VISUALIZING THE SELF: MODERNITY, IDENTITY, AND THE GENTE DECENTE IN PORFIRIAN MEXICO.

by

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Abstract

In late nineteenth-century Mexico City, members of an incipient middle class attempted to define themselves within new urban spaces and against a growing heterogeneous mix of strangers. This thesis argues that an increasingly visual culture brought about by urbanization and new visual practices heightened an awareness of the body’s surface appearances and conduct. As a newly-emerging social group, members of the middle class needed to learn how to display and perform, as well as to read, the codes of class, gender, and citizenship. This paper analyzes two types of texts that provided their middle-class readers with guides both to self-fashioning and to navigating the complexities of a growing and rapidly changing city. Manuel Antonio Carreño’s popular Manual de Urbanidad y Buenas Maneras taught its readers the rules of dress and behaviour that signalled respectability and the short urban sketches of writers such as Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera and José Thomás de Cuéllar narrated the city’s urban and social landscape into scenes of familiarity and recognition. However, despite attempts to stabilize codes of identification, these texts also reflect middle-class anxieties that surface appearances and social mobility could mask or disguise an individual’s “immoral” character or lower-class background. The reading of these texts by members of the middle class formed part of larger late nineteenth-century discourses that attempted to mould a modern citizen through moral reform, education, and hygiene.
# Table of Contents

Abstract

Table of contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction: Sources, history and the Porfirian middle class

The emerging middle class in Porfirian Mexico City

Guidelines to self-fashioning: Carreño’s *Manual de Urbanidad*

Popular fiction and changing visual practices

Home, hygiene, and the internalized gaze

Conclusion

Bibliography
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Introduction: Sources, History, and the Porfirian middle-class

In late nineteenth-century Mexico City, a new and growing middle class rode streetcars, strolled down boulevards, and shopped at large department stores. The rapid transformation of the country’s capital spurred by the government’s desire for a showcase of order, progress, and modernity offered novel amusements and modern pleasures to all who could afford them. It also challenged members of the middle class to define and identify themselves in contrast to a bourgeoning urban population of newly-arrived migrants from the countryside. Popular texts, including newspapers, almanacs, fiction, and conduct manuals, offered guidance and helped map the important visual markers of respectability in a society of strangers.

Along with urbanization, new forms of technology and architecture increasingly privileged the visual as a means to experience and understand society. Middle-class self-fashioning emphasized the display and performance of the identifying codes of class, gender, race, and citizenship. This process of demarcating and securing boundaries, however, was fraught with tension and contradiction. The anxiety evident in many contemporary texts reflects the fact that visual markers could not guarantee fixed social boundaries in a society destabilised by the marketplace and the emergence of new private/public spaces and practices. Many found themselves faced with the confusing prospect of making sense of codes of representation that were crucial to defining their class and social status.

Etiquette manuals, such as the Compendio del Manual de Urbanidad y Buenas Maneras, written by the Venezuelan Manuel Antonio Carreño, offered one means to
chart such dangerous waters. First published in 1854, it quickly became a popular text throughout Latin America. By 1897, some nine editions had been published in Mexico City by Librería madrileña. Such manuals are only beginning to receive scholarly attention. Recent studies by Valentina Septién Torres and Beatriz Stephan González discuss conduct manuals, including the *Manual de Urbanidad*, in the context of nineteenth-century Latin American nation building efforts, citizenship formation, and gender ideology. Although the middle class exemplified the type of citizen desired by the state, I propose to read the conduct manual from the point of view of the middle class itself and its attempts to self-fashion an identity premised on notions of class, gender, race, and citizenship. I use the term self-fashioning to emphasize the self-conscious attempts by members of the middle class to define an identity based on codes that could be learned and disseminated through text and daily practice. Secondly, the term suggests that identity could be understood as performance or role-play rather than something innate or natural. Conduct books were important as guides to this process. The reading of the etiquette manuals, however, must be set within larger discourses of urban and moral reform, education, science, and hygiene, as will be discussed below.

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2 The manual has since been continually republished. The latest Mexican edition of the manual was printed in 2002 by Patria publishers.

Popular fiction offered another guide. The short stories and novels by turn-of-the-century writers Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, José Thomás de Cuéllar, and others described the dangers and delights of city life, as well as portraying characters learning to negotiate new social relations and urban spaces. The short stories included in this study are representative of the turn-of-the century chronicle and costumbrista pieces. The chronicle was a short story or sketch, typically of modern urban life, serially published in the major newspapers of the time. This literary genre came at a time when a broadening economic base of the developing middle class and educational reforms extended literacy to new sectors of the population. The resulting expansion of the press and the emergence of a literary market helped separate literature from the institutions of the state, and offered the modern writer a new degree of consciousness and self-reflexivity. Two of the most popular Mexican writers of the late nineteenth century were Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera and José Thomás de Cuéllar. Much of their work first appeared serially in Mexican newspapers before being republished as novellas and in anthologies. Thomás de Cuéllar's story “Baile y Chochino” (Having a Ball), for example, was published as a short novel in 1886 after first appearing as a serial. The story was later reprinted in the second volume of a collection of short stories entitled La Linterna Mágica (The Magic Lantern) in 1889. Gutierrez Nájera’s chronicles initially appeared in major newspapers such as El Nacional and were then later collected for publication in books, including his first in 1883 entitled Cuentos Frágiles (Fragile Stories). The frequent editions of both writers’ stories demonstrate their popularity among the incipient middle class.

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4 The first volume of La Linterna Mágica was published in 1872.
5 For a brief overview of late nineteenth-century chroniclers and their writings, see Carlos Monsiváis, “On the Chronicle in Mexico” and the editors’ introduction in Ignacio Corona and Beth E. Jørgensen, eds., The
Despite the difference in genre between conduct books and fiction, they took part in similar discourses on visuality and subject formation. They reflect the emergence of a late nineteenth-century visual culture, one of exhibits, displays, and spectacles, that privileged the gaze as a way of experiencing urban life. These new ways of seeing attempted to train the activity of the eye to establish where it could look, what it could look at, and how it should look, as well as to teach the observer to code and decode the multiplicity of signs that had been adopted by the middle class. The two main characters of Mexican popular fiction - the flâneur and the voyeur – reflected the types of looking desired and feared by the middle class in the texts and spaces of late nineteenth-century Mexico City. Novel visual practices also transformed how the modern middle-class subject understood itself. An emphasis on the visual encouraged an increased self-consciousness about the presentation of the self. The conduct manual offered a guide to the small details in appearance and conduct that came under growing scrutiny.6

Historians have often dismissed literary sources, including conduct manuals and popular fiction, because they do not provide so-called “evidence” of a political and social reality. Such an approach excludes many kinds of texts as historical sources (including chronicles) that provide some of the best portrayals of late nineteenth-century urban life.7 But these popular texts did not only reflect life in Mexico City. They also helped to frame middle-class experiences of urban life. By taking seriously the dialectical relationship between literature and everyday practices, I argue that the experiences of

those in the middle class were mediated by what they read and that these experiences in
turn constituted middle-class subjectivity. A refusal to separate “experience” and
language insists on the discursive processes by which identities are constructed and helps
to make visible categories that often appear not to have a history, such as gender, class,
and sexuality. It engages with a notion of power that works through representation and
language and, in this case, the printed word, to constitute subjectivity. This is particularly
important in writing the history of the nineteenth-century Mexican urban middle class
who largely acquired their culture through reading a variety of periodicals.

An analysis that gives significance to texts, particularly texts relegated to the
domestic or “female” realm, allows for a richer understanding of the gendered nature of
the construction of the middle-class subject. It suggests that actions in the private sphere,
such as the reading of etiquette books or popular fiction were as important as “more
serious” activities in the political or public realm. Such an approach further dismantles
the continued division in historical writing between the public and the private, the
domestic and the political. The use of literature in the writing of cultural history also
points to the role of culture in attaining and preserving class dominance. While notions
of etiquette appear, and appeared to contemporaries, to have little political significance,
these rules took on the power of natural law and reinforced hegemonic constructions of
gender and class. “Natural” or “obvious” class stereotypes and gender roles justified

7 See Margo Glantz, introduction, *The Magic Lantern: Having a Ball and Christmas Eve*, by José Thomás
social hierarchies and shaped understandings of personal identities. Any deviation from feminine modesty, for example, became an aberration from nature, not just from duty.9

The emerging middle class in Porfirian Mexico City

During the regime of Porfirio Diaz from 1876 to 1911, known as the Porfiriato, an expanding capitalist market and a growing state administrative apparatus supported the growth of Mexico’s middle class. Administrative bureaucrats, lawyers, engineers, and managers of small enterprises and manufacturers comprised this newly emerging social group. In fact, it owed much of its existence to the government's strategy of “less politics, more administration,” a policy that led to a seventy-seven percent increase in the government payroll between 1895 and 1910.10 The number of government employees such as administrative bureaucrats as well as lawyers and engineers increased by 79% and 127% respectively.11 A growing market economy also increased the number of managers of commercial, agricultural and industrial enterprises, medium-sized shopkeepers and small family-owned manufacturers. By 1910 the number of merchants in Mexico City reached 30,000.12 While this number represented a range of economic circumstances from small shop owners to department store moguls, they shared similar aspirations and values.

12 Lear, 56.
The chief product and main beneficiary of a universal educational system created in the 1840s, the middle class filled the growing number of administrative and managerial occupations that demanded higher rates of literacy. The growth of the literary and periodical press testified to the existence of an expanding reading public. Over thirty mainstream newspapers published in Mexico City catered to a middle- and upper-class readership. Longer publication runs of women's journals suggest a rise in female literacy as well. While magazines from the 1840s lasted only a few years in publication, journals from the turn-of-the century ran from seven to ten years. Books such as the *Manual de Urbanidad* that addressed a young adult audience may also been important teaching tools in the homes of middle-class families. The conduct manual helped middle-class parents transmit values and rules of urban life—rules the parents themselves were only just learning—to their children. Frequent editions of the *Manual de Urbanidad* and popular chronicles indicate that those comprising the middle class enjoyed and learned from the printed word.

The reading of Carreño's conduct manual must be set against a backdrop of moral and urban reform. These efforts began in the late colonial period when Bourbon reformers legislated and prohibited drinking, prostitution, and other activities of public disorder. The Porfirian regime continued enforcing moral behaviour and regulating

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16 On eighteenth-century reform attempts, see Juan Pedro Viqueira Alcázar, *Propriety and Permissiveness in Bourbon Mexico*, trans. Sonya Lipsett-Rivera and Sergio Rivera Ayala (Wilmington, Del: Scholarly
urban space as recent studies on crime and criminology in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Mexico make clear.\(^\text{17}\) For example, it closed *pulquerias* (popular drinking establishments), banned peasant clothing from public places, and created red-light districts for prostitutes. These efforts were consistent with the late Porfirian positivist ideology, which claimed that the Mexican citizen could be developed and reformed through reason and science.\(^\text{18}\)

Urban planning projects initiated by Emperor Maximilian in the middle of the century had replaced the dark and narrow streets of the colonial city with tree-lined boulevards such as the Paseo de la Reforma. Similar projects during the Porfiriato, under the direction of José Yves Limantour, rendered the city more legible and the city’s residents more visible to authorities. City officials placed uniformed policemen on every street corner – a move that foreshadowed the building of the panopticon-style Lecumburí prison in 1900. Like the panopticon, a prison that subjected the prisoner to constant surveillance, the new strategy placed every subject on the street under an observing eye, including the policemen themselves, who tended to stray from their duties.\(^\text{19}\)

As the government’s showcase of order and modernity, the capital city received 80% of the

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\(^{19}\) Despite the municipal authorities’ attempts to modernize the police force, “drunkenness, absenteeism, and insubordination were rampant.” Wasserman, 204.
government's spending on streets, electricity, sewer systems, libraries and schools. A streetcar system moved people throughout the expanding city and at night the electric lighting illuminated "order and progress," – the government's motto and aspiring image for the city and nation. At the world fairs of New Orleans (1884), Paris (1889), and Chicago (1893), the government displayed the results of its efforts. However, many of these displays of modernization were mainly surface improvements that did little actually to improve the conditions of the large lower-class population.

Nineteenth-century efforts to regulate behaviour on the streets of Mexico City coincided with a dramatic increase in population density in the capital. Mid-century conflicts had resulted in massive migrations from the provinces to the cities. The construction of a system of railroads leading towards Mexico City, such as the 1873 line between the capital and port of Veracruz, also brought a large influx of people into the metropolis. Between 1895 and 1910 the city's population doubled in size to nearly half a million residents. A well-developed railway and streetcar system that incorporated surrounding areas into the economic and residential spheres of the city also allowed more people to come into the city to work or sell goods. The increased numbers of campesinos on the streets and in lower-class tenement housing heightened elite fears of disorder, disease and moral corruption. The desire to regulate and sanitize the image of the city became centred on the prostitute who came to symbolize the danger of moral contagion and disease. Authorities created a Sanitary Police Force that forced prostitutes to submit to a weekly hygienic examination and confined syphilitic women to a sanitation

20 Wasserman, 199-202.
21 For a discussion of Mexico's participation at the world's fairs, see Maurico Tenorio Trillo, Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting the Modern Nation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
22 Wasserman, 135 and 184. See also Lear, 22.
Identifiable visual codes of class respectability became an important means for members of the new middle class to distinguish themselves against the crowds of strangers as well as the mobility of urban society.

In short, the *Manual de Urbanidad* was a key text for the Mexican middle class, whose members depended on outward displays of culture rather than tradition or birthright to indicate class status. Conducting oneself according to rules of etiquette was an essential aspect of middle-class cultural practice. In Mexico, as in Europe, bodily expression and control were important indicators of an individual's "civilized" culture and class privilege. Members of the middle class distinguished themselves more by cultural values than by economic considerations. Self-described as the *gente decente*, or respectable people, the middle class embraced values of moral reform, civic pride, hygiene, nationalism, and economic progress. Its members adopted European architecture, dress, customs, technology, and science promoted by the Porfirian government that hoped to place Mexico among other "progressive" nations of the world. In the Porfiriato, members of the middle class embraced conduct manuals and chronicles as practical guides for their self-fashioning and for help in negotiating the city's new geography.

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23 Lear, 52.
Guidelines to self-fashioning: Carreño’s *Manual de Urbanidad*

Moral and respectable behaviour formed part both of middle-class conduct and of the duties of citizenship in Carreño's *Manual de Urbanidad*. The manual separates these responsibilities into two parts. The second half of the manual, the focus of this thesis, pertains to codes of middle-class respectability and contains six chapters that cover roughly three areas of concern: the first, on hygiene, clothes, and living spaces; the second, on dress and conduct in the home; and the third, on public etiquette. The three chapters in the first half of the manual (not considered here) outline the duties to God, society, and *la patria* that every modern Mexican should fulfill. In her discussion of religion in late eighteenth-century Mexico, Pamela Voekel clearly outlines a shift in how individuals conceptualized their relationship to God and to the church. A modern “enlightened” piety embodied individualistic notions of moderation, self-control, and even hygienic practices. Similarly, by placing religious and civic duties alongside rules of conduct and dress, the manual makes clear that both were requirements for inclusion into society’s *gente decente*. This meant behaving modestly, wearing proper attire, keeping elbows off the dinner table, going to church, respecting civic officials, obeying one’s parents, and being a good neighbour. The conduct manual suggests that citizenship was not only taught and learned, but also performed by following the codes of etiquette and fulfilling certain duties.

Carreño's use of the inclusive pronoun we (*nosotros*) throughout the text serves the dual purpose of inclusiveness and distinction. The reader was made to feel *already* included in middle-class society while receiving affirmation of his/her own

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distinctiveness that separated him/her from the large lower-class population. Moreover, the shared understanding of nosotros may also refer to the larger category of citizenship. Middle-class values and morals distinguished between those who were model Mexicans and those who were not. The conduct manual defined the category of citizen against its opposite, the criminal, as defined by the growing science of criminology in the late nineteenth-century. Based on racial and class stereotypes, this science criminalized the indigenous and lower classes, simultaneously reinforcing the definition of the citizen as culturally white and middle-class.\(^\text{29}\) In outlining how to perform the duties of a good citizen, the conduct manual formed an important part of the discourse on citizenship and criminality.

Along with defining the categories of class and citizen, the conduct manual also marked out guidelines for gender roles. It helped the female reader in particular to learn about her responsibilities and duties in the home as mother and wife. The warning in the Manual de Urbanidad that rules of etiquette apply more severely to the woman emphasizes her exemplary role in the family.\(^\text{30}\) As the main caregiver and principle teacher to her children, she modelled virtue and modesty. The stress on female adherence to the rules of conduct also underlined the woman’s symbolic importance in identifying the family’s status to outsiders. A woman’s place in the home signalled her exclusion from (outside) productive labour and indicated her family’s rise out of the working class. Her confinement to the home also protected her virtue from the social and moral contagion of the street and ensured her purity. To the female reader, the conduct manual

\(^{29}\) See Robert Buffington, Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico.
\(^{30}\) “La mujer tendrá por seguro norte, que las reglas de la urbanidad adquirieron, respecto de su sexo, mayor grado de severidad que cuando se aplican a los hombres.” Carreño, 29. This warning is reiterated a few
also taught the principles of proper home management and the importance of order, method, time, and cleanliness.31 A mother’s efficient methods and proper hygiene in the home exemplified an embrace of modernity and passed on such values to her children.

The conduct manual’s emphasis on female duties echoed that of Porfirian educators and writers who rested the moral burden of nation building on women. Referred to as the “guardian angel of the home,” the woman was considered crucial to the well being of the nation as the mother and educator of future citizens. Her role involved inculcating values of time-discipline, respect for authority, work ethic, and belief in progress.32 Conduct manuals worked in tandem with women’s journals to help outline duties and responsibilities to its female readership. In the 1840s and 1850s, a proliferation of such journals, written by men, promoted “feminine” values necessary for the young nation’s development.33 By the 1880s women were the main contributors to magazines such as El Album de la mujer (1883-1890) and Correo de las señorases (1883-1893).34 Along with offering advice and information, these types of periodicals gave their female audience a space to interpret discourses on femininity, motherhood, education, and nationalism.35

The teaching of female responsibilities by various texts, including the conduct manual, formed part of female education that educators, writers, and reformers

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31 On method, for example: “La falta de método nos conduce a cada paso a aumentar el desorden que nos rodea.” Carreño, 42. On time: “...horas distintas para los quehaceres de diferente naturaleza...” Carreño, 43.


33 Arrom, 14-26. For a more general discussion about the content of these manuals, see Herrick, 135-144.

34 Franco, 90.

considered key to ensuring social stability and national development. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, Bourbon officials promoted female education in recognition of its importance to the colony’s prosperity. By the mid nineteenth century, reforms opened up more schooling opportunities for girls and young women. By the end of the century, women themselves took an active role in educational reform as more females entered teaching professions. Laura Méndez de Cuenca, for instance, wrote and spoke about the importance of female education between teaching, holding various government positions, and serving as the country’s representative at international congresses. For Méndez de Cuenca, an educated woman was not only a better wife and superior mother but, as “the primordial chisel of society,” she was also essential to building a strong social foundation. Primary school textbooks from the Porfiriato illustrate how the educational system prepared girls early for their future role as mothers and wives. Laura Méndez de Cuenca’s two volume *El Hogar Mexicano: Nociones de Economía Doméstica para Uso de las Alumnas de Instrucción Primaria* taught the basic duties of maintaining a proper home. Primary school readers presented young girls with model characters of their own age. So, in a series of four picture books, *Rafaelita: Historia de una Niña Hacendosa* tells the story of an industrious girl who exhibits proper conduct, hygiene, physical appearance, and appropriate sympathies towards the lower classes.

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36 Méndez de Cuenca was also a teacher as well as a poet, novelist, and chronicler. Her work and life remain largely unstudied. The introduction to her seventeen short stories published as *Simplezas* offers a brief overview of her life and her writings. Laura Méndez de Cuenca, *Simplezas* (México: La Matraca, 1983). For a brief study of some of her literary work, see John Brushwood, “El Espejo de Laura Méndez de Cuenca,” *Una Especial Elegancia: Narrativa Mexicana del Porfiriato* (México: UNAM, 1998) 127-140.

37 Méndez de Cuenca quoted in Vaughan, 204.


39 María M. Rosales, *Rafaelita: Historia de una Niña Hacendosa* [Story of an industrious/hardworking girl]: *Libro Primero de Lectura para Niñas* (México: Herrero Hermanos Sucesores, 1913) AGN, Caja 272, Reg. 1300. The inside cover indicates that there were four books in the series.
Despite the fact that a large number of texts, including conduct manuals, journals, and textbooks, emphasized female domestic roles, an increasing number of middle-class women ventured out of the home and enjoyed the city’s amusements. The boundaries of the middle-class home became more porous than ever before as entertaining, shopping, theatre-going, promenading, home visiting, and philanthropy increasingly became the norm. The opening of department stores, such as El Palacio de Hierro in 1891, offered señoritas decentes an opportunity to meet friends and spend leisure time outside the home. Philanthropic societies provided legitimate grounds for women’s increased public participation by expanding their traditional role as caregiver. New entertainment and leisure spaces drew women out of the domestic sphere: they attended the theatre and went to the cinema, rode bicycles and learned to roller skate.40

As more of middle-class women moved about the city, the conduct manual helped them to learn how to display the proper characteristics of respectability. In particular, guidelines on good taste and style outlined in the Manual de Urbanidad helped female readers distinguish themselves from the large numbers of lower-class women who had migrated into the city. Modesty and self-restraint in appearance and behaviour were the chief visual codes indicating female virtue and respectability. According to the manual, there was “nothing more repugnant than the exaggeration of etiquette,” particularly in females.41 Women who exaggerated manners, dressed in flamboyant clothes, and wore too much jewellery and make-up were considered “disorderly” or women who led a life

41 “Nada hay [ ] más repugnante que la exageración de la etiqueta.” Carreño, 27.
gone wrong (las mujeres de vida equivoca). The association of certain types of dress and conduct with the figure of the prostitute powerfully symbolised the counter-image of the respectable middle-class woman. Precautions against particular behaviour and appearances continually, although implicitly, evokes the image of the prostitute throughout the manual. The prostitute was also linked to the working-class woman: the same discourse which desexualized women of the middle class hypersexualized lower-class women, making them “naturally” promiscuous.

The rules of street etiquette in the conduct manual offered further visual cues to distinguish, at least in principle, between middle- and lower-class women, or the respectable woman and the prostitute. The conduct manual cautioned its female reader to appear serious and solemn in public so as not to attract attention to herself. A woman who imitates the “confident air” of men appears “immodest and unrestrained” and she would be suspected of being a prostitute. Modest behaviour was also encouraged in the semi-public space of the windows of the home. The manual warns its reader that in the window, “we must conduct ourselves with great circumspection. In it we must never speak without a low voice, nor laugh without moderation, nor in anyway call the attention to those who pass by.” It cautioned against appearing frequently in windows, doorways, or on balconies that face towards the street because it showed not only “a

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42 “[B]uenas maneras o buenos modales [ ] no es otra cosa que la decencia, moderación y oportunidad en nuestra acciones y palabras, y aquella delicadeza y gallardía que aparecen en todos nuestros movimientos exteriors...” Carreño, 26.

43 In his discussion of women and the family in Porfirian Mexico, William French describes how writers used the prostitute as an example of the moral and cultural degeneracy of lower-class families and neighbourhoods. See William E. French, “Prostitutes and Guardian Angels.”

44 “…la mujer que tomará el aire desenbarazado del hombre, aparecería immodesta y descomedida.” Carreño, 30. A man who takes on the countenance and mannerisms of the woman appears timid and bashful: “Asi como el hombre que tomará el continente y los modales de la mujer, aparecería timido y encogido. Carreño, 29.
devotion to idleness” but also “a vice of a childish or dangerous curiosity.” A woman who exhibited herself too comfortably in public space and in the public eye invited criticism and a questioning of her virtue.

The repeated warnings about windows in the Manual de Urbanidad point to how visuality and performance were implicated in class and gender representation. The window invokes an image both of a display case as well as a performance space or stage. It serves as an appropriate metaphor for a late nineteenth-century culture that privileged the visual in fashioning markers of gender and class. Categories of identity, such as class and gender, were both displayed or performed, and seen and identified. Such categories were constructed as acts and sets of manipulated codes and costumes rather than core aspects of identity defined as essential. The metaphor of the window also calls attention to the spectator who has the power both to affirm and question markers of gender, class, and sexuality. By standing in a window, warns the manual, we “offer ourselves to the looks of all those who pass by.” The guide plays a dual role in simultaneously teaching the reader not only how to perform, but also how to read the visual codes of gender and class representation in others. It helps the members of the

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45 “La ventana es uno de los lugares en que debemos manejarnos con mayor circunspección. En ella no podemos hablar sino en voz baja, ni reírnos sino con suma moderación, ni llamar de ninguna manera la atención de los que pasan.” Carreño, 90.
46 “No aparezcamos habitualmente en las ventanas que dan a la calle ... [Entiéndase también balcón, puerta de calle etc]... [Esta persona] se manifiesta entregada a la ociosidad y al vicio de una pueril o dañada curiosidad ...” Carreño, 89.
47 While the nineteenth century went crazy about exhibitions and world fairs, exhibitionism was defined as a pathology in 1866. The label for the pathological individual – the exhibitionist – was coined in 1888. See Sylvia Molloy, “The Politics of Posing,” Hispanisms and Homosexualities, eds. Sylvia Molloy and Robert Irwin (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) 143.
49 “Al presentarnos en las ventanas que dan a la calle, consideremos que vamos a ofrecernos a las miradas de todo el que pasa.” Carreño, 49.
50 In her study of literary realism and photography in late nineteenth-century Britain, Nancy Armstrong makes clear that both text and image belonged to the same cultural project that showed readers how to play
middle class identify the “we” hailed by the conduct manual as they moved about in the streets of the city.  

**Popular fiction and changing visual practices**

Popular fiction, including that of Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera and José Thomás de Cuéllar, accompanied the conduct manual in helping members of the middle class to negotiate urban spaces and their self-fashioning. In one of Gutiérrez Nájera’s most popular short stories, “La Novela de Tranvía” (The Streetcar Novel), the narrator travels through the city in a streetcar looking at its “strange and curious [ ] living scenes.” The chronicle allowed the reader to experience the city as a *flâneur*, the nineteenth-century urban character who strolled through the city observing its inhabitants and other amusements. Turn-of-the-century Mexican writer Justo Sierra described the verb “to *flâneur*” as “to wander jostled by people, leaning against the store display windows...gazing into the interiors of houses.” The nineteenth-century chronicler in Mexico, like his European counterpart, turned the roving eye of the *flâneur* into a printed digest and offered middle-class readers public scenes for private consumption, as well as private lives for public entertainment. The eyes of the chronicler acted as a window through which the reader could look at the city and its inhabitants. The repeated

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52 “Para el observador, nada hay más peregrino ni más curioso que la serie de cuadros vivos que pueden examinarse en un tranvía.” Gutiérrez Nájera, 154. This was one of Gutiérrez Nájera’s most popular works. It was published four times in periodicals between 1882-1888 and included in two anthologies, one in 1883 and the other in 1898.

53 Sierra quoted in Ramos, 128.

54 Schwartz discussing Walter Benjamin, *Spectacular Realities*, 27.
publication of Gutiérrez Najera’s story indicates that this type of gaze fascinated the late nineteenth-century reader.

While male and female members of the middle class read the chronicle, both genders were not entitled to this type of public looking. The flâneur was a male nineteenth-century urban character whose class and gender privilege turned the city into possibilities of geographic, if not sexual, exploration of “unknown worlds and virgin regions.”\(^{55}\) He could gaze on the city without calling into questioning his respectability.\(^{56}\) The description in the *Manual de Urbanidad* of “the confident manner of men” (el aire desembarazado del hombre) reveals the way in which men inhabited public space.\(^{57}\) A middle-class woman, on the other hand, risked potential speculation on her class-status and virtue by going out in public. Despite her well-dressed appearance, the woman on the tram in Gutiérrez Nájera’s story becomes the object of the narrator’s speculation and fantasy in which imagines that she is on her way to meet her lover.\(^{58}\)

Although the gaze of the female stroller was considered sexually provocative and belonged to the prostitute, flânerie was not simply for the privileged bourgeois male. In Mexico City, as in Europe, this was a gaze that female members of the middle class could experience vicariously in popular nineteenth-century texts and cultural activities.\(^{59}\) The

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\(^{56}\) Although the city remained largely the domain of the male writer, more research on turn-of-the-century female writers such as María Enriqueta and Laura Méndez de Cuenca might give insight into women’s experience of the city. For a British example, see Deborah Parsons’ study of the female writer as a flâneuse in *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

\(^{57}\) Carreño, 30. See footnote 45.


chronicle provided the female reader with the possibility of public looking, as is suggested by the publication of Gutiérrez Nájera's story in the woman's magazine El Correo de la Señoras in 1887. As well, philanthropic societies opened up working-class homes to the scrutinising gaze of middle-class women and department stores offered them a safe space to look at and linger over the objects on display. Unlike the gaze of the male stroller on the street or in the streetcar, however, female looking was only sanctioned within domestic or interior spaces. But while middle-class women could not move comfortably and anonymously through the city like men, the new mass press along with cultural activities offered the female reader a means to enjoy a public gaze.

Nineteenth-century popular texts and activities formed part of other visual practices that taught members of the middle class how to perform and display the codes of gender and class. For the middle class, going to the city's fashionable department stores and the respected museums was part of displaying one's class status and citizenship. Moreover, like the conduct manual that taught middle-class duties and etiquette through the act of reading, both the museum and the department store exhibited what it meant to be middle class and to be Mexican. The display windows of the department store modelled the look – the clothes, household objects, and other accoutrements – of a modern life. On the walls and in the display cases of the national museum, the documents and objects provided the text for a shared and recognizable Mexican history. Created at the beginning of the nineteenth century, El Museo Nacional de México housed natural history, antiquities, art, and historical documents and maps. In 1867 it acquired a more prominent role when it was reorganized and moved to the National Palace where it attracted a great number of visitors (personas del pueblo) and
school children. Nineteenth-century exhibitionary architecture, such as the department store and museum, provided the middle class with visual texts on how to know and understand the requirements of national and class membership.

Exhibitionary architecture allowed for a type of looking that both was entertaining and educational while at the same time situating the modern viewer in a passive role. The century saw an unprecedented explosion of exhibitionary architecture in which the spectator gazed upon objects behind glass. For the first time glass-making technology allowed for the production and use of large glass sheets in buildings such as department display windows and museum exhibit cases. The invisible wall of solid crystal separated the object from the viewer rendering the modern observer passive and distanced from the object of its gaze.

The new passive spectatorship contrasted with the long tradition of public participatory festivities related to the church and to the carnival. Attempts to prohibit “disorderly” forms of revelry usually associated with the lower classes began in the late Colonial period and continued during the Porfiriato. The Manual de Urbanidad reminds its reader not to get involved in lower-class religious festivities: “An educated and well-mannered person never takes part in the disorder that makes up the [religious] processions.” The ruling elite replaced these celebrations with an invented tradition of

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60 Cosio Villegas, 738. For the history of another Mexico City museum, the National Museum of Anthropology, see Enrique Florescano, “La Creación del Museo Nacional de Antropología,” El Patrimonio Nacional de México, ed. Enrique Florescano (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997) 154-164. Studies of early museum culture in nineteenth-century Europe and the United States reveal how city officials and museum curators considered the museum a “socially uplifting” environment where working-class visitors would emulate the “normative” behavior of the middle-class visitors. Museum objects, then, were not the only things to be looked at or on display. See, for example, Allison Griffiths, Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 8-9. It is not known if this was the case in Mexico as more studies on early museum culture are needed.

61 “Una persona culta y bien educada, no toma jamás parte en los desórdenes que suelen formarse en las procesiones [religiosas].” Carreño, 55.
bicycle and flower parades in which the participants performed only in accordance with proper gender and class roles. These types of parades relegated the lower classes to spectator roles where the elite hoped they would learn to emulate middle-class behaviour. In a similar way, the commercialisation of the theatre brought about attempts by the authorities to change audience behaviour there, banning shouting and other forms of participation. These efforts to instill a passive spectatorship culture were also directed towards movie-going audiences as cinemas opened and became a popular form of entertainment.

Late nineteenth-century modernization and urbanization also changed the visual practices of the members of the middle class. The modern city multiplied the amount of visual stimuli and situated viewers within a context of rapidly changing images. Justo Sierra remarked how the stroller in the city "wander[ed] with the certainty of perpetual distractions for the eyes." The department store demanded a similar fleeting and distracted form of looking with its multiplicity of objects on display. Popular short stories reflected these new forms of visual perception. In one of José Thomás de Cuéllar’s popular stories entitled “Having a Ball,” the character Enriquetta watches the world outside from her window in which “everything was in motion, creating fleeting images that barely left an impression on her retina before being erased by another image, and then another, in a never-ending vertigo.”

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64 Justo Sierra quoted in Ramos, 128.
65 Thomás de Cuéllar, 53. In the United States and Britain, this type of distracted looking worried museum curators. They wanted visitors to take time to view the objects as part of an educational experience. See Allison Griffiths, Wondrous Difference, 12-17.
and the streetcar, produced a similar type of impressionistic perception as well as providing a new panoramic gaze, later captured by the pan of the movie camera.\textsuperscript{66} From the contained and stationary space of the streetcar in Gutiérrez Nájera's "La Novela de Tranvía, the scenes of the city move across the rider's – and the reader's – vision. Thomás de Cuéllar's fragmentary stories in \textit{The Magic Lantern} reflect the influence of photography, another technological innovation that challenged and changed viewing practices. The photograph produced "realistic" images of scenes and people that could be easily reproduced and circulated. Photography was a fashionable new medium for documenting private scenes for those who could afford it in mid century Mexico. In 1865 the capital city counted twenty-three photography studios.\textsuperscript{67} By the end of the century, the decreasing cost of photography meant that more middle-class families could publicize scenes of familial domesticity. Each scene in \textit{The Magic Lantern} reads like a snapshot that exposes the private lives of the characters.

The privileging of the visual in late nineteenth-century culture brought increased attention to the body. Members of the middle class became extremely conscious of the body as they read and learned about the many details pertaining to clothes, mannerisms, and cleanliness. Even the shape of the female body had significance for indicating class status. Corsets and crinolines, narrow skirts, bustles and trains turned middle-class women into "bell-shaped angels" that separated them from the "square-shaped" body of the lower-class and/or indigenous woman. It forced a middle-class woman, including the "lady of the house" in "Having a Ball," to "[pinch] the sides of her waist to see if its

\textsuperscript{66} In Europe, at least, writers remarked that the speed of train travel caused the landscape to look like streaks of colours. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, \textit{The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century} (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977) 59-60.
contours could be reduced by another quarter inch.” It heightened anxiety over how the signs of the body would be deciphered and what moral qualities they could disclose. An involuntary slip or improper appearance could give the wrong impression. Pseudo-sciences such as physiognomy turned the surface appearances and the bodily pose of an individual into a visual narrative. The photograph placed further emphasis on reading the visible signs of the body by allowing the image to be circulated and framed within new contexts, such as in a police record or family photo album. In the photography studio the selection of the pose was considered extremely important because it revealed an individual’s inner character, as did the relationship between a person’s pose and his/her facial expression.

On the other hand, the photographic image and visual codes could deceive by *masking* the “true character” of a person. In Mexico, as antebellum America, members of the middle class were fearful over the potential hypocrisy of surface appearances and rules of etiquette. Fine clothing and self-restrained conduct could hide a person’s lower-class background or debased and unscrupulous character. Members of the middle class who were attempting to distinguish themselves against the lower classes were concerned that etiquette could be disingenuous and did not assure sincerity or “transparency” of character. The *Manual de Urbanidad* advises its reader that the face of a speaker should give the same impression as his/her ideas to ensure against hypocrisy, while

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68 Thomás de Cuéllar, 127.
69 Massé Zendejas, 73-74.
implicitly warning that facial expressions could deceive.\textsuperscript{71} Photography further heightened an awareness of visual codes while at the same time it more than ever destablised traditional conceptions of personal identity. The middle class whose members enjoyed having themselves photographed were confronted with the possibility of a prostitute dressed in her finest having her picture taken against a familiar middle-class domestic scene or backdrop. Despite the rules of dress and etiquette outlined in the conduct manuals, they could not guarantee stable categories of representation for the middle class of Mexico City.\textsuperscript{72}

The anxieties over artifice came at a time when social markers of respectability could be increasingly bought in the marketplace. With the beginning of mass cloth manufacturing, lower-class men and women could buy previously high-end styles for the first time.\textsuperscript{73} A change of clothing enabled members of the lower or indigenous classes to pass as \textit{mestizo} or middle-class, rendering racial and class difference invisible.\textsuperscript{74} Mexican authorities were forced to confront a difficult paradox. While urban regulations attempted to mould the lower classes into respectable citizens by prohibiting them from wearing peasant clothing, the collapse of such class and racial signifiers also threatened elite and middle-class dominance. Newspapers and popular fiction reflected these concerns, as well as poking fun at the difficulty of distinguishing class differences. In many of his popular short stories, José Thomás de Cuéllar laments that appearance based on fashion eliminates class distinctions. For instance, in “Having a Ball” the Machuca

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\textsuperscript{71}“La fisonomía del que habla debe presentar las mismas impresiones que sus ideas ha de producir en los demás.” Carreño, 63. The word “fisonomía” means both physiognomy and face/features. \textsuperscript{72}Richard Sennett offers a detailed account of the impact of capitalism and urbanization on nineteenth-century social relations in chapter seven of \textit{The Fall of Public Man}. \textsuperscript{73}Maria Kalonika, \textit{La Historia del Traje} (México: Editorial Diana, 1992) 116. \textsuperscript{74}On this in Bolivia, see Marcia Stephenson, \textit{Gender and Modernity in Andean Bolivia} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).
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sisters wear elegant clothes and attend high-class parties, masking their corrupt nature and uncultured lower-class upbringing. An 1895 newspaper column related the story of how an hombre decente mistook a group of elegantly dressed prostitutes in the National Theatre for señoras decentes. When other men in the theatre laughingly informed him of his “mistake”, the mortified man quickly left the theatre with his family.\(^\text{75}\) The newspaper story reflects anxieties over the disruption of class and racial boundaries caused by the possibility of simulation and disguise inherent in fashion. Urban life was, then, fraught with concerns over how to distinguish between those who deserved such social status from those who were merely “passing” as genteel.

Although the consumerist society allowed for the disruption of many boundaries, Thomás de Cuéllar insisted that certain non-visual signifiers could “betray” the true identity of an individual. The mouths of the Machuca sisters disclose what lies beneath their fancy dresses: “As long as they didn’t open their mouths, they appeared quite refined: but their tongues, in the basest of treacheries, betrayed them, making the curious bystander recall the word ... ‘barefoot’.”\(^\text{76}\) The reference to “barefoot” identifies the sisters’ way of speaking as lower class, indigenous, or “uncivilised”. It also effectively turns an aural marker into a “visible” one. Decent and respectful language as well as good pronunciation and tone of voice marked a cultured individual. The Manual de Urbanidad devotes several pages to words “more cultured and better sounding” (más cultas y de mayor sonido) and to rules on having a conversation that mark a member of the middle class.\(^\text{77}\) But Thomás de Cuéllar insists that, while clothes could be bought and manners learned, speech could not be imitated: “As we were saying, whenever they

\(^{75}\) Bryan, 193.

\(^{76}\) Thomás de Cuéllar, 29.
opened their mouths, the imperfect thread became visible, which was only to be expected, since refined speech, unlike miracle-working satin, is not a piece of merchandise for sale” (my emphasis). 78

Popular fiction read by members of the middle class reflected these anxieties by revealing what lay behind closed doors, fashionable clothes, and stylish appearances. It echoed another popular Latin American literary form, the melodrama, that attempted to “lift the veil” (levantar el velo) and “expose the scandalous details of domesticity.” In melodrama, staple characters, such as the intrusive gossiping neighbour, spy on each other and revile improper behaviour. 79 Characters in the short stories of Thomás de Cuéllar's similarly form a great gossip circle. 80 But it is the role of the narrator/author to expose the hypocrisy and deceit that lies underneath the mask of decency and respectability. He leads the reader “behind the scenes” into dressing rooms and bedrooms of the home, such as in “Having a Ball” where he reveals how white face makeup and gloves hide the Machuca sisters' colour of skin: “They appeared to belong to the Caucasian race, as long as they wore gloves, but when they took them off, the hands of La Malinche appeared on the marble bust of Ninon de Lenclos.” 81 While they “appeared to be beautiful at night, or in the streets, [ ] in the morning or at home, the sisters were nothing more than dark-skinned girls who had been slightly washed.” 82

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77 Carreño, 62-67.
78 Thomás de Cuéllar, 29.
80 Monsiváis, 30. Julio Ramos argues that the chronicle, such as Gutiérrez Nájera’s La Novela de Tranvia, offers a form of gossip that helps to reconstruct a collective space fragmented by urbanization. See Ramos, 131.
81 Thomás de Cuéllar, 29. La Malinche was Cortes' indigenous lover and translator. Lenclos hosted a seventeenth-century French salon and was known for her wit and beauty.
82 Thomás de Cuéllar, 29.
Thomás de Cuéllar’s stories the eye of the camera/writer penetrates closed doors and surface appearances. It is not surprising, then, that Cuéllar, who was himself a photographer, subtitled his short story, “Christmas Eve” with “Negatives Exposed from December 24th to 25th, 1882.”

The crime reporter was another urban voyeur who published scandalous behaviour for the middle-class reading public. The proliferation of Porfirian newspapers such as El Gendarme, Gaceta de Policía, and Gaceta Callejera (Street Gazette) reported on “crimes of passion” – crimes involving private lives – for a larger public eye. The newspaper reports publicized exploits of the “dangerous classes” that reporters and others claimed existed in the lower-class Mexican population. These texts offered middle-class women and men a means to experience the city and look with fascination, desire, and sometimes fear at the scandals and spectacles of urban life.

Along with the reporter, writer, and gossipmonger, the criminal anthropologist also promised to expose the dangers underneath the surface of Mexican society. Nineteenth-century science emphasized the body as a visual text for revealing moral and cultural characteristics. In Mexico, modern criminology derived data from cranial measurements and facial characteristics. Criminals were then categorized by physical traits through the aid of photography. These visual techniques promised to find the criminal elements that hid themselves among the lower classes. Nevertheless, in everyday social relations Mexican elite had to trust their “natural” instincts. For

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84 Buffington, 50, 73. See also Pablo Picatto, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931*.

85 Buffington, 51.
members of the middle class, conduct manuals, newspaper stories, and popular fiction helped form those “basic” instincts in distinguishing between the *gente decente* from the *pueblo abajo*, and the citizen from the criminal.

Some contemporaries raised concerns about the dangers of voyeurism in that looking might lead to dangerous temptations. In his 1908 report on prostitution in Mexico, Dr. Luis Lara y Pardo targets imitation as the major reason for women becoming prostitutes, as well as the cause of “epidemics” of suicide and abduction (*raptos*). Consequently, restrictions on brothels included darkened windows and curtains to hide the scandalous and corrupting activities inside from a curious look or an inadvertent glance. The *Manual de Urbanidad* mirrors these concerns when it describes women who appear frequently at windows and doorways as exhibiting a “dangerous curiosity.” It warns the reader to “never approach the lower windows of a house with the objective of directing our looks inside.” The *gente decente* as “cultivated persons [with] good principles” should also refrain from “direct[ing] from their house scrutinising looks to nearby houses.” In these passages the precautions are directed to the manual’s female reader who damaged her purity and virtue by looking at potentially corrupting scenes. Male readers could adopt the gaze of the *flâneur* who “gaz[ed] into the interiors of houses” and not suffer any tarnish of his reputation. But for female members of the middle class, curious or indiscriminating looking corrupted manners, decency, and even innocent minds and lives.

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87 Lara y Pardo, 63.
88 Carreño, 89.
89 “No nos acerquemos nunca a las ventanas bajas de una casa, con el objeto de dirigir nuestras miradas hacia adentro.” Carreño, 54.
Home, hygiene, and the internalized gaze

Echoing the concerns about what was going on behind closed doors raised by newspapers and popular fiction, Carreño’s *Manual de Urbanidad* devotes an entire chapter to how to conduct oneself in the home. The reader learns that physical appearance and conduct are as important in the house as they are in public. Clean and smart clothes, for example, should be worn not just when presenting oneself in society or walking in the street, but in the home as well. A man must never appear in the house without a tie, in a sleeveless shirt or with bad shoes while a woman must take even greater care not to appear slovenly. Inappropriate dress and behaviour called a person’s upbringing into question, particularly for women. Even in the privacy of the home the rules of respectability apply. This helped calm fears over what went on in the homes of the middle class and provided reassurance that a person’s public persona matched their private behaviour, particularly as these rules became interiorized, as will be discussed below.

The remarkably open doors of the middle-class home reinforced the need for strict rules of conduct in the domestic sphere. A mix of strangers and visitors entered the home to work or to be entertained. By the end of the century, more middle-class families could afford to hire at least one domestic servant as the influx of lower-class women from the

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90 “No es propio de personas cultivadas y de buenos principios, el dirigir desde su casa miradas escudriñadoras a las casas inmediatas.” Carreño, 52.
91 “Nuestros vestidos deben estar siempre aseados, no solo cuando nos presentamos en sociedad o vamos por la calle, sino cuando no encontramos dentro de nuestra casa.” Carreño, 35.
92 “No está, pues, permitido a un hombre el permanecer en su casa sin corbata, en mangas de camisa, sin medias, ni con los pies mal calzados.” Carreño, 48. “En cuanto a la mujer, en quien debe lucir siempre mayor compostura que en el hombre, ya se deje ver que su desaliño dentro de la casa dará muy mala idea de su educación.” Carreño, 48.
countryside into the city increased the supply and lowered the cost of private servants.\textsuperscript{93} Families now faced the potentially threatening gossip of their servants who might divulge private secrets and report on indecent or immoral behaviour. More affluent members of the middle class threw parties and women in particular entertained guests and visitors throughout the day. Rules on visiting and receiving visitors demand five pages in the conduct manual.\textsuperscript{94} Socializing and entertaining visitors brought enquiring gazes into the home, particularly with architectural changes to the Porfirian middle-class house. Outside patios, once central to domestic life, turned into purely ornamental spaces as small salons inside the home became the centre of private relations, as well as reception room for almost daily visitors.\textsuperscript{95} The salon served a similar role to the parlours of early nineteenth-century middle-class American homes where private lives met a public gaze.\textsuperscript{96} In Mexico, at least, the new social space emphasized the public eye in the home and the need to be vigilant in one's conduct and appearance. In Tomás de Cuéllar's story “Christmas Eve,” private spaces are promiscuous rather than intimate. The narrator leads the reader from the street – a place for meeting and gossip – to the salon, which has been transformed from an intimate space into the principal room for the Christmas Eve ball. Here friends and strangers meet and deception, rumours, and promiscuity run rampant.\textsuperscript{97}

While the home increasingly opened its doors to visitors and strangers, public spaces took on a more intimate, domestic quality. The chronicle helped mediate the

\textsuperscript{93} Between 1895 and 1910 there was a 214 percent increase in private servants. Lear, 67. Lear suggests that the increase in migrants in the city made it possible for lower middle-class and even some working-class families to hire a servant as a sign of respectability. Lear, 76. The Manual de Urbanidad mentions servants in various sections on conduct in the home.
\textsuperscript{94} Carreño, 67-72.
\textsuperscript{95} Enrique Ayala Alonso, La casa de la Ciudad de México: Evolución y Transformaciones (México: Consejo Nacional para La Cultura y Las Artes, 1996) 87-92.
\textsuperscript{96} Halttunen, 59.
\textsuperscript{97} See Margo Glantz’s comments in her introduction to The Magic Lantern, xxv-xxvi.
threatening and unfamiliar scenes of the city brought by rapid change. Modern chroniclers narrated the streets of the city into spaces of private pleasure and transformed the city into an intimate salon shared with its readers. The introduction of electrical lighting, such as in the city's Alameda Park in 1892, and increased police surveillance offered a sense of security, even at night, and changed people's perception of public and exterior spaces. Interior spaces, on the other hand, were revolutionized by cast-iron construction that allowed for large glass surfaces, such as in Mexico's first department store appropriately named El Palacio de Hierro – the Palace of Iron. An unprecedented amount of natural light now flowed into the public interiors. Moreover, department store owners purposefully designed their new palaces of consumption as domestic spaces, leading contemporaries such as nineteenth-century Argentinian writer Gómez Carrillo to describe them as a salon. With their washrooms, free telephones, drinking water, checkrooms for parcels, delivery services, and lounges with refreshments and food, department stores encouraged women to linger by offering the comfort and security of a home-like atmosphere. The late nineteenth-century reconfiguration of public and private spaces reinforced the need for the members of the middle class to regulate their conduct and appearance at all times, and ultimately facilitated the internalization of these rules of respectability.

Like the crime reporters who exposed private scandals, some late nineteenth-century literature delved into the private sphere of the home. In the story "Christmas Eve," Thomás de Cuéllar takes the reader into the intimate space of a woman's bedroom:

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98 Ramos, 129.
99 Gómez Carrillo quoted in Ramos, 129.
“Once again asserting our privileges as writers, we shall tiptoe inside this room, which for many people had a certain mysterious air, for no apparent reason (at least on the surface).” Here the narrator peers beneath the surface of the mysteriously female and private space of the bedroom. Gutiérrez Nájera narrates a similar transgression of female private spaces. In “En Horas de Calor,” the narrator plunges himself into the private space of a woman's bedroom by imagining himself as an elf diving into a drawer of his lover's clothes: “I am in the middle of silky underwear, white linen, light Indian cotton, all warm, amorous, and perfumed.” These types of stories allowed the reader to join the writer/voyeur in entering the home, and enjoy his textual conquests of private feminine spaces.

Unlike the excitement offered by voyeurism in popular fiction, the possibility of an outside gaze inside the home is feared in the Manual de Urbanidad. In a section entitled “The act of going to bed and our duties during the night,” the writer repeatedly evokes the fear and horror that “an accident” in the middle of the night may expose the reader’s naked body to an outsider’s gaze. The conduct manual therefore warns the reader to always wash his or her body before retiring to bed – not only for the satisfaction of proper cleanliness – but also to be “preventively decent” (a fin de estar decentemente prevenidos) in the case of such a formidable circumstance. The constant fear of an outside gaze even in the bedroom turns the eye inward and internalizes a process of self-control and discipline. The conduct manual explicitly warns that the rules concerning

101 Thomás de Cuéllar, 127.
103 Carreño, 31.
dress and conduct “apply naturally more severely in the bedroom [where] any comfort contrary to honesty and decency is never permitted ... even in those moments that only God witnesses.” In contrast to the regulated (clothed) body, the naked body becomes an object of shame. The author exclaims, “horrible is the spectacle when an accident that occurs in the middle of the night presents a person entirely uncovered.” At night, clothes are to be taken off with honest modesty (honesto recato) and at no moment should the reader appear uncovered (descubiertos) even while sleeping. Self-regulation also ensured that a person’s private life matched the restraint and decorum of his/her public persona: internalized discipline merged inner and outer selves. Moreover, sexual self-control placed the temptations of bodily pleasures under constant surveillance. Although the manual desexualises the body in the use of the term “uncovered” (descubiertos) rather than “naked” (desnudo), sexuality seems to permeate the pages of the text. The need for detailed rules to strictly repress the naked and sexual body indicates pressing concerns and fears over sex and sexuality.

Members of the middle class distinguished themselves by the strict control over their bodies. The Mexican middle-class body, as in Europe, was defined against the lower-class (grotesque) body that lacked control or shame of its openings and inner and lower genital, reproductive, digestive, and excretory parts. In the conduct manual, the

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105 “La severidad de estas reglas se atenua naturalmente cuando premanecemos en nuestro dormitoro; bien que jamás hasta permitirnos ningún desahogo contrario a la honestidad y a la decencia, que serán siempre el atavio del hombre en todos los momentos en que sólo tiene a Dios por testigo de sus acciones.” Carreño, 48.
106 “Horrible es el espectáculo que presenta una persona que, por cualquier accidente ocurrido en medio de la noche, llega a aparecer enteramente descubierta.” Carreño, 45.
107 “Al despojarnos de nuestros vestidos del día para entrar en la cama, precedamos con honesto recato, y de manera que en ningún momento aparezcamos descubiertos.” Carreño, 45.
openings of the body and the instability of their boundaries produce repeated rules concerning orifices and hands in the manual. Hands in the mouth, eyes, and nose give cause for horror and disgust (asco). One particularly explicit warning informs the reader that it is a grave mistake to “impregnar los dedos de la humedad de la boca,” literally to “impregnate the fingers into the wetness of the mouth.”¹¹⁰ The preoccupation with the opening of the mouth also appears in the section on table manners. Eating demarcates the body’s boundaries of inside and outside while continually destabilising them.¹¹¹ Table manners turn eating into a highly regulated activity and ensure propriety during one of the body’s most transgressive activities. The members of the middle class subjected the most private and biologically necessary acts of the body to rules of control and discipline.

Hygiene also helped to distinguished between dirty/disorderly and clean/normative bodies. In the Manual de Urbanidad, the reader is urged to examine his/her nails often in order to clean them at the moment they have lost their “natural whiteness” (natural blancura).¹¹² Insistence on hygiene defines cleanliness as a natural marker of a “civilized” individual. It reinforces the superiority of the clean, middle-class body over the body of the dirty and “uncivilized” lower classes. An entire chapter entitled “Del Aseo” is dedicated to worries of contamination and the proper hygiene. As one of the most visible openings of the body, the mouth requires particular care. It is to be gargled and washed and the front and back teeth “scrupulously” brushed, although the manual assures the reader that the care taken in cleaning the mouth is “never

¹¹⁰ Carreño, 33.
¹¹² “Las uñas deben ser recortadas cada vez que su crecimiento llegue al punto de openarse al aseo: y en tanto que no se recorten, examínense a menudo, para limpiarlas en el momento en que hayan perdido su natural blancura” (emphasis mine). Carreño, 33.
Each part of the body requires particular methods of care with soap, water, and brushes: “Never use the fingers to clean the eyes, the ears, the teeth, and very least the nose,” warns the manual. These rules partition the body into separate areas of concern and regiment their cleaning by time and place. For instance, the reader is told to wash the face and hair in the morning and at least once more during the day. Moreover, all bodily hygiene takes place in the privacy of the home. Teeth, for example, are never to be brushed in front of strangers or in the street. Readers are also instructed to wash the hands frequently throughout the day and at “every occasion in which we suspect that we are not perfectly clean.” The rules of hygiene in the manual point to the symbolic importance of cleanliness as visually marking middle-class membership.

The reading of the manual by the members of the middle class intersected and was intersected by social debates on hygiene and science and by the institutional practices of the hospital and the school. While the manual considers bodily hygiene a private duty, it nevertheless formed part of larger discursive practices and institutions of the late nineteenth-century city. For example, participants of the Mexican Hygienic Congress in 1883 argued for a creation of a national agency for dealing with issues of hygiene and sanitation. They believed that hygiene was indispensable in achieving a modern urban “civilized” culture. Mothers especially played an important role in raising healthy and productive citizens for a developing nation. Concerns about women being

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113 “Al acto de levantarnos, debemos hacer gárgaras, lavarnos la boca, y limpiar escrupulosamente nuestra dentadura interior y exteriormente. Los cuidados que empleemos en el aseo de la boca, jamás serán excesivos.” Carreño, 32.
114 “Jamás empleemos los dedos para limpiarnos los ojos, los oídos, los dientes, ni mucho menos los narices.” Carreño, 34.
115 “...nunca delante de los extraños ni por la calle.” Carreño, 32.
116 “Lavémonos las manos con frecuencia durante el día, y por contado todas las ocasiones en que tengamos motivo para sospechar siquiera que no se encuentran perfectamente aseadas” (emphasis mine). Carreño, 32.
distracted by consumerism and fashion prompted many writers to stress a woman's responsibility for the proper cleanliness of her children and home. They drew women back to the private sphere by reminding them of a mother's familial responsibilities. The Manual de Urbanidad echoes these concerns when it places the burden to perform the duties of hygiene and proper conduct primarily on women. In José Thomás de Cuéllar's short stories female characters receive the harshest criticism because they desire objects rather than men and pay more attention to fashion and appearances rather than their families. In "Having a Ball," he scornfully depicts a female character looking at herself in the mirror whose narcissism distracts her from any other concerns: "These corrections took a long time, and absorbed her to such a degree that not even the noise from the rest of the house distracted her, from which we can gather that her first concern was to correct her waistline." By contrast, women who paid attention to their families and hygiene ensured healthy future citizens, as well as social progress and national development.

Conclusions

Like a guidebook to an unfamiliar culture, texts, including the conduct manual and the chronicle, helped members of the middle class negotiate life in a rapidly changing city. They provided guidelines on self-presentation and social interaction, as well as a sense of familiarity with the city. They played a productive role, rather than a restrictive one, by offering assurances of how to move about in the private and public spaces of the city. At the same time, the facilitation of movement ensured potential and inevitable forms of transgression. Conduct manuals and chronicles simultaneously invoke and

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117 Tenorio Trillo, 155.
118 Thomás de Cuéllar, 127.
heighten the fear of "stepping across" physical, social, and bodily boundaries while attempting to regulate them.

Thus, anxiety and contradiction marked middle-class life in Mexico City. While more opportunities at the end of the nineteenth-century allowed women to traverse the boundaries between the home and public space, writers condemned them for not paying enough attention to their families and domestic responsibilities. Members of the middle class embraced the capitalist market with its goods and fashion that signalled social power and class respectability. Yet they lamented the potential and real dissolution of class and racial categories. Despite middle-class hopes for stability, order, and progress, life in late nineteenth-century Mexico City could only guarantee new tensions, heightened anxieties, and more contradictions.

The popular texts discussed in this thesis served as a script on how to perform and how to read the visual codes of class, race, and gender mapped onto the body. They taught respectable Mexican citizen how to embrace middle-class aspirations, practice good conduct and proper hygiene, visit museums, go to the theatre, and linger in department stores. But the desire for natural fixed categories with stable definitions was more of an ideal, than reality. The preoccupation with masks, artifice, and disguise in these texts expose middle-class fears of the lower-class individual performing its codes of representation. Surface appearances, and even vision itself, could not always be trusted: what you saw was not always what it seemed. The increased preoccupation with private lives in the mass press and in the discourse on hygiene makes it clear that both the working- and middle-classes were under suspicion. This gaze turned inward into the private sphere as well as internally: an interiorized gaze brought about self-surveillance
and self-regulation. The repeated adherence to these codes helped to naturalize these otherwise socially constructed categories and reinforced a hegemonic gender, class, and racial ideology in late nineteenth-century Mexico.
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