URBANISMS OF THE INFORMAL : TRANSFOR-MATIONS IN THE URBAN FRINGE OF MEXICO CITY. JOSE CASTILLO

To make the experience of conflict a maturing one requires the destruction of an assumption regnant since the work of Haussman; that the planning of cities should be directed to bring order and clarity to the city as a whole. Instead the city must be conceived as a social order of parts without a coherent controllable whole form. This disorder is better than dead predetermined planning.
— Richard Sennet, The Uses of Disorder

The phenomenon of informal urbanization has become the single most pervasive element in the production of cities in developing countries. The magnitude of this modality of city-making has become the norm rather than an exception in the growth of developing world cities, as something natural to the urban environment rather than an aberration. The terms favelas, barriadas, kampongs, slums, villas miserias, bidonvilles, or asentamientos irregulares are only local manifestations of a global phenomenon. The Informal has eroded our notion of what a city is and has seriously challenged the efficacy of urban planning. Mexico City represents the paradign of such an urban condition: an area of 1,400 sq km contains a population of 18.5 million inhabitants,

approximately 60 percent of whom live in settlements that began through some mode of informal urbanization.[1] Peter Hall called Mexico City the "ultimate world city: ultimate in size, ultimate in population, ultimate in threat of paralysis and disintegration, ultimate in the problems it presents..."[2]

This ultimate situation prompts an alternative reading of Mexico City through informal urbanization for three reasons. First, the rise of informal urbanization and its entry into the professional design realms during the late 1950s and early 1960s coincide, both synchronically and conceptually, with some of the dominant critiques of modern city planning. Second, informality has become the dominant mode of new urban development in Mexico City. The evolution of the two most significant informal settlements in the urban fringe of Mexico City explicates this process of urbanity in the developing city. Finally, the relevance of this phenomenon to the disciplines of architecture and urban planning can be made explicit by exploring some of the strategies which informal urbanism may instrumentally engage through both the forms and the procedures of this urban condition.

Informal urbanization is conventionally regarded as development that takes place outside the legal, planned, and regulated channels of city-making. Usually it is characterized by indiscriminate occupation of land, lack of official approval, lack of property titles, makeshift housing, and an absence of utilities and human services.[3] The notion of informality is contingent upon the existence of norms. In other words, informality enters our consciousness precisely at the moment that the State normalizes practices once considered marginal.[4] It was only after the origins of modern city planning in the mid-nineteenth century that the existence of zoning and codes made informality a relevant phenomenon. This conception clearly distinguishes informal urbanism from other unplanned urban productions such as the medieval town and other vernacular forms that share similar traits with the phenomenon of informal urbanization yet differ in their forms and procedures.

While appearing sporadically throughout history, informality becomes an important phenomenon only after the mid-twentieth century, coincident with other important critiques of CIAM urbanism and modern city planning. The mid-century population explosion and the surge of urbanization outside the practices of professional architecture and planning were a blow to a discipline with limited success in fulfilling the social project it had set for itself.

In the early 1960s the rapid expansion of informal developments coincided with a series of significant challenges to the assumptions of modern architecture and urban planning; dominant discourses, both European and North American, were opening to urban conditions in other parts of the world.

At the forefront of this challenge were the activities and projects of the members of Team X. Team X developed a fascination with regionalism, the vernacular, the spontaneous, the open-ended, the self-organizing – subjects suppressed by modernism – that became central to their productions. These fascinations took different guises by different members of the group. Aldo van Eyck took an interest in the Dogon culture of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as other forms of primitive dwellings like Pueblo architecture. His interest in the order of these urban phenomena was not that of the classical or modern tradition, but rather in the responses of human behavior to adapt to the constraints of architecture. His studies provided a critique of the modern movement's goal to eliminate slums and substitute them with worse conditions in living.

Allison and Peter Smithson's studies of "patterns of human association," "ordinariness," and "urban restructuring" also point to a less heroic and more quotidian approach to urban planning. Notwithstanding their fascination with iconographic
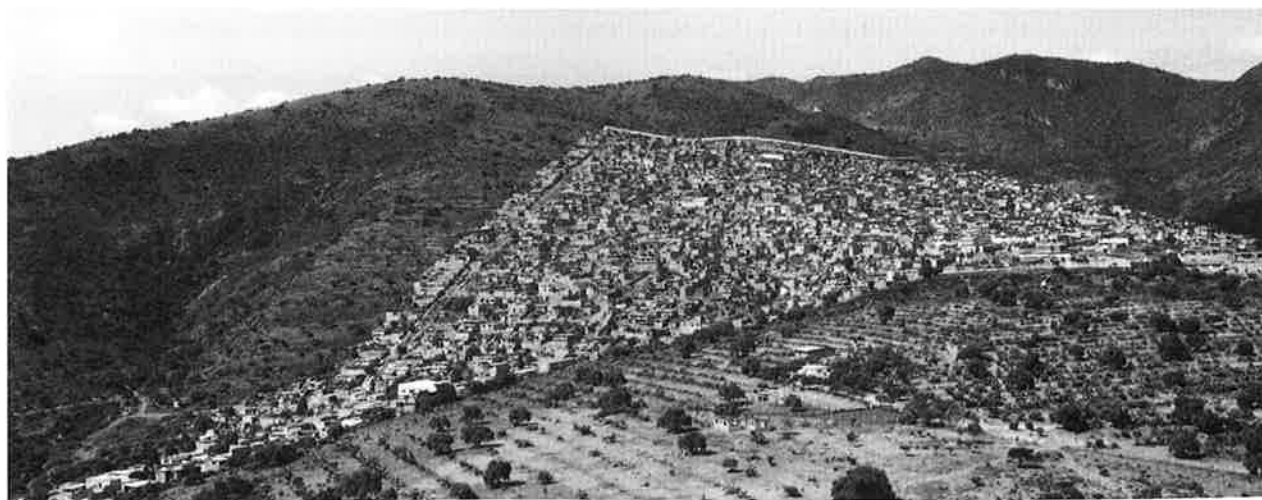
LEFT : Indiscriminate Appropriation of Land. The natural patterns of land property result in peculiar patterns of occupation of greenfields and mountain areas. The natural environment is always underscored by the artificiality of informal urbanization. In this case, in the hills of Ecatepec, the municipal authorities concentrated efforts to improve the urban image by painting every single house the same color: the tyranny of applied beauty.

modernist works such as Le Corbusier's Unité at Marseille, they sought to develop an architecture with a capacity for growth and change.

From Giancarlo de Carlo's work in Urbino and his later obsession with user participation, to Christopher Alexander's work developing participatory methods of designing, we find a fascination with the vernacular, the generic, and the spontaneous. Such interests thereby indicate a recognition of the architect's absence as a value in the development of built environment.

This interest in the human-architectural symbiosis and in the self-organizing processes is evidence of a lack of faith in modern architecture's methods to engage in the transformation of everyday life and in resolving the problems of present-day society. In this light, we can understand the change in attitude towards the urban condition of informality.

Some of the earliest references to the phenomenon of informal urbanization appear in the work of John F.C. Turner and Charles Abrams.[5] Turner, an English architect educated at the Architectural Association in London during the 1950s, was influenced by the anarchist writings of Peter Kropotkin of the late nineteenth century. After finishing school he was invited to Peru to work in community development programs and learned firsthand of the experience of the barriadas in Lima. Before the 1960s, informal urbanization was perceived as a 'cancer' and locus of subversive groups that remained outside the experience of modernity.
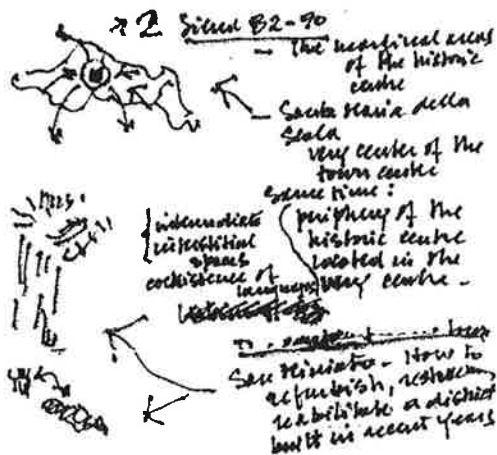
Turner discovered the merits of informal settlements and promoted their acceptance as a legitimate solution to the problem of housing and urbanization in the developing world. In his writings, most notably Housing by People and Freedom to Build, Turner criticized modern housing as a limited way of approaching the real problems of housing primarily due to its restricted production and minimal flexibility in terms of type and use. Turner instead found that when the dwellers controlled major decisions and were free to make contributions in design, construction, or management of their housing, the resultant environment stimulated individual and social well-being. Turner's ideas were influential in developing countries and agencies such as the World Bank that were globally active in fostering and funding urbanization programs. He ultimately worked as an advisor to housing agencies in Mexico and other developing countries and his theories became the standard for housing policies world-wide.

Turner's success in identifying the phenomenon of informal urbanization and its related social structure resulted in an important number of theoretical works and projects during the seventies. These works focused predominantly on developing countries and remained marginalized from the prevailing discourses surrounding architecture and urban planning. Paradoxically, the more important informality became, the more urban and landscape architects became removed from informal development. During the seventies and eighties, the interest in this urban condition shifted from the disciplines of architecture and urban planning to those of sociology, anthropology, and political economy.

When discussing informal urbanization a number of prevailing myths and misconceptions need to be reconsidered. These misconceptions exist among the general populace but persist among design and planning professionals as well. To challenge these myths is to clarify the condition and open up the possibility of engaging it in more productive ways.

The first of such misconceptions is the belief that informal urbanization is unplanned urbanism. Informal urbanization involves a series of decisions, strategies, and policies that, although may be minimal or unorthodox, amount to a form of planning. Squatting and spontaneous invasions represent only a small percentage of the overall processes of informal urbanization. The assumption that informal urbanization is unplanned or irrational ignores the sophisticated and sometimes more effective devices that individuals employ to allocate resources, organize space and resolve social and economic needs. This form of planning is foremost a spatial practice where decisions and strategies develop alongside the transformations of physical and social space.

While still practiced, self-built housing is not the dominant modality of informal urbanization. To assume that the produc-
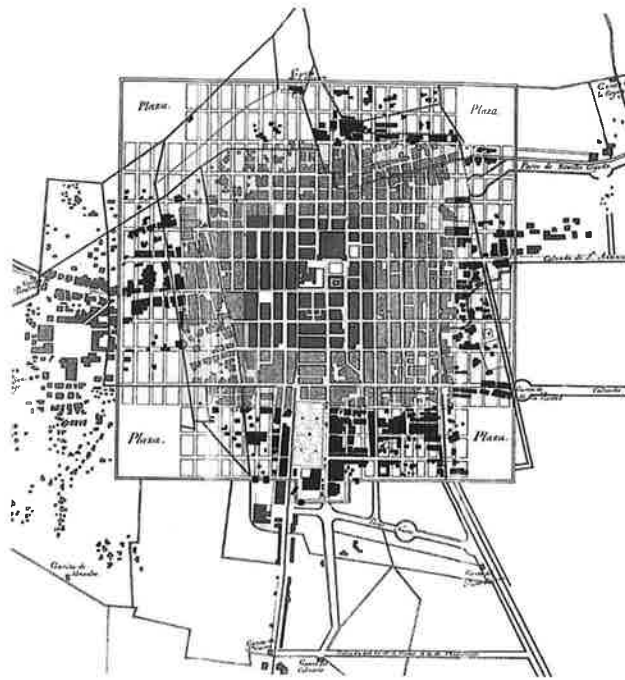
LEFT : Ensanche by Ignacio Castera. Castera recognized, the necessity to organize the future growth of the city. Nevertheless, his plan proposed razing the informal urbanization taking place outside the colonial grid, an eighteenth century urban renewal program.

tion of housing is the only component of informal urbanization is to neglect the myriad strategies and forms that configure this type of urbanity. Informality also includes the construction of public space and infrastructure. The tendency to equate urbanization with housing establishes a false polarity between the self-builder and the building industry (the state, developers, landowners, and contractors) which in turn ignores the complex dynamics of this form of urbanization.

The idea that informal urbanization will ultimately disappear is another common misconception. With every structural, political, or economic change (industrialization, internal migration, modernization, population growth rate reduction) there has been a promise that informal urbanization will disappear. The common perception that the problem of informal housing can be resolved through regulated housing programs fails to recognize both the history of urban fringe development and the rational choices settlers make every day in their housing decisions. Considering the State's limitations in providing housing and the minimum share of the housing market that formal developers make available, the economic access of the poor to standard housing remains extremely hindered.

Citizens, politicians, and even urban specialists still fail to regard informal urbanization as a legitimate and valid mode of urban development. Its legitimacy, however, should be understood not only as a legal operation; rather its validity is based on much more than Lefevbre's "right to the city." Along with the power and magnitude of the phenomenon, informal urbanization has generated a series of mutations and creative surges in

believe but rather followed the same pattern of practices and mechanisms which had been taking place for centuries.[7] The city of palaces, as Alexander von Humboldt called Mexico City in 1811, was also the city of the Informal. However, in the last 50 years the architecture and city planning in Mexico City have increasingly intertwined with the phenomenon of informality.

In 1949 Mario Pani finished the multifamily housing project President Miguel Aleman. A 'unité de habitation' in its own right, the Multifamiliar Juarez represented an exemplar of Mexico's architectural, social, and political modernity. Paradoxically, at precisely the same time Pani built his unité, informality was becoming the dominant modality of urbanization in the city's periphery. During the next twenty-five years, architects and planners engaged in a futile battle to house a growing population and to understand the dynamics of a megalopolis that exceeded their conceptual tools and frameworks.

Two settlements are paradigmatic of Mexico City's informal urbanization in the last fifty years. Although they were developed at different times and in different ways, Neza and Valle de Chalco nevertheless share a scale, magnitude, and relevance to the broader megalopolis.

Neza: The Anti-Atlantis

Neza, short for Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl, is an area of roughly 3,800 hectares, twelve kilometers east of downtown Mexico City, located in the region formerly occupied by Texcoco Lake. Its development is intimately related to the drainage operations of Texcoco Lake in the Mexico City Valley that were begun by the Spanish colonists in the 1600s and continued into this century. Neza initially developed during the mid 1940s on land with dubious legal tenure. The receding water line of the lake continually reconfigured the territory, generating property disputes that remained unresolved for decades.

If one of the ideal cities in the western tradition has been Atlantis, the mythical city submerged under water, then Neza is

the practices of architecture and planning. This legitimacy is evident in the fact that rather than the informal city disappearing in Mexico City, the city has become Informal.

Informality has played a major role in constructing Mexico City's urban space for over 500 years. Most of Tenochtitlán, the ancient Aztec capital, was built in defiance of official rules and practices.[6] Ignacio Castera's plan of colonial Mexico City, drawn over 200 years ago, sketched the city's future ensanche and included an informal city outside the planned, regulated colonial grid. Even during the mid-eighteenth century when the first subdivisions of land were created by private developers, irregularity was manifest in the way the land was sold and occupied, and in the lack of public services provided by developers. Informality in the twentieth century did not arise spontaneously as many people seem to

its anti-thesis; the city was revealed as the waters of Lake Texcoco receded in mid-twentieth century. Neza counters the utopian ideals of Atlantis — civilization, form, community and city, with the short term tactics of flexibility, informality, pragmatism, and action.

The name Neza, even today, evokes exaggerations, images of chaos, injustice, fraud, despair, vulnerability, crime, and real estate speculation. Both in public opinion, as well as professional circles, Neza became the symbol of everything that plagued the city: pollution, environmental decay, and uncontrolled growth. Critics called Neza a bastard urbanization, a cancer that should have never been allowed to grow. The development of Neza coincided with Mexico City's descent into a permanent state of crisis.

Two dominant events precipitated the founding of Neza. Rural migration created significant demographic changes in Mexico during the mid-twentieth century. Almost 60 percent of Neza's population in 1970 was born elsewhere in the country. This rapid growth in Mexico City's population sparked a series of disjointed urban policies implemented by the local governments of the Federal District (DF) and the State of Mexico. Rent control policies implemented in downtown Mexico City combined with uncoordinated governmental regulations that banned land subdivisions and limited growth forced masses of residents to move to the periphery to find housing. Neza, with its privileged location just over the state line, was an obvious first choice.

The drainage of Texcoco Lake and the immediate pattern of land sales and appropriations indicate a rational, almost Jeffersonian, subdivision of land. The first operation to define the urban pattern used a gridiron at two scales: a maxi-grid — one kilometer by one kilometer — that organized the territory in districts and a mini-grid which arranged each district according to its own distinct logic. The district typologies varied according to the different developers and to the mode of occupation, invasion or illegal sale. A typical district consists of orthogonal blocks 150 x 40 meters and is delimited by avenues 45 meters wide (one and a half times wider than avenues in Manhattan.) Most districts originally contained a large central site for public facilities and open space. Over time many of these squares have been in-filled leaving the districts with minimal public space. Individual private lots are roughly 150 square meters.

Neza developed both through illegal land subdivisions and sales by developers and through invasions by squatters. The illegal subdivisions were the result of owners holding dubious property titles or developers defaulting on the provision of services. The question remains why such a vast development, if illegal, was allowed to be built. Contrary to the belief that clandestine developers started all settlements, the people and the companies involved in the development of Neza never hid their activities. Drawings and plans were widely used for sales and marketing and, in some cases, they revealed an elaborate comprehension

of urban plans. Such plans were probably created by other developers working within the primary land market at the same time. These plans show street hierarchies as well as areas for schools, markets, medical facilities, and open space. The areas developed through squatting reveal only minor irregularities in the standard, orderly grids and some realignment of streets.

The first land sales took place in 1946 and continued vigorously for twenty-five years without governmental provision of services or infrastructure. Settlers and buyers organized into social and civic groups to deal with tasks such as the provision of water through tank trucks, obtaining health and education facilities, and minimizing damage from flooding. Urban services were implemented gradually through negotiation with developers and state authorities.

In the late 1960s a variety of these civic groups organized into the Movimiento Restaurador de Colonos (MRC: Movement for the Restoration of Settlers). Settlers fought against both fraudulent developers who were not providing promised services and infrastructure and the State that was not meeting their needs. By channeling demands and articulating protest, the MRC was able to achieve many of the improvements that currently exist in Neza. During the early 1970s the MRC organized a payment boycott and vandalized developers' offices numerous times resulting in a number of violent clashes between local police and settlers. The MRC, as most other popular grassroots movements, was ultimately co-opted by the city government. Although dismantled, the MRC not only set a precedent for other local movements striving for urbanity but also served as a model for the provision of urban services in most informal urbanization. The MRC was, in a way, the first group of 'bottom-up' planners in Mexico.

After 1973 Neza began implementing formal planning procedures. The State's efforts focused on granting clear and legal land deeds and organizing urban services. A parallel history of architecture and planning decisions continued to be made by
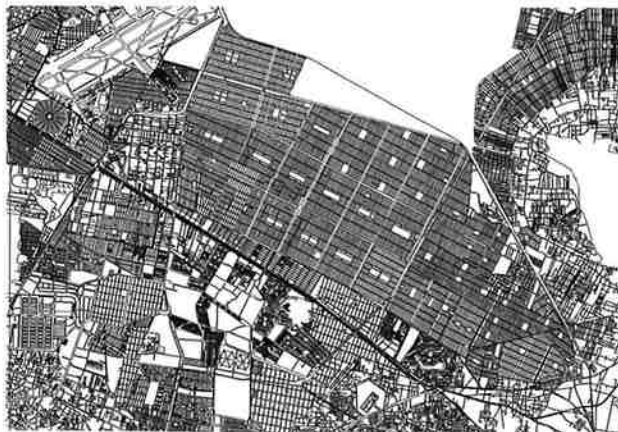
LEFT : In the plan of Neza, the uniform grid pattern starts just north of the state line. Although in this plan the 'central parks' for each neighborhood read distinctly, over the years most of these public areas have been filled with larger buildings. The empty triangular area above the settlement grid is where Neza meets Lake Texcoco.

individuals and organized groups, resulting in the progressive construction of the individual private dwelling, as well as the construction and appropriation of public space.

In less than forty years Neza was transformed from a desolate territory to a city of almost 1.5 million people. The current population density of 363 inhabitants per hectare represents an astonishing number considering that the primary land use is two to three story single-family dwellings. Neza has become a fully mature city with a level of social interaction, plurality, and spatial complexity to which other 'planned' communities can only aspire.

The architecture and urban space in Neza have no fixed image: they are constantly evolving. In a few short months, a back-of-the-lot shack built with makeshift materials and rough exteriors may evolve into a 'smooth' bunker of concrete block. A prevailing issue is nevertheless the way in which decoration is applied freely to overcome the standard or generic qualities of the structure. Housing building techniques are almost standardized (concrete block and floor slabs), but ornamentation (applied paint, stylistic decoration in windows, roofs, etc.) is the procedure for individual difference. Each structure, however, maintains a coherence as part of an overall fabric comprised by the block itself.
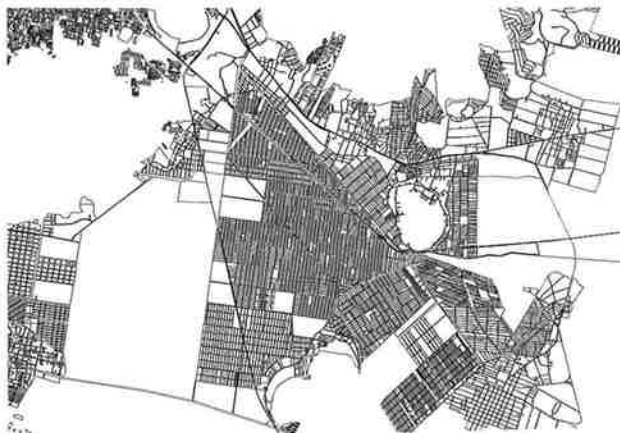
Valle de Chalco: The Territory of Informality

Valle de Chalco covers an area of roughly 2,200 hectares located in the southeastern fringe of metropolitan Mexico City, thirty kilometers from the center of the city. Similar to Neza, the settlement is located on a former lakebed, Lake Chalco. From the early twentieth century to the late 1960s Lake Chalco was drained for high-yielding agriculture. The expansion of industry into the valley ultimately polluted the water making it impossible for farmers to grow productive crops. By the 1970s Valle de Chalco was a bleak valley with high pastures and an active flood plain during the summer months.

Viewed from the air, Valle de Chalco exceeds an urban scale, entering into the realm of geography as its vastness achieves a territorial condition. The same flat, gray, unfinished, homogenized space extends for kilometers. The Xico volcano, the canal bordering Chalco Lake, the 'diagonals' of the highway, the right of way for high-tension electricity lines, and the railroad line serve as the only boundaries and references within the large tabula rasa.

At a first glance, Valle de Chalco and Neza appear similar. Both consist of continuous orthogonal grids developed on a former lakebed. However, on closer examination, they have considerable differences both in the planning processes undertaken and in the urbanity that developed.

Organized land invasions and other forms of squatting were not the norm in Valle de Chalco. Rather, it was through widespread illegal sales of the ejido lands in the late seventies that the valley was developed. Clandestine real estate brokers made arrangements with the agricultural communities to sell the land with relative ease. Unlike Neza, in Valle de Chalco there was never an explicit promise or contract from the developers to the settlers regarding planned services such as electricity, water, or sewage. Settlers assumed that infrastructure and services were extras to be demanded by them and provided by the state over time rather than the developer's obligations.

The first areas to be occupied in Valle de Chalco were those between the highway and the sewage canal to the north. The highway served as a development corridor because it provided access to transportation and jobs in the factories nearby. After this initial development, settlement continued to spread without clear direction resulting in dispersed growth over a large region rather than concentrated growth in smaller areas.

From 1978 to 1984 illegal sales proliferated but in 1984 municipal authorities restricted the developers' activities. Paradoxically, sales remained consistent with collisions between ejidatarios and local authorities abounding throughout the 1980s. A strong connection emerged between the developers, local authorities, and the official political party making it commonplace for illegal practices to be approved or tacitly allowed by public servants.[8]

Unlike Neza, Chalco never had a district nor an overall city-wide plan. Real estate operations were carried out with plans drawn on a piece of cardboard or drawn on the ground in situ. The apparent regularity of the urban pattern can be attributed to the fact that ejido properties followed an orderly gridiron and that some of the developers involved in subdividing Chalco had previous experience in Neza.

The absence of public and semi-public space in Valle de Chalco is relentless. Urbanization has been reduced to its minimum and the blocks' patterns rarely escape the tight-knit scale associated with single-family housing. In some cases the limited provision of space for public amenities was a product of negotiations between ejidatarios/developers and settlers but in most cases settlers simply 'appropriated' empty land to preserve it for schools and markets. Unlike an orthodox division of public and private spaces, the street has become the site for public life, from the open-air market to playground.

Valle de Chalco consists of approximately twenty-five districts. Although they vary in size, each district contains on average over 3,000 lots, comprising close to 200 city blocks. The standard lot is around 190 square meters but over 25 percent of the dwellings contain only one room. In the early 1990s the average dwelling was forty-one square meters and over half of the dwellings were less than thirty square meters.[9] An average of 5.41 persons live in each dwelling and the highest densities in Valle de Chalco are close to 200 persons per hectare.

Before the provision of legal electricity in the early 1990s, the system of illegal connections known as the 'telaraña' (cobweb) provided irregular access to electricity. Residents obtained water from hydrants along the highway, illegal wells, and delivery by water trucks. Because Chalco was built with far less planning

LEFT : Official vs. Real Public Space. The occupation and transformation of a street into a space of public interaction (right image) has no match in the so-called planned public-spaces (left image.). The flexibility of the former accounts for the limited success of the latter.

than Neza, its grid is far less flexible thereby making the relationship between street frontage and lot area inefficient. To provide the same number of inhabitants with electricity and water as in Neza, the State installed more than twice the length of pipes and cable to Chalco. After 1995, however, over 90 percent of the dwellings had running water and nearly 100 percent had electricity.

If migrations and demographics produced Neza, Valle de Chalco emerged from a connection between the informalization of the city and the informalization of economic activities and processes that resulted from large economic restructuring. Valle de Chalco is a territory 'built' through informal practices but one that nevertheless recreates the conditions of informality and serves as the bastion of an informal economy.

The relative newness of Valle de Chalco's development accounts for its reduced population density as compared to Neza. The number of rooms and size of the houses is also a product of its recent development. For now, and because of the informal activities carried out in the dwellings (live-work-play-produce-sell), the basic shells entail a flexibility that the houses of Neza no longer have. As a mature urban environment Chalco will likely become more similar to Neza.

Neza and Valle de Chalco are not isolated phenomena. Hundreds of settlements in the urban fringe of Mexico City have followed this modality of urbanization in spite, or precisely because of, the intrinsic limitations of formal planning and architectural practices. Despite their deficiencies both settlements have developed a distinct and often successful urbanity. The banal, vulgar, generic, and sometimes mediocre qualities of their built environments are overcome by the creative transgressions and subversions that take place every day and challenge our fixed assumptions of what defines a city.

A New Term

The use of specific words and terms to describe emerging conditions always runs the risk of sounding trivial or demagogic. During the 1980s the term informal was used as a semantic blanket to describe anything from self-built dwellings to petty economic activities. However, terms such as spontaneous, anarchic, illegal, self-built, or irregular do not adequately describe this urban condition. Conscious of its limitations, I propose the term Urbanisms of the Informal as a possible, if only transitory tool, to describe and engage this particular urban condition. "Urbanisms," in plural, not only embraces the complex and heterogeneous forms and procedures that represent this urban phenomena but also engages them both as practice (as in urban planning and design) and as body of knowledge, a new episteme. The word informal is used with its multiple connotations. Informal means "lacking form," as in formless, but it also suggests "outside of the formal, the regular

or prescribed," as in irregular. Finally, the term informal also refers to "casual" or "ordinary."

'Urbanisms of the Informal' refers to the practices (social, economic, architectural, and urban) and the forms (physical and spatial) that a group of stakeholders (dwellers, developers, planners, landowners, and the state) undertake not only to obtain access to land and housing but also to satisfy their need to engage in urban life. These practices are characterized by tactical and incremental decisions, by a complex interaction among players, and a distinct set of spatial strategies that produce a progressive urban space and reconfigured hierarchies. In using such a definition, I strive to separate the association made between terms such as informality and illegality with that of undesirability. By suspending judgment on the quality of the urban environment produced through informal processes, we can achieve a more instrumental understanding of the phenomenon.

If professional attitudes towards this urban condition have traditionally been concerned with how planners and architects can improve informal urbanization, perhaps it is more relevant to understand how informal urbanization can enlighten the processes and forms we currently use to develop and plan the city. To do so, we have to understand the spatial strategies of informal urbanization that define its exceptional condition. With different degrees of complexity, these strategies operate at distinct scales: from the dwelling and the district to the city and the territory.

In Urbanisms of the Informal the traditional notions of hierarchies of development – of use, of public and private distinctions, and of infrastructure – achieve a high degree of flexibility. The apparently non-hierarchical space of informality as manifest in the ubiquitous use of the grid, in reality, configures and reconfigures itself over time. Shifting hierarchies is the process by which generally accepted spatial hierarchies are substituted with

a-posteriori tactics of infrastructure, service provision, and land occupation. As a result areas of lesser importance at the beginning of the development of a settlement eventually take a dominant role while development in areas that were hierarchical at some point are slowed.

Urbanisms of the Informal deal with evolution in far more complex ways than traditional modalities of urbanization. Urbanity is realized by spending more time consolidating in order to achieve an 'image of the city.' It involves a combination of slow and fast strategies that maximize the relationship between stakeholders' resources and needs. Some residents may build a shell in as little as two weeks while the transition from a shack to finished dwelling may take decades. This approach to urbanization as a city 'becoming,' shifts our understanding of urbanity as a finished form to urbanity as an accretion of spatially structured processes.

The urban configuration of informal urbanization supersedes the mere physical definition of space. This strategy not only involves high levels of participation by stakeholders in constructing urban space but also involves a complex intertwining between forms of urbanity and processes that create that urbanity. From the ad-hoc provision of services and infrastructures such as water and electricity to the appropriation of a street for an open-air market, the human-architectural symbiosis represents a potential for planners and architects to imagine new relationships between program and form and to integrate the enormous resources of the residents.

To present Urbanisms of the Informal as a way to understand Mexico City, is to inform city- making with a social and political dimension, to relinquish the obsession of control as a desirable tool, and to recognize the limits of form. It is also a call for a practice of urbanism that is able to embrace the real, the everyday, the generic, and the built without prejudices and biases. Rather than Neza or Valle de Chalco looking more like Mexico City, the city will become more like these places. The future of Mexico City will depend in good part on planners' and architects' ability to acknowledge informality as a constitutive urban condition and to align frameworks and tools to deal with this ever more complex urban phenomenon. ◉

JOSE CASTILLO lives in Mexico City and is currently pursuing a doctorate in design from Harvard University. In the past, he has worked for TEN Arquitectors, Benjamin Thompson and Associates, and has collaborated with Alberto Kalach and Futura Desarrollo Urbano.

NOTES
1. Ward, Peter M.: Mexico City. Rev. 2nd ed. .; World cities series. Chichester; New York: J. Wiley, 1998, and Connolly, Priscilla "Uncontrolled Settlement and Self-Build: What Kind of Solution? The Mexico City Case." in Self-Help Housing: A Critique, ed. Peter Ward, 141-74. London: Mansell; Bronx, 1982.
2. Hall, Peter Geoffrey: The World Cities Series. 3rd ed. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984.
3. Cymet, David: From ejido to metropolis, another path: an evaluation on ejido property rights and informal land development in Mexico City; American university studies. Series XXI, Regional studies, ISSN 0895 -0482; vol. 6, New York: P. Lang, 1992.
4. Hiernaux Nicolas, Daniel, and Alicia Lindón Villoria. "Producción del Espacio y Regularización de laTenencia de laTierra en el Valle de Chalco." In El Acceso de los Pobres al Suelo Urbano, ed. Francois Tomas and Antonio Azuela. México DF: PUEC, UNAM, 1997.
5. Abrams, Charles: Man's Struggle for Shelter in an Urbanizing World. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964, and Abrams, Charles: Housing in the Modern World. London: Faber and Faber, 1966 and Turner, John C. "Housing Priorities, Settlement Patterns, and Urban Development in Modernizing Countries." AIP Journal, vol. 34 (1968): p 354-363.
6. Hardoy, Jorge Enrique, and David Satterthwaite: Squatter Citizen: Life in the Urban Third World. London: Earthscan, 1989.
7. Varley, Ann. "Propiedad de la Revolucion? Los Ejidos en el Crecimiento de la Ciudad de Mexico." Revista de la Sociedad Inter Americana de Planificacion, vol. XXII, no. 87-88 (1989a): 125-155
8. Legorreta, Jorge: Efectos Ambientales de la Expansion de la Ciudad de Mexico, 1970-1993. ed. Col. Del Valle, Mexico: Centro de Ecologia y Desarrollo, 1994.
9. Hiernaux Nicolas, Daniel, and Alicia Lindón Villoria. "Producción del Espacio y Regularización de laTenencia de laTierra en el Valle de Chalco." In El Acceso de los Pobres al Suelo Urbano, ed. Francois Tomas and Antonio Azuela. México DF: PUEC, UNAM, 1997.

"...By deletion, combination, deformation, reorganization, we seek to break through the stubborn stereotypes that fortify the city against penetration, and to achieve an effective characterization. A character thus conveyed is as much made as found. Capture by rendering is comprehension and creation. Right and relevant renderings make and remake cities and even remake our way of making cities."
– Nelson Goodman, On Capturing Cities

BELOW : The relationship between housing and infrastructure shifts from parasitic in the early stages of a settlement electricity by 'hooking up' illegally to the grid, to symbiotic in latter stages, where dwelling and street share the space of the power lines. Issues such as right-of-way, property and air rights, are rendered useless in this kind of urban condition.