Livia Corona Benjamin

From the Series Two Million Homes for Mexico (2006–present)

In 2000, Mexican presidential candidate Vicente Fox Quesada proposed an unprecedented plan to build two million low-income homes throughout the country during his six year term. On the eve of his election, Fox proclaimed, "My presidency will be remembered as the era of public housing." To enact this initiative, the federal government agency INFONAVIT ceded the construction of low-income housing to a small group of private real estate investors. Then, almost overnight, grids 20 to 80,000 identical homes sprouted up, and they continue to spread in remote agrarian territory throughout the country. To encounter these developments by land, by air, or even via satellite imagery, evokes a rare sensation. These are not the neighborhoods of a "Home Sweet Home" dream fulfilled, but are ubiquitous grids of ecological and social intervention on a scale and of consequences that are difficult to grasp. In these places, urbanization is reduced to the mere construction of housing. There are nearly no public amenities—such as schools, parks, and transportation systems. There are few commercial structures—such as banks and grocery stores. Yet demand for these low-income homes continues to increase and developers continue to provide them with extreme efficiency. During Fox's six-year presidency, 2,350,000 homes were built, at a rate of 2,500 homes per day, and this trend is set to continue.

French Pastry, Ixtapaluca, Edo. Mex., 2008

Living Room to Bedroom Conversion, Mérida, 2011

Livia Corona Benjamin

... Two Million Homes for Mexico (2006–)

Day Worker at Home Expansion Site, Cancún, 2010

Moving in, Zumpango , 2009

... Two Million Homes for Mexico (2006–)

Progressive Development, Los Héroes, Puebla, 2008

Homeowner Activism Center, Cuatro Vientos, Edo. Mex., 2011

Livia Corona Benjamin

47,547 Homes for Mexico, Ixtapaluca, 2007

Raymond B. Craib

Mexico City Modern: A Review Essay

"Overcrowded, polluted, corrupted, Mexico City offers the world a grim lesson."[1] Thus proclaimed Time **Magazine in 1984. Never mind that it could just as easily have been describing any number of cities in the world, including a number of metropolises in the US, as Mike Davis's indictment of Los Angeles** (City of Quartz) **showed six years later. But Mexico City—in theory so close to the US, so far from modernity—was much easier fodder for the progenitors of predictable caricatures of elsewhere.[2] Recent media obsessions with narco-trafficking and its attendant violence are only the latest instantiation of a long tradition of casting Mexico as a lawless, corrupt, and failed state. Meanwhile, the US State Department warns travelers away from Mexico (the entire country!) even as the body count in the US from gun violence—merely random, unpredictable, scattershot, apolitical, and utterly routine—grows at a steady clip.[3]**

Projections and predictions such as those articulated by Time **are nothing new, as Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo shows in** I Speak of the City. **At a hefty 500 pages, Tenorio-Trillo's book offers a vision of the city's history not found in most travel guides, popular journalism, or history books. It is reminiscent at times of Jamaica Kincaid's** A Small Place**, although less polemical in tone and more elliptical in style, in its efforts to force readers out of clichéd visions of authenticity, paradise, or hell—and radical (often racialized) otherness. Or, in this case, "**fiesta, siesta, sombrero, pistola **and** Frida Kahlo**."[4] One suspects, by sheer virtue of its prominent absence in the text, that revolution is also part of that canon for Tenorio-Trillo. Mexico's social revolution of 1910-1920 has cast a long shadow over the country's twentieth century history and historiography. Invocations and images of the agrarian leader Emiliano Zapata, the social bandit Pancho Villa, and a landscape of peasants and** pueblos **dominate the historiography, overwhelming the radical Flores Magón brothers, industrial workers, urban anarchists, and Mexico City itself. This is a revolution defined by pueblos and peasants rather than cities and communists—for compelling reasons, as Alan Knight has demonstrated in his two-volume magnum opus.[5]**

Mexico City was not, of course, removed from the revolution: pitched battles unfolded in its streets, plots were hatched behind its closed doors, varied armies occupied its plazas, its hillsides, and its Sanborns.[6] But Tenorio-Trillo is interested in Mexico City not as a site of revolutionary history but as a capital of modernity. The revolution perhaps serves up too many visions of peasants and pistols which, along with tropicality and indigeneity, caciques **and** calaveras**, have long haunted the pages devoted to Mexico's history.[7] Thus, for Tenorio-Trillo 1910 is a date notable less for the purported "start" of the revolution than for the celebrations of the** centenario **in Mexico City, which marked the 100th anniversary of the rebellions that would culminate in Mexican independence from Spanish rule. And 1919 is notable less for the purported end of the armed phase of the revolution than for the moment of its intellectual and political commodification, when an array of radicals and intellectuals from other shores arrived in Mexico City's central streets seeking a location in which "to** safely **try out all sorts of enchantments and disenchantments." In the process they helped create a Mexico "frozen as a modern metaphor of atemporal race, endless community, and redemptory violence," or what Tenorio-Trillo calls the "Brown Atlantis."[8] The revolution, then, is very present—just not as the self-contained, agrarian, peasant rebellion it would come to**

be codified as; instead, the revolution appears as part of a broader, global epoch of crisis and social change, of protest and hunger, of labour strife and political agitation: "it was the same in Philadelphia as in Buenos Aires, in Mexico City as in Barcelona, in Berlin as in Delhi."[9]

The comparisons are purposeful. Tenorio-Trillo constantly pulls the reader toward comparisons that most histories avoid. And this is precisely the point. Thus, in an early chapter he compares and contrasts Mexico City and Washington DC. The two capital cities have more in common than the dominant historiographical prejudices would lead one to believe (the standard comparisons, predictably enough, are between Mexico City and Paris, or between Mexico City and itself), and he observes that in fact "the aristocratic Spain that created Mexico City" also shaped "the plans for the US capital." The point is made in various ways repeatedly throughout the text in order to emphasize that "Mexico City has been so much a part of the making of the modern that examining it is but another way to inhabit what is known as the modern world."[10] Why is it, then, that questions of authenticity and imitation can be asked of Mexico City with such ease but not of Paris or London or, yes, even Washington DC? Can Mexico City be cosmopolitan without being imitative? In a rich chapter on Mexico City interiors, Tenorio-Trillo writes that "all late nineteenth-century interiors, whether in Paris, New York, Buenos Aires, or Mexico City" were imitative "and could not be otherwise."[11] It will no longer do to continually replicate diffusionist arguments that situate points of origin in Paris, London, and New York when in fact the very notion of "diffusion" itself, as well as "authenticity" and "imitation," are part of an unequal geo-politics of the commodity form. The peripheral is real, inasmuch as it becomes a category that real people are forced to really inhabit, but this should hardly be justification for reproducing binaries of centre and periphery as if they were essential. Indeed, the dilemmas of authenticity, of "importation" or mimicry, are "nothing more than the unsolvable problems faced everywhere by anyone attempting to speak, write, paint, or otherwise express culture."[12]

Tenorio-Trillo's study ends around 1940, the beginning of a period that would see enormous transformations in Mexico City. The city grew at a remarkable pace, swelling rapidly with the influx of rural migrants and international refugees, fuelled by an industrial boom and government-led development. Its population doubled in size between the 1940s and 1960s as Mexico itself went from a country of largely rural cultivators to mostly urban inhabitants. Industry blossomed at a steady pace, as did the economy with an average six percent annual GDP growth rate—known as the Mexican Miracle—in the middle decades of the century. This was Mexico's so-called "Golden Age." As Mexico City grew, so did its middle classes. By 1970, somewhere between a quarter and a third of Mexico's population was middle class—an amorphous multitude of lawyers and doctors, white-collar and intellectual workers, bureaucrats and merchants, supervisors and technical workers, their numbers spurred on by a growing population of university students who studied at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), housed on a sprawling campus in the south of the city suitably named "University City."[13]

Mexico's glory appeared to be confirmed when it was granted the onerous honour of hosting the 1968 Olympic Games, which appeared on the horizon just as economic growth began to slow and social inequalities started expanding. Confronted with the visual evidence of capricious expenditures and an emerging urban and social crisis, protests mounted. Dissent and strikes were not unheard of in the 1950s—most prominently by railroad and education workers—but the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI) hegemonic bubble really burst in October 1968 with the violent assault on protestors in Mexico City's Tlatelolco Plaza, days before the Olympic Games opening ceremonies.[14] By the early 1970s the ruling party had incurred the ire of more than students and radicals. President Luis Echevarría's leftist rhetoric, combined with increased economic uncertainty, drew sharp responses from private industrialists and businessmen. If in the 1960s Mexico had appeared poised to make the jump to "first-world" status, the 1970s were, as Louise Walker shows in vivid detail in Waking from the Dream, a cold reality check as the economic slowdown, inflation, increased foreign debt, and an eventually floating peso took its toll. (The country's foreign debt—deuda externa—would grow in the early 1980s to such a size that it would be wryly referred to as the deuda eterna—the eternal debt). In the meantime, rural migrants poured into Mexico City by the hundreds or thousands each day, looking for shelter and work. This vast migration simply overwhelmed the state's capacity to provide, and most new arrivals settled on the ever-expanding edges of the city. They built with what they could find and, as the population increased, the informal but very real neighbourhoods that developed would eventually reach a size where they could petition the government for various services.[15]

The quintessential example is Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, located on a drained lake bed at what was once the eastern edge of Mexico City. Settled in 1946 by a number of displaced poor, it grew to become Mexico's fourth largest city by the 1970s with a population that was, and remains, marginalized in terms of economic insecurity and infrastructure.[16] During the rainy season the roads are frequently inundated and services are often intermittent; during the dry season the wind kicks up the dust of the lake bed, blowing fecal matter into the atmosphere, such that one can contract salmonella or hepatitis just from breathing the air.[17] Even so, the descriptions of "Neza," and many of Mexico City's margins, as places of "misery, loathing, and a lack of identity," inhabited by "mutants" and "souls on the run" are highly problematic because they pathologize the poor based upon the simplified notion of a "culture of poverty," characterized by fatalism, abandonment, resignation, and machismo.[18] Such characterizations pay little attention to the agency of the inhabitants of Neza.[19] Life may not be easy there, but it is no more a "place" of fatalism than Polanco or Las Lomas—two of Mexico City's most elite districts—are places of bourgeois anomie or individualist success. Judith Adler Hellman's Mexican Lives, a wonderful collection of interviews from the early 1990s, gives us a window onto the practices of working people on Mexico City's margins, in the process demolishing the persistent and pernicious stereotypes of fatalism, machismo, waste, and apathy.[20] Life on Mexico City's margins in fact has spurred all kinds of political mobilization and social innovation. The economic crisis of the 1970s—as well as the effects of the repression in Tlatelolco—spurred a new wave of organizing efforts in the form of coordinating bodies (or coordinadoras) that would address the needs of labour, peasants, and urban dwellers. As Tom Barry notes, the autonomous space they created made them very hard to co-opt or control, and set the groundwork for a vibrant grassroots democratization movement.[21] Among such efforts was the Urban Popular Movement's National Coordinating Committee (or Conamup). Founded in 1981, Conamup organized people not in places where they were subject to direct control by PRI infrastructure (the workplace, for example), but in the barrios where they lived, taking up issues such as lighting, housing, sewage, trash collection, schools, public transport, and the like.[22] Like many of the grassroots organizations formed at the margins, it acquired dramatic importance in the wake of the devastating earthquake of 1985, which levelled parts of downtown Mexico City. Here Mexican civil society revealed that it would more than make do while a lethargic state wallowed in confusion in the immediate aftermath of the seismic event that took some 10,000 lives. The short-term result of the work of such grassroots organizations was a real challenge to PRI's supremacy in the 1988 elections; the long-term result has been, in part, various responses by the government to popular demands for low-cost housing, rent control and the like.

These are the broadest of brushstrokes

for making sense of Mexico City in the late twentieth century. For a street-level view of the city, there is a superb collection of writings from some of Mexico City's most astute and highly regarded commentators, assembled by Rubén Gallo in The Mexico City Reader. If there is one book to throw in your luggage on a future trip to the DF (Distrito Federal), this is the one. It is one of the very best introductions to Mexico City's recent history—say, the past five decades—as well as to its rich literary output. The Reader offers to the general (and non-Spanish speaking) reader a collection of writings on the city by some of its most prominent intellectuals and observers—including Juan Villoro, Carlos Monsiváis, Jorge Ibargüengoitia, and Guillermo Sheridan—as well as some newer voices. Gallo's introduction is a rich evocation of the city and an effort to rethink how one might theorize the city: "What kind of questions should we ask to try to understand Mexico City?" His answer draws us back to where we started: Tenorio-Trillo's work. Too many studies of Mexico City, in Gallo's reading, have compared the city only to itself. Obsessed with its deep historicity, commentators end up either celebrating the city's continuities or lamenting its ruptures. In either case, the city remains a prisoner of a kind of exotic parochialism, "isolated from other cities around the world." Rather than compare Mexico City's challenges, successes, or Metro system to, say, Moscow's, authors often simply compare it to itself. Or they see only its drift toward uniformity, fretting over its preservation as if it were a specimen to be pickled. In contrast, Gallo's collection brings together essays which focus on the experience of the city, taking "the reader though a series of fragments, creating a reading experience that would approximate the feeling of walking down the streets of the capital and being relentlessly bombarded by heterogeneous impressions and sensations."[23]

The collection is organized around various themes: "Places," "the Metro," "Monuments," "Eating and Drinking," "Maids," "The Margins," among others. It is a wonderful and rich introduction to the city, built out of short crónicas, a cross between a "literary essay and urban reportage." A few riffs from some of the essay's opening lines are useful for illustrative purposes: "In the future all the roads in Mexico will be called Insurgentes." "The Cuauhtémoc District, like the rest of Mexico City's district boundaries, was a brain wave of President Luis Echevarría that our city hardly deserved." The Zona Rosa, in 1965, is "cheap perfume in a fancy bottle." Or take Augusto Monterrosso's approximately 500-word whirling, run-on paragraph on maids, which begins thus: "I love maids because they're unreal, because they leave, because they don't follow orders, because they embody the last vestiges of unstructured labor and they lack insurance and benefits [...]." Or the artist Jonathan Hernández's efforts to document trying to get documented. Pretending to be deaf and mute, he asked each bureaucrat he encountered to write down what he needed to do in order to get a replacement student ID. The resulting labyrinthine experience—expressed in a series of photographs—bears painful witness and ironic homage to bureaucracy. (It took some three dozen steps to get his replacement ID.)[24]

Or take the selected images of Daniela Rossell, who photographed friends (mostly women, wealthy, and politically connected) primarily in their homes in the Las Lomas district of Mexico City. Her subjects included Paulina Díaz Ordaz, grand-daughter of President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz and stepdaughter of Raúl Salinas de Gortari. Raúl, arrested and jailed for illegal enrichment, is the brother of former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. (The only male individually photographed in the collection is Carlos Salinas' son Emiliano.) Aristocratic kitsch hardly comes close to describing the results, and the scandal that erupted when the photographs were eventually published as a book in 2002, Ricas y famosas (rich and famous women) was hardly surprising given the sordid revelations of graft and nepotism that accompanied the birth of neoliberalism during this period.[25]

Gallo's collection is all the more valuable given that so many of Mexico City's chroniclers have rarely been translated in to English. Little work, for example, by Carlos Monsiváis, one of the great commentators on Mexico City, popular culture, and politics, has been translated into English. In the meantime, newer works, in English and by writers based at least initially in the US, have taken up the charge of writing about youth culture (Mexico City's population is young: one in three residents in the DF is between the ages of 15 and 29), underground music scenes, popular culture, and Mexico City's relentless consumption and production of modernity.[26] For these writers the city is delirious, frenetic, and improvised, terms which at times veer close to cliché, although the subject matter in any given chapter might demand such exuberant terminology.[27] This is Mexico City from the perspective of a particular set of users; the city as everyday life, assembled from spatial practices, which is, as some would have it, the essence of the city itself: "You can be born and raised in this city, vow never to leave it, and still hardly know it: to live here is simply to practice (ejercer is the dazzling verb employed by Salvador Novo) some of its locations, those that best conform to one's temperament."[28] It is a city to be celebrated rather than condemned for the apparent futility of centralized planning; a city seen from its streets, all 85,000 of them, 850 of which are named Juárez, 750 named Hidalgo, and 700 named Morelos; a city which is a contingent assemblage of architectural forms that quickly escaped efforts at continuity and conformity, an effective "jumbling of historical periods," and a city that refuses to obey not only planning fantasies but also historical and political teleologies.[29] This is a revolution of a different kind: one more anarchist in its sensibilities than Marxist or liberal, more horizontal than hierarchical. There is a danger of fetishizing improvisation, as if daily practice itself were somehow emancipatory. It is not. But the term does nonetheless work as a means to give voice to the revolutions of everyday life in a Mexico City which residents continually make their own. They know that, contrary to Time magazine's 1984 headline, there are no "grim lessons" to be learned from Mexico City that could not be learned in any other major metropolis.[30] And in the meantime, there is much still to be taught.

Notes

1
Cited in Aurora Camacho de Schmidt and Arthur Schmidt, "Foreward: The Shaking of a Nation," in Nothing, Nobody: The Voices of the Mexico City Earthquake, Elena Poniatowska (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), x.

2
See, among others, Robert Kaplan, An Empire Wilderness: Travels in to America's Future (New York: Vintage, 1999).

3
This is not to downplay what has unfolded in parts of Mexico over the past decade or so. It is simply to emphasize that the violence has a geography. Efforts to track non-suicide deaths by firearms in the US is not easy. For an effort, see Chris Kirk and Dan Kois, "How Many People Have Been Killed by Guns since Newtown?," Slate.com, 16 September 2013, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/crime/2012/12/gun_death_tally_every_american_gun_death_since_newtown_sandy_hook_shooting.html.

4
Maurico Tenorio-Trillo, I Speak of the City: Mexico City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), xxi.

5
Knight, The Mexican Revolution, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

6
The nature of those revolutions depends, as it would in any instance, on the protagonists one chooses. For example, if one were to take the experience of working women in Mexico City, one would have to question the degree to which a revolution occurred at all. For women in Mexico City, at least, their revolution was an attenuated one, a gradual process of change in the labour market and workplace (and the public discourses about gender, work, sexuality, and morality that attended such change) that most dramatically shaped and reshaped their reality. See Susie Porter, Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879–1931 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003). Or one can take the case of Rubén Gallo's Mexican Modernity, which concerns "the other Mexican revolution," that is, the "cultural transformations triggered by new media in the years after the armed conflict." His protagonists are artists and writers, and he cheekily begins his analysis in Detroit, Michigan. Gallo, Mexican Modernity: The Avant-Garde and the Technological Revolution (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 1.

7
For a classic work that emphasized the urban and outward-oriented history of Latin America, and sought to counter the persistent images of Latin America as rural, feudal, inquisitorial, and isolated, see Jose Luis Romero, Latinoamerica: Las ciudades y las ideas (Medellin: Universidad de Antioquia, 1999 [1976]).

8
Tenorio-Trillo, I Speak of the City, 94, 148, and, more generally, chapters 4 and 5.

9
Ibid., 93.

10
Ibid., xv. See also 415. I was reminded in places of Doreen Massey's efforts to see time and space as so inextricably entwined that geography becomes a "simultaneity of stories so far," rather than as a means to construct discrete locations on temporal axes that are morally and politically valenced. Massey, For Space (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005).

11
Tenorio-Trillo, I Speak of the City, 79.

12
Ibid., 416. For earlier, superb efforts to wrestle with questions of authenticity and national culture, see Roberto Schwarz, Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture (London: Verso, 1992); Emilia Viotti da Costa, The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories (Chapel Hill: University of

North Carolina Press, 2000), especially "Liberalism: Theory and Practice"; Elías José Palti, "The Problem of 'Misplaced Ideas' Revisited: Beyond the 'History of Ideas' in Latin America," The Journal of the History of Ideas 67, no. 1 (2006); and Neil Larsen, "Roberto Schwartz: A Quiet (Brazilian) Revolution in Critical Theory," in Determinations: Essays on Theory, Narrative and Nation in the Americas, ed. Neil Larsen (London: Verso, 2001), 75–82.

13
On the history and cultural politics of Mexico's golden age, see Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein and Eric Zolov, eds., Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). On the middle classes, see Louise Walker, Waking from the Dream: Mexico's Middle Classes After 1968 (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013).

14
See Elena Poniatowska, Massacre in Mexico, trans. Helen Lane (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991).

15
For an excellent discussion, see Judith Adler Hellman, Mexican Lives (New York: The New Press, 1995).

16
On settlement and size, see Colin MacLachlan and William Beezley, El Gran Pueblo: A History of Greater Mexico (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), 422.

17
Ibid., 423; Hellman, Mexican Lives, 25.

18
The quoted text comes from Mexican intellectual Roberto Vallarino, excerpted in Gilbert Joseph and Timothy Henderson, eds., The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 536. On the culture of poverty the key figure is Oscar Lewis; see, for example, Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty (New York: Basic Books, 1975); on Lewis's influence in the US, see Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, "Other Americas: Transnationalism, Scholarship and the Culture of Poverty in Mexico and the United States," Hispanic American Historical Review 89, no. 4 (2009): 603–641. For a bleak vision of children on the margins in Mexico City, see Luis Buñuel's Los Olvidados (The Forgotten).

19
See the brief introduction to Vallarino's essay by Joseph and Henderson in The Mexico Reader.

20
Hellman, Mexican Lives; on the myth of machismo, see Matthew Gutmann, The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), and Mema's House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens, and Machos (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998). For a classic text on marginality, see Janice Perlman, The Myth of Marginality: Urban Poverty and Politics in Rio de Janeiro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

21
Tom Barry, Mexico: A Country Guide (Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, 1992), 196.

22
Ibid., 195.

23
Rubén Gallo, The Mexico City Reader (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 9 and 21.

24
On crónicas, see ibid., 21; Fabrizio Mejía Madrid, "Insurgentes," in ibid., 55; José Joaquín Blanco, "Cuauhtémoc," in ibid., 222; Vicente Leñero, "Zona Rosa, 1965," in ibid., 78; Monterrosso, "Maids I," in ibid., 249; Jonathan Hernández, "The University," in ibid., 271–28.

25
Daniela Rossell, Ricas y famosas (Madrid: Turner Publicaciones, 2002). See also the brief discussion in David Lida, First Stop in the New World: Mexico City, the Capital of the 21st Century (New York: Riverhead, 2008), 249–251. In the summer of 2013, Raúl Salinas was exonerated of the charges. He had been released from prison in 2005 after more than 10 years.

26
The statistics on age come from Daniel Hernández, Down and Delirious in Mexico City: The Aztec Metropolis in the Twenty First Century (New York: Scribner, 2011).

27
Rubén Martínez, The Other Side: Notes from the New L.A., Mexico City and Beyond (New York: Vintage, 1993); Daniel Hernández, Down and Delirious in Mexico City: The Aztec Metropolis in the Twenty First Century (New York: Scribner, 2011); Lida, First Stop in the New World. On youth and counterculture, see Eric Zolov, Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). Martínez's work is valuable too for its range—he brings Mexico City into dialogue with Los Angeles, Havana, San Salvador and Tijuana, among others cities.

28
José Joaquín Blanco, "Plaza Satelite," in Gallo, The Mexico City Reader, 104.

29
On street names see Lida, First Stop, 7; on "jumbling" see Gallo, The Mexico City Reader, 3. On early post-revolutionary architecture, see Patrice Olsen, Artifacts of Revolution: Architecture, Society and Politics in Mexico City, 1920–1940 (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

30
Lida, for example, neither avoids issues of crime and pollution, nor does he fetishize them. He had lived in Mexico City for six years when he was "express kidnapped" in 1996. The taxi he boarded turned out to be the vehicle for a joyride around the city as a couple of pistol-wielding characters forced him to hand over his ATM card and passcode. After a fortunate turn—one of the men interpreted the rejected card to be evidence of a problem with the card rather than the fake passcode Lida had given him—he went home shaken but intact. Despite his experience, Lida makes a very important point: "The great majority of people in Mexico City not only haven't been kidnapped, but don't know anyone who has been either," he notes. Nevertheless, a litany of self-serving hysteria regarding crime and Mexico City peppered the pages of the US publications in the 1990s, much of which was, Lida notes, "blatantly irresponsible" and contradicted by statistics showing that Mexico City wasn't even in the top 15 of the most dangerous cities in Latin America. The fact that writers have to invoke such statistics with mantric regularity is just one more reminder of the persistent orientalist hyperbole that pervades the US media and popular perceptions of Mexico and its modern metropolis. Lida, First Stop in the New World, 199–228, quoted text on 204 and 227.