Towards a Synthesis of Natural and Human History: Situating the Municipal and Ecclesiastic Viceregal Arches of 1680 Mexico City within the Lacustrine

In fall 1680, the newly appointed viceroy of New Spain, Tomás de la Cerda, the Marqués de la Laguna and Conde de Paredes, made his entrance into Mexico City, passing through two triumphal arches, one municipal and one ecclesiastic. In New Spain, as in Europe, viceregal arches depicted mythical, iconic and emblematic figures and stories. Through the arches, the city and church of Mexico City (standing in for New Spain) communicated to the incoming ruler their hopes for his governance, while extolling the qualities he presumably already possessed. The two arches under which Laguna passed are perhaps the most written about of all arches in New Spain, as much for their criollo designers as for their content. Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, intellectual luminary of Mexico City, designed the municipal arch. Rather than adhere to the conventional European custom of using classical mythology and symbolic iconography, he populated his arch with images of past Mexica rulers, and a single, powerful, indigenous god, Huitzilopochtli, patron of Tenochtitlan. [1] Rising literary talent Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz designed the ecclesiastic arch. In contrast to Sigüenza y Góngora, she opted to utilize the motif of Neptune. Sor Juana made local references, as well: the unfinished cathedral and the flooding that plagued the city.

The arches have been well examined, at times together and often alone, across the fields of history, literature, and cultural studies, including within discourses of the Latin American Baroque and developing criollo consciousness.[2] They have also been situated within the larger mise en scène of the preceding months' viceregal re-enactment of the trajectory of Hernán Cortéz from Veracruz.[3] Despite both arches' multiple references to water, however, and both Mexico City's and Tenochtitlan's long and complicated relationship to the lacustrine environs of the basin of Mexico, the arches have yet to be examined in relation to the conflicted, and ongoing Desagu?e (drainage) project in the northeast quadrant of the basin of Mexico, a massive project which the viceroy likely made an obligatory tour of in the first days of his reign.

In this article, I examine the two arches not as performing (nor as a performance of) imperialism, anti-imperialism, Baroque communication, or criolloismo, a priori. Rather, I situate the arches within both the human and the natural history of the city and its basin (or, rather, the basin and its city), in an attempt to both follow and build upon charges laid out by Dipesh Chakrabarty in relation to the Anthropocene. Chakrabarty argues that to think of the human as geological we must "scale up our imagination."[4] In order to respond to the Anthropocene's collapse of human and geological chronologies, we must, as historians, work against what Chakrabarty characterizes as the "conscious tendency" of "philosophers and students of history" to (falsely) "separate" human history from natural history.[5] I build on Chakrabarty's examination of the Anthropocene by situating the 1680 viceregal arches *volumetrically*, through a focus on water and its contingent subterranean environs, rather than on the earth's surface and its atmosphere (Chakrabarty's focus). My application of the volumetric is adapted from Mark Anderson's work on contemporary Mexico City.[6]

There are two larger conversations that I hope this article engages. First, I ask how the Anthropocene can move performance history *towards* a merging of human and natural history.[7] How does the Anthropocene re-orient the ways in which a performance historian conceptualizes evidence and interprets

the meaning-making (and history-producing) processes of images, actions, and human-built structures in relation to histories of water and land? Simultaneously, I hope to demonstrate how performance histories situated within the geographical and temporal margins of established discourses of the Anthropocene might offer means through which to scale up our imagination of the Anthropocene itself.

Volumetric Methodology and the Anthropocene

In "The Climate of History: Four Theses," Dipesh Chakrabarty writes that the Anthropocene has repositioned humans. Humans are no longer biological actors (beings that effect their natural environs through, for example, agriculture, pollution, urbanization) but, rather, geological agents, beings whose actions irrevocably change the earth. For historians, Chakrabarty argues, the Anthropocene offers a number of challenges. Historians must imagine (and contend with) deep time: both a future in which humans may become extinct and a deep past in which the human appears as but one quite recent species.

While Chakrabarty centers his attentions on the implications of the Anthropocene for the historical imagination (and the merging of deep time with modern time), his provocations focus on the surface of the earth and its atmosphere.[8] Though the planet's waters and stratigraphy may be understood as implicitly included in Chakrabarty's analysis, he does not explicitly engage with either, enacting, arguably, a certain human-centered analysis of history even as he attempts to destabilize such analyses. That is, human life is largely lived on the terranean level of the earth. When humans in cities travel underground and/or explore the deep sea, it is through human-made apparatuses, dependent on air that circulates through human lungs. Geological history, in contrast, must move through sedimentary layers and along with currents of ocean, river, lake.

Mark Anderson, in his study of contemporary Mexico City, critiques "the 'flattening' effects of modern planning, which may have originated in European cartographic traditions but which continue to feature prominently in data based and satellite representations of the world such as Google Earth." [9] Anderson extends his argument to dismantle the "notion of the ecological footprint as a conceptual tool." The "footprint," he holds, despite its utility, is born of and beholden to the flatness and flattening enacted by geopolitics. Its emphasis, intended or not, on surface-centric engagement "both exposes and reproduces [. . .] cartographic territorializations, showing that cities are not contained by their cartographic borders, but still flattening them into schematic representations that fail to evoke the full volume of urban ecologies."[10] While a volumetric perspective, inclusive of water as well as the subterranean, addresses a gap in Chakrabarty's "Four Theses" for historians, Nigel Clark cautions that the volumetric is not simply a matter of moving up to the clouds or down to the magma. Rather, Clark calls for bringing "politics into an intensive engagement with the planet's own dynamics: its process of sedimentation and mobilization, its layering and folding, its periodicities and singularities."[11] In this, Clark and Chakrabarty share a contention: a collapse of human history and geological history, a charge Anderson prioritizes in his analysis of the subterranean transport systems and waterways of contemporary Mexico City.

Anderson issues a challenge to the urban historian and planner alike to think in geological depth, as much as geographical surface, in order to enable "one to imagine a livable, sustainable future" in opposition to certain neoliberal, environmental, and Anthropocene-based narratives of an unavoidable apocalypse of ever increasing ecological degradation in Mexico City.[12] Anderson argues that waterways and subways testify not only to a sinking city (up to, perhaps, eight inches a year, and over 42 feet in the last 100 years), but also represent intuitive and imaginative (present and potential) ways of relating to

implacabilities of environment.

The “intense, entangled and” (literal and metaphoric) “fluid geographies” of Anderson’s contemporary Mexico City move through and contextualize the historical site of Mexico City 1680, as well.[13] Anderson reads waterways and subways. I also use waterways and human made constructions, but in tandem with human made images. The spatial and temporal dramaturgy of water and imagery in the 1680 viceregal arches enacts and evokes if not a collapse than a co-ordination of human and natural history. That is, the 1680 viceregal arches are not only imperial display, representative of iterative confrontations and negotiations between human histories. Rather, the arches invite a concurrent inclusion of the subterranean levels of Nahua cosmology as well as the lacustrine environment within/from which the city of Tenochtitlan was forged.

The Basin of Mexico before and after Human Settlement (1700-1100 BCE)

Viceregal entrances to Mexico City had been taking place since the 1500s to mark, celebrate and ritualistically enact the installment of the Spanish king’s proxy government in the New World.[14] Though arch-bishops likewise received celebratory entries, it was the viceroy that was considered the king’s “living image.”[15] As such, the viceregal entrance was the largest celebration of Mexico City’s many, elaborate festivals. Like viceroys before him, Laguna’s entrance into Mexico City was the culmination of a two to three month long itinerary across the territory of New Spain, from Veracruz through Jalapa, Tlaxcala, Cholula and Huejotzingo. His penultimate entrance took place at Otumba, the site of the decisive battle of Cortéz and the Tlaxcalans against Cuauhetemoc—notably, as Castro reminds us, a battle lost and won, given the environment of Tenochtitlan, via water. Cortéz, Castro writes, secured victory in “an odd naval war at about 2000 meters above sea level.” His “success relied largely on the water expertise of the city’s Indian enemies.” [16] Cortéz’s victory over the Nahua is but one event in a much longer history of the environs that ultimately hosted Tenochtitlan and then Mexico City. The natural history and human histories of the basin of Mexico, in tandem, provide particular insight into the dramaturgy of the 1680 arches.

The basin of Mexico is a closed “hydrological watershed” (now artificially drained) of 7000 km. The basin’s lowest plane is a lacustrine environment approximately 2250m above sea level. The basin is surrounded by imposing volcanic ranges on its south, east, and west. Many peaks reach over 4000m; the highest is 5465m. The north of the basin is a series of hills. The entire area “lies in a Transversal Volcanic Axis, a late tertiary formation, 30-70km wide.” As such, “earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tectonic instability” have long been key features of the region.[17] Preceding human settlement, the basin hosted five shallow lakes, of which four existed at a higher elevation than the fifth, Lake Texacoco. Lake Texacoco not only received runoff from the other four lakes but also from the surrounding mountains, as well. In an open system, that runoff and its salt and mineral deposits would have flowed to the ocean. In the closed system, Lake Texacoco held the water, and hence, formed a briny body of water connected to bodies of fresh water. The basin hosted nine major environmental zones, all rich in flora and fauna diversity, including aquatic and subaquatic life.[18]

Archaeologists assert that the “hydrological cycle of the basin” followed a seasonal pattern in which rain and snow “percolated into the soil,” to replenish “the aquifers and natural springs, or flowed into the lakes in the central plateau where most of it evaporated.”[19] The first humans settled in the basin between 1700 and 1100 BCE (well before the establishment of Tenochtitlan in 1345 CE and the height of

Mexica rule in the 15th century CE). The human population increased until, by the 7th century BCE, the first evidence of human-built dams—attempts to control the unique characteristics of the basin— appeared. As the human population continued to grow in the basin, so did human intervention. Human concerns of fresh drinking water, waste water disposal, agricultural irrigation, and navigable waterways drove construction projects to protect against floods and isolate the salty waters of Lake Texacoco. Because all the lakes were connected, however, such projects involved masterful balancing acts. A dam in one lake necessarily affected another lake as well as the basin's natural hydrological cycle which, in turn, "exacerbated the impact of drought and flood events," effectively driving additional human intervention.[20]

By the late fifteenth century CE, the population of the basin had likely reached 1.5 million. The region might well have been the "largest and most densely settled area in the world" at the time.[21] The vastness of its two major cities-- Tenochtitlan, the seat of the Mexica empire, together with Tlatelolco, ruled by Tenochtitlan at this time --is all the more impressive for having been forged into land, from whence there was so little. Tenochtitlan, as Mundy writes, had been no less than "*reclaimed*" from "shallow swamps around an island in Lake Texacoco." Mundy continues to explain that "controlling the excesses of that environment was a constant battle, one likened to warfare both in representations of the city and in practice."[22] Basin inhabitants had long navigated and negotiated the challenges of their environment. As the empire grew, Nahua rulers and their people faced the same challenges (fresh water, waste water, navigable waterways), but in an ever expanding scale.

As Ezcurra et al point out, though the basin of Mexico was rich in species diversity, that diversity was not sufficiently abundant to sustain such a large human population. Water, necessarily, presented a key challenge and opportunity. Human inhabitants of the basin had learned to farm on land that regularly flooded, garnering sustenance from both the crops of dry farm land and the plants, insects, and small aquatic creatures of the seasonal wetland. The Nahua agricultural system, chinampas, first appeared between 700 and 900 CE.[23]*Chinampas* were a "succession of raised fields within a network of canals dredged on the lake bed." The rich sediment of the canals could be spread across the fields, leading to "abundant harvests."[24] Still, the Mexica could not sustain their city. Records demonstrate the massive import practices of the city at its height: 7000 tons of grain, 5000 tons of beans, 40 tons of dried chilis, 20 tons of cocoa seeds, and many other foodstuffs and goods, as well.[25] The resources, whether trade or, very often, tribute, had to travel through water ways, efficiently and regularly. Simultaneously, the city had to be able to be defended via waterways, and waterways had to be used to launch military offenses. The lives of Mexica rulers and their people, thus, were intimately, and exigently, bound to building and maintaining dams and canals, as well as aqueducts, desalination, and drainage projects.

Both Ezcurra et al and Candiani caution that it would be a mistake to "interpret the success of Tenochtitlan and the Aztec empire as resulting from sustainable use of the basin's natural resources."[26] The Mexica and other inhabitants of the basin related to water in ways conceptually different from those of the Europeans who would arrive. Mundy explains how the Nahua "understood the surrounding environment to be filled with divine presences that made themselves manifest in the fall of rain and the sweep of the tides." [27]Still, the Nahua absolutely and forcibly altered their watery world. The 600 years preceding the arrival of the Spanish attests to the most intense period of human construction in the basin. Humans built massive and numerous "dams, causeways, aqueducts, canals, irrigation systems, terraces."[28] This construction, in conjunction with urban expansion, brought with it deforestation, desiccation, pollution, and overexploitation of the natural environment. Human innovation both

succeeded and failed, spectacularly. In the mid 15th century, Mexica rulers built a 16 km dyke made of soil and stone "to prevent floods and protect freshwater from saline water," which introduced "substantive changes to the lacustrine system."[29] In the late 15th century Ahuitzotl (a ruler included in Sigüenza y Góngora's arch) built a massive aqueduct to control waters newly possessed by military force from Coyoacán. The aqueduct collapsed in 1499, "destroying dwellings, places, orchards."[30] I offer this not to discount the validity of Nahua cosmologies or technology, but to demonstrate against the oft-simplified platitudes that position indigenous peoples as ever in harmony with nature. Living with the lacustrine basin was, for the Nahua, akin to warfare, and just as brutal. For, as the natural history of the basin tells us, the environment was unstable, and, despite human efforts, continued to flood, overflow, and shift.

Water, Conquest, Colonization

The Spanish took advantage of water (both in terms of indigenous knowledge of water and the cutting off of fresh water from the city) to win Tenochtitlan in August 1521. Though the Spaniards capitalized upon indigenous water expertise, they also feared it, facts that the indigenous elite and non-elite utilized. Almost immediately after the final fall of the city, the indigenous "began to reorganize and repair their water networks." [31] Some could gain favor by doing so with or for the Spanish. But, just as the Mexica rulers had known, the Spanish saw that control of the water equaled control of the city. The Spanish occupiers utilized indigenous expertise, but were not eager to cede rights to the water. In return, indigenous inhabitants, upon losing access to water infrastructure, sabotaged the system. By 1524, viceregal authorities employed water guards to protect Spanish rule.

In the process of colonization, Spaniards imposed ideological, political and cultural rule of their empire by remaking the spatiality of conquered cities to reflect European aesthetics and use. In Tenochtitlan, Spaniards tore down indigenous structures (such as the Mexicas' sacred temple), and rebuilt their own (the Templo Mayor) on the destroyed sites. They also erected new structures, while simultaneously re-routing main travel ways, re-patterning human dwelling space, and claiming new or repurposed land for European livestock and agriculture. As SilverMoon and Ennis detail, the Nahua altepetl (roughly translated as, but not equivalent to, city-state) of Tenochtitlan carried within its philosophical and geographical structure the political, historiographical, and cosmological convictions of its pre-Colombian inhabitants. Each unit of the altepetl was composed of smaller units (calpolli or tlaxillacalli) which formed "distinct regions or 'neighborhoods' consisting of extended kinship groups." The "spatial organization" of the calpolli "structurally contain[ed]" the history and governance of the calipolli and the altepetl:" a "rotational pattern" reflecting the arrival of each calpolli and according to which "communal tasks and functions" were assigned and carried out for and within the altepetl.[32] The "Nahua cosmos" consists of layers above and below the ground, joined by the terrestrial plane—the altepetl—which, in turn, enables the joining of the earth (*tlalticpac)* "to the rest of the universe."[33] The Spaniards destroyed the architecture of Tenochtitlan, but they also *rearranged* the city, enacting a material erasure of the altepetl and, effectively, Nahua cosmology with it. "The disruption of the continuity of altepetl structure," write SilverMoon and Ennis, "constitutes one of the most severe and fundamental ruptures wrought by colonialism."[34]

"One might assume," Mundy writes, "that the rupture of the Conquest and the diminishment of indigenous power in the city would have led to the erosion of technological knowledge, but there is abundant evidence of the continuing role that indigenous experts played in managing the valley's water

system."[35] Such evidence, as Mundy documents, resided throughout the city, including the Desagu?e.[36] Through the 16th century, it became increasingly apparent that the designs of the Spanish for their imperial city could not develop with the Nahuas' conceptualization, usage, and engineering of water. The Spaniards' European crops, livestock, city, and bodies needed water to be managed differently: no seasonal flooding, more freshwater, more effective flood protection. Moreover, the tension between indigenous and Spanish management of water had additionally resulted in the lakes "filling with eroded soil and frequently overflowing" the city.[37] Finally, the Spaniards, as Candiani simply and elegantly puts it, dreamed of dry land.[38] Viceregal authorities embarked on an ambitious plan: artificial desiccation of the basin.

The Desagu?e was begun in 1607. In its first year alone, the project required the labor of over 60,000 indigenous workers to dig tunnels and canals, Construction and labor demands, as Candiani details, rose and fell, peaking again in the decade after the 1629 flood, and again in 1760s and 1790s.[39] The project lasted nearly 200 years, progressing in fits and starts of failure and success. The closed system of the basin was opened, canals were made into roads, and lakes were drained; aqueducts, sewage systems, and dams were built, razed, and rebuilt, each major undertaking a performance of inter-cultural negotiation. At times indigenous or criollo engineers helmed the project; at other times, they were ousted. Spanish (at times drawing on Muslim or Roman technology), German, Dutch, indigenous, and criollo convictions and theories vied for primacy. Urban dwellers and rural inhabitants, as well as municipal and religious leaders, clashed over expectations and needs. And, still, the natural history of the basin, hydrological and stratigraphic, continued to challenge and defeat human needs for fresh water, waste water disposal, dry land, and travel. The Desagu?e constituted a major feature of governance for each new viceroy (installed every 6-7 years, generally). Human histories continued to be brokered, and human efforts broken, by the natural, a context through which the viceregal arches of 1680 take on additional meanings.

Human Histories brokered by the Hydrological Histories

Viceregal arches in Mexico City, though temporary, were imposing structures. The viceregal entrance into Mexico City was the most expensive festival of all the many festivals and events to take place in the capital. Each entrance cost an "average of 23,000 pesos in gold (more than a Native American worker could earn in a lifetime)."[40] The triumphal arches featured as the centerpieces of the event. In 1680, the municipal arch, temporary and free standing in the Plaza Santo Domingo, was over five stories tall, reaching beyond the tallest permanent building in the city. It cost "approximately 2000 pesos in gold" and boasted gilding, bronze statues, and enormous painted canvases.[41] The viceroy halted his progress and heard an aural description of the arch. In the municipal arch, Sigüenza y Góngora presented twelve paintings of Nahua imagery: eleven rulers and Huitzilopochtli, the god who had led the Nahua to Tenochtitlan, and who served as patron of the city, god of war and god of sun. Anna More argues that though Sigüenza y Góngora's arch clearly spoke the syntax of European statesmanship, he also "[broke with] the convention of spectacle" through his use of "local figures" in order to create both a "bridge" between Spain and New Spain and to affirm creole stewardship of indigenous history.[42] Though Sigüenza y Góngora may well have been crafting a bridge between Spain and new Spain, while asserting certain criollo priorities and prowess, his arch documents not only the collision of human histories, but the collisions of the human with the natural, processes begun before both Spanish *and* Nahua rule. The Mexica were led to the basin of Mexico by Huitzilopochtli; the god displayed the site of their capital to them, in the southwest area of Lake Texacoco. It is he, then, who might be seen as the fulcrum upon which the most intense period of human intervention into the lacustrine environment of the basin began.

Though Sigüenza y Góngora may have intended the figure of Huitzilopochtli as a beginning point of (human, Tenochtitlan, and Mexico City) history, the god nonetheless also represents a transition, a before and after. Also: he is not a god of rain, but of war. By situating the Mexica within a lake, as well as blessing them in war, he representationally connects war with water, a theme repeated throughout the arch's panels. Acamapichtli, who ruled from 1372 to 1392, and considered the first king of the Mexica, is rendered with reeds in his hands, expanding the city over lakes. His image is followed by Huitzilihuitl, who, Sigüenza y Góngora explained, governed with clemency even as he consolidated massive military victories.[43] Chimalpopocatzin, renowned for aqueduct building, follows. He not only contributed to major hydrological projects, he also sacrificed his life to protect the city and his descendants (its rulers). He is painted breaking open his chest, defending his children. Itzcohuatl, Motecohcuma Ilhuicaminan, Axayacatzin, Ticoctzin each represent territorial expansion for the Mexica empire, and, with it, water projects. Ahuitzotl, as noted above, appears as well. Sigüenza y Góngora renders Ahuitzotl drowning in water surrounding the city. Within the waves are numbers of old men, representing his counselors. Ahuitzotl constructed the ill-fated Acuecuexco aqueduct. Under Ahuitzotl, Tenochtitlan benefited greatly from the Chapultepec aqueduct, which brought fresh river water to the city, but the dry season regularly sapped the resource of its robustness. Ahuitzotl embarked upon building another aqueduct, that would "tap the five springs" near the city of Huitzilopochtli, governed by the city of Coyoacán. Coyoacán's ruler, Tzutzumatin, as well as Tenochtitlan counselors, warned Ahuitzotl that his plan was ill-fated. He would not be able to control the waters.[44] Ahuitzotl ignored the advice and built the aqueduct in 1499. In 1502 it did indeed devastatingly flood the city. The lesson for the viceroy is to listen to advice with more prudence. Such a lesson could have been interpreted generally. It could also have been flattering to the viceroy: a critique of Ahuitzotl and a compliment to the better judgment of Laguna. Additionally, however, the floods had not stopped. The image resonates with the Desagu?e, as well, resurrecting feats of indigenous engineering, capitalized upon and compromised by the Spanish colonists. The final image of the arch presented Motecohcuma Xocoyotzin. He is rendered in imperial grab, rather than in death. In the image, of course, we can read the survivance of pre-Colombia Tenochtitlan, as well as a hoped for amicable relationship between New Spain and the viceroy, first embodied by Motecohcuma's welcome of Cortéz. Sigüenza y Góngora does not include the death of Motecohcuma, nor the deaths and defeats of his two successors and the resultant fall of Tenochtitlan. Though Motecohcuma is not represented in defeat, defeated he and his city indeed had been: through water.

After receiving the presentation of the municipal arch, Laguna swore his intent to govern wisely and received keys to the city. City councilmen accompanied Laguna to the ecclesiastic arch, constructed over the façade of the Cathedral. The arch was seventy-five feet high and forty-four feet wide. It was comprised of eight major paintings, two between the columns, and four on the bases.[45] Again, the viceroy halted to hear the arch's description. Sor Juana used Neptune to allegorize the viceroy. Historians have noted Sor Juana's cleverness in playing on the Laguna (lake) of the viceroy's name by choosing the water-bound Neptune.[46] I would add that, given the lacustrine environment of the basin the allegory of Laguna as Neptune enacts a more violent, and final, transposition of space and time as well. That is, though Sor Juana used Neptune to praise and direct the viceroy, the ecclesiastic arch also effectively transplanted three European figures (Neptune, Laguna, and the King of Spain) from the open waters of the ocean into a closed, and enclosed, water system: that of the basin of Mexico City. In the central painting of the arch, Laguna and his wife are depicted as Neptune and Amphitrite, ensconced in a chariot pulled by four seahorses. Each of the four winds (East, West, North, South) are rendered at the four corners of the canvas, surrounding the viceroy's watery chariot, not unlike the mountains of hills that contained Mexico City. In the second painting of the arch, Sor Juana depicted the city of Inachus,

flooded, and Neptune parting the waters with his trident. Sor Juana explained the image as a plea for the Marqúes to fund the drainage project of frequently flooded Mexico City. The theme is repeated in the next image, wherein Neptune steadies the island of Delos with his trident. Both images, born of mythology, nonetheless directly reference the environment of the city within the basin of Mexico. Neptune continued to appear throughout the images of the arch, accumulating meanings, yet carrying the first three paintings with him. When the presentation of the arch concluded, Laguna swore his allegiance to the Catholic Church. His procession continued into the viceregal palace and its chambers to enact the transfer of power. At some point in the initial days of his rule, Laguna must have toured and contended with the Desagu?e, a continuation of the dramaturgy of the arches.

Conclusion

The given circumstances of the Anthropocene remain contested. The when of its beginning functions as a key fulcrum in debates over its usage. Does it date, as is often put forth, from the Industrial Revolution and its attendant increase in pollution and carbon emissions? Or, would it more appropriately eclipse the Holocene altogether, dating its origin back to the agricultural revolution, a human engineered event facilitated by the Earth's own warming?

In the Americas, European conquest and colonialism wrought profound environmental changes for both natural and human history. In March 2015, Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin asserted 1610 and 1964 as two plausible dates for the beginning of the Anthropocene, the former due to a spike in what could be characterized as a globalization of disease (initially set in motion by the collisions of cultures in the New World in 1492), and the latter due to nuclear weapons fallout.[47] They write, "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 "mixing of previously separate biotas." [48] As Crosby described in his well-known *The Columbian Exchange*, "the fact that Kentucky bluegrass, daisies and dandelions, to name only three out of hundreds, are Old World in origin gives one a hint of the magnitude of the change that began in 1492."[49] Europeans also brought pigs, sheep, cows, horses, and dogs. As their numbers increased, enormous tracts of land—and animal, plant, and human life—were transformed irrevocably throughout the Americas.[50] The implications of "1492," for humanity, has been well documented, historicized, and theorized.

While I am not discounting the real devastation wrought by European colonialism in the Americas, the Anthropocene demands, as Chakrabarty points out, that we reconsider the primacy of our focus on the colonial project and process. In the basin of Mexico, as elsewhere, the collision of natural and human history predates 1492, and it is the much deeper natural history (tectonic plates, closed water system) that quite explicitly and profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the human in that geography. Performance and theatre historians must confront the politics of a decentered human, while simultaneously writing the human in collision (aiming towards collapse) with the natural. A certain queasiness ensues, given the quite real inequalities, based on categorizations and locations of humans, of the contemporary world. As we continue to build methodologies, I suggest we bear in mind Mark Anderson's characterization of the subterranean waterways of Mexico City: evidence of degradation and devastation, but also of innovation and imagination.

I also suggest that the Anthropocene itself must be scaled up in our imaginations. Discourses of the

Anthropocene prioritize conceptualizations of progress, coalescing around geographically and temporally bound ideas of development, industrialization, and modernization. Definitions of the Anthropocene must contend with massive, global, human interaction with the environment; such interactions are the very foundation of the conceptualization of the term. But by focusing on the primarily western and northern geographical and the post-1700 temporal, orientation of, for example, the Industrial Revolution, we set limits upon the deep history the term calls for, replicating, in effect, certain patterns of priorities that have contributed to the current moment.[51] In 1680, Spain and New Spain, including Mexico City, were not marginal within the mise en scène of global power. In terms of industrialization, however, both Spain and the Spanish Americas have been marginalized in relation to Western and Northern Europe and the United States. And, yet, such sites, as I hope I have demonstrated, can prove powerfully effective in moving towards a synthesis of natural and human history. The when of the origin of the Anthropocene is a red herring for our field. Likewise, a focus on the 1700s forward, I suggest, enacts a paralysis of the ways in which the Anthropocene can mobilize us, as historians and citizens.

Lisa Jackson-Schebetta is an assistant professor and director of graduate studies in Theatre Arts at the University of Pittsburgh. Her research focuses on the hemispheric Americas and Iberian performance and theatre. Her first monograph, *Traveler, there is no road: Theatre, the Spanish Civil War and the Decolonial Imagination in the Americas* is forthcoming from the University of Iowa Press. She earned her PhD from the University of Washington.

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[1] I use Mexica, in place of Aztec, following contemporary scholarship. The Mexica are one tribe of the Nahua. I maintain the usage of “Aztec” if in a direct quote. I also use Nahua when appropriate.

[2] See, for example, Alejandro Cañeque, *The King’s Living Image: The Culture and Politics of Viceregal Power in Colonial Mexico* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Francisco de la Maza, *La Mitología Clásica en el Arte Colonial de México* (Mexico DF: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1968); JR Mulryne, Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly and Margaret Shewing, editors, *Europa Triumphans: Court and Civic Festivals in Early Modern Europe: Volume II* (Aldershot and London: Ashgate and MHRA, 2004); Kathleen Ross, *The Baroque Narrative of Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Antonio Rubial García, *Historia de la Vida Cotidiana en Mexico: Tomo III, La Ciudad Barroca* (México DF: El Colegio de México, 2005); Georgina Sabat-Rivers, “El *Neptuno* de Sor Juana: Fiesta Barroca y Programa Político,” *University of Dayton Review* 16.2 (Spring, 1983); Michael Schreffler, *The Art of Allegiance: Visual Culture and Imperial Power in Baroque New Spain* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[3] See Cañeque, *The King’s Living Image.*

[4] Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009), 206.

[5] Chakrabarty, 201.

[6] Mark Anderson, “The Grounds of Crisis and the Geopolitics of Depth: Mexico City in the

Anthropocene" in *Ecological Crisis and Cultural Representation in Latin America: Ecocritical Perspectives on Art, Film, and Literature*, edited by Mark Anderson and Zelia Bora (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 105. The basin of Mexico continues to be a site in which the meeting of the human and the natural remains both legible and exigent.

[7] I write move towards because, though I will situate human history alongside natural history, a total collapse of the two is beyond my discipline: I have but an introductory knowledge of geology. While I will draw upon and mobilize that knowledge, I do so with respect for experts in the sciences. I suspect a complete merging of human and natural history would demand the collaboration of humanists and scientists, not as in one field borrowing from another, but in terms of conceptualization of method, argument, and site. On a related note, I am intentionally eschewing object and thing studies within the humanities. In choosing not to work with, for example, Bill Brown, Nigel Thrift or Jane Bennet, or others, it is not for disregard of their work, but rather as a challenge to myself to be wary of substituting humanist readings of the non-human for natural history.

[8] Chakrabarty, for emphasizing geology throughout the essay, demonstrates a preoccupation with the surface referencing, for example, the footprint (198), "accumulation in atmosphere of greenhouse gases" through "burning of fossil fuel and industrialized use of livestock" (198), biodiversity and the Sumatran rhino (210).

[9] Anderson, 101-103; 105.

[10] Anderson, 105.

[11] Nigel Clark, "Geo-politics and the disaster of the Anthropocene," *The Sociological Review* 62 (2014), 31.

[12] Anderson, 105.

[13] Ibid.

[14] In 1528, triumphal arches hailed the Audiencia, or governing court. In 1611, arches were incorporated into the viceroy's welcome. The office of the viceroy was created in 1535.

[15] I take this phrase from Cañeque.

[16] José Esteban Castro, *Water, Power, and Citizenship: Social Struggle in the Basin of Mexico* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 45.

[17] Exequiel Ezcurra, Marisa Mazari-Hiriart, Irene Pisanty, and Adrián Guillermo Aguilar, *The Basin of Mexico: Critical Environmental Issues and Sustainability* (New York, NY: United Nations University Press, 1999), 10.

[18] Ezcurra, 11-12.

[19] Castro, 43.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ezcurra, 34.

[22] Barbara E. Mundy, *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 210.

[23] Castro, 44.

[24] Ezcurra, 7.

[25] Ezcurra, 34.

[26] Ibid. The idea recurs throughout Candiani's book, as well. Its first explicit mention appears on page xxvi. Vera S. Candiani, *Dreaming of Dry Land: Environmental Transformation in Colonial Mexico City* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014).

[27] Mundy, 210.

[28] Castro, 44.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Castro 45.

[31] Castro 47.

[32] SilverMoon and Michael Ennis, "The View of the Empire from the *Altepetl*: Nahua Historical and Global Imagination," in *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Racial and Religious Difference in the Renaissance Empires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 153.

[33] SilverMoon and Ennis, 155. I intentionally use present tense, here, as such cosmologies continue to survive in indigenous communities.

[34] SilverMoon and Ennis, 153.

[35] Mundy, 199.

[36] We might situate such survivals alongside those already well documented in performance and theatre studies, particularly in regards to religious performance and mock combat. See Max Harris, *Aztecs, Moors, and Christians: Festivals of Reconquest in Mexico and Spain* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1992); Louise M. Burkhart, Barry D. Sell, and Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Nahuatl Theatre Volume 1: Life and Death in Colonial Mexico* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2004); Louise Burkhart, ed, *Aztecs on Stage: Religious Theatre in Colonial Mexico* (Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011).

[37] Vera S. Candiani, "The Desagüe Reconsidered: Environmental Dimensions of Class Conflict in Colonial Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 92, no 1 (2014), 6.

[38] See Candiani, *Dreaming of Dry Land*.

[39] Candiani, "The Desagüe Reconsidered," 15.

[40] Linda Curcio-Nagy, "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and the 1680 Viceregal Entry of the Marquis de la Laguna into Mexico City" *Europa Triumphans: Court and Civic Festivals in Early Modern Europe: Volume II,* edited by J.R. Mulryne, Helen Watanbe-O'Kelly, and Margaret Shewring (Hampshire, England: MHRA and Ashgate, 2004), 353.

[41] Curcio-Nagy, "Sor Juana" 353.

[42] Anna More, *Baroque Sovereignty: Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora and the Creole Archive of Colonial Mexico* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 114-115. As Cañeque and others point out, though the use of Nahua imagery in such a public, diplomatic ceremony was indeed unheralded, the arch's aesthetic and literary frame placed the figures firmly within European convention. Mixing of European and indigenous figures was not completely anathema in New Spain. The 1680 pageant of Querétaro, which Sigüenza y Góngora published a description of, included large parade figures of indigenous gods and the King of Spain. Indigenous arches, too, mixed imagery. In 1593, for example, Curcio -Nagy notes that an indigenous arch at the Chapel of Saint Joseph "depicted the Nahua eagle on a cactus being ridden by Saint Francis." Chapel decorations included "pre-Conquest scenes and the ancient rulers of Tenochtitlan." Linda A. Curcio-Nagy, *The Great Festivals of Mexico City: Performing Power and Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 173, n19.

[43] My summaries of the paintings are drawn from Sigüenza y Góngora's published description of his work. See Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, *Teatro de Virtudes Políticas que constituyen a un principio. . .* Mexico: Por la Biuda de Bernardo Calderon, 1680. Reprinted in Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, *Obras Históricas*, edited by Jose Rojas Garciduenas, (Mexico DF: Editorial Porrua, 1960), 229-361..

[44] Mundy, 64.

[45] Curcio-Nagy, "Sor Juana" 366.

[46] See Curcio-Nagy, "Sor Juana," and Sabat-Rivers, for example. The depiction of Laguna as Neptune was repeated in 1683, with the arrival of the new archbishop and his entry into Mexico City. See Maza, 121-134.

[47] Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene," *Nature* vol. 519 (March 2015), 171.

[48] Lewis and Maslin, 174.

[49] Alfred W. Crosby, Jr., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), 73. Chakrabarty, in "Four Theses," critiques Crosby.

[50] See, for example, Elinor G.K. Melville, *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[51] Wendt makes a similar case: “studies of the historical evolution of the Anthropocene can offer a new interpretation of the histories of Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires, as long as it avoids falling into conventional narratives of industrialization and modernization.” Helge Wendt, “Epilogue: The Iberian Way into the Anthropocene**”** in *The Globalization of Knowledge in the Iberian Colonial World*, edited by Helge Wendt (Berlin: Max Planck Institute Open Access Edition, 2016), 298.

“Towards a Synthesis of Natural and Human History: Situating the Municipal and Ecclesiastic Viceregal Arches of 1680 Mexico City within the Lacustrine" by Lisa Jackson-Schebetta

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Martin E. Segal Theatre Center:

The Graduate Center CUNY Graduate Center
365 Fifth Avenue
New York NY 10016