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Landing Time

It doesn't seem so long ago that cultural anthropologists, media theorists, and post-modern philosophers alike eagerly zeroed in on spatial constructs across the planet in their efforts to address the cultural particularities of the end of twentieth century. Globalization insisted upon a proliferation of ostensibly generic and standard (though, in fact, often emphatically Western) infrastructures, public spaces, urban programs, and indeed no small number of buildings, which were so homogeneous and lacking in local and cultural specificity as to be practically interchangeable. The intensity with which these tendencies shaped urban landscapes mushroomed by the end of the century, whether in the Global South or in the Global North, compressing the psychological map between cultures and traditions that were historically distant, even antagonistic. Those spaces and programs—airports, shopping centers, urban strips, cultural and governmental institutions, etc.—served to lubricate the circulation of capital, releasing the cultural anchors of an increasingly abstract postmodern subject. Late capitalism necessitated a universal, recognizable architectural continuum: a standard of programs, functions, and spatial protocols ready to accommodate the rapid expansion of international corporations. While many attempted to visually articulate this emerging historical condition—and many continue to do so today—perhaps none were so rhetorically effective as the homogeneous, endless landscape of Superstudio's anticipatory "Continuous Monument" in 1969. *Junk space, no-places, etc.*, only theorize a colossal, still ongoing reorganization of the planet's geographies and economies, a process in which pre-twenty-first century forms of abstraction and alienation deeply influenced the practices of architecture and urban planning, and vice versa. The building frenzy of

end-of-the-century "supermodernity" cast a somber shadow over the last five decades of architecture production.

This emphasis on spatial practices, however, has been challenged by a cultural climate in which the ghosts of the past hover to confront the questions of the present. First and foremost, we must consider our contemporary environmental preoccupations, in which geological time resurfaces time and again, only to quickly vanish into the air of our everyday practices. Yet, this seems to be changing. Increasingly, unavoidably, the current climate crisis confronts us with the fundamentally extractive logic of our present culture—affecting minerals and land riches as much as labor, genders, cultures, and other nonhuman earth-bound species, to name but a few—in which organic and inorganic matter reinstate a different temporality. The geological accumulation of mineral strata has acquired critical impact in the present. The industrious strength of companies which mine, drill, refine, and distribute the energy that capitalism desperately necessitates to function, puts forward a cultural and geological contract in which different forms of accumulation and displacement become increasingly visible. The act of burning fossil fuels, for instance, reiterates that contract, unleashing a set of chemical and physical reactions slowly concocted in geological formations across eons of time that nonetheless have accelerated atmospheric and environmental impacts. The past, in other words, lands in the present with unexpected violence. Together, the extraction, production, transportation, and consumption of these same fuels constitute a critical activity, reconvening past and contemporary forms of accumulation, extraction, and dispossession. What once was organic matter is outgassed to the atmosphere, bridging distant geological times as a planetary paleo-retaliation. Organic substances that once populated the planet reemerge millions of years later to alter atmospheric and spatial

relations on a planetary scale, setting into motion biopolitical and spatial reconfigurations. Natural catastrophes are no longer perceived as a fateful, promethean, unique, and inevitable discharge of atmospheric and/or geological forces of breath-taking magnitudes, but instead, as an aftereffect of an economic-turned-cultural model for the planet in which human agency is indisputable.

This situation may not completely overrule the spatial perspective, but it does insist upon a temporality that is critical for contemporary discussions on the role architecture might play in the future—a field traditionally vigilant to emerging spatial theories. The temporal axis opens a different epistemological landscape with long-term promising consequences that span from the micro-scale of the constructive detail to the macro-scale of the region. Deep time circles back to redefine space, land, and materials in a continuously expanding field that is wrestling with its artificial and self-imposed straitjacket. Interdisciplinary knowledge that not so long ago seemed unassailable now permits for a common understanding of the limits and constraints in the practice of architecture, as well as new opportunities to redefine a healthy and ethical compromise for building industries. Social theories and political action on climate change might be prone to dilution of the very same atmosphere they seek to remediate. Increasingly, however, architects, landscape architects, artists, designers, and engineers are embracing a new material and geo-psychological dimension of time and space to present contemporary narratives of resistance. The renewal of architecture's privileged sites for research and exploration situates at the very core the extra-long *durée* temporality that a reconceived environmentalism requires. This opens new opportunities for action-oriented research and practice. New fields and possibilities are emerging in and between once-stable categories—material science, chemistry, land management, etc.—challenging architecture,

a field that has been historically mesmerized by the visual impact of globally-circulating commercial image, with the potency of new forms of meaning, critical optimism, and moral responsibility. Biomaterials, organic and responsive building elements, etc., present us with an opportunity to renovate the visual and material palettes of architects and to revisit different traditions of construction, promising to turn twentieth century certainties upside-down, and discredit non-symbiotic forms of construction.

The articles included in this issue are a good example on how researchers and architects from across the globe are *getting together* to understand how a new ecological paradigm can reorganize architecture and landscaping practices to depart from local and historical knowledges. Crucial in this new understanding is the continuity between geology, history, and life (both human and non-human), an interdependent triad pinpointing specific and more robust attempts at addressing climate change from the design's point of view. Considering traditional and modern forms of construction from such a temporal perspective encourages the introduction of new materials (including bio-based materials), landscapes (peatlands, marshlands, swamps, etc.), and practices (such as regenerative agricultural methods) into the field of design. Together, they offer new lenses by which to assess the ways in which colonial power structures continue to disrupt local knowledge in resource management and infrastructures. Expanding our temporal frame of analysis also helps to unpack symbiotic relations that have been lingering in local economies for decades, centuries, or even millennia. The hybridization of humans and non-humans in landscape construction is crucial for a post humanistic understanding of the set of relations of this temporal paradigm. We enthusiastically greet the efforts that new generations of designers and researchers are making in this respect.



Cultural Center Real del Bosque under construction, Tuititlán, 2023.

Public Works at the Periphery: AMLO and the Urban Improvement Program

Departamento
del Distrito
Francisco Quiñones and
Nathan Friedman

On July 1, 2018 during the most recent presidential election in Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) was elected president with 53.8% of the vote.¹ In total, 629 positions for federal office were up for election, the largest number in the country's history. AMLO's party, MORENA (short for Movimiento Regeneración Nacional), secured a majority in both chambers of the legislature, a feat unachieved in Mexico since 1988.² The MORENA party recognized and harnessed a popular appetite for political change. Its members promised a radical set of policy shifts that were on par, they professed, with other critical moments of Mexican history: the Mexican War of Independence (1810–1821), the Reform War (1858–1861), and the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920). AMLO's administration positioned itself as the Fourth Transformation that would build upon this historic lineage of popular social movements, and would alter the economic and political trajectory of the country. Architecture and design would play a pivotal role.

Today, five years later, the Fourth Transformation promised by AMLO and his administration has generated both ideological and material products. A massive building campaign is currently underway throughout the country, the likes of which has not been seen since the mid-twentieth century. Construction initiatives can be broadly categorized into two groups. The first group, called *obras prioritarias* or priority works by the administration, are geared towards national infrastructure. They include the AIFA International Airport that serves the Mexico City metropolitan area; the Olmeca oil refinery in Dos Bocas, Tabasco; and the intercity Maya Train under construction for the Yucatán Peninsula. All have garnered national headlines since their conception, and

all have been deployed to generate popular support for the president throughout the nation-state.



Felipe Ángeles International Airport (AIFA), 2022.

The second group, which serves as the focus of this text, includes smaller-scale regional projects, implemented with the aim of developing public works in underserved municipalities and neighborhoods throughout the country. Led by the Secretariat of Agrarian, Territorial, and Urban Development (SEDATU), these projects fall under the administrative umbrella of the Urban Improvement Program (PMU). The stated goal of the PMU is the construction of social infrastructure projects that allow for local communities to gather, facilitate exchange, and appropriate space based on their individual needs. To date, the federal government, through the PMU, has carried out approximately 1000 works in 153 municipalities over 27 states, with a total investment of over two billion US dollars.³ Programs include municipal markets, schools, health centers, libraries, auditoriums, exhibition spaces, parks, sports complexes, fire stations, and community centers. The amount of public construction that has been initiated since 2018 in Mexico cannot be overstated.

While the PMU projects are made possible through a unified federal campaign, one may argue that they are also part of a national project of decentralization—both geographic and disciplinary. Projects are spread across the country and are located primarily

outside of the larger and more heavily populated urban centers that have, historically, served as the geographic focus for federal investment and development. From a disciplinary perspective, the large number of projects simultaneously underway, coupled with a heavily constricted timeline (one only made plausible by the federal mobilization of resources and labor), was achieved through a tactical shift in how federal building projects are typically managed. Rather than attempting to both design and construct the entirety of the PMU initiative internally through government-employed architects and public servants, SEDATU reached out directly to private practices to commission projects, working first with faculty from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) School of Architecture.⁴ The government engaged directly with academic and design professionals, commissioning both established practitioners and lesser-known offices with smaller portfolios of built work. A wide array of architecture offices and adjacent practitioners—including the fields of urbanism, landscape architecture, graphic design, and structural engineering—were employed, several from emerging practices.⁵ This understanding comes, in part, through first-hand experience working with SEDATU on five public projects funded through the PMU: for the El stage of the program, our office Departamento del Distrito, established in 2017, collaborated on a cultural strategy for the municipality of Tultitlán in the State of Mexico.⁶

What is the role of such a decentralized design approach in building and promoting a contemporary image of the nation-state, particularly in Mexico? And, for a political party that makes direct reference to popular social moments of Mexico's past, what relevance does history hold in a building campaign of this kind for MORENA and its members? As AMLO's presidential term

enters its final year, a collective conversation on the wide spectrum of architectural work being produced is critical to the future of the Urban Improvement Program, as well as to how the local architecture community in Mexico reflects on its role within the broader cultural and political context of our contemporary moment.

Nation Building, 1929-1969

The years following the Mexican Revolution initiated a slow but fruitful process of national reflection and self-revision. Power structures that had been imposed over the past three centuries were questioned—from Spanish colonial rule to the tenure of Porfirio Díaz—and a new generation of architects, together with an emerging class of artists, engineers, lawyers, and economists, set out to establish a modern national identity. Functionalist and international modernist theories were largely embraced by Mexican architects of the time as a way to promote a progressive and democratic future, which was also influenced by an influx of European immigrants to Mexico and increased communication with the United States. Modernism served as a welcome vehicle for federal development plans while providing a new aesthetic paradigm for national identity that could be deployed to both span and unify several decades of diverse political leadership. This critical process, together with Mexico's rapid economic and industrial growth during the mid-twentieth century (popularly referred to as the *Milagro Mexicano* or "Mexican Miracle"), transformed the country and, in particular, its capital. Infrastructure and public-works projects retooled the Federal District, attracting millions of laborers from around the country who, in turn, extended the city limits through the creation

of new settlements and neighborhoods. Mexico City experienced immense development and population growth as a new global face was literally built through the construction of institutions, infrastructure projects, and public buildings.

Historiographically, the modern architecture movement in Mexico is commonly framed over a period of four decades, running from the end the 1920s after the Mexican Revolution (one of the MORENA party's historical touchstones) to the architectural and urban projects associated with the 1968 Olympic Games.⁷ Emblematic works of architecture were produced in a variety of modernist idioms. Notable constructions in the Federal District alone include the Sanatorio para Tuberculosos de Huipulco hospital (1929-36), by José Villagrán; Secretary of Communications Centro SCOP (1954), by architect and government administrator Carlos Lazo; Mercado de la Merced (1957), by Enrique del Moral; and the Nonoalco Tlatelolco social housing complex (1949-64), by Mario Pani. Major cultural institutions were established, such as the National Anthropology Museum and Modern Art Museum, both designed by Pedro Ramírez Vázquez and opened in 1964 within Chapultepec Park. New roadway and metro infrastructures redefined the city limits, largely in anticipation of the 1968 Summer Olympics, integrating art and architecture. The artist Mathias Goeritz, for example, curated the expansive Ruta de la Amistad public sculpture program, while Félix Candela designed four stations to serve the city's first metro line, which opened in 1969. The most important project of this period—in terms of scale, program, and national symbolism—is widely considered to be the Ciudad Universitaria, the new campus of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Inaugurated on November 20,

1952, the project comprised more than twenty academic departments, libraries, administrative buildings, cultural spaces, and sports facilities (including a stadium for 70,000 spectators), with more than one hundred architects contributing designs to a master plan developed by Pani and Del Moral.



Agustín Melgar Olympic Velodrom under construction, 1968. Architect: Herbert Schurman.

While the projects listed above have been leveraged as the global face of Mexican modernism, a more anonymous architecture, based on systems of modularity and replicability, was also deployed at considerable scale. One example, of relevance to the social infrastructure projects currently under construction through the AMLO administration and PMU, is the modular system of elementary schools devised by Juan O'Gorman in 1932. Mexico City experienced significant population growth following the Mexican Revolution, climbing to over 1.2 million inhabitants by the 1930 census. This growth, largely attributed to the internal migration of laborers and their families from rural communities, created an unprecedented demand for schools for the children of the new working class.⁸ Narciso Bassols, National Minister of Public Education, appointed O'Gorman as head of the ministry's architectural office after recognizing the potential of his early work, which explored architecture through an economy of means, functionality, standardization, and efficiency, allowing for the

possibility of mass production.⁹ O'Gorman would later call this approach to architectural design "Building Engineering" or "Technical Architecture." With this methodology, O'Gorman designed and built twenty-five public schools around the periphery of the Distrito Federal (now Mexico City) in only six months.¹⁰

Miracles, Now

Despite the momentum and global recognition that Mexico's building campaign achieved by the end of the 1960s, the political project behind it collapsed after the Tlatelolco massacre on October 2, 1968, just ten days before the Olympic Games were set to open. Government forces violently suppressed protesters gathered in the Nonoalco Tlatelolco social housing complex, killing what is now estimated to be hundreds of students and arresting more than a thousand individuals.¹¹ The state's political legitimacy was largely destroyed, along with the progressive and democratic national image that had been so carefully constructed. Historians Fernando Carmona, Guillermo Montaña, Jorge Carrión, and Alonso Aguilar have worked to expose the social tensions that led to the Tlatelolco student massacre, and to challenge the national rhetoric of progress and development that was disseminated through era-defining terms like the Mexican Miracle. Their collection of essays, first published in 1970 under the title *El Milagro Mexicano*, offers a counter narrative to state talking points that were heavily influenced by the authoritarian, one-party rule of the PRI and the federal economic policies of Secretary of the Treasury Antonio Ortiz Mena, who served during the presidencies of Adolfo López Mateos and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (spanning 1958-1970).¹² In the essay

"Retablo de la Política 'A la Mexicana'" (Altarpiece to Politics the Mexican Way), Jorge Carrión criticizes the "systemic preaching of the *miracle* through the advertising and propaganda apparatus monopolized by the government," calling this official dissemination "cynical, fallacious, and hypocritical" in the face of events like the Tlatelolco student massacre by the military.



Student demonstrations in Plaza de las Tres Culturas, Mexico City, 1968.

Mexico's public institutions and infrastructures were further compromised over the following decades, impacted in particular by the economic crisis of 1982 and the presidential administration of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), during which a neoliberal model was implemented. The Mexican economy was opened to international markets, which slowly eroded the institutions and enterprises it had taken the country decades to build; foreign investment, privatization, and deregulation ultimately worked to transform the nation-state.

Today, as the federal administration of López Obrador signals a shift in domestic policy and publicly rejects the tenets of neoliberalism, several iconic architectural works from the mid-twentieth century stand at a turning point. Carlos Lazo's SCOP building (1952) is undergoing partial demolition due to structural damage incurred during the 2017 earthquake. Enrique del Moral's Reaseguros Alianza (1952) stands vacant, Felix Candela's Restaurante

Los Manantiales (1957) is up for sale, and innumerable other projects from the twentieth century—structures designed by known figures as well as generic swaths of city fabric—hover in a state of precarity. Weak preservation legislation has left them unprotected and susceptible to erasure by capital interests that have come to dominate Mexico City under market deregulation. Reuse projects, largely driven by private developers when total demolition of a structure has been denied due to landmark status, has commonly resulted in facade preservation while interiors are gutted and reconfigured for commercial programming. Unprotected by law, abandoned by government and preservation institutions, valued and considered primarily in closed academic circles, and disconnected from the popular consciousness, the fates of such structures urgently demand public reckoning.



Súper Servicio Lomas, 1948. Architect: Vladimir Kaspé.

To better understand the inherent tensions between modernist-era preservation and private development in Mexico, one may turn to the recent history of Súper Servicio Lomas. This building, designed by Manchuria-born émigré Vladimir Kaspé in 1948, was one of the first multi-use projects to be constructed in Mexico City. In contrast to the residential context in which it was built, Súper Servicio Lomas employed a rationalist structure that echoed the modernist principles of Le Corbusier,

complete with *pilotis*, a free plan, a roof garden, and horizontal strip windows. The most radical element of the project, however, was the unprecedented mix of programs integrated into the building's interior: a gas station, an auto repair shop, a car dealership, retail space, a dance hall and party venue, offices, and executive apartments. In 2007, then mayor of Mexico City Marcelo Ebrard, together with a series of real-estate developers, began a redevelopment campaign for the site of Súper Servicio Lomas. The first proposal, the 300-meter-tall Torre Bicentenario designed by OMA in Rotterdam, was shelved after receiving harsh public criticism and government opposition. The tower's immense height, promoted as the tallest building in Latin America at the time, was a dramatic break from the surrounding context of residential homes and modest office buildings. The design proposal also included an underground parking structure that would impact the adjacent Chapultepec Park, one of Mexico City's most active and important public spaces. The proposal that followed soon after, the 121-meter-tall Torre Virreyes designed by Teodoro González de León, was ultimately approved. Completed in 2015, the construction required a section of Súper Servicio Lomas to be demolished, with the remaining structure remodeled for commercial lease.¹³ The section of Chapultepec Park adjacent to the tower has since taken on the dynamic of a privately owned public space. Activities on the ground are surveilled and controlled by the building's security staff. Today, the site serves as a symbol of the city government's preference for private interests over the preservation of public space and the national heritage of the twentieth century.

How is it possible that a site designated national heritage was partially demolished and then adapted in such a way?



Demolition of Súper Servicio Lomas, 2011.

The answer, in part, lies in how buildings deemed “cultural patrimony” are classified in Mexico. There are two national institutes that deal with preservation: INAH and INBAL. INAH (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, or the National Institute of Anthropology and History) is entrusted with “archaeological” and “historical” structures, zones, and remnants. This remit primarily includes pre-Hispanic sites and Spanish-colonial, post-conquest architecture from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Structures that fall under these categories are automatically protected by law. INBAL (Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, or National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature), on the other hand, is entrusted with “artistic” buildings and monuments—sites that are of “significant aesthetic value.”¹⁴ Structures under this category—which includes all architecture from the twentieth century—are *not* automatically protected. Their aesthetic value must be assigned and established through argumentation. The outcome of this institutional cleavage is that pre-Hispanic and colonial-era architecture is given preference—particularly in terms of preservation—while twentieth-century architecture is often left at the mercy of private political and economic interests.

Dr. Ramón Vargas, professor of architectural history and philosophy at UNAM and the former head of the Direction of Architecture and Conservation of Artistic

Heritage (DACPAI), was part of the legal defense team that fought for the protection of Súper Servicio Lomas. In a 2017 interview, Dr. Vargas described the difficulty of advocating for the project in front of the office of the Mexican Attorney General:

When the public prosecutor called on us to defend Súper Servicio Lomas, we began to discuss an area of knowledge that was foreign to the context. We went there thinking as architects—speaking about the distribution of space, about how the building is well-oriented, about its circulation, about it being multi-use—but we were speaking with a public prosecutor, and few people are more disconnected from such concepts. He listened to us and commented, “That’s interesting. Is Súper Servicio Lomas the only building in Mexico with these characteristics?” To which we replied, “No, there are others.” And, of course, he responded, “Why do we need to preserve this specific building, and not the others? Why do you argue that this building has a very important aesthetic value? What does that mean?” That’s when you realize that as architects we’ve created our own, insular narrative. In a fight of this kind, such arguments do not interest anyone but us.¹⁵



2021 Chicago Architecture Biennial.

Dr. Vargas's statement makes clear that the preservation of twentieth-century architecture in Mexico is not only a problem of law but also—and perhaps more importantly—a problem of communication.

This gap between insular academic narratives and broader public discourse around cultural patrimony in Mexico City has served as motivation for several projects by Departamento del Distrito, including the free publication series *En-Medio*, contemporary documentation of mid-twentieth-century city landmarks in collaboration with photographer Adriana Hamui, and a related catalog of at-risk building sites produced for the 2021 Chicago Architecture Biennial.

Tultitlán

The national project of decentralization currently underway by the AMLO administration has shifted the economic and political focus of the country away from metropolitan city centers and towards peripheral rural communities. The government's aptly named obras emblemáticas—all of which are located outside of large urban centers—exemplify the popular ambitions of the administration, which also include structural alterations to how the government is managed and from where it operates. López Obrador has long stated a desire to move several government ministries from their centralized position in Mexico City to different states across the country, a tactical shift that is often presented alongside plans to spread economic growth more equally throughout Mexico. Within this context, the projects of SEDATU and the PMU are designed to operate at the local scale, providing much needed public infrastructure and resources to communities that have historically been underserved by federal funding and support programs.

The municipality of Tultitlán de Mariano Escobedo, which is located approximately fifteen miles north of Mexico City's historic center in the neighboring State of

Mexico, was selected for the E1 stage of the PMU program in 2020.¹⁶ Tultitlán—due to its proximity to Mexico City and Querétaro and its location on the main highway connecting Mexico's capital with the U.S. border—developed as an important industrial center beginning in the mid-twentieth century. According to government projections, the corridor that it forms together with Cuautitlán Izcalli and Tepotzotlán will soon concentrate the greatest demand for industrial spaces in the country. The industries located in Tultitlán are primarily dedicated to the production of parts, accessories and electric accumulators for motor vehicles, a high percentage of which are sold to the United States.¹⁷ In 2022 alone, Tultitlán's industry made 184 million US dollars in revenue from international sales and received 83 million US dollars in remittances from Mexican migrants living in the US.¹⁸ Despite this local economy, resources remain unequally distributed. According to government statistics published by INEGI, 42.3% of Tultitlán's population lives below the national poverty line, with 34.5% in vulnerable conditions that include suboptimal access to housing, education, and health services.¹⁹ These social inequities, coupled with the construction of the nearby Felipe Ángeles International Airport, made Tultitlán an optimal investment site for the PMU program.²⁰

The Tultitlán cultural strategy is composed of five public projects: (1) a municipal market in the historic center; (2) a cultural center and library in San Pablo de las Salinas; (3) a fire station in Solidaridad; (4) a park and sports facility in Valle de Tules; and (5) a cultural center in Sierra de Guadalupe. While the sites, programs, and square-meter requirements were defined by SEDATU, the onus was placed on our design team to devise a strategy of unification across various scales of intervention, building types, and ground conditions.



Agora and Library Elena Poniatowska under construction, Tultitlán, 2023.

A heavily constricted timeline required a strategy for the conceptualization, development, and construction of all five projects to allow the core design team to deliver documents on time and in due form.²¹ The projects were conceptualized as pieces of infrastructure in which everything from their structural module, materials, and details was standardized and repeated. Designing them to be modular, functional, and adaptable allowed for projects to be thought through systemically and flexibly enough so that they could respond adequately to the differences in location and program of each site.²² Inspired by the manufacturing history of Tultitlán and the large presence of the steel industry in the area, the buildings followed the logics present in the local typology of the industrial shed. Their basic components were the same: a spatial module of 5m x 5m repeated throughout the diverse conditions of the sites, an I-beam and truss steel structure using the same profiles and sections, and a façade system composed of concrete masonry blocks on the interior and corrugated metal on the exterior. Steel structures were painted in distinct colors to soften the appearance of the buildings and give them distinct characters. Finally, interior systems and materials were left exposed, alluding to industrial architecture's bare nature while revealing the system's logic at large.

In addition to an architecture-as-infrastructure approach, the integration of new, exterior public spaces into the largely informal neighborhoods of Tultitlán was a primary focus of the PMU cultural strategy, and gave the design team license to push for unconventional programmatic pairings. The Felipe Ángeles Fire Station, for example, situates an essential public building within an informal neighborhood at the periphery of Tultitlán, and combines this effort with the creation of a clearly defined

and legible community space. A perimeter structure of steel I-beams and elevated metal mesh panels frames the site plot and its activities. The station includes a double-height garage for the storage and maintenance of vehicles, dormitories and leisure zones, administrative offices, and a small medical center. These programs, consolidated in an L-shaped volume, anchor a publicly accessible plaza that is located within the perimeter structure. This strategy provides a secure public zone that is directly supported by the adjacent fire station. An open-air basketball court located on the second level of the structure has the potential to further extend this dynamic into the building itself. Designed as a controlled site for exercise, this space will be opened to the surrounding community during specific events throughout the year, and accessed by means of the central training tower.

Projects designed for the PMU program in Tultitlán are slowly opening to the public. Typically, not all public infrastructure projects in Mexico survive more than a few years of operation without modification by local authorities. Sometimes they are abandoned or demolished. O'Gorman's schools built in the periphery of Mexico City provide a model for design as well as for evaluating the success of the projects in Tultitlán as they operate, grow, and adapt post-occupancy. The system devised by O'Gorman was clear and flexible enough to be utilized in its original form, and also to be communicated and appropriated by the federal government. O'Gorman's kit of parts has been used to create what is still today the most recognizable system for public schools in the country. And so, almost a century after their construction, one might ask: Can this specific case be considered successful in terms of preservation, even if many of the original structures have disappeared or been altered beyond

recognition? What is more valuable: preserving a physical building in perpetuity or, instead, preserving the ideology embedded in a building itself?

In the case of our projects for Tultitlán, the degree of their success—measured in their capacity to be durable, efficient, and flexible for the communities in which they are situated—will be based on the projects' resiliency to future pressures of many kinds: budgetary, political, climatic, social, and cultural. Their capacity to accommodate and withstand these forces, whatever they may be, will be their most critical test.

- 1 R. Castro Cornejo, "Elecciones 2018: Una coyuntura histórica en México | Política y Gobierno," *Revistas CIDE* 27, no.2. <https://www.cide.edu/blogs/revistas-cide/elecciones-2018-una-coyuntura-historica-en-mexico-politica-y-gobierno-vol-27-num-2/>
- 2 The 2018 election was notable on several fronts: it cemented the meteoric rise of MORENA, a left-wing political party officially registered only four years prior in 2014; it signaled a further break from the policies of the PRI party, that had remained in power for much of the twentieth century, holding the presidency continually from 1929 to 2000 and then again from 2012 to 2018; and it reflected strong popular support for political change.
- 3 Statistics published by SEDATU. See www.gob.mx and *SEDATU, La Transformación de México desde sus Ciudades: Programa de Mejoramiento Urbano 2019* (Ciudad de México: SEDATU, 2019), 8.
- 4 SEDATU's first iteration of projects for the PMU was done in conjunction with selected faculty from UNAM's School of Architecture through its Coordinación de Vinculación.
- 5 Practices involved in recent SEDATU projects include: Colectivo c733, Taller Capital, Miguel Montor, JC Arquitectura, CCA, ÁGORA, Taller MRD, Taller CD, and Estudio MMX.
- 6 The cultural strategy for Tultitlán was led by Oficina de Resiliencia Urbana (urban design), Departamento del Distrito with TALLER Architects and Ricardo García Santander (architecture), and Virens (landscape architecture). El refers to the group of projects commissioned by SEDATU in 2020, and includes projects for the following municipalities: (1) Paraíso, Tabasco; (2) Jalpa de Méndez, Tabasco; (3) Minatitlán, Veracruz; (4) Cosoleacaque, Veracruz; (5) Zumpango, Estado de México; and (6) Tultitlán, Estado de México.
- 7 For an elaborated history of Mexico's mid-twentieth century development, see Edward R. Burian, *Modernity and the Architecture of Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).
- 8 The Ministry of Public Education acquired a new dimension and role through the 1917 Mexican Constitution and Article 123, which for the first time gave all workers the right to education.
- 9 According to narrative accounts, O'Gorman was asked to join the ministry's building department after Narciso Bassols visited O'Gorman's functionalist home and studio designed for Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. The early work of O'Gorman was influenced by the Spanish translation of Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture*, which arrived to Mexico in 1924. Juan O'Gorman, *Autobiografía* (Ciudad de México: National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), 1973).
- 10 See Luis E. Carranza, *Radical Functionalism: A Social Architecture for Mexico* (London: Routledge, 2022).
- 11 The number of casualties from the Tlatelolco student massacre is contested. Mexican government reports issued after the event list under 10 casualties, while

foreign correspondents at the time estimated as many as 400 people were killed. La Noche de Tlatelolco, a collection of first-hand testimonials edited by activist, writer, and journalist Elena Poniatowska, offers a range of accounts and perspectives on this historic event. See Elena Poniatowska, ed., *La Noche de Tlatelolco: Testimonios de Historia Oral* (Ciudad de Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1998).

12 Fernando Carmona, Guillermo Montaña, Jorge Carrión, and Alonso Aguilar, *El Milagro Mexicano* (Ciudad de Mexico: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1970).

13 For a supporting account of Súper Servicio Lomas and the building's contested site, see Diane Davis, "From the Reforma-Peralvillo to the Torre Bicentenario: The Clash of 'History' and 'Progress' in the Urban Development of Modern Mexico City," *Mexico City through History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 55-82.

14 The Ley Federal Sobre Monumentos y Zonas Arqueológicas, Artísticas, e Históricas is the federal law that protects cultural patrimony in Mexico. Published on May 7, 1972, this law delineates in Chapter V "De la Competencia," and associated Articles 44 and 45 that INAH "is the competent entity responsible for archaeological and historic monuments and zones of monuments," while INBAL "is the competent entity responsible for artistic monuments and zones of monuments." The legislation does not define the difference between the terms "archaeological," "historical," and "artistic." It does state, however, that for the sake of the competence of each institution, "archaeological character should be given priority over that of historical character, and the latter over that of artistic character." The difference between these three categories of cultural patrimony can be inferred through the time periods that define the domain of each office. According to their respective websites, INAH "is responsible for more than 110,000 historic monuments built between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries and 53,000 archaeological zones," while INBAL "promotes the defense and conservation of the tangible and intangible patrimony of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries." See <https://www.inah.gob.mx/> and <https://inba.gob.mx/>.

15 Departamento del Distrito, *En-Medio* no. 2: Súper Servicio Lomas (Ciudad de Mexico, 2017).

16 See footnote 6.

17 Camila Ayala Espinosa, "Corredor logístico Cuautitlán-Tultitlán-Tepotzotlán se posiciona como el más importante del país," *El Economista*, November 26, 2021.

18 https://copladem.edomex.gob.mx/sites/copladem.edomex.gob.mx/files/files/pdf/Planes%20y%20programas/Mpales-2022-2024/Tultitlan_PDM_2022_2024.pdf

19 https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/699606/15_109_MEX_Tultitlan_n.pdf

20 SEDATU, *PMU Tultitlán: Plan de Acciones Urbanas 2020* (Gobierno de México: Desarrollo Territorial, 2020), 9.

21 The ministry allotted approximately six months for architectural design and the production of construction drawings for all the projects. One year was initially allocated by the government for the construction of all projects from start to finish. This ambitious timeline was extended on multiple occasions, with projects taking on average two-years to complete. To date, all but the Agora and Library Elena Poniatowska are open to the public.

22 Like any architectural endeavor, developing this series of projects required the involvement of many actors throughout the design and construction process. Apart from the group of architects, urbanists, and landscape architects who formed the core team, the process required collaboration with three main entities: the SEDATU coordination team led by Telma Rodríguez, the construction companies LARA Diseño y Construcción and Grupo TADCO, and the construction supervision company FOA Ingeniería. The assignment and coordination of roles also became a fundamental aspect of design.



Above: Agora and Library Elena Poniatowska, Tultitlán, 2023. Below: Cultural Center Real del Bosque, Tultitlán, 2023.



