

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Rereading Postrevolutionary Mexico City: Recent Trends in Mexican Cultural Studies

Rubén Gallo

Princeton University, US
gallo@princeton.edu

This essay reviews the following works:

Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics. By Luis M. Castañeda. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. Pp. ix + 293. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780816690794.

Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico. By Ben Fallaw. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013. Pp. xx + 329. \$27.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822353379.

Deco Body, Deco City: Female Spectacle and Modernity in Mexico City, 1900–1939. By Ageeth Sluis. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. Pp. ix + 396. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780803293823.

Portrait of a Young Painter: Pepe Zúñiga and Mexico City's Rebel Generation. By Mary Kay Vaughan. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015. Pp. ix + 279. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822357810.

Recent scholarship on Mexico City has privileged an interdisciplinary approach combining the critical tools of art history, literary analysis, cultural studies, and architectural theory. Works offer new perspectives on the urban culture that developed from the postrevolutionary administrations of presidents Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles in the 1920s; through the sexenio of Lázaro Cárdenas, who nationalized oil and gave asylum to Leon Trotsky in the late 1930s; to the transformation of the PRI into a very different party during the 1950s and 1960s, when the rise of business interests and a Cold War paranoia linked to the fear of communism came to a head during the 1968 student massacre, weeks before Mexico was to host the Olympic games.¹

During this half-century, propelled by an economic boom, the capital's culture was vibrant, producing everything from muralist-inspired, *indigenista* art to sparkling new buildings designed in the international style promoted by Le Corbusier and his disciples. The four books reviewed here give a panoramic overview of the diversity of Mexican cultural practices during this period: from Pepe Zúñiga's portraits of campesinos and working-class subjects, analyzed by Mary Kay Vaughan; to the "deco girls"—actresses and vaudeville performers—chronicled by Ageeth Sluis; and from the intransigent Catholics spread throughout the country who refused to subscribe to the revolution's anticlericalism, discussed by Ben Fallaw, to the urbanistic, architectural, and design landmarks produced on the eve of the 1968 Olympics, examined by Luis M. Castañeda.

Mary Kay Vaughan's *Portrait of a Young Painter: Pepe Zúñiga and Mexico City's Rebel Generation* is a fascinating cultural study of José (Pepe) Zúñiga, a gay Mexican figurative painter known for his portraits of Indians and other rural subjects. Zúñiga was born in 1937 in the provincial city of Oaxaca and moved to Mexico City in the early 1940s. This study is based on extensive conversations with Zúñiga and his relatives, and Vaughan quotes extensively from the artist's recollections of events including his childhood in Oaxaca, his arrival in Mexico City, his education at La Esmeralda, Mexico City's foremost art academy, and his stays

¹ See, for instance, Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City: Mexico at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Tatiana Flores, *Mexico's Revolutionary Avant-Gardes: From Estridentismo to ¡30–30!* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Rubén Gallo, *Mexican Modernity: The Avant-Garde and the Technological Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Guillermo Sheridan, *Los contemporáneos ayer* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985).

in Paris during the 1970s and 1980s. Early on, the author writes that her “goal in narrating Pepe’s story is to free it from extensive analytical commentary” (9).

The choice of Zúñiga as the subject of a monographic study might at first seem surprising; Zúñiga is a relatively minor figure who does not belong to any of the major Mexican art movements of the twentieth century. He was born years after the heyday of muralism in the 1920s and 1930s, when José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros reinvented Mexican art by giving it a public and overtly political content. Unlike the members of the *Generación de la Ruptura*, Zúñiga did not attempt to break with the muralist program by embracing abstraction. And unlike the neo-Mexican artists of the 1980s and 1990s—Nahúm Zenil, Julio Galán, Germán Venegas—he never attempted an ironic, kitsch-laden reinterpretation of the Mexican iconography invented by muralism.

Yet it is precisely his marginal place in Mexican art history that makes Zúñiga a fascinating object of study. One of the greatest merits of Vaughan’s book is that it resists the language, scope, and methodology of art history in order to provide a biographical account of how a young man from the provinces moved to Mexico City in the early 1940s and found his calling as a painter. In addition to providing a detailed biography of Zúñiga, Vaughan writes a lively, inspired, and extremely detailed cultural history of Mexico City’s urban culture between 1940 and 1970, focusing on the working-class neighborhoods where the Zúñigas settled. She writes with empathy, intelligence, and humor about the family’s modest lifestyle, noting, for instance, that “although the Zúñigas occupied a very small apartment in a *vecindad*, their access to running water, a toilet, drainage, a kitchen, and garbage collection contrasted starkly with the almost complete absence of services that made private life difficult in the popular *barrios* during the *Porfiriato*” (18).

In order to flesh out episodes from Zúñiga’s life, Vaughan sketches brilliant portraits of popular theater, radio, music, and other elements of Mexican popular culture that would have influenced young men who were coming of age in the 1950s—a golden age for Mexican music, film, and popular culture in general. In these years before NAFTA and globalization, Mexico had a distinct and nationalistic cultural production, especially in music and film, fields that exported many cultural products to other countries in Latin America.

Vaughan’s chapter “Enchanting City/Magical Radio” offers a very original and compelling interpretation of *Cri-Cri*, the children’s radio character invented by Francisco Gabilondo Soler, which was a strong presence in the upbringing of all Mexican boys and girls until very recently. Discussing the politics of *Cri-Cri*’s characters—duck mothers forced to work because they are married to lazy males, grandmothers who offer their armoires as treasure troves to their grandchildren—Vaughan writes: “*Cri-Cri*’s paradigm was modern, but his notions of liberty and work had very old artisan roots, familiar to the Zúñigas. . . . *Cri-Cri* was very clean in every sense of the word. What he promoted from the artisan’s tradition was their notion of individual freedom, their pride in their craft and their sense of solidarity in work” (51).

The portrait of this young man from the countryside, from a rural and working-class background, arriving in Mexico City just as the capital began the greatest demographic expansion in its history, is extremely moving. The reader sees the city through the eyes of Zúñiga’s family, for whom economic hardship was part and parcel of inhabiting the modern metropolis.

Zúñiga’s life story culminates with his extended stays in Paris from 1972 to 1975 and from 1981 to 1983. The book’s last chapters, devoted to the painter’s life and work in his last three decades, are not as compelling as the first (Vaughan notes that “Guillermo Ceniceros refers to his generation as ‘forgotten,’” 216), but this may be symptomatic of the ways in which Mexico City changed in this period. After the signing of NAFTA in 1994 and the rapid globalization that ensued, the capital became a very different place, a “global city,” as the local government insists, one that often seems more attuned to trends coming from New York or Los Angeles than to the work of artists like José Zúñiga. Vaughan’s study would have been even more compelling if she had offered some reflections on how a globalized Mexico City became a space in which artists like Zúñiga struggle to find a place.

More than a biography of Zúñiga, Vaughan’s book is a deeply personal cultural history of working-class Mexico City during the second half of the twentieth century. The fact that very few of the chapters invoke an art historical language or methodology to examine Zúñiga’s work is one of the book’s greatest assets, since it allows the author to use this painter as a lens to study an important period of cultural life in Mexico’s capital.

Deco Body, Deco City: Female Spectacle and Modernity in Mexico City, by Ageeth Sluis, takes a similar approach to Mexican culture of the early twentieth century by focusing on how a specific class of subjects—in this case middle- and lower-middle-class women—inhabited the capital. Sluis’s study is one of the most original studies of women in Mexican culture since the publication of Jean Franco’s *Plotting Women* in 1989. But while Franco—and other scholars after her, such as Vicky Unruh—have focused on women writers and artists, Sluis turns her eye to a group of women who have for the most part gone unnoticed by cultural

historians: popular actresses, vaudeville girls, prostitutes, working-class women, and other female subjects who inhabited the lower tiers of urban culture between 1920 and 1950. Sluis notes that, starting in the 1920s, “Mexico City experienced a drastic influx of female migrants” (1), and, for the most part, the stories of these migrants have been neglected in favor of their male counterparts.

Sluis’s book seeks to chart “the development of Mexico City through the lens of spectacle as a two-pronged approach: the visibility of women’s social and physical mobility in the city, and the entertainment industry as helping to facilitate these changes” (15). Her study focuses as much on female subjects as on the forms of urban and popular culture that carved out new spaces for these modern subjects. Her chapter “Performance,” for instance, offers one of the best readings available in English of Esperanza Iris and María Conesa, two actresses who revolutionized the world of popular Mexican theater in the first decades of the twentieth century. “As *femmes fatales*, sexual objects, and feminists,” Sluis argues, “famous actresses such as María Conesa and Esperanza Iris altered the image of women in public life. As stars of the stage and celebrities, the divas had a profound effect on women of all social classes in Mexico City” (60). Actresses became role models for urban women, both in their role as modern citizens and especially in their status as successful professional women. The author demonstrates that in addition to the role women played as performers, their theaters created a unique space in which social classes could mingle: “Middle-class housewives would take their seats next to waitresses, Spanish shop owners, truck drivers, plumbers and other working-class folks on the benches of numerous *carpas*” (52).

Sluis constructs a highly original theoretical frame to discuss these female subjects. Part of her project consists in developing a new critical terminology: “deco bodies” (“white, thin, and tall,” 97), “bataclanismo” (“the vast number of copycat theater productions, advertisements, and media coverage in the wake of *Voilà Paris: La ba-ta-clan*,” 96), “camposcape” (a romantic and idealized vision of the Mexican countryside “as a site of national authenticity, origin, and beauty,” 102). In addition to analyzing depictions of women in journals like *El Universal Ilustrado* and *Revista de Revistas*, which have been well mined by Mexicanists in recent years, she expands the archive by offering close readings of images and articles in *Vea: Semanario moderno*, an erotic magazine from the 1930s that featured scantily clad female models collaged onto various cityscapes, as well as certain areas of the capital inhabited by female bodies, such as Plaza Garibaldi: “Mexico City’s ultimate ‘never-never land’ of illegitimate eroticism in the 1930s was Plaza Garibaldi, in the northeast of the city’s historic district around the *Zócalo*. Known for its burlesque theater celebrated in the neighboring *zona libre*, Plaza Garibaldi used eroticized Deco bodies to sell sex” (153).

In the second part of her book, Sluis focuses on various spaces in the “Deco city”—public buildings and neighborhoods erected in the 1920s and 1930s, such as Colonia Condesa or the Palacio de Bellas Artes—and how these were inhabited or used by women. The chapter titled “Planning the Deco City” offers an especially compelling analysis of how Parque México, the centerpiece of Colonia Condesa, features oversize (and overstylized) reliefs of women that seem to bridge the abyss separating rural Mexico from the modern metropolis.

A chapter on the Abelardo Rodríguez Market unearths little-known documents to show that the markets were also used as stages for popular theater. It argues that “the continued emphasis on the city and the campo as distinct spheres . . . characterized discourses of the entertainment world [and] sharpened perceived tensions between the rural and the urbane, tradition and modernity, indigenismo and mestizaje,” and that “the camposcape of the Mercado sought to neutralize these tensions” (256).

Another extremely insightful chapter explores how the Palacio de Bellas Artes, started by Porfirio Díaz in 1905 and completed almost thirty years later in 1934, relates to questions of female spectatorship and the representation of women through its strategy of “inserting a site of idealized countryside in the rapidly-growing metropolis” (271). Sluis argues that “the Palacio de Bellas Artes in many ways functioned as a mirror to the Mercado. While the Bellas Artes’ modern and luxurious indigenista Deco interior communicated modern cosmopolitanism, its camposcape—like that in the Mercado—showed string nationalist overtures” (289).

In her conclusion, Sluis argues that Mexican modernity had a paradoxical effect on female subjects. On the one hand, it opened up spaces—like the Teatro Esperanza Iris—that were made by and for women; on the other hand, urban planners and the architects who built Colonia Condesa and other modern neighborhoods used architecture and urbanism to promote old stereotypes about women and their place in the countryside by building giant fountains, statues, and other representations of voluptuous women analyzed in Sluis’s book. “The conceptualization of the city as female space where Deco bodies represented a daring, new, and bare modernist architecture resulted in the planning and construction of new buildings in the neighborhoods such as upscale colonia Condesa. Building a utopian, revolutionary city was an aesthetic project that looked

to female bodies for its inspiration, but was also a moralistic project that attempted to contain women's mobility" (296).

In contrast to Vaughan's and Sluis's books, which offer new readings of familiar archives by giving agency to female citizens, Ben Fallaw's *Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico* aims to revise the established history of the Mexican Revolution's involvement with the Catholic Church. The usual narrative emphasizes the anticlericalism of Plutarco Elías Calles, who served as president from 1924 to 1928 but continued to wield power behind the scenes until well into the 1930s. Calles's crusade against the church provoked a reaction that culminated with the Cristero War of 1926–1929 in the conservative states of Jalisco and Guanajuato. It is generally acknowledged that in the 1930s, as Calles's influence waned, tensions decreased, most notably after President Lázaro Cárdenas (in office from 1934 to 1940) loosened many of the restrictions that had been imposed on the church and brokered a working relationship between the Catholics and the Mexican government.

Fallaw's extensive archival research deconstructs this narrative, presenting "Church-state relations as evolving from conflict provoked by Calles (1926–35) to mutual accommodation under Cárdenas (1935–40)" and arguing that Mexico was a diverse country and that the various states reacted in radically different ways to the revolutionary project's anticlericalism. He devotes individual chapters to examining case studies in the states of Campeche, Hidalgo, Guerrero, and Guanajuato. In each of these regions, the legacy of the Catholic Church was different; it traditionally held more power in the Bajío states, while in Campeche it had never fully succeeded in replacing indigenous practices. In addition, "behind the monolithic, ultramontane façade of the Church in Mexico, deep divisions lurked" (13). In any case, Fallaw demonstrates that the revolution never fully achieved its goal of quashing the Catholic Church, since "Mexico's predominantly Catholic civil society denied the revolutionary ruling party generalized consent" (12).

Fallaw's extensive research shows that "there was no single Church in Mexico." In the state of Jalisco Catholicism was synonymous with oligarchy, while in the southeastern state of Campeche, Indians practiced syncretic rituals that would have horrified the Vatican; "rather than fracturing the Church along the old fault lines, the revolutionary project tended to unite Catholics" (32).

One particularly vicious confrontation between church and state took place in the state of Hidalgo, where Bishop José Jesús de Manríquez y Zárate of Huejutla accused Calles of trying "to turn [churches] into synagogues of Satan" (64). This episode contradicts the established narrative of relations between church and state in postrevolutionary Mexico since "many of Bishop Manríquez's indigenist initiatives disrupted long-established Nahua religious practices" (68). The state of Hidalgo makes a fascinating case study, since "in 1945, the Diocese of Huejutla had only one priest per every 23,000 of its 45,000 Catholics, the third worst ratio in Mexico" (98). Bishop Manríquez fought hard against the Cárdenas government, eventually fled Mexico to live in exile in Texas, and was finally stripped of his miter in 1939. But despite these setbacks, he continued to fight against the government and attempted to launch a second Cristero war. "Because of Manríquez's status as a bishop, *segunders* across Mexico invoked his existential exhortations to legitimize violence" (99).

Fallaw's chapter "Beatas, Ballots, and Bullets in Guerrero" considers the case of a very different state. Guerrero was the home of Emiliano Zapata, one of the revolution's most revered caudillos, and the place in which the land reform movement was born. Here, "revolutionary-era *rancheros* had a Jekyll and Hyde character: peaceful and democratic, they turned violent if not reactionary when agrarian reform loomed" (105). Surprisingly, Guerrero saw the emergence of a Catholic-ranchero alliance as well as the explosion of a violent confrontation between church supporters and detractors. In the end, "Catholics and Catholicism played a decisive role in frustrating the revolutionary project in Guerrero" (154). The church in Guerrero "demonstrated a kind of agility and resiliency that the postrevolutionary state never possessed" (156).

The chapter devoted to Guanajuato, long considered one of the country's most Catholic states (158), shows how the revolutionary project failed in this region. Clashes between Catholics and government representatives lasted into the 1930s, when Cárdenas tried a new approach, "ending the Psychological Revolution," though his move failed to "open the minds of the rural poor to a new, modern mentality free of 'fanaticism'" (215). Many of the revolutionary goals failed in this state, where illiteracy rates surpassed 60 percent, and peasants responded "not only by migrating, but also by supporting the [right-wing, ultra-Catholic] Sinarquista movement" (216). One historian quoted by Fallaw goes so far as to argue that the 2000 election of the right-of-center PAN presidential candidate Vicente Fox has its roots in the state's 1930s Sinarquista movement.

Fallaw concludes his study by arguing that "the subtle but pervasive influence of the Church over Mexican society reflected the fact that it was far from a monolithic, timeless institution" (220). Even after Cárdenas's

reforms in the 1930s, “many clergy and lay leaders continued to resolutely oppose federal schooling as irreligious, even after overt anticlericalism was removed from the SEP curriculum” (221). Fallaw’s reinterpretation has important implications, since it demonstrates that “the postrevolutionary state at the dawning of the PRI’s golden age in 1940 was much feebler, and its social support was much shallower, than the current scholarly consensus represents” (223). In the end, his study focuses less on the institution of the Catholic Church and more on the masses of faithful Mexicans who took to the streets and sometimes took arms against the government. “In the end, the failures and frustrations of the revolutionary project were due not to Rome but to hundreds of local Catholic leaders, men and women largely lost to posterity” (224).

Fallow’s study is fascinating to read, especially when considered alongside Sluis’s and Vaughan’s books. It reminds us that even as Mexico City grew and modernized in the postrevolutionary period, the countryside remained a deeply traditional, Catholic space, afflicted by many of the social problems that sparked the revolution in the first place: extreme poverty, high illiteracy rates, and the dominance of wealthy landowners and *rancheros* allied with the Catholic Church. Despite the message conveyed in the revolutionary literature of Mariano Azuela and Martín Luis Guzmán, and in the murals of Diego Rivera and the paintings of David Alfaro Siqueiros and Frida Kahlo, these tensions were not resolved by the revolution. They persisted, and many of them continued into the twenty-first century, marring the narratives produced by many Mexico City-based cultural producers.

While Fallow’s, Sluis’s and Vaughan’s studies deal with events that occurred, for the most part, during the first half of the twentieth century, Luis M. Castañeda’s *Spectacular Mexico: Design, Propaganda, and the 1968 Olympics* focuses on the years leading up to the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. By then, the PRI had consolidated its power, having won every election since 1929, and many of the revolution’s early promises for social justice remained a dead letter. Nevertheless, the country, and especially Mexico City, had achieved impressive levels of economic growth and modernization during the decades of peace and relative political stability that followed the tumultuous period of the Mexican Revolution. Mexico was the first Latin American country to host the Olympics, and President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz understood this event as the perfect way to showcase “the Mexican miracle” to the world. On October 2, 1968, a few weeks before the opening of the games, following months of student unrest, Díaz Ordaz ordered the army to open fire on a group of students who had congregated peacefully for a rally at Tlatelolco. Over one hundred were killed and many more jailed, thus tarnishing the bright image the president aimed to convey.

In recent years, Mexicanists and other scholars have revisited Tlatelolco and the 1968 student massacre.² Castañeda’s book is the most ambitious among these. It examines aspects of the Tlatelolco episode that have received scant critical attention—architecture, urban planning, and graphic design—and provides an in-depth analysis (and criticism) of the imagined Mexico that President Díaz Ordaz sought to sell to the world. Castañeda coins the term “image economies” to analyze “sites where the cultural capital invested by the makers and patrons of official design projects could yield a number of different returns—bureaucratic and professional esteem, critical acclaim, political influence, or financial gain” (xxi). Díaz Ordaz invested much time and energy to promote Mexico as a modern, stable nation—an ambition that leads Castañeda to describe 1960s Mexico as “an exhibitionist state.”

In the first chapter, Castañeda offers an overview of architect Pedro Ramírez Vázquez’s works, which include some of the most important mid-century projects in Mexico City. He designed the former foreign ministry in Tlatelolco and wielded such influence that Castañeda describes him as “an architect-politician” who was charged with exporting an image of modern Mexico. His international projects include the Mexican pavilions for Expo 58 in Brussels and for the World’s Fairs in Seattle and New York.

In the second chapter, “Archaeologies of Power,” Castañeda analyzes the design of various museums inaugurated during President Adolfo López Mateos’s tenure (1958–1964), including the monumental Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, designed by Pedro Ramírez Vázquez and inaugurated in 1964. In his famous “Post-data” addendum to *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz objected to the museum’s portrayal of pre-Columbian history and especially to its presentation of the Aztecs as the most advanced and sophisticated civilization—a statement the poet interprets as an act of propaganda, since the PRI imagined itself as the political heir to the Aztec Empire. Castañeda analyzes the museography and demonstrates that the museum is part of a large network of public projects that include Tlatelolco and the Plaza of the Three Cultures, which aimed to highlight the continuity between the Aztec past and the twentieth century, dominated by PRI rule. Castañeda unveils the financial and political interests linking architects—including Ramírez Vázquez and Mario Pani—to the state, and he demonstrates that a majority of large-scale

² See, for instance, Samuel Steinberg, *Photopoetics at Tlatelolco: Afterimages of Mexico, 1968* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016).

construction projects can be seen as political-financial-urbanistic deals. "As in the case of other large-scale commissions, [the Nonoalco-Tlatelolco] complex's clientelist patrons faced multiple social pressures and deployed political intelligence to address them. Understanding the production of monumental buildings along these lines suggests that the state's exhibitionist apparatus operated not only as an all-powerful propaganda force, but also as a more strategically flexible, if fundamentally authoritarian, set of forces" (100). Castañeda offers a nuanced analysis that takes him beyond the traditional binarism that plagues analyses of these projects: on the one hand, some critics have characterized Pani's housing projects as failures due to his proximity to presidential power; on the other hand, enthusiastic scholars like Pablo Landa have tried to reevaluate Pani's projects and highlight their originality, but their efforts tend to ignore the many conflicts of interest that enmeshed the the projects' construction. Castañeda walks a fine line between these two extremes: acknowledging financial irregularities while acknowledging the architectural merit of projects launched in the 1950s and 1960s, two decades that saw financial expansion accompanied by an unabashed intermingling of political and business ventures.

Castañeda devotes two chapters to reading the architectural and design projects commissioned by the 1968 Olympic commission: Felix Candela's Palacio de los Deportes, Ramírez Vázquez's Estadio Azteca, Mathias Goeritz's Route of Friendship, and the Camino Real Hotel, designed by Ricardo Legorreta as the preferred accommodation for foreign heads of state and other VIPs. (At the time, Candela "was singled out as the primary builder of Mexico's economic 'miracle,' and his architecture in concrete, especially his hyperbolic paraboloids, were widely understood as a 'Mexican' architectural sensation," 38.) Castañeda foregrounds the importance of state surveillance in these projects, writing the "direct intersection between Olympic designs and the exercise of state surveillance" (107). He concludes that Ramírez Vázquez inscribed "his practice as Olympic organizer squarely within the biopolitical domain" (107). The Camino Real Hotel is a perfect prism to untangle the intermingling of public and private, state-sponsored construction projects and entrepreneurial get-rich schemes: "The alignment between the agendas of private corporate patrons and those of the state's cultural apparatus was long-standing in the Mexican tourist industry. The exclusionary nature of this compact was also long-standing, and in the case of the Camino Real Hotel's construction, this exclusionary logic was literally manifested in the displacement of mostly middle-income residents of the area east of Chapultepec Park, where the hotel was built, as a result of its construction" (196).

In his last chapter, Castañeda analyzes the Mexico City metro, which opened in 1969, a few months after the Olympics had ended. This section includes a fascinating analysis of Lance Wyman's graphics, designed to make the subway accessible to illiterate travelers by foregrounding icons and images. Castañeda identifies the 1960s as a decade marred by a clash between two competing total design projects: one that targeted the city above ground and a second one directed at metro and its underground spaces, complete with commercial areas, museums, libraries, and even pre-Columbian exhibits. "Here again," writes Castañeda, "the clashing point of ancient and modern surfaces becomes the site from which Mexico's culturally specific modernity can be articulated" (221).

Castañeda concludes by stressing the crucial role design played in Mexico's emergence as a modern state in the late 1960s, a rise that was marred by conflicts of interests between private and public ventures:

"Ramírez Vázquez and his fellow professionals understood that designers could take on increasingly prominent roles in the midst of the geopolitical and economic transformations of the mid-twentieth century, and they provided the single-party state and its allied interests with a series of environments much like the ones the U.S.-based designer[s] claimed to be inventing. . . . While motivated by political interests, these works also aimed to spur economic gains, stimulating tourism, industrial, and real-estate investments through strategic incisions into the expanding fabric of the capital city as well as through broader overhauls of its infrastructures." (247)

Out of the four books reviewed in this article, Castañeda's is certainly the most ambitious: it features extensive archival research and includes many photographs, architectural plans, and other visual material made available for the first time for a North American readership. He quotes from numerous official memoranda highlighting the intricate connections between government officials and developers, and he writes in an eloquent, theoretically informed style that will make these materials accessible to scholars and students of architecture and urban studies who are not necessarily experts on Mexico or Latin America.

What work remains to be done on this period? Queer readings of postrevolutionary Mexican culture, with special attention to the role of gay men, lesbians, and gender-bending writers and artists. Little on this topic has been published since Robert McKee Irwin's *Mexican Masculinities* (2003).

Author Information

Rubén Gallo is the Walter S. Carpenter Jr. Professor in Language, Literature, and Civilization of Spain at Princeton University.

How to cite this article: Gallo, R. Rereading Postrevolutionary Mexico City: Recent Trends in Mexican Cultural Studies. *Latin American Research Review*. 2017; 52(4), pp. 728-734. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.214>

Submitted: 20 January 2017

Accepted: 05 February 2017

Published: 23 October 2017

Copyright: © 2017 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



Latin American Research Review is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Latin American Studies Association.

OPEN ACCESS 