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The Church of San Francisco in Mexico City as Lieux de Memoire

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The Church of San Francisco, as the oldest and first established by the mendicant Franciscans in Mexico, acts as a repository of the past, collecting and embodying centuries of memories of the city and the congregation it continues to represent. Many factors have contributed to the church's significance; the prestige of its site, the particular splendor of ceremonies and rituals held at both the Church and the chapel of San Jose de los Naturalés, and the liturgical processions which originated there. While the religious syncretism of some churches, especially open air chapels, has been analyzed, the effect of communal inscription on the architecture of Mexico City is an area of study that has not been adequately researched. This project presents a holistic approach to history through memory theory, one which incorporates cross-disciplinary perspectives including sociology and anthropology. This study proposes a diachronic analysis of change and adaptation from the indigenous to the contemporary, through a deep and focused analysis of one site during five periods of time. From its 'beginning's as the Aztec capital to the modern metropolis, the city's fabric is continually being built upon, both metaphorically and literally—paradoxically while the city itself is sinking into the pre-Columbian lakebed. As a site of memory, the church is a paradigm of the larger cultural processes of the city, wherein the history of the city is inscribed in the history of the church. This study does not presume to be a comprehensive architectural history of San Francisco, but it does focus attention on the nexus of memory and architecture over the entire chronology of the church's history during five periods of time. It unpacks the role of architecture in perpetuating memory and conversely it explores the role of memory in sustaining architecture. The overriding question this project seeks to address is: Can the embodied memory or collective consciousness of a group of people be maintained through time in an architectural monument? If so, by what mechanisms does architecture accomplish this feat of social cohesion? While architecture encompasses space, its power to generate and preserve collective memory goes far beyond space.

As a result of this research, this project argues that indigenous builders' memory is encoded into structures they create even if they are not the designers, and despite the predilections of time to forget, the durable materiality of architecture embodies memory even in adverse conditions. Moreover, the public character of architecture and the spaces they create disseminates remembrances more easily than other media. These temporally continual efforts are augmented by collective organizations in and around a building, especially during times of social flux. These organizations have their own social cohesion strengthened through work and the memory of labor which outlasts the actual activity at the site. Nevertheless, however embodied memory may be in a building, the structure and the collective memory it contains is vulnerable to appropriation by those hostile to the history of the building and even to its fabric. In detailing its architectural mnemonic argument, this study of San Francisco uncovers new insights on the local spatial production of memory through architectural culture. For instance, it documents how religious spaces in the capital were maintained, and how they adapted to contextual changes, and, reciprocally, how the context adapted to them. As sites of memory, sacred buildings such as the Church of San Francisco are shown to remain in, and shape, the collective consciousness of the community. This project painstakingly maps what is being remembered, and whose memory it is. In so doing, the investigation reveals how the mythologies of the indigenous Nahua and the Christian settlers "vibrated" one against the other in architectural form. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, this research describes how Nahua culture maintained ownership in religious practice and how it may still remain a force in nurturing the collective memory of the site today. As such, the purpose of this project is to examine and analyze the ways in which sacred spaces of México City, specifically the Church of San Francisco, negotiate the urban fabric as *lieux de mémoire* – or realms of memory. This project offers an analysis that takes the church from the realm of material culture to suggest how such physical evidence might be used to answer broader questions of collective remembrance.

Fragmented Memory: The Church of San Francisco, Mexico City, as a *Lieu de Mémoire*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Honors Program of the Department of
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INTRODUCTION

“We Mexicans suffer from an illness, a rage, a desire for self-destruction, to cancel and erase ourselves, to leave no trace of our past, or the way of life in which we believed and to which we devoted ourselves....We Mexicans still believe that it is necessary to destroy the past to make way for the present. More than just a bad habit, this is a serious problem of national identity.”¹ With these disturbing observations, historian Guillermo Tovar de Teresa (b. 1956) opens his classic book on México City, *The City of Palaces* (1990). His distress – and the far-reaching cultural ramifications it gives voice to – is partly to blame on human indifference, ignorance, and greed, but partly on the swampy geology of the site as well. México City was at one time home to the most impressive assemblage of colonial architecture in the New World. Undoubtedly, one of the most extraordinary and innovative was the Church of San Francisco and its open-air chapel – the first of the so-called Indian chapels – San José de los Naturales (b. 1525). The church has a unique site in that it was built on top of Moctezuma's zoo and aviary.² As the first Franciscan church in the new world, and the center of evangelizing efforts, it was considered the cradle of Christian México. But, as Tovar de Teresa intimates, a building like San Francisco is a paradigm of the larger cultural processes of the city: the history of the city is inscribed in the history of the church.

¹ Guillermo Tovar de Teresa, *The City of Palaces: Chronicle of a Lost Heritage* (México, D.F.: Fundacion Cultural Televisa, A.C., 1990), 12.

² Fidel Chauvet, “The Church of San Francisco in México City,” *The Americas* 7, no. 1 (July 1950), 14.

Sixteenth-century buildings like San Francisco once made up the core of México City, but few traces of this colonial past remain today. From its 'beginning' as the Aztec capital in the middle of Lake Texcoco to the modern metropolis, the city's fabric has been continually built upon metaphorically and literally, while, paradoxically, it sinks. The city could not expand outward due to its lacustrine conditions and so had to devour itself in order to 'grow.' In the 1520s the Spanish conquistadors razed the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan to build a new European capital. They filled the city's canals and transformed them into streets and avenues. In so doing, they created an unstable foundation for their own buildings. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many a colonial church was in disrepair and demolished in order to build another on the same site. Dozens of buildings in the city center were razed simply to make room for grander baroque palaces and larger churches to better represent the power and riches of the capital of New Spain, the crown jewel of the Spanish empire. In the nineteenth century, México struggled to distance itself from its Spanish Colonial past, and architects rebelled against the lavish baroque style. In the space of a few months, dozens of buildings could be demolished to make way for neoclassical reconstructions. Similarly callous destruction continued in the twentieth century, culminating in the 40s and 50s when large sections of the city were bulldozed to make room for vast modernist housing projects. Despite this unchecked destruction, San Francisco remains standing today as a testament to the tumultuous history of the city.

The convent of San Francisco's building history is complex because it has managed to survive for five centuries. There are five main phases of San Francisco's lifespan: the Primitive Church and Monastery (1525-1590), the Second Church (1590-1710), the Third Church up to the Exclaustration (1716-1860), the church from the Reform to Reclaustration (1860-1950), and the contemporary church (Figure 1).³ Today, all that remains are the Balvanera chapel and church, the cloister and the chapel at

³The first four categories are Chauvet's, "The Church of San Francisco," 15.

the corner, all embedded in the contemporary fabric (Figures 2, 3, 4). Small pieces of the church remain fragmented, isolated, and independent from the original complex. They have been amputated from their origin to become something new, entirely different-- to be appropriated by the everyday needs of the city.

Given the fragmentary condition of San Francisco, any comprehensive study of the site must rely on a synthesis of memory and history. This study does not presume to be a comprehensive architectural history of San Francisco, but it does focus attention on the nexus of memory and architecture over the entire chronology of the church's history. It unpacks the role of architecture in perpetuating memory – at least at this key monument – and conversely it explores the role of memory in sustaining architecture. The overriding question this thesis seeks to address is: Can the embodied memory or collective consciousness of a group of people be maintained through time in an architectural monument? If so, by what mechanisms does architecture accomplish this feat of social cohesion? A spatial dimension is key to the encoding of memory, as historian of modern Europe Maiken Umbach has observed: “sites feature as the primary structuring principle of memory, in the same way that chronology was the primary structuring principle of history.”⁴ But while architecture encompasses space, its power to generate and preserve collective memory goes beyond space (at least the traditional definitions of it). This thesis argues that indigenous builders' memory is encoded into structures they create even if they are not the designers (e.g., the Nahua's building the first San José de los Naturales), and despite the predilections of time to forget, the durable materiality of architecture embodies memory even in adverse conditions. Moreover, the public character of architecture and the spaces they create disseminates remembrances more easily than other media. These temporally continual efforts are augmented by collective

⁴Maiken Umbach, “Memory and Historicism: Reading Between the Lines of the Built Environment, Germany c. 1900” *Representations*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (Fall 2004), 27.

organizations in and around a building, especially during times of social flux. These organizations, many of which were based on construction, have their own social cohesion strengthened through work and the memory of labor which outlasts the actual activity at the site. Nevertheless, however embodied memory may be in a building, the structure and the collective memory it contains is vulnerable to appropriation by those hostile to the history of the building and even to its fabric. Indeed, this willful forgetting is the fate of San Francisco in the nineteenth century, as various disparate ideologies claimed the patrimonial heritage of the church. However, twentieth-century preservation efforts reintegrated the church into the daily rhythms of the city and recreating spaces of multivalent of collective memory.

In detailing its architectural mnemonic argument, this study of San Francisco uncovers new insights on the local spatial production of memory through architectural culture. For instance, it documents how religious spaces in the capital were maintained, and how they adapted to contextual changes, and, reciprocally, how the context adapted to them. As sites of memory, sacred buildings such as the Church of San Francisco are shown to remain in, and shape, the collective consciousness of the community. I therefore painstakingly map what is being remembered, and whose memory it is. In so doing, my investigation reveals how the mythologies of the indigenous Nahua and the Christian settlers “vibrated” one against the other in architectural form.⁵ Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, this thesis describes how Nahua culture maintained ownership in religious practice and how it may still remain a force in nurturing the collective memory of the site today. As such, the purpose of this thesis is to examine and analyze the ways in which sacred spaces of México City, specifically the Church of San

⁵ The term Nahua is derived from the word for the language, Nahuatl, that was spoken by a sizeable majority of indigenous in central México at the time. Nahua was a widespread language, used by many different ethnic groups and communities. The term Nahua is preference over Mexica because of the influx of Nahua speaking immigrants from other parts of the country to México-Tenochtitlan. All Aztecs were Nahua, but not all Nahua were Aztecs. The word Aztec is derived from the Nahuatl term *aztecatl* which means "people from Aztlan"; evidently, the Aztecs identified themselves based on a place (which may have been physical or mythical), thereby asserting their divine heritage. As a result, Aztec is used primarily to refer to the pre-Conquest group that controlled much of Mesoamerica before the arrival of the Spaniards.

Francisco, negotiate the urban fabric as *lieux de mémoire* – or realms of memory.⁶ This thesis offers an analysis that takes the church from the realm of material culture to suggest how such physical evidence might be used to answer broader questions of collective remembrance. To that end, this study uses a diachronic analysis of change and adaptation from the indigenous to the contemporary, through a deep and focused analysis of one site during five periods of time.

Historiography

While an increasing number of studies explore memory and its embodiment in architecture, they have primarily focused on sites of traumatic events. Given the vast literature on the history of México City and the Church of San Francisco; social, religious and cultural syncretism; and memory as a theoretical framework, this state of research summary will necessarily be an abbreviated one.

Significant voices not included here will be introduced in the chapters that follow. Because the church has undergone a cycle of destructions, rebuildings, and additions, the accounts of Spanish and Mexican chroniclers are invaluable in interpreting the space and form of the church. Among the most important are those of Fray Juan de Torquemada (1562-1624), Toribio de Benavente Motolinia (1482-1568), Cervantes de Salazar (1514-1575), Geronimo de Mendieta (1525-1604), Chimalpahin (1579-1660), Augustin de Vetancurt (1620-1700), and Antonio Garcias Cubas (1832-1912). All of their descriptions of the church were anecdotal and part of larger chronicles of the history of New Spain, and they are obviously representative of the European point-of-view. The only monographic article on the Church of San Francisco was written in 1950 by the Franciscan historian Fidel Chauvet (b. 1907): "The Church of

⁶ The term *lieu de mémoire* is Pierre Nora's and will be discussed below; Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Realms of memory: rethinking the French past*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 12.

San Francisco in México City."⁷ Like earlier defenses of the church formulated by Franciscans during threatening times, Chauvet focuses on the origins of the church and its uniqueness, writing about the church in terms of its importance for the mendicants in México. A similar chauvinism –albeit of secular stripe – informs Tovar de Teresa's *City of Palaces* (mentioned above), but it too is one of the most significant pieces of documentation on the site's history, including one of the few complete plans of the complex.

Until quite recently, when people thought of colonial architecture in Latin America, they thought of buildings derivative of the great monuments of Europe, awkward versions of the styles of the great masters. Joseph Baird attributes colonial architecture to "modifying European sources to suit the skills of local craftsmen," completely ignoring their shared cultural syncretism.⁸ Clara Bargellini's 1991 historiographical essay on sixteenth-century churches of México provides a convenient overview of the evolution of scholarship, including essential works such as John McAndrew's *The Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth-century México: Atrios, Posas, Open-Chapels, and Other Studies* (1965), an early examination of Mexican architecture in terms of the typology of which San José de los Naturales was the progenitor.⁹ Naturally, George Kubler's (1912-1996) magisterial *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth-Century*, published in 1948, is essential to this thesis for many reasons, primary among which is his coverage of a broad range of topics such as the background of the mendicants, urbanism, design, labor, materials, and construction techniques which helped to bring the indigenous perspective to greater prominence. Kubler's work has been continued by historians such as Matthew O'Hara who studies the ways in which successive generations of Indians contributed to their communal churches, thereby embodying

⁷ Chauvet's retelling is often harsh in its accusations against those who were not Franciscans that attempted or brought harm to the church or the mendicant order itself. Fidel Chauvet, "Church of San Francisco in México City," *The Americas* vol. 1, issue 1 (1950): .

⁸ Joseph Baird, *The Churches of México, 1530-1810* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 2.

⁹ Clara Bargellini, "Representations of Conversion: Sixteenth-Century Architecture in New Spain," in *The Word Made Image* (Boston: Published by the Trustees of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum), 91-102.

collective memory that would otherwise be lost.¹⁰ Starting in the 1990s, scholars like Jaime Lara and Samuel Edgerton have made enormous strides in revealing the genius behind the great early churches of México. Lara's book is extraordinary because he examines architecture in the context of Christian and Aztec metaphors,¹¹ while Edgerton looks at the different iconographical components of colonial architecture as a synthesis between the two cultures.¹² By examining shared ritual, spatial, and architectural concepts between the Aztecs and the Spanish, they have shown that colonial architecture in México was a unique and monumental achievement of the confluence of cultures in the New World.

Memory has become, in recent years, a ubiquitous and favorite scholarly theme. Here, I shall limit myself to those studies most essential to an exploration of collective memory at the convent of San Francisco. Pierre Nora's seminal *Realms of Memory* proposes a fundamental distinction between memory and history. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present, whereas history is a representation of the past. Therefore, *les lieux des mémoire* are material, symbolic, and functional, and are created by the interaction between memory and history.¹³ French sociologist Henri Lefebvre's (1901-1991) three-part spatial theory (i.e., practices of space, representations of space, and representational spaces) forms the spatial armature through which memory is filtered in this thesis. Lived space, the most important space, is the space of inhabitants that veils itself over physical space, thereby creating symbolic use of its objects.¹⁴ *How Societies Remember* and *How Modernity Forgets*, both written by Paul Connerton, are two sides of the same coin. He

¹⁰Matthew O'Hara, *A Flock Divided: Race, Religion, and Politics in México, 1749–1857* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 90-130.

¹¹Jaime Lara, *City, Temple, Stage: Eschatological Architecture and Liturgical Theatrics in New Spain* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

¹²Samuel Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2001).

¹³Nora and Kritzman, *Realms of memory*, 12.

¹⁴Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 39.

speculates that societies remember in three distinct ways: inscriptions on cultural texts (in this case, monuments and architecture); commemorative rituals that engage people in participatory events and social action; and the incorporation of social memory into the human body.¹⁵ What is common to all three is an insistence on the inextricable link between architecture and the body and the meaning produced by their interaction.

Methodology

At the time of contact, México-Tenochtitlan stood at the center of an empire and was continued as the Viceregal capital of New Spain. As a result, the city became the testing ground for many ideas, among them architectural, religious, and communal. *Lieux de memoire* inherently embody a sedimentation of memory over time; as such, I adopted the case study method. David Wang defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon or setting.” The characteristics of a case study include 1.) a focus on a single case studied in its real-life context; 2.) the capacity to understand causal links; 3.) the importance of interdisciplinary theories in design; 4.) a reliance on multiple sources of evidence.¹⁶ As per the case study method, I implemented both interpretive-historical and qualitative methods. The tactics for the qualitative portion include interviews with participants, and direct and participant observation. These are filtered through other methodological perspectives, such as memory theory. When possible, chronicles and annals have been corroborated or augmented by archival sources.

Contemporary readings of the place are based on a phenomenological perspective which incorporates a post-structuralist framework for interpretation of discord in readings. Buildings are

¹⁵ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 3.

¹⁶ Linda and Wang Groat, *Architectural Research Methods* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2002), 346.

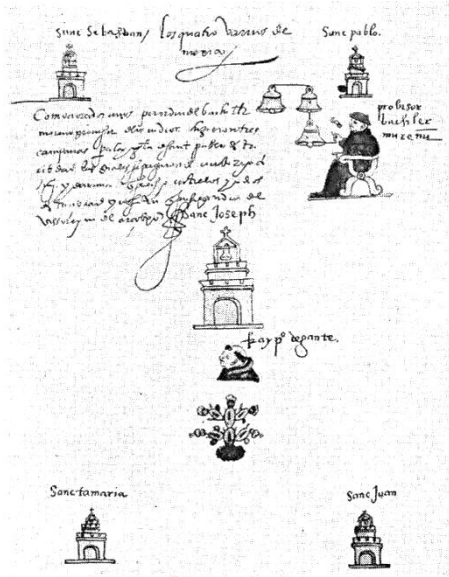
inescapably expressions of forces that create them, the continual and simultaneous acknowledgment of these forces and past influences are the foundation for the contemporary part of this study.¹⁷ My interest in the church as a site of memory is formed in part by my concern about the systematized forgetting that has become so prevalent in our fast-paced world. We, as a global and national community, have externalized our memories to a greater degree than any that came before; digitalization, books, drawings, and artifacts comprise our memories more than our own ability to remember. What better mnemonic device is there than architecture? Furthermore, the destruction of the social mechanisms by which we link our contemporary experiences to those of earlier generations is one of the most characteristic phenomena of modernity. In schools of architecture, relationships to the past have often been mediated by intellectualization and even cynicism. I was first introduced to the Church of San Francisco as an architecture student during a walking tour of the *centro*, which was admittedly confusing and disorienting.¹⁸ As an author, I am neither a tourist, nor a parishioner, but an interested architect, seeking to understand many questions on the church's terms. As a student on site, I draw to remember, lest my memories, as they invariably do, leave me. And as our contemporary social system, little by little, loses its capacity to retain its own past, modernity turns to externalizations – both bodily and architectural – to keep the past alive.

¹⁷ Andrew Ballantyne, *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects* (New York: Routledge Press, 2007), 98.

¹⁸ I was overwhelmed by the chaotic environment of the *centro*, especially since we ascended the colossal Torre Latinoamericana and then dipped into the remains of the church. It was a particularly surreal sequence because of the two polarities of experience. I was fascinated by its apparently anachronistic existence in a zone so congested with traffic, both pedestrian and vehicular. Thus, one could say my memories and experience sparked my interest in the oldest edifice and Franciscan mother-church of New Spain.

Chapter Outline

The thesis is structured chronologically and is divided into three main chapters, defined by moments of rupture which produced clear cultural paradigm shifts. The chapters are further organized according to San Francisco's relationship to memory and history; each chapter focuses on one type of embodied consciousness, which, taken together, become an overlapping collage of memories that are definitively greater than the sum of their parts. The first chapter introduces México-Tenochtitlan and the cultural context surrounding the Conquest. As a result of unique circumstances, San Francisco became an active generator of communal memory, which spans from its inception in 1524 until its urban apex in the late 1700s. The second chapter focuses on the short but tumultuous period of time from the secularization reforms in the 1770s to the dismemberment of the church in 1856 during which the convent was appropriated by disparate ideologies. With its existence constantly threatened, the mendicants made recourse to history to save the church, thereby assuring that it became a silent witness to the vicissitudes of history. The third and final chapter, which is framed by a more post-modern perspective, spans the past 160 years, from the onslaught of modernity to today, during which the church and its memory have become appropriated, in part, by the state for memorial and patrimonial heritage. However, the chapter demonstrates that the church has continued to embody the mentalities of its parishioners through ritual and the incorporation of social memory into the human body.



Chapter 1:

The Church of the Indians and Collective Memory

The Church of San Francisco, and its adjacent open-chapel, San José de los Naturales, in México City, as the oldest and first established by the original Twelve Franciscan friars who arrived in the 1520s, became a local, regional, and national center of the Christian religion in New Spain. As the origin of the Franciscan order in the colonies, it was the center of Franciscan life and missionary activity in México-Tenochtitlan. From this church, the Franciscans set forth to extend their missionary activities to Peru and North America.¹⁹ As the first open-chapel, San José de los Naturales established the architectural and social precedent of the open-chapel in the soon-to-be expansive repertoire of Mexican colonial architecture, thereby creating one of the most significant developments in spatial typology. But, as significant as San Francisco is in architectural history, equally important and often overlooked, is its role as a material repository of the past, a site which over time veritably collected and gathered centuries of the memories of the city and congregations it has served.

¹⁹Chauvet, "Church of San Francisco," 13.

Many factors have contributed to San Francisco and San José's capacity to actualize collective memory, including the status of its two sites, the splendor of its ceremonies, and the role it played as the origin of urban liturgical processions. The Franciscans would recall the prodigious history of the church in their later battles to both empower the Indians and maintain their parish's spiritual dominions. The performed relationship of the friars and Indians within the chapel subsumed many of the spatial articulations of past, but not forgotten, Aztec ritual centers. In fact, any person in the crucible of San Francisco might well have experienced one or more of the ways societies remember, according to sociologist Paul Connerton: inscriptions on cultural texts (in this case, monuments), commemorative rituals that engage people in participatory rationality and social action, and the incorporation of social memory into the human body.²⁰ Through its collective significance and their embodied memory, the site of San Francisco and its open-chapel became one of the primary means by which not only Spaniards and mendicants constituted themselves socially and politically in the New World but the space in which Indians in México-Tenochtitlan developed and articulated group agency as well.

Architecture's unique role in this collective memory process allowed San Francisco to remain a *lieu de mémoire* throughout the sixteenth century, that is, a site interactively producing collective awareness (one not yet consigned to a place in history). This chapter will cover three spaces – the site, the Church of San Francisco, and the open-chapel of San José de los Naturales – illustrating the difference between memory as lived space, unself-conscious in its mediations, and history, an intellectualized, universalizing account of what is no longer.

²⁰Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 3.

Ravaged and Ravenous: Early México-Tenochtitlan and Its Inhabitants

Founded in 1325 AD, the cosmological center of Aztec culture was located in the sprawling metropolis of Tenochtitlan. Upon the arrival of Cortés in 1521, the city was undoubtedly both the economic and ritual heart of the Aztec empire. The beauty of the city was unrivaled; Cortés himself exclaimed, “The city is so vast and so full of wonders, that though much indeed could truthfully be said about it, I reckon that even what little I saw will beggar belief.”²¹ Central to understanding the origin of the sacred city is the foundational myth of symbolic signs that directed the Nahuatl to found their lakeside city in the Valley of México. The story goes that the Aztecs left their mythological home of Aztlan at the behest of their main deity, Huitzilopochtli, and after many years of wandering and much strife, discovered a nopal cactus in the Valley of México. Atop the cactus was an eagle perched with its wings open to the sun, and in its talons it held a precious bird or serpent.²² To the Nahuatl, this singular act communicated the gods' will to the chosen people. Once they had settled on the island, the Aztecs immediately built a temple to their god in the exact spot where the eagle had been, in order to lay out the four quarters with the temple as the center. The Aztecs' foundational myth, the most consistently depicted story in Aztec manuscripts, was fundamentally a myth of place, origin, sacred pilgrimage, and divinely-mandated empire.

Center, periphery, and memory were linked in the Aztec cosmology and echoed in the design of Tenochtitlan. The physical cosmos was arranged by a quadripartite ordering of space, originating at the center or *axis mundi*, which represented the fifth point, after the four quadrants of the universe.²³ Mirroring the cosmos, the physical center of Tenochtitlan was marked by the intersection of four

²¹Hernán Cortés, *Cartas de relacion*, translated in *Letters from México* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 67.

²²Some scholars believe this image symbolized the triumph of the sun, represented by the eagle, over his enemies. Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, “Symbolism of the *Templo Mayor*,” in *The Aztec Templo Mayor*; ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987), 189-190.

²³*Ibid.*, 189. On the *axis mundi* in structuralist analyses of space, see Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956), 20-64

quadrants: north, south, east, and west with the *Templo Mayor*, the major sanctuary of the city and the Aztec people as a collective, marking the axis mundi at the ceremonial center (Figure 5).²⁴ In section, the verticality of the *Templo Mayor* symbolized the layers of space starting from the base, or the terrestrial level, to the upper levels of the celestial realm of the gods.²⁵ Four major radiating streets crossed at the base of the *Templo Mayor*. These four major avenues were carefully arranged to correspond to major celestial events and were conceptualized as infinite extensions reaching out to the corners of the Aztec empire and beyond.²⁶ Each of the four quadrants had its own centralized temple that housed gods of the ethnic groups inhabiting that neighborhood. For instance, the western quadrant of Moyotlan, the future district of the Church of San Francisco, was the domain of Quetzalcoatl, the god of wind, whose color was white and symbol was *calli* (house) (Figure 14). The identification of a precinct of space with a universal or cosmological symbol to which inhabitants of the area can identify is the progenitor for the development of social memory. As Anthony Cohen, in his seminal work on the construction of community, speculates, boundary, much like architectural spatial articulation, "encapsulates the identity of the community" and is called into reality by the exigencies of social interaction; in other words, communities are bound by specific places which are activated by bodily and social interactions of the group.²⁷ This system of barrio temples and sacred space as a repository of collective memory would continue during the rapid development of the city and long after the Conquest.

The Spaniards' maintenance of the existing urban organization suggests that they found the Aztec cosmology had resonances with Christian thought and saw little reason to change it. For instance, the Aztecs choreographed a sacred ritual as they journeyed to Tenochtitlan which was viewed as

²⁴Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 92.

²⁵Moctezuma, "Symbolism of the *Templo Mayor*," 194.

²⁶Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 93.

²⁷Cohen's work postulates that community is symbolically constructed according to place. Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (Chichester: E. Horwood, 1985), 12.

analogous to the medieval Christian and Jewish desire to visit Jerusalem.²⁸ Pilgrimage was the method by which all Aztecs could be accepted, integrated, and gifted by the local and universal sacrality of the *Templo Mayor*. Hence, through ritual movement, the Aztecs became part of a larger universal ordering. For their part, the Franciscans were guided by ordinances framed on the model of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516).²⁹ As Jaime Lara has demonstrated, Biblical descriptions of the Holy City appealed directly to the Aztecs' intrinsic affinity for order, nobility, and precious objects, which evoked a utopian image of the city be it Nahua or Christian.³⁰

While much of the ancient city was destroyed during Cortés' invasion, Cortés insisted that the Spaniards maintain much of the original organization and structure of the Aztec city when rebuilding began. Cortés' decision to build the new capital atop the old one was controversial, in direct contradiction to the majority opinion of his followers.³¹ The major avenues and rectilinear plan – crucial to the cosmology of the site – were preserved. In late 1523, Alonso Garcia Bravo, a stone mason, was asked to design the plan of the Spanish section at the center of the conquered Tenochtitlan.³² He took the four major avenues of the Aztec city as the basis for his design and augmented it by adding a grid of seven streets in both directions as well as plazas and building lots (Figure 7). The problematical pre-existing topography the Spaniards encountered in building on top of Tenochtitlan would continue to haunt the Europeanized city environmentally and existentially.³³

²⁸Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 93.

²⁹George Kubler, *Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and Their American Dominions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 70.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 94.

³¹Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of México 1519-1810* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), 368.

³²James Early, *The Colonial Architecture of México* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New México Press, 1994), 8.

³³Cortés's decision meant that the city would be perpetually susceptible to flood, and its surrounding environments would subsequently be swampland. As a result, there was very little agricultural production in the area. In addition, the transportation of water, goods, and services would be particularly difficult due to the exceptional site. Today, the mountain ranges surrounding the city and the elevation assure that the massive amount of smog and pollution is unable to leave the city, constantly hovering over the metropolis. Many of the large canals were

Biblical metaphors in the colonial re-founding of Mexican cities were equal in importance to urbanistic ideals of its planners. One of the most significant Spanish chroniclers of the sixteenth century, Fray Toribio de Motolinia, described the early Conquest of New Spain as a refigured domination of Canaan.³⁴ Collectively acting as David, the Franciscans carried the ark, here transformed into Christian holy sacraments, into the New World's first temple, which was none other than the convent of San Francisco. Diego Valades represents the metaphorical mission in a 1579 engraving (Figure 6). According to Motolinia,³⁵ this founding singularly transformed the Mother Church of México City into the most sacred new temple, analogous to the *Templo Mayor*, thereby cementing its sacred significance for eternity. By extending the origin myth of the Mexican Church to Biblical history and time immemorial, the Franciscans created a deeper and more hallowed collective memory. By one trenchant act, he believed the Franciscans had effectively converted the entire pagan city into a Holy Jerusalem.

The well-known story of the spiritual Conquest of México began in the 1520s when small groups of reforming Spanish Catholic friars acted as missionaries. Through the righteous efforts of the evangelizing Franciscans, according to Motolinia, millions of Indians were converted to Christianity by the end of the sixteenth century.³⁶ Against the background of the turbulence of the Protestant Reformation in Europe, the mendicants in México saw the “pagan” Indians as the perfect opportunity to create a Christian utopia in which the sins and detritus of the Old World could be avoided and cast aside with the innocence and purity of the New World savage.

drained to make way for boulevards, but some continued to exist well into the 18th century.

³⁴ Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 99.

³⁵ Toribio de Motolinia, *Memoriales e Historia de los indios de la Nueva España* (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1970), 220-234.

³⁶ During the early 16th century, the supply of diverse and highly skilled labor was slow to form. The Spaniards made use of previous social structures in order to effectively organize labor. In 1522 Cortés reinstated several of the great Indian lords to organize labor in each parish. Don Fernando Ixtlilxochitl, the lord of Texcoco, sought Cortés' trust through summoning his nobles to aid in the construction of the first primitive Cathedral as well as the Church of San Francisco. The Spanish organized great trade schools affiliated with Franciscans in México City, one of which was located near the open-chapel of San José de los Naturales. See Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule*, 111.

The conversion was so successful that no other colonization by Spain in America could claim to have achieved similar results. The friars were particularly successful in preserving indigenous institutions which would be instrumental in fostering group identity and memory among Indios for centuries. It was largely through labor organizations with Nahua roots that the Church of San Francisco and its enormous parish became an almost autonomous unit in which parishioners identified themselves and their lineage through the church, rather than the large city-state of México-Tenochtitlan. While the Spaniards organized the work of large pools of unskilled labor through communal draft, the strength of indigenous labor associations was key to their success and especially the fact that the Indians perceived work in sacramental terms.³⁷ The Indians' interest in work was not merely tied to labor, wages, and subsistence; in fact, they fundamentally disagreed with the European money-based economic system. A unique and significant first-hand Indian account in Nahuatl compiled by Franciscan friar and precocious ethnographer Bernardino de Sahagun (1499-1590) reveals that the Indians conceived of ritual and work as intertwined and inseparable.³⁸ Every act of creation was bound by the laws of religious rites and as such their output was for some ritual or ceremonial purpose, rather than as a commodity to be bought and sold. For the Indian, no work was truly worth doing unless it was infused with ceremonial utility and symbolism. In contrast, Christianity established a sharp distinction between work and worship, hence, the fourth commandment to keep the Sabbath holy (Exodus 20).³⁹ Through their efforts of labor and toil in architecture, the Aztecs believed that they were ritually sustaining their gods and communities, and now, by extension, the Christian cosmology.

However altruistically the mendicants may have acted towards the Indians, some Nahua were still treated questionably. The sixteenth-century chronicler Friar Gerónimo de Mendieta commented on

³⁷Ibid., 145.

³⁸Ibid., 157.

³⁹For the Christians, time was linear and bound eschatologically by the events from Genesis to Revelation. In contrast, the Nahua viewed time as based on even cycles of fifty-two years, at the end of which cataclysms might occur if sacrifices were not performed. Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 42, 64.

the arguably immoral character of Indian labor in New Spain: "that in those times and for many years after, the Indians were not paid for their work on the church edifice . . . though food was given to the workers in the monastery."⁴⁰ Despite the deplorable conditions, the Indians continued to donate their time and labor to the construction of the church; evidently, the edifice held great meaning for them or otherwise they would have protested or revolted. As Edgerton suggests, Indians were accustomed to donating labor to build their sacred temples as a sign of piety.⁴¹ Yet, immortalizing the herculean efforts of the Indians, Mendieta continues with a rose-tinted description: "The principal benefactors we have are the Indians of this city of México who have bestowed and do bestow many and generous alms. They constructed this convent and the Chapel of San José; they do us great charity continually; they have been and are the main support of this house [San Francisco], and altogether the Indians of this country love us with great devotion, doing us a great deal of good and giving us many alms: they built up all our monasteries."⁴² Mendieta recognized that without the help of the Indians, neither the church nor the chapel would have been built; in part, because of their generous labor donations, the Franciscans went to great lengths to protect the Nahua. To that end, the mendicants would later establish and encourage several organizations through which the Nahua could advocate for their rights.

Even as the physical relationship to the Aztec past grew ever more tenuous, the symbolic and metaphorical ties remained strong. As anthropologist Anthony Cohen posits, the symbolic construction of a community often refers to a putative past or tradition.⁴³ Thus, the re-construction of the Nahua past, which the Franciscans would initiate along with the participation of the indigenous community, was necessarily going to be selective and could not help but resonate with contemporary influences. Often, a reconstructed history resembles myth in that the contemporary condition seeks and obtains

⁴⁰ "Memoria de los bienhechotes..." in *Cartas de Religiosos*, 180.

⁴¹ Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion*, 50.

⁴² "Memoria de los bienhechotes..." in *Cartas de Religiosos*, 180.

⁴³ Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, 99.

validity through its association with the cultural past. Regardless of the deepening ambivalence between the Indians and the friars, the church, through its own goals and objectives, nurtured and preserved communal forms of life among the Indians. Consistently, if not always consciously, the interests of the Indian community were made to closely coincide with the overarching cosmological vision of Christianity. Despite the European-style school system, the pride the Indians took before the Conquest in building groups would help embed their collective memory in the edifices they built and consolidate their fraternal ties long after construction was complete. Arguably, in the sixteenth century Christianity appeared as a cohesive, uniting force that repeatedly actualized Indian preferences for communal organization.⁴⁴

Between the Old and New: Siting San Francisco

The Church of San Francisco has laid claim to two significant sites: San Francisco el Viejo (the Old), somewhere in the central sacred precinct of the *Templo Mayor*, and San Francisco el Nuevo (the New), the present-day site west of the Zócalo on the former site of Moctezuma's zoo and aviary. Beginning with Franciscan chronicler Juan de Torquemada (1562-1624), historians have debated where the original site of the Church of San Francisco was. Like some Christian edifices, it may have been built on the site of a sanctuary or monument dedicated to an earlier cult, in this case the Aztecs. While incontrovertible evidence for the location and form of the original church is important, the Franciscan claim to origins directly on the site of the *Templo Mayor* is significant for its ideological implications in the construction of memory. Why would the mendicant friars in the later sixteenth-century wish to claim the site in the present-day Zócalo, the center of pagan Aztec ritual and cosmological symbolism?

⁴⁴ Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule*, 113.

The construction of memory around San Francisco is made all the more complicated by the fact that chroniclers of México City's early history have often confused the first church of the Franciscans (San Francisco el Viejo) with the primitive *iglesia mayor*, that is, with the city's cathedral in the main plaza. Most of the ambiguity stems from the seventeenth-century friar, Juan Diego de Torquemada's interpretation of Mendieta and Motolinia's chronicles. While re-writing the two authors, Torquemada interpolated a passage upon partial evidence, and George Kubler claims that his re-writing was an attempt to retroactively enhance the reputation and prestige of the Franciscan Order.⁴⁵ At the time, Torquemada was attempting to establish hierarchy and status over the secular church because the Franciscan parish was under threat of partial secularization.⁴⁶ He wrote that the Franciscans had occupied a site near Moctezuma's palace (which formed the western boundary of the plaza), and he had evidence for the plot of land from a 1525 bill of sale for the site.⁴⁷ Almost all the confusion is a result of the inability to locate the exact site upon which this plot was located. Torquemada, and the scholars that followed him, insisted that it was originally situated upon the privileged site of the primitive cathedral in the Zócalo (Figure 8).⁴⁸ Here, not even a century after the church's founding, the battle to preserve memory in the face of history is fought by chroniclers and historians.⁴⁹

⁴⁵George Kubler, *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*. Vol 2.(New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1948), 462.

⁴⁶The secular clergy are part of the Catholic Church, but are not mendicants or members a religious institute. They do not take religious vows and are obstinately 'of the world.'

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 463

⁴⁸Later, during the height of the frenzied suppression of the mendicant orders in the nineteenth century, scholars would seek to prove that the Franciscans did not even build a church before 1525. These historians who wished to erase the early history of San Francisco would claim that the sale of land in 1525 concerns a lot in the region east of the plaza mayor, and that the Franciscans did not own or build any building at the time at the site of the primitive cathedral; see Chauvet, 15

⁴⁹The exact site of San Francisco el Viejo is still bitterly contested among historians. Torquemada and Joaquin Icazbalceta (1824-1894) maintain that the site was near the southwest corner of the present Cathedral, and therefore within the limits of the Aztec Plaza Mayor; however, Lucas Alaman (1792-1853) and scholars that have followed him agree that the site could only have been on the eastern corner of the Plaza, forming a boundary with it.

Several documents contemporaneous with the friars' initial settlement of the city offer other clues for the location and use of San Francisco el Viejo. The First Book of the Cabildo (March 16, 1527) mentions in passing the existence of a space in which the Franciscans congregated within six years of the Conquest: "The aforementioned gentleman at the petition of Antonio de Villagomez granted him a plot...which is on the site of San Francisco el Viejo," and later in 1529, "...granted him a plot which is among those where the Monastery of San Francisco used to be."⁵⁰ Hence, documentary evidence proves that within the first few years of the colony, there was a definite place where the friars would assemble called San Francisco el Viejo.

In addition, the account of the first Franciscan chronicler, one of the Twelve, Motolinia states in 1542 that the site known as San Francisco el Viejo was being used as a cemetery:

"The Spaniards for the space of three years held their masses and sermons in a hall, which served as a church, in the same place where the mint now stands; but with few exceptions they did not bury their dead there, but instead used San Francisco el Viejo, instead, until they began to build churches."⁵¹

Because the Spanish customarily interred their dead in churches, this passage indicates that they were intending to build there, if not their main church, at least one of the most important. Furthermore, the

⁵⁰*Actas de Cabildo de la Ciudad de México* (México 1888)

⁵¹Motolinia, *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España*, Tratado II, Cap. 1, 250. CDHM. (Madrid, 1970): "En el primer año que a esta tierra llegaron los frailes los indios de México y Tlateloco se comenzaron a ayuntar los de un barrio y feligresía un día, y los de otro barrio otro día, y allí iban los frailes a enseñar y bautizar los niños; y desde a poco tiempo los domingos y fiestas se ayuntaban todos, cada barrio en su cabecera adonde tenían sus salas antiguas, porque iglesia aun no la habían y los españoles tuvieron también, obra de tres años, sus misas y sermones en una sala de estas que servían por iglesia, y ahora es allí en la misma sala la casa de la moneda; pero no se enterraban allí casi nadie sino en san francisco el viejo, hasta que después se comenzaron a edificar iglesias. anduvieron los mexicanos cinco años muy fríos, o por el embarazo de los españoles y obras de México, o porque los viejos de los mexicanos tenían poco calor. después de pasados cinco años despertaron muchos de ellos e hicieron iglesias, y ahora frecuentan mucho las misas cada die y reciben los sacramentos devotamente."

use of the site for burial indicates the foundation of ancestral memory at the site, for the corpses of the past laid claim to the future through a sanctified demarcation of space. In the same way that the occupation of the land laid claims to spatial origins and myth, the corporeal occupation of the first site guaranteed that the church would henceforth act as a reliquary at least for important figures throughout México's history.

Even if San Francisco el Viejo never became a church, or even a convent, the situation sheds light on the context of Franciscan practice, intentions, and methods at the time. Chauvet posits that upon arriving, the missionary friars were unable to erect a church and convent because the city was still in the process of pacification. They had to be content with dwelling in one of the houses of the principal Indians, whose large, spacious halls were perfectly suitable for the domestic needs of the friars and divine services.⁵² Evidence for a similar process of occupation and appropriation is well documented in cases in Tetzoco, Tlaxcala, and Huejotzingo.⁵³ Thus, Torquemada's seventeenth-century testimony makes sense: amidst a chaotic environment, the friars would have first occupied a safe space near Moctezuma's palace, especially since they would not have been able to effectively organize Indian labor for a while. Therefore, according to previous settlement patterns, and with Torquemada's testimony, it can be concluded that the missionary Franciscans provisionally established themselves in one of the central plots of the Zócalo's sacred precinct, and the building they occupied would have most likely been one of Moctezuma's houses, one next to the houses of the elite Marques. Because it served as the dwelling for the Franciscans, it was called San Francisco even if it was not an ecclesiastical building or monastic *claustrum*.

⁵²Chauvet, 17.

⁵³Otoz-Mendieta-Suarez, *Relacion de la Descripcion de la Provinciadel Santo Evangelio* (México, 1947) 131-132, 163, and 166.

The exaltation of history through myth and legend, exemplified through Torquemada's claims, attempted to abolish historical distance and turn the past into an eternal present. Even if Torquemada's was incorrect, it establishes the Franciscan desire to link the church to a myth of origins, in other words, the nurturing or enriching of memory. By claiming to have inhabited the site that is now the Metropolitan Cathedral, Torquemada raised the stakes in a long-running ideological rivalry between the regular clergy (Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians) and the secular clergy. The contentious relationship would continue throughout the history of the Church of San Francisco and create friction between the mendicants who advocated for the Indians and the seculars who were under the control of the Spanish crown. In fact, later during the secularization reforms of the 1700's, the Franciscans would use historical evidence (like Torquemada's account) as support for their case against the government appropriation of the church.⁵⁴

In 1525, soon after their occupation of the site near the Zócalo, the Franciscans sold the land Cortés had given them on the Plaza Mayor and moved to the west side of the city so they could be closer to the Indian population whose conversion they were responsible for (Figure 2).⁵⁵ They established the Church of San Francisco on the site that once was Moctezuma's *Casa de fieras, aves de rapina y monstruos humanos* (house of the beasts, birds of prey, and monstrous humans). Traces of this original church disappeared in 1590 rebuilding and later seventeenth-century enlargements. A map produced in the 1900s of Tenochtitlan in 1591 shows the menagerie occupying the site of San Francisco (Figure 9).⁵⁶ In pre-Hispanic America, Moctezuma had ordered the construction of a menagerie. Menageries were mostly connected with the aristocratic court and situated within a garden of a palace.

⁵⁴Ricardo Arancon Garcias, "Conventos de Frailes en el Centro Historico" in *Evolucion de las Ciudades*, (1993), 4.

⁵⁵John McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth-century México: Atrios, Posas, Open-Chapels, and Other Studies*.(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 375.

⁵⁶The original description of the site on the map reads: XXIII: casa de fieras, aves de rapina y monstruos humanos. "Esta casa ocupaba parte del sitio del extinguido convento de San Francisco, entre San Juan de Letran, calle de San Francisco, y la calle de Gante con una prolongacion hacia Zuleta"

The house of the beasts had many varieties of wildlife and was organized into four taxonomic departments and it had ten ponds for waterfowl and deer enclosures and a large collection of Central American birds, whose feathers were often used for the sacred artistic tradition of featherwork. Moctezuma was displaying his power and wealth through the ownership and exhibition of animals and oddities, and it impressed Cortés. In Cortés' second letter to Charles I, King of Spain, he details the paradise and grandeur of the menagerie, including adjoining balconies and courts from which Moctezuma and his court could comfortably observe the animals.⁵⁷ The animals were only meant to ever be engaged with by the elite at a comfortable distance. Another conquistador, Bernal Diaz del Castillo (1492-1585), who wrote an eye-witness account of the Conquest of México, marvels at the pleasures the Aztec elite enjoyed in their king's zoological garden, especially the "numerous baths, wells, basins, and ponds full of limpid water, which regularly ebbed and flowed . . . [and the] buildings were substantially constructed of stonework, as also the theatres where the singers and dancers performed.... I can scarcely find words to express the astonishment I felt at the pomp and splendor of the Mexican monarch." However, his amazement quickly turns to revulsion as he describes the relationship between the ritualized human sacrifice and the zoo in a contemptuous and horrified tone: "No other part of the body was eaten [besides the heart], but the remainder was thrown to the beasts which were kept in those abominable dens, in which there were also vipers and other poisonous serpents..."⁵⁸ He continues

⁵⁷Hernan Cortés, *Cartas de Relación*. (México: editorial Porrúa, 1960), 180.

⁵⁸Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*. Prólogo de Claudia Parodi. (México, Promexa Editores, 1979), 233-235.

Dejemos esto y vamos a otras gran casa donde tenían muchos ídolos y decían que eran sus dioses bravos, y con ellos todo géneros de alimañas, de tigres y leones de dos maneras, unos que son de hechura de lobo, que en esta tierra se llaman adives y zorros, y otras alimañas chicas, y todas estas carniceras se mantenían con carne, y las más de ellas criban en aquella casa, y las daban de comer venados, gallinas, perrillos y otras cosas que cazaban; y aún oí decir que cuerpos de indios de los que sacrificaban. Y es de esta manera: que ya me habrán oído decir que cuando sacrificaban algún triste indio, que le aserraban con unos navajones de pedernal por los pechos, y bulliendo le sacaban el corazón y sangre y lo presentaban a sus ídolos, en cuyo nombre hacían aquel sacrificio, y luego les cortaban los muslos y brazos y cabeza, y aquello comían en fiestas y banquetes, y la cabeza colgaban de unas vigas, y el cuerpo del sacrificado no llegaban a él para comerle, sino dábanlo a aquellos bravos animales.

to be astounded at the sacrificial quality of the space, in which Indians and Conquistadors alike were fed to the ravenous beasts. The memory of this ensanguined site rests uneasily underneath the foundations of the first church of San Francisco where sacrifices of a different order were enacted on a bloodless altar.

Motolinia, writing in 1538, gives a brief account of the primitive church that belies its cultural significance as a repository of memory in part through its relationship to the great sacrificial *Templo Mayor* still visible across town. He claims that in the year 1525, the Church of San Francisco was built; the church was small, the chapel was vaulted and built by a stone mason of Castile.⁵⁹ The Indians' reactions to the stone vaults is phenomenal: "The Indians greatly wondered on beholding the vaults, and could only believe that the whole edifice would fall when the forms were removed...." He describes the ceiling as vaulted and very tall and "upon climbing to the roofs and looking over México, *the only high edifice to be seen is the temple of the devil* [my italics] and from there México and the all surrounding towns were clearly visible."⁶⁰ The temple of the devil to which Motolinia refers is the great *teocalli* (i.e., the pyramid) in the *Templo Mayor*. México-Tenochtitlan at the time was composed of a ubiquitous datum of two-story buildings, punctuated only by the church and the *teocalli* contentiously standing in opposition to, and dialogue with, one another. This comparison is important because it asks why a mendicant Franciscan like Motolinia would wish to create a direct comparison between the temple of the devil and San Francisco. The early Franciscans clearly wished to usurp the imperial and sacred image of the temple and re-imagine their church as an embodied reincarnation of the temple, albeit one which cleansed the space of its transgressions.

⁵⁹Motolinía, *Memoriales*, 184.

⁶⁰Ibid., 84.

Through a series of spatial and iconographic subsumptions, San Francisco fulfilled its role as spiritual successor to the great Aztec *teocalli*. The act of building on the foundations or platforms of the Aztec sites functioned as a classic substitution or “exchange” of one place of memory for another. Although they did not build the Church of San Francisco on top of the physical remains of the *teocalli*, a chronicler of the seventeenth century, Augustin de Vetancurt, writes of a material link between the two edifices: “at least of the main chapel they used the square blocks of the stairs of the great pagan temple.”⁶¹ Much like the use of spolia during the construction of Christianized Rome, the recycling of the previous regime's building material was both out of necessity and a way to lay claim to the glory and power of the previous empire. From the natives' perspective, placing visible pieces of their old temples in the walls of the new churches was not sacrilegious, but a preservation of sacred material. Indeed, this practice follows an Aztec tradition of “termination rituals” in which the debris from earlier temples about to be replaced was carefully preserved under new structures.⁶² Most significantly, the new buildings continued in the same topographic and spatial relationship as the previous Aztec organization; hence, the friars clearly comprehended the key role of place in the indigenous culture. To the Indians, the reuse of materials from sacred structures quite conceivably transferred the sacrality and significance of the old building to the new. Furthermore, since neighborhood construction was based on labor from the community, the Indians who built the churches would have understood the physical differences between the masonry of the *templo* and the masonry of the church, while others, through the memory and oral tradition integral to Nahua story-telling, would have been aware of simply the physical act of transference. The friars were quick to take advantage of the phenomenon whereby a new shrine founded upon an earlier holy site seemingly leeches the latter's sacrality and holiness even when the old religion has supposedly been erased.

⁶¹Vetancurt, *Cronica de la Provincia del Santo Evangelio*, pt. IV of *Teatro Mexicano* (Mexico, 1871), 32.

⁶²Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion*, 47.

Hence, in the construction of the Church of San Francisco el Nuevo, the friars used many techniques for evangelizing which in other places would have been deemed heretical, such as founding the most crucial monastery of the New World on an Aztec paradise. By recalling the memory of important Aztec sites, the friars attempted to gain favor with their indigenous parishes. The friars subverted the aristocratic privilege of the palace and the hierarchical distance between the animals and Moctezuma by creating a space in which the poverty and piety of the Franciscans were shared with the Indians. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) observed that such phenomena are to be expected when an invading group unites with a group whose soil is arguably more sacred and more ancient.⁶³ By consciously evoking ancient memories in order to substitute new ones, instead of attempting to erase them, the friars linked their organization temporally and spatially with the power of the previous regime. The Franciscans annexed a part of Aztec collective memory by appropriating part of its local remembrance while at the same time transforming the perspective of it. Through this consciously stratified memory, the Franciscans nurtured collective memory around the church and ensured its longevity.⁶⁴

Foundations of Memory: San José de los Naturales, the first Open-Air Chapel

The encounter of Mesoamericans and Europeans during the sixteenth century led not only to the development of some of the most significant and widespread building projects of the last five-hundred years in the western hemisphere but to the earliest encoding of a multicultural consciousness in architectural form. Monumental constructions like San Francisco and its Indian chapel largely date to

⁶³ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 215.

⁶⁴"Iglesia de San Francisco" (Centro de Informacion Documental): La construcción del convento de San Francisco se inició en 1524, auspiciada por Fernando Cortés. Es, sin duda, el convento más antiguo de México permaneció dignamente en pie durante 332 años. se cuenta que el predio en que su levanto fue justamente el sitio en donde estaba el jardín en que Moctezuma hizo guardar una multitud de animales raros por su hermosura y su fiereza.

1530-1580 and were therefore the products of Indian communities that had already been converted. Notions of a colonial architecture entirely of Conquest and evangelization are therefore misleading and incorrect. In fact, some contemporary authors, like Jaime Lara, argue that simple root metaphors shared by the two religions allowed for an unheard of cultural synthesis. For instance, both religions had an eschatological focus that transformed apocalyptic metaphors into divine judgment. The success of indoctrination depended on the missionaries' understanding of Aztec religion, and the Indians eventually came to equate many elements of Catholicism, such as the gardens of paradise and the tree of the cross, with similar aspects of their own religion.⁶⁵ The synthesization intended to convert the Aztecs by rapid ritual substitution, combined with a more extended quest for “grammatical compatibility” in the visual arts. As the term synthesization implies, “conversion” was not one-sidedly the work of the mendicants; the resultant New World Catholicism was accomplished with the guidance of the Aztec neophytes, specifically the native scholarly elite.⁶⁶ Through metaphor, the friars were able to explain natural and cosmological phenomena easily and effectively to the Nahuatl.

Through the convergence of the Spanish and Aztec cultures, entirely new architectural typologies, both formal and spatial, created a landscape that was conducive to conversion and syncretism. Historians have established that the dominant typological monastic complex, consisting of a single nave church, open-chapel, and walled open plaza called an *atrio* with its monumental cross and stational chapels called *posas* (Figure 12) was heavily influenced by the spatial arrangement of indigenous complexes.⁶⁷ The sacred typology of central Aztec building, evident in the cities of Tenayuca, Tenochtitlan, and Teopanzolo, consists of pyramidal platforms supporting temples symbolic of heaven, emerging from the land, with colossal staircases facing west onto grand open plazas in which citizens

⁶⁵Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 7.

⁶⁶Ibid., 113.

⁶⁷Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion*, 34-36.

would worship, enact ritual, and perform. With analogous features – i.e, temple and plaza– colonial monasteries became the most significant tool for the conversion of the Aztecs to Christianity even as they embedded memories of the former’s architecture into novel contemporary settings. Recent scholars, such as Lara and Edgerton, have recognized that sixteenth-century Mexican architecture is not merely a bricolage of disparate parts that can be identified as Aztec or Spanish, but is rather something entirely new and should be evaluated on its own terms.

Whether founding a new town or entering a conquered Aztec city, friars first had a church and its dependencies erected with lodging for the friars and a temporary chapel. The early Indian congregations were enormous and special arrangements were soon contrived to accommodate them. The original San José de los Naturales (1525, demolished in 1697), built next to the church of San Francisco, established the open-chapel typology in México (Figure 10). All the evidence for San José comes from textual accounts and maps. Its general composition supplied the model for the distinctive *convento* layout adopted by all three evangelizing orders in Mesoamerica. Similar to the conventional European monastery, the Mexican *convento* consisted of standard friars' living quarters abutted to a church, along with other architectural features that were either adapted from European prototypes or invented on site to suit the needs, both utilitarian and spiritual, of the Mexican mission.

The open-chapel of San José de los Naturales – not to be confused with the adjacent church for the friars (San Francisco) which colonial witnesses spoke of separately – represented a brand new architectural form in the New World. One side of the open-chapel had no wall at all, as the name suggests, and it served as the sanctuary for preaching to the large crowds of Indians who stood outside since their numbers were too great to fit inside the single-nave church, which, in any case, was reserved for Europeans. For this reason, open-chapels became known as the *Capillas de Indios* (chapels of the Indians). The Indian chapels would either abut or sit slightly separated from the church (Figure 12, a).

San José de los Naturales was located to the north of the church of San Francisco (because the friars' convent is traditionally on the south side). Both the chapel and church are oriented with the apse at the eastern end, establishing a popular typological pattern in which the axis of the chapel was parallel to the church; its large number of naves faced onto the *atrio* (Figure 10).⁶⁸ In the case of San José de los Naturales, the chapel faced away from the Spanish center to the Indian neighborhoods to show that the friars' main concern was the Nahuas' well-being -- spiritually, physically, and mentally. While the open plazas of *conventos* obviously brought to mind the large plazas in front of Aztec temples, the open-chapels incorporated indigenous spatial practices in more subtle ways, such as being raised above eye level, thus recalling the twin temples atop the Aztec pyramids, at the foot of which the Indians were accustomed to congregate.

Even in the late sixteenth-century, the open-chapel maintained specific formal and spatial characteristics that recalled the worship spaces of the Nahua. Cervantes Salazar provides additional accounts of the building after Charles V's memorial in 1558. He states: "On the left is a chapel called Saint Joséph's, to which one goes up by two steps; it is very large, and supported by many columns which makes seven naves....they had been like marble for the occasion." The slight ascension into the chapel marked the sacred precinct of the chapel as being at once a part of and separate from the *atrio*. Several years later he continues the description: "It is a sight to see because it is so ingeniously covered with wood over many columns. In front it has a set of stone arches. It is very light because the chapel is high and all open in front, and the stone arches are low, and serve more for ornament than for shelter or support."⁶⁹ Evidently, there was a larger, more substantial primary structure composed of columns, upon which the stone arches were situated to create the illusion of a portico (Figure 13) .

⁶⁸ Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion*, 40-42.

⁶⁹ Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, *México en 1554 y tumulto imperial*. Edmundo O'Gorman, ed. (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1963), 55.

The precise date of San José's construction is difficult to ascertain, as there are few accounts of its earliest construction. Some scholars, like Truitt, speculate that the earliest version of San José was finished by 1532.⁷⁰ Kubler, on the other hand, maintains that the chapel could not have been constructed until 1547, whereas John McAndrew believes that within a year of moving to the site of San Francisco el Nuevo, the chapel of San José de los Naturales had been constructed.⁷¹ As the only open-chapel in the city for many years, the necessity for evangelization would seem to have required that the chapel be built shortly after the church of San Francisco itself. While the chapel came to be an immense, many-aisled hypostyle hall, it was initially probably no more than a small, thatched shed facing onto an expansive *atrio*. Although the early accounts of church construction do not survive, other open-air chapels in Mexico were known to be built in less than a day. An account written in 1527 by a certain Father Tello, for example, claims that "On Palm Sunday a church was built in the town of El Tuito...."⁷² As a small thatched shed erected quickly, San José existed by 1532 when Fray Pedro wrote to his cousin, the emperor, of "corrals and a chapel" at the San Francisco complex.⁷³

The chapel required many rebuildings or restorations early in its history. Bishop Zumarraga's account of a chapel to his nephew in 1539 indicates that a portico-chapel may have already replaced the thatched shed by that time. He stated that the chapel was the "chief site of the country, with its aisle and chancel suitably arranged [with a corridor and oratory]."⁷⁴ His remarks imply that the chapel was at least one portico deep with an apse set in the middle of its back wall, and was now a proper chapel. Then, another chronicle states that in 1547, the chapel was begun after an earthquake in that year, which would suggest that the chapel was rebuilt at this time rather than merely repaired. Without

⁷⁰ Johnathan Truitt, "Nahuas and Catholicism in Mexico Tenochtitlan: Religious Faith and Practice and la Capilla de San Josef de los Naturales, 1523-1700." (Ph. D. diss., Tulane University, 2011), 41.

⁷¹ Kubler, *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, 466-467.

⁷² McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 375.

⁷³ Chauvet, "The Church of San Francisco," 15.

⁷⁴ McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 389.

further information, however, one can safely conclude that the friars ordered a significant alteration or rebuilding of the open-chapel of San José de los Naturales already in or around 1538, which was followed by a collapse harmful enough to call for repairs or rebuilding in 1547.⁷⁵ But the chapel's construction history was not yet a *fait accompli*, for in 1552 Fray Pedro de Gante wrote a letter to the emperor stating that the chapel "has been done over again, good, and well built, so that the Holy Offices can be celebrated there impressively."⁷⁶

This prestigious *Capilla de Indios*, by 1555, was a dominating architectural presence in the *atrio*. It was seven aisles wide and very large, and it boasted an intricate wooden ceiling supported on wooden columns. Its central aisle was given hierarchy by low masonry arches from facade to sanctuary. Its facade of seven high, trabeated wooden bays ordered the east side of the *atrio*.⁷⁷ Spanish man of letters, Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, described the open-chapel in his 1554 account of the city as a significant landmark and an effectual ritual center: "Its roof, high above the ground, is carried by tall tapering columns of wood, the material ennobled by the workmanship....It is arranged in such a way that the crowd of Indians, big as it is, which flocks from all around on feast days, can see without hindrance and hear the priest as he performs the Holy Sacrifice."⁷⁸ In 1558, Fray Pedro claimed that the chapel could hold 10,000 and its *atrio* 50,000, surely one of the largest in the world. Salazar's account agrees that the open-chapel of San José de los Naturales was large enough to hold all the Spanish population of the city.⁷⁹ His was a remarkable observation – if he was not speaking purely hypothetically – in that spatial entities were here seen as agents in blurring the typically strict racial divisions in the city.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 380.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 382.

⁷⁸ Salazar, *México en 1554*, 54.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 53.

The walled, immense *atrio* in front of the church and open-chapel replaced the pre-Conquest sacred precinct and attempted to substitute Christian rituals for the memories once produced there. Its success made it the most distinctive and significant spatial tool of conversion. The immediate inspiration for the *atrio* was found in pre-Conquest México. Ritually, it was typical for the Indians to perform rites and dances outdoors in quadrangular precincts similarly surrounded by a wall. Edgerton thinks that the *atrio*'s reproduction was a deliberate replication by the friars to remind the Indians how similar the Christian cosmological worldview was to their own deeply held notion of the universe.⁸⁰ Nearly all Mesoamericans shared the concept that the universe was formed at the time of creation in the shape of a quincunx that was oriented to the four cardinal directions. This sacred master plan was reflected in miniature at every scale, from the city to church complexes like San Francisco, and beyond to the landscape of each Indian settlement. Quite naturally, the quincunx was the organizing device for the *atrio*, with a wooden cross marking the center, walls delineating the sacred boundary, and *posas*, or station chapels, marking the four corners (Figure 12). By the mid- sixteenth century, San José's *atrio* did in fact contain a massive 200-foot *ahuehuete* wood cross. Salazar states that the *atrio*'s "level plain is not inferior in extent to that of the Dominicans, and a tall cross erected in its center seems to touch the sky."⁸¹ This cross was visible from all the roads that led to the city long before the traveler ever entered the precinct. It was constructed from the tallest cypress trees of Moctezuma's gardens, one element of the Aztec paradise that was incorporated into the Indian chapel. Salazar's description indicates that several trees from the king's garden weathered the Conquest and survived in the *atrio* of San José: "The trees, too, set around the cross in orderly fashion, and indeed overshadowing and vying with it in height delight the eye no less. There are shrines in the court's corners, also, and for the same

⁸⁰ Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion*, 58.

⁸¹ Cervantes Salazar, *México in 1554*, 54.

purpose."⁸² Trees are in fact seen in contemporary depiction of an open-chapel (Figure 6). Also contained herein is the metaphor of an originating center in the cross and an allusion to the sacrality of the corporeal body manifested in the ritual organization of the *atrio*. Indians would have reenacted the Stations of the Cross as they processed around the perimeter of the *atrio*. The new metaphor of the body of Jesus as a filter through which the entire world could be comprehended, like the blood ritual of the Aztecs – a memory by now – was implicitly connected with the sustenance of the universe and the body's blood. These, then, are some of the basic, but multivalent spatial strategies by which mendicant friars adapted and subverted Indian ritual, spatial, and architectural elements in their sacred architecture, thereby creating an exchange, rather than submission, of the two cultures which allowed memory to be sustained rather than eradicated.

The construction of the atrio and its open-chapel provided the foundation for the post-Conquest collective memory of the workers who built them. Although the general plans of *conventos* were probably determined by the friars, the physical construction was carried out with autonomy by the indigenous craftsmen. As Kubler notes, the simple fact is that the Indians were not exterminated by colonization, and their labor produced an abundant and qualitative material culture.⁸³ Native architecture was restricted in its material means; hence, the effects typical of colonial architecture, such as monolithic masonry, came more from the manual performance of the common laborers than from any intellectual decisions by designers.⁸⁴ The survival of Aztec architectural culture was literally embedded in the way walls were formed. Although the walls of San José de los Naturales do not survive, it is safe to assume that it followed the most common of building methods which was to pile up stones which had been flattened only on the visible side but which had not been squared but were left roughly

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Kubler, *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, 419.

⁸⁴McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 190-191.

polygonal. Inside much of the wall was rubble encased in mortar made with volcanic sand, carbonate of lime, and clay mud; since the mortar was not strong in large amounts by itself and became weaker through weather contact, often the surface of the mortar was reduced by inserting small stones. The resulting pattern of masonry, called *rejoneado*, is a simple technique that affected the physical composition of the buildings but not the architectural design since for an important wall or facade in the best colonial churches, *rejoneado* was normally surfaced with stucco. Although the perseverance of the technique would have been apparent when it remained unfinished, it is unclear if this particular material memory of Nahua architectural culture could have survived once the walls were plastered.

Although the chapel was rebuilt many times, San José was the example par excellence of the culmination of indigenous and European building traditions. It was mostly constructed by Indian laborers and contained ornate stonework; Vetancurt mentioned that San José contained a mirror made of *tlalchinol* (an indigenous stone) which he said was more beautiful than either jasper or alabaster.⁸⁵ Additionally, he describes the fountains, baptismal fonts, pillars, and doorways as constructed of jasper and alabaster. Metalsmiths crafted the doorknobs, door jams, and the crucifix in the chapel out of silver. Vetancurt mentions the fountain in one of the cloisters in the friary of San Francisco as being made out of white jasper, contained two basins, and included a carved image of San Diego. They also crafted many of the smaller icons of saints in silver and gold for home and chapel use.⁸⁶ In short, the Nahua were exceptional craftsmen and their spiritual devotion to San José de los Naturales manifested in innumerable ways which combined the material symbolism of indigenous construction with the imagery and iconography of European Catholicism.

⁸⁵Vetancurt, *Teatro Mexicano*, pt. 1, 23.

⁸⁶Vetancurt, *Teatro Mexicano*, pt. 1, 22-23; pt. 2, 59-60; pt. 4, p. 33

Social Memory: San Francisco as Vessel of Indigenous and Spanish Anamnesis

Once the primitive Church of San Francisco had been established in what had been Moctezuma's aviary and the Franciscans and Nahua built the open-chapel adjacent to the church, they established a hub for most of the indigenous activity in the capital, although it, theoretically, served only a quarter of the city's area. By the mid sixteenth century, San Francisco was becoming a community center, and, as such, the *convento* helped foster collective memory through the production of social space around it.⁸⁷ The original quadripartite division of the city into barrios continued under the Spanish regime, and San José de los Naturales served as the center of social life in the southwest quadrant (Figure 15). As the locus for Indian activity including liturgical dramaturgy, theatre, ritual, and festivals, the open-chapel and its atrio was the spiritual, religious, administrative, and political epicenter of Indian life. Memory is inherently bound by place and human dimensions – both bodily and ritually. Indian collective identity was embodied in the space and liturgy of the chapel, giving the Nahua agency that could have otherwise been lost. The church was built at the expense of the Indians as a national or communal church, and was therefore perpetually maintained by their gifts.⁸⁸ Finally, because the chapel derived its origins from Moctezuma's zoo, the Nahua would have been aware of the former grandeur of the site and could claim that their social identity persevered and was maintained by their will.

The chapel of San José de los Naturales, more than a mere chapel in which a group of people congregated, emerges as a locus of cultural memory. As a locus, the chapel belonged not just to the time in which it was built, but to an extended period of time reaching far back into the past (while also actualizing the past in the present). In terms of social space, a Nahua entering into the sacred *atrio* would not be merely penetrating into the verdant gardens of the convent, but producing a space written

⁸⁷ By 1555-1556, it would boast an infirmary and sacristy adjoining San José; Chauvet, "The Church of San Francisco," 16.

⁸⁸ Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 141-142.

by the habitual actions of the body, thereby becoming subconsciously and collectively familiar. The perpetual construction of San José persisted within the city's memory for many generations, and became part of the larger collective biography of the city's inhabitants, especially the Indians.

As with the original division of México-Tenochtitlan into four quadrants, space continued to be an important anchor of social consciousness in the later sixteenth century. The post-Conquest parish communities of Indians had their roots in the four Aztec quadrants called *callpolli*, or literally "big houses", which were subdivided into *visitas*.⁸⁹ Unlike the Spanish civil government, the ecclesiastical body recognized these Indian subdivisions and organized the missionary church according to them. San José de los Naturales commanded four *visitas* of Indian barrios, each with its own chapel.⁹⁰ In the Codice Osuna, these four *visita* chapels are depicted at the four corners of the map with San José de los Naturales in the middle (Figure 17). Fray Pedro de Gante, the mendicant founder of San José, is depicted below the chapel, with the Nahuatl place-name for the city of México-Tenochtitlan beneath him. This image diagrams how the community maintained its fundamental organization in the early decades of colonial rule, echoing the quincunx plans of the *Templo Mayor* and the Cathedral zone.

Before and after the initial Spanish administration, each barrio acted as a semi-autonomous unit; all administrative and practical needs of the community were governed and provided by the groups that identified with the parish. Therefore, Indians saw themselves not as part of the greater city of Tenochtitlan, but rather with their particular barrio, for instance, San Juan Moyotlan, where San Francisco/San José de los Naturales was located.⁹¹ The Nahuatl of the city maintained their group identity through the parish of San Juan Moyotlan in many ways, as noted elsewhere.⁹² The barrio acted as the

⁸⁹ Lockhart, *The Nahuatl After the Conquest*, 25.

⁹⁰ Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule*, 372.

⁹¹ Felipe Castro Gutiérrez, "Origen y Conformación de los Barrios de Indios" in *Los Indios y la Ciudades de Nueva España*, 37.

⁹² The residents of San Juan expressed their patriotism after the barrio donated the church of San Juan to the nuns of

seat of indigenous government, where there was also a jail and governor's palace.⁹³ Even until the seventeenth century, Franciscan parish records emphasized the centrality of San José de los Naturales in the hierarchy of the indigenous chapels. They referred to the chapel as "esta iglesia Cathedral de Yndios de S. José de México" (this cathedral church of Indians of San José of México). This term appears to have been used in order to distinguish the chapel from the other indigenous chapels, which had since been established on the model of San José. And, according to Torquemada, the Nahuas of the four barrios continued to think of San José as their "mother chapel."⁹⁴ Its exalted status is to be expected as the parish constituted over half of the Indian population (Figure 15).⁹⁵ Because San José represented such a large part of the population, it was their most effective means of organizing political and economic leverage in México. The main parish chapels, among them San José, kept baptismal, burial, and marriage records for their parishioners. Archival documents show that communal ties to parish churches were so strong that some parishioners, confronting death, preferred to face the afterlife on the site of the chapel formative to their birth rather than the one in which they resided.⁹⁶

Architecture, and specifically the Indians' communal church, San José de los Naturales, anchored the social space of the actions of people and allowed them to develop and give expression to their own values. For instance, the large, squarish space of the *atrio* and chapel encouraged a more egalitarian, less hierarchical ritual than the longitudinal plan of the church proper. As seen above, the chapel acted

Santa Clara. The Nahuas chronicler Chimalpahin (1579-1660) recalls that when the nuns began living in San Juan in 1593, the Holy Sacrament was placed there. To commemorate the event, Spaniards and Nahuas proceeded through the city, and the viceroy and Audiencia judges were in attendance. Chimalpahin continues by claiming that "God greatly favored the altepetl" as a larger unit, but that the honor and fame went to a specific barrio, San Juan Moyotlan. Chimalpahin, *Annals of his Time*, 45.

⁹³Truitt, "Nahuas and Catholicism," 27.

⁹⁴Torquemada, *Monarchia Indiana*, v.3 229.

⁹⁵Although census data from the time is rare, Truitt speculates that by 1570, the barrio of San Juan Moyotlan had a large percentage of tribute paying citizens: 4,091 married couples, 1,115 widows, 2,231 single men over fourteen; comparatively, Truitt, 30. His dissertation contains the full table of figures.

⁹⁶There are accounts of Indians requesting to be buried in the parish chapel in which they were raised, even though they had moved to a different parish. For example, two wills, written for parishioners of San Pablo Malcuitlapilco in 1644, requested masses and burial at the chapel of San José, despite living in the district of San Pablo. AGN, Historia, v. 413, e. 1, fs. 56ff.

as a vessel for the most important rites of passage, such as baptism, matrimony, and burial, but, more than a vessel, the space came to embody these social events and rituals, allowing the Nahua parishioners to claim many of the chapel's buildings and the ceremonial activities it held as their own. The space of San José was reserved for the Indians; during times of procession through, San José was the origin of their exaltations, "And we commoners assembled at San Josef, at San Francisco. Thereupon, everyone set out and departed [in procession and penitence]." ⁹⁷ Historians can now decipher a more holistic understanding of the social and bodily constructs of the Indian congregation. The constant intermingling of body and architecture produced spaces like San José which were able to resonate so profoundly with the parishioners. San José is remarkable for its spatial and functional flexibility; throughout its life, the chapel went through many iterations to suit the needs of the parish. Religious spaces in México acted as multivalent carriers of meaning for the parishioners, because churches encapsulated not only deep religious symbolism (as evidenced in the evangelizing friars' biblical metaphors), but also genealogical and communal memory.

From the earliest years of the existence of the open-chapel as a thatched shed, native casts of thousands performed elaborate plays spoken in Nahuatl. They were immensely popular and successful in catechizing large numbers. ⁹⁸ In New Spain, the friars adapted elements of Aztec religious dramaturgy, employing indigenous traditions of singing, dancing, and puppetry, and even using native playwrights to compose the plays. ⁹⁹ The native artists created the costumes for this edifying theatre, along with its props, scenery and hoisting machinery. In 1531, the first such play was staged at San José. It was an eschatological drama entitled "The Last Judgment." ¹⁰⁰ According to the Spanish historian, Bartolomé de

⁹⁷ Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin,, James Lockhart, Susan Schroeder, and Doris Namala eds. *Annals of his time: Don Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin.* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2006), 87.

⁹⁸ Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 178.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*,179.

las Casas (1484-1566), it had a cast of eight hundred with sixteen speaking roles. It was the first of several plays with end of the world themes, and its *mise-en-scène* was the city of Jerusalem. In the script, an angel interrupts the Nahuatl dialogue to announce in Latin "rise you dead, come to judgment." The eschatological message, intended for the Nahua audience, effectively reimagined Tenochtitlan as the new theater of Jerusalem. Not surprisingly, the message of conversion is hammered down at the end of the play with an emphasis on the fact that the neophytes saw "with their own eyes" and "witnessed" the Christian truths professed by the mendicants.¹⁰¹ When the open-chapel is rebuilt in 1539, the stage had evolved into a *cuauhteocalli*, a Nahua term for a wooden platform for theatrical representations which the Nahua often staged in the *atrio*.

The indigenous population was not the only one whose social memory was also constructed spatially by the great *convento* of San Francisco. Many sixteenth-century Spaniards in México City returned repeatedly to the open-chapel and church in the barrio of San Juan Moyotlan for significant personal and collective events. For instance, in 1555, the First Council of the Mexican Church met in the open-chapel, which was presumably chosen for its size and its significant status.¹⁰² Perhaps most impressively, the open-chapel of San José was chosen for a burial memorial for Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (r. 1519-1558) who died in Spain. San José was presumably chosen because the Metropolitan Cathedral was too small to shelter the burial monument. In addition, the chapel combined with the courtyard of San Francisco was able to accommodate 50,000 people for the event, making it one of, if not the largest, public spaces in the city. The chapel was again transformed to accommodate King

¹⁰¹"O beloved children, o Christians, creatures of God! you have seen these horrible things with your own eyes. Everything is true, written in the sacred books awaken and see with your own eyes, so that what you have witnessed in this drama may not happen to you...tomorrow or the day after, judgment day will come. Pray to our Lord and to the Virgin Mary that she petition her beloved son Jesus Christ, so that after the judgment you may merit and receive the glory of heaven."Bartolome de las Casas, *Historia de Las Indias*, 243-245.

¹⁰² Manuel Rivera Cambas, *México pintoresco artístico y monumental: vistas, descripción, anécdotas y episodios de los lugares más notables de la capital y de los estados*, vol. 3. (Alicante: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2007), 221.

Charles V's burial ceremony. The chapel was radically altered by the architect of the Metropolitan Cathedral, Claudio de Arciniega; the renovation required a great amount of lime and forty 'big stones' for heavy pillars and for arches.¹⁰³ The Franciscans also installed a seventy-foot tall funeral monument for the obsequies of Charles V; to accommodate the view of his burial tomb (*tumulo*) from the chapel, they removed the files of arches flanking the central aisle. These arches were probably rebuilt in the facade after the ceremony, two to each bay, making fourteen in total (Figures 10, c, and 13). As the king that oversaw the Spanish colonization of the Americas, he was the most important figure for the Spanish empire. His burial at the chapel of San José symbolically marked the origin of New Spain and the ritual dawning of a new era under the reign of his son, Phillip II. The chapel, as a repository of memory for the Spanish, both shaped the social space of the capital and was transformed by its liturgical needs.

San José assumed many of the ritual and liturgical duties of San Francisco when the church collapsed in 1590, thereby expanding its memorial dimension to encompass spiritual memory. The Nahua chronicler Chimalpahin describes various significant events in the city in his famous work, "Annals of his Time." This chronicle, written in Nahuatl, was compiled in the early seventeenth century and is based on testimony from Indigenous persons. It covers the years 1589 through 1615. His testimonies are some of the few surviving chronicles written from the perspective of a Nahua. As such, his work is crucial in understanding the perspective and memories of the indigenous residents of México-Tenochtitlan. He recounts the event of installing the Sacrament in San José:

"Sunday the 14th of October 1590 was when the Sacrament was installed and put inside the Church of San José, on the right side. With that the Spaniards for the first time began to attend mass there, and with that the demolition of the church of San Francisco began."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³McAndrew, *Open-Air Churches*, 383.

¹⁰⁴Chimalpahin, *Annals of his Time*, 125.

While his perspective cannot be taken as the *only* Indian viewpoint, the inclusion of his voice amongst the Spanish chroniclers is invaluable because it speaks for itself of collective Indian memory, which few other written accounts preserve. As Halbwachs posits, individual memory is undeniably a part of collective memory, since each interpretation and truth is filtered through the social milieu of the time and community to which one belongs.¹⁰⁵ Hence, Chimalpahin's accounts relate the close ties that inextricably link the chapel to a multi-ethnic memory of the city.

As the city became more unified, builders of San Francisco made concerted efforts to create an architectural and spatial unity; during the construction of the new church, it and San José were architecturally reconciled by aligning the runs of their battlements.¹⁰⁶ A side wall, perhaps a party wall of the older church and San José was removed, revealing old confessionals. Interestingly, even this late in the sixteenth century, an Indian chronicler referred to San José as a *teocalli* which still, of course, meant "house of god," although now it was a house to a new god. This word-choice shows that even in the late sixteenth-century, Indians were still conceptualizing of ritual space in fairly analogous ways; the Nahuatl's pantheistic religion, therefore, allowed interchangeability between gods which extended to architecture and space. Furthermore, the Franciscans continued to capitalize on this symbolic analogy by increasing the prestige and grandeur of the open-chapel.

Fray Diego Valades (1533-1582), a Franciscan mestizo missionary, illustrated an open chapel literally on top of the Aztec *teocalli* in his depiction of the *altepetl* México-Tenochtitlan (Figure 11). An *altepetl* is a Nahuatl word for a local, ethnically-center political entity, the largest of which was México-Tenochtitlan.¹⁰⁷ While his engraving was factually inaccurate, it nevertheless carried a meaningful

¹⁰⁵ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 52-53.

¹⁰⁶ McAndrew, *Open-Air Churches*, 383.

¹⁰⁷ *Altepetls* are typically analogous to city-states, as they are an ethnically and culturally homogenous group.

Furthermore, the Nahuatl conceived of the world as a collection of *altepetls*, which were bound together by ties of community, rather than geographical constituency.

allegorical dimension. In his interpretation, like the missionary Franciscans, he depicted the Nahua as divinely chosen to become Christians. Therefore, the engraving shows the *teocalli* as a proto-Christian structure foreshadowing the Nahua's conversion to Christianity. Rather than the imposition of a universal, ideal Christian space, his engraving focused on the inherently communal and local appropriation of space for the Nahua. Valades attempted to perpetuate Nahua memory through the visual arts, thereby creating a unique identity around the particularities of regional histories in distinction to Spain.

For the Nahua, the *teocalli* was not merely a stage where the sacrifice of and for the gods was enacted; it was literally a mountain where the gods *actually* sacrificed and were sacrificed. In short, the *teocalli* was not a mere representation but the actual cosmic mountain and origin of Aztec religion. And because their understanding of time was based on cycles, they were not particularly concerned with the notion of transference from one set of gods to another. The previous Aztec system of conquest was based on tribute that maintained the autonomy of subjugated groups. Rather than enforce a system of complete tutelage and suppression, the Aztecs believed that as long as the defeated paid tribute and added the main Aztec deity to their pantheon of gods, the subjugated could continue with their lives much as they had before. However, they were divinely mandated to sustain the cosmos through successive cycles of time, which compelled them to maintain the balance of the universe, even if that meant transferal of gods and power. The end of the current era was not the end of the world, but was expected to be succeeded by a new era, in which the social memory of the previous age would continue. The Spanish Conquest represented this new era and was ideologically represented by the progenitor of the open-chapel, San José de los Naturales.

By the beginning of the seventeenth-century, San José had reached its most colossal dimensions and parts of the old *atrio* were becoming their own spolia or relics. Torquemada's early seventeenth-century account gives a more concise description of the building in 1608-09: "At the monastery of San Francisco, close by the north side of the church, stands an impressive chapel dedicated to glorious Saint Joséph...notable for its most curious building, and for its size and capacity. There is no other church nor other room in all México large enough to hold so many people. The chapel has seven naves, and for them there are seven altars, all at the east end, with the high altar in the middle and three on either side." Torquemada wanted to stress the colossal size of the *atrio* and the profusion of altars in the chapel. At this point, the chapel reached its maximum size: two hundred by eighty-five feet. Furthermore, when the 206 foot-tall *atrio* cross was taken down due to degradation in 1601, the indigenous parishioners kept pieces of it as relics. The tradition of keeping sacred objects recalls pre-Columbian traditions of relic collection. For the Aztecs, relics (often kept in sacred bundles) were the embodiments of the essence of their representative gods. In some early sixteenth-century manuscripts, the bundles of relics were the means by which the gods communicated to the Nahua as they guided them from their mythical origin in Aztlan to their destined homeland, Tenochtitlan. As Christ was still, even in the early seventeenth century, often thought of as an addition to the pantheon of gods, the Nahua maintained his being in the fragments of the cross.¹⁰⁸

From 1527 to 1611, San Francisco as a *locus*, or site of memory, for the Indians embodied their collective identity by unself-consciously recalling past memories of Nahua building, spatial, and ritual traditions. Nahua claimed ownership of San José and its attendant parish through their contributions of labor and ritual. Hence, the church became the embodiment of Nahua memory well into the seventeenth-century.

¹⁰⁸ Truitt, "Nahuas and Catholicism," 206



CHAPTER 2

From Memory to a Fragmented History: Mnestic Traces in the Age of Secularization

By the seventeenth century, the territorial and spiritual dominion of the Church of San Francisco had expanded to become the largest architectural complex of México City. Due to the church's grandeur and importance in the life of the city, it became a battleground for ideological contestations that were to plague México City in the early modern period. During the late eighteenth century, the secular clergy rose to challenge the mendicant orders for control of many parishes, including San Francisco. Ascendancy over the church passed from the mendicants to the seculars, but was soon to be supplanted by the imperial ambitions of nineteenth-century nationalists, only to see the church defaced by a group of radical Protestants at midcentury. However, the memory of San Francisco continued to inscribe itself in the material artifacts of the church, despite Protestant attempts at erasure. The parish of San Francisco was weakened during the secularization reforms (17th-19th centuries), during which a multitude of social entities attempted – and in large part succeeded – in appropriating and subverting the space of the Indians of San Francisco. Hence, the church, beyond its ability to shape Indian consciousness, began its descent into history rather than playing its previous role as actualized memory.

This passage from memory to history required every social group invested in San Francisco to redefine its identity through the conscious revitalization of its own history, which was complicated by the fact that each group had to reevaluate memory within the larger national meta-narrative of New Spain. Under the new Bourbon monarch on the throne in late eighteenth-century Spain, a program of secularization was imposed as part of a process of modernization. As result, the mendicant convents, where a cultural intermingling of parish/convent and Nahua/Spaniard, had evolved, would be fragmented or downright abolished, thereby destroying the sense of shared purpose that had bound the city's social groups together. Large *doctrinas* were broken up into smaller parishes led by secular clergy and conventual buildings were purged of the material culture of the mendicant past and sometimes deconsecrated. This process made many colonial churches pieces of history, in Pierre Nora's use of the term, rather than crucibles of communal memory. For the Indians shunted off into new parishes, modernization meant that they lost the ties that once bound them genealogically, through memory, to place by means of their contributions to architecture and the culturally heterogeneous space it produced. However, due to the way in which Indians had long defined the sacred, ways which had not been lost in the centuries since colonization, they redefined material culture through parish professional organizations, such as *cofradías*, so that they could still articulate group membership and social difference. Interjecting itself into the meta-narrative of New Spain, post-Independence politics reimagined the recent colonial past by sacralizing the imperial ambitions of the newly-formed government. Seized by an anti-clerical fervor, the new republican government passed Reform Laws that nationalized Church property which ultimately lead to the geographical, spiritual, and physical fragmentation of San Francisco. But even these fragments would soon be appropriated by various groups wishing to usurp the history of the church. However, the material and historical traces of San Francisco survived by externalizing the ravages and ideological battles in a transformed architectural face and body.

During this tumultuous span of time, San Francisco began its slow slide from a *lieu de mémoire* toward becoming a historical monument. According to Nora's theory of collective memory, a historical monument no longer participates in producing the living memory of a culture, whereas a place of memory is one that continuously evolves with its community, mirroring the social culture of the place back to itself.¹⁰⁹ The fragmentation of the church and its parish – communally, spiritually, and physically – led to an epistemological rupture that marked the transition from a firmly-rooted past to a past that was experienced as a radical break in temporal continuity. Mnestic and imagined traces gained greater importance over the material in this period as the church lost its power to shape collective memory. However, even the physical scars the church incurred in a period of iconoclasm succeeded in maintaining memory, inasmuch as the church came to be defined as much by what it was as by what it was not. History itself became inherently imperialist, not only because it subjected the past to political manipulation, but because it claimed universality, creating a past presumably equally accessible to all. This reimagined memory was self-consciously shaped in the mold of the holy by new national leaders, who fashioned themselves as protectors of México's sacred past. Hence, memory and its descent into history became the vehicle that allowed Mexican identity to remain standing on its re-constructed, sanctified foundation.¹¹⁰

Rebuildings

From the late sixteenth century into the first decades of the seventeenth, the friars of San Francisco expanded their territorial dominion, gradually adding a multitude of conventual buildings and rebuilding the church itself at least three times. The growth process was somewhat erratic, but in the

¹⁰⁹Nora, "Between Memory and History," 15-16.

¹¹⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 400-405.

end it augmented the monastery's spiritual and political mission. Around 1547, the first Bishop and Archbishop of México, Fray Juan de Zumarraga (1468-1548), built the friars an infirmary within the confines of the convent, another wing of the monastery, and a dormitory for the friars. Greater than their concerns for the Spanish space of the church, the Franciscans chose to focus on buildings that supported their evangelizing efforts. But at some point in or around 1569, the church of San Francisco suffered irreparable damage and lacked funding to be rebuilt.¹¹¹ The convent also had to be renovated, but in a 1585 account, Fray Alonso Ponce reported that the monastery "remained unfinished because they had torn down the old one and were in the process of building the new one, and at the time the large hall of two stories was finished and two dormitories in which the friars dwelt and another of one story and the infirmary."¹¹² A letter written by Fray Navarro reveals that the convent was still experiencing material hardships in 1574. He outlined plans for building a new church at the behest of the city; despite the friars' petitions, the church was left untouched. He describes some irreparable damage the church had apparently suffered: "and it is certain that the church is very small and furthermore that it has sunk and is six feet below the sidewalk and in the lake, so that the water oozes from the ground and the church cannot be raised because it is very low and, besides that, the ends of the beams with which it is covered are already half-decayed...."¹¹³ Thus, the great mother-church of the Franciscans, from its inception, was a site of constant rebuilding, demolition, and construction. The Indians' contribution of perpetual labor – even for monastic buildings they did not claim as their own – created a sense of shared ownership that continued to maintain their communal memory.

A second church of San Francisco was begun on the same site as the first in 1590, and construction continued for over twelve years. The new edifice was eleven meters in width and of an

¹¹¹"Good Friday, the 12th of April, was when the new *cofradia* of the soledad was first founded at San Josef. It was done for the benefit of the Mexica." Chimalpahin, *Annals*, 210.

¹¹² "Carta de Don Fray Juan de Zumarraga el Principe Done Felipe," 21.

¹¹³ "Relacion de Fray Miguel Navarro" in *Codice Mendieta*, IV, I, 120-121.

indeterminate length. An early description of this church comes from Vetancurt's musings on the church interior: "And the main chapel has so many *retablos* that they stand one next to another and so close together that they permit no view of the walls. The ceiling is of ornamental carved wood, sheathed with lead."¹¹⁴¹¹⁵ According to Vetancurt's account, then, the new church, despite the humble beginnings of the Franciscans' first house, became a product of the pervasive Counter-Reformation frenzy that had finally reached México's shores. To that end, the church slowly built an army of chapels in its *atrio* to help combat the perceived threats of the Protestants, while expanding its spiritual dominion to Indian and non-Indian alike (Figure 1; 7-14).

Throughout the early modern period, the new San Francisco would continue to bear witness to several important events which augmented its political and national status. For instance, in 1629, the Franciscans had the bones of Cortés, along with those of his descendants, transferred to their mother church in México, where these relics stayed for eighty-seven years. From his monetary and spiritual dedication to the founding of the church, and then to his eventual eternal entombment in the sanctuary, the church maintained a great ideological connection with the most mythologically significant actor in the history of New Spain. As one of the primary patrons of the church, he was indelibly connected to its origins and glorious history and as the legendary hero of the conquest, Cortés's burial in the church would be recalled by successive rulers laying claim to his imperial legacy. Thus, Cortés's immortal presence in the church perpetuated the sedimented memory of subsequent rulers, creating a space in which the specter of conquest and its imperial ambitions created a *lieu de mémoire* of grand proportions.

¹¹⁴ As a rule, *retablos* were painted by guilds of Spaniards or European-trained artists.

¹¹⁵ Vetancurt, *Chronica de la Provincia del Santo Evangelio*, 34.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the monastery complex was absolutely massive (Figure 19). The convent underwent an overhauling renovation in 1649 which changed the character of the monastery to function as the headquarters for a much expanded mission in North and South America. The Franciscans had a new infirmary and cloister erected atop the old edifices. Only a few years later, they added nine two-story dormitories and two cloisters each with a fountain. Added services were accommodated in a new refectory, the hall of the *De profundis*, spacious halls for classes in philosophy and theology, a splendid library and special section for the Commissary General and his staff as well as the professors. Unfortunately, the church itself remained a perennial architectural problem. Despite its grandeur, the land on which San Francisco was built caused rapid deterioration of the new edifices in the latter half of the seventeenth century.¹¹⁶ A map produced in 1690 shows the alarming condition of the main facade of the church with its bell tower and open *atrio* (Figure 18). It shows that there were no walls on the western side of the *atrio* which left the space open to the canal. Between 1683 and 1689, the Franciscans planned to take down the church and build a new one, but the church was not demolished. After a series of reconstructions failed due to faulty soil conditions, the church reached its final, present-day incarnation on December 8, 1716 (Figure 28). Carrillo y Pérez described the church as "sumptuous in its dimensions, magnificent in its decoration, and rich in its sacred vessels...The main *retablo* is a work of the first class and without equal even in México..."¹¹⁷ Indeed, the new church stands at a magnificent seventy meters long and fourteen wide, and the convent, also remodeled and extended, reached its largest dimensions, occupying two entire blocks. The sixteenth-century chapels of the patio which surrounded the oldest church in México were reconstructed or modified. The Third Order Church and the Chapel of San José de los Naturales were profoundly changed; the great open chapel was reduced from its original seven naves to five, and eventually to only three. Its open façade

¹¹⁶Within less than a hundred years, the church would sink twelve more feet. See Vetancurt, *Cronica de la Provincia del Santo Evangelio*, 34.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

was closed at this time and renamed Chapel of the Servites (Figure 20 and 1; 5). Adjoining the main church, parallel to it, they constructed a small chapel to Our Lady of Balvanera which provided a northern-facing entrance to the church that today is San Francisco's main façade (Figure 1; 3). By this time, then, the church had reached its most influential apex architecturally and spiritually, and it was still functioning actively as a *lieu de mémoire* for the mixed population of México City and for missionaries leaving for the distant edges of New Spain.

Secularization and Attempted Erasures of Indian Identity

The Church of San Francisco's once pervasive memory began its slow descent into history during the eighteenth century, a period marked by widespread Enlightenment reforms which installed secular clergy into all of the parishes in México City. The reforms were part of a larger cultural process that sought to modernize New Spain based on ideas of inclusiveness and integration that associated Indian culture with spiritual and material provincialism.¹¹⁸ Secularization was a structured Enlightenment solution to the perceived disorder, both practically and socially, in the current parish system. The crown came to view the mendicants, who had long been the spiritual shepherds of the Indians, as a necessary but temporary solution to evangelization. They intended the new transferal of parishes to secular priests to supplant the mendicants' power thereby fundamentally changing the identity of parishes and parishioners. Hence, the reforms attempted to restructure both the administrative space of the city and the identity of Indian parishioners. The crown secularized the first parish in 1750 and successive parishes were integrated every few years, with San José, as the last bastion of Indian identity, finally succumbing to secularization in 1772 (Figure 16). The Indian parishioners of San José were able to resist some of the

¹¹⁸ Matthew O'Hara, *A Flock Divided: Race, Religion, and Politics in México, 1749–1857* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 99-101.

homogenizing effects of the secularization program and succeeded more effectively than their mendicant clergymen in preserving the memory of San Francisco as the symbolic center of the city.

Beyond the ideological precepts of reforming Indian identity, the practical, administrative implications of secularization for the parishes were severe. Many of the *ex-doctrinas* lacked adequate secular clergy for the administrative and spiritual care of the Indians; even in the well-staffed areas of the city, this led to unsatisfactory spiritual care that compelled the Indians to seek out the remaining unsecularized parishes. The patio of San José de los Naturales, still under the control of the Franciscans, was filled with Indians so disgruntled by their treatment at the hands of the secular clergy that they travelled long distances to confess at San José. The brothers asked why they did not attend confession in their own parishes and the Indians responded that no priest was available or that the resident priest could not speak their language.¹¹⁹ The mendicants' ability to speak native languages was one of the reasons why their evangelizing had been so successful, whereas the seculars, in an attempt at integrating the Indians, tried to force them to speak Spanish which began to erode their collective identity, which was based in part on a well-established oral tradition. As a result of secularization, many Nahua felt the parish churches no longer attended to their spiritual needs, which later led to the establishment of semi-autonomous groups such *cofradías* based on social identity.

The Franciscans were able to sustain the defense of the *doctrina* of San José, at least for a time, due to its locus as a generator of collective memory. However, in 1764 the Franciscans feared the death of the Minister of San José would be a catalyst for secularization.¹²⁰ By 1767, Archbishop Lorenzana (1766-72) updated the Council of the Indies on the problems of continued maintenance of San José's parish boundaries and concluded that the only acceptable course was to integrate the Indians alongside

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹²⁰ AGN, Bienes nacionales, leg. 584, exp. 53.

the Spaniards, definitively abolishing the bipartite parish system, and distributing the parish's land to smaller communities led by the secular clergy.¹²¹ Under the new parish scheme, San José would have strict geographical boundaries and tend to all the religious living in its vicinity, regardless of caste or race. As the last parish to resist secularization, it was only a matter of time before the secular clergy wrested control from the Franciscans thereby fundamentally changing how the church had negotiated the city as a *lieu de memoire*.

With their very existence threatened, the mendicants of San José did not take the secularization issue lightly and in an effort to maintain control of the parish, the Franciscans emphasized the church's glorious history as the first indigenous parish, the accomplishments of its parishioners, its success in evangelization, and its ritual importance in the city. In their petitions, the Franciscans mentioned the vast accomplishments of many of their parishioners and students, citing the works of Fray Juan de Torquemada and Fray Juan Bautista in defense of their continued ministry to the Nahua. The Procurator of the province of the holy gospel, Fray Castro, pointed out that "this province [of San José] is the primary and first of all the Americas to raise the standard of faith and preach the doctrine and Gospel in those vast domains." The Franciscans recalled the primacy and importance of the order, even before the secular clergy had arrived in New Spain: "before these lands had bishops, cathedrals or councils, the first religious or priests who went to the regions themselves were of the Franciscan order, and they found nothing more than barbarians and crowds of Indian gentiles."¹²² They referred to the symbolic importance of the *doctrina* of San José and the relevant role of the mendicants in the capital at the inception of evangelizing. Furthermore, the mendicants recalled the ritual and liturgical importance of the chapel in not only the parish of the Indians but also the city. They claimed that, "in this capital was founded the first Church, which now the Crown and Franciscans call San José, which was the only Indian

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²AGN, Reales Cédulas, v. 130, exp. 108, f. 170-172v.

parish, in which was held the first sacrifice and consecration of the body of Christ's sacrament." The Franciscans beseeched the King that they were given by grace the parish of San José de México, from which they could expand their evangelizing mission, "for being the first of the Kingdom founded by the Franciscan predecessors and the foundation of all their spiritual progress in the spread of the Catholic faith."¹²³ For a time, through historical arguments, the Franciscans were able to delay the process but, despite their efforts, were unable to prevent it.¹²⁴ In 1772, San José's parish was secularized,¹²⁵ and it was irrevocably sundered into many smaller parishes administered by the seculars.¹²⁶

Thus, the Franciscans appealed to the far-reaching political and spiritual significance of the church, rather than its contemporary importance as the generator of collective memory; the mendicants' arguments hoisted the church from the lived memory of the Indians to the calculated, intellectualized realm of history. As Nora postulates, history is the reconstruction of the past, of what is no longer, and it is an intellectual and secular production which calls for analysis and critique. It belongs to *everyone* and no one simultaneously, which legitimizes its attempts at universal authority.¹²⁷ Clearly, the loss of memory to history creates problems for remembering because it introduces the self-aware mediation that creates distance from the unself-conscious ritual repetition which is the hallmark of memory. By appealing to the objective reality of history, the mendicants attempted to claim the universal meaning of the church in order to survive. Before, the Indians' memory was a phenomenon that was always *actual*, a living tie with the eternal present in which there was no self-conscious mediation between now and then, but rather time – past and present – existed contemporaneously. Even though the mendicants made recourse to history in a valiant attempt to save memory, by their

¹²³ AGN, Clero regular y secular, v. 119, exp. 5, f. 117-120.

¹²⁴ AGN, Templos y conventos, v.8, exp. 4, f.127v.

¹²⁵ AGN, Correspondencia de Virreyes, v. 4, f. 295-295v.

¹²⁶ AGN, Bienes nacionales, leg. 841, exp. 7.

¹²⁷ Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux des Memoire," in *Representations* 26 (University of California, 1989), 8.

efforts San Francisco began its entry into history, which was in part a representation of the past that divested the church of its lived experience and, in some part, of its legitimacy as a vehicle for the production of Indian memory.

The Indian parishioners left the debate about secularization to the mendicants and seculars; rather than involve themselves directly, they used the conflict to restate their claims to San Francisco's memory through the meaning sacred property held for them.¹²⁸ During secularization, neighborhood groups like *cofradías* engaged in a number of battles with the orders over property rights and claims on the material culture of the sacred. The Nahuas reminded the mendicants that they had received their initial training in European building techniques in the *Colegio de San José*, located right within the *atrio* of San Francisco. The combination of Spanish architecture and Nahua skilled labor with native stone had made the construction of many of the friaries, churches, and chapels of México City possible.¹²⁹ The Indians not only constructed the edifices themselves, but also the liturgical garments, interior ornament, and devotional objects necessary for the daily and spiritual life of the community. The Nahua spiritual devotion to the church manifested itself in forms that had combined Nahua material symbolism with the iconography of European Catholicism. The mendicants, by contrast, believed that the church, although a product of Indian labor, could not be *owned* by anyone as it was made for the glory of God. It was the property of the Holy and Apostolic Catholic Church and could never belong to the *barrio*.¹³⁰ However, for the parishioners, control over the building was nothing less than the embodiment of their

¹²⁸The debate about secularizing San José's parish allowed Indians to offer an alternative path to agency; a petition for an Indian seminary was started and led by a mestizo named Don Julian. He intended for the seminary to train indigenous priests knowledgeable in the indigenous languages. Following their training, the native priests would be sent to rural areas to proselytize, much as the mendicants had done two centuries ago. He eventually gained the support of the secular church and mendicants in México City because they noticed the need for priests conversant in native languages.¹²⁸ By secularizing the mendicant *doctrinas*, the secular church provided the Nahuas with another strong argument in favor of indigenous priests. While the main priest in charge, Don Julian, was from Tlaxcala, Nahuas of Tenochtitlan were active in the process; they considered the possible establishment of an indigenous seminary as a salve for the loss of their former parish. Unfortunately, although King Charles II was interested in the seminary, he failed to follow through.

¹²⁹ AGN, Bienes nacionales, v.100, e.58.

¹³⁰ O'Hara, *A Flock Divided*, 103.

community. Their claims to sacred property were therefore claims to communal identity. Not only had the Indian's tribute and labor built the church, but they had collectively maintained the property through its constant maintenances, repairs, and rebuildings. Thus, in contrast to the mendicants, the Indians firmly located sacred property within the world and believed that San Francisco belonged as much to the present and its material concerns as to the afterlife.

In the process of secularization, then, the Indians' understanding that through mundane and ordinary use places became sacred, preserved San José de los Naturales from falling into the irrevocable rupture between memory and history. Thus, as Paul Connerton suggests, the chapel was in fact a *locus*, that is, an implicit, lived reference to memory, which made it a more effective carrier of cultural memory.¹³¹ As a *lieu de memoire*, San José was the uncontested time-keeper of eternity for every parishioner; as the primary site for baptisms, burial, record keeping, and community devotions, the chapel embodied not only the community's sacred wealth but also the rhythms of daily existence. Traditions that had existed for centuries were sedimented in the memory of the church, and it was therefore considered irreplaceable because it combined spiritual worth and material value throughout the centuries.¹³² Therefore, the secularization reforms opened a new legal space in which parishioners and mendicants debated the very meaning of sacred property. Moreover, the reforms became a catalyst for the community to invigorate and re-evaluate itself in an effort to maintain the memory of its communal heritage and material contributions. As the eighteenth century progressed into the early nineteenth and the reforms enacted by the crown to secularize the parishes began to silence the active, lived memory of the city, the Church of San Francisco, as a paradigm for the larger cultural shifts and forces of the city, became a silent witness to the vicissitudes of history – a memory seized and appropriated by the jaws of history.

¹³¹ Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009),30-32.

¹³²O'Hara, *A Flock Divided*, 105.

Nationalized Memory and Imperial Ambitions

The period before Independence, from 1810 to 1821, was politically and spiritually chaotic both in Spain and in the New World. As a result of armed conflict in Europe involving Spain, prominent subjects in a number of Spanish American cities grabbed the opportunity to invoke a doctrine of popular sovereignty and formed semi-autonomous *juntas* that resisted the pretensions of continued authority of Spain.¹³³ The crisis of monarchical legitimacy and the fundamental questions of self-rule led to the beginning of México's independence movement. The political turbulence and administrative flux of the period created a space in which the fragmentation of church communities into smaller independent units facilitated the formation of semi-autonomous social groups of indigenous peoples still tied to the life of the parish. In this context, the Nahua, through their respective internal agencies – e.g., *cofradías*, organized groups of Indians based on shared identity – reinforced their claims to a spiritual heritage centered on San Francisco.

Meanwhile, the memory of the church of San Francisco itself was modified for the nationalist ideals of the new Republic. These were embodied in the sacralization of the military march, the worship of imperial ashes, and the destruction and subsequent re-colonization of large swaths of the convent, all of which consciously recalled the legacy and obsequies of past imperial rulers Hernan Cortés and Charles V. An interminable procession of imperial and nationalist ideology lasting several days appropriated the space of the church during the celebration of Independence from Spain. The break from colonial rule was anything but peaceful. The narrative of nineteenth century México is replete with the turmoil of vicious conflicts between proponents of liberalism and conservatism. The two ends of México's political spectrum – liberals that favored secular, populist representative government and conservatives that

¹³³Ibid., 150.

avored a more Catholic and dictatorial regime – would each gain the upper hand at various times. Indeed, a seditious plot hatched at San Francisco, which led to its exclaustation, was an embodiment of the theatrical drama between these divergent ideologies. The gradual physical and spiritual fragmentation of the church at the hands of the state would last for several years, as the friars were helpless to stop the destruction of their mother church.

In the wake of the fragmentation of the city, which, as seen above, began in the eighteenth century, Indian organizations had a real, if limited success in consolidating their hold on collective memory still manifested in the city's convents. The *cofradías* were one of the primary means by which the Nahua could gain agency and preserve their shared memory. *Cofradías* were, by definition, groups of indigenous Roman Catholic laymen responsible for the material care of ceremonies, religious images, and pilgrimages. Although *cofradías* were Spanish institutions introduced by the friars, the existence of similar entities in Nahua society before the arrival of the Spaniards made the *cofradías* the most readily accepted of the imposed colonial structures. Charles Gibson postulates that "*cofradías* offered their members a spiritual security and a sense of collective identity otherwise lacking...."¹³⁴ Through such indigenous brotherhoods, the Indians gained an increasing amount of agency beginning in the sixteenth century and continuing well into the nineteenth.¹³⁵ The first Nahua *cofradías* in México Tenochtitlan were founded at the chapel of San José de los Naturales and were initiated, encouraged, and overseen by the Franciscans. The *cofradías* were especially helpful for maintaining indigenous identity during moments of population decline and influx of Spanish immigrants. Chimalpahin attests to the agency afforded to the Indians with the introduction of *cofradías*, stating, "it [the establishment of Indian

¹³⁴ Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule*, 38.

¹³⁵ Truitt, "Nahau and Catholicism," 181.

cofradías] was done for the benefit of the Mexica."¹³⁶ In short, during times of social and religious flux, *cofradías* offered the opportunity for individuals to come together to affirm their place in the world.¹³⁷

Despite the apparent agency offered by these communal organizations, there is only one surviving Nahua *cofradía* constitution for San José de los Naturales. It dictated firm obligations for the daily and spiritual comportment of its members.¹³⁸ This *cofradía* organized events, processions, and festivals, which were one of the most jubilant of all visible aspects of indigenous life.¹³⁹ Members of the *cofradía*, by agreeing to support the constitution, were able to preserve aspects of their culture, while protecting it from outside influences.¹⁴⁰ It served to tie the Nahua to one another, in effect creating a distinction between themselves and the Spaniards. The specific character that the Indians derived from belonging to such a community did not maintain itself merely through genealogical evolution, but also through socialization and customs. As seen above, the perpetual maintenance of social customs – either through their continuation or subversion – was a fundamental way in which Indians made claims to memory. But, beginning in the nineteenth century, identity became defined increasingly by the social, rather than racial, identity of parishioners.

Promoting an Enlightenment program of modernization, which involved integrating the country's ethnic groups as "Mexican," revolutionary politicians appropriated the space and history of local parishes and the clergy, especially the oldest and most respected like San Francisco. The most public activity they co-opted was the parish procession which had previously been organized by

¹³⁶Chimalpahin, *Annals of His Time*, 76.

¹³⁷Truitt, "Nahua and Catholicism," 151-155.

¹³⁸The list included leadership duties, the organization of mass and public gatherings, prayer responsibilities, care for the sick and dying, and the *cofrades'* public deportment. Truitt, "Nahuas and Catholicism", 176-178.

¹³⁹"Sunday the 27th of June was when the sacrament went in procession at San Francisco...And everything was done at San Francisco. All the different tradespeople set up a platform each. There they carried out their activities, and the merchants, blacksmiths, church attendants, and carpenters celebrated and danced on wooden platforms." See Chimalpahin, *Annals of his Time*, 120.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 180.

cofradías. Over the course of three centuries of colonial rule, the Church and state had repeatedly used religious events to rally colonial subjects behind the king to ask for divine intercession during times of need, whether wartime or natural emergency.¹⁴¹ Ironically, in this age of modernization a sacralization of Mexican politics took place and increased in the first half of the nineteenth century. During México's struggle for independence (1810-1821), the short-lived empire of Agustín de Iturbide (1822-23), and throughout the period of the early republic, both church and civil authorities often ordered supplicatory masses to ask for God's political favors. These ranged from supplementing loyalty to the failing Spanish crown, and ensuring the success of republican elections, to maintaining national unity when confronted with an invasion. Hence, although the new constitution of the independent republic signaled a transition from the old regime to the new, political legitimacy required the tight fusion of the civil and the sacred which entailed further material and symbolic sacrifice from San Francisco.¹⁴²

Following independence, exalted processions invoking symbolic new beginnings, led by General Iturbide, initiated the imperial re-conquest and re-colonization of the nation. Iturbide became Constitutional Emperor of the new nation, and at the time of his triumphant procession, Mexicans manifested their newfound national pride in the flamboyantly decorated streets of their parishes, as was customary for public celebrations, including in and around the *atrio* of San Francisco. On a beautiful morning in 1821, the distant din of marching platoons and shouts of victory declared the once-religious city-stage ready for the procession of military might. The bells of San Francisco rang out in cacophonous exaltation. The city no longer burdened with sad memories of recrimination felt the satisfaction of having achieved a long desired victory. The atmosphere was one of optimism and idealism at the prospects of a new and better country, independent of Spain. Arches of flowers and colorful hangings adorned the streets, appearing in a myriad of forms and colors. Holy and righteous enthusiasm, gripping

¹⁴¹ AGN Bienes Nacionales, vol. 607, exp. 85

¹⁴² AGN, Bienes Nacionales, vol. 976, exp. 5.

the city in an orgiastic fervor, created universal joy bordering on delirium. As everyone flooded into the streets in celebration, the army processed in front of San Francisco; the same kind of fervor and excitement had not long ago greeted the religious processions of sacred relics and the triumphant march of Cortés through the conquered streets of México-Tenochtitlan. The sacralized military processions celebrating the Mexican War of Independence joined all Mexicans, spiritually if not politically, regardless of race, in a celebratory unity.¹⁴³

Bodily ritual of the once-sacred procession legitimized Iturbide's instatement as Emperor as his triumphant march through the city marked the production of a space of a new imperialism, one which displaced and appropriated the familiar embodied memories of ritual procession to become a statement of the eternally national. Through the ritualized spatial practices the army co-opted in its procession through the streets, complete with imagery, sound, and gesture, Iturbide consciously recalled past traditions to legitimize his empire. Despite the newly-independent government's attempts at creating a new beginning, as Connerton posits, "all beginnings contain an element of recollection."¹⁴⁴ As the ritual processions of the previous centuries had defined the public space of the city, now, in 1821, the militarized might of the nation heralded the rule of an empire in which church and state were inextricably joined. Iturbide's procession was not unlike the means by which Cortés produced a new space of conquest to succeed the Aztec empire. Rather than obliterate the Aztec capital, Cortés subverted the temples of the Aztecs by constructing the church of San Francisco to maintain the urban memory of Tenochtitlan by. In a similar way, Iturbide's march through the city triumphantly ushered in a new series of Imperial ambitions that recolonized the space of the city, displacing the sacred and conquering processions that had previously defined the life of the city.

¹⁴³ Manuel Rivera Cambas, *México pintoresco artístico y monumental: vistas, descripción, anécdotas y episodios de los lugares más notables de la capital y de los estados*, vol. 3 (Alicante: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2007), 222.

¹⁴⁴ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 6.

After Iturbide's death in 1824, the space of the Church of San Francisco itself was appropriated for imperial memory. When the general's ashes were transported to San Francisco, it submitted to a dramatic transformation of nationalist reverence for the deceased Emperor (Figure 21). The back of the church was covered with black carpet from the vault to the pavement and the four columns of the center crossing were adorned with tricolor beams. Under the front half hung suspended a tricolor flag from which departed tricolor bands that joined the capitals. A sumptuous catafalque, elevated above the level of the religious, rose more than thirty feet high, its square base adorned with six poles per side. The white, imposingly vertical shaft commanded the space and subsumed the altar in a statement of divine predestination. His remains were housed within a glass and bronze reliquary which was guarded day and night by two grenadiers. For several days, his ashes remained exposed in San Francisco, and requiem masses were sung while many candles burned around the sarcophagus and the altars. Iturbide's ashes, resting on a slender pedestal from which sprung a truncated pyramid, were essentially presented as the sacrament of which the body of the new nation ritualistically partook.

In enshrining himself in San Francisco, Iturbide reawakened the memory of the grand funeral obsequies of Cortés and Charles V on the same site nearly three-hundred years prior. Charles V, as the first divinely sanctioned ruler of New Spain, and Cortés, as the military mastermind that subdued the Aztecs, were legitimizing specters in the newly-established pantheon of Mexican heroes that Iturbide inaugurated. The solemn mass around the catafalque physically and symbolically converted the church into an imperial mausoleum – yet another step towards further laicization of the space. In lively processions as in death, Mexico's revolutionary heroes re-colonized the old colonial city in the name of liberty, combining, as Cortés had, the holy and the imperial to re-found sacred state. As for San Francisco, its sublimely somber space foreshadowed its encroaching decline.

The Seditious

Historians now view the era surrounding Independence as an obscurant age in which insurrection and militant violence plagued the country, even as a growing nationalism looked back to the pre-Columbian era, attributing classical status to it – much as the Renaissance had disowned its medieval past to invoke the value of Greek and Roman Imperial antiquity. In the process, many of Mexico’s majestic eighteenth-century Baroque edifices began to exhibit a republican appearance, and the deliberate and constant erasure of colonial buildings deemed “un-classical” re-defined the architectural landscape of the burgeoning capital. With the advent of ecclesiastical reform, the capital was cleft by a profound dilemma faced by many historical nineteenth-century cities: to preserve the past or to build the future; to maintain the old monasteries that had come to stand for the fanaticism of colonial times or to demolish them, however regretfully, in order to prevent them from being reoccupied by religious groups. The government suspected that anti-institutional ideas were breeding within the city’s convents, and one such seditious plot materialized, supposedly, among the friars of San Francisco. As a site that had “generated” this secular heresy, San Francisco’s newly embossed image would be blackened and its ability to remain a *lieu de mémoire* – however tenuous this had become – was severely compromised.

On September 14, 1856, at eleven o'clock at night, a meeting of suspected traitors purportedly took place in the cemetery of the convent of San Francisco of México. According to Garcias Cubas, General Vicente left his headquarters near the church and spotted a group of people that suspiciously ran through the courtyard of the convent.¹⁴⁵ Guessing that a conspiracy was afoot, the general penetrated the atrium on the heels of the suspects, who had taken refuge inside the convent. He seized the convent's Father, demanded information, and then arrested the suspected villagers despite their

¹⁴⁵ Antonio Garcias Cubas, *El Libro de mis Recuerdos*, (México , 1903), 80-84.

pleas of innocence. Reportedly, the guard at the gate of the court, in a flash of irrationality, put a gun to his chest and shouted: "Long live religion and death to Comonfort!"¹⁴⁶ Vicente, with his militia, scoured the convent for suspects and arrested six religious and clergy who lived there, as well as twenty-one countrymen, the waiters, the cook, the ringers and the school teacher. This conspiracy, or sedition, was evidently a fabrication because even the government-inspired press that published the story could not adduce documentary justification for its charge. No proof was ever brought that the so-called conspiracy had ever existed. However, the next morning, the convent doors, for the first time, were closed.

In light of what seems to have been trumped-up charges, the government issued a decree the next day that radically changed the convent. It declared the land and convent to be national property, with the exception of the main church and chapels, with their sacred vessels, vestments, priests, relics and pictures, which were to be allocated to the archbishop. The friars had no choice but to obey the decree and they vacated their cells on the same day; in total, fifty-two individuals were forcefully removed from their community. Two days later, for the betterment and beautification of the capital, – an all-too-common urbanist subterfuge – the street called *Independencia* was cut through the middle of the convent, disemboweling it to create a more efficient and rational space for commerce (Figure 22). Many of the interior, domestic spaces of the convent were thereby eradicated: the infirmary, kitchen, multiple cells and part of the garden of the convent (Figure 1, 23, 24). The most sacred interior realm of the cloister, that had heretofore been completely isolated from the profanity of the world, was exposed to the city in a mockery of shame and parodic irony (Figure 24). The liberal government would only increase its efforts to secure the gradual and sustained dismemberment of the church. With the space of the city thus invading the interior of the convent, a new place of history was created, rather than

¹⁴⁶ Comonfort was the Liberal president who passed anti-clerical laws.

memory, a space that contained material traces of the convent and commemorated, as if in a spontaneous museum, the contributions of Franciscans centuries ago.

Several months later, the Franciscans were allowed to return to their cells, and, in the space of a year, they were able to partially repair the convent. But the official nationalization of Church property rendered the friars' initial joy at returning to the ruins of the convent short-lived, for two years later the monastery was definitively suppressed in virtue of the Reform Laws, promulgated on December 28, 1860. The Reform Laws, passed in the midst of a destructive and bitter civil war, nationalized ecclesiastical wealth, depriving the Church of its resources and power. Yet, as with previous efforts to modernize, the Reform Laws' far-reaching attempts at liberalizing the economic and spiritual realms of a newly-formed nation indelibly yoked church to state yet again.

But there would be no return to glory for San Francisco. The buildings of the ancient convent, excluding the part that had already been confiscated in 1856, were definitively divided into nine lots and put up for sale on May 27, 1861.¹⁴⁷ One month previously, the venerable and exalted Church of San Francisco had been entirely dismantled and part of the monastery further destroyed. It is difficult to imagine the sad impression produced by the spectacle of the huge old house of the Franciscans in ruins and the church completely and irrevocably destroyed (Figure 25). Enemies of the Church continued re-colonizing the remnants, further consigning the church to the realm of history, despite its broken and mutilated body. However, this was not the end of the church's memory, as it continued to be adapted and reused for a myriad of purposes, sacred and profane alike.

¹⁴⁷ Chauvet, "The Church of San Francisco," 29.

Protestant Appropriation and Iconographic Memory

“Forgetting – I would even go so far as to say historical error – is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation. The essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things.”

-Ernest Renan

The church and its conventual buildings were unsanctimoniously sold to a group of Protestants from the United States in 1861; they reimagined the church as a site of ideological colonization of New Spain. As a result, spaces were purged of their iconographic and material wealth and insensitively deprived of all figurative statues at the hands of Pastor Riley, the Protestant minister.¹⁴⁸ However, by appropriating the church, cloister, and facade and stripping them of icons rather than outright destroying them, the Protestants maintained the memory of Catholic space through visible material traces. What the space is and what it is no longer are both legible, just as what something *is* is defined by what it is *not*. Thus, the effaced church does not look to one temporality exclusively but to two simultaneous interpretations of time, one to the past, and one to the present.¹⁴⁹

For the short time they owned the church, the Protestants stripped the church, cloister, and façade of the Balvanera Chapel of iconographic representation. They wanted to destroy any memory of the heretical Catholic ideals of saints as intercessors between God and Man. However, memory not only enables the transmission of images but is itself enabled by the act of transmission and the making (which implies altering and destroying, by exclusion) of art is itself a mode of memory. The act of deformation and the presentation of deliberately altered works of art are specifically formal gestures

¹⁴⁸Tovar de Teresa, *The City of Lost Palaces*, 25.

¹⁴⁹Jas Elsner, "Iconoclasm and the Preservation of Memory" in *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 132.

within a material iconography.¹⁵⁰ The facade, church and cloister, the preserved damaged objects, in their own material being, signaled both their predamaged state – a different, Spanish colonial memory – and their new or altered state.

While the bodily practices and material craft embodied Indian ideology as a source of social memory, the facade of the Balvanera Chapel also became a place of memory through its desecration. The main portal facade (Figure 26), marked by extreme, expressive and florid decorative detailing, was a stunning example of the Churrigueresque Baroque style. The facade, divided vertically into three parts of equal size, depicts the stigmatization of St. Francis of Assis above the portal door. The original facade was particularly striking because of its lack of rest; the figures of saints and cherubs grew from the columns and niches in a profusion of Christian and pagan imagery. Cornices and capitals wrapped around the facade, interrupted and ejected into the space with each articulation and added escutcheon. However, if the original facade were a sentence with a profusion of information and lack of hierarchy, the denuded facade is a string of words with missing junctures and too frequent commas (Figure 27). The flat, mute pieces of stone unsurreptitiously interrupt the overgrown facade as the hollow niches that once held saints gaze into the atrio like empty sockets.

Because the Protestants did not completely *destroy* the facade, by leaving the majority of the facade intact and removing the icons, the act of iconoclasm – which may immediately imply a visual defacement and confiscation of memory – may nevertheless preserve the memory of the condemned in the very act of obliteration. While the facade's images of saints may be particular to Catholicism, the subsumation of saints into the pantheon of Aztec gods is a well known ritual act.¹⁵¹ Although the new era imposed by the Spaniards - and subsequently the Protestants - was different in many regards, on

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 133.

¹⁵¹ This theory, while heretical on a fundamental level in Christianity, is one of the reasons that Christianity was readily adopted by the Nahua. The Aztecs at the time of Conquest assigned meaning to saints much as they had to their previous cult, which was aligned with cycles of time and destruction.

fundamental levels the two religions worked in parallel, if not convergent, ways. Furthermore, the chapel's facade, facing onto the largest *atrio* in the city, had a public presence in the city, and as one of the few surviving fragments of the church, it became a testament to the memory of San Francisco. The icons that adorned the front of the facade evoked the spiritual life of México City, which was conspicuously omnipresent throughout the city. By facing the public space of the city, the act of reversal was by nature public and resonated liturgically and normatively.¹⁵² Therefore, through iconographic displacement, the Protestants made a public claim to usurp the mantle of the Franciscans' mother-church in México.

The Protestants continued their erasing fervor on the interior of the church. San Francisco's nave, altar, and choir were denuded of all Catholic imagery, whitewashed, and then insulted by having the interior reshaped into a reformed liturgical space through the removal of the implements of Catholic liturgy. The whitewashed interior of the church, stripped of all ornamentation, cleared of altars, sumptuous *retablos*, and devotional panel paintings contained only anti-ritual objects, like banal folding chairs and sparse, functional furniture (Figure 29). What had only a few years prior been the most sumptuously and profusely decorated sacred spaces in the city became an acerbic, cleansed space of immaterial abstraction in which the material contributions of the Indians were outright ignored (Figure 28, 29). Every stone and sculpture, now covered or removed, had been a physical testament to the church's – and its parishioners' – genealogy. The cloister was the next space to be remade into a temple (Figure 31). The arches were filled in and the space that had housed the verdant garden was transformed into a worship space. Rather than destroy the old cloister, the Protestants chose to reappropriate the space, sealing it hermetically from the exterior and internalizing and occupying a space which had normally been intended for sober monastic circumambulation (Figure 31). The myriad

¹⁵²Ibid., 136.

paintings and ornaments that had adorned the exterior walls of the cloister were removed, further removing heretical icons. Not only were the public façade and main Baroque altar stripped of their ornament, but even the friars' interior, private realm was defaced,

By stripping the architecture of ornament, the Protestants gestured toward iconoclastic desecration. However, this is not iconoclasm in the typical sense of the word, that of destruction and complete erasure. Instead, it repeats a constant ritual desecration of pre-Reformed liturgy. The Catholic memory of the church interior was preserved in and by space, and enhanced (if only to be mocked) in the ways that the space has been adapted.¹⁵³ Whether the viewer's response to such spatial vacuity is to revel in iconoclastic erasure or mourn for lost liturgy the significant point is that memory remains inscribed in monumentality however much the building has been physically transformed.

Buried Memories in the Specter of Ruins

Antonio Garcia Cubas' (1832-1912) seminal work of historical documentation, *El Libro de mis Recuerdos* (The Book of my Memories), written after the fragmentation of the church in the late nineteenth century, is one of the few first-hand accounts of the convent before its destruction; as Nora suggests, individual memory has increasingly become the means by which social groups remember because "memory is no longer everywhere" and will not be anywhere unless one takes the responsibility to capture it through individual means.¹⁵⁴ We may understand each memory as it occurs in individual thought only if it is located within the larger amalgamation of thought of the corresponding group. Individual memory is nevertheless a part or an association of group memory, since each memory and feeling, even if it seems to be exclusive to one person, leaves a lasting impression only to the extent that

¹⁵³Ibid., 224.

¹⁵⁴Nora, "Between Memory and History," 16.

it is inextricably connected with the thoughts that come to us through the social milieu.¹⁵⁵ Hence, Cubas' memories are situated within and are a reflection of the memories of *chilangos* in the mid 1800's. Cubas lived in an age of uncertainty in which rapid economic and urban change compelled him to fight exuberantly against the forces of forgetting by compiling his memories after the destruction of much of the convent in the name of liberal progress. By externalizing his memories, he submitted them to history, but through his efforts, we have one of the few first-hand accounts of the colossal complex. Furthermore, since the archives of the church have been lost, his book of memories provides the only depiction of the interior artwork of the convent, which would have been tremendously important in instructing the friars, novitiates, and parishioners as a theater of memory.

Cubas's *El Libro de mis Recuerdos* captures two principles fundamental to memory: a stable system of contiguous places and an implicit relationship with the human body. The notion that memory is bound to topography is an ancient postulation; the ancient 'art of memory' was located within a complex system of rhetoric that dominated classical culture.¹⁵⁶ Cicero briefly describes the process: "Persons...must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things." The 'art of memory' was therefore defined as a 'method of loci' in which 'loci' means a place easily grasped by memory.¹⁵⁷

His recollections tie architecture and the iconographic message of art to one another to create a theater of memory. One day, he travelled to San Francisco and entered through the Letrán door on the west, into the wide atrium, which was surrounded by temples and chapels (Figure 32). After that, he went straight into a big portico that was situated on his right side, perpendicular to the west entrance of

¹⁵⁵ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 53.

¹⁵⁶ Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets*, 6-8.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

the church. This portico was an arcade that supported several big galleries on its top, he recalls, which was later transformed into an iron storage room (Figure 1; 16). The composition was “very symmetrical and beautiful.”¹⁵⁸ The interior walls of the cloister were decorated with big oil canvases, representing the main stages of the life and work of Saint Sebastian de Aparicio. He read the captions that came with every painting, committed them to memory, and then proceeded into the convent.¹⁵⁹ One of the means by which one orients oneself to a place is by the sensory and arguably banal interactions with the everyday accoutrements of a place. Therefore, by systematically associating the convent's artwork with the architecture, Cubas was able to create a mnemonic association between image, memory, and iconography.

Then he proceeded to a big room, with a very high ceiling and almost no illumination which led to the cloister that would, in a few years, be overtaken and remade by the Protestants. He could see a colossal painting of San Cristobal about to cross a river with a cane made from a tree branch, and upon his shoulders he was carrying Jesus as a child, holding the world in his hands. His first impression was of a space “flooded with light that was made perceptibly even shinier” because of the contrast it made with the gloomy porter’s lodge.¹⁶⁰ The interior walls of the cloister were ornamented with big canvases that depicted the main scenes from the life of San Francisco de Assisi. The paintings had explanations underneath them, held by painted angel figures, that highlighted San Francisco’s virtues. Cubas continued his journey further inside and discovered the tomb of Friar Antonio Margil de Jesús, who had been a missionary and charity apostle. Some years later, the Chiarini Circus was installed in the space, reconfiguring the now-distant memories of Moctezuma's zoo upon which the church was founded.

¹⁵⁸Cubas, *El Libro de mis Recuerdos*, 80-84.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

Continuing his memory-journey, he went back through the northern part of the patio, towards the porter's lodge, and encountered an array of paintings portraying the life of San Buenaventura along the wall of the staircase. The ceiling was golden with reliefs crowned by the Holy Spirit that symbolized his virtues. In front of the staircase, there was a painting of San José, valued at \$3,000, which was a tremendous amount of money at the time. Evidently, since he wrote *El Libro de mis Recuerdos* after much of the church's destruction, Cubas was interested in taking an inventory of its possessions, as well as its architectural form. In part, he was compelled by the destruction of the church to commit his memories to paper, thereby insuring that the experience of the church, at least, would not be lost. He then walked towards a door and was amazed to find an immense library that was such an enthralling space that he stayed there for hours, looking at the books accumulated by the friars over the last 300 years. And what if some of those books had at one point been used to instruct the Indians, centuries ago, at San José? Because he only describes the spaces that were destroyed during the Reform Laws, this sense of melancholic memory-loss is pervasive throughout his accounts

However, it was getting late, so he proceeded to the chapel of San Antonio, situated at the corner of Zuleta and San Juan de Letrán. This chapel belonged to the choir department and was then, after the exclaustation, occupied by the Hotel del Jardín, and on the street level, next to the chapel, there was a pool hall (Figure 33). It had a beautiful geometry, with a Greek-cross floor plan, whose sides formed four tiny naves contained by a beautiful groin vault supported by Doric columns. The four central columns of the building supported the main arches, which had reliefs of the lives of San Francisco and San Antonio. The rich and sumptuous ornaments were carved in stone on the architrave and the cornice and culminated in a dome covered with mosaic paintings. The San Antonio chapel still exists as a bookstore (Figure 34 and 1; 40), only because the demolishing was too expensive. This chapel was also called *De los Santos Lugares* (From the Holy Places) and was the chapel in which priests

returning from the Holy Land chose to give service. He concluded his meditative journey, walking through a succession of gloomy galleries in which the space was trembling with foreboding silence: “I was scared because of the emptiness of the place, and the feeling of loneliness was overwhelming for me.”¹⁶¹ From his description which included few encounters with people, one can imagine the still silence that filled the convent, capturing the immense feelings of loss that would soon accompany the edifice's destruction.

Cubas's account of the convent demonstrates the degree to which San Francisco was, at one time, open to the public and still part of the social memory of the city. Despite the oppressive silence of the space, it still belonged to the city and acted as a public, institutionalized history lesson of Christianity and the Franciscans in México. However, after the exclaustation and the Reform Laws, the church was fundamentally changed to become a scarred and broken body that exhibited its scars to reclaim its own memory. His memories, replete with the former grandeur of the space, compared the complex at its height with its immanent destruction after the convent was mercilessly desiccated. As ideological factions fought to reclaim the memory of the church and assert universal authority, San Francisco's role in the actualized memory of the Indians and the city became sedimented to such a degree that memory was overtaken by history. However, far from becoming an inert monument to the vicissitudes of history, the church externalized these ideological battles to tell a story of far-reaching universal implications. San Francisco today perseveres as both an actor in the fragmented memory of the contemporary city and a testament to the avarices of divergent ideologies.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 58.



CHAPTER 3:

Displaced Memory: San Francisco as Repository of Multivalent Modernity

San Francisco, as a *lieu de mémoire* of broken and reconstituted fragments, has sustained itself against Mexico City's century-long ravenous and self-erasing growth. The forces that shape the city evidently conceive of culture not so much as a matter of accumulation as it is of displacement. Due in part to the lacustrine conditions of the city's soil, a cruel and parodic memory of Tenochtitlan's paradise of canals, Mexico City must double back upon itself, destroying its own history in order to expand. The city is now divided along two divergent trajectories: one of memorialized history and one of self-cannibalizing ahistoricity. Self-consciously the government has chosen those monuments imbued with the greatest national memory to maintain, while the rest of the city constantly remakes itself. Hence, this dialectic relationship between monumentality/ modernity and memory/history questions the fundamental relationship a city has to both its past and its future. However, it is Mexico City's unique ability to combine the historic and the modern that makes it "the most surreal city on earth."¹⁶² It is a cacophony of dialectic ideas: a city frozen in time, but also seized by chaos and disarray.

Just as the various ideologies appropriated the history of San Francisco over the past 500 years, so too does our modern era endow the modern monument of San Francisco with both historical and

¹⁶² André Breton.

relative age-value. However, unlike the legitimizing appropriation of history in the nineteenth century, today there is a fundamental disturbance in the relationship between objective, universal history and subjective, lived memory. The physical fragments of the church, however desecrated, have been faithfully restored by the state beginning in the 1930s as a greater historical consciousness gripped the nation. San Francisco's fragmented body has been absorbed by the everyday needs of the city to become something greater and more multivalent than ever before. As a reimagined historical monument and *lieu de mémoire*, San Francisco has become at once sacred and profane, urban and non-urban, lived and historic, anachronistic and contemporary. Like the city itself, San Francisco encompasses a multitude of riotous and contradictory – if not mutually exclusive – voices. Hence, through the cultural forces of the city, San Francisco has persevered despite all adversity to become a multivalent space, one in which the universalizing precepts of history have been subjugated to the plural and simultaneous nature of multiple memories.

Modernity has a monopoly on cultural amnesia for many reasons, and it is against this tumultuous onslaught of forgetting that San Francisco as *lieu de mémoire* actually defends itself. Although the trajectory from realm of memory to history in Nora's thought went only in one direction, the case of San Francisco – embedded in the unique setting of Mexico City – demonstrates that a site can be simultaneously part of history as well as memory. Without commemorative vigilance, history would sweep away memory, both individual and collective.¹⁶³ Identities are buttressed against the bastion of architecture because if history did not continue to besiege memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and solidifying it, there would be no *lieux de mémoire*.¹⁶⁴ Hence, parishioners today define their relationship with the church in much the same way as they had before; despite the deep epistemological rupture of modernity, a sense of continuity pervades in the individual

¹⁶³ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 12.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

memories of parishioners. The church, as a *lieu de mémoire*, is now both a *locus* of parishioners' communal identity and a universal embodiment of Mexico's national history. San Francisco stands as an exemplary *lieu de mémoire* because it continues to be the battleground over which memory and history fight and have fought for centuries; this temporal tug-of-war manifests in the plural and contradictory nature of the church's reclaimed spaces.

The Self-Erasing City in the Age of Modernity

Once illustriously called "The City of Palaces," today Mexico City sprawls outward in a self-destructive fervor, beneath the weight of excessive pollution, poverty, and overpopulation. An urban planner's worst nightmare, Mexico City is a monstrous construction too large and unwieldy to be administered effectively. Since initiating industrial development in the 1940s, Mexico's capital has been transformed from a quaint, charming city with wide boulevards, a leisurely lifestyle, and a population of 1.8 million to what many view as a veritable living hell in which 20 million people cohabit in what was once, now ironically, described as the paradisiacal Eden of Tenochtitlan. However, more than time, which has fundamentally altered and corrupted the city; more than nature, which has continuously swamped, flooded, and shaken it; more than any other cause, it is resolutely the negligence and avarice of men that has ruthlessly, and willfully, forgotten the city of palaces.

The tumultuous life of the city has been the subject of many writers, as they experience it as *flâneurs*, persistent explorers of the capital. Sybille Bedford (1911-2006), an upper-class Briton travelling through Mexico, describes the dialectical relationship of the city in 1953, beginning with its tremendous economic growth due in part to the imposition of modern American brands. She writes, "But there is still that Indian sitting on the curb selling a string of onions and one cabbage, still that fortuitous air as

though the city were not a town but a sample bag, a travesty of modern urbanism, a cautionary tale perhaps: the caricature that gives the show away."¹⁶⁵ Despite the impositions wrought by foreign capital and the ideological parties of the post-Revolution period, a visible trace remains of the overlaps of memory and history, tradition and modernity. An identity of social difference, one removed from the modernizing vicissitudes of time, remains within the city as a constant reminder of that which has at once been lost, displaced, and maintained. The Indian sitting on the curb exposes the universalizing claims of modernity as myth. By analogy, the forgotten fragments of San Francisco, having endured the ravages of the ages, unveil the superficial thinness of the homogenizing precepts of modernity despite the economic opportunities they purport to offer.

However, almost as rapidly as this urban miracle of growth and capital had arrived, it turned abruptly around. By the late 1970s and the early 1980s, Mexico's industrialization strategy had reached a point of saturation as officials were hard-pressed to meet the administrative demands of the colossal city. Because most industries were located in the capital, the city shuttered as the economy declined in the process of massive, rapid modernization. Near-lethal levels of pollution from industrial firms that had made the massive industrialization miracle a reality were choking the local population. By 1990, ozone reached dangerous levels, and as a result, the government closed schools and factories while systematically restricting automobile usage.¹⁶⁶ With huge demand and limited fiscal resources, crucial services like electricity and water became unsustainable at least at the rate demanded by the colossal, ever-expanding megalopolis. Faced with less than ideal conditions as a side-effect of modernization, Mexico attempted to reevaluate its identity.

¹⁶⁵ Sybille Bedford, *The Sudden View*, 65.

¹⁶⁶ Davis, *Urban Leviathan*, 2-5.

Over the past century, the city's exponential growth, which necessitates forgetting, has compelled Mexico to look backward and develop a new nationalist pride in pre-conquest art and architecture. Thankfully, many historical colonial monuments, like San Francisco, were declared national property in the 1930s and were thus protected from further destruction wrought by unchecked urban growth. By the 1940s and 1960s, Mexico City more than doubled in size as it proudly manifested the burgeoning nation's economic and political growth.¹⁶⁷ In 1987, the church of San Francisco, along with most other colonial edifices, became part of what UNESCO termed the *Centro Historico* (roughly corresponding to the colonial core city). It is an area that constitutes the historical, if not the economic, capital of the nation, including one of the world's largest plazas, the Zócalo. The extensive uncovering of the *Templo Mayor* there in 1978 sparked a renewed interest in the pre-Columbian significance of the area, even as buildings continue to be erased and rebuilt.

Mexico City hardly conveys the image of one of the world's largest cities and the capital of one of Latin America's most industrious and advanced nations. Walking through the streets of the *Centro*, one is presented with the image of a city lost in time. Tiny shops mix with colorful residential buildings and prep schools to produce a low-density land usage. Individual trades (e.g., bridal shops, stationery stores) still predominate on given streets, as guilds did in late medieval Europe. Except for the lone skyscraper standing atop the foundations of one of San Francisco's many temples, the *Centro* is oddly reminiscent of prerevolutionary days at the turn of the century. Street vendors trundle alongside cars, while pedestrians, loud diesel trucks and cyclists fight for right-of-way on narrow streets, many of which have been converted -- very successfully -- to pedestrian-only streets. One only has to compare a nineteenth-century lithograph of Madero street to the image of the street today to immediately recognize on one hand how little the scale of the *Centro* has changed, while on the other, how

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 7.

fundamentally programmatic shifts have changed the landscape of the city. Life in the *Centro*, could be conceived as one huge public square. Despite the loss – or perhaps appropriation – of many churches and palaces, today the neighborhood is one of the most vibrant and lively areas of the city: vendors, homeless beggars, children, street performers, and families all populate the streets and public spaces of the *Centro* – including the remains of the *atrio* of San Francisco.¹⁶⁸ Historical edifices in the *Centro*, despite their scars, adapt to the forces of the city by continuing to accommodate and give shape to public life; hence, the *Centro* can still nourish, rather than devour, *lieux de mémoire*.

Outside of the *Centro* stands a different Mexico City. There, planners employ the *tabula rasa* approach to urban development – destroying and rebuilding large swaths of space, especially on the edges of the city, which are characterized by lifelessness. The steep cost of progress wrought by modernization was the destruction of not only large numbers of buildings, but also fundamental ways of living. This willful destruction of the past necessarily brought forgetting and its varied mnemonic associations in its wake. The city periphery is dominated by vast stretches of empty space without signs of a public realm. For instance, Santa Fe is a wealthy residential district that is home to a multitude of high-rises and a prestigious private university (Figure 28). However, the only way to reach the district is by car, and there are few pedestrians. Driving through Santa Fe is an exceptionally eerie experience as the streets are deserted and the highway oddly quiet. Its desolate no-placeness stands in sharp contrast to the kind of vitality that characterizes much of the rest of the city.

Architects and city planners fear that the entire metropolis will become a lifeless city like Santa Fe. Writing in 1967, Mexican progressive writer and political activist, Carlos Monsivais (1938-2010) already noticed that Mexico City was becoming a bland, homogenized city; he argued that in the past

¹⁶⁸ Ruben Gallo, "Introduction" in *The Mexico City Reader* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 10-12.

twenty years the capital had undergone immense transformation as it was now full of highways, skyscrapers, and metros. He concluded that, "The reigning tendency is towards uniformity." Not only were the neighborhoods starting to resemble one another, but Mexico City was itself beginning to look like cities all over the world. However, he embraced the bombastic energy of the city, "Today Mexico City is an ambitious city, growing shamelessly: violent, shy, full of prejudices and snobbery, free, horrendous, indescribable, magnificent, eager, ready." But Dutch postmodern theorist and architect Rem Koolhaas (b. 1944) provocatively embraces what he termed the "generic city." He observes that a "city without history" is perpetually able to reinvent and renew itself without the confines of the past.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, to ensure its survival, the city must submit itself, eternally, to periodic erasures and renewals. Koolhaas accepts and celebrates the generic city's ahistoricity as liberating. He claims that cities with strong cultural identities invariably degenerate into motionless monoliths, stricken by the weight of their own traditions. However, it is against such a process of willful forgetting that San Francisco, as *lieu de mémoire*, manifests itself in the late twentieth century. Realms of memory are by necessity remains, according to Nora, "the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age."¹⁷⁰

Cities and their inhabitants must choose one of two possible destinies: they can either die and keep their architecture intact (like the great Mayan cities of Palenque and Uxmal) or they can remain alive by constantly transforming and renewing themselves. The city must choose between either mummification or life: museum or city: paralyzing history or willful forgetting. Herein lies the exceptionalism of Mexico City as it has appropriated colonial space for modernization while clinging to its memories: it has embraced modernity while appropriating history. In short, it has survived and flourished since Aztec times through a series of transformations, destructions, and reconstructions to

¹⁶⁹Koolhaas, *S,M,L,XL* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 1249-50.

¹⁷⁰ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 15.

become something greater and more prodigious than either monument or modernity could offer alone. So whereas Tovar de Teresa believed that Mexicans destroyed their past to make way for the present – a “bad habit” (as cited in the introduction) – a closer look at a site such as San Francisco reveals that they manage to mediate the two realms.

San Francisco: The Modern Monument and Reconfigured Memory

The Church of San Francisco is nothing more than "...old stones that none living know or remember today."¹⁷¹ With this alarming declaration, the city's preservationists declared the church a forgotten fossil to be eternally memorialized. As Mexico City has confronted its metabolic, self-consuming growth, the city has increased its efforts to monumentalize its colonial past. These preservation movements have emerged as a multivalent response to industrialization and other upheavals in social change. As this thesis has demonstrated, *what* gets preserved and its symbolic interpretation depends upon the values and structure of the society and its conception of time and place. In 1931, San Francisco was officially declared a national monument by the Historical Monuments Commission, a government authority of the still newly revolutionized country, and a concerted effort, that continues today, was made to preserve the isolated fragments of the once colossal complex. As a result, the various iterations of the church emerge as an embodiment of man's evolving perceptual relationship with the external and internal worlds of memory, a relationship which is fundamentally temporally and historically constituted. Despite the efforts of the city to create a collection of frozen monuments for the consumption of tourists and the glorification of the state, San Francisco remains in the social milieu as an embodiment of its successively subversive past.

¹⁷¹ *Edificio Rule*, INAH, 25.

The Austrian art historian Alois Riegl's (1858-1905) seminal 1903 essay, "The Modern Cult of Monuments" addresses fundamental questions of time and history (and mankind's place within them) in relationships between the object (monument) and the subject (humanity). For Riegl, monuments externalize the events and values of the societies that constructed them, manifesting meaning according to the perception of the viewer.¹⁷² Clearly, the historicity of monuments is affected by time and decay; through desire and destruction they become something greater and more meaningful than their origins could have ever anticipated. Thus, what remains of the convent of San Francisco today has become subsumed by the needs of the city. Its remaining structures – the Balvanera Chapel, the San Antonio Chapel (now a bookstore; see Figure 34), the church, cloister (today a bakery), and the remnants of the Chapel of Señor Burgos – stand as testaments to the moving and evocative power of monuments in the modern city (Figures 1 and 3).

The start of restoration efforts at San Francisco revealed the true extent of its fragmentation. In the last years of 1940s, after significant efforts made by the Archbishop of Mexico Luis Maria Martinez, the San Francisco property was sold by the Jesuits to its original owners, the Franciscans, and in 1949, the friars commissioned the reintegration and restructuring of the surviving buildings. One of the largest earthquakes in recent memory seriously damaged some of the buildings in 1985, including the former library and the outside of the cloister. The neighboring property, the Chapel of Señor de Burgos, now known as *Edificio Rule*, was also damaged. But the most recent work of demolition unearthed some of the old walls that corresponded to the chapel and the Chapel of the Third Order of St. Francis, now a hotel (Figure 1).

¹⁷² Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin," trans. Kurt W. Foster and Diane Ghirardio, *Oppositions* 25 (Fall 1982), 21.

The Commission's demolitions unexpectedly revealed walls that had been resting on what had been the original main facade of the church of San Francisco (i.e., its west façade).¹⁷³ Fortunately, while defaced, the façade still retained its overall character. The most gratifying discovery by government agencies was the pavement of the original *atrio* and the main entrance of the Church of San Francisco. The INAH, successor to the Historical Monuments Commission, then freed the northern facade of the Balvanera chapel, and expanded the *atrio*. The new *atrio* was repaved to form a large square with a staircase to mitigate the changes in level from the modern street down to the colonial stratum. Facing the front of the chapel, they excavated a depression in an attempt to regain the original level, despite the church's perpetual earthly descent. The restoration efforts concluded with the augmentation of the *Capilla del Señor de Burgos*, the recovery and extension of the *atrio*, and restoration the Balvanera chapel's façade. These works were completed in early 1991 and plans are in place to expand the scope of restoration and rehabilitation projects for San Francisco. In fact, at the time of this report in 1992, the subsequent projects include, at later stages the reconstruction of the main entrance of the temple of San Francisco, the reconstruction of the Pilgrims Portal building, the restoration and reuse of the *Edificio Rule*, the adaptation and reuse of former the Hotel Guardiola. With all of these fragments of memory liberated from the city and reconstituted once again as lived spaces actively participating in the life of the city, San Francisco since the exclaustation has taken on a new reconfigured memory.

Furthermore, by encapsulating and sedimenting the layers of Mexico's history, the modern viewer can appreciate the church's inherent age-value through its mutilation.¹⁷⁴ The Church of San Francisco has been ripped apart by the city, effacing much of its body to become a quietly suffering saint of resilience. Thus, the church's historical value alone fails to account for the obvious interest which is excited in the modern parishioner and tourist today. In part, it is the taxonomy of architectural

¹⁷³*Edificio Rule*

¹⁷⁴ Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin"

language, the church's metaphorical whisperings of a more glorious and illustrious past that is easily recognized as memory-traces.

The Remains of Memory

Our modern interest in the church, as subjects of experience rather than intellectualized history, is rooted purely in its value as memory, in that we consider the church an involuntary monument; however its value as memory does not interfere with the building itself, but arises from our appreciation of the immense span of time which has elapsed since it was made which has veritably burdened it with the traces of age. It is only because we place value on the church that it remains. Our immediate emotional reaction is not predicated on academic or scholarly knowledge, for our satisfaction lies in universal perception. It is this immediacy which, has in part, sparked my interest in understanding how this phenomenal church, which was once home to the *Capilla de los Indios* and the liturgical, ritual, and communal center of the city, has affected the 20-million inhabitants of the ravenous megacity.

San Francisco through its deformations has become a memory vessel that conveys multiple meanings for different audiences. For historians and preservationists, the church of San Francisco is a historical monument because it represents a specific stage in the development of New Spain's architecture. For mendicants, it has become a testament to the legacy of the Franciscan order and its prodigious evangelizing efforts. As the original site of San José, the progenitor of all open-chapels throughout the continent, the convent represents typological origins to historians, while architects appreciate the urban space the atrio creates with the city. For the Mexican government, San Francisco represents the nationalistic and patrimonial heritage of the country, while for tourists, their relationship to San Francisco is predicated on perceptual evidence. For those that stumble upon the church, they

evaluated it as an evidently 'old' edifice that exhibits its age-value, while simultaneously conveying a sense of a space removed from the modern city in which sacred space transcends the material realm. By collecting different memories throughout its lifespan, San Francisco now embodies multivalent memories according to every social group; in particular, the parishioners of the church, continue to view the edifice as the embodiment of their collective memory.

In describing the church's material forms in terms of the mendicant past, many of Mexico City's parishioners to San Francisco draw on a version of memory that articulates with a scholarly tradition emphasizing memory's tactile, embodied, and material aspects. That is, the parishioners acutely experience the relationship between the abstracted cognitive faculty of memory and the past as purely 'immanent' in the church, which evokes memories of both the city's and the church's glorious history and their own exclusive claim to that past based on their identity as *Capitalinos*. Additionally, they stress the sacred and ritual role the church plays in the life of the city. While many monuments have been pressed into service by the regimes of the nineteenth, and especially twentieth, centuries to embody a narrative of national development intended to promote a bond of national identity, many parishioners continue to make claims to the church's ability to foster and shape their memory. Despite the government's efforts, which tended to decontextualize monuments and to reduce their specific historical and religious associations, *chilangos* have continued to stress the historical lineage of the country's first church. Hence the collective memory of the parishioners is necessarily predicated on individual memories. As Nora postulates, the atomization of a general memory into a private one, here exemplified by the memories of the interviewees, has given everyone the necessity to remember and to protect their identity. Thus, when memory is no longer communal, it is nowhere unless individuals take it upon themselves to capture it through individual means.

Moreover, memories are inherently embodied in San Francisco with the continuation of the basic precepts of the social milieu. Hence, parishioners experience and value the church in a certain way because they think in a certain way, and vice-versa. It is this unconscious and uncontested *knowing* of the site through appropriation that allows *chilangos* even today to claim ownership of the space. The church for those that attend and see it regularly has become a part of the habitus of the body. For these habitual places are appropriated by the physical body that has a "knowledge bred of familiarity."¹⁷⁵ For the first time, parishioners were asked to confront their unself-conscious relationship with San Francisco; as a *locus* of memory, they experienced the space inattentively in an inconspicuously familiar way, as though the church were taken for granted. This unmediated relationship is the most effective carrier of place memory because it is not motivated out of a conscious wish to commemorate.¹⁷⁶

In this section, I will examine the implications of *chilangos'* conceptualizations of place, ritual, and sacrality from the perspective of the classification of public space. I believe that in these specific articulations, parishioners engage their own inalienable memory while simultaneously negotiating the universalization of the church's memory as an institutionalized product. The fundamental question I seek to address is: How do *chilangos* experience and implement their distant and recent memories of the past prosperity of the church in the context of an increasingly secularized sacred space? Although most Mexicans declare their religion officially as Catholic, fewer and fewer people now attend mass. However, the church has successfully adapted itself to the needs of the city by participating in public events through its distinct and unique relationship with the street.

For the purposes of this chapter, the main differences between memory and history lie in their differing degrees of transferability. Memories are seen as belonging to a particular group of people

¹⁷⁵ Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets*, 32-33.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

(here the parishioners of San Francisco). They are non-transferrable; that is, they cannot be exchanged without fundamentally changing their character. They can never become true memories of another group in the same way. In the case of the Church of San Francisco, many *chilango* parishioners stress their relationship to the city and proclaim that no one from outside (like tourists) can possess the same understanding. In the opinion of these parishioners, the memory of the church's illustrious past and its role in the life of the city cannot be shared, entirely, with outsiders. As such, the memories of the past embodied in the San Francisco are fundamentally an inalienable possession of the collective. In a sense, memory is a form of cultural capital, embodied in the church, whose dispersal or dissolution would lead to a decay of the collective itself. Indeed, it is this impending universalization that threatens the memory of the church while simultaneously preserving its material past, a point which many parishioners emphatically made. As one interviewee quietly lamented: "Sadly, it is becoming a tourist place, and that should never happen." Ironically, many of the efforts to conserve the church have been funded and supported by exterior authorities -- UNESCO among them -- thereby encouraging the creation of touristic monuments to Mexico's colonial past.

History claims to be infinitely alienable and transferable. Parishioners criticize the accessibility of the church to outsiders. To subscribe something to history is to necessarily declare that it is the same history for all participants. The signs that mark the entrance to the *atrio* and hang over the church's interior portal are largely aimed at outsiders, that is, those who cannot participate in the lived memory of the church. They regulate the public hours of the church for tourists versus those times for parishioners. For the purposes of this section, the main dichotomous relationships are between parishioners (those with memory) and tourists (those without). Parishioners are defined as those that live in Mexico City that regularly attend mass in the church, as opposed to a memory bound by race or genealogical heritage (Indian/friar, Indian/Spaniard). The past memories of colonial groups have become

conflated into a singular *capitalino* history; however, the characteristics that define these memories have been and continue to be bound by San Francisco's ability to create a unifying space.

My research, conducted during the summer of 2012, revealed that parishioners were concerned with the history of the church insofar as it affected the church's current relationship with the city. As Connerton speculated – and is shown in the responses of interviewees – societies remember in three distinct ways: inscriptions on cultural texts (architecture), commemorative rituals that engage people in participatory rationality and social action, and the incorporation of social memory into the human body.¹⁷⁷ Specifically, while interviewing parishioners, there were four reoccurring points. First, the unique cultural activities the *atrio* gives shape to are a continuity of ritualized memory. Additionally, the space has transformed into a place for people from different neighborhoods and social strata to come together, despite the increasing compartmentalization of neighborhoods. Parishioners also argue that the church has become a bastion against the modernizing violence of the city. Finally, they stress the spiritual heritage of the mendicant past, however distant their memories may be of the role the church played in the conversion of the Nahuatl. They not only cited the distantly-remembered past as a claim to the church's continued (and often threatened) survival, but declared that the church, and by extension its history, *belonged*, specifically, to them.

The church's *atrio* as a public space continues to shape the social actions of parishioners. One parishioner claimed that the *atrio* is unique for its development of communal memory, "Unlike other churches in the center, it does have an *atrio* that allows the development of cultural activities." In Mexico City, public events are often relegated to the happenstance arena of the street or large formal plazas; San Francisco's *atrio* is an intermediary between the scale of the Zocalo and the scale of the street (Figure 37). Its sunken retreat from the street preferences the public and ritual life of the city.

¹⁷⁷ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 3.

Most churches in urban areas do not retain their *atrios*, which are now distant memories of the mass conversion of the Nahua. The *atrio* of San Francisco, which was once able to hold 50,000 people, has persevered as a ritualized space in which the dramas of the sixteenth century have been reimagined. Elaborate plays that had once been performed with native casts of thousands are now transformed to become a similarly spectacle-based production. By participating in their production and execution, parishioners have claimed ownership of these events. Thus, the church of San Francisco has continued to participate in the public and spectacle-based life of the city.

Furthermore, parishioners argue that the church as a bastion against the city's chaos, mediates the public/private and sacred/profane. One parishioner when asked what he would change about the church, stated that he would rather make the space of the *Centro* less violent. Despite the perceived danger of the area, he continues faithfully attending mass. The church as an unself-conscious *locus* of collective memory, as it has for centuries, regulates the rhythms of everyday existence. The entrance gate, dating from the eighteenth century, frames the facade of the north-entrance of the Balvanera chapel and acts as both a spatial and sacred threshold (Figure 39). The church itself emphatically embeds itself into the earth, creating both a scar to the nation's historical body and a space symbolically removed from the world (Figure 38). It is San Francisco's ability to mediate these realms (sacred/profane, public/private, memory/history) that makes its memories multivalent.

Additionally, the space has transformed to become a place for people from different neighborhoods/classes to come together, despite the increasing segregation of neighborhoods within the city. What was once the localized space of collective memory has been transformed to become a space of confluence. One interviewee concludes that: "There are a lot more people coming to service from other places who are not precisely from this neighborhood." Most parishioners are from far-away neighborhoods and have to commit to a lengthy commute to attend mass. Despite the journey – and

the danger -- the church remains as the temporal judicator of the parishioners' lives, "They [parishioners] come for service on Sundays, or on its anniversary (patron) festivity. They know each other, but they come from different neighborhoods." By its perceived sacrality, created in part by its illustrious past, parishioners ritually embark on a sacred journey through the city to the shrine, rather than attend their local churches.

Finally, they stress the spiritual heritage of the mendicant past, however distant their memories may be of the role the church played in the conversion of the Nahua. One couple alludes to the origin of the church: "It was the first convent in the city, and the biggest created by the Franciscans." By acknowledging the extent to which the church dominated the city, parishioners testify to the church's physical fragmentation. As an unintentional monument, the church unfolds its totality through exhibiting its stigmata embedded in the city. These parishioners engage with a space that is itself pregnant with the past. Descending into the church and entering through the north façade, rather than the west, the church betrays that it has been reconfigured by the city. The space's metamorphosis is a tangible and perceptible sign of the dismemberment of San Francisco, which has heightened the parishioners' pleas for conservation and restoration.

All of these testimonies, taken together, reveal that even today, the social memory of *chilangos* is created by the church. When asked how he would react if the church were torn down and replaced by another, modern church, one parishioner emphatically replied: "It'd feel as if they had taken something away from us, because of the meaning of this place to the citizens of the city." While some parishioners are less conscious of the role the church plays in the city, evidently they identify themselves with the church, much as the Nahua had during the secularization debates of the eighteenth century. Evidently, the same social practices focused on architecture, ritual, and body that created the *lieu de memoire* remain today, as memory and history continue to fight over the contested ground of San Francisco.

After many years of restoration, the remaining fragments of the Church of San Francisco --the church, the convent (now a bakery), the *atrio*, and the San Antonio chapel (now a bookstore) -- have been reconfigured to create a type of memory similar to the mnemonic traces seen during the church's appropriation by the Protestants. These fragments of San Francisco, now embedded in the city, recall a memory of a once colossal totality, although they are not necessarily contingent parts that fit together to make a cohesive whole. Rather their meaning is reliant upon the viewer to project a memory of the space, one which is invariably predicated on their own experiences. Unlike the singular memory of the Indians during the colonial period and the appropriated descent into history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, today the church of San Francisco through its fragmentation, manifests its successive subversions to become a space of multiple and varied memories. It belongs to neither history nor memory but the liminal space between, creating a *lieu de memoire* in which a multitudinous number of memories are given expression.

CONCLUSION

This thesis is an attempt to study the complete history of one building and its multitudinous social, political, and symbolic meanings that have sedimented themselves, one on top of the other, to create meaning for different – and often disparate – social identities. In order to address questions about the space of collective remembrance, I have chosen to focus on one site: the Church of San Francisco, near the Zocalo as it was the city's first church and considered the cradle of Christian Mexico. In addition, it has survived – albeit through a series of collapses, destructions, and rebuildings – and has been radically altered by the imposition and shifting of the city's street grid. Greater than the fragmentation of the church itself, the fluctuating ideologies that have been shaped by and appropriated the space of the convent have continued to manifest in the memory of San Francisco. Because of this constant cycle of the architectural and the symbolic, many of Mexico City's most important historical edifices remain undocumented. I hope that these explorations of memory in its many forms has elucidated meaning that is often neglected in architectural histories, while simultaneously showing the significance of the oft-forgotten and now fragmented Church of San Francisco.

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IMAGES



Figure 1: There are five main phases of San Francisco's lifespan: here depicted in bright red the Primitive Church, Monastery, and San Jose de los Naturales (1525-1590). The first structures were San Francisco (1) and San José de los Naturales (5). The Second Church (1590-1710), the Third Church up to the Exclaustration (1716-1860), the church from the Reform (1860) to 1950, and the contemporary church. The surviving edifices outlined in black are: 1.) San Francisco 3.) Balvanera chapel 4.) Atrio 9.) Portal Gate 20.) Principal cloister and 40.) San Antonio chapel.

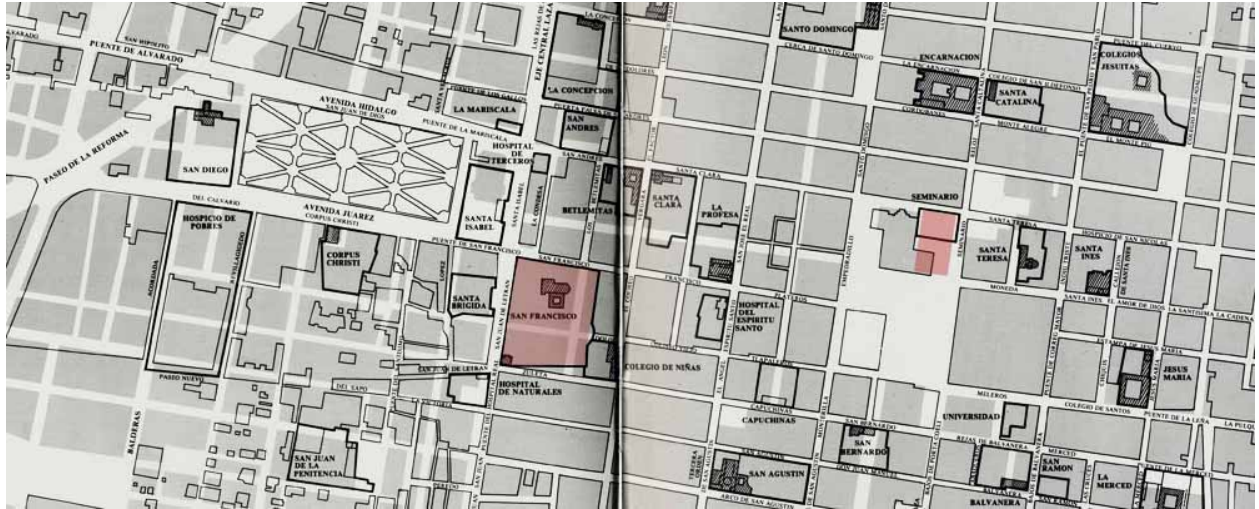


Figure 2: Site plan showing remains of the Convent of San Francisco in the contemporary urban fabric. In 1525, then, soon after their occupation of the site near the Zócalo, the Franciscans sold the land Cortés had given them on the Plaza Mayor and moved to the west side of the city so they could be closer to the Indian population whose conversion they were responsible for.



Figure 3: Today, all that remains are the Balvanera chapel and church, the cloister and the chapel at the corner, embedded in the contemporary fabric.



Figure 4: The contemporary *atrio*.

PLANO DE LA CIUDAD DE TENOCHTITLAN EN EL AÑO DE 1519

ENSAYO DE RECONSTRUCCIÓN FORMADO POR LEOPOLDO BATRES
INSPECTOR Y CONSERVADOR DE LOS MONUMENTOS ARQUEOLÓGICOS DE LA REPÚBLICA MEXICANA,
Y PUBLICADO POR LA SOCIEDAD MEXICANA DE GEOGRAFÍA Y ESTADÍSTICA.

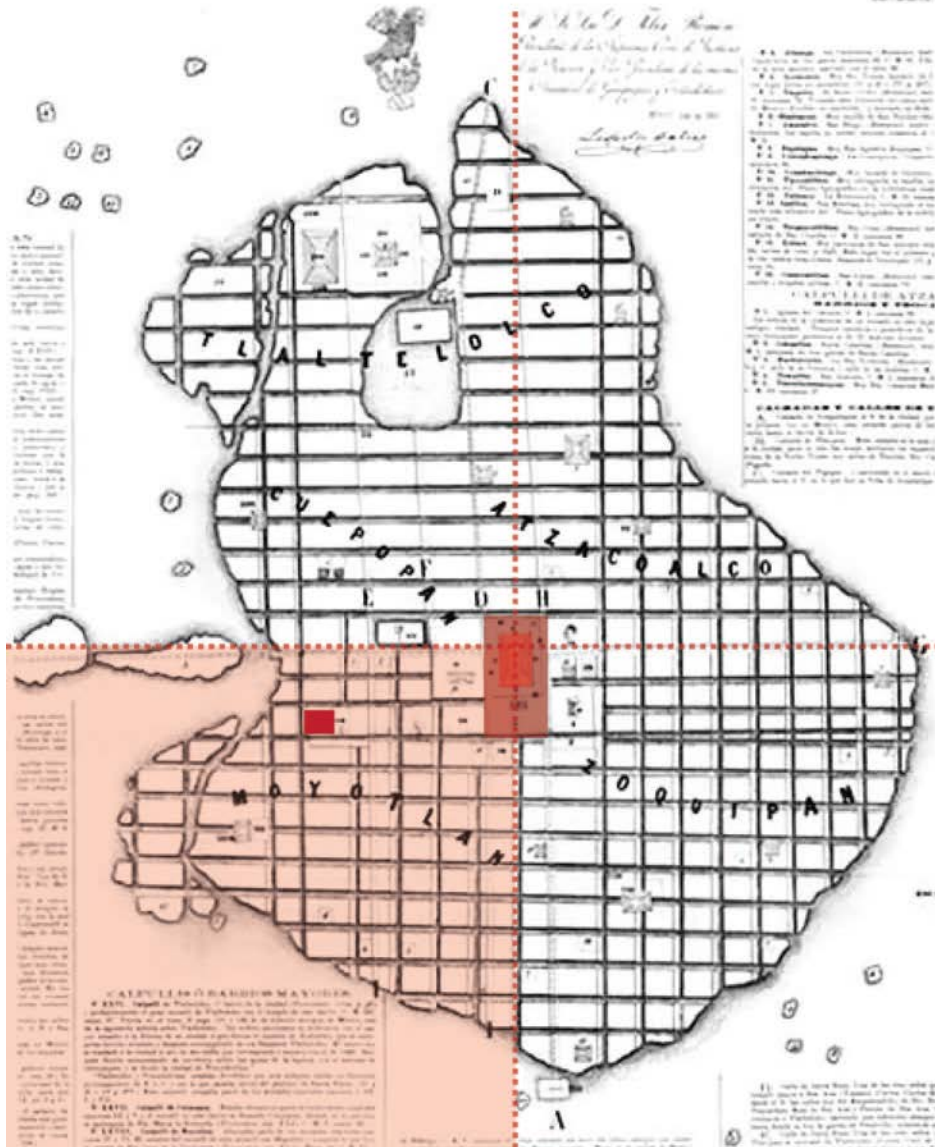


Figure 5: Mirroring the cosmos, the physical center of Tenochtitlan was marked by the intersection of four quadrants: north, south, east, and west with the *Templo Mayor*, the major sanctuary of the city and the Aztec people as a collective, marking the *axis mundi* at the ceremonial center. Source: Orozco y Berra Mapa Library

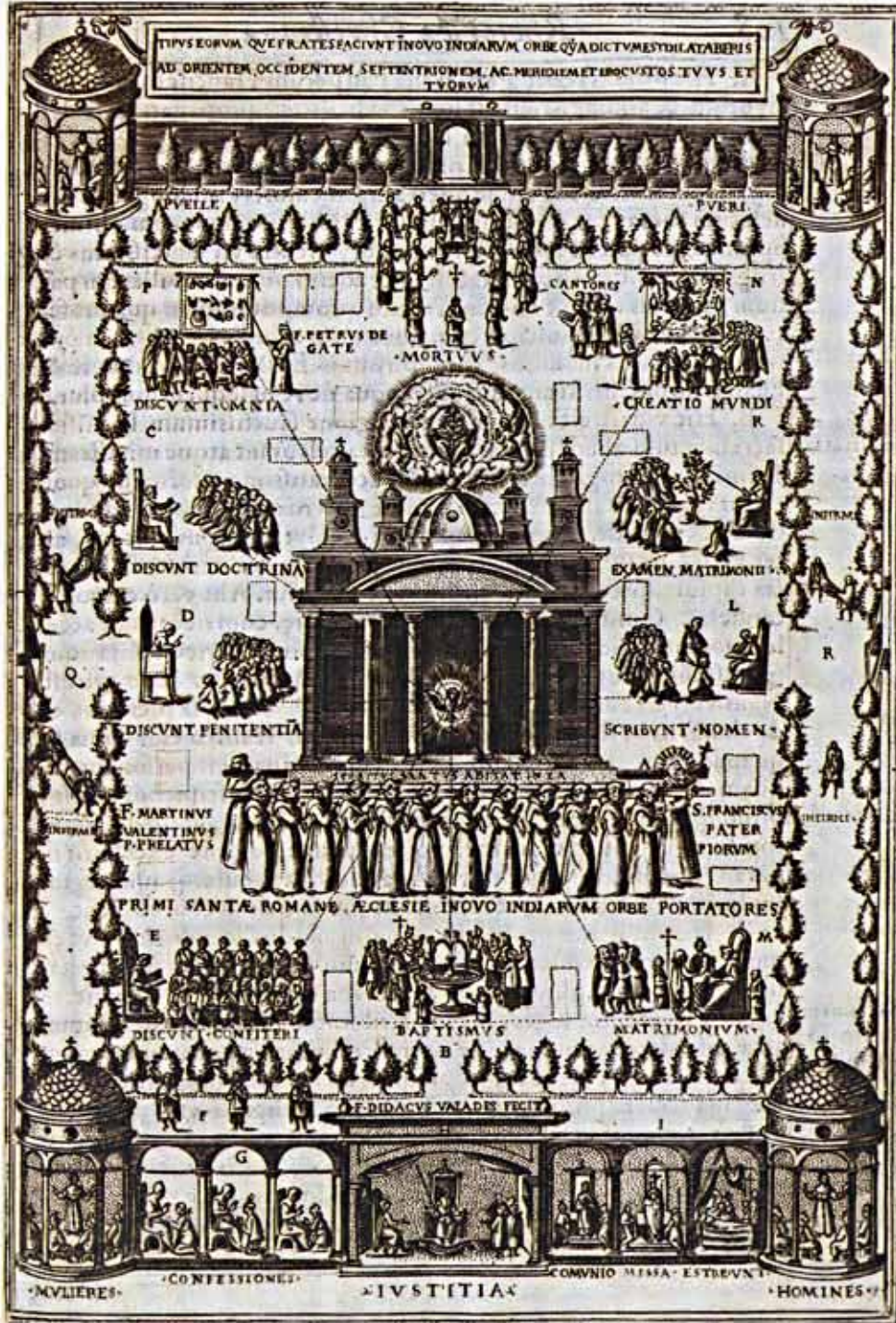


Figure 6: Diego Valades, *Rhetorica*, 1579, engraving representing the metaphorical mission of catechism of the Franciscans.

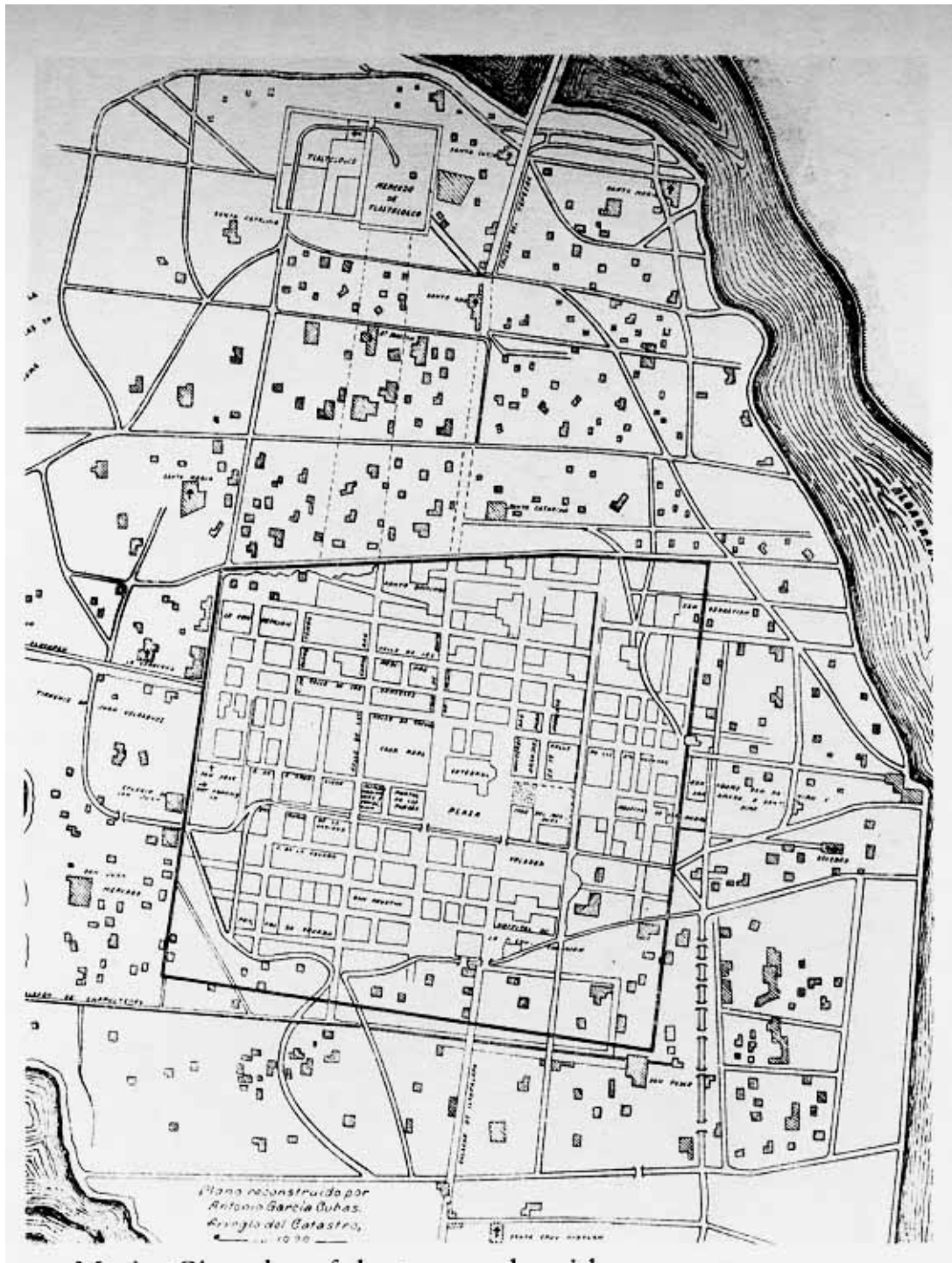


Figure 7: Map of México-Tenochtitlan in the 1570, showing Alonso Garcia Bravo's seven-street grid drawn in 1523.

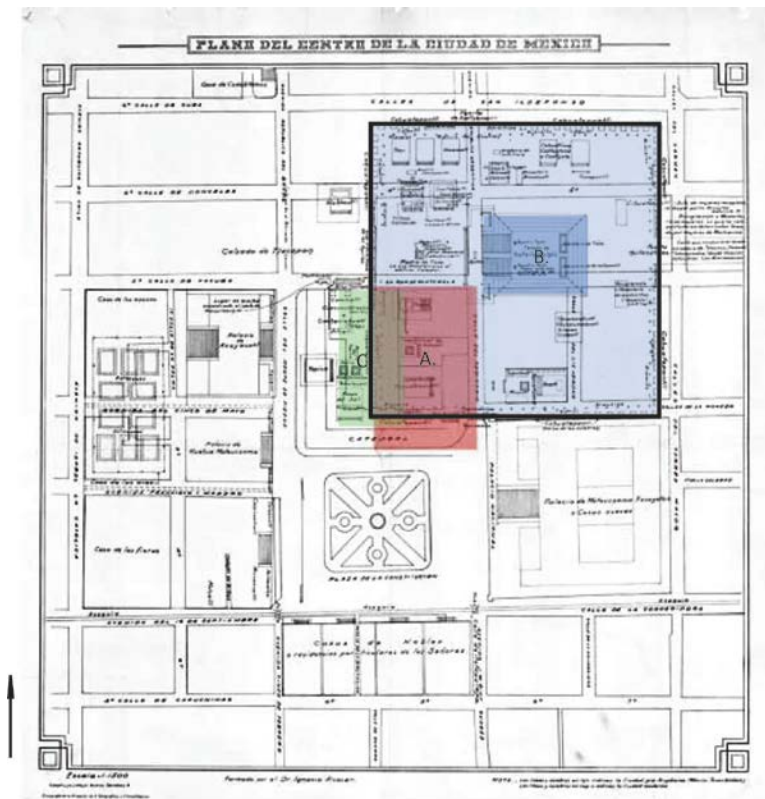


Figure 8: Plan of Aztec Templo Mayor and Spanish Zócalo, with San Francisco purportedly occupying the space of overlap between the two. A.) Contested site of San Francisco el Viejo (1523) B.) Aztec Templo Mayor with the sacred precinct outlined in black C.) Secular Metropolitan Cathedral (1571). Source: Orozco y Berra Mapa Library



Figure 9: A map produced in the 1900s of Tenochtitlan shows the menagerie occupying the site of San Francisco. In pre-Hispanic America, Moctezuma had ordered the construction of America's first menagerie. Source: Orozco y Berra Mapa Library

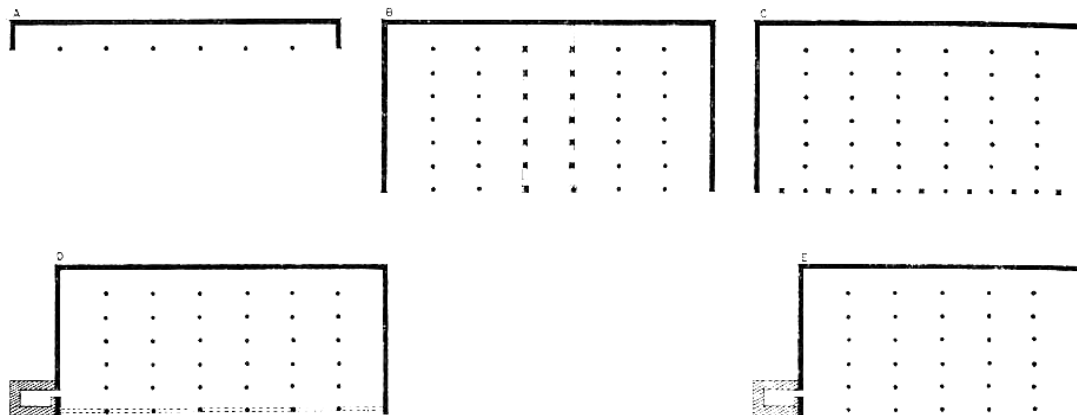


Figure 10: The original San José de los Naturales (1525 – no longer extant), built next to the church of San Francisco, established the open chapel typology in México . Stages of development: a. 1525 ca.-1547 b. 1559-74 c.1574-1587 d. 1590 e. 1697. See Kubler, *Mexican Architecture*, 330.



Figure 11: Fray Diego Valades (1533-1582), a Franciscan mestizo missionary, illustrated the *teocalli* and ideal open-chapel, exemplified by San José, in his depiction of the *altepetl*.

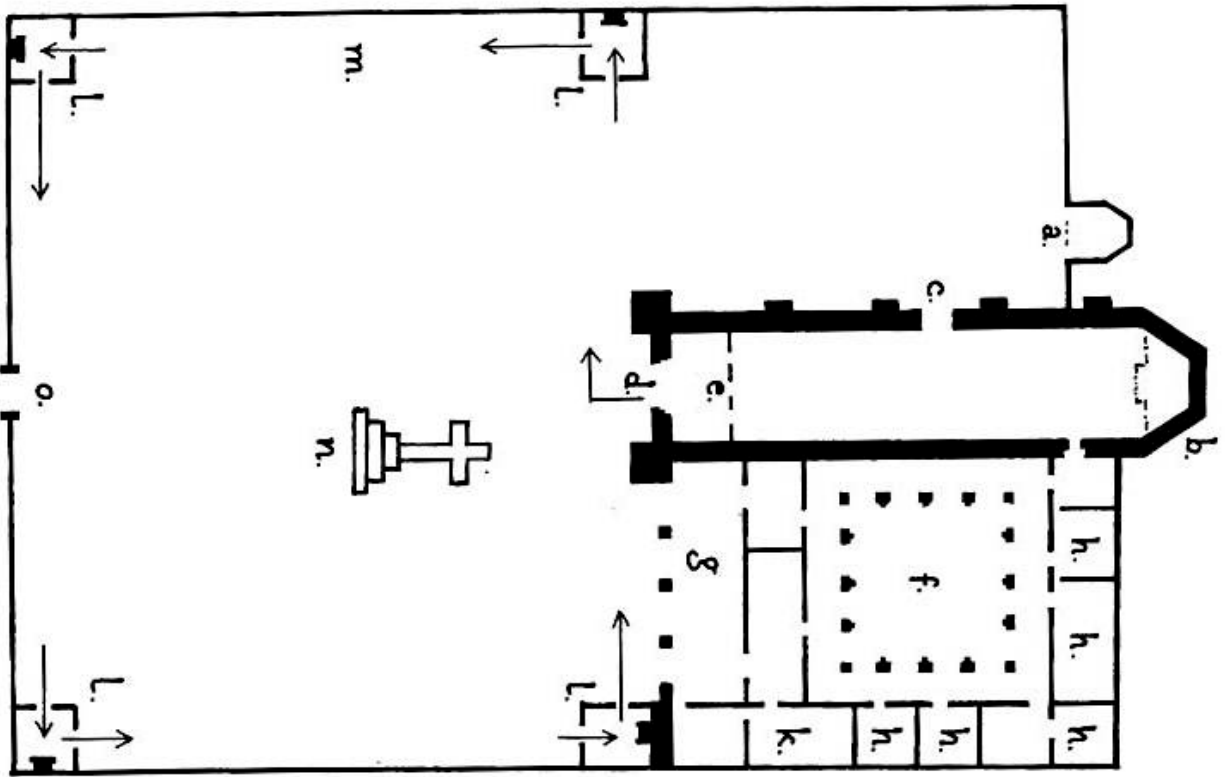


Figure 12: Generic diagram of a convento with an *atrio* (m.), the wooden cross marking the center (n.), walls delineating the sacred boundary, and *posas* or station chapels (l.) marking the four corners. Source: Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion*

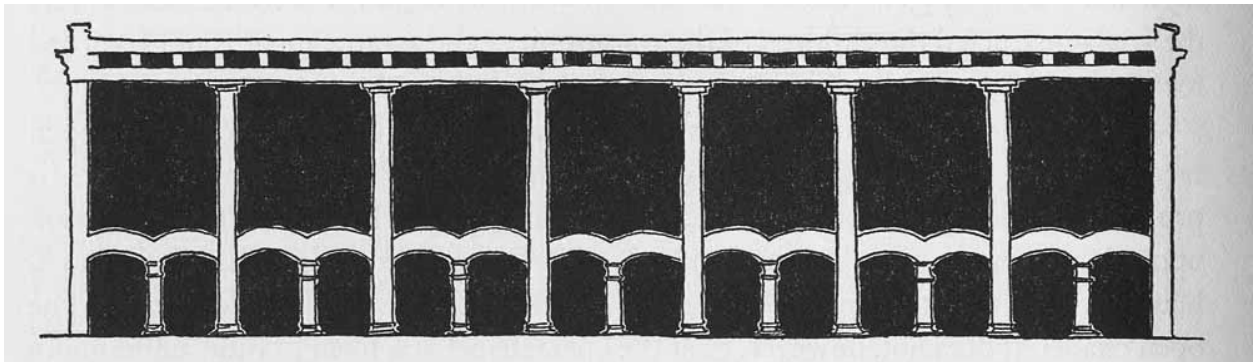


Figure 13: Facade of San José at its apex. Source: Kubler, *Mexican Architecture*.

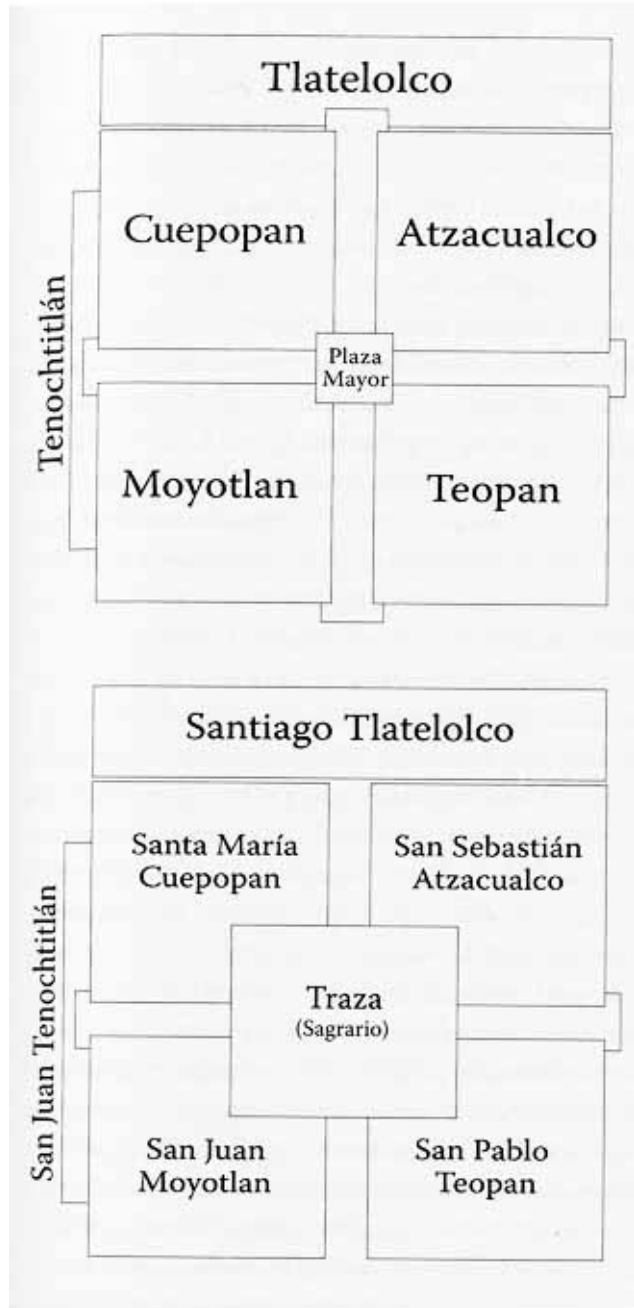


Figure 14: Original and renamed Spanish barrio system. The top image is the original quadripartite division of the city, with the Spanish renamed districts beneath. Source: O'Hara, *A Flock Divided*.



Figure 15: Spanish and Indian barrios before secularization. Bold lines are boundaries of the Indian parishes, while the thin lines are the Spanish districts. Race based, physically and geographically overlapped. Source: O'Hara, *A Flock Divided*.



Figure 16: Barrios after secularization in which San José parish has been significantly reduced. Source: O'Hara, *A Flock Divided*.

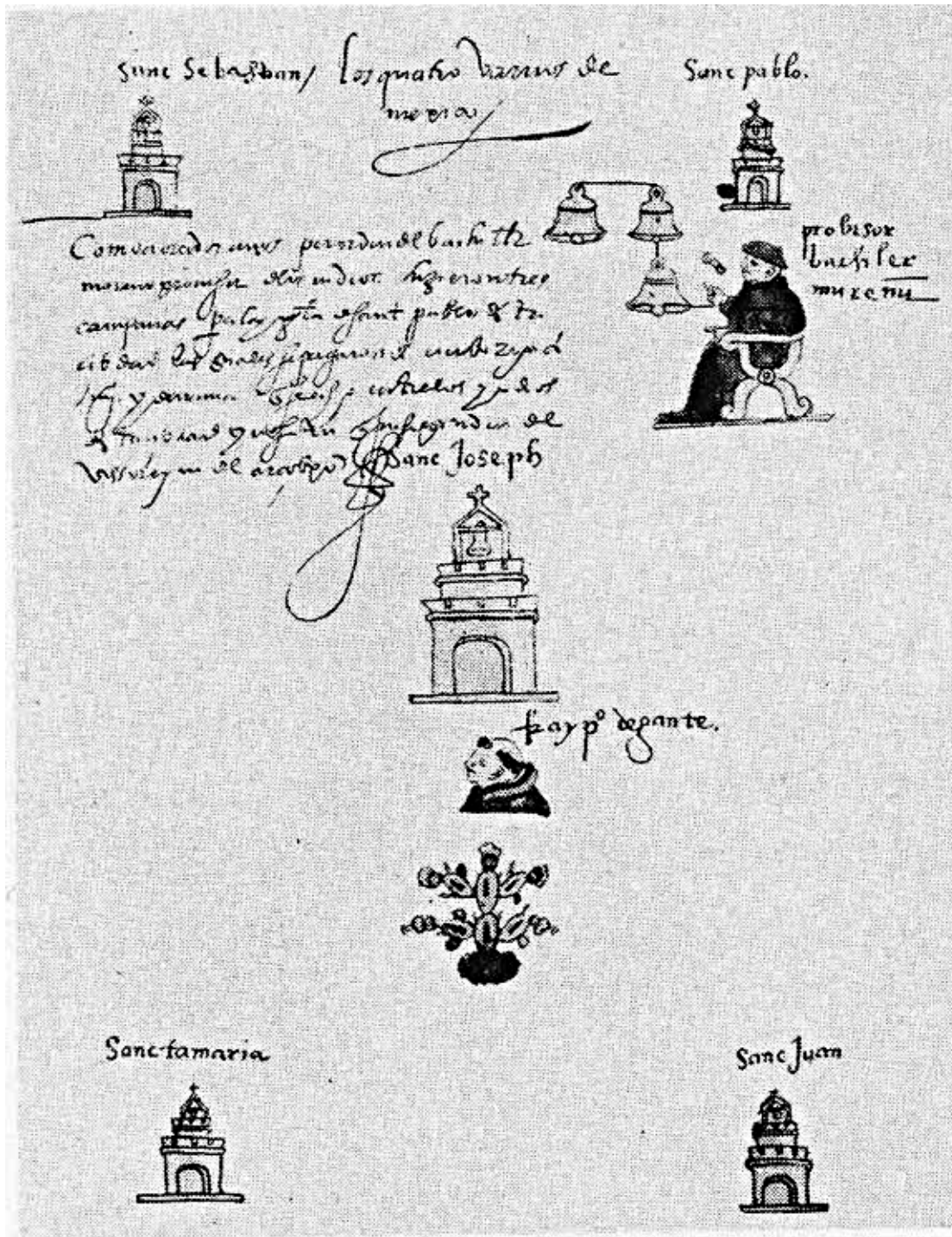


Figure 17: Codice Osuna, fol. 196. Osuna showing four visita chapels at the four corners of the map with San José de los Naturales in the middle. Fray Pedro de Gante, the mendicant founder of San José, is between the church and the cactus (the Nahuatl place-name for the city of México-Tenochtitlan).



Figure 18: A map produced in 1690 shows the condition of the main facade of the church. Source: Orozco y Berra Mapa Library

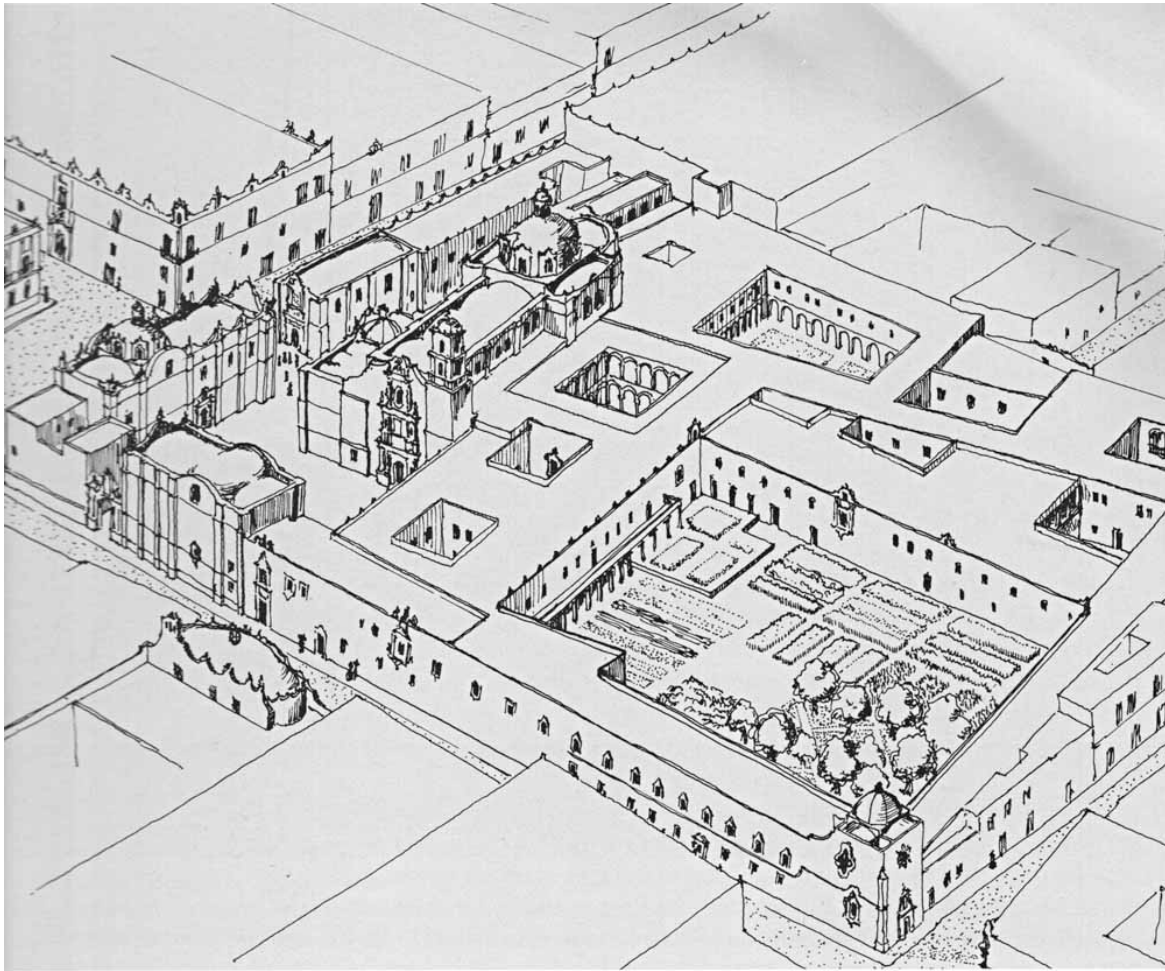


Figure 19: Axonometric of the convent of San Francisco at its most expansive stage. This view looks north-east. Source: Tovar de Teresa, City of Palaces, 17.



Figure 20: The Chapel of the Servites that had once been the Chapel of San José de los Naturales; the great open chapel was reduced from its original seven naves to five, and eventually to only three. Its open façade was closed at this time and renamed. Source: Tovar de Teresa, *City of Palaces*, 19.

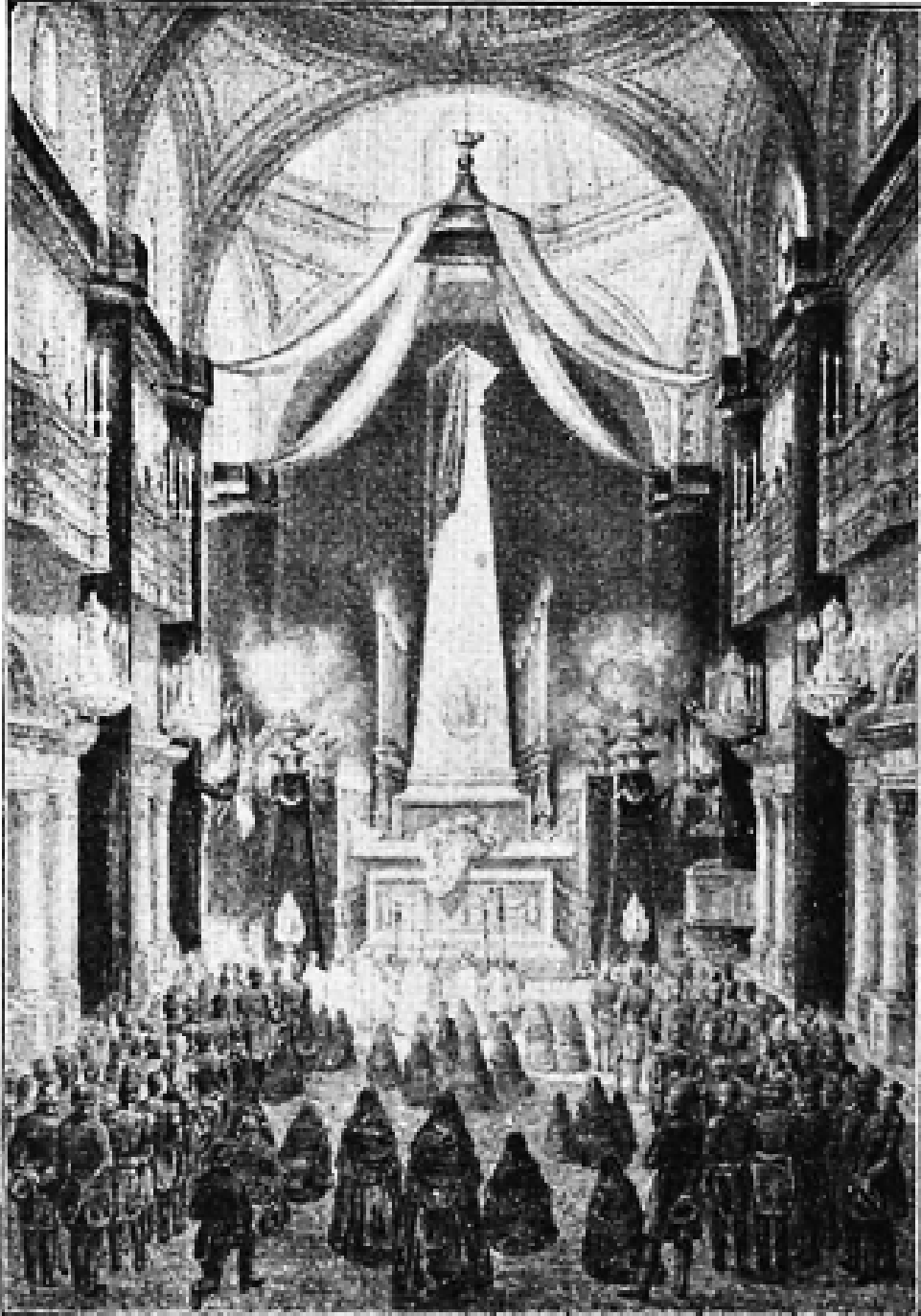


Figure 21: This lithograph from Cubas's *El Libro de mis Recuerdos* shows the dramatic funerary space. Source: Cubas, *El Libro de mis Recuerdos*, 71.



Figure 22: Two days later, for the betterment and beautification of the capital, the street called Independencia cut through the middle of the convent, disemboweling the space to create a more efficient and rational space for commerce.

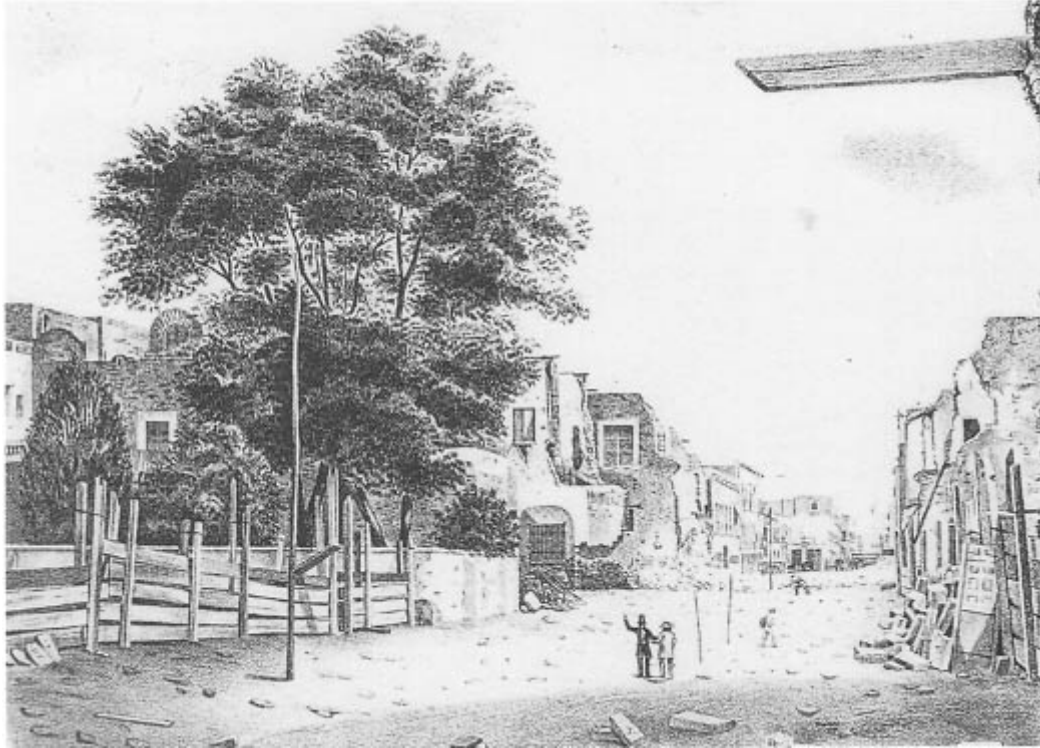


Figure 23: Many of the interior, domestic spaces of the convent were eradicated with the construction of the street: the infirmary, kitchen, multiple cells and part of the garden of the convent. Source: Tovar de Teresa, *City of Lost Palaces*, 18.

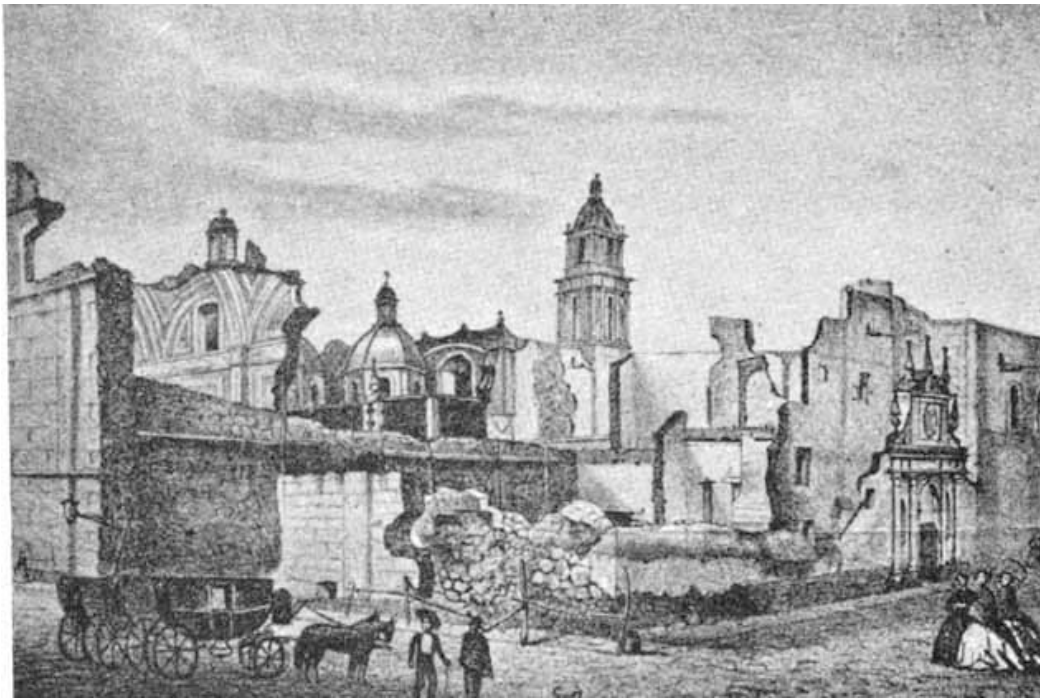


Figure 24: The most sacred interior realm of the cloister. Source: Tovar de Teresa, *City of Lost Palaces*, 18.



Figure 25: Before and after the exclaustation. Source: Tovar de Teresa, *City of Lost Palaces*, 27.



Figure 26: The main portal façade of the Balvanera Chapel was a stunning example of the Churrigueresque Baroque style.
Source: Tovar de Teresa, *City of Lost Palaces*, 24.



Figure 27: Façade of the Balvanera Chapel as it stands today, after its defacement by the Protestant minister. Source: Tovar de Teresa, *City of Lost Palaces*, 25.

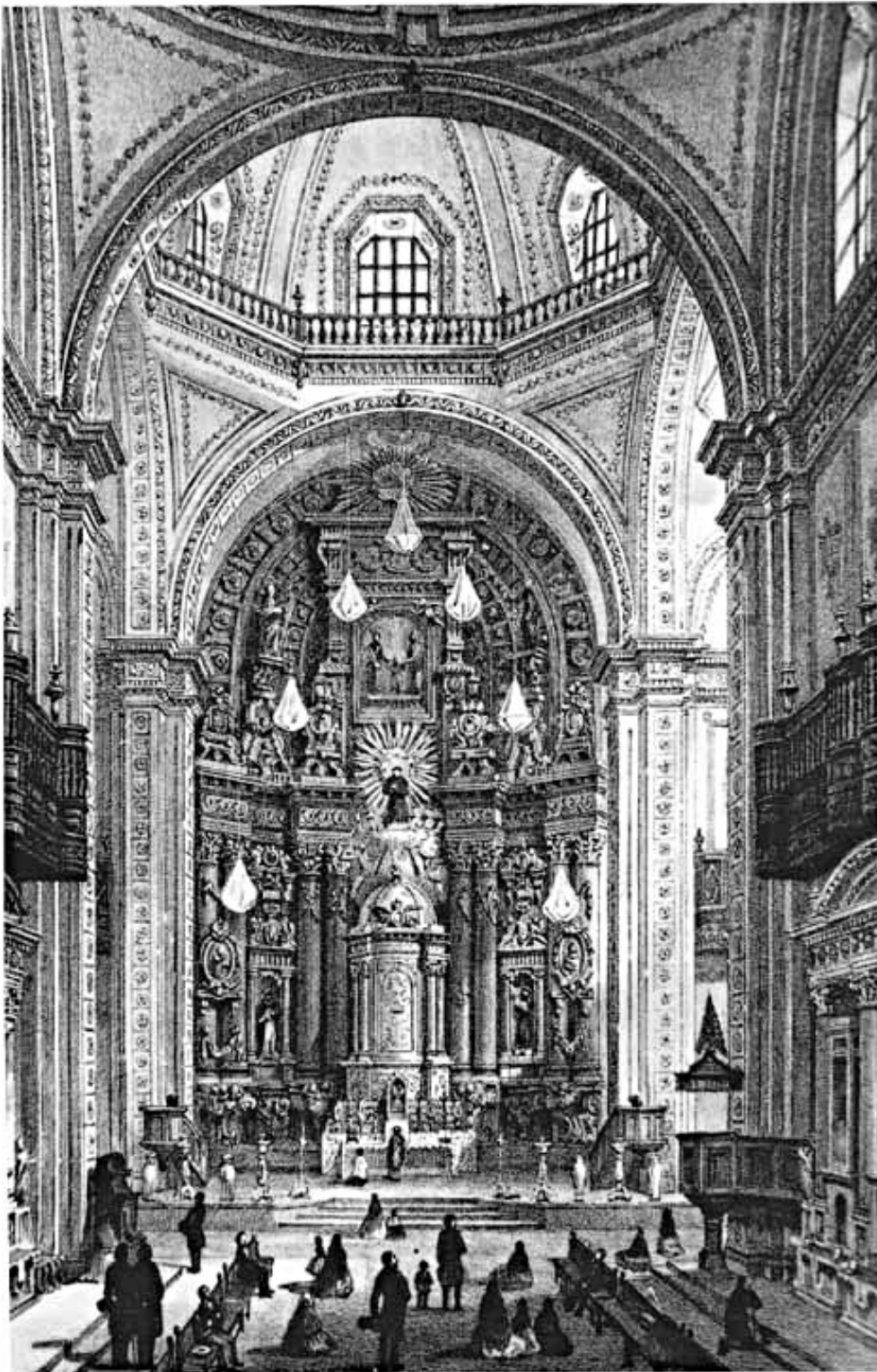


Figure 28: Sumptuous interior of the church before its desecration. Source: Tovar de Teresa, *City of Lost Palaces*, 26.



Figure 29: Protestant effacing of the interior of the church. Source: Tovar de Teresa, *City of Lost Palaces*, 28.

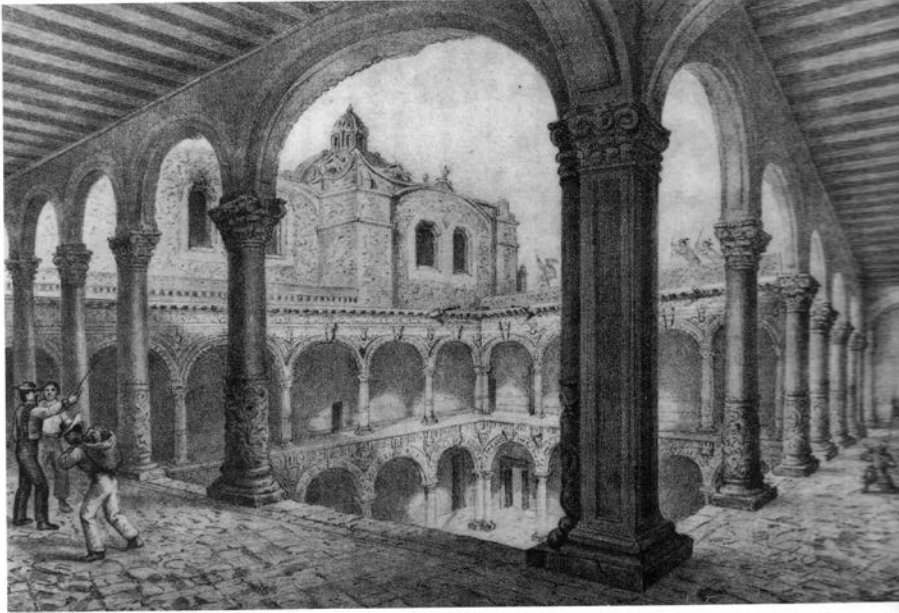


Figure 30: The interior walls of the cloister were decorated with big oil canvases. Source: Source: Tovar de Teresa, *City of Lost Palaces*, 32.

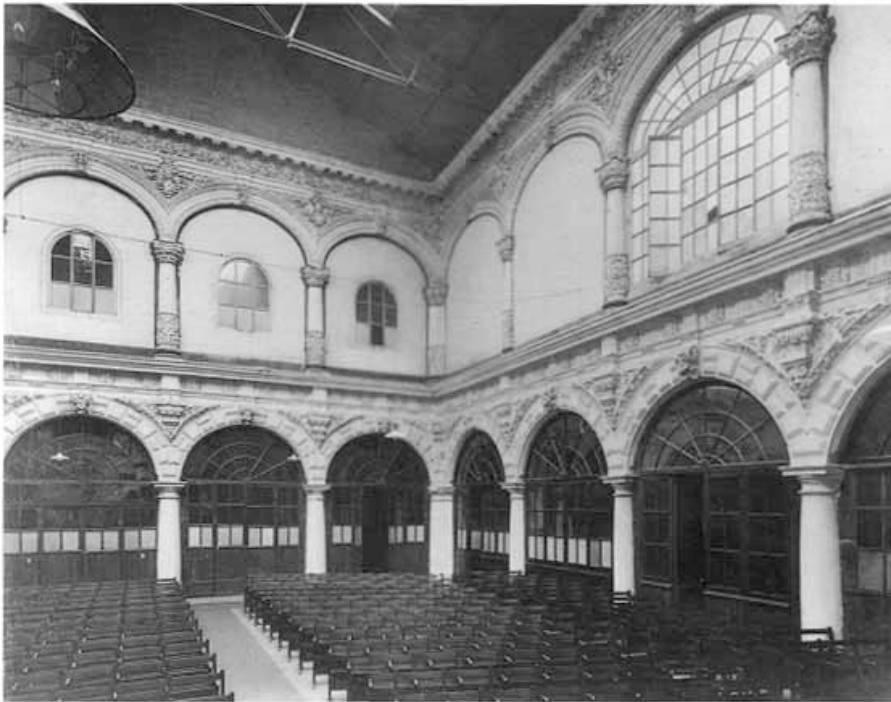
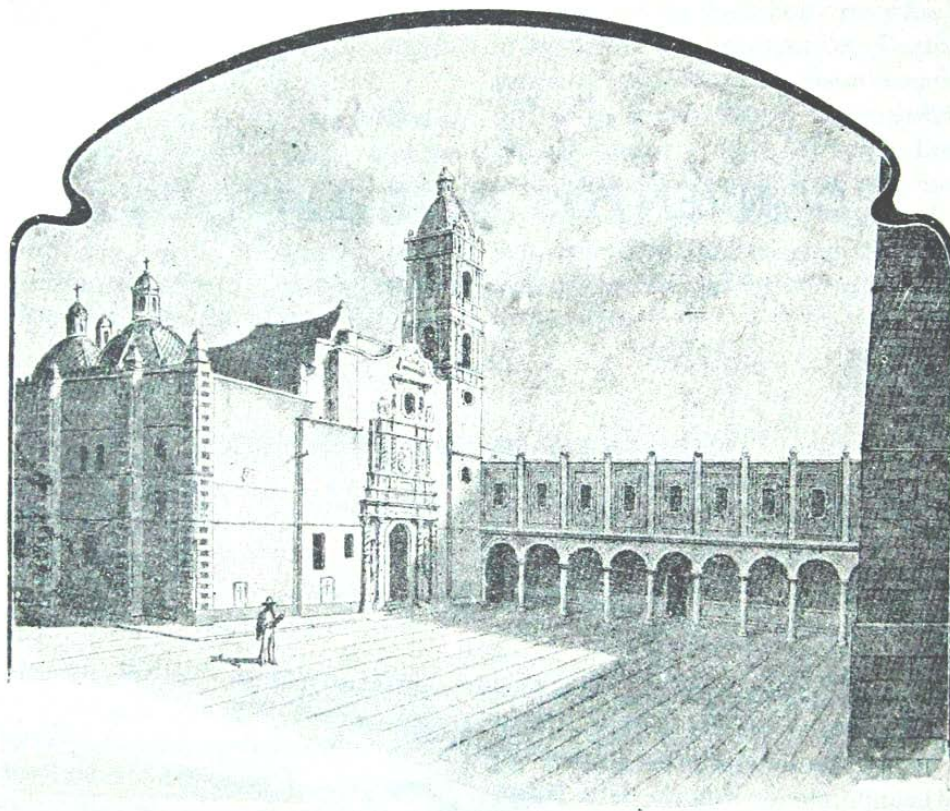


Figure 31: The cloister was transformed to house a protestant temple. Source: Tovar de Teresa, *City of Lost Palaces*.



ATRIO DE SAN FRANCISCO.

Figure 32: View of the *atrio* and west, main façade of the church (no longer visible).



Figure 33: Nineteenth-century pool hall that occupied one of the former chapels. Source: Tovar de Teresa, *City of Lost Palaces*,



Figure 34: The San Antonio chapel still exists as a bookstore, isolated from the remaining fragments of the convent.



Figure 35: Santa Fe, composed mainly of high-rises, is a non-place.



PROYECTO DEL ATRIO DEL TEMPLO DE SAN FRANCISCO.

Figure 36: Plan of San Francisco's proposed (in grey) and actual (white) restoration. Government agencies continued the rescue of the atrium and the main entrance of the Church of San Francisco. Source: Direccion General de Sitios y Monumentos del Patrimonio Cultural



Figure 37: View into the *atrio* from the chapel. Portal door of the chapel framing the *atrio* of San Francisco, with the yellow gate marking the entrance from Calle Madero.

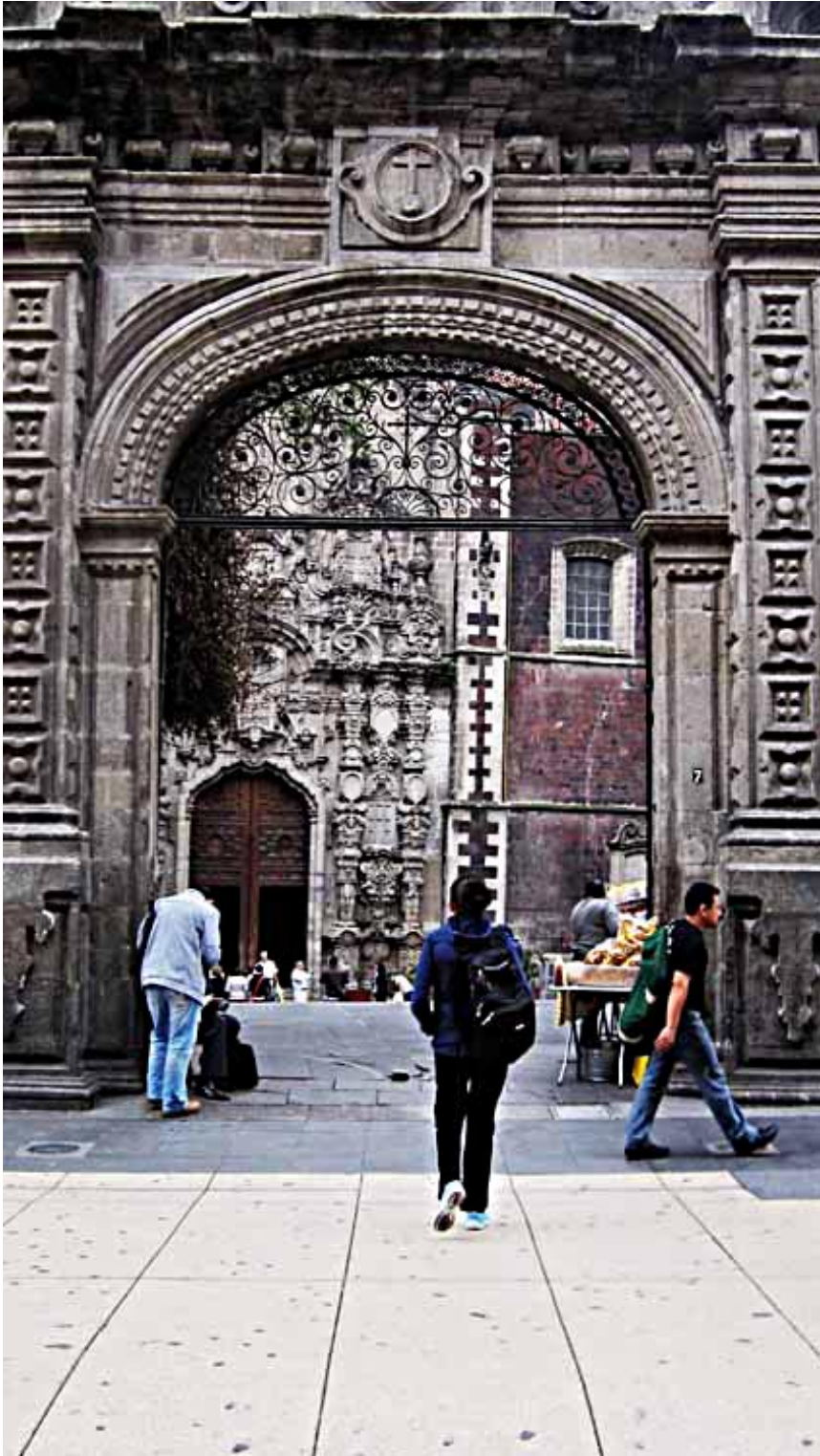


Figure 38: Approaching the church, the gate, dating from at least the eighteenth century, frames the facade of the north-entrance of the Balvanera chapel.



Figure 39: View of the *atrio* from the interior portal door of the Balvanera Chapel.



Figure 40: The *atrio* gate at night.



Figure 41: Interior of the church today.