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The Animist Museum of Lake Texcoco: Environmental Entanglements in Central Mexico

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Abstract

This essay analyzes the artistic, ecological and political drifts of the Lake Texcoco animist museum project. This is a mutant, alternative and de-territorialized museum that mobilizes reflections, affections, knowledge and political densities about the lives and deaths of Lake Texcoco, central basin of the Valley of Mexico. By reviewing and proposing an animistic museology, objects, stories and archives that organize human and more than human lives were collected in the lake basin. Each of the exhibition processes, called apparitions, organizes experimental communities around the collection to trigger situated discussions about other lakes and bodies of water.

Keywords: Epistemic Entanglements, Topographical, Animism, Museology

Mexico City is currently one of the most densely populated cities in the planet, despite being built on top of an immense ensemble of interconnected lakes: Zumpango, Xaltocan, Mexico, Texcoco, Chalco, and Xochimilco. Among these, Lake Texcoco used to occupy an important portion of land throughout this city's northeastern area, also covering various municipalities from the neighboring State of Mexico. The history of this colonial city's foundation has been intimately related to a longstanding struggle *against* water. In this struggle, Lake Texcoco has become a threat to the metropolis. Mexico City was founded in 1521, on the ruins of the defeated city of Tenochtitlan. The latter had in turn been built as an island in the middle of the lake. Its development was part of a larger enterprise by the Spaniards who intended to take over the territory inhabited by the Mexica people. The new city attempted to replicate European construction methods, on a radically different geography, without considering its lacustrine condition. Threatened by its own disintegration under the force of fluctuating water currents, this urban project coexisted with the desiccation of its basin: by means of slopes and channels, all traces of the region's ancient water bodies have progressively disappeared, in order to make room for the new urban settlement. Cyclically, water has overflowed its streets, causing floods which have induced the collapse of buildings.

By 1970, the lacustrine lands of Lake Texcoco were fully desiccated, exposed to the sun and wind. Some segments were paved, while others conformed an immense salty desert which measured approximately twenty thousand hectares. This desert has since been transformed, fractured, and occupied in multiple ways, thus perpetuating old disputes which date back to the arrival of the Spanish army. These disputes were rekindled in 2014, when the construction of the New International Airport of Mexico (NAIM for its acronym in Spanish) was decreed on 5000 hectares belonging to the lacustrine lands of Texcoco. The ensuing political debates had nation-wide impact and international media resonance.

In public discussions, numerous arguments against the NAIM's construction have been laid out. It was put into question, for instance, how certain political leaders had violently repressed social movements in the towns of Atenco and Texcoco, as a reaction to the first attempt to build the airport in 2002. The resulting acts of violence against communities whose lands neighbored the future airport's potential premises, triggered a humanitarian crisis yet to be repaired. Additionally, a 5°C increment in the region's temperature was discussed, along with the accelerated desiccation of its basin, all pointing to a radical climate alteration in Mexico City's metropolitan area. The NAIM's construction was revealed to pose a threat to certain migratory bird species, which periodically seek shelter in the Nabor Carrillo regulatory reservoir inside the premises of Lake Texcoco. This megaproject was proven to compromise this reservoir's ten million cubic meters of water. It was asserted that the expected atmospheric changes would affect the course and speed of city winds, worsening the already recurring hazardous spikes in air pollution. Additionally, it was posited that draining the Nabor Carrillo reservoir would incite wildfires, therefore aggravating preexisting environmental crises.¹

Each of these arguments, all triggered by the reemergence of Lake Texcoco in the public arena, have summoned certain *epistemic entanglements*: scientific knowledge, experiential understanding of the territory, public policies, and the forces of global economies have become intertwined with each other. These entanglements have also been situated in a territory which is itself conformed by diverse and intermingled layers: working-class neighborhoods, housing units, farming industries, an ecological reserve, archaeological sites, a landfill which receives the city's waste, and a desiccated area that spawns dust storms onto northeastern urban areas and its inhabitants.

Dealing with Lake Texcoco is not an easy task. For instance, a controversial referendum that took place on October 25th, 2018, enabled the newly elected President to decree the cancellation of this megaproject, after obtaining a majority of votes against its construction. This referendum also paved the way for an alternative expansion of the region's aeronautical network, to be set in the municipality of Santa Lucia. However, its apparent resolution has not overridden the dense issues surrounding Lake Texcoco. The NAIM stoked up a media-driven discussion, which had long been held by social movements, certain scientists, social anthropologists, historians, and political leaders. These various actors have sustained that the aforementioned social, political, and environmental problems didn't begin in 2014. These problems are rather the sum of geo-historical decisions which

¹ The media have been particularly attentive to the changes of Lake Texcoco's significance to its neighboring city. Regarding the history of its drainage, see (in Spanish): <https://labrujula.nexos.com.mx/?p=1363>. Increments in temperature and signs of climate change are accounted at: <https://www.economista.com.mx/politica/7-efectos-visibles-del-calentamiento-global-en-la-Ciudad-de-Mexico-20170603-0010.html> and <https://www.jornada.com.mx/ultimas/2018/10/28/aumentara-la-temperatura-en-valle-de-mexico-por-naim-expertos-7538.html> Information about the environmental impact of the NAICM on water bodies, bird species, and the climate is available at: <https://labrujula.nexos.com.mx/?p=2035>

date back to the conquest of this particular territory. This violent subsumption had long fractured an ancient interdependency between humans and the hydric geography they inhabit.

The Valley of Mexico is shaped by a series of lakebeds, by underground waters currently underlying the southeastern area of Mexico City, and by mountains which constitute the city aquifer's recharge area. The peoples inhabiting this region have dealt with superficial and subterranean waters in diverse ways: they have constructed drains which redirect the overwhelming flow of rainwater, seeking to mitigate floods in metropolitan lowlands; they have created transportation networks and agricultural zones which have adapted to the morphology of lacustrine terrains; they have negotiated their coexistence with other plant and animal species. These relationships have changed throughout the centuries, being drastically reconfigured by the establishment of the Spanish colonial city model and its European agricultural methods. Subsequently, urbanization and industrialization processes have required the desiccation of important water sources. In the mid-19th century, the construction of complex drainage and supply systems became entangled to the previous topographical transformations. Thus, we may further consider Lake Texcoco as a sum of diverse phenomena that form an intricate entanglement: it is both the ancient terrain of the Valley of Mexico and the many infrastructures built upon it; it is both the city itself and a peripheral terrain; it is both a failed airport and a territory of social struggle; it is a portion of land which has been destabilized by climate change, and a succession of projects that have sought to restore its former balance.

The desiccation of lakes in central Mexico is not a circumstantial decision, but rather an anthropocentric, historically rooted endeavor. The present essay builds on this view of the territory. We will consider the desiccation of this basin as a *naturecultural* process (Haraway, 1997). We will regard Lake Texcoco as a living entity (Stengers, 2012), formed by a set of entangled, overlapped, often convoluted components. Said components may be human, non-human, and *other-than-human* (Haraway, 2016). We will appeal to the situated and partial experience generated by a particular artistic research project: The *Animist Museum of Lake Texcoco*, created by Adriana Salazar.²

Through the current research project, we will conceive Lake Texcoco as a *hyperobject* (Morton, 2013). It is *opaque*, as it may be understood as a body of water and its absence, all at once. It is *viscous*, as it does not allow us to perceive clear boundaries between an airport, agricultural zones, water reservoirs, desiccated areas, or the city itself. It *connects* with apparently distant processes of historical, urban, ecological, and experiential nature. Although we may perceive a distinct territory, *its existence goes beyond* the political borders of the city: water, winds, migrations, aeronautical routes, extraction of resources, etc. Thus, we will—discursively and physically—appeal to the multiplicity of timeframes, materialities, and spaces encompassed by the lake.

Although present-day Lake Texcoco is located in a concrete geographical zone, it is not limited by it. It exists in denser and larger dimensions than those predetermined by development enterprises such as the NAIM. In this sense, defending Lake Texcoco as more than a “desiccated wasteland” is an important political statement that may alter its very existence. This political mobilization may also suggest its *inter-objectivity*: Lake Texcoco is also made of the discursive, material, geographical, and environmental relations between human and *other-than-human* lives inhabiting the Valley of Mexico. It is therefore irreducible.

Climate affects us in a paradoxical way. We react to that which sticks to our bodies. We feel how the sun burns our skin, how scarcer the water coming out of our taps becomes each day. Yet we understand climate is changing in ways we are not able to grasp; we sense its affectations go deeper

²See the project's website here: <http://www.allthingslivingallthingsdead.com/museum>

than the effects captured by our limited perception. The way we deal with climate is comparable to the way we should address Lake Texcoco's contingencies: it is necessary to heed to the human and *other-than-human* signs that appear in this conflicted territory. We may narrate how these contingencies affect us, and discern their traces. We may consequently situate them within a coherent sense-making field, which can articulate its stories, ecologies, urban processes, megaprojects, and forms of citizenship. However, this place surpasses us. We can only tell a partial tale, while allowing this field to remain open for future stories.

The Animist Museum

Adriana Salazar arrived in Mexico City in 2014, as one among thousands of migrants coming to this city from South America. This metropolis seemed to have lost all traces of the lacustrine water which, in the 1500s, covered large areas. Instead, it merely appeared as a dense array of buildings, avenues, and people. Salazar found Mexico City's lacustrine desiccation to be a much larger and more complex enterprise than what she had formerly encountered in her native Bogota. Overwhelmed by the scale of its alleged disappearance, she went looking for the lake's remnant, and began to shape the *Animist Museum of Lake Texcoco* (AMLT).

In the project's preliminary research, Salazar found a series of pillars and pedestals located throughout the city. Some structures were originally intended by city planners to be pipes for subterranean water extraction, while others were built as plinths for monuments. They are firmly and deeply anchored in rocky strata that lay under a thick layer of lacustrine muds. In the course of the last century, these structures have progressively increased their height, revealing how the city's soil has sunk several meters due to the overexploitation of the underlying aquifer. These structures are commonly called "subsidence witnesses": they physically show how the lacustrine soil—all buildings and avenues rest upon—is constantly moving. While the soil slowly retracts, these "witnesses" also reveal how the lake *lives* underneath the city's foundations.

This is how *animism*, a word which acknowledges life in apparently inanimate things, was incorporated as a central notion to this project. The "witnesses" pointed at Lake Texcoco's multiple forms of existence: a compound of substratum and city which would later incorporate other forms—a desert, a fractured territory, a landfill, a reservoir. As they revealed the depletion the city's aquifer, these lacustrine layers were appearing as important agents of change, at work in the current-day metropolis. They also exposed the persistence of certain colonial processes, which began almost five hundred years ago. Mexico City keeps expanding towards its surrounding woodlands and mountains, and still extracts water from distant regions. As the first European settlers did in the past, present-day developers displace local communities and alter the region's Eco systemic balance.

The intersections between this lake's simultaneous layers and its historical dissonances, challenged the traditional meaning of the word *animism*. This term, originally coined by 19th century anthropologists, enabled certain processes of epistemological colonization. A number of human communities, intimately entangled with the land they inhabited, could be regarded as objects of study through its use (Morrison, 2013). These communities' living practices were understood as a set of primal misunderstandings between humans and the *world*, which demanded to be clarified by means of long-term civilizatory endeavors. Among these "misunderstandings", which modern Europe had already weaned itself from, non-human entities such as rivers, lakes, mountains, or woods were attributed voice and agency (Povinelli, 1995). By the power of this anthropological category, the "civilized" could observe the "primitive" as its *other* (Garuba, 2012), while dividing the *world* between the realm of the living and the realm of the inanimate. Thus, "legitimate" knowledge processes could be set in motion.

Since its inception, the AMLT has sought to turn this word on its head, by identifying how the living and the inanimate are intertwined. This project regards said convergence as a critical node from which a certain kind of knowledge may emerge. Moreover, Lake Texcoco may be responsibly addressed if its political, historical, and socio-environmental dimensions are embraced as entangled, rather than divided realms. Retrieving the word *animism* has also implied the acknowledgement of certain “colonial resonances” within this project: its quest for an allegedly disappeared lake has probably been triggered by an Enlightened “expeditionary curiosity”. This spirit of inquiry may also permeate certain historical narratives, which regard Lake Texcoco as a thing of the past, distantly managed from the present. By naming this project as animist, we also acknowledge the ontologies and epistemologies that have preceded it.

As this research was coming about, Salazar located and explored the lacustrine lands of Texcoco. Said lands had been considered “dead” after the desiccation of the lake’s remains. In 1971, the Mexican Government established the Lake Texcoco Federal Zone. This newly enclosed portion of land aimed to somehow recover the long-gone lacustrine ecosystem, while promoting development initiatives on its soil. Over the coming decades, these two contradictory objectives further fractured this territory. As Salazar explored these terrains, she found a series of ruins and traces belonging to various attempts at transforming Texcoco’s lakebed. These ruins and traces seemed to comprise entirely different settings, thus adding new material layers to this ancient water body: abandoned public infrastructure, hectares covered with ruins from the 1985 earthquake, debris from evicted human settlements, and newly built water reservoirs which were inhabited by foreign flora and fauna—such as the Nabor Carrillo regulatory reservoir. Within the northern portion of this federal territory, one of the largest development projects of central Mexico—in terms of its size and costs—was being planned at the time of these explorations: the New International Airport of Mexico (NAIM). The effects of this megaproject were becoming visible in the lake’s soil and its immediate surroundings. Its construction also perpetuated the conquest operations, which, centuries earlier, had attempted to erase this valley’s hydric geography by means of Spanish civilizing means. This time, the airport developers’ conquest method implied shaping the Mexican landscape in order to make it fit into the arena of global development (Escobar, 2014: 27).³

Salazar and a group of collaborators collected a number of samples, objects and materials, which had been spotted at specific sites within these lacustrine terrains. For this collection, she appealed to an experimental archaeology of sorts, which related to other practices pertaining to the fields of Ethnoarchaeology and Material Culture Studies. These practices deal with a diverse array of materials, all belonging to the recent past—and present—of certain cultures (Gonzalez-Ruibal, 2014). Certain methods of exploration, excavation, and categorization, which are commonly applied to archaeological materials, were appropriated. These methods enabled the retrieval of “ordinary” materials that are commonly considered as waste: rocks, soil samples, fragments of plants, tools, household objects, construction materials, documents, and many others. All these collected pieces were somehow materially unstable, in a state of neglect, and indistinguishable from the matter that currently constitutes Latin American cities.

The AMLT collection formed an ensemble of approximately 500 pieces. The pieces were gathered at different sites within the federal reserve of Lake Texcoco, in which particular attempts at restoring, transforming, or seizing this lakebed, had taken place. This collection’s discordant

³The cancellation of the NAIM was decreed via a referendum which took place in 2018. To this day, this project’s infrastructure remains partially erected within Lake Texcoco’s terrains, as a contemporary ruin of an overruled political project

materialities were progressively connected to the narratives that accounted for this lake's various forms of existence: their narratives then resonated strongly, as the NAIM's foundations were laid on lacustrine soil. The recently collected pieces were charged with the intensities from the past of central Mexico, the circumstances of its present, as well as a possible future full with drastic transformations.

This lake was then animated in a particular way: the substrate underlying the foundations of Mexico City was sinking; new layers of materials belonging to its soil were retrieved for the archives of an artistic project; human communities inhabiting its ancient shores were being prompted to reclaim a lacustrine ecosystem from the airport megaproject. Responding to these complicated entanglements, a set of installations and public displays were articulated with the AMLT collection. In light of a moving context whose past seems to return constantly, this museological devices would enable the pieces to be differently re-ordered, re-interpreted, discussed, and gazed at.

Anthropological museologies usually separate the present from the past, by distancing the "living" observer from apparently inert pieces. These pieces are commonly frozen, trapped behind glass cabinets and plinths. In resonance with the nature of the AMLT pieces, the *animist museology* shaped its contents otherwise: this project both excavates and inhabits a context, and therefore can not be immobilized. Such museology proposed an alternative to anthropological methods of display, by making room for the intricate temporalities pertaining to this basin, as well as for the voices that constantly modify its significance. It also allowed its pieces to change by the force of environmental deterioration; to shiver from the alterations inflicted on their place of origin; to be moved by multiple discussions and interpretations which leave semiotic traces.

This museology, contrary to traditional museological institutions, may be displaced, relocated, and adapted to new circumstances. It may consequently remain open to new speculative endeavors regarding its pieces: historical, socio-ecological, and *fabulative* speculations (Haraway, 2016). By virtue of its animist design, this museology may bridge the distance between exhibits and public, which usually determines archaeological heritage exhibitions. It may also "set up shop" in other contexts, far from the Valley of Mexico, by adjusting and interweaving its devices to the circumstances of the hosting environment. This animist museology may require summoning multiple voices to be mobilized. As it comes into view in the form of an exhibition, its very emplacement may transform it, therefore invigorating Lake Texcoco itself. Taking this ethical stance on museology, we will now account for two appearances of the AMLT.

In both instances, the AMLT was inserted in pre-established museological institutions. It thus resonated with other artistic projects that have sustained critical dialogues with preexisting cultural initiatives. Among these projects, Brazilian artist Maria Thereza Alves' *The Return of a Lake* was situated on a former water body, south of Lake Texcoco, which was also desiccated due to central Mexico's urban growth. Alves's project connects to a local museological endeavor: the *Xico Valley Community Museum*,⁴ founded and directed by community leader Genaro Amaro. This community museum aims to preserve locally-rooted knowledge, a series of archaeological pieces, and certain historical counter-narratives. The museum's materials were incorporated to Alves's artistic project, through a series of mutual collaborations and exchanges between the community museum and the artist, which underscored the region's history of colonization and dispossession. This resulted in having one museological plan nested inside another.

In a comparable way, the AMLT assemblage of materials, various strains of knowledge, and actions, appeared on April 2018 at the Clavijero Palace Cultural Center, in Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico. Throughout the second semester of 2018, it also appeared at muca-Roma (University⁵ Museum of Science and Art), in Mexico City.

⁴ Museo Comunitario del Valle de Xico.

⁵ National Autonomous University of Mexico - UNAM.

Appearance in Morelia, Michoacán

Michoacán means “land of lakes” in the Purépecha language. This state, located in central-western Mexico, has invoked its numerous water bodies through this powerful word, since long before the Spanish conquest of its territory. Nowadays, the abundance of water that originated this placename is in crisis. Cuitzeo, the largest of its lakes, has undergone a dramatic reduction of water volume, due to the construction of a highway which currently crosses it. Some water springs, like La Mintzita—located in the outskirts of the city of Morelia—, have suffered from deregulated water extraction, effected by means of informal catchment systems; a set of tank trucks carrying the extracted water are meant to distribute it randomly (Morales, 2015). These springs are additionally being exploited and polluted by industrial compounds, such as the Kimberly Clark paper factory—located only a few kilometers from this water source. The Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve is also being altered by the extraction of water from the Cutzamala System, a massive hydric infrastructure which supplies Mexico City. This ecological site, which hosts substantial lepidoptera migrations each winter season, is receiving less specimens each year. Additionally, all the aforementioned hydric reserves are being rapidly depleted, as climate change prompts a general increase in temperatures.

The National School of Higher Studies⁶ (which belongs to the National Autonomous University of Mexico) is located in Morelia, the capital of the state of Michoacán. Its academic programs feature trans-disciplinary initiatives that articulate Art History, Anthropology, Geoscience, Geohistory, Environmental Sciences, Curatorial Studies, among other disciplines. Within this framework of disciplinary convergences, the Art History program created the *Performance and Live Arts Seminar*, headed by David Gutiérrez. This seminar aims to foster artistic research processes which may address Michoacán’s context in unexpected and transversal ways. In this setting, the *Animist Museum of Lake Texcoco* was hosted as an artistic, pedagogical, and museological experiment. This appearance resulted in a collaborative curatorship of the AMLT collection, an exhibition of its pieces, and a forum that elicited diverse strains of local knowledge from activists, academics, cultural agents, and students. Its emplacement also sought to connect Lake Texcoco’s recent transformations, the colonial past that prompted the desiccation of its basin, and the current status of Michoacán’s water bodies.

This public appearance of the animist museology began by entangling its pieces with the context that was hosting it. Said entanglement was meant to amplify the layers of meaning associated with the lacustrine lands of Texcoco, while also inciting speculations on the future of Michoacán’s water bodies as possible ruins. The latter required opening the AMLT to its collaborative possibilities: its pieces needed to be “animated” and articulated to other lives and voices. Salazar and Gutiérrez summoned a group of students, in order to critically “unpack” this collection in a collaborative manner. Throughout several work sessions, they all sought for material and narrative clues that may resonate with local water crises. Thus, the pieces of the AMLT collection were displayed and reconfigured in the space of the seminar, unraveling their meaning within its local lacustrine territory: debris from the NAIM construction site, ruins from the 1985 earthquake, materials belonging to abandoned federal infrastructures, and ruins of evicted dwellings.

This experimentation exercise provided by the seminar yielded an exhibition proposal for the collection, which took place at the Clavijero Palace Cultural Center, in Morelia. While curating, sorting, and installing the various pieces, *entanglements* between the lands of Lake Texcoco and the geography of Michoacán were embodied via museographical displays. Diverse forms of knowledge were also congregated around these exhibits. As it was mentioned earlier, the animist museology that binds this project does not merely imply a display of its collection, but also certain forms of mediation, which

⁶ Escuela Nacional de Estudios Superiores

may foster new knowledge regarding its objects. During its appearance in Morelia, the AMLT brought about a series of conversations, field trips, and other activities that would shed light on certain aspects of the pieces. It thereby incorporated artistic, geo-scientific, geo-historical, environmental, and anthropological knowledge in the process, along with voices from a social movement which defends La Mintzita spring against pollution and unregulated extraction—the *La Mintzita Gardens Ecological Community*.⁷

The AMLT addressed questions regarding the plausible futures of the water bodies in the host environment. Entangling its pieces to local strains of knowledge, this appearance in Michoacán revealed concrete connections between two distant basins—the basins of Mexico and Michoacán—. It thus became a means of approaching the *multisituated* dimensions of water, the colonization processes that modify its course, and a possible resignification of the very notion of climate.

After repacking its collection, the AMLT traveled to Mexico City to be differently unpacked.

Appearance in Mexico City

The University Museum of Science and Arts, *muca-Roma*, is located in a Mexico City neighborhood that was built on lacustrine lands. The buildings of this neighborhood are sinking, cracking, and progressively tilting, as Lake Texcoco's soil recedes underneath their foundations. Some of these buildings crumbled during the 1985 earthquake, becoming debris which were later used as filling material for the recently constituted federal lands of Lake Texcoco. These debris formed a new layer of soil. Decades later, this new soil was partly excavated and incorporated to the AMLT's collection. Between August and December of 2018, the AMLT was emplaced and activated at *muca-Roma*. This cultural institution's building is possibly made of the same matter as the pieces that were there being unpacked and installed.

As this artistic project's emplacement took shape, the NAIM's construction was rapidly progressing, making way for new controversies, while reactivating old disputes regarding the lands of Lake Texcoco. This airport project has a long history of failed attempts, which date back to 2001. At that time, sitting President Vicente Fox was planning to build its infrastructure in the federal terrains of Lake Texcoco, also occupying an important portion of agricultural lands which belonged to the *Atenco ejido*.⁸ Consequently, a group of farmers whose lands were affected by this megaproject, created the *Peoples' Front in Defense of the Land (FPDT)*:⁹ a community organization which actively opposed the airport. The FPDT's resistance achieved this development project's cancellation, which nevertheless led to an aftermath of repression¹⁰.

Almost two decades later, in 2018, the FPDT had reactivated the defense of farming lands which had been inhabited and cultivated by its members for generations. This front was joined by certain urban collectives, gathered around the defense of a new lacustrine ecosystem. Said ecosystem had slowly prospered on Lake Texcoco's federal premises since 1971, as a number of plant and animal species thrived at the Nabor Carrillo regulatory reservoir's shores. By the time the new airport project

⁷Comunidad Ecológica Jardines de la Mintzita

⁸The ejido is a form of collective land partition intended for agricultural use, which resulted from the 1915 Revolutionary Agrarian Reform.

⁹Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra.

¹⁰On May 3rd, 2006, shortly after the first cancellation of the new airport, members of the FPDT were violently repressed by federal and state police forces. This front was at that moment acting in support of a group of flower vendors undergoing an eviction process at the city of Texcoco's flower market, in the state of Mexico. According to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights and the National Supreme Court of Mexico, the clashes between the FPDT and the police escalated into acts of police violence, thus violating the protesters' human rights.

was rekindled, this area had gained ecological importance for the region: 250 species of local and migratory birds inhabited its shores; its reservoir regulated the level of runoffs from local rivers; its topsoil mitigated the degradation of air quality within the metropolitan area of Mexico City; its newly created water bodies contributed to the stability of local temperatures (Cordova, 2018).

By the time the AMLT opened to the public at muca-Roma, newly elected President Andrés Manuel López Obrador had proposed a referendum which would define the future of this airport's construction. Said referendum's urgency galvanized different struggle fronts for the defense of Lake Texcoco, its surrounding areas, and Mexico City's sustainability.

At this juncture, The AMLT was shaped as an ensemble of devices: an installation of its collection; a series of graphic pieces which included labels, texts, and maps; a documentation center comprised of publications related to the lacustrine histories of central Mexico; a forum space, activated weekly through talks and public discussions. These devices sought to address the many temporalities intermingling at this problematic site, while tackling the interdependency between the lakes itself, the farming lands neighboring its ancient shores, and the city overflowing its lakebed. Thus, the AMLT inhabited muca-Roma as a museum embedded in another museum. This animist museology temporarily hacked the cultural institution's place of enunciation, whose role is to determine the position of artistic projects inside its walls. It required surpassing the disciplinary dimension of the Visual Arts, in order to create a space for political discussion: the particular situation which was then developing needed to be addressed. As a project which originated from a particular convergence of different sets of knowledge (artistic, archaeological, and museological), the AMLT entangled its own archaeological findings with the numerous implications of the NAIM megaproject in a public forum. At this forum, different realms converged: academic knowledge and activism; analyses of environmental impact and reports of archaeological findings on lacustrine sites; testimonies of FPDT members and journalistic research on the airport's irregular finances; communal mappings of extraction sites and statements by inhabitants of the city of Texcoco; accounts and voices of various visitors, all coming from different backgrounds.

Repacking the Animist Museum

Highly diverse in their material constitution, the AMLT pieces have continued to change as they are displayed, gazed at, and addressed throughout their public appearances. The aforementioned AMLT appearances have required a series of articulated, yet distinct processes. Each appearance has appealed to the fields of museology, exhibition-making, and public engagement in a specific manner. Each one has articulated academic and community knowledge through various activities, while appealing to diverse communication mechanisms. Each one has created a new version of the animist museum. As the AMLT activated its public discussions, Lake Texcoco has also been rapidly changing. The aborted construction of the new airport has left traces on the lacustrine soil: an immense layer of concrete, partially built runways, pillars for nonexistent terminals, among other elements, lay in a state on expectant idleness.

Since Lake Texcoco is certainly larger than the sum of its parts, the AMLT cannot delimit a specific narrative for its territory. Instead, it preserves its collection as a sort of open question. It safeguards the discussions and issues gleaned throughout its emplacements as valuable knowledge. The animist museology is a beam that temporarily sheds light into an otherwise opaque set of circumstances.

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