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Inhabiting Utopias
Literature, Architecture, and Urban Utopianism in Post-Revolutionary Mexico (1919-1959)

by
Alfonso Fierro Obregón

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of
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in
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and the Designated Emphasis
in
Critical Theory
in the
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of the
University of California Berkeley

Committee in Charge
Professor Natalia Brizuela, Chair
Professor Estelle Tarica
Professor Donna Jones

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Abstract

Inhabiting Utopias: Literature, Architecture, and Urban Utopianism in Post-Revolutionary Mexico

by

Alfonso Fierro

Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory

University of California, Berkeley

Prof. Natalia Brizuela, Chair

This dissertation undertakes a critical history of post-revolutionary Mexico's literary and architectural urban utopianism, from 1919 to 1959. As the Mexican Revolution that erupted in 1910 was coming to an end, debates on what this social movement meant in urban politics was a contested terrain. Radical writers and architects of the period believed that a revolutionary production of urban space could dramatically transform the daily lives of Mexico's population by solving basic needs that, today, we organize under the concept of social reproduction. They claimed that reproductive needs like healthcare, affordable housing, childcare, education, and recreation constituted urban rights that could be provided through imaginative and experimental forms of designing urban space, providing public services, and organizing reproductive labor collectively. To this end, they approached the aesthetic and philosophical languages of utopianism, futurism, and science fiction. The dissertation analyzes how, in objects like the science fiction novel, the futurist magazine, the socialist realism novel, or the utopian architecture project, writers and architects articulated a radical critique of capitalist urbanization and explored alternative models of urban habitation. In this project, utopianism is understood as a world-building literary and architectural practice based on political speculation and aesthetic experimentality.

As mentioned before, the dissertation provides a critical history of this generation of radical utopian writers and architects. It examines their crucial shortcomings, but also the most disruptive aspects of their urban thought and aesthetic practice. Chapter 1 explores Eduardo Urzaiz's science fiction novel *Eugenia*. In dialogue with Donna Haraway's notion of "oddkin," it explores the novel's critique of the traditional family as a reproductive institution and its complex notion of "scientific socialism" in Yucatán. Chapter 2 follows the debates on political stability and economic recovery in the 1920s by comparing how two different periodicals understood the importance of "networked infrastructures" (roads, radio, telephone): on the one hand, *Horizonte*, a futurist magazine published by the avant-garde *estridentistas* while collaborating in the leftist local government of Veracruz; on the other, *Planificación*, published by liberal technocratic urban planners in Mexico City. Chapter 3 studies how, after the fall of *Estridentismo*, some of its members remained in Jalapa and reorganized into the "proletarian literature" project experimenting with socialist realism. The chapter analyzes José Mancisidor's socialist realism novel *La ciudad roja*, a socialist reconstruction of the massive anarchist tenant strikes in Veracruz in 1922. The chapter then analyzes the 1938 *Proyecto de ciudad obrera*, an architecture project for a workers' city based on collective houses and a cooperative distribution of all labor (including reproductive tasks such as cleaning, cooking, or childcare). While never built, this project's insistence that it was necessary and possible to organize social reproduction collectively so that all inhabitants had access to childcare, recreation facilities, or education

became important in the experimental social housing policy of the 1940s and 50s in Mexico City. Chapter 4 traces how architects and bureaucrats in the magazine *Arquitectura México* theorized the *multifamiliares* social housing policy as an urban system of economic redistribution and welfare provision. A final epilogue, “Utopianism Reconsidered,” analyzes the legacy of post-revolutionary Mexico’s literary and architectural utopianism in the context of present-day urban struggles and world-building aesthetic practices.

The world is always new, said Coro Mena, however old its roots.
Ursula LeGuin, *The Word for World is Forest*.

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Introduction

In 2020, I happened to spend several months of the COVID-19 outbreak in Mexico City's Roma Sur neighborhood. Every week, I would take my recyclable waste —cans, plastic bottles, carton boxes, organic scraps— to the Huerto Roma Verde, a community garden that, since 2012, collects recyclables, composts, grows organic food in a spiral plot (Figure 1), hosts ecological workshops for children, and organizes public events such as concerts and film festivals. While several stations in the *huerto* were closed at the beginning of 2020, I could still walk the place and admire its ecologically experimental architecture, one based on recycled materials, low-cost systems, a do-it-yourself aesthetic, and scraps of past futurisms such as Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes.



Figure 1. Huerto Roma Verde.

The *huerto* is a small utopian space growing on the ruins of another utopia, that of the state-developed, modern housing complexes known as *multifamiliares*, a protagonist character in this dissertation (Figure 2). After the 1985 earthquake, several buildings in the Centro Urbano Presidente Juárez (CUPJ) were demolished. The residents of this *multifamiliar* demanded a park in the empty plots, but the ISSTE —the governmental agency that administers the project— never fulfilled its promise. Eventually, a group of residents and neighbors in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood such as Roma took matters into their own hands, occupied the land, and built the Huerto Roma Verde. As I walked around the place every week, I found it easy to notice the diverging points between these two superimposed urban utopianisms, the decaying *multifamiliar* and the thriving *huerto*, but I simultaneously could not help but wonder about some possible historical connections between the two. To begin with, it reminded me that, immediately after construction, the residents of all *multifamiliares* began appropriating space according to their needs and tastes, despite the condescending complaints of modernist architects.



Figure 2. Guillermo Zamora, “Centro Urbano Presidente Juárez,” *Arquitectura México* 40 (1952): 404

In an effort to chart some of the historical echoes between past and present utopianisms and to question their place in the urban process, this dissertation undertakes a critical reconstruction of post-revolutionary Mexico’s literary and architectural utopianism. The dissertation follows a network of radical writers and architects that, from the early stages of the post-revolutionary period to the “Mexican Miracle” of the mid-twentieth century, approached the aesthetic and political world-building practices of utopianism. Responding to the violence and devastation of the revolution, but imbued at the same time in the political potentialities the movement inaugurated, these radical modernists contemplated what the Mexican revolution meant or could mean in the city. They were deeply involved in the urban debates of the period, debates over hygiene and public health, infrastructural modernization, or tenant rights and affordable housing. Critical—in very different ways—of capitalist processes of urbanization and the living conditions of Mexico’s urban dwellers, they believed that a revolutionary production of urban space could radically transform the daily lives of Mexico’s population by solving basic needs such as housing through different possible forms of organizing collective habitation.

They also believed that such a revolutionary production of urban space needed to be imagined, modeled, discussed, and experimented on the ground. In other words, they argued that it required the imaginative practice of artists, their familiarity with world-building aesthetic forms like the science fiction novel or the futurist architecture project, and, above all, their capacity to speculate and experiment. On these grounds, they claimed a place for modernist writers and architects to participate in Mexico’s political and urban processes as they were developing in the years after the revolution. Navigating this rather unstable place between aesthetics and politics, theory and practice, they fell upon multiple and sometimes contradictory traditions of urban utopianism in both Latin America and Europe: from the positivist “scientific” novel of the late nineteenth century to the models of utopian socialists

like Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, from anarchist cooperatives and movements in revolutionary Mexico to the Soviet avant-garde, and the modernist urbanism of European architects like LeCorbusier and the CIAM.

Writers and architects conceptualized their approach to utopianism and their models for a revolutionary urban space in objects like the science fiction novel, the futurist magazine, the socialist realism novel, or the architecture project. In these objects, they articulated an urban critique on issues such as social inequality in the city, public health, rent burdens, lack of affordable housing, or the absence of social security and public services. Furthermore, utopianism allowed them to defy normative conceptions of the family, centralizing models for urban growth, pre-conceived ideas on collective housing, and (on some occasions) the modern assumption that it was necessary to surveil the habitation practices of lower-class urban populations. And to defy these conceptions —part and parcel of the post-revolutionary State’s biopolitical governmentality— by countering with possible alternatives: experimental models for “group houses” for non-familial kin, communication infrastructures for local political networks, organized *barrios*, communal and cooperative houses, or housing models with extensive public services like the *multifamiliares*. Finally, as I will have the opportunity to explore in detail, the utopian documents themselves tended to be speculative and experimental in their form. They were reflections on what textual objects like the novel, the magazine, or the project could be in terms of their capacity to act politically in the public sphere. Indeed, I argue here that writers and architects of the post-revolutionary period employed these objects to introduce a disruptive position in the urban debates and struggles of the period, aiming to inaugurate a series of virtual political horizons.

Echoing David Harvey, these modernists explored “the potentiality to build or inhabit new forms of social relations (a new commons) within an urban process influenced if not dominated by capitalist class interests.”¹ They understood the habitation crisis that led to the Mexican revolution as one based on an unequal distribution of the commons. In this sense, their urban thought emphasized questions that today we organize under the concept of social reproduction, understood as “the activities and attitudes, behaviors, and emotions, and responsibilities and relationships directly involved in maintaining life, on a daily basis and intergenerationally.”² As we shall see, they claimed that reproductive needs like healthcare, affordable housing, childcare, education, and recreation constituted urban rights that could be provided through public services or other forms of organizing reproductive labor beyond the family.

Their emphasis on social reproduction should by no means indicate that they were feminists. In fact, their incapacity to critically address patriarchal authority and female oppression was a constant limitation in their economic critiques of the traditional family. We will also have time to dwell on how a socialist realism author like José Mancisidor intentionally erased the female sex workers that initiated the Veracruz tenant strikes of 1922 in his reconstruction of the events. Overall, this was a male and heterosexual-centered generation in Mexico’s radical left, including utopian writers and architects. In fact, women were excluded from the professional field of architecture, while groups like the *estridentismo* only offered limited space to artists like Tina Modotti and writers like Adela Sequeyro I

¹ David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 68.

² Johanna Brenner and Barbara Laslett, “Gender, Social Reproduction, and Women’s Self-Organization: Considering the US Welfare State,” *Gender & Society* 5, no. 3 (1991): 314.

mention in Chapter 2. Furthermore, post-revolutionary Mexico's utopians mainly emerged from the ranks of the professional, urban middle classes. More times than not, this racialized class position rendered them unable to question the governmental idea that it was necessary to surveil and modernize Mexico's urban population. Similarly, as I will have an opportunity to show, they were mostly incapable of understanding traditional forms of organizing collective habitation through extended families and popular neighborhood networks.

In the following pages, I aim to provide a critical reading of post-revolutionary Mexico's urban utopianism, dwelling on its crucial shortcomings, but similarly reevaluating the most disruptive aspects of their urban thought and aesthetic practice. I also aim to provide a reading that helps us understand how their practice followed different directions, some of which are important to understand present-day urban struggles and utopian practices in Mexican cities. As I will discuss below and throughout the project, criticism has read urban utopianism as a discourse complicit with the authoritarianism of post-revolutionary Mexico's State and its biopolitical project of modernization, one that insisted that it was necessary to surveil, control, and intervene on Mexico's backward population. In this project, I will carefully dissect the different lines of communication utopian writers and architects established with state-builders like Alberto J. Pani, liberal and professional urban-planning journals like *Planificación* in the late 1920s, or bureaucrats in development banks and social security agencies like Adolfo Zamora in the 1940s and 50s (Zamora was director of the BANHUOP, a development and mortgage bank that financed some of the *multifamiliar* projects).

However, it is important to remember that urban utopianism emerged in a highly unstable political moment. In the 1920s, post-revolutionary Mexico's political direction was an open question. Writers like Eduardo Ursaiz in Yucatán or the *estridentismo* in Veracruz were participating in regional "laboratories of the state" —to use Thomas Benjamin's phrase— that were politically at odds with the directives coming from Mexico City.³ In other words, they had very different readings and interpretations of what the revolution meant. And if it is true that in moments like the 1930s *Cardenismo* the radical avant-garde came close to the central government's political project, at other points, they were at odds with each other. Utopian writers and architects established shifting relations with labor organizations, urban social movements, local governments, and federal agencies precisely because they were operating at different times, places, and political situations. Therefore, I claim that urban utopianism, when seen as a dispersed network, created multiple configurations, inaugurated different lines of communication, and evolved in various trajectories simultaneously. Not all roads lead to the State and its spectacular projects like the *multifamiliares*, and we need to understand that even these projects were a result of a plural negotiation that included labor unions, social security agencies, private construction companies, and the architectural avant-garde.

Since the later twentieth century, modernist utopianism has received a fair share of criticism. In the 1960s, for instance, Henri Lefebvre undertook a radical critique of utopian urbanists in Europe like LeCorbusier and the CIAM. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, in *The Urban Revolution*, he claimed that these urbanists were right in detecting a habitation crisis in the

³ Thomas Benjamin, "Laboratorios de nuevo Estado, 1920-1929: Reforma social, regional y experimentos en políticas de masas." In *Historia regional de la Revolución Mexicana. La provincia entre 1910-1929*, edited by Thomas Benjamin and Mark Wasserman (México: Conacyt, 1996): 109-135.

context of a capitalist-driven urbanization determined by real estate speculation and extraction of rent and surplus value. However, he argued that their proposed solutions—in projects like the Mexican *multifamiliares*—benefited only the articulation of welfare capitalism, what Lefebvre deemed a “bureaucratic society of controlled consumption.”⁴ In other words, they served the purpose of rationalizing urban habitation according to lines that benefited the planned consumption needs of a modern economy.

Lefebvre was by no means an anti-utopian. In fact, *The Urban Revolution* constitutes an attempt to wrestle utopianism away from state-developed modernist urban projects and from all sorts of programmed social models “that end up minutely organizing a repressive space.”⁵ In this sense, Lefebvre’s thought may seem to echo the longstanding Marxist reserves against utopianism. As is well-known, in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels deemed the models of Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, and Saint-Simon “castles in the air” that lacked a systematic critique of capitalism and proposed rushed alternatives doomed to fail. Similarly, after the fall of the 1871 Paris Commune and the dispute between Marx and Bakunin, “scientific” socialism and anarchism followed separate paths. And yet, if Marx and Engels considered—not without inconsistencies—that socialism could only emerge after the revolution and could not be pre-figured, Lefebvre was also critical of this apocalyptic understanding of revolution and the Marxist incapacity to welcome utopian imagination into its critical apparatus.

According to Lefebvre, urban space is characterized by incessant movement and contradiction. “The signs of the urban are the signs of assembly [...]. The urban is, therefore, pure form: a place of encounter, assembly, simultaneity.”⁶ As such, hegemonic forces are constantly met by the spontaneous formation of alternative forms of inhabiting the city, organizing collective life, and building space. Lefebvre calls them heterotopias, spaces of difference and possibility that necessarily emerge in any given urban space. Radical urban critique, in fact, constitutes one of these spaces of alternative possibility, which is why Lefebvre insists that his work “constitutes itself slowly, making use of theoretical hypothesis and practical experiences as well as established concepts. But it cannot exist without imagination, that is, without utopia.”⁷ However, these plural and spontaneous utopianisms resist the urge to provide fixed models for the future. Instead, they offer living sites of resistance and creativity that, in specific contexts, coalesce into revolutionary movements. In his texts on the Paris Commune, Lefebvre thus reconsiders the importance of Proudhonian anarchisms insofar as the Commune was made possible by the previous existence of anarchist spaces, cooperatives, and networks that eventually joined together in the crucial months of 1871. In this sense, for the Lefebvre writing from France in the 1960s, a truly potential urban utopianism was closer to anarchist spaces and federations than to the large-scale modernist visions of socialist architects in the USSR or the social-democratic CIAM.

In Mexico, the critique against utopian modernism began by disenchanting modernist utopians themselves. Starting in the 1940s, socialist writer José Revueltas used his work to dismantle the premises of socialist realism and criticize the disconnection of the Mexican Communist Party from the reality of Mexico’s working classes. Meanwhile, Alberto Arai, one of the architects behind *Proyecto de ciudad obrera*—a 1938 model for a cooperative

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban*, 160.

⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban*, 157.

⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban*, 118.

⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban*, 141.

workers' city I analyze in Chapter 3— was, by the 1950s, doing everything possible to distance himself from the *multifamiliares* he had argued for as a young socialist architect. In a self-critical talk delivered in 1956, he suggested that modernist architects had failed to consider how people in Mexico actually lived and had never contemplated the possibility of inquiring about their needs and desires. In that conference, Arai was not ready to discard modernist architecture, but he was prepared to reconsider his previous dismissiveness of traditional forms of habitation. Arai now understood tradition not as the backward obstacle he had taken it to be as a young socialist, but a living force: “la tradición persistente que vive en cada uno de nosotros no es algo muerto, sino que define la realidad presente de cada pueblo.”⁸ From this perspective, he reformulated his previous utopian ideas on cooperative housing. As I will explain, these ideas eventually reappeared in architects like Enrique Ortiz that defended urban self-determination and contributed to the creation in the 1970s of autonomous popular housing experiences such as the Cooperativa Palo Alto in Mexico City.

In his post-colonial critique of urban space in *México profundo: una civilización negada* (1987), anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla further developed Arai's insights. Bonfil Batalla contrasted “dos maneras de entender y experimentar la vida vecinal.”⁹ On the one hand, the *vecindades*: a longstanding form of low-cost tenement housing in Mexico in which rooms are distributed around a patio with shared services such as bathrooms, laundry sinks, or playgrounds. On the other hand, the *multifamiliares* that architects and planners presented as a modern collective housing model meant to substitute *vecindades*. We shall see in detail the long history of virulent attacks against *vecindades* and their dwellers from modern architects, writers, and urban planners who considered them sites of physical, moral, and social disease. In the 1980s, however, Bonfil Batalla argued that extended families often organized life collectively in spaces like the *vecindades*. Albeit not entirely accurately, as I shall discuss in Chapter 4, Bonfil Batalla claimed that the *multifamiliares* represented a biopolitical project aimed at re-organizing habitation around the nuclear family structure, dismissing the indigenous and traditional importance of the extended family as a self-organized network of cooperation and support.

Bonfil Batalla was thus critical of modernist utopianism's collaboration with Mexico's post-revolutionary governments in state-developed projects like the *multifamiliares*, a stance that has continued in the work of more recent literary and cultural critics. For instance, literary critic Ignacio Sánchez Prado has criticized the the futurist *estridentismo* I explore in Chapter 2. According to Sánchez Prado, the *estridentismo*'s utopian and revolutionary literary project failed when the group began to collaborate in the progressive local government of Heriberto Jara in Veracruz: “la ideología presentista del estridentismo significó, en la práctica, una afiliación al proceso político mexicano en contradicción directa con los principios estéticos que ellos mismos propugnaban.”¹⁰ Sánchez Prado reads Manuel Maples Arce's poem *Urbe* (1924) as a contradictory text: on the one hand, it advances the utopian image of a united revolutionary working-class advancing toward the future in a technologized, modern city; on the other hand, what Sánchez Prado calls the “retórica oficialista” manages to penetrate the poem's language. In this sense,

⁸ Alberto Arai, “La casa mexicana: ideas sobre la habitación popular urbana.” in *Leer a Alberto T. Arai: reflexiones, ensayos y textos*, edited by Elisa Drago (Mexico City: UNAM, 2019): 176.

⁹ Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México profundo: una civilización negada* (México: FCE, 1989), 64.

¹⁰ Ignacio Sánchez Prado, *Naciones intelectuales: las fundaciones de la modernidad literaria mexicana (1917-1959)* (West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 2009), 57.

Sánchez Prado concludes that the *estridentismo*'s failure was its participation in the local government of Veracruz and its incapacity to build an autonomous political position. In Chapter 2, I will concentrate on *Horizonte*, the magazine the *estridentistas* published in Jalapa as part of Jara's government, and will thus engage critically with Sánchez Prado's account of the *estridentismo*'s "contradiction" as avant-garde artists and collaborators of a local government at the same time.

Meanwhile, cultural critic Rubén Gallo has aimed to present the Tlatelolco *multifamiliar* as a modernist utopian dream that resulted in a dystopian nightmare. To begin with, Gallo argues that Tlatelolco—and *multifamiliares* in general—belong to the imagination of architect Mario Pani, citing comments on LeCorbusier's megalomania to suggest that they could also apply to the Mexican architect and his visions for the future of Mexico City. In Chapters 3 and 4, I shall try to contest this idea by showing that *multifamiliares* are the result of the magazine *Arquitectura México*'s negotiation with previous architecture projects, government officials, and labor unions in the context of the "Mexican Miracle." Gallo further suggests that the *multifamiliares*' modernism—one based on rationalization and homogeneity—constituted a panoptical architecture meant "to control the living environment, leisure activities, and even the movements of its inhabitants," a point that we shall have time to debate further on.¹¹ In this sense, he claims that it was a dystopia from the start, and that the fact that the student massacre of 1968 took place in this housing development only served to reveal its true face. "After 1968" Gallo writes, "it became the darkest symbol of Mexico's dystopian failures," an idea reinforced after the 1985 earthquake that affected buildings in both Tlatelolco and the CUPJ in the Roma neighborhood.¹² This way, *multifamiliares* represent for Gallo "disastrous nightmares that continue to haunt the country."¹³

As a cover for their recent book *Un habitar más fuerte que la metrópoli* (2018), the Consejo Nocturno chose a photograph of the demolished Nuevo León building in Tlatelolco after the 1985 earthquake (Figure 3). Not only does the image serve to show the ruins of the post-revolutionary regime and its modernizing biopolitical project. The image also reminds us of the massive autonomous networks of support that emerged spontaneously after the earthquake to distribute food supplies, remove rubble, support paramedics, and do many other necessary tasks while the government famously did not react to the tragedy. Following the image's two-sided meaning, in *Un habitar*, the Consejo Nocturno claims that radical autonomy remains the only possibility of moving from "cualquier avatar de del paradigma de gobierno en favor de un paradigma del habitar, durante mucho tiempo el punto ciego de los revolucionarios."¹⁴

¹¹ Rubén Gallo, "Tlatelolco: Mexico City's Urban Dystopia," in *Noir Urbanisms*, edited by Gyan Prakash (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010), 62.

¹² Rubén Gallo, "Tlatelolco," 65.

¹³ Rubén Gallo, "Tlatelolco," 53.

¹⁴ Consejo Nocturno, *Un habitar más fuerte que la metrópoli* (La Rioja: Pepitas de Calabaza, 2018), 10.



Figure 3. Marco Antonio Cruz. “Edificio Nuevo León (Tlatelolco)” (1985).

The Consejo claims that the Metropolis —the globalized economic forces of capitalism, along with its national and transnational juridical and political supports— aims to secure its own reproduction through temporal and spatial devices. The Consejo points to large-scale infrastructural projects, urban planning attempts to make the city “smart” or “efficient,” and processes of gentrification disguised as urban renovation as examples of the metropolitan appropriation of space. In a context in which entire neighborhoods in places like Barcelona or Mexico City become readily programmed for tourism —empty apartments for Airbnb, pretty cafés, enhanced policing—, we see the emergence of “una condición generalizada de extranjería, que nos prohíbe seguir usando la palabra “habitante” para referirnos a sus inquilinos.”¹⁵

In opposition to this *estranged* mode of residence, something Lefebvre had also noticed in *The Urban Revolution*, the Consejo proposes radical secession and autonomy as the sole possibility to inhabit a territory beyond government, understanding habitation in a rich sense that aims to nurture the existence of plural “forms of life” in the present and toward the future: “la política que viene está completamente volcada al principio de las formas-de-vida y su cuidado autónomo.”¹⁶ The Consejo conceptualizes these forms of life as polymorphous, heterogeneous, and autonomous potencies that can nevertheless coalesce in a federalist network (what they call the *Intercomunal*). Furthermore, these formations are not merely a desired possibility, but an already existing reality:

En heterogeneidad con ese Imperio que se quiere positivamente inconstestable, existe una constelación de mundos autónomos erigidos combativamente y en cuyo interior se afirma siempre, de mil maneras diferentes, una férrea indisponibilidad hacia

¹⁵ Consejo Nocturno, *Un habitar*, 48.

¹⁶ Consejo Nocturno, *Un habitar*, 11.

cualquier gobierno de los hombres y las cosas, hacia el *planning* como proyección y rentabilización totales de la realidad.¹⁷

Here, the Consejo has in mind the *Zapatista* communities in Southern Mexico, the initiatives of the Consejo Nacional Indígena, and projects of *Comunalidad* in Oaxaca. But it is also thinking of experiences like the Cooperativa Palo Alto, a housing cooperative organized in the 1970s by migrants of an abandoned sand mine that is currently facing pressure from developers given that it occupies valuable real estate in one of Mexico City's financial centers (Figure 4). In more general terms, the Consejo is thinking about the importance that autonomous urban networks and heterotopic spaces—to use Lefebvre's term—have had in actively resisting neoliberal governance in Latin America since the 1980s, offering possibilities of survival, organization, and mutual aid. The barter clubs and networks that emerged in Argentina during the 1990s crises, the transnational feminist movement #NiUnaMenos, or the urban garden movement through which residents take over decaying urban sites are examples of these self-organized urban utopianisms appearing here and there. Not unlike what Lefebvre thought about urban revolutionary movements, in specific contexts, these different networks, experiences, and urban spaces come together in horizontal, dispersed, massive movements like the ones we saw in the Oaxacan APPO in 2006, the Bolivian Water Wars, or the 2021 *paro nacional* in Colombia.



Figure 4. Cooperativa Palo Alto. Photograph by the author. (2021).

¹⁷ Consejo Nocturno, *Un habitar*, 9.

The impressive rise of science fiction authors, independent editorial projects, and libraries across Latin America in very recent years is part of this heterogeneous constellation of world-building practices. In the marginal neighborhood of Ecatepec (located on the eastern outskirts of Mexico City), the independent library Periphéria seeks to build a select catalog of science fiction, fantasy, and speculative critical theory and offer related cultural activities for the nearby residents. Its name evokes a double meaning: on the one hand, it refers to the library's marginal location in geographical, social, and cultural terms; on the other, it suggests that science fiction and fantasy are still sometimes considered peripheral literary genres, especially when produced by Global South authors. Meanwhile, the editorial project Odo Ediciones—which takes its utopian name from Odo, the political mother of the anarchist planet Anarres in Ursula LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*—aims to publish contemporary Mexican speculative fiction and participate in the articulation of a community of readers and writers with links to other Latin American projects like the Bolivian Dum Dum Editora or the library *La valija de fuego* in Bogotá.

In *Staying With The Trouble* (2016), Donna Haraway claims that the speculative world-building practices of science fiction are essential to answering the pressing question of how to inhabit a ruined planet and how to build life-sustaining practices for the future. Throughout the book, Haraway argues for the necessity of kin-making, understanding kin beyond the family structure in a way that expresses supporting connections between humans and between species. As I will discuss in my reading of the Mexican sci-fi novel *Eugenia* in Chapter 1, Haraway names this practice “oddkin” and argues that it is a way of envisioning multi-species futures. Similarly, Haraway draws from feminism the continuing importance of struggling for a comprehensive notion of sexual and reproductive rights, including housing, education, food, water, and healthcare for communities living in increasingly precarious conditions throughout the planet (even at the heart of the so-called “First World”). With these objectives in mind, Haraway writes, “we need to write stories and live lives for flourishing and for abundance, especially in the teeth of rampaging destruction and impoverization.”¹⁸ Like Lefebvre and others, Haraway is critical of modern utopianism's urge to create society models from scratch, erasing the past and ignoring the present. In her view, it is necessary to learn how to live and restore life to a ruined world. Still, Haraway recovers utopianism's speculative narrative operations, its world-building practices. She invites the reader to participate “in a kind of genre fiction committed to strengthening ways to propose near futures, possible futures, and implausible but real nows.”¹⁹ These world-building practices across media are certainly not about predicting the future or offering a fixed model for it, but exercising our capacity to articulate what the Consejo calls potential forms of life. Leading with the example, Haraway closes the book with a speculative text of her own, one in which she envisions a series of small, dispersed, self-governed communities inhabiting industrial ruins here and there, aiding through “oddkin” practices to the reconstruction of life wherever possible.

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, as I was doing my weekly rounds to the Huerto Roma Verde, I was also reading Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero's feminist reflections on housing and social reproduction in “staying at home” times in Argentina. In a series of texts published in *Revista Anfibia*, Gago and Cavallero argued that feminist and LGBTTQ+ groups

¹⁸ Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2016), 136.

¹⁹ Donna Haraway, *Staying*, 136.

have struggled to create their own spatialities and habitation practices: “construimos otros “interiores” inventando formas de refugio, cuidado y acompañamiento que declinen aquí y ahora la pregunta por cómo queremos vivir.”²⁰ Against the “staying at home” romanticization of the family house as a “supuesto espacio de refugio privado,” Gago and Cavallero argue that feminism has demystified housing as a site that intersects different forms of violence and exploitation.²¹ To begin with, urban developers, mortgage banks, and landlords control access to housing and exploit it as a readily available market. According to Gago and Cavallero, during the pandemic, Argentinian urban dwellers saw a rise in “proprietary violence” in the form of evictions, threats, and increasing debt obligations. But, in Latin America, the house is also the domain of the patriarchal family that exercises domestic violence against women and dissident sexualities and lifestyles, thus operating as a normative social structure and another source of “proprietary violence.”

In spaces and networks such as #NiUnaMenos and the yearly #8M, Latin American feminism has articulated the right to anti-patriarchal and anti-speculative housing as part of a larger reflection on social reproduction. According to Gago and Cavallero, the reliance during the pandemic on “essential workers” laboring in precarious conditions revealed once again—as feminist literature has insisted over the years—that reproductive labor essential to sustaining life (cooking, cleaning, maintenance, nursing) happens in some of the most invisibilized conditions. Furthermore, Gago and Cavallero claim that the absence in many countries of an ample network of public services eroded by decades of neoliberal policies bent on State “austerity” should also remind us of the absolute necessity to struggle around reproductive issues such as housing, living conditions, healthcare, and public services of a different kind.²²

Here, Gago and Cavallero reintroduce the question of the public and interpellate the State as an administrative apparatus that should be held accountable for guaranteeing the welfare of its population, moving away from calls to secession and autonomy like the Consejo’s (at least in terms of immediate tactics). This way, they claim that “la batalla por la propiedad de la que hablamos se juega en la demanda concreta de usos comunes y públicos de los bienes y servicios que hacen posible (o no) la reproducción de la vida personal y colectiva.”²³ In their view, the articulation of a social movement like the *paro feminista* should aspire to incorporate into its immediate demands “la provisión de servicios públicos gratuitos (de la conectividad al agua, de la electricidad a los servicios de salud) y políticas de desendeudamiento.”²⁴ As they understand it, the *paro feminista* thus aims to recover the working-class tradition of the labor strike to make these demands to the State by stopping the

²⁰ Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero, “La batalla por la propiedad en clave feminista,” *Revista Anfibia*. <http://revistaanfibia.com/ensayo/la-batalla-la-propiedad-clave-feminista/> Last Date Accessed: March 8, 2022.

²¹ Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero. “La batalla.”

²² Verónica Gago y Luci Cavallero, “Deuda, vivienda y trabajo: una agenda feminista para la pospandemia,” *Revista Anfibia*. <http://revistaanfibia.com/ensayo/deuda-vivienda-trabajo-una-agenda-feminista-la-pospandemia/>. Last Date Accessed: March, 8 2022.

²³ Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero, “La batalla.”

²⁴ Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero, “La batalla.”

entire social reproduction machinery, including homes, childcare facilities, schools, healthcare centers, recreational facilities, and other reproductive spaces.²⁵

In this sense, they agree with Social Reproduction Theory author Tithi Bhattacharya when she claims that, insofar as better living conditions can and are fought over through short and long term strategies, “reproduction [...] is therefore class conflict.”²⁶ As Bhattacharya acknowledges, many important urban struggles of the past decades have organized around living conditions, “from the struggle for water in Cochabamba and Ireland, against land eviction in India, and for fair housing in the United Kingdom.”²⁷ From her perspective, these various popular movements are working-class struggles aiming for self-development and self-transformation in a neoliberal global context in which labor unions have been cornered, coopted, or dismantled. Similarly, Gago and Cavallero suggest that feminist discussions on social reproduction and reproductive spaces like the house constitute points of entry for a critique of contemporary capitalism as a whole. Consequently, for them, the *paro feminista* should include in its agenda the immediate demand for public access to the urban commons.

Currently, several Latin American regions are undergoing profound political changes that, in different ways, respond to fractures in the hegemonic neoliberal governance of the past four decades. In Chile, Mexico, and Argentina, leftist political movements have successfully won executive and legislative elections. In cases like Chile, where former student activists have won key positions (including the presidency), change has come with tremendous hopes for progressive electoral politics. In other cases, like Mexico, the tenure of the so-called 4T has disappointed feminist, LGBTTTQ+, and indigenous networks alike. To mention only one example, several indigenous communities in Southeastern Mexico have contested the federal government’s plan to build a “Tren Maya.” They claim that this massive infrastructural project, designed in the capital, promises “progress” while aiming to develop the Southeastern region for the sake of industries such as tourism and with little regard to traditional political, economic, and ecological territorial organizations. Beyond electoral politics, grassroots spaces, initiatives, and networks continue to demonstrate their importance as venues of political assembly and self-organized efforts to provide education, food security, recreation, childcare, and many other reproductive services in rural and urban local communities. In the urban landscape, these plural heterotopic spaces may in part explain the rise of massive horizontal urban movements like the yearly #8M *paro feminista* or the *paro nacional* that paralyzed several Colombian cities in 2021.

In this context, the theoretical discussions outlined in the previous pages raise important questions and offer provocative answers. From Lefebvre to Haraway, from the Consejo Nocturno to Gago and Cavallero, the matter of the urban commons and the possibility to reorganize the domains of social reproduction has a central place in their critical theories around the notion of habitation. Harvey, for instance, claims that we need to pursue “the socialization of surplus production and distribution, and the establishment of a new common wealth open for all [...] that extend and enhance the qualities of the non-

²⁵ Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero, “8M: La invención política del paro feminista,” *Revista Anfibia*. <http://revistaanfibia.com/ensayo/la-invencion-politica-del-paro-feminista/> Last Date Accessed: March 8, 2022.

²⁶ Tithi Bhattacharya, “How Not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class,” in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, edited by Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 79.

²⁷ Tithi Bhattacharya, “How Not,” 86.

commodified reproductive and environmental commons.”²⁸ Similarly, these authors all participate in a debate over political strategy that oscillates between radical autonomy and the possibility to fight for immediate reforms that can prepare the ground for more ambitious demands. Related to this point are the authors’ questions on heterotopic spatialities and speculative practices: How do they organize and operate? In what ways do they intervene in the urban process and urban politics? What is their connection to previous utopian socialisms, anarchist initiatives, and *autogestión*? What kind of links, if any, do they establish with other networks, social movements, and the State? These reflections certainly include a reconsideration of science fiction, futurism, and utopian world-building practices in literature and architecture, both past and present, as Haraway attempts to do in the context of a global environmental crisis. Finally, although diverse, the critical theory I am interested in engaging with throughout this project holds on to the principle of radical hope, which partly explains their interest in engaging with the utopian mode of political thought and praxis.

The fact that these reflections, debates, and struggles are taking place in the context of regional political reconfigurations across Latin America evokes in many ways the urban discussions happening in a Mexico emerging from a complex revolutionary process in the late 1910s. In the urban terrain, the post-revolution meant dealing with the devastating living conditions that resulted from more than a decade of civil war and ongoing economic recession. At the same time, beginning in 1920s “reconstruction,” the post-revolution arrived with hopes that radical political and social change was possible. As we shall see, similar debates on habitation and social reproduction, on the democratic control of urbanization, on local and regional autonomy, and on the political potential of world-building aesthetic practices permeate the work of post-revolutionary Mexico’s urban utopian writers and architects. That is why this is an opportune moment to undertake a critical reevaluation of urban utopianism in modern Mexico.

My approach to utopian literature and architecture will, first of all, situate the work of modernist writers and architects in their different social, political, and cultural contexts. All four chapters in this project deal in one form or another with archival material, and it is necessary to present and situate it clearly for the reader. This is even more true considering that there is little scholarship on many of the works I analyze here, including magazines like *Planificación* and novels like *La ciudad roja*. Urban historians of modern Mexico like Diane Davis, Enrique de Anda, Michelle Dion, or Manuel Perló Cohen will prove essential to this task. In turn, the work of critical theorists like Donna Haraway, David Harvey, Verónica Gago, and Henri Lefebvre will allow me to engage at a theoretical level with post-revolutionary Mexico’s utopianism. In each of the chapters, I will provide close readings of science fiction and socialist realism novels, avant-garde magazines, and futurist architecture projects. Through these close readings, I aim to dissect the crucial shortcomings of modernist urban utopianism, signaling previous criticisms leveled against these works and providing new grounds of critique (for instance, related to the question of gender and social reproduction). But I also aim to reconsider disruptive aspects of their urban thought and world-building aesthetics, analyzing how they intervened in the urban debates of the period. In other words, I am not interested in judging utopianism according to the political “perfection” of its futurist models—an impossible and futile task. More times than not, utopianism’s world-building aesthetics aimed to contemplate possibilities, open lines of

²⁸ David Harvey, *Rebel*, 86-88.

inquiry, experiment, and chart political directions forward rather than provide fixed blueprints for the future. Instead, I aim to render utopianism as an imperfect, historically situated form of political thought and praxis relevant in post-revolutionary urban processes, debates, and struggles.

Chapter 1 dwells on the science fiction novel *Eugenia* (1919), published in the Southeastern state of Yucatán by Eduardo Ursaiz, a Cuban doctor and writer who was an active participant in the progressive local governments of Salvador Alvarado and Felipe Carrillo Puerto in the early post-revolution. In *Eugenia*, Ursaiz articulates an eccentric “scientific socialism” that scholars have correctly criticized for its reliance on eugenics. While scholarship has consequently focused on race and body interventions, I will read the novel along with Alberto J Pani’s *La higiene en México* (1916) to understand the eugenic matrix of positivist urban thought. However, I will also claim that certain aspects of Ursaiz’s “scientific socialism” deserve further attention, particularly its radical critique of the traditional family and its reorganization—in the novel—in freely-formed “group houses” that the author likens to inter-species associations. Donna Haraway’s posthuman notion of “oddkin” and Roberto Esposito’s reflection on immunology will allow me to engage with this aspect of Ursaiz’s eccentric political thought.

While post-revolutionary “reconstruction” meant different things for different regions, political associations, and government levels throughout the 1920s, the urban thought of the decade concentrated on issues of political stability and economic recovery. Urban periodicals avidly discussed the importance of connecting cities, regions, and the country through modernizing networked infrastructures such as streets and highways, traffic systems, radio stations, and telephone lines. Chapter 2 will concentrate on the magazine *Horizonte* (1926-1927) that the avant-garde *estridentistas* published in Jalapa while collaborating in Heriberto Jara’s progressive “laboratory of the state” in Veracruz. The chapter will focus on how the magazine employed a futurist aesthetic language to describe how networked infrastructures built in Jalapa could transform the political and sensorial organization of life in the city. These communication infrastructures include the magazine itself, which the *estridentistas* theorized as a medium capable of establishing direct communication lines between the local government and working-class associations in Veracruz. By the end of the chapter, I will compare the *estridentismo*’s regional experiment with the professional urban-planning journal *Planificación* located in Mexico City. Published by technocratic liberal architects, engineers, and urbanists in the late 1920s, *Planificación* argued that, as experts, they should design *planos reguladores* for all Mexican cities and regions. This way, they aimed to concentrate the design of networked infrastructures and urban planning in Mexico’s political center. The liberal position of Mexico’s central government in these years echoed *Planificación*’s ideas, some of whose members obtained influence in planning decisions. Meanwhile, the central government brought down Jara’s “laboratory” in Veracruz in 1927 due to evident political discrepancies.

Jara’s fall signaled the dismemberment of *estridentismo* as an avant-garde group. However, some of its members remained in Jalapa and, in the early 1930s, joined a new generation of local writers in the “proletarian literature” project that aimed to experiment with socialist realism. In the first part of Chapter 3, I will engage with José Mancisidor’s proletarian literature novel *La ciudad roja* (1932). The novel provides a re-writing of the anarchist tenant strikes that paralyzed the port-city of Veracruz in 1922 from a socialist perspective that aimed to equate it with the Paris Commune. I address the Commune’s place in European Marxism as a fleeting utopia, a tragic image the author recovers. Furthermore, I

discuss Mancisidor's socialist critique of post-revolutionary urbanization, theories on rent in both the tenant strikes and *La ciudad roja*, and the novel's erasure of relevant aspects of the 1922 strikes such as the active participation of organized sex workers. I argue that the novel attempts to wrestle the legacy of a massive urban movement away from anarchism and present it as a lesson to organize urban politics around a socialism aligned with the directives coming from the Third International or Comintern.

With the arrival of the leftist *Cardenismo* (1934-1940) at the presidency, the radical avant-garde reasserted itself and reorganized in a series of groups, collectives, and unions. The second part of Chapter 3 deals with one of these groups—the Unión de Arquitectos Socialistas—and their utopian *Proyecto de ciudad obrera para México DF* (1938). With this project, the UAS engaged with experimental Soviet architects like Moisei Ginzburg and attempted to collaborate with Mexico's rising labor movement. The project envisioned a cooperative city based on high-rise communal houses with shared services, collective ownership of land, and a cooperative distribution of labor, including reproductive tasks like cooking, cleaning, childcare, and education. The UAS recovered previous radical critiques on the family as an economic institution, claimed that reproductive services should be universal, and embraced the cooperative as an alternative possibility for collectivizing urban habitation. Social Reproduction Theory authors like Tithi Bhattacharya and Latin American feminists Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero will allow me to address the UAS's model critically.

While *Proyecto de ciudad obrera* was never built, the UAS's argument for providing public services that could guarantee equal access to reproductive rights such as childcare, recreation, or education reappeared in the magazine *Arquitectura México*'s modeling of the *multifamiliar* in the 1940s and 50s. David Harvey has analyzed how mid-century policies in different parts of the world transformed the city into a redistributive apparatus through planned urbanization and development. Drawing from Harvey, Lefebvre, and architecture historian Enrique de Anda, I argue that *Arquitectura México* presented the *multifamiliares* as a negotiated solution between labor organizations, social security agencies, and private construction companies. According to the magazine, these social housing complexes could satisfy all ends by generating industry, providing affordable housing and public services for organized labor, and securing political stability for Mexico's developmental agenda.

By the end of the chapter, I signal how certain writers like socialist José Revueltas and architects like Alberto Arai—ex-member of the UAS—distanced themselves from both the orthodoxy of the Mexican Communist Party and the social-democratic welfare program behind the *multifamiliares*. Their work followed diverging trajectories in urban utopianism that led to autonomous housing experiences like the Cooperative Palo Alto in the 1970s or the experimental science fiction magazine *Crononauta* published by Carlos Monsiváis, Alejandro Jodorowsky, and other “Ruptura” artists in the 1960s. From this perspective, in a final section of the dissertation titled “Utopianism Reconsidered,” I provide a critical balance of post-revolutionary urban utopianism. Standing on the experimental *huerto* growing on the lost foundations of a *multifamiliar* building, I discuss how some of its plural and sometimes unexpected trajectories remain relevant in Mexico's contemporary urban struggles.

The Eugenic City
Urban Space, Social Reproduction, and the Family in *Eugenia*

In 1919, in the context of cities devastated by death and disease, Eduardo Ursaiz published the science fiction novel *Eugenia: Esbozo novelesco de costumbres futuras* in the provincial city of Mérida, in the state of Yucatán. A public figure with important political positions in the progressive governments of Salvador Alvarado and Felipe Carrillo Puerto in Yucatán, Ursaiz drew from naturalist narrative and from his own scientific theories on eugenics, social Darwinist evolution, and the family to articulate a utopian speculation of what a “scientific socialism” in southern Mexico and Central America could look like. Throughout the chapter, I will argue that Ursaiz’s utopia was responding to the pressing urban debates on health, hygiene, and the management of life in the early years of the post-revolution, but he was doing so from a region where radical experiments with social reform are taking place.

In *Eugenia*, a powerful state apparatus has taken over the control and management of society’s biological reproduction by means of an eugenic program. In Villautopía, the novel’s city, “la reproducción de la especie era vigilada por el estado y reglamentada por la ciencia.”¹ Not only has the state improved the hygienic conditions of urban space and the practices of the population. It also selects certain individuals as “official” breeders, deselects others, and manages the entire reproductive process in Villautopía’s Eugenic Institute. In this process, the traditional family has been replaced as the institution in charge of biological and social reproduction. If the state commands the former, society now organizes itself in freely formed “groups” that do not correspond to blood ties or genetic inheritance. This has allowed the socialist Villautopía to abolish inheritance and thus the reproduction of private property. In the novel, the narrator likens the “group” to ecological associations between species in nature, and considers the emergence of the “group” as an indication of progress with respect to the traditional family. Below, I will suggest that the “group” evokes in different forms Donna Haraway’s notion of “oddkin” in *Staying With the Trouble: non-normative kin-making practices that challenge the structure of the patriarchal, heteronormative, and human-centric family.*² I will show how the novel’s “scientific socialism” debates itself between the critical notion of “oddkin” and a recentering eugenic discourse that it ultimately prefers.

Indeed, throughout the chapter, I will argue that the novel belongs to a larger eugenic discourse that, at the turn of the century, manifested a biopolitical concern with the government and management of life and the body as a means to order, control, and modernize Mexico’s population. As Roberto Esposito explains in *Immunitas*:

Biopolitics addresses itself to this body –an individual one because it belongs to each person, and at the same time a general one because it relates to the entire genus– with the aim of protecting it, strengthening it, and reproducing it, in line with an objective that goes beyond the old disciplinary apparatus because it concerns the very existence of the State in its economic, legal, and political ‘interests.’³

¹ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia: esbozo novelesco de costumbres futuras* (México: UNAM, 2006), 17.

² Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke UP, 2016).

³ Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 137.

Understood in this broader context, *Eugenia* may be read as belonging to a series of Mexican discussions on health, hygiene, and reproduction in relation to government. These discussions go back to the positivist interventions of the *Porfiriato*, later to be reformulated in the face of the postrevolutionary reconstitution of the state apparatus. In the most general sense, these discussions shared the belief in science and scientific methodology as objective forms of knowledge and thus objective governmental instruments. Furthermore, they employed what they conceived as scientific analyses, diagnoses, and “treatments” to build a discourse on the population in terms of its health, hygiene, and racial profile. They also advanced “scientific” theories such as eugenics as optimal tools with which to intervene the body, and target these interventions both at the level of the individual body and at the level of structures of social reproduction such as the family. Finally, they fully participated in the biopolitical governmentality described by Esposito above insofar as they believed that the construction of a modern nation-state depended on integrating, managing, and modernizing the population. If, at a first level, eugenics in the novel promises to modernize the population’s individual and collective body, at a second level, in dialogue with intellectuals such as Justo Sierra or Alberto Pani, eugenics also promises to radically reconstitute the social structure of the family, understood throughout this tradition as the reproductive organ of society and thus an important site of governmental intervention.

To a large extent, in Porfirian and early postrevolutionary Mexico, the discourse on the population’s health and hygiene emerged and revolved around reflections, diagnoses, and proposals regarding urban space, the modern city, and the territory’s urbanization. *Eugenia*, in fact, articulates its utopian model for scientific socialism in the city of Villautopía and, more specifically, in two infrastructures. The novel grounds the state’s eugenic program in a detailed architectural tour of Villautopía’s Eugenic Institute. In contrast to the institute, the novel presents the “group house” as the location where different post-familial units dwell. While the novel seems to consider both complementary, its plot in fact draws a trajectory that leads Ernesto –the protagonist of the novel– away from his group and forces him to willingly submit to Villautopía’s Eugenic program. I will suggest that, with this plot, Ursaiz foreclosed his own radical critique of the family and undermined his notion of socialism, ultimately subjecting it to an eugenic discourse similar to that of the emerging postrevolutionary state.

Indeed, the novel begins when Ernesto is “selected” as one of Villautopía’s official breeders. Ernesto must leave his group, in which he enjoys the partnership of Celiana, an older intellectual who used to be his teacher and became at some point his lover and economic supporter (later in the novel, Ernesto will remember his life with Celiana as that of a parasitic organism that enjoyed her love but did not execute a function of his own). Ernesto finally accepts his new role and soon begins to drift apart from Celiana, who becomes deeply depressed. Ernesto then meets Eugenia, another official reproducer, and they immediately fall in love. Eugenia soon becomes pregnant and Ernesto leaves Celiana and his group for good. Celiana, in turn, succumbs to depression and vice. The novel closes with her imminent death in contrast to Eugenia’s pregnancy, which augurs a future for Villautopía’s eugenic program.

Utopia, Dystopia and the National Body

While the body of critical texts on *Eugenia* is still small, critics interested in Mexican science fiction or related genres have consistently paid attention to the novel. Part of the initial critical discussion on the novel focused on the question if *Eugenia* should be considered a utopia or a dystopia. Critics who argue that it should be read as a dystopia do so from two different perspectives or positions. First, there are critics who consider it a dystopia by determining the distinction between utopia and dystopia not from the perspective of the author but from their own intellectual and political positions. From this angle, they understand Villautopía's radical and racist eugenics, the social Darwinist ideas that organize its society, and the state control over the individuals present in the novel as a dystopic universe.⁴ Rachel Haywood-Ferreira, for instance, argues that "it remains difficult to call the novel utopian when considering the extreme degree of state control over private life –and indeed over a citizen's right to live."⁵ However true this may be from a contemporary political perspective, as Haywood-Ferreira herself points out, this approach is not consistent with Ursaiz' ideas and intellectual practice or with the status of eugenics as a science at that point in time. The second approach taken by critics such as Aaron Dziubinskyj is to argue that Ursaiz himself wrote the novel as a dystopia and that, therefore, certain elements in the text point in this direction. He argues that Celiana's death at the end of the novel presents a world where "love crumbles under the weight of science" and reads the fact that Ernesto and Eugenia settle by the end of the novel in a chalet on the outskirts of Villautopía as an escape from Villautopía's eugenic state.⁶ We will return to both points later on in our analysis of the plot to show that, as a matter of fact, the plot in its entirety is there to prove *Eugenia*'s political organization as perfect as a society can be from Ursaiz's perspective. Given that most of the critical readings that consider *Eugenia* a dystopia belong to the earlier period of criticism on the novel, perhaps we can attribute their failure to reconstruct the intellectual context in which the novel was written to the lack of information at that point regarding the intellectual biography of Eduardo Ursaiz and Latin American eugenics in general.

Indeed, later critics of the novel such as Miguel García, Alfredo Bojórquez, and Javier Ordiz have argued against these readings of the novel, first of all by demonstrating that the ideas on science, eugenics, and race that articulate *Eugenia*'s utopic model are consistent with other texts written by Ursaiz and with his practice as a psychiatrist, professor, and bureaucrat. Born in Cuba, Ursaiz spent most of his life in Mérida, the capital of Yucatán, where he was a public intellectual figure. Among other jobs, "he held positions as founding director of the psychiatrist hospital, the Ayala Asylum (1906-30); head of the Yucatán Department of Public Education (at several points in the 1920s); head of the State Board of Health (beginning in 1926); and first president of the National University of the Southeast, later the Autonomous University of Yucatán (1922-26, 1946-55)."⁷ As a public figure, Ursaiz

⁴ Ross Larson, *Fantasy and Imagination in Mexican Narrative* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1977), 55; Aaron Dziubinskyj, "Eugenia: Eugenics, Gender, and Dystopian Society in Twenty-Third Century Mexico," *Science Fiction Studies* 34.3 (2007): 463; Rachel Haywood-Ferreira, *The Emergence of Latin American Science Fiction* (Middletown, Wesleyan UP, 2011), 78.

⁵ Rachel Haywood-Ferreira, *The Emergence*, 78.

⁶ Aaron Dziubinskyj, "Eugenia," 463.

⁷ Rachel Haywood-Ferreira, *The Emergence*, 68.

was a longstanding champion of urban reform, hygiene policies, and eugenics, while also a constant critic of the traditional family structure.⁸ All of these elements appear in *Eugenia*'s model for a future society. In his 1922 *Conferencias sobre biología*, Ursaiz explicitly relates eugenic practices to “advanced” nations and sustains that eugenic programs will be hegemonic in the future:

En la actualidad los pueblos más adelantados empiezan a preocuparse por realizar la selección [natural] por medios más humanos. [...] En esta novísima dirección se ha constituido la Eugénica o Eugenética [...]. En algunas de las naciones más adelantadas, se ha intentado ya reglamentar de cierto modo el nacimiento de los hijos y evitar la reproducción de los individuos enfermos o degenerados. [...] Y ha de llegar un tiempo en que el nacimiento de cada niño sea el resultado de una larga y consciente deliberación científica y venga precedido de una verdadera y rigurosa selección, en vez de ser como hoy, el fruto, rara vez deseado, de un instinto irreflexivo y ciego.⁹

Eugenia is certainly consistent with such a reflection on an eugenic future. Moreover, Nancy Stepan has shown in *The Hours of Eugenics* that Ursaiz was by no means alone in supporting eugenics in and around 1919. On the contrary, during the first decades of the twentieth century, support for eugenics was in fact common in scientific, biological, and public policy discussions in Europe, the United States, and Latin America. According to Stepan, the first international congress on eugenics was held in London in 1912. Two other congresses were held in New York in 1921 and 1932, while 1921 saw the formation of the first International Federation of Eugenic Societies. Latin America became involved in these discussions during the same period, particularly after World War I. Stepan argues that, in Latin America, support for eugenics has to be understood “as part of a generalized endorsement of science, as a sign of cultural modernity.”¹⁰ Furthermore, as we will explore, it responded to a discourse on modernization as evolution or degeneration of society, one where “healthy and fit populations were seen as essential to material wealth, and the continued high rates of illness in the region a dreadful impediment to progress.”¹¹

Ursaiz is certainly writing from this point of view, as the quoted passage from his conference shows. Therefore, regardless of how critical we may be of eugenics and social Darwinism from a contemporary perspective, in order to fully understand *Eugenia* it is important to recognize that, for Ursaiz and several other intellectuals of his time, these scientific theories provided viable governmental techniques in order to increment what, in

⁸ Alfredo Bojórquez, “El silencio de *Eugenia*,” *Pacarina del Sur* 8.3 (2017). Online; Miguel García, “*Eugenia*: Engineering New Citizens in Mexico’s Laboratory of Socialism” in *Science Fiction Circuits of the South and East*, edited by Anindita Banerjee and Sonja Fritzsche (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2018), 58-9.

⁹ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Conferencias sobre biología* (Mérida: Talleres Gráficos del Estado de Yucatán, 1922), 42-3.

¹⁰ Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1992), 39.

¹¹ Nancy Stepan, *The Hour*, 42. In the specific case of Mexico, Stepan traces the discussions on eugenics to Fortunato Hernández’ 1910 pamphlet titled *Breves consideraciones sobre la stripcultura humana* and to Alfredo Saavedra’s 1921 article “Lo ‘eugénico’ anunciado por primera vez en México”. 1921 saw the first formal discussion on eugenics in the Congress of the Child (which voted in favor of the sterilization of criminals). In 1931, Alfredo Saavedra formed the Sociedad Eugénica Mexicana and drew up an eugenic code.

Security, Territory, Population, Foucault calls the “state’s forces,” (323), particularly the acceleration of the economic process.¹² Foucault claims that what emerges from the discussions on police in the sixteenth century onwards is the idea that governing a population implies integrating “men’s activity into the state, into its forces, and into the development of these forces.” Echoing Foucault, Roberto Esposito explains that “what characterizes the horizon of biopower is [...] the way the whole sphere of politics, law, and economics becomes a function of the qualitative welfare and quantitative increase of the population.”¹³ *Eugenia* articulates a utopian model of a state that has perfected the government on the population, to the point of being able to produce, by means of its eugenic program, a modern, healthy, hygienic, and organized collective body. We will discuss that even the textual passages that Dziubinskyj reads as proof that Ursaiz intentionally wrote a dystopian text – Celiana’s death at the end and the chalet on the outskirts of the city– are indeed the culmination of Villautopía’s eugenic program, not a critique or an escape from it.

Among the later critics of the novel such as García, Bojórquez, Ordiz, and Haywood-Ferreira, an important part of the discussion has concentrated on the question of the desired body of the population and the racial prejudices that sustain the novel’s eugenics (and eugenics as a scientific discourse in general). García and Bojórquez have argued at length on the erasure of the indigenous body and the *blanqueamiento* implicitly proposed by the novel, where all of the characters fit for reproduction are white and tend to be described as perfect Hellenistic bodies. Bojórquez thus claims that “los indígenas, particularmente los mayas, aparentemente no subsisten hasta la sociedad futura que diseña el autor.”¹⁴ Indeed, while beauty, harmony, and fitness are related in the novel to the white body, the narrator animalizes the black body of the two African doctors who arrive to Villautopía in order to learn about its eugenic program: “Los negros al sonreír descubrieron el teclado de sus formidables dentaduras caníbales. [...] El viejo, con su collar de barba blanca, parecía un chimpancé domesticado.”¹⁵ Moreover, the indigenous population of the region where the novel takes place (Southeastern Mexico) never appears or, as these critics suggest, no longer exists. It remains but a classic, imperial past celebrated in the Neomayan architecture of Villautopía, while the city’s eugenic program has whitened the population’s body.

In this sense, García claims that, in the context of the early postrevolution, “*Eugenia* proposed a path to national reconstruction that diverged greatly from the more dominant emphasis on cultural renovation and celebration of *mestizaje*.”¹⁶ While this statement seems correct, it is crucial not to forget that certain pre-revolutionary conceptualizations of *mestizaje* were tacitly or explicitly posed as a process of modernization-by-*blanqueamiento* of the indigenous body. Such is the case of Justo Sierra in *Evolución política del pueblo mexicano* (1909), with whom Eduardo Ursaiz is in constant –albeit implicit– dialogue in *Eugenia*. As we will discuss later on, Sierra’s notion of *mestizaje* participates in eugenic ideas insofar as it proposes that miscegenation of the indigenous population with European

¹² Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (New York: Picador, 2007), 323.

¹³ Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas*, 138.

¹⁴ Alfredo Bojórquez, “El silencio,” 19.

¹⁵ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 35.

¹⁶ Miguel García, “Engineering,” 54.

immigrants represents the most secure path towards modernization of the Mexican people. Postrevolutionary versions of *mestizaje*, including the notion of “aesthetic eugenics” proposed by José Vasconcelos in *La raza cósmica* (1925), constitute a direct confrontation with the positivist and eugenic perspective of Sierra and other Porfirian intellectuals. *Eugenia*, however, is closer to Sierra than to Vasconcelos in this regard.

García and Bojórquez have also attempted to relate the question of eugenics and the production of a healthy and strong national body to the postrevolutionary context of national reconstruction. Specifically, they have established a relation between the novel and the leftist political projects of Salvador Alvarado (1915-18) and Felipe Carrillo Puerto (1922-24) in Yucatán. Both critics take their cue from the fact that Ursaiz was, as we mentioned, a public figure that participated to different extents in both of these political projects. According to García, Salvador Alvarado’s political project insisted heavily on modernizing Yucatán’s population, particularly its indigenous groups, by targeting such things as alcohol consumption and religion, which Alvarado considered backwards habits. Alvarado also attempted to promote labor and women rights: “[Alvarado] dirigió sus reformas en el sentido general promovido por los ideales de la Revolución, como el anhelo de desfanatizar e higienizar al pueblo, promover la igualdad de derechos de la mujer y educar a la niñez con una perspectiva científica y laica.”¹⁷ García connects this modernizing project with the novel’s discussion of eugenics and, more broadly, with its defense of positive science against religion, which in *Eugenia*’s future has all but disappeared. He also correctly argues that both Alvarado’s political project and Ursaiz’s novel are attempting to define what socialism could imply in Yucatán precisely during these years. In Alvarado’s case, this meant constructing a strong state apparatus in charge of the economy, a state capable of incorporating the popular sectors as its political base. *Eugenia*, on the other hand, also imagines a strong state apparatus that controls the economic process, but its “scientific” socialism participates in social Darwinist ideas of class and hierarchy, as we will see later on in our discussion. Similarly, Bojórquez argues that, given Ursaiz’ militancy in the Partido Socialista del Sureste lead by Felipe Carrillo Puerto, *Eugenia* should be read among the different utopian socialist interventions developed in Yucatán during the early postrevolutionary years, especially Carrillo Puerto’s political project. Nevertheless, he also acknowledges that Carrillo Puerto’s *indigenismo* is clearly at odds with the novel’s eugenic proposals. In this sense, Bojórquez argues, Ursaiz is unable (or perhaps unwilling) to notice “las disonancias entre su propuesta y la del líder indígena [Carrillo Puerto].”¹⁸

¹⁷ Miguel García, “*Eugenia* en su contexto: utopía y proyecto alterno de nación,” *Alambique* 4.1 (2016): 3.

¹⁸ Alfredo Bojórquez, “El silencio,” 31. According to Gilbert Joseph, Alvarado’s political project was more moderate than Carrillo Puerto’s (“Cacique Politics...” 43). It included a moderate agrarian reform and social welfare programs, as well as the extension of labor and women rights (in this case, for example, by extending access to education). It also included an overt attack against the Church insofar as it held, according to Alvarado, a conservative social, cultural, and pedagogic control over the population, while it attempted to “correct” the vices of the population by reforms such as strict alcohol prohibitions and regulations. Carrillo Puerto, on the other hand, had as its main political goal a radical agrarian reform that would expropriate the henequen plantations of Yucatán. In practical terms, this meant the acceleration of the agrarian reform and land retribution to the peasants, as well as the consolidation of the agrarian Ligas de Resistencia that incorporated the rural masses as the political base of the Partido Socialista del Sureste. Furthermore, in response to his *indigenista* discourse, in Carrillo Puerto’s project “the speaking of Maya and the teaching of Mayan culture and art forms

But perhaps we do not have to find a perfect identification between *Eugenia* and the leftist projects of the early post-revolution in Yucatán, even though Ursaiz participated in them and felt part of at least some of its ideas. *Eugenia*'s utopian model represents Ursaiz's own speculative intervention in discussions regarding governmental regulations on health, hygiene, and reproduction that go back to the positivist currents of thought of the *Pofiriato* and have important reconfigurations after the revolution. In this sense, the novel dialogues with both Porfirian and early postrevolutionary discussions alike. As a utopian model articulated at a point where the nature of the postrevolutionary state represented an open question, it also advances its own speculations of what an eugenic governmental program could look like, particularly in regards to the reconfiguration of the family structure as the site of social reproduction. The importance of the disappearance of the family in the novel and its substitution by the post-familial "group" constitutes an aspect not yet discussed by criticism and one that can help us understand Ursaiz's scientific socialism better. As we mentioned above, following the utopian tradition inaugurated by More, Ursaiz depicts in detail the utopian space, especially by means of a thorough description of the Eugenic Institute, which constitutes the matrix of the Villautopía's state apparatus. Therefore, it is there where our discussion of the novel must begin.

At the Eugenic Institute

It is true that *Eugenia*'s central concern has to do with the biopolitical production and government of a modern, healthy, and organized population. In the novel, Villautopía's eugenic program has achieved as much by planning human reproduction according to the material resources available, to the physical and genetic "fitness" of its reproducers, and also by deselecting those candidates that are deemed unfit. Furthermore, the state is in charge of the child's breeding and education, thus securing a strong level of homogeneity among the people not only genetically or racially, but also in pedagogical and moral terms.

In a visit to the Eugenic Institute, the director explains to the protagonist Ernesto that the program has been so successful that "la población de las cárceles, los manicomios y los hospitales de incurables se ha reducido casi a cero."¹⁹ Complemented with euthanasia for "los seres condenados a pasar toda su vida o gran parte de ella en la inconsciencia o entre sufrimientos irremediables," this is, among other things, an economic success.²⁰ The State no longer has to provide for people who cannot produce. Indeed, biological reproduction and economic production are implicitly tied together in the novel. Albeit never put in these terms, the concern for a healthy and organized population is, in many respects, the concern with how to organize a modern, productive workforce, as Stepan argues for Latin American eugenics as a whole. Perhaps that is the reason why the novel despises intellectuality: "preferimos a los de tipo muscular y desechamos sistemáticamente a los cerebrales de ambos sexos."²¹ But above all, following the explicit argument of the novel, it is an economic

were to be encouraged and every effort made to instill pride in the rural masses by appealing to the great tradition to which they were heir" ("Cacique Politics..." 55).

¹⁹ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 41.

²⁰ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 41.

²¹ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 49.

success because a modern State is able to scientifically administer both the biological reproduction of society and economics in general: nothing exceeds the resources available and every single body seems to have a place in the social system. That is why intellectuals in the novel, following social Darwinist ideas, argue that this is as just as a social system can be, since everyone occupies its “natural” place in society:

Todavía hay ricos y pobres; pero los ricos de hoy son simplemente aquellos individuos, bien dotados, que poseen aptitudes suficientes para proporcionarse con amplitud todo lo necesario, más el lujo de lo superfluo. Pobres llamamos hoy a quienes, por pereza, falta de ambición o escasez de facultades, no ganan para permitirse caprichos y delicadezas. (91)

As we will discuss below, Villautopía’s eugenic program is central to *Eugenia*’s utopic model because it guarantees the organized, planned, and ordered evolution of society instead of its chaotic degeneration. However, little critical attention has been paid to the fact that the novel frames its explanation of the eugenic program spatially, through a detailed narrative tour of Villautopía’s Eugenic Institute. Given that eugenics lies at the center of Villautopía’s state apparatus, the Eugenic Institute works as a spatial model of the state’s governmental reason and, as we will see, as a synecdoche of the utopian city as a whole. Put differently, in its spatial organization, its architectonic style, and its functional distribution, the Eugenic Institute materializes the social space engineered by the scientific governmentality of the novel’s modern state apparatus. As we will discuss at length, the social space proposed in the novel through the architecture of the Eugenic Institute is in direct dialogue with the modernizing visions of Mexican positivist intellectuals from the *Porfiriato* and the early post-revolution. As we mentioned above, to a large extent, these visions emerged out of reflections on urban space. A spatial reading of *Eugenia*, which has not been done, may thus lead us to understand the centrality of eugenics in the novel as part of a larger biopolitical discourse which emerged out of discussions on urban space and which dealt with question of why and how to govern over the health, hygiene, and reproductive practices of the population in order to construct a modern nation-state.

Once the Bureau of Eugenics selects him as an official reproducer of the species, Ernesto has to visit the Eugenic Institute in order to learn about the eugenic program and its history. His visit has an explicitly pedagogical purpose, and the director of the institute himself guides Ernesto and two African doctors who are there to find out how to avoid “el estancamiento evolutivo de su raza.”²² The three visitors, the director, and other employees of the Institute travel through this space, allowing both the visitors and the readers to understand the material grounds that organize Villautopía’s scientific state apparatus as a whole:

Construido por el sistema de pabellones aislados, el Instituto de Eugénica de Villautopía ocupaba, en las afueras de la ciudad, un extenso terreno de varios kilómetros. Para recorrerlo con más comodidad, ocuparon un ligero automóvil de motor de éter sulfúrico comprimido; así pasaron el resto de la tarde visitando y admirando las enormes cocinas, los almacenes de víveres, las oficinas de la administración, el gran laboratorio de bacteriología y el de química industrial, la

²² Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 35.

fábrica de albúmina sintética y, finalmente, los establos y prados en que pastaban hermosos rebaños de cabras y burras, cuya leche sería de alimentación de los pequeños.²³

The description of the institute offers the image of a place that is, virtually, a city in itself. It has kitchens, industry (factories and labs), countryside (*establos y prados*), parks, gardens, dormitories, and warehouses. Furthermore, it is located on the outskirts of Villautopía, thus signaling both its isolation and belonging to the city, very much in the same way that the prisons, hospitals, and psychiatric asylums built during the *Porfiriato* were placed at the urban limits. In the case of prisons and mental hospitals, their location at the limits served the purpose of extracting certain subjects from the *polis*, while demarcating clearly the grounds where scientific authority could act upon these subjects as well. At the same time, however, and precisely because they were built according to a “scientific” reason, they were conceived as spatial models of a scientifically engineered social space, the type of space that the Porfirian state saw as its ideal. In fact, models of the Lecumberri panoptic prison and the Castañeda psychiatrist hospital in Mexico City were showcased as examples of Porfirian modernity in the famous exhibition on public hygiene that was organized as part of the Centenario festivities in 1910.²⁴

In this sense, these disciplinary space may be understood as what Foucault calls heterotopias of compensation, that is, “a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled.”²⁵ What Foucault is suggesting is that the spatial and architectonic arrangement of this type of space works as a sort of corrected image, a planned response to a given social space that attempts to reorganize society first of all by reorganizing its spatial foundations.²⁶ Although implicit in their “corrected” response, these spaces contain a critique of a given society, while they also expose their own discursive paradigm through their own modeling. In Foucault’s terms, they show both the lack they are trying to compensate for and the spatial means by which they attempt to do so. If, as we argue, Villautopía’s Eugenic Institute is meant to work for the reader in this way, then we must begin by analyzing the institute’s spatial and architectonic characteristics in order to understand the particular discursive paradigm from which these characteristics emerge as both a critique and a model.

The tour begins at the Department of Statistics, “the state’s knowledge of the state,” as Foucault would have it.²⁷ The narrator immediately insists on the size and “excelente iluminación” of the three sections of the building occupied by this department, where the director explains “el complicado funcionamiento de aquella oficina, pormenorizando cómo eran clasificados los asuntos, distribuido el trabajo, estudiadas las solicitudes, archivadas y

²³ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 60.

²⁴ For a detailed account of the Centenario festivities and the construction of an “ideal” city, see: Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *I Speak of the City* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012), 3-42.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 8.

²⁶ As an example, Foucault mentions the Jesuit colonies in Paraguay as an attempt to colonize by means of a Christian organization of space that would in turn produce a Christian life and community.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Security*, 315.

contestadas las comunicaciones recibidas de las distintas instituciones.”²⁸ One hundred employees on the Department of Statistics are in charge of gathering, organizing, classifying, and analyzing the data collected on the population so they can have exact figures on everything the Eugenic Institute needs to know: how many reproducers have been selected, how many children have been sterilized, what are the figures of people in jails or psychiatric wards, how many newborns are expected, how do these numbers relate to the material resources available, and so forth. If in his *Evolución política del pueblo mexicano* (1909), Justo Sierra complained on the lack of truly professional “trabajos estadísticos” and archival conservation, both of these are crucial for Villautopía and its Eugenic Institute insofar as they provide systematic and scientific knowledge on both material resources and population –and therefore on the economy in general–, a first necessary condition to govern scientifically.²⁹

After Statistics, the visitors cross a garden and visit the pavilions where the sterilization surgery takes place. Then, after yet another garden, they visit the wards where the sterilized children recover. The narrator insists on certain architectonic characteristics such as order, cleanliness, ventilation, light, and the presence of vegetation:

Mucha luz, mucha asepsia y mucha ventilación; el aspecto de *las blancas camitas alineadas* era alegre y tranquilizador. [...] Había cerca de quinientos, entre varones y mujeres, distribuidos en seis grandes pabellones; en el hermoso parque contiguo, los convalecientes paseaban por grupos o jugaban a la sombra de árboles frondosos y floridas enredaderas.³⁰

The tour continues in the pavilions where the *gestadores* live: men who are in charge of carrying the child through the nine months of pregnancy. By 2218, women no longer have to do it. Once pregnant, they go to the Institute to get the fecund ovule removed and placed in one of the *gestadores*: “la operación” the director explains, “aunque delicada, es sencillísima.”³¹ Like the “blancas camitas alineadas” of the sterilization ward, the narrator insists once again in order, ventilation, light, and vegetation: “Componíase el edificio destinado a los gestadores de varios dormitorios con grandes ventanas y las camas en filas como en un hospital. [...] No pocos paseaban por las avenidas del parque, leían o conversaban a la sombra de los árboles.”³² The narrator returns to these architectonic characteristics yet again when the tour goes through the lactation and infant pavilions. The sight of healthy children playing –the future population of Villautopía– makes the narrator reflect approvingly on the city’s eugenic program and the guided social “evolution” it provides:

¡Qué alegría tan sana en las adorables caras infantiles! ¡Cuánta solicitud maternal en las niñeras! Aquel espléndido florecimiento de vida y salud bastaba por sí solo para justificar cuanto de violento o inmoral pudiese haber en las medidas a que la humanidad se había visto obligada a recurrir para detener su *degeneración* y acabamiento y seguir con paso firme *su marcha evolutiva* hacia un ideal de

²⁸ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 42.

²⁹ Justo Sierra, *Evolución política del pueblo mexicano* (Caracas: Ayacucho, 1977), 263.

³⁰ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 44.

³¹ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 45.

³² Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 46-7.

perfección. Ni uno solo de los pequeños ofrecía el triste espectáculo de la atrepsia o el encanijamiento, tan frecuente en los pasados siglos.³³

The urban scenes in the novel echo the organized architecture of the Eugenic Institute and its scientific procedures, thus suggesting that the same scientific paradigm has managed to produce the entire social space of Villautopía. We thus see Ernesto and his friends strolling through parks where children run and the “parejas de enamorados buscaban el amparo de las frondas más tupidas para arrullarse” or witness an “ancha avenida” built in the style of the Parisian boulevards, “flanqueada de altísimos edificios y sombreada por frondosos laureles.”³⁴ Strolling through parks, participating in intellectual *tertulias*, dining in fancy restaurants or attending dances, the inhabitants of Villautopía we see in the novel enjoy the material progress achieved by a state that has produced a modern social space characterized, like the Eugenic Institute, by hygiene, order, organized distribution of space, and the abundant presence of parks and vegetation. But in order to understand why these particular spatial elements –light, hygiene, order, ventilation, and parks– constitute for *Eugenia* the utopic image of a modern social space, a detour through the *Porfirian* and early post-revolutionary discourse on urban space becomes necessary. This, in fact, may lead us to understand how these spatial characteristics connect with the positivist faith in science as a modernizing device and with the eugenic concern for the body of the population in terms of health, habits, and hygienic practices.

The Lab and the City

After a politically chaotic and unstable nineteenth century, the Porfirian ruling elite believed that the only way Mexico could become a modern nation and achieve material progress was first of all by establishing order. By order they meant the consolidation of a strong state capable of securing peace across the territory, political stability, and a capable administrative apparatus. Leopoldo Zea has argued extensively in *El positivismo en México* that Porfirian intellectuals found in positivism and its appeal to science the promise to modernize the Mexican state and its people by establishing a firm methodological ground for governing. Due to its proposition that truth could be observed, experimented, and proved if one followed a rigorous scientific method, positivism promised for these intellectuals and government officials –soon called the *científicos*– a form of social knowledge that was both neutral and, according to them, scientifically demonstrable. Science was neutral because it did not depend on beliefs, opinions, or tradition; science depended on facts, and a modern state would be one that would govern neutrally, according to facts and demonstrated knowledge. Observation and experimentation, method and demonstration, scientific facts and social policies that responded to these facts were to become the building blocks of a modern state that would lead the nation to progress. Scientific truth thus offered an ordered and indisputable ground from which to govern, regardless of personal ideologies, beliefs, or traditions. In Zea’s terms,

su único ideal, si había de tener alguno, debería ser el del orden y con él la paz. [...] De aquí que el estado haya tomado como ideal educativo el del conocimiento

³³ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 50. My highlight.

³⁴ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 14-29.

científico o positivo; pues éste no atacaba las ideologías individuales, sino que tan solo mostraba aquellas verdades que eran patentes por sí mismas y que por lo tanto estaban al alcance de cualquier individuo.³⁵ (107)

In line with Foucault's reflection on statistics as "the knowledge of the state, of the forces and resources that characterize the state at a given moment [...], a set of technical knowledge that describes the reality of the state itself," the *científicos* began to see statistics as a fundamental source of knowledge the nation needed to develop urgently.³⁶ If available, statistics would provide –very much like in *Eugenia's* Institute– an archive of organized, verifiable, and systematic knowledge of the nation in terms of its population, territory, economy, and resources. This archive promised to become an important governmental instrument, first of all by working as an ordering and centralizing device. To this effect, by 1910, the Porfirian state had carried out three national censuses, while 1882 saw the creation of the Dirección General de Estadística.³⁷ Nevertheless, all three censuses were criticized in both their methods and results, and we have already seen that in 1909 –just one year before the revolution erupted– Justo Sierra complained in *Evolución política del pueblo mexicano* on the lack of systematic statistical and archival pursuits in Mexico. Furthermore, Sierra suggests in this book that the statistical data and official documents available before the *Porfiriato* were unreliable because they lacked scientific rigor and were partisan to the many factions disputing political power: "Y descuidamos adrede el contingente de los documentos oficiales, también incompletísimo, porque éstos nunca tienen valor de probanza, puesto que obedecen a miras especialísimas."³⁸ (263). In this sense, the development of a truly scientific statistical archive –objective and systematic–, would also increment the political stability of a state that had been disputed throughout the nineteenth century by factions that governed according to deficient or even forged governmental knowledge.

Along with statistics, and as Zea's remark above already shows, the other important building block for the construction of order and progress according to the *científicos* involved modernizing education. Gabino Barreda, usually considered the introducer of positivism in Mexico, believed that every citizen's consciousness needed to be "ordered" according to scientific rationality, therefore guaranteeing a "fondo común de verdades" that would separate personal beliefs from objective knowledge.³⁹ His life work was devoted to the creation of a curriculum for the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (the National High School) that would prioritize first and furthestmost the teaching of the scientific method: observation of phenomena, experimentation, and proof. Only after learning the material sciences could the student approach theoretical and abstract knowledge.⁴⁰ Following Barreda's remarks of how the teaching of science would combat "anarchy" in all its forms, Leopoldo Zea argues

³⁵ Leopoldo Zea, *El positivismo en México: nacimiento, apogeo y decadencia* (México: FCE, 1968), 107.

³⁶ Michel Foucault, *Security*, 274.

³⁷ For more on statistics during the *porfiriato*, see: Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments of Progress: Modernization and Public Health in Mexico City 1876-1910* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press/University Press of Colorado/UNAM, 2003), 26-30.

³⁸ Justo Sierra, *Evolución*, 263.

³⁹ Leopoldo Zea, *El positivismo*, 94.

⁴⁰ For a detailed account of Barreda's curriculum see: Leopoldo Zea, *El positivismo*, 122-147.

that Barreda's pedagogic ideal was to establish social order by means of modeling a modern citizen: "Barreda ha propugnado un tipo de educación total que modele la consciencia de todos los mexicanos conforme a un mismo modelo."⁴¹

Given that societies were material phenomena, they were most certainly subject to scientific explanation. As a matter of fact, for many *científicos*, societies were complex living organisms. Like any other living being, they responded to the laws of their nature, to their development, and to the environment in which they grew. "La ciencia social" argued Manuel Ramos "deberá estudiar el nacimiento, desarrollo, la estructura, las funciones de la sociedad como la biología estudia el nacimiento, desarrollo del individuo."⁴² Justo Sierra, perhaps the most important of the *científicos*, similarly argued that "la sociedad es un ser vivo, por tanto, crece, se desenvuelve y se transforma."⁴³ Among other things, this meant that if society was studied carefully and rigorously, and if its government followed the facts demonstrated by these studies, then society would evolve into a higher stage of development. For Sierra, as Leopoldo Zea explains, "el progreso en la naturaleza se da mediante un movimiento llamado evolución. Los organismos naturales evolucionan; las sociedades también."⁴⁴ Like any other organism, societies could evolve or degenerate. Not unlike the human body, they inherited, transmitted, and became infected with diseases that threatened their life. They could survive or they could perish if they were unfit for survival, very much like Darwin had proven of certain species that had not been able to adapt to changing environmental circumstances. It was the task of the state to guarantee the conditions for adaptation, survival, and evolution, which for the *científicos* meant above all to modernizing the nation's territory and its people. One of the common answers given by *científicos* was that, in order to do this, they first needed to transform social space.

As Claudia Agostoni has argued in *Monuments of Progress*, it is at this point that urban space, particularly the urban space of cities immersed in a process of growth and modernization such as Mexico City and Mérida, became a crucial epistemological and governmental terrain. Because it concentrated a vast number of people, because it raised multiple challenges, and because it was the site associated with modernization and progress, urban space became the perfect laboratory for *científicos* to explore Mexican society and test possible solutions to what they conceived were the problems that "degenerated" a society they wanted to modernize. Particularly in Mexico City, experts set out to create what Agostoni calls "medical topographies of the capital," that is, diagnoses of social diseases that spread out, that were contagious, that infected the social body, and –particularly important for our discussion of *Eugenia*– that were transmitted through both education and genetic inheritance.⁴⁵

These social diseases were first of all a question of physical health: *científicos* associated the abundant presence in the city of diseases such as typhoid, cholera, anemia, or small pox with the poor hygienic conditions of the city, particularly with stagnated water,

⁴¹ Leopoldo Zea, *El positivismo*, 142.

⁴² In Leopoldo Zea, *El positivismo*, 173.

⁴³ Justo Sierra, *Evolución*, 264.

⁴⁴ Leopoldo Zea, *el positivismo*, 243.

⁴⁵ Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments*, xvi.

miasmas produced by accumulated and decomposing refuse, lack of air circulation, and absence of vegetation and oxygen.⁴⁶ But then there were also “moral” diseases, such as alcoholism, prostitution, gambling, and a general lack of personal hygienic habits. These diseases were also contagious and, for many *científicos*, they were a product of the city’s environment. Furthermore, they were transmitted through inheritance and imitation in a disordered, uneducated urban space. In his study on crime and alcoholism, two of these “moral diseases,” Pablo Piccato explains:

The mechanisms of imitation and heredity converged in the sphere of the family. In overcrowded lower-class dwellings –much like in Belém [prison]–, children received the genetic seeds of their weaknesses and sat models for future behavior. Lara y Pardo [in *La prostitución en México*] described the images of incestuous lust in claustrophobic rooms that created prostitutes. Boys saw their parents drinking and fighting. [...] This enclosed environment of contagion and its genetic counterpart rendered education, the *científicos*’ favorite instrument of modernization, an ineffective weapon.⁴⁷

We will return later on to the question of education and the family, since it is crucial for our reading of *Eugenia*’s utopian model. For now, it is important to notice how the *científicos* posed the problem of social diseases as a spatial question, a problem of the environment or, more exactly, of certain environments. That is why Justo Sierra describes alcoholism and religious superstition as “microbios sociopatológicos que pululan por colonias en donde el medio de cultivo les es propicio.”⁴⁸ The spatial disposition of a disordered, unhygienic, and clustered city was precisely one of those environments that were “propitious” to the spread of social diseases, either physical, moral, or both. Therefore, urban space needed to be transformed. Disorder, unplanned growth, lack of services and education, clogged or unavailable sewers, floods, clustered constructions: those were, according to the Porfirian *científicos*, the propitious conditions for a weak, sickening, anemic, and degenerating population. As Agostoni explains, “public health officials [...] emerged from different disciplines, and they managed to create a discourse about the city and its inhabitants in which the notions of order, cleanliness and hygiene were regarded as indispensable for a comfortable, safe and modern city.”⁴⁹ To this effect, the Porfirian government gave more authority and jurisdiction to the Consejo Superior de Salubridad, which had existed since 1841 but was virtually incapable of acting. By 1879, the Consejo had reorganized its administrative distribution, had published new health and construction codes and received authority to act on situations such as the typhus outbreak of 1909. In 1910, as part of the Centenario festivities, Eduardo Liceaga –director of the Consejo– organized the previously mentioned Hygienic Exhibition meant to popularize personal hygienic practices.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault has described extensively how epidemics such as the plague were treated above all as a spatial problem. Controlling these epidemic outbreaks

⁴⁶ Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments*, 37.

⁴⁷ Pablo Piccato, “El paso de Venus por el disco del sol: Criminality and Alcoholism in the Late Porfiriato,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 11.2 (1995): 238.

⁴⁸ Justo Sierra, *Evolución*, 283.

⁴⁹ Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments*, 56.

implied a process of spatial dissection, isolation, and management that, in turn, allowed for a constant surveillance and observation over the body. In this sense, the confrontation of the plague constitutes “the utopia of the perfectly governed city” insofar as “each individual is constantly located, examined, and distributed among the living beings.”⁵⁰ The “medical topographies” examined by Agostoni, then, operated on two different levels. First, they managed to isolate and construct a discourse on the “diseases” that affected individuals that inhabited certain spaces in the city, dissecting and distributing the population on this basis. At a second level, these “medical topographies” offered spatial solutions that would operate as a treatment for disease.

In her discussion of urban reform and infrastructure projects that would modernize Mexico City during the *porfiriato*, Agostoni singles out two areas in which experts found particular urgency to intervene. First of all, the question of water, which was thought to be the source of multiple digestive and respiratory diseases: availability of clean water to drink, and the construction of infrastructure that would effectively drain the excess water and carry refuse out of the city. This infrastructure included waterproof pavement, a modern drainage and sewer system, and draining the polluted Lake Texcoco through the Gran Canal del Desagüe, which was perhaps the most important of Porfirian public works projects.⁵¹

The other urgent intervention had to do with parks and green areas, which Dr. Jesús Alfaro conceived as “instruments of disinfection.”⁵² (in Agostoni 40). Miguel Ángel de Quevedo, director of public works, proposed the creation of a number of parks and squares that would expand Mexico City’s green areas and offer healthy leisure, particularly to the lower classes.⁵³ In his study of the planning and growth of Buenos Aires in this same period, Adrián Gorelick has shown that the question of parks was indeed part of a transnational network of ideas on how the modern city should grow and transform itself, a network that is in close relation to Ebenezer Howard’s garden city movement. According to Gorelick, parks were hygienic *dispositifs* as much as they were a “civic institution” that taught citizens how to act and socialize: “el parque es uno de los nuevos artefactos urbanos en los que más ambiciones reformistas se depositan.”⁵⁴ Besides embellishing the city, disinfecting the air, and providing oxygen, parks promised an educational experience (since they often had pavilions, botanical gardens or zoos). They also provided what was thought to be a healthy leisure, far from the *pulquerías* and other “vices” such as gambling and prostitution. Gorelick argues that reformers in Argentina such as Sarmiento believed that parks could disseminate across society “el mismo manual de instrucciones para el uso de la metrópoli” in terms of hygiene, socialization, and habits.⁵⁵ In other words, for both Argentinian reformers like

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline*, 197-8.

⁵¹ For a detailed account of the Gran Canal del Desagüe see chapter 5 of Agostoni and Manuel Perló Cohen, *El paradigma porfiriano. Historia del desagüe del Valle de México*.

⁵² In Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments*, 40.

⁵³ Tenorio Trillo explains that, for the Centenario, Quevedo “presented a project for a garden in the populous Calzada de la Viga. No grounds were available at La Viga, but an alternative location were the ninety-six hectares at Balbuena and, as a result, the worker’s park of Balbuena was created” (14).

⁵⁴ Adrián Gorelick, *La grilla y el parque: espacio público y cultura urbana en Buenos Aires 1887-1936* (Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1998), 150.

⁵⁵ Adrián Gorelick, *La grilla*, 165.

Sarmiento and Mexican ones like Quevedo, the hygienic and pedagogical promise of parks made them a modernizing instrument *par excellence* and thus a fundamental part of what a modern urban space should look like, very much like *Eugenia's* Villautopía and its institute full of parks and gardens.

If, as Agostini claims, Mexico City in particular served as a model of both the problems faced by a growing city and the possible blueprint of a modern urban space, other cities in the country replicated such a model. That is the case of Mérida, which grew during the final years of the Porfiriato due to the henequen industry boom. During Olegario Molina's tenure as governor of Yucatán (1902-07), Mérida experienced a vast transformation that followed the public works and infrastructural model of the capital. As such, Molina paved the center's streets and built a drainage system, erected a hospital, a penitentiary, an asylum, and the Peón Contreras theatre. He also expanded the (higher class) city toward the suburbs by means of the Paseo Montejo, very much like the Paseo de la Reforma had worked in Mexico City as a boulevard that "produced" higher-class neighborhoods in both of its sides. Interestingly enough, Eduardo Urzaiz himself, when recalling Molina's tenure in his late *Del imperio a la revolución* (1946), praises it as a "síntesis de la [obra] que realizó D. Porfirio Díaz en el país entero" and describes the modern transformation of the city as follows:

En vez de aquellas rúas polvosas o encharcadas según la estación, surgieron las relucientes avenidas de asfalto que hasta hoy se conservan y se irguieron en ellas edificios suntuosos, de más o menos buen gusto, descollando en primer término el moderno Teatro Peón Contreras; se instaló la actual Planta de alumbrado eléctrico con cables subterráneos; los elegantes carruajes con soberbios troncos de frisiones de media sangre se vieron poco a poco reemplazados por poderosos automóviles particulares, a los cuales siguieron los de alquiler.⁵⁶

In an article devoted to Mérida's urban transformation during this period, Allen Wells and Gilbert Joseph have claimed that provincial ruling elites, government officials, and intellectuals such as Urzaiz followed the "chilango blueprints" for modernization established in the capital. In their own words, "Mérida or México's other provincial capitals replicated in miniature the institutional and ideological blueprint for modernization that Díaz' advisors had designed with the national metropolis in mind."⁵⁷ And indeed, as we will argue in the following section, for *científicos* such as Justo Sierra, it was the idea of a planned urban space developed in the capital –what they called *colonia*– what promised to become the model for producing the modern social space of the country.

To Colonize the Country

If in 1858 Mexico City occupied 8.5 square kilometers that held around 20,000 inhabitants, by 1910 it had grown to 40.5 square kilometers and about 470,000 inhabitants.⁵⁸ While the unplanned, informal growth of the city was usually known as *barrios*, the planned urban

⁵⁶ Eduardo Urzaiz, *Del imperio a la revolución 1865-1910* (Mérida: Gobierno del Estado de Yucatán, 1946), 141-144.

⁵⁷ Allen Wells and Gilbert Joseph, "Modernizing Visions: "Chilango" Blueprints and Provincial Growing Pains: Mérida at the Turn of the Century," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 8.2 (1992): 170.

⁵⁸ Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments*, 45.

expansion toward the countryside came to be known as *colonia*. As Gorelick claims, unlike cities like Buenos Aires, where the state established a grid that determined the city's expansion, Mexico City's expansion process was carried out by private developers who made use of their political contacts and networks looking to make profitable business.⁵⁹ In his study on the topic, Jorge Jiménez Muñoz offers a detailed account of the workings of this particular system of urban development, which entailed the close relationship between a business elite with useful connections to state officials, carpetbaggers able to attract both national and foreign investment, and bankers. This period also saw the emergence of construction enterprises (of asphalt or cement, for instance), owned by the same businessmen and state officials that oversaw the buying and selling of land, the construction permits, or the commissions to pave or bring services into the new *colonias*. This process culminated with the emergence of the Compañía Bancaria de Obras y Bienes Raíces (later called Compañía Bancaria de Fomento y Bienes Raíces de México), which incorporated different nodes of this system – a bank, a group of urban developers, a paving company, a cement company – into a single enterprise.⁶⁰

Not only did this mean that Mexico City's expansion lacked a spatial, infrastructural, or urban development plan. It also meant that, from the mid nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, “there were no clear policies or guidelines to follow” in order to develop *colonias*, which in turn resulted in the fact that some of these developments did not provide services such as sewers, drainage, potable water, or paved streets.⁶¹ By 1903, however, the city's government published the *Reglas para la admisión de nuevas colonias*, which complemented the public health code published that same year by the Consejo Superior de Salubridad. The requirements established by the municipality included stipulations on the width and length of the streets, the number of blocks, the availability of sewers and drinking water, and the presence of a public park or plaza (at least ten percent of the *colonia's* total area).⁶² These requirements were a direct response to the “medical topographies” experts elaborated on an urban space that produced, disseminated, and nurtured physical and moral diseases: ample streets would allow air to circulate and clear off

⁵⁹ Adrián Gorelick, *La grilla*, 142.

⁶⁰ For a detailed account on this topic from the *Porfiriato* to the early post-revolution, as well as an account of the characters, enterprises, banks, and officials involved in the urban development and expansion of Mexico City, see: Jorge Jiménez Muñoz, *La traza del poder. Historia de la política y los negocios urbanos en el Distrito Federal, de sus orígenes a la desaparición del ayuntamiento* (México: UACM/Secretaría de Cultura del DF, 2012).

⁶¹ Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments*, 69. According to Jiménez Muñoz, the municipality was thus strong-armed to “admit” these already built *colonias* that did not have official authorization in order to provide municipal services to their inhabitants. See: Jorge Jiménez Muñoz, *La traza*, 33-56.

⁶² Jiménez Muñoz summarizes some of the main requirements as follows: “asegurar la realización de atarjeas, dotar de agua potable a la colonia y pavimentar todas las calles, ceder un terreno no menor al 10 por ciento del área de la colonia para utilizarlo como parque y plantar árboles en la colonia. [...] Las calles no tendrán menos de 20 metros de ancho y debían ser formalmente cedidas al ayuntamiento a título gratuito. [...] No se podía fincar casa alguna si no se contaba con la aprobación del Consejo Superior de Salubridad. [...] Las casas construidas después de la promulgación del Código Sanitario en sitios donde no existieran servicios municipales, sanitarios, de atarjeas, provisión de agua potable, pavimentos y limpia no podrían habitarse mientras dichos servicios no se establecieran” (35).

stenches and miasmas; parks would purify the air, produce breathable oxygen, and offer healthy recreation for the inhabitants of the neighborhood; an organized number of blocks would avoid clustered buildings and overcrowded tenements, while it would also rationalize urban space; sewage and drinking water would reduce all those digestive systems associated with polluted water and also the respiratory diseases associated with excessive humidity.

Following these guidelines, urban developers of the late *Porfiriato* constructed *colonias* destined for different social sectors and classes of the city, but these years saw in particular “the creation of some housing areas destined exclusively for the well-to-do sectors of the urban population, such as the *colonias* Juárez, Cuauhtémoc, Roma and Condesa in the southwest.”⁶³ In terms of the urban design, these later *colonias* reflected the Parisian model of diagonal avenues, round points, tree-lined boulevards, and an abundance of green areas.⁶⁴ Developed for and by the elites, they soon acquired good means of public transportation and connectivity, as well as provision of services in general, from clean sewers to police vigilance.

Eventually, these planned, hygienic, and beautiful *colonias* developed along the Paseo de la Reforma became the spatial figure of what a modern urban nation would or could look like. Mauricio Tenorio Trillo has argued that the activities planned for the centennial celebrations of 1910 articulated the virtual map of an “ideal city” that would showcase the nation’s modernizing progress achieved during the *porfiriato*. This ideal city began in the old colonial center but expanded along the Paseo de la Reforma to the new *colonias*, demonstrating Mexico’s arrival to modernity: “The ancient (political, cultural, and geographical) center was extended through main avenues that linked the comfortable modern suburbs with the old city. During the centennial celebration all of the monuments, events, and parades appeared within (and were part of the making of) this ideal city.”⁶⁵ In this sense, for the *científicos* and the Porfirian elites in general, the *colonia* became the spatial model or figure for visualizing the modernization of the country, which in their minds meant expanding the physical limits of the capital into the countryside. That is why Tenorio Trillo argues that “the ideal city consolidated by the Porfirians should be seen as a civilizing process, a frontier expansion.”⁶⁶

The term *colonia* suggests as much in its linguistic evocation of both the Spanish “civilizing” expansion in the American territory and the North American “conquest of the west.” According to Jiménez Muñoz, the origin of the term *colonia* may be traced to the development of agricultural settlements for foreign immigrants –European in particular– that

⁶³ Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments*, 50-1.

⁶⁴ According to Gorelick, by the turn of the century, the Parisian model was far more hegemonic in Latin America than the American model of the rational, open-ended grid that Buenos Aires chose. He argues that the reasons did not have to do at this point with the critique of the grid’s abstract rationality, but with a functional and economic critique: functionally, diagonals and round points made distances shorter and allowed to connect different points of the city better. “La crítica económica, a su vez, se desplegaba en dos líneas de argumentación: por un lado la “irracional” extensión de la infraestructura a que obliga el damero; por el otro, la “irracionalidad” nuevamente, del módulo cuadrado, en términos de la pérdida de valor de renta del centro de la manzana” (145).

⁶⁵ Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *I Speak of the City: Mexico City at the Turn of the Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 11.

⁶⁶ Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *I Speak*, 15.

different governments throughout the nineteenth century attempted to attract.⁶⁷ Indeed, for *científicos* such as Justo Sierra, this urbanizing frontier expansion implied not only an infrastructural modernization of the territory. This modernization, in fact, would also urbanize the Mexican people in two senses: on the one hand, it would modernize its ideas, beliefs, and habits, many of which were considered an impediment for progress; on the other, it would also transform the racial profile of the population, as the idea of attracting colonies of European immigrants already suggests. This way, to fully capture the extent of the term *colonia* and its eugenic assumptions we can dwell on Justo Sierra's notion of *colonización* in his *Evolución política del pueblo mexicano* (1909).

As the title suggests, Sierra sets out to narrate the history of Mexico as a process of evolution, following his idea that societies were living organisms that evolved or degenerated, that adapted or perished, that survived or were prey to a more apt organism (for Sierra, this meant the United States). According to Sierra's historical narrative, Mexico had advanced through three stages of evolution: if the Mexican independence had given birth to a "national personality" and the liberal *reforma* to a "social personality," then the era of "Peace" (as he called the *Porfiriato*) "dio vida a nuestra personalidad internacional."⁶⁸ This was the case, first of all, because the Porfirian government had managed to attract foreign capital and immigrants by developing a liberal economy that offered opportunities for investment and profitable business, especially in the construction of multiple infrastructural projects such as the railway that, in turn, accelerated the economy's growth. Sierra recalls the multiple infrastructural projects and ideas that emerged during this period of "gran esperanza" in Mexico's liberal modernization and political order (or, in his terms, "peace"):

Al arrimo de esta situación se proyectó todo: colonizaciones, irrigaciones, canalizaciones, quiméricos ferrocarriles interoceánicos en Tehuantepec, formación artificial de puertos que no existían en el Golfo, esbozos de marinas nacionales creadas de golpe y poderosas instituciones bancarias en que parecía que el capital mexicano debía afluir para abrir paso a la industria y al comercio en el nuevo periodo que apuntaba en el horizonte.⁶⁹

The advent of a "periodo de la disciplina diplomática, del orden, de la paz, si no total, sí predominante y progresiva" had made this new horizon possible.⁷⁰ It had also closed the gap that separated Mexico from the modern nations, which is the second reason why the *Porfiriato* gave Mexico its "international personality," according to Sierra. However, he believed that this process of modernization was still on its early stages: Mexico had not yet evolved socially and materially to the extent that it could.

Sierra conceives the modernization of the country as a process of "*colonización, brazos y capitales para explotar nuestra gran riqueza, vías de comunicación para hacerlas circular.*"⁷¹ *Colonización* has for Sierra two different components, a spatial one and a racial one, but both of which coincide in the urban figure of the *mestizo* and are related to the

⁶⁷ Jorge Jiménez Muñoz, *La traza*, 11.

⁶⁸ Justo Sierra, *Evolución*, 289.

⁶⁹ Justo Sierra, *Evolución*, 286.

⁷⁰ Justo Sierra, *Evolución*, 265.

⁷¹ Justo Sierra, *Evolución*, 265.

formation of a liberal economy. First of all, as his insistence on communication and circulation of goods and capital suggests, *colonización* implied for Sierra a planned process of infrastructural urbanization of the countryside, hence the connection with the urban *colonias* that had expanded the limits of Mexican cities into the countryside. *Colonización* implies in this sense the occupation of a territory that remains outside, that is not in control, and that is yet to become part of the nation, particularly of its economy. In order to productively exploit the Mexican territory and the natural riches it contained, nature itself had to be domesticated and controlled. This process began by pushing the urban frontiers into the country, occupying “free” land, and connecting the territory in such a way that goods, capital, and workforce (*brazos*) could circulate continuously. This is what he calls *vías de comunicación*, the necessary base for Sierra’s two colonizing agents to expand: capital, on the one hand, and the development of a workforce, on the other. In a spiral economic motion, both of them –capital and workforce– are already necessary for the construction of the infrastructure itself. Hence the notion that *colonización* sets out from the urban centers and spirals out into the country.

But the question of *brazos*, that is, of the emergence of a modern workforce, leads us to the second component of the *colonización* process. Sierra is conscious that the land that needs to be integrated into the liberal economic process is not precisely empty. Therefore, *colonización* not only implies for him modernizing the territory, it also implies modernizing and integrating the indigenous population of the countryside into the economy in a process Sierra calls *mestizaje*. According to Sierra, the *mestizo* is “la mayoría urbana e industrial, más ilustrada, más activa y más transformable que la rural.”⁷² Leopoldo Zea argues that Sierra employs the concept of the *mestizo* in order to identify the Mexican bourgeoisie and separate it from the more traditional and conservative land-owning class, on the one hand, and the indigenous population, on the other. But what seems crucial in *Evolución política* is that the *mestizo* is an urban figure, and therefore a modern subject: more productive, more cosmopolitan, more dynamic than its rural counterpart. That is why, for Sierra, “la familia mestiza [...] ha constituido el factor dinámico de nuestra historia.”⁷³ In order to modernize the country, the spatial urbanization of the territory required the urbanization –or *mestizaje*– of the people as well: its transformation into the dynamic urban figure of the *mestizo*. Going back to Sierra’s definition of *colonización* quoted above, the result would be a productive workforce (*brazos*) and a productive space (*vías*), both of them moved by capital (*capitales*).

But how to urbanize Mexico’s the indigenous population? How to transform them into the urban *mestizo* that Sierra conceives as the modern subject of the nation and thus the *brazos* that the nation requires in the modernizing process? For Sierra, *mestizaje* is achieved by two means, education and racial miscegenation, both of which need to be overseen by the state and its scientific elites, as is clear in the first-person plural employed in the following passage:

Nos falta devolver la vida a la tierra, la madre de las razas fuertes que han sabido fecundarla, por medio de la irrigación; nos falta, por este medio con más seguridad que por algún otro, atraer al inmigrante de sangre europea, que es el único con quien

⁷² Justo Sierra, *Evolución*, 301.

⁷³ Justo Sierra, *Evolución*, 299.

*debemos procurar el cruzamiento de nuestros grupos indígenas, si no queremos pasar del medio de civilización, en que nuestra nacionalidad ha crecido, a otro inferior, lo que no sería una evolución sino una regresión. Nos falta producir un cambio completo en la mentalidad del indígena por medio de la escuela educativa. [...] Convertir al terrígena en un valor social (y solo por nuestra apatía no lo es), convertirlo en el principal colono de una tierra intensivamente cultivada.*⁷⁴

The passage reveals very clearly Sierra's eugenic thought: while education would produce a "mental" transformation, the *cruzamiento* of the indigenous body with the European immigrant would secure a racial and genetic one. Together, they would guarantee the "evolution" instead of the "regression" or degeneration of Mexican society. Mexican scientific, urban elites needed to foster and oversee both of these processes: they had to attract European immigrants, they had to make sure that reproduction happened only between the indigenous population and the white body of the immigrant, they had to provide schools in order to modernize their rural mentality, and they had to transform space by means of infrastructure. The result would be an urbanized territory that was yet to be exploited, on the one hand, and, on the other, a *mestizo* population –in both its racial and its urban sense– that would become its ideal colonizer.

Sierra's thoughts on *colonización* offer an insight on the eugenic implications behind the *colonias* and their "civilizing" frontier expansion, as Tenorio Trillo calls it. According to Jiménez Muñoz, the *colonias* in Mexico City and other cities in the country legally privileged the presence of foreign immigrants by offering different incentives to those urban projects that planned to incorporate European or North American immigrants (or that were exclusively planned for them).⁷⁵ As is clear in Sierra, the European immigrant represented a modernizing agent in a racial sense, but also in a pedagogic and economic one. Similarly, the *científicos* believed that the production of a modern space –typified by the capital's planned, ordered, and hygienic *colonias*– would also work as a modernizing agent of the population in all of these senses: racially, because it would attract the desired immigrants into the country; economically, because it would expand the territorial limits of a liberal economy; and pedagogically because the spatial organization of the *colonia* would modernize the habits, beliefs, and hygienic practices of its inhabitants. Sierra's eugenic thought makes clear that the spatial modernization of the territory would go hand in hand with the racial and pedagogic modernization of the population. It is this entire process what would guarantee the formation of a strong liberal economy, which in turn would secure Mexico's "evolution" into a higher social and political organism

As we will mention below, *Eugenia's* engineering of a whiter, urban, and well-educated population by means of its eugenic program is in close dialogue with Justo Sierra, as well as with the urban discourse we have been exploring in the past two sections. Indeed,

⁷⁴ Justo Sierra, *Evolución*, 291. My highlight.

⁷⁵ Jiménez Muñoz mentions two of these incentives that actually date from the presidency of Benito Juárez before the Porfiriato: "Durante la presidencia de Benito Juárez se expidieron dos decretos importantes que fueron aprovechados por los fraccionadores. Uno fue el del 12 de marzo de 1861 que dio franquicias importantes a los colonos extranjeros, como la de exceptuarlos del pago de derechos de importación de insumos para la formación y funcionamiento de la colonia. Otro fue el del 6 de febrero de 1861 que [...] favoreció a aquellos fraccionamientos de mexicanos que incorporaran extranjeros a su población" (20).

biopolitical interventions that, setting out from reflections on urban space, conceptualize the different dimensions where government must act on the population's health and hygienic habits acquire a new sense of urgency in the context of postrevolutionary reconstruction. Alan Knight has argued that one of the characteristics of the emerging postrevolutionary state was its "activist" role in trying to transform the population of the country: "it sought to mold minds, to create citizens, to nationalize and rationalize the wayward, recalcitrant, diverse peoples of Mexico."⁷⁶ Like many *científicos*, postrevolutionary intellectuals also believed "that the vices of the people—drink, dirt, disease (especially venereal disease), sloth, blood sports and prostitution—were major impediments to civic virtue and social development."⁷⁷ A governmental text such as Alberto J. Pani's 1916 *La higiene en México* may thus offer an insight into the way questions on how to build urban space, how to correct the habits and vices of the population, and how to transform their bodies and minds reappear in the early postrevolutionary ideas and projects for reconstruction.

The Doorman's Family

By 1916, when the constitutionalist President Venustiano Carranza commissioned Alberto J. Pani to write on the hygienic conditions of Mexico City, Pani was already an important figure in postrevolutionary Mexican politics. He had been Undersecretary of Education and Fine Arts with Madero and was about to become Carranza's Secretary of Commerce, Industry, and Labor. Álvaro Obregón would later appoint him as Secretary of Foreign Affairs in 1921, and, in 1923, Pani would become Secretary of the Treasury and Public Credit under president Calles, where he remained until 1927. It was as Secretary of the Treasury that Pani oversaw the creation of the national bank (Banco de México) and improved the fiscal revenue system, thus allowing the federal government to invest in public works and infrastructure.⁷⁸ Susan Gauss explains that Pani, like other intellectuals and government officials of the early post-revolution, "had faith in the order and progress of positivism, and he held classically liberal views in fiscal and monetary matters. Yet, also like many Porfirian *científicos*, he tempered his liberalism with a belief in the power of an activist, centralized state, guided by a technocratic, scientifically oriented elite, [that] could lead the nation toward progress."⁷⁹

Indeed, very much in line with Alan Knight's description of the early postrevolutionary state and its activist role in modernizing the nation's people, Pani begins *La higiene en México* with the argument that the hygienic conditions of urban space and the

⁷⁶ Alan Knight, "Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico 1910-1940," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 74.3 (1994): 394.

⁷⁷ Alan Knight, "Popular," 396.

⁷⁸ Susan M. Gauss, *Made in Mexico: Regions, Nation, and the State in the Rise of Mexican Industrialism 1920s-1940s* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2010). Gauss offers a brief account the short-term results of the Banco de México under Calles: "Though it remained relatively weak in its early years, the bank helped to stabilize public financing, augmented the state's regulation of the banking sector, and offered the federal government limited autonomy from private lenders. Moreover, it enabled the state to enhance its tutelary role in stimulating the private sector to invest in industry or other productive fields, something the Calles administration also pursued through investment in and regulation of transportation and public utilities" (33). We will return to some of these topics in the next chapter.

⁷⁹ Susan M. Gauss, *Made*, 28.

practices of its inhabitants constitute a fundamental responsibility for the state: “El Estado protege la salud del individuo, para posibilitar así el desarrollo progresivo de la Sociedad, popularizando los preceptos de la Higiene privada o practicando los de la Higiene pública.”⁸⁰ Although he does not employ the terms evolution or degeneration, his notion of “progressive development” linked to a medical discourse on society is still very close to the positivist urban discourse we have been exploring in the past two sections, one that also reappears in Ursaiz’ *Eugenia*, as we will discuss below. Like many *científicos*, Pani also believed that society could be scientifically and medically diagnosed, treated, and cured. Moreover, he insists, tacitly or explicitly, that the postrevolutionary state’s consolidation depends greatly on how to regulate and manage public health, hygiene, and reproductive practices of the population.

For Pani, the “progressive development” of society would be the result of two interlinked governmental interventions. The first one, which he calls private hygiene, revolves around education and pedagogy: the state has to transform the population’s habits, practices, traditions, and beliefs by making information more accessible to the public and improving the public education system. As we already discussed at length, Porfirian *científicos* attempted to do this as well by means of public health codes or the Consejo Superior de Salubridad’s famous exhibition on public hygiene that was part of the centennial celebrations. Nevertheless, Pani criticizes the inefficiency of the Consejo and its incapacity to act federally. Although codes were established, he argues, the Consejo was virtually inexistent since it did not have the capacity or power to “vigilar y hacer cumplir las leyes y reglamentos de protección a la salud pública.”⁸¹ He also suggests that a very similar critique applies to the public education system of the *porfiriato*, which was incapable of reaching the majority of the population (and was even unwilling to do so).

The second governmental intervention, the one he calls public hygiene, implies an even more direct responsibility from the state given that it involves transforming space, particularly urban space, according to previously established codes, rules, recommendations, and regulations. Pani will dwell at length on what this modernized urban space should look like, but he only arrives at this by first executing an exhaustive diagnosis of the public health situation in Mexico City, which he explicitly takes as a model of the nation as a whole: “las conclusiones relativas a los habitantes de la capital de la República podrán ser generalizadas –sin cometer por esto el más leve pecado contra la lógica– hasta el grado de quedar también comprendida en ellas la gran mayoría de la población urbana nacionala.”⁸²

Pani begins by employing statistics, particularly the death rate of Mexico City and its comparison with other cities worldwide, in order to determine that the public health situation in Mexico is critical, to say the least. Not only does Mexico City compare poorly to European or American cities, it even has a higher death rate than cities in Africa such as Cairo or Madras. As a matter of fact, Pani concludes, Mexico City “es, seguramente, la ciudad más insalubre del mundo.”⁸³ But it is “insalubre” in two different, albeit inextricably intertwined,

⁸⁰ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene en México* (México: Balleca, 1916), 8.

⁸¹ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 143.

⁸² Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 28.

⁸³ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 19.

senses. First of all, it is unhealthy in a strictly physical sense: respiratory, nutritional, and digestive health problems abound. They do so because of the spatial, infrastructural, and hygienic conditions of the city. Tuberculosis, for instance, has to do with “los defectos sanitarios de las habitaciones” and with the lack of clean water, while humid living spaces produce respiratory diseases in the lungs and throats of its inhabitants, not to mention the “condiciones poco satisfactorias en los pavimentos, ineficacia de los procedimientos de regar y barrer las calles.”⁸⁴ Furthermore, people in Mexico City live in clustered and messy spaces, what Pani calls “agglomerations” and which represent the perfect condition for the contagion and spread of disease. Pani devotes a good amount of pages to a detailed analysis of the quantity and quality of air that is able to circulate in such conditions, only to conclude that air does not circulate properly in the city. It cannot achieve any of its hygienic and health related functions such as ventilating living spaces, removing dust, carrying out odors and stench, or providing clean air to breathe. According to Pani, the average Mexico City inhabitant is not even breathing enough oxygen.⁸⁵

But then there is the other sense in which Mexico City is the unhealthiest city in the world. These other diseases are also contagious; they also spread out in an agglomerated, chaotic, and unhygienic urban space such as Mexico City; they can also become epidemics. Pani calls them, following the positivist discourse of the *científicos*, “enfermedades morales.”⁸⁶ (47). Alcoholism, prostitution, criminality, and what Pani calls “promiscuity” are among his examples of moral diseases. These, too, are passed on from body to body, especially in the clustered living spaces of the city. As a matter of fact, Pani believes that both aspects of public health, the physical and the moral, are inextricably intertwined: if an unhealthy physical environment produces and fosters moral diseases, unhealthy moral habits produce physical diseases. Ultimately, the reason why these diseases spread in the city has to do with the poor (physical and moral) hygienic habits of Mexico City’s inhabitants, particularly the lower classes that lack education. Pani believes that both types of diseases are transmitted the same way, through mechanisms of imitation, inheritance, influence, and contact. He thus insists that it is within the structure of the family how all of these mechanisms act:

Al que solo conozca de nuestra capital las mentiras agradables que bullen en la superficie de la complicada vida metropolitana [...] le bastará [...] asomar un momento los ojos y las narices a la estrecha covacha de debajo de la escalera o al sótano contiguo al zaguán, para ver el aspecto repulsivo que presenta y la hediondez insoportable que exhala *el asqueroso hacinamiento humano de la familia del portero*. Esta sencilla pesquisa será suficiente para destruir toda sospecha de exageración y para convencerlo de que, más bien, me he quedado corto al concentrar mi exposición referida a la sola ambiencia física, pues la moral, como es bien sabido, con *esa horrible promiscuidad animal de sexos, estados y edades*, tan común entre las gentes de bajo pueblo, es, desgraciadamente, mil veces más dañosa que aquella.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 25.

⁸⁵ The detailed analysis on air is on pages 91-102 of Pani’s text.

⁸⁶ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 47.

⁸⁷ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 95.

It is the doorman's family's "horrible animal promiscuity" what really troubles Pani. Promiscuity results from a number of interconnected factors that ultimately revolve around space and spatial organization. First, there is the matter of agglomerations in relation to air, what Pani calls the "asqueroso hacinamiento humano." The urban expert that penetrates the living space of the doorman's family will be met by the "unbearable" air that the room exhales, an air that is foul, that has been polluted by the fact that too many bodies breathe it and that there is no ventilation to renew it. At a more general level, however, promiscuity is a problem of spatial order. It is the result of a living space that is not properly divided according to family roles (parents, children, pets), to gender (boys and girls), or to household functions (kitchen, bedroom, living room, and so forth). In other words, a promiscuous architectonic space, where no clear divisions exist whatsoever and where everyone and everything occupies the same place at the same time, both reproduces and is a product of the physical and moral unhygienic practices characteristic of the lower, uneducated classes of Mexico.

Furthermore, a promiscuous living space makes visibility impossible. The urban expert, in fact, has to penetrate with "eyes and noses" the underground spaces of the city where these families inhabit: under the stairs or in a basement. Only then can the expert witness, observe, and register the poor living conditions of this family, which would otherwise pass unnoticed, thus making vigilance and control virtually impossible. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues extensively that architecture becomes a powerful disciplinary device insofar as the production of a certain spatial order is meant to allow for observation, surveillance, and control of a given population. New spatial arrangements are set in place in order "to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control –to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals."⁸⁸ As is well known, this ultimately leads to the figure of the panopticon that ensures permanent visibility of the subjects under observation and control. In the panopticon, "each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible," thus becoming a site of uninterrupted registration, control, and experimentation on the individual.⁸⁹ Echoing what Foucault would later theorize, in the quoted passage above Pani concludes that the governmental question on the population's health and hygiene is ultimately a question of vigilance and regulation. This is particularly the case when it comes to the lower-class urban family and its living conditions, which need to be made visible.

Indeed, Pani offers the hypothetical doorman's family as an example of the average lower class family of Mexico City, what he calls "las clases populares."⁹⁰ That is why he argues that the doorman's family's "promiscuidad animal" is actually "tan común entre las gentes de bajo pueblo." As we mentioned above, Pani argues that the poor hygienic conditions of the city and the unhygienic habits of most of its inhabitants are directly relatable to poverty and lack of education. That is why Pani believes that the ultimate solution to the problem is a combination of two elements, "el mejoramiento económico del pueblo y su educación higiénica," both of which are responsibility of the state and both of which require

⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline*, 172.

⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline*, 200.

⁹⁰ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 66.

the state to intervene and modernize the *familia popular*.⁹¹ Why the family? Because, like the *científicos*, Pani considers the family to be society's reproductive organ, both in a biologic and a pedagogic sense. Through mechanisms of imitation, inheritance, and influence, families reproduce certain habits, traditions, practices, and beliefs. In order to modernize the population, the state needs to intervene the family –particularly the lower class or “popular” family– analytically and pedagogically, if not also physically (as we will see in *Eugenia*).

That is the reason why, when discussing nutrition, Pani devotes an entire section of his book to a detailed case study of an “average” working class family. The implication is that, in order to act, the state must first know how a family actually lives. Based on statistics collected and organized in charts, Pani offers an exhaustive analysis of the family: he maps where the family lives, “una pieza estrecha y húmeda;”⁹² what the father does for a living (*jornalero* in the gardens and parks of the city); the amount of money that they make and spend; their basic shopping list; the number of people in the family, among other information. After computing all of this information together, he analyses and determines that the family's income is not enough to support an average living standard. For instance, he establishes the “scientific” amount of protein and carbohydrates an adult person requires per working day and then compares it to the amount of protein and carbohydrates the people in this family consume: not enough to be healthy, and thus not enough to be productive. Pani also organizes the family's budget to show that an average family is unable to save money, and thus is not prepared to face any type of emergency (Figures 1 and 2). His perhaps unsurprising conclusion is that the average family in Mexico City does not make enough money to live a healthy, nutritious life. Among other things, this not only results in a weakened and unproductive population, but it might actually lead to the possible disappearance of the “Mexican race”: “Este déficit en el presupuesto del jornalero –ejemplo representativo de las clases populares más numerosas de la población nacional– que deja sin reparar buena parte de las energías gastadas en la labor cotidiana, conducirá fatalmente, a través de una agonía prolongada y dolorosa, al completo aniquilamiento de nuestra raza.”⁹³

⁹¹ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 55.

⁹² Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 68.

⁹³ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 72.

	De la vuelta	\$ 4.24
Lavado de ropa:		
	Jabón	„ 0.25
Renta de casa:		
	Paga semanalmente por una pieza estrecha y húmeda, en la 5ª calle de Chile No. 19 de la Colonia de Santa Julia	„ 0.50
Peluquería:		
	Se corta el pelo cada tres semanas con un costo de \$0.20; el gasto semanal es, pues, de	„ 0.07
	Suma	\$ 5.06
INGRESOS		
	Gana semanalmente, a /r de \$0.75 diarios	\$ 5.25
	Saldo hebdomadario a su favor	\$ 0.19

Figures 1 and 2. Average family budget. In *La higiene en México*: 67-68.

But perhaps more interesting than Pani's conclusion is his methodological attempt to scientifically penetrate and dissect the "average" lower class family by means of statistics, charts, data collection, and demographic analysis. Discussing observation and writing in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that the "case study" (of a patient, prisoner, or student, for instance) operates as a mechanism of objectification that introduces individuals and groups of individuals into documentation:

Thanks to the whole apparatus of writing that accompanied it, the examination opened up to correlative possibilities: firstly, the constitution of the individual as a describable, analyzable object [...] and, secondly, the constitution of a comparative system that made possible the measurements of overall phenomena, the description of groups, the characterization of collective facts, the calculation of the gaps between individuals, their distribution in a given 'population.'⁹⁴

What we get in Pani's case study of the *jornalero*'s family is precisely an attempt to describe, characterize, and distribute individuals within a certain group where governmental intervention is required, that of the lower-class family. If an important part of the health problem is that the doorman's family lives in the dark, out of the vigilance and control of the urban expert and of the state, Pani's scientific approach promises visibility and observation: his case study and figures are there to clarify the exact living situation of the family and, in extension, the exact dimension of the health problem facing the postrevolutionary state both

⁹⁴ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 190.

in Mexico City and throughout the nation, given that Pani takes the capital as a model for the whole country.

Once he has identified the different dimensions of the problem –physical and moral health, lack of education, poverty–, Pani reflects on the grounds of action. Going back to his concern with urban “promiscuity,” modernizing the familiar household begins first of all by what he calls public hygiene, that is, transforming urban space in general and the living spaces of the family in particular. It is precisely at this juncture where *vecindades* appear in his text as the enemy to fight and as the prototypic living space of the lower class family that the state needs to modernize urgently. Given that *vecindades* house many families in small, disorganized, and usually unsafe spaces, “puede afirmarse que las casas de vecindad de México [...] son verdaderos focos de infección física y moral. [...] Son, además, el teatro de todas las miserias, de todos los vicios y de todos los crímenes.”⁹⁵ *Vecindades* had already caught the attention of some Porfirian *científicos*, but they become truly important for postrevolutionary urban experts, particularly during the 30s and 40s, as we will discuss in a later chapter.⁹⁶

Vecindades were old colonial or nineteenth century mansions subdivided into multiple rooms, which housed a very vast number of people in small spaces. These houses rarely had access to services such as clean water, sewage or drainage. The police could not enter these places, hence the belief that they were sites that produced and fostered criminality. Furthermore, the property owners did not usually invest in renovations, which meant that many stood in a precarious state. Moreover, hygienic practices such as cleaning or garbage disposal were, according to Pani, inexistent. As a matter of fact, Pani dwells on the question of dead bodies and where to dispose of them precisely in relation to *vecindades*, where the health threat of keeping a decomposing body for too long was particularly delicate due to the amount of circulating bodies that lived in these spaces and their already unsanitary conditions:

Debo hacer notar aquí, de una manera muy especial, los peligros que resultan de la permanencia de los cadáveres en las Casas de Vecindad, que abrigan a una población numerosa y se encuentran, como se sabe, en detestables condiciones sanitarias: dichos peligros justifican la conveniencia de prohibir la conservación de los muertos en estas habitaciones y de establecer, en cada Demarcación de la Ciudad, locales adecuados para su depósito.⁹⁷

Vecindades represent for Pani, as for later urban planners, anthropologists, architects, and hygiene experts, the antithesis of what an organized, modern urban space would look like. Furthermore, they were the living space of the family and hence a space where children learned and imitated the habits and practices of the adults. Pani insists several times on the

⁹⁵ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 111.

⁹⁶ Among the Porfirian *científicos* who were critical of *vecindades* were Dr. Doming Orvañanos, who in 1895 reported on the unhygienic conditions of these spaces (see: González Navarro, *Historia moderna de México*, 87-88) and Vicente Montes de Oca, who, according to Claudia Agostoni, “suggested that in order to avoid overcrowding in buildings and homes, it was necessary to build hygienic, cheap, and segregated housing for the proletariat” (70).

⁹⁷ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 87.

urgency to “formular y poner en vigor un Código de Edificación.”⁹⁸ While it is true that, for Pani, an important part of the problem had to do with the lack of education of the lower classes and their unhygienic habits, he also argues that another part of the problem had to do with the landlords and their exploitative practices. As we will bring up in a later chapter, in a certain passage of the text Pani seems to suggest in passing that, ultimately, the problem is rent: landlords were happy to charge rents for clustered and unsafe rooms, but they were unwilling to invest in construction, renovations, or health standards. According to Pani, the postrevolutionary state had the responsibility to control the situation by creating and enforcing a construction code on these landlords and developers, as well as on the inhabitants of the *vecindades*.

What would this code look like? Pani addresses several possible features that respond directly to his diagnostic of Mexico City and that are similar to the *científicos*' proposals we explored above and to *Eugenia*'s insistence on order, ventilation, light, and clean air at the Eugenic Institute. His recommendations include the use of cleanable materials for floors and walls, the importance of impermeable floors or the necessary presence of at least one window for air to circulate. But he insists particularly on light, and not only because of its importance to avoid humidity and prevent the respiratory diseases that abound in the city. In one of several moments where Pani's discourse partakes from Catholic symbolism, he argues that light brings both physical and moral improvement: “La luz tiene efectos inexplicables, pero ciertos, en el organismo y aún en la moral de los individuos.”⁹⁹ Like faith, light purifies the organisms that it is able to reach. Hence Pani's recommendation that all constructions should face the South or the East and must have windows, while he also determines the maximum height of buildings and the width of streets in order that no construction blocks the light from another one. Once again, Pani collapses the physical and the moral in such a way that a healthy space –a space built according to his hygienic paradigm– will transform the population both in its physical health and in its “moral” health. Such a space would solve two problems that, as we have discussed, are for Pani like two sides of a coin. On the one hand, a hygienic space is the first step toward solving the physical health problem, a solution that would guarantee a vigorous and productive population instead of the “aniquilamiento de nuestra raza.” On the other, a hygienic and ordered space would address the urban promiscuity of the doorman's family living space, which is where children learn, imitate, and inherit their parents habits and practices. This way, it would also be the first step toward finding a solution to “moral diseases” such as prostitution, crime, or alcoholism.

Indeed, if we return to the obscurity and impenetrability of the doorman's family once again, we can recognize that light is important for Pani in terms of visibility, an issue that will return constantly in later reflections on the *vecindades*. Pani has already argued that a modern urban space, a space that is not promiscuous, must be organized in such a way that things, people and matter are permanently ordered and are made visible. Otherwise, experts cannot observe and the state cannot enforce health codes, construction codes, or the law in general. In other words, visibility and order, which have to be guaranteed by “public” hygiene, are fundamental in order for the state to be able to intervene on “private” hygiene:

⁹⁸ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 91.

⁹⁹ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 103.

on the daily habits, practices, and beliefs of the population through public education and mass-popularization of certain codes and standards, while also by being able to enforce and normalize these codes. As we have discussed, *vecindades* are the place to begin because they are the living space of the lower-class family. Given that the family is the reproductive organ of society, it is what first needs to be intervened, modernized, and standardized in order to reach the objective Pani describes as follows: “El problema verdadero de México consiste, pues, en higienizar física y moralmente la población y en procurar, por todos los medios, una mejoría en la precaria situación económica de nuestro proletariado.”¹⁰⁰ In *Eugenia*, to which I now turn, we will see that intervening the family is not only a pedagogic or urban question, but also a genetic one: imitation and inheritance, education and genetics all at the same time.

The Eugenic Lettered City

After this long detour, we can now return to *Eugenia*'s Eugenic Institute, an architectural model of the positivist governmental reason of Villautopía's state apparatus. Now we are in a better position to understand the reasons why the narrator insists again and again on the organized disposition of the pavilions, the soothing order of the “blancas camitas alineadas,” the presence of multiple gardens and green areas, or the fact that every single space in the Institute—from the Statistics Department to the surgical rooms—are always filled with light and are thus permanently visible.¹⁰¹ The narrator also makes it clear that the operations that take place at the institute, everything from organizing and archiving information to sterilizing the “unfit,” are as organized, ordered, and systematic as the space itself. As the matrix of Villautopía's state apparatus, the Eugenic Institute both materializes in its architecture and executes in its practice a form of government directed by positive science in each of its sites of intervention, from the reproduction of the population to the economy. Hence the fact that the Eugenic Institute works in the novel as a spatial model of Villautopía as a whole, as we previously argued by means of the narrator's depictions of the city's parks and other urban scenes in the novel.

Clearly enough, *Eugenia*'s urban space—a hygienic, ordered, ventilated space filled with light and disinfected by abundant vegetation—responds directly to the issues raised by the *científicos* and their diagnoses of physical and moral “diseases” that we have examined in the past three sections. It is, as a matter of fact, the final and complete image of the modernizing visions that run from Porfirian *científicos* such as Miguel Ángel de Quevedo or Justo Sierra to early postrevolutionaries such as Alberto Pani. Thanks to its scientific governmental reason, Villautopía has finally produced a modern, scientifically engineered social space. A space, moreover, that has made every body visible, thus making governmental observation and regulation of individuals possible. At the Eugenic Institute, for instance, every single patient is visible thanks to an architecture based on order and light, and the director is able to show to the visitors all of the different individuals that inhabit that space. The same is true of Villautopía as a whole because, without knowledge of the individuals that compose the population of the city, the eugenic selection of the most apt members would not be possible. The result of this scientifically engineered urban space is that both physical

¹⁰⁰ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 191.

¹⁰¹ Eduardo Urzaiz, *Eugenia*, 44.

and “moral” health problems have almost disappeared. Along with the more direct eugenic intervention we will discuss below, Villautopía’s spatial disposition has in fact accomplished what Justo Sierra and many other Porfirian and postrevolutionary intellectuals strived for: the constitution of a modern, healthy, well-organized, and well-educated population. The narrator describes Ernesto in the following fashion: “un modelo digno de la estatuaría griega y una buena muestra de lo que los adelantos en la higiene habían logrado hacer de aquella humanidad que, varios siglos atrás, nosotros conocimos raquítica, intoxicada y enclenque.”¹⁰²

But as we mentioned before, the importance of Ernesto’s tour at the Eugenic Institute in narrative terms is that it allows the narrator to frame and articulate Villautopía’s eugenic program spatially, connecting eugenics with this particular architectural figure we have traced. Therefore, through this narrative tour, the novel inscribes eugenics within the larger biopolitical discourse we have been exploring on governmental regulations of health, hygiene, reproduction, and urban space in relation to the consolidation of a modern state. Indeed, the eugenic concern on reproduction and the human body we see in *Eugenia* emerges from the positivist paradigm of progress as evolution and society as a living organism shared by many *científicos*. More importantly, however, Urzaiz speculates on a radical eugenic program as a utopian solution to the question of how to govern over the reproduction and administration of life, a question that the Porfirian *científicos* and the early post-revolutionary intellectuals had been consistently posing in their different reflections on health and hygiene in the urban spaces of Mexico.

In *The Hour of Eugenics*, Nancy Stepan explains that “eugenics in Latin America was associated theoretically and practically with flexible neo-Lamarckian notions of heredity (in which no sharp boundaries between nature and nurture were drawn) and practically with public health interventionism.”¹⁰³ Lamarckian eugenicists believed that if the environment or social milieu was improved and modernized –very much in the sense we have discussed here–, the genetic makeup of the population would improve. Like the giraffe that grew its neck to reach the high trees (Lamarck’s classic example), better environments and better habits would ultimately modify individuals genetically. As Stepan summarizes using a phrase from Brazilian doctor Olegario de Mouro, for many Latin American scientists and public health experts of the period “to sanitize is to eugenize,” (90), to the point that “even the promotion of sports and physical fitness could be claimed to be eugenic because it ‘improved the race’.”¹⁰⁴ We have seen, through the architecture of the Eugenic Institute and the depiction of Ernesto as a product of the “advances on hygiene,” that this type of eugenics – which Stepan calls “preventive”– is most certainly part of Villautopía’s eugenic program, but only a part. As a matter of fact, the director of the institute explains that a more radical approach had to be taken when depopulation and degeneration of the population threatened to exterminate humankind: “nació la Eugénica, pero esta ciencia, que hoy, perfectamente reglamentada, ha alcanzado *su total desenvolvimiento* y constituye la principal preocupación

¹⁰² Eduardo Urzaiz, *Eugenia*, 7.

¹⁰³ Nancy Stepan, *The Hour*, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Nancy Stepan, *The Hour*, 91.

de los gobiernos, tenía que limitarse entonces a medidas meramente paliativas, y sus resultados eran poco menos que irrisorios.”¹⁰⁵

The director suggests that a modern state ought to take the sciences to their complete development –“su total desenvolvimiento”– if it truly wants to govern scientifically. It is not enough to improve the environment and prevent diseases; eugenics also has to take an active role in producing a desired population, not unlike Justo Sierra’s claims that the modernization of the country, overseen by the *científicos*, would entail both the “mental” modernization of the indigenous population through education and its racial “improvement” by means of miscegenation with the white, European immigrant. Within eugenics, the novel is pointing toward a perspective that is not Lamarckian but Mendelian. This line of eugenics argued that the environment was not a factor to be considered in terms of genetic inheritance: certain races and certain individual types were by “nature” more fit, apt, or evolved than others. Therefore, this line of eugenics –more common in the United States and the UK than in Latin America at this time– focused on selective breeding by means of what Stepan calls “positive” and “negative” practices. Positive practices included mechanisms to select certain individuals, groups, or races through incentives such as pre-marriage certificates or an allowance for selected families. Negative practices included mechanisms to prevent certain individuals, groups, or races from reproducing such as sterilization, segregation, and euthanasia. Stepan explains that it was not uncommon for Latin American eugenicists to have a flexible understanding of this science, thus reaching conciliating positions between Lamarckian and Mendelian theories.¹⁰⁶ And indeed, as Haywood-Ferreira suggests, in *Eugenia* we get everything (*The Emergence* 76): sterilization for the unfit and also for those unwilling to reproduce; euthanasia for the extreme cases of delusion or sickness; improvements in hygiene and the environment, as we have discussed extensively; and, finally, the selection of official reproducers and other “positive” practices such as the dances that the Eugenic Institute organizes for reproducers to meet each other. Together, all of these practices constitute the “total desenvolvimiento” of eugenics and the full meaning of the director’s claim that that reproduction of the population in Villautopía is “vigilada por el estado y reglamentada por la ciencia.”¹⁰⁷

But the question remains why eugenics –understood in this large biopolitical sense that includes everything from the construction of a hygienic urban space to euthanasia– is central to the novel’s utopian model. In other words, why is eugenics the utopian solution that the novel offers to the series of discussion we have explored surrounding urban space and the governance of life? Why does Villautopía’s state apparatus need to control reproduction and why does this control result –according to the narrator– in a perfect government over the population and an almost perfect social arrangement? Although crucial, the answer does not only have to do with the physical and racial engineering of the

¹⁰⁵ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 39.

¹⁰⁶ In his *Conferencias sobre biología*, Eduardo Ursaiz himself demonstrates this type of flexibility by defending both Lamarckian and Darwinian theories of evolution as mutually complementary instead of mutually exclusive: “En realidad, la ley de Lamarck no se opone en nada al principio darwiniano de la selección natural. Ambas leyes intervienen poderosamente en la evolución, y ambas son igualmente ciertas. La moderna escuela que las admite por igual se denomina neolamarckismo” (45).

¹⁰⁷ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 17.

population's body, as critics such as García, Bojórquez or Haywood-Ferreira have discussed, because the eugenic program in the novel goes farther than that. Indeed, eugenics in the novel modernizes Villautopía's population and society by radically transforming the institution of the family, which from the *científicos* to Pani was conceived as society's organ of reproduction and thus a site where modernizing interventions needed to occur. In the novel, and as a result of the eugenic program, the traditional family has in fact disappeared and has given way to a more complex but –according to the narrator– more rational form of organizing the reproduction of human life and society.

To begin with, the state is now in charge of biological reproduction. It chooses its candidates according to their physical and genetic constitution, making sure that only the “best” specimens reproduce. In the novel's argument, this has solved problems related to degeneration in terms of physical and “moral” health (the population of the prisons and asylums, says the narrator, has all but disappeared). This way, it has created a physically vigorous and productive population that, echoing Foucault's argument in *Security, Territory, Population*, has incremented the state's forces. This is the aspect of the novel that has caught most critical attention thus far. Miguel García and Alfredo Bojórquez have dwelled extensively on the fact that Ursaiz' notion of health and vigor imply a process of *blanqueamiento* and a complete erasure of the indigenous body. Indeed, by means of aesthetic descriptions of the white body and animalistic descriptions of the black body (of the two African doctors), the novel clearly states ideas of racial superiority and finds in eugenics a modernizing and evolutionizing force insofar as it implies a whitening process of the population's body (Bojórquez 19-23; García “Engineering...” 67-72). García argues that “the ultimate goal of Villautopía will be the complete homogenization of the population” (“Engineering...” 71), but one that does not rely, as other eugenic discourses such as Vasconcelos' *La raza cósmica*, on the *mestizo* subject. However true this may be regarding postrevolutionary formulations of the *mestizo*, we can suggest that *Eugenia's* program is actually in dialogue with another version of *mestizaje*, the positivist one that appears in Justo Sierra's eugenic thought. Indeed, as we discussed above, Sierra poses *mestizaje* as a modernizing operation on the indigenous body and mind, one that the urban intellectuals in control of the state needed to oversee by means of attracting European immigrants and transforming the indigenous “mentalidad” through education. In Villautopía's whitened bodies, we in fact see this particular formulation of *mestizaje* as a *fait accompli*.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Vasconcelos' conceptualization of *mestizaje* and his “aesthetic eugenics” are contained in his 1925 essay *La raza cósmica* (México: Porrúa, 2001). The essay, as a matter of fact, shares with *Eugenia* its speculative character insofar as Vasconcelos argues that only speculation may provide a powerful philosophical insight: “Sólo un salto del espíritu, nutrido de datos, podrá darnos una visión que nos levante por encima de la microideología del especialista. Sondeamos entonces en el conjunto de los sucesos para descubrir en ellos una dirección, un ritmo y un propósito. [...] Ensayemos, pues, explicaciones, no con fantasía de novelista, pero sí con una intuición” (5). Vasconcelos employs *mestizaje* in order to argue for Latin American postcolonial cultural emancipation from what he calls the “anglosaxon” world. Vasconcelos critiques the fact that nineteenth century intellectuals in Latin America failed to recognize the region's cultural autonomy and instead attempted to build modern nations in imitation of Europe and the United States. According to Vasconcelos, *mestizaje* is precisely what defines Latin America and what connects it with its Hispanic inheritance: “La colonización española creó mestizaje, esto señala su carácter, fija su responsabilidad y define su porvenir” (14). In this sense, Latin America is destined to become the place where all the different races meet and mix into a final “cosmic

But Villautopía's state apparatus is not only in charge of biologic reproduction; it is also in charge of the education and upbringing of all children. Pablo Piccato claims that "education [was] the *científicos*' favorite instrument of modernization," something we have seen in different manifestations from Gabino Barreda to Alberto Pani to the 1910 exhibition on public hygiene.¹⁰⁹ Pani in particular tied education quite explicitly with the importance of intervening the lower-class family in terms of its habits, traditions, customs, or beliefs. He detected, as previous *científicos* did, that the family was a reproductive machine also in pedagogic terms. It is within the family that children observe, learn, imitate, and reproduce certain practices, which are in turn inherited to their own children. Hence the importance of modernizing the family as an institution, something that for Pani began by modernizing and organizing their living spaces as such.

Eugenia's state-driven education also seems to offer an answer that revolves around space and spatial organization. Although it is never described in full detail, we know through certain passages on Ernesto's past that early upbringing in Villautopía involves spending childhood at a boarding school surrounded by nature. If parks were seen at the turn of the century, as Adrián Gorelick claims, both as hygienic and pedagogic devices, the depiction of Ernesto's boarding school corresponds to this idea and is indeed reminiscent of the architecture of the *fin de siècle* park that included workshops, pavilions, zoos, and orchards:

Recordaba Ernesto, con gran delectación, su escuela y los años felices que en ella pasó: con intenso colorido renacían en su imaginación las frondosas y frescas avenidas, los amplios parques de juegos, el gran estanque, la rumorosa actividad de los talleres y la apacible calma de los laboratorios, la rica colección zoológica viviente, las huertas, la granja, los jardines...¹¹⁰

Intertwined with Ernesto's memories, the narrator explains the importance of this particular spatial and pedagogical architecture. To begin with, it is a healthy and hygienic space where to spend the formative years. But the direct contact with nature also implies that the child's first learning experience would be that of observing natural phenomena, deducing its laws little by little. This is consistent with Mexican positivist thinkers like Barreda, who insisted that the national high school's curriculum should start with empirical observation and the learning of the scientific method. In addition, the workshops, orchards, gardens, and farms taught practical abilities that involved tending to nature and thus learning its laws even better: "allí, en contacto íntimo y continuo con la naturaleza y con la vida misma, había ido adquiriendo el conocimiento de los fenómenos naturales y las habilidades prácticas

race." Throughout the essay, he understands *mestizaje* as a process of cultural and racial enrichment, which is where eugenics comes in. The creation of the "cosmic race" will be defined by a process Vasconcelos calls "aesthetic eugenics:" selection will be made on the basis of beauty and not genetics: "las leyes de la emoción la belleza y la alegría regirán la elección de parejas, con un resultado infinitamente superior al de esa eugénica fundada en la razón científica" (25). Through this notion of "aesthetic eugenics," Vasconcelos attempts to undermine the notions of racial superiority intrinsic in the scientific eugenic discourse and thus reverse the equation in order to argue that it is *mestizaje*, not racial purity, what defines cultural superiority. Latin America thus appears in Vasconcelos as an emancipated, autonomous, and culturally superior region vis a vis the richer and more powerful but culturally less complex "anglosaxon" world.

¹⁰⁹ Pablo Piccato, "El paso," 238.

¹¹⁰ Eduardo Urzaiz, *Eugenia*, 10.

indispensables.”¹¹¹ Interestingly enough, this education is complemented by hypnotism sessions where the professor “transmits” certain knowledge to the hypnotized student. Perhaps this form of indoctrination, besides Ursaiz’ assumptions on its effectiveness, may be gesturing toward the spatial isolation of the boarding school as a place where only the state may intervene on the education of children. In this sense and not unlike the Eugenic Institute, the spatial figure of the boarding school may also be related to the question of visibility and the permanent observation of the individual, in this case the student.

The result is a scientifically and almost homogeneously enlightened population, one that has gotten rid of superstition and other “unscientific” ideas. In one of her writings, the intellectual Celiana explains that religious beliefs have all but extinguished in Villautopía since most people accept the natural laws of life and death. The few that insist on believing in an afterlife or a transcendental spirit are drawn to theosophy, which according to Celiana is in any case a “doctrina idealista, más bien filosófica que religiosa.”¹¹² In a similar vein, morality now responds to “natural” laws, not to beliefs, superstition, or religious dogma. Miguel explains to Ernesto that fidelity in love is impossible because it does not correspond to nature, and moral is that which is in synchrony with nature’s proceedings: “¿Quién fue el necio que pensó alguna vez oponerse al ocaso de una estrella, a la metamorfosis de un insecto o al brote de una planta? Ley natural del corazón es también el continuo alternarse de amores viejos y amores nuevos que florecen.”¹¹³ Even art responds to this new moral and intellectual order where most people are able to grasp the intrinsic “harmony” of life itself. Celiana compares it to the “extravagant” art of the past: “Lo bello no se veía entonces en *la armónica fuerza de la vida*, sino en lo raro y extravagante, en lo anormal y lo morboso.”¹¹⁴

Space is fundamental here insofar as the household has been replaced by new architectural figures such as the Eugenic Institute or Ernesto’s boarding school. Alberto Pani insisted that, in order to intervene on the population’s physical and moral “health,” a first transformation needed to occur on the household (particularly the lower-class household) itself. Setting out from these discussions, *Eugenia*’s utopian speculations take them one step further. The household has indeed disappeared and the individuals are no longer born and raised in such a space, but are distributed in the highly controlled architecture of the Eugenic Institute or the boarding school. These spaces, managed by Villautopía’s state apparatus and its scientific experts (such as the director of the Eugenic Institute), have replaced the familiar space of the house and the kinship roles of parenthood. In this sense, not unlike Pani or the *científicos*, modernization appears in *Eugenia* as a process of minute surveillance, regulation, and control allowed by disciplinary spatiality itself.

Finally, a new institution has emerged to substitute the traditional family in its communal function, one more consistent with state-driven eugenic reproduction and a new morality that allows couples to “constituirse y disolverse libremente.”¹¹⁵ This institution is called the “group:” once they leave school, adult individuals are free to compose their own

¹¹¹ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 10.

¹¹² Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 101.

¹¹³ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 31.

¹¹⁴ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 102. My highlight.

¹¹⁵ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 17.

group according to shared affinities and complementary functions. “En vez de la familia antigua, unida por *imaginarios lazos de sangre*, había aparecido el grupo, basado en las afinidades de carácter y en la comunidad de gustos y aspiraciones.”¹¹⁶ At the beginning of the novel, for instance, Ernesto belongs to a group conformed by Celiana (her lover), Miguel (an older intellectual who is friends with Celiana) and a young couple who grew up together. According to the narrator, the group is a more functional institution than the family because it is based on palpable bonds and functional arrangements that correspond to the needs of the individuals that conform them, not to “imaginary” bonds of blood. As a matter of fact, the group is reminiscent of interspecies or collective forms of collaboration that, for Ursaiz, emerge in nature as a result of complementary roles (as in symbiotic relations), parasitic relations (which is how Ernesto sees himself with Celiana), or collective protection in the struggle for survival (as in packs or flocks).

While explaining this type of relations in his *Conferencias sobre biología* (1922), Ursaiz returns to a social Darwinist understanding of human society. This way, “la sociedad misma es un trasunto, una síntesis, de la lucha por la existencia.”¹¹⁷ In this sense, “la ley de apoyo mutuo en los animales debe considerarse como la iniciación de un principio de unión y solidaridad que, en la especie humana, vemos culminar llegando a constituir la sociabilidad.”¹¹⁸ The “law of mutual support” visible in animals and other species is part of their continuous struggle for survival. But if humans are also part of this struggle and have evolved as a species in and through this struggle, then this “law of mutual support” must be taken as the origin of human sociability. Human sociability is thus nothing but a powerfully evolved mechanism of survival. And if society is, as Ursaiz poses, but a “synthesis” of the struggle to survive, only the more evolved structures of human sociability will guarantee the survival and continuous evolution of the species and of certain members of that species. In the novel, the group, which is conformed rationally by its members and offers the possibility to mutate or dissolve if the arrangement no longer works, appears precisely as the evolved social structure of mutual support and human sociability that has replaced the prescientific familiar structure based on bonds of blood or kinship.

Indeed, although never made explicit, the novel’s discussion of eugenics seems to make a distinction between blood and genetics. Whereas genetic inheritance is scientific and represents what the Eugenic Institute is in charge of when reproducing the human species, the notion of “blood” as kinship represents for the novel an “imaginary” or pre-scientific understanding of inheritance. The familiar form of social organization based on name and blood is thus a residual form of communal organization that is at odds with a society that, by controlling reproduction and inheritance scientifically, has replaced traditional notions of name, blood, and kinship. As we have seen, Villautopía’s state apparatus has replaced the family: it selects the “specimens” that will reproduce, the fetus is later carried by a professional “gestador” (not the mother), and the child is raised at the Eugenic Institute or at a boarding school. The group emerges as a form of mutual support among individuals unburdened by the residual structures of familiar ties and who are then able to try, invent,

¹¹⁶ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 17. My highlight.

¹¹⁷ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Conferencias*, 47.

¹¹⁸ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Conferencias*, 54.

and produce different possible communal arrangements. This constitutes perhaps Urzaiz' most overt attack against religious conservatism, which has always defended the preservation of the traditional family insofar as it represents a "natural" structure of reproduction (man and woman). By means of this naturalist argument, it defends the preservation of a series of moral values and practices that Urzaiz considers conservative and unscientific. Taking its cue from evolutionary theory, *Eugenia* responds with the argument that what is actually natural is evolution, not preservation. Once Villautopía's eugenic program has replaced the family in its reproductive and breeding functions, the familiar form of communal organization evolves "naturally" into the malleable structure of the group.

Against the immutability of the traditional family structure, the malleability of the group represents one of *Eugenia*'s most radical speculations, one indeed close to Donna Haraway's notion of oddkin.¹¹⁹ The group emerges, as we have seen, from taking scientific and social theories such as eugenics and social Darwinism to their limits, and thus remains within the bounds of the biopolitical discourse we have been tracing throughout Mexican positivism. However, because it pushes these theories to their speculative limits, it does manage to open up a horizon where to speculate on what a society conformed by a multiplicity of divergent communal arrangements –or groups– could look like. It also presents a hint, against kinship or –in Esposito's terms– against the immunological paradigm that reacts against the Other, on the possibility of a social structure based on difference and alterity. By reversing the immunological paradigm that is traditionally thought of as a defense against what is outside, Esposito arrives at this point precisely when he claims that "immunity is a process that always involves an open system of self-definition that consistently produces the self and other."¹²⁰ From this perspective, "the other is the form the self takes where inside intersects with outside, the proper with the common, immunity with community."¹²¹ In *Eugenia*, the notion of the group as a malleable formation does open up to this notion of communal interaction, contamination, and mutation. However, the novel itself forecloses these speculative possibilities by inscribing the groups within the control of a social Darwinist state apparatus whose eugenic program not only excludes but, as a matter of fact, annihilates the non-white body.

A similar point can be made regarding the economic necessity of dismantling the traditional family structure. This has to do with land possession and inheritance. The fact that the traditional institution of the family has disappeared implies that property cannot be inherited to the following generations. Furthermore, there does not seem to be rules within the group structure to inherit property to other members of the group. Among other things, as an intellectual in one of the *tertulias* explains, this means that once an individual dies, her property becomes public, it passes on to the state, who can then fund its social programs and public services:

Cuando un individuo llega a producir riquezas mayores de las que puede gastar en el curso de su vida, este exceso de producción pasa, a su muerte, al erario y aumenta el fondo destinado a los servicios públicos. Pero éste es un caso excepcional [...] pues

¹¹⁹ Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke, 2016).

¹²⁰ Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas*, 169.

¹²¹ Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas*, 171.

no hay que olvidar que aquellas fortunas colosales de los multimillonarios de otros tiempos se formaban siempre explotando a gran escala el trabajo ajeno.¹²²

Interestingly enough, this constitutes the only comment regarding how Villautopía's state can actually afford to sustain its public programs, from eugenics to public education for all. But, in addition to funding, the comment relates the institution of the family with legal structures of land possession and inheritance. Therefore, albeit implicitly, *Eugenia* argues that the traditional family is also a social reproductive organ in the sense that it reproduces property, class divisions, and social inequality. Modernizing the family and doing away with its legal structures of property and inheritance is thus a necessary step toward creating an equal ground for the population, both in the sense that it makes programs such as public education possible and because it breaks with the old familiar and class lineages that reproduce privilege.

The result, however, is not precisely equality. Consistent with the positivist thinking of the novel, one of the intellectuals at the *tertulia* explains that the current state of affairs was the closest we could get at a perfect social system not because class no longer exists, but because class is now determined only and exclusively according to the talent and capacity of the individual. This is the social Darwinist argument we quoted before in which the intellectual explains that, in Villautopía, the lower classes are such “por pereza, falta de ambición o escasez de facultades.”¹²³ In this sense, after detecting the reproduction of class through the legal structures that preserve familiar privilege, it immediately replaces this notion of class with another one that allegedly responds to the natural order of the individual's capacities to face the continuous social struggle for survival.

But how did all of this happen? What exactly explains the origin of Villautopía's social order? The emergence of Villautopía's state apparatus must have resulted from a process of primitive accumulation that saw the abolition of the old laws of inheritance, the expropriation of lands and private fortunes, and, as a result, the consolidation of a new state that in the novel we see in its most developed form. The intellectuals at the *tertulia* do mention this in passing and the *maestro* of the group offers an enigmatic answer: “Muchos y muy complicados fueron, por cierto, los factores que intervinieron en su realización [del “equilibrio actual”]; mas parece que la casualidad, o mejor dicho, *la marcha misma del proceso evolutivo*, los hizo agruparse de manera que obrasen simultánea y solidariamente en el momento propicio.”¹²⁴ (94; my highlight). Immediately after this, he mentions that perhaps the “cansancio y agotamiento” of continuous warfare was what pushed people toward a new social system.

The fact that the *maestro* (and the novel as a whole) cannot decide between multiple possible explanations is as revealing as the fact that revolution is not considered among the possible causes, only war. As we have discussed, in response to early postrevolutionary projects of reconstruction, *Eugenia* offers an entire utopian model consistent with Ursaiz' intellectual ideas and with his role as a public figure in Yucatán. Yet, it cannot explain how

¹²² Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 92.

¹²³ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 91.

¹²⁴ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 94.

to get there and hesitates when imagining a possible historical path. The best answer it can give is revealing because, like the model in its entirety, it attempts a positivist gesture toward science, in this case by choosing evolution as the most plausible explanation: neutral and progressive, it is “la marcha misma del proceso evolutivo” and not a revolutionary process or program what best explains the origins of Villautopía and what justifies it as an “almost perfect” social organization. Ursaiz thus refuses to identify *Eugenia*’s model with any one particular political project in the context of the postrevolutionary process: only science might take us there. The plot of the novel, to which we now turn, reproduces this gesture in the sense that it is only there to give the readers an “empirical” proof of the workings of Villautopía’s scientific governmentality and the social order it has produced, despite the fact that we cannot determine for certain the causes that saw its rise. Meanwhile, the Mexican revolution, which clearly lingers behind the novel’ preoccupation with depopulation, wars that decimated entire countries, or with the sense of urgency in reestablishing order, remains but an absent presence in the novel.

Celiana or Eugenia

Protagonist of the novel, Ernesto’s most defining trait as a character is his lack of agency. He is a reactive character, a character that responds to other people’s actions and commands. The plot begins when Miguel—one of the elder and male intellectual figures in the novel—sends Ernesto’s profile to the Bureau of Eugenics knowing that he will be selected as an official reproducer. Miguel himself then goes looking for Ernesto and convinces him of taking the job. Until then, Ernesto was reluctant to do so since he enjoyed a comfortable life as Celiana’s lover (who also supported him economically). Both Miguel and the Eugenic Institute’s director finally convince Ernesto to accept his post. As Ernesto begins fulfilling his new role, he “evolves” as an individual: his newly discovered social function allows him to detach from Celiana and understand his life with her as that of a parasite: “sentía vergüenza de haber vivido cinco años en la ociosidad y el parasitismo.”¹²⁵ But what seems even more important than Ernesto’s evolution is the fact that the actions that take him there—and thus his whole evolutionary process—are in fact provoked and controlled by an agency that comes from the outside. Namely, from the male, intellectual figures in the novel such as Miguel or the director of the Eugenic Institute, as if he were but a subject in their social experiment. And indeed, Ernesto’s story seems to be there as a case that exemplifies for the reader how Villautopía’s social system works. In fact, Ernesto’s encounter with Eugenia at a dance organized by the Eugenic Institute—which is the main turning point of the plot—also responds to a plan that Ernesto does not control. In this case, a doctor of the institute—another male, intellectual figure—asks Ernesto to approach Eugenia and “guide” her into the practices of the official reproducers, given that Eugenia has just arrived from the countryside and is “en estado casi primitivo.”¹²⁶

These series of actions, culminating in the encounter between Eugenia and Ernesto, set *for* him a choice between two women, Celiana or Eugenia. Celiana, as we have seen, is Ernesto’s old love and maternal figure. In this sense, she represents the past, which is

¹²⁵ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 113.

¹²⁶ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 114.

complemented by the fact that she is a historian. It is Celiana, in fact, who has taken us from our present to the utopic Villautopía by means of all those written conferences and *tertulias* where she speaks of the transformations in the family structure, the emergence of eugenics, or the disappearance of religion in favor of science. But Celiana, who knows the past, does not have access to the future because she is sterile. Despite being described as a powerful intellectual and an autonomous woman (or perhaps also because of this), Celiana is one of those individuals that Villautopía's state does not deem fit for reproduction given that they are too "cerebral."

Eugenia, on the other hand, is "primitive" to Villautopía and knows nothing of the past, as Celiana does (as a matter of fact, we never hear her speak; she is voiceless).¹²⁷ But she is fertile, she is young, and she is healthy, in the double sense that this implied for Urzaiz and his contemporaries: physically and morally healthy. Recently arrived from the countryside, the narrator basically describes her as an extension of nature itself: "armonía de líneas y proporciones, frescura juvenil y salud perfecta, el prototipo de belleza femenina. Allá en un remoto pueblo del interior de la comarca, en pleno y constante contacto con la naturaleza, habíase desarrollado aquella lozana flor de la carne."¹²⁸

Ernesto chooses Eugenia, the choice that better suits his new social role as a reproducer and the one that can promise a future instead of a past. Rachel Haywood-Ferreira is right to argue that neither the emotionally rich but physically sterile relationship with Celiana or the physically rich but emotionally sterile relationship he had with other reproducers is satisfactory enough. For Ernesto, whose social function in Villautopía is reproduction, the most evolved possibility must entail a combination of both.¹²⁹ The result of Ernesto and Eugenia's encounter is pregnancy and thus the possibility of a future that immediately justifies their social existence and purpose: "Comenzaba para los jóvenes amantes a existir el futuro."¹³⁰ "Al enterarse de que tendría un hijo adorable, por serlo también de la mujer adorada, [Ernesto] adquirió la noción exacta de la utilidad de su existencia."¹³¹ By the end of the novel, Ernesto and Eugenia move to a chalet on the outskirts of the city to spend the first months of pregnancy, which Dziubinskyj reads as an escape from Villautopía and its scientific state. But, as García argues, Ernesto and Eugenia have interiorized Villautopía's discourse.¹³² Ernesto is glad he visited the Eugenic Institute because he now knows the process that awaits them (evidence enough that they are not escaping) and can explain it to Eugenia: "gracias a ella [la charla con el Doctor Pérez Serrato], estaba perfectamente documentado acerca del modo de incubar un niño, por el método científico en uso en aquella época, y pudo explicárselo a Eugenia, que lo ignoraba por completo."¹³³ As García claims, "si hay emoción, surge al descubrirse parte del sistema, no en su rechazo."¹³⁴

¹²⁷ Bojórquez has dwelled on the racial and gendered "silences" in the novel: 19-25.

¹²⁸ Eduardo Urzaiz, *Eugenia*, 115.

¹²⁹ Rachel Haywood-Ferreira, *The Emergence*, 72.

¹³⁰ Eduardo Urzaiz, *Eugenia*, 122.

¹³¹ Eduardo Urzaiz, *Eugenia*, 122.

¹³² Miguel García, "Eugenia," 11.

¹³³ Eduardo Urzaiz, *Eugenia*, 123.

¹³⁴ Miguel García, "Eugenia," 10-11.

In fact, the entire encounter between Ernesto and Eugenia is a product of Villautopía's eugenic program: they meet at a dance organized by the Institute, a doctor from the Institute commands Ernesto to "guide" Eugenia, and, when they immediately fall in love, this comes as a surprise to absolutely no one: "Todo mundo respetó aquella unión y la sancionó como un hecho consumado y fatal."¹³⁵ In this sense, the future that the pregnancy lights up for the couple is indeed a future that was planned, produced, and desired by Villautopía's eugenic program. As such, it represents a future for Villautopía's social structure as a whole.

Celiana, on the other hand, becomes deeply depressed and begins abusing her cannabis cigarettes. Celiana herself explains her reaction as pathological and blames her genetic inheritance for it: "Y aquí Celiana, dejando de leer, pensaba que ella, a pesar suyo y bien por su desgracia, era uno de aquellos seres atados aun por cadenas hereditarias al dolor de amar patológicamente."¹³⁶ Celiana feels trapped in a past she knows as a historian and assumes that dwells deep inside her genes. Finding no escape or possible future, she falls prey to her vice. Critics such as Dziubinskyj have taken Celiana's pain as an indication that Ursaiz' perspective on Villautopía is dystopic rather than utopic.¹³⁷ Similarly, Bojórquez, who reads the novel as a utopia, nevertheless suggests that there is an ambiguity to a utopia that allows pain and sorrow to survive.¹³⁸ But there are two reasons why Celiana's pain may be understood as a coherent part of Villautopía's utopic model.

First of all, Miguel reflects at the end of the novel that pain must be understood as a fundamental part of human nature, and thus something that a society that has taken scientific rationality as its guiding principle must not suppress. Pain is what defines us as humans because it is an indicator of consciousness and thus of reason and intelligence, which are the qualities of the evolved species that is humankind. Eradicating pain would be tantamount to suppressing the human capacity to think, remember, and imagine:

¿Por qué no aprenden los hombres a amar como aman los pájaros y las mariposas? Mas no; no puede ser ni es bien que sea. Divino patrimonio es el dolor humano, el dolor moral, distintivo excelente de *nuestra superioridad específica*. Para el pájaro, el insecto o el bruto, no existe en el amor más que el momento fugaz del goce mismo; para el hombre, el presente es solo un punto entre el pasado y el futuro.¹³⁹

The second reason why Celiana's pain may be read as a justifiable part of Villautopía's model has to do with Celiana herself. She is sterile because she was not deemed fit for reproduction, and her reaction to Ernesto's abandonment is there in the novel to prove this decision correct: she falls prey to vice (the cannabis cigarettes), to disease (depression), and to jealousy and obsession, which Celiana herself considers pathological because she has also interiorized Villautopía's discourse and never rebels against it. In other words, following the eugenic argument of Villautopía's model, Celiana must not reproduce: she must remain in the past, which is what she knows as a historian and where she feels trapped by her genetic inheritance; her line of descent, which carries a tendency for degeneration, must be interrupted. If the

¹³⁵ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 117.

¹³⁶ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 103.

¹³⁷ Aaron Dziubinskyj, "Eugenia," 463.

¹³⁸ Alfredo Bojórquez, "18.

¹³⁹ Eduardo Ursaiz, *Eugenia*, 130-31. My highlight.

production of an “evolved” population lies at the center of Villautopía’s eugenic program, individuals like Celiana must be excluded and have to gradually disappear. As Roberto Esposito has claimed, “the new biopolitical order subordinated even death to the demands of reproducing life.”¹⁴⁰ By the end of the novel, Ernesto chooses the future Villautopía’s program prepared for him and Celiana’s degenerated line of descent ends with her imminent death. In the process, the eugenic mechanisms of Villautopía are proven as functional as ever.

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A text that belongs to the early postrevolutionary period, *Eugenia*’s utopic model represents a speculative intervention within a larger body of biopolitical discussions regarding the government of the health, hygiene, and reproductive practices of the population. As we say throughout the chapter, to a large extent, these discussions emerged and revolved around urban space and urbanization, both during the *porfiriato* and the early post-revolution. They diagnosed the physical and moral “diseases” produced by and in urban space (Agostoni’s “medical topographies”), they conceptualized the stakes of urbanizing the territory and its people (Justo Sierra), and they defined different sites of governmental intervention such as the lower-class family and its household (Pani). Ultimately, this discourse shared the notion that the government and reproduction of a healthy, hygienic population required constant surveillance and regulation, beginning by transforming urban space in such a way that it allowed to do so. Modernizing a population this entire discourse conceived as backward, in turn, represented the necessary step towards the consolidation of a modern nation-state.

It is within these discussions that *Eugenia* reflects and speculates on the biopolitical possibilities of eugenics, understood in a large sense as the governmental production of a specific collective body. Following the classic utopian tradition but also addressing the aforementioned discussions on urban space and modernization, *Eugenia* grounds its speculations in space, particularly in the architecture of the Eugenic Institute. In the novel, the eugenic program of Villautopía selects the individual bodies that must reproduce, selects the individuals that must not reproduce, and engineers a social space that resolves questions of health and hygiene by means of light, order, and other architectural characteristics we explored. As we discussed throughout the chapter, in *Eugenia*’s utopic model, eugenics goes as far as having dissolved and reorganized the traditional structure of the family, understood as a site of social and biologic reproduction.

Although *Eugenia*’s speculative character manages to take its positivist paradigm to its limits and thus approaches moments of highly critical speculation on such things as the institution of the family, it forecloses these possibilities by inscribing them within the eugenic and social Darwinist state apparatus it envisions as its ideal notion of a modern state and society. In this sense, by taking it to its utopian limits, it manages to crystallize with particular clarity the biopolitical implications of the positivist paradigm of urban thought where it ultimately remains. Along with Pani’s 1916 *La higiene en México*, *Eugenia* thus represents a postrevolutionary reconfiguration of the stakes of governing over the health, hygiene, and reproductive practices of the population in order to consolidate a modern state apparatus.

¹⁴⁰ Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas*, 136.

And indeed, as we will see in later chapters, these questions will remain a constant presence in postrevolutionary urban thought well into the twentieth century.

The Networked City
Networked Infrastructures, Regional Experiments and Centralizing Plans in the 1920s

Alan Knight has argued that throughout the 1920s, during the governments of Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles, “*reconstruction* became the watchword of the new regime, which espoused ostensibly radical means to achieve more traditional ends: namely, the achievement of economic development and political stability.”¹⁴¹ While the so-called Sonora group did manage to secure considerable military and political control over the territory, Knight argues, still the position of the federal government was precarious at best, menaced above all by a horizon of what we could call political and economic atomization.

Politically, the central government had to negotiate with a fragmented territory controlled by strong regional *caciques*, political or military bosses, and other local figures of authority. According to Jean Meyer, “although on the offensive, [the state] remained structurally weak, for it had to reckon with the strong men of the regions, the *caciques* or local political bosses, whose cooperation underpinned stability.”¹⁴² Obregón thus sought a political program based on “national unity and national reconstruction”¹⁴³ which, on the one hand, employed nationalism as the common denominator to consolidate a central political base conformed by the military, urban workers affiliated to the CROM (the official labor organization), and officially sanctioned *agrarista* groups; on the other hand, as Thomas Benjamin has argued, it negotiated with regional leaders, offering them a considerable degree of political autonomy in exchange of loyalty.¹⁴⁴ Later in the 1920s, particularly under the presidency of Calles, the central government began a more aggressive attempt to control regional leaders and integrate the territory through a process of political centralization that ultimately culminated in the creation of the PNR –the National Revolutionary Party– in 1929. Thomas Benjamin argues that “durante el periodo de Calles el gobierno central llevó a cabo esfuerzos específicos para controlar los gobiernos estatales y desplazar a los líderes regionales disidentes e independientes.”¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Gilbert Joseph suggests that, beginning with Obregón but especially under Calles, “in order to promote national unity and forge a modern state, the central government began systematically to undercut the power and autonomy of the regional caudillos.”¹⁴⁶

Economically, the new regime faced a disintegrated, unplanned, and staggering economy. Furthermore, the government was virtually incapable of acting upon this situation given that creditors had suspended loans until the Mexican government paid its foreign debt.

¹⁴¹ Alan Knight, “Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico 1910-1940,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 74.3 (1994): 393.

¹⁴² Jean Meyer, “Revolution and Reconstruction in the 1920s.” In *Mexico Since Independence*, edited by Leslie Bethell (New York: Cambridge UP, 1991), 202-3.

¹⁴³ Jean Meyer, “Revolution,” 205.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Benjamin, “Laboratorios de nuevo Estado, 1920-1929: Reforma social, regional y experimentos en políticas de masas.” In *Historia regional de la Revolución Mexicana. La provincia entre 1910-1929*, edited by Thomas Benjamin and Mark Wasserman (México: Conacyt, 1996): 114.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Benjamin, “Laboratorios,” 123.

¹⁴⁶ Gilbert Joseph, “The Fragile Revolution: Cacique Politics and Revolutionary Process in Yucatán,” *Latin American Research Review* 15.1 (1980): 59.

In 1923, during the last year of Obregón's presidency, Alberto J. Pani, whose work on hygiene I discussed on Chapter 1, became the Secretary of the Treasury. According to Jean Meyer, from 1923 to 1928, Pani's "was a programme of classic liberalism –a balanced budget, the restoration of foreign confidence in Mexico's ability to pay its debts and a stable currency."¹⁴⁷ Externally, Pani negotiated with creditors and ultimately managed to restructure Mexico's foreign debt. Internally, he established austerity measures for the government and attempted a fiscal reorganization to fight what in a 1926 interview with *El Universal Ilustrado* he called "la anarquía de la tributación imperante en el país."¹⁴⁸ As Enrique Krauze explains, these measures had the purpose of creating savings in order to be able to invest and generate confidence, thus reactivating the loan and credit system: "Las fuentes de crédito externo e interno estaban cerradas para el gobierno después de la experiencia revolucionaria. Para echar a andar el proyecto de carreteras, bancos oficiales, irrigación salubridad, escuelas, el único camino era recurrir al ahorro [...] con lo cual, además, se daría a los acreedores extranjeros una muestra palpable de seguridad, responsabilidad y solidez."¹⁴⁹ It was through budgetary savings that Pani and Manuel Gómez Morín were able to inaugurate the Banco de México –the central bank– in 1925, which in turn had the purpose of reactivating credits, loans, and investments throughout the country.

Considering this situation, spending in infrastructure public works, and particularly in roads and a potential road network, became the favored political and economic solution for the regime now in control of the federal government, what Enrique Krauze has called its "road fever:"

Pocos proyectos encuadraban mejor con la mentalidad reconstructora de los sonorenses en el poder como el de dotar al país de una red caminera que lo cruzara de océano a océano y de frontera a frontera. Aparte de la conveniencia económica (comercial e industrial) del proyecto, los sonorenses entendían que, sin carreteras, el control político que ejercían sobre el país sería precario en la medida que la incomunicación favorece a los poderes locales y regionales.¹⁵⁰

Broadly speaking, because we will discuss these matters in detail throughout the chapter, a road network represented for the federal government a solution in political, economic, and even symbolic terms. As Krauze explains, it offered the possibility of integrating the territory, thus allowing the federal government to control regions and deploy its forces quickly and effectively.¹⁵¹ Economically, it promised first of all to integrate local and regional production into a national economic process, as we will discuss later on. Secondly, it promised to modernize the more isolated and traditionally underdeveloped parts of the country. Finally, it sought also to reactivate the banking system of loans and credits by offering new

¹⁴⁷ Jean Meyer, "Revolution," 219.

¹⁴⁸ Alberto J. Pani, "Una entrevista con el Sr. Alberto Pani," *El Universal Ilustrado* 422 (1926): 71.

¹⁴⁹ Enrique Krauze, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana: La reconstrucción económica*. (México: El Colegio de México, 1997), 19.

¹⁵⁰ Enrique Krauze, *Historia*, 98.

¹⁵¹ For instance, Krauze explains that the planned road network became politically crucial when the *cristero* revolt erupted in 1926, given that the railroad was now privately owned. Therefore, roads were the means for the military to deploy its forces across the revolting territories of the country. See: Krauze, *Historia*, 78.

possibilities of investment. This is why Jean Meyer explains that “financial and banking activity was linked with the major public works”¹⁵² and why a 1924 article in *El Universal Ilustrado* calls credit the “supremo constructor” of the nation.¹⁵³

But besides the political and economic advantages of building a road network that could integrate the territory, this project—and public works in general—was also important as a symbol of the new regime’s reconstructive program and its capacity to materialize it. In a 1922 letter to Roberto Pesqueira, Manuel Gómez Morín, then in charge of Mexico’s financial office in New York, claimed that “una política de obras materiales, cuando las obras no son toda la política y cuando las obras son de utilidad—no pegasos ni teatros ni leones—es muy sabia porque *se mete por los ojos*.”¹⁵⁴ Later on in our discussion, I shall return to this idea of infrastructure as a useful public work that enters through the eyes and is captured by the viewer as a political statement.

In 1925, during his very first year in the presidency, Plutarco Elías Calles held a meeting with all the state governors in order to integrate their multiple plans for roads into a single, unified plan for a national road network. By March 1925, the government created the Comisión Nacional de Caminos with the task of coming up with a final version of this project and securing the conditions to materialize it as quickly as possible. By 1927, the Comisión Nacional de Caminos presented a plan to build 10,000 kilometers of roads throughout the country. The Calles administration did make it a budget priority: from 1925 to 1928, the Comisión counted with a significant budget of 27 million pesos.¹⁵⁵ Although construction of some of these roads began right away, the economic recessions of the late 1920s made it impossible to complete the ambitious plan that Calles and his government envisioned. Indeed, according to Enrique Krauze, by the end of the 1920s no more than 700 km of roads were actually built.

In any case, the federal government’s “road fever,” its confidence that postrevolutionary reconstruction began above all by producing an interconnected national space, was by no means an isolated endeavor or an idea exclusive to the Sonora group. As we will see throughout the chapter, we can understand this “road fever” as emerging from, responding to, and debating with a series of intellectual interventions regarding the modernizing agency of what Graham and Marvin call “networked infrastructures [...], transport, telecommunications, energy, water and streets,” particularly communication infrastructure such as roads, streets, traffic systems, the telephone, and the radio.¹⁵⁶ These discussions and debates took place above all in the public sphere represented by cultural

¹⁵² Jean Meyer, “Revolution,” 220.

¹⁵³ “El crédito, supremo constructor,” *El Universal Ilustrado* 390 (1924): 46. For more information on federal economic policies during the 1920s, see: Krauze, *La reconstrucción económica*, Jean Meyer, “Revolution and Reconstruction,” and Susan M. Gauss, *Made in Mexico*.

¹⁵⁴ In Enrique Krauze, *Historia*, 12. My highlight.

¹⁵⁵ According to information provided by Enrique Krauze, “Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas” was one of the more privileged governmental dependencies, along with the military, the Banco de México, the Banco de Crédito Agrícola and the Comisión Nacional de Irrigación. See: Enrique Krauze, *Historia*, 76-82.

¹⁵⁶ Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism. Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition* (London and NY: Routledge, 2001), 8.

periodicals involved in the day-to-day transformations of urban life and urban space in postrevolutionary Mexico, which will therefore be the main focus of this chapter.

Indeed, throughout the 1920s, different cultural periodicals host speculations on the political, economic, cultural, and social potentials of networked infrastructures: on the significance of constructing new roads, paving streets, extending telephone cables, or erecting radio towers and stations. Oftentimes, albeit in different forms and coming from different political standpoints, networked infrastructures appear in these debates as “promising technological ensembles.”¹⁵⁷ In other words, the urban planners, government officials, reporters, artists, and architects who intervene in these matters envision the extension of streets and roads, telephone networks, or radio stations as a material transformation that would ultimately produce a modern political and economic space both at the level of cities and at the level of the nation as a whole. In turn, this networked space would have a modernizing and urbanizing effect on the habits, practices, beliefs, and sensibilities of the population in general. This way, discussions on networked infrastructures in the 1920s were future-oriented and highly speculative insofar as the authors, groups, and magazines involved in them, while theorizing networked infrastructures, advanced different utopian projections of how the postrevolutionary political space should be produced. In the following pages we will see how these discussions lead to the *estridentista* utopic model for an avant-garde city called *Estridentópolis* and the utopian device of the urban plan as presented by the magazine *Planificación*.

The speculative or future-oriented aspect of discussions around networked infrastructure was not necessarily specific to Mexico, although the fact that they took place in the context of postrevolutionary reconstruction did give them a sense of urgency. Nevertheless, these ideas were responding to contemporary debates regarding urban space, modernization, and planned urban expansion that were taking place elsewhere, from the metropolitan centers (the United States and Western Europe), to Latin American nations immersed in modernizing processes or the USSR, which in fact shared with Mexico the postrevolutionary sense of urgency. In *Splintering Urbanism*, Graham and Marvin thus argue that modern urban thought in general conceives “infrastructure networks [...] [as] integrators of urban spaces. They are believed to bind cities, regions and nations into functioning geographical or political wholes.”¹⁵⁸ (8). Given that networked infrastructures mediate social “exchange over distance” (10), thus determining the speed and extension of this exchange, “much of the history of modern urbanism can be understood, at least in part, as a series of attempts to ‘roll out’ extending and multiplying road, rail, airline, water, energy and telecommunication grids, both within cities and metropolitan regions.”¹⁵⁹

As I mentioned above, what is characteristic of Mexico is that the ideas surrounding networked infrastructure and planned urbanization appear inextricably intertwined with the project(s) of reconstruction. As a matter of fact, debates on networked infrastructure took

¹⁵⁷ Brian Larkin, “Promising Forms: The Political Aesthetics of Infrastructure,” In *The Promise of Infrastructure*, edited by Hannah Appel, Nikhil Anand and Akhil Gupta. Kindle Edition (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2018), loc. 3978.

¹⁵⁸ Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering*, 8.

¹⁵⁹ Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering*, 10.

place with particular force in Mexico during the 1920s precisely because due to their networking capacities –the possibility of efficiently connecting and integrating cities, regions, and the nation– they came to be regarded as powerful reconstructive devices. In the discussions we will explore throughout the following pages, reconstruction implied transforming the economically and politically disorganized urban spaces of a country emerging from years of internal warfare into well-connected and efficient “networked cities,” both by means of building infrastructure and by establishing regulations and controls over this infrastructure. Similarly, at another scale, reconstruction implied urbanizing the national territory by means of extending infrastructures such as roads or the radio in order to bind the territory together and integrate its multiple –and often isolated– regions into a coherent political and economic entity. In short, if the different interventions we will explore share something, they share the conviction that, by connecting space efficiently, networked infrastructures would produce organized, governable, and coherent political and economic spaces, be it at the level of cities, regions, or the nation.

This does not mean, however, that all interventions were in agreement as to the specifics of what reconstruction meant, what networked infrastructure could or would do, or the desired type of political and economic modernization envisioned. As a matter of fact, it will become clear from our discussion that the debates surrounding the “networked city” were indeed a site of intellectual and political contestation where the notion and stakes of reconstruction were disputed over, particularly on the public sphere represented by cultural periodicals. Furthermore, it allowed for interventions coming from different political standpoints, intellectual frameworks, and disciplines, all of which attempted to advance their own agendas, beliefs, and interests. To show this, my discussion will dwell on three different cultural periodicals from the 1920s that represent, first of all, different stages in the postrevolutionary process of the decade: from the early reconstructive endeavors to the political reorganization of the late 1920s. These three cultural periodicals also present different disciplinary approaches and different political projects during a historical moment when the fate of the postrevolutionary state was still open to multiple political configurations, as Thomas Benjamin argues with his notion of the 1920s “laboratories of new state” to which I shall return below.

I will thus begin this discussion on networked cities by examining the reports that the weekly cultural magazine *El Universal Ilustrado* presented on the early 1920s public works taking place in Mexico City, as well as the new traffic regulations in the city and articles that discuss the cultural, economic, and political importance of the telephone network. Then I will turn to the *estridentista* avant-garde discussions regarding the urban infrastructural projects in Jalapa under progressive governor Heriberto Jara as they appear in the *estridentista* magazine *Horizonte*, published from 1926 to 1927 while many members of this avant-garde movement were working for Jara’s “laboratory of the state” in Veracruz. Finally, I will explore the first period of the urban-planning magazine *Planificación* (1927-29), which was the publishing organ of an urban-planning association and thus gave voice to technical experts on this discipline as well as to professional architects and engineers during a period of political centralization that culminated in the creation of the PNR in 1929.

Things about Mexico: *El Universal Ilustrado* (1922-1926)

A new section appears in 1923 among the weekly pages of Mexico City's cultural magazine *El Universal Ilustrado*. The name of the section, which was published until 1925, is "Cosas de México": things "about," "from," and "of" Mexico all at the same time. The section reports on what its anonymous writers call the "advances" taking place in Mexico City: public works planned or already in process of construction, new streets and paving, health and hygiene regulations, new water pumps and drainage improvements, reorganization of the urban police, construction of new municipal public schools, *mejoras* in the trash and cleaning services, and several other public urban projects.

Usually, a series of two or three photographs appears next to the report in order to document the processes of urban transformation, thus showing a city in permanent renewal and reconstruction. The headings of the articles point in that direction as well, insisting on future-oriented vocabulary such as "new," "improvement," "project," "reform," or "renovation:" "El Nuevo Ayuntamiento y sus *proyectos*" (No. 349); "El Actual Ayuntamiento y las *mejoras* en la capital" (No. 356); "Las *nuevas obras* del Ayuntamiento" (No. 311). And indeed, the authors of these reports usually frame the public works under construction, at the beginning or end of each text, as a material proof that Mexico has left the revolution behind and is now undergoing a process of political, economic, and social reconstruction. A 1923 article titled "La renovadora labor del presidente municipal de México," one of the first in the section, frames its report with the following statement:

La República entera ha entrado en un gran movimiento de progreso, favorecido e impulsado por la paz orgánica de que hemos disfrutado desde hace cerca de tres años. Lo destruido se reconstruye, y las conquistas democráticas se afianzan y se elevan. Todo crece, con una fuerza admirable y poderosa que nada será capaz de detener.¹⁶⁰

In addition to the ongoing importance of hygiene –for instance, in reports on new markets, on the renovations of public parks, or on the improvement of trash services–, the section pays a significant amount of attention to the plans and projects regarding the paving and construction of new streets and avenues in the city. A 1923 article on paving in fact considers it the "labor máxima" of Mexico City's government.¹⁶¹ Throughout the section, articles constantly report on the amount of kilometers paved, the plans to pave neighborhoods or construct new streets, or the budget available to do so. Other articles describe in detail the paving procedures, the use of new construction materials such as concrete, the hygienic advantages of these materials, and even the modern machinery employed in order to transform the streets of "old Mexico" into the swift avenues of a modern city:

Para estas operaciones se están usando máquinas modernas: una máquina quebradora de piedra que usa motor de gasolina y que es de fácil transporte; otra que usa también motor de gasolina y sirve para el mezclado del cemento, la arena la piedra y el agua para formar el concreto, y finalmente los rodillos de vapor y las apisonadoras, sirven para activar las obras. [...] Hay obras que tienen el privilegio de la oportunidad: acciones cuya necesidad justifica desde luego su realización. Y la pavimentación de

¹⁶⁰ "La renovadora labor del presidente municipal de México," *El Universal Ilustrado* 304 (1923): 46.

¹⁶¹ "La obra del Ayuntamiento," *El Universal Ilustrado* 329 (1923): 12.

esta gran arteria citadina, la más transitada seguramente de todo *el México viejo*, es una obra digna de loa, porque está plenamente justificada por las circunstancias.¹⁶²

Besides describing in detail the paving procedures, materials, and machinery as a proof of the city's modernizing process –which the photographs of the construction sites further underscore–, one of the key preoccupations the authors show regarding new streets and avenues has to do with providing Mexico City with a road network that operates as the healthy “circulatory system” of the city. A 1923 article devoted to the project for *Avenida Circunvalación*, a circuit highway that surrounds what were then the limits of the city, explains that this avenue would allow for a continuous exterior circulation without the need to cross the city, thus connecting in an efficient manner the farthest points in the city as well as the different train stations and industrial routes. Therefore, *Circunvalación* “será la vía dinámica que rodee la ciudad de México, una nueva palpitación enorme y constante que descongestionará las otras vías.”¹⁶³ As a new “artery” in the circulatory system of the city, this circuit highway would, at the same time, offer the possibility of continuous and efficient circulation of goods and bodies on the periphery while also “decongesting” the rest of the streets, making circulation in the interior of the city more efficient as well. A further article on the matter claims that, once it is inaugurated, surrounding the entire city, *Circunvalación* will be a “living proclamation” of the strength and force of postrevolutionary reconstruction: “Cuando la Calzada de Circunvalación sea terminada, que será pronto, será como un pregón de fuerza tendido viviente alrededor de la ciudad, pregón de fuerza y de seguridad y de adelanto.”¹⁶⁴

The metaphor of a road and street network as a “circulatory system” is neither new in this period nor exclusive of Mexico. In fact, it goes back at least to discussions and regulations regarding health and hygiene in the European cities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, then to have a continuous appearance in urban thought throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Given that circulation of blood through the body is what guarantees the life of the organism, it became a particularly apt metaphor to reflect upon movement, activity, and management of urban life, as Ross Exo Adams discusses in *Circulation and Urbanization*. “The ‘discovery’ of circulation [in the seventeenth century] would offer forth a new, mechanical principle now useful to the ordering and management of life itself,” which in turn could be applied to the city insofar as it was conceived as a social body or organism.¹⁶⁵ The question, then, is not to show the originality of the metaphor but to discuss how and why this metaphor is employed in the particular context of the Mexican 1920s. In contrast to the use of the metaphor in Mexican urban thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries explored by Claudia Agostoni, where circulation was related to the theory of miasmas and the idea that people and things needed to circulate or the city itself

¹⁶² “El Ayuntamiento y las obras de pavimentación,” *El Universal Ilustrado* 354 (1924): 12, 50. My highlight.

¹⁶³ “La Calzada de Circunvalación: una obra admirable del Ayuntamiento,” *El Universal Ilustrado* 305 (1923): 47. My highlight.

¹⁶⁴ “La obra del Ayuntamiento,” *El Universal Ilustrado* 331 (1923): 4.

¹⁶⁵ Ross Exo Adams, *Circulation and Urbanization* (London/LA/New Delhi: Sage, 2019), 90.

would rot, here the question of circulation and street infrastructure has to do above all with commerce and with the reactivation of a postrevolutionary economy in general.¹⁶⁶ In this sense, Michael Foucault's discussion in *Security, Territory, Population* on circulation and urban police in the *raison d'Etat* theorist of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may offer a productive point of departure for our discussion.

Foucault argues that the questions, problems, and reflections on police revolve around "what could be called urban objects [...] in the sense that some only exist in the town and because there is a town."¹⁶⁷ Police, understood in the large sense of a governmentality that seeks to observe, regulate, and control the public life of a given population, emerges out of a reflection on urban life, significant urban problems such as public health, or prototypical urban spaces such as the street or the market. Indeed, commerce and the market are one of these "urban objects" that organize the discussions around police, one that has to do specifically with perfecting the "circulation of men and goods in relation to each other" by means of practices such as regulating prices, securing order in the marketplace, controlling trade traffic, or policing in the strict sense of the term.¹⁶⁸ According to Foucault, circulation and communication presented a double spatial problem, the first part of which revolved around the production of a particular space, while the second around the regulation of this space. First of all, then, it was a question of infrastructure in the sense that roads, streets, ports, channels, and markets needed to be planned and built in order for commerce to happen in the first place, and happen effectively as well. "But by 'circulation' we should understand not only this material network that allows the circulation of goods and possibly of men, but also the circulation itself, that is to say, the set of regulations, constraints, and limits, or the facilities and encouragements that will allow the circulation of men and things."¹⁶⁹

Foucault goes on to suggest that, setting out from a reflection on urban space, theorists of *raison d'Etat* and police conceive the government of the territory as a process of spatial urbanization that has as its chief objective securing economic circulation in order to increase the wealth of the state: "in the seventeenth and eighteenth century police was thought essentially in terms of what could be called the urbanization of the territory. [...] To police and to urbanize is the same thing."¹⁷⁰ As Ross Exo Adams argues, circulation of goods, people, and money was essential to discussions and calculations regarding the development of commercial activity for economic thinkers of the period such as William Petty or physiocrats such as Richard Cantillon. Circulation was indeed the mechanism through which the wealth of a state could actually be measured, accounted for, and increased. Petty, in particular, argued that the wealth of a particular state did not relate to the absolute amount of gold in the territory, but more exactly to the velocity with which it circulated. As Adams

¹⁶⁶ Agostoni writes that beginning in the eighteenth century and until the turn of the century "cleanliness was above all related to movement and the avoidance of stagnation. A clean city was one that allowed its water and air to circulate freely, and the movement of these elements was regarded as crucial in the struggle against disease" (17). For more on this, see Chapter 1 of *Monuments of Progress*.

¹⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (New York: Picador, 2007), 334-5.

¹⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *Security*, 335.

¹⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, *Security*, 325.

¹⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, *Security*, 336-7.

explains, “the circulation of wealth through the social body provided the clearest measure of a state’s actual wealth” because it was able to describe the working speed of the economic cycle and thus of its general productivity.¹⁷¹ Securing circulation, then, was fundamental in order to develop commercial activity and increase the general wealth of the state. Increasing wealth, in turn, was understood as the means for “strengthening the power of competing European states,”¹⁷² which was according to Foucault the fundamental objective of police as a governmental technique: “the problem of police is how to ensure the maximum growth of the state’s forces while maintaining a good internal order.”¹⁷³ From this perspective, as we mentioned in the previous chapter, governing a population implies integrating “men’s activity into the state, into its forces, and into the development of these forces.”¹⁷⁴ In other words, integrating activity into a territorial and economic circulatory system.

In “Cosas de México,” the authors of this weekly section argue that Mexico City requires an efficient road and street network—a healthy, uncongested, “circulatory system”—in order to reactivate the economic process of the city after several years of political instability, economic crisis, and armed violence. Authors of *El Universal Ilustrado* were not alone in reflecting on the possible ways to reactivate the city’s commerce and economy. In *Urban Leviathan*, Diane Davis explains that reactivating the local economy of the capital represented a generalized concern, given its central political and economic importance for the country in general. “Efforts to revive the local economy and restore urban infrastructural services” Davis explains, responded to the fact that “conditions in the capital were such that some concerted effort at urban redevelopment was absolutely necessary, especially if the objectives of restoring the local economy, and thus consolidating political power, were to be achieved.”¹⁷⁵

In general, *El Universal Ilustrado* lends its support to the local and federal governments’ attempts at infrastructural reconstruction. More specifically, “Cosas de México” insists that circulation of goods, people, and money by means of a modern road network with an efficient and uninterrupted traffic flow represents the type of effort at urban redevelopment that would immediately revive Mexico City’s local economy, particularly commercial activity, by accelerating exchanges of all kinds. Public plans and projects to construct, pave, or design streets and avenues thus consistently gain their journalistic approval. In a 1924 article, for example, they support the Mixcoac neighborhood’s plan to build new streets because they understand it as a public project that will produce immediate economic results: “Se han terminado las gestiones necesarias para adquirir los terrenos indispensables a la apertura de varias calles de importancia cuyos planos fueron aprobados en el segundo cabildo del año. Esto, de una trascendencia incalculable e indudable para el

¹⁷¹ Ross Exo Adams, *Circulation*, 98-9.

¹⁷² Michel Foucault, *Security*, 337.

¹⁷³ Michel Foucault, *Security*, 314.

¹⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *Security*, 323.

¹⁷⁵ Diane Davis, *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1994), 24.

progreso de la población, pues el tráfico se hará con mayor facilidad, lo que redundará en beneficio del comercio.”¹⁷⁶

And if “Cosas de México” dwells on the material infrastructure necessary to facilitate circulation and communication within the city and on the peripheries of the city, another section of *El Universal Ilustrado* dwells on the other part of the equation that derives from Foucault’s discussion above. This other section appears consistently from 1922 to 1923 and then intermittently the following years. Normally, it appears under the heading “Las iniciativas de tráfico” or “Las iniciativas del Departamento de Tráfico,” and it reports on a variety of new regulations regarding traffic and movement in the city established by the Department of Traffic: reorganization of bus stops and routes, regulation of street stands and publicity, implementation of new street lights, professionalization of traffic agents, standardization of licensing and registration processes, tabulation of tickets, and other such proposals envisioned to modernize the city and its population.

As in “Cosas de México,” the traffic section of *El Universal* frames these governmental initiatives as both proof and result of the fact that Mexico has left the revolution behind and is now immersed in a period of political and economic reconstruction. These new times require first of all a technical modernization of government itself: “El Departamento de Tráfico no solo se ocupa de expedir licencias y levantar infracciones, sino de *estudiar técnicamente* todos y cada uno de los problemas que se van presentando a medida que crece el tráfico capitalino y que crece también la población. Esto es consecuencia directa del *incontenible impulso* que está adquiriendo el comercio en toda la República después de la revolución.”¹⁷⁷ Secondly, these new times also require a new type of urban inhabitant. As a matter of fact, the section explains its own purpose as an urgent pedagogic mission, part of a concerted effort with the city’s government to educate a modern population: “Semana a semana tenemos que dedicar dos páginas a las iniciativas del Departamento de Tráfico, cumpliendo con una misión de educación social de gran importancia [...]. Se debe educar a los habitantes de la ciudad.”¹⁷⁸ According to the authors of this section, this task is particularly difficult in Mexico, given that “somos en mayoría los mexicanos de un carácter rebelde e imperioso, no hay cosa que nos parezca más desagradable que obedecer.”¹⁷⁹

As I mentioned above, the traffic initiatives this section reports on are mostly concerned with regulating circulation and ordering movement in the city by means of establishing technical procedures, uniform standards, and clear rules regarding different aspects of traffic. One of the first articles of the section, for instance, dwells on the technical modernization and standardization of licensing procedures. The article claims that, previously, licensing was not regulated by any modern technical or medical standard, thus leaving the traffic authorities with no possibility whatsoever for either qualifying or identifying drivers. Hence the new requirement for potential drivers to “someterse al examen médico y la identificación personal, en la sección dactiloscópica.”¹⁸⁰ If the technical

¹⁷⁶ “El Nuevo Ayuntamiento y sus proyectos,” *El Universal Ilustrado* 349 (1924): 42.

¹⁷⁷ “Los proyectos del departamento de tráfico,” *El Universal Ilustrado* 321 (1923): 49.

¹⁷⁸ “Los proyectos,” 49.

¹⁷⁹ Adela Sequeyro, “El interesante desarrollo del tráfico,” *El Universal Ilustrado* 306 (1923), 52-3.

¹⁸⁰ “La reorganización del tráfico,” *El Universal Ilustrado* 288 (1922): 46.

innovation of registering fingerprints would ensure the process and database of identification, a thorough medical exam would scientifically determine who could safely drive a car in the city. This exam would entail “investigación de normalidad del aparato circulatorio o cardiovascular, la agudeza visual, campo visual, comatopsia o lectura de colores, agudeza auditiva, reflejos nerviosos, estado mental, integridad funcional de los miembros superiores e inferiores e investigaciones de síntomas de intoxicación aguda o crónica por alcohol o alguna otra droga.”¹⁸¹ In a later article, Adela Sequeyro, who pens some of the articles in the section, claims that without these new standards, “[se] conceden licencias a individuos plagados de vicios, que por su morbosidad mental son incapaces de conducir debidamente un vehículo.”¹⁸²

But the most pressing question the section on traffic deals with is how to regulate, order, and organize circulation and movement in the public space of the city, particularly the urban habits and practices of the common pedestrian or *peatón*:

Arterias por otro lado plagadas de obstáculos de todo género, barracas, puestos ambulantes, baches como cráteres, *peatones indisciplinados* que las cruzan en cualquier lugar, indistintamente, sin dignarse siquiera lanzar de antemano una mirada de exploración en pro de su mismo pellejo, ebrios describiendo zig-zags, tirados a la mitad del arroyo, patinadores gozando de las delicias del pulido asfalto en los lugares que les era posible, gentes llevando a cuestras fardos bromosos, personas que se detienen a platicar, otras haciendo gala de la agilidad en los tranvías con remolques, haciendo “angelitos” en plena corriente de tráfico, otras sorteando peligros a través de los vehículos, jugadores de mano, *todos como contagiados del placer morboso de provocar el peligro*.¹⁸³

This image of urban chaos works by accumulating a series of movements without direction that need to be brought under control: obstacles, arbitrary street crossings, alcohol-driven zig-zags, random stops, or purposeless games (skaters, “angelitos”), all of which respond – according to the article – to nothing but an urban variation of the death drive. Together, the chaotic enumeration of movements spinning in all directions represents an anti-modern image of the city, characterized by a public space with no order or organization. The collection of capricious, purposeless, or arbitrary routes and speeds that conform the urban movement of a city without traffic regulations is precisely opposite to the ideal of effective circulation and communication that authors of *El Universal Ilustrado* believed to be crucial for the economic reconstruction of the city. Adela Sequeyro offers this other image when she argues that, if the new traffic regulations were seriously implemented, “se vería la corriente de tráfico en general como la de un río, sería un movimiento uniforme y educado, el número

¹⁸¹ “La reorganización,” 46.

¹⁸² Adela Sequeyro, “Las iniciativas del departamento del tráfico,” *El Universal Ilustrado* 310 (1923): 46. Adela Sequeyro was a journalist, poet, actress, and filmmaker tangentially involved with the *estridentista* movement. According to Elissa J. Rashkin, she debuted as an actress in the Mexican silent film *El hijo de la loca* (1923). In the 1930s, she directed the films *Más allá de la muerte* (1935) and *La mujer de nadie* (1937). For more on Sequeyro, see: Rashkin, *The Stridentist Movement in Mexico: The Avant-Garde and Cultural Change in the 1920s* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009), 141-143.

¹⁸³ “La reorganización,” 46. My highlight.

de accidentes disminuiría considerablemente y haríamos de nuestro México un país de orden y civilización.”¹⁸⁴

Reflecting upon each other, the sections “Cosas de México” and “Las iniciativas de tráfico” theorize the economic importance of circulation and communication in the city by reflecting, on the one hand, on the urban infrastructure necessary, while, on the other, on the required governmental regulations of bodies and movement in the city. Another article from these years in *El Universal Ilustrado*, this one on a 1925 special issue dedicated to the automobile, takes these ideas further in order to reflect on the political and economic possibilities of urbanizing the country as a whole by means of a road network:

El ferrocarril se encuentra en condiciones deficientes para llenar las condiciones de *una red perfecta de comunicación*. De aquí el aislamiento forzoso en que se encuentran algunas porciones de la República con relación al resto. La construcción de carreteras asume pues importancia especial [...] porque en muchísimos casos vendrán a suministrar el único medio de comunicación con sectores que de otra manera permanecerían alejados de *la pulsación de la vida* en el país. [...] La construcción de carreteras en México resolverá prácticamente todos los problemas más importantes que han sido causa del estancamiento de gran parte de la República, por lo que se refiere al franco florecimiento comercial e industrial y quizás aún social. La resolución de la mayor parte de nuestras dificultades políticas también hallarían menos terreno en qué desarrollarse si buenas comunicaciones pusieran a un Gobierno serio en posición de ejercer su soberanía de manera más eficaz y con éxito militar más efectivo.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Adela Sequeyro, “El interesante,” 53.

¹⁸⁵ “Jalisco, el primero en caminos,” *El Universal Ilustrado* 446 (1925): 55. My highlight. We should note that the article’s attack against the railroad is probably attempting to support the federal government’s struggle with the public railroad company, which was playing itself out precisely during these years. As Enrique Krauze explains, “los Ferrocarriles Nacionales Mexicanos, la empresa más importante del estado en estos años, fue un objetivo principal de la ofensiva económica del gobierno del general Calles” (83). Beginning in 1924, Alberto J. Pani took measures in order to privatize the public company, which according to Krauze’s research suffered from debts, damaged infrastructure, and inefficient operation. Furthermore, the railroad workers belonged to unions that were not aligned with the official CROM, thus presenting a continuous source of political conflict with the federal government. According to Krauze, all of these problems between the federal government and the railroad industry were one of the reasons why the Calles administration placed the focus of its infrastructural investments in roads rather than in railways, something to which the article quoted above offers its approval. For more on the railroad industry during these years, see: Krauze, 83-97. On a different scale, a similar conflict played out in Mexico City with the trolley, as Diane Davis has explored in detail. Many trolley workers belonged to unions not aligned with the CROM, thus representing a continuous source of labor conflict and dispute. In response, the local government decided to develop the bus service by supporting it economically and politically, while also by investing in road and street infrastructure. Ultimately, trolleys disappeared in Mexico City. For more on this, see: Davis, 20-62. Once more, *El Universal Ilustrado* supports the government in several articles in the traffic section that attack the trolley’s outdated infrastructure and general inefficiency. For example: “Un tranvía es un pambazo en movimiento. Corre mal. Está sucio, y hace un ruido indebido. De gente mal educada. Prefiero los automóviles grandes, silenciosos, rápidos y elegantes que se deslizan sobre la carretera lunada con la suavidad de un sueño” (No. 317, 48).

The article presents the image of a fragmented national territory, where some regions are not integrated into the circulatory system –*la pulsación de la vida*– of the nation. They are, in fact, both politically and economically isolated and disintegrated from what the article calls the “life” of the nation. An efficient road network would operate as the circulatory system that would integrate all these regions into a single life-rhythm or *pulsación*. This way, the road network would urbanize the territory in the sense described by Graham and Marvin of binding “regions and nations into functioning geographical or political wholes”¹⁸⁶ through a “rolling out” of networked infrastructure that could offer more ample and efficient communication, what the article calls a “red perfecta de comunicación.”

In the first place, this “perfect network of communication” would have an economic effect. The article hints at a classic liberal notion of modernization that goes back at least to Justo Sierra’s notion of “*colonización, brazos y capitales para explotar nuestra gran riqueza, vías de comunicación para hacerlas circular*” that we explored in Chapter 1.¹⁸⁷ From this perspective, roads would connect underdeveloped regions with the more developed ones, creating a larger market for both of them and thus a more complex cycle of economic circulation. This, in turn, would accelerate the modernizing process of the underdeveloped regions by allowing them to export their products into a larger market and bring in the revenue, which could then become further investment. From a national perspective, connecting regions heretofore isolated could mean offering possibilities of investment that would reactivate the loan and credit system, developing industries that did not exist, accelerating the economic process in general, and also integrating the multiple regional industries and productions into a national economic project. Regarding this last point, in a memorandum quoted by Jean Meyer, Manuel Gómez Morín, then director of the Banco de México, complained that no internal market existed in Mexico, particularly no capital market, although there was a potential for one: “One cannot talk of the domestic capital market, because such a market has never existed... But the potential for an internal market exists.”¹⁸⁸

Both Manuel Gómez Morín and Alberto J. Pani, Secretary of the Treasury under Calles, shared a liberal economic idea of modernization, but they also believed that modernization should be guided by the state, particularly through federal economic planning.¹⁸⁹ In the same memorandum quoted above, Gómez Morín complains that natural resources abounded in Mexico, but no companies would or could exploit them because there was no capital to develop these industries in the first place. However, he argues, “it is not a case of attracting capital to Mexico indiscriminately. We must obtain capital, but obtain it in accordance with prior planning, obtain it for our own development and not in order to be dispossessed, obtain it, in short, subject to our control and applied to our needs.”¹⁹⁰ While the article in *El Universal Ilustrado* quoted above does not dwell in matters of federal economic planning –to which we shall return in our discussion of *Planificación*–, it does

¹⁸⁶ Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering*, 8.

¹⁸⁷ Justo Sierra, *Evolución política del pueblo mexicano* (Caracas: Ayacucho, 1977), 265.

¹⁸⁸ In Jean Meyer, “Revolution,” 219.

¹⁸⁹ Susan M. Gauss has studied the conflicts this project presented between the federal government and the regional industrialists of the country. See: Susan M. Gauss, *Made in Mexico*.

¹⁹⁰ In Meyer, “Revolution,” 219.

share with the Calles administration the idea that a road network that connected the territory would be the urgent material infrastructure necessary to develop and guide the proper development a postrevolutionary national economy.

However, the article also suggests that in order for a national economy to exist, the national space as such needed to be politically produced first. This is the other “resolution” that, according to the article, the road network would provide: “buenas comunicaciones” also meant that the state could have a better political and military control of a still very much-disputed and fragmented territory. It would allow it to “ejercer su soberanía de manera más eficaz” and secure political stability for the first time in more than a decade, which were necessary conditions for the development of an active economy. If, summarizing the ideas of the sixteenth century Italian political thinker Palazzo, Michael Foucault suggests the notion that “government [is] the continuous act of creation of the republic,”¹⁹¹ the article in question suggests that the road network is indeed the material infrastructure that the state requires to govern in the first place, and thus the material production of the political and economic space of the postrevolutionary nation-state. As Ross Exo Adams suggests paraphrasing Carl Schmitt, “the very existence of ordered, secured channels of circulation, systems of infrastructure, and the movement of traffic would [...] confirm the existence of a corporeal unity of the state itself.”¹⁹² According to the article in question, if built, the road network would increment the state’s forces in a sense not entirely different from Foucault’s discussion of the objectives of police: first, it would help secure political and military control of the territory; secondly, this political stability, in addition to the connectivity of the network, would allow for the development of a national economy; finally, both of these would increment the state’s legitimacy by showing its control and capacity of action, what Gómez Morín implied with his idea that useful infrastructural works “se mete[n] por los ojos.”¹⁹³

Estridentismo in general and some of its members in particular such as Maples Arce and Arqueles Vela (who actually worked in the magazine) had a place among the pages of *El Universal Ilustrado* during the first half of the 1920s. However, the magazine followed in general terms a liberal economic and political perspective directed to the middle and higher classes of Mexico City, which was at odds with the soviet-socialist turn of *estridentismo* by the mid-1920s. By 1925, several members of the movement including Maples Arce, Germán List Arzubide, Ramón Alva de la Canal, and Leopoldo Méndez had left Mexico City and moved to the provincial city of Jalapa. There, they worked under the progressive government of Heriberto Jara in Veracruz and published from 1926 to 1927 the magazine *Horizonte*, which may allow us to examine another intersection between networked infrastructure and postrevolutionary reconstruction in the 1920s.

Building the Multitude: *Horizonte* (1926-1927)

Thomas Benjamin has argued that, during the 1920s, several state governments led by powerful regional *caciques* or *caudillos* operated throughout Mexico with a considerable

¹⁹¹ Michel Foucault, *Security*, 259.

¹⁹² Ross Exo Adams, *Circulation*, 114.

¹⁹³ In Enrique Krauze, *Historia*, 12.

degree of autonomy *vis a vis* the federal government. In this sense, and given the progressive politics of many of these *caciques* –such as Carrillo Puerto in Yucatán, for instance–, Benjamin argues that these governments functioned as political laboratories that came up with different possible mechanisms for integrating the working or peasant masses into the popular bases of their governments. In his words, “durante la década de los veinte, un periodo en el que el gobierno nacional careció de fuerza suficiente, ciertos gobernadores estatales pudieron llevar a cabo experimentos con la reforma social; de este modo, controlaron la movilización política de las masas y, por lo tanto, expandieron la base popular de su gobierno.”¹⁹⁴ While, according to Benjamin, most of these governors were not as radical as they claimed to be, and thus “no consiguieron transformar radicalmente la estructura social de sus regiones,” they did constitute experiments of “un Estado poderoso integrado por organizaciones de masas.”¹⁹⁵ This is what Benjamin calls “laboratorios de nuevo Estado” and which, according to his argument, culminates in the powerful labor and peasant organizations of the *cardenismo* in the following decade.

Heriberto Jara’s brief government in Veracruz (1925-1927) constitutes one of these “laboratories of new state.” Indeed, one of Jara’s main concerns during his tenure in Veracruz was to integrate the working class masses of the state into official political networks through union and gremial organizations, particularly those officially sanctioned. As Erasmo Hernández recounts, in Veracruz, the CROM –then the official labor organization lead by Luis N. Morones– “entre 1925 y 1927 desplegó una gran labor organizativa creando nuevos sindicatos, llegando hasta los ingenios y otras empresas agrícolas. En abril de 1927 el trabajo de organización en todo el estado de los cromistas permitió la fundación, en la ciudad de Orizaba, de la Confederación Sindicalista de Obreros y Campesinos del Estado de Veracruz (CSOCEV) que sería la principal central de trabajadores de la entidad.”¹⁹⁶ Jara supported non-official labor organizations as well, including the communist CGT and other independent organizations, which would result in conflicts with the CROM and the federal government.

The other emphasis of Jara’s political program as a governor was public works: paving and street building in cities such as Jalapa, plans to build a road network throughout the state, projects to erect radio stations in Jalapa, and the construction of the first stadium made of concrete in 1925.¹⁹⁷ As Elissa J. Rashkin describes, there was an entire urban plan surrounding the Jalapa stadium: “One side would be the site of the Universidad Veracruzana; on another, the Ciudad Jardín community would be built. Here, planners would draw on the best ideas of modern urban design to develop well-organized residential, commercial, and industrial zones.”¹⁹⁸ Most of these public works were either interrupted or left on paper due to the government’s political and economic crisis by mid-1927. Jara’s labor-oriented policies

¹⁹⁴ Thomas Benjamin, “Laboratorios,” 109.

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Benjamin, “Laboratorios,” 109-117.

¹⁹⁶ Erasmo Hernández, *Redes políticas y sociales. Consolidación y permanencia del régimen posrevolucionario en Veracruz 1920-1970* (Jalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 2010), 84.

¹⁹⁷ For a detailed account of the Jalapa stadium, see: Rubén Gallo, *Máquinas de vanguardia: Tecnología, arte y literatura en el siglo XX* (México: Sexto Piso/Conaculta), 2014.

¹⁹⁸ Elissa J. Rashkin, *The Stridentist*, 172.

antagonized powerful national and foreign companies (particularly in the oil industry), which, in turn, alienated the conciliatory Calles administration. The federal government first withdrew financial support, which threw the Veracruz government into economic crisis, and then approved the *coup d'état* against Jara in September 1927. Making a balance of Jara's government, Elissa J. Rashkin argues that public works were more successful than labor policy insofar as they “gave expression to the governor's utopian-socialist ideology without directly demanding concessions from the business sector.”¹⁹⁹ However true this may be, throughout this section we would like to discuss how the *estridentista* magazine *Horizonte*, making sense of Jara's overarching political program, creates a discursive intersection between the infrastructural works in Veracruz, on the one hand, and the attempts at integrating the working class of Veracruz into organized political networks, on the other. *Horizonte* theorizes urban infrastructure in general and networked infrastructure such as roads, streets, and the radio in particular as devices capable of mediating between the working masses of Veracruz and a government they conceive as popular and revolutionary.

During its brief but active heyday, Jara's government acquired two state-of-the-art presses and linotype machines for the Talleres Gráficos del Estado, which came under control of the *estridentista* members who followed Manuel Maples Arce—Jara's secretary—to Jalapa. In Jalapa, the *estridentistas* employed this printing infrastructure to publish works such as *Los de abajo* (in a series called Ediciones Populares), while “they also published a diverse and substantial body of material that ranged from pamphlets on hygiene and civics to new literary works by the Stridentists themselves,” the latter under the collection Ediciones Horizonte.²⁰⁰ From April 1926 to May 1927, *estridentistas* also employed the press to publish their magazine *Horizonte*, a magazine that according to the first editorial was to include “todo lo que signifique una manifestación de la actividad contemporánea [...]. Todo lo que palpita y pugna en la hora mundial.”²⁰¹

Directed by Germán List Arzubide with the artistic collaboration of Ramón Alva de la Canal and Leopoldo Méndez, *Horizonte* did in fact include in each of their ten issues a wide variety of material: avant-garde poetry, historico-political essays, current affair news, photographs, or scientific divulgation pieces, to mention only a few.²⁰² Particularly important for our discussion are the multiple reports—present throughout the magazine—on the political programs, ideas, reforms, and public infrastructural works taking place in Veracruz under Jara's government. Together, this eclectic collection was meant to disseminate what *estridentismo* conceived as a modern, urban, and revolutionary culture, and which represents a continuation of the movement's aesthetico-political fascination with the perceptual and sensorial transformations brought about by industrial landscapes, machinery, technologies

¹⁹⁹ Elissa J. Rashkin, *The Stridentist*, 172.

²⁰⁰ Elissa J. Rashkin, *The Stridentist*, 176.

²⁰¹ *Horizonte* (México: FCE, 2011), 3. We are employing the facsimile version of the magazine's ten issues published by the FCE in 2011. Therefore, when quoting from *Horizonte* we will refer to the page number in the facsimile version, not the original paging of each issue.

²⁰² For a detailed description and analysis of the magazine's sections and contents, see: Rocío Guerrero Modoño, “*Horizonte*: faro palpitante que señale el sendero de la hora convulsa”; the 1926 and 1927 chapters of Luis Mario Schneider, *El estridentismo. Una literatura de la estrategia*; and Marco Frank and Alexandra Pita González, “*Irradiador y Horizonte*: revistas de un movimiento de vanguardia y una red estridentista.”

such as the radio or the automobile, or the increasing speed and quantity of urban stimuli in general. The first editorial of the magazine claims that, shining its contemporaneous light upon its readership, *Horizonte* will become the “faro palpitante que señale el sendero de esta hora convulsa.”²⁰³ As I will discuss, *Horizonte*’s self-proclaimed objective was to become a guiding force in the process of reconstruction by culturally modernizing the population of Veracruz, while also by articulating Jara’s “laboratory of the state” in Veracruz as a model of what a popular government capable of incorporating the working class masses into its base could look like in postrevolutionary Mexico.

Elissa J. Rashkin argues that, from the third and fourth manifestos on, there is a contradictory stance in the *estridentista* avant-garde project. In these later manifestos, she claims, “the authors emulate the iconoclasm of earlier Stridentist gestures in their language, but at the same time enact the academic task of canonization by consecrating specific texts, themes, and vocabulary and by portraying the movement as a generator of institutions.”²⁰⁴ In *Naciones Intelectuales*, Ignacio Sánchez Prado has argued against this vision, claiming that, in contrast to the European avant-gardes, in Mexico the revolution opened up the inescapable horizon of nation building. Therefore, “la diferencia crucial es que la vanguardia mexicana era un debate sobre la construcción de una nación y una literatura y no el cuestionamiento sobre su decadencia.”²⁰⁵ This explains why *estridentismo* presented itself as a generator of institutions (the “Universidad Estridentista” proposed in the fourth manifesto), of aesthetic-political spaces (the “Café de Nadie” or the “Teatro Estridentista”), and, ultimately, of a new aesthetics with a series of foundational texts and episodes. However, reflecting on Maples Arce’s *Urbe* (1924), Sánchez Prado suggests that the political potential of *estridentismo*’s radical discourse and avant-garde project was lost the moment the movement became “orgánico al poder” under Heriberto Jara’s wing in Veracruz, because in doing away with their aesthetic autonomy they foreclosed the possibility of articulating a critical stance against the state and an alternative model for the postrevolutionary nation.²⁰⁶

Horizonte’s notion of reconstruction may nevertheless show us that *estridentismo* understood itself as an avant-garde movement not only parallel to but intertwined with the Mexican revolutionary process in its different phases, and thus a movement that –from their perspective– had to evolve *with* the revolution. In his history of the movement, Luis Mario Schneider suggests that, from 1922 onwards, *estridentistas* clearly attempted to conduct “el movimiento estridentista a integrarse con las ideas de la Revolución Mexicana.”²⁰⁷ In a 1922 interview with *El Universal Ilustrado* recovered by Schneider, Maples Arce famously declares that *estridentismo* “no es una escuela, ni una tendencia, ni una mafia intelectual, como las que aquí se estila; el estridentismo es una razón de estrategia. Un gesto. Una

²⁰³ *Horizonte*, 3.

²⁰⁴ Elissa J. Rashkin, *The Stridentist*, 162.

²⁰⁵ Ignacio Sánchez Prado, *Naciones intelectuales: Las fundaciones de la modernidad literaria en México (1917-1959)* (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2009), 52-3.

²⁰⁶ Ignacio Sánchez Prado, *Naciones*, 59.

²⁰⁷ Luis Mario Schneider, *El estridentismo o una literatura de la estrategia* (México: Ediciones Bellas Artes, 1970), 58.

irrupción.”²⁰⁸ Much like the revolution, Maples Arce suggests, *estridentismo* was first of all an event (*irrupción*), and then both an attitude (*gesto*) and a programmatic development (*razón de estrategia*) of that event.

In the earlier stages of the movement, this meant, as Sánchez Prado argues, short-circuiting a literary field in which their dissidence and avant-gardism could have found no place at all by means of employing the iconoclastic language mentioned by Rashkin or by tactics such as intervening directly on the public sphere (Maples Arce pasted *Actual No. 1* on the city walls). By the mid-1920s, however, *estridentismo* defined its political position as a soviet-socialist left for which the organized urban proletariat represented the revolutionary subject. Hence Maples Arce’s dedication of his 1924 *Urbe. Super-Poema Bolchevique* to the workers of Mexico. Furthermore, as we have been discussing throughout the chapter, it seemed that the revolution itself had entered a new phase, one characterized by reconstruction and early attempts at state-building and political institutionalization. Thomas Benjamin’s notion that certain Mexican regions operated as “laboratories of new state” and as sites of political experimentation allows us to understand that, during the 1920s, the nature of the postrevolutionary state was conceived as an open process that could head in multiple directions and in which all the different political actors had to intervene with their own agenda in order to consolidate their project. From their perspective, then, *estridentismo*’s alliance with the labor-oriented government of Heriberto Jara represented the possibility of participating in the reconstructive phase of the revolutionary process by materializing the aesthetic and political speculations that had characterized their avant-garde artistic project since 1921. *Estridentismo*’s Jalapa years are thus the expression of a historical moment where different political actors—including some avant-garde artists—conceived the formation of the postrevolutionary state as an open horizon and a task in which they had both the possibility and the responsibility to intervene. In other words, for the *estridentismo* of the Jalapa years, the intersection of politics and aesthetics—the political in art—does not lie in autonomy or in critique, but in commitment to an aesthetico-political project that intentionally breaks the barrier between art and life, between aesthetics and politics. This is what in *Horizonte* they call the construction of a “vida revolucionaria,”²⁰⁹ which implies a new political organization as well as a new art and, in general, a new aesthetic and perceptual sensibility.

This may become clearer by examining more closely *Horizonte*’s notion of reconstruction. In contrast to *El Universal Ilustrado*, in *Horizonte* reconstruction does not imply that the revolution has ended. On the contrary, reconstruction is another phase of the revolutionary process. In the editorial to issue number 7 from October 1926, they claim that this is “el momento reconstructivo de nuestra vida revolucionaria,” which calls for a new strategy based on construction.²¹⁰ If, at first, the revolution “necesitaba destruir y destruyó,”²¹¹ now is the time to build the foundations for this new, revolutionary life of the nation. Mexican society, they claim, “hizo una revolución, pero no sabe cimentarla.”²¹²

²⁰⁸ Manuel Maples Arce, “Entrevista con Manuel Maples Arce,” *El Universal Ilustrado* 294 (1922): 25.

²⁰⁹ *Horizonte*, 319.

²¹⁰ *Horizonte*, 319.

²¹¹ *Horizonte*, 319.

²¹² *Horizonte*, 249.

According to them, the political and infrastructural transformation of Veracruz under Jara's government represents these new foundations for revolutionary life. An article titled "La Revolución y sus nuevas orientaciones espirituales. La obra reconstructiva del gobierno de Veracruz" argues as much:

Se exige, entonces, en este periodo al que hemos entrado, que la Revolución demuestre que arrojó todo lo malo y que puede sustituirlo por lo bueno; que pruebe que hay una forma de vida más digna que la que el pasado vivió. Es la hora de las responsabilidades. [...] En Veracruz se hace. Se realiza. *Se construye la vida mejor* que reemplazará la vida injusta y malvada.²¹³

As an avant-garde project for which, in Boris Groys terms, "reality itself is material for artistic construction," the *estridentistas* conceive Jara's leftist government as a "laboratory" where to continue their aesthetico-political speculations and materialize them on the ground.²¹⁴ To begin with, this implied for the *estridentistas* the urgent task of modernizing the cultural, perceptual, and subjective profile of the people in Veracruz. Secondly, it implied working for the consolidation of a popular government capable of interpellating and integrating the working class masses as its main political base. This is what, following Germán List Arzubide's address to the workers at the end of *El movimiento estridentista* (1926), to which we shall return below, we can refer to as the "multitude." Insofar as it is capable of producing a new political and sensorial space, urban infrastructure represents in *Horizonte* a fundamental device to materialize both of these objectives. Put differently, according to *Horizonte*'s theories and speculations, the spatial transformation of Jalapa through modern infrastructure will indeed mediate the entire formation process of a revolutionary collective, and thus of "revolutionary life" in Mexico.

In her book on *Estridentópolis* –the city in *estridentista* books and artworks–, Sylvia Pappé argues that this avant-garde movement never sought to represent mimetically a particular city (Mexico City, Puebla, or Jalapa). *Estridentismo* constructs a city that has no referent outside itself, that does not exist beyond the texts and artworks that articulate it. In this sense, Pappé argues, *estridentismo*'s aesthetic project lies elsewhere: not in mimesis, but in a constant reflection, through aesthetic experiments, on how different urban technologies and infrastructures –the car, the radio, the skyscraper, the telephone cables– mediate and transform the modern subject's perceptual apparatus:

En la vanguardia se observa más bien cómo se remarcan las maneras de percibir: líneas sueltas, puntos inconexos, fragmentos, y de las dificultades de construir significados a partir de estas percepciones mediante construcciones de secuencias temporales, o formas espaciales organizadas en función de la orientación. En otras palabras, surgen experimentos en torno al impacto de la percepción de la urbe moderna, fragmentada, y de las incertidumbres de la vida moderna, en la literatura y en la gráfica, que representa el concepto de ciudad mediante fragmentos, líneas sueltas y perspectivas múltiples.²¹⁵

²¹³ *Horizonte*, 18. My highlight.

²¹⁴ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), 21.

²¹⁵ Silvia Pappé, *Estridentópolis: urbanización y montaje* (México: UAM, 2006), 77.

Following Pappel's argument, indeterminacy is what characterizes the urban subject's perceptual apparatus according to *estridentista* art and its insistence on fragments, disorientation, or lines of flight. Indeterminacy characterizes the perception of a space that always appears under construction, as the title of Maples Arce's first book –*Andamios Interiores*– suggests. Indeterminacy also characterizes a temporal perception that is always projecting itself toward the future, while signaling at the same time the multiple “posibilidades del presente.”²¹⁶ Finally, indeterminacy characterizes identity as well, which is immersed in an uninterrupted process of integration and disintegration, as the title *Andamios Interiores* also suggests.

While we can agree to a large extent with Pappel's argument, particularly regarding the *estridentismo* previous to Jalapa, we can also suggest that, in *Horizonte*, the discussion surrounding urban infrastructure reorients the notion of indeterminacy. As Romano Muñoz suggests in an article on education in *Horizonte*, in the end, the revolution for *estridentismo* “es esencialmente un cambio de perspectiva.”²¹⁷ While *Horizonte* insists that space is still under (re)construction, while it still projects a temporality that looks for the future in the possibilities of the present, and while it argues that a revolutionary identity is yet to be fully articulated, the magazine also suggests that the infrastructure modernizing Jalapa's urban space will organize the emergence of a specific revolutionary subjectivity and a political collective organization that, put together, List Arzubide calls the multitude in *El movimiento estridentista*.

The discussion present in *Horizonte* on networked infrastructures such as the radio and roads may show this more clearly. *Horizonte*'s issue number six claims that “en la colina que ocupa el otro lado, se está concluyendo la estación difusora de radio, estación la más potente de la República, y con la cual se desea hacer llegar a todo el territorio veracruzano mensajes de educación y nuevas ideas.”²¹⁸ Insofar as the radio is capable of connecting Veracruz together by broadcasting news and “messages” immediately and simultaneously throughout the territory of the state, *Horizonte* poses that radio stations, cables, and towers are privileged urbanizing and modernizing agents. “Torres de radio”, a photograph from Pedro S. Casillas that appears in issue number 9, suggests precisely this idea (Figure 2). The silhouette of a building appears at the left-hand side of the image, signaling the existence of an urban space that is not the main object of the photograph but that frames the radio towers and gives meaning to them as urbanizing agents. These two radio towers take the center of the composition, their phallic height dramatized by the perspective chosen by Casillas. A series of cables extend from these towers in multiple directions, segmenting the space of the image while also visually describing the multiple directions of the radio network, which

²¹⁶ Silvia Pappel, *Estridentópolis*, 113.

²¹⁷ *Horizonte*, 375.

²¹⁸ *Horizonte*, 275. In *Architecture as Revolution*, Luis Carranza explains that, over the years, Ramón Alva de la Canal produced a series of artworks –paintings, sketches, and woodcuts– titled Radiópolis, all of which present a model of what was supposed to become the *estridentista* radio station in Jalapa. In that sense, Carranza argues that Alva de la Canal's Radiópolis “represents the Estridentista's interest in communication to the Mexican masses through a broadcast medium” (81). A reproduction of one of the sketches was included in List Arzubide's 1926 *El movimiento estridentista*.

seams to lead everywhere. Furthermore, the erect radio towers and the cables that hold them to the ground form an abstract composition somewhat reminiscent of a classic winged victory figure propelling itself forward. In this sense, not unlike obelisks and columns that celebrated military victories in urban space, the radio towers could be read as urban symbols of revolutionary victory and modernization in Veracruz. However, already in *Actual No. 1*, Maples Arce had quoted Marinetti's famous idea that "un automóvil en movimiento es más bello que la Victoria de Samotracia,"²¹⁹ calling for a displacement in the themes and objects that were to constitute the urban avant-garde aesthetic of *estridentismo*. As a gesture of recognition to Marinetti and Maples Arce, then, Casillas' photograph could also be read as a demonstration of the new aesthetic sensibility and urban culture that was to predominate in postrevolutionary Mexico, and which the radio would both produce and represent.



Figure 2: Pedro S. Casillas, "Torres de Radio". In *Horizonte*: 474.

If the radio holds such importance in *Horizonte*, this is so because *estridentismo* considers it a "promising technological ensemble."²²⁰ Its promise lies, as we suggested above, in the radio's capacity to reach a wide audience that is perhaps illiterate, and to do it simultaneously across a large territory as well, thus offering the possibility of integrating a dispersed audience into a single, contemporaneous temporality. In *Máquinas de vanguardia*,

²¹⁹ Manuel Maples Arce, "Actual No. 1," *El Estridentismo: la vanguardia literaria en México* (México: UNAM, 2007), 5.

²²⁰ Brian Larkin, "Promising," loc. 3978.

Rubén Gallo has explored the fascination the radio provoked in the Mexican lettered city of the 1920s in general, including *estridentismo*. As the critic describes, *estridentismo*'s longstanding fascination with the radio, as is visible in poems such as Kin Taniya's famous "IU IIIUUU IU," had to do with the medium's capacity to inscribe Mexico in a contemporary global network of news and cultural exchanges. In effect, in a 1923 article by Arqueles Vela in *El Universal Ilustrado* titled "El hombre-antena," Vela interviews the man in charge of *El Universal*'s station. He describes him, using the notion of the "antenna man," as a node in a global network of modernity: "El Hombre Antena vive más que ninguno el cosmopolitismo moderno de las ciudades. Desde ese rincón escucha no solamente la novedad de los cables y el hatchis de las cosas lejanas sino que escucha el ritmo, la voz, la armonía del mundo."²²¹

As a networked infrastructure that needed to be extended by constructing new stations like the one sketched by Ramón Alva de la Canal for Jalapa or new towers and cables such as the ones that appear in Casillas' photographs, in *Horizonte*, the radio promises to be a fundamental reconstructive agent in two related senses. First of all, the radio promised to educate and modernize the masses by disseminating across Veracruz what in issue number 6 of the magazine they call a series of "mensajes de educación y nuevas ideas."²²² Articulating these messages, on the other hand, was the social function of the avant-garde artists themselves in the revolutionary process. That is why, in the very first editorial of the magazine, they claim that *Horizonte*'s revolutionary purpose is to be a guiding light, a lighthouse signaling to the people the direction to follow in the dark. That is also why, in the editorial to issue number six, they argue that "somos el único periódico revolucionario de México. En la hora en la que urge formar una conciencia cimentada con los ideales que sostuvieron los sacrificados de quince años de batalla, sólo nosotros hemos estado prestos a sostener en forma decisiva los principios de lucha."²²³ Finally, that is the reason why, in the editorial to issue number nine, they claim that their task is to create ideas that, although despised in the present, will create the "roads" for the future: "Impaciencia de futuro, que tendremos que abrir los laborantes del pensamiento, con nuestra siembra de ideas fecundas y altas, ideas que hoy son para quienes las forjamos motivo de desdén y de burla, pero que hará que mañana los caminos del triunfo, con seguro guía, el pueblo los cruce cantando."²²⁴

These series of declarations on the role of the avant-garde artists in the revolutionary process lead us to the second reason why *Horizonte* conceives the radio –and networked

²²¹ Arqueles Vela, "El hombre-antena," *El Universal Ilustrado* 308 (1923), 22. For more on the Mexican lettered city's fascination with the radio and *estridentismo*'s engagement with this technology before the *Horizonte* years, including the advertising posters made for El Buen Tono (a cigarette company that also had a radio station) see chapter 3 of Gallo's *Máquinas de vanguardia*. On El Buen Tono's special edition of the "Radio" cigarettes, Gallo recounts that "los fabricantes contrataron los servicios de artistas estridentistas para que diseñaran una campaña publicitaria para los nuevos cigarros [Radio] [...], y éstos concibieron un póster representando un mundo futuro: los cigarros Radio surgen de un paisaje dominado por rascacielos, luces de neón y máquinas modernas" (172). A reproduction of this poster was included in List Arzubide's 1926 *El movimiento estridentista*. Gallo also explains that El Buen Tono went on to fund the three numbers of the *estridentista* magazine *Irradiador* (1923), which included the radio in its name.

²²² *Horizonte*, 275.

²²³ *Horizonte*, 249.

²²⁴ *Horizonte*, 441.

infrastructures in general— as a reconstructive agent in Veracruz. Insofar as the radio would transmit the organized ideas articulated by the avant-garde artists and intellectuals, it would eventually produce a shared, revolutionary subjectivity, what in the editorial to issue number six quoted above they call a revolutionary “conciencia.” This shared set of values, ideas, and beliefs would thus help in the integration of the dispersed, often isolated, working masses. In this sense, together with the labor organizations supported by Jara, networked infrastructures would be a necessary part of the effort at building a popular government capable of incorporating organized labor as its base, if only at the level of creating a collectively shared culture.

An article on another networked infrastructure, roads, poses this point differently. This article, titled “Caminos. La mejor obra nacional,” opens with an argument that echoes Horacio Legrás’ idea that postrevolutionary nationalist art confronted the problem of representing a nation they did not know: “the revolution” Legrás claims “uncovered and mobilized an unsuspected multiplicity.”²²⁵ Similarly, the article in *Horizonte* claims that the revolution, by mobilizing people all over the territory, created an awareness of the extension and diversity of a territory heretofore ignored. In this sense, the article argues, it uncovered a territory waiting to be developed, filled with isolated communities waiting to be incorporated into the nation. Networked infrastructure represents the spatial operation necessary to do both things:

El grito de México ansioso de reponerse no puede ser sino ¡¡Caminos, caminos!! Una forma que permitirá extraerle al corazón de la sierra o de la selva la mayor cantidad de productos que vengan a los lugares de población a aumentar el trabajo, a ser factores de esfuerzo y de vida. Pero si en la especulación objetiva se nos presenta desde luego la solución del problema material de las necesidades nacionales, por la abundancia de la producción, en lo espiritual, para la solución de nuestros hondos problemas raciales, es más, mucho más necesario hablar de medios de comunicación. [...] Es necesario caminos, caminos que van a ser como lazos espirituales que fortalezcan nuestra nacionalidad.²²⁶

The first part of the argument, what they call the “material problem” and which deals with the economic question, suggests a very similar understanding of industrial development to the one we saw in *El Universal Ilustrado* and the one we will see in *Planificación* as well. Networked infrastructures—in this case roads— will prepare the ground for the industrial development of the nation by offering access and connection to the resources available in unexploited regions of Mexico such as the “heart” of the mountains or the jungles. In consequence, these infrastructures are necessary to increment the economic production and activity of the nation.

But the second part of the argument claims that even economic reconstruction is not as important as solving what they call the “racial problem.” Although they do not dwell on the specifics of what this problem actually entails, it is clear from the argument they make

²²⁵ Horacio Legrás, *Culture and Revolution: Violence, Memory, and the Making of Modern Mexico* (Austin, UT Press, 2017), 25.

²²⁶ *Horizonte*, 337-39.

that, for them, the question revolves around dispersion and isolation. In other words, a racial problem exists in Mexico because there are ethnic communities isolated from each other, with no means of connection and no shared cultural bonds between them. A unified sense of nationality can only emerge through the communication networks offered by infrastructures such as roads and the radio, networks that can integrate the territory together and shape a unified idea of national culture. As we previously mentioned, *Horizonte* conceives the latter as the social function of avant-garde artists, who have the responsibility to articulate the organized ideological program they call “conciencia” in the editorial quoted above. In *Naciones Intelectuales*, Ignacio Sánchez Prado explains that “cultura nacional” was a discursive site of confrontation where different assemblages of meanings, symbols, and referents that constituted an idea of the national disputed the preeminence to define postrevolutionary Mexican culture and the revolution as such.²²⁷ In the case of *estridentismo*, as we have been discussing, national culture implies a process of, on the one hand, what they conceive as a cultural modernization of the masses, and, on the other, their integration into organized political networks.

Before turning to List Arzubide’s infrastructural notion of the multitude, the discussion on the Jalapa stadium and physical education in Jalapa offers a final example of how infrastructure mediates, according to *Horizonte*, both parts of this modernizing process. In this case, the discussion revolves around the individual and collective body of the people. Celestino Herrera, who pens most of the articles on the matter, explains that “la construcción de su hermosísimo estadio vino a intensificar notablemente las prácticas deportivas, interesándose la juventud en estas actividades por contar con un local apropiado para ellas.”²²⁸ In *Máquinas de vanguardia* Rubén Gallo has discussed stadiums as mass media in which postrevolutionary governments, by means of choreographic, military, and gymnastic spectacles, attempted to showcase order and discipline. The organized bodies and the coordinated movements these bodies exhibited attempted to “representar a estas nuevas masas de ciudadanos ordenados” (245) that were to constitute the postrevolutionary civil society.²²⁹ In Gallo’s understanding, then, stadiums operated as yet another pedagogic site of discipline. In his articles in *Horizonte*, Celestino Herrera extends this discussion to include considerations of physical education in general.

According to Herrera, “levantado el Estadio Veracruzano, un verdadero monumento a la belleza, [se] pone la primera piedra de otro gran monumento: la reconstrucción moral y física de nuestra raza.”²³⁰ In his view, physical education will “reconstruct” the Mexican people morally and physically because it will educate workers into masculine values such as strength, competition, or efficiency, while it will also drive them away from the “centros del vicio,” namely brothels and bars. Physical education thus represents for Herrera a disciplining of both body and habits. It also implies, in a number of his suggestions, a transference or channeling of revolutionary violence into the organized, reconstructive strength of the postrevolution by means of sports’ “healthy” competition and team work.

²²⁷ Ignacio Sánchez Prado, *Naciones*, 24.

²²⁸ *Horizonte*, 283.

²²⁹ Rubén Gallo, *Máquinas*, 245.

²³⁰ *Horizonte*, 380.

Channeling the normalizing view of masculinity that characterizes *estridentismo* and its longstanding homophobic gestures, behind Herrera's discussion on physical education and sport lies, as Gallo points out, a governmental concern on how to organize a disciplined, productive, and efficient industrial workforce.²³¹ In this sense, Herrera explicitly argues that the objective behind the construction of sports infrastructure in Jalapa and the subsequent reorganization of physical education in the city is to modernize the people, both at the level of the individual body that requires discipline and strengthening and at the level of collective organization that requires order and coordination.

In one of these articles, however, Herrera inverts the argument in order to suggest that, as a matter of fact, physical and moral education was a popular demand of the revolution to which Jara's government responded with infrastructures such as the Estadio Veracruzano:

*El pueblo también pidió al Gobierno que se le concedieran útiles para dedicarse a las prácticas deportivas que los debían alejar de los lugares de vicio y les proporcionaría, a la vez que una educación armónica de sus fuerzas físicas, una educación de la voluntad. El obrero, el soldado, el campesino, recibieron los beneficios de la educación física y fueron a la vez que fortaleciendo sus cuerpos, fortaleciendo sus espíritus en la lucha sana a base de deportes, en la que se practica la caballerosidad emanada de la ética deportiva.*²³²

The importance of such an argument is that it crystallizes *Horizonte's* understanding of Jara's government in Veracruz as one that receives its legitimacy from the people insofar as its executive actions emanate from popular demands and its representative authority is popularly granted: "el pueblo [...] pidió." The modernizing urban infrastructure of Jalapa is thus the result of a popular demand executed by a popular government, constructed by the people and for the people. In this sense, infrastructure represents the materialization of the people's will. Returning to Gómez Morín's notion that public works "se mete[n] por los ojos" as political statements, it also represents a governmental structure supported by popular masses through organized channels of communication that incorporate them and represent their interests.

We can turn, in this point, to Germán List Arzubide's address to the workers at the very end of *El movimiento estridentista*, published in December 1926, at the zenith of Jara and the *estridentistas'* "laboratory" in Veracruz. *El movimiento estridentista*, which Schneider considers the farewell manifesto of *estridentismo*, is a historical account of the movement in which a collection of *estridentista* material culture informs List Arzubide's poetic prose. In Schneider's description, "fotografías, grabados, reproducciones de cuadros, facsímiles de algunos manifiestos, programas de exposiciones y anuncios, hacen que ese libro sea un libro único, una especie de Biblia estética del estridentismo; aunque, en realidad, carezcamos ahora de todas las "claves" secretas que toda sociedad poética presupone y por ello muchos de los elementos nos son inaccesibles."²³³

²³¹ For a discussion on *estridentismo*, masculinity, and homophobia, see: Daniel Balderston, "Poetry, Revolution, Homophobia: Polemics from the Mexican Revolution"; for a more general perspective, Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities*.

²³² *Horizonte*, 379. My highlight.

²³³ Luis Mario Schneider, *El estridentismo o una literatura de la estrategia*, 176.

Towards the end of book, List Arzubide claims that the aesthetico-political project taking place in Jalapa constitutes the postrevolutionary horizon and direction to follow: “los hombres han puesto la brújula hacia Estridentópolis.”²³⁴ At this point, an anonymous feminine figure appears, described as a “solemne mujer del crepúsculo.”²³⁵ List Arzubide asks her to listen to what *estridentismo* has to say to the urban workers. What follows is the address to the workers, which constitutes the final pages of *El movimiento estridentista*. In the first part of the address, List Arzubide exhorts the workers to destroy both a repressive past (dusk) and a monotonous alienating present (uniform): “Rasgad *el uniforme* de los días;” “Levantad con las grúas de esos puertos estriados en el adiós de las sirenas, las tardes que remachan *los crepúsculos*.”²³⁶ Throughout this first part of the address, metaphor allows List Arzubide to locate political agency at the intersection between the workers and urban infrastructure, as in the following image: “Las chimeneas que aventáis a la industria del anhelo, destrozarán la astronomía de lo improbable.”²³⁷ Industrial chimneys, insofar as they condense labor as a subject and labor as an activity, build the necessary political hope (anhelo) and political work (industria) in order to make emancipation possible. It is here, in this intersection between political organization and urban infrastructure, where the multitude must be constructed:

Formad las manifestaciones del escándalo y atravesad orillados de canciones las
avenidas de la burguesía.
Construíd la multitud.²³⁸

In *Commonwealth*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri present an idea of the multitude that, in many respects, is different –if not opposed– to List Arzubide’s use of the term. Reflecting on the contemporary possibilities of political organization, the multitude is for Hardt and Negri an assemblage of multiplicities that never becomes an homogeneous political organization but that, in specific contexts, works through difference in order to reclaim the common, understood as resources that should belong to all (water, air) or languages, affects, practices, and knowledges that, insofar as they are socially produced, must belong to everyone and no one at the same time. In contrast to this notion, List Arzubide’s multitude is closer to the modern idea of a uniform proletariat. However, Hardt and Negri suggest that the metropolitan city is a privileged site for the emergence of the multitude because it is the space of the common: “the metropolis is the site of biopolitical production because it is the space of the common, of people living together, sharing resources, communicating, exchanging goods and ideas.”²³⁹ In this sense, the multitude would constitute what Reinhold Martin calls a “technopolitical –or more precisely, a mediapolitical– ensemble.”²⁴⁰ (149).

²³⁴ Germán List Arzubide, *El movimiento estridentista* (Jalapa: Ediciones Horizonte, 1926), 98.

²³⁵ Germán List Arzubide, *El movimiento*, 98.

²³⁶ Germán List Arzubide, *El movimiento*, 104. My highlights.

²³⁷ Germán List Arzubide, *El movimiento*, 104.

²³⁸ Germán List, Arzubide, *El movimiento*, 105.

²³⁹ Michel Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 250.

²⁴⁰ Martin, Reinhold, *The Urban Apparatus: Mediapolitics and the City* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 149.

Martin argues that “to locate agency solely at the level of political organization risks overlooking the strange mediatory agency of the infrastructural mark or line.” Despite the different notions of the multitude, in List Arzubide the modern city is also the site where his idea of the multitude becomes possible insofar as modern urban infrastructure and proletarian subjectivity build each other and are thus inextricably intertwined. Hence the fact that what follows after the exhortation to build the multitude is a long, concluding image of an entire city in movement, a political city conformed of people as much as songs, buildings, and streets, all of which share agency:

Sobre las calles derrumbadas de sol, las suelas del cansancio sellan la protesta. Veréis acudir los edificios en tropel de las ciudades trogloditas, caídas en las falanges erizadas de gritos. Las canciones incendiadas levantarán sus garras de coraje. Sobre la impavidez de los letreros, encaramad los hurras; y poned en ruta los tejados que se asoman con su ciega paciencia. Arrojad sobre el firme silencio, los discursos que dilapidan el enojo, y al quebrar con vuestras amenazas las vidrieras del día, en la cumbre del horizonte desterrado, las banderas agitarán sus voces.

ELLA al

FIN

florecerá nuevamente en la perspectiva.²⁴¹ (106)

Who is that “ella” that reappears in the horizon of the urban multitude, this anonymous feminine figure that List Arzubide describes as the “solemne mujer del crepúsculo” right before the address? Is it the multitude as such (*la multitud*), or is it the nation (*la nación*), or even the revolution (*la revolución*)? The question is open and the answer may be the intersection of these three possible answers: a revolutionary nation built by the multitude and modeled, according to the *estridentistas* in Jalapa, in the aesthetico-political “laboratory” of Veracruz.

Horizonte’s reflections and List Arzubide’s notion of the multitude pose that a certain spatial production, in this case through networked infrastructures, is necessary in order to incorporate the working-class masses into a popular political structure. In this sense, they represent an early configuration of the “proletarian cities” of the *cardenismo* that we will explore in the next chapter. As Thomas Benjamin explains, some of the political experiments carried out by regional political figures such as Jara did in fact inform the *cardenista* political regime of the 1930s. By the late 1920s, however, the Calles administration had begun a process of political centralization meant to reduce the autonomy of regional *caciques* and powerful governors, particularly the ones with more radical ideas regarding what the revolution was and what the postrevolutionary state should be than the more conciliatory and liberal position held from the center. Ultimately, this process culminated in the creation of the PNR in 1929, meant to operate as a political party that integrated under a central authority the different revolutionary factions. Considered one of the more radical figures, and one whose labor-oriented government antagonized national and foreign companies in Veracruz, Jara represented one of the regional leaders who had to be controlled or displaced. The *coup*

²⁴¹ Germán List Arzubide, *El movimiento*, 106.

d'état that overthrew him in September 1927 represented an abrupt end not only to his political program, but also to *Horizonte* and *estridentismo* in general. The conditions were nevertheless in place for the professional, liberal, and expert-driven notion of urban planning and reconstruction that we find in a magazine such as *Planificación*, to which we now turn.

Regulation and Growth: *Planificación* (1927-1929)

The first period of *Planificación*, directed by architect Carlos Contreras and engineer Francisco Antúnez Echagaray (who were also their main contributors), appeared on a monthly basis from September 1927 to August 1928 and then bimonthly until March 1929.²⁴² *Planificación* was the publishing organ of the Asociación Nacional para la Planificación de la República Mexicana, also directed by Contreras. In consequence, several articles in the magazine have the explicit purpose of institutionalizing urban planning as a discipline in postrevolutionary Mexico. In issue number 14, for example, Contreras proposes the creation of an urban planning major within the National University, as well as a “fondo para la planificación de México” and an urban planning governmental dependency in Mexico City.²⁴³ As I will discuss in detail below, in and through the magazine, Contreras and other members of the association constantly negotiate the place of urban planning experts within the postrevolutionary state apparatus. Contreras, Antúnez Echagaray, and other contributors of the magazine (including students of Contreras who would become important architects such as Juan O’Gorman and Mauricio M. Campos) consistently advance their different urban projects of varying scales, draft proposals for urban planning regulations, or theoretical interventions as professional propositions grounded in technical knowledge and disciplinary rigor.²⁴⁴ In their view, infrastructural reconstruction has to be understood as a calculated, planned, and regulated modernization process overseen by technocratic experts on the matter.

It is from this particular angle that *Planificación* returns to questions of circulation and communication when reflecting on networked infrastructures –particularly roads– as political and economic agents of reconstruction. In the editorial to issue number 9, for instance, *Planificación* makes a critique of the economic losses that result from an unplanned “circulatory system” of roads, which makes circulation of merchandise and people ineffective, impractical, and redundant:

Es importante hacer una estimación de las pérdidas debidas a demoras causadas por la congestión en el tráfico o innecesarios transportes; por el doble o triple manejo de las mercancías, cuando una sola operación bastaría, ya que esto significará un argumento que tienda a probar la utilidad y valor económico de un plano de ciudad,

²⁴² The second period of the magazine, directed by Enrique Schulz, appeared from 1933 to 1936. I am citing from the digital edition of the magazine published by UNAM Raíces Digital in 2008. When quoting, I will thus indicate the issue number and the page number corresponding to that issue as it appears in the digital version.

²⁴³ Carlos Contreras, “Proyecto para la carrera de Planificador de Ciudades en la Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes de la Universidad Nacional,” *Planificación* 14 (1929): 12-14.

²⁴⁴ For a general account of *Planificación* and an analysis of its sections and contents, see Gerardo Sánchez Ruiz and Alejandrina Escudero’s introductory studies for the digital version in UNAM Raíces Digital: <https://fa.unam.mx/editorial/wordpress/wp-content/Files/raices/RD07/7.pdf> Last accessed: November 28, 2019. Alejandrina Escudero’s *Una ciudad noble y lógica* (México: UNAM, 2018) provides an exhaustive analysis of the life and work of Carlos Contreras, including the years of *Planificación*.

al proveerse mediante su ejecución nuevas condiciones en el funcionamiento del organismo urbano.²⁴⁵

The solution, as we will discuss below, is the creation of a city plan in which experts design the road and street network according to technical studies of traffic flows, maps, or new available technologies such as aerial photo-topography. In an article devoted to “La fototopografía aérea y sus aplicaciones prácticas,” for example, Antúnez Echegaray argues that one of its possible practical uses is to map, calculate, and plan efficient traffic routes. Aerial photo-topography, he writes, allows the urban planner to make “el recuento de automóviles y carros, estudiándose en los cruceros las corrientes de tráfico, a fin de poder establecer relaciones entre el número de autos comprendidos dentro de un área y la velocidad, así como la cantidad de éstos que pasan por un cruce dentro de un tiempo dado.”²⁴⁶ The implication is that, through such technologies and methods, traffic engineering is henceforth a task for which experts may provide calculated and scientifically backed solutions.

Antúnez Echegaray also contributes throughout the magazine with a series of articles that reflect on the importance of planning national networks of communication such as roads and airplane routes. In issue number 6, Antúnez Echegaray thus presents an “Anteproyecto de rutas aéreas para la República Mexicana,” where he designs a comprehensive map of possible airplane routes that would connect the capital city of every state, as well as other important industrial towns (Figure 3).²⁴⁷ For him, not unlike what we discussed in *El Universal Ilustrado*, networked infrastructures such as roads and airplane routes entailed the material production of a politically and economically integrated national space. This is particularly clear in an article he writes on the isolation of the southeastern region. Antúnez Echegaray argues that, given that the region is mostly disconnected from the rest of the country (particularly from the center), it represents a territory whose economical potential has not been exploited yet. Furthermore, its isolation explains the success of local forms of authority that challenge the stability of the federal government and the integration of a national space: “esta falta de comunicaciones o la deficiencia en las mismas, en su caso, solo ha servido para favorecer el despotismo local y estorbar la consolidación definitiva de la República. [...] La tardanza en la represión y la falta de control verdadero por parte del Gobierno Federal vigoriza las ambiciones locales, así como las tendencias separatistas.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ “Editorial,” *Planificación* 9 (1928): 4.

²⁴⁶ Francisco Antúnez Echegaray, “La fototopografía aérea y sus aplicaciones prácticas,” *Planificación* 5 (1928): 13.

²⁴⁷ Francisco Antúnez Echegaray, “Anteproyecto de rutas aéreas para la República Mexicana,” *Planificación* 6 (1928): 26-28.

²⁴⁸ Francisco Antúnez Echegaray, “El problema de las comunicaciones y el turismo en el Sureste de la República,” *Planificación* 5 (1928): 21.



Figure 3: Francisco Antúnez Echagaray, “Anteproyecto de rutas aéreas para la República Mexicana,” *Planificación*, 6 (1928): 27.

But perhaps it is an anonymous article from the second issue of the magazine titled “Caminos” where *Planificación*’s understanding of the political and economic agency of networked infrastructures becomes theoretically more transparent. The article argues that los caminos contribuirán a una racional distribución de la alimentación y las riquezas, uniformando y reduciendo el costo de vida y creando, de consiguiente, un bienestar general; economizarán tiempo y dinero, contribuyendo al desarrollo de la agricultura y creándole mayor número de mercados. Al comunicar entre sí las regiones y los pueblos más apartados de la República, los caminos crearán un intercambio de ideas, establecerán la comunión espiritual de todos sus habitantes, unificarán sus tendencias y sus ideales, borrarán los odios provinciales y crearán un verdadero espíritu nacional.²⁴⁹

To begin with, it must be noted that the article employs the future tense in order to give its theory a more categorical sense of certainty than what the conditional or the subjunctive would imply. The first part of the argument presents a liberal understanding of the economic agency of roads and the importance of circulation. The article presents the idea that, by means of establishing the material network that makes possible efficient circulation and creates new markets throughout the territory, roads by themselves will produce a “rational distribution” of wealth. This is another way of saying that, provided with a material network that makes the permanent circulation of capitals, goods, and people possible, the market will regulate and find a balance by itself. A proper circulatory system of roads, then, will establish the

²⁴⁹ “Caminos,” *Planificación* 2 (1927): 28. My highlights.

conditions for the market's mechanisms of growth, distribution, and uniformization to operate correctly, which will ultimately result in the population's "bienestar general."

Similarly, the second part of the argument presents a liberal theory of national unification and the emergence of a so-called "national spirit" based on the exchanges among individuals. This theory is at odds with *Horizonte's* understanding of roads and the radio as networked infrastructures through which "new ideas" articulated by avant-garde artists and progressive governments could be broadcasted to the masses. In this sense, it is also at odds with someone like José Vasconcelos, closer to the thinking of the *estridentistas* on this matter. For him, the creation of a "national spirit" was an aesthetico-political process in which avant-garde artists such as the muralists played the fundamental role of shaping it, then to be disseminated through the network of public education.²⁵⁰ *Planificación*, however, presents the idea that a road network would provide the means for individuals to circulate, communicate, and enter in contact with each other, thus *exchanging* "ideas," "tendencies," and "ideals." Not unlike the self-regulation of the market, it is this continuous process of free cultural exchange among individuals what will ultimately decant into a "national spirit," not a discourse organized and disseminated from above as we saw in *Horizonte*.

Albeit unmentioned by the article in question, the tacit element that connects both parts of the argument is freedom, both of individuals and of the market. As Foucault argues in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, liberal governmentality

is a consumer of freedom inasmuch as it can only function insofar as a number of freedoms actually exist: freedom of the market, freedom to buy and sell, the free exercise of property rights, freedom of discussion, possible freedom of expression, and so on. The new governmental reason needs freedom therefore, the new art of government consumes freedom [...] which means that it must produce it. It must produce it, it must organize it.²⁵¹

In *Planificación*, the effort to organize freedom appears in relation to spatial and economic planning in general and the device of the "Plano Regulador" in particular. As we will discuss below, planning reveals *Planificación's* liberalism as a technocratic one that does support state intervention, but only insofar as it emerges from technical and scientific knowledge and is directed at securing the organized development of economic and population processes. *Planificación's* members were indeed close to Alberto J. Pani –then Secretary of the Treasury– and other bureaucrats that would later form the Oficina de Investigaciones Industriales within the Banco de México in "promoting an activist, autonomous state capable of directing economic development toward both growth and collective welfare" by means of technocratic planning.²⁵² In this sense, the model for reconstruction in *Planificación* is one that believes in the modernizing development of the nation and its capitalist economy directed from above and from the center by a technocratic state whose purpose is to secure

²⁵⁰ For more on this, see: Claude Fell, *José Vasconcelos: Los años del águila*. See also Luis Carranza's chapter on the architecture and murals of the SEP building in relation to Vasconcelos' racial theories in *Architecture as Revolution*.

²⁵¹ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (New York: Picador, 2004), 63.

²⁵² Susan M. Gauss, *Made*, 8.

mechanisms of concerted growth and distribution of wealth that ultimately aspire to collective welfare or, as they put it in the article quoted above, the “bienestar general” of the population.

Throughout the first period of the magazine, *Planificación* exhibits different efforts directed at creating a “Plano Regulador” for Mexico City and its surroundings, which in these years is reorganizing politically into the nation’s Federal District. Diane Davis explains that Madero’s 1911 reestablishment of local municipalities in Mexico City “with the aim of marking a break from the immediate past and legitimizing his rule among populations in the capital” backfired, particularly in regards to coordination of urban services, shared economic resources, and political stability.²⁵³ By 1928, Mexico City thus reorganized into the Federal District governed by a centralized Department of the Federal District (DDF) and headed by a mayor (or *Regente*) appointed by the president of Mexico. From *Planificación*’s perspective, this centralizing political process in the city became an opportunity to advocate for a “Plano Regulador” that could guide Mexico City’s transformation into a unified and governable political entity.

Indeed, since the very first issue, Contreras is already advocating the need for an urban plan for Mexico City and Mexican cities in general. In issue number seven (March 1928), they present the association’s “Comité del Plano Regional de la Ciudad de México y Alrededores” that includes, among other things, commissions on roads and communications, on industry and resources, on housing and recreation, on public education, on hygiene, and on registration of historical landmarks. By December 1928 (issue number 13), Contreras suggests that the newly established Department of the Federal District should include among its dependencies a special consulting commission in charge of producing a regulating plan for Mexico City. Furthermore, he argues, such a commission already exists in the form of the “Comité del Plano Regional” presented months back in the pages of *Planificación*.²⁵⁴

In *Planificación*’s view, the “Plano Regulador” would operate as a normative device that, in general terms, would standardize infrastructure and establish a series of regulations and restrictions in order to organize urban space according to what they understand as a rational and harmonious distribution of people, services, and urban functions. Graham and Marvin have argued in *Splintering Urbanism* that during this period, by means of city plans such as the one envisioned by *Planificación*, “small, fragmented islands of infrastructure were joined up, integrated and consolidated towards standardized, regulated networks designed to deliver predictable, dependable services across (and, increasingly, beyond) the metropolis.”²⁵⁵ In this sense, *Planificación* claims that the “Plano Regulador” will secure the efficient functioning of the city, among other things, by integrating the city’s historically uncontrolled growth and its resulting disorganized spatial and infrastructural distribution into a single, coherent, networked city. As we will detail below, the “Plano Regulador” would operate as the normative grid of the city: first of all, a spatial or topographic grid that both divided the city in sections and connected them appropriately by means of the road network or “circulatory system;” but also the grid of regulations that determined the possibilities of

²⁵³ Diane Davis, *Urban*, 29.

²⁵⁴ Carlos Contreras, “¿Comisión o Departamento del Distrito Federal?,” *Planificación* 13 (1928): 13-22.

²⁵⁵ Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering*, 40.

what could happen or not in certain sections of the city by means of zoning, land restrictions, or development plans for certain areas.

Contreras conceives this entire process as a technical endeavor. The “Plano Regulador” for Mexico City should be the result of a series of studies, maps, proposals, and projects covering multiple aspects of urban life, from economics and politics to hygiene and recreation. It would begin by providing an exhaustive understanding of the city in matters regarding its geography and resources, its historical development and growth, its population (through census and statistics), its public health situation, its political organization, or its service provision, among other things. These studies would provide a clear picture of the characteristics, deficiencies, problems, and potentials of the city, to which the “Plano Regulador” would respond with a series of projects, proposals, norms, and regulations. All of these, in turn, would have to coalesce into the single diagram of a coherent and organized urban space, the “Plano Regulador.” As Contreras describes it,

TODO ESTO lo expresa en forma GRÁFICA en un espléndido documento que se llama el PLANO DE CIUDAD, en donde queda grabado, en forma de LEY, el desarrollo ordenado y armonioso que habrá de seguir la CIUDAD de acuerdo con su topografía, su clima, su VIDA FUNCIONAL, SOCIAL y ECONÓMICA, de acuerdo con su historia y su tradición y de acuerdo a todas sus necesidades presentes y futuras.²⁵⁶

The “Plano,” in short, would conduct, by means of an exhaustive technical knowledge, the organized development of Mexico City and the region that surrounds it. In effect, one of the main concerns of *Planificación*, as may be clear from this quote, revolves around controlling growth, both in terms of economic development and spatial expansion, by means of economic and urban planning. The “Plano Regulador” would thus employ technical knowledge and technocratic expertise in order to direct and oversee urban (and regional) growth and development. According to *Planificación*, this meant that the “Plano” would exercise a rationalizing and harmonizing operation on urban space: it would make it rational, calculated, exact; it would correct all the historical deficiencies that, beginning with the conquest of the city-lake, resulted in a chaotic metropolis. As a liberal publication that, as Foucault argues, conceives economic and population processes as natural—in the sense that they are believed to work through their own, intrinsic laws—, rationalization implies here the production of an optimal space for economic development and political governability. In this sense, the “Plano Regulador” constitutes what Michael Foucault calls, in relation to the liberal organization of freedom we quoted above, a mechanism of security: a device of “state intervention with the essential function of ensuring the security of the natural phenomena of economic processes or processes intrinsic to the population.”²⁵⁷ In *Planificación*’s third issue, Raymond Unwin

²⁵⁶ Carlos Contreras, “¿Qué cosa es la planificación de ciudades y de regiones?” *Planificación* 1 (1927): 5. For a detailed description of the Plano Regulador’s categories, see the following articles in *Planificación*: Carlos Contreras, “¿Qué cosa es la planificación de ciudades y de regiones?” (No. 1, 4-5); “Comité del Plano Regional de la Ciudad de México y Alrededores” (No. 7, 21-23); “El Plano Regulador del D.F.” (No. 13, 4).

²⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *Security*, 353.

provides an organic metaphor for the city's growth that further insists on urban planning as a naturalizing device:

Una ciudad debería crecer como otros organismos, por medio de la expansión relacionada de todas sus partes, como el niño crece hasta la virilidad, no engordando simplemente, sino logrando que sus miembros, su cerebro y los demás órganos se desarrollen juntos y en proporción hasta alcanzar la estatura máxima. De ahí en adelante, cualquier crecimiento adicional debe efectuarse no por la inflación adicional del cuerpo, sino por la obtención de nuevos cuerpos y la formación de familias o grupos.²⁵⁸

A city, understood by Unwin as a living organism, may grow in two different ways. On the one hand, it may grow “unnaturally,” without proportion, organization, or coherence, a process tantamount to gaining fat. On the other hand, it may grow “naturally,” either by developing its multiple organs and members in proportion to the whole body or by reproducing and forming families or groups (an image of a central city with a series of regional satellites surrounding it). Unwin thus conceptualizes urban planning and city plans as naturalizing devices insofar as their purpose is to direct urban growth according to a “natural” proportion and a harmonic extension of its members and offspring.

Provided with the metaphor of the body, *Planificación* and Carlos Contreras' ideas on urban planning concentrate on two aspects in particular. First, on providing a functional “circulatory system” of roads and streets, as we discussed above. Alejandrina Escudero indeed argues that the different preliminary studies, proposals, and projects Contreras drafted for the “Plano Regulador” all coincide in that “se le daba prioridad a las vialidades como el eje de la modernización de la ciudad.”²⁵⁹ A planned system of roads and streets would provide the material network to unify urban space into a coherent, circulating whole. In other words, the “circulatory system” would operate as the infrastructural grid of the city, dividing, connecting, integrating, and marking the limits of the city all at the same time.

The second aspect has to do with organizing the different “organs” and “members” of the city's body, or *zoning*. In the editorial to issue number 8, *Planificación* claims that there are “tres fases primarias de la vida, a saber: el trabajo, el recreo y el sueño, cada una de las cuales ocupa aproximadamente una tercera parte del día de un adulto normal. [...] Para obtener condiciones saludables y normales en las ciudades, la *vida del hogar* tiene que separarse en cuanto a lugar de la *vida de trabajo*.”²⁶⁰ As we saw in the discussion of urban “promiscuity” in Alberto J. Pani's *La higiene en México* in Chapter 1, modern urban thinkers such as Pani or Contreras believe that the ideal urban space is one in which the different uses or functions of the city have to be strictly separated. It is this separation of industrial zones from residential and commercial ones, work from home, commerce from residence, what ultimately gives order to a city by concentrating service provisions where necessary, organizing traffic flows accordingly, or restricting movements in certain parts of the city. Zoning (*zonificación*) represents the planning operation in charge of dissecting urban space

²⁵⁸ Raymond Unwin, “La distribución de una ciudad,” *Planificación* 3 (1927): 5.

²⁵⁹ Alejandrina Escudero, *Una ciudad*, 224.

²⁶⁰ “Editorial,” *Planificación* 8 (1928): 5.

and determining the multiple functional nuclei of the city, thus establishing a series of controls and regulations on what can happen in a certain space, who can use it, for what reasons, and with what purposes. The expected result would be the production of a city where spatial organization itself becomes a mechanism of management and government.

From *Planificación*'s perspective –and Carlos Contreras specifically–, the “Plano Regulador” for Mexico City would be a first effort that could then become a model for urban and regional planning across the nation. Ultimately, *Planificación* advocated for nation-wide spatial and economic planning as an organized and concerted effort at reconstructive modernization led by technocratic knowledge. National planning would entail three different aspects, not at all different from the model of the “Plano Regulador.” First, a circulatory network of roads, trains, and airplane routes that secured communication and permanent circulation of goods, capital, and people, thus operating as the infrastructural grid of the nation itself. Second, a system of forest reserves. And third, “la Zonificación Nacional abarcando las fuentes de abastecimiento de materias primas, regiones agrícolas, mineras, caídas de agua, nuestra organización política y nuestras condiciones raciales.”²⁶¹ As in urban space, national zoning would dissect and plan the organization of the territory according to a series of studies regarding geography, resources, and demographics, securing in this way – according to them– the most efficient course for the economic development and modernization of Mexico.

As we mentioned above, planning, both at the scale of the city and at the scale of the nation, qualifies *Planificación*'s liberalism as a technocratic one that believes in state intervention to the extent that this intervention emerges from a technical standpoint. For *Planificación*, the state should have an administrative function rather than a political one: it should be conformed by experts that planned, directed, managed, and administered the nation according to knowledge instead of politics. They claim as much when they declare, in the editorial to issue number 13, “no queremos política en el gobierno de la ciudad, queremos una administración buena y honrada.”²⁶² As Susan Gauss explains, “technocrats were concerned about the political excesses that had characterized previous state interventions” and saw spatial and economic planning as a neutral, scientific, and technical endeavor that best represented the administrative function a state should have and the best means toward economic development and collective welfare.²⁶³

In response to these ideas and to the changing political landscape in Mexico City and the country in general, *Planificación* actively negotiates in its pages the place of experts –in this case urban planners– within the state apparatus, and has a relative success doing so. In *Planificación*'s twelfth issue, they propose the creation in Mexico City of a “Comisión Técnico-Consultiva de Planificación” formed by urban planning experts belonging to civil society. This commission would serve in a strictly consulting capacity within a “Comité de Planificación” with executive functions, itself a dependency of a municipal council.²⁶⁴ In the

²⁶¹ Carlos Contreras, “El Congreso Internacional de la Habitación y de la Planificación de Ciudades,” *Planificación* 11, 10-11.

²⁶² “El Plano Regulador del D.F.,” *Planificación* 13 (1928): 4.

²⁶³ Susan M. Gauss, *Made*, 15.

²⁶⁴ “Editorial,” *Planificación* 12 (1928): 3-5.

next issue of the magazine, they propose the same “Comisión Técnico-Consultiva,” but now as the consulting wing of an executive “Departamento de Planificación.”²⁶⁵ In issue number 14, however, Carlos Contreras publishes a copy of a project for an “Oficina de Planificación” within the Department of the Federal District presented to the newly appointed head of the DDF, José Manuel Puig Caussauranc.²⁶⁶ In this project, urban planning experts are now integrated into government as public functionaries with executive functions, no longer just consulting experts.

The political processes of centralization taking place under the Calles regime – namely, the organization of the Federal District in 1928 and, nationally, the formation of the PNR in 1929– supported technocratic planning insofar as it represented a centralizing networking instrument. Susan Gauss argues that the *callista* confidence in technocratic planning resulted in the creation of economic planning commissions whose purpose was “to coordinate the various factors of production and allocate resources to maximize growth and distribution.”²⁶⁷ However, she further claims, “the regional focus of many of these studies and commissions indicates that federal intervention also sought to integrate regional producers and consumers into a national project for economic development as a means to undermine state-level challenges to callista authority. This motivation was especially decisive after the formation of the PNR in 1929.”²⁶⁸ Similarly, Diane Davis explains that by the early 1930s the Consejo Consultivo in Mexico City, a space where multiple political and social agents negotiated with each other and with the state, came to be dominated by technocrats who supported planning and large infrastructural public works.²⁶⁹

In this context, the Asociación Nacional para la Planificación de la República Mexicana directed by Carlos Contreras managed to gain support for the “Ley sobre la Planeación General de la República” (1930). This law promulgated the creation of two urban planning commissions at a federal level: first, a “Comisión de Planificación” formed by civil society members with expertise who would serve in a consulting capacity; second, a “Comisión de Programa” with executive capacity and which Carlos Conteras, following *Planificación*’s model of a technocratic administrative state, envisioned in the following manner: “un verdadero Estado Mayor de técnicos planificadores, ingenieros municipales, etcétera que sean los directores de las obras públicas, en lo que hace al trazado de las poblaciones.”²⁷⁰ As Alejandrina Escudero explains, Carlos Conteras became the head of the executive “Comisión del Programa” until 1932, thus securing a place within the state apparatus. The central task of this commission was creating a nation-wide plan provisionally titled –because it was never fully realized– *Plano Nacional México*.

Although neither the Mexico City “Plano Regulador” or the nation-wide *Plano Nacional México* were ever realized and the *cardenista* regime represented a change of tides

²⁶⁵ Carlos Contreras, “¿Comisión?,” 13-22.

²⁶⁶ Carlos Conteras, “Proyecto para la creación de una Oficina de Planificación,” *Planificación* 14 (1929): 19-20.

²⁶⁷ Susan M. Gauss, *Made*, 40.

²⁶⁸ Susan M. Gauss, *Made*, 46.

²⁶⁹ Diane Davis, *Urban*, 81.

²⁷⁰ In Alejandrina Escudero, *Una ciudad*, 191.

that did not precisely favor *Planificación*'s technocratic liberalism, it is clear from the discussion above that *Planificación* did manage to build a place for urban planners among the different political forces advancing models for postrevolutionary reconstruction and modernization. In this sense, the magazine's ideas on urban planning as means to direct the organized spatial and economic development of the city did exert an important influence in later discussions and projects regarding urban space and the spatial organization of a welfare state in Mexico, as we will see in the remaining chapters.



Figure 4: Tina Modotti. “Cables de Teléfono.”

In her photograph “Cables de Teléfono” (Figure 4), Tina Modotti suggests that modernization, symbolized by the telephone cables, is above all a networking enterprise. And indeed, throughout the chapter we have explored how cultural periodicals registering and participating in the spatial transformation of cities such as Jalapa or Mexico City conceive networked infrastructures such as roads, traffic systems, telephone cables, radio stations, and city plans as political, economic, and social agents of reconstruction in Mexico precisely because of their networking capacity. Although from different perspectives and with different projects in mind, these periodicals all share the belief that networked infrastructures have the capacity to integrate space into functional political and economic entities by means of the connection, extension, and communication efficiency of the networks. In this sense, discussions on networked cities –on how and why to build cities and regions in Mexico that were better connected and integrated– became, as we have shown, an important site of theoretical speculation and practical experimentation on the possible configurations of the postrevolutionary political, economic, and social space of the nation. The urban speculations

and projects of the *cardenista* regime during the following decade, to which we now turn, thus establish a continuous dialogue and dispute with them.

The Proletarian City

Housing, Social Reproduction, and the Urban Commune in the Cardenista 1930s

In a 1938 congress on housing and urban planning in Mexico City, the Unión de Arquitectos Socialistas (UAS) presented their *Proyecto de ciudad obrera para México DF*, a proposal to build an industrial city of 200,000 inhabitants north of Mexico City in which workers would collectively own property and organize life cooperatively.²⁷¹ The UAS architects modeled the guiding architectural and political ideas behind their project through a series of texts, maps, diagrams, and time-tables, giving particular weight to their housing prototype: a three-story, functionalist building with small apartments for adult couples, dormitories for children, and collective facilities such as bathrooms, dining commons, and laundry rooms. As Enrique de Anda explains, in their housing prototype, the UAS architects were following Moisei Ginzburg's "communal houses" developed in the USSR in the 1920s, particularly Ginzburg's *Narkomfin* building.²⁷² Developed in Moscow in 1928-29, Ginzburg planned a housing development organized around four buildings: one for apartments, one for collective uses, one for a common laundry facility, and the last one for a childcare facility (this one was never built). The idea was to devise an experimental housing model in which inhabitants would begin to practice socialist principles of common property, shared cooperative labor, and collective habitation.²⁷³

While the UAS certainly engaged with Ginzburg's architectural and political perspective, the project exceeded the housing question insofar as it presented a model for an entire urban space, including production zones, an administrative city center, and an agricultural zone meant to provide food for inhabitants. The project also included a program detailing how life in the city would be organized in terms of labor functions and times. This way, while housing was a central aspect of the UAS's model, so was creating a self-sustaining urban space and a program that rationalized the inhabitants' daily life with the objective of maximizing industrial output. Presented at the zenith of Lázaro Cárdenas's leftist presidency (1934-1940) and its political program of national industrialization, the UAS was aiming to introduce a radical socialist position in the debates of the period over social housing, urban planning, and industrial productivity. As I will discuss at length below, these debates and early architectural proposals represented a contested terrain within the disciplines of architecture and urban planning throughout the 1930s.

In the most comprehensive discussion of *Proyecto de ciudad obrera* available at this point, Enrique de Anda argues that, in the project, "la actitud ideológica del grupo avanzó hacia una posición ortodoxa al tomar como referente a la Unión Soviética."²⁷⁴ De Anda

²⁷¹ Unión de Arquitectos Socialistas, *Proyecto de ciudad obrera para México DF* (Mexico City: XVI Congreso Internacional de la Planificación y de la Habitación, 1938). Four young architects composed the UAS: Alberto T. Arai, Raúl Cacho, Enrique Guerrero, and Balbino Hernández. Urban planner Carlos Contreras was behind the organization of the congress. For more on Contreras and the congress, see: Alejandrina Escudero, *Una ciudad noble y lógica* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2018).

²⁷² Enrique de Anda, *Vivienda colectiva de la modernidad mexicana* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2008), 167.

²⁷³ Daniel Movilla and Carmen Espegel, "Hacia la nueva sociedad comunista: la casa de transición del Narkomfin, epílogo de una investigación," *Hábitat y Habitar* 9 (2013): 26-49.

²⁷⁴ Enrique de Anda, *Vivienda*, 163.

further suggests that the UAS's experimental urban model was merely a theoretical device used by the group in order to intervene with a socialist position in the debates over how to build social housing for the working classes in Mexico. According to de Anda, the architects were too young to consider their project feasible and, more importantly, the project proposed a radical transformation of urban life, "un modelo de vivienda totalmente ajeno a la cultura urbana de México."²⁷⁵ De Anda employs these two arguments to claim that the objective of the UAS's model was exclusively speculative, a theoretical attempt to question the role of socialist architecture and imagine a possible socialist production of urban space. In the end, he considers *Proyecto de Ciudad Obrera* only a "precursor" to the high-rise housing developments commonly known in Mexico as *multifamiliares* that dominated housing policy from the 1940s to the 1970s in Mexico City.²⁷⁶

It is certainly true that the UAS architects were looking in the political and cultural direction of the USSR and the *Komintern*. The UAS was part of a series of avant-garde groups, unions, and artistic collectives that, in the 1930s, radicalized their political position following the USSR's cultural directives, "claimed close affinity with the urban working class... [and] presented themselves as vanguards responsible for enlightening and politically orienting a reluctant working class."²⁷⁷ De Anda is in part right to argue that this represented an orthodox turn in the avant-garde, as I will show in a discussion of the "proletarian literature" movement in Veracruz in the following section. This will also become clear in the UAS's insistence on rationalizing urban space to maximize industrial efficiency. However, it is important to note that, for their housing model, the UAS drew from Moisei Ginzburg, who belonged to the experimental avant-garde of the 1920s in the USSR. Boris Groys explains that this was a highly utopian period in the Soviet avant-garde insofar as many artistic groups believed in the potential of using their art as a vehicle to experiment with possible models for the construction of an emancipated postrevolutionary society. As Boris Groys argues, the constructivists, for instance, "the constructivists themselves regarded their constructions not as self-sufficient works of art, but as models of a new world, a laboratory for developing a unitary plan for conquering the material that was the world."²⁷⁸

Vladimir Paperny further explains that Moisei Ginzburg belonged to a group of architects that, in the late 1920s, exhibited "a renewed push to realize some of the Marxist ideals, such as reducing the traditional role of the family, transforming private housekeeping into a social industry, making care and education of the children a public affair, [and] the emancipation of women."²⁷⁹ In short, architects such as Ginzburg sustained a rather unorthodox avant-garde faith in architecture's potential to radically transform social

²⁷⁵ Enrique de Anda, *Vivienda*, 163.

²⁷⁶ Enrique de Anda's work is focused on the *multifamiliares*. His discussion of *Proyecto de ciudad obrera* is part of the "precursors," along with unbuilt projects by Juan O'Gorman and ex-director of the Bauhaus Hannes Meyer. See: Enrique de Anda, *Vivienda*, 143-193.

²⁷⁷ John Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat: Artists and Labor in Revolutionary Mexico, 1908-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 4-5.

²⁷⁸ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 22.

²⁷⁹ Vladimir Paperny, "Narkomfin Narratives: Dreams and Realities," *Recentering-Periphery*, accessed April 5, 2021. <http://www.recentering-periphery.org/narkomfin-narratives/>

reproduction practices, understanding the latter as the labor, responsibilities, and costs necessary to sustain life.²⁸⁰ By appealing to Ginzburg in their project, the UAS was thus recovering in the Mexican 1930s a line of experimental socialist architecture that drew from the utopian urban models of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, the cooperative movement, and the radical utopianism of the revolutionary avant-garde in both Europe and Mexico.²⁸¹

The chapter will begin with a discussion of the “proletarian literature” movement in Veracruz as an example of some of the politically engaged collectives of avant-garde artists that, in the 1930s, radicalized their position following the Third International’s socialist realism directives. Specifically, I will discuss the reconstruction of 1922 tenant strikes in Veracruz that appears in José Mancisidor’s socialist realist novel *La ciudad roja*. Mancisidor uses the novel, as we shall see, to provide a critical analysis of the anarchist organization of the tenant strikes from a socialist perspective. His novel was thus meant to clear the path towards a disciplined, organized, and firmly led proletarian revolution. The urban question of rent and tenant exploitation in the novel, in turn, will set the stage to reconstruct, in the following section, the urban debates on social housing taking place throughout the 1930s in order to frame and understand the UAS’s politically socialist and architecturally functionalist position in these debates. Then, I will briefly discuss the housing policy of the *Cardenismo* (1934-1940) in Mexico City, a political project that deemed itself as a socialist. This will allow me to discuss the UAS’s position and proposal in relation to the *Cardenismo*, insofar as the UAS identified with it. Finally, I will discuss in detail *Proyecto de ciudad obrera*, recognizing two sides of the project, the production side and the social reproduction side. Mario Tronti’s notion of the “social factory” and Michel Foucault’s discussion of discipline in spaces of confinement such as the factory will allow me to examine the UAS’s insistence on providing an urban program meant to maximize industrial productivity. I will argue that this constitutes an aspect of the project deeply aligned with the *cardenista* objectives of controlling and organizing the labor movement to foster industrialization in Mexico. In turn, contemporary feminist theorists such as Tithi Bhattacharya, Verónica Gago, and Luci Cavallero will allow me to discuss critically the UAS’s proposal to collectivize social reproduction, relieving the traditional family from the labor, costs, and responsibilities involved in it. As we will see, collectivizing social reproduction through spatial design and a cooperative political organization is what ultimately allowed the UAS to vindicate the revolutionary potential of architecture and imagine an urban space commonly owned by the workers. In this sense, the social reproduction side of the project reveals the experimental socialist currents that the UAS was drawing from. I will argue that, in the debates over social housing and urban planning, the UAS architects employed their *Proyecto de ciudad obrera* as a device meant to sway the *cardenista* government and the leftist architecture camp towards a utopian and experimental socialist position.

²⁸⁰ Johanna Brenner and Barbara Laslett, “Gender, Social Reproduction, and Women’s Self-Organization: Considering the US Welfare State,” *Gender & Society* 5, no. 3 (1991): 314.

²⁸¹ In the Mexican case, artists such as Leopoldo Méndez, Diego Rivera, Tina Modotti, Ramón Alva de la Canal, and others had belonged to the radical futurist *Estridentismo* in the 1920s. In the 1930s, they became part of important groups in the socialist avant-garde such as the Taller de Gráfica Popular or the ¡30-30!. For more on this, see: Tatiana Flores, *Mexico’s Revolutionary Avant-Gardes: From Estridentismo to ¡30-30!* (New Haven and London: Duke University Press, 2013).

The Red Lettered City

In 1932, socialist writer and politician José Mancisidor published the novel *La ciudad roja: novela proletaria*, part of an emerging collective project of “proletarian literature” in postrevolutionary Mexico that defended socialist realism as a revolutionary literary strategy.²⁸² Born in the state of Veracruz, the “proletarian literature” project was one of the different artistic groups, collectives, and discipline-specific unions organized by politically engaged avant-garde artists throughout the 1930s. These groups, as John Lear explains in *Picturing the Proletariat*, radicalized their position following the cultural directives of the Stalinist USSR, understanding their practice as having the function of appealing and organizing the working class along a socialist position.²⁸³ After 1934, brought together by the radical organization LEAR (Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios), some of these groups would thrive in the context of Lázaro Cárdenas’s leftist presidency (1934-40) and its support of the officially sanctioned working class movement.²⁸⁴

In *La ciudad roja*, Mancisidor presents a novelized rewriting of the momentous 1922 tenant strikes in Veracruz and the formation of the SRI –Sindicato Revolucionario de Inquilinos or Revolutionary Tenants’ Syndicate– that paralyzed the city (as well as other cities in Mexico) and had political repercussions that lasted well into the 1930s.²⁸⁵ *La ciudad roja* stages a particular version of these events, undertaking a historical rewriting of the episode and Mancisidor’s own argument regarding the importance and legacy of the tenant strikes in Veracruz. While employing a third-person narrator, the novel closely follows the point of view of the SRI’s leader, Juan Manuel in the novel. The plot advances linearly through the trajectory, development, and fall of the social movement. As a matter of fact, as Edith Negrín explains, each chapter’s title represents a stage in the tenant strikes: El Lanzamiento, el Mitin, La Sesión, and so forth.²⁸⁶ The novel thus begins by presenting the evictions that galvanized the proletarian population of Veracruz, describes the initial organization of the SRI, the first direct actions, and the transformation of the tenant buildings or *vecindades* into a self-governed workers’ commune. The plot then describes the disputes within the SRI, the incarceration of the leader, and the movement’s lack of organization that ultimately leads to the SRI’s downfall and the massacre of the strikers by the State’s forces.

²⁸² I will be quoting from the most recent edition of the novel, published by the Universidad Veracruzana in 1995 with a prologue by critic Sixto Rodríguez.

²⁸³ John Lear, *Picturing*, 13.

²⁸⁴ Through the Secretary of Education and other governmental institutions, the *cardenista* federal government hired and sponsored many of these artists, as John Lear discusses extensively in *Picturing the Proletariat*. For a historical overview of the *Cardenismo*, see Alan Knight’s “The Rise and Fall of Cardenismo” in the compilation *Mexico Since Independence* edited by Leslie Bethell.

²⁸⁵ Urban historians such as Mauricio Perló Cohen and Diane Davis both explain that organized tenant groups represented important political actors throughout the 1920s and 30s, particularly in the cities of Veracruz but in other cities of the country as well, including Mexico City. See: Mauricio Perló Cohen, *Estado, vivienda y estructura urbana en el cardenismo* and Diane Davis, *Urban Leviathan*.

²⁸⁶ Edith Negrín, “*La ciudad roja* de José Mancisidor: una novela proletaria,” in *Actas del XI Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas*, edited by Juan Villegas (Irvine: AIH, 1992), 315-16.

The novel culminates with Juan Manuel's death at the hands of a repressive postrevolutionary State.

Criticism of the novel is in its initial stages and has mostly been devoted to the archaeological task of recovering the text from oblivion. Elissa J. Rashkin briefly comments on the novel in a recent historical account of the "proletarian literature" project in Veracruz that traces the project's different publications, members, editorial activity, and political standpoint.²⁸⁷ Edith Negrín offers a detailed narratological description of the novel's structure, themes, and style, although her article remains at a descriptive level.²⁸⁸ In his prologue to the most recent edition of the novel, Sixto Rodríguez situates *La ciudad roja* in its literary and historical contexts, while also insisting correctly on the importance of historical rewriting in Mancisidor's literary oeuvre in general.²⁸⁹ My own reading of the novel will build on the insights and information provided by these three critics who have managed to exhume *La ciudad roja* for contemporary readers and critics to analyze.²⁹⁰ However, it is important to note that all three critics feel compelled to explain *La ciudad roja*'s erasure from the canon of Mexican literature as a result of its overt socialist perspective and what they consider literary deficiencies deriving at least in part from this political standpoint. Rashkin thus advances the hypothesis that Mancisidor's novel and "proletarian literature" in general have received so little attention due to "la caducidad de la adulación estalinista y, en general, el simplismo ideológico."²⁹¹ Negrín similarly considers that the novel offers a rather simple "visión maniqueísta" that neatly and dogmatically divides characters between good and evil.²⁹² Rodríguez, finally, claims that the novel abuses in its "retórica revolucionaria... Este retoricismo al servicio de una ideología cercana al marxismo-leninismo constituye una falla de composición."²⁹³ According to Rodríguez, this prevents the author from developing complex characters or a compelling dramatic arc by remaining at the abstract ideological level, or the "dominio de las ideas."²⁹⁴ Regardless of Mancisidor's possible literary failures and ideological simplifications, it is also important to note that, in contrast to the visual arts, figures that defended literature's aesthetic autonomy from politics occupied hegemonic positions within the Mexican literary field from the 1930s onwards, as Ignacio Sánchez Prado explains in *Naciones intelectuales*. This circumstance, along with the

²⁸⁷ Elissa J. Rashkin, "La ruta integral: la literatura proletaria desde Veracruz," *Bibliographica* 3:1 (2020), 66-102.

²⁸⁸ Edith Negrín, "La ciudad," 314-322.

²⁸⁹ Sixto Rodríguez, "Prólogo," in José Mancisidor, *La ciudad roja* (Jalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1995): 7-32.

²⁹⁰ Besides these critical works, both *La ciudad roja* and "proletarian literature" have been included or mentioned in passing in historical accounts of Mexican literature, particularly within the so-called *novela de la revolución*. For instance, Antonio Castro Leal's 1974 anthology *La novela de la Revolución Mexicana* or Adalberto Dessau's 1973 panoramic *La novela de la Revolución Mexicana*. Bertín Ortega's *Utopías inquietantes: narrativa proletaria en México* constitutes the only monographic study on "proletarian literature" in Mexico, but its chapters are devoted to other novels than *La ciudad roja*.

²⁹¹ Elissa J. Rashkin, "La ruta," 96.

²⁹² Edith Negrín, "La ciudad," 318.

²⁹³ Sixto Rodríguez, "Prólogo," 27.

²⁹⁴ Sixto Rodríguez, "Prólogo," 28.

postrevolutionary State's conservative turn after 1940, left the "proletarian literature" project at a very precarious position within the Mexican literary field, which helps explain at a structural level its erasure from the canon of Mexican literature.²⁹⁵

Leaving value judgments on the novel aside, my reading of Mancisidor's *La ciudad roja* will concentrate on three aspects of the novel that may allow us to gain a better understanding of the text and of the literary and political stakes surrounding "proletarian literature" in 1930s Mexico. First, I will discuss Mancisidor's historical rewriting of the 1922 tenant strikes, the erasures as well as the specific framing of the events that took place in Veracruz a decade before Mancisidor's novel. Then I will analyze the novel's account of the communal urban space that emerged during the rent strikes, which the novel compares with the Paris Commune and summarizes under the notion of the "red city." As we will see, Mancisidor believes this represents the most important legacy of the SRI because it offered the fleeting image of a possible socialist future in Mexico. Finally, I will examine questions in *La ciudad roja* regarding the relationship between the artist-leader capable of imagining a socialist world and the derelict, proletarian masses. I will argue that Mancisidor employs narrative in order to stage dramatically the theoretical problems surrounding "proletarian literature" as a project: the role of the militant artist, the social function of artistic production, and the relation between a cultural or political leadership and the working-class masses. In this sense, *La ciudad roja* may be understood as a novelization or a novelized debate of "proletarian literature's" aesthetic and political program. Consequently, I will first offer an overview of the "proletarian literature" project and a brief analysis of Lorenzo Turrent Rozas's theoretical argument of it in *Hacia una literatura proletaria* (1932), then to move into our analysis of *La ciudad roja* following the three aspects mentioned above.

Elissa J. Rashkin explains that, after the abrupt fall of *Estridentismo* and the dispersion of many of its members, a few of the remaining avant-gardists in Jalapa and a younger generation of local writers regrouped in 1930 under the magazine *Simiente*. While short-lived, *Simiente* represents the origin of the "proletarian literature" project, which in 1932 would reorganize in the magazine *Noviembre* and openly endorse socialist realism as the favored tendency of politically committed art. Additionally, in 1931, Germán List Arzubide inaugurated the Ediciones Integrales press with the first edition of Nellie Campobello's *Cartucho*. By 1932, Ediciones Integrales would become the editorial arm of "proletarian literature," publishing first editions of José Mancisidor's *La asonada* (1931) and *La ciudad roja* (1932), as well as Lorenzo Turrent Rozas's *Hacia una literatura proletaria* (1932). The

²⁹⁵ Sánchez Prado studies Jorge Cuesta's 1928 *Antología de poesía mexicana moderna* and the 1932 polemic between cosmopolitans and nationalists we will mention below (particularly Cuesta's and Alfonso Reyes's positions in it) as the foundational instances of this position. Regarding Cuesta's anthology, Sánchez Prado explains: "La literatura, entonces, es nacional en función de una tradición inmanente y estética, donde el canon es establecido... en términos de la elaboración y desarrollo de propuestas poéticas dentro de *una concepción decididamente no política de la literatura*" (86-7; my emphasis). In his study on "proletarian literature" novels, Bertín Ortega mentions the conservative turn of the postrevolutionary State after the 1940s as another one of the structural causes that explain its erasure from the Mexican literary canon. However, he also correctly explains that this literary tradition did manage to survive and influence the work of later writers such as José Revueltas or Luis Spota (18-19).

group reappears in 1933 under a new magazine, *Ruta*, directed by José Mancisidor himself. By 1934, *Ruta* was already absorbed by the LEAR (Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios), the radical organization of cultural producers that grew in numbers and importance throughout the *cardenista* 1930s. From 1934 to 1937, *Ruta* published its issues as part of the LEAR, which José Mancisidor in fact presided over for a period.²⁹⁶

As I mentioned above, “proletarian literature” was one of the multiple artistic groups, collectives, and discipline-specific unions that emerged throughout the 1930s, many of which the LEAR incorporated after 1934.²⁹⁷ These groups tended to follow the Marxist line defined by the Third International or *Komintern* and the cultural policy directed by the Stalinist USSR (Illades 41-42).²⁹⁸ As John Lear explains, these groups claimed to be working in favor of the urban proletarian masses, which therefore became, at the same time, the central subject of their artistic production, the alleged public of their work, and a symbol of their political position. In the case of visual art, for instance,

the worker of the 1930s was more fully elaborated visually and ideologically than his predecessor. He was often depicted collectively, and the blurring of the *campesino* and the worker from the 1920s largely disappears in the face of repeated representations of the proletarian masses or of a single, often colossal, worker representing the exploitation, protest, and victory of his entire industry or class. In murals, prints, and photomontages, he is embedded in the economic infrastructure of factories, or the production of primary resources like oil, and confronts the global forces of imperialism, capitalism, and fascism.²⁹⁹

In his prologue to *Hacia una literatura proletaria* (1932), a compilation of short stories, Lorenzo Turrent Rozas took on the challenge of defining the position, stakes, and projection of “proletarian literature” in Mexico. Turrent Rozas begins his argument by suggesting that “proletarian literature” represented a way out of the polemic that had divided the Mexican literary field into *nacionalistas* and *universalistas* during that year of 1932.³⁰⁰ Neither nationalists nor cosmopolitans offered a satisfying position, Turrent Rozas claimed. *Universalistas* or cosmopolitans advocated for an “art for art’s sake” position that was untenable in a country undergoing a revolutionary process, and thus produced elitist works

²⁹⁶ For a much more detailed historical account of the trajectory, magazines, events, and characters surrounding “proletarian literature,” see Elissa J. Rashkin, “La ruta,” 66-102.

²⁹⁷ Another example is the group *¡30-30!* organized by other *estridentistas* such as Ramón Alva de la Canal and Gabriel Fernández Ledesma. According to Tatiana Flores, this group “distributed belligerent manifestos against the art academy and cultural officials, embraced pedagogy as an avant-garde strategy, experimented with artistic venues—such as the circus tent—for exhibiting their work, and published a journal that pondered how to make art relevant to the masses” (14). Another case is the famous TGP (Taller de Gráfica Popular). As I mentioned above, many of these groups and the LEAR as their central organization thrived under the auspices of the leftist *Cardenismo* that governed from 1934 to 1940.

²⁹⁸ Carlos Illades, *El marxismo en México: una historia intelectual* (México: Taurus, 2018), 41-2.

²⁹⁹ John Lear, *Picturing*, 13.

³⁰⁰ For a complete account of the 1932 polemic and its different protagonists, including Jorge Cuesta, Alfonso Reyes, and Ermilio Abreu Gómez, see: Guillermo Sheridan’s *México en 1932* and the second chapter of Ignacio Sánchez Prado’s *Naciones Intelectuales*.

that were “indiferente[s] hacia el medio en que se produce.”³⁰¹ But nationalists, on the other hand, particularly the so-called *novela de la revolución*, exploited the folklore and the bloody gruesomeness of the revolutionary struggle, “el espectáculo de los ahorcados,” in Turrent Rozas’s words.³⁰² Such a position did not attempt to seriously analyze the historical causes and consequences of the Mexican revolution, nor did it offer a revolutionary perspective oriented towards the future, captivated as it was by the stories and legends of the long-gone *caudillos* from the past.

In this context, “proletarian literature” and socialist realism represented for Turrent Rozas a third and only way out of Mexican literature’s political and aesthetic impasse. Socialist realism was truly cosmopolitan because, without being oblivious to the local political context, it constituted an international tendency in favor of proletarian masses anywhere in the world. In Turrent Rozas’s own words, “proletarian literature’s” socialist realism “coincide con la tendencia proletaria mundial.”³⁰³ At the same time, “proletarian literature” was truly nationalist because it refused to exploit the spectacle of the revolution and instead attempted to create works that were useful to the Mexican working-class masses. Turrent Rozas’s defense of socialist realism was more than a mere repetition of the USSR’s cultural policy. As a matter of fact, as Régine Robin explains, from 1932 to 1934, the notion of socialist realism was still being widely debated both in the USSR and elsewhere, and it would only be officially sanctioned in the USSR during the 1934 First Soviet Writers’ Congress.³⁰⁴ In her words, socialist realism is “the result of more than ten years of polemical struggles, questioning, and confrontations in the critical, literary, and aesthetic realms.”³⁰⁵ In this sense, we can consider Turrent Rozas’s 1932 argument and Mancisidor’s novel of the same year as attempts to theorize this notion from Mexico and introduce it as an active position and a militant faction within the debates taking place in the Mexican literary field at that particular point in time.

After such contextualization, Turrent Rozas goes on to claim that “proletarian literature” should be “la literatura que organiza el espíritu y la consciencia obrera y de las grandes masas trabajadoras.”³⁰⁶ Like any other kind of labor, literature had a social function to accomplish in the construction of a socialist alternative. This function had to be specific to literature itself and, although Turrent Rozas does not put it in these terms exactly, it involved words and images: the writer’s capacity to express ideas and the artist’s capacity to imagine and picture a different world. That is why literature had an “organizing” function, according to Turrent Rozas. Through words and images, by speaking to the people and showing them a direction forward, the writer could transform the working-class masses from a dispersed multitude into an organized, conscious, political body. In this particular sense, he claims, literature has “el mismo valor que la arenga pronunciada por el líder.”³⁰⁷ In *La ciudad*

³⁰¹ Lorenzo Turrent Rozas, *Hacia una literatura proletaria* (Jalapa: Ediciones Integrales, 1932), viii.

³⁰² Lorenzo Turrent Rozas, *Hacia*, xvi.

³⁰³ Lorenzo Turrent Rozas, *Hacia*, xviii.

³⁰⁴ Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetics* (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1992), 11-12.

³⁰⁵ Régine Robin, *Socialist*, 12.

³⁰⁶ Lorenzo Turrent Rozas, *Hacia*, xi.

³⁰⁷ Lorenzo Turrent Rozas, *Hacia*, xii.

roja, as we will discuss below, Mancisidor replicates this idea in the figure of the artist-leader who is capable of imagining a different world and speaking to the masses about it, guiding and transforming them into an organized social movement.

In Turrent Rozas's argument, this objective determined the themes, procedure, and style of "proletarian literature." Themes should concentrate in the present or in questions relevant to the present of the oppressed social class, "el examen de la vida actual, su *enjuiciamiento* desde el punto de vista marxista... Interesa esta hora dolorosa que vivimos, llena de miserias, claudicaciones y bufonadas revolucionarias."³⁰⁸ Narrative procedure entailed denouncing injustice and making a critical analysis of society –Turrent Rozas's *enjuiciamiento*–, while also advancing a political direction that an organized proletariat should follow or could aspire to pursue. Style, finally, had to be "sencillo, exento de piruetas literarias, accesible a todos."³⁰⁹ This responded to the broad audience "proletarian literature" was trying to reach, at least allegedly. But it also responded to socialist realism's aversion to formal experimentation, its suspicion that the formal experiments of the avant-garde masked an old, bourgeois content. And indeed, while Turrent Rozas defends *Estridentismo*'s militant spirit, he also claims that this avant-garde was too hermetic and thus remained trapped within the logic of bourgeois elitist literature: "literatura para minorías, literatura incomprendible a las masas."³¹⁰

In his account of socialist realism in the USSR, Boris Groys explains that this "antiformalist" spirit has led many critics to consider socialist realism "the absolute antithesis of the formalist avant-garde."³¹¹ But Groys goes on to argue that socialist realism claimed that originality had to be found, rather than in formal experimentation, in the radical novelty of its content, which entailed nothing less than the projection of a new society: "There is thus no reason to strive for formal innovation, since novelty is automatically guaranteed by the total novelty of superhistorical content and significance."³¹² In this sense, socialist realism is a continuation and extension of the avant-gardist project of breaking with the established divisions between life and art, and transforming life itself by means of a complete aesthetic and political project. This is the utopian aspect of both the formalist avant-garde and socialist realism, the intersecting point in which the latter reveals itself as an evolution of the former: "socialist realism is oriented toward that which has not yet come into being but should be created, and in this respect it is the heir of the avant-garde, for which aesthetics and politics are identical."³¹³

Turrent Rozas arrives at a similar conclusion when he claims that, ultimately, "proletarian literature's" utopian objective is nothing less than to imagine a "new life" and offer it as a direction to follow: "describir una vida nueva para orientar."³¹⁴ The preface to Mancisidor's *La ciudad roja*, probably written by the editor Germán List Arzubide, reiterates

³⁰⁸ Lorenzo Turrent Rozas, *Hacia*, xviii. My emphasis.

³⁰⁹ Lorenzo Turrent Rozas, *Hacia*, xviii.

³¹⁰ Lorenzo Turrent Rozas, *Hacia*, xvi.

³¹¹ Boris Groys, *The Total*, 36.

³¹² Boris Groys, *The Total*, 49.

³¹³ Boris Groys, *The Total*, 51.

³¹⁴ Lorenzo Turrent Rozas, *Hacia*, xiv.

this idea and makes the connection to *Estridentismo* clear when it claims that the novel “hace arder para México el litoral por donde nos asomamos a un mar vagabundo, sonámbulo en la llamada de *sus faros* que azotan a la distancia. De allá nos va a llegar la palabra de orden que esperamos heridos de impaciencia. José Mancisidor nos lo asegura con una clara visión del porvenir.”³¹⁵ The passage redeploys the metaphor of a text understood as a lighthouse offering a guiding signal in the middle of a restless political ocean. This metaphor first appears in the editorial to the inaugurating issue of *Horizonte*, the *estridentista* magazine in Jalapa, which List Arzubide directed.³¹⁶ This way, following Groy’s argument that socialist realism contains aspects that must be understood as evolving from the logic of the avant-garde itself, we can understand “proletarian literature” as a particular development of the militant and experimental *Estridentismo* that resided in Jalapa from 1925 to 1927. Indeed, “proletarian literature” absorbed some of the *estridentista* members, redeploys some of its metaphors (the lighthouse), made use of the editorial and cultural infrastructure already in place in Jalapa, and inherited in general the *estridentista* militant spirit, while at the same time renouncing the avant-garde’s formalist experimentation for being too hermetic and evasive, too trapped in bourgeois language games, too distant from literature’s responsibility to speak to and for the working class masses of Mexico.³¹⁷

According to Sixto Rodríguez, “la mayor parte de la producción narrativa de José Mancisidor tiene como preocupación central algún acontecimiento de la gesta revolucionaria” (16). In this case, Mancisidor returns to the 1922 tenant strikes in Veracruz and the formation of the SRI that Andrew Grant Wood summarizes as follows:

Early in 1922 a group of prostitutes in the Veracruz neighborhood of La Huaca stopped paying their rent. They quickly found many others throughout the city willing to join a housing boycott. Soon, led by charismatic tailor and anarchist Herón Proal, renters who came out of the crowded Veracruz neighborhoods and off the waterfront docks where workers had been politicized by the writings of the anarchists Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón soon founded the Revolutionary Syndicate of Tenants

³¹⁵ “Prefacio,” in José Mancisidor, *La ciudad roja* (Jalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 1995), 33-34. My emphasis.

³¹⁶ The first editorial of *Horizonte*, published in April 1926, claims that the magazine is to become a “faro palpitante que señale el sendero en esta hora convulsa” (3). As director of *Horizonte*, Germán List Arzubide probably wrote that editorial, as well as the preface to Mancisidor’s novel that recycles the lighthouse metaphor, considering that by 1932 he was the editor of Ediciones Integrales.

³¹⁷ Groy’s understanding of socialist realism as emerging from the logic of the avant-garde is useful for our argument because it helps clarify the relation between the avant-garde *Estridentismo* and the “proletarian literature” project. For a rather different take on socialist realism in the USSR, see Régine Robin’s *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*. Robin claims that if “from the outset, the notion of socialist realism was a confused one” (39), once officially sanctioned, it became a straightjacket for literary production, therefore constituting an “impossible” aesthetic: “it unconsciously aimed at blocking all indeterminacy, the unspeakable in language; because it tends to designate for all time the historical vector with full certainty, blocking the future since it is already known” (74). In the Mexican case, however, “proletarian literature” does not claim to know the future, but to be actively trying to construct it precisely by means of its literary project, as we have seen above. That is why Bertin Ortega claims that “proletarian literature was, above all, “una forma de participación (toma de posición, discusión, acción)” (16) in Mexico’s political and social conflicts.

[SRI]. Within weeks, the mobilization had grown to include some forty thousand residents in the port of Veracruz or nearly 75 percent of the city's population.³¹⁸

Wood's historical account of the events offers important insights for our discussion here. To begin with, it was a group of prostitutes who began direct action by refusing to pay rent and going on a rent strike, following a series of evictions by the police. The prostitutes' actions galvanized an important sector of the port's working-class population, most of which rented increasingly expensive rooms in old colonial buildings that had little or no renovations in place, were crowded, and lacked safety, sanitary conditions, or services such as water and drainage. These living conditions had caused increasing unrest throughout the revolutionary years leading to 1922. At the same time, Wood points out that, crowded as they were, over the years these *vecindades* or *patios* –as they were called– had become sites where the working-class population had organized grassroots political networks that were already in place by 1922. In a similar vein, the revolutionary years in Veracruz saw the emergence of socialist and anarchist groups such as Antorcha Libertaria, in which Herón Proal participated before becoming the leader of the tenant strikes in the city. In daily public rallies, Proal advanced an idea of rent as a coercing mechanism not unlike David Harvey's understanding that rent sustains the capitalist social relation insofar as "if labor is to be kept as wage labor, then the laborer has to be denied free access to the land."³¹⁹ Similarly, Proal claimed that rent subjected the working-class first of all because rent prices absorbed most of their earnings in exchange for poor living conditions, but especially because, without selling their labor-power at any cost, they would be at risk of losing shelter itself, thus forcing them to accept precarious wages and laboring conditions.

The movement soon organized into the SRI, Sindicato Revolucionario de Inquilinos. The SRI went on a general rent strike, established an organization of committees per *patio* or *vecindad*, and drew up an initial list of demands. Chief among these was annulling individual contracts with landlords and signing collective agreements through the SRI. The protests continued, tensions escalated with landlords, and new direct actions took place. In May 1922, for instance, "the renters in Veracruz took the protest to a new level when they invaded land outside the city limits. They called their improvised encampment the Colonia Comunista."³²⁰ Proal soon envisioned it as a utopian anarchist city: "The area will soon have many different homes, baths, gardens, electric lights, asphalt roads, and a number of other amenities."³²¹ Land invasion tactics would continue in the following years, and the government would ultimately formalize some of these settlements as land concessions to the settlers.³²² While the movement grew in numbers and soon reached other cities in the state of Veracruz and Mexico, internal divisions within the movement, the incarceration of Proal in 1924, and increasing repression from the State's authorities brought it to an end by 1926. Besides land concessions, Wood lists as part of the legacies of the tenant movement a

³¹⁸ Andrew Grant Wood, *Revolution in the Street: Women, Workers, and Urban Protest in Veracruz 1870-1927* (Wilmington: SR Books, 2001), xv-xvi.

³¹⁹ David Harvey, *The Urban Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985), 92.

³²⁰ Andrew Grant Wood, *Revolution*, 96.

³²¹ Andrew Grant Wood, *Revolution*, 96.

³²² Andrew Grant Wood, *Revolution*, 208-9.

constitutional reform on rent in Veracruz that limited rent prices and forced landlords to invest in renovations and service provision, the creation of government offices specifically devoted to dealing with tenant-landlord conflicts, and the organized presence of tenants as political actors in different cities across the country in the following decades.

Although Sixto Rodríguez claims that “la trama de la novela de José Mancisidor sobre el Movimiento Inquilinario se ajusta fielmente a los acontecimientos históricos,” our discussion here will show that Mancisidor’s rewriting of these events entails a more complex process of historical re-inscription insofar as the novel frames, selects, and erases different components of the episode in order to present a singular version of the tenant movement and its implications.³²³ To begin with, Mancisidor frames the emergence of the tenant movement according to a particular understanding of Mexico’s postrevolutionary process in the 1920s: one increasingly aligned with capitalist and conservative interests. *La ciudad roja* thus presents a modern and economically active Veracruz immersed in postrevolutionary reconstruction, which Mancisidor presents for the reader as a process of spatial production for the accumulation of capital. A policeman in the novel claims: “La Revolución ¡no hay que dudar! ha dejado atrás, en el desarrollo de su proceso sabio y atinado, el inútil y engañoso periodo destructivo, para entrar gallardamente en los ricos senderos de la reedificación.”³²⁴ *La ciudad roja* offers several descriptions of a buoyant and active urban life that evoke the *estridentista* fascination with urban technologies and industrialization:

Los tranvías, repartiendo sus luminarias de vivos colores –verde, rojo, azul– por las rutas emprendidas, descargaban los racimos humanos que se apresuraban a incorporarse a los grupos ya estacionados... Los cines trepidaban con la gritería de las “jazz” sumando *sus estridencias* descoyuntadas a la alharaca de la multitud. Los autos, pasando raudos, sin detenerse, prendían el bullicio de sus claxons al ruido y la animación difusos de la hora y el lugar.³²⁵

As in many *estridentista* texts such as Manuel Maples Arce’s *Urbe* (1924) or Arqueles Vela’s novella *La señorita etcetera* (1922), the passage insists in describing the modern technologies that have industrialized life in the city such as electric lights, urban noise in the form of claxons or jazz, modern means of transportation (cars, tramways), and, in general, the acceleration of daily activity. However, *La ciudad roja* presents this as evidence of the city’s buoyant industrial activity that divided the population into an increasingly rich capitalist class and an increasingly exploited working-class.

Indeed, the police, the judges, and the postrevolutionary legal system in general – what Mancisidor calls bourgeois justice– appear in the novel as agents in charge of clearing space for capitalist accumulation, controlling the population so as to not interrupt the economic cycle, and generating the necessary semblance of order to inspire investments. The policeman in the novel claims: “El momento es otro: ¡creador, edificante, optimista! Hay que

³²³ Sixto Rodríguez, “Prólogo,” 27. Although her article does not analyze this in detail, Negrín agrees with the perspective presented here when she claims that “esta obra no es una fuente de documentación acerca del movimiento inquilinario tematizado” (320).

³²⁴ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 37.

³²⁵ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 45. My emphasis.

inspirar confianza en el capital para que la patria prospere y engrandezca.”³²⁶ Mancisidor plays ironically with the word *edificante* –edifying–, which has both material and moral overtones. Pronounced while evicting a poor woman, the policeman’s suggestion that postrevolutionary reconstruction is materially edifying reveals instead for the reader the moral shrewdness behind capitalist interests and the harsh reality of the lower classes within the buoyant 1920s Veracruz. *La ciudad roja* thus presents the edification of the postrevolutionary State apparatus itself as the institutional and legal foundations for an industrial capitalist economy ultimately at odds with the lower and working classes of Veracruz. In this sense, the novel claims that the revolutionary governments in Mexico were not revolutionary at all or had betrayed the popular sectors that fought in the armed struggle of the previous decade.

As Edith Negrín notes, *La ciudad roja* attempts to establish a Manichean distinction between the capitalist class and the State’s institutions, on the one hand, and the working classes of Veracruz on the other, a point we can further explore regarding the erasure in the novel of the prostitutes’ role in the origins and development of the tenant movement.³²⁷ In the novel, the tenant movement begins after the scene in which the policeman evicts a poor woman and pronounces the claims quoted above. However, not only does *La ciudad roja* evade characterizing her as a prostitute, the novel as a matter of fact presents her as a woman who has been evicted precisely because she refuses to give sexual services to the landlords. The woman claims: “Negarse a satisfacer la lujuria de los dueños es encontrarse como yo me vi, despedida en el arroyo... Cuando el dinero escasea en el hogar de una mujer el sexo paga el compromiso... He tenido valor para resistir... No quise pagar con mi carne flácida y ajada el monto de mi adeudo.”³²⁸ In other words, Mancisidor chooses to invert the historical episode, presenting the origin of the tenant strike not as the direct action of an organized group of prostitutes, but as the result of a woman who chose not to exchange sexual services with the capitalist landlords. This is probably due to *La ciudad roja*’s attempt at presenting a victim as compelling as it could be, choosing the stereotypical figure of the “honorable” woman to do so. In this process, the novel establishes a neatly organized division between capitalists and proletarians, exploiters and exploited, perpetrators and victims that offers no kind of ambiguity and is ultimately posited in moral terms, as a stable distinction between good and evil.

However, in the end, this erasure betrays Mancisidor’s conservative moral standpoint and, more generally, “proletarian literature’s” preference for a dogmatic moral denunciation of capitalism over critical examination of it. Indeed, by erasing the prostitutes’ role in the tenant strikes and choosing as a victim a traditionally understood honorable woman, the novel is either incapable or unwilling to offer a critical account of prostitution in terms of labor exploitation, as Herón Proal and the Veracruz prostitutes already did in 1922. They argued that the prostitutes were, in Proal’s words, “the exploited flesh of the bourgeoisie” (in Wood 78) and, as such, part and parcel of the exploited working classes of the port. Proal’s notion of the “exploited flesh” indeed suggests that both prostitutes and workers were rented bodies

³²⁶ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 40.

³²⁷ Edith Negrín, “*La ciudad*,” 318.

³²⁸ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 66.

exploited for profit or pleasure, thus belonging to a similar class position (the proletariat). From this perspective, traditional moral notions of feminine honorability were in place precisely in order to obscure prostitution as a form of labor, casting it instead as an obscure moral practice perpetrated by abject women in the shadows of social life. In contrast to Proal and the Veracruz prostitutes, *La ciudad roja* refuses to include them in the novel and chooses to remain within the accepted traditional moral parameters in order to present the distinction between capitalists and proletarians as an unambiguous moral line separating good from evil. In the process, the novel reveals that Turrent Rozas's notion that "proletarian literature" should carry out an *enjuiciamiento*, a trial and sentence of capitalist society, prioritized moral denunciation, even if that ultimately implied an uncritical and unquestioned acceptance of traditional moral values that served the reproduction of capitalist social relations and gendered forms of exploitation such as prostitution.

Just as *La ciudad roja* rewrites the origins of the tenant strikes, it also rewrites the ending. Mancisidor's novel concentrates on the first wave of the SRI: the origins of the movement, the organization of the tenant syndicate, the emergence of a leader capable of speaking to the proletarian masses (Juan Manuel in the novel), and the general rent strikes in the *patios* of Veracruz. The novel then depicts the inner struggles within the movement, the incarceration of Juan Manuel, and the increasing disorganization and lack of unity within the tenants. These events lead to a repression by the police and, in the novel, the death of the leader Juan Manuel. In *La ciudad roja*, Juan Manuel's murder by the State's forces signals the downfall of the tenant movement and the definitive foreclosure of its revolutionary potential. Mancisidor's novel leaves out the more decentralized and reformist struggles that characterized the movement after the incarceration of Proal in 1924.³²⁹ This second phase of the movement, which is left out of *La ciudad roja*, saw new negotiations between tenants and landlords, the organization of tenant groups as representative actors within city councils, a rent reform in Veracruz, and land concessions from the government.³³⁰

By rewriting the tenant movement as a social struggle that emerged from below, paralyzed the port's economy for a few months, and was brought down by the State's forces, Mancisidor manages to make a historical argument that does not place the legacy of the tenant movement in the aforementioned reforms, concessions, and institutionalization of tenant organizations. Rather than in any of these reformist outcomes, *La ciudad roja* makes the case that the most significant legacy of the 1922 tenant strikes was the revolutionary emergence of an urban space autonomously governed by the proletarian masses in a form evocative of the 1871 Paris Commune, a point to which we now turn.

As the tenants organize and begin to take direct action against the landlords and patrons, paralyzing the port's economy in the process, the city of Veracruz mutates from the buoyant modern city described above to a militant city in dispute. The notion of the "red city" appears in order to describe an urban space full of combative banners and flags, but, more importantly, a city suddenly recharged by utopian aspirations:

³²⁹ In contrast to the novel, in which the leader dies at the hands of the police, Herón Proal was incarcerated in 1924 and remained in jail until 1928.

³³⁰ Andrew Grant Wood, *Revolution*, 208-9.

La ciudad –entre un florecer de banderines y gallardetes que acariciaban las paredes con mimos fraternales– era, al reflejo quebradizo de las luces centelleantes, una interesante *ciudad de ensoñación* toda teñida de rojo. Rojos los destellos de sus cúpulas; roja la esbeltez de sus torres elevadas; rojos los reflejos optimistas de sus paseos; rojo el flamear de los lienzos en la distancia; rojo el brillar del sol que incendiaba el ocaso; *rojo el ambiente saturado de esperanzas*.³³¹

Covered by the socialist red flags under a red sunset, the narrator describes Veracruz as a city living as in a dream, “saturated” of working-class hope and a newly found optimism. In contrast to the capitalist-driven *edificación* of the postrevolutionary urban space, *La ciudad roja* presents the organized *patios* and *vecindades* as a modest and improvised, yet autonomous urban commune. In this respect, the novel reiterates Herón Proal’s vision for a “communist colony” in the land occupied by the movement in May 1922. In contrast to Proal, however, who imagined the commune as a future project, the novel claims that the commune already existed in fact, in the striking tenement buildings and neighborhoods governed by the working-class people and their grassroots committees. Indeed, although poor and modest, these urban communes are transformed into beautiful gardens by the sheer fact that the people have taken into their own hands the creation of networks of support, aid, and protection, as the following passage suggests:

En la zahúrda enclavada en el corazón del arrabal, *la muchedumbre vigila, cuida y atiende a sus moradores*... Un gran lienzo rojo ondula desafiante. Rápidamente las fachadas de las casas vecinas se van cubriendo también de rojas banderolas que convierten el barrio paupérrimo, miserable, en *un maravilloso jardín sangrante* en el que las flores rojas de los estandartes arden bajo el reflejo luminoso de la ciudad. [...] En la calle desolada *monta su guardia la falange revolucionaria*.³³²

As I mentioned above, in the novel’s historical rewriting of the tenant movement, Mancisidor locates the movement’s most important legacy not in the legal reforms on rent, the official land concessions, or the institutionalized tenant organizations, none of which appears in the novel. Instead, the novel presents the argument that the movement’s fundamental legacy has to be located in the fact that, for a few months, it managed to offer the image of a communal urban space autonomously organized by the proletarian masses of Veracruz. In this respect, we could inscribe Mancisidor’s understanding of the 1922 tenant movement as an instance of the “Mexican Commune” that Bruno Bosteels has been discussing in recent articles.

Following the work of historian Adolfo Gilly, Bosteels argues that an initial postrevolutionary instance of the “Mexican Commune” may be found in the Zapatista experiment in the state of Morelos in 1915. Throughout that year, the Zapatistas developed a program of land distribution and communal assembly, as established in their *Plan de Ayala*. Bosteels argues that it “constituyó uno de los experimentos más radicales de autogobierno municipal, reforma agraria y autodefensa militar jamás vistos en la historia de México.”³³³

³³¹ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 85. My emphasis.

³³² José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 105. My emphases.

³³³ Bruno Bosteels, “Más allá del poder dual en México: la utopía del cardenismo,” in *Cardenismo: auge y caída de un legado político y social*, edited by Ivonne del Valle and Pedro Palou (Pittsburgh: *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, 2017): 153.

From this point on, Bosteels claims, instances of the “Mexican Commune” appear in social movements and experiments that oppose the postrevolutionary State, that are organized around the movement’s autonomy from this State, and that ultimately advance the possibility of an other State.

In his argument, Bosteels goes back to Lenin’s notion of “dual power” in order to explain the particular political configuration of these instances of the Mexican Commune with respect to the postrevolutionary State. Lenin employed the notion of “dual power” to describe the situation of revolutionary Russia in 1917, in which two forms of power coincided simultaneously: first, a provisional democratic government that Lenin refers to as bourgeois; second, the emerging proletarian government of the Soviets. According to Bosteels, Lenin describes the second as a power of the same type as that of the 1871 Paris Commune. Such type of power was based on three elements: the direct initiative of the masses instead of a previously established law or political system; the substitution of the police and the army by the armed people themselves; and a bureaucracy or administrative leadership organized and elected by the people, who could always relieve that leadership from their post.³³⁴

In *La ciudad roja*, Mancisidor presents an image of Veracruz in 1922 that attempts to evoke the Paris Commune and a situation of “dual power” in which two types of government confront each other: the postrevolutionary State that defends the interests of landlords and the capitalist class against the emerging autonomous government of the “red city” in the *patios* and *vecindades*. Mancisidor describes the latter in terms that are not unlike those used by Lenin to describe the Paris Commune and the 1917 Soviets. First, as we have seen, in the novel, the movement emerges by the spontaneous assembly of the proletarian working classes in revolt against the so-called “justicia burguesa” that allowed landlord exploitation and eviction.³³⁵ The novel then presents the organization of the SRI and the different committees per *patio*, as well as the election of the leaders, as a communal decision taken by everyone who attended the popular assembly. Popularly elected, the leader’s name becomes a uniting factor among the residents of Veracruz, to the point that *La ciudad roja* describes it as part of the city’s shared, environmental, sounds: “Con el jaderar incesante de los autos y otros mil ruidos que se diluían en el clamor multitudinario, el nombre de Juan Manuel fue divisa de redención, grito de protesta, alarido de combate.”³³⁶ Finally, against the armed forces of the State, the SRI contains its own “falange revolucionaria” in charge of protecting themselves as tenant strikers.³³⁷ Not unlike Paris in 1871, *La ciudad roja* claims, in 1922 Veracruz became a workers’ city and offered an image of an urban space organized and governed by the working-class people themselves.³³⁸

³³⁴ Bruno Bosteels, “Más allá,” 144.

³³⁵ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 66.

³³⁶ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 50.

³³⁷ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 105.

³³⁸ Bruno Bosteels’s notion of the “Mexican Commune” may be understood as part of a larger contemporary theoretical project concerned with reflecting on the actuality of communism “from a truly internationalist perspective” (*The Actuality* 16). In the specific case of the “Mexican Commune,” his explorations are deeply intertwined with the history of the Mexican revolution, the consolidation of the postrevolutionary State, and the political potentialities that the revolution inaugurated and that opposed this State. In this sense, this discussion may contribute to that project by suggesting that both the 1922 tenant strikes in Veracruz and the

But *La ciudad roja*'s most explicit evocation of the Paris Commune involves the place Mancisidor gives the 1922 tenant movement in his idea of an open history of socialism in Mexico, as seen from 1932. As a matter of fact, in the novel, Mancisidor presents a historical argument similar to the one Marx made for the Paris Commune in *The Civil War in France*. In that text, Marx explains the historical origins of the Paris Commune and analyzes its development in terms of the actions taken, the strategies followed, the difficulties the Parisian workers faced, and also the mistakes they committed, which ultimately signal the downfall of the Commune. Errors aside, Marx frames the Paris Commune under a structure of sacrifice and future redemption, describing it as a "glorious harbinger of a new society" and the massacre of the Parisian workers as a "heroic self-holocaust."³³⁹ In *The Actuality of Communism*, Bosteels explains that Marx does so because he finally found in the Paris Commune a political form for communism, allowing his thought on this matter to "shift from the purely philosophical register to the material conditions of communism."³⁴⁰

Mancisidor reiterates this same structure of sacrifice and redemption in his account of the Veracruz Commune organized by the tenants. In the novel, this is achieved by establishing a connection between two notions of the "red city." The first notion, which we have already described, involves a city organized by the working classes, full of hope and optimism. The second notion of the "red city" is that of an urban space covered by the blood of the tenant strikers following the repression and massacre by the State's forces. In the original cover of the novel, done former *estridentista* and LEAR member Leopoldo Méndez, both senses converge: the blood-stained letters in the novel's title on the foreground share color with a red, revolutionary, city that appears through an open window in the back (Figure 1). Both senses of the "red city" also converge in Juan Manuel's premonitory vision that the blood of the massacred proletarians in Veracruz would become the necessary sacrifice and foundation for a redeemed future city:

¡El camino! ¿Cómo sería el camino? Por ahí apuntaba la tragedia. Largo, oscuro, erizado de obstáculos... Todo pasó en un momento por su imaginación atenazada, como maravillosa visión kaleidoscópica. En el fondo de la escena la sangre de la masa corría a raudales. Sobre ella se levantaba al final, grandioso y resplandeciente, el edificio generoso del futuro.³⁴¹

history of the philosophical, political, and literary appropriations of this event must be included in the revision of radical political movements that emerged during the revolution and opposed the postrevolutionary State in Mexico. Furthermore, we can also claim that reconstructing the history of a radical movement that emerged around questions of rent and real estate continues to be important for urban popular struggles in the present.

³³⁹ Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France," in *The Marx and Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York: WW Norton, 1978): 648-652.

³⁴⁰ Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (London and New York: Verso, 2011), 14.

³⁴¹ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 127. Bertín Ortega claims that a similar structure of sacrifice and redemption is reiterated in later proletarian novels such as Francisco Sarquís's *Mezclilla* (1933) and Gustavo Ortiz Hernán's *Chimeneas* (1937). In Ortega's words, "en casi todas estas novelas hay huelgas en las que los obreros primero parecen triunfar y al final pierden y son masacrados. El mensaje es claramente hacia el futuro, las víctimas son los heraldos de una nueva sociedad" (21). A similar structure may be found in other committed artworks from the period such as the mural *Retrato de la burguesía* (1939) by David Alfaro Siqueiros.



Figure 1: Leopoldo Méndez. *La ciudad roja* (cover). México: Ediciones Integrales, 1932.

If, according to *La ciudad roja*'s historical rewriting of the tenant movement that leaves out the reformist phase that lasted well into 1926, the SRI was so short-lived, the novel must then provide an argument that explains its sudden and definitive downfall. It is at this point where Mancisidor, following his dogmatic socialist standpoint, introduces the question of the relation between the leader and the proletarian masses, ultimately constituting a reflection on the “proletarian literature” project itself.

La ciudad roja insistently describes the masses as a disorganized and undisciplined multitude that is easy to manipulate or lead astray, “fáciles de ser empujadas, por la ausencia de oriente, en una falsa dirección.”³⁴² In contrast, the novel describes Juan Manuel as an artist whose words have the magical capacity to wake up, enlighten, and guide this derelict multitude:

Y Juan Manuel habló... su voz, vibrante y pastosa, fue como *mágico conjuro* en que engarzó sus emotividades al despertar de las conciencias... Su palabra fuerte, fácil, sencilla, incursionó liviana por los cerebros de aquellas gentes, a quienes se les figuraba –coincidencia definitiva– que eso que él expresara era exactamente lo que ellas sintieran y pensarán. En sus cerebros zafios, toscos, ignorantes, la luz de la expresión diáfana y tangible fue alumbrando de tal manera persuasiva, que venía a despertar dormidas inquietudes de viejas ansias incomprendidas, de añejas quimeras improvisadas.³⁴³

As may be clear in this passage, Juan Manuel's leadership depends on his capacity to speak clearly to the masses, on the *mágico conjuro* that his discourse produces, and his ability to

³⁴² José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 49.

³⁴³ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 47. My emphasis.

express in words what the proletarian consciences feel and desire but cannot grasp. The clarity of his words, in turn, is a result of another artistic capacity, that of imagination. Juan Manuel is the sole person in the tenant movement that is capable of imagining an emancipated future, the “edificio generoso del futuro” that he sees emerging out of the blood of the massacred strikers. He is thus the only one who realizes which direction to follow, in opposition to other members of the movement who are inclined to negotiate with landlords or surrender to the State’s authorities. Images and words, then, imagination and discourse, are at the center of Juan Manuel’s popularly granted leadership and have a structuring capacity over the masses. Indeed, words and images have the potential to transform the derelict masses into a coherent political body armed with discipline and direction. Juan Manuel himself understands this to be his task as leader of the tenant movement: “señalarle valientemente [a la masa] el camino de su liberación; manifestarle lo que en él le espera; gritarle y repetirle que urge de disciplina y de estudio; alumbrarle la ruta; empujarla al camino.”³⁴⁴

What is at stake, according to *La ciudad roja*, is the always-possible dismemberment of the masses or their incapacity to evolve from an incoherent multitude into an organized collective body. Juan Manuel blames the internal divisions within the movement and its ultimate downfall precisely to a lack of organization and discipline:

La organización se fragmentaba como un cristal cuando se quiebra. Se deshacía en facciones turbias, oscilantes, que sin rumbo y sin dirección, rectificaban en las vaguedades de un día lo verificado en el anterior. Dividida, dispersa, ayuna de cohesión, rota la unidad, huérfana de oriente, como navío al garete entre la tempestad del mar, navegaba sin timón en las aguas alborotadas de su propia desorientación.³⁴⁵

The metaphor of the “restless ocean” employed to describe a crisis of political direction appears once again, as it did in the novel’s preface that claimed that Mancisidor’s novel represented the guiding “lighthouse” in the middle of a tempest. In the novel, it is the SRI’s internal turmoil that produces the storm, not an enemy attacking from the outside. The police and the army merely take advantage of a movement that has dismembered into a disorganized multitude: “El enemigo ¡tenedlo presente! está entre nosotros mismos... El enemigo está en la falta de unidad, en el derecho que todos creemos tener para caminar por caminos distintos.”³⁴⁶ Juan Manuel understands this, but in the end, as the sole leader, he is incapable of holding the collective body of the Veracruz proletariat together. Hence the movement’s downfall, which culminates with Juan Manuel’s death at the hands of the State’s armed forces and the fall of the “Veracruz Commune.” Rashkin explains that “la derrota, ejemplificada en el cuerpo martirizado de Juan Manuel, contrasta con el canto, aún en la boca de la multitud dispersada por el tiroteo, de *La Internacional*... El autor logra mantener el ideal revolucionario en el horizonte.”³⁴⁷ Indeed, as we analyzed in the previous section, Mancisidor presents the 1922 “Veracruz Commune” as a harbinger and a fleeting image of a socialist future in whose construction “proletarian literature” aspired to actively participate.

³⁴⁴ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 131.

³⁴⁵ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 147-8.

³⁴⁶ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 63.

³⁴⁷ Elissa J. Rashkin, “La ruta,” 82.

The political potential of words and images in the novel, insofar as they represent the *métier* of writers, relates to the “proletarian literature” project in general. If Turrent Rozas claimed that the works of this literary project should have “el mismo valor que la arenga pronunciada por el líder” (xii), Juan Manuel, as an artist-leader capable of speaking to the masses, stands in for proletarian literature as a whole. In this sense, *La ciudad roja* stages, through Juan Manuel’s trajectory, the role, function, objectives, and possible risks of this politically engaged literary project. In this particular respect, Mancisidor’s novel seems to be speaking to his fellow writers and comrades, discussing in narrative form the theoretical issues at stake in “proletarian literature.” Like Juan Manuel, the proletarian writer must assume a leadership role and speak to the working class masses with clarity, offering political direction and guidance. Like Juan Manuel, through words and images, the writer must aim at transforming the proletarian multitude into an organized, disciplined, and orchestrated political body. However, and also like Juan Manuel, the writer must at the same time realize that the failure to transmit the message implies the dismemberment of the collective body into a disorganized multitude and thus the failure of its political objective.

Following a socialist position deeply influenced by the Stalinist USSR, and not unlike the struggle between Marx and Bakunin over the legacy of the Paris Commune, Mancisidor’s novel tacitly critiques the anarchism that pervaded in the 1922 tenant movement. While the novel suggests that the SRI did contain revolutionary initiative and impetus, managing to transform for a few months the city of Veracruz into a workers’ commune, it claims that the movement ultimately lacked a sufficiently disciplined organization orchestrated by a strong leadership provided with a clear political program. Juan Manuel himself reflects, in the novel, that the SRI fell short of being revolutionary precisely because it lacked an organizing program: “¿Podría llamarse Revolución a ese movimiento sentimental, realizado por intuición, en que se deshacía por ahora la ansiedad de las masas como se deshace en las aguas un grano de sal?”³⁴⁸

Mancisidor’s tacit conclusion in *La ciudad roja* is that the creation, expression, and dissemination of that organizing political program that the SRI lacked represented the most immediate task of “proletarian literature” in Mexico. Only provided with such a program could the struggle of the Mexican proletariat evolve from a “sentimental” movement into a revolution. Mancisidor and Turrent Rozas both considered the articulation and dissemination of such a political program the most important task of the “proletarian literature” writers, and in this respect the novel’s account of the downfall of the “Veracruz Commune” reads as a cautionary tale for those involved in the project and for the factious Mexican left in general. However, part of a political and literary movement that looked up to the increasingly dogmatic USSR and the Third International as a direction to follow, this program had to be firmly aligned with the direction provided by the larger international socialist direction. Adopting this perspective, the novel erases Herón Proal’s anarchist thought from its reconstruction of the 1922 tenant strikes, transforming the protagonist Juan Manuel into a proto-socialist leader and evoking this episode as a failed instance of a future socialist revolutionary movement in Mexico. It thus forecloses the possibility to engage in the novel with the anarchist thought of the 1922 leader Herón Proal on matters such as rent or

³⁴⁸ José Mancisidor, *La ciudad*, 126.

prostitution in relation to the capitalist production of urban space, depicting the leader instead as a proto-socialist martyr abandoned by the derelict masses. Similarly, although reconstructing a tenant social movement, this dogmatic position prevents Mancisidor from engaging with the debates on social housing and revolutionary architecture taking place in those same years in the disciplines of architecture and urban planning to which I turn.

Urban Growth, Social Housing, and the “New Architecture” in Mexico

In his urban history of Mexico City in the 1930s, Mauricio Perló Cohen explains that, as the country recovered from the 1929 economic depression and industries began to grow, migrants arriving to the city looking for gainful employment found that there were few housing options available. In the 1930s, “la edificación de vivienda de alquiler para las clases trabajadoras fue mínima y no alcanzó a cubrir la demanda existente.”³⁴⁹ Private developers did not consider that building tenement housing for the working classes was a profitable venture because rent controls and organized tenant groups in the city limited rent prices.³⁵⁰ Facing this lack of offer, the working classes had two options available to them. The first was to rent a room in the already crowded *vecindades*, old colonial mansions in the city center subdivided into multiple small dwelling spaces. The second was moving to the emerging *colonias proletarias*, squatter settlements on the outskirts of the city. Considering that the residents themselves built these settlements, houses did not count with service provision (water, sewage, electricity) and did not follow stipulated construction codes. Architects and urban planners of the period tended to refer to these settlements pejoratively as *tugurios* or *pocilgas*.

Mexican architects, urban planners, and government officials had been discussing the conditions of *vecindades* and *colonias proletarias* at least since Alberto J. Pani’s 1916 report on the hygienic conditions of Mexico City we explored in Chapter 1.³⁵¹ In his report, Pani harshly criticized *vecindades*, claiming that they represented “verdaderos focos de infección física y moral. [...] Las casas mencionadas son, además, el teatro de todas las miserias, de todos los vicios y de todos los crímenes.”³⁵² According to Pani, not only did physical diseases spread quickly in buildings with no access to clean water or a sewage system. In such conditions, what Pani calls “moral diseases” such as alcoholism or game spread as well, reproducing out of control. Pani claimed that the small dwelling spaces in *vecindades* lacked appropriate distributions of gender, family role, or household function, reproducing instead a “horrible promiscuidad animal.”³⁵³ In his argument, this situation, along with the lack of

³⁴⁹ Mauricio Perló Cohen, *Estado, vivienda y estructura urbana en el cardenismo* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1981), 12.

³⁵⁰ Mauricio Perló Cohen, *Estado*, 47.

³⁵¹ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene en México* (Mexico City: Balleca, 1916). Alberto Pani was in 1916 serving as Secretary of Industry and Commerce for the government of Venustiano Carranza. He would later become a very renowned bureaucrat, serving as Secretary of the Treasury and Public Credit in the 1920s and early 1930s. For an overview of Pani’s liberal economic thought, see the first chapter of Susan Gauss, *Made in Mexico: Regions, Nation, and the State in the Rise of Mexican Industrialism 1920s-1940s* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2010).

³⁵² Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 111.

³⁵³ Alberto J. Pani, *La higiene*, 95.

governmental regulations and surveillance, were consistently undermining the healthy reproduction of the nation's workforce in both a physical and a moral sense.

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, the liberal urban planning journal *Planificación* further developed Pani's housing ideas, as a 1928 editorial presents clearly:

En su aspecto social, el problema de la casa habitación es el problema de acabar con la pocilga, con los amontonamientos humanos y con los barrios bajos, que son los lugares en donde se generan el descontento, las enfermedades, la inmoralidad y el crimen. De los barrios bajos es donde salen los anarquistas, los enemigos de la sociedad y del orden, allí está la causa del socialismo; la pocilga es la enemiga del hogar, y el hogar es la piedra angular de una verdadera y fuerte ciudadanía. [...] Con cada niño que muere, la Nación pierde un futuro ciudadano; pero con cada niño que vive en las pocilgas, la Nación tiene un probable tísico y un posible criminal.³⁵⁴

An insistence on reproduction characterizes this passage. Clearly echoing Pani, the editorial claims that the absence of governmental regulations and surveillance in lower-class neighborhoods resulted in the uncontrollable reproduction of diseases, crime, and immorality. It further argues that the urban conditions in *vecindades* and *colonias proletarias* also allowed for the spread of radical ideas such as anarchism and socialism, which could ultimately menace the success and survival of the postrevolutionary regime itself. In line with Pani, the editorial suggests that this housing situation was detrimental to the organized reproduction of a modern workforce, a point it brings up by appealing to the figure of the child. Instead of a productive citizen, the editorial claims, a child born and raised in one of these neighborhoods was a possible criminal and a probable sick. The child thus became a problem for the state, rather than a solution for the nation's economic development.

The editorial's answer was to save the familiar "home" by means of architecture. The passage claims that the *pocilga* ultimately menaced the stability of the traditional *hogar*, which was the cornerstone of a moral citizenship untempted by radicalism or vice. Consequently, designing the correct architectural disposition of the single family house in order to replace what Pani considered "promiscuous" dwelling spaces of *vecindades* and *pocilgas* entailed nothing less than regulating and stabilizing the family as a social institution. In this sense, the house would operate as a normative device meant to control the family's structure and organize social reproduction through this structure. This would result in a modern, disciplined, and healthy population: the child would no longer be a criminal or a weakened individual, but the desired future citizen of the nation.

In the context of these debates, architect Carlos Obregón Santacilia organized in 1932 a contest for a *casa obrera mínima*. The winning architect was functionalist architect Juan Legarreta with a project to build 120 serialized houses in the Balbuena neighborhood, east of Mexico City's center. Legarreta followed the functionalist principles of prioritizing function over form and creating a cost-effective design that could be replicated elsewhere. Indeed, as Sarah Selvidge points out, "the Balbuena complex was intended as a prototype: a model for the eventual solution of the urban housing problem through the replication of the system

³⁵⁴ "Editorial," *Planificación* 6 (1928): 4.

established there.”³⁵⁵ Legarreta’s proposal operated at two different scales, the family house and the neighborhood. For the house, Legarreta designed an austere concrete box that followed the prototypical family home model, only reduced to its basic elements and minimal proportions: a kitchen and dining room, a bathroom and storage space, bedrooms for the adult couple and their children (girls and boys each had a separate one), and a small yard. In this respect, Legarreta did not question the traditional family structure or the idea that each family should have its own private house. All 120 houses in Balbuena were identical to each other, and they were distributed in a rectangular grid. This way, at the scale of the neighborhood, Legarreta’s project proposed to rationalize urban space in contrast to both the old city center and the informal *colonias proletarias*, offering the image of an homogeneous and serialized rectangular housing development. As the winner of the *casa obrera mínima* contest, Legarreta’s project claimed that functionalism’s austerity, cost-effectiveness, and reproducibility represented the solution to the housing question in Mexico City.

It is at this point that the debates on social housing intersect with the dispute over functionalism and what “revolutionary” architecture meant in Mexico. Throughout the 1920s, neocolonial architecture had most successfully claimed revolutionary credentials, espousing the nationalist argument that this style preserved Hispanic tradition and the autochthonous forms of *mestizo* Mexico. Important intellectuals such as José Vasconcelos championed it, while considering functionalism an imported tendency deprived of any relation to Mexican culture. By the 1930s, however, young architects on the left such as Juan Legarreta, Juan O’Gorman, and the UAS architects rebelled against this position, militantly defending functionalism as the correct “revolutionary” tendency. In their view, functionalism was revolutionary because it promised to deliver austere and efficient buildings using the most modern construction systems. Functionalism also represented an economic approach, insofar as it could reproduce series of a single model, as Legarreta did in 1932. They claimed that such an approach would allow the postrevolutionary state to build housing, hospitals, or schools at the pace and scale that Mexico’s developmental agenda required.³⁵⁶

Functionalism found an important stronghold in the L.E.A.R, the radical organization of artists and writers that held conferences and published the journal *Frente a Frente*. In a 1936 article in *Frente a Frente*, for instance, Carlos Leduc criticized neocolonial architecture for lacking functional designs and disguising their impracticality in a “miel nacionalista” that ultimately evoked a period of colonial exploitation.³⁵⁷ That same year, also in *Frente a Frente*, Juan O’Gorman repeated Leduc’s argument that the neocolonial style glorified “los tipos de arquitectura que recuerdan la esclavitud del pueblo.”³⁵⁸ He further claimed that, if

³⁵⁵ Sarah Selvidge, “Modernism and Miracles: Architecture, Housing, and the State in Mexico, 1930-1970,” PhD diss., (University of California Berkeley, 2015), 40.

³⁵⁶ For more on Vasconcelos and neocolonial architecture, see the first chapter of Luis Carranza, *Architecture or Revolution: Episodes in the History of Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010). For an overview of the dispute between functionalists and neocolonialists, see: Horacio Legrás, *Culture and Revolution: Violence, Memory, and the Making of Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 77-84.

³⁵⁷ Carlos Leduc, “La Revolución Mexicana en la arquitectura,” *Frente a Frente* 2 (1936): 17.

³⁵⁸ Juan O’Gorman, “El Departamento Central, inquisidor de la Nueva Arquitectura,” *Frente a Frente* 5 (1936): 22.

preserving colonial buildings was in the interest of national history, reiterating an ancient style was impractical at best: “una cosa es conservar la carroza de Maximiliano en el Museo, y otra es usarla para salir de paseo en la calle.”³⁵⁹ Three months later, O’Gorman published yet another article in *Frente a Frente* in which he disputed the claim that functionalism was an imported tendency in Mexico. O’Gorman claimed that functionalism’s approach to architecture was based on modern innovations in construction systems, materials, and techniques. According to him, since these innovations were a result of scientific and technological development, they were essentially universal, impossible to import or export in the first place. But, even if they were, that fact would be irrelevant. Functionalism was revolutionary not because it was essentially Mexican, but because it simply represented the most effective construction style for a developing country in need of housing, hospitals, schools, and other infrastructure. In this sense, because it would benefit the population in general, Mexico had the right to embrace functionalism regardless of its origin.³⁶⁰

In November 1937, Alberto T. Arai –member of the UAS– presented a conference in defense of functionalist architecture at the L.E.A.R titled *La nueva arquitectura y la técnica*. In the conference, Arai argued that modern architecture and urban planning should be understood as technical disciplines that had to follow a rigorous methodology in order to provide the most efficient results. To explain his point, Arai offered the example of an architect commissioned to build a train station. Arai argued that the modern, technical architect would begin by gathering data: average passengers expected, train traffic information, service hours, number of employees, and other information of the sort. The architect would then process this data along with an up to date knowledge of construction systems, materials, acoustics, or illumination technology. Only then could the architect design a train station capable of carrying out its desired function efficiently. Arai concluded that this technical approach to construction could be employed to design any kind of building, and it could even be extended to urban planning as such:

El arquitecto [...] parte de un programa de trabajo o problema muy preciso por desarrollar y resolver, y que consiste en un conjunto de necesidades humanas y en el conjunto de elementos disponibles de trabajo lo más detallado posible, al cual tiene que ponerle enfrente una solución salida de su pensamiento técnico. Dándose como fijo el problema o programa, que emana de una necesidad real y auténtica, se limita a resolverlo creando solamente una hipótesis arquitectónica; solución que puede muy bien ser de este o aquel género de edificios o, bien, una ciudad entera.³⁶¹

Insofar as this technical approach to architecture and urban planning offered the possibility of designing urban infrastructure that could efficiently carry out its purpose, Arai argued that

³⁵⁹ Juan O’Gorman, “El Departamento,” 22.

³⁶⁰ Juan O’Gorman, “Arquitectura Contemporánea,” *Frente a Frente* 6 (1936): 14-15. Functionalism did in fact win terrain in the 1930s. In this decade, O’Gorman himself built more than twenty public schools following this architectural style. However, by the 1940s and 50s, functionalism would incorporate and synthesize nationalist elements in its buildings, most commonly through the so-called “plastic integration” of the Mexican muralist school.

³⁶¹ Alberto T. Arai, *La nueva arquitectura y la técnica* (Mexico City: DAPP, 1938), 11.

functionalism should become the theoretical foundation for a “national doctrine of architecture” that would guide the production of urban space in postrevolutionary Mexico.³⁶²



Figure 2. UAS, *Manifiesto a la clase trabajadora* (Mexico City: DAPP, 1938).

A year later, in 1938, Arai's functionalist ideas would be a central part of the UAS's position on the social housing debates, expressed in the *Manifiesto a la clase trabajadora* (Figure 2) and the introduction to *Proyecto de ciudad obrera*. In the *Manifiesto*, following Arai's ideas on architecture and the group's socialist politics, the UAS presented itself as a collective of “trabajadores técnicos de la arquitectura.” The UAS architects invited the working class to support them as *camaradas* in their idea of building collective houses, which “traería la simplificación de la labor doméstica y menor gasto de sostenimiento familiar.” The UAS claimed in the *Manifiesto* that having access to modern and hygienic housing was labor right that the entire working class should stand for, insofar as health and productivity depended on housing conditions. The UAS also provided a small drawing of a functionalist building that would serve the needs of the two working class figures that stand on the forefront.

In the *Proyecto's* introduction, the UAS reiterated the idea that modern housing played a crucial role in guaranteeing the healthy reproduction of the labor force and thus in securing industrial productivity in Mexico. The housing problem was for the UAS essentially

³⁶² Alberto T. Arai, *La nueva*, 6.

a problem of “insalubridad y antieconomía: se muere o imposibilita la gente que soporta el peso del engranaje de la producción; por lo tanto, disminución de ésta.”³⁶³ However, if in the *Manifiesto* access to housing was seen as a labor right, in the *Proyecto*, the UAS extended the claim, arguing that it was in fact a human right:

No se trata, en modo alguno, de dar facilidades o favores, de otorgar concesiones, de llevar a cabo actos de filantropía capitalista [...]. El obrero, el campesino, el soldado, el empleado público y los técnicos tienen el derecho, dado por su naturaleza misma como hombres, de habitar una vivienda decente, cómoda, higiénica.³⁶⁴

The UAS argued that the most urgent task for politically committed architects was that of providing an efficient model capable of satisfying housing demand for everyone, according to “la necesidad real de cada individuo.”³⁶⁵ Like Legarreta, the UAS found in functionalism the most efficient architectural approach to building social housing at a large scale, claiming that it was exclusively focused on function and that “la elaboración de productos en serie causa el abaratamiento de los mismos.”³⁶⁶ In contrast to Legarreta’s project, while also to Pani and *Planificación*, the UAS departed from the traditional family structure and approached Ginzburg’s idea of the communal house based on cooperative housing principles. But to fully understand the UAS’s political position and its implications, it is necessary to discuss the temporality of the project against the backdrop of the *Cardenismo*’s political program of national industrialization and its housing policy in Mexico City.

Cardenismo in the City:

Lázaro Cárdenas arrived at the presidency in 1934 with a political program of state-driven industrialization. As Alan Knight claims, the *Cardenismo* “participated in the global shift from cosmopolitan laissez-faire to nationalist dirigisme.”³⁶⁷ It sought to foster the development of domestic industry by substituting imports and incentivizing consumption in the domestic market, intervening in specific sectors of the economy to do so.³⁶⁸ Lázaro Cárdenas considered that supporting the organization of a disciplined labor movement incorporated to the official channels of the state represented a fundamental aspect of this project. Wage raises and collective contracting meant increasing the consumer base of the economy, which in turn would accelerate production and foster industrial growth.³⁶⁹ But an

³⁶³ UAS, *Proyecto*, 1.

³⁶⁴ UAS, *Proyecto*, 1.

³⁶⁵ UAS, *Proyecto*, 1.

³⁶⁶ UAS, *Proyecto*, 5

³⁶⁷ Alan Knight, “The Rise and Fall of Cardenismo,” in *Mexico Since Independence*, ed. Leslie Bethell (New York: Cambridge UP, 1991), 248.

³⁶⁸ Enrique Cárdenas describes the *cardenista* economic program: “Si bien no planteaba la eliminación del principio de libre mercado y la competencia [...] sí suponía la intervención directa del Estado en sectores estratégicos como los energéticos, las comunicaciones, el sector financiero y eventualmente la minería. Se acuñó la frase “nacionalismo económico” pues se buscaría crear las condiciones para la expansión del mercado interno y que éste se convirtiera en el motor de desarrollo.” Enrique Cárdenas, “La economía mexicana en el dilatado siglo XX (1929-2009),” in *Historia económica general de México*, ed. Sandra Kuntz (Mexico City: El Colegio de México/Secretaría de Economía, 2010), 723.

³⁶⁹ Enrique Cárdenas, “La economía,” 725.

organized labor movement incorporated to the state's official channels also meant securing popular support, benefiting the government's capacity to mobilize the masses when needed. As Arturo Anguiano claims, "la política de masas cardenista tendía a convertir al movimiento obrero y a los campesinos en una base social de apoyo."³⁷⁰ Cárdenas aimed at having a federal government with significant political control over both capitalists and labor, and thus a government strong enough to intervene in the economy in order to command its industrializing project.

With these objectives in mind, in 1935, Cárdenas supported Marxist labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano in creating a workers' central, the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM). Officially sanctioned, the CTM managed to incorporate unions from different industries that were swayed by the possible benefits that being backed by the state could imply in negotiating labor conflicts. In turn, the CTM unions offered support to the *cardenista* government and limited demands to those deemed appropriate by the state such as wage raises and collective contracting.³⁷¹ According to Arturo Anguiano, through the CTM "el movimiento obrero cobró un nuevo carácter: ya no era la lucha desorganizada e impetuosa [...] sino un movimiento regulado y manipulado al servicio de un Estado que se preocupaba por mejorar la producción para impulsar el desarrollo."³⁷²

In Mexico City, which was the country's industrial center, social housing policy was a particularly challenging problem for the *Cardenismo* and its labor-oriented policies. As we have seen, the working classes had little affordable housing available beyond the crowded *vecindades* and the self-produced *colonias proletarias*. According to Mauricio Perló Cohen, due to the state's limited economic capacity and the lack of sophisticated mortgage mechanisms, the *cardenista* government in the city mostly pursued a housing policy aimed at regulating the already existing *colonias proletarias*.³⁷³ However, as we have seen, architects and planners of the period were extremely critical of both *vecindades* and *colonias proletarias*, including those on the left such as Juan O'Gorman and the UAS members. Furthermore, insofar as housing demands were in the agenda of several unions, developing social housing could represent another strong incentive for labor to organize under the official channels. In response to these pressures, the state continued the pioneer efforts begun in 1932 aimed at developing social housing in Mexico City. A small effort in comparison to the magnitude of the problem (only 250 houses were built between 1934 and 1940), Mauricio Perló Cohen considers these projects as merely symbolic or propagandistic.³⁷⁴ But, besides political symbols of the *Cardenismo*'s leftist orientation –which they certainly were–, these developments may be understood also as experiments for a future housing policy. At the very least, they were symptomatic of the fact that the *cardenista* government was open and interested in such a policy, similarly attested by the fact that it sponsored the organization of

³⁷⁰ Arturo Anguiano, *El Estado y la política obrera del cardenismo* (Mexico City: Era, 1983), 50.

³⁷¹ Arturo Anguiano, *El Estado*, 77.

³⁷² Arturo Anguiano, *El Estado*, 131.

³⁷³ Mauricio Perló Cohen, *Estado*, 71. Perló Cohen explains that the government would buy or expropriate the invaded land from its original owners, then to distribute land titles or establish mechanisms to sell or rent the land to the settlers.

³⁷⁴ Mauricio Perló Cohen, *Estado*, 68-69.

XVI Congreso Internacional de la Planificación y de la Habitación. In fact, the UAS architects dedicated the project to President Lázaro Cárdenas, honorary president of the congress.³⁷⁵

The UAS responded to the early housing experiments of the 1930s with a project for an autonomous urban space with distinct zones for housing, industry, agriculture, and a civic center. According to the UAS members, this *ciudad obrera* would be organized “según la propiedad común.”³⁷⁶ Enrique de Anda claims that the architects were too young to deem their project feasible, especially because it proposed a radical departure from Mexico City’s urban culture and property regime. He concludes that the objective of the project was therefore only theoretical.³⁷⁷ But the fact that the UAS published the *Manifiesto* with the objective of mustering working class support for their idea of collective housing suggests otherwise. Similarly, the UAS was drawing from Moisei Ginzburg’s *Narkomfin* building in the USSR, an actually built example. As for the proposal to build an autonomous urban space organized around common property, the UAS may have been thinking about the cooperative model favored by the *cardenista* government. President Cárdenas supported the organization of cooperatives and believed that “la forma más aceptable, visible y realista en que el proletariado podía acceder al dominio de los medios de producción era la cooperativa.”³⁷⁸ If orthodox Marxists such as Vicente Lombardo Toledano rejected cooperatives, considering them a bourgeois palliative to class struggle, it is entirely possible that a group interested in utopian socialism and avant-garde experiments such as the UAS was drawn to this alternative model of worker organization.³⁷⁹ The UAS even selected a location northeast of Mexico City as the ideal location for the *ciudad obrera*, given that industrial production was concentrated in that area.³⁸⁰

The UAS in fact presented their project as offering solutions on two different temporalities. First, a “solución provisional” to the housing question that could be immediately applied.³⁸¹ Second, the prototype for the long-term production of a socialist urban space:

³⁷⁵ Enrique de Anda holds a similar view on the congress and its implications. See: Enrique de Anda, *Vivienda*, 98-108.

³⁷⁶ UAS, *Proyecto*, 1.

³⁷⁷ Enrique de Anda, *Vivienda*, 163.

³⁷⁸ Arnaldo Córdova, *La política de masas del cardenismo* (Mexico City: Era, 1974), 77. During Cárdenas’s term as president, the government handed enterprises that had declared bankruptcy to workers as cooperatives supported them by becoming their main client. By the end of the *Cardenismo* in 1940, 937 new cooperatives had been formed under a regulatory law established in 1937 for a total of 1715 cooperative organizations in the country. See: Eduardo Nava and Beny Oliver Barajas, “Cooperativismo, autonomía y poder: el movimiento cooperativista en México durante el cardenismo,” *Cooperativismo y Desarrollo* 23, no. 106 (2015): 30.

³⁷⁹ For an overview of Vicente Lombardo Toledano’s thought, see: Carlos Illades, *El Marxismo en México: una historia intelectual* (Mexico City: Taurus, 2018), 30-56.

³⁸⁰ Urban planner Carlos Contreras included the project in his 1938 plan for Mexico City’s growth, so it seems that he deemed it feasible as well. See: Alejandrina Escudero, *Una ciudad*.

³⁸¹ UAS, *Proyecto*, 1.

Externaremos solamente nuestro punto de vista más amplio: el de la vivienda humana del porvenir. *Solución-guía*, proposición reguladora de todos los esfuerzos encaminados a resolver el caso. [...] Ella indica un deber ser. Ella se levanta como un ideal vivo del proletariado. [...] [La arquitectura] se hace principalmente con dirección, empieza por el cerebro técnico y la idea se concreta en planes. Y estos planes son el comienzo del cambio radical.³⁸²

Enrique de Anda is right to point out that the UAS architects were interested in presenting a highly experimental model in *Proyecto de ciudad obrera*. However, from their perspective, this did not seem to cancel the project's feasibility, insofar as it was explicitly proposed as both a theoretical and practical experiment with immediate and long-term objectives. In this respect, the UAS was drawing from Ginzburg's avant-garde utopianism and from a long tradition of utopian socialists and anarchists that believed in the possibility of building intentional communities as initial lived experiments that could be replicated at a larger scale later on. Their model, as I will discuss in the following section, responded to the *cardenista* objective of increasing industrial productivity, while it also attempted to steer both the *Cardenismo* and the leftist architecture camp towards a radical and unorthodox housing policy.

The Social Factory and the Communal City

David Harvey has explained at length that urban planning during industrialization waves in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries demanded the rationalization of urban space and the normative standardization of forms of life in the city, “the production of rational physical and social landscapes.”³⁸³ Harvey's rational urban landscapes, aimed at maximizing industrial productivity and accumulation, evoke Mario Tronti's notion of the “social factory.” Discussing modern political projects of economic planning, industrialization, and development (such as the Mexican *Cardenismo*), Tronti coined the term “social factory” to describe this period of capitalism as a point in which all aspects of life are subsumed under the logic of production first established in the factory:

The more capitalist development advances [...], the more necessarily production-distribution-exchange-consumption form a complete circuit –that is, the relation between capitalist production and society, between factory and society, between society and the state, becomes increasingly organic. [...] The whole society becomes an articulation of production, the whole of society lives in function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive dominion over the whole of society.³⁸⁴

In *Proyecto de ciudad obrera*, the UAS architects were in many respects offering the model of a rational urban landscape for the *Cardenismo* and its agenda of organizing the labor movement in order to drive industrial development. As I mentioned above, the UAS architects selected a location northeast of Mexico City for *Proyecto de ciudad obrera* precisely because industry in the city was concentrated there, facilitating production and distribution chains. Similarly, the UAS architects presented a functional distribution of

³⁸² UAS, *Proyecto*, 1.

³⁸³ David Harvey, *The Urban Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985), 29.

³⁸⁴ Mario Tronti, *Workers and Capital* (London and New York: Verso, 2019), 70-71.

different city zones. For instance, they proposed that the industrial zone of the *ciudad obrera* be located close to railways, highways, and the main sewage canal, whereas the residential zone would be located on the other side to avoid pollution (Figure 3).³⁸⁵



Figure 3. UAS, “Plano Esquemático de Localización de las Zonas,” *Proyecto de ciudad obrera para México DF* (Mexico City: XVI Congreso Internacional de la Habitación y de la Planificación, 1938).

As for the social landscape, the UAS provided an extremely detailed time-table in order to program daily life in the city.³⁸⁶ In his discussion of spaces of confinement such as the factory and the strategies of control developed there, Michel Foucault famously argues that “discipline is a political anatomy of detail.”³⁸⁷ He further claims that “the first of the great operations of discipline is [...] the constriction of ‘*tableaux vivants*,’ which transform the confused, useless, or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities.”³⁸⁸ In effect, in the table, the UAS architects devised a systematic organization of activities, hours, and population flows that meant to transform the workers into a highly coordinated labor force. In words of the architects, “se trata de una organización precisa para [...] regularizar lo más posible la vida de la colectividad.”³⁸⁹ As I mentioned before, the UAS was part of a socialist avant-garde that believed to hold the responsibility to enlighten the masses, and in this respect

³⁸⁵ UAS, *Proyecto*, 7.

³⁸⁶ UAS, *Proyecto*, 11-12.

³⁸⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 2005), 139.

³⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline*, 148.

³⁸⁹ UAS, *Proyecto*, 8.

they assumed that their program expressed a cooperative division of labor that the workers would approve of.

In the table, the rows classify each individual according to gender (men or women) and five age groups (childhood, puerility, adolescence, adulthood, and old age). The columns indicate each of the five possible activities in the city: productive labor (industry and agriculture), organizational labor (administration), education, leisure, and recovery (includes eating and sleeping). Depending on gender and age, the table indicates how many hours of the day an individual in the city must devote to each of the five possible activities. A closer look at the table suggests that the two interrelated objectives behind the UAS's program were maximizing labor productivity and ensuring the optimal reproduction of the labor force. For instance, the table distributes industrial and agricultural labor to the younger adults, while the older age groups would be in charge of administrative work that is not as physically demanding. In the case of reproduction, the table distributes half of the leisure hours to physical exercise, ostensibly to ensure the health and shape of the workers. The table also stipulates regular hours for "recovery" (eating and sleeping), guaranteeing the daily reproduction of the labor force. As Tithi Bhattacharya explains, "the time of reproduction must necessarily respond to the structuring impulses of the time of production."³⁹⁰ The UAS architects synthesized all of the information provided in the table in a diagram that mapped the population flows between city zones for each of the five age groups in a given day (Figure 4).

In the table, the UAS also presented its first argument in favor of relieving the family from the labor and costs associated with social reproduction. According to the UAS's program we described above, it would be more productive if both parents, as young adults, took on industrial and agricultural labor instead of childcare and education. Older adults in the city would take on the responsibility and labor of childcare, while the entire collective would assume its cost. For the UAS architects, this represented the most productive form of dividing labor, and therefore the best one. It is true that proposing that women should work full time in Mexico in the 1930s placed the UAS architects clearly on the far left of the spectrum, but it is also true that this proposition was trapped in a series of gender assumptions and blind spots worth pointing out. For example, the UAS architects followed prototypical gender roles when they assigned, in the table, industrial labor for men and agricultural labor for women. Furthermore, the table indicated that mothers (not fathers) should put in twelve hours of early education for newborn children.³⁹¹ However, these hours were not counted as part of a woman's labor hours. In fact, they were not counted as part of a woman's recovery or leisure hours either, so they stand simply as twelve extra hours in a woman's day that the architects did not account for. As Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero claim, "los cuidados que sostienen la vida son históricamente invisibilizados e imprescindibles."³⁹² Finally, it is

³⁹⁰ Tithi Bhattacharya, "Introduction: Mapping Social Reproduction Theory" in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 10.

³⁹¹ UAS, *Proyecto*, 10-11.

³⁹² Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero, "Deuda, vivienda y trabajo: una agenda feminista para la pospandemia," *Revista Anfibia*, Universidad Nacional de San Martín, accessed April 5, 2021. <http://revistaanfibia.com/ensayo/deuda-vivienda-trabajo-una-agenda-feminista-la-pospandemia/>

important to note that the UAS's proposal to liberate women from most household labor responded not to a critique of gender oppression, but to the principle of maximizing productivity, and in this respect it is possible to argue that it was trapped in a capitalist logic of accumulation that contemporary thinkers such as Gago, Cavallero, and Bhattacharya criticize from a feminist standpoint. As Bhattacharya succinctly explains, social reproduction theory "is primarily concerned with understanding how categories of oppression (such as gender, race, and ableism) are coproduced in simultaneity with the production of surplus value."³⁹³

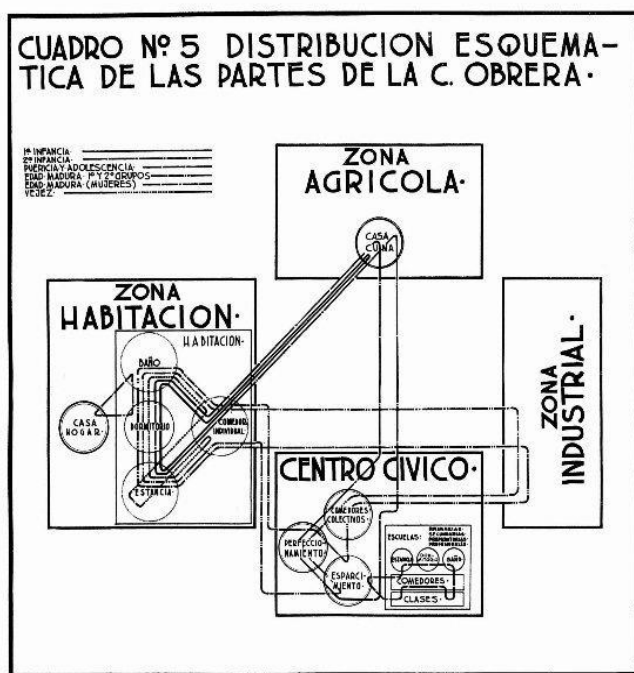


Figure 4. UAS, “Cuadro No. 5 Distribución Esquemática de las Partes de la C Obrera,” *Proyecto de ciudad obrera para México DF* (Mexico City: XVI Congreso Internacional de la Habitación y de la Planificación, 1938).

Keeping this in mind, the extent of the UAS's proposal to collectivize social reproduction is only visible in their functionalist design for a housing unit (Figure 5). The UAS presented the prototype of a three-story high-rise with small apartments for adult couples and a series of collective facilities: bathrooms, dining commons, and children's dormitories. The apartment's design included a small kitchen, a living room, toilet, sink, and a bedroom. Each floor in the building had collective bathrooms in the middle of the hallway and children's dormitories on the right-hand side of the building. Throughout their project, the UAS architects mentioned other collective facilities such as dining commons, laundry rooms, playgrounds, and nurseries. It is clear from this that the UAS proposed a project in which the city's collective facilities and its cooperative division of labor would organize social reproduction responsibilities and labor collectively, both on a daily basis (food, cleaning, leisure) and intergenerationally (childcare).

³⁹³ Tithi Bhattacharya, “Introduction,” 14.

Therefore, the UAS's social reproduction model proposed a move from the traditional family to the workers' collective. For the architects in question, this would not only ensure a productive labor force, as I mentioned above, but also a radical transformation of social organization. To begin with, the UAS architects argued that collectivizing social reproduction through architectural design was financially and architecturally economic, in the sense that building education, sports, and cultural infrastructure that would serve a large community was a feasible endeavor for a developing country like Mexico. As I explored above, they supported functionalism precisely for its cost-effectiveness and reproducibility.³⁹⁴ But building collective infrastructure also meant guaranteeing equal access to services such as cleaning, childcare, sports, and education for all inhabitants in the city. The UAS architects described this aspect of their project as "arquitectura económica en el sentido de la Economía Política, esto es, para todos."³⁹⁵

The UAS architects also claimed, following Moisei Ginzburg's own ideas for the *Narkomfin* building, that communal housing with collective facilities would advance in practice a cooperative organization of social life in its different aspects, from labor to childcare, from food production to leisure and culture. In other words, architecture and urban planning could become fundamental devices used to consolidate the workers' collective as a social unit, displacing the traditional family as the institution in charge of distributing the labor, costs, and responsibilities necessary to ensure society's own survival. The UAS architects further implied in their project that the dissociation of social reproduction from the family institution opened up the possibility of a common property regime.³⁹⁶ However, they did not push the matter further. It is nevertheless worth suggesting a possible explanation for their rationale. Collectivizing social reproduction implied relieving the traditional family from the costs, responsibilities, and labor behind it. This situation, in turn, opened up the possibility to radically transform inheritance laws and practices that reproduce private property through familiar (and oftentimes patriarchal) lineage. In the project, as I have explained, it is clear that all reproductive costs would be assumed by the workers' collective and administered through a cooperative organization of labor. In this sense, the UAS architects implied that the traditional family was a site of social oppression and may have therefore concluded that collectivizing social reproduction was a necessary step in the process of collectivizing private property as such.

Proyecto de ciudad obrera was never built, and the postrevolutionary state in Mexico took a conservative turn in 1940 that diverged from the UAS's line of thinking. However, the UAS's architectural utopianism did manage to produce a lasting effect in Mexico's social housing policy and the debates surrounding it. To begin with and as Enrique de Anda has studied, for reasons of densification and cost-effectiveness, the functionalist high-rise or *multifamiliar* was at the center of Mexico City's social housing policy from the 1940s to the 1970s (and, to a lesser extent, in other cities in the country).³⁹⁷ Furthermore, as we will discuss in the following chapter, in direct response to the UAS's ideas on collectivizing social

³⁹⁴ UAS, *Proyecto*, 5.

³⁹⁵ UAS, *Proyecto*, 5.

³⁹⁶ UAS, *Proyecto*, 9.

³⁹⁷ Enrique de Anda, *Vivienda*, 227-335.

reproduction, the *multifamiliares* tended to include in their architectural programs collective public facilities such as sport fields, nurseries, schools, and cultural centers. In this sense, the debates that took place in the 1940s and 50s in magazines such as *Arquitectura México* on the relation between public architecture and welfare provision were in close dialogue with the UAS's project. This chapter has attempted to better situate *Proyecto de ciudad obrera* in order to provide a framework that can help us examine critically the relation between the project and these later social housing models, policies, and debates. It has also attempted to situate the UAS's ideas on housing and the family in relation to feminist social reproduction theory. Contemporary feminism has recentered questions of domestic spaces and labor, and it is currently debating the configuration of anticapitalist and antipatriarchal forms of organizing domestic life. As Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero explain, “porque la casa no puede ser un lugar de especulación inmobiliaria ni de violencia machista es que [...] quedará un horizonte en relación a la lucha por el acceso a la vivienda y una pregunta más profunda: ¿dónde, cómo y con quién queremos vivir?”³⁹⁸ Reflecting critically on the socialist utopian urban models of the 1930s avant-garde such as *Proyecto de ciudad obrera* may contribute important insights to this momentous debate.

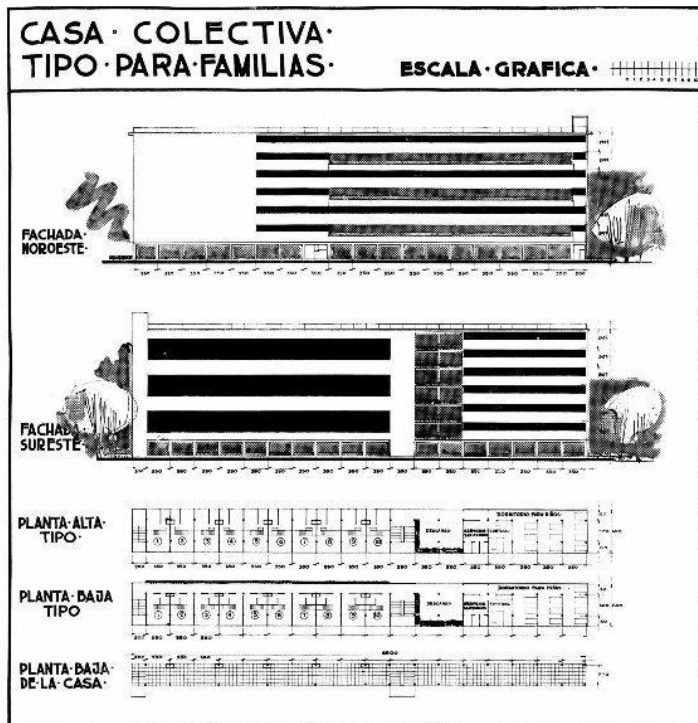


Figure 5. “Casa Colectiva Tipo Para Familias,” *Proyecto de ciudad obrera para México DF* (Mexico City: XVI Congreso Internacional de la Habitación y de la Planificación, 1938).

³⁹⁸ Verónica Gago and Luci Cavallero, “Deuda.”

The Satellite City
Urban Speculation and Social Housing in *Arquitectura México* (1943-1957)

In 1957, the magazine *Arquitectura México* published a conference that Mario Pani, owner and director of the magazine, had dictated on September 12 of that year at the Society of Mexican Architects. In the conference, titled “México: un problema, una solución,” Pani attempted to explain the conceptual framework behind his plan for a suburban development north of Mexico City called Ciudad Satélite, a few months before breaking ground. Pani also aimed at presenting this plan as a replicable solution for housing developments in Mexico. As a matter of fact, throughout the conference, he presented Ciudad Satélite as a model of how urban planners should design the city's expansion to control and manage urban growth. He thus presented the concept of the satellite city as a “programa de solución integral para los problemas de la ciudad de México, adecuado también, en el ámbito nacional, para aquellas ciudades que puedan ser víctimas del mismo fenómeno.”³⁹⁹

Mario Pani, nephew of Alberto J. Pani, whose urban thought we explored in Chapter 1, opened his 1957 keynote address by claiming that the biggest problem urban planners of the Post-War period faced around the globe was the uncontrolled growth of cities, which he referred to as “un problema de época.”⁴⁰⁰ After laying down the problem, Pani went on to discuss a tradition of utopian urban planning in which he wanted to situate the satellite city model, including Arturo Soria y Mata’s “linear city,” Ebenezer Howard’s “garden cities,” and Le Corbusier’s *Ville Radieuse*. In his comments, Pani recognized the value and limits of each of these proposals, particularly Le Corbusier, who was still the most influential international architect in Mexico at that point in time. In fact, Pani had been in dialogue with Le Corbusier’s urban planning and social housing ideas since the construction of the Centro Urbano Presidente Miguel Alemán a decade earlier, in 1947.⁴⁰¹ In the conference, Pani argued that Le Corbusier had managed to understand the depth of the problem at hand. Pani also approved the idea that vertical growth represented the best possible means to densify urban space, rationalize it, and liberate the ground floor as public space and green areas. However, he claimed that Le Corbusier’s *Ville Radieuse* plan was far too radical in its proposition to destroy and rebuild Paris, and therefore too idealistic: “Es una solución ideal, para un mundo ideal, de ilimitados recursos económicos; que serviría a hombres y núcleos humanos capaces de olvidar las piedras y las obras en que está escrita su historia y fraguada su tradición” (209).

Instead, Pani countered Le Corbusier’s plan with a vision of his own for Mexico City, arguing in favor of a solution outside the city center: “esta solución lleva un nombre: la ciudad

³⁹⁹ Mario Pani, “México: un problema, una solución,” *Arquitectura México* 60 (1957): 226. The notion of a suburban development as a “satellite” is by no means Pani’s. On the contrary, it was part of the urban planning lexicon at least since Ebenezer Howard’s *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (1902). As we will see, Pani and other urban thinkers of these years reframed this notion in the Mexican context in particular.

⁴⁰⁰ Mario Pani, “México,” 203.

⁴⁰¹ See: Enrique de Anda, *Vivienda colectiva de la modernidad mexicana* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2008), 240-264 and Juan José Kochen (editor), *El primer multifamiliar moderno: Centro Urbano Presidente Alemán* (México City: Fundación ICA/Fundación Miguel Alemán, 2017).

fuera de la ciudad.”⁴⁰² According to Pani, the old colonial city should have been preserved only as a historical landmark many years ago, while the modern city should have been rationally planned and organized elsewhere. This is essentially what Pani proposed to do by means of a series of autonomous satellite cities: “unidades de tipo autónomo, autosuficientes, en las que tengan presencia eficaz todos los elementos de servicio.”⁴⁰³ Satellite cities would be based on the figure of the “superblock,” a centripetal urban form insofar as it was designed to deliver most services within the urban satellite: “Mercado de alimentos, escuelas, deporte, artesanía, están allí, son servicios comunes.”⁴⁰⁴ Therefore, Pani argued that a satellite city organized around superblocks meant that sixty percent of the inhabitants would be able to live in the satellite without having to commute elsewhere for education, childcare, shopping, sports, or entertainment. Furthermore, these urban satellites would become in time true urban communities in which inhabitants would acquire a sense of belonging to their living space. By the end of his conference, Pani envisioned a utopian model of his own, albeit one he considered feasible. He proposed a decentralized network of autonomous satellite cities connected to each other through highways: “Proponemos un apunte de solución integral. La solución total será una red de comunicaciones de ciudades satélite en México.”⁴⁰⁵ Pani believed that this network of urban satellites would decongest Mexico City’s center, decentralize services, and rationally organize the city’s expansion, thus solving the most important urban problems he diagnosed at that point in time. As I mentioned above, he also believed that other cities in the country facing a similar situation should adopt the model, if on a different scale.

Throughout this chapter, we will see that Pani’s 1957 satellite city model is only the most fully formed version of a theoretical argument and an urban planning program he and his colleagues in the magazine *Arquitectura México* had been developing since the early 1940s, particularly when discussing their participation in state-developed housing projects outside Mexico City’s center. As a magazine, *Arquitectura México* brought together a group of architects, writers, and intellectuals that revolved around Pani’s orbit, an architect who, after studying in Paris, had returned to Mexico in the late 1930s with important economic and political connections.⁴⁰⁶ *Arquitectura México*, which Pani owned and directed, soon became the advertising arm of his group’s architecture firms, as well as a space to theorize and broadcast their political visions for the production of urban space in Mexico (particularly in the capital, for reasons I shall explain below).

In a 1955 article celebrating the first fifty issues of *Arquitectura México*, Antonio Acevedo explained that the magazine had been originally interested in publishing contemporary architecture projects from around the globe in order to inform the Mexican audience. They had not foreseen, Acevedo argued, that the period of economic expansion that followed the Second World War in Mexico would bring with it a construction boom

⁴⁰² Mario Pani, “México,” 211.

⁴⁰³ Mario Pani, “México,” 217.

⁴⁰⁴ Mario Pani, “México,” 218.

⁴⁰⁵ Mario Pani, “México,” 226.

⁴⁰⁶ For a biographical account of Mario Pani, see: Miquel Adrià, *Mario Pani: La construcción de la modernidad*. Mexico City: Gustavo Gili, 2005.

spearheaded by Mario Pani and other architects, bureaucrats, and intellectuals related to the magazine. In this process, the magazine had had to swiftly change courses: “la paulatina definición de unas tendencias arquitectónicas que en pocos años emparejaron a México con el Brasil como uno de los países de América profundamente originales y creadores de esa disciplina, hicieron de la revista un vehículo de expresión propia, fecunda.”⁴⁰⁷ As Acevedo recounted, from the mid 1940s on, *Arquitectura México* became deeply involved with the development of modernist architecture and urban planning in Mexico, covering different types of architecture projects (residential, commercial, industrial) built in Mexico, offering advertising space for local brands involved in the construction industry, hosting urban debates taking place in those years, and publishing plans for future developments such as Ciudad Satélite, both in order to explain their program and to advertise them for potential buyers.

Throughout the 1940s and 50s, *Arquitectura México* consistently claimed that the biggest urban challenge Mexico City faced was the unrestrained growth of the capital. Following the line inaugurated by Alberto J. Pani in 1916, the magazine was deeply critical of *vecindades* and the self-produced urban settlements normally referred to as *tugurios* or slums (using the English term). However, *Arquitectura México* leveled many of their attacks against land speculators, who the magazine characterized as the true force behind the sprawling expansion of the city. In opposition to speculators that were only interested in urbanizing for profit, *Arquitectura México* argued that it was them, the professional architects, who had to be in charge of planning and designing the controlled growth of the city, in alliance with like-minded bureaucrats and construction companies. In the following section of the chapter, I will dwell on this matter in detail by reconstructing the historical and political context and by showing how *Arquitectura México* operated both commercially and politically. We will see this by dwelling briefly on the magazine’s coverage of the Ciudad Universitaria project and the development of a southern section of Mexico City known as El Pedregal.

Following Pani’s own architectural and intellectual ideas, *Arquitectura México* found in modernist utopian urban plans such as Le Corbusier’s *Ville Radieuse* and the CIAM’s *Athens Charter* the material with which to thread their concept of the satellite city. Although the magazine employed different names for the satellite city model –*multifamiliares*, *unidades vecinales*, *ciudades autónomas*, *islas urbanas*–, they were all attempts to design autonomous urban developments that offered different housing modalities, collective services and infrastructures, and an important amount of public gardens and green areas. By exploring the development of their satellite city model in detail, we will see that this solution fitted the group’s commercial interest in participating in the production of urban space in Mexico City, but also its moderate political position in favor of welfare provision. In this respect, I will argue that the magazine was attempting to dialogue both with the socialist avant-garde we explored in Chapter 3 and with the new economic challenges and demands posed by the postrevolutionary state during the so-called “Mexican Miracle.”

It is important to note that *Arquitectura México* theorized its urban planning model on the go, in close relation to the housing developments that Pani and his group were

⁴⁰⁷ Antonio Acevedo, “Los 50 números de *Arquitectura*,” *Arquitectura México* 51 (1955): 180.

constructing, planning to construct, or had just constructed. Enrique de Anda's *Vivienda colectiva de la modernidad mexicana* remains the most comprehensive account of the housing developments of the period available, and I will closely dialogue with his work, but a considerable amount of criticism has been published recently on specific housing developments or on other urban projects like Ciudad Universitaria.⁴⁰⁸ Having said this, these works are more concerned with the architecture of the projects in question or with the history of Mexico's housing policy than with exploring in detail the urban model of the satellite city and the central importance of collective infrastructure and local autonomy in this model. Furthermore, little has been said about *Arquitectura México*'s role as an integral part in Pani's architectural and political project. In this chapter, I will explore how the magazine became a communication venue that Pani and his group used to conceptualize their utopian urban planning model, broadcast their work, and thread key alliances with bureaucrats, artists, and other architects in order to realize their model on the urban terrain. I will also show that, in its attempt to remain true to a socialdemocratic political position, the magazine swayed on occasions both to the right and to the left, and in this respect it is clear that it was attempting to negotiate with different positions regarding the production of urban space in Mexico City. This is particularly visible in the importance *Arquitectura México* gave to providing collective infrastructure in housing developments and in the related question of local autonomy, which will thus be the central focus of the chapter. In the final pages, I will offer a brief account of the fate of Pani's satellite housing developments as seen from the present moment.

Penicillin for the City

During the Second World War, in an effort to satisfy domestic demand as well as foreign market spaces abandoned by the United States, Japan, and Europe, Mexico's economic policies focused on developing the consumer goods industry.⁴⁰⁹ This policy continued to foster industrialization in Mexico, a process that the ruling party decided to further encourage in the Post-War period through its program of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) that included protectionist economic measures such as import tariffs on consumer goods and devaluing the peso "in order to discourag[e] Mexican consumers from purchasing imported goods. The result was to stimulate local manufacturing and to create a new cadre of prominent industrialists."⁴¹⁰ As Susan Gauss explains in *Made in Mexico*, while, after the

⁴⁰⁸ See: Juan José Kochen (editor), *El primer*; Miquel Adrià (editor), *Tlatelolco: Un concepto de ciudad* (Mexico City: Arquine, 2020). For a discussion of Tlatelolco in the context of 1968, see: George Flaherty, *Hotel Mexico: Dwelling on the '68 Movement* (Oakland: University of California, 2016). For a series of essays, photographs, diagrams, and plans on UNAM's Ciudad Universitaria, see: Salvador Lizárraga and Cristina López (editors), *Living CU: 60 Years* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2014). For an analysis of Mexico's housing policies in the twentieth century, see: Sarah Selvidge, "Modernism and Miracles: Architecture, Housing, and the State in Mexico," PhD Dissertation (Berkeley: University of California Berkeley, 2015).

⁴⁰⁹ Susan M. Gauss, *Made in Mexico: Regions, Nation, and the State in the Rise of Mexican Industrialism 1920s-1940s* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

⁴¹⁰ Peter H. Smith, "Mexico Since 1946: Dynamics of an Authoritarian Regime," in *Mexico Since Independence*, edited by Leslie Bethell (New York: Cambridge UP, 1991), 324.

war, the United States pursued the possibility of signing a free trade agreement according to which Mexico would provide raw materials and the United States consumer goods in exchange, “a critique of Mexican dependency on the United States dominated the debates about development” and the ruling party ultimately favored ISI as the path towards Mexico’s autonomous economic development.⁴¹¹ From Miguel Alemán’s presidency (1946-1952) to the early 1970s, “protectionism [...] became the foundation for a new version of revolutionary nationalism rooted in statist, urban industrialism.”⁴¹² As the Mexican economy began to present patterns of sustained economic growth that would ultimately last into the 1970s, the official label of the “Desarrollo Estabilizador” was soon replaced by the much more appealing notion of the *Milagro Mexicano*.⁴¹³

This program of industrial development was indeed presented as an endeavor to ensure Mexico’s autonomy from foreign powers, particularly the United States, and it involved a process of class conciliation that, at the discursive level, the PRI ensured by deploying a series of nationalistic symbols. At the political level, meanwhile, the PRI put to work its corporatist machinery in order to secure alliances from different sectors such as CANACITRA –a chamber that represented a series of prominent industrialists mostly based in Mexico City– and the CTM, the confederation of working class unions created by Vicente Lombardo Toledano during the *Cardenismo* and directed in the 1940s by Fidel Velázquez. Michelle Dion has shown that the 1943 Social Security Law that saw the creation of a social security institute that provided health insurance, retirement pensions, and other benefits to workers in the formal sector (IMSS) was the result of a negotiation between labor, state, and the private sector in the context of ISI. According to Dion, the IMSS responded to a long lasting labor demand that the postrevolutionary regime had not been able to deliver but that the PRI needed to ensure in order to win labor for the contentious 1940 election. In Dion’s words, “the adoption of social insurance in 1943 should be viewed as the outcome of an implicit bargain between labor and the state, a bargain whereby labor accepted increased control of its activities in exchange for guaranteed social insurance benefits.”⁴¹⁴ As we shall see, the IMSS would become in time an important actor in the development of social housing in Mexico City.

CANACITRA, for its part, espoused a nationalist discourse not unlike President Alemán’s, becoming a private sector voice that argued in favor of protectionist policies with the objective of “building a domestic market for Mexican manufactures based on worker commitment to consumption and production.”⁴¹⁵ This separated this chamber from other private sector voices such as the Monterrey Group, whose businesses depended more on exporting raw materials to the United States and who were thus more interested in free trade

⁴¹¹ Susan M. Gauss, *Made*, 176.

⁴¹² Susan M. Gauss, *Made*, 204.

⁴¹³ According to Peter H. Smith, “between 1940 and 1960 the GDP grew from 21.7 billion pesos to 74.3 billion pesos (in constant 1950 prices, thus adjusting for inflation), an average annual increase of 6.4 percent.” Peter H. Smith, “Mexico,” 324.

⁴¹⁴ Michelle Dion, *Workers and Welfare: Comparative Institutional Change in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh UP, 2010), 75.

⁴¹⁵ Susan M. Gauss, *Made*, 96.

than protectionism. By supporting the regime's program, CANACITRA assured that most of the State's attention in its program of fostering industrial development would be placed in Mexico City, where the chamber's constituents were essentially located. In his discussion of the "Keynesian City," David Harvey explains that centralization was indeed a general tendency of protectionism worldwide insofar as these policies hinder intercapitalist competition and help "to further concentrate production geographically or to protect geographical concentrations already achieved."⁴¹⁶ In the Mexican mid-twentieth century, the combination of these political and economic calculations resulted in the fact that Mexico City saw a period of dramatic growth. "From 1940 to 1950, the number of industrial establishments in Mexico City exploded from 4,920 to 12,704," while the population of the capital's metropolitan area reached 3 million people by 1950.⁴¹⁷ As Diane Davis explains, the concentration of urbanization-led development in Mexico City meant "a massive infusion of state money into urban services and urban infrastructure" that would lay the spatial conditions for industrial production and consumption.⁴¹⁸

Harvey's account of the "Keynesian City" offers valuable insights to understand the urbanization process of the period, even if he is mostly referring to the United States (and, to a lesser extent, Europe). According to Harvey, Post-War urbanization should be viewed as "a state-organized response to what were interpreted as the chronic underconsumption problems of the 1930s," aggravated by a politically organized working class.⁴¹⁹ Improving the conditions of the working classes, both in terms of salaries and benefits, could solve the political problem of assuaging labor and the economic problem as well, by enhancing mass consumption in the domestic market in order to accelerate production. This led to what Harvey calls a "demand-side urbanization" in which the city was understood, simultaneously, as a consumption artifact and a redistributive apparatus. A consumption artifact because urbanization was meant to open new spaces to realize surplus value, a redistributive apparatus because this process aimed at incorporating an increasing number of inhabitants into this dynamic through access to social security, public services, and credit. Indeed, according to Harvey, the emergence of different modalities of debt and credit was at the center of this urban process. Debt assured that a growing population would have enough security, stability, and compromise (due to their debt) in order to participate in the market both as workers and consumers. Furthermore, debt allowed for "a smoother and accelerating flow of capital into the deepening and geographical widening of urban infrastructures."⁴²⁰

The flow of capital through debt and credit, in turn, allowed governments to develop welfare infrastructure projects that, by offering social securities and ensuring a safely controlled reproduction of the labor force, satisfied both labor and capital's demands: "Investments in transportation, education, housing, and healthcare appeared particularly appropriate from the standpoint of improving labor qualities, buying labor peace, and

⁴¹⁶ David Harvey, *The Urban Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985), 35.

⁴¹⁷ Susan M. Gauss, *Made*, 99.

⁴¹⁸ Diane Davis, *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1994), 103.

⁴¹⁹ David Harvey, *The Urban*, 37.

⁴²⁰ David Harvey, *The Urban*, 36.

accelerating the turnover time of capital in both production and consumption.”⁴²¹ Harvey explains that this entire process was managed by a state apparatus capable of intervening in macroeconomic policy that understood “the urban process as a vehicle for redistribution,” but that also aimed at producing a rational consumption landscape that ensured the expansion of certain industries, including construction.⁴²² Therefore, “the Keynesian city was shaped as a consumption artifact and its social, economic, and political life organized around the theme of state-backed, debt-financed consumption.”⁴²³ However, and this will interest us throughout this chapter, the success of this project was contingent upon “the creation of a powerful alliance of class forces comprising government, corporate capital, financial interests, and *all those interested in land development*.”⁴²⁴

Arquitectura México emerged in this particular context as a magazine that brought together a group of emerging architects concentrated in Mexico City, led by the figure of Mario Pani.⁴²⁵ As Enrique de Anda claims, in the 1940s, the architecture trade in Mexico was relatively small and somewhat provincial:

Prácticamente todos los arquitectos [...] provenían de la misma escuela a la cual habían regresado para dar clases, formaban parte de la SAM [Sociedad Mexicana de Arquitectos] y desempeñaban su trabajo profesional formando parte de la “gran familia” en la que por supuesto todos se conocían y habían aceptado la “presencia tutelar” del arquitecto más reconocido de la época, José Villagrán García.⁴²⁶

Without openly challenging Villagrán’s authority, after returning with an architecture degree from Paris, Pani wanted to dispute Villagrán’s leadership by demonstrating his cosmopolitan approach to architecture and his up to date knowledge of international tendencies and actors. This explains why, at first, the magazine was mostly devoted to presenting projects and reviewing architecture literature from around the globe to a Mexican audience. Once Pani and those architects close to him began to build in Mexico, *Arquitectura México* included their projects along with the work of important international figures such as Richard Neutra or Oscar Niemeyer, increasing their symbolic value as a cosmopolitan architecture in synchrony with what was being constructed in Europe, the United States, or countries like Brazil. Furthermore, by reviewing recent books or commissioning essays to international authors, the group consolidated the magazine’s position as the semi-official arbiter of a new generation of modernist architecture that was bringing to the country the best that the international arena had to offer. In this respect, *Arquitectura México* was seamlessly aligned with the Milagro Mexicano’s political argument that Mexico was coming closer to the developed nations of the world. Soon enough, by including or excluding certain projects from its pages, *Arquitectura México* became the arbiter of what counted as modern architecture in Mexico, and Mario Pani an increasingly powerful voice in the sector.

⁴²¹ David Harvey, *The Urban*, 38.

⁴²² David Harvey, *The Urban*, 40.

⁴²³ David Harvey, *The Urban*, 37-8.

⁴²⁴ David Harvey, *The Urban*, 40. My highlight.

⁴²⁵ *Arquitectura México* ran from 1938 to 1978, for a total of 119 numbers. It is by far the most important publication in the history of modern Mexican architecture.

⁴²⁶ Enrique de Anda, *Vivienda*, 28.

Directed by Mario and his brother Arturo –an industrial designer–, *Arquitectura México* was also a networking space, an opportunity to thread key alliances with different actors involved in the construction industry in Mexico. First, with other architects who they welcomed or approved of by giving them recognition in the magazine. Second, with the private industry. The advertising pages of the magazine, for instance, featured brands involved in construction such as real estate developers, material manufacturers (glass, steel, concrete), civil engineering companies, or banks specializing in mortgages and housing credits. These brands, insofar as they paid for commercial space in the magazine, were responsible for the magazine’s subsistence. Third, *Arquitectura México* threaded alliances with people in the art world as well, particularly photographers such as Guillermo Zamora or Armando Salas Portugal who would become very important for the magazine’s operation insofar as they were able to capture the aesthetic waver of modernist architecture in Mexico (Figure 1). Finally, the magazine welcomed in its pages the voice of certain bureaucrats or governmental officials involved in developing urban infrastructure projects through institutions such as the IMSS, the Banco Nacional Hipotecario Urbano y de Obras Públicas (BANHUOP), or the Dirección de Pensiones. As we will see in this chapter, by doing so, *Arquitectura México* wanted to claim a voice in the decisions over the production of urban space in Mexico, particularly in Mexico City.



Figure 1. Guillermo Zamora, “Centro Urbano Presidente Juárez,” *Arquitectura México* 40 (1952): 413.

When addressing Mexico City’s situation, *Arquitectura México*’s main focus was the question of growth. On the one hand, the city had to grow because the nation’s industrializing

agenda required so and because it was a tangible proof of the economy's development. Mexico City was growing and construction was booming because the economy was on the rise. Writers in the magazine were rarely critical of the government's developmental agenda, among other things because the construction boom was benefiting them directly. On the other hand, *Arquitectura México* claimed that, thus far, the city had grown with no direction or plan, responding only to the profit interests of a series of land and real estate speculators. In 1943, Hannes Meyer –former director of the Bauhaus– wrote in issue 12 of *Arquitectura México* that private speculators were the main force behind the city's disorganized suburban sprawl. “Esta especulación,” Meyer claimed in the article, “abusa de la tendencia de la gente hacia la casa propia.”⁴²⁷ In one of his presentations at the 1938 XVI Congreso we discussed in Chapter 3, Adolfo Zamora –by the 1940s director of the BANHUOP– had already summarized the critique against the suburban sprawl that we see throughout the issues of *Arquitectura México*:

Esta solución presentaba todas las ventajas. Halagaba, como un espejismo, la siempre viva añoranza de los obreros por la vida campesina; elevaba los valores del suelo en la periferia de las ciudades; imponía la necesidad de contratar la construcción de redes más amplias de servicios municipales; constituía a la clase trabajadora en una especie de colonizado industrial; abarataba la mano de obra, gracias al jardincito cultivado y a la sumisión de los obreros temerosos de perder su viejo anhelo de casa propia; abría la posibilidad de negocios ventajosos, con la demolición de barrios céntricos de tugurios (alza de valores, contratos); permitía la concentración del suelo urbano en manos de unos cuantos propietarios; en fin, fomentaba en todas las formas imaginables ese vasto negocio que ha sido para ciertos grupos de capitalistas y de funcionarios poco escrupulosos el crecimiento horizontal de las ciudades.⁴²⁸

Mario Pani and *Arquitectura México* opposed these speculators with an alternative model for doing business. *Arquitectura México* was particularly critical of the suburban sprawl of single-family homes produced by developers, as well as of the lack of services and infrastructure these developments provided to inhabitants. They also opposed the profit-driven mentality of speculators, who, as Zamora claimed, were only interested in buying cheap land, urbanizing it, and selling it for a profit. In 1949, Mario Pani said: “No queremos que nuestra obra tenga nada que ver con la infección fraccionadora del urbanismo lucrativo,”⁴²⁹ and their housing models in many respects stood against the suburban expansion of single-family homes with no public space or collective infrastructure of any kind.

On the other side of the equation, writers in *Arquitectura México* continued to build on a discourse deeply critical of *tugurios*, *vecindades*, and other forms of popular housing, a discourse we have been exploring throughout the dissertation. A 1950 anonymous article

⁴²⁷ Hannes Meyer, “La ciudad de México: fragmentos de un estudio urbanístico,” *Arquitectura México* 12 (1943): 103.

⁴²⁸ Adolfo Zamora, *La habitación agrupada y la aislada con relación al problema del empleo del tiempo libre* (Mexico City: XVI Congreso Internacional de la Planificación y de la Habitación, 1938), 2.

⁴²⁹ Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, “El problema de la habitación en México: realidad de su solución. Una conversación con el arquitecto Mario Pani,” *Arquitectura México* 27 (1949): 71.

titled “Penicilina para la ciudad,” for instance, held no punches in its virulent argument in favor of destroying *vecindades*. The article, which was meant to describe a series of photographs of urban poverty in Mexico City, asked if it was a good idea to publish photographs that depicted such a delicate urban situation. The article answered affirmatively, claiming that “con ellas [las fotografías], en realidad, se reclama el uso de la dinamita, el trabajo suavizador de las motoconformadoras, *el entusiasmo del urbanista, el impulso del arquitecto*, para limpiar y mejorar.”⁴³⁰ The article went on to argue that professional experts (architects and urban planners) had both responsibility and jurisdiction to aggressively intervene in these neighborhoods, clearing the impoverished *vecindades* and slums in order to erect a planned urban space in its place. Publishing the photographs, the article suggested, would only make the urgency of this project clear for the public. Furthermore, reiterating a common trope we have seen since Alberto Pani’s 1916 *La higiene en México*, the article suggested that professional experts had to intervene because the inhabitants of *vecindades* had become used to living conditions that were subhuman and even worse than animal:

Quienes habitan dicha vecindad trabajan, albergan esperanzas, conservan el instinto de querer vivir más decentemente. Claro que ya podrían haberlo hecho. Pero los aplasta la mala costumbre, el gusto a la porquería, el hábito vicioso de estar cerca de la pestilencia y el tufo de jabonaduras y de la fetidez de los charcos estancados. [...] Allí la gente vive, por lo tanto, peor que los animales. El problema es tremendo pero hay que proceder con energía. Meter dinamita, como ya dije, y regar petróleo.⁴³¹

Using a different language, the idea that experts should participate in the disappearance of *vecindades* and *tugurios* by different means was in fact a common trope in the magazine’s pages. *Arquitectura México* thus aimed to carve a place in between urban speculators and self-produced settlements, claiming that it was them, as professional experts in construction, who had the responsibility, knowledge, and political compromise necessary to direct the process of urban development and growth, in alliance with key figures in the construction industry and public institutions. It was architects, then, who had to provide a housing model that would regulate the city’s growth and serve the housing needs of an increasingly large urban population.

In practice, this did not exclude the possibility of pursuing business interests or investment opportunities. It is clear that securing public works commissions brought business to Pani, his associates, and construction companies close to him, particularly Ingenieros Civiles Asociados (ICA). But there were other operations included in the process, some of which Adolfo Zamora himself had criticized in 1938. In these, *Arquitectura México* played a significant role, as we can see in its coverage of Ciudad Universitaria and the neighboring Jardines del Pedregal

The Move South

⁴³⁰ “Penicilina para la ciudad,” *Arquitectura México* 30 (1950): 310. My highlight. It should be noted, at least in passing, that 1950 is the year that Luis Buñuel’s film *Los Olvidados* came out to scandal the Mexican establishment, precisely by showing images of the forsaken slums of the metropolis.

⁴³¹ “Penicilina,” 312.

Architecture historians such as Alfonso Pérez-Méndez, Elisa Drago, and Jimena Torre claim that the idea that Mexico's National University required a unified campus had been floating around for many years. In 1928, architects Mauricio M. Campos and Marcial Gutiérrez Camarena presented the design for a campus as their bachelor's thesis and, in 1931, the University's administration promoted a formal research study on the feasibility of the project.⁴³² Although the National University was the most important higher education institution in the country, it occupied old colonial buildings dispersed throughout Mexico City's colonial center. There was therefore little connection between different schools and disciplines, while the colonial buildings had to be thoroughly renovated in order to transform them into modern education facilities, a process that was increasingly difficult, costly, and ultimately incapable of accommodating a growing number of students.

By 1946, the project for Ciudad Universitaria became a reality with the passing of a law for its construction, and President Miguel Alemán considered it henceforth one of his term's main priorities. This was politically sound given that Alemán prided himself on being an UNAM graduate and the first president of postrevolutionary Mexico not to emerge from the ranks of the military. His presidency (1946-1952) was meant to signal a change in the PRI's direction from military to civil rule, and CU symbolized this change to perfection. A few months later, in 1946, CU's planning commission selected a large piece of land in the lava-covered Pedregal de San Ángel as the potential site for the campus. A year later, Mario Pani and Enrique del Moral were put in charge of coordinating CU's master plan, envisioning the campus as a satellite university city in the south, far away from the congested city center. The civil engineering company ICA, who had close ties to Pani, took charge of the construction.

In an essay on how the CU project was conceptualized, Alfonso Pérez-Méndez explains that, at first, CU's commission deemed the idea of building a campus in El Pedregal unfeasible. Rector Salvador Zubirán "nevertheless made the proposal of buying the lands of El Pedregal de San Ángel just as a real estate investment, selling it and using the resulting capital to finance another purchase in a different section of the city."⁴³³ It is clear from this remark that, besides a campus, CU was conceived as a project of urban development and real estate speculation right from the start. If buying those lands represented an investment, this was so because the city seemed to be growing south. In fact, Luis Barragán and his associates were developing the high-end neighborhood Jardines del Pedregal nearby. Pérez-Méndez actually explains that architect José Villagrán attempted to recuse himself from CU's commission, considering that he was a significant investor in Barragán's development, but the commission saw no conflict of interest and allowed Villagrán to stay.⁴³⁴ In the end, CU's

⁴³² For a detailed account of the different architecture projects for UNAM's Ciudad Universitaria from the initial attempts to the final design, see: Elisa Drago and Jimena Torre, "Ideals for a University City," in *Living CU: 60 Years*, edited by Salvador Lizárraga and Cristina López (Mexico City: UNAM, 2014), 95-131.

⁴³³ Alfonso Pérez-Méndez, "Conceptualization of the Settlement of El Pedregal: The Staging of the Public Space in the Master Plan of Ciudad Universitaria," in *Living CU: 60 Years*, edited by Salvador Lizárraga and Cristina López (Mexico City: UNAM, 2014), 38.

⁴³⁴ Alfonso Pérez-Méndez, "Conceptualization," 46.

commission did end up choosing the land of El Pedregal, claiming that it was big, cheap, and in the direction where the city was growing.⁴³⁵

The city was in fact growing in different directions, but what characterized the southern expansion was that it was growing by means of planned developments such as Pani's CUPA and middle or high class suburban neighborhoods like Jardines del Pedregal. In this sense, the transformation of the southern parts of the city from a series of fields and scattered towns (Tacubaya, San Ángel, Coyoacán) into a desirable and aspirational city zone was indeed a semi-concerted operation that brought together a series of interrelated public and private interests. As Pérez-Méndez claims, despite the fact that the commission saw no conflict of interest in Villagrán's involvement in both projects, "the early investors of El Pedregal ended up benefiting greatly from CU's proximity, since its construction and final occupation contributed decisively in convincing the public that El Pedregal was actually habitable."⁴³⁶

It is in this context that we can examine *Arquitectura México's* coverage of CU and the Pedregal site. The magazine played a key role in making the urban move to the south appealing to the public, considering that many of the architects close to the magazine –Mario Pani, of course, but also Enrique del Moral, José Villagrán, and others– had vested economic and political interests in it. The magazine did so by different means, all of which followed the general objective of presenting the Pedregal as a site where modernist architecture and planning were reaching their peak, a place where the cosmopolitan, international style met with a volcanic landscape that symbolized the ancient roots of Mexican identity. Architect Ricardo de Robina, for instance, expressed the idea that CU's architecture and purpose had the responsibility to redeem a landscape that was unique and that still held ties to ancient Mesoamerican cultures:

Ese paisaje, tan familiar para nosotros, constituye un raro producto de la naturaleza no fácil de encontrar en otra parte del mundo; ha sido el manto amoroso que ha cubierto la primera cultura de América y su desaparición bajo los nuevos edificios sólo puede justificarse por la creación de ese otro mundo nuevo y dinámico de la cultura, pivote y eje de toda la vida nacional: por la creación de la Nueva Universidad.⁴³⁷

In a 1952 issue of the magazine specially dedicated to CU's project (issue 39), the magazine made sure to also give space to the Jardines del Pedregal development. The idea was to present both projects as connected to each other in their vision of a future satellite city in the south, as a 1959 advertisement makes clear by highlighting Mathias Goeritz's Pedregal sculpture and the CU buildings (Figure 2). To dispel notions of the Pedregal's isolation, the advertisement announced that the city –the modern, desirable city– was relentlessly advancing toward the south. To prove so, it presented a map of the site's connection to the rest of the city, suggesting that investing in the Pedregal would result in significant returns once urbanization caught up with these pioneering initiatives. In a 1952 interview in the

⁴³⁵ Alfonso Pérez-Méndez, "Conceptualization," 40.

⁴³⁶ Alfonso Pérez-Méndez, "Conceptualization," 46.

⁴³⁷ Ricardo de Robina, "El Pedregal de San Ángel," *Arquitectura México* 39 (1952): 337.

magazine, Noé Carlos Botello –project manager of the Jardines del Pedregal– explained the point:

Sin duda, en el futuro la ciudad de México se extenderá hacia la enorme zona de lava en donde está situado nuestro fraccionamiento. [...] Todavía no se siente la influencia y el beneficio de la Ciudad Universitaria, esa realización arquitectónica que en un momento dado hará valer el acierto de quienes planearon el fraccionamiento más inquietante, asombroso de la capital.⁴³⁸

As Botello suggested, both projects were related, not only because architects like Villagrán were participating in both at the same time, but also because their mutual success would benefit each other. As the Jardines del Pedregal progressed, *Arquitectura México* gave advertisement space to the project, while simultaneously providing extensive coverage of the neighborhood's houses even after CU had been finished. Through photographs, plans, and texts, *Arquitectura México* contributed to creating the idea that Jardines del Pedregal was not only a suburban neighborhood, but a place where modernist residential architecture in Mexico was maturing. In this sense, it presented the Jardines del Pedregal as a neighborhood that offered a luxurious, yet characteristically Mexican modern lifestyle in the lava-covered gardens of the suburbs.

⁴³⁸ Noé Carlos Botello, “Los Jardines del Pedregal,” *Arquitectura México* 39 (1952): 345.



Figure 1: “México avanza siempre hacia el sur.” *Arquitectura México*, 59 (1957).

In its related coverage of Ciudad Universitaria and Jardines del Pedregal, *Arquitectura Mexico* cemented the idea that the southern urban developments in the city represented the avant-garde of modernist architecture in Mexico, contributing to creating a myth around places such as these to the benefit of all the players involved: from landowners who saw prices go up (including the federal government as owner of CU) to architects who secured further business and recognition in the magazine, while also civil engineering companies such as ICA (in charge of CUPA and CU, for instance). As David Harvey claims, planned suburban developments were seen a solution to the problem of incentivizing consumption because they allowed for “the mobilization of effective demand through the total restructuring of space so as to make the consumption of the products of the auto, oil, rubber, and construction industries a necessity rather than a luxury.”⁴³⁹ In this sense, throughout the 1940s and 50s, an alliance between public sector institutions (Dirección de Pensiones, IMSS, and BANHUOP, mainly) and certain private interests (investors, architects, construction companies, and the magazine) attempted to become a driving force

⁴³⁹ David Harvey, *The Urban*, 39.

of urbanization in Mexico City. In contrast to land speculators, this private-public alliance claimed to be looking for an urbanization model that would strike a balance between commercial and social interests. For them, this would ultimately benefit the organized development of the economy as a whole. *Arquitectura México* became, in this process, one of the most important spaces in the public sphere where this model was theorized, presented, defended, and publicized as Pani and other architects close to him began constructing a series of satellite housing developments known as *unidades vecinales* or *multifamiliares*.

A Conversation with Pani

In 1949, *Arquitectura México* published the interview “El problema de la habitación en México: realidad de su solución. Una conversación con el arquitecto Mario Pani.”⁴⁴⁰ The interview’s purpose was giving Pani an opportunity to present the project he and his colleagues in BANHUOP (Félix Sánchez and Carlos B. Zetina) were developing for what would eventually be called the Unidad Modelo. As its name indicates, the Unidad Modelo was understood as a possible prototype for satellite cities, developed in a piece of land owned by the BANHUOP and financed by that bank along with the Dirección de Pensiones Civiles, the pension fund of government employees that would offer housing to union members at relatively low credit rates.⁴⁴¹ According to de Anda, the architectural mind behind this project was actually Félix Sánchez, BANHUOP’s main architect, but Pani was officially in charge and *Arquitectura México* presented it as such: a collective effort coordinated by Pani. Insofar as the Unidad Modelo was explicitly conceived as an experimental model, the 1949 interview with Pani offers important insights on the concepts and theory behind the satellite city.

To begin with, Pani explained that these social housing developments were not exactly for the working class, or at least they were not experiments with the subsidized *casa obrera* or *ciudad obrera* we explored in the previous chapter. According to him, they were meant for the lower middle class, specifically, for government employees and bureaucrats who had been saving part of their income through the Dirección de Pensiones Civiles and would now receive a housing credit. In Pani’s mind, the only way that developing social housing would be feasible was if a financial mechanism was readily available. He claimed that such a mechanism already existed, but, in order to work, middle class workers had to subscribe to banks such as BANHUOP in order to save money and receive credits. The more subscribers, the bigger the capital flow that could be channeled to these projects: “Existen actualmente en México seis Bancos del Ahorro y Préstamo fundados en los últimos tres años en los que más de veinte mil familias están capitalizando sus ahorros para construir su vivienda. [...] Eso permite lanzar un programa de extraordinaria importancia. Hay que darse cuenta de lo que significa para nuestra ciudad la magnitud de una energía potencial como esa, capaz de modificar radicalmente nuestra vida urbana y doméstica.”⁴⁴² Among other

⁴⁴⁰ Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, “El problema de la habitación en México: realidad de su solución: Una conversación con Mario Pani,” *Arquitectura México* 27 (1949): 67-74.

⁴⁴¹ As we will mention briefly below, the government was acting here as an employer. As such, it respected section XII of the Constitution’s Article 123, which stated that employers should guarantee safe and comfortable housing to employees. For more on this, see: Enrique de Anda, *Vivienda*, 195-225.

⁴⁴² Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, “El problema,” 68.

things, the Unidad Modelo was meant to make the idea of acquiring debt in the form of a housing mortgage visible and appealing to the urban workers, of course, but possibly also to employers that could participate as capital investors in further projects.

According to Pani, such a financial strategy could realistically end up satisfying housing demand for the middle classes in Mexico City, particularly for labor unions fighting for increasing social security benefits. Furthermore, Pani believed that it would have ulterior effects as well. Using an idea somewhat reminiscent of “trickle down” economic theory, Pani believed that, through these developments, the housing standard in the city would naturally increase, to the point that slums would disappear and could be turned into public space. In his words:

Al habitarse las unidades vecinales van a producirse naturalmente vacíos originados por la población que abandonará antiguas habitaciones para ocupar las nuevas. Ese movimiento originará a su vez, vacíos en habitaciones de menor calidad que serán llenados por clases más humildes las que a su vez desocuparán casas de menor calidad aún. Lógicamente, se llega al punto en que los vacíos se transfieren a las habitaciones de calidad mínima, o sea, a los slums, los que al haber sido desocupados por una última clase social ya no pueden ser llenados por nadie.⁴⁴³

Zooming in on the architectural model, Pani insisted on one of the major innovations Unidad Modelo offered with respect to the *casa obrera* experiments of the 1930s. In contrast to the homogeneous living spaces we discussed in Chapter 3 with *Proyecto de ciudad obrera*, Unidad Modelo offered different housing modalities: from small, one bedroom apartments to single family homes. Pani claimed that they were attempting to provide housing options for different family sizes and different economic means: “Así, todos los grados sucesivos de posibilidades y de estructura familiar quedan representados en una gama de valores que es casi continua.”⁴⁴⁴ Interestingly enough, Enrique de Anda argues that Pani and Sánchez understood this diversity of economic means and family types as a progressive scale, in the sense that each resident would begin in the smallest apartment as a single person, then to transfer to subsequently larger spaces as *his* family grew. Diversity in means and type of family depended, then, in the stage of an individual’s life more than in different possible life styles or family forms *per se*. The idea was that, through a credit mechanism I will address below, each resident could exchange a smaller apartment for a larger one when needed, emptying the smaller apartment for the younger residents in line. According to de Anda, the four stages (single, married without children, married with children, married with independent children) and four housing modalities were planned to last twenty years, “los mismos del plazo hipotecario.”⁴⁴⁵ Pani understood this as an important advantage with respect to the previous social housing experiments, insofar as this model responded with more flexibility to demand and offered an integrated mobility scheme. In the interview, Pani suggested this was more realistic and in tune with Mexico City’s urban culture than the socialist vision of the 1930s for homogeneous living spaces.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴³ Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, “El problema,” 74.

⁴⁴⁴ Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, “El problema,” 72.

⁴⁴⁵ Enrique de Anda, *Vivienda*, 132.

⁴⁴⁶ Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, “El problema,” 72.

Having said this, Pani agreed with leftist architects such as the UAS and Hannes Meyer, as well as with Le Corbusier, in the importance of providing collective infrastructure of different kinds in every housing development. In the case of Unidad Modelo, for instance, Pani explained that this infrastructure would include market spaces, sport fields and gym facilities, schools, childcare nurseries, a cinema, and a church. He claimed that “todo esto constituye los servicios públicos entendidos como un criterio de profunda sociabilidad y de habitabilidad humana y verdadera. No basta con la construcción de habitaciones si no es complementada por todos aquellos otros elementos de los que el hombre se vale para vivir como necesita.”⁴⁴⁷ For Pani, as I shall discuss in the following sections, the provision of collective infrastructure and public services was a central aspect of the satellite city model and one of the major differences he saw with respect to the sprawling growth of the city. As the above statement makes clear, Pani believed already in 1949 that collective infrastructure provided three things: first, a series of services that were an essential part of a habitable living, understood as more than the mere maintenance of life; second, insofar as these services and spaces were located in the housing developments, the residents would be able to satisfy most of their needs at a walkable distance, which solved problems of commuting and congestion affecting the city as a whole; third, evoking the UAS, Pani believed that this infrastructure would also allow for the emergence of “sociabilidad,” that is, of a neighborhood community. In the following years, drawing heavily from Le Corbusier, both Pani and other writers in *Arquitectura México* developed a more robust theory regarding collective infrastructure and housing developments that was nevertheless already summarized in Pani’s arguments in this interview.

Throughout the interview, Pani explained that the Unidad Modelo was just the first of a series of “housing islands” he and his colleagues at BANHUOP would develop in the following years. In fact, Unidad Modelo was formally called UM9 because it was located in zone 9 of 21 planned locations. In the interview, Pani was absolutely confident that such developments would succeed: “Afortunadamente esta solución de conjunto en la que estamos trabajando existe precisamente como una inmediata posibilidad, y no quiero que la presentemos como algo que podría ser, sino que va a ser.”⁴⁴⁸ Ultimately, only the Unidad Modelo was built, but Pani, Sánchez, and other architects continued to build other satellite cities in the following years. In *Arquitectura México*, they theorized the evolving models, paying particular attention to the question of collective infrastructure and urban autonomy. To this end, the pages of *Arquitectura México* turned to the utopian visions of Le Corbusier and the CIAM in order to explain their work in housing developments such as the Centro Urbano Presidente Alemán (CUPA) and the Centro Urbano Presidente Juárez (CUPJ).

The Human Habitat

As we saw at length in the previous chapter, the socialist architects of the 1930s had brought up the question of how to guarantee equitable access to urban public services. They had claimed that radical architecture could provide a model that, by collectivizing social reproduction labor and costs, would ensure that all inhabitants accessed basic services (water,

⁴⁴⁷ Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, “El problema,” 74.

⁴⁴⁸ Mauricio Gómez Mayorga, “El problema,” 70.

heat, electricity) and social ones as well (childcare, laundry facilities, dining rooms, recreation infrastructure). In the UAS's utopian vision, this necessarily led to a transition from the family as society's basic unit to the collective of workers or urban residents. Early on in *Arquitectura México*'s history, former director of the Bauhaus Hannes Meyer published an article that approached this question from a different perspective, albeit also a socialist one. Meyer's purpose was summarizing the results of an "urbanistic study" he had undertaken with the objective of designing a social housing development called Lomas de Becerra.⁴⁴⁹ In the article, Meyer wrote what constitutes one of the very few comments in favor of *vecindades* written by modern architects of the period:

Los núcleos de viviendas proletarias en este tipo no se entremezclan como en el fraccionamiento individualista, sino que se agrupan alrededor de un patio interior, incorporando orgánicamente ciertos servicios en común, como lavaderos, bodegas, baños, etc. Aunque el factor que ha creado este tipo de manzanas es el elemento especulador en terrenos y viviendas, no puede desconocerse que esta forma de agrupamiento de familias representa el primer paso de una nueva convivencia urbana que ya se expresa en las tradicionales fiestas de vecindades. Por eso creemos que el desarrollo técnico y urbanístico de esta clase de viviendas colectivas es de vivo interés para todo el pueblo de México.⁴⁵⁰

Recognizing that urban speculators (developers or landlords) operated *vecindades* for profit, Meyer nevertheless dialectically understood them as sites where a new urban community was emerging, insofar as families shared a public patio and a series of collective infrastructures. This, according to Meyer's understanding of the *fiesta de vecindad*, was resulting in the formation of a series of collective neighborhood cultures beyond the family.⁴⁵¹ In contrast to most modern architects of the period in Mexico, Meyer believed that *vecindades* could therefore become a valid housing modality, one that urban residents of the city had in fact been already inhabiting collectively for years.

Writers in *Arquitectura México*, including Mario Pani, shared with Meyer and the UAS the belief in architecture's capacity to respond to the social demands of the Mexican revolution. This certainly included guaranteeing public access to urban services of different kinds through public architecture, including education, childcare, and health. However, they could not accept the critique against the traditional family and its role in reproducing private property according to the UAS, or Meyer's appreciation of the dreaded *vecindades*. Instead, the magazine turned to Le Corbusier's urban planning ideas and the CIAM's considerations on "the reconstruction of the human human habitat [...], of the Home of Man" in the *Athens Charter*.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁹ He would not be able to build it. However, in that same location, Pani would end up building the Unidad Santa Fe along with the IMSS years later. I will touch upon Pani's project later on in this chapter.

⁴⁵⁰ Hannes Meyer. "La ciudad de México. Fragmentos de un estudio urbanístico," *Arquitectura México* 12 (1943): 103.

⁴⁵¹ By the end of this chapter we will see Guillermo Bonfil Batalla's different understanding of this fact.

⁴⁵² CIAM, *The Athens Charter* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973), 27. Le Corbusier appears constantly in *Arquitectura México*'s issues, be it as a reference or in articles dedicated to his thought and architecture. For instance: Vladimir Kaspé, "Le Corbusier y la arquitectura contemporánea," *Arquitectura México* 21 (1946): 3-13.

The *Athens Charter* was the result of an interesting history in itself. It was based on the CIAM's legendary 1933 congress on a cruise ship in Greece, led by Le Corbusier, Siegfried Giedion, Helena Syrkus, and other prominent European and American architects, planners, and artists. However, the text was not published until 1942, "in the depth of the occupation" according to Le Corbusier.⁴⁵³ In this sense, the utopian plans, models, and ideals the CIAM had discussed in 1933 saw light in a moment of extreme pessimism, almost as a reflection on another possible course of history. By 1957, however, the *Athens Charter* had become a program of Post-War reconstruction. In his preface to the 1957 French edition, Le Corbusier emphasized Europe's devastation, suggesting that architecture had the role of bringing back life: "What measures can be taken, what charms employed, what transfusion given to remedy this destruction [...], that is the question that all political fronts meditate upon at this point in mid-century."⁴⁵⁴ Le Corbusier saw the ruins around him as testifying to France's decline and fall, its spectral condition. "France is seeking its age, much more than its reason,"⁴⁵⁵ he claimed. In this context, for Le Corbusier, the *Athens Charter* provided an architecture and urban planning model that could be used to bring France (and Europe) back to life, in a redemptive renaissance:

It is essential that a whole people be launched as a mass and a force, into that adventure, somewhere on the course between history and legend, between sun and ice, between metals and water, between work and play, between necessity and fantasy, that its life can become –on the threshold of this new age.⁴⁵⁶

As I mentioned above, the CIAM proposed to offer a solution to "the cardinal question: that of the reconstruction of the human habitat."⁴⁵⁷ Like *Arquitectura México*, in its diagnostic, the CIAM leveled attacks against the slum residents and urban speculators alike. In the first case, they brought up arguments similar to those we have explored throughout these chapters on the population's moral and physical "decay" due to lack of urban services and proper construction codes. In fact, as Alberto Pani had done in Mexico in 1916, the CIAM employed the notion of "promiscuity, arising from the interior layout of the dwelling, from the poor arrangement of the building, and from the presence of troublesome neighborhoods."⁴⁵⁸ In the second case, the CIAM argued that urban speculators exploited the working class population by providing unsanitary and unsafe housing conditions. This was tantamount to selling a rotten product, and should be regulated as such:

In these congested urban sectors, the housing conditions are disastrous, for the lack of adequate space allocated to the dwelling, for lack of verdant areas in its vicinity, and ultimately, for lack of building maintenance (a form of exploitation based on speculation). [...] A butcher would be condemned for the sale of rotten meat, but the building codes allow *rotten dwellings* to be forced on the poor.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵³ Le Corbusier, "Preface to the 1957 French Edition," in *The Athens Charter*, xiii.

⁴⁵⁴ Le Corbusier, "Preface," xvii.

⁴⁵⁵ Le Corbusier, "Preface," xviii

⁴⁵⁶ Le Corbusier, "Preface," xix.

⁴⁵⁷ CIAM, *The Athens*, 27.

⁴⁵⁸ CIAM, *The Athens*, 53.

⁴⁵⁹ CIAM, *The Athens*, 54. My highlight.

If housing was of the utmost importance in solving the question of habitation, the *Athens Charter* argued in favor of an extended definition of dwelling that did not refer only to the private residence. The CIAM did not question the integrity of the family as Moisei Ginzburg had done in the USSR or the UAS in Mexico, but did recognize that “outside the dwelling, and close to it, the family also requires the presence of collective institutions that could be considered actual extensions of the dwelling. These are: supply centers, medical services, infant nurseries, kindergartens, and schools, to which should be added the intellectual and athletic organizations.”⁴⁶⁰ The CIAM argued that such services were at that point in time inaccessible for the urban population at large. Parks, for instance, were present only in the more affluent neighborhoods and their function was mainly that of embellishment, whereas the rest of green areas were located mostly in the outskirts of cities. Because parks and other collective infrastructure were directly related to social reproduction and care work, equitable access to them was a necessary step towards providing a habitable urban space. Adopting a marxist affirmation of automation, the CIAM suggested that such infrastructure would provide a glimpse of what Marx called the realm of freedom (as opposed to necessity):

The working hours, often exhausting for the muscles or for the nerves, should be followed every day by an adequate amount of free time. These hours of freedom, which machinism will unfailingly increase, will be devoted to a refreshing existence amidst natural elements. The maintenance and the establishment of open spaces are, therefore, a necessity, a matter of public welfare.⁴⁶¹

The CIAM framed the environmental question behind parks also as a problem of social reproduction, in the sense that one of the main objectives behind parks was the question of human health. The CIAM nevertheless argued that “the urban population centers will tend to become green cities.”⁴⁶² Particularly interesting here, for reasons that will become clear at the end, is the CIAM’s position in favor of urban agricultural gardens. According to the CIAM, the edible urban garden had been the strongest argument in favor of Howard’s Garden Cities. Instead of the private garden, however, the CIAM pushed in favor of communal grounds, including agricultural gardens: “Kitchen gardening [...] might very well be considered here: a percentage of the available ground will be allocated to it and divided into multiple individual plots, but certain collective arrangements, such as tilling, irrigating, and watering can lighten the labor and increase the yield.”⁴⁶³ I will return to this idea in the closing section.

For now, it is important to note the extent to which the *Athens Charter*’s ideas suited the political objectives of the architects and writers in *Arquitectura México*. They were on the same page in their critique of urban speculators and in their absolute rejection of slums and self-produced housing models. They agreed that architects and planners had a central role to play in the design and construction of a habitable urban model. Furthermore, through their insistence on collective infrastructure and green areas, they articulated the political importance of guaranteeing equitable access to health, education, childcare, and leisure as

⁴⁶⁰ CIAM, *The Athens*, 58.

⁴⁶¹ CIAM, *The Athens*, 67.

⁴⁶² CIAM, *The Athens*, 69.

⁴⁶³ CIAM, *The Athens*, 69.

part of a welfare program. And the *Athens Charter*, devised by some of the most renowned avant-garde architects of the Western world, offered *Arquitectura México* an authoritative model with which to negotiate with the radicalism of the 1930s and with the urban speculators of the 1940s and 50s in Mexico. In contrast to Post-War Europe, however, in Mexico such a model would not be part of a reconstructive process in grieving landscapes, but part of the deeply optimistic moment of Mexico's developmental "miracle" under the revolutionary governments. In this respect, insofar as it was enunciated as the result of a maturing revolutionary process, the idea of the welfare state adopted in Mexico the utopian quality of being both a lived experiment and an aspiration that would only be fully realized in the future, once Mexico's was developed in full.

The Urban Illusion

In *The Urban Revolution*, written in the aftermath of 1968, Henri Lefebvre offered a critique of Global North urbanists and architects like Le Corbusier and the CIAM, in what he called "a criticism of the left (by the left)."⁴⁶⁴ According to Lefebvre, these urbanists had correctly detected that capitalism, running out of steam in developed nations, "found new inspiration in the conquest of space—in trivial terms, real estate speculation, capital projects (inside and outside the city), the buying and selling of space."⁴⁶⁵ Capital thus found increasing opportunities to produce urban space as a circuit on which to realize surplus value through speculation or rent, subsuming in its logic the urban fabric as a whole. In this context, Lefebvre claimed that "the utopian part of urbanist projects [...] is not without interest as a precursor symptom, which signals a problematic without explaining it."⁴⁶⁶ In this, Lefebvre seemed to be evoking Marx and Engels' views on utopian socialism as a series of models that were accurate in their critique of certain dynamics of capitalism, but were ultimately misdirected in their proposed solutions insofar as they lacked a systematic (or "scientific") theory of capitalism and revolution. Although Lefebvre does not explain it explicitly, it is possible to argue that the problematic utopian urbanists like Le Corbusier "symptomatically" detected was the question of social reproduction and habitation we explored in the previous section.

According to Lefebvre, these urbanists were right in diagnosing habitation as a problem. The urban resident "is reduced not only to merely functioning as an inhabitant (habitat as function) but to being a buyer and seller of space, one who realizes surplus value."⁴⁶⁷ Their urban models, as expressed in places like the *Athens Charter*, were attempts to dignify habitation, offering the urban resident more than just the bare minimum necessary to survive, what Lefebvre calls habitat as merely satisfying a reproductive function in the context of an urban landscape produced by the logic of realizing surplus value. However, because the urbanists lacked an understanding of the urban process as part of capitalism's

⁴⁶⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 163.

⁴⁶⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban*, 155.

⁴⁶⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban*, 161.

⁴⁶⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban*, 156.

systemic logic, their solutions ended up becoming false exits that benefited the welfare state as a model of organized production and consumption:

What is urbanism? A superstructure of neocapitalist society, a form of “organizational capitalism,” which is not the same as “organized capital”—in other words, a *bureaucratic society of controlled consumption*. Urbanism organizes a sector that appears to be free and accessible, open to rational activity: inhabited space. It controls the consumption of space and the habitat.

Lefebvre understood the Global North utopian urbanists, at their best, as Marx understood the utopian socialists and even economists like Ricardo and Smith: figures of intellectual stature that had nevertheless fallen short of comprehending the inner logic of capitalism as a social system. At their worst, urban planners took on the challenge of rationalizing space in order to better organize capital’s flow. In this sense, if urban speculators bought and sold habitats with the objective of realizing profit, urban models like those of Le Corbusier, despite their utopian overtones, ultimately offered just an organized alternative for arriving at the same result. For Lefebvre, the welfare model was but a “bureaucratic” version of capitalism, its urbanism ideological, and the urbanist a figure caught between the state and capital, responsible for providing urban spaces that satisfied both ends. “When the urbanist realizes this [...], he becomes cynical or simply resigns. As a cynic, he may even sell freedom, happiness, lifestyle, social life, even community life, in phalansteries designed for the use of modern satraps.”⁴⁶⁸

In the discussion of the Keynesian City I summarized above, David Harvey agrees with Lefebvre’s understanding of the welfare model and extends the critique against architects and planners, to the point that they appear only as agents of a concerted alliance between state and capital. Referring mainly to the United States and Europe, the architecture of welfare infrastructure such as housing developments does not interest Harvey in the minimum. He argues that this infrastructure had three major objectives. To begin with, echoing Le Corbusier, it was supposed to bury the trauma of the economic crises and war of the 1930s. Furthermore, as we saw, it was meant to appease a politically aggressive working class at the same time that it offered access to social securities and credits that enhanced the population’s purchasing power in the market. Finally, these health, housing, education, and sport infrastructures ensured a controlled reproduction of a healthy, educated, somewhat comfortable labor force.⁴⁶⁹

The Latin American case of *Arquitectura México* we have been exploring here offers three qualifications to Lefebvre and Harvey’s radical critique of Global North urbanists and architects of the period. The first one is that, although Harvey hints at it, there is not enough insistence on the fact that the construction of collective infrastructure that offered access to education, housing, and health to increasingly large numbers of the population was the result of the organized struggle of the working class and avant-garde architects on the left. In Mexico, Michelle Dion’s work on the Social Security Law of 1943 and the intervention of socialist architects in the debates on social housing we saw in Chapter 3 show the importance that both actors had in pressuring for equitable access to education, childcare, or health

⁴⁶⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban*, 160.

⁴⁶⁹ David Harvey, *The Urban*, 34-43.

through collective urban infrastructures. With the advantage of hindsight, including a global health crisis and three decades of neoliberal policies depleting all social services, it seems important to recognize these triumphs of organized labor, especially in a peripheral economy like Mexico and even if these social guarantees could not escape capitalism's grasp or its contradictions.

The second qualification is that, as we have seen and will continue to do so, the architects and writers in *Arquitectura México* were not just agents of an alliance between capital and state. Because Mario Pani had such strong political connections and because artists in general had played an important role in the definition of the postrevolutionary state's cultural discourse, these architects cemented that alliance in the city. I have been arguing here that they did so through *Arquitectura México*, which brought together architects, planners, bureaucrats, and private industry. The magazine threaded such an alliance in its pages and, by doing so, claimed a place in the production of urban space in Mexico City. Furthermore, *Arquitectura México* adopted the role of political negotiator and envisioned the possibility of using architecture as a tool for political negotiation. In the specific case of social housing, they aimed at providing a model that would satisfy labor's demands and that would provide access to both housing and collective welfare infrastructure, particularly to workers affiliated to officially sanctioned unions. They would do so, however, leaving behind the radicalism of the UAS or Hannes Meyer, because their model would also satisfy the state and private interests. Echoing Harvey's critique, the architects in the magazine believed that this model offered a controlled social reproduction of labor, a machinery to accelerate economic growth, and a political weapon to appease labor struggle. Echoing Lefebvre's critique, they believed that this model, the satellite city model, would ensure an organized and stable development of urban space by controlling speculation and providing infrastructure for the working classes without sacrificing economic growth. But, in any case, they negotiated all of these positions through architecture and urban planning.

This leads to the third qualification, which is that *Arquitectura México* explicitly aspired to the consolidation of a welfare state in Mexico. As we have seen, the idea of the welfare state appears in a deeply utopian moment in Mexico, the moment in which the revolution seemed to be maturing politically and economically. However, as a developing nation and in contrast to the geographical referents Harvey and Lefebvre have in mind, the consolidation of a welfare state in Mexico was only a project, a distant possibility. For the architects, bureaucrats, and writers in *Arquitectura México*, the welfare state was their utopian horizon, an ideal they aspired to materialize in Mexico. As Enrique de Anda correctly claims, an important part of the challenge consisted in inventing the financial and architectural mechanisms that would allow the state to develop satellite city housing projects in a country that did not count with a highly developed financial system or a state capable of acquiring excessive foreign debt.⁴⁷⁰ In this respect, their satellite city model was an evolving experience, a learning process that contemplated different modalities of operation. It was similar to utopian socialists like Owen or Fourier and to intentional communities in the sense that each housing development they built was a social experiment, a test they would theorize and then reflect upon in the pages of *Arquitectura México* with the objective of arriving to a

⁴⁷⁰ Enrique de Anda, *Vivienda*, 209.

model that would make the welfare state a reality in Mexico. In a broad sense, this model had a financial and an architectural component, to which I turn.

The Financial System: Debt or Rent

In financial terms, throughout the 1940s and 50s the architects in *Arquitectura México* and their allied banks and public institutions experimented with two financial systems, a credit one and a rent one. Each was targeted to different population profiles. The credit system was designed by Adolfo Zamora, director of the BANHUOP, and it was the system in place in both the *unidades vecinales* such as Unidad Modelo (and the later Jardín Balbuena) and the *multifamiliares* such as the Centro Urbano Presidente Juárez. All of these were built with the Dirección de Pensiones Civiles, the pension fund for government workers in the city, so the system served middle class workers affiliated to an officially sanctioned union.

Zamora had been part of the urban debates since the 1938 XVI Congreso, where he presented a radical critique of urban speculation and suburban developments I quoted above. In that same presentation, he had argued in favor of what he called “habitación agrupada,” by which he meant a satellite city with high rise housing and a series of collective services and infrastructures. For Zamora, suburban homes produced by speculators and developers reduced habitation “a su expresión más escueta [...], carecen de agua caliente, de sala de estar, de teléfono, de biblioteca y de una multitud de servicios que sólo pueden proyectarse para edificios multifamiliares como gimnasio, club, enfermería.”⁴⁷¹ Suburban developments also destroyed green areas by expanding to the outskirts, creating marginal suburban peripheries: “formando entre la aglomeración citadina y el verdadero campo una zona gris de desechos, de barracas y construcciones provisionales, de basureros, de polvo y lodo.”⁴⁷² Already in 1938, the solution for Zamora consisted in densifying urban space through high-rise housing and providing in these developments collective services that would satisfy the different needs of the inhabitants and control population flows (by offering these services close to where inhabitants resided).

By the 1940s, Zamora had become director of the BANHUOP, a position from which he continued to push in favor of satellite city developments in line with Pani and *Arquitectura México*, where he participated on different occasions. Specifically, he devised the credit system with which BANHUOP and the Dirección de Pensiones Civiles organized the construction of high-rise housing. For the seasoned Zamora of the 1940s and 50s, “la cuestión del alojamiento no es un problema técnico de proyección y construcción, sino un problema financiero de centralización y canalización de capitales disponibles.”⁴⁷³ Zamora was in favor of using government funds in public housing developments, but only “para inducir una corriente de capitales privados hacia la edificación de hogares.”⁴⁷⁴ By “private capitals” Zamora meant the residents’ savings, which implied that, for him, the most important element behind social housing was subscribing an increasingly large number of workers into financial institutions specifically designed to offer housing credits. In this sense, he believed that it

⁴⁷¹ Adolfo Zamora, “La habitación,” 3.

⁴⁷² Adolfo Zamora, “La habitación,” 5.

⁴⁷³ Adolfo Zamora, “El problema de la vivienda y el capital privado,” *Arquitectura México* 37 (1952): 67.

⁴⁷⁴ Adolfo Zamora, “El problema,” 68.

was their responsibility as public servants to incentivize the population to subscribe and save part of their earnings in these institutions.

For the satellite cities developed between Pani, the BANHUOP and the Dirección de Pensiones Civiles, Zamora designed a credit title called the “certificado de participación inmobiliaria,” which offered the desired financial elasticity. Instead of a mortgage for a specific real estate property, the resident acquired this title for a property *he* –it was always a *he* in their minds– could then trade for a larger one as his family grew. Importantly, this responded in theory to the increasing savings capacity of the resident from the beginning of his professional life and until retirement, at which point the credit would be paid in full. In Zamora’s view, this would allow a continuous exchange of apartments, a mobility necessary to vacate the smaller apartments and incorporate the emerging working force into the financial and housing system.

The rent system, on the other hand, was designed by the social security agency IMSS for the housing development called Unidad Santa Fe, located in the place where Hannes Meyer had proposed the Lomas de Becerra project that was never built. The project was planned for the lower income workers affiliated to the IMSS who worked in that area of the city. If in its first years of existence after its establishment in 1943 the IMSS had mainly focused on offering medical services and pension funds to workers in the formal sector, by the 1950s it was ready to expand its social welfare program through housing developments that offered a multiplicity of services. As Arturo Ortiz Mena, director of the IMSS explained, “se trataba de establecer una nueva y verdadera forma de vida para los trabajadores y sus familias; se quería, en una palabra, iniciar la etapa de los servicios sociales al través de de una unidad que fuera síntesis y ejemplo de lo que otorga el Seguro Social.”⁴⁷⁵

Sarah Selvidge explains that the logic behind rent instead of debt was mainly that the IMSS wanted to guarantee that houses were occupied by workers from nearby areas and not sold to any other possible resident.⁴⁷⁶ In an article published in *Arquitectura México* titled “El I.M.S.S. no vende sus casas,” one H.G. offered a different explanation, one that painted the IMSS in a better light. According to H.G., workers in Mexico aspired to own a house, but they could not really afford it, which resulted in two possible outcomes: either they acquired a constraining debt they could never pay in full or they bought an affordable house that did not improve living conditions because it was far away, lacked urban services, and was too small. Insofar as the IMSS promised to be an honorable landlord who offered a well maintained property for a fair price, renting with the institute was a way out of this problem. The author invented the case of a worker who approached him for advice on what to do with a little plot of land in the outskirts of the city the worker had managed to buy, to which the author responded:

Venda su terreno –le dije– e inscribese luego para obtener en arrendamiento una de estas casas de Santa Fe. Aquí su vida y la de los suyos cambiará por completo, tendrán todo lo necesario: aire y luz, mercados, escuelas, médico y medicinas, un club para el esparcimiento de la familia y hasta tendrán flores. [...] Llevarán así todos los días una

⁴⁷⁵ Arturo Ortiz Mena, “Una importante obra de habitación colectiva,” *Arquitectura México* 59 (1957), 134.

⁴⁷⁶ Sarah Selvidge, “Modernism,” 95.

vida con dignidad humana. Física y moralmente crecerán sus hijos mejor y más fácilmente serán útiles a la sociedad y sobre todo felices.⁴⁷⁷

Despite certain differences scholars like Enrique de Anda and Sarah Selvidge have studied, the different actors involved in theorizing, planning, and developing satellite housing cities—the BANHUOP, the IMSS, the Dirección de Pensiones Civiles, and the architects in *Arquitectura México*—all agreed on certain elements. First, all satellite cities were to be dense housing developments, for which “vertical growth” was the most straightforward solution. Second, satellite cities would be financed by one of the two systems described in this section, incorporating residents to the state’s financial institutions. Third, satellite cities would provide residents with collective infrastructure for services such as education, childcare, or recreation that would improve living conditions while securing political and economic stability. Fourth, by guaranteeing that residents would be able to satisfy most of their needs in the autonomous satellite, these developments would control urban growth and rationalize population flows. In the following section, we will see *Arquitectura México*’s evolving understanding of the political, economic, and social roles collective infrastructure and local autonomy had from the CUPA in the 1940s to Pani’s 1957 conference.

The Architectural System: Collective Infrastructure and Local Autonomy

The Centro Urbano Presidente Miguel Alemán (CUPA), built in the Del Valle neighborhood in the southern part of the city in 1949, was an ambitious proposition that, in its urban theory, closely followed Le Corbusier’s precepts. The density per hectare was 1,000 residents, by far the largest number in all previous and subsequent developments, while the zig-zagging buildings of the complex counted with schools, a childcare facility, supply stores, laundry rooms, radio station, casino, medical services, playgrounds, and courtyards, among other services. The CUPA was thought and theorized as an urban and social experiment from the outset. In *Arquitectura México*’s presentation of the CUPA, for instance, Mario Pani explained that the complex offered a vision of the future for Mexico City: by building high-density housing that provided services in the locality, the city could be five times smaller and transform 80% of its area to parks and public gardens.⁴⁷⁸ In this respect, it provided a solution to disorganized urban growth, concentrating urban infrastructure and services in a smaller area. At the same time, as Enrique de Anda explains, “el problema era la conducta, la nueva manera en la que habrían de relacionarse las familias, la conservación de valores o el inicio de una nueva moralidad.”⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁷ H.G. “El I.M.S.S. no vende sus casas,” *Arquitectura México* 59 (1957), 141.

⁴⁷⁸ Mario Pani, “Centro Urbano Presidente Alemán,” *Arquitectura México* 30 (1950): 269-70.

⁴⁷⁹ Enrique de Anda, *Vivienda*, 242.



Figure 3. “La vida en el Multifamiliar,” *Arquitectura México* 33 (1951): 182.

In effect, *Arquitectura México* presented the CUPA above all as a social experiment in which architecture and urban planning would transform and modernize the habitation practices of a population that these architects and bureaucrats believed to be uncivilized. Improving the social reproduction conditions of labor had to be part of Mexico’s developmental program, necessary for an active economy and a stable political landscape. It is no coincidence that the issue on the CUPA features the article “Penicilina para la ciudad” I analyzed above, because this article offered the necessary contrast for the CUPA’s social experimentality: low income residents of the city had been affected in their daily habits and practices by the “promiscuous” architecture and urban organization of *vecindades* and *tugurios*, as Pani’s uncle had been claiming since 1916. In contrast, writers in *Arquitectura México* focused on how the CUPA’s architecture would produce a new urban subject and, more specifically, the lived image of a civilized urban neighborhood. In issue 33 (1951), *Arquitectura México* published a series of photographs that captured daily life scenes at the CUPA: a couple reading on a balcony, a woman watering plants, kids playing in the courtyard (Figure 3). In the text that went with the photographs, Antonio Acevedo made the connection between past and present, *vecindades* and *multifamiliar* explicit:

No más dormir de los padres e hijos mezclados en un cuarto redondo [...]. No más caminar en el patio por entre las aguas sucias de los lavados de cualquier índole, ni más colas ante el hidrante y el excusado del que todos hacen uso. Esta es la promiscuidad que degrada. Esta es la inmundicia que vuelve torvas las conciencias. Y no la otra del Multifamiliar –si la hubiera–: allí hay perspectivas al horizonte desde

todos los ángulos; alcoba para cada uno en la familia; servicios higiénicos modernos; la clara bendición de la luz; jardines donde alegrar los ojos. El ambiente todo invita al juego y la risa, virtudes superiores de la especie.⁴⁸⁰

What was architecture's role? According to Acevedo, providing comfortable and hygienic dwelling spaces, offering infrastructure and services, designing a beautiful space, one that considered views to the horizon and light. But the CUPA utopian experiment went farther than that. Without reaching the extent of the UAS's program in *Proyecto de ciudad obrera*, it also involved programming a series of rules, regulations, procedures, and norms meant to organize neighborhood life. In the article "Vivienda para muchos" in *Arquitectura México*, Mauricio Picón Salas presented in detail some of these rules, including the volume limit for the radio, and claimed that this program would partially operate on the basis of incentives: the residents who cared for the cleanliness of their dwelling would be exempt from paying rent for one month of the year.⁴⁸¹ Who designed these rules? *Arquitectura México* does not provide a direct answer to this question, although it implies that the developers planned the rules for the future residents, just as they had planned everything from the architecture project to the suggested furniture for the apartments.⁴⁸² At the same time, it is important to note that neighborhood assemblies were incorporated from the start, perhaps because the residents belonged to labor unions that already had a culture of political participation. These assemblies would be an important part of the democratic culture that have in fact developed to this day in some of these projects, something I shall dwell in at the very end.⁴⁸³

Similar considerations appear as the group moved from the CUPA to the Centro Urbano Presidente Juárez (CUPJ) in 1952. Esteban García del Alba, director of the Dirección de Pensiones Civiles, described the *multifamiliar* (the most common name used to refer to housing satellite cities) as "una excelente escuela de formación social y educación cívica."⁴⁸⁴ The population had been transformed in their habits and practices through the *multifamiliar* infrastructure, including both the architecture and the civil regulations and services. García del Alba showed statistics such as the rising amount of hot water usage or the decreasing number of misdemeanors as proof of this. Conveniently using the impersonal form, which left the question of agency intentionally unclear, he explained: "se han eliminado prácticamente muchos de los malos hábitos que se exteriorizaban al principio, como los de destruir los árboles, pisotear los prados, ensuciar las paredes, producir ruidos molestos para los vecinos, uso inmoderado o impropio de servicios, etcétera."⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸⁰ Antonio Acevedo, "La vida en el Multifamiliar," *Arquitectura México* 33 (1951): 183.

⁴⁸¹ Mauricio Picón Salas, "Vivienda para muchos," *Arquitectura México* 31 (1950): 55.

⁴⁸² Built by industrial designer Clara Porset.

⁴⁸³ See: Graciela de Garay, *Rumores y retratos de un lugar en la modernidad: historia oral del Multifamiliar Miguel Alemán 1949-1999* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2002).

⁴⁸⁴ Esteban García del Alba, "García del Alba dice...", *Arquitectura México* 40 (1952): 374.

⁴⁸⁵ Esteban García del Alba, "García del Alba dice...", 374.



Figure 4. Guillermo Zamora, “Centro Urbano Presidente Juárez,” *Arquitectura México* 40 (1952): 377.

The result of the CUPA experiment was thus a satisfying one for both architects and bureaucrats, and by 1952 *Arquitectura México* was presenting it as a learned experience that found a more mature formulation in the CUPJ. Mario Pani, for instance, claimed that, in the CUPA, “había que exagerar un poco la idea de combate, pues se intentaba exponer una idea [...], trataba de demostrar el hecho de que podía vivirse en una gran comunidad, a diferencia de lo que se acostumbra en México [...]. Acaso se exageraron algunos servicios con ese sentido de comunidad.”⁴⁸⁶ By 1952, once that idea had been realized and put in practice, the concept of the satellite city and the “sentido de comunidad” it proposed could mature. In contrast to the CUPA’s high density, for instance, in the CUPJ the architects attempted to distribute 19 buildings in a park, accentuating the idea of a high-rise garden city. Furthermore, if the CUPA had four types of apartments for four types of families (or stages in a family’s life, as I discussed), the CUPJ presented twelve types, acknowledging a larger diversity of needs. The architects distributed collective infrastructure, including a large childcare facility and a recreation center, throughout the park as well, although most of it was concentrated in what they called a “civic center,” which was to operate as a modern version of the central plaza of a small town, in words of the architects.⁴⁸⁷ The idea of the public plaza as a place to concentrate commerce, administrative offices, and collective infrastructure (schools, childcare, playgrounds) would reappear in further satellite city developments,

⁴⁸⁶ Mario Pani and Salvador Ortega Flores, “El Centro Urbano Presidente Juárez,” *Arquitectura México* 40 (1952): 375.

⁴⁸⁷ Mario Pani and Salvador Ortega Flores, “El Centro,” 379.

including Unidad Santa Fe and the famous Plaza de las Tres Culturas in the much later Tlatelolco.

The Unidad Santa Fe experience with the IMSS in 1957 offered yet another opportunity for *Arquitectura México* to revise and theorize the importance behind collective infrastructure and local autonomy from a different perspective. Here, the magazine decided to give voice to the IMSS bureaucrats and their idea of satellite city housing developments in relation to social security. Arturo Ortiz Mena, for instance, did not approach the question of local autonomy as a question of controlling urban growth or as an economic calculation for the city (in terms of the cost of providing urban services or transportation), as Pani tended to do. Instead, as director of social security in Mexico, he decided to present it as an economic calculation in favor of labor: if workers lived close to where they worked and if most services needed (education, supplies, childcare, sports, entertainment) were located at a walkable distance, their real salaries would increase insofar as they would not need to spend money on transportation. Ortiz Mena also mentioned that this arrangement would liberate commuting hours as free time that the worker could dispose of for rest or recreation, for which the satellite city provided several possible activities in its libraries, gardens, sport fields, cinemas, and everything else.

Indeed, Ortiz Mena claimed that improving the conditions of labor habitation was the main priority behind IMSS-developed social housing projects such as Unidad Santa Fe: “Cada uno de los habitantes de la Unidad gozará, desde su llegada, de prestaciones sociales que, en muchos casos, se traducen en mejora de sus ingresos y, siempre, en elevación de sus niveles físicos, culturales y cívicos.”⁴⁸⁸ The urban development thus needed to ensure not only comfortable and affordable housing, but also public access to collective services including health, education, childcare, and recreation.⁴⁸⁹ This was, according to Ortiz Mena, the IMSS’ objective, which responded to a long lasting labor demand for better living standards that went all the way back to the revolution and Article 123 (the labor article) of the 1917 Constitution. It also responded to president Adolfo Ruiz Cortines’s (1952-1958) own interpretation of the Mexican revolution’s social demands: “Así cumplíamos con la certera interpretación presidencial de lo que quiso la Revolución Mexicana y la Constitución de 1917: servicios sociales, beneficios colectivos.”⁴⁹⁰ In this respect, Arturo Ortiz Mena claimed that the Unidad Santa Fe was evidence enough that the PRI’s governments were a continuation of the revolution through institutional reforms in favor of social equality, beginning by an expanded understanding of social security.

In a text for the same issue of the magazine, Julián Díaz Arias offered a similar interpretation of social security as an effort based on collective solidarity administered by the state:

La esencia misma de la Seguridad Social es la solidaridad. Trata de liberar al hombre del temor de la enfermedad y del horror a la miseria. Para hacer realidad sus propósitos se apoya en el sentido de solidaridad humana: los sanos ayudan a los enfermos; los jóvenes cooperan para dar tranquilidad a los viejos; los de altos ingresos

⁴⁸⁸ Arturo Ortiz Mena, “Una importante obra de habitación colectiva,” *Arquitectura México* 59 (1957): 134.

⁴⁸⁹ Food and supply stores at the Unidad Santa Fe offered products at subsidized prices as well.

⁴⁹⁰ Arturo Ortiz Mena, “Una importante,” 134.

permiten la atención de los que ganan poco, y patronos y Estado concurren para hacer posibles los servicios a todos los miembros de las familias de los asegurados.⁴⁹¹

After providing this theoretical definition, Díaz Arias explained how the Unidad Santa Fe would make this happen, focusing once again on the question of local autonomy and collective infrastructure. He argued, for instance, that everybody in the satellite city would have access to medical services on site, that markets and other stores would be at a walking distance, that residents could use libraries, cafeterias, gardens, cinemas, and theatres for entertainment, that children could go to school there and participate in sport and cultural activities as well. Reiterating Ortiz Mena's statements, through collective infrastructure, the Unidad Santa Fe made sure that all residents had access to an ample understanding of social services in Mexico. For him, as well as for Ortiz Mena and Pani, such an urban model represented a radical improvement in the habitation conditions of working class residents in the periphery of Mexico City (Unidad Santa Fe is located in the western slopes of the city). In this sense, for the IMSS bureaucrats, the satellite city essentially responded to what Harvey understands as "the attempt to use the urban process as a vehicle for redistribution."⁴⁹²

These different built experiences, theorized before and after their construction by a multiplicity of voices in *Arquitectura México*, led to Mario Pani's 1957 conference with which this chapter began.



Figure 5. Images in Julián Díaz Arias's article. *Arquitectura México* 59 (1957): 178.

The Satellite City

⁴⁹¹ Julián Díaz Arias, "Santa Fe: una unidad de servicios sociales," *Arquitectura México* 59 (1957): 178.

⁴⁹² David Harvey, *The Urban*, 40.

As I mentioned above, the 1957 conference had the purpose of presenting the idea for an autonomous urban satellite for 200,000 inhabitants north of Mexico City called Ciudad Satélite. The basic urban unit for the city was the superblock: a limited space with different housing modalities for different types of family. The center of each superblock was destined for high-rise housing, while the outer parts of the urban cell were destined for townhouses. Without detailing what he meant, Pani suggested that “es un fecundo propósito social fomentar que convivan sin segregaciones, en un espacio común, familias de distintas capacidades económicas.”⁴⁹³ A small group of superblock cells shared a civic and commercial center so that “sesenta por ciento de sus habitantes satisfacen dentro de ella [la supermanzana] la mayoría de sus funciones diarias, sin cruzar la ruta de los automóviles.”⁴⁹⁴ In this respect, Pani incorporated in Ciudad Satélite the central importance of public infrastructure and local autonomy as key to neighborhood formation. Larger arteries connected the different groups of cells together, while they also linked all cells with a central civic center with commercial venues, office space, and entertainment facilities. Ciudad Satélite as a whole had access to the central highway system that connected the satellite with Mexico City proper.

It is clear that Pani’s main inspiration here was the American suburb, and it was advertised in *Arquitectura México* as such. Ciudad Satélite was designed for the car, included monumental entrances designed by artists such as Mathias Goeritz, prioritized the availability of commercial venues, and targeted an aspirational professional class that increasingly admired the American way of life. Pani, in fact, sold the idea that this was the first of its kind in Mexico, “una ciudad de futuro, como una ciudad de mañana que empezamos a construir hoy.”⁴⁹⁵ In this, Pani and the magazine were indeed following Harvey’s idea that the suburbs were “new kinds of communities [that] could be constructed, packaged, and sold in a society where who you were depended less and less on class position and more and more on how you spent money on the market.”⁴⁹⁶ Indeed, it is important to note that Ciudad Satélite was the group’s private venture, in contrast to the social housing experiments we have been exploring here that were financed by governmental institutions. As a matter of fact, Pani explained that they were acting as developers of Ciudad Satélite, not architects, and would thus provide only the urban skeleton and its regulations, leaving architecture to each private interest.

And yet, in his explanation of Ciudad Satélite, Pani incorporated the theories on housing developments, collective infrastructure, and local autonomy the group had been experimenting with for a decade, in dialogue with Le Corbusier and the *Athens Charter*. In this respect, he presented Ciudad Satélite as a replicable solution to control the sprawling expansion of the city and to provide a satisfactory habitation model by offering a planned development of interconnected local satellites (the group of superblock cells) that offered basic urban services. Furthermore, as I mentioned, each superblock contained different housing modalities, following the flexibility principle the group had been attempting to figure

⁴⁹³ Mario Pani, “México,” 219.

⁴⁹⁴ Mario Pani, “México,” 218.

⁴⁹⁵ Mario Pani, “México,” 225.

⁴⁹⁶ David Harvey, *The Urban*, 40.

out since the Unidad Modelo both architecturally and financially. Interestingly enough, Pani claimed that Ciudad Satélite would hold 200,000 inhabitants, exactly the same figure the UAS architects had proposed for *Proyecto de ciudad obrera* in 1938, which was also located north of Mexico City. Both were proposed as models for the future, although Pani insisted that Ciudad Satélite was already a reality. Almost two decades after the UAS's model, the ideals of absolute housing equality and full collectivization of social reproduction had dramatically changed: Pani's vision for a network of autonomous urban satellites implied flexibility: satellite cities could be privately or publicly developed, more or less dense, more or less compromised with providing public services.

In 1957, *Arquitectura México's* satellite city model was at its zenith, both commercially and politically. Commercially, the Ciudad Satélite would indeed be a successful venture, attracting residents that aspired for a modern, Americanized lifestyle in the suburbs. Politically, *Arquitectura México's* social housing experiments had become by then symbols of the state's welfare agenda and its revolutionary credentials. In fact, only a few years later the group would build the massive Tlatelolco, where they put to work the entire theory we have been discussing here. To begin with, they erased from the site a settlement of *tugurios*, one of the alleged enemies of modern housing along with *vecindades*. In its place, they built a huge satellite city with a variety of apartment types and units, a civic center, and all the collective infrastructure needed to guarantee public services. As we have seen, *Arquitectura México* believed such a model answered to different demands and negotiated with all the different positions. Insofar as it was backed by state institutions, it was a safe commercial venture for themselves as architects and for the civil engineering and construction companies involved. For the city, the satellite model offered to control and rationalize urban growth, making the provision of urban services easier and more economical. For labor unions and for the radical architecture avant-garde, it held the compromise of providing affordable housing and, more importantly, of guaranteeing access to education, childcare, and recreation through collective infrastructure. Similarly, these common services and the local autonomy of the satellite promised the creation of a democratic neighborhood culture. Finally, for the state's developmental agenda, it argued that such a model would ensure the safe reproduction of the labor force for a growing economy, while also its subscription as consumers in this economy, via housing credits and debt. The satellite city model was thus a governmental device that employed architecture and planning to negotiate positions: between capital and state, state and labor, capital and labor, and public and private architecture. As I mentioned above, it offered tangible symbols of the state's incipient welfare programs, in which *Arquitectura México* believed. In fact, it is clear that the magazine believed that, as they experimented with social housing models, they were producing in space the urban infrastructure necessary to make the welfare state in Mexico a reality and not only an unrealizable dream.

By then, certain utopian figures in both the architecture and literary fields were already disenchanted with the place where urban utopianism had landed, as the architectural arm of developmentalist state apparatus controlled by the authoritarian PRI regime. Juan O'Gorman had famously renounced functionalism, which in the 1930s he had espoused as the only possible revolutionary tendency in architecture. By the 1950s, functionalism appeared to him as an authoritarian weapon used to homogenize and control the population,

transforming it into a disciplined production and consumption machinery.⁴⁹⁷ Without sacrificing his utopianism, Alberto Arai, ex-member of the UAS, was in 1956 attempting to rethink social housing through a cooperative approach different from *Proyecto de ciudad obrera*, suggesting that social housing models up to that point had been incapable of incorporating the inhabitants in a participatory process, neglecting the people's needs, tastes, and traditional knowledges.⁴⁹⁸ In the literary field, the proletarian literature project disappeared completely, its work continued indirectly by authors like José Revueltas who left behind the utopian overtones of Turrent Rozas or Mancisidor to explore the contradictions of the so-called “institutional revolution” in Mexico. Revueltas's 1954 novel *En algún valle de lágrimas*, for instance, followed a day in the life of a landlord in a precarious, chaotic, and violent city, with no sight of justice or of the modern landscapes *Arquitectura México* and the postrevolutionary state were so fond of. In the novel, the possibility of a social revolution appears only an undefined sensation, not even a thought: “había experimentado un miedo vago, instintivo, a quién sabe qué amenaza informe que sintió cernirse sobre la atmósfera como antes de una tempestad, miedo a algo que sería tal vez un motín silencioso.”⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁷ Much later, in 1982, he committed suicide by hanging himself in front of his first functionalist house.

⁴⁹⁸ Alberto T. Arai, “La casa mexicana: ideas sobre la habitación popular urbana,” in *Leer a Alberto T. Arai: reflexiones, ensayos y textos* edited by Elisa Drago (Mexico City: UNAM, 2020): 153-207. Cooperativism in social housing would continue in the work of later architects and bureaucrats like Enrique Ortiz and in lived experiences such as the still-existent Cooperativa Palo Alto in Mexico City. Arai was moving towards a perspective where architect and resident were to collaborate or cooperate, each providing specific kinds of knowledge and information, according to Arai. He also claimed that the popular family would be better organized as a cooperative. His housing model at this point in time included either a workshop or an urban garden, a “casa-taller” or a “casa-granja.” It was inspired in the popular housing forms of rural Mexico, and aimed at securing an increasing autonomy from wage labor.

⁴⁹⁹ José Revueltas, *En algún valle de lágrimas* (Mexico City: Novaro, 1973), 101.



Figure 6. Centro Urbano Nonoalco-Tlatelolco.

However, it was only after the 1968 student massacre at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in the Tlatelolco complex that *Arquitectura México*'s satellite city model began to show its cracks. After October 2, social housing developments like Tlatelolco suddenly appeared not as symbols of Mexico's revolutionary welfare state, but as images of an authoritarian governmental structure. Furthermore, after the violence of 1968, it became increasingly possible to criticize the violent erasure and displacement of the self-produced settlement on top of which the development had been built, signaling the violence of modernist architecture and its ambition to determine how people should live. Beginning in 1968, *Arquitectura México*'s satellite city utopia entered political and discursive crisis, inaugurating a period of decline and fall that buried the urban utopianism of postrevolutionary Mexico as the failed political and aesthetic project of an overly ambitious but deeply contradictory literary and architectural avant-garde.

Utopianism Reconsidered

During the 1970s, Mexico's social housing policy began to diverge from the satellite city model, parting ways with the figure of Mario Pani. Its new central objective was providing the financial structure for making mortgages available to workers in the formal sector through the creation of a centralized social housing governmental agency, the INFONAVIT. While the INFONAVIT "did not build housing directly, it made decisions along with labor unions and other governmental agencies about how much housing was built where."⁵⁰⁰ However, the architecture and urban model for the housing developments was open to different solutions, and the *multifamiliares* built in the 70s were noticeably smaller in size, less ambitious in density, and much more austere in collective infrastructure than *Arquitectura México's* models. Some of them were little more than a series of high-rise buildings fenced together.⁵⁰¹

The earthquake that struck Mexico City in September, 1985 represented yet another blow to *Arquitectura México's* satellite cities. Most of the buildings at the Centro Urbano Presidente Juárez in the Roma neighborhood and a number in Tlatelolco were deemed unsafe and had to be demolished. Discussions in architecture revolved around if the buildings had been deficient from the outset (due to the architects and engineers' attempt to reduce construction costs) or, on the contrary, if the problem was lack of maintenance, signaling the state's abandonment of its own housing projects. Public opinion increasingly began to see *multifamiliares* as a failed experiment reminiscent of soviet totalitarian architecture. Mario Pani lost his hegemonic place as the semi-official architect of the state apparatus, a place that was claimed by the brutalism of Pedro Ramírez Vázquez or by Ricardo Legorreta's "nuevo mexicanismo."

By 1985, in any case, the neoliberal turn of the PRI's governments were more than willing to shut the door on the ambitious mid-twentieth century utopian urban planning we explored in the last chapter. The existing satellite cities continued to be defunded or neglected, while a series of reforms in the mid-1990s reorganized the social housing structure, making it a governmental device used to expand the private construction industry. As Monkkonen explains, these reforms

included an initiative to foster the expansion of the private construction industry in Mexico. [...] INFONAVIT convened a series of meetings with home-building companies to convince them that building low-cost housing could be profitable. They facilitated access to loans for participating developers, offered construction loans connected to mortgages, and assisted builders with state and local permitting process as well as with land acquisition. [...] By 2004 nine homebuilders that were involved had expanded their operations to the whole country and represented 25% of the country's housing construction industry.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰⁰ Paavo Monkkonen, "The Housing Transition in Mexico: Expanding Access to Housing Finance," *Urban Affairs Review* 47.5 (2011): 675. Through the INFONAVIT, patrons are required to pay 5% of the worker's salary to the agency, where the worker saved this percentage and received a low-interest rate mortgage. In early 2021, the institute is currently redefining its policies and operations.

⁵⁰¹ Juan José Kocken. *Tablero Multifamiliar* (Mexico City: FONCA, 2016).

⁵⁰² Paavo Monkkonen, "The Housing," 676.

We saw throughout the chapter that the satellite city model also operated as a private-public alliance between certain state-agencies such as BANHUOP or the Dirección de Pensiones Civiles and private companies such as Mario Pani's firm, *Arquitectura México*, or ICA. The difference was the urban model in question. If *Arquitectura México*'s satellite cities were organized around the welfare idea of providing services to residents in dense and compact urban spaces in well-connected locations, the homebuilding companies of the 1990s and early 2000s opted for "housing developments composed of thousands of identical, small tract houses in the urban periphery."⁵⁰³

This model was reminiscent of Juan Legarreta's 1932 Balbuena complex we briefly explored in Chapter 3, a result of this architect's exploration of what the *casa obrera mínima* should be (Figure 1). Like Legarreta's early project, the housing developments of the late 1990s and early 2000s were composed as giant grids that replicated the same house prototype endlessly, and did not tend to provide collective infrastructure such as schools, common grounds, sport facilities, libraries, or convenience stores. The developments, as Jorge Taboada captured in his photographic project *Alta Densidad*, were islands of identical, solitary houses in the periphery of Mexico's larger cities (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Juan Legarreta. Balbuena. In *The New Architecture in Mexico*, edited by Esther Born (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1937): 81.

⁵⁰³ Paavo Monkkonen, "The Housing," 673.



Figure 2. Jorge Taboada. *Alta Densidad*.

In practice, this meant that residents had to travel from the urban periphery to the city in order to access work, education, recreation, and even shopping, using around 30% of their salaries only in transportation.⁵⁰⁴ Despite the fact that “governments at the local and national level [...] refused to establish minimum standard of location, connectivity, density and mix-used zoning,” sooner rather than later the model showed the cracks in its foundation.⁵⁰⁵ Residents began abandoning these sites, leaving more than five million homes empty, which began to be associated with gang and drug violence. Following the global recession in 2008, three major homebuilding companies crashed, putting a swift end to this social housing experiment. Since then, using globally trendy notions such as the “15 minute city,” liberal urban planners in Mexico have begun to appreciate *Arquitectura México*’s satellite city model once again.⁵⁰⁶ Meanwhile, the actually existing satellite cities, located in what are now

⁵⁰⁴ Luis Zamorano, “The Perfect Storm: One Country’s History of Urban Sprawl,” *The City Fix*, March 5, 2014. Date accessed: May 23, 2021. <https://thecityfix.com/blog/perfect-storm-one-countrys-history-urban-sprawl-luis-zamorano/>

⁵⁰⁵ Luis Zamorano, “The Perfect.”

⁵⁰⁶ For example, the liberal think tank Centro para el futuro de las ciudades at the Tec de Monterrey university published on the matter: Veka Duncan, “La ciudad de los 15 minutos: resiliencia y solidaridad ante la covid-19,” *Centro para el futuro de las ciudades*. Date Accessed: May 24, 2021. <https://futurociudades.tec.mx/es/la-ciudad-de-los-15-minutos-resiliencia-y-solidaridad-ante-la-covid-19>

gentrifying neighborhoods such as Centro, Roma, and Del Valle continue to be rather neglected by the state.

However, by the end of the twentieth century, it was not only the neoliberal governmental apparatus that was disenchanting with *Arquitectura México*'s satellite cities. Key figures in the left were also critical of Pani's architecture and, more generally, of the urban utopianism of the literary and architectural avant-garde of the postrevolutionary period. In his 1987 *México Profundo*, anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla suggested that this modernist utopianism had never been able to consider the people, excluding them from participating in aesthetic and political projects that were supposed to guide and liberate them. From their lettered perspective, they devised models of habitation that responded to their own aesthetic and political ideas, but that disregarded and censored how people actually lived according to their own traditions, beliefs, and practices. Evoking Oscar Lewis's anthropological work in *vecindades* with a postcolonial lens, Bonfil Batalla argued that *vecindades* were an urban adaptation of rural Mexico's communal organization, an adaptation carried out by transgenerational migrations to the city. As such, for Bonfil Batalla *vecindades* were a far more adequate form of social housing than the modernist satellite city *multifamiliares*:

Es interesante comparar, por ejemplo, las antiguas *vecindades* y los más recientes conjuntos multifamiliares con los que se ha tratado de sustituirlas. En la *vecindad*, las habitaciones privadas se alinean alrededor de un patio común en el que se ubican los servicios también comunes: baños, tomas de agua, lavaderos, espacios para jugar o trabajar. Todo ello tiende a reforzar las relaciones entre los habitantes de la *vecindad* y genera un espíritu de cuerpo que se debilita en los multifamiliares, donde se pretende que cada departamento cuente con todos los servicios indispensables para la vida cotidiana y que las áreas comunes sean sólo estacionamiento para automóviles, vías peatonales, zonas de comercio y, si acaso, áreas deportivas.⁵⁰⁷

As we saw in the last chapter, Bonfil Batalla's defense of *vecindades* was not exactly new. Hannes Meyer had claimed something very similar in *Arquitectura México*, incorporating into his dialectical analysis the fact that *vecindades* had also been produced by urban speculators looking to extract as many rents as possible (something that Bonfil Batalla does not analyze).⁵⁰⁸ Alberto T. Arai, who had championed soviet avant-garde functionalism as part of the UAS in the 1930s, was in the 1950s arguing in lines not too distant from Bonfil Batalla in his suggestion that housing cooperatives that included farmland or workshops would respond more aptly to how people wanted to live in Mexico.⁵⁰⁹ In the mid-twentieth century, both of them had been completely overshadowed by *Arquitectura México* and Pani's towering figure. It was not until the 1980s, in authors like Bonfil Batalla, that it was possible to articulate a critique of modernist utopianism's invisibilization and silencing of the subaltern subject.

⁵⁰⁷ Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo: una civilización negada* (Mexico City: FCE, 1989), 63-64.

⁵⁰⁸ Hannes Meyer. "La ciudad de México. Fragmentos de un estudio urbanístico," *Arquitectura México* 12 (1943): 96-109.

⁵⁰⁹ Alberto T. Arai, "La casa mexicana: ideas sobre la habitación popular urbana," in *Leer a Alberto T. Arai: reflexiones, ensayos y textos* edited by Elisa Drago (Mexico City: UNAM, 2020): 153-207.

There has been, however, a recent critical and aesthetic recovery of the *multifamiliares*, which in part responds to a larger interest within the global cultural field for Mexico's architectural modernism. In the specific case of *Arquitectura México's* satellite cities, beyond the digitalization of the entire magazine undertaken by the project UNAM Raíces, some of the most interesting academic and aesthetic projects have attempted to respond to Bonfil Batalla's critique. They have done so by exploring through testimonial approaches the residents' perspectives, opinions, and appropriations of the housing infrastructure. Photographer Onnis Luque's *Tácticas de Apropiación*, for instance, attempts to capture how residents in Pani's *multifamiliares* have occupied and transformed apartments and housing complexes according to their habitation needs, tastes, and forms of life (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Onnis Luque. *Tácticas de Apropiación/USF*.

In *Rumores y retratos de un lugar de la modernidad*, Graciela de Garay undertook an oral history of the CUPA, recovering testimonies from two generations of residents in the housing complex.⁵¹⁰ De Garay's work showed how the people actually inhabit the CUPA, the forms of neighborhood organization that have developed there to this day through assemblies and other decision making mechanisms, the friendships and conflicts, the generational changes, and many of the residents' identification with the *multifamiliar* culture through a shared collective memory. *Rumores y retratos* helps us understand how, despite internal conflicts, the neighbors of different satellite cities have managed to organize politically in order to demand services to a series of governmental agencies that continue to

⁵¹⁰ Graciela de Garay, *Rumores y retratos de un lugar en la modernidad: historia oral del Multifamiliar Miguel Alemán 1949-1999* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2002).

neglect these urban communities, while also to face together the ongoing pressures of gentrification in their neighborhoods.

This way, the work of Luque and De Garay answers to Bonfil Batalla by reminding us, first of all, that the satellite cities were not just a result of debates and projects taking place within the modernist avant-garde, but also a result of a long process of labor struggle and organization that demanded social security, affordable housing, and public services in Mexico. Furthermore, both projects suggest that the residents themselves ultimately appropriated the modernist architecture and the collective infrastructure of the satellite cities, particularly once the state's neoliberal turn in the late 1980s implied reducing public services in education, health, and recreation. In other words, once the state broke its end of the agreement with the *multifamiliares* residents that had belonged to important labor unions in the mid-twentieth century. The emergence of communitarian urban gardens in two satellite cities –Tlatelolco and Centro Urbano Presidente Juárez– offers yet more evidence of this struggle between organized neighbors and the state.

The 1985 demolitions at the CUPJ in the Roma neighborhood left an empty plot of almost one hectare next to the remaining buildings of the complex. The former director of the ISSTE –the social security agency for state workers– promised the residents of the CUPJ a park in that space.⁵¹¹ The ISSTE never kept its promise, despite the residents' continuous demands to do something with a space that was left in ruins and that was soon filled with garbage and drugs. In 2012, a civil association called La Cuadra Provoca Ciudad A.C. decided to occupy the space in order to create the Huerto Roma Verde, a communitarian urban garden that follows permaculture principles. Technically, the Huerto Roma Verde is illegal insofar as the ISSTE, a state agency, owns the land and never gave permission for the project, but the garden is still in full operation to this day.

The Huerto Roma Verde operates through volunteer work and offers different activities. It grows food organically, collects garbage from the neighborhood for recycling, organizes workshops for children and teenagers (residents of the CUPJ do not have to pay), and offers a cultural space for film festivals and concerts. Politically, it aims at operating at two different levels. The first is an attempt to resist the pressures that long-time residents of both the CUPJ and the surrounding area experience in a neighborhood like Roma that has been almost completely gentrified. By occupying a land that is nowadays located in a prime location in order to build a communitarian space, it presents a challenge to both real estate developers and to the state, as owner of the property and facilitator of real estate development in central areas of the city. It also responds to a promise that the ISSTE made to the residents of the CUPJ but never kept, offering a public space in part reminiscent of *Arquitectura México*'s original vision for the CUPJ as a satellite city surrounded by green areas. In this respect, it holds the state accountable for its responsibilities towards the residents.

The second is the revival of the 1970s ecological utopianism in the face of planetary environmental crisis. Young volunteers critical of Mexico City's unsustainability operate the

⁵¹¹ The ISSTE was previously called Dirección de Pensiones Civiles. Cloé T. Mandujano, "Urban Appropriation of Space for Environmental and Social Projects Developed by Civil Society: Case Study Huerto Roma Verde in Mexico City, 2012-2017," M.A. Diss. (Buenos Aires: Albert-Ludwig-Universität Freiburg/FLACSO, 2018), 12.

Huerto Roma Verde, conscious of the need to raise awareness around issues such as the exhaustion of the city's water supply or the environmental expenditures of its food-system logistics, while also avid to experiment with possible forms of urban life based on sustainable ecological practices.⁵¹² Built in the ruins of one of *Arquitectura México*'s satellite cities, the Huerto Roma Verde brings together the ecological considerations present in the *Athens Charter*, a text that was already calling for communal urban gardens, with the 1970s ecological counterculture, actualizing both perspectives in the urban context of a gentrifying neighborhood and in the midst of a global environmental collapse. The Huerto Roma Verde thus opposes the production of urban space as realization and extraction of surplus value (gentrification) by creating a community in the city capable of constructing an ecological critique of Mexico City and experimenting with alternative ecological practices for and in it. In this respect, it is a communitarian space where an emerging generation of ecological activists can organize, reflect, imagine, and practice possible urban alternatives. In contrast to *Arquitectura México*'s utopianism, which aspired to the stability of the model, the activists at the Huerto Roma Verde understand their own utopian practice as experimental and speculative, a drawing board rather than a blueprint. Their testimonies on the conflicts that have taken place in the space, the ongoing criticism on how decision making processes could be more democratic, or the rather plural definition each activist holds of "communitarian" all suggest that they conceive the space as a laboratory and, primordially, as a place in which to organize a community. As one of the activists claims, "this means that we are in an essay, we are being experimental."⁵¹³

The Huerto Roma Verde's experimental approach to utopianism, its urban practice around ecology and habitation, and its standing conditions as an appropriated space autonomously organized by the activists all find echo in the work of contemporary urban critical thinkers interested in utopia. In their recent *Un habitar más fuerte que la metrópoli*, the anarchist collective Consejo Nocturno has situated the current political threshold as an infrastructural dispute. On the one hand, we witness a process of spatial uniformization, "la puesta en infraestructura de todos los espacios y los tiempos en el mundo para la constitución de un megadispositivo metropolitano que anule por fin [...] toda negatividad que interrumpa el avance *in infinitum* de la economía."⁵¹⁴ On the other hand, we are witnessing the continuous emergence of what the Consejo calls "autonomous worlds" that oppose and resist the capitalist subsumption of all spaces (what they call the metropolis). For the Consejo, in the middle of a social and ecological collapse, what is at stake is the necessary shift from modernity's governmental paradigm "en favor de un paradigma del habitar. [...] La política que viene está completamente volcada al principio de las formas-de-vida y su cuidado autónomo."⁵¹⁵ The Consejo calls for the creation and net-working of such autonomous spaces that operate on a logic antagonical to capitalism and where the habitation, care, and reproduction of plural forms of life becomes possible.

⁵¹² See their testimonies and opinions in: Cloé T. Mandujano, "Urban Appropriation," 35-48.

⁵¹³ Cloé T. Mandujano, "Urban Appropriation," 44.

⁵¹⁴ Consejo Nocturno, *Un habitar más fuerte que la metrópoli* (La Rioja: Pepitas de Calabaza, 2018), 9. Original highlights

⁵¹⁵ Consejo Nocturno, *Un habitar*, 10-11.

In the urban terrain, the Consejo's idea is reminiscent of Henri Lefebvre's situationist notion of heterotopia. Lefebvre argued that, even though the city is planned and produced following a logic that serves the realization of surplus value, and even if different mechanisms of control are implemented with this end in mind, the urban inhabitants are always in the process of inventing their own urban practices according to what they feel, do, or believe. In this process, dispersed heterotopic spaces appear throughout the city, liminal spaces that draw alternative urban possibilities and practices, different forms of producing and appropriating the city. These heterotopias, as is the case of the Huerto Roma Verde, were for Lefebvre spaces of political organization and community formation. In his famous text on the Paris Commune and in his theorization of the 1968 events, Lefebvre claimed that heterotopias were indeed at the foundations of urban revolution. In Harvey's words:

We do not need to wait upon the grand revolution to constitute such spaces. Lefebvre's theory of a revolutionary movement is the other way around: the spontaneous coming together in a moment of "irruption," when disparate heterotopic groups suddenly see, if only for a fleeting moment, the possibilities of collective action to create something radically different.⁵¹⁶

Harvey analyzes the urban social movements in Argentina in 2001 and the so-called "water wars" in Bolivia in the early 2000s as examples of moments where different social actors and urban communities—many of them organized in the years prior through heterotopic spaces such as the "barter clubs" in Argentina or neighborhood assemblies—came together and were capable of articulating a plural social movement against neoliberal governance.⁵¹⁷ To the question of how to sustain the energy of these movements beyond the moment of irruption, ensuring the survival of these heterotopic spaces, Harvey also calls for a process of continuous networking between different autonomies and groups, what the Consejo Nocturno calls the *intercomunal*.

From a different yet related angle, in *Staying with the trouble*, Donna Haraway has dwelled at length on the central place that speculative practices—narrative, architectural, or otherwise—should have in the reconstitution of habitable worlds, "strengthening ways to propose near futures, possible futures, and implausible but real nows."⁵¹⁸ In "The Camille Stories" chapter, Haraway in fact provides her own speculative fiction, following the Haudenosaunee Confederation's idea to make present decisions by thinking about the next generations of human beings and life on Earth. Haraway imagines the emergence of her *intercomunal* network, the "children of compost" or "compostitsts," that "asked and responded to the question of how to live in the ruins that were still inhabited, with ghosts and with the living too."⁵¹⁹ The compostitsts moved to sites devastated by industrial capitalism with the purpose of making these places habitable once again. Slightly echoing Eduardo

⁵¹⁶ David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), xvii.

⁵¹⁷ Analyzing the Bolivian case, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call this articulation "the multitude." See: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁵¹⁸ Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 136.

⁵¹⁹ Donna Haraway, *Staying*, 138.

Ursaiz's replacement of the family by self-assembled "groups," the compostists developed a series of non-normative kin making practices, or "oddkin," which allowed for the emergence of multi-species relations, interactions, and intimacies. Social reproduction, therefore, entailed for them more-than-human reproduction: the reproduction of a habitable environment. Haraway dwells on their practices, beliefs, and traditions, placing particular emphasis on the importance of story-telling and world-building speculative narratives in their culture. The compostists were both interested and critical of past utopianisms, insisting that learning how to inhabit a planet in ruins called for an archaeological and experimental notion of speculation:

Compostists eagerly found out everything they could about experimental, intentional, utopian, dystopian, and revolutionary communities and movements across times and places. One of their great disappointments in these accounts was that so many started from the premise of starting over and beginning anew, instead of learning to inherit without denial and stay with the trouble of damaged worlds. [...] The richest humus for their inquiries turned out to be sf –science fiction and fantasy, speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, and string figures. Blocking the foreclosures of utopias, sf kept politics alive.⁵²⁰

Throughout these pages, I have attempted to follow Haraway's insight on the need to excavate past utopianisms with a critical eye, one that nevertheless manages to affirm the political importance of utopian speculation in its capacity to imagine possible worlds and possible forms of inhabiting them. I have argued that this is a worthy task insofar as, facing a period of political reconstruction in Mexico, a dispersed network of avant-garde writers and architects articulated a utopianist political and aesthetic practice that lasted four decades and culminated in the construction of a series of modernist social housing satellite cities. These writers and architects theorized the political stakes behind the question of how to direct the urban process and for what ends. They also claimed a place for artists in the production of urban space due to their capacity to articulate images of a modern city that would be better organized, technologically robust, and socially fair. These utopianists were avid to participate in the urban debates and struggles of the period by means of a utopian avant-garde practice that drew from the tradition of socialist literature, utopian socialism, or the architecture avant-garde in the USSR, Europe, and the United States. As we saw, their speculative fiction novels, avant-garde magazines, and architecture projects, provided a critical diagnostic of the urban conditions in Mexico and utopian urban models that promised to solve the problems diagnosed through spatial production. Although the models differed with each other, the urban utopianist tradition of postrevolutionary Mexico believed that the production of urban space through public infrastructures –hospitals, street networks, stadiums, housing, and cities as such– could lay the foundations for an equitable model of habitation. They were particularly concerned with social reproduction, in the sense that their models were meant to offer access to health, education, recreation, or housing for a larger number of urban inhabitants. Their utopian practice led them to articulate important critiques of institutions such as the traditional family or forms of urban exploitation such as rent, while also to propose imaginative alternatives to these and other questions. And yet, as Haraway suggests,

⁵²⁰ Donna Haraway, *Staying*, 150.

their utopian models were ultimately trapped in different quagmires, not only the modern tendency to start afresh that Haraway mentions.

Eduardo Urzaiz's *Eugenia*, for instance, managed to articulate a critique of the traditional family as an institution that reproduced private property through inheritance. The novel's alternative figure of the self-assembled group and its groups house is equally notable, evocative in fact of Haraway's contemporary discussion on multi-species forms of "oddkin" formation as well as with queer forms of kin making. However, the author remained trapped in an eugenic paradigm according to which the state needed to control, surveille, and supervise the population's social reproduction (biologic and otherwise) in order to improve its genetic makeup. In the mid 1920s, the *estridentista* avant-garde in Jalapa employed their magazine *Horizonte* to theorize a series of public works built or planned in the provincial Veracruz as a social experiment, a laboratory of a socialist, avant-garde state. They were particularly interested in networked infrastructures and connectivity, envisioning a modern city where the socialist avant-garde and the working classes were in communication with each other, the former designing and the latter building, operating, and using the city's public infrastructures. In their futurist aesthetic, they thus envisioned an emancipating theory of modern technology designed and controlled by the proletariat, a city that was an organic, technosocial body. But most of *Horizonte*'s plans, projects, and ideas were never built, and the federal government soon crushed the experiment in Jalapa, turning instead to *Planificación*'s liberal, centralized, and technocratic approach to planning.

In the early 1930s, the remaining *estridentistas* and a new generation of socialist writers and artists regrouped in different radical collectives that turned to the USSR's cultural directives. In Veracruz, the proletarian literature project proposed that socialist realism could be used as a means to analyze Mexico's political situation and propose a future path towards socialism. In *La ciudad roja*, José Mancisidor had the insight of returning to the momentous 1922 tenant strikes in Veracruz, placing the question of rent exploitation at the center of the urban debates of the period, while also managing to reconstruct the autonomous urban space organized by the tenants as an example analogous to the Paris Commune. However, his process of historical rewriting ultimately attempted to domesticate the anarchist irruption of the tenant strikes from an orthodox socialist position, presenting it as a movement that failed insofar as it lacked discipline and a centralized leadership. In this sense, the novel was ultimately incapable of debating some of the more interesting aspects of the 1922 events, including the participation of the port's prostitutes and their own critique of rented dwelling spaces and rented bodies. A few years later, in 1938, a group of young socialist architects presented a project for a workers' city organized around cooperative principles and common property. Drawing from Moisei Ginzburg's "communal houses" in the USSR, they emphasized the political importance of collectivizing social reproduction costs and labor in order to ensure equal access to education, childcare, food, and recreation. Presented at the important XVI Congreso, the project intervened in the social housing debates of the period with a radical argument in favor of an ambitious social housing model that could guarantee equal access to public services. And yet, in the context of the *Cardenismo*'s state-driven industrialization program, the project also envisioned a minute disciplinarian programming and surveillance of the workers' daily life in order to maximize industrial productivity.

Ultimately, this utopian trajectory led to *Arquitectura México*'s welfare vision of urban planning and its central place behind the state's social housing policy during the 1940s and 50s. *Arquitectura México* operated as a political negotiator between conflicting interests, using the pages of the magazine to bring together and network different voices and positions. Their social housing model was meant to satisfy all ends, including labor demands for social security and the radical avant-garde's insistence on the importance of incorporating collective infrastructures through which to reduce costs of living and guarantee access to education, recreation, and childcare.

As we saw, once the state receded from view in the late twentieth century, it was the residents of the mid-century satellite cities who appropriated these housing infrastructures according to their own needs. In places like the Huerto Roma Verde, they also appropriated urban utopianism from a critical and experimental perspective. This work is meant to dialogue with contemporary reflections on utopianism in current speculative aesthetic, political, and urban practices. It has offered an excavation of postrevolutionary Mexico's urban utopianism, a description of its models and ideas, and a reconstruction of the urban debates and struggles in which this practice emerged. It has insisted on the limits and foreclosures of these models, in the hope that we can evade the modern avant-garde's utopian dogmatism. It has insisted on the critical and speculative insights of these models, in the hope that their reflections on habitation, kin making, and social reproduction may resound with contemporary questions of how to inhabit other possible worlds. In the context of today's global environmental and social crisis, urban utopianism's conviction that things could in fact be built differently and that we can inhabit otherwise constitutes a hopeful reminder that there is much to be done today.

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