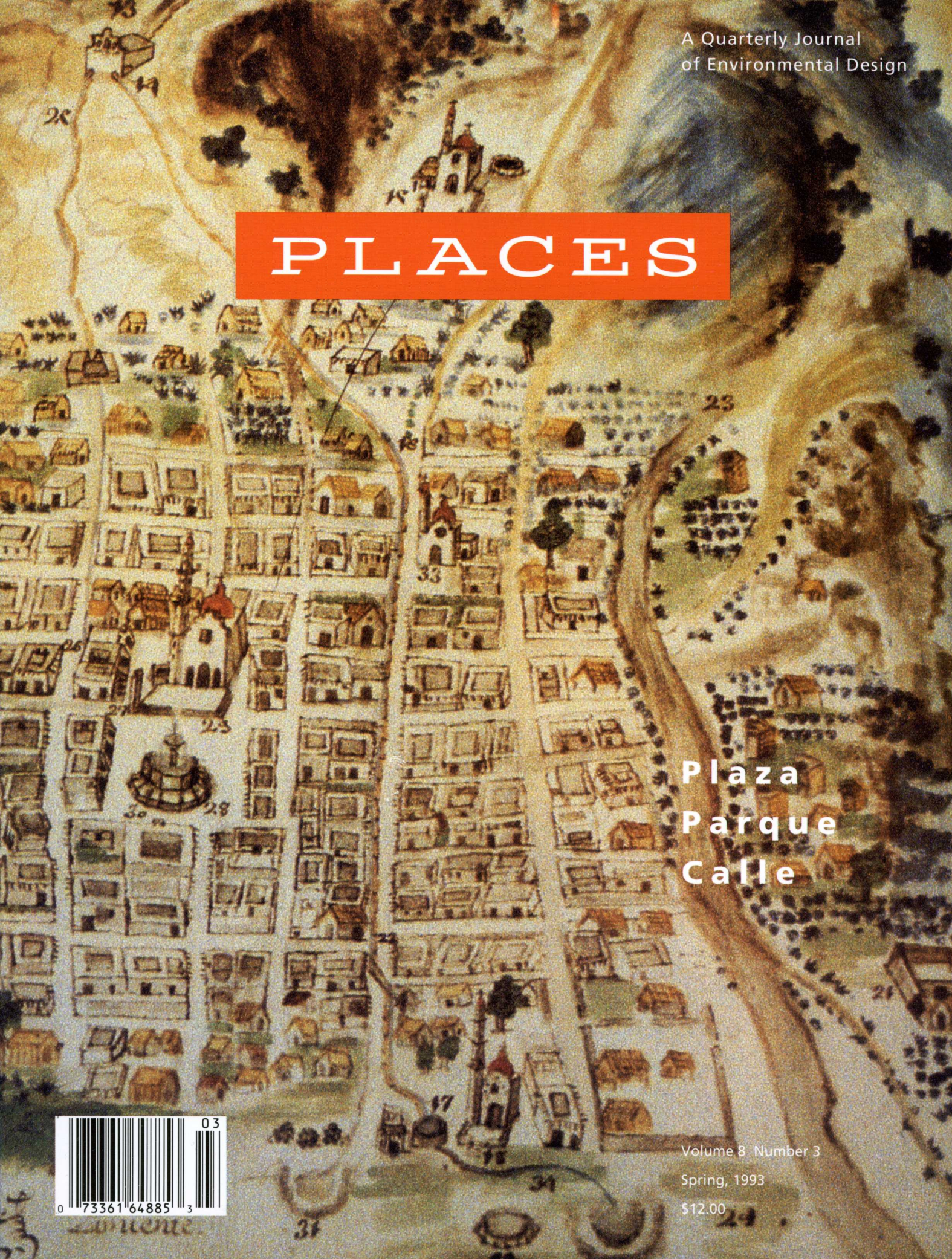


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La Vida Libre:
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The Street Culture
en Los Angeles Este
of East Los Angeles

David R. Diaz

As mothers and children pour into the street from every conceivable direction, their casual routine of daily shopping becomes a magical experience in this land of autos and freeways. Kids tug skirts; strollers and shopping carts poke for an opening in the crowds on the sidewalk; eyes glance at storefronts; everyone is in a swirl of decisions. Spanish is the predominant language, with intelligible English also available upon request. What to buy, what looks exciting, which store has the best sale, how much to buy, how far to walk back home?

In this community of brown faces, the vibrant street culture remains a timeless experience of pleasure as well as necessity. *En la calle por la gente*, the interaction of people is as important as the commerce that takes place. Instead of building upon and learning from existing multi-ethnic cultural patterns, Los Angeles' blinded leaders have poured a king's ransom building a skyline that can be seen on the horizon, a vain attempt to recreate what exists naturally across the Los Angeles River. Sadly, the city's "dream policies" (read redevelopment) believe they can purchase a lively street-level milieu.

The day-to-day activity in two East Los Angeles shopping areas, along Brooklyn and Soto Streets and

The downtown Los Angeles skyline towers over East Los Angeles, visually and symbollically. Background photo courtesy Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency. Other photos by David R. Diaz, unless otherwise indicated.







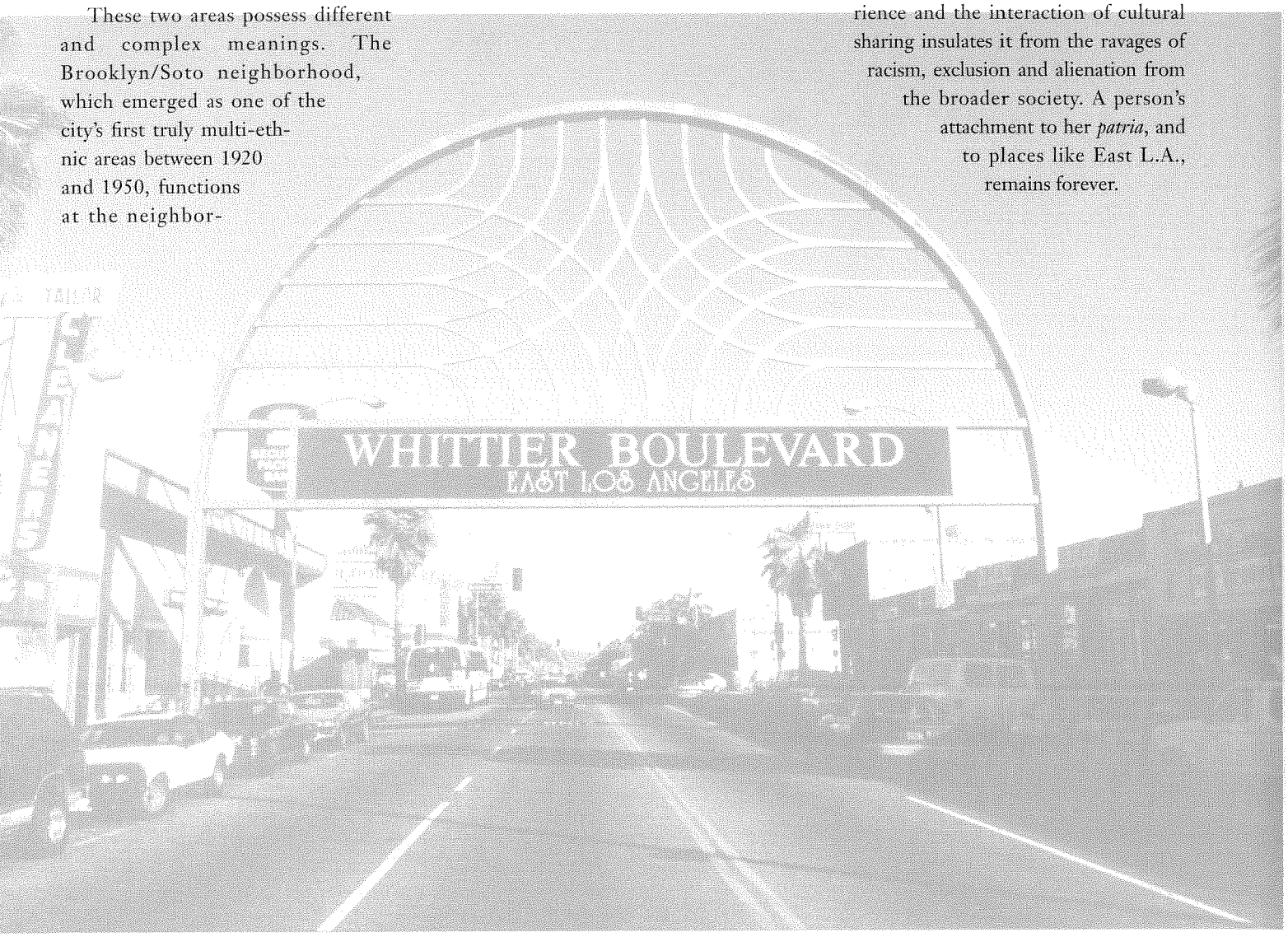


Whittier Boulevard, exhibits a street life that is foreign to most Southern Californians. It has nothing to do with stylish architecture or planning projects; the buildings and their facades haven't changed in years, except for occasional new paint and minimal remodeling. The activity on the streets is reminiscent of past eras; the people continue a fun, daily routine that expresses their rootedness in the place and the community — a sense of living shoulder to shoulder that exists in too few neighborhoods in this region.

These two areas possess different and complex meanings. The Brooklyn/Soto neighborhood, which emerged as one of the city's first truly multi-ethnic areas between 1920 and 1950, functions at the neighborhood level. It is an area of personal use and attachment: Pedestrians are bonded by family, church and school the communal connection of place that mirrors social networking in Mexico.

Whittier Boulevard is the historic center of East Los Angeles. The street is synonymous with East L.A.: Songs have been written about it, demonstrations pass through it, cars still cruise it and teenagers flock along its sidewalks to see and be seen. Along it are community landmarks like the Golden Gate Theatre, a prominent building where every Mexicano child grew up watching movies, and Ruben Salazar Park, where a significant battle with the L.A. police occured. For four generations, families have come to Whittier Boulevard from near and far to enjoy midday strolls and window shopping.

Since the 1920s, East L.A. has been the center of L.A.'s *Mexicano* population. But in a very real sense East L.A. is a state of mind that encompasses a broad area within Los Angeles County. A community takes the shape of a country (*patria*) when the flow of experience and the interaction of cultural sharing insulates it from the ravages of racism, exclusion and alienation from the broader society. A person's attachment to her *patria*, and to places like East L.A., remains forever.



The culture of East L.A. is a state of mind that streetscape symbols cannot capture. Courtesy Loftur Eiríksson.

Streams Of Life: Brooklyn and Soto

By 9 a.m. on a typical weekend morning, the bus benches fill with people of all ages — workers, shoppers, people embarking on a day of visiting or errands. Markets, *pandarias*, *carnecerias* and gift shops are typical destinations for shoppers. Families with special afternoon plans scurry down Soto Street for a quick spin to a few specific shops, and the first *mariachis* roam the restaurants, strumming the chords of culture.

The streets surrounding this shopping district are tributaries of humanity. Children, sent out to make morning purchases, walk hand in hand or with arms slung around each other's shoulders, a reminder of ancient village rites of friendship and community. *Viejos* congregate at benches and near restaurants, continuing a ritual practice of mediating another day's events among trusted *amigos o amigas*. Cars roam, hopelessly searching for a place to park. They are a somewhat useless apparatus that gets in the way of the main show.

By 10:30 Brooklyn Avenue is a sea of parents and children. Shops bursting with clothes and whatever else can be sold have opened their doors and windows; some merchants set up street booths to lure casual shoppers searching for a bargain and shoppers who haven't spent enough yet. Sidewalks sway with the scrambling of children and parents drifting along searching, visiting, shopping and relaxing.

What brings this active mass of humanity to this location? Brooklyn Street, the main commercial thoroughfare, offers a typical array of contemporary consumer desires. There are plenty of restaurants; La Parilla is among the best Mexican restaurants in the city. King Taco, the pride of the famous East L.A. taco trucks, started on the corner of Brooklyn and Soto (now it is a successful chain serving delicious specialty meats). A sea of butcher-paper signs advertising sales at Big Buy Foods hangs as if strung from a clothesline. *Mariscos* are readily available. The Lopez *cantina* and El Azteca normally have a packed house of *conjuntos* and trios taking breaks from their ritual restaurant runs, a constant flow of guitars along the street, morning, noon and night. The smell of Mexican *pandulce fresca*, one of the best snacks in the world, is never far away. Mountains of clothes for children of all ages are piled on open-air sidewalk tables and hang on storefront windows. (Sometimes, it seems, children's clothes are not bought; they are just handed out as families pass by.) If a store doesn't have some sort of sale, the owner is in the wrong business, or the wrong place.

The daily routine of shopping for food and houseold necessities generates a sense of *colonia*, a feeling that the families in the area own the street. As an example of this *confiado en la calle*, young teenagers are sent off by themselves on errands like quick trips to the market — a practice that no longer exists in most parts of Los Angeles.

The sidewalks comprise a crossroads for people still bound by a border, political and historic. They are an important social space, a community news network where neighbors and friends swap news about people, jobs, politics and scandals. In this neighborhood of cottages and small apartment buildings, which suffers from L.A.'s collective lack of attention to people, parks and open space, encountering one's friends is an important reason for being on the street. The telephone won't do; communication works best when it's face to face, when you can not only talk to people but also see them and touch them.







Being on Brooklyn Street is a daily ritual, and the street is a setting for enounters of everyday life. Greeting friends and swapping news during impromptu sidewalk conversations is as important as making the day's purchases or taking advantage of the latest sale.







The Historic Street: Whittier Boulevard

Although Whittier Boulevard is characterized by the same intensive pedestrian character as the Brooklyn/Soto district, it has a different historical meaning for the East L.A. community. This is the street that made cruising popular and was L.A..'s first ethnic and class battleground, foreshadowing the city's current ethnic diversity. It was also the scene of the most influential moment in modern Latino political history and that same history's most tragic loss.

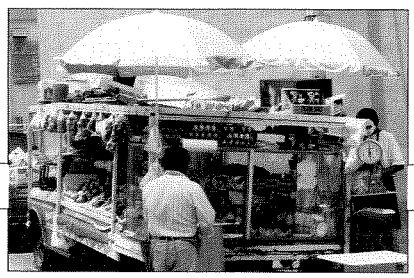
The street's regional commercial character attracts shoppers from throughout East L.A.; they arrive by car, bus and foot. Shoppers come in all sizes. It's not uncommon to see two strollers being wheeled around by mother and an older child. Sometimes the biggest battle is carting the crew and equipment — kids, bags and strollers — when the light changes to green. Neighbors and friends invariably meet, taking carefree time to discuss the latest neighborhood matters oblivious to the people passing by. The kids tolerate the day by waiting for their moment in the sun, the purchase of a *paleta o raspada*. (If they're really hungry a steaming *elote* will do the trick.) After being tugged along for two or three hours they deserve a treat.

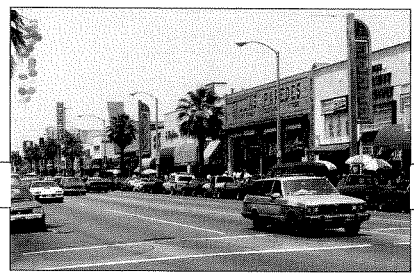
Whittier Boulevard has three commercial characteristics that differentiate it from Brooklyn and Soto: furniture stores, *secundas* (second hand stores) and street vendors; the latter two are particular evidence of social realities. Whittier Boulevard does not have many restaurants and the street vendors, who sell all types of food (*elotes*, *paletas*, *aguas*, *raspadas* and *frutas*) do a brisk business throughout the day.

Cars and Whittier Boulevard are synonymous; even today, more than half the people who shop on the street drive there. During the street's heyday (starting in the 1940s), traffic was bumper to bumper from 9 p.m. through early morning. This cultural experience was eliminated by the L.A. county sheriffs in the late 1970s. Concerned about crime and gangs, they put up nighttime barricades that forced drivers to detour through the surrounding neighborhood.

The street has always been a favorite hangout for teenagers. With plenty of

Whittier Boulevard, which serves a regional commercial market, also is important in the history of *Mexicano* settlement in Los Angeles.







clothes stores catering to their stylistic imagination, there is always a lively debate going on in front of display windows. These teens don't have a lot of cash; any purchase becomes a serious, conscious image decision. It's a pleasant way to spend a long afternoon, and parents are generously permissive if they know their aspiring adults are chattering away on the boulevard.

The evolution of Whittier Boulevard began with the skirmishes over good swimming spots in the L.A. River between Mexicans, who lived west of the river, and Russians, Armenians, Jews and other kids who lived to the east in Boyle Heights. In less than a decade these same teenagers would be raising their families as neighbors. The communities co-existed until the 1960s, when both Mexican immigration and the dispersal of whites to new suburban neighborhooods accelerated.

Over time, Whittier Boulevard, the main east/west street in East L.A., emerged as the center of the *Mexicano* community. It became a symbol of arrival that remains a part of Mexican folklore of the immigrant experience. Even today, it maintains a mystic magnetism for fourth generation Latinos scattered throughout suburban Southern California — any Latino raised in East L.A. will take an nostalgic spin along the boulevard whenever the opportunity arises.

In 1970, a Chicano moratorium (a march in opposition) to the Vietnam War was staged along Whittier Boulevard and ended in what was then called Laguna Park; at that point it was the largest anti-war protest ever in a minority neighborhood. Several journalists retreated to a bar to discuss the events of the day and police, nervous about what was happening, fired tear gas inside. A cannister struck and killed Ruben Salazar, a prominent Latino journalist whose voice has not been matched to this day. This event, the most important in East L.A.'s *Mexicano* history, galvanized the social and political concerns of a generation of Latinos; the park subsequently was renamed in Salazar's memory.

The scale of the street was symbolically altered a few years back by a facade upgrading project sponsored by Los Angeles County that incorporated a grotesque postmodern attempt to emulate the St. Louis arch in the middle of the boulevard. Fortunately, most users simply ignore its existence.



Latino street culture transcends time and place, thriving even along American-style shopping strips.



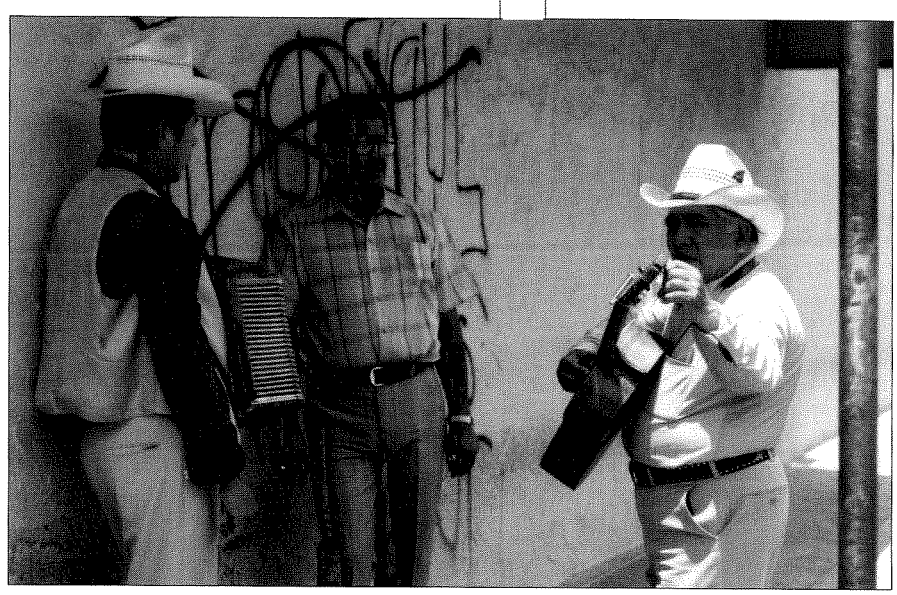
People and Culture:
It's More Than A Shopping Bag

The character of Brooklyn and Soto streets and Whittier Boulevard depends only superficially on what is sold there. The character of these streets has to do with conversation, body contact, meeting friends and life patterns like being part of a family, being independent and being part of a community. For outsiders, it is a strange sensation to experience the life of these streets, and it is to soak up, in only a few, fleeting moments, the social attitudes and pace that evident here but missing from much of U.S. culture. These are places filled with people who have learned how to wander, forget time, enjoy other people (both friends and strangers) and view themselves as a community whose existence depends on its occupation of these places.

The grid street pattern and fading brick facades of East L.A. have little connection, in terms of design, with traditional Mexican cultural space. A few murals in the area offer a semblance of our heritage. Yet this rather mundane physical demeanor is overridden with a strong sense of cultural meaning. The large immigrant community has merged with second- and third-generation families to forge a marriage between urban space and vibrant social interaction.

Latino street culture transcends time and place. Ritual contact, connection, carina with our social peers remains a constant in our changing daily lives, which are truly lived at a communal level. Here, the human scale is routine; as *la gente Latina* scurry about their indeterminate walking trips nothing appears out of the ordinary. But people taking time to stop, listen, feel and experience is a contradiction of Los Angeles' image as a place characterized by herds of cars, maddening commutes and a skyline feebly attempting to emulate Manhattan. People centeredness, the dominant character of East L.A., creates a bond that seemingly cannot be found in other L.A. neighborhoods.

Downtown powerbrokers cannot buy culture, even in its rather expensive postmodern form. In East L.A. culture is free; it blows with the wind, gets scorched by the sun and is touched hand in hand or arm around shoulder. The people in the streets across the river see the office towers, and the eyes in those same towers can see these same streets. But more than a river separates a cultural community from a "cultured" society. Despite the trend towards creating spaces that separate us from each other, seeing, touching and talking face to face are forms of social interaction still exist in East Los Angeles. In East L.A., people live to enjoy their social space.



From Broadway to "Latinoway": The Reoccupation of a Gringo Retail Landscape

Curtis C. Roseman and J. Diego Vigil

The belief that downtown Los Angeles barely exists continues to be embraced by popular and sometimes even scholarly wisdom. By the 1980s, however, passersby on the freeways have actually been able to see a central business district in L.A., thanks to a new cluster of 1970s- and 1980s-vintage skyscrapers. A new downtown, with a towering visual signature appropriate to its major function as a corporate and administrative financial district, has emerged.

As a social setting, however, the new downtown is disappointing. Like many modern urban and suburban business centers, it was designed largely as a daytime and indoor place. Each morning, tens of thousands of workers enter downtown in their cars, disappear directly into indoor parking garages and zip to their office in elevators. Each day at lunchtime they descend by elevator to restaurants and shops located in indoor mall-like shopping centers. And each afternoon, they return to their cars, re-emerge from the parking garages and join the gridlock on downtown streets and freeways. They can do all this without walking along the streets, which are often void of people.

A vibrant Latino commercial district, characterized by a lively street life, has emerged in Los Angeles' 1920s-vintage downtown. Background photo courtesy J. Diego Vigil. Right photo courtesy the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.

NEWS STATE
BROOKS
Bank of America
Bank

Just a few blocks away from this new downtown, however, is the contrasting environment of Broadway, which is as lively as any street in the United States. On most days, and especially on Sunday afternoons, thousands of people stroll along Broadway in the Southern California sun. Because of its setting in the older part of downtown Los Angeles, Broadway has become a unique place where Latino people, culture and trade abound in a built environment that is right out of 1920s urban Anglo America. This vibrant place is light years away from the nearby new downtown in social practices, ethnic customs and functional use of space. And it clearly symbolizes how Anglos and Latinos live together but apart; Broadway is hardly acknowledged or frequented by most non-Latino people in the region, including people of other ethnic backgrounds.

From Broadway . . .

Prior to the turn of the century, Los Angeles' commercial center was near the intersection of Spring and First streets, and it stretched only a few blocks south down Broadway. But construction of the new city hall on Broadway between Second and Third streets in the 1880s was a primary impetus in turning the commercial district southward. For the next few decades, and particularly in the 1920s, the stretch of Broadway from Third to Tenth streets emerged as the primary thoroughfare of a central shopping and entertainment district that served the entire region.

Almost everybody in the burgeoning city rode streetcars to the district, taking advantage of a mass transportation system that fully served the urban area. A number of major department stores, including The Broadway itself, settled along the street, and hundreds of smaller shops lined Broadway from about Third to Tenth streets.The district functioned as the focal point of a complete business and entertainment center, having retail stores and theaters at the sidewalk level, and doctors, lawyers and other professionals working in the upper floors of the buildings.

Together, these buildings comprised a significant architectural framework executed with bravado in a variety of classical and commercial styles, including art deco, art moderne, Italianate, Sullivanesque, Romanesque, Spanish Renaissance, French Renaissance and Gothic Revival. They incorporated a significant use of terra cotta and metal grillwork for ornamentation and were embellished with signs that came in a plethora of styles and sizes.

Among the most significant structures dating from this era is the Bradbury Building, whose interior is a distinct architectural wonder because of its latticed ironwork elevators and an almost comical indoor network of fire escapes. Another is the Arcade Building, which has a unique facade and glass-roofed interior and once contained many smaller jewelry and clothing establishments that catered to well-heeled shoppers.[1]

Also, twelve theaters were built along this stretch of Broadway between 1910 and 1932; only one has been razed. Initially, they offered vaudeville, big band and other live entertainment; eventually they became a prime location for major movie premieres. Theater architecture was even more flamboyant than commercial styles, injecting variety and dazzle into the Broadway streetscape. For example, the two-story Los Angeles Theater, built in concrete and terra cotta, features French Renaissance design with columns capped by sculptures of urns and eagles.

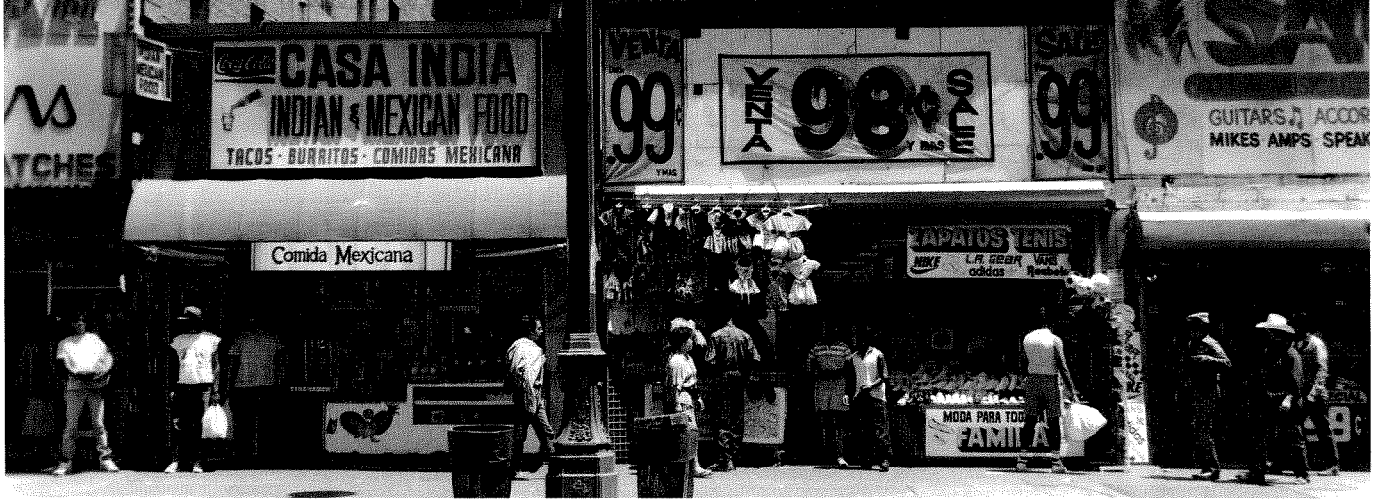


Left: Broadway looking south from Sixth Street, 1923. Opposite page, top: The Los Angeles Theatre, 1938. Opposite page, bottom: RKO Orpheum Theatre, ca. 1931.

Photos courtesy the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.


Golden Castle's
SALE
JEWELRY KIMONOS
2 FIRST RUN FEATURES
SALLY EILERS
"LADY BEHAVE"
"PORT/MISSING GIRLS"
COMPLETE
NEW SHOW
EVERY
WEDNESDAY
Zukor's


ORPHEUM
RKO THEATRE
RKO VAUDEVILLE ACTS
POLICY STUPENDOUS
RKO ACTS
STOP



. . . to "Latinoway"

Mexicans have always been a part of Broadway, although they first established a business district around the original plaza area, founded in 1781 just to the north of what is now downtown. At first, the Anglo-American settlers used this district as if it were their own; yet as the Anglo commercial district drifted southward on Broadway, relatively small numbers of Mexicans moved along to shop and watch movies with the rest of the citizens.

Broadway retained its Anglo orientation through World War II, but by the late 1940s the Million Dollar Theatre was hosting live shows by Mexican entertainers and showing a Spanish-language film once a week; nearby movie houses soon followed suit. In the 1950s, the increase in Mexican population living around downtown made it profitable for some businesses to cater to the Spanish-language trade.

The Broadway district began to transform further as the pace of demographic change in the region accelerated. The closing of the streetcar system and reliance on the increasingly diffused freeway network weakened Broadway's role as a central shopping district. The flight of white Los Angelenos to outer suburbs picked up pace as a partial result of the Watts revolt and other civil unrest in the 1960s; downtown retailers followed their clientele by opening satellite stores in suburban malls and then abandoned downtown altogether. Meanwhile, the volume of immigration from Mexico into central city neighborhoods increased; by the 1980s other Latinos (mainly Salvadorans, Guatemalans and Nicaraguans), Asians and other immigrants were joining the resident Mexican-American population.[2]

Today, activity along Broadway is dominated by Latinos, particularly people of Mexican origin. Business is commonly trans-



Broadway's vibrant commercial life primarily activates ground floor retail spaces. Often, however, the upper floors of these historic buildings are vacant. Photos courtesy J. Diego Vigil.



acted in Spanish, and the atmosphere is dictated by Latino culture and custom. "Latinoway" differs from other business concentrations in places like East Los Angeles, Boyle Heights and Alvarado Street. Its central location, near the city's public transportation hub and at the junction of many freeways, gives it access to more customers from a wider radius. Other Latino business areas primarily serve their nearby residential populations.

At first, in the 1960s, Anglo Angelenos resented the Latino behavior patterns on Broadway — people hawking wares on the sidewalks and streets, pedestrian crowding on the sidewalks and, worst of all, people talking in Spanish. But with the new occupation complete, a new spirit has arisen: New kinds of music have appeared, as have vendors of flowers, *paletas* (Mexican Popsicles), *tortas* (Mexican mini-submarine sandwiches) and *chicles* (gum, often sold by children).

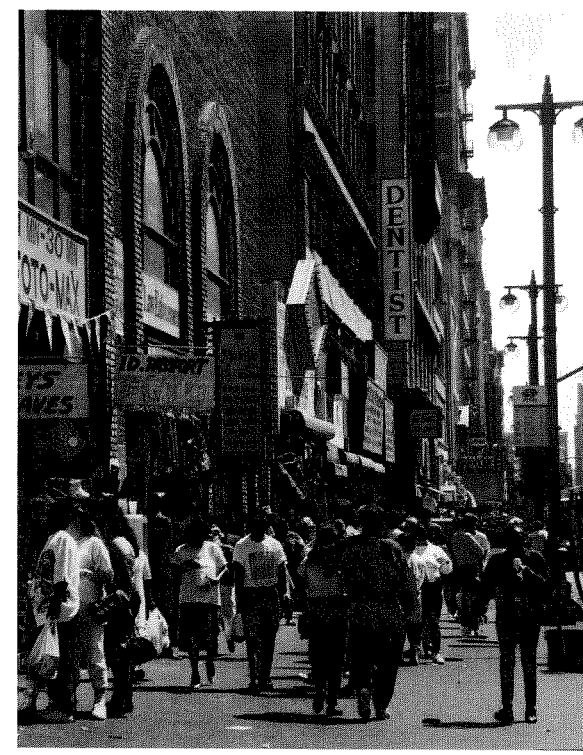
Now the shops are small; retail activities and displays crowd the fronts of stores. Clothing racks, shoe displays and sundries tables spill into the sidewalk, and salespeople can be seen on the sidewalks waving items in front of passersby (in the historic department stores, where retailing took place in elaborate interior selling floors and the only connection to the streets was display windows). The product range suggests a "street K-Mart"; inexpensive clothing, shoes, toys, jewelry and a wide range of consumer and electronic gadgetry dominate the retail scene. The economic activity is often informal; considerable amounts of bartering and trading are conducted.

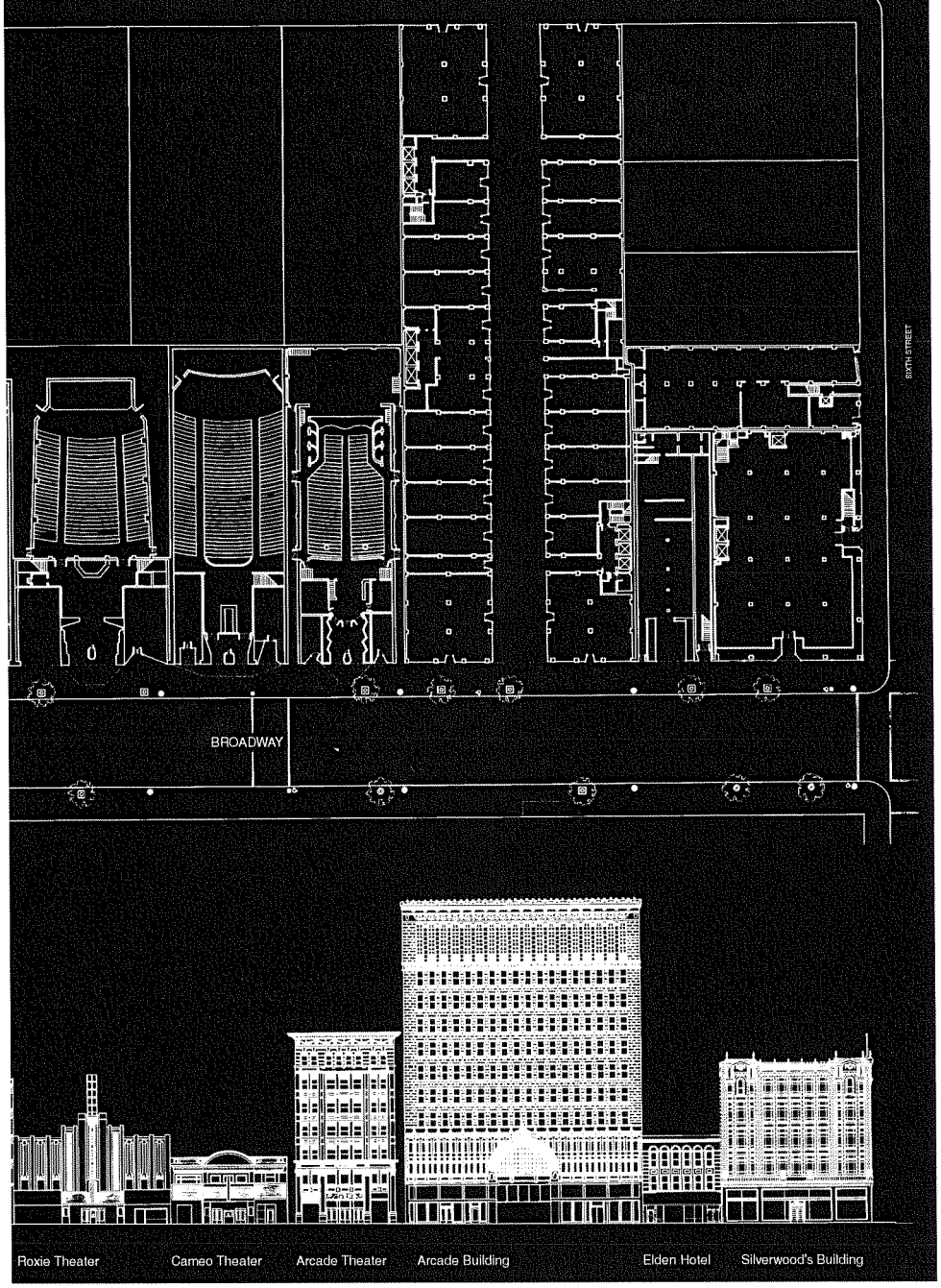
Entertainment takes on several forms. On the street, clowns and gamesmen working "shills" compete for people's attention. Blaring music emanates from some stores. Several theaters still show movies, most of them in Spanish, although the movie premiere extravaganzas of yesteryear are gone.

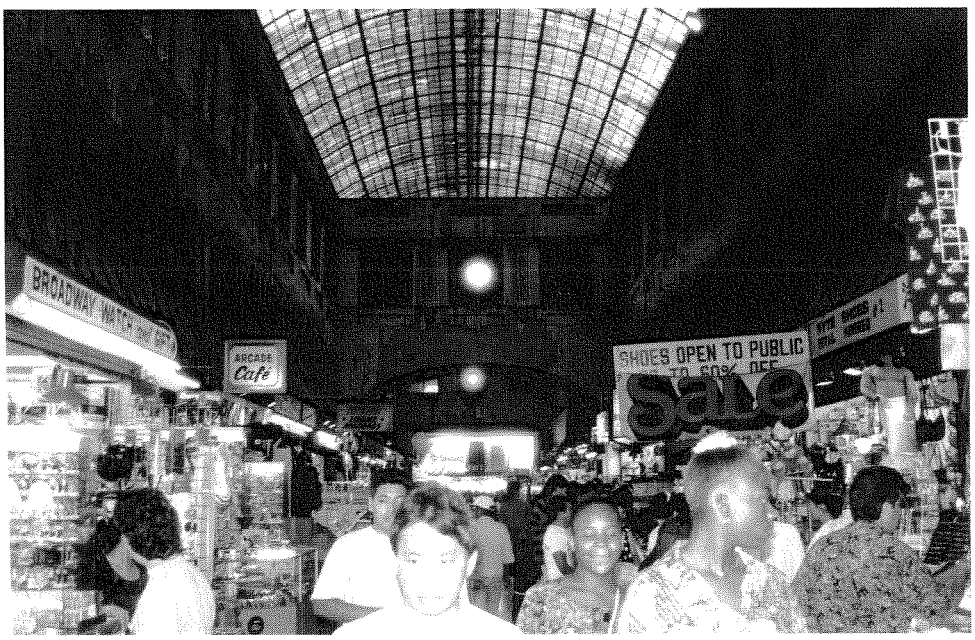
Many smaller stores have been converted into Latino eating places where people sit, stand, or walk while eating, whatever suits their mood. Some eateries reflect the increasingly multicultural flavor of Los Angeles, serving Mexican/ Chinese or Indian/Mexican fare. During the last two or three years, American fast food places have also invaded: Major chains like McDonald's, Taco Bell and Pizza Hut each have established at least one outpost on "Latinoway."

This is a family place, especially on Sunday at midday and during the afternoon. Latinoway reflects the importance Mexican/Latino culture places on family outings and public gatherings on Sundays; in contrast to the quiet Sundays on Broadway in the past. Three-generation families are a common sight; strollers and meandering kids add to the cacophony on the streets. Several bridal shops line the street, and next to one of them is a shop selling paraphernalia for baptisms and holy communion celebrations, underscoring and celebrating Latinos' deeply held belief in Catholic ritual tradition and the importance of marriages, births and religious faith to Latino family life.






SIXTH STREET
BROADWAY
Roxie Theater
Cameo Theater
Arcade Theater
Arcade Building
Elden Hotel
Silverwood's Building


ARCADE
Cafe
SHOES OPEN TO PUBLIC
Sale

The Persistent Built Environment

What makes Broadway distinctive today is the contrast between the human activity there and the built environment. "Latino-way" exists within essentially the same urban and architectural frame as that which characterized Broadway during its Anglo heyday in the 1920s and 1930s. Most of the buildings that housed department stores, theaters and office buildings remain intact, except, in most cases, for modifications at street level.

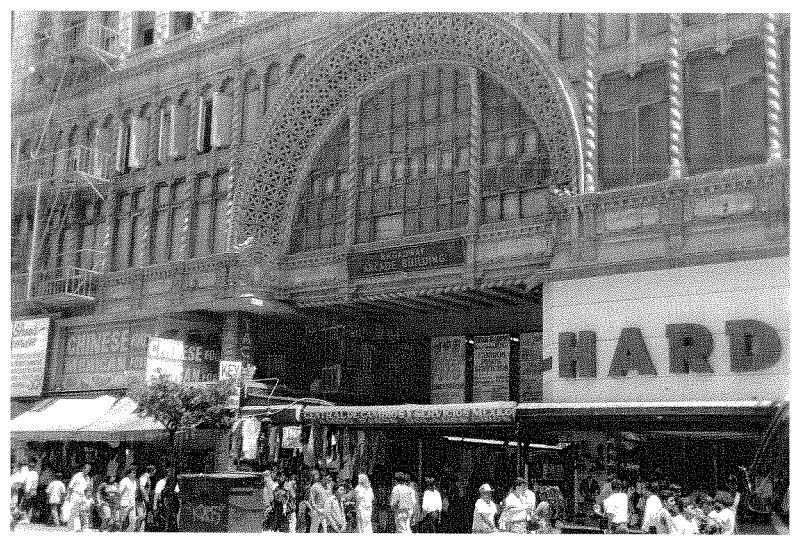
A close examination does, however, reveal some differences: Most buildings are utilized only at ground level, where store configuration and facades have been modified and new signs, in English and Spanish, have been added. Little activity can be found above street level; most upper floors are vacant and many of the buildings are in disrepair (the careful viewer can detect numerous signs for stores from times past).

Broadway's wide sidewalks, designed to accommodate crowds walking to and from department stores, now are cluttered with tables and racks that present merchandise directly to passersby. Generally, two types of retail stores exist. One is the sidewalk-oriented store, often narrower than a typical American retail shop and sometimes occupying only the front half of the interior ground floor space inside the building. The other occupies a large interior space, like the historic Arcade Building or a converted large department store (such as the former May Co. building), that offers a large, free-flowing area for walking, talking and shopping, all in one motion. These spaces distance people from the street and sidewalks, providing a more secure and safe environment for children. The retail mix in the Arcade, which has numerous children's apparel and toy shops, reflects this orientation.

Dozens of 'teens- and '20s-era buildings in this part of Los Angeles have been preserved in a passive manner. Their survival in the face of the economic change along Broadway is the product of a myriad of factors, one of which may be paramount: Since the 1960s, the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency has created a new downtown for the city in the Bunker Hill district, just to the west. Using large amounts of public money, the CRA has stimulated numerous new projects, including skyscrapers in the financial district, hotel and indoor shopping center complexes, and residential developments. The locational choice for these integrated developments allowed buildings in the older downtown to stand, unmolested, by modern urban development.

Consequently, the older downtown, including Broadway, has retained a distinctive '20s flavor — an imagery that can be seen especially above street level. Some classic building elements can still be found. Metal fire escapes, old flag poles, faded signs and other unchanged components of the upper floors are repeated from block to block, with little interruption by any modern buildings or facades.

One of the more distinctive aspects of these buildings is their uniform height. Until the late 1950s, buildings in Los Angeles (City Hall excepted) could not exceed 150 feet in height because of the earthquake hazard. During building booms in the 'teens and '20s, dozens of buildings were built right up to the limit. In 1926 and 1927 alone, 47 new 12-story buildings were completed in the Broadway neighborhood. The resulting landscape permits many multi-block vistas of buildings having uniform heights.[3]



The atrium of the Arcade Building, once a jewelry mart, now serves Latino shoppers.

Drawings courtesy Chuck Lagreco, USC School of Architecture. Photos courtesy J. Diego Vigil.

Broadway's Next Move: From "Latinoway" to Common Ground

To the framers of Los Angeles' forthcoming Downtown Strategic Plan, Broadway is at a critical juncture. To the west is "the city," characterized by modern office, hotel and residential towers and flashy cultural facilities. To the east is "the markets," an active and economically successful industrial, warehouse and distribution center.

But Broadway, largely a Latino-oriented retail district, is showing signs of weakness. Latinos are moving to the suburbs and shopping there, too. Some of the grandiose movie palaces, which have shown Spanish-language films for years, are being used as religious halls and for swap meets. The upper floors of the buildings that constitute Broadway's magnficent architectural frame have long been vacant.

L.A.'s new downtown strategic plan will try to boost Broadway by drawing in more workers and tourists, according to Robert Harris, a University of Southern California architecture professor who co-chairs the plan's public advisory committee. It will suggest stronger connections between Broadway and the "city" and "market" districts, the Union Station transit hub and the expanding convention center; set out architectural and programming ideas for reviving Broadway as an arts and entertainment center; and recommend strategies for keeping Broadway cleaner and making it feel more secure.

This plan is likely to be more sensitive to downtown's cultural, economic and architectural character than the bulldoze-and-rebuild approach that shaped the redevelopment of nearby Bunker Hill (part of what the strategic plan calls "the city"). It will propose a set of "catalytic projects" — for example, a trolley running from the Union Station transit hub to the convention center and connecting with new subway and light rail lines. Another is the reconstruction of Angels' Flight, a funicular railway that was ripped out during redevelopment and would provide a "direct, dramatic connection" between Broadway and Bunker Hill office towers.

Striking a balance between attracting new activity and maintaining Broadway's Latino-oriented commercial character will be challenging. Planners want to encourage more projects like the Yellin Co.'s rehab of Grand Central Market, an important through-block building that links the funicular railway's Hill Street terminal to Broadway. Here, the renovation, restoration and expansion of the historic market was completed without dislocating the small-scale, independent food shops that have thrived on the main market floor for 75 years.

The hope is Broadway will retain its Latino-oriented shopping character but emerge as something more — a place where office and warehouse employees come for lunch; where Latinos, Anglos and others come for entertainment and shopping; and where residents, workers and tourists mingle on the street. Planners hope that by connecting Broadway better to its surroundings and the city at large, and by nurturing projects that create potential for diverse activities and peoples, they can turn Broadway into a sorely needed common ground.

— Todd W. Bressi



Future projects along Broadway would be characterized by east-west connections to adjacent districts, like Biddy Mason Plaza. Courtesy Burton and Spitz, landscape architects.

Tianguis

The transition from Broadway to "Latinoway" has been marked by new cultural uses for existing spaces and buildings. While the street remains a place to shop, its role as a place to visit, socialize and browse has expanded. Activities like eating, shopping and viewing movies and entertainers continue as before, although they now involve a more intense use of the sidewalk and street, taking advantage of and basking in the sunlight that is ubiquitous in Los Angeles. In a sense, the open air market concept, formalized in the *tianguis* (from the Aztec word for "market") of Mexico, has been superimposed on an urban environment that Anglos built — an environment that, ironically, occupies a place previously inhabited by Native American and Mexican settlers.

What the next transition in the landscape will be is anybody's guess. The area has been awarded limited protection as a historic district, and preservation advocates may seek additional measures; their interest might increase the pressure for tourist-related activities to emerge along Broadway, as has occurred in other preservation districts, and push out the stores that serve the Latino community. While some planners observe that Latino shopping districts elsewhere in the region are gaining strength relative to Broadway, L.A.'s new rapid transit system will have a hub near Broadway and reinforce its central role.

Similarly, these buildings' upper floors are being rediscovered as viable office space, perhaps infusing a new, and somewhat different, clientele for the shops along the street. A major renovation project at the north end of Broadway, involving the Million Dollar Theater, the Bradbury Building and the Grand Central Market, is currently underway; downtown government agencies are expected to move into the Bradbury Building.

Because of the sluggish economy, "Latinoway" may remain just that for the time being. But in the long run, the Latino occupation of Broadway may be more vulnerable than the street's magnificent, historic architectural frame.

Preservation, redevelopment and the suburbanization of Los Angeles' Latino population will shape the next chapter of Broadway's story. Courtesy J. Diego Vigil.



Notes

1. National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, Broadway Theater and Commercial District, 26 December 1985.

2. In 1960, almost ten percent of the six million people in Los Angeles County were of Mexican origin. In 1990, about 27 percent of nine million people in the county were of Mexican origin and an additional 12 percent were Latinos with other national origins, primarily countries in Central America.

3. The height limit is probably one of the reasons why downtown Los Angeles gained the dubious reputation of having no downtown. If people could not see downtown from afar, one might reason, they could easily conclude no downtown was there.

The Enacted Environment of East Los Angeles

James T. Rojas

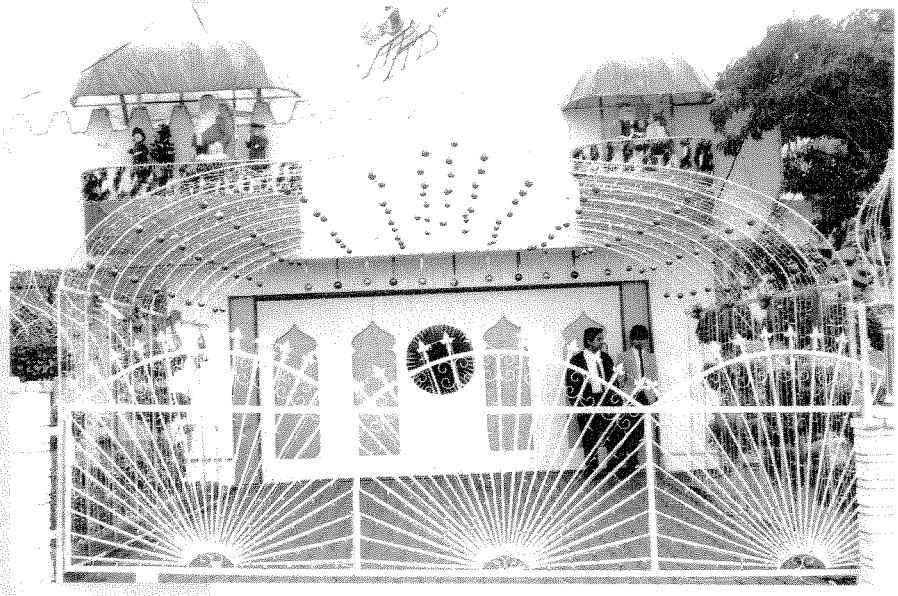
One planning report on East Los Angeles found that the area "lacks a physical identity . . . therefore needs a plaza." Funny they should say that. As everyone in Los Angeles knows, and as visitors can perceive, East L.A. has a very strong identity that is created by the way its Mexican and Mexican-American residents use its spaces. East L.A. is an animated and extroverted environment that confronts the viewer; no space is left unmarked or unused.

By working, playing and "hanging out" in spaces like streets, front yards and driveways, East L.A. residents create a spontaneous, dynamic and animated landscape that is unlike any other in Los Angeles. These spaces, which often isolate residents in other communities, bring the residents of East L.A. together. The identity of the place is created through the culturally related behavior patterns of the residents. It is not built; it is enacted.

All photos courtesy James T. Rojas.



Mariachis, murals, yard sales and social fences help activate the environment of East Los Angeles.







Above: Pushcart vendors sell their wares on the street.
Below: Laborers wait for day jobs.



Selling on the Street

Street vendors are one of the most noticeable elements in the East L.A. landscape. They flow in and out of commercial and residential areas and attract crowds wherever they go.

Los Moscos (flies), as they have been called,[1] are day laborers who use the streets to sell their menial labor. From 10 to as many as 50 men station themselves at strategic locations (near hardware stores and major traffic arteries), positioning themselves on the street so they can confront drivers with their eyes. If a driver shows any kind of interest and slightly slows down, he will be swarmed by work-hungry men.

Mariachis (Mexican musicians) walk from bar to bar in their black uniforms and instruments looking for work. They station themselves at one particular corner, where prospective employers go to hire them for events.

"Carriers," who sell anything they can carry, are the simplest form of vendor because they do not have much overhead. For example, one man carries around a box of tapes while another carries a long pole with wicker baskets of silk flowers hanging from each end.

"Asphalt vendors" stand by strategic freeway off-ramps and on median strips at major intersections. They keep their wares on the ground, in shopping carts, or in plastic bags tied to chain link fences. These vendors approach cars as they stop at intersections and try to sell the occupants a bag of oranges or peanuts for a dollar.

"Pushcart vendors" roam the streets selling exotic fruit cocktails, tamales, ice cream and vegetables. One resident said, "In the morning a man comes around selling bread and vegetables and later in the day different vendors come selling other eatable items." The pushcart vendors almost look out of place on the suburban streets of East L.A., dodging moving cars as they push their small carts.

"Tent vendors" sell odds and ends from their front lawns and sidewalks, mainly on Saturdays, much like a garage sale. Fences are an important part of this composition because they hold up items and easily delineate the selling space. One boy had sacks of peanuts tied to the fence in front of his house and conducted business from a small table on the sidewalk.

"Auto vendors" are a spontaneous sort who drive around to different locations to find the right market. They conduct business from their truck or car by parking on the roadside and setting up shop. Some will set up tents on vacant lots, while others prefer street corners. Some trucks have been converted to elaborate roving bazaars with things attached everywhere.

"Roach coaches," or food trucks, have long been part of the American vending fabric. In East L.A., these stainless steel trucks

have been redesigned with long windows on the side to serve customers and personalized with names like "Maritita's." They have become very popular and follow Mexicans all over the city, from West Side construction sites to *discotecas* in Hollywood.

No Blank Walls

In East L.A., blank wall space has become a tableau for cultural expression for *cholos* (gang members), political groups and shop owners. Very few walls are left untouched by graffiti, store signs, or murals. Even garage doors, fences, sidewalks, benches, buses and freeway signs have become displays of personal expression. All this expression creates a new reality of visual stimulation, "fills in" the landscape and reveals the different sorts of order in a place.

Graffiti, the most prolific form of visual communication, can be found just about everywhere. To the outsider none of these markings make any sense, but to the people that make and read them, they do. *Cholos*, for example, use graffiti as territorial indicators. Most residents do not like graffiti and are constantly painting over it.

Stores and buildings are kinetic because of their flamboyant use of graphics and words. The use of both pictures and words is very common. Certain pictures indicate the type of store. A large pig's head or jersey cow indicates a butcher shop. Cornucopias indicate vegetable and fruit stands.

Murals, the most celebrated form of public decoration, express many different values. They add an element of public art and local culture to otherwise dull buildings and streets by saluting pedestrians and motorists, and they make otherwise marginal spaces very tolerable. Many buildings are painted from top to bottom, which changes the character of these sometimes rather plain structures.

Religious murals of Our Lady of Guadeloupe are popular because she is the patron saint of Mexico. Murals from the '70s often express social concerns. However, the most common murals are those commissioned by shop owners for advertisements; these can be whimsical and animated. On one corner, a bar with an aquatic theme is covered with an ocean-blue mural; Neptune's eyes gaze out with a mischievous look. On another corner, another bar is covered with a mural of a woman in a bathing suit smoking a cigarette and having some fun.

Most murals are painted on the large walls on the side of corner buildings. They "wrap" the commercial activity from a busy street into otherwise quiet streets and forgotten areas. These transitional corner spots are important places. Often, vendors will hang out in these locations, further activating the space.



Pushcart vendors seem out of place in suburban scale East L.A.



Murals adorn a front yard wall.

Props

Props add a layer of architecture to the landscape and help make spaces usable. Props produce a sense of security in a place by acting as territorial markers: they are apparent and aggressive; they can be seen, heard, felt and smelled.

A parked car can become the center of a day's activities just by shifting its location. A pushcart selling ice cream occasions a fleeting moment of social exchange between eager children. A sofa under a tree or on a porch can be a place for residents to wallow away the afternoon. A barbecue pit can generate revenue and be a place to swap neighborhood gossip.

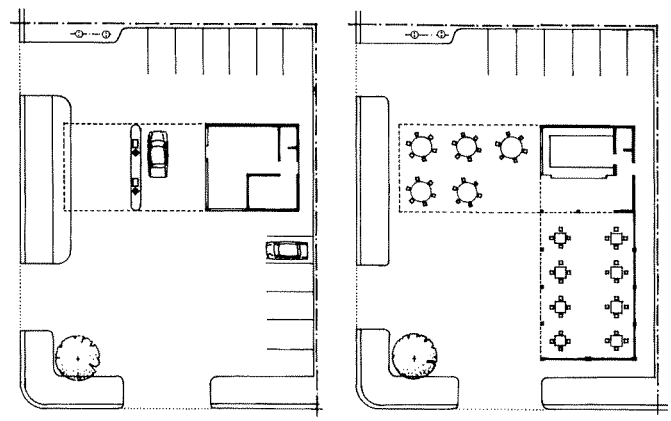
Music is used as a prop because sound can control and define a space. Spanish and disco music are aggressive to some, normal to others. *Mariachis* and car stereos add to the ambiance through their music; each appeals to a different audience. The music adds an extra layer to the landscape.

Many shop owners have replaced the fronts of their stores with glass walls that can be opened during the day; these "opened ends" connect indoor and outdoor spaces. Inexpensive wares, placed in front of the store, serve as a three-dimensional display that adds a tactile quality to the pedestrian experience and advertises what's inside.

Olympic Boulevard, otherwise a no-man's land, has been "pedestrianized" by the use of props. Gas stations have been converted into taco stands by the heavy use of props and only minor changes to the structure. Pumps are replaced with tables and chairs, which make a bold attempt to capture and reenforce street activity; people can sit here and have direct visual access to the street. Wrought iron sheds are sometimes added in an attempt to enclose some of the seating areas. The thirty-foot sign that advertised the gasoline company now announces the taco stand.

The use of props in both residential and commercial areas creates a connection between the two. Props scale down the landscape to a pedestrian level that contradicts the automobile scale of Los Angeles. Driving on the streets of East L.A. all one sees is a clutter of people, props and vendors. Walking, however, one experiences a rich, tactile landscape that enhances the enacted environment. What might seem like a visual mess from an automobile becomes a personal and vivid experience for the pedestrian.



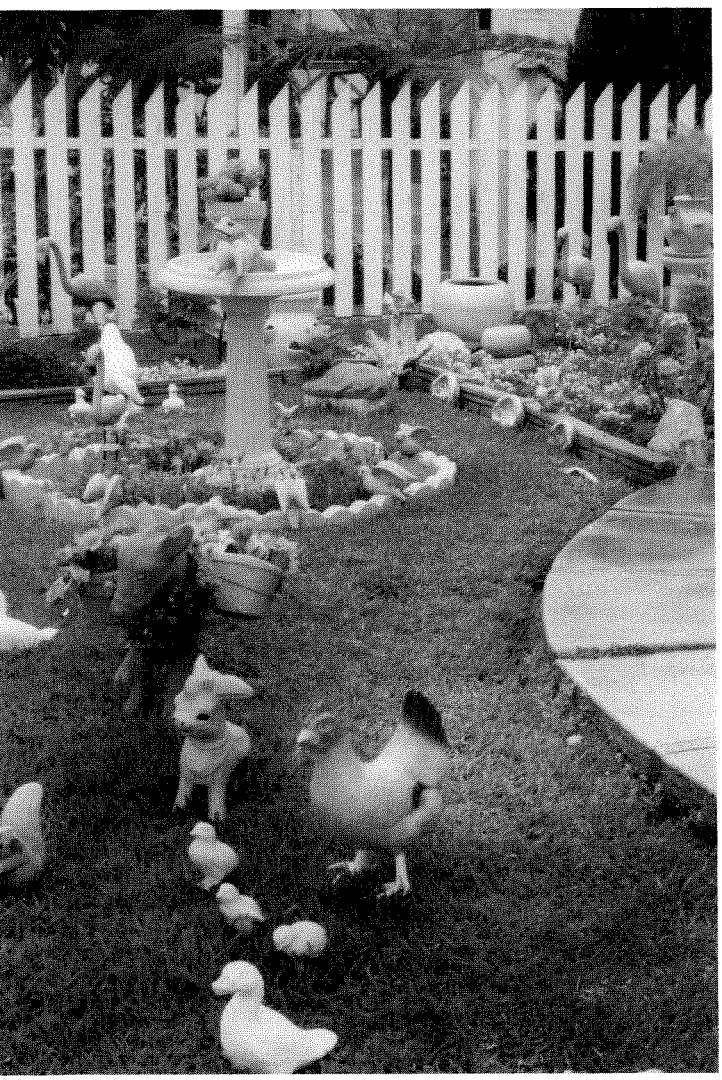


Top and bottom: Gas stations have been turned into pedestrian-oriented restaurants.
Center: How a typical conversion works.



La Yarda: A Personal Expression

Nowhere in the landscape of East L.A. is the Mexican use of space so illuminated and celebrated than in the enclosed front yard. Since many Mexican homes do not have American, sub-



The front yard is a place for personal expression.

urban-style front yards, residents of East L.A. have reinterpreted them. The front yard has become, through use and design, a place for personal expression and for recreating traditional Mexican housing forms.

Houses in East L.A. are sited on their lots just like other suburban American houses, but the enclosure and personalization of front yards has greatly changed their appearance. In fact, the enclosed front yard is such a dominant element that it has altered the physical character of entire neighborhoods as well as residents' behavior patterns.

In a middle-class neighborhood, the appearance of one's front yard is a standard for being accepted into the community. In East L.A., the green, parklike setting that open front yards create in typical American suburbs has been cut up into individual slices that permit a greater range of expressiveness, create visual diversity and allow sociability to take place more readily. The appearance of one's front yard expresses one's individuality; acceptance is based on physical and social contact with neighbors.

Depending on the practical needs of the owner, the use and design of the front yard vary from junk yards to elaborate courtyard gardens reminiscent of Mexico. The maintenance of the front yard varies from house to house; one may be kept up nicely while the next is not. No one is ever penalized for not watering or taking care of his front yard.

In these enclosed front yards, the residents' private worlds unfold. All the sights and sounds from the uncontrollable street have been manipulated and tailored to the needs of the owner. The enclosed front yard acts like a room without a ceiling because of the personalization and sense of security. Things that look like clutter from outside the fences actually are as organized and purposeful as objects in a room.

Most outsiders are not prepared to read front yards and think they are unsightly. But East L.A. residents identify with these front yards because they understand and can read the personalization. Walking down a neighborhood street, one becomes aware of who might be living in each house. Residents might be outside doing something in their front yard, or the objects they leave in the yard might display traces of their lives. Toys speak of children living in a house; lots of cars and auto parts might indicate that teenagers live there. A lack of planting along the fence might indicate a dog runs around the front yard. Intricate gardens, potted plants, small statues and other elements that shelter a house from the street might indicate an elderly person resides there or that the resident is not too involved in street activity.

Fences: A Social Catalyst

One can find fences in many American front yards, of course. But for East L.A. residents, fences are a social catalyst that brings together neighbors and passersby for interaction. Fences break down social and physical barriers by creating a comfortable point between a front yard and sidewalk where people can congregate.

The use of fences in the front yard modifies the approach to the house and moves the threshold from the front door to the front gate (mailboxes, for example, are hung on the fence or front gate rather than near the front door). The enclosed front yard serves as a physical barrier between the private spaces of the home and the public spaces of the street; it acts as a large foyer and becomes an active part of the household.

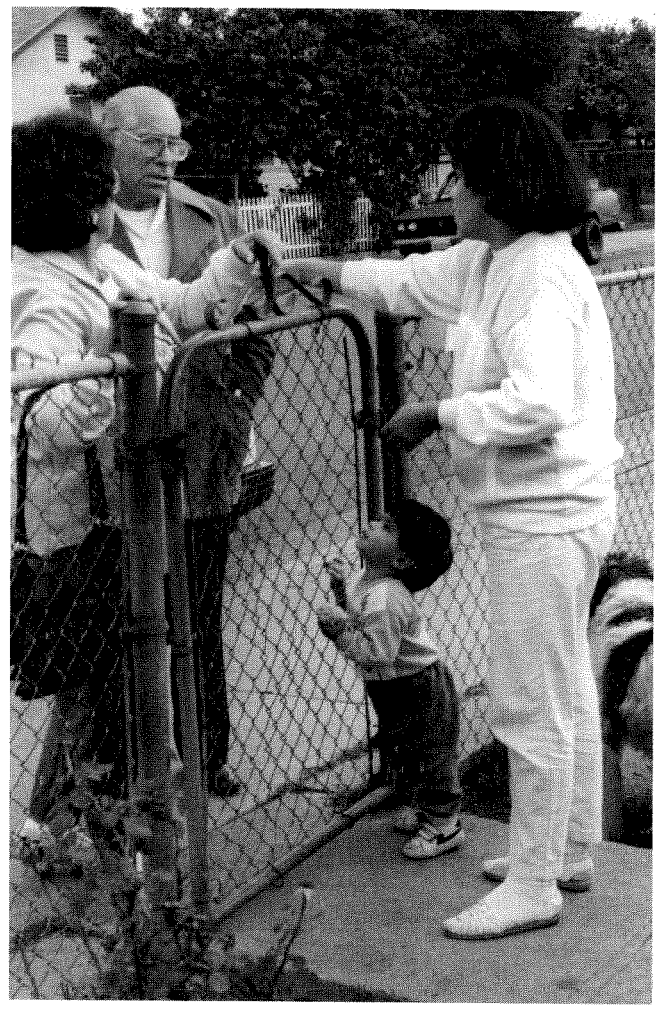
Stepping into the front yard from the sidewalk, one feels as if one is entering a home. The front gate or entry, sometimes made of wrought iron fencing or even masonry, can be articulated with structural elements such as arches — giving it a sense of being a building that is independent of the actual house.

The enclosed front yard becomes a large, "defendable" threshold, which, in fact, allows for more social interaction to take place. In a typical American home or apartment, which lacks a defendable threshold, there is great pressure to define social interaction because one cannot have a comfortable conversation at a front door or in a hallway. In East L.A., it is perfectly acceptable to have conversations at the front gate and not to invite people into the home.

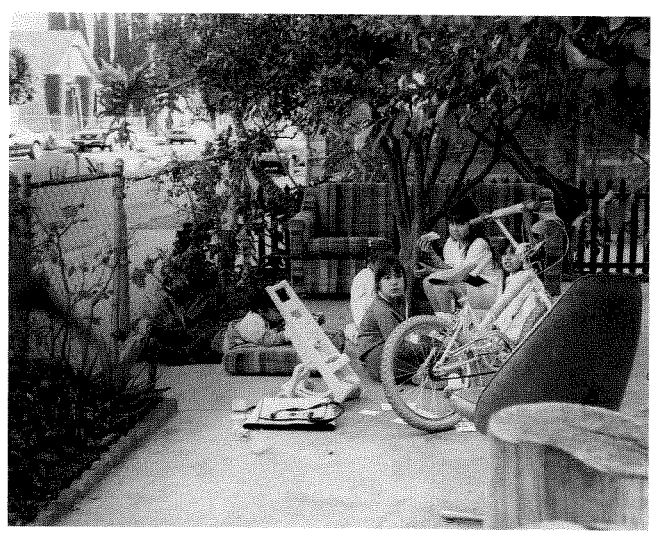
The social interaction one experiences in the enclosed front yard is neither as demanding nor as intimate as that which takes place in a house. Since this space is public, the interaction is very casual, like being in an outdoor cafe where one could stare off for a few seconds and not offend one's companions. In the front yard, one is always aware of cars and people going by on the street. Collectively, the enclosed front yards in these neighborhoods create a very intimate atmosphere. The fences along the street break up the lawn space of each home, and the street becomes more urban than suburban in character because the fence reflects the personality of each resident. The street can now function like a plaza, and every resident can participate in the public street from the protection of his private yard.

East L.A. Vernacular

In Los Angeles, the city of suburban dream homes where architectural freedom runs rampant, the small housescapes of East L.A. seem inconsequential compared to houses designed by architects like Greene and Greene, Richard Neutra, Rudolph Schindler and Frank Gehry.



Social interaction takes places at the front gate.





Fences and threshholds help extend household space to the street.



But the small, modern houses in East L.A. are distinctive because they were built by non-architects. They have evolved into what I call "East L.A. vernacular" because the combination of design and usage (people, props and physical form) is unique to this area. The houses are customized and personal; every change, no matter how small, has meaning and purpose. The colors, building materials and personal items used to embellish houses, fences and front yards offer a public face to the street.

Shy American-style homes are transformed to an extroverted form that sets the stage for the enacted environment. Each house communicates with others. People, fences and porches help extend household activities to the street. Instead of hiding behind a lawn and shrubs, suddenly each house comes forward, staking its claim to the pavement. The neighborhood feels filled in, physically and socially. The sidewalk and street feel more controlled because the household reaches right to these public areas.

The typical Mexican courtyard house and household extends itself to all four sides of the lot and is designed with a patio or courtyard in the center; this form accommodates the warm weather and reflects Spanish precedents. Because most rooms face the patio, it becomes a central point into which the flow of the household radiates. Similarly, in East L.A., the house is defined by the property line rather than the floor plan or exterior walls; the front yard and fence are integral parts of the household.

In the typical American house plan, rooms are arranged in a strong linear sequence that depends on their degree of publicness, from the front living room (public) to the back bedroom (private). But in the Mexican household, as one Mexican put it, "Most rooms are not private because many times rooms have been attached to each other as the family grows, regardless of their adjacency to other rooms. Many times one has to go through one bedroom to get to others. Many people also keep their doors open to the patio because of the hot weather."

American house plans seek to protect individual privacy through the arrangement of rooms; the typical Mexican house plan tries to keep the family separate from the general public. In East L.A., the front yard and porch can be considered semi-private rather than semi-public because the space flows out of the home to the porch, front yard and fence.

Driveways are an important feature that allows for many ephemeral uses — parking cars, children playing, barbecuing, or partying. In most cases, the driveway runs the full length of the lot on one side. The garage is placed in the back yard, rather than at the front of the house. Most houses have easy access to the driveway through a side door. The importance of



The space of the house reaches out to the property line and is defined by fences.



East L.A. vernacular is a form of empowerment.

the driveway increases as additional houses are built on the lot over time; the driveway serves as an outdoor hallway along which residents walk between their houses and the street.

In many American neighborhoods the use and importance of front porches has declined for various reasons, and most new homes are built without them. In East L.A., front porches have gained a new importance because many residents use them, and because they help connect the enacted front yard to the house. The porch is often decorated with personal and useful items, such as potted plants, bird cages and furniture.

Learning from the Enacted Environment

Modern structures neatly package and organize people in comprehensible arrangements of space; life is hidden behind facades. Recently, architects and urban designers have realized that the presence of people can add a rich texture to the often banal urban and suburban landscape, and they have responded by introducing street furniture, plants and vendors in the design of public spaces.

The resulting settings look like they could sustain the street life of East L.A., but there is a basic difference. In those settings, the use of props is planned and the space controls the user, rather than the user controlling the space. The enacted environment of East L.A. is not planned; the props and vendors reflect the nature of the people. The enacted environment is made up of individual actions that are ephemeral but nevertheless part of a persistent process.

People have always criticized the Mexicans of East L.A. for being nonpolitical because they do not vote. The word "politics" comes from the Greek word *polis*, or city. There are two kinds of politics in the world, theoretical and practical. Theoretical politics are the politics of politicians, who discuss how people should live their lives. Practical politics is the way we conduct our everyday lives and express our existence.

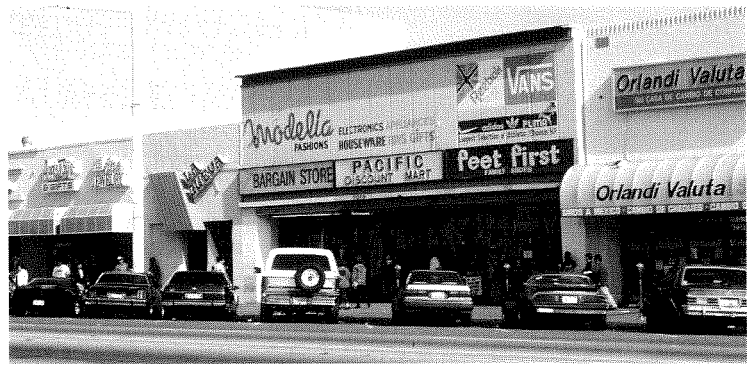
By examining the enacted environment of East L.A., one becomes aware of the politics of everyday life. The residents have created a life in their environment that says something about themselves. They may not have political control, at least in theoretical terms, but I would argue that the residents have empowered themselves through the way they use their front yards and their streets.

Note

1. Bruce Kelley, "El Mosco," *Los Angeles Times Magazine* (18 March 1990), 11.

Downtown on Parade: The Reshaping of a Traditional Retail Model

Terezia Nemeth



Pacific Boulevard is characterized by narrow stores whose facades are almost completely open to the sidewalk. Photos courtesy Terezia Nemeth.

Pacific Boulevard, the heart of Huntington Park, Calif., is a traditional downtown street. Any aerial view of the city demonstrates this clearly. An intensity of built forms lines up tightly against the edge of the street; each building elbows the others for more access to the main drag, as if it were trying to get a better view of the passing parade.

Pacific Boulevard is a wide street, with a 120-foot right of way, and serves as Huntington Park's historic downtown. The "blue line," a streetcar route that once connected the city with downtown Los Angeles, used to run down the street. By 1950, Huntington Park was considered the "Beverly Hills" of south-central Los Angeles and was a major regional shopping area. But the Watts riots tore through the city, along with the rest of south-central, and a mass exodus of residents and businesses resulted.

Today, as if by magic, Pacific Boulevard is again a major regional shopping street. There is indeed a parade of shoppers along its nearly mile-long core from Florence to Slauson avenues. But the traditional model has been reshaped — first by the ascendence of the automobile, then by the city's expanding Hispanic population.

Today most people arrive in cars or on buses that run along Pacific and Florence. To accommodate cars without ruining the street's pedestrian nature, the city has been creating public parking areas behind the Pacific Boulevard frontage; people can reach the parking via passages between buildings or through arcades incorporated in newer projects. Diagonal parking on Pacific enhances the pedestrian atmosphere: It creates a protective zone between sidewalk and street, and it slows traffic because cars are constantly pulling in and out.

The shopping street reflects the dominant Hispanic population in several ways. There are a large number of specialty stores, such as "bridal" shops that sell various types of party dresses for the many special events traditional to Hispanic culture and many discount clothing and accessories retailers. There is all manner of specialty food stores, restaurants and quick-eating establishments, selling typical Hispanic dishes like tortillas, beans, rice and meats (you can't find a hamburger anywhere on the street). The signage is typically in Spanish with at most a subtitle in English, as a courtesy to the host country.

The most distinguishable characteristic of the change is the people that parade along the street. The overwhelming majority is obviously of Hispanic descent, many from Mexico.

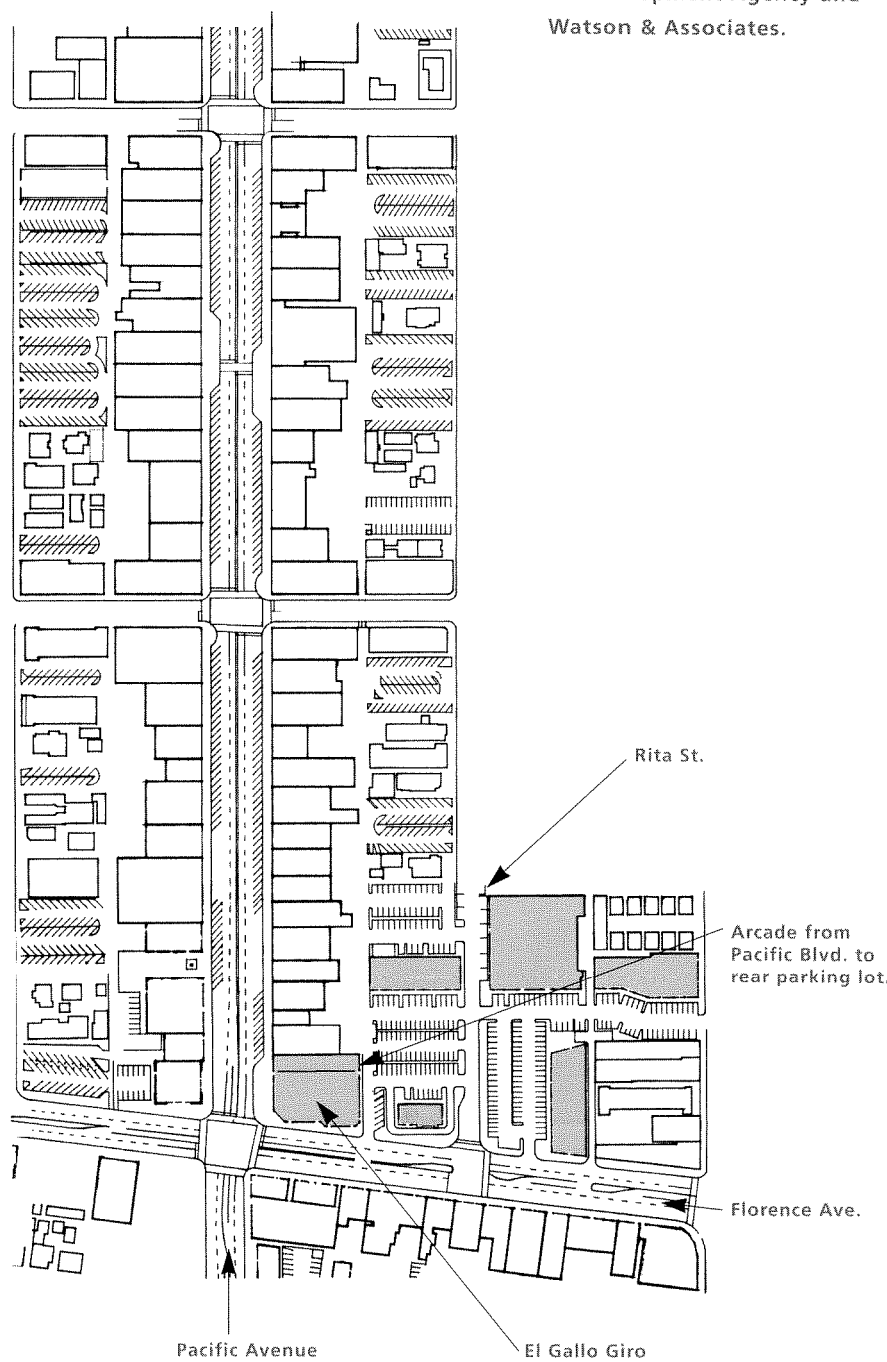
They come downtown in large family groups, bringing many children along. The average length of their stay is several hours, often an entire day. The parade is festive and unchoreographed, people stroll up and down the length of Pacific and browsing in its many stores.

The mere density of people along the street is staggering. The response from shopkeepers is predictable; they try to make maximum use of their frontage — their view of the parade. Shopkeepers vie for the interest of the mass of people by creating large openings along the storefront, both to allow for displays that push as close to the sidewalk as possible and to simplify pedestrian access into the store. In many cases the facade of the shop is a sliding-glass wall that can be retracted or swung into the store, creating a near seamlessness between retail space and sidewalk. At the same time, storefronts have been subdivided into ever-decreasing widths as demand for shop locations has increased. (The city recently issued a regulation prescribing a minimum width of 16 feet for retail stores, for health and safety reasons.)

The effect is chaotic and exciting. The festive activity is intoxicating — people flowing in and out of stores easily, colorful wares displayed as close to the sidewalk as possible, children running up and down the street, vendors setting up temporary stands on any piece of the sidewalk they can find and selling food like fruit kebobs, *chicharron* (fried pork rind) and other delicacies.

This evolution has begun to express itself in the choices made in new investment along Pacific Boulevard. A case in point is Plaza de la Fiesta, a retail complex built recently at the intersection of Florence Avenue and Pacific Boulevard, a prime location at one end of the shopping district. The developer, Watson & Associates (of Seal Beach,

Drawing by Pankaj Vaid. Base maps courtesy Huntington Park Redevelopment Agency and Watson & Associates.





El Gallo Giro, owned by a Mexico-based food company, includes a restaurant, retail store, offices, production facility and sidewalk cafe.



Calif.), and the Huntington Park Redevelopment Agency generated the project's concept and acquired the necessary properties, which had been in various states of disrepair.

This major assemblage of land is not a traditional pattern on Pacific Boulevard, where the buildings that constitute the streetwall read as if they are in individual ownership, and the project held the potential for causing a major disruption to the pedestrian-scaled environment. But the agency and the developer made a number of decisions that helped Plaza De La Fiesta become a positive terminus for the shopping district.

Plaza de la Fiesta is designed to continue the streetwall along both Pacific and Florence, and it extends the prevailing retail rhythm, with store widths of generally 14 to 20 feet. This contrasts with typical L.A. boulevard-oriented "mini-mall" development, in which an "L"-shaped row of shops is set against the back property line and frames a parking lot open to the corner.

The redevelopment agency was particularly adamant that the streetwall be maintained at the intersection of Pacific and Florence, which is not only a terminus for the shopping district but also a gateway into the city. Now the corner is anchored by El Gallo Giro, a Mexico-based food company. McDonald's had expressed serious interest in the location, but the developer correctly assumed that El Gallo Giro would fit more appropriately into the street's existing activity.

El Gallo Giro's mixed-use concept and street-hugging design activate the corner in many ways. There is a restaurant, a food store that sells fresh meats, baked goods and imported specialties from Mexico, and a production facility in which specialty food items like tor-

tillas and *masa* (freshly made dough) are manufactured for wholesale and retail sale. Upstairs the company has its offices. Finally, there is an outdoor cafe built into a section of the street that had been devoted to parking — further enticing activity out from the building and into the street. The festive colors of the umbrellas, plantings and cafe, combined with the bustle of people, make an appropriate finale to this active street.

The choice of El Gallo Giro was risky, as the company had no other U.S. locations and lacked the recognition, marketing back-up and success of an international chain like McDonald's. But the uniqueness of the concept has worked marvelously here; El Gallo Giro supplements Pacific Boulevard's tremendous regional draw and is inarguably a better addition to the street than a chain like McDonald's, which would not have been unique to this place, environment, or clientele.

Plaza de la Fiesta also is successful at drawing the Pacific Boulevard parade into its core without physically disturbing the scale and nature of the street. It includes an interior ring of stores that surrounds a parking lot, as at a typical shopping center. Pedestrians can move between Pacific Boulevard and the interior shopping area through an arcade lined with small shops (and an entrance to El Gallo Giro); they also can reach the interior via Rita Street, which bisects the parking lot and connects to Florence Avenue.

Because of the easy availability of parking nearby, Plaza de la Fiesta includes only three parking spaces per 1,000 s.f. of retail space, as opposed to the standard five. This makes a perceptible difference: The proportion of building coverage to parking area is clearly more conducive to pedestrian retail traffic, upon which the viability of the project depends, than a traditional parking arrangement would be.

Another key component of the project was the acquisition of an old Ralph's Supermarket on Florence and Rita. The supermarket was converted into a mini-mall that serves as the second anchor for the project: It includes about 40 small, independent retailers who sell specialty goods like leather goods, jewelry and clothing accessories in a bazaar-like atmosphere. The mini-mall serves as an "incubator," allowing for small, start-up, locally-owned enterprises in a location that traditionally would be occupied by a large, national or retail chain store.

The success of Plaza de la Fiesta required the foresight of a proactive redevelopment agency and an enlightened local developer who could understand the needs of the people of Huntington Park and the involved presence of a large Hispanic community. Other developers were approached by the agency but were uninterested or unable to recognize the potential of a project that does not fit currently accepted retail formulas.

The local freestanding J.C. Penney store is an example of a large corporation's difficulty in understanding local conditions. After the 1992 riots in south-central Los Angeles, the store covered its street-level windows with stucco, raining on the Pacific Boulevard parade. Happily, Penney is now installing display windows reminiscent of traditional downtown department stores — adding a yet another dimension to the life along Pacific Boulevard.

Between Cultures: Public Space in Tijuana

Lawrence A. Herzog

Architectural expressions of public life are deeply rooted in the history of Mexican cities. The first great plazas of the Americas, vast public spaces surrounded by temples or towering stone pyramids, were consistent features in pre-Hispanic indigenous settlements, especially those crafted by the Olmec, Toltec, Mayan and Aztec cultures.[1] The sprawling open plaza in Monte Alban, an ancient Zapotec city in the valley of Oaxaca, has been described as "one of the loveliest civic areas ever created by man, and certainly the most beautiful in America."[2]

The public plaza was accorded official recognition as an important civic location during the period of Spanish colonial rule in Latin America. King Philip II of Spain, in a series of strict royal ordinances passed on to the colonists in 1573, proclaimed that every new town would have a central public square, or Plaza de Armas, which would be the fulcrum of town life and the main location of important public and religious buildings.

For more than three centuries, plazas have served as the most vital arena for public life in Mexican and Latin American cities. They have been embellished by kiosks, park benches, fountains and trees, and surrounded by arcade-covered sidewalks. Even in the

Background: Aerial view of Tijuana looking south from U.S.-Mexico border. © Aerial Fotobank.
Opposite page, top: Ruins in Teotihuacan.
Opposite page, bottom: Plaza in Guadalajara. Courtesy Mexican Goverment Tourism Office.





twentieth century, as the pressures of population expansion have combined with changing transportation technology to alter urban structure, the public plaza (or *zocalo*, as it has come to be called in Mexico) continues to thrive as a locus for public life. Public space — plazas, parks and the street — remains embedded in the civic conscience of contemporary urban Mexico.

Urban Public Space along the Northern Mexican Border

The cities of Mexico's northern border region, isolated from mainstream Mexican culture by distance, evolved under unique circumstances.[3] To understand the changing design and nature of public space in a border city like Tijuana requires that one sort out the varying and often conflicting impacts the different cultures, Mexican and Anglo-American, have had on this region.



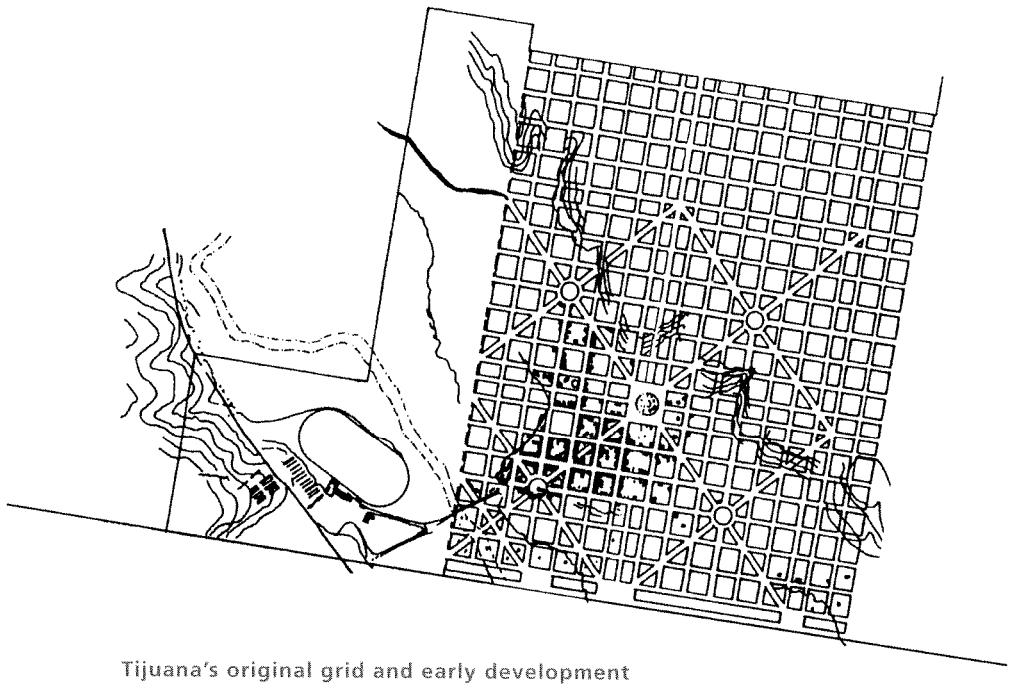
Like other towns on Mexico's northern edge, Tijuana languished as a small, insignificant settlement, nothing more than a *rancho*, or cattle-ranching village, well into the nineteenth century. Its birth as a town can be traced to the 1880s, the era of a land boom in Southern California. Two wealthy Mexican families, who lived in California and hoped to extend that boom south of the border, hired engineer Ricardo Orozco to create an ambitious plan for the town. The site they chose was adjacent to the international boundary, near a small border crossing and customs house, flat and easily buildable, and owned by one of the families.

Orozco had worked for a California real estate company and was clearly influenced by the U.S design profession. It is not surprising that his 1889 plan for Tijuana combined the radial street designs in vogue in the rapidly growing western U.S. with the traditional Mexican plaza-centric plan.[4] The resulting hybrid urban design included one large central plaza and four smaller ones. The tradition of the Mexican Plaza de Armas was to continue along the northern border.

But Tijuana quickly parted ways with older Mexican cities. During the first three decades of the city's growth it became clear that Tijuana's emerging commercial character would not conform with the 1889 plan. By 1921, Tijuana had become a dynamic center for trade with its northern neighbor and for tourism. Commercial uses began to cluster in the northeastern corner of town, near the international border crossing, rather than around the main plaza that had been designated in the plan. The radial streets and plazas

fell into disuse. The city's form evolved with a compact geometry, which facilitated the provision of tourism services in a concentrated, accessible space, and with a series of commercial ribbons — arteries that facilitated travel back and forth across the border.

During the 1920s, Prohibition in the U.S. further accelerated Tijuana's evolution into a commercial zone by adding new activities like gambling, bars and cabarets. In the Tijuana of the "Roaring Twenties," traditional Mexican public spaces were quickly forgotten as the emphasis shifted to expanding the service economy and improving circulation for tourists. Calle Revolucion, lined with wooden *cantinas* and dancing halls, became the functional center of town. In Orozco's 1889 design the street had originally connected two plazas; now the plazas were disappearing and only one public space, a park called Teniente Guerrero, west the downtown area, would survive the fervent tourism boom.



Tijuana's original grid and early development (above), compared to its urban core today (opposite page). Historic map from *Diagnostico especial de la mancha urbana en la Ciudad de Tijuana*. Courtesy the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden foundations. Photo © Aerial Fotobank.



Public Space in Tijuana in the Late Twentieth Century

Between 1950 and 1990, Tijuana was among the fastest growing cities in the Americas, its population increasing from 65,364 in 1950 to nearly 1.5 million in 1990. The expansion, fueled mainly by migration within Mexico, placed enormous strains on the city's physical form, which by the 1980s was one of increasing decentralization and spontaneous growth. Within this amorphous geometry, the city's design continued to respond strongly to the commercial economy and its links with the United States. Partly because automobile ownership increased after 1950 and because Southern California's freeway-oriented planning practices and culture diffused across the border, Tijuana increasingly became a city oriented along commercial boulevards.

In Tijuana, much like in other North American cities, the public plaza has largely been eclipsed by the quintessential late-twentieth-century private plaza: the shopping mall. A brief survey of Tijuana's vital public spaces today corroborates this point, although it also reveals some important exceptions.

The city's largest and most vibrant public space is Plaza Rio Tijuana, a private outdoor shopping mall completed in 1982 and located in Tijuana's heavily travelled River Zone, a linear wedge of office buildings and shopping centers with high-speed traffic corridors running through it. The plaza is built along the line of a modernist Southern California outdoor regional shopping mall, with a cluster of stores surrounded by a vast ocean of parking lots. It is anchored by three large department stores (two are Mexican companies, the other is Sears), a triplex movie theater, restaurants and an array of smaller shops that, as in the U.S., sell everything from designer clothing to books, records, shoes, athletic equipment and pastries.

The mall's design enables its shoppers, most of whom are middle- and upper-class and most of whom arrive by car, to actively use its open-air public spaces. These spaces consist of sunken plazas and courtyards decorated in two-toned brown tile, and all of them contain ample seating and landscaping. The spaces are carefully maintained and tend to be heavily used for casual eating, with food supplied by numerous concessions. Plaza Rio Tijuana's tremendous popularity, however, may have less to do with its design than with the fact that it offers the kind of stores and quality of goods that Mexican consumers learned to prefer from their shopping experiences in the United States.

More specialized shopping centers in Tijuana have been far less successful. Plaza Fiesta, completed in 1986 and also in the River Zone, seeks to re-cre-



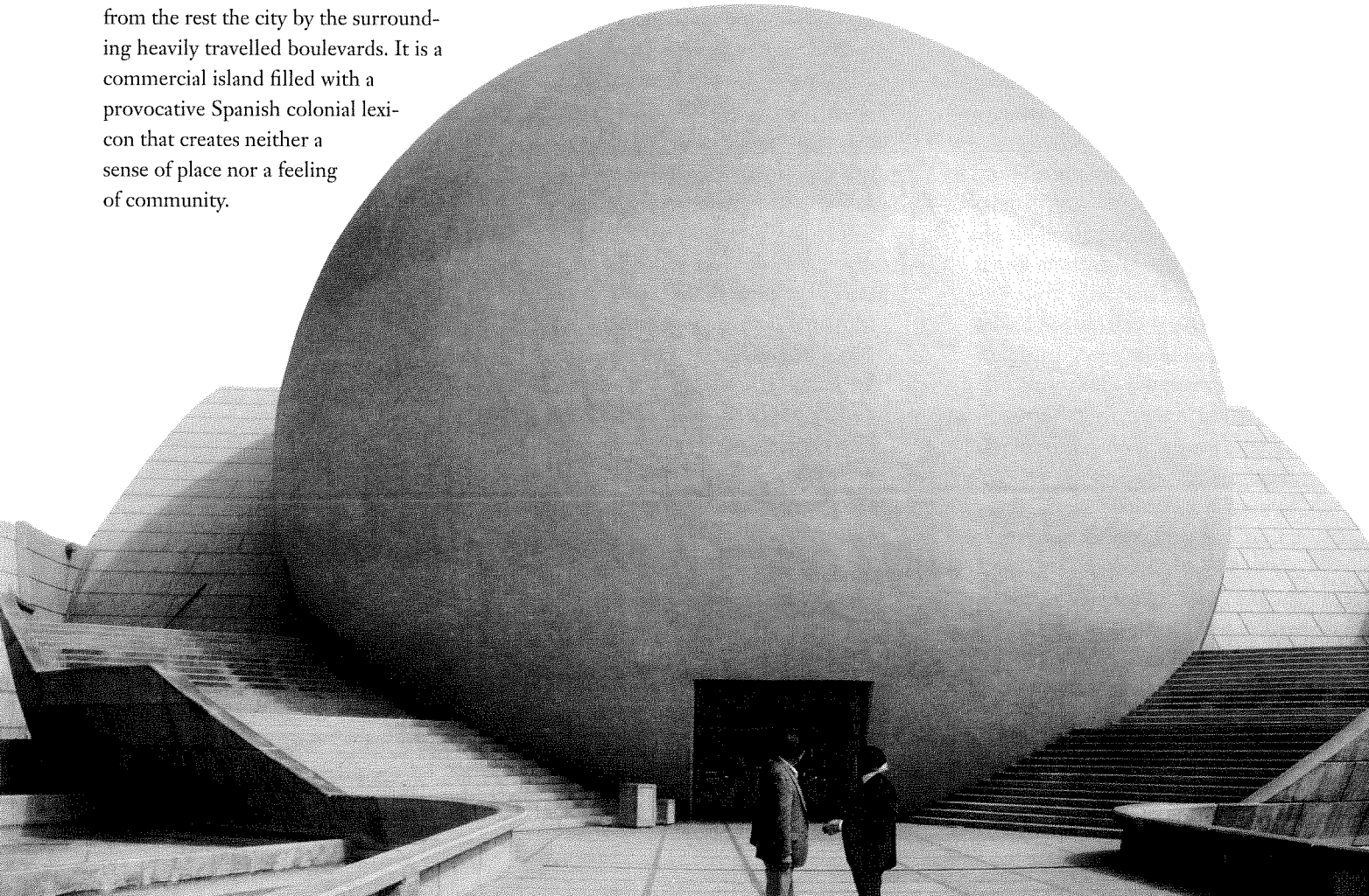
Plaza Rio Tijuana, a regional shopping mall, has courtyards and pedestrian spaces that are heavily utilized by city dwellers. Courtesy Lawrence A. Herzog.

ate the lively ambience of a Spanish colonial town (some speculate the developers had Guanajuato in mind) by providing a space dominated by outdoor cafes and restaurants. The site plan consists of two rectangular rings of stores, one nested inside the other, with the space between designed to resemble a series of colonial streets and small plazas. The buildings are white stucco with pseudo-arcaded facades and second-floor balconies with iron railings and lanterns; the public areas have fountains and imitation *kioscos*.

There is very little public seating; users of these spaces are primarily those who sit under the brightly colored awnings and umbrellas of costly outdoor cafes or restaurants. The center offers live entertainment in the evening, but it is largely underutilized, claustrophobic and not very public. It is cut off from the rest the city by the surrounding heavily travelled boulevards. It is a commercial island filled with a provocative Spanish colonial lexicon that creates neither a sense of place nor a feeling of community.



Above and below: The Centro Cultural de Tijuana, which recalls the grand plazas of Mexico's indigenous cultures, also is a setting for public life today. Courtesy Manuel Rosen.



There may still be hope for the memory of spontaneous public life in Tijuana, though. One fine example of a contemporary public space is the outdoor plaza in the Centro Cultural de Tijuana museum complex designed in 1982 by architects Pedro Ramirez Vazquez and Manuel Rosen. The architects believed the museum would be more exciting if it included a usable outdoor space.[5] The one they created has touches of the indigenous ceremonial plazas, empowered by the massive concrete walls of the museum and a globe-shaped amphitheater. The space is generously used by pedestrians, school children and museum visitors. Taxis stop and pick up nearby; vendors sell tacos, hot dogs, sandwiches, ice cream and juices. Unfortunately, it is mainly utilized as a function of the presence of the museum and has yet to take on a life of its own, primarily because the site is hard to reach on foot.

In downtown Tijuana, two public spaces remain: the shopping streets and the old Parque Teniente Guerrero. Calle Revolucion (Revolution Street) is a pedestrian artery that is an island of intensive tourist activities: nightclubs, shopping arcades, restaurants, stands selling artisans' work, and street vendors; it connects with the San Ysidro border crossing via a pedestrian walkway. The street was substantially remodelled in the early 1980s to enhance its appeal to tourists: sidewalks and the street itself were widened, iron benches installed, colorful flags hung, special bus stops created. Surrounding buildings were modernized, their facades repainted in bright pastel shades, while new glass-box style stores and office buildings were built (although at a scale that allows the streetscape to retain its vitality).

One block west is Calle Constitucion, the main pedestrian shopping street for Mexican consumers. This busy corridor of retail stores, small eateries and service businesses is oriented toward Tijuana's large middle and working class. Its buildings are not glitzy or carnival-like, as on Revolucion, but simple and austere. Although the street is in the heart of the downtown business district, it is not pedestrian friendly: The sidewalks are narrow and the street is crammed with vehicles, since it is an artery for the municipal bus system and for trucks delivering goods.

The second major public space in downtown Tijuana, Parque Teniente Guerrero, emerged near one of the original secondary plazas from the 1889 urban plan. The park, established in its current location and expanded to cover an entire city block in the 1920s, consists of radial pedestrian paths leading into a central square (mirroring the original town plan) with a *kiosco*. Along the perimeter are iron benches and a series of green spaces bordered by well-manicured hedges, a variety of lush tropical plants, and trees (all carefully painted white on the lower portions).

In a city largely devoid of open space, Teniente Guerrero remains essential. Although the park does not serve the larger city, it is a well maintained neighborhood public space used by residents of the downtown zone. At dusk, it comes alive with children on bicycles, young couples, pigeons, vendors selling elote (corn on the cob) and shoeshine stands. It is Tijuana's throwback to the colonial *zocalos* that have generally been well preserved in Mexican cities in the interior.

Places Pulled between Two Cultures

Public space in Tijuana may be a fitting metaphor for the city as a whole, which has been pulled between two cultures, Mexican and U.S., since its birth. At its inception, Tijuana sought to preserve the past by configuring itself as a city of public plazas. But these plazas and the spontaneous urban public life they symbolized disappeared in the first decades of the twentieth century when an architecture of North American consumption swept through. In the 1950s and 1960s, the automobile arrived and Tijuana's public life was pulled into private shopping malls and pushed onto a few downtown shopping streets.

Like its neighbor, Southern California, modern Tijuana is a highly fragmented space in which continuous pedestrian movement is not possible. Communities and pedestrian zones are arrayed like islands floating on the superstructure of a diffuse, highway-oriented commercial metropolis. Perhaps, though the town square has disappeared, one can find hope in the fact that the memory of vibrant public spaces did not. Architects like Pedro Ramirez Vazquez and Manuel Rosen have kept it alive in civic building. Residents have kept it alive by actively utilizing the oldest park/plaza in the downtown area.

Notes

1. See Doris Heyden and Paul Gendrop, *Pre-Columbian Architecture of Mesoamerica* (New York: Electa/Rizzoli, 1988).

2. Jorge Hardoy, *Ciudades Precolombinas* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Infinito, 1964), 138.

3. See Lawrence A. Herzog, *Where North Meets South: Cities, Space and Politics on the U.S.–Mexican Border* (Austin: CMAS/ University of Texas Press, 1990).

4. See David Pinera, *Historia de Tijuana* (Tijuana: Centro de Investigaciones Historicas UNAM-UABC, 1985).

5. See Lawrence A. Herzog, "Driven By Shame," *San Diego Reader* (13 June 1991), 10-14.



A tourist-oriented street in downtown Tijuana. Courtesy Sandy Huffaker.



Parque Teniente Guerrero, a public plaza reminiscent of the colonial *zocalo*, is Tijuana's link to the past. Courtesy Lawrence A. Herzog.



Plaza Fiesta, a shopping center designed to be reminiscent of colonial Mexican towns, was intended to bring tourists and upscale residents into a common public space. However, it has not been very successful. Courtesy Lawrence A. Herzog.

Havana's Parque Coppelia: Public Space Traditions in Socialist Cuba

James R. Curtis

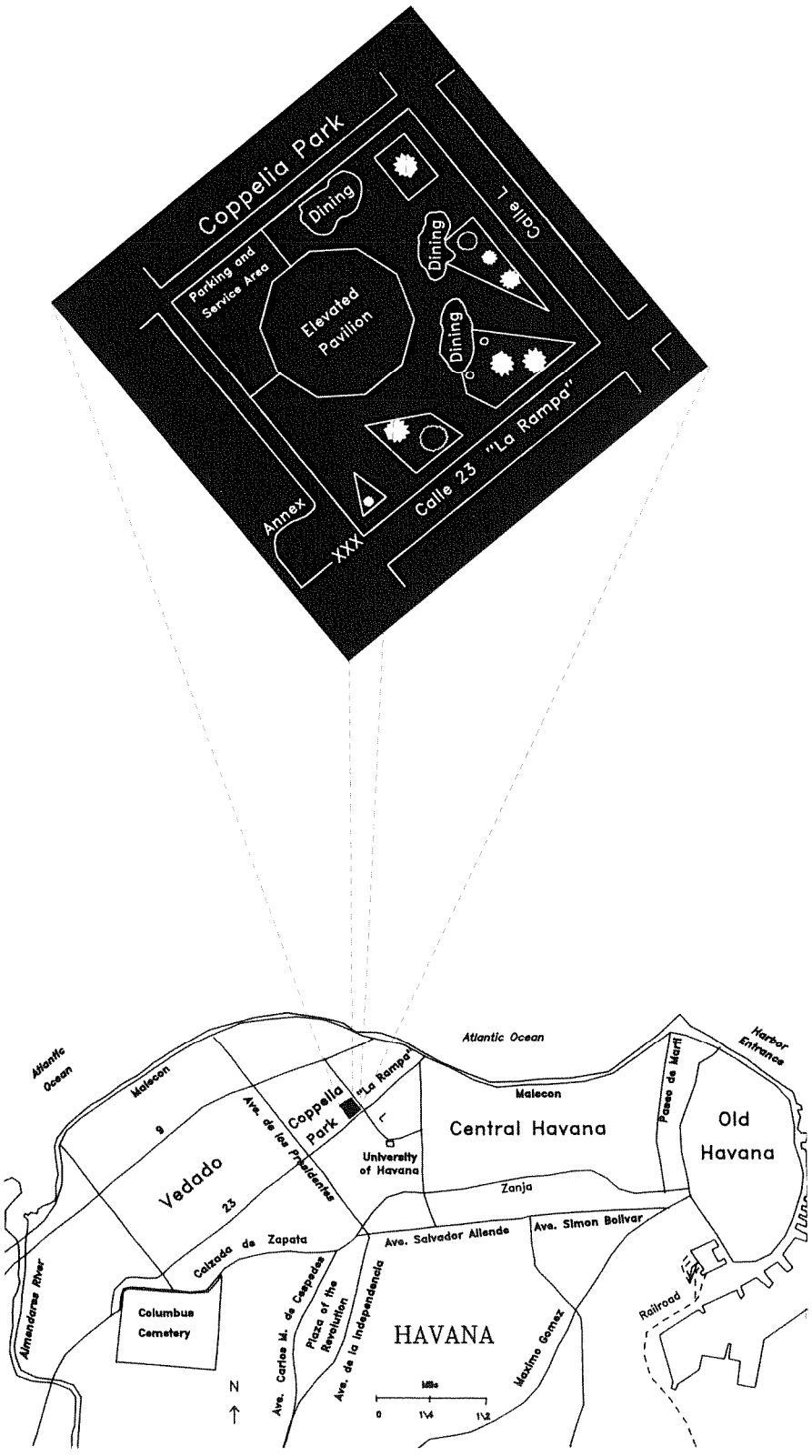
Throughout urban Cuba, one of the most popular informal gathering places is the local outlet of the state-run ice cream chain, Coppelia. The flagship is a square-block parlor/park located in the commercial core of Havana's modern and formerly elite El Vedado section. This tropical park features lush groundcover, a canopy of towering banyon trees that shade open-air dining areas, and intricately designed paths that lead to a large, elevated, circular pavilion with indoor seating. The park, parlor and ice cream are all called Coppelia (a name chosen by Cecilia Sanchez, Fidel Castro's long-time private secretary and confidante, after her favorite ballet).

Although a small, urban place, Parque Coppelia is a signal setting that conveys in microcosm two major public space traditions in contemporary Cuba. It both evokes elements of the traditional Latin American plaza and illustrates ways in which socialist ideology and orientations help shape the design and use of public spaces.

Before the revolution, Cuba imported most of its ice cream from Florida, with Howard Johnson's 28 flavors the undisputed brand of choice.[1] In the wake of the U.S. trade embargo, the government committed

Parque Coppelia viewed from the Hotel Habana Libre, across the street. Courtesy James R. Curtis.





Central Havana and Parque Coppelia. Courtesy James R. Curtis.

resources to increasing the domestic production of dairy products, including ice cream. The rich and creamy delicacy that ultimately was produced comes in a myriad of flavors from nuts and tropical fruits to even grains, such as rice and wheat. Helado Coppelia has won international acclaim and is considered by food critics to be on par with Italian gelati and the renowned ice cream made in the Philippines.[2] It is one of the few commercially prepared Cuban foods that sends foreign tourists raving; among Cubans, who routinely endure food rationing and scarcity, it is a culinary treat worth waiting in line for.

Perhaps nowhere on the island is the wait longer or more engaging than at Parque Coppelia. Daily, it attracts thousands of visitors and *habaneros*, especially youths, who may snake along a series of lines for two hours or more to indulge in the prize-winning *helado*. Reportedly the park, which is open from 10:45 in the morning until 1:45 a.m. and employs more than 400 workers, serves some 4,250 gallons of ice cream to 35,000 customers each day.[3] A great deal of socializing, which may be more important than the ice cream itself, occurs in the process. Opposite the park, the Yara Cine nightly entertains those waiting in line and generally hanging out with films projected alfresco against the 26-story Hotel Habana Libre, built in the 1950s by the Hilton chain.

The park, founded in the summer of 1966 on the site of an abandoned hospital, commands a prime spot at the busy intersection and public transit node of L and Twenty-third streets. The latter, known as "La Rampa," is a major commercial thoroughfare that sweeps down to the Malecón seawall and esplanade; it is lined with shops, cafes, cinemas, hotels, airline offices

and government agencies. This is the heart of El Vedado, Havana's trendiest (if now aging) quarter, which supports a vital and boisterous streetlife and, because of its attractions and proximity to the university, affects a decidedly youthful aspect.

Seen from above, say from an upper floor of the Habana Libre, Parque Coppelia appears as a cool green square against a backdrop of white buildings and blue sky and sea; only the parlor's circular dome protrudes from the oasis. Although open on all sides, the park is most accessible from commercial L and Twenty-third streets; a parking lot and service area partially restrict access from the two residential streets that also bound it.

A series of shaded walkways, sharply defined by ornate wrought iron fences or tall, curvilinear retaining walls, lead into the park's lush, airy interior. The waist-high barriers effectively cordon off the spaces around the massive trunks and spindly air roots of the banyan trees, where a thick understory of ivy, philodendron and small palms flourishes. These deep, verdant plots not only create a sense of restfulness but also give the park an impression of spaciousness, even though space is at a premium.

The park's design is clearly meant to facilitate circulation. The barriers, in a passive and aesthetically pleasing manner, contain and manipulate people's movement. Fenced as well are the out-of-doors dining areas, which serve as hard edges that unobtrusively direct the long queues that wind along the interconnected pathways. Except for the designated dining areas, there is no formal seating; the fences' pointed tips preclude anybody from sitting on them.

The park's circulatory focus and visual magnet is the *torre*, or elevated parlor. The clean lines, unadorned white exterior facade and large arching supports of this modernist structure are reminiscent of the futuristic theme restaurant at Los Angeles International Airport. Overall the park is a pleasant, intimate place of a human scale that is enhanced by the tropical sunlight that filters diffusely through the dense foliage, the muted lights that are strung amongst the tree branches and the infectious rhythms of Afro-Cuban music that issue from the park's loudspeaker system.

The Park as Plaza

Comparisons between Parque Coppelia and traditional Latin American plazas are obvious and compelling. In characteristic plaza fashion, the park encompasses a city block, although it has expanded to a small adjacent annex and parking area. Likewise, the park's internal layout (crisscrossing paths that focus on a central node) is reminiscent of the garden-park plaza design that originated in Mexico during the reign of Emperor Maximilian (1864-67) and has evolved throughout Latin America since then.

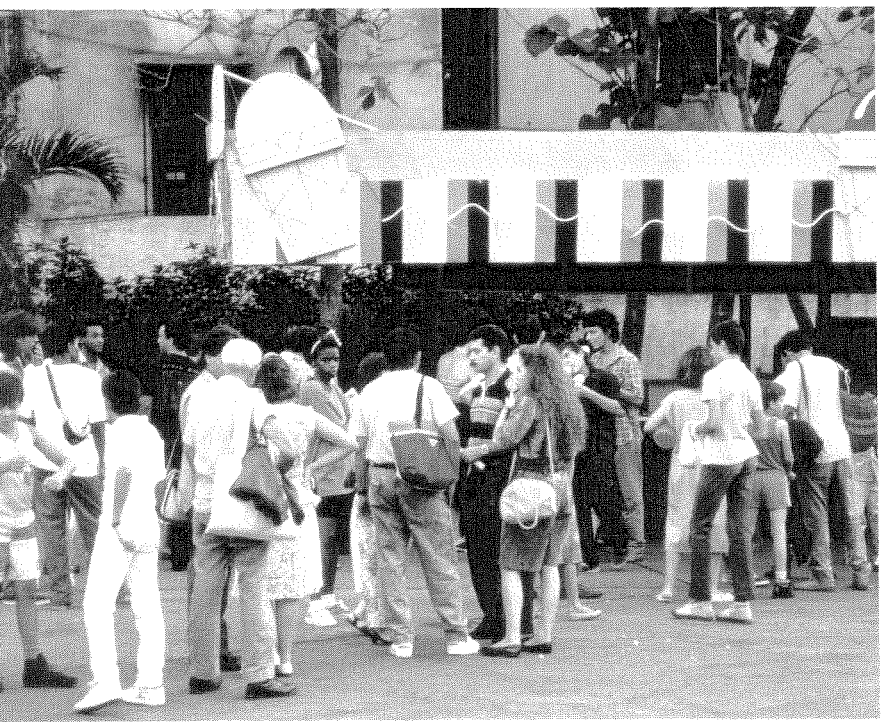
Parque Coppelia's center pavilion is the design equivalent of the *kiosco* (or bandstand) and circular fountain, which are widely popular features of garden-park plaza design. The park's emphasis on nature (albeit a highly cultivated, idealized representation) serves, like the plaza, as an emotional and aesthetic complement and counterpoint to the urbanity and verve of the surrounding human-made environment.

Having been inserted into an existing urban fabric, the park has had a minimal influence on the surrounding physical framework. Unlike the traditional centrally placed Spanish-American plaza, Parque Coppelia is not the focal point of the street network, nor is it flanked by the dominant structures of church and state, which served historically to reinforce the plazas roles as civic symbol and concourse of social interaction.

Nonetheless, Parque Coppelia's design and function relate to and integrate with the prevailing character of El Vedado. The district is laced with busy commercial arteries lined by modernist buildings and with tree-lined residential streets of Mediterranean-style villas and *palacios* that exude a beguilingly faded, genteel personality (many have been subdivided into apartments or converted to government use and are in obvious need of fresh plaster and paint). And Parque Coppelia is more than just a community resource; it is a social nexus and public gathering place of metropolitan importance that reflects the traditional plaza's role as the hub of civic life and as a spontaneous urban theater that lures and entertains people from all over the city.

Yet in this peculiar milieu, where ideology creates or alters forms that do not always follow function, the traditional Latin America plaza may not be a politically appropriate model. While it certainly provides an enduring frame of reference (and the city has its share of ancient and beloved squares, such as the classic sixteenth-century Plaza de Armas), the plaza is also symbolic of colonialism and a heritage of dependency and exploitation. Inextricably linked with the dominant and repressive colonial institutions of church and state as well as the socioeconomic elite, the plaza could scarcely be held up as a form to emulate in a socialist society.

This may explain why Parque Coppelia lacks the formal and often imposing commemorative patriotic features or religious icons common to traditional plazas. This might also shed



The queues in Parque Coppelia. Courtesy Rob Crandall.



light on why, in a regime that trumpets the virtues of individual labor and sacrifice for the common good, the park's design precludes virtually any activity besides waiting for, buying and eating ice cream. Presumably, Parque Coppelia was intended as a place for *el hombre integrado* (the new, integrated person) to enjoy a brief respite.

This intention of strict functionality stands in stark contrast to the diversity of uses characterizing large Latin America plazas, which historically have been popular and convenient venues for informal and formal activities and for celebrations of both a religious and secular nature. But, in fact, Parque Coppelia is a very interactive place that supports a varied daily social life with lots of *movimento* that is, perhaps, no less engrossing than that of a traditional plaza.

The Park as Socialist Space

While it may be difficult to isolate unique features in the cultural landscape that have sprung from socialism, it seems clear that there are distinctive patterns and imprints.[4] One characteristic — observed in Soviet and Eastern European cities and true of urban Cuba also — is the comparatively greater importance placed on providing and maintaining public spaces rather than private ones.[5] Public places, not only *calles*, *parques* and plazas but also museums, concert halls and education and health facilities, are better endowed in terms of both financial and emotional commitments than elements of the private sector that cater to the individual.

This favored status mirrors the operative ideology of providing for group needs and amenities before providing for personal ones. It may also serve as a form of institutional com-

pensation for the chronic shortages and inadequacies of housing as well as the paucity of consumer goods and services. Consequently, public spaces like Coppelia are not only generally attractive in appearance but also conspicuously clean; in fact, the park has a Disneyland-like tidiness to it.

Parque Coppelia also illustrates the inclusive nature of socialist public space. Based on socialism's egalitarian underpinnings, access to all is at least theoretically inherent. By local standards the park, which has been called "the ultimate democratic ice-cream emporium,"[6] does attract a rather heterogeneous collection of *compañeros* (comrades), including even "anti-social" elements. It is used not only by squeaky-clean Communist youth, who constitute a majority of its patrons, but also by young people who have long hair and are dressed in "radical" 1960s-era hippie styles as well as contemporary punkers. The park is also frequented by *jinetes* ("black marketeers"), who engage in "economic crimes" by illegally exchanging pesos for dollars. Moreover, the area around the bus stop on La Rampa has a reputation as a hangout for homosexuals. The park is thus comparatively diverse and tolerant (although homosexuals especially have been greatly persecuted by the government)[7] and acts as a kind of social leveler in that everyone must wait his or her respective turn in the ice cream lines.

The *cola*, or line, is itself a phenomenon that has come to be associated with the socialist urban experience. Queues that extend from bus stops, restaurants and food stores have become a common scene in the Havana streetscape. Ideologically, the orderliness of waiting in line reflects the power of the state and its ability to impose control. In Coppelia, a microarena of urban life, one might stand in two or even three lines. One must first queue up to obtain a ticket, then wait in another for the ice cream (served in scoops, sundaes, or mixed into an *ensalada*, or salad), and perhaps wait in yet another for seating to become available. While all of this might be quite time-consuming, it is as good an excuse as any for hanging around, watching the slow-moving *paseo*. As Jacobo Timmerman has recently observed, "waiting constitutes the inner dynamic of Cuba."[8]

A Convergence of Traditions

Various public space traditions converge in Parque Coppelia. At the very core of these is the Mediterranean-based affinity for the open-air meeting place — a place simultaneously of activity and repose, of functionality and symbolism. In the New World, this tradition was institutionalized in the Spanish colonial town plan in the form of plazas — which were at first open and rather austere spaces intended essentially for military purposes and have since been transformed to a garden-park format meant to enhance their aesthetic and commemorative aspects and broaden their appeal.

The plaza as an urban form has always stood for the workings of a central authority. Ironically, while the traditional plaza has been rejected as a model in socialist Cuba because of its connotations of colonialism, socialist public space traditions are similarly intended to convey the power of the state. As Parque Coppelia evocatively illustrates, such power is reflected in the desire to bring order to both the landscape and human behavior; the dominant theme is the successful management of both humans and nature according to a reasoned plan. That the ideology of centralized authority should emerge in a place ostensibly devoted to something as innocuous and apolitical as eating ice cream reminds us of the significance of ordinary features in the cultural landscape.

Notes

1. Medea Benjamin, Joseph Collins and Michael Scott, *No Free Lunch: Food & Revolution in Cuba Today* (San Francisco: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1989), 53.

2. George Lang, "Castro Comestibles," *Esquire*, February 1978, 88-91.

3. Richard Boudreaux, "Castro's Revolutionary Cry: Let them Eat Ice Cream!" *Los Angeles Times*, 5 November 1991, p. H2.

4. That socialist ideology exerts an influence on the form and spatial character of the urban built environment has been addressed by others. See, for example, R.A. French and F.E. Ian Hamilton (eds.), *The Socialist City* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1979).

5. Kathryn H. Anthony, "Public and Private Spaces in Soviet Cities," *Landscape* 23 (1979): 20-25; Dean S. Rugg, *Eastern Europe* (London: Longman, 1985), 346-353.

6. Enrique Fernandez, "Fidel's Limbo" *Condé Nast Traveler*, July 1991, 79.

7. Carlos Alberto Montaner, *Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution: Age, Position, Character, Destiny, Personality and Ambition* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 104-107.

8. Jacobo Timmerman, *Cuba: A Journey* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 15.

Calle Ocho

Monica Ponce de Leon

The author would like to thank Nader Tehrani for being a most supportive reader of and commentator on this article and, most importantly, wishes to give him credit for the arguments put forth. Less precise, but substantial acknowledgement should be made to professors Rodolfo Machado and Jorge Silvetti; it it to their design practice, written work and studio instruction to which this article is greatly indebted.

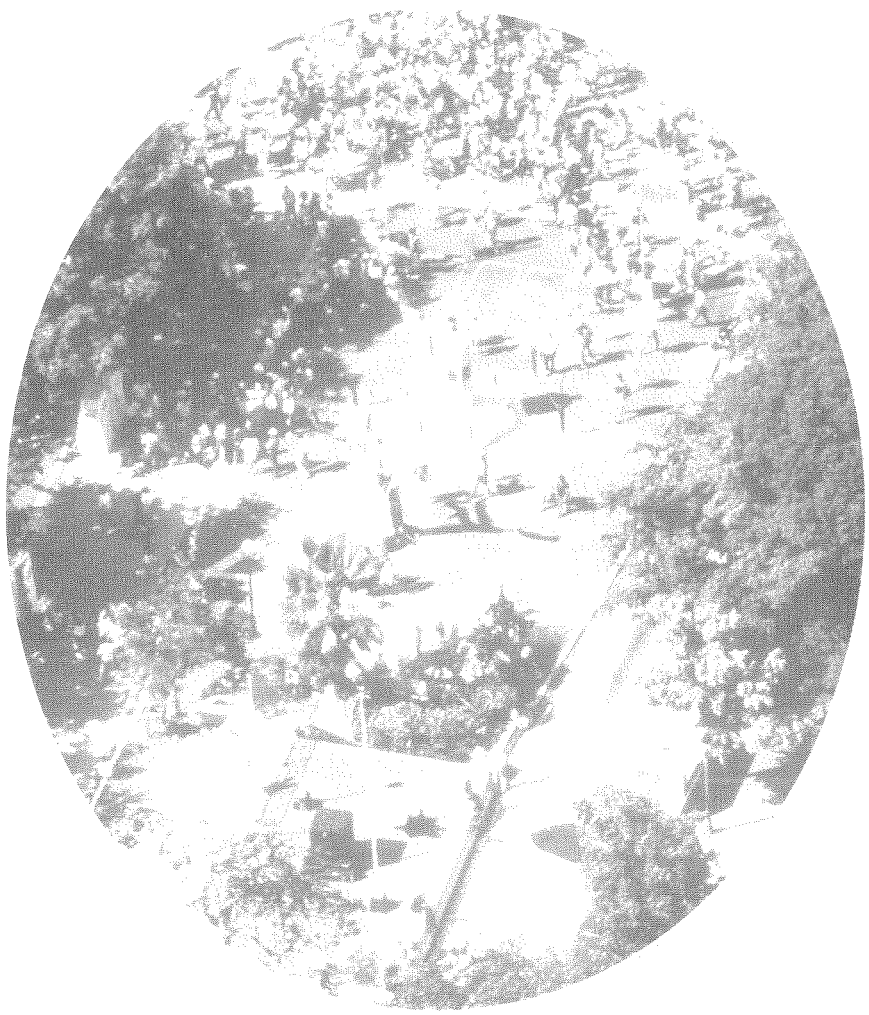
Background: Festival on Calle Ocho, with downtown Miami in background. Inset: Brigade 2506 Memorial Plaza.

Opening photos © David Gleason. Other photos courtesy Ramon Trias.

New forms of urbanity, such as those associated with recent commercial developments and new town centers, are no longer produced as the result of a layering through time (urbanity as we know it in historic centers). In fact, as Rodolfo Machado has pointed out, ". . . in the very near future, and more often than not, urbanity will be produced 'artificially' rather than . . . as the 'natural' result of a culture at work, as it has normally been produced . . .."[1] At the same time, the role of architecture in the making of public spaces has become increasingly limited, if not eclipsed, by private land developers, zoning officials and traffic engineers, depleting the profession of its traditional civic dimension.

This essay presents a general diagnosis of the public spaces thus produced as an attempt to lay the basis for redefining the relationship between architecture and city-making. Through the specific analysis of Miami's Calle Ocho, an existing alternative to this prevailing condition, this essay seeks to put forth a general theoretical proposition by which architectural practice can effect the production of public spaces today.

That urbanity is "no longer the 'natural' result of a culture at work" could be illustrated by the



conspicuous similarities among residential and commercial developments throughout the U.S., despite the variety of the landscape and the richness of its people's cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This condition is exacerbated in cities like Miami, whcih have no pretwentieth century history and know no traditional urbanity. The city's center, which covers less than a square mile, by no means holds the density associated with the downtown of cities like Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and New York, whose historical contingencies have given them a particular character. Around this nucleus Miami displays only the suburban configurations found elsewhere — shopping centers, office parks, highways, condominiums, commercial strips and square mile after square mile of single family homes.

At the same time, the predominance of the automobile has given privelege to long-range rather than short-range circulation, resulting in the fragmentation and discontinuity of public access at the local level, where emphasis is placed on singular and centralized connections over multiple and dispersed ones. This has led to the production of localized enclaves rather than spaces that serve the city at large, and, conversely, spaces that serve the city at large but disregard the local. Miami's highways, for instance, effectively connect the city at large, in turn acting as physical barriers and often dividing neighborhoods. The city's square-mile grid constitutes its system of collector roads, facilitating circulation at large but impeding connections at the local scale.

For the most part, Miami's public interventions have been limited to its infrastructure while the rest of the landscape has been left to private enterprise. As a result, the public spaces produced today are epitomized by the interior street of the mall and the covered courtyard of the office park, which are, in fact, "privatized" commercial spaces masquerading as "public." Such models are public insofar as they are available to the public, but they are owned, operated and controlled by private enterprise.

Furthermore, the real estate ventures that shape our environment tend to be single, large-scale interventions that are produced over a short period of time because they respond and belong to a particular market. The city can no longer be understood only as a place that provides the setting for consumption to take place; it also is an object of consumption, becoming a commodity itself.

In this respect, Miami displays public life no different from that of other U.S. cities, despite its particular climate and geography and the presence of different multicultural groups, which give the city a unique character and way of life. This "sameness" of public spaces makes us question their "publicness."[2] Contrarily, it might be argued that such sameness is in fact "culture at work"; as Rafael Moneo has pointed out, despite the common pluralistic image of the U.S., a certain homogenity prevails, supported by an all-encompassing media.[3] I would argue, nevertheless, that a closer look at how spaces are occupied differently from place to place might indicate otherwise.



Calle Ocho is a regional traffic artery that connects downtown Miami to a highway crossing the Everglades.



Calle Ocho also serves as the heart of Miami's "Little Havana" neighborhood.

U.S. 41 and Little Havana

The American typology of the strip has led to places that look the same in Boston and Miami — low-scale commercial buildings set back from the street by a sea of parking. The food franchises found in both might be the same: Denny's, Burger King, or Sizzler; and the prevailing stores will not be different: supermarkets, lumber stores, pharmacies, video stores, liquor stores, and the like. In Miami, however, Calle Ocho (Eighth Street) has developed alternative typologies that conform to the strip configuration but activate it quite differently.

Eighth Street evolved into a strip in the early 1920s, when it was extended through the Everglades to connect Miami to Fort Myers and then up to Tampa (it was officially designated U.S. 41 and acquired the name "Tamiami Trail").[4] During this time, the city's small Latin population was located elsewhere, along a tangential strip of northwest Miami. This group was composed largely of middle-class Cubans interspersed with a few wealthy Cubans who placed their large homes amid the modest, framed bungalows of the area.

In the late thirties, ". . . as the downtown Black population was expanding into the Latin neighborhood, Cubans started moving south, eventually establishing a neighborhood around Eighth Street."[5] Before the immigration wave of "anti-Castroites" began populating Miami in the 1960s, the area was already well on the way to becoming Miami's Latin district.

In the manner of other "ethnic" quarters in the U.S., Little Havana provides Latin immigrants with the safety of a neighborhood in which everyone shares a similar history, parallel customs and the same language. In turn, Little Havana enables "Americans" to experience a taste of the "foreign" through its array of Cuban restaurants, stores that specialize in Hispanic books, Latin music and Santeria artifacts — as well as the annual Calle Ocho Festival.[6]

Ironically, the Latin community has given Eighth St. or U.S. 41 yet another alias, "Main Street of Little Havana."[7] even though Calle Ocho does not look like Main Street and Little Havana in no way resembles Habana. Instead, it is surprising how any photograph of Calle Ocho could illustrate the descriptions in *Learning from Las Vegas*, which describes how vehicular traffic determines the morphology of the spaces: The curbing allows frequent right turns for commercial enterprises and eases the difficult transition from highway to parking; the regularity of form and position of the streetlights identify the continuous space of the strip; and the parking lot is treated as a symbol as well as a convenience. Cuban specialty shops, gas stations, used-furniture stores, porn shops, gun shops, fast-food franchises, big Winn-Dixies and little motels are close enough to the roadway to be seen yet far enough back to accommodate driveways, turnarounds and parking.[8]

The big sign and the little building are the rule along Calle Ocho. Symbol dominates space; architecture defines very little. Calle Ocho's most prominent Cuban restaurants, La Carreta and Versailles, exemplify what *Learning from Las Vegas* defines as the two main manifestations of automobile-oriented commercial architecture in the United States. For La Carreta, the architectural systems of space, structure and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form (what *Learning from Las Vegas* defines as the "duck"). At Versailles, the systems of space and structure are directly at the service of program, and ornament is applied independently of them (what *Learning from Las Vegas* refers to as the "decorated shed").[9]

In keeping with the restaurant's name, the building for La Carreta takes the shape of a giant cart seemingly standing in a thicket. This effect is



Buildings and signs along auto-oriented Calle Ocho seek the attention of people in passing cars.

achieved by the building's oversized parapet and the clever concealment of all its windows behind landscaping. Across the street, Versailles displays decorative motifs consistent with its name. The building's cornice is a wooden replica of the French original; the green geometrical patterns along its walls recall the window frames of Versailles, while its mirrored interiors are but a distant memory of the original Gallerie des Glaces. La Carreta is a symbol; Versailles applies symbols. As in any American strip configuration, the buildings alongside Calle Ocho reinforce the signage system of vehicular spaces, whether they are "Cuban" or not.

On the other hand, Calle Ocho differs from the traditional morphology of the strip in that vehicular and pedestrian activities are coordinated, maximizing public access. While the high-speed circulation along a strip usually acts as a physical barrier for local traffic, Calle Ocho serves regional through traffic as well as the immediate neighborhood. Whereas big signs connect the drivers to the stores, supermarket windows do contain merchandise and stores do open directly onto the street. This juxtaposition of pedestrian and automobile uses is mediated by a scale that is neither that of the conventional strip nor that of a traditional urban fabric. In this U.S. 41, the residents of the surrounding neighborhood can walk from their homes to the commerce along the strip; in turn, drivers can be catered to by street vendors while stopping at a traffic light. The roadway, which potentially could divide Little Havana, instead constitutes its vital center.

The new sets of relations between vehicular and pedestrian modes of occupation are orchestrated in Calle Ocho through the formation of spaces that account for local characteristics. On the surface Calle Ocho's architecture seems merely to conform to the demands of automobile-oriented urban sprawl; in actuality, the configuration of buildings and spaces along Calle Ocho promotes a particular way of living that differentiates it from other parts of the city and the United States.

For example, despite the fact that a Cuban restaurant looks like any other restaurant along a strip, it attracts an unexpected mix of people. On any given day one might see the mayor of the city of Miami on a family meal, a banker with an out-of-town client and construction workers on lunch break. Although the clientele is predominantly Latin-American, the restaurants also are used frequently by corporations for power lunches and by community groups for after-meeting meals. This mix is promoted by a menu that carries an incredible variety, accompanied by an extreme price range; one can have a Cuban sandwich or an "Elena Ruth" for $2.50, while your dinner companion can have a steak for $14.75.

More signifcant to this argument is the way in which the organization of the spaces in the Cuban restaurants encourages and supports this mix of people. In fact, one can see physical differences between restaurants such as Versailles, La Carreta and Casablanca and the non-Cuban restaurants along a strip. Because of the Cuban restaurants' typological configuration, one finds all varieties of seating arrangements, which from long tables for group occasions to diner counters for quick meals, and allow the assemblage of a variety of people simultaneously.

The most significant alteration to the type is the incorporation of an outdoor "coffee counter," at which coffee, cigarettes, magazines, sweets and other items are sold directly to the outside. One can park the car, get out and have a coffee standing by these counters. These are extremely popular for people on the way to work in the morning, coming back at night from the movies, or after particular events, when the crowd in the parking lot can number up to 50 people. Ironically, it is here where the Cuban community exchanges discussions about Castro, recounts old times in Cuba, or maps out its role in Miami's political life. More importantly, it is here where one sees signs of an urbanity that differs from that of the conventional strip.

Another example is the neighborhood laundromat, which also makes use of a mix of programs whose formal

arrangement results in a complex set of relationships. These types combine a self-serve coin laundry with a grocery/-flower shop, a coffee counter and a small video arcade. The coffee counter opens simultaneously to the inside the laundry room and the street outside so it can serve both customers waiting for their laundry and the passing public. Similarly, the video machines stand between the washer/dryer areas and the street, entertaining those who are waiting while attracting other people from the street.

Such typological configurations promote interaction between the private and the public realms because they might bring out the latent public characteristics of certain private activities and, in turn, enrich our experience of urban life. This differs greatly from the traditional commercial architecture of the strip, where the program is often







Nevertheless, some buildings also respond to the pedestrian scale.

internalized and mediated to the exterior street only by the big sign.

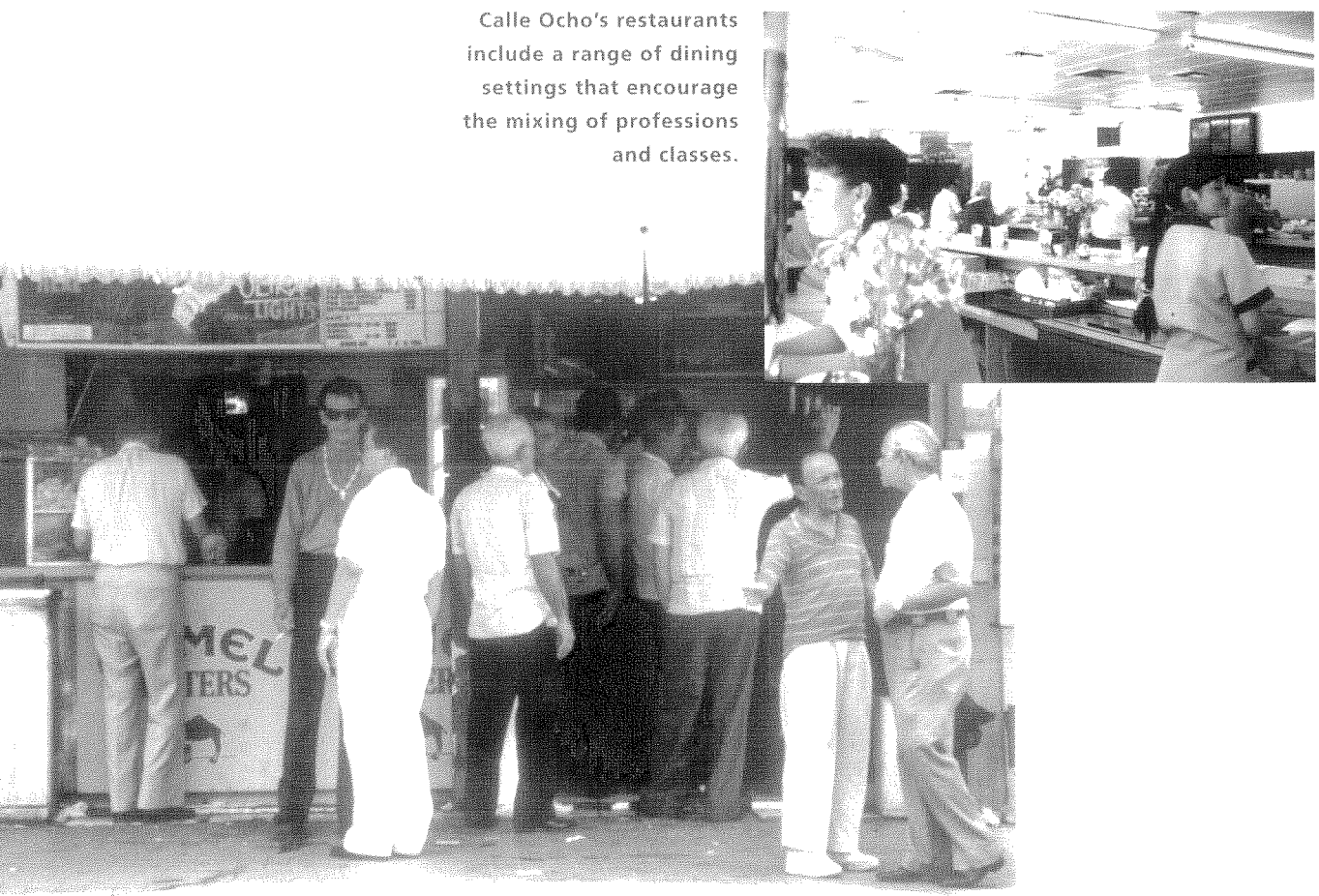
The presence of a pedestrian scale along Calle Ocho was formalized by the construction of two small plazas, the Brigade 2506 Memorial Plaza and Maximo Gomez Park. Whereas the conventional strip promotes a singular mode of occupation throughout, Calle Ocho also incorporates spaces that clearly belong to a pedestrian tradition, urbanizing the strip through heterogeneous uses and modes of occupation.

In the first place, these two plazas are invested with a certain "officialness" that sets them apart from the commercial, vehicular strip. The Brigade 2506 Memorial Plaza, for instance, commemorates the most significant event in Cuban-American history by honoring the heroes of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. The space does not have the scale usually associated with ceremonial plazas, but the intervention (a truncated obelisk that supports a permanent flame) does belong to a tradition of commemorative monuments. The "officialness" is further supported by the obelisk's formal inscription, militaristic detailing and durable materials, foreign to the prevailing character of the strip.

Similarly, Maximo Gomez Park, named after one of the greatest figures in the Cuban Independence War of the late 1890s, is designated as the only visitor center outside downtown Miami. Situated at the corner of a traffic intersection, the plaza is surrounded by a low, metal fence that protects the park from passing vehicles. Even though this configuration would tend to isolate the space from the public, the permanent presence of a large tourist information booth here ensures the plaza's publicness.

This tendency towards intrinsically public programming is reinforced by the way both plazas engage the strip. The Brigade 2506 Memorial Plaza marks the beginning of 13th Avenue, which also is known as Cuban Memorial Boulevard (a street of exceptional beauty, lined with trees along its center). Such a privileged location makes this plaza the key link of a well-traveled circulation network, serving as a formal entrance from the strip to the adjacent residential area.

Likewise, Maximo Gomez Park is also known as "Domino Club" because it provides permanent tables and seat



Calle Ocho's restaurants include a range of dining settings that encourage the mixing of professions and classes.

ing, covered and uncovered, where Latin men engage in public games of dominoes or chess — activities that are reminiscent of the public urban lifestyle Cubans left behind. Ultimately, both plazas attain a public life relatively independent of commercial development because they materialize fragments of Cuba's history and mythology.

It is clear that the life of Cuban immigrants (among others) in Little Havana has altered the experience and meaning of the public spaces along this strip. Nevertheless, the presence of a particular group of people did not entail a literal return to the urban forms specific to their culture because the historic and cultural conditions that generated Havana are foreign to Miami. As a result, Calle Ocho still operates in the manner of a strip, and its public characteristics are still far from the esplanades of a Cuban boulevard. Instead, the Latin community retrieved from its traditional urbanity that which was positive: heterogeneous uses, various modes of occupation and specific notions of monumentality. Therefore, existing types were altered and traditional spaces were re-invented in order to produce a particular effect of urbanity.

Learning from *Learning from Las Vegas*

In *Learning from Las Vegas*, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown and Steven Izenour urged architects and urbanists to gain insight from common places, to learn from the existing landscape in the same manner that fine art often follows folk art. In their view, the subject of architectural inquiry is not limited to the history of the discipline itself; rather it includes the study of all cultural artifacts.

They accept the city in its present condition and use it as empirical evi-



Brigade 2506 Memorial Plaza, a monument that addresses both pedestrian and automobile scales.

dence for the formulation of architectural discourse, grounding the pursuits of architecture and urbanism in "realism." Even the auto-oriented architecture of urban sprawl, the skyline of signs on the strip and the methods of commercial persuasion can "serve the purpose of civic and cultural enhancement," they contend.[10] Basic to their argument is the assumption that symbolism is essential in architecture; the model from a previous time or from the existing city is part of their source material, and the replication of elements is part of their design method. For them, "architecture that depends on association for its perception depends on association in its creation."[11]



Maximo Gomez Park.

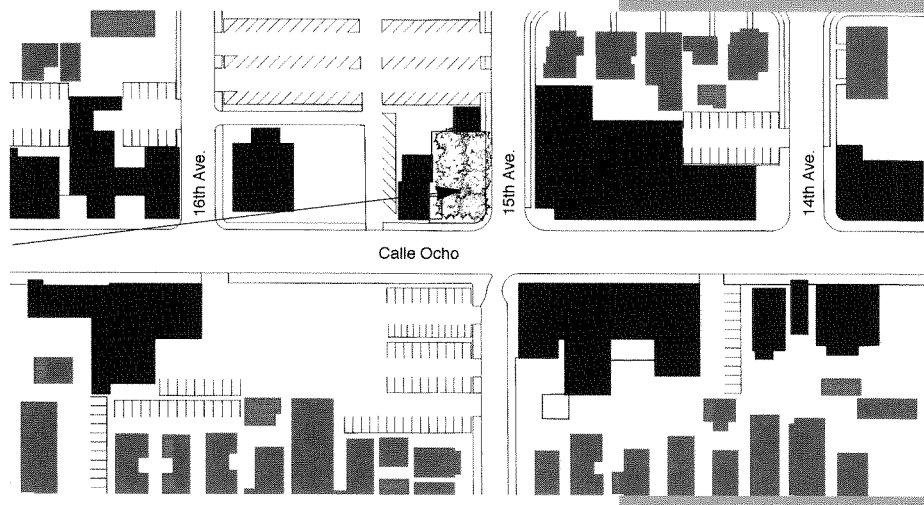
As Jorge Silvetti has stated, although Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour do not explicitly base their arguments on typology, theirs is a "purely iconographic interpretation and use of the idea of type." While for the orthodox Modern movement function provided meaning, in Learning from Las Vegas, the "[type] is the cultural icon that appears and circulates in society that is made identifiable, and becomes, in turn, the represented symbol."[12]

The intentions in *Learning from Las Vegas* are explicit: "we shall emphasize image — image over process or form — in asserting that architecture depends in its perception and creation on past experience and emotional association and that these symbolic and representational elements may often be contradictory to the form, structure and program with which they combine in the same building."[13]

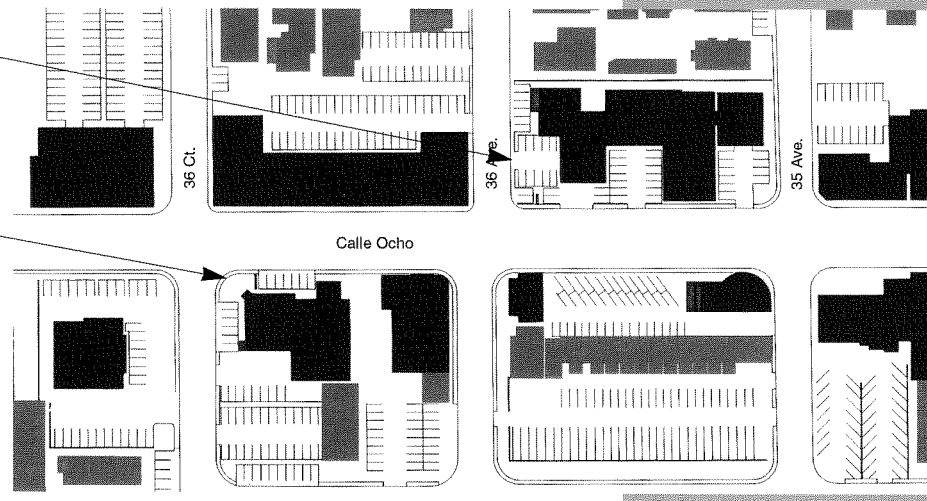
While Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour's iconographic interpretation of typology is at the center of the arguments put forth here, their emphasis on imagery leaves out of the discourse the very means by which we occupy the city. Their position disregards many of the cultural conventions that generate urban life and, consequently, give meaning to the city's artifacts.

Although Calle Ocho looks like any strip in America, I would argue that its symbolic and representational elements (types) also derive their meaning from the ways in which they promote a particular way of life:

- coordination of vehicular and pedestrian activities, maximizing public access,
- formulation of spaces that account for local characteristics, taking



Drawings courtesy
Monica Ponce de Leon.





advantage of Miami's particular climate and culture,

• configuration of buildings and spaces so they can be occupied in a variety of ways,

• types that promote interaction between the private and public realms.

These modes of occupation, together with the images along the strip, generate the powerful cultural associations that have made Calle Ocho the symbol of Latin culture in the United States. For instance, while the Cuban restaurants' decorative motifs give them a particular character, the opportunity to gather outdoors around the coffee counters makes them meaningful. Similarly, although the Mediterranean-style canopies of Maximo Gomez Park give this plaza an image characteristic of Latin public spaces, the possibility of sitting at the tables to play dominoes or chess is what makes the space significant. In their mix of Spanish and English words, the signs along Calle Ocho indicate to drivers the presence of a Latin context, but the street vendors at traffic intersections are what really makes the drive memorable. The signage system effectively provides identifiable images for the elements along Calle Ocho.

The implications of these typological assertions provides us with the modus operandi to effect change within the prevailing means of urban production. I do not propose a break with the typologies that have generated urban places in the past or a rejection of types that characterize public life today. As Alan Colquhoun argues, it would be impossible to operate outside existing typological models:

If, as Gombrich suggests, forms by themselves are relatively empty of meaning, it follows that the forms which we intuit will, in the unconscious mind, tend to attract themselves to certain associations of meaning. This could mean not only that we are not free from the forms of the past and from the availability of these forms as typological models but that, if we assume we are free, we have lost control over a very active sector of our imagination and of our power to communicate with others. It would seem that we ought to try to establish a value system which takes account of the forms and solutions of the past if we are to gain control over concepts which will obtrude themselves into the creative process, whether we like it or not.[14]

Colquhoun postulates that the meaning assigned to types is not fixed but is the result of cultural convention, thereby invalidating the legitimacy of function as the main instigator in the making of forms. Therefore, while programming can play an important role in the formation of public life (as is the case of Maximo Gomez Park) function per se does not inevitably produce meaningful public spaces.

On the other hand, Colquhoun does not advocate an unthinking acceptance of tradition; rather, he proposes "to investigate the part which modifications of type-solutions play in relation to problems, and solutions which are without precedent in any received tradition."[15] This implies the possibility of manipulating existing typologies in order to provide alternatives to current commercial developments, not unlike the way in which the typologies along Calle Ocho represent an alternative to the traditional strip. More important, it is strategic to use known types in the production of new ones in order to make them culturally resonant and in that way ensure their production.[16]

By investigating the relationship between typology and the formation of public spaces, I have demonstrated typology's usefulness as a tool to produce urbanity. Although Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour's iconographic interpretation of typology is at the center of the argument, their emphasis on imagery leaves out of the discourse the means by which we occupy the city, in turn disregarding many of the cultural conventions that generate urban life and subsequently give meaning to the city's artifacts.

If urban artifacts also obtain their meaning by the very means in which they promote a particular way of life, and if this meaning is not fixed, architecture can effect change through the manipulation of "cultural conventions." This is not to say that the production of urbanity will or can overdetermine our way of life, nor does it imply the reduction of the architectural discipline to the realm of social engineering. Instead, it demonstrates that architecture can promote public alternatives through mechanisms specific to its own medium and discipline, revitalizing the city while redefining its role and potential within both private and public spheres of the political process.

Notes

1. Rodolfo Machado, Course Description, Department of Urban Planning and Design, Spring 1990.

2. See Kenneth Frampton's "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 16-30.

3. Rafael Moneo, "Reflecting on Two Concert Halls: Gehry vs. Venturi," Walter Gropius Lecture; Harvard University Graduate School of Design; 25 April 1990.

4. For a concise history of the American strip and of the prevailing typologies along it see Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Boston, Toronto, London: Bullfinch Press,

Little Brown and Company, 1985). For a chronological account of Calle Ocho, see "Changing Personality Lends Eighth Street Charm, From One End to the Other Trail Has Many Names, Many Faces," *The Miami Herald*, 16 August 1990, 18-20.

5. Terry Johnson King, "Little Havana Develops Spread — and It's Not from Middle Age," *The Miami News*, 14 April 1969, 1C.

6. Traditionally such Latin festivals are staged just before the pre-Eastern Lenten fasting begins. But the Calle Ocho festival, unlike Carnivale in Rio and Mardi Gras in New Orleans, is held in the middle of Lent, at a time when Cubans are supposed to do penance. As T. D. Allman argues in *Miami, City of the Future* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987), such dating seems to indicate that the festival is geared more towards an American public rather than the continuance of a Latin American tradition *per se*.

7. This reference is a gesture to the "American" tradition of Main Street, rather than the boulevard of "Latin" tradition (El Prado Boulevard in Cuba, for instance).

8. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), 20.

9. Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour, 87 - 90.

10. See Jorge Silvetti's arguments about verisimilitude and persuasion in "On Realism in Architecture," *Harvard Architecture Review* 1 (Spring, 1980).

11. Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour, 131.

12. Silvetti, 25.

13. Venturi, Scott-Brown, Izenour, 87.

14. Alan Colquhoun, "Typology and Design Method," in *Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 48

15. *Ibid.*, 48.

16. Silvetti, 25.

Street vendors tailor their wares and selling techniques to take advantage of a captive market: People in cars stopped at traffic signals.



Plazas of San Diego Texas: Signatures of Mexican-American Place Identity

Daniel D. Arreola

San Diego, Texas, unlike its older and larger namesake in Southern California, is not immediately recognizable as an important Hispanic-American place. It does not carry the name recognition of a San Antonio or a Los Angeles. Rather, this predominantly Mexican-American community is typical of small towns in the ranching, farming and oil-producing region of South Texas.

But San Diego is unique in at least one respect: Although it was founded under Anglo-American political authority, its plan follows the Spanish colonial tradition in which a plaza serves as the focus of community life. In fact, San Diego has two plazas, which is unusual for such a small, village-like place. The creation and use of these spaces distinguishes San Diego as one of the dozen or so *Mexicano* plaza towns in South Texas.

The plazas of San Diego, like those in other South Texas towns, are adaptations of the heritage of small town public spaces found in much of Latin America. They have persisted well into this century as social nodes for both local residents and Mexican-Americans throughout the region. Their story reveals how traditional Latino public spaces have survived even in the smallest of settlements along the U.S.-

Padre Pedro Park.
Courtesy Daniel D. Arreola.

Mexico border, and how these places are being rediscovered and preserved.

San Diego is located about 100 miles south of San Antonio and about halfway between Corpus Christi, a port city on the Gulf of Mexico, and Laredo, a border crossing into Mexico. The town emerged in about 1858; when Texas organized Duval County in 1876, San Diego became the county seat and was moved seven miles to its present location along a railroad line. This connection gave San Diego direct access to Corpus Christi, Laredo and the interior of Mexico.

The town is situated on the Rio Grande plain, an undulating landscape of mesquite and woody scrub vegetation that stretches across much of the interior of South Texas. Sheep ranching first dominated the local economy, and San Diego became a service center for surrounding ranches and a distribution point for wool exports. In 1880 the town counted 1,000 residents and included a bank, three churches and a Spanish and English weekly newspaper; five decades later, after oil had been discovered in the region, it boasted a population of 3,500. Today the town is home to nearly 5,000 residents, 95 percent of whom are Mexican-American. It is still the county seat and a service node for the surrounding farming and ranching hinterland.

From the beginning of settlement, San Diego's Mexican population was composed of working class people as well as prominent ranchers and merchants. Mexican Americans have been the entrepreneurial and political elite of San Diego and Duval County, being represented in many businesses from the wool trade to hat manufacturing to lodging, and holding such political positions as county commissioner, judge, assessor, deputy sheriff and justice of the peace.[1]

Padre Pedro Park

San Diego's first plaza, created in 1876 when the town was moved to its present site, was intended to be the center of the community. The plaza is clearly an important element in the town plan: It is located near the creek that borders the town; it is set apart from surrounding blocks by 70-foot-wide streets, 20 feet wider than standard streets; and it measures a monumental 200 feet on each side.

The buildings that surround the plaza today reflect its central role in the life of the community. St. Francis de Pabla Church on the east and city hall on the west are anchors that establish the plaza's institutional authority. Such buildings also provide continuity with Latin American plaza traditions; churches and government buildings typically can be found next to central plazas in cities throughout Latin America. Two abandoned merchant houses, the Guerra building, a limestone masonry structure on the southwest corner, and the Levy building, a wood frame structure on the northwest perimeter, testify to former commercial functions on the plaza. Also, several private residences remain along St. Peter and St. Joseph streets. Some were the most prominent homes of their day, illustrating the social gradient typical of Latin America plazas, which traditionally attracted the most affluent residents of a community.

Like plazas in many Mexican towns, San Diego's plaza was without ornament or landscaping when first organized. A photograph taken in 1876 shows the open space filled with *jacales* (or thatch huts), which were typical rural dwellings of northeastern Mexico during that era. Arranged within the space were several *palisados* (or fence-like enclosures), which suggests that the plaza may have been used as a commons to hold livestock like sheep and goats.

The first evidence that the plaza was more than a space for accommodating animals appears in an 1886 report of a celebration organized to raise funds for improving and adorning the plaza. This account relates how town folk walked around the brilliantly lit space, patronizing numerous food stands, dancing to live music and crowding around lottery stands from early in the evening until midnight.[2]

The plaza was, of course, the stage for the *paseo* (or ritual promenade), an activity inherited from Mexico and practiced especially by the upper classes that lived close to the plaza. The *paseo* usually was a Sunday afternoon event, although sometimes it became a daily activity. The ceremony typically involved men strolling around the plaza in one direction and ladies circulating in the opposite direction; the men and women acknowledged each other in passing.

The activities that drew the entire community to the plaza were the *fiestas patrias* or Mexican patriotic celebrations, especially the Cinco de Mayo, which celebrates the Mexican victory over French forces in the Battle of Puebla, and the Diez y Seis de Septiembre, Mexican independence day. These celebrations would be swelled by the hundreds of Mexican seasonal workers who came to town during the sheep shearing seasons (April-June and August-

Christmas festival, Padre Pedro Park. Courtesy San Diego Chamber of Commerce.

View of St. Francis de Pabla Church from Padre Pedro Park *kiosco*, 1957. Courtesy Institute for Texan Cultures, University of Texas, San Antonio, *San Antonio Light* collection.


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September), providing visible links between the culture of the homeland across the Rio Grande and the Mexican-American town. In 1887, according to one description, students marched to the plaza for the Diez y Seis celebration carrying U.S. and Mexican flags, and an improvised stand was erected to accommodate a speaker and musicians.[3]

A fire insurance map from the same period illustrates the evolution of institutional, residential and commercial functions around the plaza. By 1885, when the town counted 1,500 inhabitants, the square was surrounded by the town's first Catholic church, seven dwellings and 13 businesses (including a hotel, boarding house, restaurant, barber, tailor, tin shop, two grocery/dry goods stores, a notions store, a general store and two billiard halls).

Today the plaza is called Padre Pedro Park in honor of Father J. Pedro Bard, who served the town from 1877-1920. It includes an elevated, red-tile-roofed *kiosco* encircled by a concrete walkway that intercepts diagonal paths from the four corners of the space and receives two additional perpendicular walkways from the Victoria and Mier street sides of the plaza. In Mexico, most plazas were transformed into gardens with walkways radiating from a central *kiosco* during the Porfiriato (1876-1910), when this plan, attributed to French Renaissance ideas about landscape design, was introduced in Mexico City and then quickly imitated elsewhere.

Presently, Padre Pedro Park is shrouded in live oak and elm trees that give a canopy effect to the space while ground cover consists of grass that is mowed and trimmed regularly by city workers. Three light standards illuminate the plaza and no fewer than 38 benches border the perimeter and walkways, many bearing the inscriptions of benefactors who donated the seats.

Plaza Alcalá

Early in the twentieth century, a second plaza was donated to San Diego by Don Juan de Alcalá, who owned a boarding house facing the new open space. Plaza Alcalá, as it became known, is situated several blocks northwest of Padre Pedro Park.

It is not certain why a second plaza was created in such a small town, but changes in the fortunes of the local elite may have been a factor.[4] After 1910, the South Texas economy shifted from wool exporting to cotton exporting. Several prominent Mexican-American farmers and merchants benefited from this change, and it is likely they saw the new plaza as a symbol of their stamp on San Diego's landscape.

This economic change was reflected in a shift in the location of the town's business district. The old plaza had been the focus for late nineteenth century wool export activities, but when cotton became king, a new commercial focus emerged a few blocks away on Center Street. By 1932, even though the town's population had increased to 3,500, the number of commercial functions surrounding the old plaza had dwindled from 13 to six. Today, the Center Street core has largely been abandoned in favor of a newer automo-

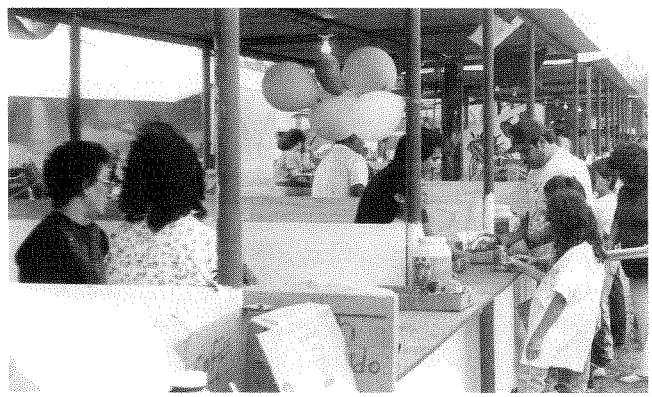


bile-oriented commercial strip, but the derelict two-story brick storefronts that still line the street testify to earlier commercial prosperity.

Plaza Alcalá is located on Collins Street one block west of Center. It occupies a large city block measuring some 250 feet on each side, somewhat larger than Padre Pedro Park. In 1932, nine dwellings and three businesses (including the boarding house) surrounded the plaza on three sides; there was no church on the plaza and the western flank was an open field. At the center stood a high *kiosco* (since removed and replaced by a rectangular platform) where musical ensembles performed, both local bands and orchestras that toured from Mexico. Surrounding the *kiosco* were wooden benches; later some of this seating was covered to shield audiences from the sun when the plaza became used for other celebrations. Unlike Padre Pedro Park, Plaza Alcalá is strictly a space in which special events are staged; the plaza never had the garden-like ambiance created by shade trees, walkways and commemorative benches. Today it is more reminiscent of an athletic field or playground than a traditional Mexican plaza.

The special event that has marked the Plaza Alcalá since early in the twentieth century is the Feria de San Diego. Fairs were common in South Texas plaza towns during the early twentieth century; the festivities often were held in the fall after the cotton harvest and might have lasted for several days. These celebrations, like the *fiestas patrias*, were said to have attracted ranch families from across the region. One account of the *feria* at Plaza Alcalá recalled that food stands, lottery booths and a roulette table defined the perimeter of the space in addition to the requisite musical ensemble stationed on the central *kiosco*.[5]

Right: Pan de Campo festival, Plaza Alcalá. Courtesy San Diego Chamber of Commerce.



Opposite page: Central San Diego in 1932. Graphic by Pankaj Vaid, base map courtesy Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas, Austin.

Below: Plaza Alcalá. Courtesy Daniel D. Arreola.



Legacy of Plaza Space

Today, *fiestas* and special occasions are still celebrated on the plazas in San Diego, but the traditional function of these spaces as social nodes has changed. While the traditional plaza was the place to see and be seen, this function has largely been replaced by other social activities. For example, the formal *paseo* has largely disappeared from Padre Pedro Park as attitudes towards courting have changed and as modern entertainment media, like television and videos, have become popular. Similarly, San Diego's commercial heart has moved from Padre Pedro Plaza to the Center Street district to a new state highway that bypasses the old town center.

Perhaps because the town has remained small, Padre Pedro Park, with its garden landscape, is still used as a social node by the local residents, even if less frequently than in the past. Importantly, it also persists as a formal plaza with the parish church and city hall on its periphery. These institutions bring town residents to the plaza weekly, if not daily.

Plaza Alcalá remains the site of San Diego's Pan de Campo Fiesta, the modern-day version of the early twentieth century Feria de San Diego, which may be one of the longest-lived celebrations carried out in a plaza in the region. The *fiesta* represents an increasingly rare confluence of a traditional celebration and space: A recently published directory of Hispanic-American culture listed only six South Texas towns with Mexican-American festivals.[6] Moreover, most South Texas towns stage these and other festivals in new city parks that are larger and more accommodating to crowds than the historic plazas.

The Pan de Campo Fiesta, celebrated on the first weekend in August, attracts some 6,000 visitors, more people than the town's resident population. Activities include traditional music like *conjunto* (accordion musical combo), dances, folk arts and crafts, games, and especially *tejano* (Texas Mexican) foodways. The central competition of the fiesta is the famous *pan de campo* (country baked bread) cooking contest.

Both Padre Pedro Park and Plaza Alcalá remain symbolic spaces, reinforcing the heritage of an earlier era. Changing social awareness, enhanced by such special events in the plazas, may signal the rediscovery of the Mexican plaza as a social space in towns across South Texas. In Laredo, San Ygnacio, Eagle Pass, Del Rio, Brownsville, Roma, Rio Grande City and other places local historical societies and chambers of commerce have spotlighted plazas in self-guided brochures and maps that circulate to the public. San Diego has commissioned a study to incorporate Padre Pedro Park into a historic district focused on the plaza and adjacent historic buildings like the Guerra mercantile. These preservation efforts may be a vehicle for the revitalization of these traditional spaces.

The plazas in San Diego and in other South Texas Mexican-American communities may not mirror the dynamism of public spaces in larger immigrant centers like Los Angeles or Miami. Nevertheless, they represent an important dimension of the larger world of Latino public spaces. Mexican town plazas are more common in South Texas than in any other U.S. border region, reinforcing the area's Latino demographic dominance. The small-town nature of these spaces resembles the social role of plazas throughout much of small-town Latin America; thus, these spaces mirror the living heritage of this public space tradition. That plazas are being restored, rejuvenated and celebrated here suggests the recognized importance of this symbolic space to Mexican people in the region and their desire to formalize and give visible expression to a pride of place.

Notes

1. Arnoldo De León, *The Tejano Community, 1836-1900*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982).

2. *San Antonio Express*, 15 May 1886, 4; *San Antonio Express*, 26 November 1886, 2.

3. Cited in Arnoldo De León, *Social History of Mexican Americans in Nineteenth Century Duval County* (San Diego, TX: County Commissioners' Court, 1978).

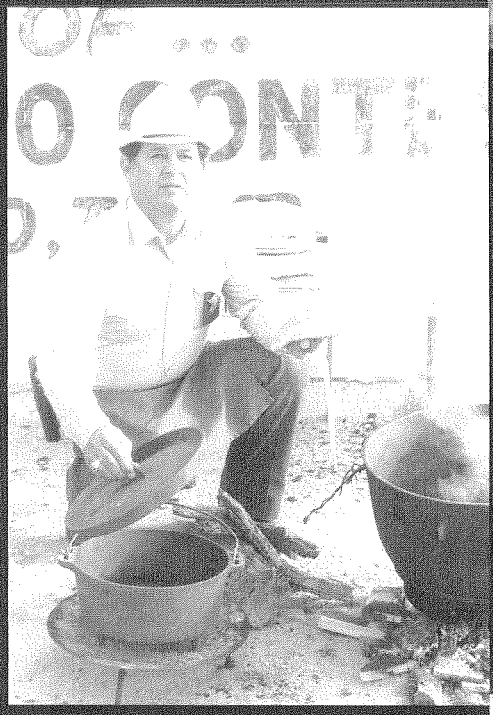
4. Some other South Texas Mexican-American towns have multiple plazas, and the tradition of several large plazas and smaller *placitas* or *plazuelas* is common throughout Mexico.

5. Peter Saenz, "History of Feria de San Diego," Duval County *Picture* (14 September 1988).

6. Joe S. Graham, *Hispanic American Material Culture: An Annotated Directory of Collections, Sites, Archives and Festivals in the U.S.* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

Christmas festival,
Padre Pedro Park.





Pan de Campo Fiesta,
Plaza Alcalá.

Christmas festival,
Padre Pedro Park.





Christmas festival,
Padre Pedro Park.

Photos courtesy San Diego
Chamber of Commerce.

The Personality of Plazas

In countless towns throughout Latin America, the center of the community is a small open space, or placita, *that serves as a forecourt for the local church or chapel. It is an enduring pattern, one that descends as much from the formal planning principles of the Laws of the Indies as it does from the timeless relationship between civic (in this case religious) authority and community spaces. These Dispatches consider the extent the* placita/*church model can serve as a focal point for Latin-American communities in the United States.*

Illustrations courtesy Weintraub and di Domenico.

Two *placitas* in New York City — Tiffany Plaza in the South Bronx and McKenna Square in Manhattan's Washington Heights — demonstrate how a plaza's personality depends on the relationship between its design and its connection to neighborhood life.[1]

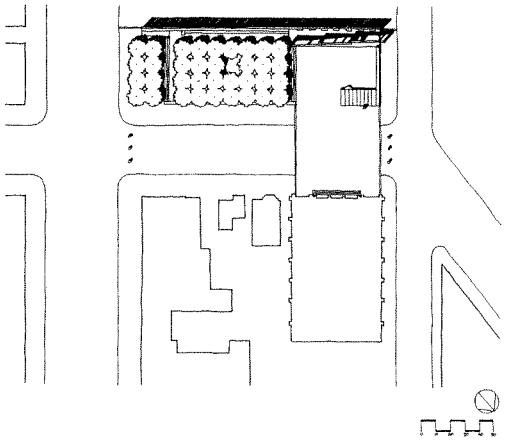
Both plazas, designed by Lee Weintraub and John di Domenico for New York's housing agency, are familiar yet foreign: They emulate the strong visual and spatial relationship between plazas and churches in traditional Latin communities; and they use materials, colors and visual language similar to that found in the homelands of the neighborhoods' Hispanic residents. Nevertheless, their design is a striking departure from the surrounding utilitarian landscape of tenements, walk-ups and taxpayer strips.

Tiffany Plaza, which was created by closing a lightly travelled street and melding it with a vacant lot, consists of two formal spaces: a forecourt for St. Athanasius Church and a bosque. The forecourt, which is defined by special granite pavers, includes a raised speakers' platform that serves as a focal point for gatherings. The plaza is bounded on opposite sides by the church and by an arcade and wall that shroud a linear fountain. Yet the space flows freely; gatherings spill from the forecourt into the surrounding streets and sidewalks.

Tiffany Plaza has become the anchor for an emerging neighborhood. Since it was built, hundreds of housing units have been constructed or carved out of abandoned buildings in nearby blocks. Like the neighborhood, the plaza's role has evolved incrementally: It has come to be a place where community residents share their sense of struggle, investment and accomplishment.

At McKenna Square, the designers tried to replicate the same formula. A forecourt extends from St. Rose of Lima Church, across a street and into a small public park; a sculptural *templita* stands on axis with the church entrance and is enclosed by an arcade; and a tree-shaded sitting area is off to the side.

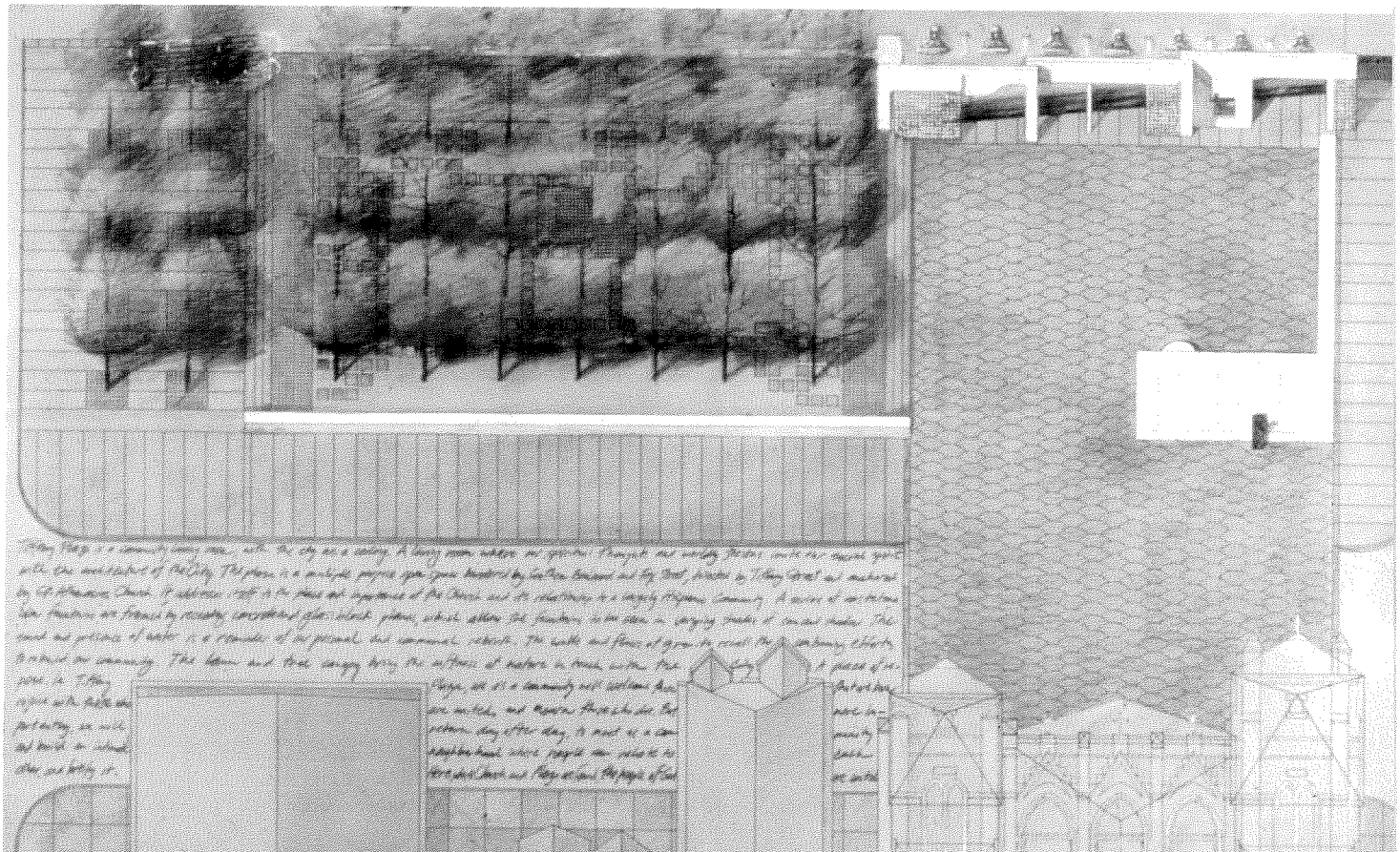
But McKenna Square enjoys neither the use nor the community support that Tiffany Plaza does. The design, Weintraub concludes, suffers from a too-rigid reliance on ideas that worked well at Tiffany and too little attention to the site's difficult conditions. McKenna Square, a triangular patch created by the meshing of two grids, is surrounded by busy streets that could not be closed; even though the forecourt connects the park to the church with special paving, traffic isolates it. Opposite the church is a nondescript row of commercial and residential buildings that establishes neither the presence nor sense of unity that Tiffany's wall and arcade do.







Above left: Tiffany Plaza, plan.
Above right: The bosque.
Right: The wall and fountain.
Below: Tiffany Plaza, conceptual sketch.



Weintraub also speculates that the difference in neighborhoods also influenced the outcome. By the time McKenna Square was redesigned the surrounding community was relatively well established, and the square had difficulty attracting a constituency. "One day they went to church and it was there," he explains.

Another lesson these plazas offer, Weintraub says, is that designs for neighborhood spaces can have a limited shelf life. As conditions in the community change so will the demands put upon the space. For example, the degree of drug use and homelessness these areas face were not anticipated years ago. At Tiffany Plaza, which had become infiltrated by drug dealers, fences now surround the bosque and block off the arcade. Another example is the expansion of the informal economy; street vendors now come to Tiffany Plaza to sell fish, fruits, shaved ice treats and other foods. Had this been anticipated, Weintraub says, the designers would have incorporated better spaces for selling food.

An expectation in both projects was that the church would be the glue that would hold the plaza together. This was true at St. Athanasius, whose pastor, Father Louis Gigante, is committed to the resurrection of the neighborhood through the development of affordable housing. Tiffany Plaza serves as a place for religious celebrations and informal gatherings before and after services — a place where, as Weintraub puts it, "people congregate under the watchful eye of the church." But St. Rose of Lima has played less of a role in the development of McKenna Square and the surrounding neighborhood. "It depends on the leadership of the church, not just the institution, but the personalities."

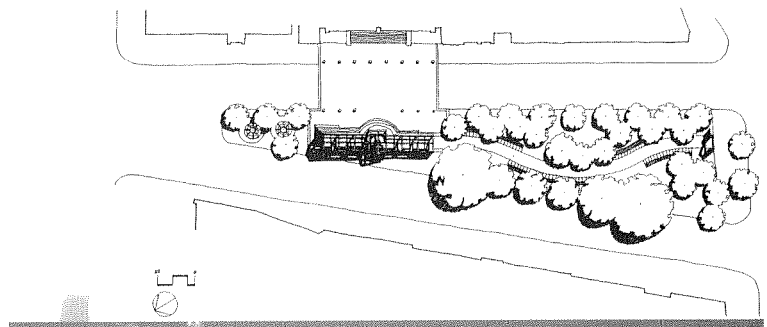
Each plaza itself has a personality, which derives from its design, its surroundings and the way that people inhabit it. The vocabulary of the *placita* does not translate literally in New York City, but it constitutes the root of a brand new language.

— *Todd W. Bressi*

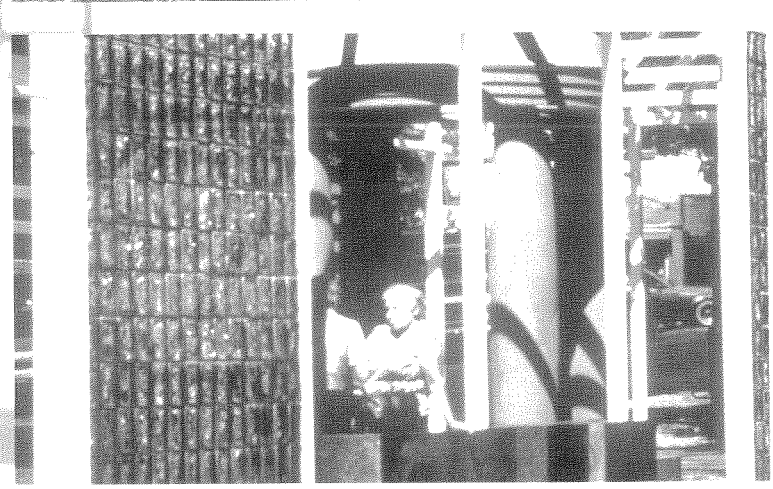
Note

1. Tiffany Plaza was first reported on in *Places* in 1987 as part of the "Inhabited Landscape" competition.

Left: McKenna Square, inspirational collage.
Below: McKenna Square (plan) and the *templita*.







Plaza, Parque, Colonia

Salem, N.M., one of the newest Mexican-American settlements in the U.S., is typical of half a dozen similar communities in the Mesilla Valley of the Rio Grande, which runs north from El Paso and the border with Mexico.

Salem is a *colonia*, a hardscrabble place that is home to Mexicans who gained legalized residence or citizenship under the amnesty provided by the 1986 Immigration Reform Act. *Colonias* generally are unincorporated, lack most basic services and are full of cheaply built shacks and used trailers that do not meet building codes.

Residents find employment picking and processing the chiles, long-grain cotton and pecans that are the main crops of this region — work from which they earn, on average, less than $7,000 a year. Most work in fields and factories around Hatch (a town about five miles away), south to Las Cruces, and west to Deming, about 60 miles away.

No matter what a worker's circumstances, a home in a *colonia* like Salem represents a great step towards permanence in his life. Those unable to afford homes may commute every day from El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, more than an hour away via Interstate 10, or live under the bridges that cross the arroyos or the Rio Grande. Only the luckiest find a place to live in the FmHA-sponsored housing in Hatch. A house in a *colonia* usually represents a worker's second capital investment; the first is an automobile. The cheapest trailer costs $2,500.

Salem is not a place that has been won easily. It was platted some 25 years ago and the first resident moved in about 13 years ago. The streets are narrow and all but two are unpaved. There is only one shop, a video store.

Salem, N.M.
Photos courtesy E. K. Willis.



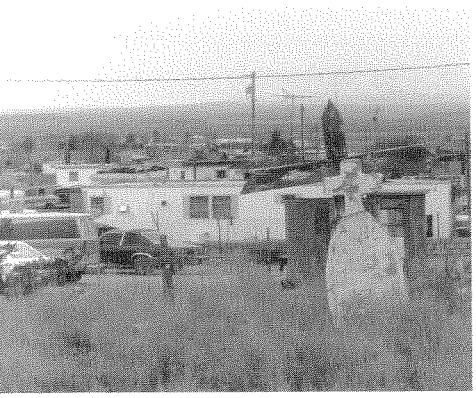
The land was not subdivided thoughtfully. Lots and streets were laid out without regard to the presence of *arroyos*, or five-foot-deep channels that carry flood waters about once a year. Some residents have built masonry walls across the gullies, others have filled in their share of the *arroyos* to flatten out their properties.

About three years ago, the Catholic Diocese of Las Cruces began to organize Salem's residents and help them identify priorities for improving their community. Diocese social workers thought the residents would be most interested in improving their working conditions. But the residents' first priority was bringing natural gas service. Without it, they depended on jerry-rigged systems of gas tanks and plastic tubing for cooking and heating — an extremely dangerous set-up. A year after residents started work on this issue, the natural gas utility agreed to run service from a trunk line that runs under the state highway nearby.

The residents' second priority was naming the streets and installing traffic control signs at intersections. This was important not only for preventing accidents, but also for helping emergency vehicles find their way around the *colonia*. Although residents wanted to name the streets themselves, they discovered that the streets had been given names like Independence Street when they were platted, and those names were kept.

The third priority was a park. Last year, a local state legislator won an appropriation of $100,000 to buy land and start building the park. All the lots in Salem have been sold, so the park will be built on a nine-acre, state-owned site at the edge of the community.

Last fall, community members began discussing the park among themselves, with organizers and with land-



Left: Typical housing in Salem.
Below: The site for Salem's park.



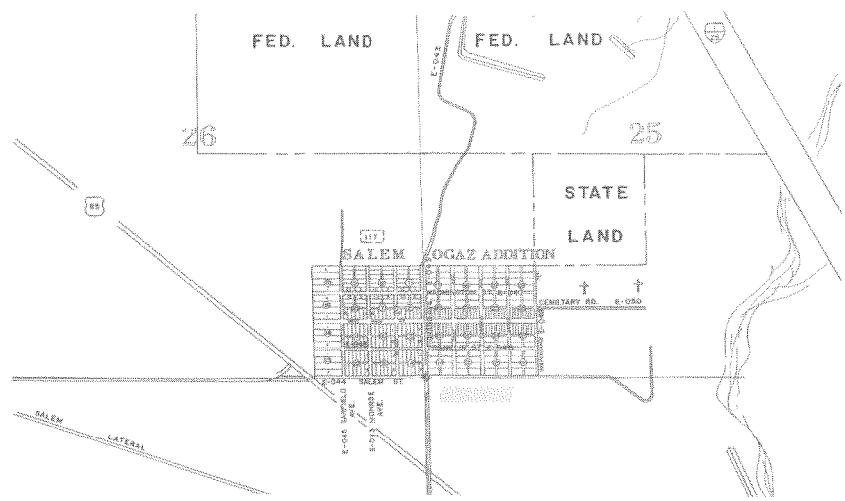
scape architect Joni Gutierrez. The residents wanted the park to include a *placita*, a traditional town square, and raised the idea of building a chapel.

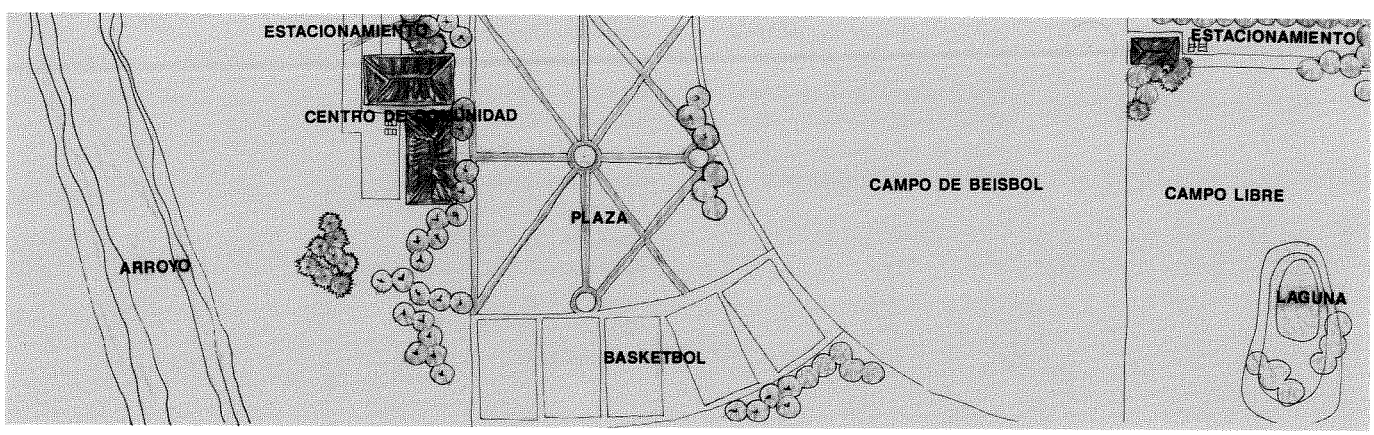
To Carlos Corral, a diocesan organizer who grew up in a *colonia* next to the town of Anthony on the New Mexico-Texas border, this made perfect sense. Many of the residents in *colonias* like Salem were raised in Mexico, or their parents in larger cities, in settlements called *ejidos* that have grown up at the edge of older Mexican cities and are similar in many ways to the *colonias*. Many of the *ejidos* have *placitas*, small public spaces that front a *capella*, or chapel, but are not lined with the civic and commercial buildings that eventually came to surround plazas. "Every town in Mexico has its *placita*. You go there to eat, to relax. When we ask the people in Salem, I bet they'd like to build a little *kiosco*," Corral said.

The residents have other ideas for the park, as well, including space for baseball and soccer fields, basketball courts, a community center and a fire station. To Gutierrez, who designs parks for the city of Las Cruces (some 40 miles away), this is no surprise. She has learned that while the memory of traditional plazas and *placitas* lives on, many Mexican-Americans also seek the same recreational facilities that can be found in typical "American" neighborhood parks.

This blurring of cultural borders is evident even in Salem, an outpost that is, nevertheless, on the cutting edge of Mexican-American life. The park design evokes the timeless relationship between *placitas* and Mexican community life, and it demonstrates the openness to adaption, the possibility for evolution that has enabled this type of space to endure for centuries.

— *Todd W. Bressi*





The Salem subdivision and sketch plan of the new park. Map, drawing courtesy Joni Gutierrez.

CONTRIBUTORS

Daniel D. Arreola

is a cultural geographer in the Department of Geography and the Hispanic Research Center at Arizona State University. His research interests are in urban landscapes and place identity. He is co-author of *The Mexican Border Cities: Landscape Anatomy and Place Personality*.

James R. Curtis

an associate professor in the geography department at Oklahoma State University, has co-authored books on Cuban Americans and the Mexican border cities and has contributed many articles to the professional geography literature on urban cultural landscapes.

David R. Diaz

is an environmental planner who is pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of California, Los Angeles. He obtained a Master of City and Regional Planning at the University of California, Berkeley, and is active in political, environmental and social issues in Southern California.

Lawrence A. Herzog

is a Professor of Mexican American Studies at California State University, San Diego, and has been a visiting member the Urban Studies and Planning faculty at the University of California, San Diego since 1981. An urban geographer by training, he specializes in U.S.- Mexican border cities and their design and planning problems. His most recent book is *Where North Meets South: Cities, Space and Politics on the U.S.- Mexican Border.*

Terezia Nemeth

is an urban designer with Skidmore, Owings, Merrill in San Francisco, and has worked with Lyndon/Buchanan Associates as manager for several urban design and planning projects. A native of Argentina, she holds a Master of Architecture from the University of California, Berkeley, and a master of Real Estate Development from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Monica Ponce de Leon

was born in Caracas, Venezuela. She received a Bachelor of Architecture at the University of Miami, and later a Masters of Architecture and Urban Design at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. She is currently living in Florida, where she teaches at the University of Miami and has a private practice.

James T. Rojas

is a Mexican-American, born and raised in East Los Angeles. Following college, he spent four years in the U.S. Army stationed in Europe, where he began to formulate his ideas on the enacted environment. He has masters degrees in architecture studies and city planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His thesis was "The Enacted Environment: The Creation of Place of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in East Los Angeles."

Curtis C. Roseman

is professor of geography at the University of Southern California. He has published widely on human migration and is currently involved in research and teaching on population redistribution of ethnic groups in urban and rural settings. He regularly conducts walking tours of downtown Los Angeles.

Douglas R. Suisman

is an architect and urban designer. He is the founder and principal of Public Works Design, and has been a visiting professor of urban design at the University of Minnesota and the University of California, Berkeley. He is author of *Los Angeles Boulevard.*

J. Diego Vigil

is professor of anthropology and research fellow at the Center for Multiethnic and Transnational Studies, University of Southern California. As an urban specialist, he has authored *Barrio Gangs* and *From Indians to Chicanos*, and is presently completing a monograph on high school-aged Chicanos. He is a long-time community activist in Los Angeles.

Plaza Mexicana

Douglas R. Suisman

In Los Angeles, where I live, many longtime Anglo residents regard the growing Latinization of the city as a new and foreign phenomenon. Confronted with sidewalks filled with people from places like Managua, San Salvador, Chihuahua and Monterrey, they imagine they are witnessing a cultural invasion from troubled nations to the south.

My impression of this change is different; I liken it to wildflowers pushing up through concrete. The seeds of this urban culture have been in California's soil for more than two centuries and have survived in the Americas for more than five hundred years. Compared to this longevity, the Victorian, wood-frame urbanism that the Yankees carried across the prairies seems flimsy and raw, and post-war automotive urbanism seems *arriviste*.

When I visit the old plaza and church of the Pueblo de Los Angeles and find it filled with the lively Spanish exchanges of parishioners, I realize this is not an invasion but a recolonization. The military seizure of Mexican California by the Yankees in 1848 may, a century and half later, be reversed by the sheer proliferation of these wildflower seeds breaking through the cracks of the Anglo-techno metropolis.

Clockwise from top left: Street in Oaxaca, © Douglas R. Suisman; arcade near plaza in Oaxaca, courtesy Mexican Government Tourist Board; parade in Morelia, © Douglas R. Suisman; outdoor restaurant under arcade in Morelia, courtesy Mexican Government Tourism Office.

Text © Douglas R. Suisman.





One pole of daily urban life unfolds in front of your eyes; another pole of deep historical forces is still at play. The arc connects them, sparking and then retreating like an electric heartbeat.





Regretably, few Americans make a connection between this emerging "Latinization" and Mexico's extraordinary urban culture. Mexican cities possess a grace in their architectural settings, a complexity in their social choreography and a dynamism in their interwoven public spaces that provides an exceptional richness of experience — particularly in the types of spaces that are so often exceptionally bleak in U.S. cities.

Ironically, the cities of Mexico are not so different from those north of the border. Like most early U.S. settlements, virtually all of them began as planned new towns. The plans of both U.S. and Mexican cities are generally orothogonal and open-ended, as distinct from the walled, medieval urban cores of Europe. And like our urban areas, Mexican cities today contend with the staggering growth of both human and automotive populations.

Given the similarities, why are the differences so profound? Why do Mexican social, political and family life continue to unfold gracefully under stone arcades, at sidewalk cafes and within earshot of fountains in plazas while the civic cores of so many U.S. cities continue to decline in a swirl of graffitti and litter along sidewalks emptied of people? Even as Mexico modernizes and industrializes, its cities sustain a civic apparatus of plazas, palaces and churches that acts as a virtual vortex of the nation's social and historical consciousness.

Addressing this question may help us see the Latinization of our cities not as a problem with which we must contend but as a phenomenon of which we can take advantage. To lay the groundwork for that kind of appreciation, I want to go straight to the core of the tradition: the Spanish colonial plaza as it has evolved in central Mexico, the viceregal heart of the empire. A comprehensive study would require three legs: the historic origins of plaza form, the evolution of plaza uses over five centuries, and social and physical character of plazas in contemporary Mexico. I will leave it to others to supply even the outline of the second leg. Instead, I hope that a synopsis of the plaza's formal origins combined with a descriptive assessment of contemporary plazas will create a kind of electrical arc between these two analytical poles.

Certainly even a day spent observing life in and around the central plaza of almost any Mexican city suggests a potent and continuous cultural legacy, a potency underscored by the striking similarity of forms and rituals from city to city. But the course of that legacy is not always apparent. The experience of the Mexican plaza is moving because of the intuitive, almost preternatural way in which contemporary Mexicans weave their complex collective existence around these very old and rather schematic urban armatures. It has little to do with a grand Mexican theory of urbanism.

As an old man shines the shoes of a clerk along the path of a 400-year old plaza, as three businessmen gather at a cafe table under an eighteenth-century vaulted arcade, as the *campesina* trudges her sack of peppers to a nineteenth-century municipal market, as two young men sell videocasettes from the back of a parked minivan, there is a powerful sense of simultenaiety in these material and historical forces. One pole of daily urban life unfolds in front of your eyes; another pole of deep historical forces is still at play. The arc connects them, sparking and then retreating like an electric heartbeat.



Plaza in Oaxaca. Courtesy Mexican Government Tourism Office.

The Laws of the Indies: Instrument of Colonization

Many of the historical forces that shaped Mexican cities predated the arrival of the Spanish; the Aztecs, for example, had a powerful urban planning tradition. But the specific programmatic and repetitive form of Mexican plazas is anchored in the history of Spanish colonization.

The cities of Spanish America were not only born of a momentous and violent conquest but also regarded as the very instruments that would make the conquest permanent.[1] Spanish authorities had studied the Roman technique of ruling by establishing a network of highly regulated colonial cities and concluded that their shadowy New World territories could only be held together by a similar network. Similarly, the slow process of widespread religious conversion would require religious and urban settings of great power and permanence.

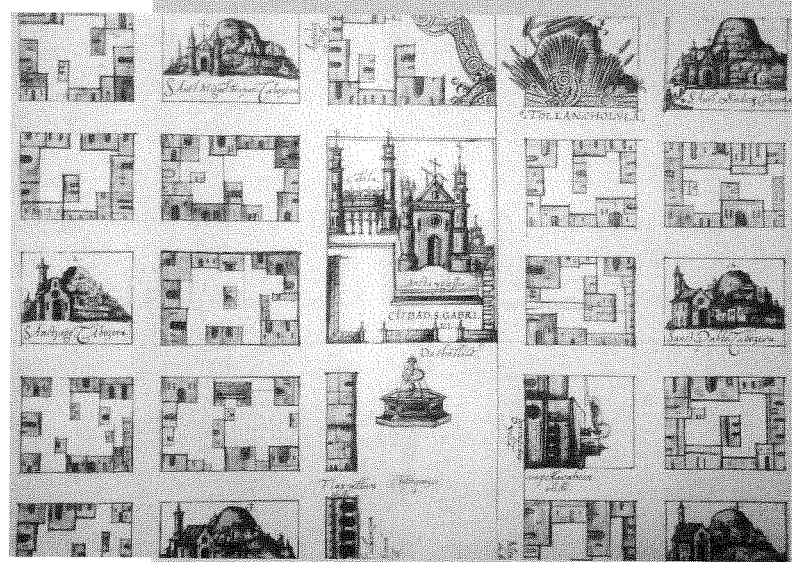
At first, decisions regarding the establishment of New World settlements were left to the *conquistadores*, who were empowered by King Ferdinand to "establish settlements in the numbers and the places that seem proper to you."[2] But as the vast scale and riches of the New World became apparent, the royal authorities decided to exert more direct control and began dispatching more instructions. As time wore on, the growing number of royal ordinances became unwieldy and in 1573 they were reorganized into a single, momentous document, *Copilación de las Leyes de Indias* (Compilation of the Laws of the Indies).

By 1580 the Spanish had established more than 220 settlements — almost all of them laid out in a fairly regular, fairly orthogonal street plan with a plaza and church at the center — as far north as the Rio Grande and as far south as Patagonia. (This colonial wingspread, more than 5,000 miles, exceeded the span of imperial Rome). For their cumulative impact on so many settlements over such a wide area, the Laws of the Indies have been called "probably the most effective planning documents in the history of mankind."[3]

The Laws of the Indies

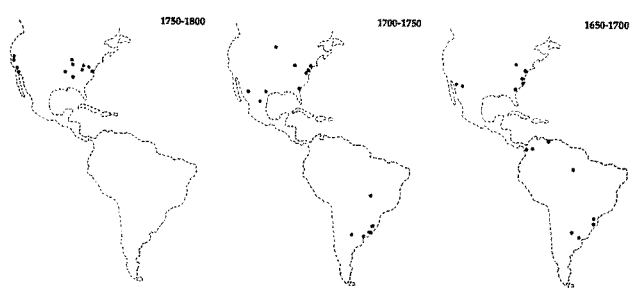
110 Having made the discovery, selected the province, county and area that is to be settled, and the site in the location where the new town is to be built, and having taken possession of it, those placed in charge of its execution are to do it in the following manner: On arriving at the place where the new settlement is to be founded, which according to our will and disposition shall be one that is vacant and that can be occupied without doing harm to the Indians and natives or with their free consent, a plan for the site is to be made, dividing it into squares, streets and building lots, using cord and ruler, beginning with the main square from which streets are to run to the gates and principal roads and leaving sufficient open space so that even if the town grows, it can always spread in the same manner. Having thus agreed upon the site and place selected to be populated, a layout should be made in the following way.

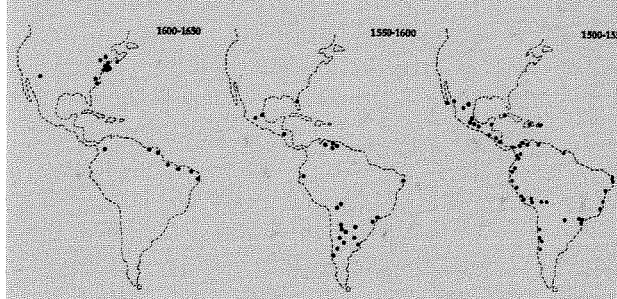
Excerpts from the Laws of the Indies were originally published in Dora P. Crouch, Daniel J. Garr and Axel I. Mundigo,* Spanish City Planning in North America *(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982). Reprinted with permission.



Cholula, 1851. Courtesy Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin, and the New York Public Library, Map Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden foundations. Photos credited to the New York Public Library are from *El Territorio Mexicano* (Mexico City: Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social, 1982) unless otherwise noted.

Location of settlements established under Spanish colonial rule. © Douglas R. Suisman.



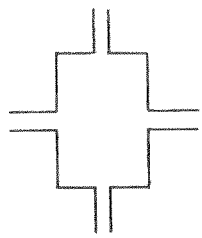


113 The size of the plaza shall be proportioned to the number of inhabitants, taking into consideration the fact that in Indian towns, inasmuch as they are new, the intention is that they will increase, and thus the plaza should be decided upon taking into consideration the growth the town may experience. [The Plaza] shall be not less than 200 feet wide and 300 feet long, nor larger than 800 feet long and 530 wide. A good proportion is 600 feet long and 400 feet wide.

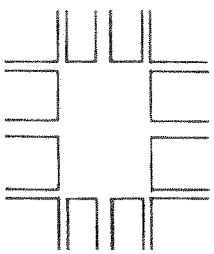
114 From the plaza shall begin four principal streets: One [shall be] from the middle of each side, and two streets from each corner of the plaza; the four corners of the plaza shall face the four principal winds, because in this manner, the streets running from the plaza will not be exposed to the four principal winds. which would cause much inconvenience.



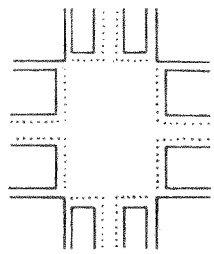
Rectangular Plaza



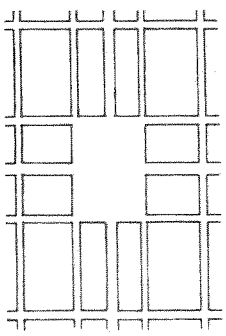
Plaza with Center Streets



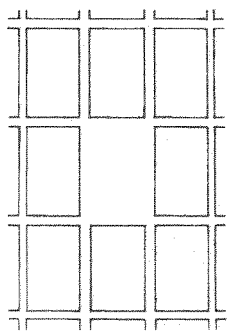
Twelve-Street Plaza



Twelve Street Plaza with Colonnade



Twelve-Street Plaza



Eight-Street Plaza

A New Urban Model: The Centrifugal Plaza Plan

The 148 ordinances addressed virtually every aspect of founding a new human settlement, from its site and layout to its social protocols and political structure. The focus here is on those ordinances concerned with the physical form of the settlement — its street plan, plazas, churches and civic buildings.

Spanish colonial cities are distinguished by a remarkable conception of dynamic centrifugality. The plaza would serve as the generative space of the entire settlement, which would be laid out from the center outward rather than from the boundaries inward. This conception was unusual and inventive since plazas in Spain (and throughout Europe) were rarely starting points of towns but rather renovations of existing urban fabric.

The pattern of streets and blocks was conceived not as a complete and delimited entity, like the ideal city plans then being formulated in Renaissance Italy, but as an open-ended projection of a fixed and precisely formulated core. The town was to be surrounded by enough open space to provide room for growth; the plaza would be connected to the periphery by a web of streets. The laws might reasonably have called for protective walls or boundaries, as in a traditional Roman castrum or the stockades of the American West. But the emphasis was on connection and growth, not confinement and protection.

It is commonly thought that the laws required that a rigid street grid serve as the basic structure of new colonial towns.[4] But the ordinances do not specifically prescribe a checkerboard or, for that matter, any other variant of a grid. Nor is there any requirement that streets or blocks must be straight, orthogonal, or regularly spaced. Rather, the ordinances established a procedure for laying out plazas, streets and blocks.

Even so, most Latin American cities are organized on grids that vary from distorted fishnets to rigid grills. If the laws did not not specify the grid, why does the form recur? Perhaps the implication of a grid was tacitly understood by surveyors. Another possible explanation is that the use of a regular grid for the imperial capital, Mexico City, in 1524 set a powerful precedent, offering a workable model that resolved the ambiguities of the ordinances.

It seems remarkable, in our age of instant transmission of images, that the colonial urbanization of Latin America was orchestrated from Europe entirely on the basis of handwritten verbal instructions. Nevertheless, the urban model verbally

Drawings © Douglas R. Suisman.

transmitted by the Laws of the Indies possessed a remarkable balance of specificity and flexibility. The centrifugal plaza plan was simple and clear enough for widespread execution, yet sufficiently open for adaption to extraordinarily diverse situations. As a result the colonial cities of Latin America, whether in the jungles of Bolivia, the coastal desert of Chile, or the temperate highlands of Mexico, bear an unmistakable resemblance.

The Eight-Street Plaza

The laws required that plazas be rectangular, with a 2:3 ratio recommmended. The plaza was to be the starting point for twelve streets: At the center of each side, a principal street was to begin (creating a "single-cross" pattern), and at each corner, two secondary streets were to begin.

This twelve-street model, however, was rarely employed. In most cases, the principal streets of Latin American cities leave plazas from the corners rather than the sides, resulting in an eight-street pattern. Streets that leave from the center of a plaza's side are usually minor streets or through-block arcades, extending only a short distance from the plaza. The twelve-street model described in the laws may have been viewed as too elaborate for most settlements, and it may have been beyond the rudimentary surveying skills available at remote settlement sites.

Consequently, plazas are primarily entered and exited at the corners rather than along central axes, which fundamentally transforms the way they are seen and experienced. It also undermines the hierarchy of major and minor streets and creates a "double-cross" of parallel and perpendicular primary streets that pass along the edges of the plaza. Which streets emerge as the more important usually has been determined by factors away from the plaza, such as the presence of another important plaza or church, rather than by the geometry of the plan itself.

Mapa y Plan Orisontal que manifesta la Villa de Leon. Courtesy Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin, and the New York Public Library, Map Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden foundations.





Churches and Civic Buildings

The laws concerning the precise location of the principal church and its volumetric relationship to the plaza are vague, but they embody two concerns — protecting the space of the plaza and establishing the church's visual dominance — that establish a formal tension not addressed by the laws.

The laws state that "the church [shall] not be placed on the plaza, but at a distance" (notwithstanding the the common conception that the main church must be next to the plaza) — an instruction seemingly aimed at protecting the open space of the plaza while leaving some discretion as to the church's exact placement. The same ordinance also says the church "shall be separated from any other nearby building . . . and somewhat raised from ground level." This is a clear mandate for the development of a church type that works as a freestanding object, visible "from all sides so it can be better decorated, thus acquiring more authority."



Should the figural space of the plaza dominate, with the church contributing one of its sides? Or should the church dominate the plaza, disengaged from all surrounding buildings like a monumental object? Most central plazas in Latin America manifest the struggle to resolve these competing imperatives, with the result that the church's legibility as object or edge often changes from one vantage point to another.

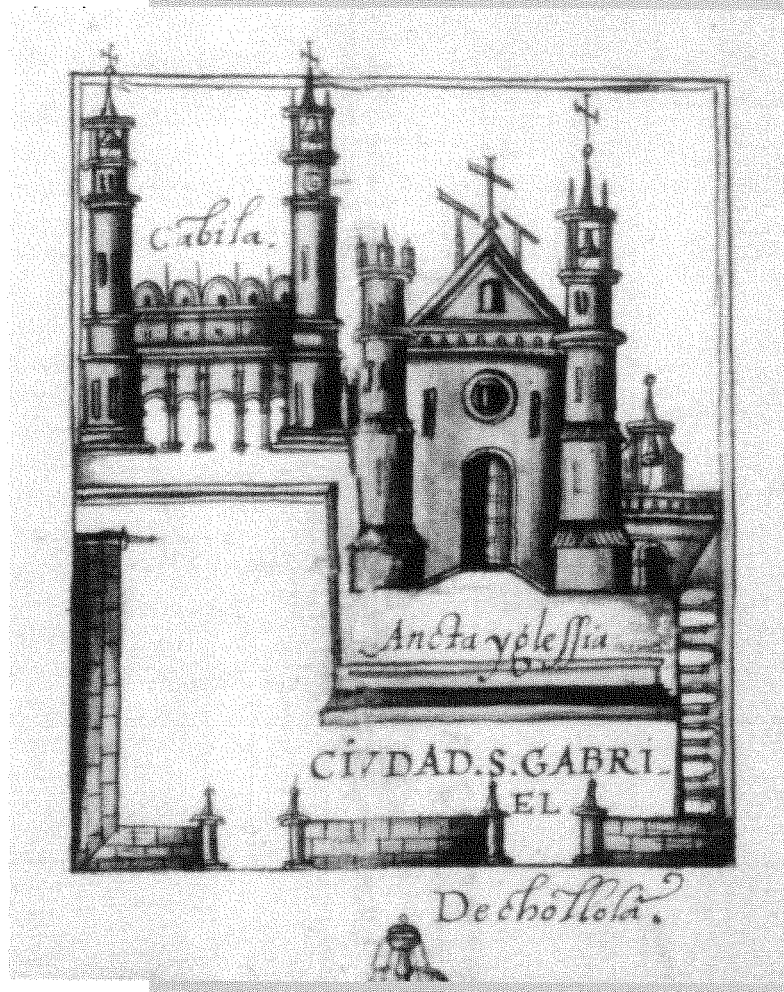
The ordinances concerning the location and expression of the civic buildings are less complex, requiring only that buildings to house the council and *cabildo* should be next to the plaza. The civic buildings are assigned neither a precise location around the plaza nor any particular architectural expression. In general, they have emerged as courtyard buildings whose surfaces define the plaza's edge.

The relationship of the principal church to municipal buildings is often competitive. While the architectural scale, massing and elaboration of the church usually make it the dominant element, the location of the municipal palace may challenge that primacy. In Lima and Vera Cruz, the *palacios* stand between the plaza and the waterfront, giving them a prominence that renders the church secondary by comparison. In Mexico City, the cathedral and National Palace occupy adjacent sides of the plaza, giving strong emphasis to the church but a close second to the palace.

The complex and often tempestuous relationship of the Mexican government and the Catholic church is played out on the stages of the nation's principal plazas in a kind of choreography of spatial domination. In Guadalajara, the cathedral has been subjected to a monumental project of "disengagement" from its surroundings; it now stands at the intersection of an enormous spatial cross consisting of three small plazas at the head and sides and an elongated plaza below. The various government palaces are clearly secondary.

119 For the temple of the principal church, parish, or monastery, there shall be assigned specific lots; the first after the streets and plazas have been laid out, and these shall be a complete block so as to avoid having other buildings nearby, unless it were for practical or ornamental reasons.

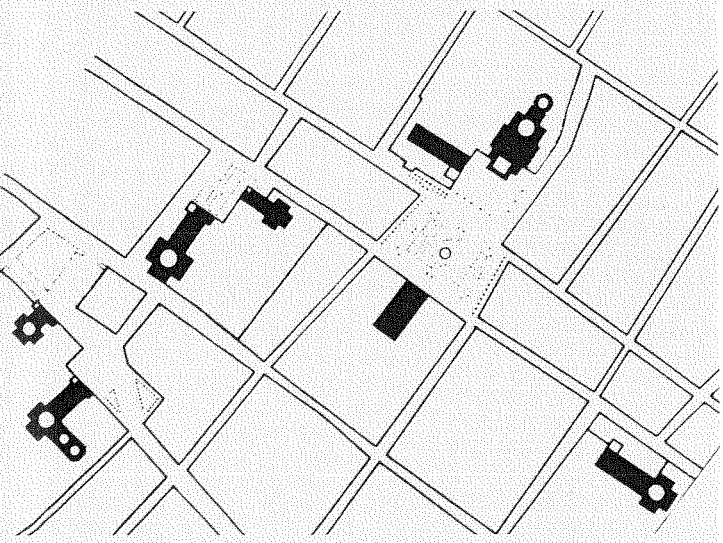
120 The temple of the cathedral [principal church] where the town is situated on the coast shall be built in part so that it may be seen on going out to sea and in a place where its buildings may serve as a means of defense for the port itself.



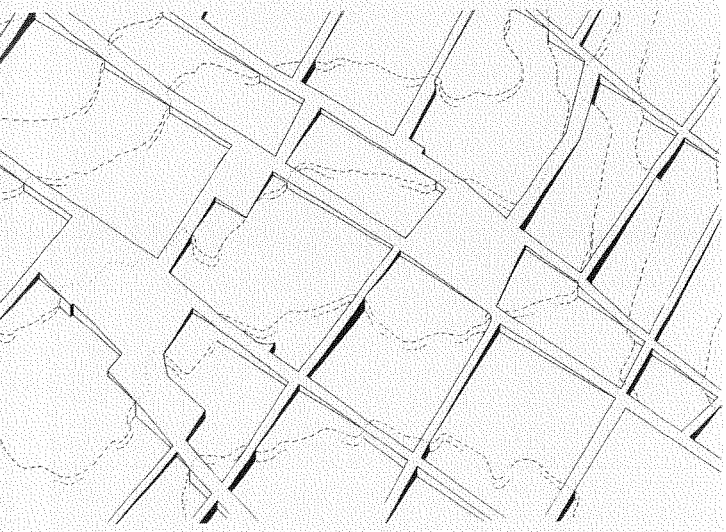
121 Next, a site and lot shall be assigned for the royal council and *cabildo* house and for the custom house and arsenal, near the temple, located in such a manner that in times of need the one may aid the other; the hospital for the poor and those sick of noncontagious diseases shall be built near the temple and its cloister; and the hospital for those with contagious diseases shall be built in such a way that no harmful wind blowing through it may cause harm to the rest of the town. If the latter be built in an elevated place, so much the better.

Opposite page, top: Morelia, © Douglas R. Suisman. Opposite page, bottom, plaza and cathedral in Guadalajara, courtesy Mexican Government Tourism Office. Above: Detail from map of Cholula, 1851. Courtesy Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin, and the New York Public Library, Map Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden foundations.

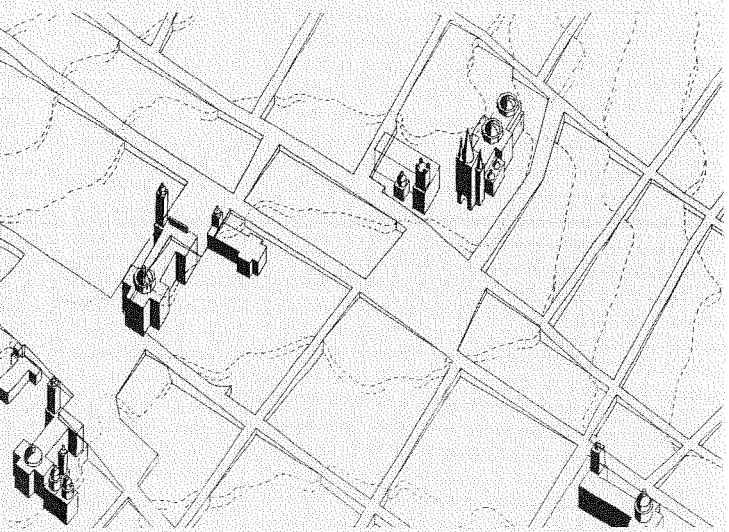
Central Morelia, plan view.



Central Morelia, axonometric view of topography.



Central Morelia, axonometric view of topography, including tower buildings.



Drawings © Douglas R. Suisman.

The Missing Dimension: Towers and Domes

The laws contained few clues as to the character of the architectural manifestations of its urban model, either in terms of building height, volumetric relationships, or visual connections. They provided only that buildings should be "all of one type, for the sake of the beauty of the town."

In this respect the laws implicitly acknowledged that there is an operational gap between planning and urban design. One can trace a grid on the bare ground almost anywhere, but the resulting architectural expression will vary significantly depending on local conditions. Furthermore, even if Spanish authorities had wished to address this issue, they would have had very little experience from which to draw. Plazas of contemporaneous Spanish cities were usually little more than dusty intersections of major roads; they were rarely located in the geometrical center of the city or graced by its primary church.[5] So the specific formal resolution of the urban framework established by the laws had to be worked out on an experimental basis in the field.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, two architectural elements that were never mentioned in the laws began to appear in Mexican cities. Both were related to the construction of churches: the tower, imbedded into the front corner of the church; and the dome, surmounting the crossing of the nave and transept. Because of their height, plasticity and distinctive silhouettes, these two forms provided an unforgettable spatial correspondent to the grid-and-plaza plan.

Under the religious edict known as the Constitutions of Barcelona, church towers had been outlawed because they were viewed as extravagant. But in the Spanish tradition of *obedezco pero no cumplo* ("I obey but I don't comply"), towers were soon found all over New Spain.[6] One reason may have been the impulse to fortify churches, with towers providing protection. Another reason may have been the need to hang bells for calling congregations to prayer; by 1526 a foundry was turning out bells in Mexico City and it seems no town felt municipally complete without them. The simple, and ecclesiastically legal, method of supporting them was by raising the church gable above the roofline and piercing an arched opening for each bell, an arrangement known as an *espadaña*.

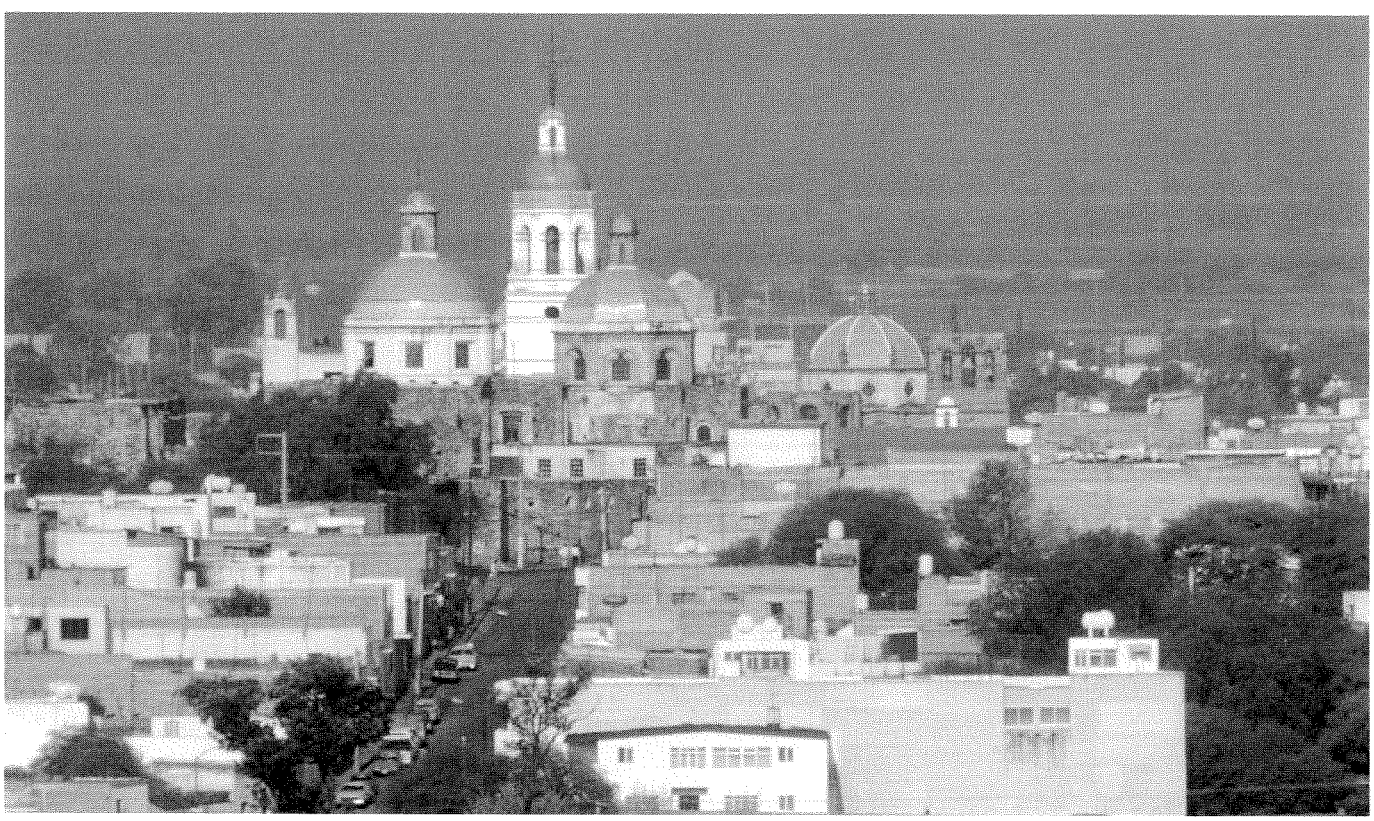
But the *espadaña* only slightly increased a church's visibility, an issue that became increasingly important as rivalries between monastic orders increased. Since the grid plan virtually precluded a frontal approach to any church other than the one next to the main plaza, the majority of secondary churches were located at intersections, where they were more readily visible to pedestrians. Naturally, this visibility could be made

more commanding if the corner were articulated as an ecumenical skyscraper. Thus the most characteristic church massing in Mexico is not symmetrical towers flanking the entrance, but a single tower hugging the corners of the grid.

Mexico's infatuation with domes, it has been argued, was unleased by the seventeenth-century emergence of the Baroque in Europe.[7] The reductive mentality of colonial culture led to the proliferation of a single type, the hemispherical dome resting on an octagonal base, rather than an explosion of formal variety.[8] Within this narrow expressive range, however, domes began to develop a mimetic relationship to the nearby towers. The upper levels of square-plan towers often became octagonal to serve as the base for miniature domes; while the major domes were frequently surmounted by cupolas that resembled miniature belltowers. The result is a characteristic Mexican colonial skyline with a flickering, almost festive quality. In many cities it achieves in spatial terms some of the exuberance usually reserved in Mexican culture for the ornamentation of two-dimensional surfaces.



Right: Morelia's main street, © Douglas R. Suisman. Below: Queretaro, Courtesy Mexican Government Tourism Office.



Morelia: The Plaza as Formal Network

Here, then, was a kit of parts for making civic space in colonial territories: street, block, gate, plaza, arcade, church, palace, market, tower, dome. This prescriptive method of town planning remained virtually unchallenged for three centuries. Although political stability eroded in late 1700s and the forces of industrialization came into play soon after, the cities of Spanish America could absorb these changes by expanding the urban pattern.

Only the overwhelming forces of international Americanism, decentralization and the automobile have managed to threaten the basic relationships established by the colonial kit of parts. Change has come more slowly to Mexico than to the U.S., but it is visible and more is on the horizon (the effects of a North American Free Trade Agreement, for example). Nonetheless, the tradition of Spanish colonial space-making is alive in Mexico today. Two case studies can illustrate not only the richness and variety of the centrifugal plaza plan, but also its durability as a formal structure and a cultural setting.

Morelia sits in relative isolation amid pine forests and volcanic mountains some 150 miles west of Mexico City. The state capital of Michoacan, it has many government workers, a large university population and nearly half a million residents. It is somewhat cut off from the country's major industrial and shipping corridors, and its character is conservative, handsome, provincial and dignified.

Morelia demonstrates the capacity of the centrifugal plaza plan to generate a dynamic linear orientation. In plan, the city's street grid appears nearly perfect, with regular blocks and an archetypal plaza-and-cathedral structure in the center. What is not apparent from the plan is that the grid lays over a gentle, north-south ridge, and that the ridgeline is occupied by Morelia's main street, which also passes along one edge of the plaza.

Over time, the historic core has oriented itself toward the street. The cathedral originally faced the central plaza but was later reoriented to face the main street. A second plaza was created to the south of the original plaza, thereby reinforcing through symmetry the principal axis of the church and lending greater weight to the street. The state capitol was located across the street from the cathedral, not across the plaza from it. Along the main street, opposite the cathedral, are the city's most popular cafes, where people of all classes and professions gather.

This balance towards the linear dynamism of a main street rather than the more static centrality of a plaza reverberates throughout the core. Twelve streets radiate from the space around the cathedral (although not in the manner prescribed



Morelia's plazas, cathedral and main street. Courtesy Mexican Government Tourism Office.

by the Laws of the Indies), and they encounter at least five other religious complexes within two or three blocks. Almost all of these secondary churches and plazas (one of which serves as a market) are visually connected with glimpses of towers, domes, or portals. In other words, Morelia is a magnificent example of the capacity of an uninflected grid to evolve into a circuit of connected public spaces.

While the cathedral area is clearly the focus, there is a feeling of activity and connection throughout the core. Most people still buy their food at one of several neighborhood public markets. Churchgoers spill into the plazas after services. University students sit on fountains and talk between classes. Businessmen and politicians read newspapers while having their shoes shined in the public garden.

The city's natural conservatism, due in part to its isolation and its rich cultural history, has resulted in a strong sense of historic preservation. The built fabric is extremely well documented, and new buildings must be sympathetic to the older colonial structures (preferably by using the favored local stone, which has a distinctive rose hue). Within this beautiful and carefully preserved setting, Morelia's public life unfolds.

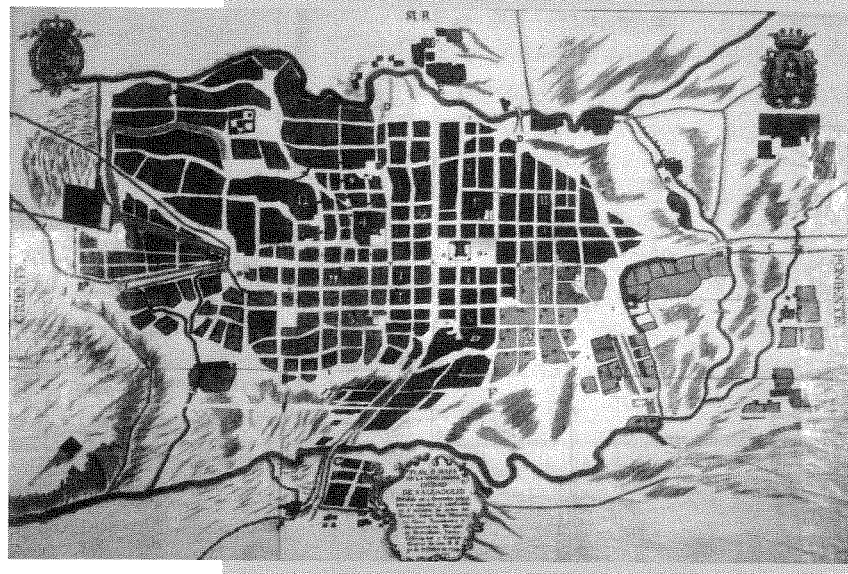
In recent years, the influence of American suburbanism has been felt. Some wealthier residents are leaving their single-story patio houses in the historic core for new, freestanding houses in gated compounds. This new housing on the outskirts is accompanied by a modern shopping mall, complete with department store and supermarket. A peripheral roadway, while hardly a California freeway, handles heavy traffic at high speeds with little concession to pedestrians. Clearly, these newer districts are geared towards owning an automobile.

Morelia also has seen an influx of professionals from Mexico City, seeking refuge from the traffic and environmental oppression of the capital. They bring a cosmopolitanism that may influence the pace of Morelia's social rituals and their locus in the historic core. For example, the state symphony hall is located in a freestanding cultural complex well outside the center, surrounded by a large parking lot. This setting makes the central plaza seem quaint and raises questions as to how well and how long the historic formal and social structure can withstand the constant televised pounding of "foreign" culture, from elsewhere in Mexico and abroad.

116 In cold places the streets shall be wide and in hot places narrow; but for purposes of defense in areas where there are horses, it would be better if they are wide.

117 The streets shall run from the main plaza in such manner that even if the town increases considerably in size, it will not result in some inconvenience that will make ugly what needed to be rebuilt, or endanger its defense or comfort.

118 Here and there in the town, smaller plazas of good proportion shall be laid out, where the temples associated with the principal church, the parish churches, and the monasteries can be built, [in] such [manner] that everything may be distributed in a good proportion for the instruction of religion.



Plan, O Mapa de la Nobilissima Ciudad de Valladolid [Morelia], 1794. Archivo General de la Nacion, Mexico. Courtesy New York Public Library, Map Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden foundations.

126 In the plaza, no lots shall be assigned to private individuals; instead, they shall be used for the buildings of the church and royal houses and for city use, but shops and houses for the merchants should be built first, to which all the settlers of the town shall contribute, and a moderate tax shall be imposed on goods so that these buildings may be built.

129 Within the town, a commons shall be delimited, large enough that although the population may experience a rapid expansion, there will always be sufficient space where the people may go to for recreation and take their cattle to pasture without them making any damage.

133 They shall arrange the building lots and edifices placed thereon in such a manner that when living in them they may enjoy the winds of the south and north as these are the best; throughout the town arrange the structures of the houses generally in such a way that they may serve as defense or barrier against those who may try to disturb or invade the town, and each house in particular shall be so built that they may keep therein their horses and work animals and shall have yards and corrals as large as possible for health and cleanliness.

134 They shall try as far as possible to have the buildings all of one type for the sake of the beauty of the town.



Oaxaca 1848 de Order del Exmo. Sr. Gobernador D. Benito Juarez. Courtesy Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin, and the New York Public Library, Map Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden foundations.

Oaxaca: The Plaza as Geographic and Social Landscape

Unlike Morelia, which is located on a ridge, Oaxaca sits on the lower slopes of a broad valley. While it rarely offers dramatic views of the valley floor, its uphill street views often terminate in the green, upland pastures of the valley wall.

These views are tepid compared to the dramatic views from Monte Alban, the famous pre-Columbian site that sits on a flattened hilltop in the center of the valley. Indeed, from the central plaza of Oaxaca, on its relatively level site and with its enormous trees, one is noticeably cut off from any visual connection to the larger landscape.

Oaxaca's real connection to its site is not the views one has of the surrounding landscape. Rather, it is through a kind of an urban respiration that reflects the location's benign climate. There is a fluidity of movement at all scales that results from the clear hierarchy of spaces and the unimpeded connections between them.

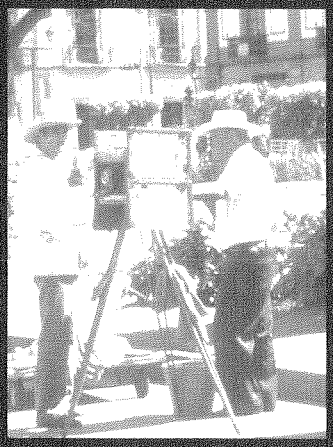
The valley acts as a big room with the hills as its walls. The streets of the city act as the connectors from the valley to the large, urban room of the plaza, whose walls are the surrounding blocks of buildings and their open *portales*. The *portales*, in turn, give way to courtyards, smaller outdoor rooms whose walls are the buildings themselves. Finally, the courtyard, by means of arcades, *portales*, verandas and terraces, give on to the few truly interior rooms. The rooms are, in effect, the city's cells, and are used mainly at night. Togther, the valley, plaza, portales, courtyard and rooms comprise a fractal spatial organization, with each scale containing within it the structure of the next.

This relationship of rooms within rooms and the effortless means of transition between them constitutes a spatial language that is based on both a fluid pattern of urban activity and a climate that permits a weaving of indoors and outdoors. Along with this weaving comes a sense of spatial modulation, a gradation from the enclosed to the exposed, with rich variety and subtle transitions.

The purpose of doors is quite ambiguous and often has less to do with providing thermal enclosure than with establishing a social threshhold. Many exterior doors and gates open onto other outdoor spaces, while the "roof" may be a canopy of trees; the most spectacular of these spaces is the plaza itself.

This weaving characteristic extends even to the use of color. There is a chromatic sympathy between the way Oaxacans live and the city's architecture: The people have a love of color, which can be found in the fruit and flowers, and in fabrics,













Top: Plaza in San Luis Potosi.
Other photos from Morelia,
Oaxaca and San Luis Potosi.
Photos © Douglas R. Suisman.

ceramics and walls. There seems to be a flow of consciousness regarding ornamental surfaces, from embroidered dresses to the carved facades of churches.

The fluidity that is built into the architecture is reinforced at the urban scale by the system of streets and plazas, which encourages continuous movement and connection. There are, for example, almost no culs-de-sac in this indoor-outdoor continuum (with the notable exceptions of the church altar and the cemetery). The city itself fingers into the landscape without the transition of city walls or city gates.

More than in Morelia, with its balanced focus on street and plaza, the public life of Oaxaca spins around the main plaza in pinwheel formation. But the character of that public life has changed in recent years. For generations, the plaza had been the exclusive domain of the ruling elite. Farmers, vendors and workers were permitted to pass through or sell their wares at the market, but the government buildings and the *portales* were reserved for the *grandees*. The city's relative isolation meant that foreigners were few in number and did not tip the prevailing social order.

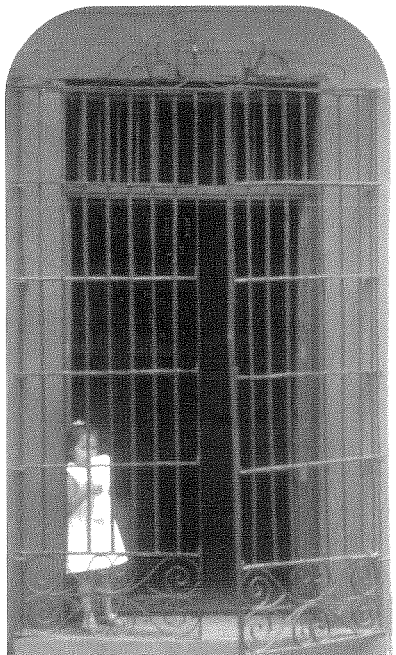
In the 1960s, Oaxaca became an important destination for the hippie movement. Young people, mostly from the U.S. and Canada, found that Oaxaca, with its temperate climate, slow pace, rich culture and isolation from mainstream tourism, was an ideal hangout, with the central plaza serving as ground zero.

The arrival of the young foreigners precipitated a major change in the social geography of the plaza. Innocently ignorant of the prevailing social segregation, they took over the *portales*, the gardens and the cafes. Imbued with populist and leftist ideology, the visitors had a natural sympathy for the workers and *campesinos*, to the point of emulating their dress of simple white cotton clothing and leather sandals. It must have been bewildering to conservative, hierarchical Oaxacans to observe this invasion by tall, long-haired, relatively affluent Anglos dressed like Mexican peasants. The effect of this latter-day "conquest" was, in effect, the social liberation of the plaza. All the residents of the city and the countryside began to view the plaza as their own.

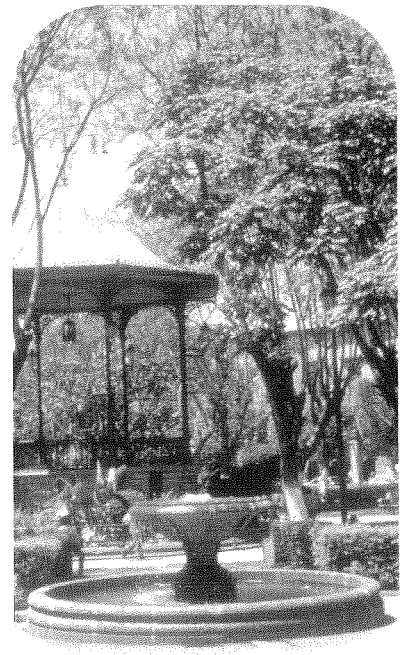
Today the plaza has become a destination for family outings. On Saturdays and Sundays, it has the atmosphere of a festival. Early in the morning, the balloon and toy vendors arrive and set up their wares. The elite families now limit their presence on the plaza to Sunday afternoons, following their attendance en masse at the noon Sunday mass in the cathedral. They move into a single cafe at the northwest corner, reinforcing their class identity and reclaiming for a short period their dominating presence around the plaza.

The atmosphere in the plaza is one of extraordinary laissez-faire. There is little police presence; the plaza is self-policed: People behave well; they sit quietly, passively. Children, however, may run and scream. Throughout Mexico, it seems, there is an extreme love of children and a tolerance for their wildness through a certain age.

The children are street smart. They sit on walls and stand at streetcorners after school, in their crisp green uniforms. They're at home in public space. The city really is their playground, their backyard. Home provides a bedroom, a kitchen and dining room, maybe even a place to watch television. But the living room seems to be, for many people, the city.







Tides Across the Border

The creation of a hemisphere of cities for the purposes of empire has yielded, after half a millenium, an urban culture of remarkable power, durability, complexity and grace. But for so many Americans, this culture is seen in the periphery of our vision if it is noticed at all. Few of us have experienced Latino urbanism in operation on its home turf in Zacatecas or Arequipa or Cordoba, which means we barely recognize it when it shows up on our own streets. Greater familiarity with the sources of this urbanism in places like Morelia and Oaxaca (themselves shaped through the merger, albeit violent, of two cultures) would open our consciousness to new possibilities, new ways of imagining the American city.

When a Cuban-American businessman takes espresso in a parking lot along Calle Ocho in Miami, or when a woman from central Mexico carves mango into a floral sculpture on top of a little cart along Broadway in Los Angeles, their embrace of urban public space echoes with the rituals of the Latino New World. The crossing of Latino and (let us call it) Anglo urbanism produces riptides and a rich intertidal zone in which hybrid forms of urban occupation emerge.

The structures and rituals of the Spanish colonial settlements in Latin America can hardly be expected to reverse the deterioration of our cities. But they offer a bracing contrast to the articles of faith — functional segregation, retail agglomeration, suburban privacy and the automobile — that underlie the ongoing crisis of our cities. They remind us that the life and design of cities are still rooted in the most ordinary places, the most simple gestures — the basics of being human in a street, a park, or a plaza.

Notes

1. Leonardo Benevolo, *The Architecture of the Renaissance* (London: Westview, 1978). I am deeply indebted to Professor Benevolo who, during his visit to Columbia University in 1981, provided the inspiration, insight and encouragement for this research.

2. Dora P. Crouch, Daniel J. Garr and Axel I. Mundigo, *Spanish City Planning in North America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982). I also am very much indebted to Professor Crouch, who permitted me to review her work while it was still in manuscript form, and who made helpful suggestions on the direction of my own work.

3. John Reps, *The Making of Urban America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965). Despite their significance, the laws were not translated into English (by Celia Nuttall) until 1921. This may partly explain the generally dim awareness of this urban legacy in the United States. In 1976 Crouch, Garr and Mundigo produced a new translation that corrected many flaws in the Nuttall version.

4. As an example of different views on whether the grid was predetermined, Ervyn Galantay, in his *New Towns: Antiquity to Present* (New York: Braziller, 1975), asserts that the laws prescribed a "regular checkerboard" and a "nine-square plan."

5. George M. Foster, *Culture and Conquest: America's Spanish Heritage* (New York: 1960).

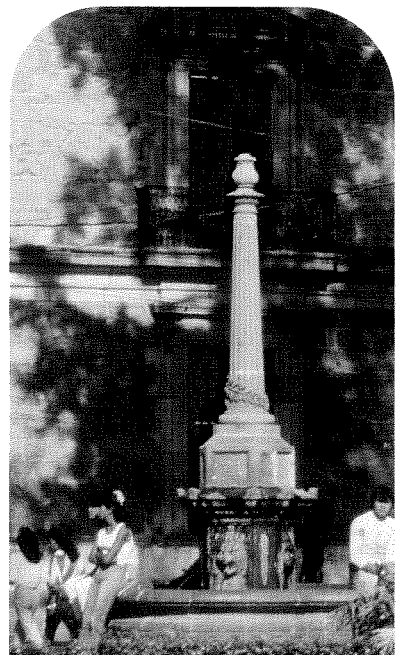
6. John McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

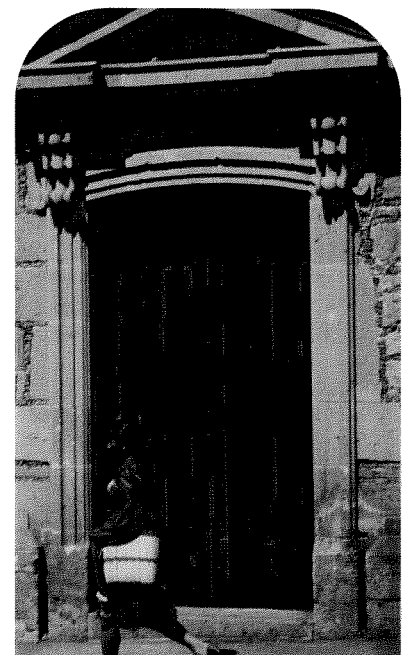
7. Graziano Gasparini, "The Present Significance of the Architecture of the Past," in Roberto Segre (ed.), *Latin America in its Architecture* (New York: 1981).

8. Gasparini.

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Appropriation

For decades we have been told that we must come to grips with the changes in our culture brought about by evolving technology. Automobiles, jet travel, domestic appliances, telephones, television, fax machines and the continuing evolution of computing have all left their traces in our lifestyles, thought patterns and values, as well as in the concentrations of power that determine how we express our place in the world.

These changes touch the lives of all of us. Through the unfamiliar juxtapositions they foster we become aware of still another set of forces that lie deeper in the human psyche and are linked to social structure. Divergent aspirations and habits of mind carried forward from the past by traditions of differing ethnic groups and religions or spawned by generations of economic deprivation and strife have led to a multiplicity of cultures, seeking at once to find their way in the present and to forge their place in the future.

The dark, fearsome side of this presents itself to us every day: remotely in news reports of virtually incomprehensible brutality among peoples who, though neighbors, define themselves differently; directly in the degradation, violence and neglect that plague the workings of our society.

The protean, creative side of these diversities expresses itself in the glimmering vitality of many changing neighborhoods, the intricate resourceful-

ness of people with minimal means and expansive spirits, the energizing fusion of memories and wishes that can give new form to community.

We examine in this issue of *Places* what Guest Editor Douglas R. Suisman, who initiated this project, refers to as "the other American tradition" — patterns of urban organization rooted in Latin America, including the implanted forms that were mandated by Spain in the Law of the Indies, then adapted and transformed by evolving local interests and economic circumstances — by the lived experience of a people in transition.

Comparable transformations are taking place now as people of diverse origins take a greater role in shaping the future of North American cities, appropriating segments of the urban fabric according to their own interests and resources, challenging conventional expectations of urban form and practice. Designing places that can effectively accommodate demographic and cultural change calls for a new kind of listening and observing, a wider range of knowledge about formal precedents, their significance and their potential to inform new work, and an ability to anticipate forms that have both resilience and flexibility, allowing the continuing investment of imagination and invention by their users.

The real test of our abilities to care for places will be our ability to extract creative and productive energies from these necessary disparities of background and expectation, to forge a positive future through spirited appropriation of the many pasts in our present.

— *Donlyn Lyndon*

Background: Mexico City, 1628. Juan Gomez de Trasmonte. Courtesy Museum of Mexico City. Inset and cover: San Andres Chalchicomula Pueblo, Mexico, 1764-5. Ventura de Arze y Castilla. Courtesy National General Archives, Mexico. Both images courtesy the New York Public Library, Map Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

