

– CITY OF REPAIR: Practicing the Future in Mexico City

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Abstract

This essay is based on long-term ethnographic research in Mexico City, and centers on a street epistemology that involves researchers immersing themselves in material street life to explore the relationships between the body, the house and the street in the constant repair of the (future) city. I assert that Mexico City is not a city dominated by planners, experts, or professional social workers, but rather a place where everyone knows that perfection is elusive and that constant repair of oneself, the city and the objects that constitute daily life make life possible here. The city is permanently under construction—populated by workers who destroy and rebuild, and by repairers of all kinds: roadside mechanics, nurses who check your blood pressure and offer flu vaccinations in the subway, herbalists who sell their medicines on the sidewalks, ‘bone setters’ who offer osteopathy services on the street, improvised pharmacies, used car part sellers, anti-flu juices producers, and cabinets for intercession with angels. In the ‘city of repair’ different yet interdependent futures are practiced. There is the future imagined and constructed by professionals seeking perfectibility and manifestations of aspirational politics. There is also the future imagined and practiced by the vast majority of urban dwellers—a pragmatic future grounded in the ‘here and now’ of constant repair and in the constant search for solutions to contingencies—an anticipatory political form.

The streets of Mexico City: understanding the future through a street epistemology

It's 7 p.m. on a weekday. I hop on the second subway car, reserved for women, and I am lucky enough to find a seat. There are very few formally approved advertisements on the walls, but I see various informal posters, such as the one for a self-managed addiction treatment group (see Figure 1a). My eyes are closed as I rest a while. Suddenly, I catch a whiff of a strong cleaning product. I open my eyes to see where it comes from. A slim woman enters the car with a broom, a mop, a recycled bottle of Coca-Cola filled with a blue cleaning product and a garbage bag. Two young boys of about five and seven years of age are accompanying her. She repeatedly says ‘permiso’ to politely but firmly ask everyone to allow her to sweep the floor of the crowded car. She lifts my feet with her broom to sweep under my seat. A small mountain of dust and garbage accumulates in the middle of the passageway. The elder boy follows with the garbage bag, into which the mother swiftly throws the dust. She then proceeds to open the Coca-Cola bottle to pour the cleaning product on the floor. By then, the train has left the station and we are moving. She takes the mop to start washing the floor as she speaks: ‘These trains are too dirty. I offer my services to clean them. I always tell my children my job is dirty, but my money is clean. I earn it honestly by cleaning the dirty streets of our city’. Her youngest boy follows with a styrofoam coffee cup to collect money. Almost everyone donates something. I guess that she might have collected between 20 and 30 pesos in this carriage (about US \$0.80 to 1.50). She moves to the next carriage once she has finished cleaning ours.

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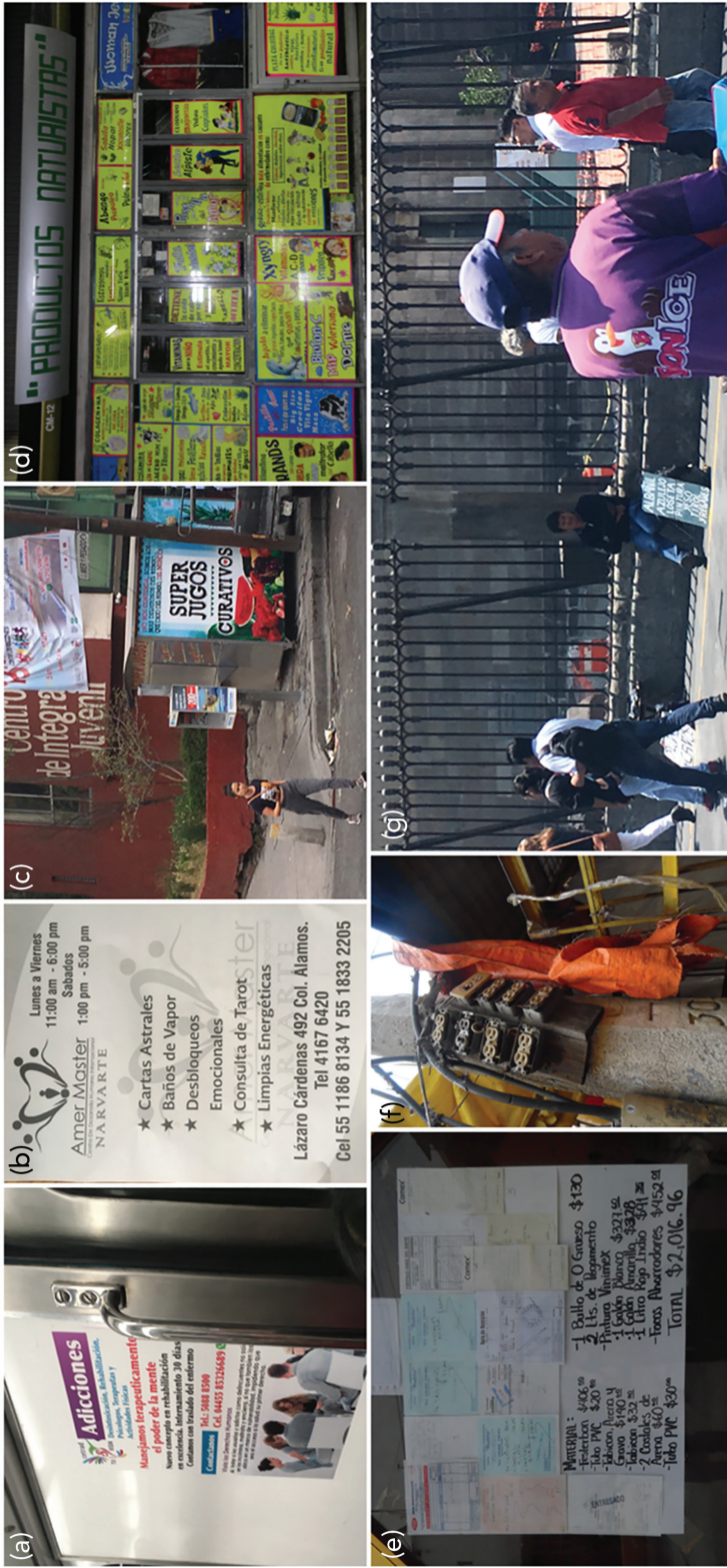


FIGURE 1 Examples of repair practices. From top left: (a) a poster in the subway advertising self-managed addiction treatment; (b) a flyer for a yoga and spiritual health center; (c) a sidewalk stall selling freshly pressed ‘curative’ juice; (d) a herbal medicine store in a subway station; (e) a board showing receipts for repair materials different community members bought to maintain a sidewalk shrine; (f) informal electricity connections for street market stalls; (g) a man offers his construction skills in front of the cathedral (photos by the author, 2012–2018)

As I step out of the train and walk up the stairs, I pass the natural products and herbal medicine store in the station (see Figure 1d) before I emerge at street level. Here, a woman hands me a flyer: ‘Astral maps, steam baths, emotional unlocking, tarot reading, energetic cleansing’ (see Figure 1b). I stop by a stall on the sidewalk to buy a freshly pressed anti-flu juice, as I’ve had a scratchy throat since I woke up this morning (see Figure 1c). I’ve now reached the Colonia Doctores, a centrally located working-class neighborhood known for its concentration of sellers of used (sometimes stolen) auto parts. Residents know that there are a number of streets in the city where they may find the necessary parts for or skills to repair just about anything: Tepito (regarded as the largest open-air informal street market in Latin America), particular streets in the historic center (see Figure 1g), the El Salado street market—the list goes on. The combination of objects being sold, the improvised stalls and the makeshift electric wiring on which these depend (see Figure 1f) and their constant circulation through the city produce what Milton Santos (2000) calls a system of objects. This is the essence of urban space.

The streets of Mexico City are characterized by a dense arrangement of such systems of objects. Most are placed on the sidewalk without formal approval from urban authorities. Indeed, conflicts over usage, order and aesthetics pervade Mexican public life and are most visible on the streets. Perhaps because of these tensions, urban authorities have progressively left behind ‘the street’ in their discourses to speak instead of ‘public space’. Since the nineteenth century, in Mexico, much as elsewhere in the Western world, the house has become synonymous with wellbeing and intimacy (Sennett, 1971) and represents a spatial norm long criticized by feminists (Wilson, 1992). In contrast to this narrative of intactness and cleanliness, the street has become a symbol of transgression (Valentine, 1996). It is associated with grime, danger, illicit transactions and vagrancy. Street culture, street prostitution, street vending, street people, taking to the street—these are all normatively charged expressions that mark transgression today. The reference to ‘public space’ instead of ‘the street’ represents a way for authorities to participate in a global urban discourse on the desirable city—a creative and safe city where individual rights are respected. The language of public space seeks to order and ‘clean’ the city of its transgressive (often called informal) street practices. Yet, as in many other cities around the world, the discourse on good governance, rights and public space rests on a governing regime that is itself characterized by a spectrum of informal practices, ranging from clientelism and corruption to street-level bureaucratic tolerance of infractions and informal verbal arrangements (see also Yogita Naruka’s essay, 2022, this issue).

The complex and porous relation between formal and informal governance generally constitutes the theoretical lens through which cities of the global South are analyzed (Roy, 2005; Boudreau and Davis, 2016). Research about the street in Mexico mainly focuses on street vendors (Crossa, 2018) and approaches street occupation as an economic and labor issue, or explores the street’s relationship with the law and the police (León Salazar, 2010; Meneses, 2011).

While these authors insist that entanglement of repression, negotiation and conciliation produces an always temporary order on the street, they rarely explore cultural elements. I am not talking here of simplified declarations on the so-called ‘essence’ of Mexican-ness, which tend to ‘naturalize’ specific practices. Instead, I take culture to mean an assemblage of symbolic practices through which people are able to read what is happening on the street. When I arrived from Montreal, I did not possess this language: I could not read the street nor understand its rhythms and rules. I would wait for the green light for a few minutes before realizing it didn’t work; I would search for the subway entrance for a long time before learning that the stairs are probably located where the density of parasols is higher; I would not know that to order food at a stall I had to ask what they have at the moment, because any written board will

inevitably be outdated. The collective, yet largely unremarked, knowledge of these symbolic practices participate in governing the street.

When a new symbol formation appears on the street, or when previously hidden practices become visible, order and stability on the street are disrupted. Graffiti is an example. Studies addressing the street as the medium and origin of urban art are indeed important for understanding the street culturally. In their investigation of graffiti as a mechanism for the interpellation of power in Ecatepec on the outskirts of Mexico City, Araiza and Martínez (2016) analyze the evolution of street painting in light of sociopolitical changes in this marginalized community. Instead of considering the street as productive of temporary orders conciliating informal and formal forces, this literature tends to relegate the street to a mere backdrop for art and political contestation.

Finally, another important body of literature examining the street is urban planning, whose main concern is the incidence of transgression (street vending, violence, homelessness, or sex work) on people's access to public space. Its focus is on various competing uses—transit, sociability or work (Ramirez Kuri, 2016). Generally, this literature emphasizes the repressive and uneven nature of spatial regulations implemented in response to these transgressions (Salvaire, 2019).

This literature takes the street as its object of study. In my work, the street is not the object of study; instead, it is my standpoint—it is what I wish to call a street epistemology. By this I mean that I find it fruitful to begin with ethnographic involvement in the street to study any urban topic. In the case of this essay, I begin not with a study of institutional actors, visions, discourses and programs to understand how the future is conceived and practiced in Mexico City, but from an ethnographic immersion in its streets. I build on three sources of inspiration to develop this idea of a street epistemology,

First, I am inspired by what Simone (2010) defines as an epistemology of Blackness and a call to study the social by situating the analysis in a specific place where over time certain ways of doing crystallize because of the constant movement and intermingling of Black people. As a heuristic device, the epistemology of Blackness helps emphasize circulations and connections.

A second source of inspiration for a street epistemology is posthumanist literature's argument that 'things' are what make us human; that things share agency with us (Latour, 2005; Haraway, 2008; Harman, 2011). This materialist outlook requires thick descriptions of how people interact with objects.

Finally, I am inspired by the pioneering work of de Certeau ([1984] 1988), who worked with thick ethnographic descriptions grounded in everyday life and in the street. In particular, de Certeau's interpretation of everyday practices as 'art' is insightful here to understand how the city is produced through practices and experiential knowledge. As I show through the empirical examples I develop in this essay, Mexico's 'repairers' use skills developed through practice, not diplomas. They have developed an art—the art of producing the city's future (see Figure 2).

A street epistemology implies describing the relationship between the body, the street and the house. Indeed, much of the urban literature focuses on the street (or public spaces) on the one hand, and housing on the other. I thus reduce the scale of analysis to street scenes, represented by mobile bodies circulating between situations, bodies that are constantly transiting in (house) and out (street) to offer a thick description not only of the street, but of the 'city' (understood as the relationship of connected bodies, streets and houses). A street epistemology requires thick descriptions of street scenes that include the relationships between people and objects, but mostly requires connecting these street scenes by following the movement of people between their houses and on the street. From a posthumanist perspective, this means understanding how these circulations produce certain bodies, and how affects and emotions flow between these three geographical scales: the body, the house and the



FIGURE 2 Continuous urban production. Top: self-constructed housing on the western periphery; bottom: advertisement for cement in the subway; a father is posing with his daughter in front of a typical self-constructed house, his finger pointing to the future. The slogan reads: 'We continue building a Mexico of quality'. Homes such as these tend to remain under construction for long periods, while the family saves up to build on the next room or floor (photos by the author, 2018)

street (see also Chakkalakal and Ren's discussion on vulnerable bodies in connection with queer futurities, 2022, this issue).

Repair the city, as the future is here: ethnographic and posthumanist thoughts on the future

By grounding my work in ethnographic descriptions of the body, the house and the street, I offer a distinctive understanding of the future that differs from one that would emerge from a study of institutional planning and visions. The perspective of the street provides the most obvious understanding of the future as being here and already active in the present. The future is concretely and actively produced through daily acts of repair. By repair I mean a large variety of practices, ranging from care for oneself (health, spirituality) to the nurturing of social bonds through community initiatives (such as maintaining a street shrine, see Figure 1e), to the construction of a home or the repair of broken objects or urban infrastructure (such as the lady cleaning the subway car described at the beginning of this essay). Through these continuous artful practices, city dwellers produce the future city. The future, in other words, is always already present through repair practices that are aimed at finding solutions to daily practical problems.

In their anthropological exploration of the future, Bryant and Knight (2019) identify six futural orientations that can be detected through ethnographic work: anticipation, expectation, speculation, potentiality, hope and destiny. These orientations guide action. Anticipation means that through activity, time is felt as an embodied experience: 'Anticipation, then, is more than simply expecting something to happen; it is the act of looking forwards that also pulls me in the direction of the future and prepares the groundwork for that future to occur' (*ibid.*: 28). Anticipation is an embodied orientation towards the future; it is sensed when our bodies are pressing towards, rushing towards, what is to come.

Instead of looking forwards by doing something now, the futural orientation of expectation comes from past experience. It provides predictability and foreseeability (see the discussion on expectation in Bunnell, 2022, this issue). Expectation is the privilege of people who have a sense of what is to come, who can 'await the future, rather than always having to anticipate it' (Bryant and Knight, 2019: 70). Speculation, by contrast, is what flourishes in the gap that emerges 'from shattered expectations, an inability to anticipate, and a lack of historical anchors' (*ibid.*: 79). In other words, when the world seems to slip from our understanding, then fantasy, conspiracy theory and magic provide meaning. Speculation is a futural orientation that works through everyday conversations when information is partial, conjectural and confidential: 'participating in gossip feeds fantasies and conspiracy theories and as such should be considered as a form of communication about the future through which people in an ambiguous situation attempt to construct a meaningful interpretation by pooling their conversational resources'. (*ibid.*: 94).

Potentiality and hope drive urban planners and policymakers in Mexico City. As educated actors, they enjoy the privilege of expectation. Their professional work is influenced by the idea that the present is pregnant with possibilities, that things have not-yet-actualized capacities. For instance, they will design a pedestrian street with the expectation that it will develop community bonding. The redesigned street, for them, has the potential to develop social ties. Their work is thus imbued with hope, with 'a way of pressing into the future that attempts to pull certain potentialities into actuality' (*ibid.*: 134). Hope is what stands between possibility and probability; it is what works through cultural practices of imagination and dream.

Finally, destiny (fate) is much more visible on the street where, combined with anticipation and speculation, people take responsibility for the future by coming to terms with the uncanniness of contingency. Destiny is a mode of action based on aleatory

reason. It is grounded in a conception of the future that is akin to the idea of destination: one is walking with a destination in mind (one's destiny) but knows that the road will be replete with surprises and is confident of making the right decisions along the way. As Nowotny (2016) explains, coping with uncertainty is a precious cultural resource because in order not to feel threatened by it, we need to acknowledge its cunning. The history of Western science (on which urban planning and policymaking rely) has taught us to strive for certainty. This has led to narratives of the future conceived as abstractions: a plan, a program, a vision. A street epistemology reintroduces context and materiality into the conceptualization of the future by describing how people create through uncertainty. Or, in the words of Simone (2016: 8), the point is understanding 'processes of instantiation', that is, identifying 'where the singularities of place and history are experimentally refigured into unsettled articulations with larger surrounds'. This is what I wish to call acts of repair.

I find it useful to think about how different acts of repair are oriented towards the future. In the three examples described in the section that follows, I show that anticipation, speculation and destiny are the most prominent futural orientations on the streets of Mexico. They provide a conception of the future that is very different from the expectation, potentiality and hope expressed by urban planners, social workers and policymakers. Yet expectation, potentiality and hope also build on futural orientations related to the street. Planners often repair, just like the construction worker nourishes hope. These are not mutually exclusive orientations.

In the English-speaking literature, repair is an object of study developed in Science and Technology Studies, studies of human computer interaction and the study of urban infrastructure.¹ In their ground-breaking 2007 paper, Graham and Thrift called for rethinking the 'onflow of everyday life that has now become so significant in the social sciences and humanities' (Graham and Thrift, 2007: 3) by focusing on moments of infrastructural breakdown. The problem with contemporary theory, they argue, is that it has predominantly focused on connection, whereas failure is the key to understanding innovation. They show, based on posthumanist thought, that 'things' play an important role in the everyday life of almost everyone, as they weave various cultures together. The proliferation and complexification of materials leads to more maintenance and repair. In this sense, breakdowns have existential quality, since they affect a large number of people simultaneously.

This is what Jackson (2014) calls 'broken world thinking' to argue for a reorientation of research away from innovation, design, production, planning and top-down governance to repair. Jackson defines repair as 'subtle acts of care by which order and meaning in complex sociotechnical systems are maintained and transformed, human value is preserved and extended, and the complicated work of fitting to the varied circumstances of organizations, systems, and lives is accomplished' (*ibid.*: 222). In other words, repair is about the art of fitting, of making things work. Epistemologically, broken world thinking is based on pragmatist philosophy (Dewey, [1922] 2012). It highlights that cities are continuously produced by responding to everyday problems. Its theoretical basis differs fundamentally from that of planning. The focus of analysis shifts from urban production to urban sustainability (Denis *et al.*, 2015). This requires shifting from a language of use and function to a language of distributed agency, decentered from human control and planning (Jackson and Kang, 2014). Things will let themselves be repaired or not, and this influences the process of creation while producing experiential knowledge and subjectivities: 'Educated guesses are made, fixes are attempted, and at some point in the process of trial and error produces a positive result. Along the way,

1 It is worth noting that in Latin America, the literature on repair (*reparación*) emerges in a region marked by a history of dictatorship, state violence and guerillas. It focuses on the judicial process of reconciliation and decolonialism (see, for instance, Nanclares Márquez and Gómez Gómez, 2017).

small bits of understanding and belonging are also produced, through the shared puzzle of the broken [object]' (Houston *et al.*, 2016: 1407).

Thus, acts of repair produce the future by making the city work. The act of repairing relies on distributed agency between people and things. It relies on being able to accept the cunning of contingencies, to work from surprise and wonder. It is also an act of care. Repair is an affectively charged practice.

Making the (future) city: three examples of repair

To better understand how repair produces the future in Mexico City, I present three ethnographic vignettes in this section. The first vignette describes an act of self-repair, the second one presents an act of community repair, and in the third I discuss an act of government repair. Together, these vignettes illustrate two interrelated political forms: anticipatory and aspirational politics.

– Repairing oneself

Chilucas is 16 years old. He was born on the street. At the age of three, he escaped from a religious orphanage with a friend a little older than him. They lived together for three years on the streets of the Chinese neighborhood. When he turned six years old, a rich landowner saw him on the street and decided to adopt him. He went to live with this landowner on a ranch five hours from Mexico City. Chilucas speaks of this man as his father. After he had lived there for a year, the landowner and his family went to live in the United States, leaving him behind with the ranch employees. Chilucas could play video games all day and was happy, but lonely (see Figure 3).

One day he accompanied his caregiver to buy something in the city. He sneaked out to play video games at the Friki Plaza and never returned to the ranch. Instead, he went back to the Chinese neighborhood where he found his friend again. They rented a room on Madero Street for US \$5 a night. Here they had access to a shower and an old analog TV. They lived there for about a year until his friend decided to leave because he thought he had found his parents. Chilucas could no longer pay the rent, so he left too.

He went to live near the museum of fine arts—Palacio de Bellas Artes—which he called his 'mansion'. Chilucas knows the city center very well. One day, he was walking on Tacuba Street when he heard the Llorona. According to Mexican legend, the Llorona (weeping mother) is a ghost that haunts rivers, crying while searching for her drowned children. A river runs under Tacuba Street, and this is why Chilucas explains, 'I heard the Llorona crying'. The Llorona was there, he assures me. He didn't hear her because he was high on drugs—others heard her too. In fact, the employees of Café Tacuba closed the restaurant and invited him in, as they had heard the ghost too.

Chilucas lived in Bellas Artes until he got caught for stealing on the street and was taken to a juvenile correction center for two months at the age of 15. He liked it there because the center organized cultural outings and he liked the orange uniform. He was then moved to a self-managed evangelist center for treatment of his problematic drug use. By law, he is required to stay there until he turns 18. Here he met Maria and fell in love with her. During the interview, he showed me about ten letters from her, written on small pieces of paper. During our conversation, he drew a heart on his wrist and wrote her name on the red bracelet he had made of the wool we had given him the previous time we had seen him. Chilucas anticipates a future with Maria; he is rushing towards this love. When I pressed him to describe this future to me, he would only speak of his future with her.

Chilucas has adopted the repair discourse of the drug treatment center, a discourse based in the 12-step Alcoholics Anonymous program, including the notion of repentance and the need to submit to a higher power. Chilucas is highly skilled at dealing with contingencies, having lived on the street most of his life. He speaks of his destiny and of various forms of spiritual mysticism. He depends on the singularity of

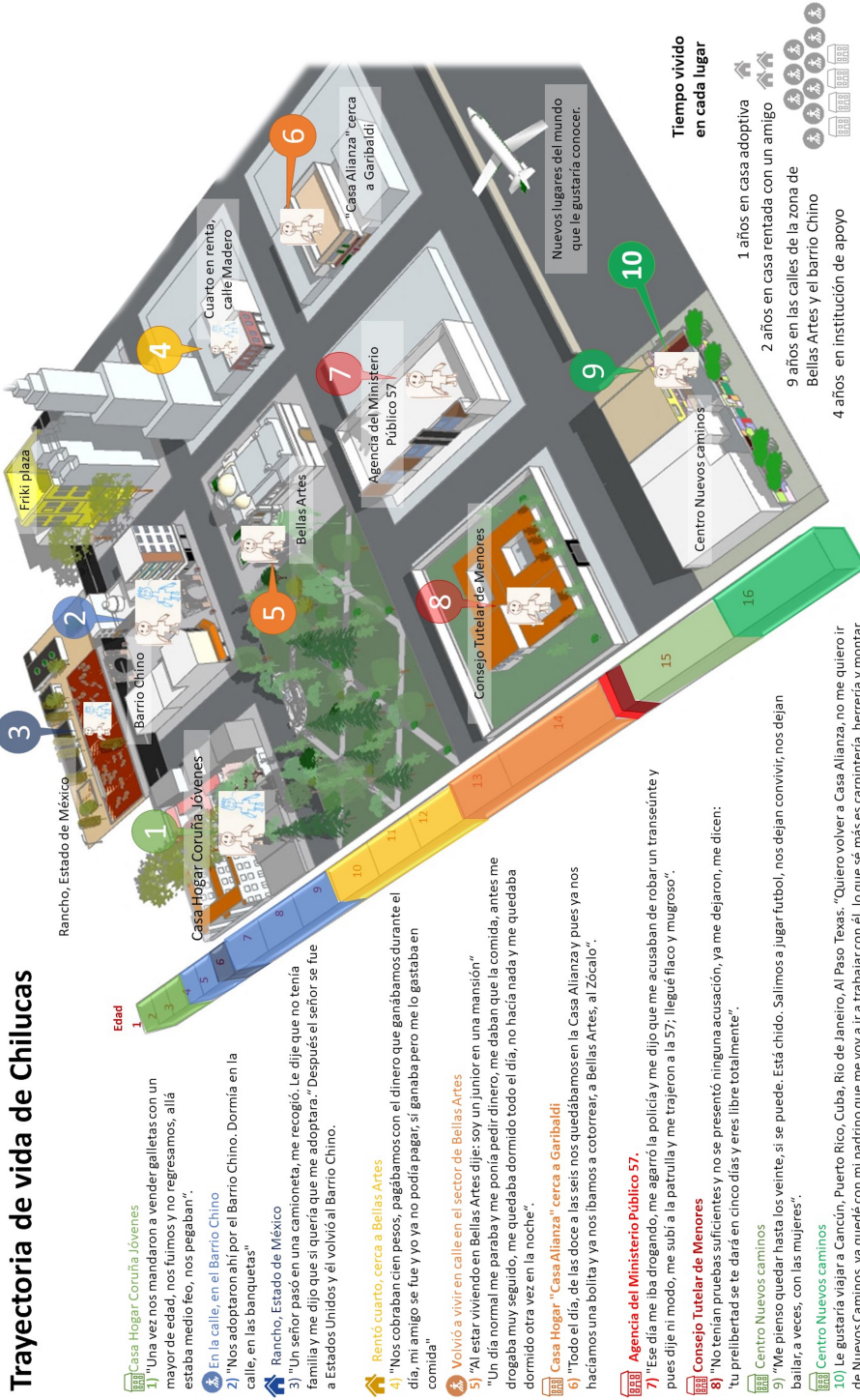


FIGURE 3 A biographical mapping of Chilucas's life (map conceptualized by the author and drawn by Evelyn Mejía)

the historic center to experiment with the many contingencies he encounters on the street: where to sleep, what to eat, how to have fun. He reconfigures Mexican legends, re-signifies Tacuba Street and transforms constraints (such as being arrested by the police and brought to a drug rehab center) into constant repair and experimentation. This is how he is living his love story.

– Repairing the community

Constancia, a street in the Tepito neighborhood, is quiet compared to the frenetic activity of the largest street market in Latin America. Here there are no colorful makeshift plastic roofs covering the street to protect merchants from the sun. It is a residential street, with old buildings called *vecindades* (multiple rooms that shelter the poor that relocate to the city from the countryside), and social housing complexes built by the government after the 1985 earthquake.

On the yellow wall of a *vecindad*, a mural shows the Virgin of Guadalupe floating above an angel whose wings have been painted in the colors of the Mexican flag. An epitaph is inscribed on the image of the Virgin: ‘In memory of my brother, the youngest of the family’. The center of the mural shows Christ on the cross. At his feet, St. Jude Thaddeus (patron saint of desperate causes) puts his hand on the shoulder of a young man. Next to the young man there is another man who seems a little older. The characters represent the dead to whom the mural is dedicated.

An altar of approximately two by three meters was built in front of the mural about a decade later. A statue of the crucified Christ on which plastic cards with religious icons and prayers are hung, is placed at the center. It is surrounded by several smaller statues. The word ‘Tepito’ is visible to the left of the shrine, as are the words ‘Am I not here because I am your mother’—a phrase often found alongside images of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Under this phrase is the title of a song by the venerated Puerto Rican salsa singer Héctor Lavoe—‘Mi Juanito Alimaña’—a 1983 song that tells the story of a local bandit and drug user. It is there because the dead who lived there loved it. But it is also there because it represents the neighborhood fittingly. The song explains that Juanito stole from everyone, but no one in the neighborhood denounced him. If by chance he was jailed, he would get out immediately because his cousin was a policeman.

In their various forms, the objects and images of the saints that make up the altars constructed on many sidewalks across the city play an important role in maintaining community bonds. They are usually constructed by a family or a group of neighbors who wish to pay tribute to their dead, but also to protect their street from supernatural or human threats. Community members finance their construction and plan for maintenance (Figure 1e). A shrine opens up a sacred space on the sidewalk, which allows people to pause as they slow down to cross themselves, pray, or admire the shrine. It also provides a local collective space where neighbors stop to chat or gossip. Shrines are where meaning is given to the cunning of uncertainty, where the future is constructed through speculation.

The altar is a place that welcomes imagination. It is a window that reveals a desired future. It tells the story of a different world. The materials (marble and Spanish roof tiles) and the architecture of this shrine produce a dream mini house in a neighborhood marked by precarious housing conditions (see Figure 4). This mini house is full of intimate memories—arrangements of objects that provide evidence of destiny as a futural orientation, and of the life and death of all the Juanitos of the neighborhood.

– Repairing the government

Repair practices on the street are echoed within government. Since President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) was elected in 2018 under the banner of the Fourth Transformation, promising to eliminate corruption and redistribute resources to the poorest, a form of left-wing populism has characterized the Mexican political



FIGURE 4 A street shrine in the neighborhood of Tepito, Mexico City (photo by the author, 2017)

scene. As head of a new party born of a civil organization, the Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (MORENA), the president is criticized by left-wing intellectuals who reject his apparent indifference to the principles of liberal democracy. What these critics often forget, I argue, is that liberal democracy has never fully existed in Mexico. If we analyze this government on the basis of a street epistemology, it is not surprising that a government elected on the promise of eliminating corruption and giving priority to the poor works through various repair methods that resonate with people on the street. So, instead of focusing on liberal institution building, the MORENA government favors direct communication with the people and the ‘therapeutic rehabilitation’ of corrupt people.

Mexico’s political party system relies on charismatic leaders who often use informal channels to secure their election. Through its campaign against corruption, the MORENA government seeks to eradicate corrupt practices. Yet, public administrations continue to be strongly linked to the people who hold a particular office. Teams and networks of contacts matter, rather than the institutions. For example, during electoral change, the administrative team habitually deletes its archives so as not to give the new team information that would strengthen it. The state seemingly cannot exist outside its political teams. In most liberal democracies, by contrast, the state is regarded as an entity in itself that exists independently of its governors or teams. In Mexico, the state always remains linked to those who are in office. This is clearly visible in all its functions: there is a clear emphasis on the personality and image of politicians, on the *mordida* (bribe) demanded by policeman to give you ‘personalized service and solve your problem’, on the need for civil servants to be part of a political team.

What are the consequences of this administrative and political culture? First of all, it is difficult to maintain programs from one government to another. For citizens this discontinuity makes it difficult to ‘read’ the institutional city. Urban policies always lag far behind street practices. Thus, the government responds to emergencies: it repairs

and erases but does not plan. The most recent illustration of this is the cancellation of the new international airport project the previous government had planned. In response to strong political movements, AMLO has cancelled the airport project, deciding instead to expand an existing airport. This response is a 'repair' strategy that answers to political emergencies instead of providing a carefully thought out and planned development project.

An impressive array of urban plans and policies are available for Mexico City. The documents for these plans and policies are exemplary in terms of equity, innovation, vision and administrative detail. But they are completely ineffective for administering the city, as they do not correspond to the lifestyles, attitudes and skills of city dwellers. What current critics of the AMLO government call 'populism' is in fact a mode of governance attuned to the city's ever-changing ways and the knowledge of its inhabitants. When the president mobilizes popular beliefs, spiritual practices and examples of daily know-how in his speeches, he is aiming to legitimize his urban policies before the vast majority of city dwellers. Five years after the presidential elections, MORENA politicians and their supporters remain driven by the hope of truly transforming Mexico. Massively high approval rates for the government testify to this hope. Intellectual critics, by contrast, are disappointed, as the MORENA government has not lived up to their expectations, particularly to the expectation of building liberal democratic institutions guided by rational planning and certainty.

Conclusion: anticipatory and aspirational politics

Chilucas, street altars and many other daily practices in the city of repair (such as cleaning subway cars) constitute an anticipatory form of politics. These are based on a pragmatic future and on constant problem-solving efforts. Yet aspirational politics, which prominently feature for social workers and urban planners, is never far. In fact, police officers and the Youth Protection Agency are central to Chilucas's life. Local bureaucrats will not tear down an altar, even if it challenges city codes, because they would not dare offend the Virgin of Guadalupe. They nevertheless try to regulate these altars by ensuring that they are well-maintained and do not obstruct traffic. Anticipatory and aspirational politics work together.

While official discourse is aimed at ensuring order in the street, bureaucrats buy their lunch from street vendors, bribe transit officers, cross at red lights, or leave their trash on a street corner. These everyday infractions of municipal bylaws are what produce the intensity of Mexican street life. The interweaving of rational expectations and potentialities with speculation and anticipation is something the MORENA government understood very well. On the one hand, they implemented drastic measures to control corruption, in the hope of inducing transformation. On the other hand, they speak the language of the street, and this is why the most privileged residents criticize them for their 'populism'. They speak of anticipation, speculation and destiny. By contrast, for the woman who cleans subway cars, described at the beginning of this essay, repairing the street means also repairing the government's corruption: 'My work is dirty but my money is clean', she said.

Appadurai (2013) argues that the future is cultural; Urry (2016) shows how societies have conceived of the future historically. The future, in other words, is spatially and historically embedded in everyday life. In this article I have used a street epistemology and ethnographic tools to argue that in Mexico City, there are two competing futural politics: anticipatory and aspirational. While their interdependencies are rarely recognized, they work together. According to Appadurai (2013: 188), the capacity to aspire is a 'navigational capacity'. Those who are more privileged in any society simply use the map of its norms to explore the future more frequently and more realistically, and share this knowledge with one another more routinely than their poorer and weaker neighbors'. While I agree that aspirational politics is based

on the ability to have expectations, the possibility of hope, and the identification of potentialities, I maintain that anticipatory politics requires navigational capacities too. Indeed, the capacity to respond to contingencies, to speculate, to read the street and thus anticipate and live one's destiny is true navigational capacity. Navigating the streets of the city also repairs the city, and produces its sustainability through time, its future. During a period of populism, anticipatory and aspirational politics are closely intertwined.

Through this Interventions essay I wish to contribute to the epistemology of futuring. I argue that an epistemology of the street allows us as researchers to read the street to highlight the often invisible methods of futuring. While the epistemology of the street draws from a speculative and materialistic perspective (see Chakkalakal and Ren, 2022, this issue), I presented the futures from the street as sociomaterial figurations that epistemologically diversify our understanding of futuring and help us connect aspiration and anticipation.

[Correction added on 10 October 2022, after first online publication: An erroneous footnote and its related reference have been removed.]

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