

Reading about Mexi- co City ^D in ^sScape- goat

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This is the inaugural installment of the debates section. It is a space for authors to dialogue across issues of Scapegoat. Here authors can critique, intervene, expand, fill gaps and keep the conversation going.

Flâner, wandering around, *caminando sin ton ni son*, *caminando por caminar*: against all first and last impressions, Mexico City is a unique spatial Rosetta Stone for the pleasure of any wanderer. Wanderer or *flâneur*? It's the same: the city has a remarkable sense of hospitality (I mean the city itself, not necessarily its inhabitants), but it also has a horizon that points the way to other territories.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Mexico-Tenochtitlan was a cosmic city, built on an island. In much the same way as the city's greatest pyramid represented Coatepec, the mythical hill where Huitzilopochtli was born, the city itself represented the universe. While destroying the Native city in 1521 and 1522, Cortés commissioned the drawing of a new city plan from Alonso García Bravo. Following Cortés's instructions but, more importantly, in a manner consistent with the Castilian custom dating back to the Spanish Reconquista of developing cities using an orthogonal grid, Garcia Bravo did not change the original layout. Indeed, the existing *calpulli* division could be perfectly adapted to the checkerboard plan. Cortés, moreover, never intended to change the centre of the city. Thus, the cosmic city became a practical city without changing its form. In fact, the original principle didn't vanish; it survived under the new layout.

Something that actually died was the Indian concept of water as a deity, or more than that, multiple deities according to how water manifested itself. Indeed, with the new city plan began the ominous war against flooding, i.e. against water. Paradise was drained, and with the drying up of the lakes the "most transparent region of the air" also vanished. In 1900, the lakes started their final journey: the lakes, not the floods. It was particularly ironic that 1910, the year of the country's centennial celebrations, was also a year of heavy flooding.

The Revolution ended the Porfirian regime, as well as the plan to develop Mexico City "rationally." Indeed, with the Revolution and the almost complete destruction of the natural hydraulic system in the Mexican basin, a new Mexico City emerged. Since then, nobody has made any progress to stop the untamed growth of the metropolis, and a period of uncontrollable transformation has begun that currently has no end in sight. Every day there is a new city: a new miracle and a new nightmare.

When I was a child I used to wander throughout the most varied neighbourhoods in Mexico City. Although I have not

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lived there for decades, every time I visit the first thought is: “Where am I going to wander, which neighbourhood I am going to choose to walk around this time?” Scapegoat (Issue #6, Winter/Spring 2014) has been an odd experience: I have wandered through the whole issue, reading essays on urban political economy, urban sociology, and even urban mythology. And it has been more illuminating than many contemporary novels. It seems that the literary imagination was left behind in the city’s wild metamorphosis. Mexico DF/NAFTA is, for the moment, my new guide for imagining the city.

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