" (1968: 9).¹⁹ The depiction in the mural supports an understanding of contemporary mestizaje as the product of a very specific genetic and cultural admixture, one constant with the original museographic practices of the Museo. The European woman's fully extended hand does not actually touch the mestiza body; Camarena instead uses color to suggest a connection between them. The African woman's arm bends slightly at the elbow, her palm tilted toward the viewer, and away from the center of the mural. A building placed in between her hand and the mestiza representation interrupts any possibility of connection. A third hand—appearing from the figures that represent the indigenous Americas, but not attached to any one in particular—reaches out and crosses the thigh of the mestiza figure.

Simultaneously, by placing the mestiza in a universal context, the mural points to a notion of culture as a shared human endeavor, and brings together the arenas of inquiry the wall texts identify as the components of anthropology: "the biology of man, his characteristics, and his struggle to dominate Nature." But if the mural intends to

¹⁹ Bernal (1910-1992), an archeologist, was twice director of the Museo, once from 1964-1968, and again from 1970-1977. His primary archeological work was done in Oaxaca, where he was one of the principal investigators at Monte Alban, among other sites. He also worked at Teotihuacán.

demonstrate human diversity and comment on human mastery of the environment, it also suggests particular relationships to the “natural.” The more modestly exposed body of the white woman and the fully revealed bodies of all of the women of color provide a clear statement of whose bodies are available for display in this “study of man.”

After passing through the vestibule, visitors entered the exhibit space. The position of the walls and modular displays encouraged a counter-clockwise movement through an introduction to the classic four fields of anthropology: physical anthropology, archeology, ethnology, and linguistic anthropology. The first section described “General aspects of evolution.” A set of displays titled “Fossil Evidence of Human Evolution,” containing skulls and other fossil remains, opened the exhibit. Next comes “What Bones Tell Us,” describing various sorts of information gathered by the examination of bones: the age and sex of remains, skull types (dolichocephalic, mesocephalic, and brachycephalic), and illustrated explanations of practices intended cranial deformation, and a section on human growth, including statues and drawings. “Biotypology,” defined as “the study of corporeal structure and its relation to individual conduct,” followed. A wall text asserted that contemporary knowledge of body types “allows us to relate body type to predispositions or tendencies toward certain physical or mental diseases. Miniatures depicting the three basic body types—endomorph, ectomorph, and mesomorph—punctuated the information.

The text and exhibits then turned to heredity. These displays introduced the “*mancha mongólica*,” the Mongolian spot. According to the text, the “Mongolian spot” is a marking that appears around the fourth or fifth month of fetal development on the small of the back of babies of Asian and South American descent. It disappears around the time

a child reaches four years. A wall map illustrated the prevalence of the Mongolian spot. The stain is hereditary, the text stated, and considered original to Asiatic populations; its appearance in other groups reveals “the mixing that exists on all continents.” As further proof of intercontinental mixing, the text offered “the Mongolian Eye.” A map compares the part of the world in which the “Mongolian” and the “European” eye each prevail.

Having introduced the idea of human variation, the exhibit then provided a series of photographs depicting various somatic characteristics. The texts here confronted the viewer with the struggle between Culture and Nature. Although thanks to culture, humans largely dominate their environments, individual bodies “like those of any species of animal,” adapt and integrate to particular surroundings. A series of drawings clarified the relationship: first, a group of heavily dressed European figures observing lightly dressed “natives” of an indeterminate region; then a sweltering European standing next to a smiling African; then a chilly African next to a smiling European. These drawings led immediately into an exhibit titled “Staetopygia.” A miniature of a naked African woman with enormous buttocks rested on a shelf that protruded from the wall. The wall text read: “Staetopygia is the accumulation of fat deposits in the gluteal region. It manifests itself most of all in women of certain African groups. This characteristic is represented in sculptures dating from the Later Paleolithic. Today we find it predominately among the Hottentots and Bushmen.”

The introduction to physical anthropology concluded with a case titled “Blood.” Next to drawings representing five continents—the Americas rendered as one, and Antarctica missing— and a vial holding a drop of blood, the text informed viewers that “We can now see that human groups across time differentiate themselves in accordance

with genetic and environmental factors... This is how the races are constituted and disappear.” However, the text admonishes, the concept of race is “dynamic... There is neither racial superiority nor inferiority, simply differentiation ... of populations always in a process of change.”

At that time, all of the wall texts and labels appeared only in Spanish. Lacking the ability to read the wall texts, non-Spanish speakers struggled to make sense of the illustrations and artifacts on display, particularly in the physical anthropology section, which relied on multiple illustrations. One afternoon I heard an English-speaking man tell the teenaged boy with him that a wall painting illustrating the development of human bipedalism was an explanation of “how perspective developed in art.” He spoke with great certainty. Guided tours also engaged with the exhibits differently, depending on the group’s dominant language. For example, none of the tour groups I observed being led by English-speaking guides lingered over the heredity display; they usually moved quickly to the archeology displays that followed. In contrast, the tours led in Spanish passed more slowly. One guide paused with her group in front of the Mongolian spot display. “How many of you had the *mancha mongólica*,” she inquired, adding “I was born with one, or so my mom says.”

The exhibit “How an Archeologist Works,” marked the transition to the space shared by the archeology and linguistic exhibits. Archeology occupied the perimeter. Beneath panels painted with lush tropical landscapes, cases of Neolithic artifacts alternated with dioramas highlighting life in the Early and Late Paleolithic. Along another wall hung charts portraying the chronologies of four ancient culture groups: Mesopotamia, Mesoamerica, Peru, and Egypt. A large glassed-in mandala divided the Egyptian section

from the others. The Egyptian material was more extensive, including maps and several cases of artifacts. Murals imitating ancient Egyptian style provided the background for the cases. Enormous black and white photos of religious and other objects hung above the displays. In addition to the objects in vitrines, the exhibits included two freestanding objects, a sarcophagus in a glass case, and a sculpture of the Egyptian god, Tot.

A partially enclosed central rotunda, designed to resemble a cave with Neolithic artwork decorating the top, contained the linguistics exhibits. Inside, cases described the evolution of language, the development of writing, and the work of historical linguistics. A fan, flags, a horn, and a conch shell served as examples of non-verbal means of communication. Outside the rotunda, a low, open case displayed a “Neolithic Burial.” Other platforms, also uncovered, displayed more Egyptian pieces: a carved stone, a tablet, and hieroglyphics.

An unmarked carving divided the last of the cases in this area from the next section, “Ethnology.” Wall plaques stated that the science of ethnology consists of fieldwork and ethnography. A primer for the budding ethnologist followed. Before beginning an inquiry into a community, the ethnologist carries out a thorough preliminary investigation. Among other steps, this includes reading the existent bibliography and “selecting adequate informants.” Field research—“applying all of the modern techniques of social science investigation—“ then begins. With the data collected during fieldwork, the ethnologist produces an ethnography, which collates all of the data into an integrated cultural whole. The task of the ethnologist is then to compare the social institutions characteristic of one society with the social institutions of other societies; to compare its historical antecedents with history in general; to place the society studied in the

appropriate level of technological development, and from this, to derive the social and cultural laws that underlie human interaction. Cases hanging on the wall held samples of tools and other examples of material culture from a variety of places.

A wall text quoting Claude Levi-Strauss preceded the next display case: “Ethnography tells us that the ideas of the supernatural are universal and that man has two attitudes toward his dealings with unknown forces: magic and religion.” A narrow case displayed a variety of ritual objects, such as kachina dolls, amulets, and prayer sticks. To the left, a curving waist-level case served as a room divider and repository of a collection of photos and artifacts titled “Eskimo Life.” A carved mask of unmarked provenance adorned one wall. One case contained a bolt of cloth, feather headdresses, belts, and rattles; there were artifacts identified as Masai, Kwakiutl, and Cameroon, some identified as only “African,” and others not identified at all. The Levi-Strauss quote reappeared, this time printed on a card mounted in one of the cases. The ethnology section closed with a wall-length case that catalogued “Conclusions from the Study of Culture.” The “conclusions” cover six areas: housing, weaponry, education, food, toys, and adornment. Enlarged black and white photographs and items appropriate to each subject area filled the case.

I enjoyed watching other visitors as they made sense of the exhibits, and I was fascinated by the displays themselves. To someone trained as an anthropologist in the United States in the late 1990s, much of the terminology and the information presented in the texts seemed outdated. While they might have been state-of-the-art at the time of construction, thirty years later, the techniques employed to create the displays had an outmoded feel: some of the cases included labels typewritten onto index cards, photos

meant to demonstrate contemporary living showed people wearing clothing and hairstyles popular decades earlier, the raised metal letters used to make the section titles for each set of exhibits and for some individual cases reminded me of elementary school bulletin boards. I shared my impressions with some graduate school colleagues, but considered my observations and notes as frames of reference for, rather than a focus of, the project I intended to do.

I returned to Mexico City in the summer of 1999, this time with my four-month old son, Rubén. We shared an apartment with a friend and colleague from my graduate department, Apen Ruiz, and her four-year old daughter. Both Apen and I were working in the SEP archives.

In addition, Apen was also working at the Museo's archive. She mentioned that several of the galleries were in the process of being renovated. This interested me; I wondered what would become of the Introduction to Anthropology gallery. Would it be updated? What would that look like? One morning, she invited me to come along with her when she went to the Museo to see a friend, a fellow Catalán who worked in the photographic archives. During conversation with the archivist, I mentioned my interest in the renovations. He offered to introduce me to two of the designers working on the renovations. Before we left that morning, I met Mariko and Lucás. I thought that changes to the introductory gallery might make an interesting conference paper, or article. I called Lucás, and asked if he and Mariko would be willing to talk to me. He responded enthusiastically, so I scheduled an interview.

I made a list of a few general themes I wanted to touch on during the interview. On the appointed day, Mariko was needed at another meeting, so I spoke only to Lucás.

He was eager to discuss the work; our interview lasted nearly two hours. We discussed the proposed changes to the exhibit spaces, who was in charge of suggesting change, where the money was coming from, anything it occurred to me to ask. He didn't seem to be very guarded about his opinions, either, criticizing the "old style" exhibit spaces as we walked through the stripped galleries, and enthusiastic about the proposed changes. In the designers' work area, he showed me mock-ups of the proposed changes.

Lucás explained the concept behind a gallery to be titled "Hall of the Indian Peoples." This hall would introduce the ethnographic galleries, and provide the general background necessary to understand the galleries that would follow, dedicated to specific indigenous groups. The guiding motif of the gallery was that of living cultures confronting the world. "We want to talk about cultural changes, why certain characteristics develop," he said. The gallery plan he showed me opened with an exhibit depicting the "moment of contact" with Europe, and the destruction of indigenous life as it was. Samples of ceramics created during the initial encounter years demonstrated how quickly cultures adapt to new techniques and styles. Maps depicting indigenous population density before and after the European invasion provided demographic proof of the shattering of the indigenous world. An interactive kiosk introduced indigenous languages. Sample phrases in all extant indigenous languages played at the touch of a button. A chart or map would identify languages that no longer exist, though the designers hoped to find spoken samples of extinct languages in the ethnological recordings collection of the Museo's archives. The language kiosk will be followed by a display titled "Phenotype." Photos of six physically distinct ethnic groups precede a textual explanation of mestizaje, the mixing that leads to the "typical" Mexican of today.

Next, the exhibits turn to the relationship between environment and cultural production. Through the juxtaposition of photos, “cultural facts,” and material objects the exhibit argues that all peoples adapt to and make use of their natural resources as efficiently as possible. A glass case will then present the concept of “zones of refuge,” places far from urban centers and outside influences in which indigenous practices flourish unadulterated.²⁰ More cases follow: religious practices, life processes, agriculture, festival, everyday life. “Downstairs, “ Lucás tells me, referring to the archeology exhibits, “everything is from the elites. We want to show pieces that are used every day.” A mural-sized map delineating the cultural areas of Mexico closes the gallery. Hand held information cards about each area accompany the map.

The intention of the gallery is to provide a general outline of indigenous life, as the remaining ethnographic galleries will teach specifics. One of the items Lucás showed me was a photo of an Indian man with a computer. The photo was grouped with some other objects intended for a section in the ethnographic galleries titled “Hall of the Indian People”. In the photo, a man dressed in a long-sleeved shirt, pants, and track shoes, sits at a wooden table, working on a computer. There is a box of floppy disks and a stack of notebooks next to the computer. The room in which he is working appears to be made of unfinished boards nailed together, with a dirt floor.

²⁰ “Zones of refuge” is a concept associated with Gonzálo Aguirre Beltrán (1908-1996), and described in his book, *Regiones de refugio; el desarrollo de la comunidad y el proceso dominical en mestizo América*. Mexico City. Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, Ediciones Especiales: 1967.



Sample photo for renovated Sala Introducción a los Pueblos Indios (1997)

I asked how the photo might be used. Lucás talked about collages of photos, about the need to “give a general idea about Indians that is very current.” But it needed to be done in an interesting way. I ask whether the new exhibits will include any information on urban Indians: “Look, we all know Indians wear tennis shoes, drive buses, whatever. We see that every day! What we want here is the essence, the pure *indio*.” What about the Zapatistas, I want to know. “We don’t want to do anything too topical, too political,” Lucás answers. “I mean, these exhibits have to last a long time, right?”

In November of 1999, at the American Society for Ethnohistory meetings, I presented a paper based on my interview with Lucás and the observations I had made at the Museo the previous summers. The analysis I presented took as its theoretical frame García Canclini’s critique of the Museo (1989) and Susan Stewart’s work on the miniature and the gigantic (1984). García Canclini identifies two strategies employed by Mexican

national museums to “consecrate the national culture” (1989:162). The first strategy renders the national patrimony an aesthetic object to be contemplated. The second requires that national culture be the subject of historical and anthropological ritualization. It is this second strategy that García Canclini identifies with the Museo. According to his analysis, the strategy succeeds, because its designers successfully combined two modes of reading the nation, the scientific, and the politically nationalist.

In the presentation I prepared for the Ethnohistory meetings, I argue that the representational modes used in the introductory gallery prefigure strategies employed in other Museo galleries: the invitation to contemplate, to measure, to compare, to align yourself with the viewer rather than the viewed, the investigator, not the investigated. The exhibits promise that through viewing parts—a single bone, a drop of blood, a ritual object—the visitor can understand the whole. The variations in scale Museo visitor’s experience: the miniature models, the dioramas, the life-sized displays, such as the tomb, the huge decorative panels, and the vast physical space of the building itself produce an effect at once disorienting and exhilarating. As Stewart writes, “aesthetic size cannot be divorced from social function and social values” (1984: 95). The shifting spatial dynamics allow visitors to be both the giant and the miniature, the container and the contained. García Canclini termed this tactic “monumentalization” (1989: 123); it is one of the mechanisms through which the state establishes a notion of a unified national culture. Through collections of miniatures, diagrams, maps, and displays comprehended in a glance, the Museo assures visitors that they do indeed grasp the complexity of what is Mexico that, in fact, there is a Mexico to be grasped. The sheer physical size of the building convinces visitors that the Museo actually encompasses that reality. In a museum

dedicated to establishing an explicit relationship between the modern nation-state and a glorious indigenous past, between a citizenry identified as Mexican, and peoples called Huichol, Pame, or Tzotzil, these techniques collapse difference, blur power relationships, and “replace history with classification, with order beyond the realm of temporality” (Stewart 1984: 150).

I next returned to the Museo in March 2000, on my way back from a visit to another colleague, Anne Johnson, at her field site in Guerrero. The paper I presented the previous November was well-received; I was using it as a way to conceive of a new dissertation project, one that built on the archival and observational work I had already done. Some of the renovations were to have been completed in November, and I was curious to see them.

Packing Rubén into the backpack I set off, hoping that the walk and bus ride from the hotel to the Museo would put him to sleep. It is much harder to do fieldwork with a mobile, verbal toddler than with a tractable, portable infant. The bus ride lulled him to sleep, and I arrived ready to take some quick notes. The gallery that was formerly devoted to “Introduction to Anthropology” was now an open, but unfinished gallery titled “Introduction to the Indigenous Cultures of Mexico.” The Camarena mural still hung in the vestibule. The wall text that previously described it as an artistic statement of the relationship between humans, nature, and technology now presented it as a depiction of “*la mujer indígena*” (the indigenous woman).

Part of the original gallery space was blocked off, preventing entry. A few visitors were in the open section, including an English-speaking family with a grade school aged son. The son watched the screen of a video kiosk. The narration, which described the

relation between culture and environment, is in Spanish. The child thought he was watching a nature program, and asked his mother if he could change the channel.

The room was arranged in a semi-circle. Most of the exhibits in this space were flat—timelines, maps, video screens. The arrangement encouraged a counter-clockwise perusal: first, the video kiosk and some texts about environment, then a large map with prominent archeological sites marked on it, next a pre-conquest chronology. A timeline of prominent post-conquest events in indigenous history followed, then various illustrations of events from the timeline. I recognized some, but not all, of the elements from my visit the previous summer. The mural-sized map with artistic depictions of the “culture areas of Mexico,” included territories not held by the present-day Mexican state. The principal archeological sites for each area were represented by the features most prominently associated with them: the *chac muul* for Chichén Itzá, the “Aztec” calendar for Tenochtitlán. An explanatory panel described the notion of cultural contact, accentuating the fluidity of borders and the importance of “exchange and contact.” Visitors gravitated towards the mural. Few read the texts, instead using it to map their own understanding of Mexico.

I listened to a Mexican man explain to his English-speaking guests that there are no prominent archeological sites on the northeastern coast because “it is not touristic, it is for petroleum extraction.” An English-speaking couple oriented themselves by attempting to plot the locations of various resort locations—“this is where Cancún is, that’s Acapulco—“ managing to locate Tula (which is just north of Mexico City) at Monte Albán (in the state of Oaxaca, south and slightly west of Mexico City) and Mazatlán on the east coast rather than the west. As the couple passed on to the next exhibit, a Museo

docent used the same map to guide a group of Mexican schoolchildren through the naming of “*nuestros antepasados*” (our ancestors) and their primary characteristics.

I paid close attention to the group that included the Mexican host. His companions seemed to know a fair amount of Mexican history, and also to be interested in contemporary events. They asked many questions. The group was just ahead of me as I perused the exhibits. They paused in front of a wall-sized photo of a Zapatista. The text that accompanied it places the 1994 Zapatista revolution in the context of other indigenous uprisings, such as the Caste Wars and the Yaqui Rebellion. One of the English-speakers asked what their host thinks about the Zapatistas. He waved his hand dismissively. “But they’re going to lose, they’re going to lose out. Fox extended his hand to them, and they refused.”

I noted his comments, and moved my eyes to the next space on the wall. It was the photo Lucás showed me, of the Indian and the computer. It appeared next to a wall panel titled “The Indigenous Cultures of Today.” The text read as follows (my translation):

We are accustomed to thinking that the culture of contemporary indigenous people is less meaningful than the culture of the pre-Hispanic indigenous people. This comparison is unfair, because it does not take into account the marginalization to which indigenous peoples have been subject from the arrival of the Spaniards until the present. It is also inexact, because it does not recognize the great cultural achievement that it has been for them to survive and adapt themselves to the new realities imposed by the Spaniards and the Mexicans, and because it does not recognize all that they have learned in the last 500 years. Because of this, the plurality and vitality of indigenous cultures is one of the great prides of Mexico.

It identified neither person nor place. In my notes, I wrote “unidentified photo, smiling Tzotzil (?) man.”

I next investigated the refurbished ethnographic galleries. According to García Canclini, only 57% of all Museo visitors actually climbed the stairs or rode the elevators up to the ethnology exhibits (1989: 131). At the times of my visits in the 1990s, the galleries had been in a state of flux, with preparations for their overhaul already underway.²¹ During our conversation the previous summer, Lucás told me that one of the reasons for the renovations was the need to make more contemporary the approach to ethnographic practice employed in the original exhibits. Museo staff commissioned or produced many new pieces for this gallery. Due to cost considerations, they also left in place several pieces—primarily murals commissioned of well-known artists at the time of the Museo’s construction—that represented a more dated approach to ethnography, remedying out-of-date pictorials with more contemporary text.

I approached the newly renovated hall, titled “Pueblos Indios,” “Indian People.” Among the newly commissioned pieces is an immense ceramic “*árbol de vida*,” a tree of life. The *árbol de vida* is a traditional form in Mexican folk art, typical of the state of Mexico and the town of Metepec most particularly. The basic shape is that of a cross, with any number of additional arms or branches extending at right angles from the center. Each branch is decorated with miniature figures. Most *árboles de vida* are table-sized; this one was easily four feet tall, and displayed in a special case at the top of the stairwell that lead up from the patio.

²¹ Mary K. Coffey notes that at the time of her visit to the Museo in 1997, the introductory gallery had been dismantled and a traveling UNESCO exhibit about children’s rights occupied the space (2003: 236). I have a very vague recollection of that exhibit.

The central trunk/cross, fashioned of ears of corn, supports four branches. On the lowest branch, the figures depict persons in traditional indigenous dress, along with their “cultural products”: crafts, baskets, masks, weavings to the left, various forms of traditional housing to the right. The second level holds a model of a *campesino* home and mechanical workshop to the left, and a miniature wedding party, complete with mariachis, to the right. Above the *campesino* home on the third level to the left rests to sets of family groupings derived from colonial portraits known as the “*serie de castas*” (the caste paintings), which provided a visual and verbal explanation of the various blood admixtures possible in the New World.²² To the right, tiny figures demonstrate outside a miniature government building, and a miniature musical and dance group congregates outside of a church.

²² For more on the casta paintings, see *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings*. Magali M. Herrera. Austin. University of Texas Press: 2003 and *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth- Century Mexico*. Ilona Katzew. New Haven, CT. Yale University Press: 2005.

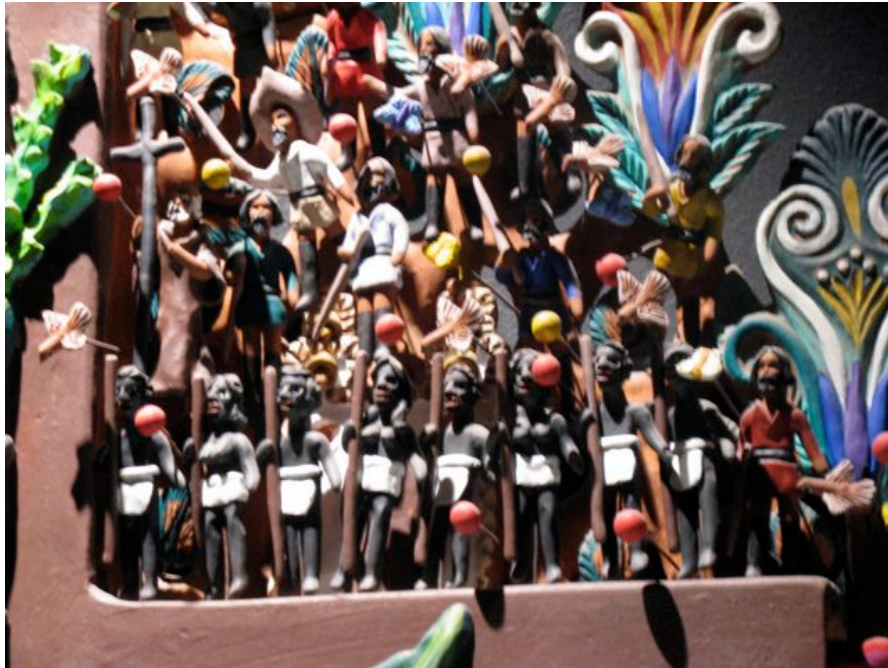


Árbol de vida, Sala Introducción a los Pueblos Indios

Above the campesino home on the third level to the left rests to sets of family groupings derived from colonial portraits known as the “*serie de castas*” (the caste paintings), which provided a visual and verbal explanation of the various blood admixtures possible in the New World.²³ To the right, tiny figures demonstrate outside a miniature government building, and a miniature musical and dance group congregates outside of a church. The left uppermost branch supports a Mesoamerican-style pyramid surrounded by generic Mesoamerican natives clad in loincloths. Its companion branch portrays a group of African “natives.” Their skin is painted inky black, their lips bright

²³ For more on the casta paintings, see *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings*. Magali M. Herrera. Austin. University of Texas Press: 2003 and *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico*. Ilona Katzew. New Haven, CT. Yale University Press: 2005.

red. Like the Mesoamericans to their left, they wear loincloths. Standing on their shoulders is a company of conquistadores in full battle armor. Atop it all glows a brightly colored sunflower. The epigraph accompanying the árbol comes from one of the serie de castas: *“In America, people of diverse color, custom, genius, and language are born.”*



Detail, árbol de vida

A mural-sized painted map hangs on the wall opposite the vitrine containing the árbol. According to the pre-renovation guidebook, this map, commissioned in 1963, shows sample members of the 56 indigenous groups found in present-day Mexico, dressed in traditional clothing and engaged in economic activities traditional to their group.²⁴ The figures on the map closely resemble the miniatures arrayed across the first branch of the árbol. As the text placed next to it admits,

²⁴ Painted by Luis Covarrubias (1918-1987), brother of the artist and ethnographer Miguel Covarrubias. Luis painted many of the murals displayed in the Museo.

[It] represents the particular vision of the artist, based in the ethnography of the time, which perceived Indian peoples as groups isolated from the national context. Nevertheless in the last five decades of the 20th century, advances in ethnography oblige us to see these ethnicities as constitutive parts of the ethnic and cultural diversity of Mexico.



Detail, Mural, Sala Introducción a los Pueblos Indios

Few visitors read the text, though many paused at the map, which serves as an ethnological counterpart to the “culture areas” mural in the “Indigenous Cultures” hall. Here, however, the “culture areas” refer to six geographically defined regions within the boundaries of territorial Mexico. The notion of “culture areas” recurs throughout the ethnology halls. It overlapped with the concept of “zones of refuge,” spaces in which indigenous peoples are free to carry on traditional ways of life. Neither quite matched the nomenclature given the eleven remaining exhibit halls, which in some cases represented

the names of specific ethnic groups (Nahuas, Mayas), in others, linguistic groups (Otopames), and in others, geographic areas (Oaxaca, Gulf of Mexico). I also noticed that the hand-held cards with ethnographic information on them, proposed in the plans I had seen the previous summer, were not included.



Language vitrine, Sala Introducción a los Pueblos Indios

One of the vitrines in the gallery is dedicated to indigenous languages. It contains a map marked with the languages spoken in contemporary Mexico, as well as languages deemed “extinct.” Also enclosed within the case are a shield and *bastón* (a cane or stick symbolizing indigenous authority), a discussion of native languages reproduced from one of the Spanish chronicles, and several black and white photos of indigenous families. In some of the photos, women are bare-breasted. Text running alongside the photos informs

readers that *“through photographs, we recuperate the memory of extinct peoples, such as the Yumas and the Ocoronis. A counterexample would be the Kikapu, who, originally from the United States, refused to live on reservations and asked permission to establish themselves in Mexico.”*

I observed as a group of fifteen or so schoolgirls and their teacher navigated the gallery. They stopped in front of the vitrine, and the teacher announced “Language. Let’s read about language.” After a silent couple of minutes, she asked the girls “What have you learned from this exhibit?” After another silent moment, one of the girls offered, “Indians don’t wear shirts?” The teacher appeared nonplused for a moment, then briskly said “Very good,” and moved the group along.

I treat such moments as expressions of “unintentional learning” (Bourdieu 1984:25). Contextualizing them within Museo educational practice and wider public discourses provides one means to approach the shaping and reshaping of the relationships between peoples, states, and territories (Lomnitz 2001: xiv) in Mexico. This focus allows for “an engagement that moves our collective understanding forward” (Chaat Smith 2009, cited by Zimmerman 2010: 35), towards more nuanced perspectives on the shifting relationships between national museums and nationalist constructions of identity.

CHAPTER ONE

Knowing Your Place

Space is a practiced place.
de Certeau 1984: 117

In this chapter, I detail the ways that my living and working relationships informed my fieldwork. The negotiation between my assumptions of how to conduct myself in my everyday life and the expectations built into the systems and structures I now traversed contributed a particularly embodied understanding of the relations Bourdieu describes as essential to the formation of class habitus (1984: 101). In turn, this understanding informed my observations and interactions at the Museo. What I noticed changed over the span of my research as I became more attuned to distinctions the people with whom I lived, worked, and observed noted.

The rainy season in Mexico City typically begins in June. It rains nearly every day, great bursts of rain sometime in the late afternoon, usually around three or four. Often, there is thunder, and gusting wind. Cardboard and corrugated tin homes of the poor, built in the canyons and hills surrounding the city, slide apart as their foundations turn to mud. Occasionally, some Metro stops close, due to flooding. Other stations fill with people, either diverted from closed lines, or escaping the torrents. All movement becomes collective: pushing two or three inches forward, being pushed a foot back. Above ground, water swirls and rushes through the streets. Pedestrians huddle in doorways or under overhangs, or collect in the entryways of buildings. Traffic, which

never moves quickly, comes to a near halt. Before my fieldwork, I had not spent a full rainy season in the city. I expected the profuse rains of June, July, and August, but didn't really know what September and beyond might bring.

It brings more rain, much more rain. Maybe it only seemed to rain more because my schedule was determined by the Museo's working hours, and I had to calculate the effects of the rain on my commuting time. More than one night I returned to my apartment soaked to the waist; the street I had to cross to get to the housing complex became a river during heavy rains, the water often deep enough to graze my hips. The rain is more than a personal inconvenience, of course: rain often meant the delay or cancellation of scheduled school tour groups as buses either never departed or were stuck in traffic, and the power outages that accompanied the fiercer storms interrupted work. When I wrote my dissertation proposal, I did not consider how ordinary occurrences, like rain, might affect what happened inside the Museo.

Living in Mexico City and going to work in the Museo every day changed my perceptions of the Museo and the city in a variety of ways. Before I began my fieldwork, my primary experience of the Museo was as a visitor, albeit a regular one. I entered through the general entrance in the lobby, paid admission, and saw the areas available to be viewed by any other member of the paying public. Occasionally, I joined other local and international students and scholars upstairs in the Museo's public library. I didn't have any sense of the activities going on behind the public face of the Museo. I knew nothing of the routines of Museo staff, and did not realize the vast amount of space occupied by workshops, office, and storage areas in the Museo.

My experience in the city was much the same. I visited often, became familiar with the neighborhoods I lived in, but rarely departed from a set repertoire of routes. I knew where to shop, where I liked to eat, and where to take my film to be developed. When I returned for my fieldwork year, I sublet an apartment in the far northwestern corner of the city, right on the border with the state of Mexico. Accustomed to living in the center, I found myself quite disoriented in my new surroundings. Even the *Guia Roji* provided little help. In the Centro, I got about on foot, relying on certain landmarks—the tall spire of the Latin American tower, the communications tower at *Teléfonos de México*, for example—to guide me. For distances too far to walk, I used the Metro, as I lived within easy walking distance of four lines. Now I lived in a largely industrial zone served by a multitude of *peseros* and *combis* whose route designations I did not understand. What was “*Lecheria*”? Why did so many of the *peseros*²⁵ I saw speed by have signs for “*Defensa*”? I could still walk to one line of the Metro, but even that confused me at first: the official name of the station is “*Cuatro Caminos*” (Crossroads) but most residents call it “*Toreo*,” because of its proximity to the bullring. The station itself, the northern terminus for one of the main Metro arteries, bewildered me. An enormous asphalt field, a chaos of buses, taxis, and street vendors, surrounded it. It took several trips for me to determine which exit I should use. I learned new landmarks: the dome of the *Toreo*, a highway overpass I walked under, the huge Wal-Mart sign that glowed 24 hours a day.²⁶

²⁵ VW vans and small buses used for mass transit, respectively

²⁶ The *Toreo* no longer serves as a landmark. A private company purchased it and the surrounding area; demolition of the structure began in 2008. A portion of the property is to be used for an extension of the upper level of the Mexico City Beltway, the “Bicentennial Viaduct;” the rest will become a shopping center. “*Crecen dudas entre escombros del Toreo.*” Arturo Páramo, *Excelsior* online, September 22, 2008. Accessed March 15, 2010.

While I struggled to establish myself in my neighborhood, I also worked to orient myself as a researcher. Doing ‘official’ fieldwork permitted me to learn new ways of navigating the Museo. While I still spent a large amount of time observing in the galleries or working in the library, I now included the downstairs offices of the Ethnography Department and *Servicios Educativos* (Educational Services, Servicios from now on) division as part of my regular routine. My new status allowed me access to places I never realized existed. A door next to the elevator opens into a stairwell connecting the exhibit spaces to the departmental offices, the hallway crammed with overflow from the ethnography and physical anthropology collections. A glass door near the Ethnography department leads to a wrought iron spiral staircase that takes you to the patio. Below the stairs leading to Servicios, the audio-visual technician maintained a series of small rooms, complete with a makeshift kitchen.²⁷ Narrow doors tucked behind some of the exhibit cases disguise cramped storage for equipment belonging to the security staff. I learned this last in vivid and embarrassing fashion, when I leaned against the panel to balance myself while taking notes early in my fieldwork, tumbling into the hidden cubby and knocking over a stool and logbook in the process.

Observations I did before beginning fieldwork focused almost entirely on the activities of museum visitors. My visits were inconsistent and sporadic. Being in the museum daily, I incorporated the movements and perceptions of other people who participate in the social arena of the Museo: administrators, educators, research and curatorial staff, technicians, the security guards and custodians. As I became familiar with the use of spaces not intended for public viewing, I began to appraise public spaces

²⁷ Since my fieldwork, the Servicios space has undergone a complete renovation. The below stairs work area no longer exists.

differently. Observing the educational staff leading tours, I learned to think of the galleries, and the exhibits they housed, as pieces of narratives. I became practiced in moving deftly through galleries crowded with visitors, and gained an awareness of how display techniques intended to showcase the aesthetic properties of an object sometimes made it difficult to present the object didactically. Paying attention to the daily routines of the security staff taught me to perceive the gallery spaces as zones bounded by specific rules of conduct. Watching the custodial staff in their continuous rounds, I saw the Museo as a series of surfaces that required sweeping, dusting, or polishing.

Early in my fieldwork, one of the Educational Services guides commented to me that she did not care for the way “*grupos de la montaña*—“ literally, groups who came from the highlands, particularly groups that were presumed to be primarily indigenous—smelled. Not long after, a different guide told me that she particularly enjoyed working with the *grupos de la montaña*, in part because she loved the scent they carried with them. Since all schools, even those who came without reservations, registered at the reception desk, guides knew from where a group came. Also, most schoolchildren wear uniforms that identify their school: Escuela Primaria Jorge Luis Borges, Chilpancingo, Guerrero, for example. But guides also used other indicators, such as how non-teacher chaperones, especially women, dressed. A woman identified as *de la montaña* would typically wear her hair in braids, either one long plait or two, sometimes tied together at the bottom with wide satin ribbon, or wrapped into a coil on top of her head; a brightly patterned skirt and satiny blouse, often with tucks and lace trim, or, occasionally an embroidered white cotton blouse, many times covered with a full apron; a long cardigan sweater with a woven shawl (*rebozo*) across her shoulders; and cheap flat shoes, frequently the plastic

sort called jellies in the US, or sandals. Baffled, I tried every time a group identified as “de la montaña” arrived to discern the odor both women referenced. I detected nothing. Then, one day, accompanying a group and their guide across the patio of the Museo, I perceived it: the tang of wood-smoke, tinged with the sharpness of *ocote*, the fat pine used to start fires, the perfume of *Zote*, the laundry bar soap used for hand-scrubbing.

Mexico City itself also shaped my perceptions and bodily practices. Though I had sometimes stayed in the city for several weeks at a time, I had not lived there full-time before. Moving into an unfamiliar area of the city meant not only learning how to reorient myself physically in the urban landscape, but becoming accustomed to new sounds, scents, and ways of accomplishing everyday tasks, like emptying the garbage. Because I became a commuter, I learned what it took to arrive at particular places at specific times in a city of 8.6 million people.²⁸ In order to convey a sense of how I came to know the city as I do, I preface the ethnographic account with a series of descriptive vignettes, each describing a particular time and place in Mexico City.

Mexico City Mornings: Vignettes

Centro Histórico (summer 1997, 1998, and 1999, various visits 1993-1999)

As we fill the coffee carafe with water, the steady scouring of brooms on the streets begins. The scrape of the hammered tin cans the street cleaners use to collect wet or sticky garbage, and the drag of metal dustpans across the asphalt accompany the steady throb of the coffee brewing. The sound of traffic from the Eje Central, just half a

²⁸ That was the official population of the sixteen *delegaciones* that make up the Distrito Federal proper, according to the figures for 2000. The total population of the metropolitan area in 2000 was 19.2 million. Source: *Panorama Demográfico Centro y Zona Metropolitana del Valle de México*. Accessed online April 4, 2010.

block away, muted at first, intensifies as horns blare and brakes squeal with the increasing traffic. Shrill police whistles and the voices of officers crackling through bullhorns, urging drivers to “Avanzale, avanzale” (keep moving) compete with our morning conversation. We drink the first cups of coffee; keys rasp in metal locks, announcing the arrival of the neighborhood storekeepers, then the creaking and grinding of the storefronts being opened. Soon, we hear the splash of water across the pavement, the swishing of rags through soapy puddles, the pull of the rubber edge of the squeegee across the concrete. Now the music starts: norteros from the boots and western wear place, relentless replaying of the first few bars of current hits from the music store, pop in English and Spanish from the shoe stores, the sudden blare of radio from a passing taxi. Other residents leave for work, or errands. The building door swings into the wall with a reverberating clang, and crashes closed. The gas and water deliverymen slowly pedal by on their bicycle trolleys, broadcasting their services with prolonged calls: “El gaaaaaaaaaas” “El aguaaaaaaaaa, agua purifiiiiiiiiicada.” The garbage man’s hand bell rings out his arrival, causing one of us to jump from the table, grab the week’s garbage we bagged up the night before, and run down four flights of stairs to catch him before he leaves. The doorbell buzzes, announcing mail delivery. Snatches of conversation and the whistles people use to get one another’s attention rise up from the street.

Colonia del Valle (summer 1998)

The earliest sounds are the click of an upstairs neighbor’s high heels on floor, back and forth, back and forth. The whine of a vacuum cleaner and muffled buzz of an

electric shaver follow. People walk rapidly through the hallway to the elevator, the doors sliding electronically closed behind them. Little noise from the street enters the apartment, as the windows are fixed closed. I might not hear much of anything, regardless. I am a few blocks from the Eje 7, which is less packed than the Eje Central. None of the businesses on the street plays music. Right next to the apartment building is a car bodywork shop. The hiss of paint being sprayed on is constant, but only audible in the street. I joke to a friend that this is the place that people bring their cars to have them painted red, because it is the only color I ever see used. On the Eje, walking the several blocks to the Metro, I am most aware of smells, perhaps because I am pregnant that summer, and my sense of smell is quite acute. A couple of convenience stores, an Oxxo and a 7-11, send the odors of over-roasted hot dogs, stale coffee, and powerful floor cleanser out their opened doors. A row of florists lines one block, displaying immense bouquets and funerary wreaths; the overpoweringly sweet scent of lilies drives me to cross the street. I later learn, from reading a Paco Ignacio Taibo II crime novel, that the building I pass after I cross, which I thought was some sort of private clinic, is actually one of the more prominent funeral homes in Mexico City.

Near Coyoacán (Summer 1999)

For part of the summer, I share a sublet apartment with a colleague from my graduate department, Apen Ruiz. She has her daughter, Lucía, who is about to turn four with her, and I have four-month-old Rubén. Both of us are working in the archives of the Secretaría de Educación Pública, which are in the Centro Histórico. We use a combination of taxi and peseros to get there. For me, this is a new way to get around the

city. I am accustomed to walking, or using the Metro. Also new is the experience of navigating the city with an infant. Rubén goes everywhere with me. He attracts a lot of attention: small children want to know why my baby doesn't wear shoes, old ladies chide me for not keeping him "tapado," covered under a blanket as most Mexican infants are; a couple in indigenous clothing, holding a plump baby of their own, ask me why I haven't protected him against mal de ojo;²⁹ and everyone wants to feed him. The two men who operate the tortillería near the Centro Histórico apartment greet him every morning and offer a bit of tortilla; one of the administrative staff members at the archive brings him a slice of strawberry layer cake; a woman sits next to us on the Metro, makes baby conversation with Rubén, then pops her finger into the bag of steaming mixiote (a spicy stew, often made from lamb, wrapped and cooked in the thin skin of the maguey leaf) she holds and into his mouth. "He's very Mexican," she says, as he eagerly eats it.

Hotel Diligencias, Centro Histórico, (Summer 2002)

I think every merchant who comes up to either buy or sell at the Lagunilla market stays at the Diligencias. The anteroom of the lobby is often full of precariously stacked boxes and bundles barely held together with copious amounts of twine, and big plastic bags crammed full of stuffed toys, artificial flowers, foam floral forms, hoops to be worn

²⁹ *Mal de ojo* is often translated as evil eye. But *mal* also means "malady," so another way to translate it would be as something like "gazing illness." It stems from beliefs about powerful versus weak persons. By gazing for too long at a weaker person, a more powerful person can make him or her ill. Giving mal de ojo is not necessarily a malicious act. The more powerful person can disrupt the transmission of mal de ojo by touching the recipient of the gaze. Babies and small children who attract admiring looks are especially susceptible. Parents protect their children by pinning a bit of red string to their clothing, tying red string or a strand of red beads around their wrists, or with a pin or bracelet made from a buckeye (*ojo de venado* in Spanish), and by keeping babies covered.

beneath first communion and quinceañera dresses, and other miscellany. On weekends, an influx of families, in the city for weddings or first communions or baptisms, arrives. Children run up and down the stairs and passages, and the usually empty restaurant fills with customers. Like the apartment building I frequently stayed in, which is on the next block, the hotel is built around a central courtyard. The windows of the interior rooms face the hallway, and open onto the courtyard. They receive little or no natural light. The management will tell you they are quieter. While it is true that you cannot hear street noise, every interior sound is amplified, so the party five doors down and the baby crying two floors up are clearly heard.

Morning sounds here depend on the location of your room. All of the noise of the Eje Central that is audible at the apartment is also audible here, only louder, since the hotel is even less buffered from the street, with the addition of the stuttering purr of buses pulled up to the hotel's circular curb to either take on or discharge passengers. Sometimes it seems the motors run for hours. Very early in the morning, when it is still dark, the scuffling, snapping street dogs fight over the garbage. The church of La Concepción dominates the street opposite the hotel, so there are no stores there, and a large bakery occupies the corner right next to the hotel. The sounds of commerce here differ from those one block over. The rattle and scrape of overloaded dollies being pushed across the pavement replaces the creak of storefront shutters being opened. The street sweepers still come by. They congregate in the small plaza on the eastern side of the hotel, adding more brush to their brooms and joking. They usually share the space with some homeless people who have slept out on the sidewalk and use the fountain in the plaza to wash.

I had first stayed at the Diligencias on my friend's recommendation in the summer of 1999, when all of my family drove down for a visit. There was no way the six of us could fit at the apartment, so we stayed around the corner at the hotel for nearly two weeks. Rubén was a chubby blond infant, and quite popular with all of the hotel staff, especially the day porter, whose name is also Rubén. After that visit, I stayed at the hotel several times, both with Rubén and by myself. The proprietors, a tall sallow man and a plump smiling woman--I'm not sure whether they are siblings, or a married couple, or simply business partners—remember me and always ask after Rubén and the girls.

When I returned in 2002, I thought I would be staying a week to ten days. However, a few complications came up, and the apartment I planned to sublet turned out to be occupied longer than anticipated. I lived in the hotel for six weeks. The señora who worked the desk felt quite sorry for me, “solita y sin casa” (alone and without a home). When it looked as though my housing arrangements might fall through altogether, she called relatives to see if anyone had a room to let to a quiet, clean, sober señora.

I. Fieldwork: At Home

When I first arrived in Mexico City that summer, I envisioned living on my own in the sublet I had arranged. I did, for part of the time, but for much of my fieldwork year, I shared the apartment with the mother/mother-in-law of the friends from whom I was subletting. As someone accustomed to running her own household, I wasn't sure how it would feel to be the junior member. The Señora is about ten years older than my own parents, and though she was born in a town in Guanajuato, grew up in Mexico City. Over

the course of the year, she taught me many things about how to live in Mexico City. As part of her household, I conformed to schedules and acquired habits I might otherwise not have, preferring the comfort of my own routines. I learned not to go barefooted in the house, and ate on a completely Mexican schedule, taking my main meal (*comida*) at three or so in the afternoon, and having a light *cena* (supper) later. We often sat talking for a long time in the evening over our *pan dulce* and cups of café con leche, cinnamon tea, or chocolate; my field journal is full of stories the Señora told me about her family in Guanajuato, her childhood and medical studies in the city, and later her work as a doctor. Though I don't think she ever quite trusted me in the kitchen, I also recorded a number of recipes and cooking tips in my journal, along with home remedies, names and uses of various herbs, and how to choose a *cazuela* (clay cooking pot). Along with reminiscences, she shared memories of events in the city, including the night of October 2, 1968, when she and her husband attempted to return home from work to their son, waiting in their Tlatelolco apartment with the housekeeper.³⁰

On Sunday afternoons, I often joined her for *comida* at a favorite restaurant, followed by visits to her friends. One particular afternoon remains vivid in my mind. We called on one of her friends who had been a young rural schoolteacher during the socialist education movement promoted by the Cárdenas administration in the 1930s. As the ladies

³⁰ Tlatelolco is a housing complex, constructed in 1962 by the López Mateos government to house middle class families. On October 2, 1968, the Mexican military confronted student demonstrators who occupied the plaza, murdering an undetermined number of people; the government alleges thirty, other estimates go as high as 300. The massacre was much in the news during my fieldwork. In 2001, Vicente Fox appointed a special prosecutor to investigate the killings. The findings of the investigator led to charges of genocide against Luís Echeverría, minister of the interior in 1968 and subsequently President of Mexico (1970-76). For more, see *La noche de Tlatelolco: testimonios de historia oral*. Elena Ponitowska. Mexico City. Ediciones Era:1971. and *Tlatelolco: La autoadministración en unidades habitacionales* Rubén Cantú Chapa. Mexico City. Plaza y Valdés : 2001.

reminisced over glasses of tequila and *rompope* (an alcoholic eggnog drink, sometimes made at home, but also marketed commercially), the Maestra sprang to her feet and began singing the Marseillaise in Spanish, then recited slogans popularized as part of the effort to encourage temperance and other social changes at the time. Another time, I heard several accounts of the 1985 earthquake as each had experienced it in her neighborhood.

Teresita, the upstairs neighbor, often looked after the apartment when the Señora and the rest of the family were away, managing accounts and building payments, and other business affairs. She and her husband were active members of the Mormon temple located not too far from the apartments. Not long after I moved in, I accepted her invitation to attend the temple's Independence Day celebrations. I wasn't sure what to expect, aside from a big meal, and perhaps some children performing a simplified version of the *Jarabe Tapatio* (known in English as the Mexican Hat Dance). I did not anticipate the more than two hours of music, patriotic recitations, and skits prepared by various temple groups. The final sketch featured the Ladies' Auxiliary dressed as *soldaderas* (women who participated in the military activities of the Revolution, either by fighting or providing labor and support in the camps). The performance ended with the women unwinding their shawls to reveal a full complement of baby dolls with Pancho Villa moustaches.

Teresita's mother, Teresa, had been the Señora's nurse when the Señora practiced at a clinic. She lived with Teresita and her family. Teresa was in ill health during much of my stay at the apartment. She and the Señora frequently visited together, recalling their days at the clinic. When the Señora was away, I visited Teresa on my own. She had

grown up in the Centro Histórico, on the same street as my friends' apartment, and took pleasure in talking to me about her days there as a young woman, courted by military officers and *licenciados*. According to Teresa, in the 1920s and 30s the street was largely populated by Russian emigrés, whose main enterprise was selling used clothes. She had a hard time remembering my name, and often called me *La Rusa*, the Russian, as she said I resembled the Russian women she knew in those days.

Another unexpected influence on my fieldwork was the Señora's housekeeper, Doña Lupe. Doña Lupe came weekly, whether the Señora was there or not. She freely dispensed advice and admonishments, chiding me for drinking hot coffee when I had just gotten out of the shower ("No wonder you always have a cold"), and scolding me for wearing wrinkled clothes or unpolished shoes, prefacing her remarks by admonishing, "Ai, Sra. Melissa, *¿cómo cree usted?*" (What are you thinking). She marveled at my eating habits: how could I eat raw broccoli, or cook with basil, typically a medicinal herb in Mexico. The one time I made myself a pasta sauce with a liberal amount of chopped fresh basil, Doña Lupe entered the apartment exclaiming, "What is that terrible smell?" She promptly opened every window in the place.

Doña Lupe's family struggled, always on the margin of financial disaster. They lived in a section of the city that she herself told me to avoid. She was twice robbed at gunpoint on the *combi* on the way home after work; once, she had no money, so the robbers took the bag full of fresh *masa* for making tortillas that she had just purchased at the market. After I had known her for several months, she told me about feeding herself by picking through the discards at the La Merced market when her oldest daughter was

an infant. From our conversations, I learned about the *tanda*, a system of rotating credit, and other strategies she and her family members and neighbors used to get by.

At first, I was very uncomfortable having a housekeeper when I was there alone. Having cared for my own household for many years, I felt somewhat ridiculous leaving my laundry or dishes to be washed by someone else. But my discomfort reached deeper than that. Being the de facto señora forced me to confront aspects of my own privilege I could otherwise elide. In my observation and experience, the relationships between domestic workers and their employers in Mexico tends to be much more personal than is common in middle class households in the United States. To a degree, Doña Lupe expected to access certain resources through me. For example, she regularly asked my advice about medical matters. The Señora was a doctor and could give an informed opinion and treatment; all I had was the financial ability to purchase aspirin or other simple remedies. Once Doña Lupe asked if I would give her an injection that had been prescribed for her. She had purchased the dosage and the syringe. Both she and Teresita found my rather adamant refusal, based in my own fear of needles and utter lack of experience giving shots, very funny; Doña Lupe teased me about it for several days.

My medical ineptitude did not prevent Doña Lupe from seeking my advice about other matters. Very occasionally, and with a great deal of embarrassment, she asked me for small sums of money. Over the months, I learned to pick up the cues and offer before the request was made. I always felt very gauche and self-conscious, and was never sure if doing so upset some sort of accepted protocol I didn't understand, sparing me shame, but causing more for Doña Lupe.

Navigating these tacit understandings was full of pitfalls for me. I had been at the apartment two or three weeks when the Señora left to visit family. A couple of days after she left, I realized I had forgotten to ask her how the garbage was collected. This might not seem like a difficult thing to figure out, but in my experience, the method of collection varied, depending on the neighborhood. Doña Lupe had already come for the week, and Teresita and her family were also away. Fortunately, just as the trash began to accumulate, I heard the familiar ringing of a bell that preceded the garbage truck in the Centro. I gathered all the bags, and ran outside to deposit them in the truck. I did this a few times, relieved that I had figured out the system. Shortly after the Señora returned, Don Erasmo, the man who tended to the grounds around our unit, came to the door to see her. He seemed annoyed. As the Señora later explained to me, I had unwittingly disrupted an arrangement between them. Don Erasmo supplemented his salary by gathering residents' trash and taking it to the collection point. By taking the trash out myself, I deprived him of forty pesos a week he counted on.

II. Fieldwork: In the Museo

I arrived in Mexico City in June, ready to begin fieldwork. Some of the remodeling work I saw in progress in 1999 and 2000 was now complete, but other galleries were still in process. I intended to focus on the ethnographic galleries, and hoped to speak to Museographers, curators, and docents from the educational services department. I also planned to observe visitors as they move through the galleries. Knowing what I did about Mexican bureaucracy, I decided to wait to request research permission until I could actually present myself, in person, to the appropriate Museo

personnel. I received permission to begin my research from the director of the ethnography department without much fanfare. He seemed somewhat amused by my earnestness and the amount of critical theory in my bibliography, but found the project interesting enough to allow me to begin.

The *Licenciada* who directed educational services was not so sure.³¹ She was perfectly polite, but requested that I make a “*solicitud*” (formal request) to the governing board of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), which sets policy for its museums. She gave me the phone number and name of the person I should contact. I learned that I needed to submit a formal request, in writing, to the board, and that they would then determine whether or not I could proceed. I asked a friend to look over and correct the letter I composed. The language of Mexican bureaucracy is tricky to navigate, and I didn’t want to make any mistakes. I submitted the letter in July; I was still waiting for their decision in September. I had been busy in the interim, mostly resolving an unanticipated problem: it had appeared as though the sublet arrangement I had made might not work, but at the last minute, everything came together.

I told the head of Ethnography that I would be willing to help with any projects he thought I had the skill to manage. In early September, I began checking in with the department two or three times a week. Several students were there, doing the social service hours required of all Mexican college students before they can receive their

³¹ The title *Licenciado/a* signifies that a person holds an undergraduate university degree. In Mexico, it can also be used for lawyers. It is a common honorific. It is typical practice in Mexico to refer to people by their job or degree titles. For example, most people referred to the Museo’s director, who was an archeologist, as “el *Arqueólogo*.” Most of the curators in Ethnography were called *Maestra/o* or *Doctór/a*, depending on the terminal degrees they held. People often referred to me as *la Antropóloga*, or sometimes *la Señorita Antropóloga*. All of the teachers who passed through *Servicios* were referred to as *Maestro/a* by the *asesores*.

degrees. The director grouped me with the “*niños*,” as he called them, and told them to give me things to do.

Shortly after I began work, the Museo celebrated its 38th anniversary, marked by a special meal hosted in the research wing.³² Here I met some of the curators and Museographers. What sort of anthropologist am I, one asked, an ethnologist, an ethnographer, a Museographer? She seemed a bit surprised to know that I considered myself simply a social anthropologist. Everyone was perfectly nice, but clearly not very interested in talking with me about the renovations.

I spent most of my time helping on of the social service students, Francisco, catalogue the photograph collection held by the department. One morning when I arrived, he wasn't at his desk. “He went to help Luis prepare an exhibit for the Metro. You can help them,” the director said. He asked Nola, another of the social service students, to take me to the room in which they were working. She took me out a side entrance, and led me to a twisting spiral staircase that takes you from the basement to the ground level patio and galleries. I had never been up the back way before. She led me to the gallery, the same one that had once been the “Introduction to Anthropology” hall, and which at my last visit had been renamed “Introduction to the Study of Indian Peoples.” I was a little surprised to see that it was now empty, but “*ni modo*” (whatever), as I was learning to say.

³² Servicios Educativos occupies one portion of the downstairs area. Most of its space is open to the public, though there is a receptionist and a guard stationed at the door that leads from Servicios to the patio of the Museo. The other downstairs areas, which include the carpentry workshops, the collections areas, and the offices of Ethnography, Physical Anthropology, Muesography, and other curatorial and research departments are divided from the Servicios area by a partitioned door. In order to enter, you must sign in with a guard, unless you wear a badge denoting a certain level of access to Museo offices.

Most of the wall texts and photos were gone, but the map I remembered from 2000 was still there. The video kiosk was pushed aside, the screen askew. “Didn’t this used to be something, else, a different gallery,” I asked Nola, but she didn’t know. She hadn’t been there in 2000. We passed through to the section that at one time was blocked. I saw Francisco working with a couple of other men, and a lot of large, woven straw figures. Nola left, and Francisco introduced me to Luis, the from the ethnographic storage facility, and Martín, who is one of the Museo’s photographers. When work needs to be done, any hands will do. There was also a third person, but no one introduced us.

Luis explained what was being done: the pieces were going to be part of one of the rotating exhibits that appear in some of the Metro stations. Each piece needed to have its identification number affixed to it. Francisco and Martín were panting tiny dabs of white paint onto inconspicuous bits of straw on each piece. When the paint dried, Luis carefully inscribed the identification numbers, which he checked against a master list. My job was to paint a thin layer of varnish over the number.

It seemed that sometime between my visit in 2000, and the gallery’s dismantlement, this area had been opened to the public. We were working on top of an exhibit of a burial site, constructed beneath a plexiglass floor that we walked across. A bunch of empty video kiosks, their screens missing, were shoved in one corner. There was still one wall installation: “*aldeas, ciudades y estados*” (villages, cities, and states). The work was tedious, and we talked a lot. Luis asked a lot of questions about Chicanos: why don’t some Chicanos like to be called Chicano, why don’t Chicanos like Mexicans. We listened to music on a small boombox while we talked, arguing a bit over the music. Luis wanted to listen to norteño music and played his *Tigres del Norte* cd over the

protests of Francisco and Martín. While it played, Luis talked about “*narcos*.” He told me about a murdered *narcotraficante* named Jesús Malverde. After his death, people started bringing “*pedritas*” (little offerings, a common way to mark a sacred site) to the site of the murder. “It was near a church, but the church was closed,” Luis said.

One of the plainclothes guards came in and looked around. Then a museum administrator came in, and told them to turn down the music. I asked Luis what happened to the other exhibits, like the photo of the Indian at the computer. He said it was decided to use them elsewhere. I wondered what happened to the wall panels; those had to be expensive to produce. Later I would see some of them dispersed in other galleries. But I never found the photograph.

During my fieldwork, July 2002-August 2003, several of the galleries remained closed. In the ethnography section, the galleries devoted to Oaxaca and to Highland and Lowland Mayas were still incomplete. The dates for their reopening were postponed several times. “*Falta de presupuesto* (budget problems)” was the official line. But I heard a lot of theories about political problems between the curators and the INAH board, especially with regard to the Mayan galleries, which would include Chiapas. No one said anything explicit, though.³³

³³ In November of 2004, I visited the Museo. All gallery renovations were complete. I spent an afternoon in the Oaxaca and Maya galleries of the ethnographic halls. In the section dedicated to Mayas of the Lowlands, I found the photograph of the Indian and the computer. This time, however, the photograph appears next to a wall text titled “*En continua transformación* (Continually transforming).” The text describes the comings and goings of people in the Lacandon jungle: woodcutters, evangelists, academics, other Mayan peoples, immigrants from the Caribbean. It states that “these other realities” exert more influence over the people of the Lacandon than might appear at first glance. According to the text, “some have acquired knowledge and techniques for the study and understanding of their own culture,” including the man in the photograph. He is identified as Ricardo Obregón; according to the text, he is using the computer to compile and record information about native flora.

Often, there wasn't any work for me in Ethnography. Before I received official permission to work in the galleries, or with Servicios Educativos, I concentrated on archival research in the Museo library. The library proved to be a good spot for some casual ethnographic observations as well. Patrons must sign in with a security guard upon arrival, and stop to check all belongings except for writing instruments and paper. The space is divided into an open reading area, which contains the circulation desk, the card catalogs, two computers for computerized catalog searches, the photocopying services for the Museo, and some cubicle offices, and the reference room, which has volumes for consultation and its own librarian. The stacks are closed; patrons submit requests to one of several librarians at the circulation desk. The librarian disappears through a doorway, retrieves the book, and then calls for the patron. I usually chose to sit in the open reading room, which afforded me a clear view of the entrance and circulation desk.

Museum staff and university students used the library; so did teachers, identifiable by their SEP badges, *prepa* and *secundaria* (high school and junior high) students, and members of the general public came in as well. Occasionally, I noted patrons in traditional indigenous dress. Most people seemed to have a particular book or search in mind when they entered. I did sometimes notice people who seemed to be browsing, or just curious, such as the man dressed in laborer's clothes that came in one afternoon. After signing in, he stopped at the computer workstation, reading line by line the instructions for how to use the rather cumbersome database. Without attempting a search, he moved to the display cases containing new acquisitions, where he stood and read aloud to himself all of the titles. Then he stopped at the magazine racks and selected the

current issue of *Arqueología*--similar to the *Smithsonian* or *Natural History Magazine*-- and sat down to read.

The library also provided a good introduction to both the explicit and the tacit bureaucratic culture of the Museo. Everything required paperwork, from the signature book at the entrance, to requests for books from the stacks, to the photocopy requests. Much of my archival work consisted of reading the annals and collected bulletins of the Museo in its various incarnations. Nearly all of those had to be read in the special consulting room, a small, stifling space located behind the circulation desk. However, other volumes of the same age could be used in the main room, and patrons were not required to wear gloves or handle the materials in any particular way. No photocopiers were self-service. Having as few as two or three pages copied sometimes required an overnight wait, as the photocopy machines in the library served all of the Museo departments. During the rainy season, the Museo experiences fairly routine power outages. Though the main reading room receives plenty of natural light, the consulting room and stacks do not, so a power outage often meant work was effectively over for the rest of the day.

The security guard on duty made occasional rounds, checking for infractions, admonishing those who were perhaps talking too loudly or not sitting properly. A tap on the shoulder accompanied a hushed “*Silencio, por favor,*” or “*Sientese bien, por favor, señorita*” (sit properly). “Sitting properly” included keeping both feet on the floor, rather than resting on the rungs of a chair or crossed on the seat beneath you, keeping your elbows close to your body and your posture upright, and not slipping your shoes off, ever, even if your unshod feet rested right on top of them.

I received my official *permisos* from INAH toward the end of September. After I presented the appropriate paperwork, the Licenciada granted me permission to work with the staff. Things began awkwardly. The Licenciada wanted to know what my research hypothesis was, and seemed skeptical when I instead told her some of the things I was interested in observing. When she introduced me to the staff, she instructed them to “cooperate” with me. This did not go over particularly well with anyone. I tried to mitigate her command when I spoke for a few minutes afterward, stressing that their participation was voluntary and that I would not record anything they did not wish me to write down, but I could tell by body language that most people remained unconvinced. All of the *asesores*, as the Servicios guides are called, gave me permission to accompany them on tours, but no one really talked to me outside of that.

At least a few people seemed convinced that I was there to evaluate their performance, and perhaps report back to the Licenciada. Why else would I carry a notebook and write everything down? Domingo, a retired rural schoolteacher who was one of the older *asesores*, was the most open about his suspicions. He enjoyed putting me on the spot during the tours, first giving his explanation of a piece, then turning attention to me: “And now la Señorita Antropóloga will tell us what she thinks.” More than once I was glad that I had spent so much time teaching young children, and so could actually say something reasonably informed about topics such as why people in the United States decorate trees to celebrate Christmas. He also warned me that someday he would make me guide the tour, and he would follow me with a notebook to write down everything I say.

Servicios Educativos serves pre-kindergarten through 8th grade students.³⁴ Two “turns” of asesores, corresponding to the morning and afternoon sessions common in Mexican public schools, work in Servicios. The majority of visits take place in the morning, when there are eight asesores assigned. The afternoon turn has only three. In addition, there is an audio-visual technician, responsible for running the short educational films with titles such as “*Sentinels of Silence.*” Tours typically take about two hours, with some of that time spent organizing the group. Some groups are quite large; sometimes entire schools come. Tours guided by an asesor or asesora are free of charge to any SEP accredited school, but must be scheduled in advance. School groups can also come independently. These groups still enter the museum through the Servicios Educativos entrance, allowing the Servicios staff to check the credentials of the accompanying adults.³⁵ All teachers with SEP credentials may enter for free; up to four other adults may also enter without paying admission. The Servicios staff constantly battles with outside tour agencies that sell the service of guides to schools as part of a field trip package. In this case, though the children and their teachers still enter for free through the Servicios entrance, the guides must enter the Museo galleries through the lobby entrance, and pay the admission fee.

³⁴ This includes two of the SEP levels, *Educación Inicial* and *Educación Básica*. The next educational level, called *Media Superior*, includes *preparatorias* (high schools that prepare students for college, sometimes affiliated with a university), which award a degree called a *bachillerato*, technical schools, and other job training institutions. The final level, *Educación Superior*, refers to higher education. Media superior and superior students also received educational support from Museo staff, but through the office of *Promoción Cultural*, Cultural Promotion, located on the lobby floor with the other administrative offices.

³⁵ A couple of the asesoras told me that the director of the Museo proposed building an entrance to be accessed from Reforma, leading directly into the Servicios area, rather than entering through the lobby and then coming downstairs. When I asked why, they made faces and said that the Museo’s administrators worried that the large and sometimes noisy school groups disrupted the tourists who paid to enter the Museo.

During the first days I observed tours, I tried to observe each asesor, both morning and afternoon shifts, at least once. I preferred to watch tours from start to finish. Not all tours began at the same time. In between, I sat on a stool near the reception desk. Salma, the receptionist, seemed happy to chat with me while she worked. Sometimes I helped her with small tasks, such as entering the number of students and accompanying adults in a particular group into the ledger. Perusing the pages of the ledger, I learned that, though Mexico City schools predominate, groups come from across the country to visit the Museo. Schools served include traditional elementary and secondary schools, both public and private, and some of the other SEP-coordinated institutions, such as telesecundarias.³⁶ At times, other groups came: a children's shelter sometimes brought groups of street kids, and occasionally, a group of children from one of the *delagaciones* comes.³⁷ I also noticed that hardly anyone requested tours of the ethnographic galleries. The Licenciada and the asesores confirmed this observation.

Aside from the information I gleaned from the ledgers, sitting with Salma provided other benefits. Though there was a work area for the asesores, and some seating in the office of the Licenciada's personal secretary, people rarely used it. Most of the asesores gathered around Salma's work area, talking and comparing notes. Often Ignacio, the audio-visual technician, joined the group. Only two of the asesoras regularly took breaks in the secretary's office. I gathered from gossip that they were widely regarded to

³⁶ Secondary schools taught with the assistance of televised programming, located primarily in places where either terrain or economics—and usually, both—make traditional secondary schools inaccessible.

³⁷ Mexico City is divided into sixteen delegaciones, political entities similar to boroughs in New York City.

be especially thick with the Licenciada. Sitting at the reception desk gave me a chance to participate in everyday conversation about traffic, politics, and the favorite topic, food.

Gradually, I learned more about the asesores. Several had a second job outside of the Museo. Sara taught pedagogy classes at a university; Anita and Miguel taught secondary school. Some, like Lila, were working towards master's degrees. They asked questions about my research; I shared some of the observations I have made in the galleries. The concern that I was there to critique job performance dissipated. Even Domingo eased up a bit.

The morning turn lasts from 8 am until 3 pm, the afternoon from three until seven. Each morning asesor usually leads two tours, sometimes three. The afternoon asesores usually lead one tour each. My earliest field notes from Servicios dwelt on the sheer numbers of people who passed through. Many mornings I arrived to find the waiting area completely full, end to end. The Licenciada told me that an ideal size for a school tour would be no more than 25 students. In practice, asesores did well to limit tour groups to forty students, depending on how many came with a specific school. Schools often brought two hundred or more students, requiring nearly all of the available asesores. For example, in a two-hour period one April morning I recorded visits by three *telesecundarias* (see footnote 21), and one *primaria* that alone brought 642 children and 27 adults.

Servicios offers *talleres*, hands-on workshops, as part of the school tours. For a materials fee, students participate in a craft related to the tour they take. As in Ethnography, university students completing social service hours provide some extra hands, helping to set up the talleres and assisting the asesores in charge.

When I presented my project to the Licenciada, I asked only to be allowed to observe. But as I became more accustomed to the routine, I started to feel silly sitting, writing in my notebook while the asesores scrambled around me. I already assisted Salma in small ways. One extremely hectic day, when not enough social service students were there to prepare for a taller, I asked if I could do anything to help. After that, I regularly assisted with the talleres, and more directly helped Salma by registering schools, checking for SEP credentials, and answering inquiries when I could.

In addition to the tours and talleres, Servicios provides other educational support to students and teachers. Students came into the department looking for help with homework, either searching for the answer to a specific question (“How many indigenous languages are there in Mexico?”), or asking to purchase one of the gallery pamphlets available for ten or fifteen pesos. The pamphlets printed all of the wall texts from a particular gallery. Teachers inquired about tours, purchased pamphlets, or asked where they could find more information. Students also came seeking *sellos*, that is, official museum stamps for their notebooks or homework sheets, as proof that they had actually come to the Museo. Giving out sellos fell to the guard in charge of the Servicios entrance. A big sign on her desk announced that, but that never prevented five or ten students, or their parents, from asking Salma for sellos. The heavy “ka-ching” of the metal hand stamp that Lola, the guard, used to give the sellos punctuated conversation, especially in the late afternoon, when many students came to the Museo to complete homework assignments. When observing in the galleries, I often saw students filling out homework sheets, or copying down wall texts. Secundaria and prepa students tended to come in groups, sometimes collaborating to complete the work. I once watched as a group of five

or six used their cell phones to photograph objects and labels, and communicate with friends working in other parts of the Museo. Primaria students came with their families. Many times a parent or other adult filled out the worksheet or copied the texts for younger students. I heard parents admonish their children by threatening to stop copying: “If you can’t behave, I won’t finish the assignment!”

Understanding how the Museo functioned on a day-to-day basis required learning something about its bureaucratic workings. Every directive that came from the administration, even invitations to the annual Christmas party, came with two additional forms, one to be stamped by the person responsible for receiving the documents, indicating that they had been delivered. The second sheet remained in the office, to be signed by all staff members to whom the materials pertained, signaling that they had been apprised of the contents. When everyone had signed, the documents was stamped by the department head, and sent back to administration. The applications process for research permits, the processes involved in doing archival work, and the time I spent observing and helping Salma all provided examples of daily routines governing access and providing accountability. The word used to describe these sorts of transactions is “*trámites*.” It literally means procedures, and it covers a multitude of situations requiring signatures, stamps, seals, standing in line, and “*fotos tamaño infantil*.”³⁸

Once I had been working at the Museo for a few weeks, I asked the director of Ethnography if it would be possible for me to be issued a Museo badge. He agreed to sponsor my request, and told me to draft a letter to the director of the Museo. Still

³⁸ Almost all official requests and documents in Mexico require *fotos tamaño infantil*, ID-sized photos. They are attached to job applications, diplomas, and a score of other similar documents. Photo studios advertise package deals. I wound up with ten copies of the photo I needed for my Museo badge, and used all but two over the course of my research.

uncertain of my mastery of the peculiarly baroque Spanish that is the trademark of bureaucratic Mexico, I asked Francisco to help. Together we drafted the letter, and I took it to the director for his approval. “No, no, you can’t send this,” he exclaimed. He scolded Francisco for his sloppy oversight of my work, and helped me rewrite it into an even more elaborate and diffuse request. A week or so later, he told me the Museo director approved it. Now I needed to bring identification, proof of address, and two photos tamaño infantil to the office of the technical director, Licenciado Garfías.

Francisco went with me to fill in the papers, in case of “difficulties.” We entered a warren of offices tucked behind the main gift store on the lobby floor. First I was presented to Licenciado Garfías. He recognized me from the Servicios desk: “*Ah, sí, la Señorita Antropóloga.*” Then he escorted me to the office of another licenciado, who would actually process the paperwork. I filled out multiple copies of the same form. The Licenciado made several copies of my identification card, then date-stamped everything numerous times, and gathered it all into a manila folder to which he clipped the fotos tamaño infantil. I should have my badge in a week or so, he assured me. I took this to mean two or three weeks.

After two weeks, I asked the director if he had heard anything about my badge from the Licenciado. No, but Francisco and I should go check in person. We returned to the Licenciado’s office. Ah, the badge is right here, but I never came back to sign it! It cannot be laminated without my signature. How unfortunate, what a silly mistake, sign right here. *Todo bien*, it should be ready soon. I noticed that I have been assigned a social services badge color, and that my title is “*Tesista*,” thesis writer. Another week passed. At Francisco’s urging, I inquired at the Licenciado’s office. Yes, yes, everything is in

order, but the director of Ethnography must sign the badge. Didn't I know that? No, of course I cannot take the badge to him for his signature, it must go through proper channels. It will be ready soon. A few days later, the director told me he received and signed the badge. Once again, I visited the Licenciado. No, the badge is not ready. It requires signatures. Whose signatures? The Licenciado didn't say. When I returned to Ethnography empty-handed, Francisco, incensed, insisted on going to see the Licenciado himself. A short while later, he came back, looking disgruntled. "It's in Lamination," he said. Several days later, I received notice that the badge was ready. It was bright yellow, and had four signatures and two stamps on the back. From start to finish, the trámite for the badge took eight weeks.

One day, after a particularly hectic morning in Servicios, I sat talking with Naila, one of the asesoras. Two schools with reservations arrived bringing twice as many students as expected, and a large number of groups came without reservations. Given how intractable some regulations are, and what a problem it causes for Servicios, I was surprised that reservations for guided tours are honored when groups come "*sobrecargados*," overloaded, and I remarked upon that to Naila. She smiled ruefully, and commented that I must find them very disorganized. I responded that no, I am actually impressed by the quantity of students they manage. The trámites for field trips take a lot of a teacher's time and energy, Naila explained.³⁹ Not only must they secure permission for a trip from several layers of school bureaucracy, they must arrange the transportation, and, in many cases, figure out how to fund the trip. Of course, teachers try to take advantage of the situation. Why travel with 50 empty seats on a bus, better to

³⁹ Naila referred specifically to public schools, not private schools.

bring as many children as possible. She shrugged and said, “*Acomodamos.*” *Acomodar* translates as accommodate, and applies to a variety of circumstances: you *acomoda* when two extra people show up for dinner, you *acomoda* when you shift your position on a *pesero* to allow one more person to squeeze in even though people are already doubled in the aisle, you *acomoda* when the ideal and the actual don’t quite meet.

Though I observed many instances of *acomadando* at the Museo, I also noted times in which strict attention to protocol prevailed, and even some in which people decided not to comply with what seemed to me to be fairly benign requests. One afternoon, a couple of students approached the reception desk, requesting pamphlets. I reached my hand down to unlock the cabinet where they were stored, but before I said or did anything, Salma stopped me. “We’re all out,” she told the two. “Check in the bookstore.” While the bookstore sells pamphlets, it does not sell the ones with the gallery texts, which Salma knew as well as I did. Also, there were plenty of pamphlets in the cabinet, visible to the boys. Perhaps they did not notice, or perhaps they saw Salma’s set expression and decided not to protest. After the boys were out of earshot, I asked her why she turned them away. “Well, if we sell some to them, then everyone will come here wanting to buy them, and we’ll never be finished!”

I encountered a similar stall when I tried to contact someone in the INAH administrative offices about a visitor survey done in the Museo a couple of years earlier. The Director of Ethnography phoned ahead on my behalf; I followed through with a call, and an appointment was made. I appeared at the designated time, with the Director’s card to introduce me. What a shame, I had just missed the *Licenciado*; an “*imprevisto*” (unforeseen circumstance) had called him away. I rescheduled, and again arrived to find

the Licenciado regrettably unavailable. The third time, the secretary smiled sympathetically and told me “*No sabría que decirle*,” I wouldn’t know what to tell you. I eventually received a copy of the report from a friend whose friend worked in the same administrative office.

This push and pull between acomodando and seemingly arbitrary denials of access to information or services exemplifies an aspect of Mexican bureaucracy that Nuijten calls “the hope generating machine” (2004: 211). The Licenciado never specifically refused to give me the report; Salma did not always turn students away. Analyzing the land claims struggles of a peasant community, Nuijten writes that Mexican bureaucratic practices “produce endless opening, documents, stamps and maps in a bewildering world of fantasy” (2004: 210). Of course, the consequences of being foiled for me and for the students are minor, some frustration and wasted time. Even these relatively inconsequential interactions, however, contribute to a general sense of diminished public expectations when dealing with governmental institutions at all levels.⁴⁰ This, in turn, shapes perceptions of citizenship, and what can be expected from governmental agencies.

⁴⁰ In my case, I even developed a bit of a conspiracy theory, not unlike some of the examples in Nuijten’s piece. It occurred to me that perhaps the Licenciado wished for some reason to thumb his nose at the director without directly confronting him, so used my request, which came with the director’s imprimatur, to do so. I have no real reason to believe this to be true. The director expressed a great deal of surprise that the Licenciado was not helpful. However, I admit that the idea that his surprise might be feigned also crossed my mind.

CHAPTER TWO

Measures of Modernity

*news today and tomorrow a ruin, buried and resurrected every day,
lived together in streets, plazas, buses, taxis, movie houses, theaters, bars, hotels, pigeon
coops, and catacombs,
the enormous city that fits in a room three yards square, and endless as a galaxy,
the city that dreams us, that all of us build and unbuild and rebuild as we dream,
the city we all dream, that restlessly changes while we dream it...*

Excerpted from Octavio Paz *I Speak of the City*
Collected Poems 1957-1987

This chapter explores the relationships between the built environment of Mexico City's Centro Histórico, the Museo, and the ways in which the asadores establish relationships between contemporary Mexico City and its colonial and indigenous pasts. My analysis draws on archival sources and ethnographic observations to locate points of connection—"choreographies," to borrow a term from Donald Preziosi (2003:124)—between the organization of the city, the foundations of the Museo, and the technologies and techniques used to create and reproduce narratives of mexicanidad at specific points in time. I understand each of these components as "objects of knowledge" (Bourdieu 1984: 467) that intersect and overlap both within the Museo and outside of its confines.

Low describes Mexico City's Zócalo as a space in which "meanings from the past are encoded in the built environment and manipulated through spatial representations and architecture to create the sociopolitical present" (2000: 103). Applying a similar analysis to the Museo makes visible some of the techniques through which physical structures intersect with narratives of the past and experiences of the present as constituent elements of an imagined Mexican national culture. This, in turn, enables an understanding of the

processes that serve to display, frame, and interpret culture as themselves a part of culture (Handler 1988: 195).

I first look at the reorganization of space in the Centro Histórico within the context of selected moments of political change, beginning with the Spanish conversion of the former Mexica ceremonial center. I do this in part by tracing the movements of a monument to Carlos IV of Spain, first placed in the capital during the colonial period. Though originally placed in the Zócalo, it now adorns the plaza in front of the National Museum of Art. Following the placements and displacements of this monument provides on way of tracking public representations of Mexico, as colony and nation, and also marks particular moments in Mexico City's urban expansion.⁴¹

The next section describes the establishment of the Museo, from its colonial antecedents to the present. The amassing of some of the collections that would eventually become the Museo began before the nation of Mexico existed; I highlight key figures and collections in the colonial period.⁴² Next, I describe endeavors to create a national museum after Independence, as a means to delimit and solidify Mexican sovereignty both within and outside its territorial bounds. Like the statue of Carlos IV, the Museo had

⁴¹ For this section, I rely in particular on pieces gathered in the collection *Memoria y encuentros: La ciudad de México y el Distrito Federal (1824-1928)*, edited by Hira de Gortari Rabiela and Regina Hernández Franyuti. Mexico, DF. Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora: 1988; essays from *El corazón de una nación independiente*, volume III in the series *Ensayos sobre la ciudad de México*, edited by Isabel Tovar de Arechederra and Magdalena Mas. Mexico, DF. CONACULTA, Universidad Iberoamericana, and Departamento del Distrito Federal: 1994; and essays in *The Oxford History of Mexico*.

⁴² For a detailed history of the Museo and its antecedents, see Enrique Florescano, "La creación del Museo Nacional de Antropología," in Volume II of the series he edited, *El patrimonio nacional de México*. Mexico, DF. CONACULTA and Fondo Económico de la Cultura: 1997, 147-171. Florescano's essay appears in English in *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past: A Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks, 6th and 7th October, 1990*. Edited by Elizabeth Hill Boone. Washington, DC. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection: 1993. See also Morales (1994), Olvera (1994) and Rutsch (2004).

several homes before finding permanent space in its current location. This section ends with post-Revolutionary institutionalization of particular relationships to the past through the creation of regulatory and educational agencies intended to oversee cultural production.

The final section of the chapter provides an ethnographic account of a guided tour of the Sala Mexica. According to the Museo's chief architect, Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, it is the largest and most important of the Museo's galleries. A visitor survey conducted by the INAH in 2000 determined that the Sala Mexica was the most frequently visited gallery in the Museo, and my observations indicate that it is the gallery most school groups ask to see as part of a Servicios-led tour.⁴³ Most of the objects displayed in the Sala were unearthed in Mexico City or its immediate environs, often during expansion projects. When leading tours in the Sala Mexica, each asesor relies on specific knowledge of the gallery itself—encompassing both its physical arrangements and the contents on display—a general knowledge of officially disseminated national history, and, if the visiting group comes from within the city, a particularized “local knowledge” (Geertz 1983) of the contemporary city. I then offer some ethnographic examples of ways in which visitors to the Museo use its spaces for purposes other than traditional gallery visits. I posit that these localized ways of viewing the Museo interrupt monolithic readings of visitor experiences and describe ways in which visitors engage with the Museo outside of its dominant discourses.

⁴³ Encuesta 2000

I. URBAN VENEERS

Early in my fieldwork, the Señora told me that she and her brother had once gathered wild strawberries from the banks of a river or stream that ran through the section of Chapultepec Park that decades later became the site of the Museo. Looking at the traffic clogging the Paseo de la Reforma, and the crowds filling the sidewalks, I could not imagine a river flowing through that part of the city. I began seeking out pre-1960s images of the park. My search took me to the Lagunilla flea market, with its jumble of old magazines, postcards, and “antiques” of somewhat questionable provenance. The postcard vendor from whom I purchased a number of early 20th century views of Chapultepec asked why I was interested in them. I answered briefly. “*Oh, sí, el Museo de Antropología. Dicen que es una de las maravillas del mundo moderno*” (They say it is one of the wonders of the modern world), she replied. Had she ever been there, I inquired. “*Ai, no, no, aquí es mi museo*” (this is my museum), she answered, indicating the overflowing stands around her.

Until the middle of the 19th century, what is today called the Centro Histórico constituted all of Mexico City. The initial Spanish plan divided it into two parts: “*La Traza,*” constructed on the former ceremonial center of Tenochtitlán, to be occupied by Spaniards, and four surrounding barrios, to be occupied by indigenous people. A canal separated the two areas. Communally held *ejidos* surrounded the indigenous barrios, and produced much of the food consumed in the capital.⁴⁴ The wealthier classes settled primarily in the areas north and east of the Zócalo. This division held through Independence and the first years of the republic.

⁴⁴ Ejidos are communally held lands.

The Spaniards razed most of the ceremonial and other structures, filling Tenochtitlán's canals with dirt, rubble, and toppled monuments. However, the practice of using stones from the demolished structures to build Spanish homes and colonial offices left visible traces of the Mexica city. As the postcard vendor realized, you do not have to visit any museums to experience Mexico City as a historical repository. Remnants of the past continually assert themselves. For instance, the building that today houses the Museum of Mexico City has as its cornerstone a massive serpent's head, possibly once part of the Templo Mayor. Also known as the Casa de los Condes de Calimaya, it is one of the first Spanish houses constructed in what had been the ceremonial center of Tenochtitlán.⁴⁵

Public works projects intended to modernize drainage, transportation, and communication systems have regularly revealed objects and structures pertaining to the Mexica capital. Drainage work done around the Cathedral and National Palace in the 18th century resulted in the unearthing of both the Piedra del Sol (Sun Stone) and the earth mother, Coatlicue; construction in 1830 uncovered the massive head of the moon goddess, Coyolxauhqui.⁴⁶ All of the pieces are now exhibited in the Sala Mexica of the Museo. Excavations for the Metro resulted in numerous finds, particularly in the Centro Histórico.⁴⁷ In 1978, workers laying electrical cable on Avenida Guatemala uncovered an enormous relief of the dismembered Coyolxauhqui. INAH excavations at that site then

⁴⁵ The façade was remodeled in the early 1960s by Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, the architect of the Museo (Wahr 2004: 57).

⁴⁶ I provide an analysis of the role of the Coatlicue piece in Chapter Four.

⁴⁷ Several Metro stations have items on display in the tunnels. See Araceli Peralta Flores, editor, *Hallazgos en el Metro de la Ciudad de México*. Mexico, DF. INAH: 1996.

exposed the remnants of the Templo Mayor itself.⁴⁸ In 1987, the Museo del Templo Mayor, also designed by Ramírez Vázquez, opened on the site. Discoveries continue to the present, including the October 2006 discovery of a massive image of the earth deity Tlaltecúhtli approximately one block from the Templo Mayor.⁴⁹



Excavation site outside Templo Mayor

The area remains under investigation, and is still cordoned off. Outside of the designated “Centro Histórico,” significant finds have been made in the south central part of the city, and construction of the second level of the Periférico highway revealed artifacts as well.

⁴⁸In 1830, the Templo Mayor was still buried underneath what was then Calle Santa Teresa, now Avenida República de Guatemala. For an overview of the history of discoveries and interpretations of the Templo Mayor and some artifacts associated with it, see Elizabeth Hill Boone, “Templo Mayor Research, 1521-1978” in *The Aztec Templo Mayor: A Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks, 8th and 9th October, 1983*. Edited by Elizabeth Hill Boone. Washington, DC. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection: 1987, p.5-70. INAH’s original plans called for a Museum of Tenochtitlán.

⁴⁹ Archeologists believe that the site of the statue might also be the location of the tomb of Ahuitzol, the father of Moctezuma.

Vestiges of other historical realities remain as well. One route connecting the Museo to my apartment travels along a road called Río Consulado. I gave the name little thought; the streets in one of the neighborhoods near the Museo bear the names of rivers from around the world (Río Tigris, Río Volga, etc.). It seemed a fairly conventional way to name streets. Only after the Señora recounted her strawberry-picking story did I learn that the Río Consulado still flowed, far beneath the pavement. Like most of the other rivers in the city, it had been deemed inconvenient and potentially hazardous to citizens, due to its seasonal nature.⁵⁰ Channeled into pipes and paved over, they became thoroughfares.⁵¹

Street nomenclature also reflects a different sort of reshaping, especially visible in the Centro Histórico. Streets here underwent a variety of name changes as a result of shifts in both naming conventions and ideology. As Patricia Elizabeth Olsen notes, “[S]treets, then, are carriers of meaning, evoking memories of conquest, tragedy, triumph, and burgeoning nationalism” (2006: 120). For example, the apartment I often stayed in is on a street that is visible on colonial maps of the Centro. In 1525, it was called Ballesteros, because the soldiers who manned the crossbows (*ballesta*, in Spanish)

⁵⁰ For a full discussion of Mexico City’s attempts to control rivers flowing through the urban areas, see “Mexico City: From Water Avenues to Asphalt Rivers: Current conditions and future perspectives of the Mexico City rivers,” Perlo, M., et al. Paper presented at the Fourth European Centre for River Restoration Conference on River Restoration. Venice, Italy; June 16-21, 2008. Available at <http://www.scribd.com/River-restoration-in-Mexico-City/d/19505007>. Accessed April 7, 2010.

⁵¹ The Río de la Piedad and the Río Churubusco were channeled and paved over during the 1952-1966 tenure of city regent Ernesto Uruchurtu, the so-called Iron Regent, who undertook a number of public works and city beautification projects. For more on Uruchurtu and mid-century changes to the urban landscape of Mexico City, see *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the 20th Century*. Diane E. Davis. Philadelphia. Temple University Press: 1994, and “El arte de saber vivir: Modernización del habitar doméstico y cambio urbano, 1940-1970.” Anahí Ballent in *Cultura y comunicación en la ciudad de México, Primera parte*. Edited by Néstor García Canclini. México, DF. Editorial Grijalbo: 1998.

were quartered there. At various times it was named Juan Jaramillo, after the husband of La Malinche, as they owned a home there (now a primary school); Del Águila, perhaps after a barbershop; and, at the beginning of the 18th century, de Medinas, because the Count of Medina y Torres lived there. In the 1920s, certain streets in the Centro were renamed in honor of the Latin American countries that first recognized Revolutionary Mexico as a state. Today it is República de Cuba.⁵²

II. THE CENTER SHIFTS

Outside the National Museum of Art a bronze Carlos IV of Spain, mounted on horseback, frowns imperially—or contemptuously—at passersby. The common name for the statue, El Caballito, The Little Horse, ignores the rider, perhaps returning his apparent disdain. The idea for a statue in honor of Carlos IV began in 1788, as part of renovations to the Zócalo during the viceroyalty of the Conde de Revillagigedo. However, a budgetary shortfall caused the plan for an imported bronze likeness to be scrapped. Instead, a wooden statue carved by an indigenous artist, Santiago Sandoval, was erected. The wood suffered severe deterioration, and the monument was removed. In 1794, Revillagigedo was recalled to Spain. The new viceroy, the Marqués de Brancifort, arrived in New Spain in the king’s bad graces. As a way to ingratiate himself with the court, he revived the notion of a bronze statue in honor of the king. By commissioning the well-known and respected Spanish architect and sculptor, Manuel Tolsa, the vice-royal government also asserted the colony’s ability to support public art worthy of display in any European capital.

⁵² “Sucedió en República de Cuba.” Alonso Flores and Sandra Ortega. *Km. 2*, August 15, 2008. Accessed online April 7, 2010.

Installed in 1796, El Caballito occupied a prime spot in front of the National Palace. However, after Mexico's independence in 1821, this prominent placement of the Spanish king became problematic. For Iturbide's 1822 coronation as emperor, the organizers temporarily solved the dilemma by enveloping the statue in a huge blue fabric globe. In 1823, the government ordered it moved to the less accessible enclosed patio of the University, where it joined another troublesome monument, the Coatlicue.

In 1852, the mayor of Mexico City, Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, suggested that El Caballito be moved from the University patio to the intersection of Bucareli and what is now Avenida Juárez, one of the principal routes into the city at the time. It took twenty-one days to move the statue the approximately two kilometers to its new home, in part because of the poor state of the roads. An 1856 lithograph by Casimiro Castro shows the monument in place. It faces south, toward Bucareli, Crowds promenade down Bucareli, some on foot, others in carriages. A bullring occupies the corner just northwest of the statue. Land to the west appears without human habitation, tree-dotted plains rolling toward the mountains, with the barest glimpse of the Castle at Chapultepec in the background; to the east, walls and low adobe buildings and grazing farm animals demonstrate that the area is still clearly on the outskirts of the city.

After the passage of the *Ley Lerdo* (1856) and later, the Reform laws, forced the public auction of church and ejido property, speculators bought much of the auctioned property, converting it into subdivided lots called *fraccionamientos*.⁵³ Land that had

⁵³ Miguel Lerdo de Tejada served as Secretary of the Treasury under Ignacio Comonfort, President of Mexico from 1855-1858. The *Ley Lerdo* ordered the seizure and sale of state municipal, and Church buildings used only to generate income, and not to support specific institutional activities. It also abolished ejido holdings. In 1859, President Benito Juárez issued the *Leyes de la Reforma*. These laws nationalized Church property, made marriage a civil

previously been part of the *barrios indios* became housing districts for the rich, shifting the wealthy population west. The policies of Lerdo, and subsequently the Reform Laws, resulted in the demolition of many of the chapels and convents attached to churches located between the Zócalo and the Alameda, leaving open space.

Following their defeat of Juárez's troops, the French in 1864 installed Maximilian of Hapsburg as the second Emperor of Mexico.⁵⁴ Maximilian brought a new sensibility to the capital. A new type of street became fashionable: the ample boulevard that guided the gaze toward an imposing structure or monument, modeled after Haussmann's interventions in Paris. Maximilian initiated the construction of the first such street in the city, linking the National Palace in the Zócalo more directly to his preferred residence, Chapultepec Castle.

First called the Emperor's Road, this route eventually became the Paseo de la Reforma. It extended from the Caballito due west to Chapultepec. Another of Castro's lithographs, dated 1869, marks the changes to the area.⁵⁵ Horse-drawn trolleys curve around the bullring; scattered houses now dot the western expanse. Unlike the earlier lithograph, this one shows few pedestrians or carriages. Of those shown, many are now

contract, ended clerical involvement with cemeteries, and forbade public officials from attending Church functions in an official capacity. The strict separation of Church and State functions characterized all subsequent Mexican governments. When Pope John Paul II arrived in Mexico for the canonization of Juan Diego, President Vicente Fox's decision to kiss the papal ring generated enormous public controversy because he, acting in his capacity as President, acknowledged the Pope as a religious authority.

⁵⁴ France invaded Mexico in 1862, due to the Juárez administration's suspension of the payment on foreign debt. Though initially defeated at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862 (*Cinco de Mayo*), the French ultimately prevailed.

⁵⁵ The lithograph, part of Castro's portfolio *México y sus alrededores*, is available online through the New York Public Library's Digital Gallery, <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?1519684>

heading west, down Reforma, rather than north or south on Bucareli. Before the Paseo was completed, Maximilian and his supporters lost the backing of the French government. Despite the withdrawal of French military support, Maximilian refused to leave Mexico. He was captured by Juárez's troops, and executed. Juárez's return to power proved brief. He died suddenly, and was briefly succeeded by the brother of Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, Sebastián. When Lerdo attempted to stand for re-election in 1876, General Porfirio Díaz and his supporters intervened. Díaz assumed the presidency in 1876.

During Lerdo's administration, Reforma had been widened, and adorned with plantings and benches. Homes imitating Parisian style lined the streets. Díaz continued the amplification and embellishment of Reforma, using the boulevard as a means to recast Mexican history in a heroic mold. Three new monuments joined the Caballito on Reforma: one honoring Columbus, placed in 1877, one honoring Cuauhtémoc, erected in 1887, and, finally, a tall column topped by a golden angel, honoring the "Heroes of Independence," inaugurated for the 1910 Centennial.⁵⁶

The Porfirians understood the Paseo de Reforma as a "means to educate Mexicans about the nature of the national past" (Tenenbaum 1994: 135). Their version of this past emphasized the Catholic missionary aspect of Columbus's New World voyages, while vilifying Cortéz and the military conquest. It elevated the Mexica and their principal city, Tenochtitlán, above other indigenous societies as emblematic of the Mexican nation, and

⁵⁶ For a thorough account of the history of each of these monuments, see Barbara A. Tenenbaum, "Streetwise History: The Paseo de la Reforma and the Porfirian State, 1876-1910," in *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations of Popular Culture in Mexico*, edited by William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French. Wilmington, Delaware. Scholarly Resources, Incorporated: 1994. Her explication of the design history of each piece is especially interesting, as each went through several permutations before the selection of a final design.

promoted the Mexica rulers, especially Cuauhtémoc, as noble defenders and their principal city, Tenochtitlán, as representative of the Mexican nation at the time. Díaz and his followers cast themselves as the heirs of the Mexica and Independence legacies. The Paseo made this connection visually, leading past the commemorative statuary to the Castillo, now the residence of Díaz.

However, as Tenenbaum notes, the transformation of Reforma was intended to tell a story to foreigners as well as Mexicans (1994). In 1885, the Díaz government resumed payment on the nation's foreign debt, and was openly courting new investment. An orderly and attractive city center would attract foreign capital. As transportation systems improved and population increased during the *Porfiriato*, people who could afford to do so continued to move away from the old city center, and into developing neighborhoods, such as Colonia Roma and Colonia Nueva Santa María de Ribera.⁵⁷ Governmental offices and financial and educational institutions remained concentrated in the colonial area delimited by La Traza.

After the Revolution, the population continued to surge, growing from a little over 600,000 in 1921 to one million by 1930. The wealthy continued their move west, now to Polanco and Lomas de Chapultepec.⁵⁸ Post-Revolutionary governments struggled to recast the city, giving old streets new names, or creating altogether new routes (Olsen 2006). Some colonial structures were razed in order to accommodate new construction.

⁵⁷ The *Porfiriato* refers to the time of Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship, 1876-1910 (with a break from 1880-1885). The first rail line in Mexico City began operations in 1856. By 1882, there were 112 kilometers of tracks in the city (Sánchez de Carmona 1994). At the time, Lake Texcoco still existed, and steamships traveled across from the Centro to Milpa Alta, in the south.

⁵⁸ "Mexico City." Robert W. Kemper. Accessed through his Southern Methodist University homepage, <http://faculty.smu.edu/RKEMPER/index.htm>. April 7, 2010.

Others, their walls now decorated with murals by Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and other Revolutionary artists, housed governmental offices and departments. The foundations of the building intended by Díaz to be the new Legislative Palace became instead the Monument to the Revolution. Roads were widened to accommodate automobile traffic; modern buildings, such as the Edificio La Nacional, considered the first skyscraper in Mexico, were erected.⁵⁹

Before the creation of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), in 1938, protection of historical buildings and monuments fell under the direction of the Department of Education (SEP). A count done in 1934 of an unspecified sector of the Centro registered 768 buildings that qualified as “monuments;” 422 were razed that same year.⁶⁰ By 1940, legislative protections existed that preserved the historical character of the Centro, but did little to benefit its residents, “as scant capital was reinvested in those deteriorating structures but instead found more fertile ground in the southwestern areas of the city” (Olsen 2006: 129).

After the unearthing of the Templo Mayor in 1978, a Presidential decree declared the Centro Histórico a “Zone of Monuments.” It also specified the area included under its protection, dividing it into two perimeters. Perimeter A covers the ceremonial center of Tenochtitlán and expansion during the vice-regal era; Perimeter B includes the expansion of the city up until the end of the 19th century (Mora Reyes 2003: 8). In the 1970s, plans for a system of connected thoroughfares made the roundabout featuring the Caballito an obstruction. In 1979, the statue was moved to its current location. Now known more for

⁵⁹ Opened in 1934, across from the Palace of Fine Arts.

⁶⁰ Website of the Fideicomiso del Centro Histórico de México.
http://www.centrohistorico.df.gob.mx/fideicomiso/historia_ciudad.html. Accessed April 5, 2010.

its art historical value, as an example of Manuel Tolsa's work in Mexico City, it occupies the Plaza Tolsa, in front of the National Museum of Art, and across from the Palacio de Minería, another of Tolsa's designs.

In 1987, UNESCO declared the Centro Histórico a World Heritage site. Despite its special status, when I first began visiting Mexico City in 1993, the Centro Histórico was not considered a desirable place to live. Many of the buildings in the area sustained damage in the 1985 earthquake, and had never been repaired. The deterioration was not necessarily immediately visible to passers-by; often, the exterior of a building remained standing, its interior decay exposed by tree branches protruding from the upper story windows, as plants took root in the rubble. A closer look often revealed cracked façades and fractured foundations. One morning while I was working in the apartment, I happened to look up just in time to see one of the plate glass windows from the building across the street drop from its frame and—fortunately—onto the concrete awning above the ground floor. It wasn't only the buildings that were considered insecure. The Centro had a reputation for crime and a generally unsavory character.

In the summer of 2002, when I arrived to do fieldwork, an ambitious urban renewal project was underway in the Centro. Several streets were slated for repaving, many sidewalks were to be replaced, some streets converted to pedestrian-only zones, and planters added. Once work began, walking down any of the streets under repair required a sharp eye and a certain amount of dexterity. There was much to avoid: gaping holes, piles of dirt, huge ruts, tangled wires, boards precariously balanced, slippery mud that adhered to shoes and spattered clothes in the wet season, thick clouds of ochre dust when it was dry. I remember passing by the Panadería Ideal on Avenida 16 de

septiembre, its amazing multi-tiered cakes covered in mounds and stalactites of pure white icing that appeared ecru through the construction dust accumulated on the display windows. The *Fundación del Centro Histórico*, a project of the multi-billionaire Carlos Slim Helú,⁶¹ provided much of the funding for the project, in partnership with the government of then-mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador.⁶² Some refer to the renovated Centro as the “SlimCentro.”

In addition to street repair and beautification, the renovations were intended to improve public safety by upgrading streetlights—the new fixtures copied the style of lights found on the Mexico City’s street in 1900—and adding more security measures, including street surveillance cameras and additional police. I first noticed the cameras when I looked out the window of my hotel room and directly into the camera resting on a ledge of the bell tower of the Templo de la Inmaculada Concepción. Police reinforcements took two forms, the quartering of more police in the Centro being one. The ramshackle building across from my friends’ apartment on República de Cuba transformed into a gleaming police substation. The police force also developed a new division, the so-called “*Policía Típica*,” to attend specifically to tourists. These mounted officers, dressed in *charro* style, with wide-brimmed *sombreros*, short black jackets, and tight black pants, patrol the Alameda. They receive some English lessons. I often spent part of Sunday afternoon in the Alameda. My informal observations indicated that as many Mexicans as foreigners approached the officers, either with questions or requests

⁶¹ At this writing, in spring 2010, Slim has been recognized as the richest man in the world. Most of his wealth comes from his ownership of Telmex.

⁶² López Obrador, a member of the ostensibly leftist Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD), seemed a perhaps unlikely partner for Slim. He later ran for the Presidency against Felipe Calderón, and was defeated in a highly contested election that resulted in an official recount and months of public protests.

for photos. The program succeeded so well in the Alameda, that it was recently extended to another park, the Bosque de Aragón, in the eastern part of the city.⁶³ In another showy move, Rudolph Giuliani's consulting firm was hired in fall 2002 as a consultant to the Mexico City police. A consortium of private business owners paid his more than four million dollar fee. Just before I completed fieldwork, the firm released its 146-point plan.⁶⁴



Policia Típica in the Alameda

Renovations extended from the Zócalo all the way to the fountain dedicated to the oilfield workers, just beyond the Museo, on the Paseo de la Reforma. On Reforma, drainage and communications infrastructure was replaced, new lighting installed, and the

⁶³ "Alistan Policia Típica para Aragón," *Reforma*, México, DF. February 21, 2009.

⁶⁴ The head of security for the city at the time was the current mayor, Marcelo Ebrard. Ebrard claims that many of the recommendations were put into place, but others claim the money was wasted, and that the recommendations were not practical for "Mexican reality." "In Private Sector, Giuliani Firm Parlayed Fame into Wealth." John Solomon and Matthew Mosk. *Washington Post*, May 13, 2007. Accessed online April 5, 2010.

sidewalks resurfaced. For the entire period of my fieldwork, the constant tapping of the small hammers that workers used to dislodge the old paving tiles and install the new provided the refrain for pesero rides or walks down Reforma. Jackhammers ripped apart the medians in the section of the avenue that passes through Chapultepec, past the Museum of Modern Art, the Museo, and the zoo. New medians, wider and with more extensive greenery and flowers, replaced them. Traffic police, whistles at the ready, became more commonplace. New tourist information kiosks were opened—though not always staffed—and a red double-decker tour bus began service, with one of the designated stops at the entrance to the Museo.

III. DISPLAYING THE NATION

The amassing of some of the collections that would eventually become the Museo began before the nation of Mexico existed.⁶⁵ In the immediate aftermath of the conquest, a royal decree ordered the destruction of indigenous manuscripts and objects found in the territory of New Spain, for both political and religious reasons (Gruzinski 2001, Florescano 1997). However, some descendants of indigenous nobility concealed and protected documents and artifacts, as did some clerics. During the Enlightenment, scholars in New Spain took great interest in the protected items, seeking them out for

⁶⁵ For a detailed history of the Museo and its antecedents, see Enrique Florescano, “La creación del Museo Nacional de Antropología,” in Volume II of the series he edited, *El patrimonio nacional de México*. Mexico, DF. CONACULTA and Fondo Económico de la Cultura: 1997, 147-171. Florescano’s essay appears in English in *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past: A Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks, 6th and 7th October, 1990*. Edited by Elizabeth Hill Boone. Washington, DC. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection: 1993. See also Morales (1994), Olvera (1994) and Rutsch (2004).

study.⁶⁶ The Italian Lorenzo Boturini Benaduci assembled a large collection of documents and archeological pieces, which he cataloged as the *Museo Histórico Indiano*.

Boturini fell out of favor with the viceregal government, which in 1743 expelled him from New Spain. His collections were turned over to the Vice-regal Archives.⁶⁷ In 1780, Francisco Clavijero made the first formal proposal for the establishment of a museum to house what he termed “antiquities.”⁶⁸ His proposal corresponded to a growing interest in Mexico’s indigenous and natural history, and a more welcoming climate for scientific inquiry of all sorts.⁶⁹ Following these interests, in 1790 Carlos III established the *Museo de Historia Natural*, comprised of Indian artifacts and samples of local flora, fauna, and minerals, and held at the *Real and Pontificia Universidad*. However, shortly after its formation, emerging Independence movements led to its dissolution (Vázquez Olvera: 1994).

After Independence, the Emperor Iturbide created the *Conservatorio de Antigüedades* and *Gabinete de Historia Natural*, which consisted of what remained of Boturini’s collections, and a cabinet of natural history. The collections were held at the university, after Independence the Nacional y Pontificia Universidad. In 1825, President

⁶⁶ Notable early scholars include Juan de Torquemada (1564-1624) and Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora (1645-1700).

⁶⁷ The Codex Boturini, which depicts the journey of the Mexica from their homeland in the north to the Valley of Mexico, is one of the pieces Boturini acquired. More commonly known as the *Tira de la Peregrinación*, it now hangs in the Museo’s Mexica gallery. Relatively little of Boturini’s collection remains in Mexico. Some is in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris. Much of it is lost.

⁶⁸ Francisco Xavier Clavijero Echegaray (1731-1787), a Jesuit scholar, born in Veracruz. He dedicated himself to the study of indigenous manuscripts. After Carlos III expelled the Jesuits from Mexico in 1767, he resided in Italy. Among other works, he published *La Historia Antigua de México*, which criticized Spanish actions against the indigenous populations.

⁶⁹ Mechthild Rutsch (2004) provides a concise account of the relationships between nationalism, the history of science, and the Museo Nacional.

Guadalupe Victoriano signed the decree officially creating the *Museo Nacional*.⁷⁰ The collections continued to be housed at the Universidad, though given the general upheaval of the period, little money was designated for either maintenance or acquisitions.

Maximilian took a great interest in the collections, increasing the money dedicated to their support. The *Museo Público de Historia Natural, Arqueología, e Historia* moved to the old Spanish mint, on Calle Moneda, right next to the National Palace. Given the political turmoil of the times, the availability of the dedicated funds was sporadic, at best.

After Díaz came to power in 1877, the Museo began to receive a regular budget. As with its refashioning of Reforma, the administration understood the Museo and its collections as a means to disseminate a vision of Mexico's past and present, both domestically and abroad. The Museo began to publish annals, reporting on its holdings.⁷¹ The first volume, published in 1877, includes a report of the Museo's activities for the year, presented to the Ministry of Justice. In the prologue to the annals, the director recognizes the Museo's role in spreading "scientific knowledge" in Mexico; the annual report describes his hopes that the Museo's publications will popularize the study of Mexican archeology, and that an exhibit hall dedicated to "Mexican Antiquities" will be created in the Museo, for the express purpose of attracting foreign visitors.⁷²

On September 16, 1888, Díaz presided over the official opening of the "Salón de Monólitos," an exhibit hall containing the Piedra del Sol, the Coatlicue, and numerous

⁷⁰ Rutsch places the signing in 1822, and says that the institution created was known as the *Museo Mejicano* (2004: 94).

⁷¹ The annals themselves are titled *Anales del Museo Nacional de México*. However, the introductory essay, written by the director, Gumesindo Mendoza, refers to the *Museo de Historia Natural y de Antigüedades*.

⁷² Gumesindo Mendoza. "Prólogo" and "Informe del Año 1877." *Anales del Museo Nacional de México*. Tomo I, Segunda Edición. Imprenta de Ignacio Bustamente. Mexico, DF: 1877.

other large pieces. Arranged without regard to chronology or provenance, the hall gave pride of place to Piedra del Sol, which in 1885 had been relocated from the side of the Cathedral to the Museo. The Salón de Monólitos became the site of official receptions and both domestic and foreign dignitaries were photographed there, most often posed in front of the Piedra.⁷³ In addition, in 1885, the Porfirian government created the office of Inspector and Conservator of Archeological Monuments. This office was charged with both exploratory and preservation efforts.

Though the primary investigative efforts of the time were directed toward archeology, in 1887 the Museo opened a dedicated department of ethnography. The 1892 Columbian Exposition in Madrid motivated the administration to fund not only archeological expeditions, but ethnographic ones as well (Sierra Carillo 1994:26). The Museo played an important role in preparing and presenting materials in Madrid. The Mexican government sent reproductions of some codices, both archeological and ethnographic objects, and plaster casts of the larger “monoliths” all in the company of Mexican experts, many affiliated with the Museo (Keen 1971: 418).

As the collections and academic specializations of the Museo increased, the decision was made to divide the collections. The natural history collections moved to a building known as El Chopo.⁷⁴ The remaining collections, classified as history,

⁷³ *Alquimia*, the publication of the Sistema Nacional de Fototecas, published an issue devoted to images of the Museo Nacional that contains many photographs from this time in its history. “El Museo Nacional en el imaginario mexicano.” *Alquimia* 4:12, mayo-agosto 2001.

⁷⁴ El Chopo takes its name from the black poplars that lined the nearby streets. Made of cast iron and glass, in a style reminiscent of London’s Crystal Palace, it was constructed in Germany at the turn of the century as an exhibition space. The building was purchased by a Mexican industrialist and imported to Mexico City, where it was reconstructed and used to display his company’s

archeology, or ethnology remained at the Moneda location. In 1910, as part of the festivities surrounding the centenary of Independence, Díaz inaugurated the recast *Museo de Historia, Arqueología, y Etnología*. Not long after, the political future of the nation was recast. Francisco I. Madero—Díaz’s opponent in the 1910 elections, jailed after he contested the election—escaped from a San Luis Potosí prison in October 1910. Armed conflicts between his supporters and federal troops broke out in November of the same year. By May 1911, Díaz had resigned and gone into exile in Paris.

Despite the ongoing battles of the Revolution, work at the Museo continued. According to the *Boletín* of the Museo, a new director assumed his post in July of 1911; in that month, the Museo received 14, 453 Mexican visitors, and 403 foreign visitors.⁷⁵ A person unfamiliar with Mexican history who reads issues of the *Boletín* published between 1911 and 1913 might be forgiven for not realizing a revolution was underway. Academic arguments and descriptions of efforts to organize the collections dominate the written material. Only an occasional note, such as one from March 1912, in which Museo personnel request military training, “in order to be prepared for the defense of order...in the case of any emergency” (*Boletín* 1912: 181), hints at larger concerns. Even the February 1913 “*Decena trágica*,” ten days of brutal fighting in Mexico City that began with a military coup against President Madero and resulted in the assassination of Madero and his vice-president, José María Pino Suarez, is marked rather blandly: classes

products. The Mexican government purchased it in 1909, to serve as the natural history museum; before the collections moved, it became the Japanese Pavilion for the Centennial Exposition of 1910. The Museum of Natural History moved to Chapultepec Park in 1963, and El Chopo fell into disrepair. The UNAM restored the space in the early 1970s, and it is now known as the Museo Universitario del Chopo. The area surrounding the museum has become an informal market and gathering place for alternative youth culture in the city.

⁷⁵ *Boletín del Museo* 3:1. Mexico, DF: 1912.

were cancelled for three days, due to “political events;” assistants in the Ethnography Department, who were taking turns guarding the Museo’s rooftop terraces, reported that soldiers broke windows “during the ten days that the press has called ‘tragic;’” and some artifacts had to be reclassified because of “theft and the disruption of work in progress” (*Boletín* 1913: 161). The city was heavily bombed during the ten days; the *Boletín* records that the Museo’s director requested that one of the photographers take “seventy photographs of streets and buildings destroyed during the constant and repeated bombings” (*Boletín* 1913: 163).⁷⁶ Despite going through ten directors between 1911 and 1916, the collecting efforts of the Museo continued (Morales Moreno 1994: 46). This included ethnographic data, with reports appearing regularly in the *Boletín*. In 1912, Franz Boas and his students from the Escuela Internacional de Arqueología y Etnología Americanas presented research at the Museo.⁷⁷

As the national situation stabilized, a new national imaginary emerged, one articulated by Manuel Gamio, among others.⁷⁸ In his 1916 book, *Forjando patria: Pro-nacionalismo*—“the first manifesto of the nascent *indigenista* movement” (de la Peña 1996: 61)—Gamio outlined the role of anthropology in incorporating the contemporary Indian populations into a new mestizo Mexican nation. He emphasized the need for

⁷⁶ For a thorough account of the events leading up to and including the Decena Trágica, including the role of U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Henry Lane Wilson, see pages 482-7 in Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, Volume I: Porfirians, Liberals and Peasants*. Lincoln, Nebraska. University of Nebraska Press: 1986. Paco Ignacio Taibo II provides a fictionalized account in *Temporada de Zopilotes: una historia narrativa de la Decena Trágica*. Mexico, DF. Editorial Planeta: 2009.

⁷⁷ *Boletín del Museo* 1:9. Mexico, DF. 1912. In the early part of the century, plans began to take shape for an international school of archeology and ethnology. The Escuela Internacional de Arqueología y Etnología Americanas opened in late 1910, with the Prussian anthropologist Eduard Seler as its head. Franz Boas succeeded him for the year 1911-12. The School closed in 1914, after the United States sent troops to Veracruz.

⁷⁸ Gamio was one of the students at the Escuela Internacional, and went on to receive a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Columbia University in 1916, where he was one of Boas’s students.

anthropological studies of the indigenous populations of Mexico, in order to develop policies best suited to “facilitate a normal evolutionary development” (Gamio 1960 [1916]: 15). The idea of the museum as a scientifically exact educational space guided investigation, acquisition, exhibition, and publication at the Museo through the later Revolutionary years (Morales Moreno 1994: 109) and in the immediate aftermath. As Bennet (1995) demonstrates, this concept did not originate with the Mexican museographers. In post-Revolutionary Mexico, however, the “exemplary didacticism of objects” (Bennet 1995: 28) took a bit of a twist. *Indigenismo* as an ideological movement in Mexico included an aesthetic component, one that actively challenged Western conventions of symmetry and beauty. Spending time among the artifacts on display in the Museo retrained the Mexican eye, ridding it of European prejudices, and enabling the appreciation of pre-Colombian aesthetic sensibilities.⁷⁹

Through most of the Revolutionary period, the Museo fell under the auspices of the Inspector and Conservator of Archeological Monuments, as it had during the Porfiriato.⁸⁰ This office was a division of the Secretariat for Public Instruction. Gamio served as the Inspector from 1913-1916, when he left to head the newly created Department of Archeology and Ethnography, housed in the Secretariat of Agriculture and Public Works. In 1919, this became the Department of Anthropology; oversight of the Department of Anthropology was moved in 1925 to the Secretariat of Public Education

⁷⁹ See Keen (1971), Chapter 15, for a complete discussion of the post-Revolutionary revalorization of Aztec art in particular.

⁸⁰ For a short period from 1917-19, during the government of Venustiano Carranza, the Museo director reported to the Rector of the University (Morales Moreno 1994: 174).

(SEP) (Portal Ariosa and Ramírez 1995: 84), under the Calles administration.⁸¹ Further consolidation in 1930 led to the creation of the Department of Artistic, Archeological, and Historical Monuments, which combined the Department of Anthropology and the Inspector of Monuments.

Anthropology continued to play a central role in state policy, particularly in education and economic development, during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40).⁸² He created the Autonomous Department of Indigenous Affairs in 1936, dedicated to rapid assessment of and practical responses to specific problems. This office was not intended to fulfill a “scientific purpose” (Sierra Carillo 1994: 58). In 1938, the Department of Monuments became the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. In addition to researching and safeguarding architectural and archeological structures, the INAH also had a research mission, and was given charge over the Museo Nacional.⁸³ Anthropological training, which had been taking place at the Museo, was moved to the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (National Polytechnic Institute, IPN) in 1937, where it became the Department of Anthropology, housed in the School of Biological Sciences. In

⁸¹ José Vasconcelos was the first head of the SEP. In *The Cosmic Race*, Vasconcelos argued that the future belonged to a fifth race of humans, an amalgamation of the four “known” races. He was an ardent hispanicist, who believed that the Spanish missionary experience provided the best model for indigenous education (Portal Ariosa and Ramírez 1995: 92). Another influential SEP figure was Moisés Sáenz. He studied with John Dewey at Columbia. Though not an anthropologist, he, like Gamio, believed that ethnographic study should inform educational practices designed for indigenous communities. Instead of the “incorporation” of the Indians into Mexico, as Gamio called for, Sáenz stressed their “integration.” The school program he conceived of drew the attention of the John Collier, Commissioner of the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs under Franklin Roosevelt.

⁸² Cárdenas also began a program of socialist education. In 1938, he nationalized Mexican oil production.

⁸³ The literature on the development of anthropology in Mexico is vast. Particularly useful is the work of Mechthild Rutsch (2004, 2007), Carlos García Mora (1988), and Julio César Olivé Negrete (1981).

1942, the department separated from the IPN, and joined the INAH as the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (Nolasco n.d.: 20).⁸⁴

IV. SPECTACULAR CULTURE

From the early 1900s on, various Museo directors had complained that the collections required more space (Morales Moreno 1995: 69). In 1944, the collections deemed historical were moved to the Castle in Chapultepec, which became the Museo Nacional de Historia. The Moneda location was renamed the Museo Nacional de Antropología.⁸⁵ During the 1940s and 50s, the INAH continued to develop as an institution within the federal government, working both independently and in collaboration with other official entities. One of these, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), created in 1948, and first headed by Alfonso Caso, replaced the Department of Indigenous Affairs. While investigative work continued, after World War II, an increased number of foreign tourists also meant that resources were allocated to administrating archeological and other sites to best facilitate tourism (Litvak King n.d.: 33). Museo staff approached the administrations of both Miguel Alemán (196-52) and Adolfo Ruiz Cortínez (1952-58), requesting a new museum; however, both administrations were

⁸⁴ Nolasco goes on to say that, at the time, the ENAH entered into an agreement with the National Autonomous University (UNAM) stating that ENAH would teach anthropology, while history would fall to the UNAM (n.d.: 20).

⁸⁵ People still say the National Museum of History and Anthropology, so often that it is part of almost all of the introductory remarks of the asesoras to correct this: “*No es el Museo de Historia; la sede de historia es el Castillo. Este es el Museo Nacional de Antropología*” (This is not the Museum of History; that is located at the Castle. This is the National Museum of Anthropology).

preoccupied with the construction of the new campus of the UNAM, in southwestern Mexico City (Colunga Hernández 2004: 27).⁸⁶

After Adolfo López Mateos assumed the presidency in 1958, the Museo director took a preliminary proposal for a new building to the new Secretary of Education, Jaime Torres Bodet (Colunga Hernández 2004, Sierra Carrillo 1994). By 1961, plans were underway for a new structure, specifically constructed for the display, study, and storage of the archeological and ethnographic collections (Sierra Carrillo 1994: 73). Hernández Castillo (2001) identifies two strains of thought in Mexican anthropology of the time: the Mesoamericanist, linked to ethnohistory and archeology, and tied to the Museo; and the indigenist, with a concern for contemporary peoples, affiliated with the INI. The modernizing projects of López Mateos required both. The Mesoamericanists provided the historical narrative of the glorious past, while the indigenists worked to integrate rural and Indian communities into national development (Hernández Castillo 2001: 61). According to its architect, Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, the new museum would promote both “the continuing study not only of the nation’s past, but of its present, nourished by that past and in a continuous process of transformation from it” (1968: 9).⁸⁷ Despite Ramírez Vázquez’s post-construction praise for the inclusion of

⁸⁶ Construction of the Ciudad Universitaria (CU), as the campus is called, began in 1950 and finished four years later. The move of the UNAM from buildings in the Centro Histórico to the newly emerging southwestern sector of the city marked a transition in the status of the Centro as the center of national power. Arredondo Zambrano claims that the CU represents “the site where a new Mexican identity would be born” (1997:93). In 2007, UNESCO declared the campus a World Heritage site.

⁸⁷Ramírez Vázquez was first known for his design of prefabricated rural school buildings. During this project, he met Jaime Torres Bodet. Later, he collaborated on the building for the medical school at the Ciudad Universitaria, and designed the offices of the Ministry of Labor (Canales 2009: 92). López Mateos had been Minister of Labor during the construction of the office, and

material pertinent to both the past and the present, Sierra Carrillo reports that initial plans for the museum included only the archeological pieces; members of the Ethnology Department attached to the Museo presented a request to the head of INAH, asking that ethnographic materials be included in the displays (1994: 79).⁸⁸

According to Ramírez Vázquez, López Mateos provided two guidelines for the building that housed the Museo. The first was that the Museo should provoke people to ask whether one had been to the Museum in the same way that they would ask whether one had been to the theater. The second was that Mexicans should leave the Museo proud to be Mexicans (del Villar 1997: 12). Ramírez Vázquez responded with a building that he says took inspiration from a variety of Mexican archeological and historical sources, from the plazas at Uxmal to the latticed windows of colonial convents, combined with technologically innovative features, such as the distinctive umbrella shaped roof, known as the *paraguas*, that protects part of the interior patio (1968).

Concurrent with the plans for the physical space, teams of anthropologists and museographers met to determine what the exhibition space should hold. In the ethnographic area, material for “fifty-some” groups was reviewed as decisions were made (Sierra Carrillo 1994: 83). Factors considered included the total population of the group;

subsequently engaged Ramírez Vázquez to design his home. At the time he was hired to design the Museo, he was the director of the Unidad Cultural at Chapultepec Park.

⁸⁸Luis Aveleyra, the Secretary General of the Museo at the time, reports that “[i]n less than eight months, seventy [ethnographic] expeditions covered the country” (1968: 33). Archeological holdings were increased through new excavations, but also through the purchase of private collections, including the entire collection of Miguel Coarruibas (Aveleyra 1968: 33). Sierra Carrillo (1994) provides an overview of the ethnographic collections process from the institutional perspective. Hernández Castillo (2001) provides a more critical view of the collection excursions made by the Museo’s ethnographic staff to Chiapas, focusing on the Mam population. Paul Liffman (2007) describes strategies used by the Huichols in their dealings with Museo personnel charged with the collections and presentation of Huichol objects at the time of the Museo’s construction.

“historical importance;” and the quantity of material available from previous anthropological and historical investigations. However, the selection of ethnographic exhibition materials was driven in great part by the archeological exhibits, in an effort to create “an ethnological sequence between the past and the present” (Sierra Carrillo 1994: 83). In the end, the working group decided to organize the ethnographic galleries by language and culture areas.⁸⁹ A large gallery dedicate to Nahua culture was to occupy the final gallery on the south side of the museum, “but for various circumstances this wasn’t carried out at the time” (Sierra Carrillo 1994:85). Instead, the ethnographic galleries concluded with displays dedicated to demonstrating “a synthesis of the process of social and cultural change taking place in Mexico today” (Bernal 1968:193), including a photo mosaic of INI-directed development projects.

In an especially celebrated move, the Museo brought teams of indigenous workers from the represented communities to Mexico City to build sample dwellings and make other objects for the displays (Ramírez Vázquez 1968, Sierra Carrillo 1994, Liffman 2007). Ramírez Vázquez writes:

The Indians built their characteristic huts and made and installed their exhibits in the museum galleries...The women made typical pottery, and even the children made toy animals for the displays. The various groups brought their clothing, implements and also magical objects. Thus, with as much authenticity as possible, their ancient and rapidly disappearing cultures were recreated in the materials, forms and styles natural to them, to be preserved within the modern and wholly appropriate National Museum of Anthropology (Ramírez Vázquez 1968: 40).

⁸⁹ According to the 1968 version of the Museo guide, the ten original ethnographic galleries were: Introduction to Ethnography; The Cora and Huichol Indians; Tarascan Hall; Otomi Hall; The Northern Sierra of Puebla; Oaxaca Hall; The Gulf Coast Cultures; The Maya Halls; North-western Mexico; and “Modern Autochthonous Mexico.”

Native workers also did much of the stonework and other skilled construction labor throughout the structure.⁹⁰ The Museo's designers touted this as an additional authentically Mexican aspect

⁹⁰ According to Ramírez Vázquez, the workers lived on the construction site. For Ramírez Vázquez, even the workers' personal habits linked present to past: "At night, when the sounds of

Two views of the interior patio, Museo Nacional de Antropología



of the construction, citing Mexico's "long tradition of workmanship" (Ramírez Vázquez 1968: 21).

Nineteen months after construction began, on September 17, 1964, the Museo officially opened. During this "Semana Cultural," López Mateos inspected new restoration and excavation work at Teotihuacán; inaugurated the new Museo Nacional del Virreinato (National Museum of the Viceroyalty), in the former Jesuit college of San Francisco Javier, in Tepotzotlán; inaugurated the Museo del Arte Moderno, another Ramírez Vázquez design in Chapultepec Park; and presided over Independence celebrations (Colunga Hernández 2002: 27-8).⁹¹ In addition to reflecting changes in the administration of cultural resources, the development of new museums also indicated the growing importance of tourism to the Mexican economy. In addition, the López Mateos government sought to attract foreign investment; as during the Porfiriato, an attractive, modern city center was part of that strategy (Davis 1994).⁹² Perhaps a more immediate concern, both from a cosmetic and a technological perspective, was the contract Mexico signed in 1964 with the International Olympic Committee, naming Mexico City as host of the 1968 Summer Olympic Games. The Museo showcased Mexican technological innovation and highlighted its cultural legacy—and its rapid construction time provided

work had died down, dozens of camp-fires would appear, and the men would have their supper, now as in the pre-Hispanic past, made up of tortillas, rice, beans and an occasional piece of meat" (1968: 21). As Marta could have told him, rice was not, in fact, available to people living "in the pre-Hispanic past." The Spaniards introduced it.

⁹¹ The opening of the Museo del Virreinato marked a split in the history collections, with items deemed part of the colonial period moving to Tepotzotlán, while items from the period of Independence forward stayed at the Castillo.

⁹² Davis analyzes the difficult relationship between López Mateos and the mayor of Mexico City, Ernesto Uruchurtu, both members of the PRI, linking their "divergent positions on urban growth and national development" (1994: 138) to a rift in the PRI that defined subsequent national and urban development policy.

evidence of Mexico's readiness to host the Games.⁹³ Writing in a special issue of *Artes de México*, the Secretary General of the Museo, Luis Aveylera stated that "[t]he new museum is the promising symptom of a country's maturity" (Aveylera 1965: 17).

V. EXHIBITING THE CITY

"Close your notebooks," Sara instructs the group of nearly 80 secondary school students, paused at the entrance to the Mexica gallery. "It's more important to look at the pieces." She takes a moment to look about the gallery and decide how she will conduct the group. Though the school tours usually include a somewhat predictable group of exhibits, the order in which the guide is able to present them is determined by how crowded a gallery is at any given time. In fact, Sara originally planned take this group to the Prehistory gallery, but it was so full of other groups that we had not been able to enter.⁹⁴

We are standing on the raised marble platform that serves as a foyer to the gallery, an outline map of Mexico beneath our feet. There are two pieces displayed on the platform, a basalt ocelot with a scooped hollow in its back, and a pyramid-shaped stone covered with figures in relief. None of the other galleries have an entryway quite like

⁹³ Ramírez Vázquez assumed leadership of the Mexican Olympic Committee after 1966 (Zolov 2004: 161). Kuri specifically investigates the role Ramírez Vázquez played in the creation of the "Cultural Olympics," and in making the Olympics a ratification that "Mexico was in the world and world could be present in Mexico (2003: 68). Zolov takes a more critical view, arguing that overcoming the discourse of Mexican "underdevelopment" was "an explicit and intrinsic aspect of planning for the Games" (2004: 162).

⁹⁴ The asesor taking reservations for school tours usually asks the teacher in charge if there is a gallery she or he wishes the class to see. If the teacher has no preference—as they often do not—the asesor will ask what they are studying in history, and make a suggestion. In this instance, the teacher had told Sara that they are studying the ancient Near East, and Sara then suggested the Prehistory Hall, which highlights human origins.

this, nor does any other have the soaring ceilings found here. The Mexica Hall alone does not have another gallery directly above it.

Sara first draws the group's attention to the ocelot, describing the material it is made from and how it was fashioned. Then she asks a few questions about the Mexica, a technique she uses to gauge a group's knowledge. Do they know the principal gods of the Mexica? "The sun and the moon," one of the boys ventures. She shakes her head no. No one else offers an answer, so she provides it: "Huitzilopochtli." Briefly, she explains Huitzilopochtli's place in Mexica cosmology, as god of the sun, and of war.⁹⁵ Do the students know what the most precious offering the people could present the gods was? She pauses only briefly before telling them: "The heart." She points to the shallow dip in the ocelot's back. The piece, she explains, is called a *cuauhxcalli*, and the indentation held sacrificial hearts removed from victims captured in "*la guerra sagrada*," sacred war.

She turns their attention to the pyramid-shaped object, the *teocalli*.⁹⁶ How did the Mexica know they had found the spot to raise their city? Several students call out "the eagle and the nopal, the eagle and the nopal!" She points out the figure of the eagle seated on the nopal that is carved into the teocalli, "What does the eagle have in his mouth," she asks. "A snake," the group answers confidently. She wags her finger. "That's what the Spaniards thought, too." Her finger hovering above the relief, she follows the elongated

⁹⁵ The asesores usually translate his name as "Hummingbird of the East." According to Mexica cosmology, it is Huitzilopochtli who leads them from Aztlán, in the north, to the Valley of Mexico.

⁹⁶ I usually heard "teocalli" translated as "temple." This particular piece was discovered in 1926 in the Zócalo, beneath the Palacio Nacional, and named the Teocalli de la Guerra Sagrada by Alfonso Caso. Commissioned by Moctezuma II, it commemorates the ceremony of the New Fire in 1507, and an addition to the Templo Mayor (Caso 1927).

undulating shape that dangles from the eagle's beak. "They saw this shape and thought it was a snake. But archeologists now know that



Detail from the teocalli, Sala Mexica

this is the symbol for the sacred war. If you see an eagle with a serpent in its mouth, you can be sure it is a symbol from colonial times." Because the Spaniards did not understand the Mexica symbol, they interpreted it as a snake, and the mistake became part of colonial iconography.

By this time, we have descended partway down the ramp intended to lead us into the exhibits about the valley of Mexico and its inhabitants at the time of the Mexica arrival. However, another group fills the viewing area. We can't even squeeze past to get to the next section. Circumventing the architectural prompts, and carefully snaking between displays arranged to prevent passage, we walk across the hall to the Piedra del Sol (Sun Stone). Positioned beneath the enormous Stone, Sara tells the students "In the 16th century, Mexico City was the biggest city in the world, as it is today." Introducing the piece as "la Piedra del Sol," she asks if they know other names for it. Someone says

“El Calendario Azteca (the Aztec Calendar).” Sara nods, and together the group names a few places that the symbol appears: on the ten-peso coin, on the shirts for the national soccer team. Then she explains why Piedra del Sol, rather than Calendario Azteca, is the name used for the piece in the Museo.



Piedra del Sol, Sala Mexica

To do this, she tells the Mexica creation story of the Five Suns. According to the Mexica, the universe has passed through five cycles, or suns, of creation. The Sun Stone represents these suns: Tonatiuh, the fifth and current sun, in the center, surrounded by symbols representing the four previous suns. During each cycle of creation, a different god tries his or her hand at making humans. Each attempt meets with failure, and ends with the destruction of the creation, first through a consuming darkness, populated with jaguars that eat even a portion of the sun, next, by tremendous winds that scatter all living beings, next by fire, and last, through torrents of water. As she did with the Stone itself,

Sara links aspects of the story to presumably familiar places and narratives. For example, the destruction by fire perhaps refers to an eruption by the now-extinct volcano Ajusco, located in the southern zone of the city “near Coyoacán and the Pedregal,” the destruction by water to “what for Catholics is The Flood.”

“Some people say that the fifth sun will end with earthquakes. Some say it already ended,” she concludes, quickly surveying the room to see where we might go next.

Visitors, including large commercial tour groups and school groups on self-directed tours, crowd around most of the exhibits. The size of our group also limits options.

Eighty young adolescents, even attentive and well-behaved ones, are an unwieldy bunch.

With a brisk nod, Sara indicates our next destination, the mural of Tenochtitlán, the city the Mexica built, and the scale model of its ceremonial center.

The panoramic mural, *Tenochtitlán en el siglo XVI*, painted by Luis Covarrubias for the Museo, hangs just above adult eye level.⁹⁷ Based on accounts from the Spanish chronicles, the painting imagines the city as it first appeared to the Spaniards.

Tenochtitlán floats in the middle of Lake Texcoco, ringed by mountains, including the volcanoes Popocatepétl and Ixtahualli. A grid of canals spreads from the ceremonial center, marked by its temples. Shades of blue and green dominate the composition; the pale golden brown of the ceremonial buildings contrasts with the surrounding lushness. “It’s so pretty, isn’t it,” one of the girls remarks.

The model rests on a platform set into a sunken viewing area just below the painting. Three short steps allow visitors to approach the model closely, or to sit and view

⁹⁷ During its construction phase, the Museo commissioned murals from some of the most prominent Mexican artists of the time, including Rufino Tamayo, Pablo O’Higgins, and Leonora Carrington. Covarrubias painted several, including the *culturas* mural described in the first chapter.

it at more or less eye level. Sara allows the students to choose whether they sit or remain standing. Most take the opportunity to sprawl across the steps. Sara asks them if they know what the ceremonial complex is now.



Maquette and Covarrubias mural, Sala Mexica

Several students call out “The Zócalo.” Sara nods. “Do you know where Bellas Artes is,” she asks, referring to the Palace of Fine Arts. Seeing several nods of recognition, she continues. “So you know where Calle Tacuba is?” More nodding. She then names the three major terrestrial thoroughfares evident on the mural, the *calzadas* of Tepeyac, Tlacopan, and Iztapalapa. “When the Spaniards arrived, what is now Tacuba, was Tlacopan. These streets still exist. Tlacopan is Tacuba; Tepeyac is the Calzada de

Guadalupe; and Iztapalapa is Calle Tlalpan.⁹⁸ “See these green parts,” she asks, gesturing toward the right side of the mural. “Those are the *chinampas*. You can see them in Xochimilco. Have you been to Xochimilco? You really need to go.”⁹⁹ She continues, identifying the structures represented on the model, and explaining their purposes. “See this,” she points to what appears to be a buff-colored freestanding wall, with gray cylinders protruding from it. “It looks like it could be a display of soft drink bottles, doesn’t it? But it isn’t soft drinks. It’s the *tzompantli*, the wall of skulls, skulls of sacrificed people.”¹⁰⁰

Like Sara in the vignette, all of the asesores mobilize a variety of skills and strategies when leading students through the Museo. They are not provided with a script or even a written guide for their tours. I was surprised to learn this; before arriving to do fieldwork, I had assumed that the Museo provided them with fairly specific guidelines for presenting the galleries, the better to control the official presentation of history. Instead, I learned that each asesora spent time researching the galleries and preparing the tours on her own. Asesores working at the Museo during the time of my fieldwork reported using a variety of resources when “*armando su rollo*” (putting together their spiel, basically).

They conducted research in the library of the Museo, and at the libraries of both the

⁹⁸ Almost any Mexican visitor would know Tepeyac as the site of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe. It is variously called Tepeyac, la Villa, and the Basilica. Iztapalapa and Tlacopan in 1519 were city-states that formed part of the Triple Alliance, the ruling coalition controlled by the Mexica; now they are part of the urban heart of Mexico City. Iztapalapa is one of the city’s 16 delegaciones (similar to boroughs). The Cerro de la Estrella (Hill of the Star), which figures in Mexica mythology, is located there. In 2006, a pyramid believed to be part of the Templo Mayor complex was unearthed there.

⁹⁹ Chinampas are an agricultural system which permits wetlands cultivation, developed in Mesoamerica. Mexican schoolchildren would be familiar with the term.

¹⁰⁰ The remodeled version of the Introduction to Anthropology gallery, which now focuses on human evolution, includes a photographic mural based on the tzompantli. Headshots of visitors to the Museo were taken and arranged into a grid. The photos surface and recede, each fully fleshed face slowly melting into a skull, then gradually transforming back into a face.

National Autonomous University of Mexico and the ENAH; they talked to gallery curators; they visited the galleries, taking note of the wall texts and labels, and deciding which objects they wished to highlight in their presentations; they attended lectures and talks presented at the Museo and also at the ENAH and other locations. I was also told that the Museo sometimes organized courses for the asesores. During my fieldwork, I was only aware of courses being offered for the traveling exhibits housed in the temporary exhibit space, not the permanent galleries.¹⁰¹

Asesores familiarize themselves with each of the galleries, noting the physical arrangements as well as the contents on display. If the teachers accompanying a group express no preference as to the gallery, the asesora in charge chooses the gallery she thinks most age-appropriate. When selecting a gallery, she considers not only the exhibit content, but also the visual presentation of the material. For example, preschool and kindergarten classes are usually taken to see the “Prehistory” gallery; the asesores find that its large mural of prehistoric animals and below floor exhibit of mammoth bones appeal to young children. Many of the cases in the gallery are low to the ground, making it possible for small children to see the contents easily.

The asesores consider a variety of factors when presenting their tours. The tour registry provides basic information about the schools: school location, grade level of the students, and number of students on the tour. Curriculum at the primary and secondary levels follows a national plan established by the SEP; knowing the students’ grade levels

¹⁰¹ This temporary exhibit space, located in an area accessible through the lobby, and not connected to the permanent galleries, was under renovation during the first weeks of my research. It opened with an exhibit on Africa in Spring 2003. Since the objects on display do not belong to the Museo, it is assumed that asesores will not have access to the resources necessary to conduct tours without additional training.

gives the asesores a frame for their presentations. The location of the school indicates what geographical or site-specific references the students might share, allowing the asesor to select orientation points that the group understands. The asesor in charge of a tour asks questions—as Sara does in the example above—to refine the information they include. For example, if a group already knows the story of Huitzilopochtli, the asesor will offer other information, or ask the students to share what they know with each other.

Additionally, each asesor uses her or his individual knowledge and experience when presenting the material. Domingo, a former rural schoolteacher who was older than many of the other asesores, incorporated proverbs and other standardized skits and sketches into his narratives. Some asesores share stories about their families or childhoods. The narratives they prepare, while practiced and polished beforehand, also shift slightly for each presentation. In the archeology galleries, tours must sometimes adapt because particular objects are on loan to other museums. However, the primary reason tours must be flexible is the unpredictability of gallery crowds. As I learned when leading tours myself, an asesor cannot always follow a preferred route when leading a group; sometimes there were simply too many visitors already examining a piece to allow a guided group to approach. Logistics aside, narrative variation is also one of the pedagogical strategies the asesores employ. During the majority of tours I observed, the asesores attempt to integrate the understandings and experiences of the group into each visit, shaping their narratives in response to presumed or expressed group interest and knowledge.

The architectural plan for the Mexica Hall reflected Alfonso Caso's notion of the place of the Mexica in Mexican history.¹⁰² Though overall the design of the Museo was supposed to call attention to all of the "foundational" cultures—that is, the most "important" cultures up to the Spanish invasion—equally, it was the clear purpose of the advisory board and especially of Caso to emphasize the Mexica. According to Ramírez Vázquez, Caso wished the gallery to reflect his conviction that "the Mexica culture was the living culture at the moment of the Conquest chronologically, it is our closest genetic root, therefore it should be the principal (focus), because it is the driving force of all that we are now" (quoted in del Villar 1997:19).

Caso directed Ramírez Vázquez to include architectural features that forced visitors to the gallery to follow a certain path through the exhibit space. The marble platform, 70 centimeters above the floor, requires visitors to slow their pace when they enter:

They can either go slowly, or they can fall...they want to go directly to the Piedra del Sol; they can't, they have to turn and go down another ramp to see what Don Alfonso Caso told me they had to see first: the physical surroundings, the human condition, the ways of life, etc., until, at the right moment, they arrive at the Piedra del Sol. It is architecture, not Museography, it is architecture together with Museography that manipulates the space and accomplishes the scientific adviser's purpose (quoted in del Villar 1997:19).

¹⁰² Alfonso Caso y Andrade (1896-1970), one of the most dominant figures in the development of Mexican archeology and anthropology. He first received a law degree, in 1919. He began attending courses offered at the Museo Nacional, and throughout the 1920s published articles and monographs on various artifacts and codices. In 1930, he was named head of the Department of Archeology at the Museo Nacional. In 1932, he presented the spectacular findings at Monte Albán. He was the first director of the INI, and remained in that position until his death, in 1970. See the entry devoted to Caso in *La antropología en México: Panorama histórico, Vol. 9: Los protagonistas (Acosta-Dávila)*. Edited by Lina Odena Güemes and Carlos García Mora. México, DF. Colección Biblioteca del INAH, INAH: 1988.

As reported by Ramírez Vázquez, Caso's directions provide an excellent example of the efforts that museums invest in their attempts to "assert strong cognitive control" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 21). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett emphasizes the evasions museum visitors practice, ignoring prescribed pathways, not attending to the particular objects or texts highlighted in an exhibit or gallery.

My work in the Museo points out the ways in which museum staff, in this case the teaching staff, also circumvent the wishes of designers, curators, and museographers. In some instances, this is because practicalities—how many people are in a gallery, for example—overcome curatorial intent. In others, it is because the designers of the exhibit left little room for new information to be included easily. However, the primary reason I understand for the asesores' reworking of gallery presentation is their conviction that, in order for the students under their guidance to experience the Museo in a meaningful manner, they need to be able to connect personally with the objects in the gallery. For the asesores, the establishment of an overall gallery narrative is not a priority. Their focus is on providing narratives that actively engage the students by establishing relationships between their everyday experiences and the objects and information in the displays. The asesores work through the static and planned spaces of the gallery, knitting them to both personal and localized understandings of not only their place in dominant national narratives, but also as those narratives connect to present-day Mexico City, and the complex web of connections maintained or asserted by different populations of museum goers.

A fixture in the city since the 1960s, the Museo itself becomes part of urban place narratives. One October afternoon, when I sat writing field notes in the otherwise empty

educational services center, a man accompanied by two children approached me. He wanted his children to see one of the murals painted in this section. The particular mural that interested him had been covered by an immense black plastic tarp since my arrival at the Museo.¹⁰³ He requested that I remove at least part of the tarp; I explained why that would not be possible. “I really wanted my children to see it,” he said. “I always remember it from when I used to come here, and I wanted them to see it.”

In addition to figuring in individual memory, the Museo—particularly the patio, with its reflecting pool and the paraguas—serves as recreational space. On Sundays, when the Mexican public enters for free, the patio fills with people. Families with young children line the low walls of the reflecting pond, searching for turtles, minnows, and the odd goldfish that inhabit its lily-covered water. Teenagers come to flirt with each other and to try out their English or French on likely-looking candidates. Families and friends pose for photographs in front of the paraguas. During the week, some senior citizens, who have free admission to the Museo at all times, use the patio as a plaza: a quiet place to sit. I often sat on one of the benches to write up post-tour notes, and several times fell in to conversation with older women who told me they lived in other parts of the city, but no longer felt safe sitting alone in their neighborhood parks. Within the Museo, they felt protected.

¹⁰³ I didn't see the mural, which depicts various cosmological understandings of the afterlife, until a visit in 2006.



Reflecting Pool, Patio

Emphasizing only the ideological intent of the Museo's creators obscures the ways in which staff and visitors put space to use. As this chapter demonstrates, the Museo, in its various incarnations, participates in and shapes dominant discourses of nation and modernity. It also marks a specific place in the urban landscape of Mexico City. Focusing on some of the ways that the staff and public negotiate these intersections reveals a variety of strategies for engaging with the Museo and its contents.

Understanding these engagements as part of the ideological work in which the Museo figures complicates more monolithic presentations of the relationships between museums as state institutions, the agents that mediate them, and their publics.

CHAPTER THREE

Practicing Death

A La Muerte se le frecuenta, se le burla, se le acaricia, y se le festeja. En México, La muerte es fundamento de la vida. (Death: we spend a lot of time with her, we make fun of her, we caress her, and we celebrate her. In Mexico, Death is the foundation of life.)¹⁰⁴

Claudio Lomnitz makes an explicit claim about the relation of Death to the Mexican state: “the nationalization of an ironic intimacy with death is a singularly Mexican strategy” (2005: 20). Lomnitz grants Death a special place in the creation of a post-Revolutionary mestizo Mexico. According to his analysis, “Mexican attitudes toward death are generally understood as peculiarly powerful instances of cultural hybridity or mestizaje, an area of life in which indigenous and popular culture has enveloped and transformed the culture of the colonizer”(2005: 40). My observations in the Museo support this assertion; *la Muerte* in general, and the festivities associated with the Days of the Dead in particular, stand for something “*muy nuestro*” [very much ours].

This chapter examines the ways that death figures in the staging and production of *mexicanidad* in the Museo. In 2002, the Museo sponsored three Saturdays of family-oriented Muertos activities. I attended one of the sessions, a day that included several different crafts workshops and visits to the galleries. I combine observations made during that session with observations made during a visit to the Museo by a group of Mexican-American children and their chaperones, sponsored by the Mexican Department of State

¹⁰⁴ Printed on the back of postcards depicting Days of the Dead celebrations, produced by the Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares in 1991.

(*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*, or the SRE). My analysis builds on an examination of these events to illuminate moments of congruence and tensions between the “structuring structures” of Museo displays and staff presentations, and those that visitors bring with them. As Bourdieu notes, “all knowledge, and in particular all knowledge of the social world, is an act of construction, implementing schemes of thought and expression , and that between conditions of existence and practices or representations there intervenes the structuring activity of the agents, who, far from reacting mechanically to mechanical stimulations, respond to the invitations or threats of a world they have helped produce” (1984: 471).

I. Death in Mind

Towards the end of an informal talk given by Marita Sturken to graduate students and faculty at the University of Texas Anthropology Department, she referred to the Days of the Dead (Muertos) figures available for purchase in Oaxaca as examples of a souvenir that disquiets rather than comforts.¹⁰⁵ I responded that I thought that the case could be made that the Mexican world-view, if I were to speak of a generalized “world view,” would be that “We’re all fucked” (*Estamos chingados*). She added that the figures give the sign, things are not okay. No, I said, they might give the sign, things are not okay, we’re fucked, but that is part of what maintains the status quo. Those objects no longer offer a critique, they participate in a peculiarly Mexican system of signs, where the more fucked up, the more impossible situations are, the more Mexican they are: “*Jodidos, pero*

¹⁰⁵ The departmental talk took place on April 6, 2006. Dr. Sturken was here at the invitation of the University’s Humanities Institute, as one of the Distinguished Visiting Lecturers for 2005-2006, speaking on the theme “Remembering, Forgetting, Collecting, and Discarding.”

contentos” (screwed over, but happy), a friend reminded me. “Fatalism,” Sturken said, and then time was up, and I hadn’t had a chance to think through whether or not I thought fatalism really captures what I think happens. I left, pondering what I thought a Mexican semiotics of monuments, objects, and memory might be.

When I got home, I looked up *souvenir* in the dictionary. Its origins come from the Latin *subvenire*, meaning “to occur to the mind.” As synonyms, the thesaurus offered: memento, keepsake, reminder, remembrance, token, memorial, bomboniere, trophy, relic. Then I looked up the Spanish word for *souvenir*, *recuerdo*. It has only four synonyms: *evocación*, *obsequio*, *presente*, and *reminiscencia*. I noticed how many of the words in some way reference a far-off loved one or death, with memento being the most direct, as it derives from the Latin *memento mori*: “remember that you have to die.”

Some make the connections between memory and memento, death, and the museum quite explicitly. A recent book by Andrea Whitcomb, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* (2003), describes the parallels often drawn between museum and mortuary practice. Scholars are not the only ones drawing such parallels. One of the Ethnography staff told me of a conversation she overheard one afternoon while sitting near the reflecting pool on the Museo’s patio. A little girl noticed that one of the turtles sunning itself in the shallows moved. “Look, Daddy, look! The turtle is moving.” Her father dismissed her observation: “The turtle can’t be moving, it’s stuffed. We’re in a museum, nothing here is alive.”

That anecdote, in turn, reminds me of the first detailed conversation I had with the asesores about my research. “Melissa, what exactly is it you are here to do?” Eight people turned to hear my response to Ana’s question. I’d been at the Museo for a couple

of months, learning the routines, observing the asesoras on their tours, spending time in the galleries. Now we were all in San Luis Potosí, attending the first national gathering of museum educators in the 50-year history of INAH Educational Services. I knew most of the people seated around the lunch table from my work at the Museo. Ana, however, works at the Castillo, the National Museum of History.

“Well,” I began, “I’m interested in what people do inside museums. In what they look at, where they go, if they read the labels, what catches their attention, what they ignore. I’m interested in how the asesores present information, how you prepare your remarks, what kinds of questions students and teachers ask you. And I’m interested in how the curators and museographers arrange information, how they decide to include things or leave things out, and how sometimes, what the curator or the museographer intends to communicate is not what the visitor sees or learns.”

I related the anecdote of the secondary school girls viewing the language vitrine in the Sala de Pueblos Indios to illustrate my point. When I reach the end, with the teacher accepting the girls’ summation of the information in the case as “Indians don’t wear shirts,” the museum educators seated around the table rolled their eyes and laughed ruefully. Several related similar stories. “But I still want to know what you want to do,” Ana persisted. I paused. What exactly did I want to do?

I began with an idea from a Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett essay, that of “the museum as a form of interment—a tomb with a view” (1998: 57). I explained that my observations of the ways that people behaved in the Museo did not support that notion. I came to learn more about the ways that people interacted with the displays and space of the Museo. When I finished, Tere spoke up. “But death can be active; it isn’t something

final.” Ana picked up on her comment. “Death here is a way to recuperate memory. It isn’t like European death, an inert object.”

Death had occupied my mind through much of the month. The San Luis meeting took place in late November, three weeks or so after the celebration of *Días de los Muertos*. The Museo conducted a wide assortment of activities to mark Muertos. Servicios Educativos held a series of Saturday workshops for families and children, with special gallery tours and crafts sessions (“Dress your skeleton” “Paint your skull”). The social service students created an elaborate life-sized diorama in the Servicios area, illustrating the decorating of a child’s grave in the style typical of the Mixteco and Zapotec communities of the valley of Oaxaca. Many of the departments of the Museo participated in an ofrenda contest, the entries displayed on the downstairs patio outside of the Museo’s public cafeteria. The contest display also included memorials to deceased members of the Museo staff or their families, in the form of small paper nametags mounted onto the wall, in the manner of mausoleum niches. Cut-paper banners with skulls, dancing skeletons, and the elegant *Catrina*¹⁰⁶ hung in the basement hallways. Some departmental offices also made personal ofrendas for deceased personnel. In the Ethnography department, the staff dedicated an ofrenda to one of the anthropologists, who had died the previous year. Also, for the first time, the Ethnography department sponsored the trip of a group from outside of the city to construct an ofrenda typical of their region on the main patio of the Museo. The effort included the construction of a

¹⁰⁶ A skeleton dressed as high-society early 20th c. woman, popularized in the engravings of José Guadalupe Posada.

life-sized cabin room in which to mount the ofrenda, and a “*bailable*”¹⁰⁷ by schoolchildren.



Ofrendas on the patio of the Museo

¹⁰⁷ A dance performance.



Materials for the ofrenda (top) and the bailable (bottom)

Even when it isn't being officially celebrated, death is very visible in the Museo. Each of the archeological galleries includes a tomb, and most of the ethnographic galleries include either an ofrenda for Muertos, or a mention of practices associated with death. In Servicios Educativos, one of the murals portrays children participating in contemporary Muertos offerings and relates them to pre-Colombian practices. There is also a mock-up of a burial site, with a body and offering placed around it.¹⁰⁸ One of the first tours I observed Sara conduct was to the Teotihuacan gallery, which includes a reproduction of a mural depicting the section of the underworld (*inframundo*, in Spanish) governed by Tláloc, the rain god. The children in the group were on the younger side of elementary age, probably around six or so. We had already stood in front of the mock-up of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl and learned to identify Tláloc: his headdress, the rings around his eyes, and a fangs on each side of his mouth that look like a moustache. Sara sat them in front of the mural. First she asked them to find Tláloc. After they identified him, she began explaining the structure of the *inframundo*, the different sections reserved for different kinds of deaths. "There was even a special place for babies that died," Sara continued. She pointed to a tree in one corner. "*Tenían su arbol de los chichis donde mamaban*" (They had a titty tree, where they nursed). None of the children seemed perturbed in the least by the idea of dead babies, though many giggled at the *árbol de chichis*. I couldn't help but imagine the response I would likely have received from the parents of the children I taught had I decided to share a story about dead babies in my classroom.

¹⁰⁸ The mural that was covered over during my fieldwork portrays Mayan cosmology, with a very vibrant underworld. The mock burial site had been exhibited in the old Introduction to Anthropology gallery, labeled "Neolithic Burial."



Detail, Mural "Ronda del Tiempo" by Fanny Rabel, Servicios Educativos



Tláloc in the inframundo, detail, Sala Teotihuacan

II. Tombs and Offerings

Arriving early for the first of the workshops, I settle myself on the bench in the Servicios lobby. A primary school group fills up the waiting area, crowding around the guard station as they stash their backpacks in the storage baskets. Parents and siblings of the students mingle with them. Another school group arrives. Some of the students wander into the workshop areas, marked off from the waiting areas by raised wooden platforms.

The open space in between the platforms, usually hidden from view by rolling room dividers, reveals the preparations for the life-sized Muertos diorama that the Social Service interns are preparing. The dividers, covered by brown paper painted with a rural cemetery scene, now serve as backdrop. The interns dumped bags of soil onto the floor to simulate the cemetery grounds. Crosses mark individual gravesites; the beginnings of an ofrenda decorate one of them. The toys and candies scattered on the “grave” indicate that it is a child’s tomb. An unclothed female mannequin, a wig of black braids attached to her head, stands over the grave.



The Licenciada and Lili, the departmental secretary, join the children and adults milling about in the waiting area. Three asesoras appear. I had previously arranged to accompany the group led by Naila. The workshops combine gallery visits with a structured activity; the activity for Naila's group is "*Dulces de Muertos*," Days of the Dead sweets. Naila directs those enrolled in the workshop to stand next to her: eighteen children, five pre-teen or young teenagers, and nine adults gather around. She outlines the plan for the morning; first we will visit the archeological gallery dedicated to Western Mexico, then the ethnographic gallery depicting the Purépecha people. After the gallery visits, we will return to Servicios Educativos for the activity.

We move from the Servicios area up to the galleries. The people in the group chat casually with one another. When we arrive at the Western Mexico gallery, we pass quickly through the initial cases to arrive at the life-sized diorama depicting a "*tumba de tiro*," or shaft tomb.¹⁰⁹ The design of the exhibit simulates a cave. Visitors pass through a hallway between two chamber tombs. The hallway then opens into a larger viewing area, allowing a full view of the burial sites. The material forming the walls of the viewing area and the chambers mimics stone. Sand covers the floor of the burial chambers. A pair of skeletons occupies each chamber. Ceramic dishes, elaborate figurines, and other offering materials surround them.

As we crowd into the viewing areas, Naila begins talking. A tiro is a particular type of burial site, she explains, found in the area inhabited by the Tarascans. She directs our attention to the two burial chambers. Can we tell which one is a man's burial site, and which one is a woman's? No one ventures a guess, so she begins to point out the

¹⁰⁹ A sort of burial site found mostly in Western Mexico, made by shaping a tunnel in rock and depositing the body at the base. *Tiro* is the word used to describe a mining shaft.



Tumbas de tiro, female (top) male (bottom), Sala Occidente de México

differences, the *metate* and *mano* in one chamber, the arrow points in the other. Then she notes the commonalities: the similar figurines, including the *xoloescuintles*, the dogs that accompany souls into the afterlife; the quantities of serving dishes arrayed around the perimeters of the tombs. The figures in the tombs represent the style prevalent in the state of Jalisco, she adds. She gestured towards the burial chambers. “They put all of the things they liked in there with them,” she said, “so that they wouldn’t come back.”

The discussion of the *tumbas de tiro* concluded, Naila ushers us back to the patio. As we walk across to the south entrance of the ethnographic galleries, she reminded us that we would now visit the gallery devoted to the Purépecha. People once called them the *tarascos*, she informs us, but Purépecha is “the correct name.”¹¹⁰ Like all of the ethnographic galleries, the design of the Purépecha gallery employs a variety of exhibitionary strategies, including photomurals, life-sized dioramas, conventional museum display cases, film, and interactive computer screens. Naila maneuvers us around the dugout canoe that divides the opening space. Bypassing the introductory exhibits, she stops in front of a life-sized model of a *troje*,¹¹¹ the pine plank house typical of the region. The diorama includes three figures: a woman, standing on the porch, and two young boys, playing with tops and marbles outside of the house. The woman wears the traditional clothing associated with Puré women. The two boys are dressed in t-shirts and twill pants. A recording in the Puré language plays intermittently.

¹¹⁰ The Puré are primarily located in the state of Michoacán. Historically, their territory included Michoacán and parts of Jalisco and Guanajuato.

¹¹¹ *Troje* also means granary; the house is called a *troje* because there are storage areas for corn included in its structure. There is a model of a 19th century *troje* in the gardens around the Museo. The Director of Ethnography told me that for while, a cow was kept alongside the house.

Directly across from the troje, a case describes the changes brought to the Purépecha area by primarily male migration for wage labor. The display includes an image of *Santiago Apóstol* (Saint James the Apostle), covered with U.S. dollar bills.¹¹² Our group stands in the narrow area between the two exhibits. Naila draws our attention to the female mannequin in the troje, with her tiered brightly-colored skirt. The Puré women “follow custom,” she tells us. She then describes “the agricultural cycle of life,” regulated by planting, tending, and harvesting. Traditionally, even children’s toys followed a seasonal flow, with marbles and tops associated with June and July. She guides our gaze to the image of Santiago Apóstol. “Now, many men work outside of the country.” However, many migrants return for the fiestas of the patron saints, which are celebrated with “a lot of beer, rum, and popular music.”



Detail, Migration display, Sala Purépechas

¹¹² The fiesta de Santiago Apóstol, July 24, is one of the fiestas for which the region is particularly known.

Días de los Muertos also draws migrants back to their sending communities. Naila shifts to a discussion of the ofrendas constructed for Muertos. One of the basic components of an ofrenda is the marigold-like flower, *cempaxúchitl*. “That means the flower of twenty petals in Nahuatl,” Naila explains. “The flowers and petals are used to make a path for the returning souls to follow.” The brightly colored golden orange petals and the plant’s distinctive fragrance guide the muertos to the ofrenda, and back to the cemetery. Other flowers also appear on the ofrenda: the purple *pata de león* (lion’s paw: cranesbill, in English), *nubes* (clouds, a baby’s breath like flower). An ofrenda constructed for a child would include white flowers.

Aside from flowers, a traditional ofrenda also includes a skull, made of candy or papier maché; a dish of salt, symbol of purification; candles, one for each soul being received; and water, to quench their thirst. Naila notes that ofrendas contain representations of the four elements, earth, air, fire, and water. Banners of cut tissue, *papél picado*, move with the breeze, a fluttering representation of wind. She also tells us what we will not find on an ofrenda: orange tissue paper, witches, or vampires. “Grotesque figures belong to Halloween (typically spelled *jalogüin*),” she says firmly.

We quickly pass the cases of handcrafts, feather art, and jewelry, to arrive at the life-sized representation of a cemetery in the town of Janitzio, an island in Lake Patzcuaro, internationally famous for its celebration of Muertos. A photomural depicting the launches that carry people back and forth between the shore and the island, taken during one of the nights of Muertos, when the passengers carry burning candles, provides a backdrop for the simulated gravesites. Naila introduces her remarks by telling us that “Janitzio is now very tourist-oriented, the traditions are changing.” She points out the

arches that adorn the tombs, symbolizing “the beginning and the end.” Arches used to be made of “only bread,” but can incorporate other things. She mentions that sometimes wax tapers replace the more common votives, “but you would never use black.” The colors of the candles correspond to the manner in which the deceased died.

Next, she tells a story that describes the origin of the *rebozo* worn by Purépecha women, typically indigo or black, shot through with yellow or white threads. The story compares the rebozo to the mantle of the night, its darkness contrasted with the brightness of the night. “*Cada cosa que tenemos en nuestro país,*” (All of the things we have in our country) she finishes. She gestures for us to follow her, and we exit the gallery.

When we return to Servicios, she tells the group that there are many types of ofrendas. The scene being constructed by the Social Service students depicts a Mixtecan ofrenda dedicated to a child, she says, pointing out the kites. One of the children asks if she will tell them more about the colors of the candles and what they symbolize. Naila answers that yellow corresponds to death in childbirth, green to a drawn-out death, red, to a violent death, and white to a natural death. No one else asks anything. She turns us over to the woman who will conduct the “Sweets of the Dead” workshop. I have seen Diana, the instructor, around the department, but have not met her before.

The students divide the group into seven teams, mostly in family groupings. I decide not to participate, because I want to move between this workshop and the “Dress your skeleton” workshop underway in one of the other work areas. Representatives from each group collect the materials: chocolate, rubber molds, popsicle sticks. There are various molds, including skulls, a version of the Posada Catrina, outlined on a flat

surface, and, to my surprise after Naila's talk, ghosts and pumpkins. A worried child at one of tables asks her mother whether it is okay to use the pumpkins, "because the teacher said not to!" "Oh, they're small, so it's okay," the adult reassures her. Another child makes the round, flat tablets of chocolate dance as she chants "*oye, oye, la hostía,*" (hey, hey, the Host; the chocolate does resemble a super-sized communion wafer).

The work teams take turns using a microwave to melt the chocolate, chatting with each other and Diana as they wait. One of the women asks where they can purchase the molds to make the chocolates at home. A child pulls out a pair of cardboard glasses with lenses in the shape of skulls. Diana tells them they can vary the sweets by adding cornflakes or rice krispies. I wonder if Naila knows. For the most part, the adults sit back and let the children direct the production. Some of the younger ones are just as happy to eat overheated chocolate as to mold it, but one of the older boys works very intently on his *catrina*, using toothpicks to emphasize the details.

The group working on the other side is much larger and louder. As I make my way over to their section, I notice a group of kids wearing blue berets sitting in the waiting area. They have matching t-shirts that identify them as participants in a crime-prevention program. I see that more mannequins have been added to the *Mixte* scene. There are several instructors running around in the workshop area, carrying materials back and forth. I try to count the participants, but people move between tables, and I finally give up. There seem to be somewhere around fifty people. In general, the kids in the workshop are older, upper elementary and secondary school students. A number of them carry notebooks similar to mine, indicating that they are here to complete school assignments. I notice a few older unaccompanied adults. I think of the numerous crafts

classes directed towards senior citizens that I see advertised in my housing unit and at community centers.

Much consulting goes on as each person dresses his or her skeleton. “What do you think,” people ask each other, holding up their skeleton for inspection. There is some debate over whether the skeletons should be in “modern” or “traditional” dress.

“Traditional” seems to mean either resembling a Posada drawing or imitating a particular indigenous dress style. I see one skeleton dressed as a witch, complete with pointed hat. Three tables of teenaged boys harass the girls sitting nearby and gossip, ignoring the activity completely. Younger children pop up from the tables, hurrying to the bathroom or inspecting the ofrenda. The Licenciada appears next to me. “It’s another dynamic during the week, groups with their teachers,” she says. “The workshops should be smaller, but people come.”

The two morning workshops are ending. People begin to arrive for a third workshop, “pre-Hispanic molds in clay,” one of the Social Service students tells me. I watch the clay workshop for a short while. Meanwhile, the usual activities of a Saturday continue. School groups arrive and depart. Secondary students come in search of sellos. There are two more workshops scheduled for the afternoon, “Skeletons in the style of Posada,” and “Paint Your Skull.”

When the afternoon workshops begin, I introduce myself to the Social Service student presenting the Posada workshop. He welcomes me, but is obviously mystified by my presence. It’s a small group, five teenagers, three little girls, and the grandmother and father of some of the participants. The asesor begins his presentation, describing the Posada style as one that “laughs at the actual state of events.” He lays out the supplies,

and explains the procedure. The technique involves using stencils and India ink to produce an effect similar to a Posada engraving. Participants select their stencils, choosing between “*flores normales*,” in this case, stylized roses, and “*flores prehispánicas*,” resembling drawings found in the codices. After the activity is underway, the Museo staff member in charge, Anita, arrives. She provides a few pointers to the participants as they work, but otherwise allows them to work on their own. A mother and daughter approach, well into the workshop. Anita quickly explains the activity, and sits them down with supplies. My few weeks of observation in Servicios Educativos demonstrate that, in general, the philosophy of the staff is to “acomodar,” make room, rather than exclude. The Licenciada’s remark to me earlier, that it would be better if the workshops could be smaller, “but the people come,” reflects this attitude.

The teenaged girls giggle and toss their hair, attempting to catch the young instructor’s attention: “Am I painting this the right way?” “Is this the way you do it?” Meanwhile, one of the teenaged boys wanders over to the “Paint Your Skull” workshop. He begins teasing a table of girls. Anita spots him, and marches him firmly back to the Posada tables. Most people have completed their pictures. The smallest girl asks Anita “What happens next?” “We’re going to the museum,” Anita replies. The little girl appears confused. “We’re going to the museum,” Anita repeats. “Do you know the name of this museum?” The little girl brightens. “The Museum!” Anita smiles and tells her “The National Museum of Anthropology.” Then she announces to the group that we will be leaving for our gallery tour.

I am not certain which gallery Anita plans to highlight; I am a little surprised when we move towards the Western Mexico gallery. I hadn’t visited the gallery as part

of a tour at all before today. Unlike Naila, who skipped the first displays, Anita pauses at the opening wall text. Her presentation begins with a general discussion of Muertos ofrendas, “the custom that we have in our country.” She describes the use of “the fruit of the earth” to decorate the ofrenda, and the preparation of special dishes for the departed to enjoy. “The dead eat the essence of the dishes, leaving behind the food,” she explains. “That’s why we have to reheat the food, and put in more seasonings,” one of the teenaged girls adds. “Yes, the dead take the flavor of the food with them,” Anita agrees.

Honoring the dead “is a custom that has been practiced for many years,” Anita adds. It springs from a universal “anxiety to render homage” that can be traced all the way back to “the Neanderthals.” She then leads the group through a brief explanation of the Mexica underworld, similar to descriptions I heard various asesores give: the lowest level as the resting place of those who die naturally, Tláloc’s realm for those who drown, while warriors and women who died in childbirth accompanied the sun, Huitzilpochtli. “Sometimes women who died in childbirth return as ‘*mujeres confundidas*’ (confused women),” she says, referring to the Cihuateteos and their possible relation to La Llorona.¹¹³ Dead infants go to the “árbol de los chichis.” None of this seems like new information to her listeners, who nod along. Anita moves on to other ways of thinking about death, mentioning that some interpret the placing of bodies in funerary urns as a symbolic “return to the womb,” especially if the dead person is a child. “All people”

¹¹³ The cihuateteos are the spirits of women who died in childbirth. The Mexica considered these women the equivalent of warriors. They were said to haunt crossroads, and were particularly dangerous to children. La Llorona, the crying woman, is a folk figure in the Spanish-speaking Americas. The details of her story vary; in some version, she drowns her children, in some they are swept up in a flood and she cannot rescue them. She drowns herself, or is killed, and is condemned to wander the earth, looking for them. She is said frequent rivers and gulleys, crying and crying for her children. She also appears in a Mexican folk song, “La Llorona.”

must come to terms with death, and decide what to do with the dead. “Rich and poor,” people will “*echar la casa por la ventana*” (pull out all the stops) in order to properly take care of the dead. She mentions that some cultures buried living people, servants or wives, with the dead person: “Archeologists have found scratches on the walls of tombs, made in desperation.”

On this grim note, Anita moves us towards the exhibit of the tumbas de tiro. As we walk, she tells the group that she thinks this is one of the most attractive galleries, “though it isn’t very popular.” Pre-columbian structures in the region were not monumental, “and that’s what gets the attention of the experts.” However, she says, the objects in the gallery are “the most complete” and “provide a good picture” of what life might have been like. As Naila did in the morning, she leads the group to the viewing area, where she stops. She explains that the construction of the tumbas de tiro used “a tunnel, like a chimney.” An actual tomb would have only the one opening above, she points out; the full-length windows in the reproductions, which expose the burial chambers, “are for museographical purposes.”

Having drawn our attention to the vitrines, Anita poses the same question as Naila: how can we tell which is the burial chamber of a woman, and which is the burial chamber of a man? This time, one of the group provides the answer: “las ofrendas.” Pleased, Anita instructs us to look carefully at the objects surrounding the skeletons. “Don’t tell me this isn’t beautiful,” she remarks. The adults in the group ask many questions, most of them about the physical appearance and construction of the tombs. Anita tells them that, since the openings to the tombs were ground level, “walking along, you wouldn’t necessarily notice” the shaft tombs, unlike some of the more visible burial

structures found in other parts of Mexico. Building the tombs required “many hands” and a very organized labor force. Necklaces, bracelets, and other pieces of jewelry adorn skeletons in both chambers. Anita describes some of the ways in which peoples of the Shaft Tomb cultures adorned themselves. “Many of these styles of adornment are resurging,” she asserts, listing body piercing and tattoos as two examples.

We spend less time in the exhibit than the morning group. As we exit, Anita stops in front of one of the display cases containing sculpture from the Shaft Tombs culture. The pieces represent animals, made of polished red clay. Most are realistic looking, with engaging expressions. She indicates one sculpture in particular, a plump *escuintle*. She reminds us that the each burial chamber in the tomb display included an escuintle. Anita describes the special role this “mute and hairless dog” occupied in many pre-Colombian societies. As Naila told the morning tour, the escuintle was the special guide of the souls of the dead. They also served the living, both as a food source, and as a source of healing.

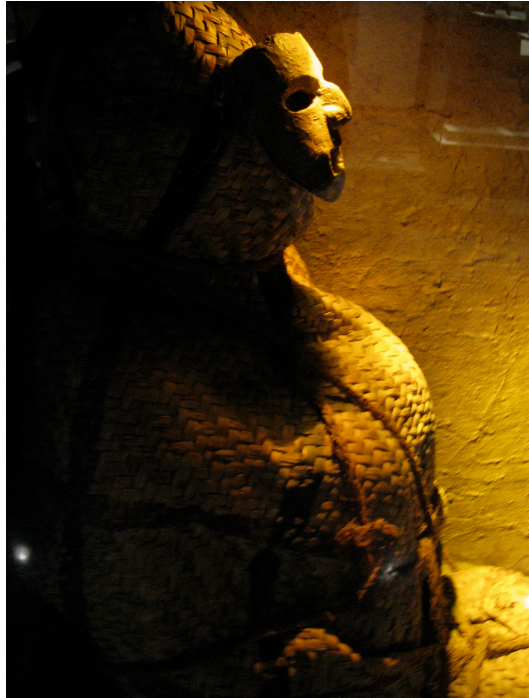
The group listens attentively to Anita’s remarks. When she pauses to allow them to approach the vitrine, they do so with interest, and much discussion amongst themselves. After everyone has had an opportunity to view the contents of the case, Anita gestures for us to exit. We follow her as she crosses the patio to the gallery devoted to the archeology of Oaxaca. She continues speaking as we walk. “Revolutionary archeologists concentrated on the Altiplano,” she says, neglecting other regions, such as Oaxaca. Oaxaca, she tells us, derives from the nahuatl word *Huaxyacac*, “place of the *guajes*.”¹¹⁴ In Mexican Spanish, *guaje* is a synonym for *tonto*, a stupid person. The Zapotec inhabitants of Monte Albán, the most recognized archeological site in Oaxaca,

¹¹⁴ A *guaje* is a variety of gourd, commonly used in rural areas as a container or scoop.

called themselves, “*la gente de las nubes*,” (the cloud people), as do contemporary Zapotec residents of the Valley of Oaxaca. Like guaje, “*la gente de las nubes*” carries a secondary pejorative meaning, indicating that one’s head is full of air. Anita explains this, implicitly linking her critique of “Revolutionary archeology,” with its focus on the Valley of Mexico and its nearby plateaus, to the more general disparagement of rural and indigenous people found in Mexico City-centric depictions of life outside the city.

Anita stops in the foyer of the gallery, allowing stragglers to catch up. We stand next to the mural of Oaxacan women that hangs in the entrance. Laughingly, Anita refers to it as “*las pretty ladies*,” and comments on their voluptuous proportions, especially their ample hips. She begins a joke: “Why do Latinos like women with big hips?” I am too far away to catch the complete punch line, but the adults all laugh.

We walk straight to the exhibit case depicting a tomb found in Coixtlahuaca, in the Mixteca Alta. The corpse, wrapped tightly in a woven mat called a *petate* and wearing a mask, sits propped against the walls of the case, which is designed to look like an underground tomb. The mask protected the deceased from evil spirits, Anita notes.



Petate, Sala Oaxaca

Observing that the corpse is bound into the fetal position, Anita reminds us of the links made in many pre-Colombian cosmologies between death and birth, the earth and the womb. She adds that these connections also occur outside of observances related to Muertos, citing as an example the rituals of the Day of the Holy Cross when observers place decorated crosses on mountain peaks and near cave entrances.¹¹⁵

“Is that really a dead person in there,” someone asks. Anita affirms that, like most of the other tombs exhibited, the body and the other items in the case are “archeological artifacts.” The group engages in a brief discussion of which tombs in the Museo are “original,” and which are reproductions. As an example of a reproduction, Anita cites the tomb of Pakal, in the Mayan archeological gallery. People offer opinions about the relative attractiveness of this or that tomb exhibit.

¹¹⁵ Celebrated on May 3, it is the special holiday of bricklayers. Construction sites often will place a decorated cross on a building that is in process to mark the day.

Anita glances at her watch. Though the time dedicated to the tour is over, she wants to show us one more thing. The group agrees enthusiastically, so we move to a case holding examples of carved bones. While we examine the bones, Anita talks about the human need to “transcend” death and “leave traces of ourselves.” She likens the bones to the columns carved by the Romans and Greeks, which she then compares to the Atlantes found at Tula, and to the “foliated cross” found at Palenque.¹¹⁶ Group members demonstrate a high level of interest in the bones, lingering and asking questions. Anita takes the opportunity to describe aspects of Mixtecan and Zapotec iconography and the concept of empathetic magic, which she encapsulates as “when you give love, you get love.”

The tour now officially over, Anita returns with the group to Servicios. As we walk, the teenaged girls approach, and ask to see my notes. I show them what I have written. They quiz me about various things: how long have I been there, am I writing a book, don't I get bored here, alone? I learn that they attended the workshop as part of a school assignment. They liked some parts of it, but thought others were boring: “there were a lot of explanations about things we already knew, because we have come here tons of times before.”

III. Visiting Death

A few weeks later, the Museo received a group of visitors sponsored by the SRE. The group of mixed age upper-elementary students from all over the United States and Canada arrive accompanied by parents and teachers acting as trip chaperones, and two

¹¹⁶ The Atlantes are tall, cylindrical sculptures of Toltec origin. The Foliated Cross at Palenque is a relief featuring an elaborately carved cross-shaped design. The cross is a common symbol in Mayan cosmology.

young women from the SRE office dedicated to “Mexicans Abroad” (*Mexicanos en el exterior*). All had been selected winners of an SRE drawing contest, “*Este es mi México*” (This is my Mexico). The Museo was their second stop on a day that included a visit to the history museum at the Castillo de Chapultepec, a tour of the Centro Histórico, and ended with a visit to the Basilica of the Virgen de Guadalupe.¹¹⁷

Rather than the tour of one particular gallery that most school groups receive, this group visited several galleries. Sara, the asesora in charge, structured the visit. We began in the “*Poblamiento de América*” (The settlement of America) gallery, which opens with a mural of people walking across the Bering Straits. We walk straight to the exhibit usually referred to as “the mammoth’s bones,” a mock-up of an archeological dig in the state of Mexico. The exhibit sits below floor level, with plexiglass floor tiles that permit viewers to look down into it, as though standing on the edge of an excavation. From this perspective, they see the array of archeological tools and the bone dispersal of a fossilized mammoth, as found by the archeologists. A cylindrical vitrine next to the “pit” depicts the miniaturized hypothetical fate of the mammoth in question, chased into a mud pit and speared by a team of prehistoric hunters. Several of the hunters also suffer injuries. This vitrine, with spears, bloody humans, and struggling mammoth is a favorite of school groups.

¹¹⁷ The group included 21 children and 28 adult chaperones, parents and some teachers, from across the United States. Coincidentally, one of the girls was a classmate of my youngest daughter at Kealing Jr. High in Austin. I tried to arrange to interview her and her parents, but we were not able to meet. At the invitation of the SRE representatives, I visited them at their offices for several hours about a month after they brought the group to the Museo. Though technically of service to Mexican citizens living anywhere outside of national territory, it clearly targets Mexicans in the U.S., working with consulates to determine what programs to offer in each location.

As we stood next to the vitrine, Sara explains the theme of the visit: we are going to learn “a little bit about death.” She points out the mural that reproduces the rock paintings found in the *Cueva del Ratón* (Mouse Cave) in Baja California Sur. Its stylized human and animal figures and abstract lines and geometric shapes hang over the section of the gallery devoted to prehistoric lifeways. Sara speaks of the human capacity for imagination. Though specific beliefs may not be accessible to us today, prehistoric peoples thought about “the idea of death,” because it formed part of their daily existence. From the Poblamientos gallery, we move to the Pre-classic gallery.¹¹⁸ Our eventual destination is the reproduction of a tomb from Tlatilco, in western Mexico. The tomb and its linked displays--a series of ceramic pieces and other artifacts and a thatched hut—are, like the mammoth’s bones, reconstructed in life-size. Rather than providing an above ground view, however, this exhibit is structured in levels, with a staircase running through. This allows the visitor to see the tomb from various perspectives, from “ground” level and from above. The tomb itself is on the lowest level. The stairs wrap around it, allowing it to be seen from three vantage points. The individual pieces are placed alongside a wall on the mid-level. At the highest level is the mock-up of a “typical” dwelling, done in cross-section, to reveal the interior of the hut, and the sub-soil immediately underneath it.

¹¹⁸ The Pre-Classic period extended from 1800-100 BCE.



Detail of tombs exhibit, Sala Preclásico

Sara arranges the children around the three sides of the tomb. Inviting the children to carefully observe the tomb and its contents, she tells them “These people did not practice Catholicism, their beliefs were different.” Introducing the term “ofrenda,” offering, she explains what archeologists think we can learn about Pre-Classic era beliefs from the material remains of the tomb. She uses the verb “*suponer*,” to suppose, when describing current archeological interpretations. Burials such as the one depicted in the tomb most likely were reserved for people of high rank, she explains, indicating the necklaces and other ornaments that support that interpretation. She then turns their attention to the thatched hut. She briefly describes the objects in the house and their uses, introducing the term “petate,” a woven straw or palm mat. Unlike the high-ranking

person buried in the tomb, common people buried their dead underneath their homes. Using the cross-section of the subsoil beneath the hut, she shows them a burial chamber.

We cross the patio to the Mexica gallery. Here, Sara sits the group in front of a section titled “*culto a la muerte*” (Worshipping Death).¹¹⁹ I can’t really tell from the children’s expressions what they think or have thought so far. The objects here are massive basalt figures of grimacing skeleton-faced women called Cihuateteos, who represent women who die in childbirth. Standing in front of them, Sara describes the Mexica conception of the *inframundo*, with its multiple levels, and divisions according to the sort of death suffered. Just as she did with the Mexican pre-schoolers, she tells the story of the nursing tree for babies. Then, gesturing to the Cihuateteos, she asks the students how many of them have heard of La Llorona. Most of them raise their hands. “Some people say the Cihuateteos were the original Llorona,” Sara tells them. “They wandered the streets at night, and frightened children who shouldn’t be out!”

She then explains the structure of the *inframundo*, including the trials the soul underwent before reaching its destination. Such a journey required assistance. Special dogs, the *xolo-escuintles*, aided the soul on its way, guiding it through treacherous passages and carrying it across the underworld rivers. “The dogs were neither black, which might lose its pigment, nor white, which might become stained, but were brown.” One of the children asked if the dogs were buried along with the body. Sara nods yes. “So they killed them,” the child asked. “Yes, sometimes. Or sometimes they were buried alive.” The children appear to consider this for a moment. Another girl asks “How could a dog carry a person?” “Remember, it was just the soul,” responds Sara.

¹¹⁹ *Culto* can mean both worship, as in attending a religious service, and cult, as in an obsessive interest.

She goes on to discuss blood sacrifice. The Mexica believed it their duty to feed the Sun. If they did not, the world would end. They employed a variety of ways to provide the Sun its due. Ritual bloodletting, using maguey spines to pierce body parts, was one method; human sacrifice, another. Sacrificial victims included children with two cowlicks—called in Spanish *remolinos*, which also means whirlpool—sacrificed to honor Tláloc. The Earth received beheaded women as a sacrifice. “Why just women,” asks one of the children.

Before she answers, Sara moves the group over to the carved representation of Coatlicue, the Mexica earth mother that towers over one section of the gallery. She explains the connections that Mexica beliefs made between women and earth. “Coatlicue was the goddess that represented the earth, life, and death.” She asks the children to examine the piece and describe what they see: the necklace of hands and hearts, the enormous skull that anchors her belt, her skirt, made of snakes. Sara links the symbol of the snake to fertility, then elaborates the Mexica concept of duality. Without death, there could be no life. She finishes by retelling the legend of Coatlicue and her children, Coyolxauhqui, the moon goddess, and Huitzilopochtli, the war deity. Fertility rites of various sorts are still practiced, she tells the group: “Our traditions are not lost.”

We conclude our visit to the Mexica Hall with a brief stop to see the replica of the *penacho*, or headdress, of Moctezuma. Sara informs them that the original was given as a gift to Carlos V, the Hapsburg ruler of Spain at the time of the *conquista*. “That’s why it’s in Austria now.” We move hastily to our final destination, an exhibit in the Oaxacan archeology gallery. Sara guides us directly to the vitrine devoted to a tomb found in Coixtlahuaca. The corpse, wrapped tightly in a petate and wearing a mask, sits propped

against the walls of the vitrine, which is designed to look like an underground tomb. Sara points the petate out to the group, reminding them of the petate we saw in the Pre-Classic gallery. “Sometimes when Mexicans want to say that someone has died, we say ‘*se petateó*.’ That verb comes from this word, petate, the mat that was used to wrap the dead. It’s a word that comes to us from ancient times.”

Sara likens the mask to a “passport” that allowed the soul to travel to the underworld. One of the children wants to know if what is in the case is “real bones.” She assures him that it is. If someone important died, she goes on, they person’s spouse and servants would be killed, too. A chorus of “ooohs” rises from the group. “Only in certain classes,” she emphasizes. We spend a moment observing the ofrenda in the case. She returns to the theme of duality: for early Mexicans, life and death were linked concepts. She brings that concept into the present: “that’s why we make an ofrenda, because the dead come to visit. When the papel picado moves, that tells us the souls are here.” As we move out of the gallery and across the patio, Sara describes some of the regional and local variations in Muertos traditions. We descend the stairs to the Servicios area, where she gathers the group. The workshop is for the children only; the adult chaperones may return to the galleries.

The supplies for the “Dress your skeleton” craft are already set out on the tables: a mimeographed skeleton, to be cut out; brads, to hold the skeleton together and enable its joints to move; and yarn, tissue, and other scraps for making the clothes. Sara holds up an example, a skeleton imitative of the Posada Catrina. The group gets to work, with Sara and Carmen in charge. I stay to help, listening to the kids talk amongst themselves, mostly in Spanish, with some English. Much of the discussion centers on the ritual

killing of the spouse. I also chat for a while with the two young SRE women who accompanied the group. The workshop area fills with various extra personnel: Martín and Saúl are taking photos for the Museo, Ignacio is videotaping, and there are two people wearing press passes.

Midway through the time designated for the workshop, Domingo joins the group. He brings two of the paper skeletons, mounted on sticks to make simple puppets, and performs a skit, “Death and Doña Francisca.” He opens the skit with a riddle: who likes to eat Death, chocolate Death, amaranth Death? The group stares blankly. Domingo explains: “You can buy sweets, chocolate skulls, amaranth skulls.” I note that, even after the explanation, many of the children still appear confused. One of the journalists makes an aside to Carmen, Sara, and Ignacio: “*No quiero comer una muerta, sino una viva*” (I don’t want to eat a dead one, I’d rather eat a live one).

The skit, while brief, contains a lot of wordplay that relies on a fairly detailed knowledge of various Muertos customs. I ask Sara and learn that the skit itself is “in all of the books.” Domingo says he’s known it “since third grade.”¹²⁰ A few minutes after the skit ends, the adults return, and it is time for the group to move on to its next destination. I take a few minutes to scribble some notes. I wonder what frame of reference the kids in the group had for the visit, the craft, and the skit. Do any of them celebrate Muertos in their home communities? If so, none volunteered the information. I was a little surprised that they all spoke as much Spanish as they did. They appeared to follow most of what Sara said during the tour. I asked one of the SRE representatives

¹²⁰ I have had no success finding a written copy of the sketch.

about this, and she said that the kids on this trip were quite Spanish proficient, which wasn't always the case.

While I am writing, the Licenciada comes out of her office. As usual, she wants my assessment of the tour. I share a few of my observations with her. She tells me that she wonders about the different experiences of the parents and children on the trip. She speculates that the parents feel “*añoranzas*” (nostalgic yearnings, longings) during their tour of the country. It was her idea to include the craft, “even though Muertos was already over,” because it was “*algo típico*” (something representative) of Mexico.

The reference to “*algo típico*” reflects the continued influence of the concept of “*lo mexicano*,” the quintessentially Mexican. *Lo mexicano* indexes an array of forms and practices, ranging from food to music to film to handcrafts. Many of the events organized by the Museo for families and school groups draw from these sources: the workshops that teach “traditional” handcrafts, such as *repujado* (embossing), or *popotillo* (pictures made with extremely thin pieces of colored straw); the demonstration of *bailables*; the activities concentrated around Muertos. The idea of *lo mexicano*, also expressed as “*lo típico*” or “*algo muy nuestro*,” composes one of “the ingredients and recipes with which one prepares the national soul” (Bartra 1987: 19, my translation), one of the constituent parts of *mexicanidad*.

The attribution of *añoranzas* to the adult members of the visiting party calibrates *mexicanidad* in another way. In this figuration, *mexicanidad* becomes a collective inheritance (Nora 1997), shared by Mexicans in Mexico and those of Mexican descent who reside outside of its borders. This conception of *mexicanidad* naturalizes sentiment by assuming that individuals carry within themselves an inherent sense of national

identity, expressed in the nostalgic longing for particular places, customs, sounds, flavors, and aromas. As Richard Handler notes, “[Nationalism] is an ideology in which social reality conceived in terms of nationhood, is endowed with the reality of natural things” (1988: 6). Nostalgia erases “the gap between nature and culture” (Stewart 1993: 23), exerting a pull understood as innate.

CHAPTER FOUR

Objectifying The Nation

I. *Trastes y Cositas*¹²¹

The conversation goes like this: as we drive away from the airport, the taxi driver asks if I have been to Mexico before. I respond affirmatively. Then he asks where I've been, do I like the food in Mexico, what do I think of Mexicans? Finally, he asks why I come. What do I do? I answer that I am an anthropologist. The driver smiles widely and nods enthusiastically. "*Ah, usted sabe de piedras.*" You know about stones, literally, but in this context, he means archeological artifacts. Then he looks at me in the rear view mirror, or even turns and looks over his shoulder. "*Sabe usted...una vez en el terreno de mis tíos...*" Once, out at my aunt and uncle's place. The piece is small, it is large, it has a rough surface, but a shape, not a natural shape. Or it is smooth, but not smooth from water, *sabe usted*, smooth like someone made it smooth. It was in Veracruz, in Puebla, or Guerrero. There it was right in the field, in the ground when they dug the well, half-hidden in the mud by the side of the road. Why, they are still finding *piedras* in Mexico itself! Do I have a card, could I possibly identify the *piedra*, tell its finder to what *cultura* it belongs?

I explain that I am an anthropologist who studies people, not *piedras*. The conversation lags for a moment. People, you say? *Ah, los indios*. Do I go to the *montañas*? No, I stay in the city; I'm interested in how people learn about the *piedras* and the *indios*, and what they say and think about them, so I am studying in the Museo.

¹²¹ A colloquial way to say knickknacks or tchotkes.

“*Cada cosa,*” the bemused *taxista* responds, a more polite way to say “well, I’ll be damned,” marveling that someone could have a job that allows them to talk to people all day long about piedras, or whatever else comes up.

The maestro wants to show his *colección* to Fina and me. Just a few things, picked up here and there while walking, but some of the pieces are nice, very nice, and we are *antropólogas*, surely they will be of interest. We have spent the day together, careening around the countryside outside of Cholula in the car the maestro borrowed from his sister.¹²² Fina stays in Cholula and is doing fieldwork in a town on the edges of the volcano, Popocatepetl. I have taken a long weekend off from the city to visit her. She knows the maestro from the town school, or from the local SEP office. We met him at the edge of the town plaza sometime before ten in the morning. It is now well after nine at night. We began at the church in Santa María Tonantzintla, not ten minutes from the city center, famous for its giddily baroque interior, and the indigenous aspects its makers gave many of the saints depicted there. In between that stop and this final one, we visited a dizzying number of churches and “sites of interest,” including the 16th century Franciscan monastery at Huejotzingo, all to the accompaniment of the maestro’s commentary on local history.

The monastery, San Miguel Arcángel, is one of the so-called “fortress monasteries,” built not long after the Spaniards first arrived. Compared to the ornate extravagance of the church at Tonantzintla, it appears sober and even somewhat foreboding. Here, the maestro insists, we must take the official tour. We join a group of

¹²² Cholula is about 3 hours southeast of Mexico City. Supposedly, there are 365 churches in Cholula. The most famous is *Nuestra Señora de los Remedios*, built in 1594 atop the Great Pyramid of Cholula. Because of location of the church, the pyramid has never been completely excavated.

tourists already waiting, and are duly shown the murals and *retablo* for which San Miguel is famous. We stop in front of one of the larger than life saint carvings, the guide encouraging us to draw nearer. “Look.” He opens a small door in the folds of the saint’s robe. This, he tells us, is where *los indigenas* hid their idols. When the *frailes* thought they were praying to the saints, they were really honoring the old gods. The group oohs and ahs and nods appreciatively. The maestro nudges us, in an I-told-you-so manner. In the town’s streets, we meet the carnival crowds: masked Moors and Christians filling the plaza for mock battles, parading in the streets, spectators pushing bodies against buildings and trees and spilling over the curbs. Now we are tired, dusty, and hungry, but politeness requires that we stop to see the colección and meet the maestro’s mother and sisters.

From a shelf high up, the maestro retrieves a bundle. He carefully opens it onto the coffee table, arraying a collection of terra cotta fragments across the crowded coffee table. To my inexpert eye, they appear to be a mix of colonial and possibly pre-Colombian bits and pieces. He points out his favorites, including a miniature parrot head, traces of red and green pigment still clinging to its clay feathers, and a couple of tiny human figures with stern expressions and tall headdresses. As he shows us the pieces, he describes how and where he found them. He tells us that it is a known fact that there were troves of gold objects hidden in the Great Pyramid of Cholula, objects that have now mysteriously disappeared. “Everyone knows the government stole them,” he asserts.¹²³ He would like us to choose one or two pieces, as *recuerdos*, souvenirs. We demur. He insists. I am attracted to the pieces, the fragments of detail and expression. Guilt tinges my attraction. From my limited time at the Museo, I know that the inexact provenance of

¹²³ Anne Johnson tells me that similar stories of hidden and disappeared treasure are told in Guerrero, where she works. (Personal communication).

these fragments most likely renders them archeologically insignificant. However, to actually claim any of them as my own, bundle them into the belongings that will accompany me home after fieldwork, brings me to the edges of a lengthy history of illicit acquisitions. We continue to protest, oh, we couldn't possibly, these are yours, you found them. The maestro presses his case: please, you must, you are my guests, it would be my honor. It now becomes a question of hospitality, as well as acquisition.¹²⁴ I leave with two small heads, broken from their bodies at the neck.

In this chapter, the frame of analysis shifts from activities designed specifically for schoolchildren and families to consider more widely the relationships between objects, people, and museum space at the Museo. Here, I combine observations of school groups taking tours under the auspices of Servicios Educativos with observations of family groups, school groups who come with external guides or no guide at all, and other, mostly Mexican, visitors to the Museo. I follow Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's understanding of objects as "sites at which discursive formation intersects with material properties" (2000: 103). Critical engagement with these discourses provides a means to explore "the adherence to particular relations of order, which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident" (Bourdieu 1984: 471).

¹²⁴ As I write this, I remember the explanation given to schoolchildren who ask why the penacho (a particular style of headdress) of Moctezuma displayed in the Mexica Hall is not the original, but a copy: Moctezuma presented the original to Cortés, as a sign of hospitality. Cortés sent it to Carlos I, who was also Charles V of Germany, who gave it to one of his Hapsburg nephews. Currently, the penacho is housed at the Museum of Ethnology in Vienna. The absence of the "real" penacho from Mexico continues to be a sore spot in relations between the two countries. As recently as 2006, the government of Mexico made a formal petition requesting its return: "Derbez pide a Austria devuelva penacho de Moctezuma," *La Crónica de Hoy*, February 1, 2006, México, DF. Accessed online February 7, 2007. For more about the history of the reproduction displayed in the Museo, see María Olvido Moreno Guzmán, *Encanto y desencanto: el público ante las reproducciones en los Museos*. México, DF. INAH: 2001, 100-105.

The development of anthropology as a discipline in Mexico, and the emergence of the Museo as an important site for the production and circulation of Mexican national identity, is intimately connected to efforts to construct a national culture that, while acknowledging the contributions of indigenous cultures, marginalizes contemporary indigenous peoples in the interests of progress and modernity. Interrogation of the narrative relationships created between archeological past and ethnographic present at the Museo elucidates the ideological and mental processes, the “alchemy” (Bonfil 1989: 147), that permits this disassociation.

Bonfil argues that Mexico is a nation divided into “imaginary Mexico,” the realm of those who adopt Western models of development, and “*México profundo*,” deep, or hidden Mexico, which he identifies as Mesoamerican and dynamic. In his critique of Bonfil, Claudio Lomnitz asserts that both “*México profundo*” and “imaginary Mexico” are “linked to sets of real practices and...both ideologies are products of the collective imagination” (1992: 248). Discursive formations circulating around the objects found in the Museo’s galleries, both those devoted to archeology, and those depicting contemporary indigenous peoples, provide a point of entry into these “real practices.” I concentrate particularly on the massive statue of the goddess Coatlicue, found in the Mexica archeological gallery, and the contents of the life-sized dioramas used throughout the second-floor ethnographic halls.

Along with the Piedra del Sol, the Coatlicue is one of the most recognizable of the archeological pieces in the Museo. The two pieces share honors as the featured object on the cover of the museum guide available for sale during my fieldwork, Coatlicue on the Spanish version, the Piedra del Sol on the English version. There are other

representations of Coatlicue on display, but it is this massive one that receives the most attention. Nearly every tour I observed in the Mexica gallery, whether led by *Servicios Educativos asesores* or not, included a stop at her enormous taloned feet. The history—both material and symbolic—of this stone piece provides a focal point by which to track the “moving horizon” (Lomnitz 2001: xiv) of nationality as it developed in Mexico.

State policies promote the construction of a shared identity and cultural heritage—a *pueblo*—for all Mexicans. Maya Lorena Pérez Ruiz’s analysis of Mexican national cultural policies, especially with regard to museums, isolates some of the elements that contribute to this notion of *pueblo*. One is an understanding of popular culture, often glossed in Spanish as “*lo popular*,” that closely identifies it with indigenous cultures. The collapse of indigenous cultures into “*lo popular*” allows for policies that on the one hand, promote “*lo popular*” as fundamental to national culture, and on the other hand, view it as a vehicle for the integration of indigenous groups into federal education and development projects whose aim it is to “Mexicanize” these groups (1999). As Elizabeth Bartra observes, “the characterization of popular culture in general, and of folk art in particular, has been intimately linked, in Mexico, to the issue of national culture and identity” (2000: 56).

In the ethnographic galleries, intended to illustrate the lifeways of contemporary indigenous peoples, I often observed Mexican visitors responding to the exhibits with family stories or personal reminiscences, or engaging other each other in conversation about the objects or images on display. Contemporary indigenous peoples often seemed to occupy the space of national and personal pasts. These reactions index individual and particular negotiations of the materiality of collective, officially identified, *pueblos* and

the private, or personal *pueblo* of recollection. Attention to these negotiations alerts us to the ways individuals and families situate themselves in relation to national narratives. It also complicates accounts, such as that of García Canclini, of the Museo as a space in which the visitor becomes spectator, distanced from his or her experience by the discursive apparatus of the Museo itself (1989).

One morning, at the conclusion of a tour, Marta and I crossed paths with a class being led through the Mexica gallery single file, with hands crossed stiffly in front of their bodies and strict instructions of silence. Marta shook her head. “*No pueden establecer ninguna relación con una pieza*” (they can’t establish any relationship with a piece). The asesores understood a key component of their work to be establishing connections between the objects they presented and their audiences. They fostered this in a variety of ways. In introductory remarks made outside the galleries, asesores usually told their charges “*el Museo es de todos nosotros los mexicanos*” (the Museum belongs to all of us, all Mexicans) and “*lo tenemos que cuidar*” (we have to take care of it). Another way to encourage the children to “*establecer alguna relación*” is to connect a narrative to the piece.

II. Coatlicue Reanimated

I begin with my version of the story of Coatlicue the asesores told. This story is one of the central myths of Mexica culture, one of the foundational stories of Mexico City itself, for it is Huitzilopochtli who guided the Mexica south from Azatlán to the isle in the middle of Lake Texcoco that became Tenochtitlán/Mexico City.

Once, long ago, there lived a good and humble woman, named Coatlicue. Every day she went to the temple on the Cerro de Coatepec to sweep the floor. One morning, as she was sweeping, a ball of downy feathers drifted down in front of her. Pleased by its beauty, she picked it up and tucked it into the belt wound round her waist. Some weeks passed, and Coatlicue realized she was pregnant. This news greatly displeased her daughter, Coyolxauqui (“she with bells on her cheeks”), and her sons, the Tzetzonhuiznahua (“the 400 Southerners”). They felt shame that their mother would fall pregnant without a husband, and plotted to kill her. They followed her one morning to the temple, planning to kill her there. Just as Coyolxauqui struck the blow that decapitated her mother, a voice from Coatlicue’s womb called out ‘Do not fear, Mother, I am here.’ And from Coatlicue’s womb sprang a fully formed warrior, Huitzilopochtli (“the hummingbird of the east”). He grabbed his sister and hurled her from the top of the temple stairs to the ground below, where she broke into many pieces. Then he threw her head up into the sky, where she remains to this day, the moon. He chased his brothers, the Tzetzonhuiznahua. The ones who survived his attack scattered throughout the sky, becoming the stars. The gods rewarded Coatlicue by transforming her from mortal into goddess, with charge over life and death. The blood spurting from her neck became two serpent heads, her hands and feet became like those of the eagle. She wears a necklace of hearts and skulls, representing her dual nature. She reminds us that without death there is no life.



Coatlícuē, front and back views, Sala Mexica

Archeologists believe that the Coatlicue adorned the temple dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, part of the Mexica ritual complex known as the Templo Mayor. This interpretation understands the temple as representing the Cerro de Coatepec.¹²⁵ Official narratives of Mexican history, presented at the Museo and other museums, archeological sites and in school textbooks, describe the arrival of the Spaniards in the Americas as the “double conquest,” a conquest explicitly intended to conquer not only territory, but also souls for Catholic Spain. Without a doubt, the Spaniards arrived prepared to make spiritual as well as territorial claims. To many of the Spanish friars accompanying the conquistadores, indigenous religious beliefs and practices represented the Devil; spiritual conquest demanded the utter destruction of places and objects associated with them. Friars smashed idols and burned codices, and encouraged the razing of temples and sacred spaces (Gruzinski 2001). But even after the Spaniards decisively captured Tenochtitlán in 1521, the pyramids of the Templo Mayor stood.

Sometime in 1521 or 1522, Hernán Cortés made the decision to locate the principal functions of the colonial administration in the former Mexica center. Spanish planners utilized the original grid layout of Tenochtitlán when designing the colonial city. Sources indicate that Cortés expressed an interest in preserving the Templo Mayor as a memorial (Martínez 2001: 27). If so, he was overruled. It crumbled gradually, its stones removed bit by bit in order to build colonial Mexico City. By the late 1500s, the area once occupied by the Templo became the central plaza (*Plaza de Armas* or *Plaza Mayor*,

¹²⁵ One of the hills outside Mexico City. Coatepec means Hill of the Serpent in nahuátl.

now typically called the Zócalo) of the colonial city, its open space flanked by a cathedral and buildings dedicated to the administrative functioning of the colony¹²⁶.

Construction and remodeling continued throughout the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. From 1789-1794, the administration of the second Count of Revillagigedo undertook extensive renovations of the city, including the leveling and redesign of the Plaza. On August 13, 1790, laborers making repairs to drainage pipes unearthed a massive stone carving. A contemporary observer described it as “a well-worked stone with a skull across its back and, in the front, another skull with four hands [and] figures on the rest of the body, but without head or feet” (Gomez: 25). On September fourth, the piece was raised from the ground and placed on display in front of the Governmental Palace.

Some sources say that Indians began leaving tributes at the statue, and that the Dominican friars requested it be moved to an enclosed space because of this. Others suggest that Enlightenment sensibilities found it worthy of public interest and scientific inquiry. In order to better preserve it, the colonial administrators decided to move the piece to a more protected space, the patio of the *Universidad Real y Pontificada* (Royal and Pontifical University), just east of the Plaza Mayor. But even behind the walls of the university, the statue proved to be a potent symbol. A Spanish subjects born in Mexico began to develop their own sense of *criollo* identity, distinct from that of both the

¹²⁶ In 1812, the Plaza Mayor was renamed the *Plaza de la Constitución*, to commemorate the Constitution of Cadíz. In 1843, Antonio López de Santa Anna decreed that a monument to Mexican Independence would be built in the center of the Plaza, displacing the Parián Market and an equestrian statue of Carlos V. The monument’s base, called a zócalo in Spanish, was erected on September 16, 1843. Funds to construct the rest of the monument never appeared. Locals began to refer to the plaza as the zócalo, the name by which it is most commonly known today. The usage spread throughout Mexico, where the principal plaza of most cities or towns is referred to as the zócalo.

Peninsular Spaniards and the native populations, and to reevaluate the pre-Columbian past. Interested in refiguring the relationship between New Spain and peninsular Spain, they looked to the indigenous past as the equivalent of Rome or Greece, and rallied around examples of Mexica technical prowess, such as the intricately carved piece.¹²⁷ University officials made the decision to rebury the piece, likely in response to pressure from both the colonial administration and the Church (Matos Moctezuma 1987).

It was not uncovered again until Humboldt¹²⁸ visited Mexico in 1803. Having read a study of the piece written shortly after its initial excavation, Humboldt sought and received special permission from the Archbishop of Monterrey to excavate it. He identified the statue as Teoyaomiqui, the deity associated with warriors who died in battle (Humboldt 1973 [1822]: 114). As soon as he finished his examination, the piece was reburied. It stayed underground until 1824, three years after Mexican independence.

Another foreigner, the Englishman William Bullock, arranged the disinterment. According to Bullock, the statue once again attracted the attention of “Indians.” He reported that authorities found the statue adorned with wreaths of flowers, supposed to

¹²⁷ The criollo pride in the indigenous resided firmly in the past. Contemporary native populations were viewed as the degraded remnants of once glorious cultures. See Natividad Gutierrez “Memoria indígena en el nacionalismo precursor de México y Perú. *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, 1:2, julio-diciembre 1990; J. Jorge Klor de Alva “The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of ‘Colonialism,’ ‘Postcolonialism,’ and ‘Mestizaje,’” in After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements, edited by Gyan Prakash. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1995; Anthony Pagden Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination: Studies in European and Spanish-American Social and Political Theory 1513-1830. New Haven, CT. Yale University Press, 1998.

¹²⁸ Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859). Humboldt trained as a geologist in his native Germany. He and a botanist, Aimé Bonpland, secured permission from King Charles II to explore Spanish America. They traveled and recorded their observations for five years, beginning in 1799 in Caracas. They arrived in Mexico in 1803, where they stayed for approximately a year, based in Mexico City. See Humboldt en México, Leopoldo Zea and Mario Magellon, editors. México, D.F. Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999.

have been stolen by Indians and left as offerings to the goddess (1971 [1824]: 119).

Bullock made plaster casts of both the statue and the Piedra del Sol, which he displayed in London as part of an exhibit of Pre-Colombian artifacts.¹²⁹ After his departure, the statue was placed in storage.

At some point following Bullock's visit, the piece was removed from storage and placed on display in the courtyard of the National Museum of Natural History, Archeology, and History, opened in 1865 in the old Spanish mint on Calle Moneda near the National Palace.¹³⁰ Along with many other pieces from the collection, it traveled to Madrid as part of the 1892 Columbian Exhibition. After the Exhibition closed, the piece—now described as “An Aztec Deity--” went on display in the newly opened “Hall of Monoliths.” It remained on display in the Hall of Monoliths until the 1964 move of all of the holdings to the present Museum, where it became identified as Coatlicue.

This is one history of the Coatlicue. There are other tales of Coatlicue told in the Museum. I first heard the story of Coatlicue and the Huicholes¹³¹ from the curator of the ethnographic gallery dedicated to their geographical home, the Gran Nayar, in central northwestern Mexico. He mentioned it as an aside, part of a longer conversation about the redesign of the Museum's galleries, begun in the mid 1990s and completed last year.

¹²⁹ William Bullock (1773-1849), an antiquarian who founded the Museum of Natural Curiosities in Sheffield. He visited Mexico in 1822. He mounted his exhibition of Mexican artifacts in the Egyptian Hall at Picadilly in 1824. See Robert D. Aguirre, *Informal Empire: Mexico and Central America in Victorian Culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

¹³⁰ My reconstruction of the movements of the Coatlicue during this period relies on contemporary written accounts and visual documentation. A painting by Pedro Gualdi, “Interior de la Real y Pontificia Universidad de México,” ca. 1840 shows a limited view of the statue, above ground, but behind a fence. A photograph by Otis M. Grove and F.E. North titled “Ídolo y piedra de los sacrificios,” ca. 1885, shows the Coatlicue in the courtyard of the Museo Nacional on Calle Moneda.

¹³¹ The Huichol, or Wixarika, live predominately in the states of Jalisco, Durango, and Nayarit.

The renovations were the first comprehensive overhaul of the Museum since its opening in 1964. At the time of the original construction, crews composed of workers brought from each of the represented contemporary ethnic groups replicated, to scale, the “typical” dwellings and ceremonial structures of their regions (Vázquez 1968).

According to the curator’s account, a shaman who accompanied the Huichol construction crew began to dream about the statue of Coatlicue, displayed in the archeological gallery devoted to the Mexica. The shaman interpreted this dream to mean that Coatlicue should be incorporated into the Huichol pantheon. Since the time of the Museum’s opening, Huicholes have made annual pilgrimages from their home, on the northwest coast, to Mexico City to leave offerings to Coatlicue. Museum staff sometimes gathers the offerings and adds them to the Museum’s ethnographic holdings. Some of the objects currently displayed in the Gran Nayar gallery, which focuses primarily on the Huichol culture, were acquired in this manner. As he told the story, the curator showed me two items collected from the Coatlicue, a god’s eye and bowl made from a gourd, decorated with beads and peso coins.

I heard the story of the Huichol incorporation of Coatlicue three more times across the span of my fieldwork: once from one of the support staff members in the Ethnography department, once from one of the instructors in the Educational Services department, and once from the head of the Ethnography department. Each teller gave it his or her special twist. The support staff member included it as part of a larger conversation about the Huichol presence in the Museum; the instructor mentioned it when discussing the museum policy of opening the Mexica gallery to the rituals of the

contemporary Mexica dancers for one April Sunday; and the Director of Ethnography included it among some other anecdotes about the galleries.

During a conversation with one of the people responsible for the ethnographic collections storage area in November 2005, I mentioned my interest in the Huichol relationship with Coatlicue. I asked what he knew about the Huichol visits to the Mexica gallery. He told me that they came every year on a specific day to leave their offerings, but he wasn't certain which day it was. They arrive separately from the Huichol who come three or four times a year to offer beadwork and other crafts for sale to the Museum staff. "Oh," he said, "you would like to see this." He pointed to an item stuffed on one of the lower shelves. "It's an altar they brought three or four years ago," he told me. He pulled it out so I could examine it more closely. It appeared to be made of plaster. The base was square, with indentations in each corner. A rounded cone protruded from the center. A thin paper picture of a figure cut from *amate* paper was glued on one of the sides of the base.¹³² "These are to hold candles," he explained, as he fitted a taper in each of the indentations. "And this used to be covered with coins," he indicated the cone. "Someone took them off. I don't know why there is this picture of the amate figure, you know that is from the Otomí, it isn't Huichol at all."¹³³ He handed me a small gourd, or *jícara*, its interior decorated with precisely cut wax figures, including a tiny deer and a corn plant. While I examined the altar, he continued talking. He suspects that the Huichol arrange for their arrival by contacting the Museo staff directly, rather than through the official channels of the INAH. "None of the anthropologists here would have any

¹³² Amate paper is made from the bark of various trees, and is considered a craft tradition of the Otomí peoples.

¹³³ The Otomí, or Hñuähñu, live predominately in central Mexico, in the states of Mexico, Hidalgo, Querétaro, and Guanajuato.

problem,” he said. “But the Board, well, they don’t like people bringing things into the galleries. And the security guards, they’re the hardest. Security likes everything to be very *tranquilo*.” As an aside, he mentioned that when the Huichol come, they never visit the Gran Nayar, the ethnographic gallery that corresponds to them. They only visit the Mexica Hall.¹³⁴

III. Dancing with Culture

While the Huichol visits to the Coatlicue may not receive official sanction from INAH or Museo administration, there is at least one time during which the Mexica gallery is officially open as a ritual space. The pamphlets inviting attendance at the “*14a Ofrenda Día Mundial De Nuestra Madre Tierra Del 20 al 26 de Abril 2003*” (14th Offering World Day of our Mother Earth April 20-26, 2003) bear a blurry image of Coatlicue on the front, with “Coatlicue: Symbol of our Mother Earth” printed below. Below the slogan “Reencounter with our ancestral roots,” the pamphlets announce a week’s worth of activities: conferences, round tables, workshops, performances, and ceremonies. Major groups sponsoring the ofrenda include “The Mexica Tradition¹³⁵, Civil and Cultural Organizations, the Preparatory School of the National Autonomous University, the Museo of the Templo Mayor, and the Museo of Mexico City.” Logos of supporting agencies and groups, among them the government of Mexico City, the

¹³⁴ Paul Liffman suggests that perhaps the Huichol interpret the Coatlicue as a manifestation of their own earth goddess, Nakawe. Offerings such as I describe here serve as individual or collective petitions to the divine, but also, Liffman states, imply that the site at which they have been left has been incorporated into Huichol sacred space (personal communication).

¹³⁵ For more on the contemporary Mexica, see Susanna Rostas, “The Concheros of Mexico: A Search for Ethnic Identity.” *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 9 (2), p 3-17.

National Autonomous University, the Museo of the Templo Mayor, the *delegación* of Cuahémoc, the Anahuac Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Xilonen Institute, and the Society for the Knowledge of Quetzalcoátl surround the image. The first activity will be the “*14a Caminata Ofrenda*,” which begins at the Museo at 8:30 on the morning of the twentieth.¹³⁶

I arrive at the Museo right around nine. The pamphlet invited the public to “join us dressed in white or ‘*ropa típica mexicana*,’ with *huaraches*, if possible, wearing a red or white band around your head, and with a little offering of seeds, flowers, or fruit.” A number of people are dressed in European-style clothing, all white, with red bands circling their heads, and perhaps a medallion or two hanging from their necks. Many more are in some version of “*ropa típica*.” Shirtless men dressed in fake suede loincloths and breastplates gleaming with gold-toned plastic stand next to women in flowing *huipiles* or embroidered dresses; other men wear short tunics and cloaks. I recognize motifs from the codices, stamped onto belts and loincloths, and embroidered on the hems of *huipiles* and skirts. A man dressed as a jaguar warrior, his shiny synthetic pelt gleaming in the sun, moves through the crowd. Some of the men carry *chimallis*, the feathered Mexica shields, and wear the cylindrical baskets used to store arrows on their backs. People hold baskets of flowers and seeds, one woman carries a bundle of blankets, another a god’s eye. Nearly everyone has a backpack slung across his or her shoulders. Both men and women wear feathered headdresses (*tocados*), though those of the men tend to be more elaborate. One *tocado* combines peacock, macaw, pheasant, and a

¹³⁶ A copy of the poster promoting the event, and the full program is available at <http://www.union.org.mx/actividades/diatierra2003.html>

multitude of other patterned and colorful feathers into a splendid cascade of texture and color that spills across the crowd and dwarfs its wearer.

People assemble in rough formation on the esplanade, some under standards announcing their affiliations: “Yaotecameh Ollin Toltitlan,” “Xolalpan Teotihuacana.”



Lining up on the esplanade



Danzantes on the esplanade

Here and there I recognize *danzantes* I have seen in the *Zócalo*, or in the plazas at Coyoacán, or outside the Museo Nacional de Arte. The sharp scent of copal hangs in the cool morning air, the rattle of shell anklets, and the whirr and click of cameras punctuates the steady murmur of voices. Amidst the profusion of feathers, fur, and *manta*¹³⁷ I notice a small group of Tibetan Buddhist monks, in their distinctive saffron-colored robes. Sunday morning visitors, already lining up at the entrance, appear somewhat confused by the crowd gathering across the esplanade. Some take out cameras and join the photographers, who include camera crews for Canal 22 and OnceTV.¹³⁸ Others keep their places in the line. I notice the family group who dances outside the Museo on Sundays,

¹³⁷ Manta is the woven white cloth associated with indigenous clothing.

¹³⁸ Respectively, the official channel of CONACULTA, and the educational channel operated by the National Polytechnic Institute.

setting up as usual at the foot of the stairs. They pay no particular attention to the danzantes congregated on the esplanade.

A conch shell sounds. The man wearing the amazing tocado begins an invocation. I can't actually hear very well: something about "*los abuelitos*," something about "*nuestros raíces*" (our roots). Invocations are made to the four directions. When this concludes, the group swells forward. I wonder how the guards will manage the entry. An instruction comes down from one of the leaders: the group will enter "*como Quetzalcoátl*." I have no idea what this means.¹³⁹ The danzantes form themselves into two columns. To the beat of drums and the rattle of gourds and shells, the columns pass through the doors, dancing. Behind them, the rest of us follow along. A few of the more aggressive photographers jog alongside the dancers, cameras clicking. We are directed



Entering the Museo

¹³⁹ Rostas explains that among the named dances performed by the contemporary *concheros* are five named after principal Mexica gods, including Quetzalcoátl.

onto the patio through the exit doors. I forget to notice whether the people already lined up when I arrived are being allowed in through the regular entrance.

The dancing continues until the entrance to the Mexica Hall. Two groups of people break off and position themselves at the doors. This forces the rest of the *danzantes* and all of the spectators to enter in orderly fashion (“*entrar formados*”). By the time I am able to enter, the hall is packed. I inch along, trying to improve my view of the Coatlicue. Copal smoke clouds the air. From my vantage point, I see offerings of seeds, fruit, and flowers arrayed on platters at Coatlicue’s feet. People play drums, conch shells, whistles, and the stringed armadillo shell instruments called *conchas* that give the *concheros* their name. The program notes contain a praise petition in Nahuatl and an “Invocation to Fire” in Spanish. I spot Alma, and right after her, Gillian, another anthropologist also doing fieldwork in the Museo. Shortly after that, we see Sara and her friend, Leticia. We hold on to each other’s clothing as we thread through the crowd. People from within the groups act as museum watchmen, reminding people not to lean against the pieces, or to touch them.¹⁴⁰ They also check their watches frequently; the program specifies that the offering in the gallery end at 10:45. A conch sounds; the crowds begin to file out. A few people stay behind, carefully cleaning the area around Coatlicue’s feet. My notes say “*ni dejan una semilla*”: they don’t leave a single seed.

After the ritual in the Mexica hall ends, the *danzantes* move to the patio. Again, they form two columns and dance, feet rapidly stomping. We then continue to the Tláloc

¹⁴⁰ In a section following the printed rituals, titled “Recommendations,” the program includes the following: “Enter and exit with respect, and maintain harmony by lining up in two columns, behind the *Grupos de la Danza de Tradición*. Wear traditional attire; bring flowers for the offering. Do not introduce animals, food, or fire into the Museum. Do not touch the pieces, use flash, or a tripod. Do not leave flowers, offerings, or seeds, and make sure that all of the Mexica Hall is left clean.”



Ofrenda to Coatlicue in the Sala Mexica

(“though it’s really Chalchiuhitlicue,” someone whispers to me) that serves as the welcome to the Museo, where an offering is given. From the Museo, we walk down the Paseo de la Reforma to the Zócalo, pausing to give an offering at the roundabout with a monument to Cuauhtémoc. At the Zócalo, we walk to the monument commemorating the founding of Mexico City: a maquette depicting several Mexica beholding the eagle on the nopal, snake grasped firmly in its beak and talon. Here, closing prayers and rituals are offered.¹⁴¹

The program of events for the week following the ritual I attended at the Museo included academic presentations on topics such as the interpretation of codices and archaeoastronomy, as well workshops on the construction of conchas and “traditional healing,” and various performances of songs and poetry in náhuatl and otomí. At the official opening of the conference, held at the Museo del Templo Mayor the day after the events at the Museo, representatives from the INAH union and the United Nations joined speakers from the “*Grupos de Tradición*.”

The Mexica groups claim to be resuscitating the “ways of our grandfathers,” or “the knowledge of our ancestors.” They position themselves in opposition to state-sponsored versions of mexicanidad, arguing that theirs is a more authentic “de-

¹⁴¹ At the closing ceremonies, the man in the resplendent headdress noticed that Gillian and I were taking photographs. He approached and asked for what magazine we worked. We explained that we were anthropologists. He introduced himself as Acatl Carlos Magos, and asked if we would give him copies of our photos. We both agreed, and exchanged contact information. He told me that I could meet him at “the place your people call the Templo Mayor” any afternoon, as his dance group met there. I tried on three occasions to find him—he had very bright blue eyes and silver hair, which I thought would help me identify him even if he were in street clothes—but I did not see him, nor did he contact me. At one time, he had an active website, but that no longer functions. However, he appears in an online travel article about the eclipse of the sun in South Africa, dated December 6, 2002: “Eclipsed by an Aztec Sun Dance,” Lucille Davie http://www.safrika.info/plan_trip/holiday/eclipseaztec.htm. Accessed February 7, 2007.

hispanicized” mexicanidad. These claims dovetail with dominant state representations of the indigenous aspects of the nation as contained, in part by the past. Supporting the revival of ancient customs cements the boundary between the nation’s past and its present, “*los antepasados*” and “*pueblos indios de hoy*.”¹⁴²

In contrast, the story of Coatlicue and her incorporation into Huichol ritual practice is one of the unofficial histories told in the Museo. Nothing in the cases dedicated to Huichol ritual objects indicates that the provenance of some is one of the archeological galleries of the Museo itself. The relationship of the Huicholes to Coatlicue unsettles official narratives of the relationship between the archeological past and ethnographic present. An object defined as the archeological artifact of the Mexica becomes animate in the cosmology of a contemporary other. This suggests that objects already entered into the representational and interpretive frames of museum space remains viable outside of that space, outside the “cognitive control” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 21) that official accounts attempt to impose. By making use of the museum for their own purposes, the Huicholes upset official representations of contemporary indigenous cultures as existing in a spatially removed “ethnographic present” (Fabian 1983).

IV. The Ethnographic Present in the Ethnographic Exhibits

“*Es muy triste que nosotros como mexicanos no apreciamos los costumbres de nuestros pueblos*” (It’s very sad that we as Mexicans do not appreciate the traditions of our peoples.). I recorded this remark one March afternoon. The man who made it was

¹⁴² See Rostas, and also Francisco de la Peña Martínez, *Los hijos del sexto sol* (INAH 2002).

part of a small group that included his daughter and wife, an older couple, and another younger man, and the comment was directed to them. They were making their way through the ethnographic galleries, stopping occasionally to comment and point out items of interest to one another. But it certainly wasn't the first time I had heard that lament. Similar sentiments were expressed during continuing education sessions for museum educators and public school teachers I attended, by other visitors, by museum guards I came to know as I conducted my research, and by acquaintances from outside the Museo.

In Mexican usage, the word *pueblo* takes on a particular valance. In the Dictionary of the Royal Academy of Spanish, the first definition given for *pueblo* is “a city or a town.” In contrast, the Dictionary of Mexican Spanish, published by the Colegio de México for use by Spanish speakers, provides the following first definition: “a group of persons who inhabit a territory and have a culture, some traditions, and forms of behavior in common.” In my experience, “*pueblo*” also commonly refers to the place to which one is connected by family ties. A conversation I had with Alma, one of the *asesoras*, helped me understand this meaning of *pueblo*.

“One day, Melissa, I want to bring you to my *pueblo*, Todos Santos.” From the way she phrased it, I understood Alma to mean that she originally came from Todos Santos. I had always assumed she was a Mexico City native, and expressed my surprise. “Oh, yes, I was born here in Mexico, but Todos Santos is my *pueblo*.” I asked when her parents had arrived in Mexico. “My parents were born here, too,” she replied. “It was my grandparents who were born in Todos Santos.” Further conversation revealed that only Alma's great-aunt and uncle remained in Todos Santos, and that she visited very occasionally, when time and finances permitted.

As I came to know more people, I learned that many of my friends and acquaintances had similar ties to a pueblo. Some had more family members still living in the pueblo they claimed as theirs, but few had actually lived in the pueblo themselves. “Pueblo” serves as a repository for family memories and stories, the place that inhabits the sentimental and nostalgic space of home for many urban residents. However, it also exists in tension with the other generally understood meaning of pueblo, a specific community of people, bound together by residence, tradition, and custom.

It’s another Sunday afternoon in the Museum. On Sundays, all museums, archeological sites, and historical sites that belong to the National Institute of Anthropology and History are free to the Mexican public. By mid-morning on a Sunday, the line to enter the Museum often extends across the esplanade and down the stairs, onto the broad walkway of Chapultepec Park. Many of the people who take advantage of the free entry are schoolchildren completing homework assignments. Elementary aged children arrive with their families, mothers, fathers, younger brothers and sisters, and often aunts or grandparents. Secondary students tend to come in pairs or groups. I climb the stairs up to the ethnography exhibits behind a pair of secondary girls, classmates who divide up their assignment as we approach the first gallery, “Pueblos Indios de México,” “Indian Peoples of Mexico.” Both girls scribble furiously for a few minutes, carefully copying down the wall texts that accompany their chosen piece. “*Orale*,” one exclaims after ten minutes of writing, “you need a lot of patience to do this work!”

I make my way slowly through the gallery, overhearing a mother chiding her son: “Pay attention to things!” and two teenaged boys with a checklist, naming the objects they see around them. I approach the exhibit devoted to farming implements, hoes, yokes,

various sorts of sowing and harvesting equipment, and a life-sized model of a *cuezcomate*, a silo typical of the state of Michoacán. The *cuezcomate* often suffers from mistaken identity. I have heard so many people erroneously call it an oven, despite its thatched roof, that the ethnography staff and I have taken to referring to the miniature version sold in the gift shop as “the microwave.” However, the farming exhibit is also one spot where Mexican visitors tend to linger. Many spend several minutes carefully matching the exhibited pieces to the numbered key on the wall. Parents will often direct their child’s attention to particular tools, or the *cuezcomate* itself.

I watch as one father explains to his young son what purpose a yoke serves, and how it works. If the oxen stop working, he explains, “there is a needle inside the yoke that pricks them.” “Poor animals,” the son responds. As they talk, the boy’s sister and mother join them. The father once again describes the yoke, this time to his wife and daughter. “It’s like the one my grandfather had,” he adds. Another family group, a mother and two children, stands in front of the plow and the yoke. The mother explains them to the children, describing them as “like your grandparents have out there in the pueblo.” The explanations the parents provide for their respective children come from their own experience and knowledge. The texts that accompany the exhibit identify the objects, but do not explain specifically how they are used. While the adults do refer to the key on the wall to identify an unfamiliar object, they generally ignore the key when they think they know what the object is. The father who so carefully explained how the yoke pricked the oxen also assured his children that the *cuezcomate* was a big oven.



Cuezcomate, Sala Introducción a los Pueblos Indios



Key to Agricultural Exhibit, Sala Introducción a los Pueblos Indios

While the father and son remain at the agricultural exhibit, the mother and daughter move on to the next case. It contains a life-sized model of a country store, complete with dry goods, milk cans, and hand dipped beeswax candles. The girl tugs on her mother's hand, pulling her to the case. "What's that, Mom?" she asks, pointing to a handmill for grinding grain. "It's a grinder," her mother answers. "Your grandparents have one like that, don't they?" The child nods, and asks "The stores out in the pueblos have those, don't they?"

A pair of women stops in front of the case containing the store. "Look, sweets from all different cities," one says. "There are the *borrachitas* from Puebla." The first

woman's son leaves the agricultural display and joins his mother and sister at the store. The mother begins to name and describe the various sweets displayed in the case, telling her children what time of year they appeared, and how they were made. She points to a row of candies. "We used to steal those," she tells the children. Her son looks alarmed. "From here?" "No, no, *m'ijo*, from the ofrenda. My grandmother would put the sweets out on the ofrenda table, and then my brothers and sisters and I would steal them from the ofrenda." She draws her children's attention to the tin milk cans and baskets suspended from the ceiling of the case. "We still have things like that at home," she adds. Her children nod.¹⁴³

Meanwhile, two more women stop in front of the case. "Excuse me," one asks the other, "but can you tell me what all these seeds are?" Unlike the agricultural implements exhibit, there is not a wall key for the store. The woman of whom the request was made

¹⁴³ On another Sunday, I observed a father and daughter, accompanied by an older woman, as they looked at the exhibit. Both of the adults pointed various items out to the little girl: the milk cans, the bottle stoppers made of dried corncobs. The man then began to explain to the woman how one of the candies was made. "I know how they're made," she snapped, "what do you think I am, an idiot?"



Tienda exhibit, Sala Introducción a los Pueblos Indios

peers closely at the case, and begins naming products: coffee, both roasted and green; cacao; various types of beans. A couple of other women chime in when she hesitates, and there are some disagreements, generally resolved with a sigh and a sheepish “I used to know!” One of the women notices the clay *comales*, the griddles used to cook tortillas, among other things. “Clay comales,¹⁴⁴ like your grandma has,” she points out to the group.

After one morning spent observing in the ethnographic galleries, I commented to Naila on the nostalgic tone older Mexicans in particular often adopted as they moved past the exhibits. People exclaimed about “*la vida bonita*” and “*la vida sencilla*” (the simple life). She nodded her head. “It gives them *añoranzas* (nostalgic longings),” she replies. As we are talking, the group I had been observing passed us. I pointed them out to her; she agreed with my assessment that they are most likely from outside of the city. “They should know how hard life is in the country,” she remarked.

Sometimes the display provoked a different sort of collective memory, one rooted in shared mass culture, for example. The Pueblos Indios gallery includes a vitrine depicting a wedding in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca. Mexican visitors often connect that display to the 1957 movie, *Tizoc*, also known as *Amor Indio*, starring Pedro Infante and María Félix as socially mismatched lovers, sometimes actually singing a few bars of the love song Infante sings to Félix.¹⁴⁵ Likewise, the mannequin wearing traditional Mazahua

¹⁴⁴ Comales now are commonly made of stainless steel, though clay comales are easily available in both rural and urban markets. Clay cookware is said to give a special taste to foods prepared in or on it.

¹⁴⁵ Directed by Ismael Rodríguez, the film tells the story of a naïve Mixteco of noble blood, Tizoc (Infante), and María (Félix), the mestiza daughter of an hacendado. Infante performs his role with an “Indian” accent, singing “*ti quiero*” rather than “*te quiero*,” for instance. Anne Rubenstein provides an excellent account of Infante as a cultural symbol in her essay, “Bodies, Cities,

women's attire is often equated with the popular television and film character, La India María,¹⁴⁶ or with Mazahua street vendors, who typically sell gum and candy on the city streets.



Mixteco wedding diorama, Sala Introducción a los Pueblos Indios

Of course, not all Mexican visitors identify with the displays in the ethnographic galleries, especially once one leaves the introductory gallery and enters the galleries devoted to specific *pueblos indios*. In general, people shift from a more personal idiom—the clay comal of your abuela—to a third-person apprehension of objects or practices:

Cinema: Pedro Infante's Death as Political Spectacle," in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*. Edited by Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov. Durham, NC. Duke University Press: 2001, p. 199-233.

¹⁴⁶ Created and portrayed by María Elena Velasco. For more on La India María, see Valenzuela Arce (1998).

“look how they carry their babies.” People remark on the evidence of participation in a consumer economy, such as canned food in a mock-up of a Huichol Indian home, or tennis shoes on a *carnaval* dancer with either surprise: “look, they’re all modern now,” or derision: “As if a carnival dancer would wear *tenis!*” People often criticized the mannequins that depicted dance traditions. Some of the regalia displayed in the exhibits incorporates characters like Tweety Bird or Mickey Mouse as part of the ornamentation, along with more “traditional” figures like the Virgen, or eagles. In this case, I think the critique was directed both at indigenous groups for having “lost” their traditions, and at the Museo staff for displaying “inauthentic” versions of tradition.



Dance exhibit, Sala Nahua

Though it is true I observed many people decrying a general Mexican ignorance of and disdain for the indigenous, I also observed many instances when the pueblos indios still stood for something backward and undesirable: pushing and shoving teenagers pointing at the mannequins of the dancers painted for Holy Week rituals in the north of Mexico, and loudly proclaiming “That’s your relative, *güey*,” comments about excessive drinking and lack of education.



Rarámuri Holy Week, Sala Norueste

Errington points out that “[s]imultaneously attacking the way of life of the living peoples while celebrating that way of life as an emblem of national heritage...has become a standard move on the part of governments throughout the world (1998: 187). National heritage belongs to the realm of the public, family to that of the private. Public and private, however, are “co-constitutive” (Gal 2002: 80). As visitors recount and rehearse memories, they simultaneously access real practices and collective imagination. This oscillation between individual and collective situates the visitor in both a personal narrative of “pueblo” and within the context of a shared Mexican pueblo. Private nostalgias and public imaginaries intersect, creating the reverberations and tensions that

underlie the “structures of feeling” (Williams 1977) that define particular versions of mexicanidad and lo mexicano.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Ends of History

In this chapter, I explore two approaches to national and local histories. One account examines a day-long professional development program presented to Mexico City schoolteachers by the Servicios Educativos staff. The session was part of a wider initiative designed by the Mexico City SEP office, “La historia más allá del aula” (History beyond the classroom, Historia más allá going forward). The second follows a tour given by one of the Museo asesoras to a school group from a small town in the state of Oaxaca, and my subsequent visit to their Oaxaca classroom. The teacher leading the group presented himself as an amateur historian; I visited his classroom in order to learn more about how he incorporated his own understandings of local history into the lessons he prepared for his students.

During the time of my fieldwork, changes to the laws governing national patrimony were being debated within the Mexican legislature and in governmental institutions such as the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA), the INAH, and the ENAH. The proposed changes include restructuring the institutions responsible for cultural matters, leaving the future existence of INAH and ENAH ambiguous. Other provisions allowed for the private ownership of certain archeological artifacts. The changes also privileged preservation efforts that promised a return in the form of tourism-generated income, and allowed for the privatization of what had been previously considered national patrimony. Objectors both within and outside of the affected institutions accused the government of placing profit before patrimony. Banners

opposing the changes hung in the Museo's library, and discussion of the changes and strategies to prevent their adoption often appeared on the agendas posted before the union meetings of the investigative branch of the Museo. Articles about the changes appeared regularly in the major Mexico City newspapers.

The Mexico City teachers and the Oaxacan teacher offer perspectives that counter official discourses. The urban teachers challenge shifts in state constructions of the past by recalling older incarnations of the relationships between state, citizens, and national heritage; the Oaxacan teacher disrupts versions of the past focused on Central Mexico and the Mexica by presenting narratives that originate from his region, both during the Museo tour, and in his classroom. I argue that in the Museo, visitors behave not only as spectators of a nationalist repertory (García Canclini 1995: 131), but also as consumers actively confronting a “nationalized, expansionist, centralized, spectacular, and clamorous production” (de Certeau 1984: 31). Operating within established discourses, they create their own trajectories that “trace out the ruses of other interests and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop” (de Certeau 1984: xviii). Analyzing these trajectories reveals some of “the processes by which the ‘mental space’ of the state is created at the level of the everyday” (Kamat 2001: 116).

I. Toppling “La historia de los bronces”

It's a Saturday morning on the esplanade outside of the Museo. Loose knots of people congregate in front of the Museo, waiting for the doors to open at 9 a.m. Not many foreign tourists arrive this early on a Saturday, but there are a few; a group of

French visitors combine and recombine, as they take turns shooting photos in front of the immense Mexican flag that flanks the entrance. There are many families, and groups of teenagers, teasing and shoving each other. Nearly everyone carries a small notebook, the *libretas* characteristic of the primary and secondary students who fill the Museo on the weekend, completing school assignments. I am looking for the director of “Historia más allá.” We met earlier in the week at the Servicios registration desk, when I helped him finalize arrangements for a professional development workshop for primary and secondary teachers. I explained my research at the Museo, and secured permission to attend the Saturday event.

The doors open, and I spot the teachers, their SEP badges distinguishing them from the other visitors. I accompany them through the entrance, and downstairs to the Servicios facilities. We all file into the small auditorium, where films with titles such as “Guardians of the Past” are shown to visiting schoolchildren. The group, about fifty in all, divides into smaller groups. Some stay behind in the auditorium, while others go to work in the galleries. I stay with the auditorium group, who will participate in a training session about cultural patrimony, led by Marta.

Marta is one of the more outspoken of the asesores. For many years, she was their union representative. She speaks authoritatively on many subjects and her opinion is not easily swayed. On more than one occasion, she has expressed to me how much she enjoys working with the groups who arrive at the Museo from the rural schools. Her preference rests partly in her belief that the children at more well-off schools are spoiled and behave disrespectfully, but she also believes that the children whose backgrounds are more humble maintain a more intimate connection with Mexico’s past, whether through a

family members who speak an indigenous language, or everyday practices, such as making tortillas “*a mano*” or caring for farm animals. Regardless of a school’s location, when guiding she often makes reference to family customs and traditions as the primary way that Mexican culture is perpetuated. During one tour she gave to a *secundaria* group, Marta related the story of the fifth sun. Before she began, she asked the students to raise their hands if they already knew the story. She smiled with satisfaction as every hand went up. “And did you learn this at home,” she asked. “No, from books,” the majority replied. “Most Mexicans learn these things from our families,” Marta commented.

The belief that “most Mexicans learn these things at home” informs Marta’s decisions about what information to highlight—or omit—when guiding. One morning, I accompanied her as she guided a group from Tlaxcala through the Sala Mexica. As we entered the gallery, she whispered to me that she would have to modify some of the things she usually said for this group, because of their “family traditions.” Puzzled, I asked what she meant. “Well, you know, a lot of people say the Tlaxcaltecos are traitors, and they are still sensitive” she said, referring to the alliance of the Tlaxcaltecos with the Spaniards, against the Mexica. For Marta, the Museo’s most important function is didactic. She asserts, often and firmly, that the Museo is principally an educational institution, and that teachers who bring their classes to it should have clear pedagogical goals in mind. I have heard her scold teachers she feels are insufficiently prepared.

Marta begins her session by defining cultural patrimony as “testimonies and material and immaterial historical legacies transmitted from generation to generation.” She gives an example of this in the celebration of the Feast of the Virgen de

Candelaria.¹⁴⁷ “This isn’t something all Catholics do,” she asserts. Cultural patrimony cannot be safeguarded in a museum; it is the legacy of all people. Her audience nods along. She then moves on to the concept of the museum, citing the 1974 International Council on Museums proclamation declaring museums a “social necessity.”¹⁴⁸ Up to this point, the teachers have done little more than nod occasionally, look thoughtful, or scribble in the workbooks with which they arrived. Marta begins to speak of Mexican museums more specifically. She mentions the debate over whether a museum should serve, in her words “a lucrative end.” She engages directly in the debates amassing around the possible legislative shifts: “Is it national patrimony, or merchandise?” This strikes a nerve. I hear a whispered “*neoliberalismo*,” in my experience a critique leveled much more frequently in everyday conversation Mexico than in the United States. Many teachers begin to speak. “If in Mexico we can spend millions of pesos on elections in which we already know the winner, how can there not be enough to defend the patrimony,” asks one. “We teachers have a key role in this,” adds another. “We are going to have to defend public space,” says a third.

Someone proposes that a declaration be drawn up that all present can sign. “We’re Mexicans, after all!” Another teacher recalls visiting the Castillo de Chapultepec, as and seeing the bedroom suite of Maximilian and Carlotta.¹⁴⁹ But when she visited again, it was gone. “What happened to the bedroom suite,” she demands. “Ask Irma

¹⁴⁷ Celebrated on February 2.

¹⁴⁸ The full definition, from the ICOM website: “A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of the society and its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment.”

http://archives.icom.museum/hist_def_eng.html. Accessed February 10, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ The National History Museum, under renovation at the time.

Serrano,” calls someone from the back, referring to a notorious actress turned politician, who was the lover of President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.¹⁵⁰ More comments come from the floor: “If we don’t do something, who will?” “We are being left without memory. That isn’t right.” “Children need to know that the things in museums and archeological zones belong to them.” Marta takes advantage of the last remark to reclaim the floor. “Everything that we live today comes from the past,” she states, pulling the conversation back to the planned program.

The Mexico City district office of the SEP developed “Historia más allá del aula” as one offering among many that allowed teachers to complete required training hours. In all, around 150 Mexico City teachers passed through the “Historia” program in its initial year, 2002.¹⁵¹ Though some teachers probably attended at the behest of their school administrators, most chose the course because it met their training needs, fit into their schedules, or perhaps seemed interesting.

According to the manual provided to participating teachers, “Historia más allá del aula” intends to change the hands-off approach to teaching history that the program’s designers claim has marked the discipline for decades. Both schoolteachers on tours and the Museo’s asesores refer to this traditional treatment of history as “la historia de los bronce,” history according to the bronze statues. This excerpt from the manual’s introduction states the basic critique:

¹⁵⁰ Serrano is popularly known as La Tigresa, after a movie role she played. She is quite flamboyant; she broke off her relationship with Díaz Ordaz by crashing his birthday party at Los Pinos and serenading him with a less than flattering song about his sexual prowess. In the late 1990s, Serrano represented Chiapas in the federal Senate. She then ran for head of the delegación of Cuauhtemoc, but was defeated. She was arrested in March 2009 for charges related to a dispute she had with the manager of the Teatro Fru-Fru in Mexico City, which Serrano owns.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Profesor Miguel Ángel Ávila, May 3, 2003.

In the schools, history has traditionally been taught as an already established discourse, impossible to modify, without any practical utility, something students should memorize in order to pass their exams. The majority of schools begin from the belief that learning history consists of the accumulation and repetition of a great number of dates, names, and events that many times have no meaning for the student (Aprendizaje 2002: 1).

In contrast, “Historia más allá” proposes to “stimulate the curiosity of students,” and to encourage them to relate the material covered in history classes “to the processes happening in the world in which they live” (Aprendizaje 2002: 1). The authors advocate a “constructivist” approach to the teaching of history, an approach that emphasizes experiential learning and the active participation of each student in his or her own learning processes. According to the manual, “any object or site that has a sociohistorical freight, anything that is a product of human activity, is a potential resource for bringing students closer to the study not just of history, but of his or her own society, in a manner that is reflexive, investigative, and intelligent (Aprendizaje 2002: 2). The text suggests several such resources, in addition to museums: archeological sites, markets, churches, cemeteries, fairs, and oral sources.

“Historia más allá” is one example of organizational, curricular, and pedagogical shifts occurring in the SEP for some time. Kamat locates these shifts within structural adjustment programs established across Latin America by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (2002). Salinas initiated the first of these changes in the 1990s, with a reform package that included the decentralization of some SEP functions, along with Constitutional amendments making the first nine years of school compulsory and introducing new systems of evaluation for both teachers and students (Ornelas 2004). The educational proposals of his successor, Ernesto Zedillo, followed the basic outline

already in place. Likewise, “the government of change” promised by Vicente Fox made few alterations when preparing its own plan for education during the sexenio. As Ornelas summarizes, the educational policies of the three sexenios “were similar, although there were modifications in the terms used: ‘solidarity’ under Salinas, ‘Progresas’¹⁵² under Zedillo, and ‘opportunities’ with the Fox government” (2004: 405).

“Historia más allá del aula” suggests several points of friction between old and new understandings of history, and the role of the state in educational and cultural endeavors. With its call to immerse students and teachers in “real world experiences,” the constructivist approach to knowledge as advocated by the program harkens back to the progressive educational movements of the 1920s and 30s. In theory, it frees students and teachers both from a centralized, regimented curriculum, and promotes local control and the use of local resources. But the larger reforms in which these decentralizing pedagogical practices require new forms of oversight, such as standardized testing as a means of measuring pedagogical efficacy, in order to meet requirements imposed by outside lenders.

The location of most of “Historia más allá” training activities, in museums and officially recognized historical sites, places it directly in the context of the “ritualized system of social action” that Canclini describes (1997: 115) as key to state-sponsored nationalism in post-Revolutionary Mexico. The curricular reforms signaled by programs such as “Historia más allá” indicate a move away from post-Revolutionary educational policy, which privileged strong federal control and “checked any real regional or local participation in a national education” (Contreras and Rice 2009: 178), and towards a

¹⁵² An acronym for the program of education, health, and food supply: Programa de Educación, Salud, y Alimentos.

decentralized model. As Kamat argues, this restructuring serves not to diminish the role of the state, but rather to reconfigure it so that “relations between local bodies and suprastate agencies are increasingly structured and rationalized towards meeting global financial interests” (Kamat 2001: 116).

However, as can be seen in the discussion that emerged during Marta’s presentation, the residue of previous nation-building projects can be used to challenge newer models. The teachers who participated used the discussion of national patrimony to offer a general critique of Mexican political processes and figures--the jokes about Irma Serrano and the comment about the elections--and began to articulate dissatisfaction with the Fox administration’s attempts to reconfigure public space. They did so, in part by looking back to an imagined moment in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, and particularly under the socialist education program of Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s, when, as one teacher told me, “we teachers were more important than doctors, we were more important than presidents.”

II. Distant Histories

Historia más allá del aula targets Mexico City and its metropolitan area. Many of the school visitors to the Museo arrive from much more distant towns and cities. One afternoon at about five o’clock, a group from Monterrey arrived. They traveled 12 hours by bus to visit the Museo and the Palacio Nacional, planning to return to Monterrey the same evening. The director of Ethnography remarked to me that the Museo, the Basilica

of Guadalupe, and the Palacio Nacional formed the Trinity of most touristic visits to the city.¹⁵³ In the next section, I describe a tour conducted for a group from Oaxaca.

A sea of schoolchildren fills the reception area of Servicios Educativos this morning. A group of 350 from a secundaria in Ecatepec, scheduled for a guided visit, occupies most of the space. Guadalupe, in charge of scheduling this month, set aside three of the asesoras for them. But it seems private guides accompanied them. There is some back and forth between Marta, Guadalupe, and the teachers in charge of the group. Salma would usually manage this kind of conflict, but she isn't here today. The Licenciada comes out of the office to settle things. Everyone talks at once; voices rise. In the end, the group leaves with its private guides.

As this plays out, a group of twenty-nine from a private school in Oaxaca arrives, without a reservation. The teacher says he would like to take them to see the Sala Mexica. Marta tells them the gallery is full, but that if they watch a movie first, it should clear out. They file into the projection room, and Ignacio begins a film. Another secondary school arrives, this one from Tulancingo, Guadalupe's pueblo. Everyone expresses surprise at the coincidence. As that group prepares to enter the museum proper, a family, parents and three children, arrive. The oldest child is a sixth grader. She has a school assignment to complete. "What do you need to do," asks Guadalupe.

¹⁵³ He meant Mexican tourists. My impression is that Mexican visitors who come from outside of the Distrito Federal combine a visit to the Museo with a visit to the Castillo, or just a walk around Chapultepec. Many visitors seemed uncertain as to what to expect to see in the Museo, asking for exhibits related to the virreinato or Independence. Some groups were just confused. My favorite example of this was a school group who made it through the Servicios reception and was lining up to go up to the patio, when one of the teachers asked where the giraffes where. The class was supposed to be at the zoo across the street.

“I have to write down what there is about the Aztecs.” Guadalupe assesses the situation. The family’s dress and demeanor indicate that they are not well-off. He tells them that they may enter through the Servicios door, if they are also sure to exit that way. The poli in charge of the door watches as he ushers the family out to the patio and directs them to the Sala Mexica. After they leave, he and Marta comment that it was obvious the family did not have enough to cover the parents’ admission to the museum.

Meanwhile, the confusion at the reception desk continues. It appears that too many adults without teaching credentials are entering with the Tulancingo group. Are the adults perhaps outside guides, trying to slip through? Someone counts. The numbers work out. Marta tells me that usually they will allow the teachers who accompany groups “de la montaña” to enter for free, regardless of whether they have their credentials. They have to go through so much paperwork “on their own time,” to make the trip: permissions from the principal, the area board, and others. Guadalupe and Marta discuss the morning’s events. Two of the teachers from Tulancingo had to speak with the Licenciada. The dispute occurred because the third teacher who accompanied the group arrived without his credential. The staff suspected him of being another agency guide. “He was the computer teacher,” someone repeated, as though that explained the confusion.

Usually, a group without a prior reservation would be unattended by the asesores, as appointments fill up to four months in advance. However, the departure of the Ecatepec school left three asesores free. Though the group from Oaxaca arrived without an appointment, Marta offers to take them through the Sala Mexica. The teacher takes her up on it. As we walk up to the gallery, I comment that there were a lot of squabbles with agencies this morning. She agrees.

The group from Oaxaca arrived late in the morning. Most of the schools on the patio are lining up to leave. We chat with the maestro as we walk across to the Sala Mexica. The group arrived in Mexico City two days before, on Wednesday. The Museo was but one of the stops in their itinerary. We arrive at the gallery, which has emptied out. Marta comments that March is the point in the curricular calendar at which the theme of “Mesoamerica” ends, hence the surge in school visits.

We step into the hall. Marta begins her tour, introducing the Mexica as “the last vestiges of Mesoamerican cultures.” She explains that much of what we know about Mesoamerican history comes from the codices, some of which came from the Mixteca, “like you.” We proceed down the ramp to the right, stopping in front of the Teocalli of the Sacred War. Marta asks if any of the children know the name of the Mexica titular god. No one does, so she gives them the answer: Huitzilopochtli. Then she asks if they know the sign that the Mexica received, telling them that they had arrived at their new home. Everyone does: “the eagle on the nopal!” We shift around to see the side of the teocalli that has the carving of the eagle on the nopal.

One the way in, the maestro told us that the class had visited the Basilica of the Virgen de Guadalupe. Marta uses this piece of information to introduce the idea of pilgrimage. Just as the class made a pilgrimage to the Basilica, the Mexica made a pilgrimage to their new home. When she presents the “*tiro de la peregrinaje*” (the copy of the section of the Boturini codex that depicts the journey from the Aztec homeland Azatlán to their new home, Tenochtitlán), she explains that in Oaxaca and Yucatán, scribes used deer hide when writing the codices, rather than the *amate* paper used farther

north.¹⁵⁴ She also spends some time explaining how to read the codex: the headdress that identifies the corn goddess, the drawings that represent Coatepec and Chapultepec itself. She tells them that springs once filled Chapultepec Park, and that those springs supplied water for the whole city. “That’s why the Metro station Sevilla has an aqueduct as its symbol. There was an aqueduct there that carried water down from the springs of Chapultepec to Salto del Agua.”¹⁵⁵ As we continue through the gallery, Marta makes references to Oaxaca part of the tour. At the vitrine describing the tribute the Mexica exacted from the peoples they conquered, she notes that Oaxacan peoples owed textiles and feathers, to be used in the fabrication of the warriors’ clothing.

When working with Mexico City schoolchildren, the asesores rely on native knowledge of the contemporary city to locate the children, connecting imagined Tenochtitlan to present-day Mexico City. Marta employs a version of this tactic with the visiting children. She describes the extensive canal system the Mexica designed, their uses of dams to control water flow, the chinampa system of agriculture. She asks if the class visited Xochimilco, the last remnants of the chinampas and a popular tourist and recreational site. Though they didn’t visit the site, they know of it. She asks them why the Spanish chronicler Bernal Diaz de Castillo described the city as a marvel. “Because it was so enormous.” “Because it floated on the water.” Marta acknowledges their answers, then elaborates on some of the other observations the Spaniard made. She notes that the Spaniards marveled at the number of languages spoken in Tenochtitlan. She uses the Spanish word “lengua,” which, while it can refer to any language, just as “tongue” does in English, in Mexico nearly always refers to indigenous languages. Does anyone in the

¹⁵⁴ Paper made from the bark of various trees.

¹⁵⁵ Another Metro station: the remnant of the public fountain is still there.

class speak Mixteca, she asks? The children nudge one another and point to one of the girls, but no one replies. The Maestro answers: “Noemi speaks Mixteca.” Marta invites her to say something, but Noemi looks down and shakes her head no.

We move to the miniature model of the market at Tlatelolco. The students whisper “exchange, exchange” to each other; I imagine them seeing photos of the model in their textbooks and dutifully copying “*intercambio*” into their notebooks. Marta asks them when the *tianguis* (market) is in their town.¹⁵⁶ They answer that their town holds its tianguis on Sundays, and that people come from other pueblos to buy and sell. Marta goes row by row through the model, explaining the products and services offered and the roles of the various people shown in the market. She calls their attention to items she thinks might be of interest, for instance telling them that the zoo across the street has xolo-escuintles.¹⁵⁷ She also draws attention to what the market lacks: no rice or wheat; no pigs or horses; no broccoli or apples, or any other item that came with the Spaniards.

Again, she familiarizes the scene by drawing on what she presumes the class already knows. When she arrives at the row depicting medicinal herbs and curing specialists, she asks them what they know of indigenous medicine. Does their abuela or maybe their tía ever give them a *limpia* (cleansing)? Several children nod. How do you do a *limpia*? Children respond with the names of herbs, *pirúl*, *hierba de Sta. Maria*, and the procedure: you go from the head to the feet, from inside to out. A child mentions the egg cure, Marta nods, but says that the egg isn’t used to cure *susto*.¹⁵⁸ Not all cultures

¹⁵⁶ Tianguis is a specifically Mexican word that refers to an impermanent outdoor market composed of individual stands; it appears on the same day or days of the week, but the vendors pack up at the end of the selling day.

¹⁵⁷ Xolo-escuintles are a hairless native dog, important for curing and death rituals, and also eaten.

¹⁵⁸ A condition believed to occur when a person receives a sudden fright or shock.

experience *susto*; “each culture has its own illnesses.” She points out the figures that represent the *mayordomos* and *topiles*, both positions of civic and religious importance that still exist in some communities. The children recognize the titles. Someone volunteers that in their pueblo, the *topiles* are in charge of scaring the dogs out of the churches during fiestas. Marta brings up the concept of *trueque*, a form of barter. The children all know what it is; in their town’s market, there is a section set aside for those who wish to use *trueque*. The presentation ends with Marta telling the children that they should be very proud of their market.

She leads them to the Piedra del Sol and Coatlicue. Standing beneath the Piedra, she tells how both it and the Coatlicue were unearthed in 1790, only twenty years before Independence. In her account, the British ridiculed the Spanish conquest of Mexico, saying that the peoples they conquered were so primitive and technologically backwards that they posed no real resistance. The two massive carved pieces proved that the people of Mexico were technologically advanced. Next she recounts the tale of the fifth sun, one of the Mexica creation stories. All along the way, extra people join the tour. Some, like the two students who joined us at the tiro, follow along the whole way, scribbling furiously in their copybooks: “Psst,” I heard one whisper to the other, “let’s stick with her!” Others, like two tourists seated on the marble steps in front of the Piedra, listen for a few minutes, then move on. The class listens attentively to the story as she tells it, exclaiming “ah, sí!” when she ends with the fifth sun. I notice the school from Tulancingo, hanging back a bit but definitely listening to Marta. We descend the steps and gather around the mosaic depicting the five directions. Marta connects the symbols

on the Piedra to the symbols on the floor, a symbol for each direction, the course of time, of the world.

We turn to Coatlicue. Marta says that Coatlicue frightened the Spaniards when they saw her. “Here, the serpent had other meanings, but for the Catholics, it signified the devil.” The Spaniards disparaged the piece, she says, but “the scientist, Humboldt” recognized its value. “He was the first foreigner who wrote about the wonders of our country.” She finishes telling the story of Coatlicue, Huitzilopochtli, and Coyoaxautli: “Every religious system has its logic, its perfect logic.”

Marta glances at her watch. The typical guided visit for schoolchildren lasts an hour; we’ve gone an hour and a bit. But I can see that she likes this group. She whispers to me that she will offer them an additional tour, of the Sala Oaxaca, since that is their home. The maestro accepts her offer, and we walk over to the adjoining gallery. She stops in front of the map of Oaxaca and asks them if they see their pueblo. Someone calls out “Nochistlan!” There it is, just north of Monte Alban. I recognize it as one of the pullovers on the Mexico City-Oaxaca City bus route. We stand there a moment, the children delighting in recognizing place names.

We move through the gallery, more rapidly than we did through the Sala Mexica. We pause briefly at the paintings of the danzante figures from Monte Alban, then for a moment at the splendid mask of the Bat God. Of the archeological galleries, Oaxaca is one of my favorites. I sometimes come in here just to look at the objects. At the model of Monte Alban, Marta describes how to identify the Zapotec rain god, Cocijo: he has ringed eyes, like his Mexica counterpart, Tlaloc, and an elaborate headdress. “He is Yahúa in Mixteco,” volunteers the maestro.

We next stop in front of the reproduction of the Codex Selden. Marta makes sure the children understand that this is a reproduction. “The original is in Europe, like nearly all of the other codices.” A case holds the unfolded facsimile in its entirety. A portion of the codex has been enlarged and made into a wall panel. It tells the story of the rivalry of Lord 8 Deer and a Lady 6 Monkey over the region known in Nahuatl as Jaltepec. “I’m from Jaltepec,” comments the maestro.



Codices, Sala Oaxaca

Together, the maestro and Marta tell the story portrayed on the codex. They sometimes speak over each other. I write as rapidly as I can: Jaltepec means “Hill of Sand” in Nahuatl; the Mixtec name is Añute. The Mixtecan lineages allowed for female succession. The non-calendrical name of 6 Monkey is Itandehui. Her son invented the Mixteco version of the ballgame. The festival of the Cristo de las misericordias (Christ of

Divine Mercy) incorporates rituals dedicated to Yahúa., the rain god. Women are in charge of the fiesta.

“Mexicans are the fusion of two ways of thinking,” Marta tells the class. “We are the only Catholics in the world who don’t fear our dead” (she says “muertitos,” using the diminutive as many Mexicans do to signal affection). She segues in to a discussion of Muertos, the class contributing remarks about their family ofrendas. Marta says that once some of her colleagues presented a Muertos ofrenda at an exhibition of children’s workshops in Paris. “But the French children were frightened,” she tells them.

We pass to the next section, the cases of gold, principally from Monte Alban. The class stands as close to the cases as possible, oohing and ahing. Marta tells them that some of the pieces in the cases were stolen from the Museo in 1985, on Christmas Eve. The alarm system had been out of service for a few years, and the guards on duty were “toasting their Christmas.” The robbers escaped with 140 pieces from various archeological galleries. The Museo recovered most of the pieces four years later, during the arrests of suspected drug traffickers. “That time the police did their job,” Marta tells them.

Marta moves along to the cases containing Zapotec and Mixtec pottery. The children crowd the cases. “Are these reproductions, too,” someone asks. Marta assures them that these pieces are originals. She points out one of my favorites, a polychrome cup with a hummingbird perched on its lip. “As you can see, the Mixtecos were a refined people,” she remarks.



Hummingbird cup, Sala Oaxaca

In one of the cases, a child spies some of the equipment for the Mixtec ballgame. “We still play that,” he exclaims. Without seeing the label, another student recognizes a piece of pottery as being from Nochixtlan. As the children dart about, I’ve been conversing with the maestro. He is an amateur historian, he says, and recently won a state prize for a poem he composed based on a Mixteco tale.

We are at the close of the gallery now. The maestro thanks Marta for her kind attention, and invites both of us to visit them in their pueblo. This kind of invitation is very sincerely offered, though it is also part of the formalities around departures of this nature. Both Marta and I say, “*Sí, sí, ojalá que sí,*” which is the expected response. The

class exits the Museo. As Marta and I walk back to Servicios, she tells me that the Licenciada will be angry that she spent so much time with the class from Oaxaca.

III. En Provincia

The Oaxacan school tour occurred just before the traditional two week *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) holiday. Though the Museo remains open, Servicios Educativos closes, as most schools are not in session. I decided to take advantage of an already planned trip to Oaxaca to visit the Maestro at his school. His active engagement in the Museo tour, and the way he augmented Marta's presentation with his own knowledge of regional history caught my interest. I am interested in the ways in which teachers present local histories in the context of a more general Mexican history. In casual conversations with teachers and museum staff, several people had remarked to me that the official textbooks approved for use include few accounts of events outside of the Mexico-Tenochtitlan area, either before or after the arrival of the Spaniards. I wondered what happened in actual classrooms: did teachers include other materials? Did they invite local *cronistas* or knowledgeable townspeople to speak to their classes?¹⁵⁹

The trip from Oaxaca City to Nochixtlán is easily made. I board the same bus I would have boarded anyway, Mexico TAPO.¹⁶⁰ Not many people get on: a nun with a heavy crucifix hanging low on her chest, a mother with two little girls and a baby, a few

¹⁵⁹ Many towns and cities do have their own chroniclers, *cronistas*, who often provide social commentary along with recording and disseminating local history. In Mexico City, the Asociación de Cronistas del Distrito Federal y Zonas Conurbanas, established in 1989, maintains a website: <http://www.cronistasdf.org.mx/10164.html> One of the most well-known Mexico City *cronistas* is Carlos Monsivaís.

¹⁶⁰ Terminal de Autobuses de Pasajeros de Oriente, for travelers heading east from Mexico City, or arriving from points east.

others. As the bus pulls onto Niños Heroes, we pass two girl clowns, bright skirts sticking straight out like tutus, oversized shoes slapping the pavement, gloved hands bringing tacos or empanadas wrapped in pink paper up to painted mouths. The baby cries for a bit while her sisters plead for treats, but within half an hour, all three are sleeping. No movie for this leg of the trip, just a local radio station. The driver amplifies it right in the middle of a public service announcement trumpeting Oaxaca as a state that respects “*los derechos de los indigenas*” (the rights of indigenous people). “*Hemos librado 6,000 presos indigenas,*” (we have freed 6,000 indigenous prisoners) the announcer proclaims, then a variation on the PAN slogan, something like “*En Oaxaca, el cambio nadie se para*” (“In Oaxaca, no one stops change.”).¹⁶¹

It’s a pleasant enough ride to Nochixtlán. The jacarandas are deep purple now, not the delicate lavender of the early blooms. One of the trees I spot shades a small ochre house. The trunk bifurcates, and in the fork a sheaf of corn stalks dries. Somewhere between the first tollbooth and the turn for Nochixtlán, a row of brightly painted toy trucks lines the shoulder of the road. I have never seen the vendor. I wonder if he ever sells any, or if he just paints over the nicks from flying gravel and the grime of the road. At Nochixtlán, several people step off the bus, but I am the only one who doesn’t get back on. The *comedor* has a public phone. I call the school. I remember to ask “*con quien tengo el gusto*” before I present myself. The secretary who answered is very nice, and soon I am speaking to the maestro. Why don’t I come to the school? His *turno* ends at noon, we can talk a bit, and if I like, I can go with him to the *prepa* where he teaches in the afternoon.

¹⁶¹ The PAN slogan was “With the PAN, no one stops change.”

Across from the bus depot, a lone taxi waits by the side of the road. I give him the address and name of the school. “*¿Es el colegio de las monjas?*” (Is it the nuns’ school?). I suppose it is a nun’s school, though as far as I know, there weren’t any nuns on the field trip the children took. It scarcely takes five minutes to arrive. The maestro opens the gate of the school, and invites me in.

Everything glares white. Children run back and forth across the patio. He shows me to the school library/storage area, where I can leave my bags. There are a few neatly labeled shelves of books: “Historia” “Oaxaca.” The rest is a jumble of props: artificial flowers, tin drums, a banner in honor of “*nuestras mamas.*” Two huge canvases lean against the wall. One is of the Virgin Mary, serenely praying in silhouette. The other is of a proud warrior, “*El flechador*” (The Bowman), arrow aimed at the sun. “Surely you have seen this image before,” the maestro says. I have, on calendars. He escorts me to his classroom. It is small, and sparsely furnished: desks for the children, his own desk, covered with a woven runner, two rickety benches pushed against the wall, and a small bookshelf that holds a few textbooks and some other books. Children’s projects line the benches: colorful cut-outs depicting “*La vida de Juárez*” pasted to typing paper, several pieces of cardboard with shards of pottery glued to them. The Maestro shows them to me proudly. “We made an excursion to Pueblo Viejo,” he explains. The bits are labeled in shaky fifth grade print. “A piece of Mixtecan pottery.” “One of their arrowheads.”

At first, the kids hang back. The Maestro has presented me as “an anthropologist from Texas.” They stare a bit and giggle, and whisper behind their hands. I am offered

the Maestro's chair. He seats me next to a girl I remember seeing at the Museo. "Here is a report one of the children prepared about our trip to Mexico," he says, and hands me a blue folder. "It's still missing some photos."

Each photo carried a brief descriptive text as follows: "We saw the model of the human body at the Museum of Medicine. We visited the archeological site at Tlatelolco. Also, students were killed there in 1968." When I finish, the girl sitting next to me smiles. I smile back. "Do you remember me from the museum?" She shakes her head no. I remember her, because the Maestro had pointed her out as one of the children who speak Mixteco. She cocks her head to one side. "How old are you," she wants to know. The other children pull in closer to hear the answer. "I'm thirty-nine." Then everyone has questions: do I have pets? What pets do I have? Do I speak English? The Maestro points out one boy. "He speaks English very well." "I was born in California," the boy tells me. His family returned to Nochixtlan three years ago. They ask me to say something in English. I say "Hello, how are you?" Everyone giggles.

The Maestro, who had been reviewing a student's workbook, approaches. "Noemi speaks Mixteco," he says. "Sometimes we have her tell us words, when she doesn't feel too shy." The word he uses—"apenarse"—can also connote shame. When I ask her, Noemi tells me she learns Mixteco from her grandfather. What do they talk about? "Stories from when he was a boy," she replies.

"Here's a book we have, written in an indigenous language." The Maestro takes a children's paperback off one of the shelves and shows it to me. "Only it's in Pure," a language spoken in Michoacan. He turns to the vocabulary in the back. "How do you say girl in Mixteco, Noemi?" Noemi responds with a soft buzzing word. The maestro and the

some of the kids repeat it after her. He takes a second book from the shelf, a textbook printed in 1991, titled “Oaxaca”. “It isn’t much, but it does have some things. The problem is, it’s not very new anymore. And anything about Oaxaca, that’s extra, not official curriculum.”

We talk about learning English. The kids want to know how I learned to speak Spanish. I tell them I lived in Spain when I was little. “Ah, *con razón*,” nods the Maestro. “That’s why I say some words differently than you,” I add. “Didn’t you notice?” One or two kids nod. “Say ‘*pollo*’ again,” a mischievous boy requests. He wants to hear me say the ‘ll’ in the middle, which I pronounce much more harshly than most Mexicans. I oblige him: “Pozho.” Several kids smother giggles. “Yes, when I met you I thought you were from Argentina,” the Maestro says. “See, *muchachos*, there are different kinds of Spanish. That’s why it is hard to spell—because it could be ‘ll’ or ‘y’. You have to memorize.”

He turns his attention to the shards, lifting one of the cardboard pieces up and carrying it over to me. It has several pieces attached to it: two polychrome pottery fragments, and some unpainted clay bits. “What is your opinion, as an anthropologist, of these pieces?” I explain again that I am a cultural anthropologist. “Almost everything I know about archeology I have learned from reading the labels in museums,” I tell him. His face betrays his disappointment. I wish I were the right sort of anthropologist.

“Well, you have read a lot. I will tell you what we think.” He points to one of the polychrome pieces, colored red and white. “We think this piece has to do with a funeral, with mourning.” He indicates the second polychrome fragment, which includes tones of green. “This, we think, has to do with death also, but more like a celebration, like *Días de*

los Muertos. Because it has more color.” I make some sort of non-committal reply. At these moments, I wish I could say something more “expert.” The Maestro so clearly wants answers. But I only ask questions.

While we are studying the shards, the maestro for the afternoon session arrives. The Maestro offers a brief introduction, then gathers his satchel and some books. “It’s time for us to go, the session at the prepa begins at 12:30.” I say goodbye to the kids. As we are leaving, one of the boys tears the red and white sherd from its poster-board base. “It’s for you,” he says, handing it to me. I am embarrassed. “Are you sure? It’s very pretty, you might not find such a nice one again.” “I can go there anytime, anytime I want,” he answers, pressing the piece into my hand. I thank him, probably too profusely. The maestro takes me back to the library for my things. On the way there, we meet the headmistress of the school. I can see from her dress that this is, indeed, “*un colegio de monjas*.” The Maestro presents me as “*la antropóloga Melissa*.” I realize that I do not know his name, just that he is “el Maestro”.

The Maestro worries that we should take a taxi to the prepa. I assure him that I am used to walking. We draw many curious glances as we walk. I feel conspicuous and somewhat ridiculous with my bulging backpack and shopping bag overflowing with produce hastily purchased during my last hour in Oaxaca. As we walk, he talks. “Do you know the story of the flechador?” he asks, referring to the painting he showed me in the library. I shake my head no. The Maestro begins: “The flechador was a brave warrior.” He challenged the Sun to a battle, to determine who would have dominion over the lands around Tilonongo. As sunset approached, the flechador shot his arrows into the heart of the Sun. The sky turned blood red. Confident that he had vanquished the Sun, the

flechador declared himself lord of all the territories. “Of course, it was just the sunset that made the sky appear red,” the Maestro adds. “But that’s the legend.”

The Maestro’s father was Mixteco, but his mother had Spanish roots. “I have my father’s color,” he says, pointing to his bare forearm, “but I don’t speak any [indigenous] language.” Like Marta during the Museo tour, he uses the Spanish “lengua”, unmodified. “I wish I did.” We walk in silence for a bit. “The children, the ones who speak la lengua, like Noemi, are apenados. That’s why I wrote the poem, for the contest. So they would feel proud.” When we first met, at the Museo, the maestro told Marta that he had written a poem based in Mixtecan legend that won a state prize:

People from the Mixteca are called ‘the people of the clouds.’ And some people say that is because they are stupid, they don’t understand, their heads are full of air. But that isn’t right. We are the people of the clouds because we live up in the mountains, close to the clouds. Mixtecos are strong, capable people. The children need to know that.

“We’re not so far now from the prepa,” he says. Heat and dust rise from the concrete paving that marks the road. “Not so long ago, when they were excavating for the highway, they found a burial site.” The bones they found were long, not short. “Our ancestors were tall, very well-formed.” We meet a group of teenagers, some walking, some riding dusty bicycles. “*Profe*,” they call out in greeting. “Where are you going? You’re coming back, right? The Antropóloga is coming to talk to us. Ai, Profe, sure we’re coming back.”

I should have anticipated that I would be expected to speak. I wonder what the maestro will want me to talk about? He mentioned during our walk that the senior students had taken a trip to the Yucatan, to see the pyramids at Chichen Itza, and the

cenotes. We pass through the painted wrought iron gate and into the schoolyard. The maestro walks towards a brick building to our right. “It’s the library.” We enter a large room, half of it lined with shelves full of books. There are also a number of long tables, covered with neat piles of books and stacks of folded blankets. The other side of the room has large windows on two walls, and a chalkboard. About thirty high-school aged students occupy desks lined up in the middle.

The Maestro presents me to the class as la Antropóloga Melissa, and tells them I will speak on the state of the social sciences in Mexico today. I speak off the cuff for about twenty minutes, then answer questions for another twenty. The students primarily ask questions about university studies and job prospects. Afterward, the Maestro shows me the photographs and projects the students made depicting their trip, while the students do bookwork at their desks. The Maestro is eager for me to meet another of the teachers at the school, a man he calls “el Profesor.” The Profesor is from Teotitlán del Valle, a Zapotec community, and he speaks Zapotec. He is helping his town develop a program of Zapotec education.

I am a little anxious about the bus schedule, but feel it would be rude to leave. Fortunately, the Profesor arrives not long after I finish admiring the photos. He turns out to be an older man, dressed in jeans and a polo shirt, with a baseball cap pulled straight across his forehead. The Maestro explains that I am an anthropologist from Texas who is interested in indigenous people. Wouldn’t the Profesor like to talk to me? The Profesor would be delighted. He suggests that we use his classroom for the interview. On the way

over, I learn that the Profesor was one of the last waves of braceros.¹⁶² When he returned from his stint working in the U.S., he decided to attend night school primaria, as he had not attended school beyond the second grade as a child. Attending night school, he completed the remaining grades of primaria, all of secundaria, and preparatoria. He eventually earned a master's degree in education.

We talk for nearly two hours.¹⁶³ “*La ideología pesa mucho*” (Ideology carries a lot of weight), he tells me. “*Llegamos a creer que nosotros que hablamos lenguas autoctonas somos menos*” (We come to believe that those of us who speak autochthonous languages are worth less). “*Nos apena manifestarlo. Yo lo viví*” (It shames us to show it (ie, indigeneity). I lived that.). He details the kinds of programs he thinks it is important for indigenous communities to have, not just language instruction, but instruction in community traditions, the practices of the community. His community, and other communities like it, face many challenges. First came the internal migrations to Mexico City, now people go to California, or Chicago. “Here in Oaxaca, it’s very complicated.” But if the community retains a base in its language and customs, it will continue to flourish.

¹⁶² The Bracero Program operated from 1942-1964, bringing Mexican men across the border, primarily to work as agricultural laborers. A portion of the money they earned was held in trust by the Mexican government, to be given to them when they returned to Mexico. However, the government did not turn over all of the money. At the time of my fieldwork, some ex-braceros were protesting and pursuing legal means to recuperate their money. The case was settled in 2008, with the Mexican government agreeing to one-time payouts of money owed.

¹⁶³ The Profesor gave me permission to record our interview. Unfortunately, both of the tape recorders I brought with me malfunctioned.

IV. The New Cultural Order

The Profesor's comments stayed with me after I returned to the Museo. I thought about the ways in which the asesores talked to children about contemporary indigenous people. One day, running late, I catch up to Naila and the group she is leading in the Sala de Pueblos Indios, in front of the case that holds the reproduction of a Mazahua wedding. It's a small group. From a hastily whispered conversation with the teacher, I learn that they are fourth graders, visiting the Museo to acquire information about geography and civic education. Naila tells the children to "observe the materials" that are used in the wedding clothing and decorations. "*Es actual* (it exists now)," she tells them. "This upper floor tells us about the present." "People in the republic still live like this." I heard variations of this on every tour I observed in the ethnographic galleries: "What did we see? Some very important people who, though they don't live in cities or dress as we do, are also Mexicans." "They are children just like us, even though they don't live in Mexico City." "They are Mexicans, but they speak Totonaco."

I visited Nochixtlán in early April. Throughout the spring, the renovations and change that began in the Centro spread in to Chapultepec Park. The city issued permits and special white lab coats with an official insignia to authorized vendors. New benches and laps appeared. Among the modifications to the esplanade outside the Museo was the construction of a new performance space for the famed Flying Men of Papantla, who perform their slow, spiraling ritual dance at regular intervals during Museo hours. The inaugural performance in the new space took place in late April, as part of the official

opening of the Centro Histórico tourist route. The mayor attended, speeches were made, and many photos taken.¹⁶⁴

During one particularly slow day of observations in the ethnographic galleries a few days after the inauguration, I fell into conversation with one of the guards, also making his rounds. I mentioned the mayor's appearance, and commented on the changes to the park. The guard frowned a bit. Did I know, he asked, that the park was being renovated in order to facilitate its sale to a consortium of foreign businessmen, possibly Japanese? He had heard it on the radio or on television. The Japanese investors planned to completely fence the park, and to charge admission for entry. They were going to construct an aerial tram to carry people from the Castillo to the Museo and back, so none of the rich park visitors would have to sweat their way up the hill. And, they would raise the prices of all of the concessions. "An ice cream will cost 60 pesos," he exclaimed indignantly. Chapultepec is the playa de los pobres, the poor person's beach, he continued. Where would the people go then?

During that same spring, I attended a series of meetings at the ENAH organized by faculty and students opposed to the granting of permits for a large-scale commercial musical festival at the archeological site of El Tajín, in the state of Veracruz. Federal and state governmental authorities claimed that the event would attract money and development to the economically depressed area; local, predominantly indigenous, communities and their supporters countered that the festival did little but damage the structures on the site, overtax already inadequate local infrastructure, and deplete scarce

¹⁶⁴ André Manuel López Obrador of the Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD Democratic Revolution Party), widely believed at the time to be preparing to run for President. He went on to oppose Felipe Calderón of the PAN, Fox's party, in the 2006 elections. Calderón did win, but

local resources. The Mexican constitution, like those of many other Latin American countries, contains comprehensive guarantees of citizenship rights, including specific social and economic rights, among them those associated with cultural preservation and expression. Opponents of the El Tajín festival claimed that the granting of permits was unconstitutional, as it violated these cultural rights.

These frictions mark a particular moment in the Mexican state's relationship to culture and its role in government policy. Vicente Fox assumed office promising "a government of change." Among the changes he proposed was a decentralization of the state's cultural functions, to permit the "ciudadanización de la cultura:" the inclusion of citizens in the creation and dissemination of culture. As Eduardo Nivón observes, the National Action Party (PAN), to which both Fox and his successor, Felipe Calderón belong, gives scant importance to Mexican cultural policy. In contrast, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which governed Mexico from the Revolution through Fox's historic victory in 2000, made culture a very well-deployed instrument of legitimation (Nivón 2004).

Under policies developed by the post-Revolutionary governments, administration of the nation's cultural policies falls under the cabinet office of the Secretariate of Public Education (SEP). In 1988, the government of Carlos Salinas created the National Council of Culture and the Arts (CONACULTA), a non-cabinet level agency that administers the various cultural institutions, including those dedicated to anthropology and archeology, historic preservation, the fine arts, dance, and filmmaking. Fox assured workers and creators from the various cultural sectors that he would follow their guidance when selecting the person to head CONACULTA during his administration. A series of forums

and other consultations followed, resulting in the nominations of several candidates of national and international stature. Despite his promise, Fox appointed Sara Bermúdez, a former newsreader with no experience in cultural policy or administration and a close friend of his wife, to the post. He also failed to fulfill his vow to overhaul the structures and administration of the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA), the National Institute of anthropology and History (INAH), and CONACULTA itself within the first 100 days of his administration. Disillusionment with Fox's inaction grew among workers within the cultural sector, academics, and artists and writers. As one writer observed, "we've known for a long time that culture and the arts exist in another realm. With the change, we are now learning that, for some, that realm is nowhere."

Though Fox delayed submitting a proposal for a comprehensive law, various of the changes to the laws governing national patrimony were debated within the Mexican legislature and in governmental institutions such as the INBA, the INAH, and the ENAH throughout 2002 and 2003. Articles covering the topic appeared frequently in the major Mexico City newspapers. The proposed changes include restructuring the institutions responsible for cultural matters, leaving the future existence of INAH and ENAH ambiguous. Other provisions allowed for the private ownership of certain archeological artifacts and art held in the public trust. The changes also privileged preservation efforts that promised a return in the form of tourism-generated income, and allowed for the privatization of what had been previously considered national patrimony. Objectors both within and outside of the affected institutions accused the government of placing profit before patrimony. Banners opposing the changes hung in the Museum's library, and

discussion of the changes and strategies to prevent their adoption often appeared on the agendas posted before the union meetings of the investigative branch of the Museum.

In September of 2005, with only one year left in his term, Fox presented the “Law for the Creation and Dissemination of Culture” for formal consideration by the Mexican Senate. The purpose of the law, Fox explained to legislators, was to regulate the role of the state in the strengthening and dissemination of “our culture.” Opposition to the proposals, particularly from unions affiliated with the INAH and the INBA, arose almost immediately. The “Ley Bermúdez,” they charged, robbed the INAH and the INBA of their proper authority, and allowed marketing concerns to replace education as the partner of cultural development and diffusion. The law stalled, and was eventually withdrawn. The groups opposing the laws formed their own Alternative Parliament of Culture and Education, which drew up its own set of recommendations. A slightly modified version of the initial proposal, derisively called the Bermudez clone, was presented in April 2006. This, too, failed, and Fox left office without the passage of a central piece of his cultural policy.

CONCLUSION

The Museo in Motion

I. “The Museo belongs to all Mexicans”

I chose to do research at the Museo in order to understand some of the mechanisms through which culture and tradition become “objects to be scrutinized, identified, revitalized, and consumed” (Handler 1988: 12). I wanted to work in Mexico particularly because of the ways in which the post-Revolutionary governments deployed anthropological knowledge as part of an effort to create a unified national culture. In the dissertation, I attend to the Museo as both a location in the built environment of Mexico City, and as a locus for representations of the national. The Museo provides a space to explore culture as an official discourse of the state; as a category of knowledge offered by specialists; and as intangible collections of beliefs and behaviors expressed in the practices of visitors and staff. Observing visitors in the galleries, observing the school tours and conversing with the asesoras about their work, and participating in museum work myself offered opportunities for a nuanced apprehension of the ways in which culture operates and is deployed in sites of “patrimonial conservation” (García Canclini 1995: 111).

The Museo forms part of cluster of such sites located in Mexico City’s Centro Histórico. As I show in Chapter Two, the constellation of buildings, plazas, and parks that includes the Museo offers one way of tracing shifts in official presentations of nation. These presentations mark ways in which “the geography of the national public, the spatial organization of government, and the nation-state’s situation in the international arena” (Lomnitz 2001: 287) intersect to construct national space. This constructed space becomes

part of a taken-for-granted relationship between social reality and ideologies of nation, one of the “relations of order, which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident” (Bourdieu 1984: 471). These relations of order both require and produce certain modes of perception. In Chapter One, I describe some of the ways these modes of perception are acquired and mobilized, at both a personal and an institutional level. I analyze the manners in which the Museo, as part of an official bureaucracy, validates particular forms of interaction between citizens and the state. I argue that these interactions and perceptions inform the interpretive strategies implemented by the asesores when conducting school tours.

In his assessment of the Museo, García Canclini presents a detached public, one that is “almost always called as spectator” (1995: 131). This coincides with Bourdieu’s description of the “aesthetic disposition” as one of “detachment, disinterestedness, indifference” (1984: 34). As this dissertation establishes, the asesores at the Museo see their work as one of creating an engaged disposition. One of their goals when guiding tours is to help the children make connections with the artifacts on display, to activate thoughts and feelings, and to impart “discursive repertoires” (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 124) that tie the museum pieces—and the Museo itself—to particular notions of patrimony and what it means to be Mexican. Almost all of the more than 200 school tours I observed at the Museo included the assertion that “This museum belongs to all of us, all Mexicans.”

The asesores primarily rely on narrative to generate these relationships. Sometimes, as I show in my analysis of the presentation of Coatlicue in Chapter Three, the narratives place the artifact within the context of its creation; at other times, as in the presentation of the maquette of Tenochtitlán in Chapter Two, the narratives are used to link the past to

contemporary reality. In some instances, as in the activities around Days of the Dead analyzed in Chapter Three, narratives serve to confirm the historical origins of contemporary practices, and to teach about the variations within those practices. In all instances, the creation of the engaged disposition draws on lived cultural practice to make connections between the objects and the viewers.

My research demonstrates that even those who visit without the mediating presence of an asesor or other guide often make narrative connections on their own. One of the asesoras told me that she preferred to take younger school groups to the ethnographic galleries: “You can see the most everyday sorts of things, and they will have a frame of reference.” This holds true for older audiences as well. As the examples of the agricultural and tienda exhibits in Chapter Four demonstrate, displays that include commonly recognized objects often elicit family stories or more general reminiscences. These sometimes become exchanges among visitors gathered at the exhibit.

At times, rather than creating connection between objects or artifacts, the narratives that visitors bring with them create disjunctures. This can be seen in the ethnographic galleries as well, in the rejection of certain representations of indigenous peoples as “inauthentic,” because they are presented as contemporary subjects. In Chapter Five, the tour of the Sala Oaxaca prompts the Oaxacan teacher to provide a different version of the historical narrative attached to the Codex Nutall, one that highlights a specifically regional perspective rather than the Tenochtitlán/Mexica focused account typically given in the Museo.

Two incidents from a tour I led late in my fieldwork bring these key findings into sharp focus. Every year the SEP sponsors the *Olimpiada de Conocimiento Infantil*

(Children's Knowledge Olympics), a contest open to all 6th graders in Mexico attending SEP-accredited schools. Through a series of competitions at the local, regional, and finally the state level, the Olimpiada identifies the "most outstanding" 6th grade students in each of the 31 states and the Federal District. The winners and their accompanying chaperones receive all-expenses paid trips to Mexico City for one week in July, to participate in a *Convergencia Cultural*, special events and visits to important cultural sites. Servicios Educativos asesores provide guided tours for the Convergencia groups when they visit the Museo.

A week before the Convergencia event, the Licenciada told me that they were short one asesora for the group. Would I lead a group? Feeling a bit nervous, I agreed. Though I often assisted the asesoras I accompanied on tours, I had not led a tour completely on my own. The Licenciada did not assign specific galleries. I chose to prepare tours of the Sala Mexica and the Sala Nahua, as I was the most familiar with their contents and layouts. In the week before the tour, I spent extra time studying each gallery, planning my routes, and thinking about what I would say. Even for this visit, considered an official occasion more formal than the typical school tour, there was no direct instruction about what to say or how to say it.

On the afternoon of the tour, we met the students, teachers, and SEP officials on the patio. The children stood in neat double lines, each group accompanied by male and female pairs of teachers. We filed in, and stood facing the groups. One of the SEP coordinators spoke about the Convergencia. The Licenciada made welcoming remarks, and then called out our assignments. I was introduced by my professional title, Antropóloga, and assigned the groups from Puebla and Quintana Roo. Some confusion ensued; one busload of participants

hadn't arrived yet, including the group from Puebla. The SEP coordinators urged us to begin anyway. They were on a tight schedule, and needed to leave the Museo in precisely one hour.

I intended to start my tour at the paraguas, with a brief introduction to the Museo. However, several groups already congregated at its base. Instead, I guided the students across the patio directly to the Sala Mexica. I stopped at the teocalli to give my introduction. When I told the group that I am from the United States, the male teacher rolled his eyes and whispered loudly, "They couldn't even give us a Mexican guide!" As I finished, the group from Puebla joined us, and we descended the main platform and moved into the gallery. The gallery was crowded, but I knew it well enough that I was able to change my mental map of the tour without too much trouble. However, when I reached the point at which I planned to present the Piedra del Sol, both it and the alternative I had planned, the diorama of the market at Tlatelolco, were choked with people.

Few objects displayed in the Sala Mexica are life-sized. The Coatlicue, Piedra del Sol, and other carved monuments are enormous; the diorama of the market and the maquette of Tenochtitlán are miniatures. One exception to this is a diorama tucked into a corner between the Piedra and the market diorama. It depicts the kitchen of a non-elite Mexica resident of 16th century Tenochtitlán. A metate and mano occupy the center of the floor; various comales, pots, baskets, and other cookware hang on the walls or are stacked on the floor. While we waited for the crowds at either the market or the Piedra to clear, I used the kitchen display to talk about the role of corn in Mexica sustenance and cosmology.



“Hey,” one of the students interrupts, “my abuela has a metate just like that!” Many of the children jumped in with comments: they knew how to use a *raspador*¹⁶⁵ like the one leaning against the wall; they have seen big baskets like that at the market; their aunt makes *atole*¹⁶⁶ in a pot like the one on the floor. I asked questions and solicited comments from the students at all of the exhibits we viewed. They were responsive, but initiated few comments on their own. Here, it seems, everyone had something to say. Though my commentary referred to the past, the children’s comments disrupted the separation between archeological time and present time. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes “the museum effect” as “one that makes the quotidian spectacular” (1998: 53). In this instance, the quotidian rendered spectacle becomes once again quotidian, as the children recognized objects in the display and moved them from the museum context to that of the everyday.

¹⁶⁵ A tool made of dried corncobs bound together by a thin band of wood or metal, used to scrape the kernels off of corn.

¹⁶⁶ A beverage made from masa.

After we completed the tour of the Sala Mexica, I led the group upstairs to the Sala Nahua. One of the vitrines displays an offering given as part of ritual petitions for rain, in many parts of Guerrero associated with dates around May 3rd, the Feast of the Holy Cross. I had been in Guerrero for some of the festivities, so decided to incorporate the exhibit into the tour I gave. As I began an explanation of the feast day, the teacher from Quintana Roo who had complained that I was not Mexican loudly commented, “That’s not correct.” He went on to say that the events I described actually occurred during the Feast of San Marcos, in April; I was confused, because I learned about these things from books, not by living them. For a disconcerted moment, I thought that perhaps I had confused the dates. But no, I was quite sure that I made the trip in May. The teacher insisted I was wrong. I repeated that I was talking about events I saw in specific towns in Guerrero. One of the teachers from Puebla spoke up: “The Antropóloga is correct,” adding that in her town in Puebla, the petitions for rain took place in May, too, along with the Feast of the Holy Cross. “Well,” said the teacher from Quintana Roo, “if she’s only talking about Chilapa and Acatlán, I suppose.” The argument here turned on lived experience: without experience to back it up, my “expertise” lacked validity.

This dissertation resists a fixed, monolithic reading of the Museo. By emphasizing practice, my analysis presents the Museo as relational space (Massey 2005). The physical structure of the Museo, the official discourses that shape its relationship to the state, and the academic discourse of archeology and anthropology figure in these relations; so, too, do the Museo staff, and its publics. The objects displayed in its galleries provide one nexus around which these relations collect. Exploring the Museo as dynamic space recognizes its

participation in dominant discourses, as well as the possibilities it provides for alternative responses.

II. Contributions and Reflections

To my knowledge, this is the first in-depth study of the Museo since the renovations began. It is also the first to employ ethnographic methods as part of the research design. The addition of ethnographic research distinguishes this from studies of the Museo that treat it solely as a static collection of “representational effects” (Bennet 1995: 132), and expands inquiries into the complex relations among state institutions, those who work within in them, and the general public. Combining archival research and observational tools typical of museum studies with the participant observation characteristic of ethnographic inquiry offers a unique perspective on the institutional workings of a museum. In this way, my work extends the ongoing interdisciplinary dialogues between museum studies and the anthropology of museums.

I recognize the Museo as part of a built environment intended to configure an image of Mexico City as the cosmopolitan center of a modern nation. By attending to changes in this environment as notions of nation and connecting those changes to institutional developments at the Museo, the dissertation adds to the critical inquiries of public space and the formation of national identity. It also contributes to the scholarship that examines dominant constructions of mexicanidad and “lo mexicano.”

When I began my research, I intended to divide my time equally between the Ethnography Department, and Servicios Educativos. As my fieldwork evolved, I spent more time in Servicios. In part, this was because of the nature of the work that is done in

Servicios. Once I learned the routines and policies of the department, it was very easy for me to contribute to its everyday functioning. My teaching experience prepared me for tasks such as helping to maintain order in waiting area, or setting up materials for workshops. An extra pair of hands was always welcome. In between tours, the staff tended to congregate around the registration desk, or sometimes in the Licenciada's office. This made it possible to converse with individuals or small groups without interfering with their work.

The work environment in Ethnography is very different. At the time of my fieldwork, with two of the ethnographic galleries still in renovation, there were several temporary staff members, mostly students performing their required social service hours. Their workstations filled the central reception area. Each of the curators has a private office inside the department. Their research and teaching responsibilities outside of the Museo often take them away from the department. Their irregular hours and the spatial arrangements inside the department made it difficult to engage in daily informal conversation with the curatorial staff. Early in the research I did formally interview two of the curators, but having the regular sorts of informal yet engaged conversations that I had with the Servicios staff was not possible.

The restoration work being done in the galleries required training in conservation techniques, which I lack. At one point, it was suggested that I could assist with the mounting of an exhibit for the Sala Nahua known as the "huipil de La Malinche."¹⁶⁷ However, preparations lagged, and it wasn't until Fall of 2005 that the huipil was actually prepared for display. I spent the majority of my time with the temporary staff, most of whom were

¹⁶⁷“*Que ni es huipil, ni es de La Malinche,*” (which is neither a huipil, nor is it La Malinche's), I was told.

completing the equivalent of a B.A. in anthropology or another social science. Initially, the director assigned me to assist one of the temporary staff in cataloging the department's photographic collection. When that project ended, I did other similar small data-entry projects. The director was supportive of and curious about my project, but few others in the department knew very much about it. I now think that presenting myself as a fully credentialed anthropologist could have led to fruitful discussions about museum practice and variations in the national traditions of anthropological training and practice. In retrospect, I can see that by choosing to downplay my professional qualifications, I missed opportunities to connect with the curators and other research staff. However, it is also true that the rapport I achieved with the teaching staff might not have developed as it did had I emphasized my anthropological credentials.

A particular strength of my work is the ethnographic component. Much museum research relies on surveys, or relatively short periods of investigation. I spent a full year in the Museo, which gave me the opportunity to know personnel from a wide variety of divisions: museum guards, technical and administrative staff, as well as the directors and staff I interacted with in Ethnography and Servicios Educativos. It also enabled me to develop a sense of a "typical" day in the Museo, both from the perspective of the departments in which I spent time, and as an observer who spent several hours a day in the galleries. The sort of fieldwork I undertook is unusual in the context of Mexican anthropology. An active community of Mexican scholars—many cited in this dissertation—produces excellent work on the history and development of anthropology as a discipline in Mexico, but I know of no inquiries based on ethnographic investigations in specific institutions.

This dissertation explores the ways in which the Museo, as an institution and as a physical site, frames discussions and experiences of nation in Mexico. My account highlights the practices of the department dedicated to primary and secondary education, and the ways in which the Museo's publics interact with objects displayed in the galleries. Aside from the Coatlicue and the Piedra del Sol, I did not engage with the objects as part of a larger collection, or with the curators as collectors. If I were to return to the Museo, I would turn my attention to the relationships between the curators' work in the field, the ongoing acquisition of objects for the ethnographic collections, and the use to which the ethnographic collections of the Museo are put. I argue that the Museo is a dynamic space, in which dominant representations and discourses are reworked in response to both political and disciplinary contexts, and the projected and expressed needs of its publics. This understanding opens the way for further research of both institutional and public practices at the Museo as they reflect tensions among these realms.

APPENDIX I

Sample Completed Observation Guide (front)

MUSEO NACIONAL DE ANTROPOLOGÍA
SUBDIRECCIÓN DE ETNOGRAFÍA

SALA GRAN NAYAR 10 min

**ESTUDIO DE PÚBLICO:
GUIA DE OBSERVACIÓN**

Fecha 19/03/03 Hora de entrada 4:26 Hora de salida: 4:35

Señale cómo visitan la sala: Solo En grupo Escolar ¿Cuántos son? familiar

Tarea escolar Trae libreta y pluma Si No ¿Quién toma apuntes? _____

MAPA	SEÑALE SI SE DETUVIERON A OBSERVAR	¿COPIAN LA CÉDULA?	COMENTARIOS QUE EMITEN EN RELACIÓN A LOS OBJETOS (LOS TOCAN, SE RIEN, SE QUEJAN...)
Cédulas de introducción	<input type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Ojo de Dios	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	la mamá lee la cédula de la vitrina "Musa que interactúa"
Sincretismo	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Artesanías	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	"Quiero una, quiero una" la mayor
Las Pachitas	<input type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Máscaras	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	la hija menor y la mamá
Semana Santa	<input type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Armas de los fariseos	<input type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Tambores	<input type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Tarima	<input type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Tunama	<input type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Instrumentos musicales 1º	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	con eso se toca su música la mamá unika como se toca un tambor
Cocina	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	mamá hija menor
Jumate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Canto a la lluvia	<input type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Joyería	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Si <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	

Guion de Observación Sala Nahua

Guion de Observación

Sala Nahua Fecha _____ Hora _____

Grupo: solo ___ familiar___ escolar ___ amigos _____

Realiza tarea escolar / trae libreta y pluma _____ Quien apunta _____

Objeto	Tiempo de parada	Apunta la cedula
--------	------------------	------------------

Cruz/ fachada de la capilla

Mapa y cedula

Vitrina de la conquista espiritual

Capilla

Mascaras

Instrumentos

Danzas

Petición de lluvia

Mujer lavando el pelo

Maíz

Huertas

Viviendas

Maguey

Indumentaria

Artesanías: barro

Velas

Huipiles

Jácaros y baules

Cestas y cobre

Barro y papel amate

Tapices

Interactivos:

Video de idioma sí ___ no ___ tiempo de parada _____

Video de migración sí ___ no ___ tiempo de parada _____

Guión de Observación Sala Noroeste

Guión de Observación

Sala Noroeste Fecha _____ Hora _____

Grupo: solo ___ familiar___ escolar ___ amigos _____

Realiza tarea escolar / trae libreta y pluma _____ Quien apunta _____

Objeto	Tiempo de parada	Apunta la cedula
--------	------------------	------------------

Mural de O'Higgins

Vivienda Rarámuri

La bola

Semana Santa Rarámuri

Objetos Rarámuri

Los Matachines

Yúmari

Los Apaches/ historia

Los Guaríjos

Yoremem

Yoemem

Los Pápagos

Los Seris

Cestería

La resistencia Yoreme

Vitrinas de los pueblos: Conca'ac

Yaqui

Rarámuri

O'ob

Mayos

Pápagos

O'dami (cedula)

Frontera norte

Interactivos:

Video de la danza del venado

Pantalla mural

Video de la historia de los pueblos

Comentarios:

Guión de Observaciones Sala Gran Nayar

Guión de Observaciones

Sala Gran Nayar fecha _____ hora _____

Grupo: solo ___ familiar ___ escolar ___ amigos _____

Realiza tarea escolar / trae libreta y pluma _____ Quien apunta _____

Objeto	Tiempo de parada	Apuntan la cedula
--------	------------------	-------------------

Cedulas de introducción

Ojos de Dios

Sincretismo

Artesanía

Las Pachitas

Máscaras

Semana Santa

Armas de los variceros

Tambores

Tarima

Tunama

Instrumentos musicales

Casa

Jumate

Canto de lluvia

Joyería

Maíz/ cultivo

Ritual de los chamanes

Tukipa

Utensilios de los chamanes

Peregrinación

Peregrino

El Nierika

Tablas

Indumentaria

Jícaras

Ofrendas

Cacería/ sacrificio

Interactivos:

Pelicula sí ____ no ____ tiempo de parada _____

Pantallas sí ____ no ____ tiempo de parada _____

Comentarios:

Guion de Observaciones Sala Otopame

Guion de Observaciones

Sala Otopame Fecha _____ Hora _____

Grupo: solo ____ familiar ____ escolar ____ amigos ____

Realiza tarea escolar / trae libreta y pluma _____ Quien apunta _____

Objeto	Tiempo de parada	Apunta la cedula
--------	------------------	------------------

Cedulas de introducción

Tributos

Conquista

Castas

Minería

Productos del maguey

Extracción del maguey

Indumentaria

Medio ambiente

Artesanías

Miniaturas y joyería

Herramientas/ agricultura

Tianguis

La Candelaria

Oratorio

Jueves de Corpus

Danzas

Día de los Muertos

Interactivos

Videos: maguey sí ____ no ____ tiempo de parada _____

Muertos sí ____ no ____ tiempo de parada _____

Pantalla sí ____ no ____ tiempo de parada _____

Comentarios:

Guión de Observaciones Sala Pueblos Indios

Guión de Observaciones

Sala Pueblos Indios Fecha _____ Hora _____

Grupo: solo ___ familiar___ escolar ___ amigos _____

Realiza tarea escolar / trae libreta y pluma _____ Quien apunta _____

Objeto	Tiempo de parada	Apunta la cedula
--------	------------------	------------------

Árbol de la vida

Mural de Covarrubias

Conquista

Idiomas

Ambiente

Comunidad

Naturaleza y religión

Ciclos rituales

Danzas

Herramientas/ cuezcomate

Tienda

Ciclos de vida/ indumentaria

Boda

Gobierno

Interactivos:

Película : sí ___ no ___ tiempo _____

Kiosko de idiomas: sí _____ no _____ tiempo _____

Guión de Observaciones Sala Purécherio

Guión de Observaciones

Sala Purécherio Fecha _____ Hora _____

Grupo: solo ___ familiar ___ escolar ___ amigos _____

Realiza tarea escolar / trae libreta y pluma _____ Quien apunta _____

Objeto

Tiempo de parada

Apunta la cedula

Cedulas de introducción

Los tarascos/ los pueblos

Economía

Modelo de taller

Mercado

El troje

La migración

Artesanías

Plumería/ joyería

Rituales

Ciclo de danzas

“La creencia”

Fiesta de Cristo Rey

Fiestas de la Virgen/ carnaval

Vieja tradición y nuevos símbolos

Interactivos:

Idiomas sí ___ no ___ tiempo de parada _____

Videos/ películas

La pesca sí _____ no _____ tiempo de parada _____

Artesanías sí _____ no _____ tiempo de parada _____

“La tradición sí _____ no _____ tiempo de parada _____

El son sí _____ no _____ tiempo de parada _____

Comentarios:

Guión de Observaciones Descanso & Sala Sierra de Puebla

Guión de Observaciones

Descanso & Sala Sierra de Puebla Fecha _____ Hora _____

Grupo: solo ___ familiar ___ escolar ___ amigos _____

Realiza tarea escolar / trae libreta y pluma _____ Quien apunta _____

Objeto	Tiempo de parada	Apunta la cedula
--------	------------------	------------------

Mural de las semillas

Cedulas de introducción

Antecedentes

Conquista

Paisaje humanizado

Viviendas

Danzas

Técnicas textiles

Indumentaria

Artesanías

Temescal

Papel amate

Interactivos

Video danzas sí ___ no ___ tiempo de parada _____

Historia sí _____ no _____ tiempo de parada _____

Comentarios:

APPENDIX II

Museums of Mexico City: An Abbreviated List

I. Museums operated by the Insituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia

Museo Nacional de las Culturas housed in a colonial building that was the site of the first museum in the country, the Museo Público de Historia Natural, Arqueología, e Historia; home of the Anthropology Museum from 1939 until 1964

Museo Nacional de Antropología 1964

Museo Nacional de Historia housed in Chapultepec Castle; opened as Museum of History in 1940

Galería de Historia, Museo del Caracol 1960

Museo Nacional de las Intervenciones housed in a 16th century Franciscan convent; opened as a museum in 1981

Museo del Templo Mayor 1987 includes an archeological site

Museo de Sitio de Cuicuilco 1970 includes an archeological site

Museo de El Carmen a 17th Carmelite school; opened as a museum in 1939

Centro Comunitario Culhuacán, Ex-Convento de San Juan Evangelista Augustine monastery built in 1560; opened as a museum in 1984

Centro de Exposiciones de la Terminal 2 del Aeropuerto Internacional “Benito Juárez” temporary exhibits at the Mexico City Airport

II. Museums operated by the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes

Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes Construction begun at the beginning of the 20th century by Porfirio Díaz; not completed until 1934

Museo Nacional de Arquitectura 1984 housed in thePalacio de Bellas Artes

Museo Nacional de Arte 1982 Shared the Palacio de Comunicaciones with the Department of Communication and Transportation until 2000

Museo Nacional de San Carlos 1968 Housed in an 18th c neoclassic building

Museo de Arte Moderno 1964 Designed by Pedro Ramírez Vázquez

Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo 1981 Originally a private museum operated by Grupo Alfa and the Fundación Cultural Televisa became part of the INBA in 1986

Museo de Arte Carillo Gil 1974 based on the private collection of Dr. Alvar Carillo Gil

Museo Nacional de la Estampa 1986 in a repurposed building next to the Museo Franz Mayer

Museo Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo 1986 the studios designed by Juan O’Gorman for the artists, constructed in 1932

Museo Mural Diego Rivera houses Rivera’s mural *A Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda* It was originally painted in 1946 for the Hotel Prado, across from the Alameda Park, suffered damage in the 1985 earthquake, and was moved to a specially constructed site

III. Other National Museums

Museo Nacional de las Culturas Populares 1982 operated by the Consejo Nacional de Arte y Cultura (CONACULTA), Dirección de Culturas Populares

Museo Nacional de la Revolución 1986 housed at the base of the Monument to the Revolution Construction of the monument began in 1910, but was not finished until 1933 operated by the Cultural Division of the Mexico City government

IV. Other Museums

Museo de la Ciudad de México 1964 Housed in the old Palace of the Counts of Santiago de Calimaya, built in the 18th century operated by the Cultural Division of the Mexico City government

Museo Franz Mayer 1986 based on the private collections of Franz Mayer; housed in a 16th century building that served as a charity hospital

Museo de Arte Popular 2006; housed in a former firehouse operated by CONACULTA, the Department of Culture of the Government of the Federal District, and private funders

Museo del Estanquillo 2006 personal collections of the Mexican writer, Carlos Monsivaís; focus on popular culture

Museo de la Charrería 1973; operated by the Federación Nacional de Charros
Museo de la Indumentaria Mexicana collection donated in 1977; operated by the
Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana

Museo Dolores Olmedo 1994 based on the collections of Dolores Olmedo Patiño;
housed in the ex-Hacienda La Noria, in Xochimilco

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