AND CARIBBEAN ANTHROPOLOGY

"Toma-La Ciudad": Intersubjective Activism in Guadalajara's Streets and City Museum

By

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═══════════ RESUMEN ═══════════

En el otoño de 2013, una red de activistas en Guadalajara, México, montó una exhibición en un museo, realizó intervenciones en las calles de la ciudad, y organizó eventos para persuadir a los habitantes urbanos y a oficiales de gobierno a remediar los problemas de la metrópolis. En su mayoría miembros de la clase media, los activistas usaron el nombre "Toma-la Ciudad" para alentar a la población de la ciudad a involucrarse en esfuerzos de la sociedad civil organizada que tendrían el potencial de remodelar Guadalajara. Con base en trabajo etnográfico entre grupos involucrados, este artículo presenta el concepto "activismo intersubjetivo" y lo utiliza como medio para analizar los usos y las referencias a las experiencias sensoriales de la ciudad. Al estimular respuestas empáticas hacia cómo otros viven la ciudad, los activistas buscaron reducir las desigualdades en México. También parecieron aprender lecciones de activistas que les precedieron, cuyas protestas violentas no alcanzaron las metas deseadas. [ciudad, México, movimientos sociales, ciclismo, movilidad, intersubjetividad, experiencias sensoriales]

═══════════ ABSTRACT ═══════════

In autumn 2013, an activist network in Guadalajara, Mexico, mounted a museum exhibition, carried out interventions in city streets, and organized various events to persuade urban dwellers and government officials to address problems in the metropolis. The mostly middle-class activists used the phrase "Toma-la Ciudad" (Take the City) to encourage urban dwellers to engage in organized civil society efforts that would have the potential to reshape Guadalajara. Based on ethnographic fieldwork among participating groups, this article introduces the concept of "intersubjective activism"

and employs it as a means by which to analyze the uses of and references to sensory experiences of the city. By inciting empathic responses toward how others experience the city, activists sought to break down some of the barriers that characterize Mexico's inequalities. They also appeared to have learned lessons from previous forms of activism in which violent protests did not achieve their desired goals. [Mexico, social movements, cities, mobility, cycling, intersubjectivity, sensory experiences]

In recent years, activists in Guadalajara, Mexico, have influenced local policymaking to improve public services and infrastructure, especially regarding issues of mobility and public space. Dozens of groups have sprung up with specific agendas to address inequalities, seeking to improve public transport, cycling infrastructure, and pedestrian crossings. In a context in which public distrust of government is rife, and where violence and insecurity have strongly influenced everyday relations in public spaces, activists' humor and creativity have drawn considerable interest and sparked public debate about quality of life in the city. Their positive strategy appears to be based on learning from previous waves of activism in which violent protests did not achieve the desired goals.

I have followed six groups of activists focused on mobility and public space since 2007, and have noticed their growing influence on government and public practices. This article argues that the success of this wave of activism concerned with mobility and public space is due, to a large extent, to activists' use of intersubjectivity in order to make spectators understand others' experiences on streets and on pedestrian crossings. This became especially evident in autumn 2013, when a wide range of activist groups co-organized a temporary exhibition in Guadalajara's City Museum (Museo de la Ciudad)—an institution funded by the municipal government and dedicated to the city's history. The exhibition, "Toma-la Ciudad" (Take the City), showcased various types of activism in the city and invited spectators to become involved. The exhibits included topics such as the defense of human rights, mobility, public space, the fight against corruption, and support for migrants and indigenous populations. In this article I focus on mobility and public space leading up to and including the Toma-la Ciudad exhibition based on my research with groups dedicated to these social problems. Specifically, I explore these issues in relation to the communication of sensory experiences and the problem of intersubjective persuasion.

In what follows, activism is considered to be the concerted effort of several individuals to bring about change for a wider social assemblage (in this case, the city and its inhabitants), which would otherwise not occur. Activism is usually studied through a lens of social movement scholarship, which may look at agenda

setting, resource management, and contentious politics, as well as at the identity or managerial aspects of activist groups (Edelman 2001; McAdam et al. 2001; Nash 2005; Stephen 1997). I suggest a new approach that focuses on, and theorizes about, the practice of intersubjective activism as a form of power. It is framed by what Jackson (2013:25) calls "existential anthropology": Instead of focusing on the identity markers by which people recognize each other and themselves as part of a collective, analytical attention prioritizes the practices and experiences of people who live together. This stance emphasizes the phenomenological over the discursive and considers the intersubjective as a significant arena of encounter: "Every engagement with another alters one's sense of oneself" (Jackson 2013:25).

Here, intersubjectivity is a form in which Being is considered as Being in the world: "a domain of *inter-est* (inter-existence) and intercorporeity that lies *between* people: a field of inter-experience, inter-action, and inter-locution" (Jackson 1998:3). Alessandro Duranti has identified such phenomenologically based notions of intersubjectivity as a fruitful source of analysis for anthropology: "When properly understood, intersubjectivity can constitute an overall theoretical frame for thinking about the ways in which humans interpret, organize, and reproduce particular forms of social life and social cognition" (Duranti 2010:17). In their group dynamics, activists follow their own agendas as a type of bureaucratic task using specialized knowledge and experience to deal with identified problems. Within the network formed for Toma-la Ciudad, as an assemblage of individuals with diverse practices and interests, activists' efforts expresses a metaphysical level: they argued for an increased agency for urban dwellers in shaping Guadalajara. Toma-la Ciudad referred to quotidian situations or objects in the city, but cast them in a new light. The approach was to create events and exhibits that emphasized risks, difficulties, or implications for some urban dwellers, which would otherwise have been generally invisible to those not affected by them. Regarding the exhibits that confronted issues of mobility and public space, the emphasis was on urban dwellers' sensory experiences. This article argues that the point of these exhibits was to attempt to alter spectators' sense of self through an intersubjective connection that stressed a shared awareness of the city.

Intersubjectivity, therefore, acts as a doorway into the political because it entertains the possibility that people can understand each other's problems or aspirations in a shared arena. Intersubjectivity is a mental capacity that provides a base for the public realm, which Jackson (2006:11)—drawing on Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958)—referred to as the "politics of experience". Anthropologists' studies of the political have scrutinized power relations in a wide variety of contexts (Gledhill 1994; Vincent 2002). The case analyzed here emphasizes activists' endeavors to alter urban life as it pertains to the shape and uses of the built environment (infrastructure, common areas), public services (public transport), and the interactions among urban dwellers (respect for cyclists, consideration of

pedestrians). The Toma-la Ciudad exhibition addressed both government officials *and* city inhabitants, seeking as much a change in policies and projects as it did in urban dwellers' daily habits and interactions.

Since 2007, I have carried out seventeen months of fieldwork within activist networks that are seeking to improve the quality of life in the city. During this time, I have conducted in-depth interviews with thirty-four activists, as well as informal interviews with sixty-two individuals, most of whom are volunteers, academics, government officials, and onlookers. In the field, I attended and photographed numerous events organized by activists, such as press conferences, planning meetings, and public performances (called "interventions"). My interest in studying this new wave of urban activism stems from its creative and engaging discourses as well as its emphasis on public interest policymaking. These activists seem to draw inspiration from the shared imagination of the student movement of 1968 in Mexico City, especially regarding its insistence on using the city's public spaces as a political stage (Flaherty 2016). This new wave of activists comprises predominantly middle class and aspiring middle-class individuals who are critical of Guadalajara's quality of life (Walker 2013). As a movement focused on mobility and public space issues, their activities have called attention to the need for policy changes and new government projects, as well as changes to the attitudes and practices of the urban population.

A leading activist collective in this movement is Ciudad para Todos (CpT), a group I followed closely in the second half of 2013. As a volunteer, I attended weekly meetings on Wednesday evenings, socialized with members, and assisted with some of the activities they promoted or collaborated on with other activist groups. Although CpT describes its structure as horizontal, and claims not to have formal hierarchies among its thirty-five members, a small clique of six defined the group's agenda and activities. Members of this clique had similar backgrounds: they studied at the same local private Jesuit university, traveled abroad for postgraduate study or work experience, and were somewhat better off financially than other members. Despite a few moments of friction, the overall atmosphere in the CpT was amicable.

In recent years, studies of urban activism in Mexico have increasingly focused on concerted efforts regarding public space and mobility as well as on activists' communication repertoires (Ávalos 2016; Padilla de la Torre and Flores Márquez 2011). Scholars have documented the way in which Mexican activists have used the accumulated experience of multiple movements in order to gain influence (Haber 2006). Urban mobilizations have also been crucial for the wider struggle for political rights, known as *movimiento ciudadano* (Tamayo 1999). In a context of multiple mobilizations against local and federal government human rights violations, corruption, mismanagement of public affairs, and impunity (Esteva 2007; Hincapié Jiménez and López Pacheco 2016; Illades 2014), an increasing

number of activist groups has moved from opposing urban plans with which they disagree (Alfie 2013) to actively seeking to influence policymaking in order to reshape cities such as Monterrey (Vázquez Uresti and Canavati Espinosa 2017), Mexico City (Morales Guzmán 2014), or Guadalajara (Acosta, Paláu, and Larrosa 2014). This process has involved a growing appreciation and use of various forms of artistic expression as part of activism (McCaughan 2012). Such assertiveness by activist groups seems to be a reaction to Mexico's prolonged and difficult transition to democracy: the country had one of the world's longest single-party regimes—the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)—which lasted for most of the twentieth century (Serra 2015). In this context, Guadalajara activists have played a crucial role at the national level in mobilizations such as vote annulment in 2009 (Alonso 2010), protection of migrants (González Arias and Aikin Araluce 2015), and in the organization of a country-wide urban cycling network (Morfín 2011).

Guadalajara's renowned activism is perhaps a result of the city's profile. With a population of almost 4.5 million inhabitants (according to the 2010 census), Guadalajara is Mexico's second most populous urban area (INEGI 2011). Its population also has the highest proportion of middle-class people among Mexican cities (39.9 percent as opposed to 28.6 percent in Mexico City and 26.9 percent in Monterrey).[1] Recent scholarly interest in the rise of global middle-class populations has produced a series of multilayered analyses that go beyond consumption (Heiman et al. 2012). For this article, "middle class" is understood as part of a transnationally entangled process (López and Weinstein 2012:12), in which a group of people have enough cultural and financial capital to secure a level of well-being with leisure. In places like Guadalajara, as in much of Latin America, such efforts are framed by a sense of fragility or vulnerability (Ravallion 2009). A key source of cultural capital is education. Guadalajara is undeniably a hub of higher education, as it hosts Latin America's second largest university (Universidad de Guadalajara), three other public universities, ten highly recognized private universities, and dozens of smaller colleges and polytechnic institutions. Every year, thousands of young people from Western Mexico move to Guadalajara to enroll in higher education. Activist groups are often made up mostly of university students.

Activism to improve the city's mobility and public space has struck a chord among urban dwellers because of the distance between the population's aspirations and the reality of its infrastructure and services. The city's chaotic urban sprawl spans 3,265 square kilometers across nine municipalities of the state of Jalisco (IMEPLAN 2017). Due to neoliberal reforms implemented since the 1980s, increased credit availability has boosted car ownership, which grew, on average, 8 percent per year from 1990 to 2010 (Silva 2013:24). This drove an overall increase of vehicles in the Guadalajara urban area (including trucks and buses), which rose from 270,000 in 1980 to 1.8 million in 2011 (Silva 2013:88). Most of the city's
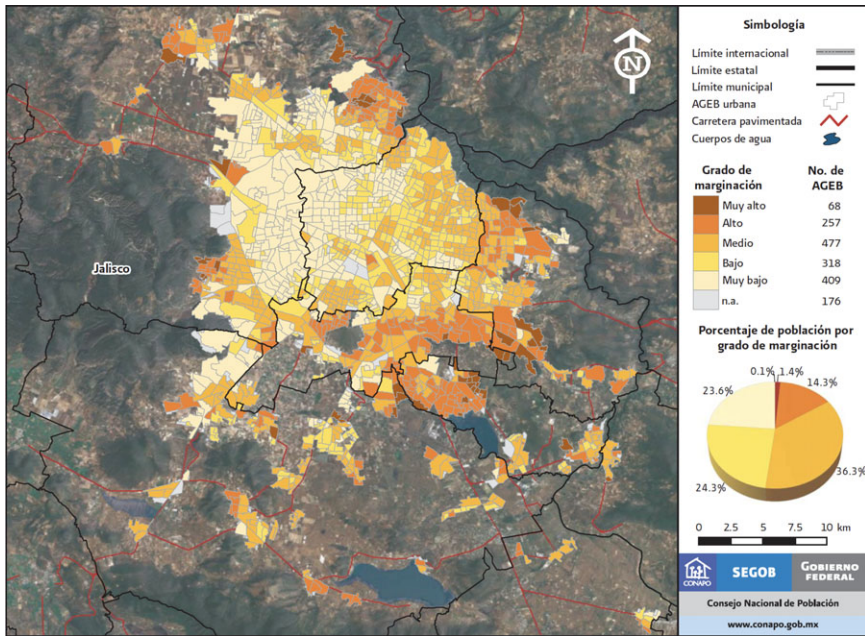
Figure 1   *Urban margination degree in Guadalajara's urban area as of 2010.*
Source: Conapo (2012:58).
[This figure appears in color in the online issue]

population uses the deficient and accident-prone public transport. It is deficient for several reasons: there are no set stops, so people wait for buses on arbitrarily chosen corners; drivers often ignore calls from waiting persons who signal that they want to board; the quality of buses and minibuses is often quite poor; and the driving style is fairly aggressive. Indeed, dozens of people die every year from accidents caused by local buses and minibuses.

Nevertheless, Guadalajara is prosperous, albeit this is mostly noticeable on its west side, where most of the city's gated communities, public parks, shopping centers, and other amenities are situated (Cabrales Barajas and Canosa Zamora 2001). The dividing line on maps that depict the city's population as determined by socioeconomic status (which the population office classifies according to "marginality" levels: see Figure 1) is found at Avenue Independencia. This road was built on top of what used to be the river San Juan de Dios (De la Torre 1998; Ruiz Velazco Castañeda 2005); in previous centuries, this divided the worker populations in the east (mostly indigenous) from the better-off in the west (mostly descendants of Spanish people). While the racial distinction is no longer so clear-cut, it is still noticeable. What is more evident is the economic divide, which has also shaped the cityscape. Overall, investment in public infrastructure has privileged road building

and neglected public transport (Silva 2013), with most new roads, bridges, and tunnels having been built on the west side. People who have grown up in this divided city tend to take the divisions for granted (Low 2001:47).

Ciudad para Todos (CpT) grew out of a protest outside a shopping mall in the affluent west side of the city. In September 2007, the state government (then led by the conservative PAN—Partido Accion Nacional) decided to carry out an experiment on one of Guadalajara's busiest avenues. With only a few days' notice, most stop lights along nine kilometers of Avenida López Mateos were turned off, and most of its crossings were blocked. Numerous public transport drivers had to improvise routes to find accessible ways of crossing the avenue. Pedestrians had to walk up to five kilometers to find a crossing. One of the few traffic lights that still worked was in front of a shopping center, Plaza del Sol. A spontaneous protest gathered there, mostly formed by people who had no experience of political mobilization. They brought placards demanding more respect for pedestrians. Among those attending, a few formed the group that came to be known as CpT. Based on a middle-class aspiration to increase their socioeconomic outlook, CpT represents disenchantment with politicians' practices and their repercussions in public life (Walker 2013). This is the case even though Guadalajara and Jalisco have been governed by parties other than the long-standing PRI since the 1990s. During its first few years of activism, CpT's members prioritized interventions and campaigns on the city's east side. Their practices drew considerable attention and incited public debate on a number of issues. They were also criticized, by other activist groups and by academics, for what was deemed to be a class bias.

Several CpT activists told me that during the first few years of the group's existence (2007–10), their personal learning processes helped the group adjust its discourse, methods, and aims. Before they told me, I had already noticed some changes, especially in the areas they chose for their interventions, and in their apparent increasing empathy toward poor urban dwellers. They learned to incorporate others' concerns and to widen the scope of their struggles; they also promoted a similar learning process among onlookers and the wider public. This occurred simultaneously with the creation of numerous city-wide activist networks. Toma-la Ciudad was the result of one such network.

The diversity of participating collectives in Toma-la Ciudad was significant. Some were small, discrete groups made up of less than a dozen volunteers. Others had more members and sought a high-profile public presence with press releases, interventions, and branded images. There were also some whose members did not refer to themselves as activists, but nevertheless fit the definition outlined above. This set included: a few nongovernmental organizations that were dedicated to a variety of social issues (for example, environmental causes, street children, social development); a group of successful businessmen who wanted to improve the image of the city; and three small consulting firms working in specialized

knowledge areas (such as urban design and development policymaking). Each group—self-identified as activists or otherwise—had its own agenda, with self-organized activities, campaigns, and projects. Together, they generated a shared message about the need for urban dwellers—in their diversity—to shape their own city.

Toma-la Ciudad sought to persuade spectators to become involved either in one of the existing projects or in other ways. The name "Toma-la Ciudad"—which, as mentioned above, can be translated as "Take the City"—was an invitation for people to take action to "reappropriate" Guadalajara (i.e., to make it their own). This call was a result of a perception that the city was shaped by government decisions that did not usually take its citizens' needs or wants into consideration. Most of the activists I interviewed (whose names have been changed here, to protect their identities) were young professionals who carried out activism relating to mobility and public space issues in their spare time.

Not only activists were involved in Toma-la Ciudad; there were also a few artists whose experience with exhibitions and public performances proved invaluable to the development of the exhibition and interventions. Groups such as CpT had previously collaborated with graphic and performance artists to carry out creative interventions in public places. Both CpT and Toma-la Ciudad thus joined a long history of creative and artistic Mexican and Latin American manifestations of dissent toward governments and power groups. Some artistic movements in the region, for example, denounced the inequalities and injustices that justified revolutions (Craven 2002). In more recent times, democratic governments in the region have resorted to forms of violence comparable to those used by dictatorships (Arias and Goldstein 2010), which have resulted in widespread disapproval. Outcries have taken the shape of protest songs (Fairley 1984; Velasco 2008), street art (Chaffee 1993), and various forms of performance (Ryan 2017).

The remainder of this article is organized in three sections. The first offers a description of the experiential basis of Toma-la Ciudad's exhibition and public interventions. The second seeks to clarify why I call this "intersubjective activism." The conclusion analyzes the intersubjective persuasion involved in shaking up what has been taken for granted.

Showcased Experiences

On Sunday, September 22, 2013, dozens of activist groups carried out interventions in different locations in Guadalajara. A map with information about each location could be found on Toma-la Ciudad's blog (TlC 2013). The date referenced the annual World Carfree Day (WCD), which has been promoted since the early 1990s by activists around the globe who are seeking to reduce reliance on automobiles

Figure 2 *Intervention on pedestrian crossing in front of Plaza del Sol. September 22, 2013.*
Source: Photo by Raúl Acosta.
[This figure appears in color in the online issue]

in cities (Badiozamani 2003; McClintock 1995). CpT also claims this date in 2007 as their founding day. Every year since then, CpT has commemorated WCD by leading a handful of activist groups in interventions. In 2011, CpT organized the annual conference of the World Carfree Network in Guadalajara, bringing together dozens of activists and transport specialists from around the globe (WCFN 2017). In 2013, activists commemorated the WCD within Toma-la Ciudad, and tailored their interventions to advocate specifically for pedestrian rights.

I joined CpT as an external volunteer for the four interventions its members carried out that Sunday. The first took as its mission painting a pedestrian crossing in Chapalita, a middle-class neighborhood on the city's east side so that people could more easily reach a small park within a roundabout. After completing this task, we visited another pedestrian crossing close to Plaza del Sol, where members of a different group stood with cardboard cuttings of the "green man"—the symbol used to indicate a pedestrian crossing area—in order to protect people's right of way over cars coming from a side road (see Figure 2). Some of us then joined the groups working on two more interventions in the city center: one in a pedestrian area where cars were also allowed to circulate, and the other at a traffic light at a four-lane avenue intersection. These interventions sought to persuade onlookers to respect pedestrians, showing the difficulties they often faced when trying to cross streets in Guadalajara.

As with earlier CpT activities, these interventions sought to appeal to urban dwellers' empathy or understanding. The intervention at the four-lane avenue—which consisted of activists painting a few cartoons and messages on the pedestrian

crossing—included a wheelchair on which activists crossed the avenue, holding up signs every time the red light stopped the traffic. While the purposes of these and other actions were serious, the execution of them was witty and fun. Edgar, one of CpT's founders, told me in an interview that CpT's ethos had been, from the first protest, to be provocative, yet peaceful:

> We said from early on: "we are not going to break things or shout bad words, we are going to have a good time, because this [their demonstration] needs to invite, we don't want to alienate people, we want them to join us". . . so it had to be something well thought through, reasonable and all, but also crucially polite and playful. (Edgar, interview, January 18, 2014, British Library, London)

Edgar had learned about similar protests during his studies in London, UK, for a Master's degree in Development Studies. When he started CpT in his mid-thirties, he was teaching at the aforementioned Jesuit university. In 2010, he moved to London, where he is currently working as a lecturer in the same department in which he gained his Master's degree. CpT's creative interventions in public spaces inspired other collectives to carry out similar stunts.

Heliodoro was one of Toma-la Ciudad's organizers. Having achieved a Master's degree in Development Studies in Germany, he worked as a consultant for various government bodies. He explained to me how Toma-la Ciudad grew out of frustration about a perceived lack of new recruits among activist groups. Several friends thought about organizing a showcase of activist groups in order to provide motivation for more participation. One of them approached Marcela, the then-recently appointed director of Guadalajara's City Museum (Museo de la Ciudad), to ask if an exhibition would be possible. As an architect who had recently returned to Mexico after studying for a Master's degree in Spain, Marcela was well regarded among activists for her efforts to preserve local heritage buildings. The City Museum hosted a permanent exhibition of Guadalajara's history since precolonial times and also reserved an area for temporary exhibitions that often focused on the city's architecture. Marcela agreed to host the collective exhibition, but warned the organizers that there was no budget to assist them. Thus, each participating group raised funds and collected materials to hold their exhibition: they contributed ideas, resources, and speakers for other events. Toma-la Ciudad included twelve evening events in the museum with documentary showings and "debates" on various topics, which proved to be popular and well attended.

Each participating group had creative freedom over its own part of the exhibition. On Toma-la Ciudad's blog, organizers defined their aims as follows: "Taking the city is making it our own, is unmasking the lies that snatch it from us . . . exposing it to the sun so that the truth airs out and takes a stroll in [the] streets, which makes us more fraternal and more worthy of being happy."[2] Some groups sought to stir emotions in order to trigger a sense of affective solidarity

Figure 3 *Installation of plastic cars by CpT for Toma-la Ciudad, City Museum, September 21, 2013.*
Source: Photo by Raúl Acosta.
[This figure appears in color in the online issue]

(Jasper 2011). One example was from a collective called White Bicycle (Bicicleta blanca), which adapted an initiative known in the US, where they started, and Europe as "ghost bikes" (Margry and Sanchez-Carretero 2011): when a cyclist dies in a traffic accident, activists take a bicycle, paint it white, and hang it on a post close to where the accident occurred. It is a roadside memorial (MacConville 2010) combined with a protest against government policies (Dobler 2011). This collective's exhibit was a white bicycle with a text explaining that it was "a symbol of denunciation in the city: it denounces the insecurity, inequality, and exclusion to which a vulnerable and numerous group is condemned: cyclists."

Other groups sought to offer more abstract critiques of urban life. These addressed both government policies and urban dwellers' practices. One example was Ciudad para Todos' exhibit, which consisted of hundreds of small, plastic cars laid out on one of the museum's patios (see Figure 3). They evoked Guadalajara's frequent traffic jams. Marcela told me one evening in her living room,

> Because [the exhibition] coincided with the rainy season, and there were heavy rains, many of the plastic cars detached from their original places and ended up clogging the drain, in the [patio's] center; so there would be a whirl of cars . . . so this was also food for thought about nature putting you in your place even when you don't want it . . . as happens every year when Guadalajara's streets flood, bringing traffic to a halt. (Marcela, interview, December 11, 2013, Colonia Americana)

Marcela added that, for her, "this reflection was one of the most powerful." One of the museum guides told me this exhibition was the most popular among visitors,

and I noticed that a group of teenagers (probably secondary students around fourteen years old) engaged with it for a longer time than they contemplated the other exhibits.

Another exhibit offered a poignant critique of the city's sidewalks. It consisted of red and gray checkered mosaics, which were characteristic of the city center's sidewalks. A line of mosaics in good condition was fixed on the wall, and was connected to a similar but longer line of cracked and broken ones on the floor. Above the installation, a text drew an analogy between the exhibit and the city's sidewalks, and the current state of Santa Tere's "social tissue," and the group's efforts to improve it. Santa Tere is a central neighborhood (*barrio*) that lies close to the border between the west and east sides of Guadalajara. It is known as a key area for commerce because of its numerous traditional stores and large weekly market—all of which are visited by thousands of people from both the city and the surrounding region. In recent years, the barrio has gone through initial stages of gentrification, as it has become a preferred living area for artists, students, and young professionals.

The text on the wall read: "We recover Santa Tere's floor and mosaic to re-build it: a symbolic, therapeutic, conciliatory act. We will bring the 'barrio' together" (my translation). This installation was done by a community project called Mejor Santa Tere (Better Santa Tere), which was set up by a CpT activist with funding from the Canadian university where he had undertaken his undergraduate and Master's degrees. Among other activities, his projects included restoring public spaces and community gardening workshops. The cracked mosaics of his installation for Toma-la Ciudad are familiar to anyone who has walked the streets of Guadalajara, and has been forced to confront the difficulties involved in navigating the badly maintained sidewalks. With this and other exhibits, activists sought to generate reflection among viewers by adding significance to something that urban dwellers experience every day, such as the state of the sidewalks.

In the context of Toma-la Ciudad, activists often explained that their aim was to open the eyes of others to the harsh realities they had learned to see. Quite a few of them shared with me their crucial moments of awakening as regards the state of the world around them and their decision to modify their behavior in order to actively change their realities. For example, María told me the following over a cup of tea one afternoon: "I used to drive my car in Tampico, my home city, but only after starting to study in Guadalajara did I start to think about the collective impact of automobile use." She added, "Now I cycle everywhere, or I use public transport." When I met María, she was in her mid-twenties and worked as a consultant helping construction firms to make more "sustainable" buildings (energy efficient, with better water management, and a smaller environmental footprint). In her free time, she was an active member of CpT and Femibici. Every time I met her, I noticed how adamant she was about transmitting an empowering

message to anyone who would listen. "I learned from early on, perhaps in the Girl Guides (or Girl Scouts) . . . that we could change things, do things better," she told me. Her attitude was a good example of the aim that Toma-la Ciudad expressed as a collective, as it promoted the "need to take action" both to avoid accumulating problems and to provide solutions. Over a long conversation in a central café, María shared with me her frustration at people who behaved as if there was no need to change things. But she was optimistic, adding that just as she had learned, others could learn too:

> I think these last six months have been the most significant, I mean, I've passed on to . . . I don't know, being more active; and I like it . . . I think we all at Femibici first focused on cycling, and nobody was a feminist, or just a few were . . . but now we all are [feminists], because you notice . . . that is, you really evolve.[3] I have learned a lot from all our activities. I think I've had none that didn't count. (María, interview, November 24, 2013, Casa Clavigero)

María's allusion to "conversion" exemplifies an underlying religious tone among many activists who referred to sleeping masses who needed to be woken. As an absorbing and meaningful set of practices, beliefs, and ideas, activism has been termed "functional religion" (Jamison et al. 2000). What I noticed among several interviewees, however, went beyond functional religion, as their practice of activism was not merely ritualized and at the center of their aims, but they also used it to refer to a transcendental sense of justice that could be reached. This was partly the influence of liberation theology that was followed by several of those involved. One example is Juan—considered a natural leader by other activists— whose activism derives from immersion in a milieu defined by progressive Jesuits. He not only studied in the local Jesuit school and university, but his uncle is a priest located in the higher in echelons of the Mexican Society of Jesus congregation. In Guadalajara, members of this Catholic order are known to follow liberation theology, combining its pedagogy with efforts to spur local civil society to action (Shefner 2008). Liberation theology applies a constructivist method to promote an acute perception of injustices and the possibility that one can fight them. A key idea behind activists' actions was variously but consistently expressed to me in interviews: if urban dwellers do not understand what they experience every day as something they can influence, or if they do not think it is worth their while, they simply do not get involved in efforts to change it and fall into a sense of hopelessness. To a great extent, therefore, activists sought not merely to provide what they considered "knowledge" about the city's problems and their own solutions, but to situate the onlooker in her/his own context to resignify her/his own experiences as not only problematic but also improvable. In other words, the goal is to instill hope.

Figure 4   *Periciclistas, installation alluding to the difficulties cyclists face traversing the Periférico (the background video projection did not work at the time of the visit), September 21, 2013.*
Source: Photo by Raúl Acosta.
[This figure appears in color in the online issue]

Many of Toma-la Ciudad's exhibits were elaborate and provocative. One example was a large cutout print of an individual on his bicycle, with a background projection of footage of cyclists on the Periférico, a twelve-lane ring road that is difficult for cyclists to navigate (see Figure 4). The accompanying text highlighted the risks some cyclists take in their daily commutes because they are invisible to drivers. Other exhibits were merely informative, such as the numerous wall tattoos (large stickers) that were exhibited throughout the museum, which comprised texts and infographics on various topics: the environment, urban agriculture, marginal groups, cultural production, social movements, and citizen participation, to name but a few. The stickers included QR codes for visitors to scan with their smartphones, which would give them further information on Toma-la Ciudad's blog.

Using props, images, and ideas to address experiences of the city, activists sought to establish a connection with the viewer. As Heliodoro noted in an interview, "A problem is perpetuated when people don't even imagine it could be solved." Of course, part of their effort was to present specific aspects of urban life as problems. This was at the core of what was shared by people who identified themselves as a community. Using a popular museum, Toma-la Ciudad's organizers facilitated the promotion of a vision of the city through the work of those seeking to change it. The museum registered more than five thousand visitors during the exhibition and events, making Toma-la Ciudad the most attended exhibition in 2013. There were numerous reports in newspapers and on the radio, with activists often appearing as talk show guests to explain aspects of the exhibition.

With their interventions, exhibition, and declarations to media, activists sought to communicate how others experience the city. This is where intersubjectivity played a crucial role.

Intersubjective Activism

An individual's experience of the world informs her/his agency. The mere act of perception entails an active engagement with one's surroundings and oneself (Noë 2004). Every social interaction is, therefore, an embodied (Csordas 1994, 1990) encounter of experience-based agency, built on negotiated forms of understanding and interpreting the world. Phenomenological approaches to social interactions have shed light on how experiences of the world can be classified as pre-reflexive (which Schutz terms "prephenomenal" [1970] and Merleau-Ponty, "preobjective" [2012]) and reflective, the latter arising, "when we take up theoretical attitudes toward our own and others' actions" (Desjarlais and Throop 2011:88). The accumulated and shared practical knowledge that we accrue through reflective social interactions helps build a collective sense of the present and future, that is, it assists us in communally formulating an understanding of how the world is and how it can be. This understanding is central to activism.

Most activists I spoke to referred to their own conversion process—their decision to become actively engaged in modifying the world around them—as a key moment in their lives when information about problems was linked with a sense of potential influence being within their grasp. This awakening compelled them to actively "do something." While there is a degree of reflexive decision-making that leads individuals to become activists—due to exposure to information or specialized knowledge—a crucial element that María and others emphasize is how their feelings toward everyday practices or routines changed. This modification points to an embodied reflection that is gained through collaboration or confrontation with others. As Armando, a CpT activist in his late twenties, told me, "One can be invited or pushed into activism, but ultimately one decides to join or not."

Anthropologists are increasingly interested in understanding subjectivity and intersubjectivity (Biehl et al. 2007a). As a result, they are paying special attention to cognitive, affective, and performative markers: "Anthropology . . . understands subjective life by analysing the symbolic forms—words, images, institutions, behaviors—through which people actually represent themselves to themselves and to one another" (Biehl et al. 2007b:7). As social beings, human existence is itself relational (Toren 2000): "In a very real way, we are in part made by those with whom we are in contact" (Bloch 2012:33). This interactive crux is precisely what is said to be the focus of social anthropological research: "The smallest entity studied by social anthropologists is not an individual, but a relationship between two. In other words, the mutual relationship between two persons may be seen as the

smallest building-block of society" (Eriksen 1995:38). In cities, this interaction is most evident in the act of dwelling (Scholte 1976), not only in living quarters—such as "self-built houses" (Klaufus 2000)—but also through the shaping of its collective form. Intersubjectivity thus plays a wide-reaching role that is not limited to the private sphere and which gives shape to the configuration of social assemblages.

Many activists involved in Toma-la Ciudad advocated for modifications to the built environment to provide better infrastructures for pedestrians and cyclists. They also promoted changes in behaviors and practices, especially among automobile, bus, and truck drivers. The fact that they directed their pleas not at the government, but at the urban population at large, constitutes a provocation to embed a shared sense of responsibility for the state of things. The idea of reappropriating the city is in tune with a recent critical approach to urban studies, in which it is argued that a city is "not just inhabited but . . . is produced through that inhabiting" (McFarlane 2011:651).

For some participating groups, what undergirded their work was a desire to promote a sense of active citizenship. In Mexico's public sphere, the concept of citizenship is overwhelmingly present as a signifier of both inclusion and participation in the polity (Holston 2008). During most of the seventy-year single-party regime, government decisions appeared to process public opinion only through its clientelist networks. Since the early 1990s, numerous civil society groups have pushed for influence in public decision-making (Fox 1994). These groups—in which many academics participate—have used the scholarly and policymaking resurgence of the concepts of civil society and citizenship (Gellner 1994; Oldfield 1990). This development has paralleled the rise of neoliberalism here: the state withdraws and encourages the participation of civil society in the provision of public services. Some of the groups involved in Toma-la Ciudad can be considered part of a wave of political entrepreneurship that befits neoliberal aims. Two examples are the Colectivo Ecologista de Jalisco, which has advocated for environmental policies for decades; and Guadalajara 2020, formed by business leaders wishing to improve the city's image and quality of life. However, the formation of an agentive citizenship also addresses historical wrongs. Throughout Latin America, vernacular notions of citizenship have been fashioned to attend to regional histories and conflicts (Yashar 2005). "Acts of citizenship" (Isin and Nielsen 2008) have been created alongside increased affluence in Latin America, which provided swaths of its population with enough economic muscle to push for political gains (García Canclini 2003). These individuals comprised a growing proportion of urban dwellers who had enough resources to aspire to a better quality of life and who were sufficiently frustrated by government officials' unfulfilled promises to take action. The activists I encountered came from such a group. Their recently discovered

political agency led them to invite all urban dwellers to put their citizenship into practice.

Toma-la Ciudad organizers used the last panel to situate the activist milieu they represented in Guadalajara's history by directly challenging what activists considered a dominant narrative regarding the local population as passive and apathetic. Heliodoro explained to me: "we planned our last dialogue to be about Guadalajara as a revolutionary city, so we invited people to tell its history as opposition to the center [Mexico City], and how it had sought its own path . . . to see ourselves beyond the apathy that we accuse ourselves of having." This meant presenting a historical revision that summarized events over centuries, and included guerrilla efforts in the 1970s, as well as more recent events. Juan, who participated in the panel alongside academics and other activists, told me about an audience member's comment that made a lasting impression on him:

> There was this guy [in the audience] who had been part in the 1970s of the [leftwing] guerrillas, and he said: "we got it wrong . . . what you are doing is the way to go; violence is not the solution, it did not help us at all." And that for me was really strong, to hear an opinion like that from someone who perhaps suffered even torture for opposing the government a few decades ago. (Juan, interview, November 22, 2013, Casa Clavigero)

Reminders of revolutionary struggles in the city's past provided attendants with fresh insights into the semiauthoritarian regime that Mexico has lived with for decades (Gillingham and Smith 2014). For many Mexicans used to hearing about violent repressions or co-optations of dissent, speaking up was not an option. Several activists told me about their initial fears of blatantly criticizing the government. Indeed, when CpT started, a few of its members were threatened with violence by police officers during some of their protests. Although the violent acts against them never occurred, it remained in their minds, particularly since older activists or their parents had shared stories of state violence against them during instances of dissent. By the time Toma-la Ciudad took place, however, numerous activist groups had been practicing similar interventions for years without being repressed. It is possible that the lingering threat of violence informed the way this new generation of activists moved forward. For example, the newer activists may have deliberately crafted messages that eschewed strong language and disparaging remarks against government policies and projects. The fear of violence perhaps also caused activists to develop strategies that relied on provoking nonreflective visceral reactions to everyday challenges among urban dwellers. On the one hand, this phenomenological turn made their practices relevant to our current age of touch and feel, where people seek experiences more than things. On the other hand, by promoting a different understanding of familiar experiences, activists fostered a shared sense of possibility that was not there before.

Conclusion

When urban dwellers are caught up in a routine, repeating their quotidian practices, they experience the city in which they live as having limited physical and social spaces. As much as things change, either through their own personal development or decisions (changing jobs, moving) or through external circumstances (new roads, amenities), their views of what could be different depend on their perception of their surroundings. Who gets to decide what a problem is? Or what a potential solution might look like? With their interventions and media strategies, activists involved in Toma-la Ciudad called for observers to see their city in a different light, as well as to imagine how it could improve. These efforts were not carried out exclusively with texts or spoken declarations. Instead, they were delivered using objects, photographs, and enacted interventions with short descriptions in order to produce reactions among spectators. Activists involved in the exhibition and related events thus demanded that urban dwellers should not only recall and reconsider their own experiences, but also, crucially, that they should imagine the experiences of others with whom they shared the city. Activists therefore used intersubjectivity as a channel for persuasion. In order to gain support for their efforts, activists required urban dwellers to reflect on their experiences of the city in a different way. Familiar places, routes, and spaces could then become full of possibility.

In naming this process "intersubjective activism," what is sought here is to combine the value of imagination with the sensory bodily perceptions of the everyday. Persuasion is thus not limited to rational arguments, but includes affective perceptions and embodied reactions. Through this combination, activists put forward potential solutions to identified problems. Public performances that highlight the difficulty of crossing a street are examples of communicational experiences. These acts and others like them by no means guarantee that onlookers will agree with activists' proposals or ideas, but they do represent an open-ended process that adds layers of signification to practices and reflections. By challenging others' simplified views on people's lifeworlds, activists advance critical debates on embodied forms of political power, one perception at a time.

Notes

[1]Statistical data about class is difficult to collect because definitions vary among Mexican government agencies (Conapo 2012; INEGI 2011). An association of private polling and merchandising intelligence firms have established a scale according to criteria that range from goods possessed and housing situation, to savings and future perspectives (AMAI 2017). This measure has been adopted by some government offices. According to this definition, people in the highest strata (A/B) are considered to be able to meet all their needs and have funds to invest in their future; those in the C+/C categories have sufficient income to meet their daily needs but have limited savings and means for future

planning. Those who are in the D+, D, and E categories lack some basic services and face uncertainties in their daily lives. According to this scale, in 2008 the middle class comprised 39.9 percent of Guadalajara's population, 28.6 percent of Mexico City's, and 26.9 percent of Monterrey's. These statistics were provided by the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales (SC), in a private communication on June 2, 2017.

[2] My translation of "Tomar la ciudad es hacerla nuestra, es desenmascarar las mentiras que nos la arrebatan, y sacarla a asolear para que la verdad se ventile y se pasee entre sus calles, que eso nos hace más fraternos y más dignos de ser felices" (TlC 2013).

[3] "Evolucionas muy cañón."

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