

The Good Governance of Mexico City's Zócalo: A Recent History of Spatial Use and Morphological Transformations

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Abstract:

The change in elected government of the Federal District (*Distrito Federal*), from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*PRI*) to that of the center-left *PRD* party, was of utmost importance for the evolution of the Zócalo's *representative space*. Using Lefebvre's semiotic tools for the analyses of spatial production¹ through the prism of Cultural Geography and Social History, this article studies one of Mexico's most important *symbolic spaces*: The *Plaza de la Constitución*, colloquially known as the Zócalo. With the ascension of new local and federal governments, the plaza began a process of transformation from a space controlled by the State for the State's demonstrations of power, to an open, inclusive space for all users. As of 1997 diverse cultural, recreational, and mass movement events began to be promoted and experienced on the Plaza.² This article explains the process by which the Zócalo began to change through *spatial appropriation* of the *absolute space* by varied groups with diverse interests and organizational purposes. In the first part, the essay discusses the so-called "March of Dignity", which attracted the participation of people from all sectors: student and youth associations, peasant farmer and laborer communities, blue collar and low-income industrial workers, populist groups, civic organizations, to name a few. The article then describes the impact of Spencer Tunick's project titled "May 6, 2007: naked Zócalo." Tunick's spatial intervention was a massive scale human participation art/happening project. Finally, the article then turns its attention to the recent Ayotzinapa protests and the symbolic significance of the damage done to the Mariana Door of the National Palace which occurred because of the civil unrest of this period.

Introduction:

This article uses Habermas' "public sphere" theory, Althusser's State apparatus relationships and Lefebvre's "plan of the present work" *spatial practice* toolkit in order to analyze contemporary spatial use of the Zócalo, Mexico City's symbolic center. The article defines the key terms as follows: *spatial production*, exhibited socio-political and economic value systems used to produce spatial relationships; *representative space*: the projection of semiotic meaning to users through symbolism, and; *absolute space* as the physical manifestation of space, which includes all past and present morphological transformations³. The goal is to demonstrate how "good governance" is achieved by providing public realms for cultural production and a political structure that not only tolerate *spatial socio-political mobilization* but *encourage spatial production* as a venting mechanism for social discontent. This article was written utilizing a Cultural Geography (Sauer) and Social History prism. Research was undertaken via primary sources: first-hand observation, museum and university websites, newspaper reports, participant interviews, and government statements; secondary sources include: newspaper editorials and essays by social commentators.

At the end of the 1990's, Federal District (D.F.) residents gained the right to elect their local government for the first time since 1928. The elections resulted from the amendment of Article 73 of the Constitution, which originally stipulated that the Head of Government of the Federal District would be federally appointed. Once the Constitution was modified, elections took place on July 6, 1997, and the Democratic Revolution Party's (*PRD*) candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano, was elected with 48.1% of the vote (vs. the then President's ruling *PRI* party's 25.6%⁴).

Since 1997 the stated purpose of local government (continuously controlled by the *PRD* to date)⁵ is to "guarantee the rights of the citizens and serve their needs (which are) the main and unwavering duties of a democratically elected government, while placing special emphasis on the most vulnerable."⁶ [*Translator's Note: All translations into English by the author*] As a clear example of good governance through civic participation, the new government of the D.F. would seek to "address the fragmentation of the social fabric"⁷ through diverse social programs; among them the use of the capital's Zócalo (formally the *Plaza de la Constitución*) as a place for civic interaction and social integration. By examining how Mexico's Zócalo is used for civic socio-political purposes, we can help construct an argument for a cogent urban policy of "good governance" throughout the world by promoting and maintaining spaces for civic discourse in the public sphere.

The Zócalo's *spatial production* changed at the end of the 20th Century, through use of its *absolute space*. This *absolute space* had been since its inception in México-Tenochtitlan period controlled by political and ecclesiastical powers and rarely occupied by social groups in demonstrating for and against State power⁸. Morphological changes dating back to 1958 (fig.1), such as the removal of the French styled gardens allowed the Zócalo to be a simple but flexible gathering space. Starting with the 1997 election, the space became a

tolerant *absolute space*, open to all groups, uses, and social trends. As of 1997 the Zócalo became a place for effective *spatial production* for individuals and groups of Mexican society, becoming a multi-purpose or multi-functional locus. Angélica Herrera argued that starting in the 21st Century, there are five forms of spatial appropriation of Mexico City's Zócalo: pre-Hispanic events; protests; national values; commerce, and cultural recreation. These are represented by the different activities that take place, on a daily basis, in the Zócalo. Since 1997, events staged that follow Herrera's categories include: Day of the Dead, Three Kings Day, Easter Holy Week, Mexican and international artists' concerts, dance performances, film screenings, book distributions, opera, exhibitions, museum and circus productions, gastronomical fairs, chess tournaments, ice rinks, and pre-Hispanic ceremonies.

Simultaneously, federal and city official ceremonies including civic parades have continued, as have planned and ad hoc protests by the citizenry, occurring almost weekly and encompassing all population sectors. Against the backdrop of these activities, this article examines *spatial practices* through three events in chronological order: The arrival of the Zapatista Army to the Zócalo "March of Dignity", a mass photographic installation by Spencer Tunick, and the Ayotzinapa Protests.

1.0 The March of Dignity

On March 11, 2001, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) arrived in Mexico City as part of its "Color of the Earth March" which had marched throughout Mexico. The 37day tour and covered 6,000 kilometers, culminating at the Zócalo. Nearly one million people watched a caravan headed by 23 EZLN "commanders" and the *Subcomandante Marcos*. By making the Zócalo the destination, the EZLN appropriated historic triumphant entrances while transforming the Zócalo by occupying its *absolute space*. Carlos Monsiváis described the symbolism of the Zócalo EZNL entrance: "We continue to acknowledge the Zócalo as the heart of the Republic. Systole, diastole, devil bastard."⁹

The marchers were joined by individuals from various social groups: student and youth associations, peasants, laborers, citizen organizations, as well as civil associations.¹⁰ Monsiváis noted that marginalized groups such as the unemployed, homosexuals, punks and anarchists flocked to the Zócalo.¹¹ The indigenous leaders of the EZLN climbed onto the dais, their backs turned to the National Palace as a symbolic act. An interview published by *Reforma* the following day, noted that the dais' location was symbolic: "the pavilion where we're standing is where it is. It is no accident; since the beginning, the government has been harassing us."¹² The significance of the pavilion location is important in a political context. On December 1st, 2000, for the first time in 71 years, a new political party, the center-right National Action Party (PAN), and its candidate Vicente Fox, achieved the office of the Presidency.

Before the Zapatistas arrived, President Fox, as the embodiment of the federal government, noted the government's *spatial occupation* tolerance, "Our democracy is showing great flexibility by allowing in its very breast, discussion of ideas, fostering debate and reaching consensus [sic]."¹³ President Fox explained a larger concern:

We hope Congress takes the first big step forward in reestablishing an open dialogue with *Zapatismo*;

We will do everything that is in our power, oh! and we are not doing this for *Zapatismo*, but for the 10 million indigenous people in our country who cannot continue to be forgotten or discriminated against!¹⁴

Demonstrating a political will for dialogue, Fox invited *Subcomandante Marcos* to "talk about indigenous communities and the country's situation".¹⁵ For the first time in the history of the Zócalo, a president invited an armed group to discuss peace. Dissidents used the *absolute and symbolic space* of the Zócalo to debate the country's situation. The Zócalo occupation by the EZLN symbolized the arrival of a socio-political force, in conflict with prevailing Ideological State apparatuses. The occupation of the Zócalo's *absolute space*, was a first order symbolic statement that can be understood at three levels (Tamayo, Cruz, pg.126).¹⁶ First as geographic, as it "weaved symbolic and material network of cities connected by the path of the march and, at the same time, built a bridge between the jungle and the city".¹⁷ The second level was urban. Once the EZLN reached the Zócalo, it took symbolic control of the representative places: "public universities, civic plazas, archeological areas, towns and communities surrounded by the great city, and the legislative palace".¹⁸ The third level was local, the EZLN and followers took over the city's plazas. As a *symbolic* heart of the country, the Zócalo was simultaneously a local and a national *representational space*.

An EZLN leader implored: "Don't allow for new day to dawn where that flag does not have a dignified place for those of us who are the color of the earth".¹⁹ He referred to the flag located in the center of the Zócalo. It was historic irony that he spoke this sentiment precisely where Tenochtitlan once stood, conquered by the Spanish at its peak of power. The EZLN had traveled to the political center of the country to symbolically reclaim their historic spatial legacy. The Zócalo acted as a *representative space* to reestablish the social pact between government and Mexico's indigenous people.

In Marcos' speech (fig.2) he emphasized the importance of including not only Mexico's original inhabitants but all those alienated by the State. The Zócalo's *symbolic, representative and absolute space* acted as an integrational space. Beyond official State symbols, the Zócalo became the Mexican diversity space:

Native American, worker, farmer, teacher, student, neighbor, housewife, chauffeur, fisherman, taxi-driver, longshoreman, office worker, employee, street vendor, gang, the unemployed, communications worker,

professional, religious, homosexual, lesbian, transsexual, artist, intellectual, militant, activist, marine, soldier, athlete, legislator, bureaucrat, man, woman, child, youth, elder,²⁰ seek to reestablish the social contract not only with the country's government but amongst all those citizens who call themselves Mexicans. Ever since the Spanish Viceroyalty, sociocultural integration between indigenous groups with Mestizo and *Criollo* populations has not been achieved.²¹ While Mexico's indigenous past is represented in the country's national symbols and form part of the foundational and morphological narrative of the Mexican national identity, the indigenous population has been marginalized since the Spanish period. The March 11th, 2001 march is one of the most transformative symbolic events of the Zócalo's *absolute space* history; the gathered masses witnessed and supported a march that demanded the recognition and integration of those who had been marginalized by Mexican society.

2.0 May 6, 2007: Naked Zócalo

Another major symbolic Zócalo event was the collective human nudity photography project organized by American photographer Spencer Tunick. Tunick had photographed naked people in streets starting in 1992 in New York. Tunick stated that the purpose of these urban installation photographs was to "expose the tension between the concepts of the public and the private, the moral and the immoral, the accepted and the forbidden."²² In 1999, he began an international tour called "Nude Adrift", during which he photographed naked people in cities including London, Montreal, Vienna, Melbourne, Sao Paulo, Barcelona, and finally Mexico City.

The installation in the Zócalo was part of a global narrative and artistic exploration; while the *absolute space and representative space* was physically in Mexico City, photographic documentation of the installation formed part of an international narrative. José Gaspar and Begoña Sendino stated that for Tunick:

The results are poly-significant works that speak of the metamorphosis of the city's landscape, all of it with a twofold consequence: on the one hand, the account of his fantasy extends to place our knowledge about reality in doubt, shattering the limited and finite idea we have about the city with the purpose of *re-creating* it through the intervention of the naked body; and on the other hand, it shows us a new vision of the nude.²³

On April 30, 2007, Tunick announced that the Zócalo would be the stage for his massive nude photographic installation in Mexico.²⁴ The installation's objective was to transform the Zócalo into a stage set for the disconcerting presence of thousands of naked bodies. Tunick noted that permission was achieved because of the Mexican people and the freedom of expression in Mexico. The announcement and recruitment for the event was made on the web portal of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) designed for the event.²⁵ In return for participating in the photographic project, each participant received an artist signed print of the installation.²⁶ Participants would experience posing nude in the fourth largest plaza in the world, but also receive an example of *spatial representation* of the Zócalo.

While the artist obtained permission to use the Zócalo's *absolute space*, the Federal government stipulated that the national flag would not be raised during the installation: The Plaza itself would be without its iconic national and international symbol. By removing the Mexican flag, the Zócalo as urban-scale backdrop was now integrated into the larger narrative of *spatial globalization*: only experienced eyes could determine where it was taking place.

Semiotic-based spatial analysis reveals poly-significant narratives. Meanings varied by groups: participants, the left-wing local government, conservative groups, and the Catholic Church. Controversy surrounded the installation from the beginning: the government argued that it was a cultural and artistic event that would give the Zócalo an international character and profile. The Catholic Archdiocese of Mexico spokesperson Hugo Valdemar opined on the project expressing that:

Spencer Tunick's naked projects are not immoral, they are artistic, thus there is no objection whatsoever from the Curia. Furthermore, Mexican society shows great openness and tolerance for this type of artistic activity [...].²⁷ In another sign of tolerance, The Archdiocese postponed the traditional 7am Cathedral Mass so the artist would be able to work without interruption.

The Archdiocese's statements and actions are relevant because the Catholic Church, from the Viceroyalty onward, had periodically occupied the Plaza's *absolute space* as a sacred space, carrying out processions, and religious ceremonies -including two *auto-da-fés*. Now, the Archdiocese signaled tolerance if not outright support for the different Zócalo activities. The Church's statement may be interpreted as support for the local government's cultural position. If briefly, Tunick's installation united Church, the DF government and the subject-participants through *spatial* relationships.

Conversely prominent business leaders, conservative *PAN* politicians condemned the event as indecent. Congressman Jacobo Bonilla (*PAN*) expressed disapproval and suggested that the event was a distraction by the then local head of government, Marcelo Ebrard: "there are more pressing issues the local administration should focus on, not an event that will be uncomfortable for all the *capitalinos*".²⁸ Conservative *PAN* officials voiced their disagreement and rejection, claiming that permission for the "pseudo-artistic" installation was an excuse by the *PRD* to justify populist acts and self-serving promotion.²⁹ These statements, many of which were made before the event, were part of a torrent of opinions unleashed in favor and against the event; reinforcing the significance of the Zócalo's *absolute space* as central to civic discourse.

On May 6, 2007, at 04:30 am, enrolled participants began arriving at the Plaza. According to one participant's account in the *El Universal* newspaper, the entrance was via 16 de Septiembre Street. Even at that early hour, the access lines were already endless. Those that had already entered the Plaza waited seated, standing up, or lying down, cheering and singing "Cielito Lindo."³⁰ As the Plaza reached capacity, would-be participants were turned away. Many of those who were turned away began heckling. Chants included "there are no limits to art and culture", "picture by picture, nude by nude"³¹, "all of us or none at all", and the crude jeers "puto" and "ulero", traditionally reserved for political demonstrations. were heard across the Plaza. The installation had become a politicized event, engendering in those who were left out animosity shown at political events. Many excluded said they had been robbed of the opportunity to be "a part of the country's history".³²

After thanking the participants, Tunick noted that Barcelona's record of 7,000 participants had been surpassed by Mexico City by 11,000. Next, Tunick instructed participants to take off their clothes. Once disrobed, they stood in pre-determined spots on the plaza, standing three or four people per module. The installation revealed Mexico's multi-culturalism and ethnic diversity enabled by the Zócalo's *absolute space*. There were men and women of all ages (over 18), skin colors, heights, with partners, friends and alone.

After the fourth photograph (fig.3), Tunick asked the men to leave, as he would photograph the women facing the National Palace. Now alone, many women began to chant "Abortion, yes! Abortion, yes! Abortion, yes!" politicizing the installation.³³ Fear spread among women when dressed men approached with their cell phones taking pictures. The women yelled: "Men Out!", "Men Out!", "Leave!" According to testimony from Ericka Montaña, it is then when "real nakedness and fear was felt."³⁴ The unity felt during the four poses required by the artist was broken when the men were asked to move away and get dressed. At that moment the women felt vulnerable and attacked, breaking the sense of gender equality that minutes before they had embraced in the Zócalo. After the men were removed, order was restored.

In a massive nude experience such as Tunick's installation, individual involvement becomes collective participation, sharing a common experience. Elías Canetti argued that people can shed the fear of touching another person when sharing experiences and situations, because the moment that the individual lets go into the mass, the fear of contact disappears, "the feeling of equality appears, and all are the same as one self".³⁵ Because of citizen participation, the artistic nature of the event, and *absolute space* morphology, the Zócalo became the "...meeting point in the city, but above all a place that reinforces the identity and social unity of the citizens".³⁶ One participant expressed: "being without clothes and seeing that we are all one community, defeats the fear of being naked in front of others. From the moment you start to take off your clothes, you defeat all!"³⁷

Media coverage included 256 certified reporters from 101 world news organizations. International media coverage thrust Mexico City into the logic of globalization as the Zócalo became an international center of attention. During the post-shoot press conference Tunick positioned Mexico City as an open, plural and cosmopolitan city challenging the stereotype of Mexico as a conservative nation. The 18,000 people that participated in the event were able to experience *spatial production* firsthand occurring in the most *symbolic, representative and absolute space* in the country.

Participants said posing for Tunick had been an "ode to the body", a way to free themselves from prejudices and accept the body as is, "beautiful by nature".³⁸ Many participants expressed that it had been an act of freedom staged in opposition to the conservatism of the ruling PAN party and their cadre of newcomers".³⁹ Younger people said that the mass nude was an "excellent way to present Mexico as a liberal country".⁴⁰

Denise Gutiérrez, interviewed for this article, expressed her motivation to attend the event and described her experience of standing naked on the Zócalo:

I got very excited....I just wanted to go and break free from all my limitations....I felt afraid, I felt shame when I got there, but it went away little by little [...] What really got me excited being there was taking part or forming part of an event that made history in Mexico, for me it was about participating in something that would mark the history of the country.⁴¹

Staging the work of art in the Zócalo's *representative* and *absolute space* triggered a multitude of significations. For some, it was an act of rebellion against the Church and conservative politicians. Although the Catholic Church had been supportive, many of those present recall when participants started shouting: "Norberto Rivera your people are getting naked!" a statement of protests against the Church⁴². Others politicized the event as an opportunity to manifest activism, shouting: "Abortion yes! Abortion yes!", or by invoking electoral fraud with, "vote by vote, poll by poll". Participants were motivated by freeing themselves of prejudices, and to transcend as part of a work of art as protagonists in the country's history. These personal motivations are closely related to the buildings that bound the Zócalo and give the Plaza de la Constitución its character; for those opposing the Church, their participation occurred directly in front of the Cathedral; for those who opposed the government, their participation occurred in front of the National Palace, symbolic seat of power of the executive branch of the Federal Government; still, for others, it was a moment of multi-cultural union amongst the entire population. The way each person *experienced* the space was a way of *identifying* and *appropriating* what it meant to them to be Mexican.

The event reaffirmed the *symbolic* power of the Plaza, and its *representational* nature for a national and international audience. The Zócalo's *symbolic* power to convene, exactly because it is the *symbolic* center of the nation, drew 18,000 participants. The installation would not have been the same to disrobe in any other plaza; the *Plaza de la Constitución* hosts the nation's political, cultural and religious *symbols*. Filling the plaza with people, in the words of Herrera (pg.88), meant:

[...] having the power to summon the public opinion in a space that imposes and demands that society take a stance before social issues. 'In other words: the symbol and, therefore, the culture, is not only a meaning to be deciphered as a "text", it is also an instrument to intervene in the world and a device for power'.

By being naked in this environment, those who participated or witnessed others in the *absolute space* itself were forced to reconsider their *spatial practice*. The Zócalo acted as a venue in which to observe and be observed, and in the process modifying the perception of the *Plaza's* morphology, from a passive *spatial production* into an active meaning generator.

3.0 The Ayotzinapa Demonstrations

In last five years, the Zócalo has been characterized by large-scale mobilizations arising from organized groups and from civil society. The story of the missing 43 students of Ayotzinapa stands out as a noteworthy event in contemporary Mexican history. Students of the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers' College in Ayotzinapa, went missing in Iguala, Guerrero. The sudden and violent disappearance caused a visceral reaction from Mexican society including mass protests in the Zócalo. Communities from all socio-economic groups demanded that the State clarify and resolve the case. The tragedy caught the attention of national and international media, bringing to the forefront what had been a latent anger with the State: corruption, lack of legitimacy of the government, calls for justice, use of legitimate and illegitimate violence at the federal and state levels. Since the incident, the Zócalo has functioned as a central space for the government, the Mexican citizenry and the world to hear the grievances and demands of the students' parents and of society at large.

On September 26, 2014, students from Ayotzinapa's Rural Teachers' College headed for Iguala, Guerrero, intending to commandeer buses in order to first complete their required practicums, and then transport themselves to Mexico City where they would join protest marches planned on October 2nd.⁴³ They managed to hijack two buses, travelled a few kilometers, passed through the *Plaza de las Tres Garantías* toll booth, and were stopped by police gunfire. Eyewitness accounts stated that at least six students were killed at the site by local police, while another 43 students were taken away into custody, and never heard from again.

On September 30th, 22 police officers were detained for their participation in the alleged murder of 6 people in Iguala. The Attorney General of Guerrero, Iñaki Blanco stated that "the violent incident that took place in Iguala was due to an excess in the use of deadly force by 22 police officers".⁴⁴ News media from across the world covered the incident and questioned the role of the Mexican government, demanding that the 43 students be returned alive. The Inter-American Human Rights Commission (CIDH), The Organization of American States (OEA) and the UN's office in Mexico requested that the Mexican government perform an investigation and search for the missing students. Five days after the 43 students had gone missing, the U.N. condemned the Iguala events, calling the incident "one of the most terrible in recent times".⁴⁵

Intermittent small protests began in the Zócalo, while solidarity protests spread across Mexico and the world. Protests took place in public spaces outside of Mexican embassies, and in emblematic sites such as the Trocadero Plaza "Human Rights Esplanade" in Paris. The Zócalo became the *spatial representation* that connected the Mexican public sphere with global *representative spaces*.

Once again, the Zócalo was confirmed as the symbolic center of the Mexican public sphere. On October 8, a first mass protest took place in Mexico City, denominated the Day of National Action for Ayotzinapa. Protesters marched under the banner of "Not one more death!".⁴⁶ Concurrent to Mexico City's march, protests were carried out in New York, Río de Janeiro, Bogotá, Madrid, Buenos Aires, London and other cities in support of the parents of the missing students. In Mexico City, the protest began at the site of the Independence Angel monument and marched to the Zócalo. The parents led the march "to demand that the federal and state government bring back our children alive".⁴⁷ Families carried portraits of the children with their names while shouting, "they were taken alive, we want them back alive". Civil society organizations, university students, actors, singers, politicians, scholars and citizens in general joined in this first demonstration. The protesters joined together chanting: "You are not alone!".

On October 22, a second global protest called Day of Global Action for Ayotzinapa was convened. Once again, mass protests took place in Mexico and around the world. In Mexico City, the demonstration began at the Independence Angel at 18:00 with 50,000 people carrying lit candles and torches to the Zócalo. The march, dubbed the "Light for Ayotzinapa" saw parents, poets and actors speaking publicly. Actor Daniel Giménez read a text called "The strongest cry" at the Zócalo referring not only to the "missing 43" but also to Mexico's "Dirty War"⁴⁸ mass graves. The events in Iguala brought back into public discourse alleged 20th Century State murders and kidnappings. The Zócalo's *absolute space* became the public sphere from which justice was demanded for State violence. As the protest ended, lit candles and 43 desks with portraits of the students were installed throughout the Zocalo, creating a morphology of memory.⁴⁹

On October 25, the newly formed Inter-University Assembly with over 80 Mexican schools called for a third day of National and international action, to take place on November 5, 2014. That day 115 schools held a national strike to protest the Ayotzinapa incident; thousands marched from the presidential residence of *Los Pinos* to the *Zócalo*. Once there, the chanted: "Out with Peña!" "Justice, Justice!" while banners were seen with the statements "State Crime!" and "We want them alive!"⁵⁰ Concurrent international protests: In New York, 80 people occupied the street in front of the Mexican consulate and lifted painted red hands and banners while chanting "teacher, brother, New York gives you a hand".⁵¹

On November 7, the parents of the 43 missing students met with Attorney General Jesús Murillo, who informed them that human remains of what could be the missing students were found in the town of Cocula, Guerrero.⁵² *La Jornada* reported that the following day there was another peaceful demonstration in the *Zócalo* called "Ayotzinapa lives! The State is dead".⁵³ This time, protestors began their march from the Attorney General's Office and headed for the *Zocalo*. At 21:55, a group of hooded individuals, jumped the metal fences that surround the National Palace and began to spray paint the main or Mariana door of the building. Subsequently, they tried to break down the door with sections of the steel fencing. Reporters on site noted that demonstrators started yelling "no violence", while the group at the Palace doors replied, "This is not violence, violence is murdering students". León Ramírez, a protestor at the scene reported to the newspaper that at 22:20 the rioters tried to set fire to the National Palace main door. Ten minutes later they launched a large firecracker through a Palace window shouting "What pacifism? What non-violence? Direct action and resistance". The mass of protestors then began shouting "Out with the infiltrator!" and upon the explosion of a second rocket, began to withdraw via Madero Street. According to the *Excelsior*, there were an estimated 15 vandals at the Palace doors, however, their actions managed to eclipse the peaceful mass demonstration: "... it became an act of vandalism that lasted around an hour, during which three attempts were made to set fire to the main door of the National Palace."⁵⁴

The hooded individuals launched rocks and firework rockets at the large wooden door (fig.3), managing to make a hole through which they then hurled "Molotov cocktails". This attack lasted until presidential guards arrived, causing rioters to flee. Met by Federal riot police, the fleeing rioters threw rocks at the police, engaging in a violent clash that lasted several minutes. In the end, 10 rioters were placed under custody while five local police officers were wounded along with four presidential guard officers and three civilians.⁵⁵ The rioters understood their symbolic actions against the State by vandalizing the National Palace's *representational space*. Following the attack, photographs spread on-line depicting tolerant State apparatuses: Police and soldiers stood by passively without engaging rioters. One photograph seems to show the authorities protecting the rioter responsible for setting the door on fire. The images generated varied reactions: Protest leaders denied any responsibility for the violence, arguing their protests were peaceful. Other outlets interpreted the incident at the National Palace's main door as an alleged State conspiracy: infiltrators, hired by the government to discredit the mass movement through violence. As if prompted, President Enrique Peña declared that "the Ayotzinapa case is a call for justice, for peace, and for unity, not for violence or confrontation. Justice cannot be sought while acting with violence".⁵⁶

The Ayotzinapa case triggered Mexican society mobilization and activism, making apparent a broken political system with little credibility. The *Zócalo* served as the *public spatial sphere* where dissatisfaction and citizen demands could be publicly voiced. The *Zócalo* became a *spatial nexus* that connected discontent in Mexico with the world at large.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates how various representative events of the first decades of the 21st Century transformed the *Zócalo* into a *public sphere* space of "good governance". Following Herrera's categories, examples were chosen that illustrate the *Zócalo's* socio-cultural *spatial production*. Earlier morphological transformations, such as the removal of Plaza gardens, along with the scale and flexibility of the *absolute* space, in combination with a new political tolerance, enabled a renewed positive use by the public sphere. The "March for Dignity" symbolized State aperture to engagement with belligerent groups such as the EZLN. The March's entry to the *Zócalo*, demonstrated a welcoming Mexican State to political counterweights into the symbolic heart of the nation. The *Zócalo*, as an *absolute, representative and symbolic space* acted as a space where Mexicans openly acknowledged and discussed their differences. The *Zócalo* became a space where diverse Mexicans sought to reestablish a social pact both with the country's government as well as with those who call themselves Mexican. Tunick's art project used the *Zócalo* to unify, if briefly, participants, Church, State and the world. Naked civic participation changed *spatial* perception of a flagless *Zócalo* and its *spatial public sphere* by allowing participants to feel vulnerable, but together, while engaging in something larger than themselves. Finally, the Ayotzinapa protests can be read as transforming the *Zócalo* into a *symbolic space* for the demands and aspirations not only of the missing students' parents but of Mexican society, and once again, much of the world: discourse focused on State democracy, justice for victims, and the debate over the legitimate use of State sanctioned violence. While the attack on the Mariana Door of the National Palace symbolized a potential break in the social contract, State inaction signified tolerance. The *Zócalo's* spatial lesson is that governments everywhere can foster "good governance" environments by promoting and building

spaces where *public sphere* users can engage in large-scale community strengthening activities through *spatial production* and the opportunity to peacefully vent socio-political discontent.



Fig.1: Zócalo circa 1948 (Miguel Aguirre Botello)



Fig.2: Subcomandante Marcos in the Zócalo (Enclavesur)



Fig.3 : Spencer Tunick, "Mexico City 4" (MUCA/UNAM).



Fig.4: National Palace's Mariana Door, (Mediobson).

¹ Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. p.38, Blackwell Publishing.2011

² Herrera, Angélica. *La Construcción Social del Zócalo de la Ciudad de México*, p.85, UNAM 2009

³ Lefebvre, p.48-4

⁴ María Eugenia Valdés Vega, "Una nueva legitimidad en el Distrito Federal. Las elecciones de 1997".

⁵ Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas 1997-2000; Andrés Manuel López 2000-2006; Marcelo Ebrard, 2006-2012. Miguel Ángel Mancera, 2012-18.

⁶ Ángel Mundo López, , "Política de desarrollo social del gobierno del Distrito Federal (1997-2010)" , p.2-3

⁷ *Idem*.

⁸ As early as 1629, riots in the Viceregal Plaza Mayor destroyed buildings abutting onto the main plaza.

⁹ Carlos Monsiváis. "2001: <Nosotros somos la puerta>. El EZLN en la Ciudad de México", *Los ídolos a Nando*. p.313, Debate, 2011.

¹⁰ Sergio Tamayo and Xochitl Cruz Guzmán, p.122. "Imaginarios urbanos e ideologías: las formas simbólicas del EZLN en la Ciudad de México", *Subjetividad y ciudad*, UACM 2012,

¹¹ Monsiváis, p.313.

¹² Tamayo and Cruz Guzmán, p.123.

¹³ *Op.Cit.* Pg.125

¹⁴ Juan Manuel Venegas, "Fox invita a Marcos a los Pinos", *La Jornada*, 10/03/2001.

¹⁵ *Idem*.

¹⁶ Tamayo and Cruz Guzmán, p.126.

¹⁷ *Idem*.

¹⁸ *Idem*.

¹⁹ Monsiváis, p. 313.

²⁰ "Marcha del Color de la Tierra: Palabras del EZLN en el Zócalo de la Ciudad de México" at:

<http://desinformemonos.org.mx/2013/12/marcha-del-color-de-la-tierra-palabras-del-ezln-en-el-zocalo-de-la-ciudad-de-mexico/print/>

²¹ Rosas-Vargas, Rocío. Exclusion, Marginalization and Development of Indigenous Villages. p.694, DOAJ, January 2007,

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- ²² <http://spencertunick.com/>
- ²³ José Gaspar Birlanga Trigueros and Begoña Sendino Echeandia, pg. 1 "Spencer Tunick. La fotografía del Alma."
- ²⁴ Merry Macmasters, "Designa Tunick al Zócalo para su instalación en el DF", *La Jornada*, sección Cultura, 30 de abril de 2007.
- ²⁵ Spencer Tunick en México en: <http://spencertunickmexico.unam.mx>.
- ²⁶ *Idem*.
- ²⁷ Edgar González Ruiz, "Desnudo en el Zócalo Spencer Tunick: Desnudos ante Dios", <http://contra-la-derecha.blogspot.com/2007/05/desnudo-en-el-zcalo.html>, 7/5/2007.
- ²⁸ *Idem*.
- ²⁹ *Idem*.
- ³⁰ "Los ángulos del desnudo masivo en el DF", *El Universal TV*, 02/08/2007.
- ³¹ Picture by Picture (*foto por foto*) refers to the political chant "*voto por voto*", a demand by the PRD
- ³² *Idem*.
- ³³ *Idem*.
- ³⁴ <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2007/05/07/index.php?section=cultura&article=a03n1cul>
- ³⁵ Herrera Loyo op. cit., p.135
- ³⁶ *Idem*.
- ³⁷ Rodríguez, Ana Monica and Palapa, Fabiola, "Foto por foto, desnudo por desnudo", *La Jornada*, 7/5/2007. art. cit
- ³⁸ *Idem*.
- ³⁹ *Idem*.
- ⁴⁰ *Idem*.
- ⁴¹ Denisse Gutiérrez, Psychologist (Ph.D.) Instituto Mexicano de la Pareja
- ⁴² Rivera is the Archbishop of Mexico; in Spanish this chant rhymes.
- ⁴³ Documental *Ayotzinapa. La historia de los 43*, at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gA-ruJz_m0A.
- ⁴⁴ Redacción Animal Político, "Normalistas cumplen dos meses desaparecidos: cronología del caso Ayotzinapa", 26/11/2014 art. cit.
- ⁴⁵ *Idem*.
- ⁴⁶ *Idem*.
- ⁴⁷ Redacción regeneración, "Miles de manifestantes exigen la aparición de los 43 normalistas #AyotzinapaSomosTodos", en: regeneracion.mx/causas-justas/estudiantes-de-ayotzinapa
- ⁴⁸ Mariana González Saravia Peña, "Memoria de los normalistas rebeldes", *El Presente del Pasado*, en: <http://elpresentedelpasado.com/2014/11/05/memoria-de-los-normalistas-rebeldes>
- ⁴⁹ *Idem*.
- ⁵⁰ Por la Redacción, "Miles se unieron por Ayotzinapa en el dolor y también en la esperanza", *La Jornada*, Sección Política, 5/11/2014.
- ⁵¹ Red Política, "Acción Global por Ayotzinapa en NY termina en detenciones", en <http://www.redpolitica.mx/nacion/accion-global-por-ayotzinapa-en-ny-termina-en-detenciones>.
- ⁵² Redacción Animal Político, "Normalistas cumplen dos meses desaparecidos: cronología del caso Ayotzinapa", 26/11/2014, art. cit.
- ⁵³ Fernando Camacho, "Marcha por Ayotzinapa, manchada por disturbios frente a Palacio Nacional", *La Jornada*, Sección Política, 8/11/2014.
- ⁵⁴ Lilian Hernández, "Vándalos queman puerta de Palacio Nacional", *Excélsior*, 9/11/2014.
- ⁵⁵ Hernández, "Vándalos queman puerta de...", art. cit. *Excélsior*, 9/11/2014
- ⁵⁶ Arsitegui Noticias, <http://aristequinoticias.com/0911/lomasdestacado/violencia-y-vandalismo-inducidos/>