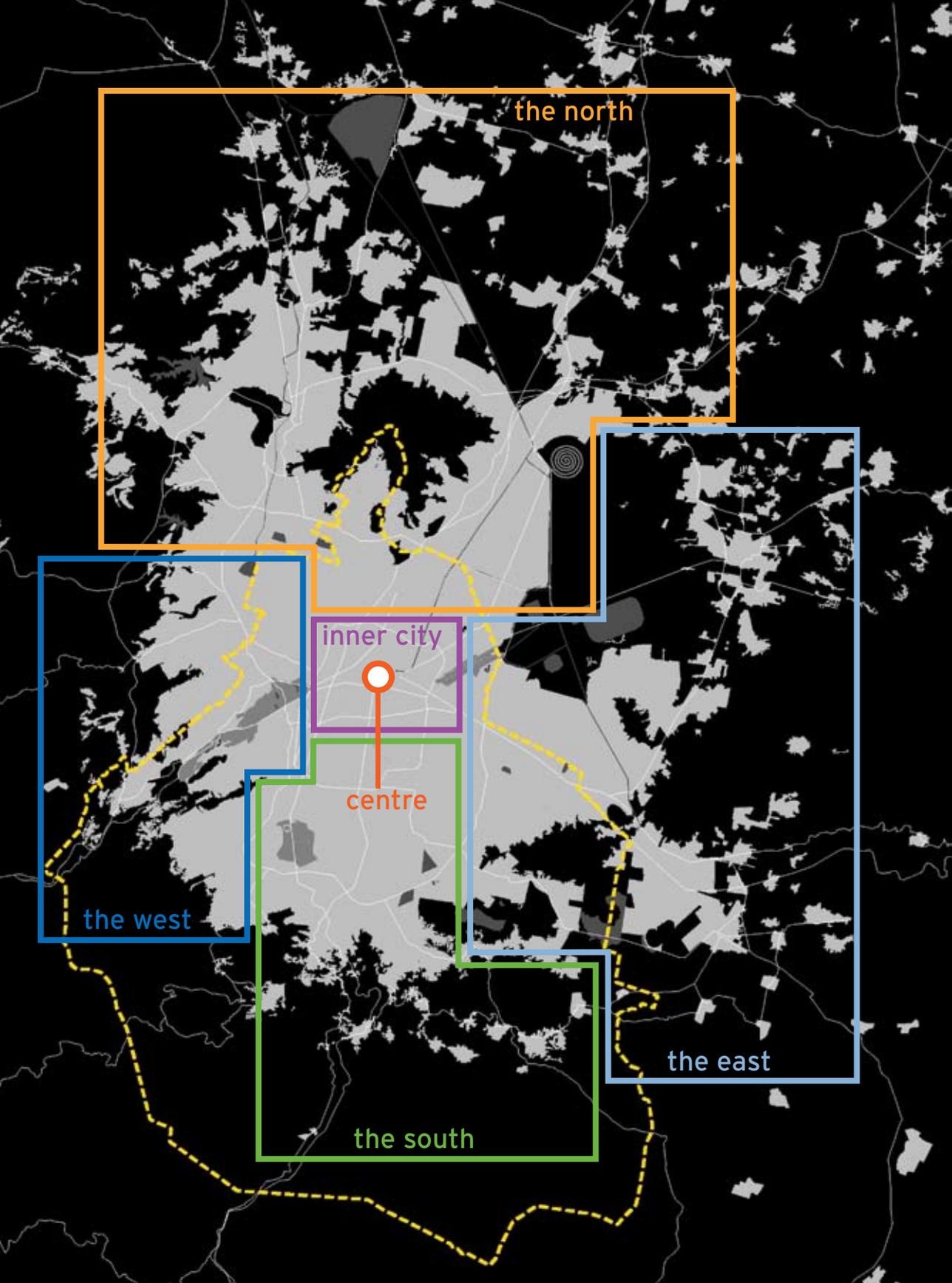




GUIDE
TO
THE MARVELS
OF
MEXICO
CITY

CITAMIBLERS

the Incidence of the Remarkable



the north

inner city

centre

the west

the east

the south

what is it 013
how far 015
how does it work 017

historic centre	023
inner city	071
the east	129
the north	185
the south	237
the west	289



citambulation 347

glossary 362
index by title 366
index by subject 372
credits + acknowledgments 379

HOW FAR





PALIMPSEST

(CTR 04) In theory, the street is a phenomenon of space rather than of time, though a stroll through the city centre at certain hours, above all on a Saturday, would seem to prove the contrary. As the shadow cast by the sundial in the middle of the Zócalo advances, the paths through the surrounding streets fork, the corners multiply and a new map is laid over the outline of Renaissance Mexico, itself based on that of Tenochtitlan.

From nine in the morning the new walls rapidly rise. Two, three or even four thoroughfares appear where before there was only one: **Ribbon Alley, CD Junction, Knickers Boulevard, Way of the Watches and Teddy Bear Avenue.** A spider's web of cords holds together the product-festooned façades, while



unsuspecting amblers have to try and guess their way out of this labyrinth, or resign themselves to walking until dusk falls and the streets are dismantled, packed away and innumerable whistling DIABLEROS cart them off to the warehouses.

At nightfall, what in the light of day exists only in palimpsest is restored: the original layout of the city's streets. The perfect and permanent reticulated grid reappears, and its stone and TEZONTLE façades are recognised. The next day, however, the city centre grows of its own accord once more, inwardly and outwardly, multiplying itself over the pattern of the existing streets. It is no sure thing that the ROJI brothers will ever be able to map it all. (EST 19)

Portable streets
Itinerary taking in Venustiano Carranza, Jesús María and Correo Mayor streets
Col. Centro, Zócalo metro, Mon-Sun: 9am-7pm



SILENT WITNESSES

(INR 17)

The corner of Bucareli and Reforma invites the imagination to wander, with inevitable suspicion, behind the tinted glass windows of the buildings. Begin with the National Lottery building and the hidden designs of chance; continue to the Senate building where – it is said – the future of the country is decided amidst the steam of luxury saunas; carry on to the 'little horse' by the sculptor Sebastián, supposedly a ventilation shaft for who knows what deep underground sewage system; and end up at *Esquina de la Información*, where two sharks used to live in the basement.

Wanda and Natasha swam in silence... What conversations might they have hidden in the recesses of their marine memories? Fourteen years of alliances and secret pacts, business deals, murders, confabulations which have never seen the light of day, buried in the basements of the press. It's not for nothing that these waters are so murky...

On Reforma avenue stands the old entrance to the Ambassador restaurant, where Wanda and Natasha served as the main attraction. From there the shadows of these two solitary beings could be glimpsed. With a persuasive word to the staff, access to the basement could be gained and their shadows observed through the glass of their enormous aquarium. When they were in the mood, they would emerge from among the rocks. It may have been during one of these rare occasions that they let slip a compromising piece of information to a visitor, an indiscretion which banished them to the Veracruz aquarium, under the pretext that they would be happier there with their other shark friends. The determined citambler may visit them there, bearing in mind that the port city will one day be swallowed up by Mexico City in the course of its incessant expansion. It shouldn't be too hard to identify them: they are the ones coloured newspaper-grey, with the wise, melancholy gaze.

(INR 14)





17
INR

(113)

Sharks
Rear entrance of the *Excélsior* newspaper building
Bucareli St., at corner of Paseo de la Reforma, Juárez and Hidalgo metros
Mon-Sat: 10am-2pm



NIGHT TIANGUIS

(EST 05) It's three o'clock in the morning and the metal shutters are still down in the main aisles of the Central Supply Market. The alphabet of corridors, with their penetrating odour of chillies, the squeaking of conveyor belts transporting oranges and the frenzied coming and going of thirty thousand buyers, lies empty. Outside, meanwhile, in the back quarters of the biggest market in Latin America, the intense, everyday encounter of country and city is taking place.

The trucks and trailers arrive in packs to sell off their surplus in the auctioning area. What wasn't sold in the local village markets of Puebla, Veracruz, Michoacán and Chiapas wakes up in the early morning at this strange border zone. Along the periphery, shadows come and go. The eyes try to distinguish what men and women are brandishing in the dark, but the gaze founders, so the nose must lead the way: this corner smells of mint, the one over there of onions, a bit further on, of basil.

Still on the periphery, Spanish is mixed and confused with NÁHUATL, while the faces buried in REBOZOS and the cowboy hats that block out the moon's rays contrast with the plastic aprons and gloves which clean and arrange the produce at great speed: tons of spinach destined for industrial kitchens, walls of radishes that will end up in restaurants and mountains of romaine lettuces to be resold in markets all over the city. However, here too a singular night-time itinerant market is improvised. On the tailgates of the trucks, illuminated by a rough and ready arrangement of hanging bulbs, produce is being offered at retail price. From there, one's steps advance along channels of mud towards the heart of the vegetable market.

A collection of sheds welcomes the customer with concrete floors, but lacking the sophisticated network of screens present in the main halls. Milky coffee to wake you up is sold from supermarket trolleys, although for anyone foreign to the metropolitan provisioning system, the frantic traffic of the DIABLITOS with their over five hundred kilo loads is more than enough for this purpose. There are hundreds of them, as can be seen from the number plates they bear, and though at this time of day it may not be easy to discern, they follow a pattern of movement among the towers of NOPALES, the stockades of corn cobs, the broccoli forests, the altars of pumpkin flowers and the ROTOPLÁS water tanks where tons of carrots and potatoes get scrubbed. To one side, however, calm reigns. In the adjoining flower market, mountains of roses rise up, sunflowers turn their heads *and, slowly, the day unwinds.* (CTR 06)



(153)

Rear of the Central Supply Market
Vegetable and flower auctioning area
Eje 5 Oriente Javier Rojo Gómez, Col. Central de Abastos
peseros or taxis from Aculco metro, suggested time: 3am-5am





MONUMENT TO THE PEDESTRIAN

(STH 05) As soon as it's glimpsed, there is a mad dash to save the life of what looks like an unfortunate woman on the point of being murdered. Who would have thought it: in the peaceful colonial BARRIO of Coyoacán a man is throwing his wife out of the window. From up close, the spectacle is even more disconcerting: beyond the legs there is nothing, not even the normal human torso that tends to accompany them. In its place, a roofless room.

Could it be that an architect and a surgeon have collaborated to put together such a peculiar prosthesis? But what use could a house have for a pair of legs? Who knows, perhaps to join the Atayde circus (*Don't miss it! Today only, the urban tightrope walker!*) or to move to the countryside on its own two feet. What's certain is that every battle-hardened pedestrian will recognise in them the very image of freedom. No more discontinuous footpaths, broken streets without footbridges, nor reverences paid to King Car! From now on, we'll roam the city along the electricity wires!

The creator of this monument understood only too well: in order to be a pedestrian in Mexico City, you have to walk on air. (NTH 04)



(257)

'Ready-made' in private residence
27 San Francisco Figuraco St., Col. Villa San Francisco de Coyoacán
Taxqueña or Miguel Ángel de Quevedo metros



THE THORN FENCE

(SUR 18) The entrance to the thorn garden is unspectacular. A gate, sometimes open and sometimes closed, is zealously controlled by the gardeners. Pedestrians or cyclists are always welcome, but they will stop cars and trucks from entering, in order to protect this spiky grove from **ravenous Mexico City**, the Devourer.

So the city finishes right here, with a fence, in brutal contrast to what now presents itself to our gaze: platforms, containment walls, ramps, labyrinths of basalt stones, embers of stone, black volcanic entrails, which define the spaces that the farmers of Milpa Alta, with millennial patience, have created in the flanks of Teuhtli Malacatepec, 'the dusty one', 'the spindle-stomach one'.

And amongst the stones, complex geometry like that of the 'genealogical NOPALES' of the Techialoyan codices, thorns everywhere, arranged in endless rows, straight and curved. Mature or tender pads, with yellow flowers or fresh buds, ripe, growing like sponges soaking up water before



our very eyes, water stolen from the basalt below. *Nopales* growing tall, or barely out of the ground, recently transplanted, on an endless blue-green carpet, prosper in this man-made landscape, protected by the walls of patiently piled stones, reinforced by nothing but the roots of the odd bush and the slender *palos locos*, which paint Spring yellow.

Occasional small birds, strong winds, trees dotted about, dried herbs and wildflowers make up the rest of the garden, but above all there are *nopales* and stones, stones and *nopales*, or perhaps just *nopales* which have turned to stone with age.

Nopal: key to a striking, complex landscape. NOPALERAS: vast project of man and nature, hundreds of corners, kilometres of walls weaving a stony web, enclosing the thorns, holding them back. Because after all, thinking it through, perhaps they are the ones which, given their primitive **ability to survive**, would overrun their plots, advancing like a silent army and, in a moment of distraction, might end up taking over the entire city. (NTH 06)

(285)

**Nopaleras**

Prolongación Veracruz Norte St., Villa Milpa Alta
peseros from the centres of Xochimilco and Tláhuac



THE MAGICAL CORNER

(WST 04) What a life it would be if everyone could carry a chair with them to take a rest whenever the city demanded it, and what better place than the corner of Revolución Avenue and Jalisco Avenue, to set up this chair, sit at your ease and enjoy the magic of the biggest cinema in the city.

The blue hour is the best time to try it: in this 'screen' the sunlight wanes gradually, while the traffic reaches its peak. The headlights transform the street into a river of lights in constant movement. At the vertex, right where you've taken up your position as philosopher specialising in applied urban studies, the river flows out and divides in two, engulfing the prow of the Ermita building. The only thing missing is a cold one to go with the hamburgers that are always on sale here, except for Tuesdays when there's a police raid.

Last call, last call, the show is about to start! Here comes the Lumière brothers' train, four million times over... (NTH 05)



(309)

Cinematographic contemplation of the traffic
Ermita building, 23 Revolution Ave. at the junction with Jalisco Ave.
Tacubaya, Juanacatlán and Patriotismo metros, suggested time: dusk (blue hour)



CITAMBLERS. THE INCIDENCE OF THE REMARKABLE
GUIDE TO THE MARVELS OF MEXICO CITY

This book was produced thanks to the support of the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (FONCA), through the Program for the Promotion of Cultural Projects and Co-Investments, 2004.

© 2006, Ana Álvarez Velasco, Valentina Rojas Loa Salazar and Christian von Wissel
(editing, texts and photographs)

FIRST ENGLISH EDITION (October 2006) consisting of 1 000 copies.

This work is subject to copyright. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing from the authors/copyright owner.

PRINTING AND BINDING:

Tecnographics Nueva Generación, S.A.de C.V
221 Giotto, Colonia Alfonso XIII
Mexico D.F. CP 01460
Tel.: 56 80 35 88

PRINTED IN MEXICO