Collaborative Matter:
Agency and Materiality in Barragán's Casa Estudio

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Abstract

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Although materials are well-understood as a central component in a building's construction, they seldom are discussed as collaborators in that construction. Instead, they take the place of the raw and inert matter through which the architect expresses their vision. To better situate materials as collaborators, this thesis focuses on Casa Estudio Luis Barragán, the home and studio of late Mexican architect Luis Ramiro Barragán Morfín (1902-1988), to investigate how particular materials are active participants in the process of construction. My argument follows a New Materialist framework that allows me to focus in-depth on some of the relationships between materials, people, and plants that comprise Casa Estudio. This method shifts attention away from the architect as the sole authorial figure behind its edification and uncovers the feminist, postcolonial, and ecocritical narratives embedded in Casa Estudio, which account for the role of human-nonhuman collaboration in the building process. Importantly, this thesis argues that the building's creation was possible through the collaboration between the different actors that have interfaced with Casa Estudio and Barragán to ultimately contend that architecture is a collaborative process that extends beyond the architect.

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Pa, esto es para ti primeramente. Tu curiosidad, intelecto y magnamidad serán una fuente de inspiración y admiración eternamente.

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Introduction

In 2002, I first saw an image of Casa Estudio. My sister Carolina introduced me to this unique place in Mexico City two years before she began her studies in architecture. At the time, I did not know who the architect was: "Luis Barragán," my sister said. I searched for more images of this house online and was mesmerized by its brightly coloured walls, its materials, and its lush garden. The photographs that came back from my search made me want to come in contact with Casa Estudio and see it in person; then, I visit it a year later with my family. Eighteen years passed before I visited again in early December of 2020 in the middle of the pandemic, as I was waiting thirteen hours in the country's capital to later continue my journey to reunite with my family. After I was inside the building and walked across its rooms, the different heights, materials, colours, lights, and temperatures of Casa Estudio demonstrated that it consists of a wide range of rich and distinct textures that collide when forming this space. Among the things that this last visit revealed, is the effect natural light has in the space as it fills it with a luminosity that envelops everything with vibrancy as well as how textured the building was.

Presently, Barragán is a figure whose architectural corpus has shaped Mexican identity, both for Mexicans and international audiences. Since the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) curator Emilio Ambasz published the first English-language exhibition catalogue on the architect, *The Architecture of Luis Barragán* (1976), Barragán's acclaim has spread internationally. The book provides extensive details about a selection of the architect's works and Ambasz successfully portrays Barragán's architecture as born out of Mexico's "splendid architectural traditions"[1]

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1 Emilio Ambasz, *The Architecture of Luis Barragán* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1976), 111.

and the country's "natural and cultural conditions."[2] Ambasz celebrated the architect's work in poetic and quasi-universalist terms: "It was as if Nature and Man's creations joined in an atavistic chant, monodic on first hearing, but which slowly began to reveal its richly intricate chromatic structure and subordinated differences of tone."[3]

More recent scholarship on Barragán is less celebratory and proposes instead to present new ways to address the architect's role in the building process as more collaborative and less focused on the individual. For instance, John Clarke Ferguson's 2000 doctoral dissertation presents Barragán's buildings as the result of the architect's own sensibilities and those of "the client's self-image," ultimately creating designs from this "two-sided relationship."[4] In his dissertation, Ferguson argues that these relationships between the architect and his clients are what give rise to Barragán's distinct architecture. Another recent interpretation of Barragán's work is that of Leonardo Díaz Borioli, whose 2015 dissertation examines the architect's role as an author, presenting him as a complex figure who is created by multiple discourses. Borioli's goal is "to resist a monographic reading that presupposes a single, stable figure at the origin of the work rather than a complex effect of multiple forces."[5] This reinterpretation decentres the individual and reinforces a "collective statement"[6] following a "rhizomatic" approach to Barragán's work that challenges the idea of the individuated subject. As defined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix

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2 Ambasz, *The Architecture of Luis Barragán,* 106.

3 Ambasz*, The Architecture of Luis Barragán,* 12.

4 John Clarke Ferguson, "Luis Barragán: A Study of Architect-Client Relations," (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2000), 13.

5 Leonardo Díaz Borioli, "Collective Autobiography: Building Luis Barragán," (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2015), 3.

6 Díaz Borioli, "Collective Autobiography," 11.

Guattari, a rhizome is "an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states."[7] Their conception of a rhizome, as applied in Díaz Borioli's dissertation, reflects the importance of looking beyond a particular or single entity (in this case Barragán) and allows for the discovery of multiple forces that intervene in the formation of buildings. Similar to Díaz Borioli's rhizomatic approach, my thesis focuses on the broad network of human and nonhuman participants in the construction of Casa Estudio. Both Ferguson and Díaz Borioli offer important contributions that build up the notion that the architecture of Barragán points to a broader nexus of forces. I agree with these scholars' arguments that, in studying the origins of a building, we should shift the focus away from the individual and take into account the subtle forces that help in creating structures such as Casa Estudio. Effectively, this thesis extends ideas of co-authorship in architecture to include how certain materials can be understood as also helping in the co-creation of Casa Estudio. What this attention to the materials opened up in the course of the writing of this thesis were: firstly the stories of certain Indigenous groups in Mexico who shaped the country's identity and aesthetic as well as Barragán's, secondly, how an interior designer whose designs are in Casa Estudio helped forge a feminist network, and finally, how the plants in Casa Estudio's garden show how they too change their surroundings.

In order to enable a framework that reverberates against the tendency to understand a building as the creation of individual human agency, I consider how certain materials in Casa Estudio collaborate in the production of the building, following physicist and feminist theorist

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7 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minnesota, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.

Karen Barad's formulation of "agential realism." In Barad's words agential realism, "allows matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming, in its ongoing intra-activity."[8]

Following this line of thought, I revisited architecture's relationship to the nonhuman as an inextricable entanglement, one that reflects a dynamic source of agencies converging and creating a building. This is what I refer to as "agential architecture," which focuses on materials' agency to further uncover the various histories, actors, and collaborations of people and matter into the building. Agential architecture, in the broadest sense then, refers to a methodological shift away from the architect himself and toward the materials through which the building is constructed and iteratively sustained.

The collaboration of matter in Casa Estudio is evident in how the building came to be. That is, labourers responded to Barragán's input and worked with the materials to co-create the structure. Once construction finished, the materials have had to continue to uphold the building and should a crack appear, the caretaker looks after it. Crucially, buildings would not exist without the material that forms them; they are at the core of every construction. Reconceptualizing materials not as fixed and inert things but rather as actors without whose materiality the building would not exist, enables their recognition as "agents," or active participants in the building's construction, with their own unique histories. In this way, new materialism can be applied as a methodology to study any building as materials are understood as agentive and collaborative.[9]

My own project should be understood in contradistinction to architects like Rashida Ng, whose work on so-called "smart materials" (such as shape memory alloys) serves to reappraise

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8 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2007), 136.

9 For further information on New Materialism, see Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds. *New Materialisms Ontology, Agency, and Politics,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 20I0).

materiality's role in the building process. To quote Ng: "In opposition to the longstanding paradigm of materials as fixed and dimensionally stable, the emergence of smart materials proposes a destabilizing viewpoint that celebrates materials that interact with the environment in more deliberate and tangible ways."[10] While I agree with Ng's impulse to challenge the "longstanding paradigm" of material fixity, my project here is to suggest that *all* materials exert some degree of agency in the building process.

How matter is formed and how, in turn, it forms the building is something that needs to be mentioned more often when discussing architecture. The turn to materiality has been brewing since the 1980s, as evidenced in the work of figures such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (assemblage theory), Bruno Latour (actor-network theory), and Karen Barad (agential realism)[11] This turn is an effort to finally break away from the humanities' tendency toward anthropocentrism. For this agentive conception of the nonhuman to work, we have to reconfigure the concept of agency which is described by Barad "as an enactment—an active participation—and not as being an intrinsically human characteristic."[12] Likewise, political theorist Jane Bennett describes the materiality of the non-human as in a state of flux. Materiality, according to Bennett, is "heterogenous, itself a differential of intensities, itself a life."[13] As she goes on to describe, "[i]n this

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10 Rashida Ng, "Experimental Performances: Materials as Actors," in *Performative Materials in Architecture and Design,* eds. Rashida Ng and Sneha Patel (Chicago, IL: Intellect Books, 2013), 5.

11 For further analysis on these authors, see Bruno Latour's, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)*;* Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); and Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University, 2007).

12 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 214.

13 Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Thing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010)*,* 57.

strange, vital materialism, there is no point of pure stillness, no indivisible atom that is not itself aquiver with virtual force."[14] Following Bennett, I would agree that materiality is not an inert resource ready to be extracted but rather a "vibrant" and active participant in the world. Bennett's conception of agency also offers a model that looks at it as a property of things that can be human or nonhuman. For her, agency is attributed to nonhumans as well as humans but it ultimately something that arises in a cohort: "The locus of agency is always a human-nonhuman working group."[15] As Barad describes, agency is best understood not as a feature of the human but rather as an emergent property of what she terms an "apparatus," which she describes as "open-ended practices involving specific intra-actions of humans and nonhumans."[16]

Using New Materialism as the methodology to investigate the role materials play in Casa Estudio's transformation, the thesis will be divided into four sections which explore the different extents in which the materials and components of Casa Estudio reveal the collaborative web formed between entities. As a whole, this project works to articulate a different way to describe how Casa Estudio came to be: formed through a collaborative network of settlers, Indigenous people, materials, designers, and plants who all coalesce into Casa Estudio. By "collaborative network," I mean to show the different ways in which people and matter come together to create

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14 Bennet*, Vibrant Matter,* 57.

15 Bennet*, Vibrant Matter,* xvii.

16 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 170. It differs from Michel Foucault's definition, who framed it, in a conversation taking place in 1977 among other scholars, as a "formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function." Quoted in Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977,* ed., Colin Gordon. Trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1980), 195. To narrow this to specific concepts and leave it less ambiguous, Giorgio Agamben explains what Foucault's apparatus is as referring "to a set of practices and mechanisms both linguistic and nonlinguistic, juridical, technical, and military that aim to face an urgent need and to obtain an effect that is more or less immediate." Quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays,* trans. David Kishink and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 8.

a building such as Casa Estudio. Just as Barad and Bennett broaden who and what has agency, so too does the notion of collaboration expand to account for how those whose input seems immaterial—in the sense that they were not themselves part of the edification of Casa Estudio—exert some influence in the building's creation.

The first section will provide the historical context in which Casa Estudio was built, the architectural discourses of the time, and Barragán's fraught relationship with the colonial and Indigenous history of the country. Furthermore, I will analyze how he tried to distance himself from a "Mexican" architectural style in the later years of his practice.

The second section focuses on the magenta colour of the walls' paint. Magenta will be the anchor for an analysis that emphasizes the role certain Indigenous groups in Mexico, namely the Huichol, Nahua, and Mixteca—and the bugs whose tinctures these Indigenous groups have used for millennia—have played in the creation of national identity in Mexico.

The third section will contextualize Clara Porset's appearance in the male-dominated fields of design and architecture in post-revolution Mexico and the effects the revolution had on women and the tinges of colonial histories in her work, specifically to the merging of Spanish colonial and Indigenous aesthetics in the *butaque*. This will help to account for women's role in midcentury Mexico. Indeed, this focus on a particular chair, the *butaque*, uncovers the often obscured role of women's labour and their participation in patriarchal professions like architecture and journalism. After tracing different material agencies at play in the formation of Casa Estudio, it is worth examining the different temporal registers in which plants and land exist.

Lastly, in the fourth section, I focus on the garden to suggest that plants can partake in the role of architects by constantly transforming their immediate surroundings through their growth.

This will be explained by building upon the work of architects Richard Hyde, Anir Kumar Upadhyay, and urbanist Alejandro Treviño, who studied Casa Estudio's "environmental performance."[17] Through a series of examples I will offer an interpretation of how the garden's flux sees the building as an active agent that changes alongside the plants which ultimately stands in distinction to a traditional understanding of buildings as finished and immutable structures.

Section 1: Indigeneity and Nationalism in Early Mexico

The construction of Casa Estudio as we know it today was the result of a complex scheme. Barragán first bought a large plot of land—4,200 square metres—in Tacubaya in the early 1940s. Subsequently, he subdivided it into four sections.[18] After his arrival to Mexico City in 1940, Barragán lived in what is now named "Casa Ortega," that occupies the plots numbered 20 and 22 on Francisco Ramírez which were later sold to Mr Ortega. Another client, by the name of Luz Escandón de R. Valenzuela (1901-1981), commissioned a house to be built in plot 14 but in the end Barragán bought this plot and built his house.[19] To describe Casa Estudio and the role magenta has played in creating a national identity and its origins with the Huicholes, Mixtecas, and Nahuas, I need to unpack the context in which the building emerged and the colonial heritage to which it is tied. This section will do this by briefly situating the architectural context in Mexico at the time and concluding with a tour of Casa Estudio.

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17 Richard Hyde, Anir Kumar Upadhyay, and Alejandro Treviño, "Bioclimatic Responsiveness of La Casa de Luis Barragán, Mexico City, Mexico," *Architectural Science Review* 59, no. 2 (2016): 91.

18 Antonio Riggen Martinez, *Luis Barragán: Mexico's Modern Master, 1902-1988* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1996), 210.

19 Riggen Martinez, *Mexico's Modern Master,* 121.

Two major historical events shaped modern Mexico: the overthrow of President Porfirio Díaz's dictatorial regime (1876-1911)[20] during the national revolution that occurred between 1910-1920 and the land reforms which occurred in the period between 1910 and 1940.[21] As a result of the Revolution (1910-1920) and the land Reform Movement (1920-1940), the country sought to solidify its national identity through the ideology of "*mestizaje"* and the construct of the "*mestizo."*[22] Architectural historian Luis E. Carranza defines the complexity of the *mestizo*:

> Definitions regarding the purity of the Mexican race and of a Mexican hybrid race—or mestizo, as it would be called—were central to the development of theories and projects for a nationalist architecture as well as contested terrains in regard to what defined the modern Mexican people in the first half of the twentieth century […] The very idea of race was extremely labile and open-ended within the Mexican context; it was used as more of a descriptor of a historical lineage or social construction of identity than as a notion of biological difference.[23]

Crucially, in the Mexican context the *mestizo* is understood not as a race but rather a concept deployed to create a unified national identity irrespective of ethnic and racial diversity coexisting in Mexico.

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20 Arnaldo Moya Gutiérrez, "Rehabilitando históricamente al Porfiriato: Una disgresión necesaria acerca del Régimen de Porfirio Díaz. México 1876-1910," *Revista* C*iencias Sociales* 119 (2008): 84.

21 Ernestina Osorio, "Intersections of Architecture, Photography, and Personhood: Case Studies in Mexican Modernity," (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2006), 21.

22 The idea of *mestizaje* was a complex phenomenon that happened in many countries that were colonized. Particular attention has to be raised when addressing the differences among Latin American countries which all had their particular discourses and ideologies informing the term. To this I would add that there is no single, fixed definition of the term *mestizaje* because it continues to be reimagined across communities worldwide." See the introduction to *Mestizaje: (Re)mapping Race, Culture, and Faith In Latina/o Catholicism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2009), XI.

23 Luis E. Carranza, "Race and Miscegenation in Early Twentieth-Century Mexican Architecture," in *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present,* ed. by Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis, and Mabel O. Wilson (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2020), 157.

Some factions of the population sought to differentiate themselves from their Spanish colonial heritage while others tried to hold on to it while simultaneously working to erase the histories of Indigenous peoples. Ultimately, the concept of *mestizaje* became useful in creating the semblance of a unified, national identity, which gave rise to nationalism in early 20th century Mexico.[24] Carranza continues to mention that

> At the beginning of the twentieth century, cultural debates in Mexico revolved around the revival of pre-Hispanic traditions because these represented the Mexican "race," pure and uncorrupted by the colony, in contrast to a nationalist architecture derived from a contemporary understanding of the people, their character, and culture that would have been forged from the colonial period through modern times.[25]

A way to account for these cultural debates in the country's nascent nationalism was through architecture. There were primarily two distinct currents by mid-twentieth-century Mexico, two of them the *indigenista* and *hispanista,* were concerned with the Indigenous and colonial origins of Mexico respectively. During the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), the government "underscored native characteristics in the construction of Mexico's identity. Such policies triggered a polarization of the *Hispanismo* vs. *Indigenismo* debate leading to the radicalization of both. "[26] Díaz Borioli explains that "Hispanismo focused on a Pan-American understanding of the Latin American republics that gave preeminence to a Spanish Catholic ideology over a native one."[27] According to political scientists Stéphanie Rousseau and Anahí Morales Hudon *Indi-*

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24 Díaz Borioli, "Collective Autobiography," 293. For a further discussion on *mestizaje* in Mexico see: . Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, "Who's the Indian in Aztlán? Re-Writing Mestizaje, Indianism, and Chicanismo from the Lacandón," in *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader,* ed. Ileana Rodriguez (Duke University Press, 2001).

25 Carranza, "Race and Miscegenation in Early Twentieth-Century Mexican Architecture," 156.

26 Díaz Borioli, "Collective Autobiography," 296.

27 Díaz Borioli, "Collective Autobiography," 294.

genismo was "a political project seeking to integrate/assimilate Indigenous peoples through education, acculturation, and income-generating projects."[28] What did this mean for architecture in Mexico? For one, the *hispanista*s were a group of people that often included architects, writers, and government officials who wanted to retain and celebrate their Spanish (i.e., colonial) heritage, whereas the *indigenistas,* supported by the government, manifested an idealized and singular version of indigeneity based on different civilizations that predated the country, such as that of the Nahua and Olmec peoples.[29]

Barragán tried for most of his life to distance himself from categorizing his practice as "Mexican architecture," and did not have any interest in participating in the aforementioned movements. For example, in an interview between Barragán and Mexican-French journalist Elena Poniatowska, she asked the architect whether he believed that a Mexican architecture existed, to which he responded: "No, definitivamente no; no creo que la haya. La arquitectura popular que tanto amo, nos liga al Mediterraneo' lo colonial nos liga definitivamente a España, y de lo precolombino hemos quedado fuera; ya no somos precolombinos."[30] This refusal to define Mexican architecture helped Barragán differentiate his practice from those who strove to align themselves with the nationalist discourse surrounding the country's architecture. In the same interview, he was asked whether he thought architects should seek inspiration from the pre-Hispanic

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28 Stéphanie Rousseau and Anahí Morales Hudon, *Indigenous Women's Movements in Latin America* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 88.

29 Kathryn E. O'Rourke, *Modern Architecture in Mexico City: History, Representation, and the Shaping of a Capital* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), 241.

30 Luis Barragán, "Luis Barragán: Entrevista," interview by Elena Poniatowska, in *Luis Barragán: Escritos y conversaciones*, ed. Antonio Riggen Martínez (Madrid: El Croquis Editorial, 2000), 120. Translation: "Definitely not; I do not believe there is. The popular architecture, that I so cherish, binds us to the Mediterranean; the colonial definitely binds us to Spain and we have left out the pre-Columbian; we are not pre-Columbian anymore."

period to which he responded: "Absolutamente no. Ya no tenemos que construir pirámides."[31] Barragán's statements are problematic. First, it is reductive to present local Indigenous peoples' architecture as related only to pyramids, implying that Indigenous culture is located only in the past. Barragán negates Indigenous existence in Mexican society when he says, "we are not pre-Columbian anymore,"[32] hence suggesting that Indigenous peoples did not exist alongside him in modern-day Mexico. It also points to his reluctance to engage more seriously with the country's colonial heritage and the Indigenous sources, namely his colour palette, which Barragán used throughout his practice.

With all of this in mind, we can finally turn to Casa Estudio itself. I get to Casa Estudio by chance. I have a layover of thirteen hours in Mexico City before I get to my hometown in Villahermosa, Tabasco. I phone Paty, a taxi driver in Mexico City with more than 30 years of experience to get to the building in the *colonia* (borough) Miguel Hidalgo. She knows how to get there but neither of us know if we turn left or right. We decided to turned right and did not see the building like we thought we would. We ask a man washing his turquoise beetle on the street, and he tells us we have to back up a little. I get there a little too early and I wait for the staff and tourists like myself to arrive. Another woman after me appears, her name is Sofïa. We bond over our admiration for Barragán's work and how we were lucky to find tickets to visit on December 4th at 10:00 in the morning. Two more couples arrive and we are a total of six, the new maximum limit for tour visits due to Covid-19 restrictions. Our guide, Arturo, takes our name, ticket,

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31 Luis Barragán, interview by Elena Poniatowska, 120. Translation: "Absolutely not. We don't need to build pyramids."

32 O'Rourke, *Modern Architecture in Mexico City,* 327.

temperature, and offers hand sanitizer in Jardin 17, another of Barragán's gardens right in front of Casa Estudio.

The building's façade is inconspicuous: it blends with the neighbouring houses with its grey paint covering the wall's rough plaster (Figure 1). The main door and garage doors are pale yellow give access to the house. The wooden door to the right is the tour's exit and it used to be the designated entryway to the studio. We go into the foyer and the warm wooden-panelled walls glisten with the sun-ray. It feels a bit too crowded for my comfort and I quickly make my way up the andesite steps into the hall where it is roomy, bright, and tall, with better air circulation. As soon as I walked into the hall, I am welcomed by the artwork *Mensaje* (Message) (Figure 2) by Mathias Goeritz (b.1959). Goeritz, a German-born Mexican sculptor and painter, frequently collaborated with Barragán. This particular painting is part of a series named *Mensajes* and consists of gold leaf on panelled wood and is part of his work "emotional architecture." The gold-leaf reflects the light coming through the window and ricochets on the magenta and white walls, resulting in an ethereal luminosity in the hall that contrasts with the depth the andesite gives to the room.

As seen in its floor plans, the house has three levels with two of them connected by the mezzanine in the library (Figure 3).[33] In the hall located on the main floor, multiple doors are painted in the same colour as the magenta and ivory walls which open to the kitchen, breakfast nook, dining room, and living room. The walls and doors blend in with each other as they are

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33 "Planos," Casa Luis Barragán, Fundación de Arquitectura Tapatía Luis Barragán A. C. accessed: November 8, 2020.

painted in the same colour and create an almost seamless space.[34] I had to stand in a minuscule and short magenta vestibule to enter the kitchen and breakfast nook (Figure 4)**.**

The central staircase in the hall connects almost all the rooms in the house and gives access to the roof terrace. I follow the group and slowly come up the stairs onto the landing that has a door to its left that opens onto a bright yellow vestibule. Once in the vestibule, the door to the right opens into the guest's bathroom while the one that is farthest on the left, opens into a narrow hallway adjacent to the mezzanine above the library. Returning again to the main stairs' landing and turning to the right, there are six steps taking one to a vestibule onto the main bedroom**,** the "Cuarto Blanco"and "Cuarto del Cristo."[35] From the Cuarto del Cristo I continue onto a couple of steps turn into the final set of stairs with an orange door at its very top that opens up to the service rooms, a service patio,[36] and the roof terrace.

Tall walls enclose the space so seamlessly that they only allow me to see the sky and the trumpet vines in orange and golden from the garden below. All the neighbouring houses and constructions disappear when you find yourself in this space. I argue that Barragán's work with the walls is best understood as an example of collaborative matter, as walls are the nexus for the labourers, Barragán, and materials to meet and work alongside each other. For instance, architect

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34 In a well-known study, Mark Wigley explores the relationship between architecture, fashion, and popular culture in his book *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995). Wigley addresses the concept undergirding much of modern architecture that positions the buildings' surfaces as white. He carefully investigates the ideologies and institutional practices that continue to uphold this idea as he argues that much of them were based off "mid-nineteenth-century discourse." Wigley contends that modern architecture had a diverse polychromy that was rendered white in part because of the technology at the time, namely black and white photography. As he demonstrates through key figures of the modern movement such as Le Corbusier and Bruno Taut, the idea that modern architecture is white, is nothing more than a thin coat over the surface.

35 This room, is also called "Cuarto del Cristo" due to the large crucifix on its wall and was used by Barragán as a walk-in closet.

36 This space is common among middle and upper classes in Mexico and it is used for primarily for drying the laundry.

Felipe Leal recounts how Barragán would frequently alter the walls' height and width, wait for them to solidify, and visit several times a day to see how they looked at different times throughout the day. Barragán's frequent visits show his attunement to the walls' material composition transforming at their own pace, before his eyes. If the wall became so tall that that it created a long shadow that affected the rest of the construction, he would ask for that wall to become shorter.[37] This suggests that the walls were being molded by the architect, but my interpretation differs in that I read the walls as agents in their own right. The walls that seemed to be formed mainly by the architect can also be seen as actively engaging in their own becoming by breaking, drying, and solidifying. The bright colours of the walls, in hues of magenta and orange, contrast with the reddish undertones of the tiles and the muted quality of the grey columns (Figure 5). The rays, rain, and wind all mingle on the wall and therefore reduce the buoyancy of the vibrant hues atop them. The magenta especially gives in and fades because of the sun and rain, only to be repainted quite frequently, as indicated by the pattern of brushstrokes on the wall (Figure 6). Indeed, Barragán's success and international acclaim had to do in part with his rich and long-term collaboration with bright colours, particularly "tropical" ones like magenta, red, yellow, orange, and lilac. In a conversation with fellow architect Mario Schjentnan Garduño, Barragán described paint as a complement to architecture: "El color es un complemento de la arquitectura, sirve para ensanchar o achicar un espacio. También es útil para añadir ese toque de magia que necesita un sitio."[38] As seen through the words of Barragán, colour adds magic to the space and it

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37 Felipe Leal, "Una tarde en la casa de Luis Barragán," in *En el mundo de Luis Barragán,* Artes de México, Nueva época, no. 23 (1994): 85.

38 Luis Barragán, "El arte de hacer o cómo hacer el arte. Entrevista," interview by Mario Schjetnan Garduño, in *Luis Barragán: Escritos y conversaciones*, 126.Translation: "Colour complements architecture, it helps with rendering spaces wider or narrower. It is also useful to add that touch of magic that a place requires."

collaborates with architecture as it helps in forming buildings. Coloured paint, in particular, has the effect of brightening, deepening, widening, and constraining buildings due to their qualities and variety of hues but, also through its application on walls, changes the surface's texture.

In the tour, the kitchen is out of bounds for visitors, but we were able to go into the breakfast nook. This room has an imposing window above eye level that overlooks a part of the garden that is partitioned by the vegetation, making it look like a landscape painting. From this room, we enter the dining room, large and carpeted in a mustard rug with beige ones superimposed over it so that we did not step on and potentially muddy the original carpets. An arresting magenta wall has a matching cupboard painted over its shelves and borders in the exact same hue and we see our reflection on a silver-glazed blown glass sphere going through the threshold before going out to the garden**.** The garden, located on the western side of the plot, occupies almost 3/4 of the plot's total size and connects the studio and the house through the *jardín de las ollas* (garden of pots).

As I come into the garden, I first see the vast greenery in front of my eyes, and I try to guess the different kinds of trees and plants to see if I remember them from photographic images. When I turn to my right, I see another view of the living room through the imposing window with its cross in the middle (Figure 7). The cross and square motif reappears in the same space with an adjacent painting (Figure 8) by German artist and former Bauhaus instructor Josef Albers (1888-1976). According to their correspondence, Albers gifted this painting to Barragán in late February of 1968.[39] It is part of the series *Homage to the Square* that Albers created between 1949 and 1976. The window performs as a wall of sorts: it allows for the garden to be seen from

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39 Luis Barragán, "Luis Barragán a Josef Albers," in *Luis Barragán: Escritos y conversaciones,*157.

the inside. In so doing, the window blurs the divide between inside and outside. It extends from wall to wall and reaches the entire width of the room while connecting these two spaces magnificently. Its glass is embedded in the wall and the height of the window almost fills the entirety of the wall which stands 5.3 metres tall[40] and it sometimes takes cover behind sheer, ivory curtains that are themselves suspended by an almost imperceptible indented railing below the wooden *vigas* (beams). The square's reappearance in this room, imbues the space with an air of tranquility and harmony in part because of the correspondence between the painting and the window.

In contrast to the clarity and slimness in Casa Estudio's windows, the walls offer a sense of protection and security that is made possible by the material's thickness and volume. The materials that form the walls in Casa Estudio are a combination of wood, reinforced concrete, drywall, and plaster. The wall facing the street Francisco Ramírez in the library is reinforced concrete with the half walls partitioning the living room and library being drywall. As architect Díaz Borioli notes, "[T]he house that is described as inspired by Mexico's traditional building methods could not have been built without ferroconcrete [reinforced concrete]."[41] He continues: "The buttresses in his house are as structurally unnecessary as the wooden beams attached to the bottom of the concrete ceiling of the living room; yet, they give the appearance of a pre-ferroconcrete construction method"[42] (Figure 9). The wall that faces the street and the ceiling are made in reinforced concrete, a material known for its durability. This wall's depth is accentuated by an

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40 Hyde, Upadhyay, and Treviño, "Bioclimatic Responsiveness," 96.

41 Díaz Borioli, "Collective Autobiography," 55. For a further discussion on concrete in Casa Estudio, see Clive B. Smith, *Builders in the Sun: Five Mexican Architects* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co, 1967).

42 Díaz Borioli, "Collective Autobiography," 60.

iron-clad framed window projecting from the library, makes it appear as though the wall's thickness is much greater than it is in reality,[43] creating an illusion of security.

Barragán's predilection toward the robust wall creates an enclosing effect on his architecture.[44] As Barragán noted in an interview with Damián Bayón: "[M]is ideas sobre los muros no vienen sólo de esto [aversión a ventanales], sino de la belleza de los pueblos indígenas, coloniales o populares de Latinoamérica, formados por grandes muros que constituyen las calles y que desembocan en los espacios abiertos de las plazas."[45] Barragán speaks of his affinity to the wall from these three sources— Indigenous, colonial, and proletarian—and melds them into one undifferentiated aesthetic. The walls that created the structure of the house consist of 300 mm double-brick veneer, commonly made of sand, concrete, and gravel.[46] The robust quality of the walls endows the structure with the semblance of a fortress that protects everything and everyone inside and also attenuate the city's soundscape.[47] Indeed, the walls inside are predominantly drywall of 100 mm thickness that provide secludedness in the room by partitioning the space and insulating it from sounds and gazes.[48] As Díaz Borioli points out in regards to the free-form plan in the library and living room, this room's "short walls that allow for the perception of a continu-

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43 Díaz Borioli, "Collective Autobiography," 153.

44 See Cuadra San Cristóbal, Casa Gilardi, Casa Prieto, and Casa Ortega for more examples of Barragán's use of robust walls that enclose the living quarters of various families.

45 Luis Barragán, "Luis Barragán y el regreso a las fuentes" interview by Damián Bayón, *Luis Barragán: Escritos y conversaciones,* (2000): 99. Translation: "my ideas about walls do not just come from this [aversion to large windows], but from the beauty of Indigenous towns, colonial or popular ones through Latin America that are built by big walls that make up the streets and that lead to the open spaces of the plazas."

46 Hyde, Upadhyay, and Treviño, "Bioclimatic Responsiveness," 96.

47 Tyler Adams, *Sound Materials: A Compendium of Sound Absorbing Materials for Architecture and Design* (Amsterdam: Frame Publishers, 2016), 10; 282.

48 R. Hyde, A. Kumar Upadhyay, and A. Treviño, "Bioclimatic Responsiveness," 98.

ity of space above eye level are characteristic of modern architecture."[49] The drywalls are of different heights in the interstitial workspace between the living room and library and they separate these two rooms without diminishing the overall effect of unity and seclusion of the room; I look over to my right and I see the garden through the window in the living room (Figure 10). There is a beam of light coming through the corner coming from my left side through the tree's branches and dangling ivy (Figure 11), where I find a threshold that puts me in the *jardin de las ollas* (garden of pots) (Figure 12). This garden has a shallow fountain that spouts water from a wooden box perched on a wall with ivy hanging on it. This interstice connects the garden with the studio with a magenta door ajar, inviting us into the architect's former work space. Coming in, the first things visible are some reflective glass-blown balls typical from central-southern Mexico that are currently being sold in Casa Estudio; Barragán himself had a few of these in silver throughout his house. The wooden drafting tables and couches are the original ones used by Barragán and his studio mates. The hallway in the studio has two doors that lead took us to the gift shop and another one connecting the studio to the living room before continuing to the foyer where I open the door and see Paty's car waiting for me parked a few meters away.

Section 2: Magenta or *Rosa Mexicano?*

As seen from this tour, the predominant colours that appear in Casa Estudio create a bright and highly-saturated palette—particularly magenta—that is complemented by off-white paint. The history of magenta in the country goes back almost two thousand years.[50] Its symbol as quintes-

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49 Díaz Borioli, "Collective Autobiography," 55.

50 Durango, "En busca de las raíces púrpuras de Mesoamérica," *Artes De México*, no. 111 (2013): 37.

sentially Mexican, extends into the present; magenta and purple are among the six colours that the The Mexican Tourism Promotion Council (CPTM), selected to promote Mexico for international audiences.[51] These vibrant hues are coopted by the government's tourism council to sell an image of a highly-saturated, lively, and vibrant country. The popularity of this colour scheme, which first appears in the craft of different Indigenous groups, such as garments and toys, and it is something that has influenced artists and architects in Mexico.

To get this colour, magenta, I trace its particular history as one that is rooted on the central valley and on the oceanic rocks of the Oaxacan coast. The red and purple tinctures from these lands are deeply embedded in colonialism and this is a history that is often unaddressed as part of the development of a national identity. This is harmful for it wrongly upholds the idea that magenta is etched within every Mexican's psyche. Because of this internalized assumption, its provenance and histories often go unquestioned, obscuring the role that the Mixtecas and other Indigenous peoples have played in shaping the country.

Carmine was derived from a little bug known as the *grana cochinilla* (cochineal),[52] who would feed on the *flor de nopal* (cactus flower) before being ground into a colourant paste known as *nocheztli* (cactus blood). Its colour is a deep vermilion that captivated Europeans with its vibrancy and depth, and was used primarily in gowns and paintings.[53] To get magenta, this tincture is combined with that of a snail found in Huatulco, in the Oaxacan coast which hosts a variety of molluscs. The *caracol púrpura* (purple snail) lives on the rocks off the coast's cliffs

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51 Javier Gomez Martinez, "Mexican Pink: Color, Museums, and Society," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 37, (2019): 184.

52 Chris J. Cooksey, "The Red Insect Dyes: Carminic, Kermesic, and Laccaic Acids and Their Derivatives," *Biotechnic & Histochemistry* 94, (2019): 103.

53 Durango, "Raíces púrpuras de Mesoamérica," 34.

alongside the Indigenous group of that region, the Mixtecas.[54] Some of the men from this region and group work as the *tintoreros*[55] who extract the tincture and then return them to the rocks so that the snails can recover. This colour is a very saturated violet hue that is very expensive and was highly sought after by the Vatican, European and Asian dynasties for the cultural significance, status, and power with which the colour purple is associated.[56]

Growing up in Mexico, I always related the colour magenta with the country's self-identity, as suggested by its colloquial name "*rosa mexicano,*" (Mexican pink). I often wondered where this colour came from and how it became such a fixture across the country. Barragán's use of magenta made me wonder about its age, its connections, its appearances and its meaning. *Rosa mexicano* began to gain popularity around the 1940s and 1950s, as in the case of designer Ramón Valdiosera, who, at a conference held in New York City in 1949, referred to magenta as "*rosa mexicano"* (Mexican pink).[57] As noted by Javier Gómez Martínez, purple was the second most important colour in México as it helped inform the *psique nacional* ("national psyche"), rooted in the heritage of Mexico's Indigenous peoples: "El indígena ha sido siempre un diseñador innato."[58] While statements like this make an effort to re-contextualize the role that Indigenous peoples play in Mexican culture, it does not suffice to say this without mentioning how their aesthetics, cultures, and knowledges have shaped the country's imaginary more broadly.

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54 Durango, "Raíces púrpuras de Mesoamérica," 36.

55 Durango, "Raíces púrpuras de Mesoamérica," 36. "*Tintoreros"* are Indigenous men who cultivate the snail's tincture.

56 Durango, "Raíces púrpuras de Mesoamérica," 36.

57 Ramón Valdiosera, (conference in New York in 1949), quoted in Gomez Martinez, "Mexican Pink," 60.

58 Gomez Martinez, "Mexican Pink," 180. Translation: "The Indigenous person was born a designer."

The Huicholes (*wixaritári)* who self-identify as "los "hermanos menores" and "los que llegaron al último,"[59] have had a significant role in crafting a vibrant colour scheme that has been co-opted by the country at large, particularly in the capital.[60] They are among the seventy-eight original *pueblos* in present-day México. They inhabit the mountainous regions of central and western México in the states of San Luis Potosí, Jalisco, Durango and Nayarit and move around these places, with some being more sedentary and others moving into cities. This group is known for their artworks, which usually take form in the brightly-coloured textiles of their garments. They also make standalone pieces in wood, wool, and beadwork and wear splendid garments made of vibrant hues and intricate patterns.[61] In a conversation between Barragán and architect Alfonso Pallares (1882-1964), Barragán recounts a trip to market with the artist Chucho Reyes. In the market, the Indigenous people from the region sold their artworks, furniture, and toys in clay, wood, *bejuco* (palm leaves), and bright fabrics. Barragán was apparently captivated by the fabrics that the Indigenous women sold:

> Lucen al sol todos los esplendores del magenta, el solferino, los azules, los rosas, los rojos, y los violetas, formando oleaje encrespado con los amarillos, los verdes, los blancos y los negros, los montones de tela desenvueltas espectacularmente para rendir los ánimos de nuestras mujeres indigenas…[62]

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59 Johannes Neurath, "Fricciones ontológicas en las colaboraciones entre huicholes y ambientalistas," 181. Translation: "the little brothers," [relative to their older brother, the peyote] and "the ones who arrived last."

60 Gomez Martinez, "Mexican Pink," 178.

61 Marina Anguiano, "Introduction," in *Los huicholes o wixaritári: Entre la tradición y la modernidad. Antología de textos 1969-2017* eds. Yolanda Sassoon y Uriel del Río (Mexico City: Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, 2018), 13-14.

62 Luis Barragán and Alfonso Pallares, "Sobre el pintor Chucho Reyes," (1951), in *Luis Barragán: Escritos y conversaciones*, 33. Translation: "They [colours] glimmer under the sun, all of the splendours of magenta, solferino, blues, pinks, reds and violets that create a choppy wave with the yellows, greens, whites and blacks, the piles of fabric unravel spectacularly to *render* the spirits of our indigenous women" [emphasis mine].

To achieve the distinctive colour palette he worked with, Barragán used to paint with *pintura a la cal* (chalk paint) in a combination of natural colours. Given that Barragán favoured natural dyes for a time, I suggest that these had to be cochineal and purple snail mixed to get magenta, as they were the regional and traditional sources to achieve this colour.[63] But with the incursion of synthetic paint in the market, some of them mimicked the texture of chalk paint and thus, he switched over to use synthetic paint only; presently, Casa Estudio uses a combination of synthetic paint that recreates the original colour scheme devised by Barragán.[64]

Thus, the appearance of magenta in Casa Estudio evokes the Indigenous practices of colour usage and creation. In this way, I argue that Indigenous peoples and the animals from which the tinctures traditionally are extracted—cochineal and purple snail—participate indirectly in Casa Estudio through the colour scheme Barragán worked with. Thus, this indirect participation of Indigenous people is a contribution because, without the Mixtecas' use of the animals' natural dye and Huichol colour scheme, magenta would have perhaps not featured in Casa Estudio; more broadly, their participation in the formation of Mexican identity would continue to be an afterthought.

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63 While it is outside of the scope of the present writing to address Barragán's ambiguous sexuality, recent scholarship on the genealogy of gay and lesbian artists in Latin America such as Rudi Bleys' *Images of ambiente: Homotextuality and Latin American Art, 1810-Today* (New York: Continuum, 2000) and Victor M. Macías-García's "The Transnational Homophile Movement and the "Development of Domesticity in Mexico City's Homosexual Community, 1930–70," *Gender and History* 26, no. 3 (November 2014) offer a glimpse into how he features in the artistic and upper-middle-class circles frequented by gay men in Mexico City. While Penny Sparke's *As Long as its Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (1995) does not explicitly deal with Barragán's work, it nonetheless can help examine the stereotypically feminine associations of the colour magenta in Casa Estudio. As she points out, feminine taste influenced modern architecture in coded ways thus queering the understanding of a movement previously construed as strictly masculine.

64 Carlos Labarta Aizpún, "Material y memoria: Transformaciones en la obra de Luis Barragán," *Revista de Arquitectura* 18, (January 2018): 34.

Section 3: *El butaque* and Feminist Networks

The previous section provided the historical and architectural contexts in which Barragán worked and described the colonial heritage of his architecture and reasserted the importance of human and non-human agents whose importance as co-creators of Casa Estudio has long been obscured by modernism's valourization of the individual architect. Building on that historical context, this section focuses on a chair in Casa Estudio, *butaque,*[65] made by Cuban-born designer and frequent Barragán collaborator, Clara Porset (1895-1981). Through an examination of this particular chair which had been ignored until recently, this section will explore its history and how Porset incorporated Spanish and Aztec motifs in a similar fashion to Barragan's approach to Casa Estudio. Just as the inattention to the *butaque* overlooks its complex history of *mestizaje* and colonialism, so too does the inattention to Porset's role in design history foreclose on the creation of a "feminist network" that also constitutes part of the agential nexus of Casa Estudio. This term denotes the partnership and friendship formed among women in Casa Estudio to help each other out in the male-dominated fields of architecture, design, and journalism. I suggest that this feminist network was started by the *butaque* in Casa Estudio, as it was its design that sparked Esther McCoy's interest in Porset's work. Particularly, I will attend to Porset's design of the *butaque* and its history that binds it to colonialism. To contextualize the colonial undercurrent behind this, I will situate it within the post-revolutionary Mexico of the 1930s. To account for the feminist network formed in Casa Estudio, I analyze Porset's role in helping and being helped by other women, particularly with reference to architecture historian Esther McCoy (1904-1989), and

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65 I use the name "*butaque*" to refer specifically to the chair designed by Porset while the use of "*butaca"* or "*silla de caderas"* refers to the Spanish chair from which Porset partly based her design; the other source was the Aztec "*icpalli"* or "*equipal.*"

through the scholarship created in 1969 in Porset's name at the UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico) where she taught until her death.[66] Furthermore, this section will explore how Casa Estudio acts as a "contact zone."[67]

As explained by postcolonial theorist Mary Louise Pratt, contact zones are "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today."[68] Seen as such a space, Casa Estudio creates the conditions for various cultures to meet one another. Notably, through Porset's *butaque,* located in Casa Estudio, Spanish (i.e., colonial), Mexican, Cuban, American, and Aztec cultures meet and become interwoven in both the chair and Casa Estudio as a building.

According to historian Ageeth Sluis, one of the negative impacts of the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910– 20) was the death toll of around a million people and the displacement of many people, particularly women in Mexico City.[69] Sluis mentions that due to the influx of migrant women to Mexico City, the revolution "carved out new social spaces in which women could exercise agency, [which] propelled women to take up traditionally male roles in the absence of men, and created new jobs in the public sphere that were open to women."[70] This shift in gender roles resulted in a beneficial turn that created a subset of cosmopolitan women

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66 UNAM Facultad de Arquitectura, "Diseño Industrial: Premio Clara Porset apoyando la formación de las diseñadoras industriales mexicanas desde 1988."

67 Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* 91 (1991): 34.

68 Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," 34.

69 Ageeth Sluis, "Introduction: City, Modernity, Spectacle," in *Deco Body, Deco City: Female Spectacle and Modernity in Mexico City, 1900–1939* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 1.

70 Sluis, "Introduction," 1.

who consequently entered the public sphere and participated in previously male-coded activities.[71] In light of this, the government's anxieties over women's newfound endeavours in the public sphere grew larger, which resulted in the government's enabling of social reforms that ultimately elided the building of the nation with a reform to the family structure.[72] This was partly due to the "anxieties [of the government] over 'free women' and the impending disintegration of society [which] mounted during the 1920s and 1930s with the arrival of 'New Women,' such as the flapper, and a proliferation in women's activism."[73] Porset's arrival to Mexico City as a Cuban exile in the early 1930s coincides with the socially-focused government of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) that mobilized peasants and labourers. Porset joined the Mexican Communist Party shortly after her arrival and by 1935, her affiliation with the party was widely known.[74] At the time of her arrival, a political movement against American imperialism was taking shape in the country. Historian of Latin America Randal Sheppard mentions that these sentiments were "reflected in the intellectual and artistic scene of Mexico City during the 1930s and 1940s [which] resulted in cultural production that although often militantly nationalist in form was strongly cosmopolitan in practice."[75]

In seeking a cohesive national identity to solidify the newly-formed Mexico, the concept of *mestizo* helped obscure the actual racial diversity that predated the country. Philosopher and postcolonial scholar Julio Covarrubias Cabeza mentions that "the Mexican state-building similar-

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71 Sluis, "Introduction," 2.

72 Sluis, "Introduction," 2.

73 Sluis, "Introduction," 2.

74 Randal Sheppard, "Clara Porset in Mid Twentieth-Century Mexico: The Politics of Designing, Producing, and Consuming Revolutionary Nationalist Modernity," *The Americas* 75, no. 2 (April 2018): 355.

75 Sheppard, "Clara Porset," 356; 377.

ly required the destruction of the Indigenous nations and the invention of the Indian, the mestizo, etc."[76] Historian Guillermo de la Peña notes that the country's post-revolutionary push to solidify its national identity led to the development of the concept of *mestizo*:

> [T]he Liberal and the post-revolutionary regimes devised a master narrative in which successive stages of Mexican history were seen as a progression towards the strengthening of a national *mestizo* identity. This identity was based on racial mixture, but also on the fusion of emblems from the indigenous remote past and the colonial heritage with representations of modernity.[77]

Is crucial to note the relationship between the *mestizo* and Porset's own work as her designs were for a time, financially supported by the government.[78] Importantly, the *butaque* also comes to represent the figure of the *mestizo* by melding the aesthetic influences of both Aztec and Spanish cultures. Currently, the figure of the *mestizo* is being problematized by scholars such as the philosopher Covarrubias Cabeza, who sees it "as a justification for the ongoing oppression and neglect of Indigenous peoples, as the Latin American version of 'melting-pot' assimilationism, or even as a eugenicist project of cultural and racial whitening ("blanqueamiento")."[79] In this sense, the *mestizo* is best understood not as a racial category but rather as an ideologically-charged figure who has been deployed to advance a project of national identity.

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76 Julio Covarrubias Cabeza"Lost Indians" or "Settlers of Color"?: Settler Colonialism and Indigeneity in Mexico," (paper presented at Mellon Sawyer Seminar Symposium on "Thinking Decolonization Hemispherically" Brown University, Providence, RI., 8 December, 2018): 7.

77 Guillermo de la Peña, "A new Mexican Nationalism? Indigenous Rights, Constitutional Reform and the Conflicting Meanings of Multiculturalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 2 (2006): 293.

78 Christina L. de León, "A Friendship Formed by a Chair," in *In a Cloud, in a Wall, in a Chair: Six Modernists in Mexico at Midcentury,* ed. Zoë Ryan (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2019): 99.

79 Julio Covarrubias Cabeza, "Letting go of Mestizaje: Settler Colonialism and Latin American/Latinx Philosophy," *Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (Spring, 2019): 4.

We can see a similar trajectory toward a consolidation of colonizer and colonized in the work of Porset. Her *butaque* chair was created by weaving five key elements of the Spaniard and Aztec chairs. From the Spaniard *butaca, or silla de caderas,* she borrows the X frame and, from the Aztec *icpalli,*[80] she borrows three materials, mahogany or cedarwood stripes from the chair's frame, leather from the seat and back, and *ixtle* (plant fibre) that ties the chair together;[81] *Icpalli* means chair in Nahuatl from which the word *equipal* in Spanish originates.[82] As Latin American and Spanish History scholar Katarzyna Mikulksa defines, "the expression '*in petlatl in icpalli,*' [in Nahuatl, language spoken by the Aztec and Nahua peoples] 'the mat, the seat," is referring to an authority figure, that is represented as a seat made of matting in the codices of the Basin of Mexico.[83] Given that the *icpalli* was a seat that served as a throne reserved for those in authority, it acted as a source of inspiration for Porset's creation of the *butaque* as she mentioned, "El ICPALLI autóctono y el BUTAQUE que trajeron los españoles—heredándonoslo a su vez—represententan esas dos fuentes en el mueble."[84] Moreover, the emphasis Porset places on the duality found in the chairs preceding the *butaque*'s final form, points to her effort in melding these distinct cultures onto the chair **(**Figure 13).

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80 Porset, "El diseño viviente: Hacia una expresión propia en el mueble," *Espacios*, no. 15, (May, 1953): 38.

81 Ana Fernanda Canales González, "La modernidad arquitectónica en México; Una mirada a través del arte y los medios impresos," (PhD diss., Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, 2013), 202.

82 *Ejercicios para el aprendizaje de la lengua náhuatl de Heypapan: Diccionario español-náhuatl,* edited by Marcelino Montero Baeza. (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2016).

83 Katarzyna Mikulksa and Jerome A. Offner, *Indigenous Graphic Communication Systems: A Theoretical Approach* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2020), 53-54.

84 Porset, "Diseño viviente," 38. Translation: The Indigenous *icpalli* and the *butaque* that the Spanish brought—that we inherited—represent those two sources in the furniture."

The *butaque* sits very low to the ground and it is comprised of four legs with the front and back being two semicircles cut into two pieces. The back leg transverses the front one and in doing so, creates the front part of the seat, meeting the back of the knees. The front legs are smaller pieces that go upward, stopping at the juncture with the wooden back being the longest piece of the *butaque's* frame. Sometimes made with armrests and sometimes without them, this was a very flexible chair design that appropriately adapted depending on its placement and usage. These two divergent aesthetics and cultures are synthesized in the *butaque* (Figure 14). The *butaca,* a chair that had been in circulation through the Americas since the 1778 arrival of the German explorer Alexander con Humboldt in Cumaná, in what is today Venezuela,[85] by mid-twentieth century was "marketed as a classical Mexican chair."[86] The *butaca* travelled from Venezuela to Mexico, in the late 18th century, the port cities of Campeche and Veracruz became the two most important distributors of the chair in Mexico, the United States, the Caribbean, Venezuela, and Spain. By 1780, the city of Veracruz was the centre of the *butaca's* production and became known as *boutaque* or *silla de Campeche.*[87]

Interestingly, the port city of Veracruz is one of the places that pass through the Trans-Mexican volcanic Belt, that extends from the west in Jalisco to the east in Veracruz and it is where the pine tree or *ocote* used in Casa Estudio's floor is found.[88] Starting from the pine slabs that make up the flooring, atop them, multiple *butacas* appear. The same long motif from the

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85 Jorge F. Rivas Pérez, "Butacas y butaques: Sillas nuevas para el Nuevo Mundo," *Silla Mexicana,* ed. Ana Elena Mallet (Mexico City: Arquine, 2017), 29.

86 de León, "A Friendship Formed by a Chair," 98.

87 Jorge F. Rivas Pérez, "Butacas y butaques," 31.

88 Esther McCoy,"Barragán's own house: 62; "Notes while photographing with Eliz," 2 in *Esther McCoy papers, circa 1876-1990, bulk 1938-1989.* Box 26, Folder 29: Research Material, circa 1952-1980.

slabs repeats itself on the ceiling in the form of *vigas* superimposed on stucco. This suggests the connectedness between place, practice, materials, and use that Porset's design espouses. These materials were primarily oak and mahogany wood, leather from cows, deer, and pork, and natural fibres, which point to the different climates and contexts in which they were placed.[89] Furthermore, the history of this chair as an amalgam of Spanish and Indigenous styles can be understood as symbolizing the Mexican identity foregrounded by the government and by Porset herself. The designer—unlike Barragán who did not believe in Indigenous aesthetics as part of Mexican architecture—believed that the X frame of the *butaca* and the materials and technique used in the *equipal*, represented the true origins of Mexican culture.[90]

According to design historian Ana Elena Mallet, chairs are generally objects that architects and sculptors are interested in: "Los arquitectos y escultores han estado interesados desde siempre en la silla como objeto escultórico y como un universo que, en pequeña parte, puede servir para encontrar soluciones a problemas tanto antropométricos como arquitectónicos."[91] In this way, the chair's importance in architecture extends beyond its aesthetic qualities. It reflects a partial indebtedness to it as it is an object that helps architects explore other forms and finds solutions to issues in architecture. The chair's ubiquity positions it not only a piece of furniture but also as a sculpture-object. In this sense, the chair can be understood as a microcosmic point of convergence between architecture and design. Moreover, this suggests that materials collaborate

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89 Hannah Martin, "The Story Behind the Design of the Iconic Butaque Chair How the Chair Became Ubiquitous." *Architectural Digest,* May 2, 2019.

90 Porset, "El diseño viviente," 38.

91 Ana Elena Mallet, "Silla mexicana: Diseño e identidad," 5. Translation: "Architects and designers have always been interested in the chair as an sculptor-object and as a universe that, in a small scale, can find solutions to anthropometric and architectural problems."

with the architect and that architecture is far from being an individualistic process. That is to say, the creation of buildings does not only reside in the architect, but it necessitates collaboration with others. Another instance of this collaborative aspect of architecture is found in furniture design at the hands of women designers. Architects such as Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Barragán designed their chairs with help from women such as Charlotte Perriand, Lilly Reich and Porset.[92] Perriand's connection to Porset is made evident by the former's incursion into making a wooden butaque in 1935.[93] After Perriand took a *sojourn* in Japan, she began to work extensible on local materials such as bamboo and not metal solely. She recounts how her hiking through French mountains introduced her to the craftsmanship of the shepherds in the region that changed her perspective on wood: "The value [of wood] was obvious, I could not go on dismissing it."[94]

Porset became familiar with *indigenismo* partly through her husband, the artist Xavier Guerrero, who was also part of the Mexican Communist Party and the muralist movement alongside José Vasconcelos, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Diego Rivera.[95] Porset was one of the most prominent women participating in the development of a post-revolutionary Mexican identity in

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92 Mónica Cruz, "Charlotte Perriand y el equipamiento de la habitación moderna" *dearquitectura,* no. 3 (December 2008): 139. For further information on Charlotte Perriand see, *Charlotte Perriand: An Art of Living,* Mary McLeod ed., (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003). For further information on Lilly Reich see, Matilda McQuaid, *Lilly Reich: Designer and Architect,* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996).

93 The reversal from previously dismissing wood to coming to value it for its properties and its potential at the hands of savvy craftsmen and designers, contrasts with European modernist sensibilities that favoured machinery. See Carmen Espegel Alonso, *Heroínas del Espacio: Mujeres Arquitectos en el Movimiento Moderno* (Buenos Aires: Nobuko, 2007), 207, 58.

94 Charlotte Perriand, "From the Archive: Charlotte Ellis and Martin Meade's Interview with Charlotte Perriand on her Long and Illustrious Career from the AR's November 1984 issue," interview by Charlotte Ellis and Martin Meade, *Architectural Review* (March 6, 2014) originally published in November 1984, https://www.architectural-review.com/author/martin-meade.

95 Sheppard, "Clara Porset," 359.

the arts that melded Indigenous, Spanish, and modern aesthetics into her work. Her furniture designs of chairs and folding screens were a regular fixture in the modern buildings of Mexican architects such as Barragán, Enrique del Moral, Mario Pani, and Enrique Yáñez who frequently incorporated her designs into their buildings.[96] Porset was highly attentive to the regional conditions and sought to create a connection between local craftsmanship and industries,[97] and was a key figure in Mexico's development of industrial design.[98] She helped create the faculty of design at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) where many generations of emergent designers have benefitted from the scholarship in her name.[99]

Her approach to design is interesting as it centres on local materials and working with independent craftsmen, in part because she did not have her own workshop. This would work in two ways as the lack of a central workshop allowed her to move around the country to work alongside craftsmen but it also prevented a streamlined process where she could meet deadlines in time and create products *en masse*.[100] Depending on the region in which the *butaque* was made, Porset adapted her materials and techniques. For instance, leather is produced in large quantities the southern regions of the country even though as a material, it tends to be associated with more temperate or colder conditions. However, leather's temperature is lower than that of the human body thus, providing a cooler surface on which to rest.[101] Wood was the material used

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96 Sheppard, "Clara Porset," 349.

97 Canales González, "La modernidad arquitectónica en México," 267.

98 Canales González, "La modernidad arquitectónica en México," 87.

99 UNAM, Facultad de Arquitectura, "Diseño Industrial: Premio Clara Porset apoyando la formación de las diseñadoras industriales mexicanas desde 1988," last modified June 21, 2019.

100 de León, "A Friendship Formed by a Chair," 99.

101 Porset, "El diseño viviente," 33.

in frames that tended to be primarily mahogany or cedar, with the seat and back made in bovine or porcine leather across the country. In the southern state of Oaxaca, more precisely in Tehuantepec, the seat and back were designed in a pattern of wood lattice. As these examples show, Porset responded in accord with the conditions of the environment and to what was local, making her design sensible and responsive to its surroundings. Lastly, in the hotter regions of Mexico, Porset notes how she would build a chair to accommodate one's body in a relaxed pose highlighted by the body's openness to welcome the breeze. To do this, she stressed that the chair's body needed to rest horizontally and that it had to be made preferably in stitched natural fibres.[102] As is made evident by Porset's attentiveness to the region from which the materials for the *butaque* were sourced, she presents a different approach to design. Porset favoured a sensibility and responsiveness to materials that focused on locality and the craftsman as opposed to a heavily-industrialized process championed by her peers.

American photographer Elizabeth Timberman (1908-1988) and architectural historian Esther McCoy travelled to Mexico in 1951 to write and photograph Mexican architecture for *Arts and Architecture* and *The Los Angeles Times.*[103] The *butaque* appears in Casa Estudio's living room while in the studio *Miguelito* (Figure 15) sits on the right side of the chimney and is facing two other variants of the *butaque*. The chair designed by Barragán borrowed heavily from Porset's design. The tropical woods of sabino and mahogany from Tabasco[104] were the ones chosen to form the *butaque.* Here I will pay close attention to the *butaque* in the living room of

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102 Porset, "El diseño viviente," 34.

103 de León, "A Friendship Formed by a Chair," 92.

104 Esther McCoy, "You'll sit low in Mexico!" *Los Angeles Times*, *Esther McCoy Papers, circa 1876-1990, bulk 1938-1989.*

Casa Estudio that is surrounded by many other *butacas* of different sizes that come from different villages across the country, which shows the ubiquity and popularity of this particular seat in Mexico (Figure 16).[105] However, as mentioned earlier, the chair's ubiquity in the country does not account for its previous travels through the Americas and the travel and ultimate settlement in Mexico of Porset, McCoy, and the *butaque.* As curator Christina L. de León notes, "in their quest to promote the *butaque*, neither Porset nor McCoy realized that it was distinctively of the Americas, a poetic symbol of their connection and their own fluid migration throughout the region."[106] In this way, we can see the connection between Porset, McCoy, and the *butaque* which-followed similar routes through the Americas but ultimately settled in Mexico.

During her trip to Mexico, McCoy discovered Porset's work and their professional relationship began. McCoy became aware of the *butaque* made by Porset as McCoy and Timberman were photographing and writing about Mexican architecture for articles in *The Los Angeles Times* and *Art and Architecture*. Since the *butaque* appeared in Casa Estudio, McCoy took a liking to it and got in contact with Porset after the publication of the articles about Mexican architecture. In correspondence with Porset, McCoy mentions that the editors from *The Los Angeles Times* and *Art and Architecture* were delighted by the chairs: "Everyone here who has seen the photographs of your chairs is charmed and wants to know more about you."[107] Both editors asked McCoy to "include a story about [Porset's] work"[108] in their respective publications.

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105 de León, "A Friendship Formed by a Chair," 92.

106 de León, "A Friendship Formed by a Chair," 99.

107 Esther McCoy to Clara Porset, May 14, 1951, Esther McCoy Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, box 27, folders 29-30.

108 Esther McCoy to Clara Porset, box 27, folders 29-30.

In this way, the chair created the conditions that allowed McCoy and Porset to forge a partnership. In the same letter, McCoy mentions that the articles she would continue to write about Porset's work, despite not being remunerated: "this is partly a labor of love, for *Arts and Architecture* makes no payment to writers or photographers, and [Los Angeles] *Times* pays a minimum."[109] What this reveals is the intention to help Porset's designs become available to American audiences who could potentially order some of them through McCoy, who would act as her agent. In correspondence with McCoy, Porset agreed: "So far I have no agent there, and it seems to me that you would make a very good one."[110] As far as this partnership proved successful, only one shipment of chairs made it to the United States and the furniture was delayed for several months at customs.[111] This, coupled with the furniture's prices increasing due to the government's withdrawal of financial support for her work, rendered their partnership null.[112] Notwithstanding, Porset's legacy lives on through her designs and by the financial aid Porset's scholarship gives to emerging women designers. Thus ultimately strengthening this feminist network that arose from the *butaque*.

Section 4: The Garden and Casa Estudio in Flux

Most of the plants that inhabit the garden of Casa Estudio were imported to Mexico, with the exception of the *colorín* (coral). The floor plan shows the garden is almost the same size as the stu-

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109 Esther McCoy to Clara Porset, May 14, 1951.

110 Clara Porset to Esther McCoy, June 14, 1951.

111 de León, "A Friendship Formed by a Chair," 99.

112 de León, "A Friendship Formed by a Chair," 99.

dio and house (Figure 17). Green abounds in the garden with trees, ivy, and trails of volcanic rock partitioning it; warm shades in red, orange, and light yellow speckle its greenery. The depth is not evident at first sight because of the flowers, trees, and ivy, whose density offers a brief and fractioned view. The trees are peppercorns that come from Peru[113] while the *colorín* (coral) comes from Mexico.[114] The coral's canopy is adorned by orange or crimson flowers that provide height and privacy while the ivy crawling on them blocks the light. The ivy, endogenous to the British Isles, central Europe, and North Africa,[115] acts as a curtain in the same way the jasmine swinging in the garden does. The jasmine is originally from the "Old World tropics and temperate regions with the specific diversity centre suited in tropical Asia."[116] While the clivias,[117] a bush coming from South Africa, lays low on the ground facing the andesite slabs on the ground-level terrace.[118] The BBC docuseries *Around the World in 80 Gardens* focuses one of its episodes on Barragán's garden. The host, Monty Don, points to the overgrowth of Casa Estudio's garden as the trees behind the terrace extend toward the magenta wall with its leaves and branches lay-

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113 Jorge E. Ramírez-Albores, Gustavo Bizama, Ramiro O. Bustamante, and Ernesto I. Badano, "Niche Conservatism in a Plant with Long Invasion History: The Case of the Peruvian peppertree (*Schinus molle*, Anacardiaceae) in Mexico," *Plant Ecology and Evolution,* 4. 153, no. 1 (March, 2020): 3.

114 Rosario García Mateos, Marcos Soto Hernández, and Ayd Heike Vibrans, "Erythrina Americana Miller ("Colorín"; Fabacae), A Versatile Resource from Mexico, 393. *Economic Botany* 55, no. 3 (2001): 392-4.

115 Daniel J, Metcalfe, "*Hedera helix* L." *Journal of Ecology* 93 (2005): 633.

116 Kai Zhang, Mingsong Wu, Bo Pan, Lianxuan Zhou, and Dianxiang Zhang. "*Jasminum parceflorum* (Oleaceae), a new Species from Southern Yunnan, China." *PhytoKeys* 146 (2020): 109.

117 Graham Duncan, "A Historical Synopsis of the Genus Clivia Lindl.: (Amaryllidaceae: Haemantheae), and a Remarkable Range Extension for *Clivia miniata* (Lindl.) Regel var. *miniata* in the Cape Floristic Region, South Africa," *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* 33, no. 2 (June 2016):169.

118 Sally Wilson, "Luis Barragán's Universal Garden," *The Plant Hunter* 15, February 25, 2015.

ing on it.[119] In this way, the garden's vibrancy is made palpable and highlights the connectedness between the plants and the building. This documentation of the garden contrasts with the photographs of Casa Estudio taken by Elizabeth Timberman in the 1950s showed a neatly trimmed garden with young trees (Figure 18). Timberman's photographs stand in contrast with my recent visit to the garden this winter, where I was taken aback by how lush the garden was and how because of it, I could not access it in its full depth.

With these vital participants in mind, the garden in Casa Estudio can be seen to extend beyond its initial shape to reach outwards and forge new self-contained networks of intra-actions. Barad suggests that "intra-action (in contrast to the usual 'interaction,' which presumes the prior existence of independent entities or relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the components of phenomena become determinate."[120] She calls attention to the capacity of intra-actions to "reconfigure" possibilities that reflect their state of flux. To quote Barad: "there is a vitality to the liveliness of intra-activity, not in the sense of a new vitalism, but rather in terms of a new sense of aliveness. The world's effervescence, its exuberant creativeness, can never be contained or suspended."[121] It is also important to take into account the soil which is grounding the structure and connects everything and everyone. As noted by anthropologist Philippe Descola: "[the soil] is not within ourselves, obviously, but it is not entirely separate from us either; it is the accomplice of our

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119 Monty Don, "Mexico and Cuba," *Around the World in 80 Gardens,* video 59:19*,* minute 10:48, January 27, 2008.

120 Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway, 139.

121 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* 177.

body and that which anchors it to the world."[122] In the soil one finds the ground for a set of different relations arising from interspecies coexistence: where critters find their home among plants; where plants are taken care of by humans; and, where humans take the oxygen needed to breathe in the plants.

However, gardens are not just beautiful enclosures of nature where people find repose and where critters make their home. They are also sites marked by complex histories and forces, one of them being colonialism. How does this relate to the garden in Casa Estudio and Mexico's colonial histories? Covarrubias argues that the connection between colonialism and the denial of Indigenous access to territories throughout Latin America is underdeveloped in Mexico's post-colonial discourse.[123] A way this is reflected on the garden is through Barragán choosing to transplant vegetation originally from Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America into Casa Estudio's garden in Mexico.

Plant ecologist Simon Lewis and geographer Mark Maslin speak on the effects colonialism: "The arrival of Europeans in the Caribbean in 1492, and subsequent annexing of the Americas, led to the largest human population replacement in the past 13,000 years, the first global trade networks linking Europe, China, Africa and the Americas, and the resultant mixing of previously separate biotas, known as the Colombian Exchange."[124] In light of this, the connection

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122 Phillippe Descola, preface to *Soil and Culture,* ed. Edward R. Landa and Christian Feller (New York, NY: Springer Press, 2009), 13.

123 Julio C. Covarrubias-Cabeza, "'Lost Indians' or 'Settlers of Color'?: Settler Colonialism and Indigeneity in Mexico," 5.

124 Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene," *Nature* 519 (March 2015): 174.

between colonialism and uprooting, replacing, and relocating thousands of people, plants, and animals from other regions onto new grounds, is evidenced though the garden.

Importantly, however, this is not a suggestion that all gardens made up from imported plants are in themselves colonial yet they come be haunted by the spectres of colonialism.[125] The purpose of invoking Derridian "spectres," is to suggest that these plants offer us another insight into how Mexico's colonial history has shaped Casa Estudio. This is partly due to Barragán potentially replicating certain affectations that resemble colonial gestures such as appropriating Indigenous aesthetics and placing foreign plants in land that could have been propagated by native species.

Speaking about the colonial project in Latin America, Covarrubias mentions that for the Spanish colonial project to succeed, the extraction of resources[126] and racialized labour[127] of Indigenous peoples were the primary focus but it necessitated "the elimination of the native or [their] access to territory."[128] Latin American scholar María Josefina Saldaña Portillo goes on to suggest that the agrarian reform in Mexico gave Indigenous peoples the right of citizenship not by their Indigenous heritage but on their merit as peasants to work the *ejidos* (communal land system).[129] Furthermore, this benefitted the state and the descendants of colonizers as mentioned

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125 Jacques Derrida describes spectres as, "what distinguishes the specter or the revenant from the spirit, including the spirit in the sense of the ghost in general, is doubtless a supernatural and paradoxical phenomenality, the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible, or an invisibility of a visible X, that non-senuous sensuous." *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (London: Routledge, 2006), 6.

126 Shannon Speed, "Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala." *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (December 2017): 784.

127 Anibal Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina," in *La colonialidad del saber: Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales: Perspectivas latinoamericanas*, ed. Edgardo Lander, (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2000), 201-246.

128 Covarrubias-Cabeza, "'Lost Indians' or 'Settlers of Color'?" 5.

129 Maria Josefina Saldaña Portillo, *Indian Given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 408.

by Saldaña Portillo who continues, "[territorial rights] would have granted larger indigenous social formations much broader political, cultural, and economic control over extensive areas of land."[130] As a result, Indigenous peoples' access to land in Mexico is paradoxical as it denied individuals to own portions of land based on their indigeneity, but they were "able" to work the land by sharing the *ejidos.* This demonstrates that the government's policies reified the exploitation of their labour and prevented them for gaining access to land and by extension, dwarfed how much control they could exert in society. This unfair distribution of land stands in distinction to how *mestizo* and the descendants of colonizer's were given access to purchase land at a low-cost as in the case of Barragán and his family who owned a large estate in rural Jalisco,[131] elucidating the power imbalance this has had in the country's fabric.

As previously noted, the plants that make up the majority of the garden come from various countries away from Mexico but, because they blend naturally in the greenery the question of their origin is not self-evident. Historian Shela Sheikh and critical ecologies theorist Ros Gray argue that within the garden's enclosures lays a complicated network: "Gardens in the Western imagination often have utopian, prelapsarian associations, but are riven with ambivalences that stem from questions concerning who is displaced to demarcate their boundaries, and whose labour is exploited to maintain them as sites of nourishment and enjoyment."[132] As they point out, gardens are networks that, although ambiguous, tend to be formed by hierarchies and labour, uprooting and relocation, beauty and desire. The garden in Casa Estudio introduces an intricate

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130 Saldaña Portillo, *Indian Given,* 408-9.

131 Ambasz, *The architecture of Luis Barragán*, 105.

132 Ros Gray and Shela Sheikh, "The Wretched Earth: Botanical Conflicts and Artistic Interventions," *Third Text* 2/2–3 (2018): 165.

story that highlights the colonial tinges contained in the space and its importance to Barragán's work as gardens were one of his key collaborators. This is noted in an interview with architect Alejandro Ramírez Ugarte (b.1940) in which Barragán mentioned: "Para mi, ese gusto por los jardines fue un poco de liberación de muchas cosas tradicionales porque en la jardinería se puede ejercer la imaginación y eso le ayuda a uno a olvidarse un poco del academicismo de la arquitectura y permite mucha más libertad."[133] The freedom Barragán speaks of reflects on one of the most important features of the garden: even if it was envisioned as a delineated space, it is one that continually challenges those boundaries by growing, climbing on the walls, and creating new networks from multiple species living within it. Gardens were a key factor in Barragán's practice as they were the ones that helped to guarantee him a place within the architectural community. As he continues in the interview, Barragán mentions how the garden facilitated the recognition of his work: "Los jardines me dieron un cierto nombre, una cierta facilidad para desarrollar algunos trabajos, en especial en fraccionamientos."[134] Given Barragán's own awareness of the indebtedness to the garden, the garden is best understood as a key participant throughout Barragán's career.

The influence of plants on Barragán's spaces is made evident through the creation of gardens. The importance and overall effect that the plants endow the built space is a sense of flux that results from the plant's growth and its inextricable entanglement with all that surrounds

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133 Luis Barragán, "Los jardines de Luis Barragán," interview by Alejandro Ramirez Ugarte (1962), in *Luis Barragán: Escritos y conversaciones,* (2000): 75. Translation: "For me, this preference for gardens was freeing from traditional things because in gardening you can exercise the imagination and that helps you in forgetting architecture's academicism and allows for much more freedom."

134 Barragán, "Los jardines de Luis Barragán," 77. Translation: "The gardens gave me a name, they facilitated the development of some projects, especially residential developments."

us. The building and the garden need to be attended to by others, thus reinforcing their coexistence, changes, and the need for constant care. This need to be cared for highlights their state as one that is ever-changing. Like the walls that need to be repainted, plastered, and cleaned, the plants need to be watered, fertilized, and cut. As Ambasz mentions, the terrace mirrors the garden in its transformations:

> Like the garden the terrace has also undergone changes over the years. When first built, the walls were all roughly plastered in white. In later years, Barragán had one of the walls painted red, and another an earthy brown [and another in magenta]. The intense Mexican sun consumes all colours, and, like a ritual, the walls must be periodically repainted.[135]

This "ritualistic" activity Ambasz speaks of, describes the ongoing collaboration between materialities, plants, and people as evidenced in the caring or maintenance of the garden in Casa Estudio.

The desire to be close to the plants replicates among the staff of Casa Estudio. According to engineer and caretaker of Casa Estudio, Chakceel Rahen, the garden brings peace to those who are in it which results in showing the propensity of plants to make one feel better. "The noises around me disappeared, and the garden seemed like an oasis. I mentioned it to some coworkers and the following day one of them took over from me, then another. We started to fight about who'd take care of the garden, even arriving at work early to claim gardening duties before anyone else. Amazing, isn't it?"[136]

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135 Ambasz, *The architecture of Luis Barragán*, 34.

136 Chakceel Rahen, "Luis Barragán's Universal Garden," *The Plant Hunter* 15 (February 25, 2015).

The garden enables the sharing of duties and shifting of roles between the staff of Casa Estudio, with Rahen, the scholar, taking the role of the gardener. Rahen, mentions that one time when the gardener of Casa Estudio was ill, "[Rahen] took over from him for a brief stint" and noted the peaceful effects the garden produced on his co-worker. The colours, heights, densities of the plants, trees, ivy, and flowers continue to grow and transform their space. One of the most interesting features of the garden is the peppercorn tree, whose sculptural form acts as a wall or a screen partitioning the space, light, and gazes with the help of the dangling ivy. As Rahem points out, the peppercorn was planted by Barragán in the same spot where it presently stands; it got its shape by having weights attached to its branches while it grew.[137] The peppercorn would be around 70 years old, taking into consideration that it was planted concurrently with the construction of Casa Estudio. The peppercorn's horizontality is evident because it acts as a steel frame while the ivy that hangs from it, covers the tree creating a wall or partition (Figure 19). Ultimately, what the shifting of roles Rahen and the peppercorn tree show, is that both engage in activities they had not planned to do. By doing so, this demonstrates the transformative state the garden in Casa Estudio can provoke for those around it.

After seeing the role the peppercorn and ivy have on Casa Estudio, namely their blocking off light, in this last example, I put forth two instances where the vegetation in the garden of Casa Estudio tempers the temperature inside the house. This example shows how entangled vegetation humans and materials are and further consolidate how these conjectures between agents provoke a different interpretation of who and what participates in the creation of a building. Focusing our attention on the segment of the garden facing the window in the living room, we can

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137 Rahen, "Luis Barragán's Universal Garden."

see how the plants, trees, bushes, and critters create what Richard Hyde, Anir Kumar Upadhyay, and urbanist Alejandro Treviño term a "microclimate." They describe: "[t]he microclimate to the East and West moderates the solar access to the facade. The garden in the West contains mature trees and vegetation."[138] The living room's window transports the sun rays and heat that are muffled by the peppercorn, coral, and ivy, regulating the temperature inside the space. As shown through Hyde et al.'s analysis, the garden regulates the house's temperature by intermingling different types of flora that prevent the sun rays from accessing the interiors. As they continue, "the microclimate is used as a moderator to prevent overheating as seen in the site plan; large mature forest trees were planted to block the western sun. This would prevent direct radiation striking to the façade."[139] The trees they refer to are the same ones Rahen pointed out as being peppercorn and coral that are aided by the ivy, which modulates the heat amassing in the garden into the living room. Here again, we can see the emphasis on the garden's warmth as mentioned by Rahen: "The garden is so warm. When the light comes through from the garden in the afternoon it fills the living room. Barragán achieved this by building up layers of colour in the garden: you have the orange of the clivias; the light yellow of the jasmine; and the red of the coral tree."[140] The staggered colours, densities, and heights of the plants envelop the light and prevent it from coming into the living room of Casa Estudio so brightly.

Thus, studying the history of the garden in Casa Estudio helps elucidate the ways the plants and the building are frequently changing, growing, and creating unexpected alliances be-

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138 R. Hyde, A.Kumar Upadhyay, and A. Treviño, "Bioclimatic Responsiveness," 94.

139 R. Hyde, A.Kumar Upadhyay, and A. Treviño, "Bioclimatic Responsiveness," 95.

140 Rahen, "Luis Barragán's Universal Garden."

tween plants, humans, and infrastructures. Their state of flux is highlighted primarily through how the walls and plants incur in gradual changes. In the case of Casa Estudio, its walls need re-painting while the garden requires trimming down. This shows that in order to keep their vibrancy and liveliness, plants and walls need to be taken care of by the staff and those of us who in sporadic visits, can partake in brief but lasting contact with it.

Conclusion

Through this project, I have embarked on a journey seeking to address the question of how best to account for a building's particular history and materiality by looking into how different materials in the house suggest that their agencies are distributed and shared among all entities, both human and non-human. I offer an alternative framework for analyzing the building that does not position its materials downstream from the architect, nor frame the building as merely the product of human ingenuity. Instead, following an agential architectural framework redescribes Casa Estudio as an instantiation of a wide range of human and nonhuman agencies that collaborate in its ongoing process of becoming, that is during its construction and its maintenance.

This way of seeing materials as vital and ever-changing, confronts the idea that buildings are static and finished structures that do not experience much change once construction is over. Materials have the capacity to quite literally show the cracks and respond to our movement in and with them. In this sense, the building, is more than the sum of its materials that coalesce into a structure: it is an intertwined set of relations between different materialities and the histories that those materialities contain. The materials in Casa Estudio helped me to develop a project that includes their histories and participations in the space in order to address their often ob-

scured collaborations alongside humans to highlight the imbrication of the two in the building. By focusing on the different agencies found in Casa Estudio, I was able to trace how certain materials produced a generative framework from which to extrapolate histories of colonialism, nationalism, feminism, and collaboration. The argument moves through different textures as it threads through the different materials, mediums, and histories in its development of a narrative that presents Casa Estudio in an ongoing state of transformation. Reinterpreting the role that nonhumans play in the formation of buildings and seeing them as collaborators rather than passive objects makes us rethink our relationship to them. New materialism's notion of distributed agencies help circulate the voices and histories of those who have long been ignored.

Through mobilizing the focus on the materiality of Casa Estudio, I was able to expand on the meaning of Casa Estudio as more than the building in its material instantiation but rather as an iterative coalition of materials, people, temporalities and technology. Artist and architectural historian Cynthia Hammond explains well architecture's ability to represent the presence of those who are seldom acknowledged by architectural history: "how I understand architecture's capacity to articulate the traces of those who do not usually feature strongly in the history of the built environment. This capacity depends on the presence (past or present) of someone who 'speaks' through architecture, and someone who uses architecture as a way to 'listen'."[141] In light of this, architecture is best understood an active vector for connections as in the case of Casa Estudio which rearticulated its history to include the voice and participation of the human and nonhuman participants who went unacknowledged in previous accounts on the building.

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141 Cynthia I. Hammond, "Breathing Spaces: Whispering Walls, Feminist Spatial Practice," in *Feminist Practices: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Women in Architecture* edited by Lori A. Brown (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 83.

By highlighting this potentiality, this thesis offers an interpretation that positions architecture as a conduit for connection and collaboration among multiple agencies, expanding its definition and reach. The field's incursion into other areas for future studies such as environmental humanities, geology, fourth-world theories, and new materialism points to architecture's propensity to mesh with other disciplines thus broadening its scope. This project's de-emphasizing of architecture as the product of a single person's idea allowed me to include the role others play in this collaborative process. By doing so, Casa Estudio shows the plurality of agencies and histories existing in its walls.

Figures

Figure 1- Building's façade Mexico City. Unknown Photographer. Image source: http://www.-casaluisbarragan.org/lacasa.html

Figure 2 - Hall with *Mensaje* (Message) by Mathias Goeritz in landing. Digital Image. Taken by Carolina Pérez Rabelo.

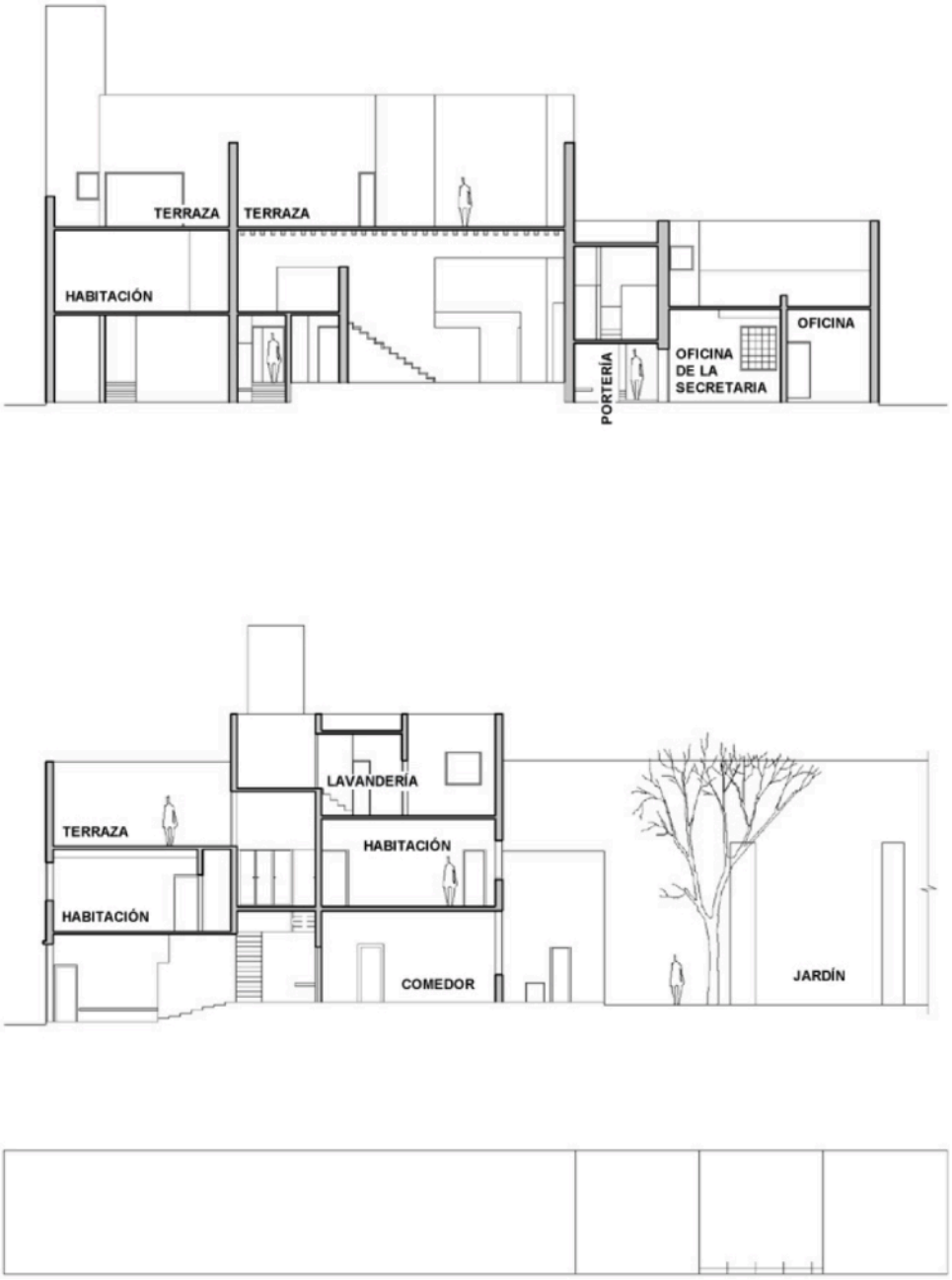

Figure 3 - Cross section of Casa Estudio. Image source: http://www.casaluisbarragan.org/planos.html.

Figure 4 - Pink nook. Digital Image. Taken by Carolina Pérez Rabelo.

Figure 5 - Magenta and orange walls with grey columns in the terrace. Digital Image. Taken by author.

Figure 6 - Magenta brushstrokes on the wall with dangling plants. Digital Image. Taken by Carolina Pérez Rabelo.

Figure 7 - View of the window from the garden. Digital Image. Taken by author.

Figure 8 - View of living room with Josef Albers' painting, *Untitled, Homage to the Square Series 1949-1976*. Digital Image. Taken by author.

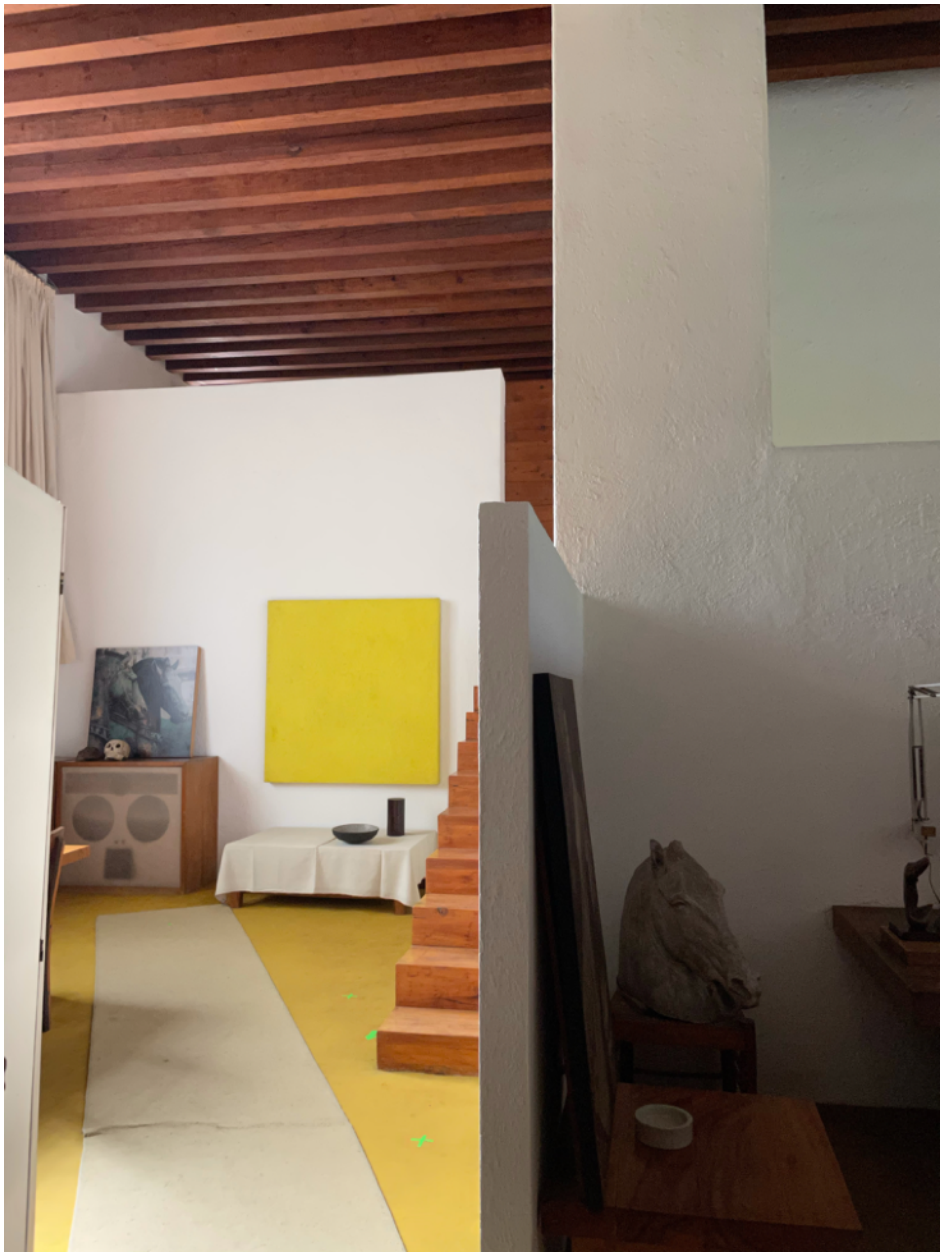

Figure 9 - *Vigas* (beams) in library. Digital Image. Taken by author.

Figure 10 - Interstitial workspace between living room and library. Digital Image. Taken by Carolina Pérez Rabelo.

Figure 11 - Intertwined branches of trees and dangling ivy in garden. Digital Image. Taken by author.

Figure 12 - *Jardin de las ollas* (garden of pots). Digital Image. Taken by author.

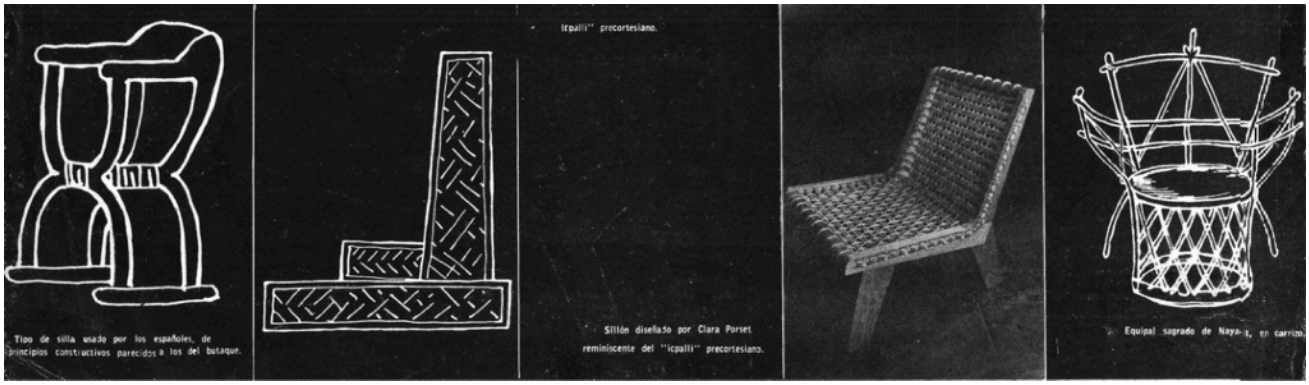

Figure 13- *Icpalli* drawing by Clara Poset in *Espacios* 16.

Figure 14 - Clara Porset's *Butaque* in living room. Digital Image. Taken by author.

Figure 15 - Luis Barragán's *Miguelito* (tall back and lighter leather colour) sits on the right side of the chimney among other *butacas*. Taken by Elizabeth Timberman in "You'll sit Low in Mexico!" By Esther McCoy for *Los Angeles Times* (1953). Image source: http://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?damspath=/ CollectionsOnline/mccoesth/Box_0033/Folder_035.

Figure 16 - *Butacas* of different sizes. Cutout of newspaper article by Esther McCoy with butaques of different sizes in the living room of Casa Estudio, (1952). Taken by Elizabeth Timberman. Image source: https://ids.si.edu/ids/deliveryService/?id=AAAAAA_mccoesth_1915998&max=1300.

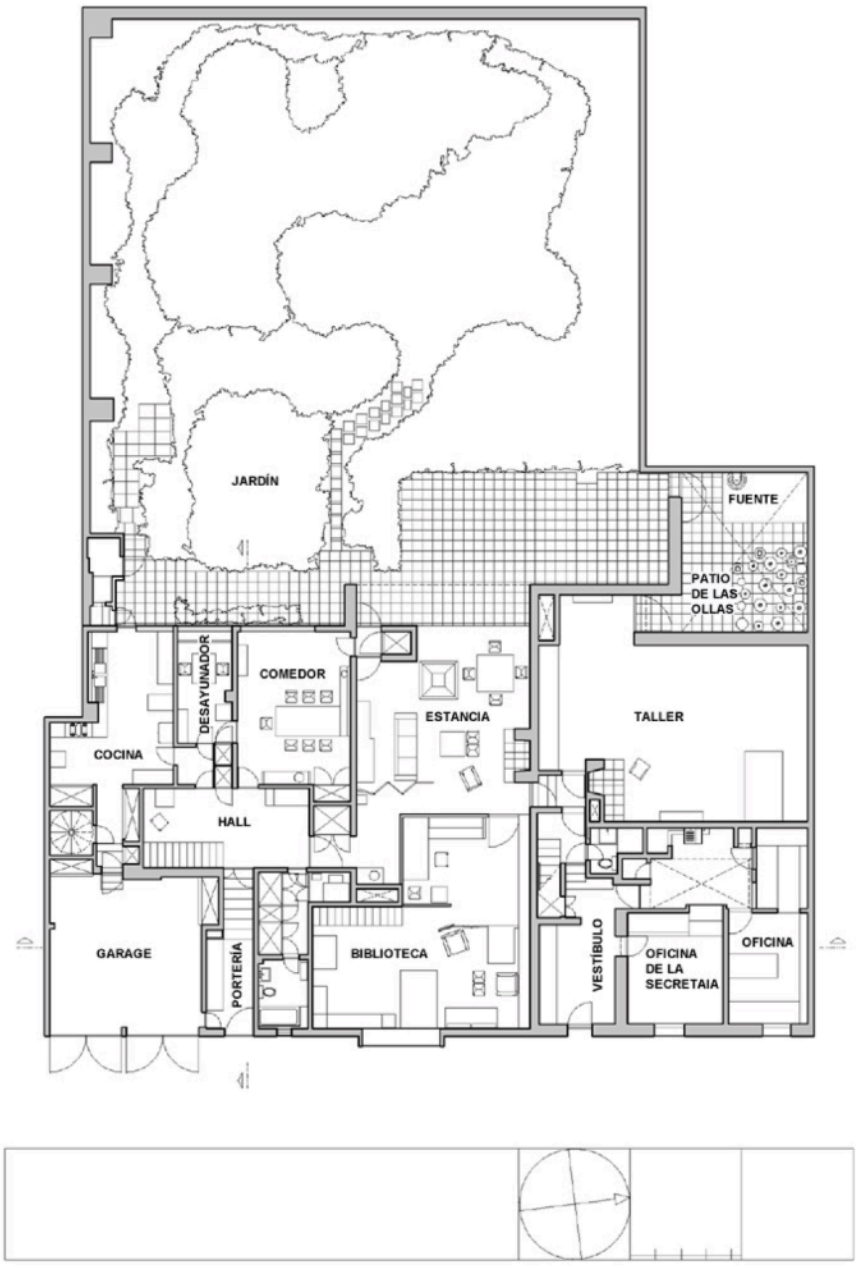

Figure 17 - Floor plan of first floor/garden. Image source: http://www.casaluisbarragan.org/planos/planos_cortes.html

Figure 18 - Portion of trimmed garden (1950). Taken by Elizabeth Timberman. Image source: Esther McCoy Archive http://edan.si.edu/. Figure 18 - danglign ivy off peppercorn tree

Figure 19 - Afforestation of mature trees in garden of Casa Estudio (2016). Taken by Catalina Corcuera. Image source: https://doi.org/10.1080/00038628.2015.1094389.

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