

The Aesthetics of the Mexican Public Garden and its Photographic Compositions (1912-1982)

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Abstract:

In Mexico, there are currently several collections of photographs which depict the history and development of public gardens and ecological corridors under the management of the National Institute of Anthropology and History. By focusing on two exemplary collections—the Nacho López Collection and Vicente Luengas Collection—I apply a visual studies approach to the photographic archive in order to formulate the Mexican public garden as a branching set of aesthetic (sub-)categories, all of which take into account the creation of garden landscapes vis-à-vis land use policies and historical accounts during the rise of Mexican modernity. In so doing, the primary sub-categories of the Mexican public garden, namely the *everyday garden* and the *stately garden*, are intended to elucidate the shifting degrees of publicness rendered visible from the years 1912 to 1982, or the end of the Porfiriato to the final decade of the Mexican Miracle years. Crucially, I view these photographic compositions through the Nahuatl poetic and epistemological tradition known as *in xochitl in cuicatl* (“flower-and-song”); i.e., the photographs showcase the alignment of the evocative (flower) and the variable (song). I conclude that public gardens were visually, territorially, and aesthetically activated through diverging modes of viewing in order to openly resist or, conversely, advance ironclad regimes of government.

Keywords:

Public Gardens, Flower-and-Song, Environmental Aesthetics, Documentary Photography, Mexico, Visual Studies, Mexico, Porfiriato, Mexican Miracle, Publicness, Modes of Viewing

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Introduction

Nahuatl lyricism blossomed in Texcoco—an *altepetl*, or “city-state,” as well as a prominent center of artistic and oratory practices in the Valley of Mexico during the Late Postclassic period of Mesoamerican chronology (1200 to 1521).¹ This is best exemplified by the poetic and philosophical tradition known as *in xochitl in cuicatl* (“flower-and-song”).² *In xochitl in cuicatl* is a doubly metaphorical Nahuatl expression that signifies evocative beauty and limitless variability. Most notably, these surface interpretations are thought of as being united, or brought into alignment, with their corresponding root word’s original meaning, that is to say, the beauty of *xoch-* (“flower”) and the variability of *cuic-* (“song”).³ Given this semanticity, those who practice this literary tradition, referred to as *tlamatinime*, or “knowers of the Nahuatl world,” are said to demonstrate reality as it actually exists in the world.⁴ The message at the core of this poetic form, according to the Mexican anthropologist Miguel León Portilla, is that “we all perceive reality, but only a few get close enough to it to find the good, that which can be sensed as true on earth.” For this reason, a great majority of poetry in the *in xochitl in cuicatl* tradition is principally concerned with nature, such as the seasonal blooming of flowers, which is considered to be highly representative of the material world unto itself in the way it appeals to the sense perception of cycles.⁵

Regarding the notion of true representation, it becomes prescient to consider the ways and means of different mediums as they appeal to the senses that pertain to aesthetic awareness, namely the visual and the auditory (i.e., those that transcend the body). Looking towards

¹ Portilla, *Quince poetas del mundo náhuatl*.

² Portilla.

³ Portilla.

⁴ León Portilla, *Flor y canto*.

⁵ Portilla, *Quince poetas del mundo náhuatl*.

mediums that have sprouted in the relatively more recent past, photography and its close associations with the genre of the documentary photograph, proves to be a considerable visual field in which to engage with the aesthetics related to sight. To this point, it would seem that in the deciding moments before the shutter button is pressed, the measured gaze of the photographer attends to a self-interpreted manifestation of reality in an attempt to assess and thereby capture its depictive qualities. In like manner, the objects in the world that are signified by the documentary photograph often align with the very same objects that appeal to the social sciences, including sociology and anthropology. Therefore, this visual genre can be described as “a reflexive process of thought and ethical social interaction whose value combines history, observation, and aesthetics in a discourse over time.”⁶

At the same time, there is the general belief that the photograph, by virtue of its production methods, serves as a “basis of fact” which axiomatically casts the person behind the camera as an eyewitness—one who can incontrovertibly attest to the facts in question.⁷ While not entirely misguided, this untenable belief presupposes that the notion of the documentary is an end in itself. In contrast, scholars of visual culture propose that the documentary is more aptly conceptualized as one approach, among many (e.g., botanical illustration, courtroom sketches, etc.), to candidly depict the material conditions of the world.⁸ The representative nature of the documentary photograph notwithstanding, *nota bene*, it is subject to historical and, at times, incongruous constructions in perpetuum.

Returning to the aesthetic expression of gardens, the commonplace appearance of their vegetal qualities would, at first glance, not be subject to historical constructions in their

⁶ Brown, “Photography as Process, Documentary Photographing as Discourse,” 199-224.

⁷ Newhall, “Documentary Approach to Photography.”

⁸ Newhall.

encounter with the documentary photograph.⁹ One might consider words used to describe the commonplace, such as ‘garden-variety,’ in order to bring to mind a sense of their general inconsequentiality in the broader photographic landscape. In order to problematize these presuppositions, it is important to consider the under-examined banality or garden-variety appearance of gardens in light of their ecological implications, which make them a terrain of subdued contestation in the Anthropocene.¹⁰ Centering on the notion of subdued contestation, it is precisely in the garden’s encounter with the enterprise of aesthetics—which comprises differences in judgment and attitudes—that a world-making project of negotiation emerges in what the aesthetician Yuriko Saito refers to as the “aesthetic dimensions of everyday life.”¹¹ Crucially, this negotiation between the material and the visual is not only subject to the historically constructive prism of the documentary: it is actively composed by the documentary as seen from the observer’s perspective of the photograph. Therefore, this aesthetics research is based on the following premise: photography, in its strive towards true representation—to unify the evocative (flower) *and* the variable (song)—can simultaneously document and compose an aesthetic tradition across the arc of time.

In Mexico, there are currently several collections of photographs which depict the history and development of public gardens and ecological corridors under the management of the National Institute of Anthropology and History.¹² By focusing on two exemplary collections—the Nacho López Collection and Vicente Luengas Collection—this research applies a visual studies approach to the photographic archive in order to formulate the Mexican public

⁹ ojalahto, Medin, and García, “Conceptualizing Agency.”

¹⁰ Bann et al., *Contemporary Garden Aesthetics, Creations and Interpretations*; Neves, “Urban Botanical Gardens and the Aesthetics of Ecological Learning.”

¹¹ Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*.

¹² Casanova and Kónzevik, “Colección Nacho López - Fototeca Nacional”; García Prado, “Colección Vicente Luengas - Fototeca Nacional.”

garden as a branching set of aesthetic (sub-)categories, all of which take into account the creation of garden landscapes vis-à-vis land use policies and historical accounts during the rise of Mexican modernity. In so doing, the primary sub-categories of the Mexican public garden—the everyday garden and the stately garden—are intended to elucidate the shifting degrees of publicness rendered visible in their photographic compositions. Crucially, these compositions, or the alignment of the evocative and the variable, illustrate the ways public gardens were visually, territorially, and aesthetically activated through diverging modes of viewing in order to openly resist or, conversely, advance ironclad regimes of government.

Theoretical Considerations / Literature Review

While previous scholarship on Mexican public gardens has primarily focused on their spatial distribution and historical development, there is a dearth of research on their representation in visual culture. Therefore, this work engages with visuality, a research area which has continually been the subject of much discussion in the context of Mexico. Ranging from state-led visual artistic movements to re-build national identity in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution—as was the case of the Mexican Muralism movement of the 1920s—to more recent viewing regimes that have attempted to visually declutter Mexico City by cracking down on the popular, hand-painted art found on the city’s food stalls, the realm of the visual is a continually contested field.¹³ Relatedly, the mode of viewing, as a closely related concept, brings into question the manner in which one views the material world given a set of mediating conditions. While these conditions cannot always be controlled, they can always be construed by different methods and illustrative techniques.

¹³ “Mexico City Food Stalls Lose Rotulos after Sandra Cuevas Edict - The Washington Post”; Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists*.

With regard to the viewing of garden landscapes, a number of important nuances around the term *garden*, or more appropriately, the Spanish cognate *jardín* warrant a delineation of the terminology that will be employed throughout the rest of this work. From the Old Frankish *gardin/gardō* meaning “enclosure, yard,” the term *jardín* can have various meanings across Mexico, ranging from the typical garden landscape that one might associate with vegetation to a place that more closely resembles a public square.¹⁴ Thus, to ensure definitional accuracy in accounting for the variability in the use of the terms *garden/jardín* in the archive, I have delineated the following terms which are my own interpretation. Understood as ‘descriptor’ words, they carry denotative senses that are ordinally scaffolded (1 to 3), as seen below:

- 1) The vegetal sense refers to gardens that contain plotted and deliberately arranged vegetation for ornamental, botanical, and/or horticultural purposes, and is more closely associated with natural environments.
- 2) The congregational sense refers to gardens that both encompass the vegetal sense, and feature designated areas, built structures, and recreational facilities for people to gather.
- 3) The experiential sense refers to gardens that encompasses both the vegetal and congregational sense, and is primarily meant to cultivate a distinct sensory and/or social experience that is enhanced by the immediate biotic and abiotic environment (e.g., a musical event or poetry reading in the garden).

Aesthetically speaking, I believe it is important to begin forming a working definition of relevant concepts and terms.¹⁵ Specifically, the philosophical enterprise of aesthetics as applied

¹⁴ “Espacio Público.”

¹⁵ “Aesthetic Attitude | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy”; Plato and Meskin, “Aesthetic Value.”

in this work is principally concerned with the following four constituting concepts and their definitions:

- 1) Aesthetic value: value of an object in virtue of its (dis-)pleasure-producing capacity¹⁶
- 2) Aesthetic attitude: appreciation of something for its own sake¹⁷
- 3) Aesthetic judgment: judgment based on a feeling¹⁸
- 4) The aesthetic experience: an emotional, affective, and sensory response to the object¹⁹

Drawing from the above, the subsequent mention of specific aesthetic categories of gardens (e.g., the public garden, the everyday garden, etc.) are always understood as a terminological shorthand for the ‘visual depiction of a garden and its aesthetic.’

I would like to note that the above definitions and concepts were informed by a review of the existing literature on three primary topics: (1) philosophical inquiries of gardens, (2) picture theory, and (3) the political, historical, and spatial history of public gardens in Mexico. To be sure, one observation is immediately salient: the philosophy of gardens is a nascent field of inquiry.²⁰ The philosopher David Cooper asserts that much of the philosophizing around gardens has yet to produce a substantial body of work that warrants the use of the definite article ‘the’ as in ‘the philosophy of gardens,’ which would imply a cohesive set of ideas and interpretations that dialogue with one another.²¹ For this reason, Cooper’s book entitled *A Philosophy of Gardens* (2006) opts for the use of the indefinite article ‘a’ to signal toward its nascent status. In his book, Cooper makes the argument that gardens cannot be ascribed simply to the appreciation of art or

¹⁶ Plato and Meskin, “Aesthetic Value.”

¹⁷ “Aesthetic Attitude | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.”

¹⁸ Zangwill, “Aesthetic Judgment.”

¹⁹ Shelley, “The Concept of the Aesthetic.”

²⁰ Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens*; Morton, *Hyperobjects*.

²¹ Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens*.

nature, but rather to the “deep ground” relations between humans and the external world, as rendered phenomenologically evident through gardening practices.

At the same time, I recognize that the philosophical sub-field known as environmental aesthetics, which concerns itself with the “aesthetic appreciation of natural landscapes,” has become one of the most hospitable fields of philosophical inquiry with respect to the garden.²² Returning to the familiarity of gardens, often misconstrued as their banality, they afford an opportunity to consider the attitudes and affective responses that a daily encounter with the familiar might elicit in the observer.²³ Finally, the question of whether it would even be possible to depict this familiarity in a photograph, or any object for that matter, falls within the realm of picture theory, which underscores the “epistemological issue of appearance”, i.e., that a photograph may not in fact denote at all.²⁴ In response, the concept of the composition (to unite the evocative and the variable) is perhaps one theorization of this dilemma, that is to say, the evocative qualities of the garden are composed through a process of variability. In a way, I am arguing that the photograph is always, as a matter of procedural fact, embellished with the manifold effects of technical variability. Thus, the garden is doubly depicted as both true-to-form object and photographic composition within the same picture.

Regarding the historical development of public gardens in Mexico, I place a special attention on the advent of modernity. Spanning from the end of an era known as the Porfiriato (1876-1911), led by the authoritarian rule of president Porfirio Diaz, to the final decades of the Mexican Miracle years in the early 1980s, the rise of large-scale urbanization included the remodeling of existing sites as well as the construction of new developments in order to position

²² Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*; Saito; Saito, “The Significance of Environmental Aesthetics”; Bann et al., *Contemporary Garden Aesthetics, Creations and Interpretations*.

²³ Bann et al., *Contemporary Garden Aesthetics, Creations and Interpretations*.

²⁴ Schuff, “Appearance.”

Mexico as a veritable model for “Third World Development.”²⁵ Much of these development projects, including the widespread creation of urban parks and public gardens, relied on a “calculated manipulation of nature” in order to naturalize modernity.²⁶

Against this historical backdrop, the territorial impact of state-led documentation in contrast with the critique made through photojournalistic appeals to justice are considered in light of the broader life trajectories that informed the work of the photojournalist Nacho López (1923-1986) and Porfirian official Vicente Luengas. Finally, different conceptions of space were considered in relation to the “garden as urban counterpoint,” which urban designers describe as the stability that gardens bring to an urban landscape.²⁷ Crucially, Mexican public gardens are considered a cornerstone of cultural life in urban zones.²⁸ As a subset of urban green space, these spaces have been subject to official designation within municipal codes and planning policies that are historically tied to changing socio-political regimes.²⁹ In determining what is at stake through this work, an aesthetic understanding of their form as viewed from the archive provides an additional opportunity to identify and address their cultural and ecological implications.

Methods

On the whole, this work combines *in situ* archival research and a visual studies framework, all which is conditioned by a close reading of 20th century history in Mexico. Beginning with a series of *in situ* consultations that were carried out in July 2022 at the National Photo Library in Pachuca de Soto, Hidalgo Mexico, the internal archival database served as a

²⁵ Wakild, “Naturalizing Modernity”; Camín and Meyer, “5. The Mexican Miracle”; Alexander, “Myth and Reality of the Mexican Miracle, 1946–1982”; Ávila Aguirre, “Boulevares y palacios en tierras bárbaras.”

²⁶ Wakild, “Naturalizing Modernity.”

²⁷ Kullmann, “Concave Worlds, Artificial Horizons.”

²⁸ Sakar, “Los jardines en México y la idea de ciudad decimonónica.”

²⁹ Sakar, “Los jardines en México y la idea de la ciudad decimonónica.”

primary research tool to select photographs. To this end, only photographs tagged with key search terms, namely, ‘garden’, ‘public garden’ and ‘urban garden’, were included in this research. The selected photographs were then compared within and among the two collections of interest, and with regard to the relevant archival information, in order to delineate visual patterns. Finally, the photographs’ date of creation were linked with their corresponding historical moment as it related to land use policies and biographical information.

Through this work, I recognize that the interpretations of the photographs are largely my own—a bilingual Chicano researcher with a culturally proximate understanding of the relevant topics. While a concerted attempt was made to accurately situate these photographs within their archival and historical context, the visual impressions outlined throughout this study are subjective, though they attempt to dialogue with diverse voices and interpretations wherever possible. To the latter point, I make it unambiguously clear if and when an introduced concept is informed by existing historical information and archival interpretations. My central aim is to emphasize the quotidian in Chapter 1 as a critical response to ironclad statism in Chapter 2 through a study of their respective modes of viewing and resulting aesthetics. It is precisely for this reason that my analysis works retrospectively, beginning in the latter years of the Mexican Miracle (1980s) that gave way to a surge of photojournalistic criticism towards the state; and which contrasted with the propagandistic media landscape of early Mexican modernity (1910s).

Chapter 1—The Everyday Garden

At first glance, the unassuming image by Nacho López entitled *Fuente de sodas en un jardín público de Macuspana* (1982), or “Soda fountain in a garden of Macuspana,” appears to depict a customary scene of people gathering amidst a curious arrangement of land that revolves breezily around a single, prominent built structure. Towards the lower right edge of the frame, as seen in Figure 1, a woman is seen dispensing a likely cold and refreshing beverage from a large container to a boy standing off to the side on what could have very well been a warm day in the Mexican state of Tabasco. Returning to the built structure, planted at the center of the frame, this most striking feature of the image takes considerable hold on the viewer: it is a larger-than-life, arched Modernist pavilion that placidly rises from the surrounding area, up and over the heads of people taking a respite, or else being social with each other, under its neoteric, two-storied architecture. Around the pavilion’s immediate vicinity, a variety of plants including shrubs and treelings ornament its surrounding, the latter perhaps indicative of the landscape's recent development. In the upper half of the frame, a barely visible single light bulb is strung on an electrical supply cord running the entire length between two mature trees opening out like a stage curtain onto this flourishing scene. Counterposed to this, in the lower portion of the image and comprising roughly two-thirds of the overall frame, a well-manicured lawn stretches out towards the observer, who, with the guiding eye of López’s low angle composition, is brought closer to the lawn in lieu of the pavilion, perhaps so as not to intrude on the scene unfolding in the distance. More interestingly still, the expansive layout in *Fuente de sodas* is reminiscent of an

urban park more so than the typical garden expected by an undiscerning viewer.



Figure 1. *Fuente de sodas en un jardín público de Macuspana*, 1982. Photograph by Nacho López. Colección Nacho López, Fototeca Nacional, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

It becomes prescient, then, to consider the probable reasons as to why the scene in the image is described in the title as a “public garden,” which would likely place a greater emphasis on its vegetal features in tandem with what the landscape architect Karl Kullmann describes as

the “poetic distinctiveness in the public imagination.”³⁰ An initial analysis of the use of the descriptor word *garden* in this instance elicits observations concerning its peopled appearance, enough so that one might even argue that the scene in *Fuentes de sodas* exemplifies the experiential sense of the word garden rather categorically. Regarding the latter point, the stability that a typical garden scene can bring to an otherwise disorienting urban landscape has been a historical marker of garden landscapes meant for gatherings and experiences. Concretely, the experiential possibilities in Figure 1 are structured by the purposeful arrangement of vegetation in relation to the pavilion. Yet, the question still remains: what were the planning policies, and their associated constraints, that gave form to the public garden depicted in *Fuente de sodas*, and in what ways do López’s aesthetic considerations and artistic sensibilities either represent or resist these constraints? In order to answer this question, and concerning the perceived expansive nature of the landscape heretofore contemplated in *Fuente de sodas*, I find it necessary to trace the different conceptualizations of ‘publicness’ attached to the public garden, which are simultaneously constructed and rendered visible as an aesthetic category.

Crucially, I define the everyday garden—or the garden and the aesthetic of the quotidian—as public gardens, typically in the congregational and/or experiential sense (with some exceptions for the vegetal sense), which bring into composition the common, everyday, and/or non-elite expressions of cultural life as the primary aesthetic experience. Moreover, my conceptual formulation of the everyday garden is conditioned by a reflection of Nacho Lopez’s work who, over the span of roughly three decades (1940s to 1980s), created a series of photographs ranging from highly collaborative street photography and photojournalism to institutionally commissioned documentation. Moreover, this visual analysis takes as its guiding line of inquiry the way select photographs appear to document, construct, and/or reflect shifting

³⁰ Kullmann, “Concave Worlds, Artificial Horizons,” 1.

degrees of publicness and their ties to the quotidian at a time of widespread state-led modernizing projects intended for public ends.³¹

Likewise, the bulk of López's career as a photojournalist (1950s) coincided with a historical period known as the Mexican Miracle years (1940-1968), arising on the heels of World War II.³² Predating this historical period, the nation-building project that emerged following the Mexican Revolution of 1910, and its early modernizing agendas, would continue to operate in the background well into the midhalf of the 20th century.³³ To this point, it is important to note that the Mexican Miracle years were subsumed within the uninterrupted seventy-one year rule led by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) at the zenith of its oft-described authoritarian rule (1929-2000). By many accounts, this scaffolded governmental history is often cited for the set of development strategies that centered on the country's internal affairs, and which possessed a staunchly imperialistic and uncompassionate drive towards economic growth.³⁴ Through a combination of state-led capitalism and rapid industrial modernization, the creation of public spaces and other urbanization measures became the spatial and territorial locus of an ever-intensifying attempt to catapult the country onto the world stage "as a model of Third World development."³⁵ While the Mexican Miracle years were governed by a number of presidential administrations that both preceded and followed López's photojournalism, the social critique he generated during this period would leave an indelible mark across the whole of the Nacho López Collection.

³¹ Mraz, *Nacho López, Mexican Photographer*.

³² Camín and Meyer, "5. The Mexican Miracle."

³³ Camín and Meyer, "2. The Revolutions Are the Revolution."

³⁴ Solano, "El Alemanismo Como Momento Clave En El Capitalismo Contemporáneo de México."

³⁵ Alexander, "Myth and Reality of the Mexican Miracle, 1946–1982."

1.1 The *collective garden* and the *incorporated garden*

Against—and in critical examination of—a panorama marked by rigid governmental priorities, multiple interpretations of publicness are being considered to compose the everyday garden. On this point, two distinct aesthetic sub-categories of the everyday garden are of fundamental interest: the *collective garden* and the *incorporated garden*. Beginning with the *collective garden*, I define it as a public garden in zones that are either stand-alone sites or, conversely, belted sites contained within larger mixed-used areas such as plazas and parks; and which is marked by the aesthetic experience of expansiveness. Moreover, the surrounding area may contain other notable features such as fountains, gazebos, built structures, and other gathering places, and is by default not limited to any one group of visitors along socioeconomic lines, i.e., it is publicly accessible to the greatest extent of people and clearly indicated as such. For this reason, I consider the collective garden to be a democratized domain that affords urban dwellers the opportunity to enter its interior conveniently and freely from the adjacent streets and walkways.

Moreover, I define the *incorporated garden* as a public garden which is subject to governmental oversight in denoting institutional publicness and its ties to homogeneity, nationalism, and symmetry, all of which lend themselves to an aesthetic experience of reticulation. An example of this is seen in the design of front-yard garden landscapes as part of wider city-led initiatives to provide public tenements, or other forms of subsidized housing, in historically underserved areas.³⁶ Crucially, the formulation of the incorporated garden takes into account the role of the state in promoting higher standards of living, which are based on perceived and legally codified aesthetic attitudes of decency in relation to bourgeois society.³⁷

³⁶ Cavazos, “El proyecto territorial del porfiriato en la península de Baja California.”

³⁷ Luna Elizarrarás, “Modernización, género, ciuda danía y clase media en la ciudad de México: Debates sobre la moralización y la decencia, 1952-1966.”

Along with this last point, the question of class merits its own series of considerations in order to trace the extent of the incorporated garden, and its intended beneficiaries, in terms of the use of public space more broadly.

While I think of both of these aesthetic sub-categories as being linked to the everyday garden and its air of inevitability—that it could not have appeared otherwise—it is worth noting that this aesthetic experience is not exclusive to garden landscapes in Mexico.³⁸ As one example, the Japanese garden is described as an “aesthetic experience that quite naturally follows the suspension of critical judgment.”³⁹ Specifically, this means that its natural features are able to take precedence over the artificiality that is widely viewed as the fundamental and necessary precondition for the appreciation of garden landscapes. Regarding quotidianity, there is perhaps a perceived familiarity to be found in a public garden, specifically one that is frequented with great habit and to which a certain ordinariness is the primary appearance from the spectator’s standpoint.⁴⁰ Yet, the defining characteristic of the everyday garden and its two aesthetic sub-branches presented here in, as it pertains to Mexico, is crucially tied to the photography of Nacho López. This manifests particularly in the ways gardens are depicted vis-à-vis themes of the everyday that are ordinary and, as a consequence of this ordinariness, are found and introjected from public spaces in the realm of the photographic.

Thus, to begin a close examination of the everyday garden as seen through select photographs, it is important to briefly discuss the work of López. Focusing largely on the eponymously named collection—*Coleccion Nacho López*, currently managed by the Fototeca Nacional, or the “National Photo Library” of Mexico—it comprises over 30,000 images across a broad range of genres. López, laboring primarily as a photojournalist during the 1940s and 1950s

³⁸ Carlson, “The Aesthetic Appreciation of Japanese Gardens.”

³⁹ Carlson.

⁴⁰ Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*.

and later as a documentarian in the 1980s, combined “social commitment with formal exploration” in contestation of what he deemed overly chauvinistic and officialist themes of his era.⁴¹ Part of a larger criticism, this position on the role of photography was counterposed to a propagandistic view of its oftentimes nationalistic and/or presidentialist subjects, as was the case with the advent of Mexican photojournalism.⁴²

While many of López’s contemporaries published mainly in newspapers, much of his work first appeared in the the magazines *Hoy* and *Mañana* (1952-1953), and *Siempre!* (1954-1959). *Hoy* in particular was a widely-circulated magazine considered to be a veritable exposition of public life during the years that it was in publication. In addition, its larger impact within Mexican image history is of special interest to institutions such as the Fototeca Nacional, who credit *Hoy* for the “emphasis that the magazine granted to the image, not only for its illustrative potential, but rather a form of information unto itself.”⁴³ It is within this mode of viewing, one which underscored the directly signficatory and wholly unmediated scene in each frame, that the subject of the image is nested—in other words, it is thought to serve as a testimony of its own epistemic certainty rather than simply being an accompanying illustration that was secondary to the information contained in the text.⁴⁴ This is partially in line with the commonly held view of the documentary photograph as being a testimony to a scene, though in this case the testimony and the eyewitness are one and the same in their ability to inform in the photographer’s absence. However, as previously mentioned in the Introduction, the construction of the documentary is continually subject to change.

⁴¹ Mraz, “Nacho López.”

⁴² Aguilar, “Fotoperiodismo Mexicano.”

⁴³ Casanova and Kónzevik, “Colección Revista Hoy.”

⁴⁴ Firth, “Coherence, Certainty, and Epistemic Priority”; Rubin, “Epistemic Modality”; Silva, “Comparative Philosophy and Decolonial Struggle.”

Spanning his photojournalism years, López's work has often been credited for spearheading the establishment of the photo essay as a genre within Mexican visual culture. Due in large part to the creative license afforded to him by working for weekly and bi-weekly magazines, he was able to direct his lens towards the Mexico he considered to be "worlds apart" from the usual spectacle framed around the Mexican elite.⁴⁵ Instead, he challenged the typification of a Mexican otherness (as was typical in photojournalistic examples that momentarily and opportunistically concerned themselves with the working class) through an "intervention of reality" not bound by the "pretensions of experimentation in the studio."⁴⁶ Ideologically, this intervention into the broader and, up to this time, unchallenged Mexican photographic landscape can be viewed as a counter-response to the dominant governmental agendas under the presidency of Miguel Alemán Valdés from the years 1946 to 1952 during the Mexican Miracle years.⁴⁷ The defining trait of the eponymously named historical period known as Alemanismo was its predominantly top-down approach to rapid industrialization in a concerted attempt to follow in the footsteps of previous presidential administrations from the turn of the twentieth-century, who held an all-consuming investment in the formation of a modernized Mexico.

To this point, Alemanismo, much like the administration under former President Lázaro Cárdenas del Río from the years 1934 to 1940, was promulgated through antidemocratic and overly presidentialist mechanisms, all of which served the purpose of unilaterally implementing its modernizing projects.⁴⁸ In short, it was believed that "through the inertia of progress [the most

⁴⁵ Mraz, *Nacho López, Mexican Photographer*.

⁴⁶ Yaconic, "Apuntes sobre la fotografía de Nacho López."

⁴⁷ Martínez and Martínez, *El despegue constructivo de la revolución*; Solano, "El Alemanismo Como Momento Clave En El Capitalismo Contemporáneo de México."

⁴⁸ Camín and Meyer, "4. The Cardenista Utopia"; Camín and Meyer, "5. The Mexican Miracle."

vulnerable segments of society] would end up being incorporated by force into modernity.”⁴⁹ In resistance to Alemanismo as well as the succeeding presidential administrations in the decades that followed—namely, those of Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958) and Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964)—López sought to capture what he believed to be visual representations of everyday or common Mexico, and, in so doing, made it possible for the photographed to take part in the composition of the image through a process of collaboration and personal agency. This can be seen in some of his most famous photographs, such as Figure 2 entitled *Campesino* (1949), or “Farmer,” and Figure 3 entitled *Globero frente a Bellas Artes* (1956), or “Balloon Blower in front of Fine Arts,” both of which feature the subjects in a center frame position, as viewed from a low angle perspective. The subject was encouraged to pose at will and without restriction such that the artistic direction was held by the subject in concert with López’s cooperative lens.⁵⁰

Alongside many of López’s photo-essays, an accompanying caption often revealed a critical denunciation of pernicious societal structures and themes ranging from the carceral state to the presidential adulation that characterized mass media under Alemanism.⁵¹ One such example is the photo essay entitled “Prisión de sueños” (Prison of Dreams) published in 1950, which was the first widely circulated pictorial essay to denounce the penal system, judicial processes, and prisons in Mexico. One particularly illustrative image in the essay depicts a coffin being carried out from a set of barred doors with the following caption: “the only way to leave the prison without having finished the sentence ... Free at last.”⁵² As a whole, the photo essay portrays the “limbo” that makes the lives of prisoners uncertain; it is an uncertainty that does not, and is never meant to, provide any hope of due freedom or even escape.

⁴⁹ Tavares, “El proyecto Alemán-Lombardo.”

⁵⁰ Mraz, *Nacho López, Mexican Photographer*; Nates, “Nacho López, entre lo documental y lo autoral.”

⁵¹ Mraz, “Nacho López.” Mra

⁵² Mraz.

These challenges to the hegemonic photographic landscape became his most recognizable thematic *leitmotif*, which was directly enabled by Lopez's own engagement with an artistic sensibility to shadow, light, and angles that was atypical among Mexican photojournalists of the 1950s who were principally concerned with the hard facts.⁵³



Figure 2. *Campesino*, 1949. Photograph by Nacho López. Colección Nacho López, Fototeca Nacional, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

⁵³ Mraz; Mraz, *Nacho Lopez, Mexican Photographer*.



Figure 3. *Globero frente a Bellas Artes*, 1956. Photograph by Nacho López. Colección Nacho López, Fototeca Nacional, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Among the recurrent subject matters present throughout the Nacho López Collection, the public garden offers fertile ground on which to nest a consideration of the quotidian aesthetic in the broader Mexican photographic landscape. For the purposes of this research, the history of public space in relation to modernizing projects during the Mexican Miracle Years will be considered in light of the larger political aims and aesthetic attitudes that informed his work, that

is to say, the public gardens contained in each frame will be assessed in terms of their ability to showcase quotidian life as an aesthetic experience.

1.2 Everyday fruits in the *collective garden*

In the ensuing visual analysis, I nest the compositions of the collective garden as an aesthetic subcategory of the everyday garden, which hinges upon the photographic rationale of Nacho López to document everyday Mexico, broadly construed. In terms of the collectivity referenced in the name, I draw from two primary contemplations: (1) the participation of López in the collectivist efforts of the New Photojournalists (1976-1996) movement and other independent photography collectives during the 1980s, and (2) the possibility for collectivity denoted by the descriptor words congregational and experiential. Regarding the first contemplation, the New Photojournalists were a wave of budding and seasoned photographers who, collectively, and in open opposition to the historically elitist and presidentialist overtones of Mexican photojournalism in decades prior, banded together to shed light on subject matter that up to that critical point in time had received little to no, or else misrepresentative, coverage.⁵⁴ Much of the New Photojournalist movement's work constellated around the founding of the tabloid known as *Unomásuno*, "One Plus One" in the year 1977, which would become one of the leading leftist newspapers in the country. For this reason, it quickly began to receive governmental backlash for its coverage of growing factions within the PRI's reign under the presidential administration of José López Portillo.⁵⁵ Moreover, it is often credited with being the first publication to address social issues related to the rights of domestic workers, feminism, early LGBT movements, and the environment.⁵⁶ Given López's long trajectory of championing

⁵⁴ Aguilar, "Fotoperiodismo Mexicano."

⁵⁵ Morales Flores, "El Unomásuno y el Nuevo fotoperiodismo mexicano."

⁵⁶ Monsiváis, *A ustedes les consta*.

the underrepresented, it can be argued that the rise of this movement was crucially informed by his earlier work which had resisted Alemanismo, and thus served as a precedent for the shifting photojournalist landscape of the 1980s.

The second contemplation that informed my formulation of the collective garden is perhaps best exemplified by the photograph *Fuente de sodas* (see Figure 1), as previously discussed at the beginning of this chapter. It is precisely its peopled appearance in relation to the Modernist pavilion that renders the scene an example of a collective garden in the congregational sense. Thinking holistically, the public garden's ability to serve as a "counterpoint" to the "dispersed city" enables its stabilizing function, which is characteristic of public gardens meant for congregation.⁵⁷ Returning to the notion of expansiveness, it seems likely that the collective garden in *Fuente de sodas* is in line with one overarching constant across the history of gardens: the garden as an object of delimitation and, as of late, one that increasingly blurs these limits while still maintaining an "ambiguous transparency" that continues to presuppose containment or a loosely defined enclosure.⁵⁸ Regarding that which is *within* versus *beyond* the garden, Kullmann offers the following: "By defining unequivocally what is in and what is out, the garden frame bolsters differentiation between unconscious nature and the elusiveness of its representation that in some form both precedes and antecedes the designer."⁵⁹

Taking note of the lawn in Figure 1, its considerable area coverage in relation to the buildings along the horizon hint at a spatial enclosure, such that the stabilizing function of this expansive layout begins to evince a perceptible form.⁶⁰ In other words, the garden is made distinct as a counterpoint to the surrounding buildings which thereby provides a sense of scale.

⁵⁷ Kullmann, 1.

⁵⁸ Kullmann.

⁵⁹ Kullmann, 2.

⁶⁰ These buildings are visible in the ground-level spaces between the curved columns of the pavilion.

Concretely, the unity of the aesthetic experience witnessed in *Fuente de sodas* takes root in the placement of the pavilion relative to the rest of the frame, where the stage of the quotidian celebrates its main actors—working class folk, spirited children, the everyday garden-goers—as they come together in the uninterrupted expansiveness of the collective garden.

While the extant archive of the Nacho López Collection contained little to no information about the production or circulation of the *Fuente de sodas* aside from the location and year (i.e., Macuspana, Tabasco in 1982), it is likely that this image is an example of López's street photography after having pivoted away from photojournalism in 1958 on the grounds that it was too restrictive in the context of the larger Mexican political arena.⁶¹ Following almost two decades of pursuing endeavors within the realms of documentary film-making, advocacy work, and the culture sector—from the 1960s to the late 1970s—he would then make his return to the practice of photography in general during the early 1980s at a time when Mexican photojournalism was taking on new political orientations, such as the previously mentioned New Photojournalists movement.⁶² In reflecting on the photographic oeuvre of López, the celebrated Mexican philosopher, political activist, and journalist Carlos Monsiváis Aceves describes the 33,000 photographs contained in the Nacho López Collection with the following: “frutos de la prisa o de la morosidad [...] formulan una estética que tardará en ser asimilada” (English: fruits of the rush or the slowness [...] they formulate an aesthetic that will take time in being assimilated).⁶³ The rush in Monsiváis' description is in reference to the expeditious production of photojournalism, while the slowness refers to the earnest engagement of artistic sensibilities⁶⁴ With this in mind, it is evident that the photograph *Fuente de sodas* is precisely situated between

⁶¹ Yaconic, “Apuntes sobre la fotografía de Nacho López.”

⁶² Mraz, *Nacho Lopez, Mexican Photographer*.

⁶³ Jiménez, “La estética de Nacho López tardará en ser asimilada: Monsiváis.”

⁶⁴ Jiménez.

the rush and the slowness, where López blends his responsiveness to social themes with a hospitable awareness to composition.



Figure 4. *Gente en el Jardín del Arte*, 1958. Photograph by Nacho López. Colección Nacho López, Fototeca Nacional, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

What is more, these conceptual fruits—rush or slowness—are also present in Figure 4 entitled *Gente en el Jardín del Arte* (1958), or “People in the Art Garden.” Similar to the scene in *Fuente de sodas*, Figure 4 might be best described as a garden in the congregational sense; however, it is also strikingly exemplary of the experiential sense, with its depiction of a spectator crowd gathered around a dance performance. Regarding the site, it more closely resembles a public square than a garden in the vegetal sense; this is particularly true when compared to the rolling lawn in *Fuente de Sodas*. On this point, it is important to reiterate that the experiential

sense places a considerable emphasis on the ability of a public garden to enable multisensory activities, much like the one depicted in *Gente en el Jardín*. Interestingly, the photograph is also captured from a slightly distanced, low angle, thus giving way to the aesthetic experience of expansiveness: these two combinatorial techniques seemingly adopt the collective viewership of the people sitting along the rim of the fountain's water basin, who, together with the photographer and the observer of the image, spectate upon the flowering performance at the center of the crowd's petaled interior.

While not much archival information was available regarding the photograph *Gente en el Jardín*, nor is it clear whether the site depicted continues to exist, one thing is clear: the composition of the collective garden is made possible by the attentive negotiation of the two complementary fruits—rush and slowness. Similar to the Andean philosophical concept of *yanantin* (Quechua: *yana-* [“help”], *-ntin* [“inclusive in nature”], or the “complementary opposites of a whole,” these two opposing fruits complement each other, their branches ever-twining so as to render the collective garden visible in its grounded expansiveness across the frame.⁶⁵

1.3 The *incorporated garden* and the popular *tene(r)-ment*

In contrast to the first subcategory of the everyday garden, my formulation of the incorporated garden takes as its central premise the notion of a state-prescribed aesthetic of the quotidian. Specifically, it is in reference to the forceful incorporation that would characterize the height of the PRI's rule, in which modernity was conceived as a project to popularize the bourgeois aspiration of ‘good living,’ a largely domestic agenda with imperial undertones that looked to industrialization in the Global North as a normative model.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Walshe and Argumedo, “Ayni, Ayllu, Yanantin and Chanincha.”

⁶⁶ Luna Elizarrarás, “Modernización, género, ciudadanía y clase media en la ciudad de México: Debates sobre la moralización y la decencia, 1952-1966.”

Of central importance was the belief that the “hope for a better future” began in the home with its daily comforts and necessities, including a highly manicured front-yard and garden.⁶⁷ The historian Sara Minerva Luna Elizarrarás underscores ‘decency’ and ‘good living,’ two aspirations of Mexican bourgeois society, which was associated with “socioeconomic capacity.”⁶⁸ In other words, it was thought that to have decency, one must have a good life. Interestingly, both the English word ‘tenement’ and the Spanish word ‘tener,’ or “to have,” share the Latin root word ‘tenere,’ meaning “to have” or “hold.” The popular tenements seen in the images below are thus considered in relation to the incorporated garden aesthetic, that is to say, it is precisely the perceived necessity to have a decent, good life that renders the aesthetic values undergirding the quotidian visible. Moreover, while these photographs are also included in the Nacho López Collection, there is a perceived distance between his overarching leitmotif and the aesthetic attitudes that informed the design of the incorporated gardens, which drew from concurrent U.S. landscape design influences.⁶⁹ To this point, López was also known to have taken an interest in the genre of architectural photography as it related to broader questions of class, which, for the purposes of this visual analysis, is considered to a certain extent phenomenologically distinct from his compositions of the collective garden, as the latter are principally ensconced within the genres of photojournalism and street photography.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Walker, *Waking from the Dream*.

⁶⁸ Luna Elizarrarás, “Modernización, género, ciudadanía y clase media en la ciudad de México: Debates sobre la moralización y la decencia, 1952-1966.”

⁶⁹ Luna Elizarrarás.

⁷⁰ Mraz, *Nacho Lopez, Mexican Photographer*.



Figure 5. *Jardín de una casa en unidad habitacional* (c. 1960-1964). Photograph by Nacho López. Colección Nacho López, Fototeca Nacional, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Relatedly, when Adolfo López Mateos, president of Mexico from the years 1958 to 1964, traveled for this first time to the city of Tijuana, Baja California at the start of the 1960s, he pronounced: “Aquí empieza la Patria” (English: Here begins the homeland!).⁷¹ It is worth noting that this declaration coincided with the inauguration of popular tenement projects in the city of Tijuana which had been put in motion by the National Institute of Housing under Mateos’ orders, and carried out by the Mexican modernist architect Félix Sánchez Baylón.⁷² An example of this is seen in Figure 5 entitled *Jardín de una casa en unidad habitacional* (1961), or “Garden of a dwelling in a housing unit,” which can be said to be diametrically opposed to the collective

⁷¹ Mateos, “¿Aquí Empieza La Patria?”

⁷² Luis Reyna and Trejo Delarbre, *La Clase obrera en la historia de México*; Canales, *Shared Structures, Private Spaces*.

garden for two reasons: (1) it is more appropriately identified as a public garden in the vegetal sense, and (2) it would appear as if the site itself would be closed off to all but those who resided in the homes pictured. To the first point, one might argue that the public garden in *Jardín de una casa* could temporally overlap with the congregational and experiential sense given the right conditions of daily life; however, the incorporated garden aesthetic is at the same time intended to highlight the distinct aesthetics that are generated by different genres and their resulting impacts, having been composed by the same photographer.

This observation remains true for Figures 6 to 8, all of which are characteristically devoid of people. Moreover, a close examination of the series as whole reveals a variety of angles and perspectives employed by López to frame the landscape. This is perhaps indicative of a divergent mode of viewing the incorporated garden from that of the collective garden, which was characterized by the use of slightly distanced, low angles to render visible the expansiveness of the site as whole. Conversely, in considering the architectural significance of the photographs in Figures 5 to 8 as a whole, it becomes increasingly important to note the way the angles and perspectives seem to be guided by the incorporated garden's serpentine tides of symmetry, uniformity, and gradation relative to the adjacent non-vegetal features. To witness the aesthetic experience in *Jardín de una casa* in conjunction with the other photographs in the series, then, is to wind in and about the labyrinth of good living from the reticulating end of necessity.



Figure 6. *Casas y escaleras en la unidad habitacional Patria*, 1961. Photograph by Nacho López. Colección Nacho López, Fototeca Nacional, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)



Figure 7. *Casas y áreas verdes en la unidad habitacional Patria*, 1961. Photograph by Nacho López. Colección Nacho López, Fototeca Nacional, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

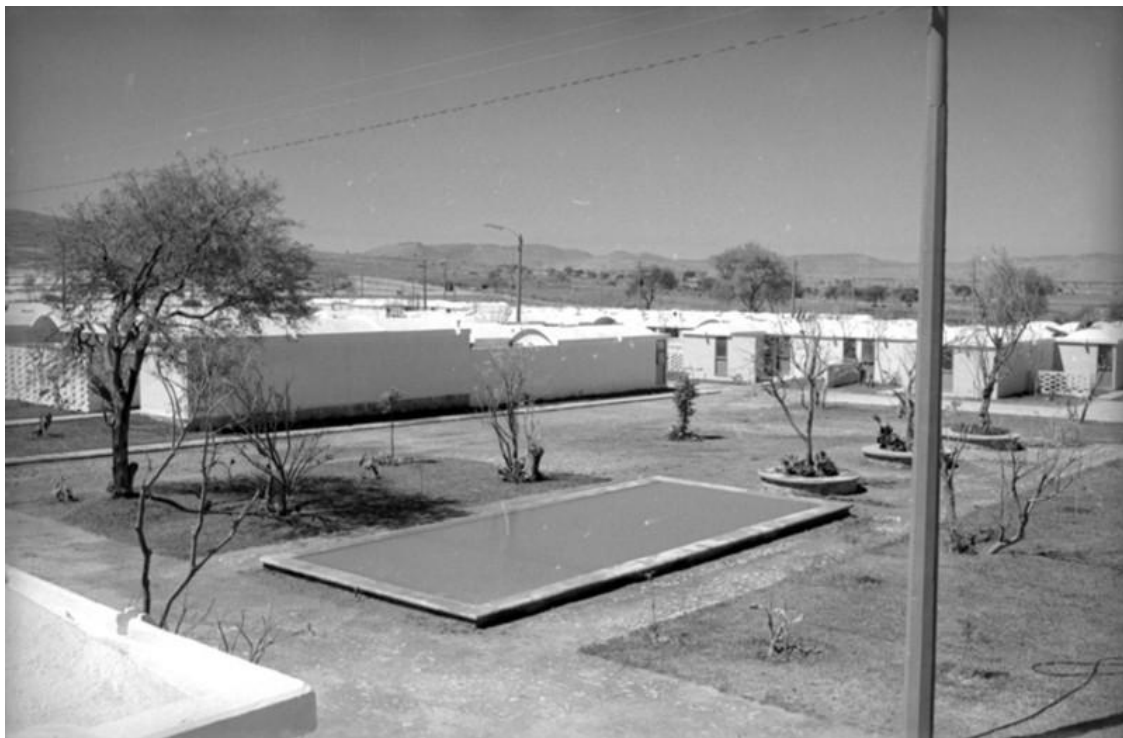


Figure 8. *Jardín de conjunto habitacional, vista parcial*, 1961. Photograph by Nacho López. Colección Nacho López, Fototeca Nacional, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

As a point of contrast, the public garden landscape in Figure 9 entitled *Niños detrás de cactáceos en el jardín de Museo de Santa Cecilia* (1961), or “Children behind cacti in the garden of the Museum of Santa Cecilia,” and whose author remains unknown, offers a slight dilemma regarding definitions in relation to the bespoke collective garden and the incorporated garden as aesthetic categories of the public garden, more broadly. Specifically, it is worth noting that the Museum of Santa Cecilia, having been founded as a public institution in the year the photograph was taken, in 1961, coincides with the inauguration of the popular tenements in Tijuana.⁷³



Figure 9. *Niños detrás de cactáceos en el jardín de Museo de Santa Cecilia* , 1961. Photograph by unknown author. Colección Mediateca, Fototeca Nacional, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

⁷³ Pública, “Santa Cecilia Acatitlan, Archaeological Site.”

Yet, the aesthetic of reticulation seen in Figures 5 through 8, with its symmetry and uniformity, is virtually absent in the contemporaneous scene in Figure 9. Part of the Santa Cecilia Acatitlan Archaeological Site in the central State of Mexico, the museum's founding was motivated by the extensive archaeological work that occurred on the Pyramid of Acatitlan in the decades prior.⁷⁴ An initial consideration of the photograph might lead to the presumption that by virtue of being incorporated to the site of a public institution, it might be thought of as being analogous to the incorporated garden in terms of state-induced notions of the public, or with the collective garden in terms of public accessibility. However, the principal distinction that makes this categorical assimilation intractable are the following: (1) the naturalistic landscaping which is free from urban constraints, and (2) the deliberate arrangement of native flora from the State of Mexico region.

At this critical juncture, it is important to stress the garden design principles that were part and parcel of the Mexican Miracle's drive towards modernity, and which are thought of as being antithetical to the traditional Mexican garden aesthetic seen in *Niños detrás de cactáceos*. While not investigated in this research, it is perhaps an aesthetic subcategory pertinent to the denotation of public gardens that is not captured by the aesthetic of the quotidian as composed by the Nacho López Collection. Nor is it analogous to the intrinsically French beau ideals that compose the stately garden in the Vicente Luengas Collection, as witnessed in the following chapter.

⁷⁴ Pública.

Chapter 2—The Stately Garden

Documentary photographs are often recognized for their innate ability to shed light on—or in this case, channel light through a lens that renders, true to form—a highly representative image of the scene unfolding before the photographer’s worldly-wise gaze. Further, and in contemplation of the documentary as a visual genre, a fleeting and rather cursory look at the photograph in Figure 10 entitled *Vista del jardín a la entrada al Bosque* (1927), or “View of the garden at the entrance to the Forest,” presents an initial and easily overlooked obstacle of interpretation standing in the line of sight. The problem concerns its remarkability, or, more appropriately, its lack thereof. Specifically, the photograph, the author of which remains unknown, might be described in terms of its opacity across significant portions of the frame, with many of its more minute subject matter such as the ground-level fountains and monuments appearing seemingly obscured by a contiguous, indiscrete foliage of trees that extends from either side of the frame’s edges. In addition, the more discerning eye would likely notice its underexposed qualities, which are particularly glaring in the atramentous depths where colliding treetops cast their overlapping shadows. To be sure, a slightly more critical examination of the photograph might draw attention to its overall lackluster appearance.

Looking retrospectively towards the first decades of the 20th century, and when compared to the first photograph discussed in Chapter 1, namely *Fuente de sodas* (see Figure 1), there is one clear difference: the relative lack of people in the frame. Having explored the ways that places of gathering such as public gardens lend themselves to the flourishing of Mexican cultural life, it would seem that the high vantage point from which the unnamed photographer captured the photograph was wholly uninterested in its more



Figure 10. *Vista del jardín a la entrada al Bosque*, 1927. Photograph by unknown author. Colección Vicente Luengas, Fototeca Naciona, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

distinguishing ground-level features.⁷⁵ Perhaps the most visible consequence of this high angle is the dislocation of the spectator from within the immediate vicinity of the scene towards a view of omniscient proportions that goes high and above its internal visual field. What then might be the reason for this high vantage point and optical distancing seen in *Vista del jardín*, and consequently, is it tied to a larger purpose dealing with the privileging of a particular line of sight over others? Unlike *Fuente de sodas*, I suspect that Figure 10 is not meant to showcase the aesthetic sensibilities typically associated with garden landscapes in the same manner as the former. Along with this initial observation, it becomes prescient then to examine the

⁷⁵ Sakar, “Los jardines en México y la idea de ciudad decimonónica”; Pérez Bertruy, “Parques y jardines públicos de la Ciudad de México, 1881-1911”; “Espacio Público.”

corresponding visual effects that *Vista del jardín*—and other similarly framed photographs in Vicente Luengas Collection—present in order to begin tracing its aesthetic significance, all in relation to the historical demarcations of publicness that produced it. As it stands, the image in question is part of a broader set of governmental objectives that transpired during the final decade of an authoritarian presidency ruled by General Porfirio Diaz from 1876 to 1910, referred to as the Porfiriato.⁷⁶ It is precisely at this critical juncture, one which is situated at the onset of Mexican modernity, that a state's self-documentary role becomes of central importance to the formulation of the stately garden.

Before beginning a discussion of select photographs from the Vicente Luengas Collection, I find it necessary to begin defining the 'state' in terms of the Porfiriato and its *modus operandi*, which underlie many of the design principles that shaped public gardens during this historical period. Crucially, the documentary purpose that gave rise to the images contained in the collection were facilitated through a combination of a largely propagandistic impetus and innovations in photographic technology.⁷⁷ In turn, these factors provided me with considerable visual terrain on which to overlay a potential interpretation of the governable landscape, one which was ultimately thought to fall within the purview of the state's jurisdiction. For this reason, the stately garden—or the garden and the aesthetic of the state—is understood here as a public garden, largely in the vegetal sense, which has been territorially configured and subsequently visually-induced by the state as the primary aesthetic experience.

In addition, images taken from a relatively high vantage point represent just one example of the photographic techniques at the disposal of the state to carry out a visual assessment of space and thereby further augment their political legitimacy. In beginning her analysis of aerial

⁷⁶ Wakild, "Naturalizing Modernity."

⁷⁷ Szeman and Whiteman, "The Big Picture."

images of Mexico City from the years 1932 to 1978, the Mexican urban anthropologist and media scholar Lourdes Roca asserts that space can be considered “above all as visual, where the dictatorship of the eye reigns, but not without the risk of conflict, since the visual can be met with representation in the form of images.”⁷⁸ The image, then, is an arena on which differing, and at times diametrically-opposed, representations of a space are indexed in accordance with their perceived veracity among a range of actors. It is also this visual contestation of fact that might explain the omniscience seen in *Vista del Jardín*, a point which I discuss in depth towards the latter half of this chapter.

In terms of the area coverage made visible by a photograph taken at a high angle, the question of boundaries and other physical delimitations becomes of paramount concern. On this point, it is worthwhile to consider the ways in which the edges of distinct natural and human-constructed landscapes are positioned within the frame, as well as the conceptual and political reasoning that this visualization might spur for a state actor. An early inquiry into the role of aerial photography and its impact on the enterprise of photography more broadly was made by the French urban sociologist Paul Henry Chombart de Lauwe, who argues that this technological advancement offered an aggregate vision of humanity and its many interactions in conjunction with the environment that contains it.⁷⁹ Moreover, it provided a formerly unattainable “synthesis of records” concerning a particular place, ranging from historical accounts to two-dimensional renderings such as cartographic maps that more closely reflected an area along a planar line of vision.⁸⁰ Therefore, it would not be entirely unfounded to argue that

⁷⁸ To make this assertion, Roca draws from the ideas of the French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who underscores the overseeing vision that a tower or other high-rise building is able to cast across an urban landscape. Roca, “La fotografía aérea en México para el estudio de la ciudad.”

⁷⁹ Chombart de Lauwe, *La découverte aérienne du monde*.

⁸⁰ Roca, “La fotografía aérea en México para el estudio de la ciudad.”

the aerial image was, to a certain degree, the successor of cartographic illustration in that it attempted to provide a more aggregate sense of scale.

Crucially, a close examination of scale as exemplified in the Vicente Luengas Collection reveals a recurrent theme: totality, understood here as the totalizing modes of engaging with urban areas at different and at times hierarchically-nested urban scales. Scholars on the visual culture of cities such as Shirley Jordan posit that photography is intimately tied to scalar configurations in that “to experience a city is to contemplate scale.”⁸¹ With regard to the stately garden, the totality represented in the selected photographs operates at the scale of the urban landscape. More to the point, a special attention is placed on the divergences in land use that are made visually apparent along the more salient human-constructed boundaries contained in the image, such as a rock wall or a fence around the perimeter of a metropolitan park, and in what might be described as a negotiation of space.⁸² Concerning the establishment of public gardens, these negotiations of space provide for two additional sub-categories that I identify as being subsumed within the heretofore discussed stately garden. These are: (1) the *bound garden*, and (2) the *model garden*. While manifold conceptualizations of the stately garden can be drawn from the same source materials consulted at the National Photo Library—in this case, the Vicente Luengas Collection—a close examination of the gardens reveal two mutually distinct aesthetic branches.

2.1 The *model garden* and the *bound garden*

In terms of the *model garden*, I define it as a public garden which is modeled after a broader series of international and domestic design influences, and is intended to promote a state-sponsored aesthetic experience of a tamed natural landscape. In the case of the Vicente

⁸¹ Jordan, “The Poetics of Scale in Urban Photography.”

⁸² Jordan.

Luengas Collection, it is worth noting that many of the gardens featured in the photographs were undergoing extensive remodeling during the Porfiriato in accordance with a particular set of aesthetic principles, many of which took inspiration from emergent design canons in the United States and Europe. Additionally, the taming of natural landscapes, as a political and spatiotemporal construct, makes specific reference to the history of the Chapultepec Forest, which will be explored in detail in a later section. To be sure, it was precisely through the gradual processes of urban transformation that the Forest's recreational status was garnered, which thereby made it possible to negotiate sufficient space for the purposes of instituting public gardens. In brief, the model garden as presented in the latter half of this chapter maps onto the historical development of the Bosque de Chapultepec from a forested hillside nestled on a rock formation to the manicured urban park during the Porfiriato.

To add, I define the *bound garden* as a public garden which has been historically produced and documented by the state in terms of its perimetrical boundaries; and which are, in form and effect, bound by law as the aesthetic experience. As mentioned previously, the depiction of garden landscapes such as the one seen in *Vista del Jardin* are notable for their ability to provide an imprint of their delimitations, which have the visual effect of ascribing a measured boundedness to what may have otherwise been an unstable terrain subject to the totalizing forces of the external urban landscape.⁸³ In terms of the state, the argument that spatiality serves as one of the many modes available in order to demonstrate political prowess alongside a modernizing agenda gains considerable traction in the context of the bound garden, where the negotiation of space and its subsequent authentication is represented and further aestheticized in the form of photographs. Concerning the Vicente Luengas Collection, the ensuing discussion on the bound garden and its formulation considers in detail the utilization of

⁸³ Kullmann, "Concave Worlds, Artificial Horizons."

specialized photographic techniques, such as the high-angle shot and stereoscopy, that draw the viewer's attention to the stately garden's perimetrical boundaries.

Likewise, these two categorical distinctions of the stately garden warrant a brief overview of the Vicente Luengas Collection in terms of its historical development and archival significance. While this photographic collection was acquired by the National Photo Library in 2012, its history can be traced back to the first decade of the twentieth century.⁸⁴ As a whole, it comprises 1,111 photographs in both positive and negative format, and is named after its principal compiler—Vicente Luengas. As a Porfirian administrative official, Luengas worked alongside the Minister of Finance and Public Credit José Yves Limantour on what at the time was known as the Junta Local de Remodelación del Bosque de Chapultepec, or the “Chapultepec Forest Remodeling Local Board.” Around this time in the history of Mexican design, the country's urbanists and architects, particularly those that were laboring under the tutelage of the Porfirian regime, were heavily influenced by a prerogative that aligned with domestic goals for rapid modernization. Specifically, these influences were promulgated by the governmental oversight of Porfirio Díaz, who put in motion a highly generalized and “forceful campaign of Frenchification” across various sectors of society.⁸⁵ These campaigns took as their central objective a largely neo-colonial and epistemically violent vision to “rationalize” a predominantly Indigenous and Mestizo population through ironclad processes of industrial and cultural transformation.⁸⁶

One of the principal aesthetic ideals to take hold in Mexico during the Porfiriato looked to Beaux-Arts architecture, a French academic architectural style first developed at the *École des*

⁸⁴ García Prado, “Colección Vicente Luengas - Fototeca Nacional.”

⁸⁵ Ávila Aguirre, “Boulevares y palacios en tierras bárbaras.”

⁸⁶ Ávila Aguirre.

Beaux-Arts in Paris from the 1830s and towards the latter half of the 19th century.⁸⁷ Having evolved from French Neoclassicism, the Beaux-Arts architectural style would go on to have a significant influence in the United States from the years 1880 to 1920, as well as Mexico during the Porfirian years. Perhaps motivated by what may be referred to as a Porfirian proclivity and the ironclad processes previously mentioned, this Eurocentric appeal to the use of eponymic iron and glass as a beau ideal of modern materials would inspire the early construction of several notable buildings and sites across Mexico, such as the Palacio de Bellas Artes (“Palace of Fine Arts) in Mexico City in the year 1905, the Teatro Juárez (Juarez Theater) in the state of Guanajuato in the year 1903, and the Faro de Venustiano Carranza in the state of Veracruz in 1910. According to architectural historians of Porfirian-era Mexico, wide scale construction during this time was principally driven by a fixation the Mexican social elite had towards modernity emanating mainly from Europe. At the center of this motivation lied a “metropolitan spirit” that stressed an “act of (re-)creation,” and whose endeavors were intended to symbolize “the technical, scientific, and administrative capacity of a generation of Mexicans that, for the first time in history, were able to control nature and steer the country to a state of well-being and peace.”⁸⁸ On this last point, the ostensible desire to rein in nature, and by extension, natural landscapes, would leave an unambiguous impression on the design of public gardens in urban Mexico.

Thus, with Luengas as the figurehead of the Chapultepec Forest Remodeling Local Board, and informed by a Porfirian proclivity, the compilation process for the collection began in the year 1905.⁸⁹ Interestingly, it would continue through the Mexican Revolution years

⁸⁷ Ávila Aguirre.

⁸⁸ Ávila Aguirre, xiv; Agostoni, *Monuments of Progress*; Almandoz and Marte, *Planning Latin America's Capital Cities, 1850-1950*.

⁸⁹ In the same year of 1905, the closely related Central Board of Forests and Trees was formed, which was led by the Mexican architect and engineer Miguel Ángel de Quevado. Working as a contemporary of Luengas under the

(1910-1920) before coming to an end well into the post-revolutionary decade, in the year 1927. Over a span of 22 years, Luengas attempted to maintain a graphical and documentary record of the remodeling and beautification projects that took place in the Bosque de Chapultepec, ahead of the centenary celebrations in 1910. Considered as a whole, archivists at the National Institute of Anthropology and History such as María Violeta García Prado note that the collection presents a significant “visual narrative about this very traditional site [i.e., Bosque de Chapultepec], and its perimeters.”⁹⁰ Hinging upon the notion of the site’s perimetrical dimensions, Prado’s archival interpretation of the Vicente Luengas Collection served as the basis for the theoretical formulation of the bound garden, as previously defined. This particular conception of boundedness and, relatedly, its propensity towards the totalizing view, can be said to emerge through the hermeneutic task of connecting image with meaning in terms of their fixed relations and sensorial appearance.⁹¹

Moreover, the meticulous level of scrutiny that Luengas deployed to compile this visual narrative consisted of both written and visual materials. Specifically, it came to include an extensive series of lithographs, pre-Hispanic codices, and bibliographic reprographics with the intent to retrace the origins of the Bosque de Chapultepec since prior to the first colonial encounters.⁹² Of central importance to this analysis is the photo album entitled *Historia gráfica del Bosque de Chapultepec*, or “Graphical History of the Chapultepec Forest,” which, thinking rather metaphorically, was bound by Luengas himself and comprised a total of 246 prints. In terms of the album’s structure, Luengas devised a specific order made up of eight sections

Porfirian regime, Quevado is credited for the founding of several notable urban green spaces, including the Viveros de Coyoacán, a tree nursery and public park that was meant to provide seedlings in order to support reforestation efforts throughout Mexico City. Aguilar Zinser, “Instituciones Fundadas Por Miguel Ángel de Quevedo.”

⁹⁰ García Prado, “Colección Vicente Luengas - Fototeca Nacional.”

⁹¹ Lotz, *The Art of Gerhard Richter*; Weichert, “The Hermeneutics of the Image – Sensual Appearance of Sense.”

⁹² García Prado, “Colección Vicente Luengas - Fototeca Nacional”; Moreno Cabrera, “Chapultepec prehispánico”; Moreno Cabrera, “El Castillo de Chapultepec. Arqueología Histórica.”

corresponding to eight different stages of the remodeling projects; this was done with the purpose of highlighting the principal changes that the Bosque de Chapultepec had undergone through the centuries. Of the eight different sections, the materials contained in the first three sections include bibliographies and reprographic prints of pre-Hispanic codices as well as lithographs ranging from the days of New Spain (1521-1821) to the final years of the 19th century.

Crucially, the photographic materials contained in the fourth through eighth sections of the photo album serve as the primary sources for the purposes of this aesthetics research. The fourth through seventh sections in particular provide a visual narration of the initial assessment of the Bosque de Chapultepec by the Board as well as the processes of transformation involved in the remodeling project, as seen in the figures I analyze in the rest of this chapter.⁹³

Specifically, these assessments were informed by an increased interest in the affordance of sanitation services and facilities during the Porfiriato that were linked to early Mexican Modernist concerns with well-being, comfort, and the suitability of urban habitation. To this end, the Porfirian metropolitan agency known as the Comisión de Embellicimiento, or the “Commission of Beautification,” was tasked with the execution of wide-scale remodeling projects in Mexico City in order to recreate existing plazas into modern gardens and parks and thereby inaugurate the awaited turn of the 20th century.⁹⁴

The eighth and final section of the album provides a record of the completed projects in the park from the year of the Board’s dissolution in 1914 up until 1927, in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. It would seem that even after the Porfirian political regime drew to a close, Luengas remained steadfast to the visual narrative’s completion. Hence, the final section, far

⁹³ García Prado, “Colección Vicente Luengas - Fototeca Nacional.”

⁹⁴ Aguilera, “El bosque en la ciudad”; Maya and Aguilar, “Las áreas verdes de la ciudad de México. Un reto actual.”

from being disconnected from the Porfirian proclivity that inspired it, provides a “general panorama of the beautification of the place,” which continues to surface in more recent remodeling projects of the park.⁹⁵ As a whole, the photo album constitutes a visual record of an urban palimpsest, that is to say, it depicts the active and relict landforms that have been continually reconfigured in a mosaic-like structure with humans acting as geomorphic agents.⁹⁶

As previously mentioned, the Vicente Luengas Collection takes in its center frame the Bosque de Chapultepec, an extensive urban natural landscape that is intimately tied to the processes of transformation that have shaped Mexico City through the centuries. This warrants a more thorough overview of the geological, socio-political, and economic forces that have been influential in its constant reconfiguration from the times of the Toltecs in the PreClassic Period of Mesoamerica (1500 B.C.-A.D. 300) to the turn of the 20th century.⁹⁷ Regarding the name Chapultepec, from the Nahuatl “Chapoltepec,” this translates to the English language as “at the grasshopper hill.” The hill in question was formed roughly 21 million years ago through volcanic processes in the region, and is mainly composed of two andesite plateaus that, when viewed from a high vantage point, appear as the silhouette of a grasshopper in-between the main lakes that traverse the Basin of Mexico.⁹⁸ For the Aztecs, the mostly uncontained natural landscape served as a place of retreat among nobles, and it was during this historical period that the first gardens appeared for both ornamental and horticultural purposes. Following the Spanish Conquest, in the year 1519, the Bosque de Chapultepec has continually oscillated between the domains of the public and the private. To this point, historians of the site underscore the site’s seemingly

⁹⁵ García Prado, “Colección Vicente Luengas - Fototeca Nacional.”

⁹⁶ Ashery and Stadler, “Palimpsests and Urban Past.”

⁹⁷ Doering, “Mesoamerica in the Preclassic Period.”

⁹⁸ Moreno Cabrera, “Chapultepec prehispánico.”

nebulous public status, given the mixed-use facilities and resources contained within the urban park's limits, including those that are only accessible to a certain few.⁹⁹

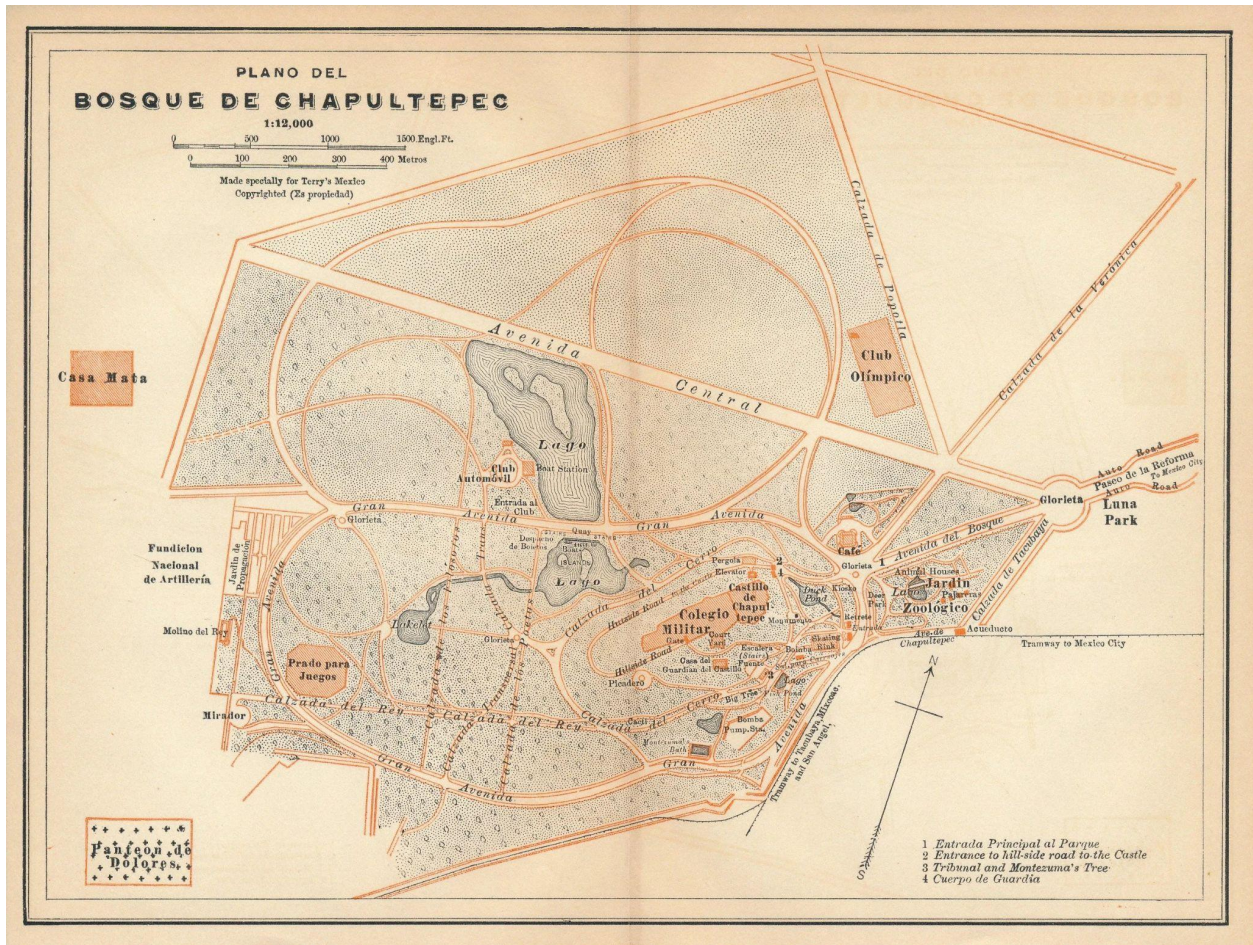


Figure 11. *Plano del Bosque de Chapultepec*, 1933. Map by Phillip T. Terry. Antigua Print Gallery. Public domain.

In like manner, the mixed-use zoning is made evident in the map seen in Figure 11 entitled *Plano del Bosque de Chapultepec* (c. 1933), created approximately eight years after Luengas ceased his compilation efforts of the park's renovation. Specifically, this historical map features a number of designated areas that corresponded to various governmental institutions,

⁹⁹ Garduño Serrano, "El Bosque de Chapultepec En La Ciudad Moderna. Las Disputas Por El Lugar Común."

agencies and private societies, including: the Colegio Militar (“Military College”) and the adjacent, eighteenth-century era Castillo de Chapultepec (“Castle of Chapultepec”); the official headquarters of the elite Club Automóvil (“Automobile Club”), which was formed in 1905 by the Minister of Finance José Yves Limantour at a time when ownership was nascent with no more than 150 cars in circulation; and the sports facilities managed by the Club Olímpico that were largely restricted to the upper classes .¹⁰⁰

It is worth pointing out that many of these zoning concessions towards the Mexican elite were ensconced within the Porfirian beau ideal of increased hygiene and sanitation, one which considered recreational activities as closely related enterprises in the (re-)creation of urban public space. Moreover, the historical development of the Bosque de Chapultepec since the Spanish Conquest has continually been situated—as a matter of physical geography and its associated recreational opportunities—in and around the wealthier enclaves of the Mexican capital.

2.2 The (re-)creation of the *model garden*

In the ensuing visual analysis of select photographs, I underscore the self-documentary aims of Luengas in the creation and re-creation of urban space, all of which take root in the Porfirian beau ideal of recreation. In short, the concept of ‘(re-)creation’ is semantically trifold, i.e., it is formulated as the creation, the re-creation, and the recreation of the model garden. Thus, a photograph of a model garden landscape is thought of as being not only an observed photograph, but also an interpreted photograph, whereby the interpretation occurs in light of the visual impressions made at either end of a moderating lens and across a spatiotemporal distance. More importantly still, it is believed that the perspectives of the photographer and the observer of

¹⁰⁰ Asperó, “El automovilismo deportivo en México. Sus primeros clubes y competencias (siglo XX)[*]”; *The Horseless Age*; Gaitán, “Prensa, Deporte y Sociabilidad Urbana En Mexico DF(1851-1910).”

the image are meant to come into compositional alignment through a hermeneutic process that underscores the landscape's most desirable, beau ideal qualities. Per contra, photographs whose authors' are unknown, as in the case of the photo album *Historia gráfica*, make it close to impossible to deduce the unknown photographers' rationale from the works alone. Nevertheless, it is decidedly clear from the extant archive and its supporting materials that Luengas did not produce any of the photographs himself, but rather contracted a group of photographers for the purposes of documenting the remodeling project. It is for this reason that much of the discussion up to this point regarding the Vicente Luegas Collection has placed considerable attention on the motivating factors behind the photo album's creation, which is onto-epistemically distinct from the more well-understood photographic rationale underpinning the work of Nacho López.

To illustrate this last point, a look at the image in Figure 12 entitled *Pequeñas cascadas en el prado norte a la entrada del bosque* (1927), or "Small waterfalls in the northern meadow at the entrance to the forest," reveals a considerably more illuminated view of a water-wise garden landscape. Notably, and in stark contrast with *Fuente de sodas*, the lack of people in the *Pequeñas Cascadas* warrants the application of the descriptor word 'garden' in the vegetal sense; this is perhaps one of the most apparent points of contrast that distinguishes the model garden aesthetic from that of the collective garden seen in Chapter 1. In terms of the overall frame, the leftmost area of the image is more heavily weighted due in large part to the contiguous, interspersed combination of mature trees, shrubs, and underbrush that coextensively sweep downward towards the rightmost edges of the frame. Far removed from the notions of quotidianity, the public garden in this image is categorically depictive of an arrangement that attempts to showcase balance, as seen in the spatial relations between an undulating treeline and the limitless sky.



Figure 12. *Pequeñas cascadas en el prado norte a la entrada del bosque*, 1927. Photograph by unknown author. Colección Vicente Luengas, Fototeca Nacional, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Indeed, the purposeful arrangement of biotic and abiotic elements in *Pequeñas Cascadas* is reminiscent of, though not entirely congruent with, the highly manicured seventeenth-century French formal garden, or simply the French Garden. As a precursor to the neoclassical Beaux-Arts garden of the early twentieth-century that likely inspired the landscape design in Figure 12, the French garden is described as “an architecture, a geometry, and a formal ensemble” that attempted to restrict, balance, and control nature as its most defining trait.¹⁰¹ Relatedly, the French garden is often credited for crystallizing a genre of the picturesque that

¹⁰¹ Saisselin, “The French Garden in the Eighteenth Century.”

indexed fantastical denotations. Specifically, its picturesque quality became increasingly associated with unpopulated scenes that lended themselves to the anticipation of reverie.¹⁰² With these aesthetic judgements in mind, the scene depicted in Figure 12 is characterized by a figmental enchantment through its careful engagement with various vegetal and geologic subject matter. By (re-)creating their arrangement, it affords balance to the otherwise immoderate conditions of the natural world, as seen in the way the rigidity of the turgescient rock formations encircle, rather tenuously, the fluidness of the water body. In witnessing the unity of the aesthetic experience seen in *Pequenas Cascadas*, the scene that arguably unfolded before the unknown photographer's gaze beckons the observer of the image to enter its seemingly uncharted terrain and, thereupon the artificial balancing of a geological epoch, consume of the recreational splendor taking form on the eve of modernity.

Similar to the metropolitan spirit of the Porfiriato and its aspirations to reign in nature for the purposes of hygiene, and by extension well-being, the development of the French garden was propelled by a courtly society who was set on marshaling into existence consumptive modes of recreation. Expanding on this point, the communication and science studies scholar Chandra Mukerji argues that the French garden was ultimately tied to an “emerging capitalist economy and materialist culture.”¹⁰³ Paired with an increased interest to mobilize nature for the purposes of cementing the rule of an absolute monarch, as in the case of Louis XIV, the rise of materialist culture and the political territoriality of the natural world were the two principal drivers for the instatement of the French garden in what Mukerji refers to as “laboratories of power.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Saisselin.

¹⁰³ Mukerji, “Reading and Writing with Nature.”

¹⁰⁴ Mukerji, “The Political Mobilization of Nature in Seventeenth-Century French Formal Gardens.”



Figure 13. *Jardines posteriores al Castillo de Chapultepec*, 1927. Photograph by unknown author. Colección Vicente Luengas, Fototeca Nacional, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Concretely, the mobilizing of nature as an aesthetic attitude might be one way to describe the photograph seen in Figure 13 entitled *Jardines posteriores al Castillo de Chapultepec* (1927), or “Gardens posterior to the Chapultepec Castle,” which features a model garden, in the vegetal sense, that juxtaposes various ornamental plants and trees against a high fortress-like structure studded with jagged boulders. More interestingly still, it would seem as if this arrangement were meant to provide the illusion of protection to the relatively small portion of the Chapultepec Castle visible just above the uppermost edge of the rock fortress. Constructed during the Viceroyalty of New Spain (1521–1821) under the orders of Viceroy Bernardo de Gálvez, the early blueprints of the castle were first drawn in the year 1785 in what was intended to be a

summer home for the viceroy.¹⁰⁵ Over the span of a century leading up to the Porfiriato, the Castle would undergo several renovations orchestrated by a differing administrative powers from the Viceroyalty to the Second Mexican Empire (1864-1867), a monarchical period ruled by the emperor Maximilian I of Mexico.

In the mid 19th-century, Maximilian contracted foreign and Mexican architects to carry out existing renovations left incomplete by preceding political administrators as well as the novel renovations proposed by the emperor himself.¹⁰⁶ Among the Mexican architects enlisted for the task was Ramón Rodríguez Arangoiti, a noted figure in 19th-century Mexican architecture and archaeology who had been formally trained in various European universities including the *École de Beaux-Arts de Paris*.¹⁰⁷ It is for this reason that the castle, while often considered an amalgam of architectural styles corresponding to major historical periods and divergent political regimes, is most characteristically described as an example of neoclassical architecture in Mexico. Regarding the aesthetic experience of the model garden witnessed in *Jardines Posteriores*, the ornamental vegetation appears to reach up towards a seemingly impassable rock fortress over which only but the most prominent trees are able to cast their shadows on the stately castle.

2.3 The perimetrical view [à la *bound garden*]

The photographic compositions of the *bound garden*, much like its aforementioned counterpart, the *model garden*, are undergirded by an aesthetic attitude that attempts to rein in, or in this case, place nature within specified state-drawn limits. As previously mentioned, the spatial boundaries seen in *Vista del jardín* (see Figure 10) at the beginning of this chapter were

¹⁰⁵ Moreno Cabrera, "El Castillo de Chapultepec. Arqueología Histórica."

¹⁰⁶ Moreno Cabrera.

¹⁰⁷ Jiménez-Madera, "Los arquitectos latinoamericanos en la École des Beaux-Arts de Paris en el siglo XIX."

significant due in large part to the totalizing view that the high-angle photograph provided of the otherwise underexposed impression of a garden landscape situated at the entrance to the Bosque de Chapultepec. On this point, the determining factor of the bound garden—namely, the ability to witness the garden’s perimeters and thereby interpret the totality of the site as a discrete unit—is made possible by the use of specialized photographic techniques. Accordingly, the landscape architect and urban designer Karl Kullman states the following regarding what he refers to as the “garden frame,” or delimitations, of the garden (not to be confused with photographic frame):

“By defining unequivocally what is in and what is out, the garden frame bolsters differentiation between unconscious nature and the elusiveness of its representation that in some form both precedes and antecedes the designer.”¹⁰⁸

Thus, it becomes unequivocally clear that the mode of viewing facilitated by the high angle within the notion of the bound garden, having been motivated by a set of corresponding planning policies, political inclinations, and stately aesthetic values, attempts to restrict nature for the purposes of parsing its vegetal entanglements; and thereby, renders the totality of the garden legally legible and consequently bound by law.

¹⁰⁸ Kullmann, “Concave Worlds, Artificial Horizons,” 4.



Figure 14. *Jardines y calzada en Chapultepec, estereoscópica*, 1914. Photograph by unknown author. Colección Vicente Luengas, Fototeca Nacional, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Similarly, the stereograms seen in Figure 14 entitled *Jardines y calzada en Chapultepec, estereoscópica* (1914), or “Gardens and road in Chapultepec, stereoscopic,” as well as Figure 15 entitled *Gente en los jardines de Chapultepec, estereoscópica* (1914), or “People in the gardens of Chapultepec, stereoscopic,” feature a rather distanced and deliberately grounded view of a garden, such that the delineations of its surrounding mixed-use zoning are rendered visible to varying degrees. Regarding stereoscopy and its physical manipulations of reality, the binocular vision created through the use of two identical images has the effect of creating an illusion of depth and solidity to an otherwise two-dimensional photographic rendering of a three-dimensional scene. In other words, the mode of viewing produced by the stereogram attempts to immerse the observer with the purpose of re-creating, to a certain extent, the physical conditions of reality as they actually existed in time and space. Since the stereograms in Figure 14 and Figure 15 were taken at ground-level, and in contrast to the high angle view in *Vista del jardín*, this artificial three-dimensionality also appears to accentuate what Kullman describes as

the “figure/ground binary that was so marginalizing for landscape in the 20th century.”¹⁰⁹ It is precisely this artificial partitioning that ascribes the garden’s boundedness: note the abruptness by which the garden is hemmed in at its perimetrical edges, where it meets the calculated and perhaps impermeable division between itself and the intermediary causeways that lead into the metropolitan bustle of the Porfirian city.



Figure 14. *Gente en los jardines de Chapultepec, estereoscópica*, 1914. Photograph by unknown author. Colección Vicente Luengas, Fototeca Nacional, INAH. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

The immediate surface appearance of reality notwithstanding, the aesthetic category of the bound garden is in some ways analogous to other forms of delimitations intended to make a space increasingly navigable, as in the case of map-making. Kullman asserts that “cartography—like the garden—also traditionally relies on the frame to separate out representation from the ground it depicts.”¹¹⁰ To this point, the archivist María Prado notes that the stereograms included in the Vicente Luengas, printed as gelatin transparencies on glass, “narrate views of the Bosque de Chapultepec from the years 1912-1914.”¹¹¹ Having been

¹⁰⁹ Kullmann.

¹¹⁰ Kullmann.

¹¹¹ García Prado, “Colección Vicente Luengas - Fototeca Nacional.”

produced in the years following the end of the Porfiriato—and prior to the model garden photographs, ie., *Jardines Posteriores* and *Vista de Jardin*—these stereograms likely provided a sensorial and cartographic excursion of the various mixed-use sites and facilities contained in the Bosque de Chapultepec, all of which was bound by the larger Porfirian beau ideals that oversaw its territorial imperatives. To be sure, the witnessing of the aesthetic experience in the stereograms *Jardines y calzada* and *Gente en los jardines* is centrally concerned with totality: the photographer's gaze as well as that of the resultant image's observer is not only guided by the garden's edges, it actively keeps the eyes trained on these seemingly concrete, stereoscopic perimeters so as to provide the impression of a subdued nature, and its total reckoning, in the urban rough.

Concluding Remarks

Concerning the aesthetics of the Mexican public garden, it is beyond a photographic shadow of a doubt that the historical instatement of Mexican modernity during the final decade of the Porfiriato, and its subsequent ideological perpetuation during the height of the Mexican Miracle years, are visually composed across both the Vicente Luengas Collection and the Nacho López Collection, respectively. Moreover, it is evident that these two collections are opposed such that their respective modes of viewing are mutually exclusive of each other. On this point, Nacho López's photographic gaze can be said to look outward towards the fruits of the everyday. Conversely, Vicente Luengas' compilatory gaze looks reflexively towards the modernizing objectives of the Porfiriato. Regarding the everyday garden, the aesthetic of expansiveness witnessed in the collective garden stands in contrast with the aesthetic of reticulation in the incorporated garden, both of which maintain a measured sensibility to the landscape through the prism of the quotidian. In addition, the everyday garden as a whole is visually and onto-epistemically counter-posed to the stately garden, that is, the witnessing of the model garden aesthetic mobilizes nature while, relatedly, the bound garden aesthetic totalizes nature; this is done through the prism of the Porfirian beau ideal of hygiene.

All things considered, the rendering of the gardens' physical features (flower) in each of these photographs are simultaneously aligned with the differing modes of viewing (song), such that the photographic composition of the Mexican public garden rests upon shifting soils of publicness in the archive of Mexican modernity. Thinking beyond the Nacho López Collection and the Vicente Luengas Collection collections, it would appear that the garden landscape, precisely through its garden-variety illusion, is a contested domain of terra firme proportions.

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