



## Conclusion

**Abstract** By way of conclusion to the preceding arguments, this chapter, drawing on ideas from the new formalism and media studies history, pursues the implications of the magazines' rhythm and serialization with respect to theories of nation-building in the context of post-revolutionary Mexico. In its summation of the ramifications of the book's findings, it also returns to the suggestive idea of archive, first rehearsed in Chapter 1, to consider the concept's material and epistemological value for this particular object of study.

**Keywords** Magazines · Mobility · Serialization · Rhythm · Modernity · Archive

In the nineteenth century, museums and monuments represented mass visual commemorations of patrimony, in which 'a fixed repertory of traditions [was] condensed into objects'. In the decades following Revolution, when only then '[the reimagining of the nation] c[a]me to include non-elites' (Tenorio Trillo 1996: 8, 1) illustrated transnational magazines such as *Mexican Folkways* and *Mexico This Month*, I suggest, fulfilled an analogous, yet distinct function. Insofar as they too shaped and became a constitutive part of the very spaces they imagined, they operated as a potentially democratic, though volatile, modern showcase of culture. Discrete historical circumstances in Mexico are critical here:

during the first half of the twentieth century, as Néstor García Canclini has pointed out, ‘the documentation and diffusion of patrimony [in Mexico] was done through *temporary and travelling exhibits*, cultural missions, and muralism’ (my emphasis) rather than in more durable forms of ‘exhibition in museums of a definitively established national culture’ (1995: 117). Indeed, while short-lived newspapers had run throughout the *Porfiriato* and during the Revolution, it was during the 1920s, as I described in the Introduction, that cultural and political journals proliferated in Mexico ‘as independent or government projects’ (Lear 2017: 87). This was, I contend, a primary ‘period of periodicals’ (an epithet I borrow from Deborah Cohn’s characterization of Mexico’s mid-century decades, 2005: 165), when cheap and rapidly produced print, though ephemeral, had significant advantages over other media forms then being deployed, offering greater immediacy of diffusion as well as ‘greater autonomy from state patronage compared to murals painted on the walls of public buildings’ (Lear 2017: 10–11). The very ‘mobility’ of periodicals, their responsiveness and serialization throw into further relief those fixed, permanent sites of monuments, museums, and (most, if not all) murals, which in turn encouraged particular forms of viewing and touring practices. Periodicals circulated among a variety of audiences (subscribers, casual readers, a pass-along readership) in different locations, at different times, and in potentially myriad ways. As such, it is not just that their editors ‘synchronize[d] cultural production to the vertiginous speed of an incipient modernity’ (Gallo 2005: 1), as Rubén Gallo proposes in *Mexican Modernity* of the new media revolutionaries of the 1920s and 1930s; in fact, those magazines enunciated its mood, pace, and ‘logic’.

For the natural state of being of magazines, media historian Mark W. Turner proposes, is ‘change and movement’, attributes that, for Turner, mean that the media provides the very rhythm of modernity (Turner 2002: 184). In establishing the pattern of everyday life, competing inordinate periodical titles enunciate diverse subject matter and different temporalities according to their publication schedules: quarterliness, weekliness, dailiness. Anita Brenner fully understood the calendrical value of magazines and its auxiliary social capital (that is, the potential of rhythmic form to do ‘serious political work’, Levine 2015: 49): she proposed that a ritual monthly travel magazine like *Mexico This Month* was imperative in the new Republic, for it was ‘cosa de cajón en todo país moderno’ [*de rigueur* in every modern country] (Brenner 1965).

Between its covers, *Mexico This Month* chronicled seasonal patterns of Mexico's fiestas, with regular coverage and an annual pull-out calendar of national and local celebrations such as the September Grito, the November Day of the Dead and Lunes de cerro in Oaxaca. It also measured the metre of political processes; publishing details of the president's annual address to Congress, for example, while its features on the presidential rotation each *sexenio* were a staple in the magazine's seventeen-year lifespan. *Mexican Folkways*, though more discontinuous in publication and in parsing folklore in quite the same formats as the later magazine, was replete with features on regional 'costumbres y fiestas' or on indigenous rituals of courtship, marriage, and burial, as well as song scores from across the Republic. Both magazines marked tempo in another fashion by advertising special Christmas gift issues as well as anniversary offers celebrating the journals' own duration. In this respect, notwithstanding the latent power of rhythm to control and subjugate, the periodicity of magazines has a generative function, producing a sense of 'communal solidarity' and that 'simultaneity' Benedict Anderson associates with nationhood; an understanding of the pulse—as well as the terrain—of national experience and belonging.

Nevertheless, in the media landscape, as Turner reminds us, there is no one single rhythm, but always cacophony and asynchrony: 'The present is the past here and it is the future too', he writes, 'if we remember the next issue awaits us' (2002: 192). On one level, both magazines' interrupted and reconfigured serialization (the change from bi-monthly to quarterly publication in the case of *Folkways*, for instance) within the broader context of multiple periodical titles speak to multiple patternings of time that contradict or compete with one another. This is not necessarily a purely 'modern' phenomenon, for separations between past, present, and future were/are indistinguishable to many of Mexico's indigenous peoples, as they were to intellectuals like Carlos Fuentes (1972). Yet, readers and subscribers of magazines such as *Folkways* and *Mexico This Month* frequently experienced a particular expression of 'untimeliness'. This is thematized and ironized in the following not untypical letter in the September 1958 issue of *Mexico This Month*, which spotlights the capacity for rhythmic repetitions to be broken. Fittingly, it construes that atemporality as a colonial legacy, resting on the historical imprecision of route-finding (Fig. 5.1).

Here the idea of simultaneity across space, central to Anderson's thesis on nationhood, breaks down: as readers (as much as the editors) of these

...Christopher Columbus has been called stupid by some critics because, when he left Spain he DIDN'T KNOW WHERE HE WAS GOING, when he arrived in the New World, HE DIDN'T KNOW WHERE HE WAS and when he returned to Spain HE DIDN'T KNOW WHERE HE HAD BEEN.

Some weeks ago I sent you my check to cover a one-year subscription to "Mexico/This Month." Last week, the JULY issue arrived. I was delighted with it and was looking forward to receiving the NEXT issue when the JUNE issue arrived. I have now received the MAY issue.

Now let's get things straight. Unlike the cynic's opinion of Columbus, I consider your publication SMART. Also, because you are smart, I know WHERE YOU ARE GOING. But, I am NOT interested in WHERE YOU HAVE BEEN.

Please advise your circulation department that I would like my subscription to start from the date of my subscription FORWARD not BACKWARD.

I am returning to your wonderful country within the next few months and I am interested in "Mexico/This Month" and the next and the next.

Don Duzick  
148 Clinton St.  
Brooklyn, New York

Fig. 5.1 Reader's letter, *Mexico This Month*

transnational titles discern the gap between 'periphery' and 'centre' they also register what Trish Loughran evocatively describes as the 'materialist corollary' of print culture as a great 'unifier': that is, 'a sense of scatteredness, or dispersion-across-space' (2007: 11).

The temporal disjunctions in the advertising and cartographic images identified in previous chapters speak to other breaches in temporality and periodization on and off the pages of these magazines. In *Mexican Folkways*, the Hotel Genève's forward-looking architectural frame and futuristic, vacant vestibule (both akin to the line of modernist photography of the period and resonant of the expectations of national elites who then valued tourism for the modernity it could bring about in terms of capital) rub up against the colonial nostalgia of its interior furnishings, décor, and Porfirian associations. At a time when the fidelity and congruity of the 'new' technology of photography were readily embraced, El Buen Tono's anachronistic hand-drawn advertisements correlate their products with an economy of making and authenticity associated with 'timeless' traditions documented elsewhere in *Folkways*, camouflaging not only the products' manufacturing processes but also the company's own historical complicity in the extinction of artisan cigarette production in Mexico. In *Mexico This Month*, the Explorers' Maps series articulates an arresting dialectic between the pre-modern function of the map as history book (expressed, *inter alia*, in an iconographic vocabulary, tour describers, and use of cartouches) and a keen post-touristic irony, which also potentially jeopardizes the magazine's founding initiatives. Those maps' fusion of the modern and colonial, as well as their repetition and number over the series' four-year duration, hints at the impossibility of

mapping Mexico at all, evoking Magalí Carrera’s characterization of cartography as ‘an endless overwriting that is never complete’ (2011: 9). On one level, such asynchrony attests to the ‘cultures in conflict’ that define (not only postrevolutionary) Mexico, as Anne Rubenstein lucidly remarks;

“Tradition” did not precede “modernity” any more than modernity displaced tradition. Each required the other. And both were aspects of a single national culture that was developing throughout this period. (1998: 6, 42)

On another level, it further problematizes the neat association between a common print culture and the formation of a shared national consciousness. In a context of precarious and fitful sources of funding, such ‘untimely’ aesthetic qualities together with temporal lags in these periodicals’ publication and distribution all suggest that the work of the media in consolidating a modern Republic as a singular bounded whole was much more complex, processual (and ‘virtual’) in post-revolutionary reality than in theory. Indeed, as Loughran writes of a germane context: ‘Nations are in fact always incomplete, cross-generational, noninevitable, and *ongoing* enterprises’ (Loughran 2007: xviii, original emphasis).

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In his recent book *Culture and Revolution*, Horacio Legrás laments that the archive of sources on Mexico’s revolutionary period has now expanded to the degree that it ‘is ‘beyond control or description’ ‘exceed[ing] the ability of any researcher to master [it]’ (2017: 2). To want to situate magazines such as *Mexican Folkways* and *Mexico This Month* within a repository of the post-revolutionary period that is equally incommensurable might seem a foolhardy endeavour. Yet such an endeavour warrants the risk in part precisely because of these magazines’ own aspirations as archival collections. If we understand the latter to be, in Geoffrey Yeo’s words, ‘a persistent representation of activities created by participants or observers of those activities, or by their authorized proxies’ (Yeo 2007: 337), *Mexican Folkways* and *Mexico This Month* very much operated in those terms. In regularly recording and relaying knowledge about Mexico north/south, with posterity in mind, they also functioned according to Derrida’s depiction of the archive, as ‘a pledge ... a token of the future’ (Derrida 1995: 18). To be sure, as I discussed in Chapter 1, such magazines pose particular methodological

challenges, in part because of those very qualities shared with many an archive or archival impulse, namely their scope, size, ambition, and persistence. Their total number of pages over several years or decades can be vast, such that in the case of *Mexico This Month* at least, its entire seventeen-years'-worth of monthly content poses problems of apprehension and command of the kind identified by Legrás. A comprehensive and exhaustive engagement with it all would indeed require a collaborative team of researchers of the like of Franco Moretti's and Matthew Jocker's Stanford Literary Lab, the work of which would benefit from digital tools to map the 'messy' yet valuable data between and beyond its covers. The publication of Ralph Boggs's valuable annotated bibliography and index of the content of *Mexican Folkways* (1945) arguably anticipated the kind of work that even 'simple' digital applications like Neatline now make possible in visual shorthand. Other methodological challenges arise in part because of the ways in which magazines have been preserved as sources. Library and archival holdings are often incomplete or fail to preserve the periodicals in their original published formats. In many ways, this in itself provides a rationale for their digitization, although digital avatars are not equivalents of their physical forms and cannot capture significant features of the magazine as a material object, including, for example, size, texture, paper quality or weight. Moreover, these magazines' transnational authorship, content, and concomitant copyright issues might also hinder such an exercise. That is not a reason to not pursue such projects or other kinds of research on these magazines, however: the task is to find ways in which the digital and the analogue, distant and close reading, as well as individual and collaborative research, can be brought together for productive ends.

That, to recall the words of Carlos Monsivais one final time, the Revolution in Mexico 'was too many things at the same time' (Monsivais 2010: xi) is less a phenomenon to regret, I suggest, than an invitation to be alert to the coexistence and ramifications of the coincidence of cultures, epochs, and aesthetics as the Republic's geography and identity, with the aid of tourism, started to find expression. In the decades after Revolution, in their number, composition and often-interrupted serialization, magazines keenly articulated and documented that cadence of unseasonableness and surfeit. Indeed, they kindle precisely the kind of 'postmodern' contribution to Mexico's past as advocated by García Canclini, an approach, he avers, that 'reveals the constructed and staged character of all tradition, including that of modernity' (1995: 143). Moreover, if that post-revolutionary period was volatile, its repository

of sources is likewise subject to change rather than stasis, for as Tom Nesmith reminds us, ‘rather than being rendered inert in archives, records continually evolve. If they are to be preserved, they must change’ (2002: 31). This is what Gabriella Nouzeilles refers to as the archival paradox, its ‘hesitation between inscription and itinerancy’ (2013: 41). Although as editors and ‘archivists’ of Mexican culture and traditions, Frances Toor and Anita Brenner were custodians of the material published between the covers of *Mexican Folkways* and *Mexico This Month*, scholars of such magazines (particularly those that are undigitized) perform a comparable custodianship in that ongoing dialectical process. For, as with the archivist’s position, there is ‘a type of authoring or [co]creating of the archival record’ (Nesmith 2002: 32) at stake in the dynamic (re)construction, analysis, and interpretation of magazines as still ‘living’ artefacts and a concomitant responsibility in the mediation and dissemination of the knowledge available within them. In this regard, I take seriously DiCenzo’s and others’ emphasis on the tasks bestowed on researchers of periodicals, as what she calls ‘history makers’ (DiCenzo 2015: 32). I may of course stand accused of having crudely excavated details from *Mexican Folkways* and *Mexico This Month* for the purposes of this exploratory book—for it is true that there is more to be said about them than has been covered in these pages. Nevertheless, I have regarded my preliminary but fundamental task here to be to mediate these magazines’ inaccessibility, be it temporal, cultural or material (as they are stored in archives some three thousand miles away from where I write) and, for the first time, to convey, navigate, and interrogate something of what is at stake in their complexity, diversity, and resonance. Writing this in the summer of 2018 when border tensions between Mexico and the United States resound with alarming echoes of early twentieth-century fascism, these magazines not only offer an instructive reminder of forms of transnational cooperation that test absolutist boundaries between ‘foreign’ and ‘national’ but also recall a time when journeys across the border were cast in terms of international public diplomacy.

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