



GLYPHS IN THE SUBWAY
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Story editor & maps
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Available at
<https://youtu.be/ypTEaCqRogg>

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for limited distribution
and no commercial purposes.

1. HOOK | EXT. WILDEBEESTS MIGRATING - DAY

Do you like Serengeti grasslands?
Imagine that, in this very place,
a 22-million inhabitant city is settled.

(Freeze frame:
the head of a great gnu
Off Screen (OS):
The mooing of a wildebeest.
Then, squawks of birds)

2. OUTCOME | INT. PLANTS AND HUMMINGBIRD - DAY

I am Francisco López-Ruiz, a Mexican
architect and art historian. In this 30-
minutes video, I will show you my current
research about an exceptional visual design
output.

(The rest of the video will present
still images and footage;
with occasional
insert shots of presenter)

In Mexico City, every subway, urban train
and metrobús station is represented by a
distinctive graphic symbol.

This original set of emblems is unique in
the world, because it embraces cultural
diversity. You will notice how Mexico
City's public transportation signage is
related with attitudes that might improve
the quality of life of many people.

I will present the interconnection between
Pre-Hispanic Visual Studies and
contemporary Western visuality.

And you will witness the biggest environmental crime in the history of humankind. Mexico City is a megalopolis that lays on the dead body of an ancient lake.

3. INVENTION OF IMAGOTYPES

In 1969, Mexico City opened its first three subway lines, designing an imagotype for every station.

An imagotype is the combination of an emblem and a word. In Mexico City's signage, the word is the name of the station, and the image evokes the essence of that place.

In 1967 something wonderful happened. During the excavation of Pino Suárez station, a circular temple dedicated to Quetzalcóatl, the god of wind and wisdom, was discovered.

José María Pino Suárez was a political martyr of the Mexican Revolution. His name prevailed for referring the subway station, but the imagotype alluded the Mexica temple.



In this manner, the graphic universe of emblems used by the subway network tells the impressive cultural heritage of a 700-years-old city.

The design processes at Mexico City privileged fieldwork, innovation and creativity.

CINEMATIC SEQUENCE
1min, 15sec
Imagotypes & Urban Context
Mexico City

1967's hit
Mike Laure
La banda borracha
2' - 3'15"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WclKOKAYNGQ>

)

Mexico City has now a visual system formed by over 500 imagotypes. Devoted anonymous professionals have designed these emblems for half a century. This outstanding signage highlighted Nahuatl toponyms, resignified Pre-Hispanic codices, and woke up mysterious, wild gods.

4. THE RESEARCH

In recent years, I have worked in Mexico City studying over 100 imagotypes and the realities they connote.

I have used multidisciplinary approaches for engaging the fascinating possibilities related to this visual system. I am interested at the crossroads of Pre-Hispanic Visual Culture, Western Art History theories and contemporary design practices.

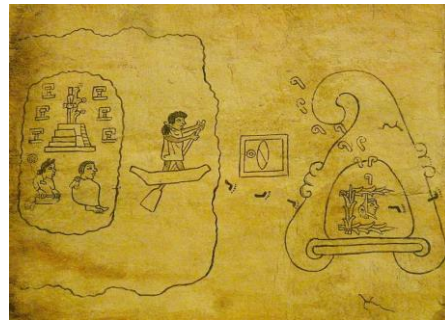
Sometimes imagotypes allude to the links of Mexico City with the lakes that existed until recently.

I strongly believe this remarkable set of emblems is a valuable cultural heritage, useful to promote a shared, higher sense of belonging in Mexico City. My research is an

Mexica glyphs are paintings that must be read.



Tira de la Peregrinación is a beautiful codex that narrates the heroic peregrination of the Mexica people as they wanted it to be told.



A priest navigates from the island and reaches a sacred mountain. Huitzilopochtli talks.

(She-Nahuatl)

huitzi hummingbird
opóchtli southern, left sided, sacred

Huitzilopóchtli
[wi:tˈsilo:ˈpo:tʃtli]

Hummingbird | Left - Sacred
Left-Handed Hummingbird
Hummingbird of the Left

(She-Nahuatl)

coltic curvature
-huacan locative suffix: "abundance"

Colhuacan
[ko:l'wa?ka:n]
At the Distorted Hill
At the Magical Hill

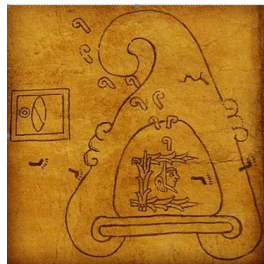
The Solar God
Our Holly, Driven Lord

Huitzilopochtli speaks sacred words; that's the reason curls turn to the left.



The god urges Aztecs to find a Promised Land. *Tira de la peregrinación* will tell how they managed to find that place in 22 folios.

In 2012, Culhuacán subway station was inaugurated. It is not the mythical place of the beginning of *Tira de la peregrinación*, but a real site with the same etymology. The glyph *Colhuacan* also appears at the end of the codex, without the sacred cavern. If imagotypes tell the history of Mexico City, this might be the very first piece.



The emblem alludes to the conceptual birth of the Mexica: the name that Huitzilopochtli gave to former Aztecs.

Line 12 links very poor southern areas to the rest of Mexico City. Before subway transportation, a person that lived in Culhuacán could spend three hours for arriving downtown: now this trip can be covered in 45 minutes.



The Culhuacan imagotype remembers the identity of Iztapalapa: a two-million inhabitants municipality. It is difficult to imagine that this place was once a beautiful peninsula, between the lakes of Texcoco and Xochimilco.

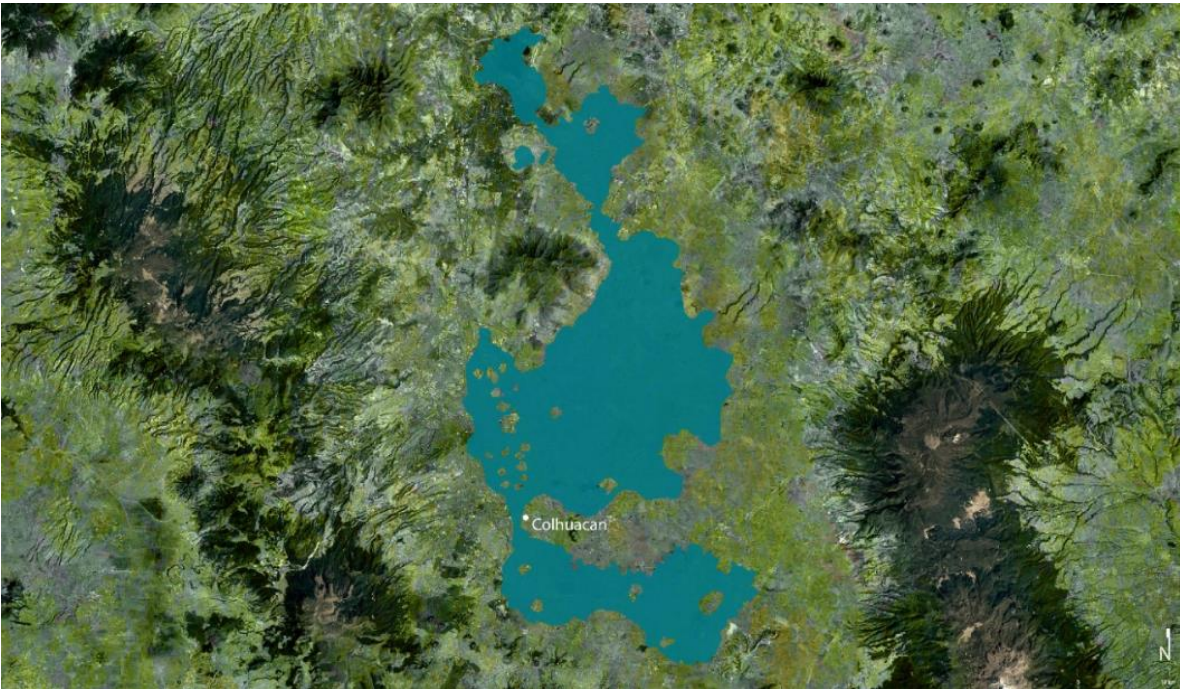
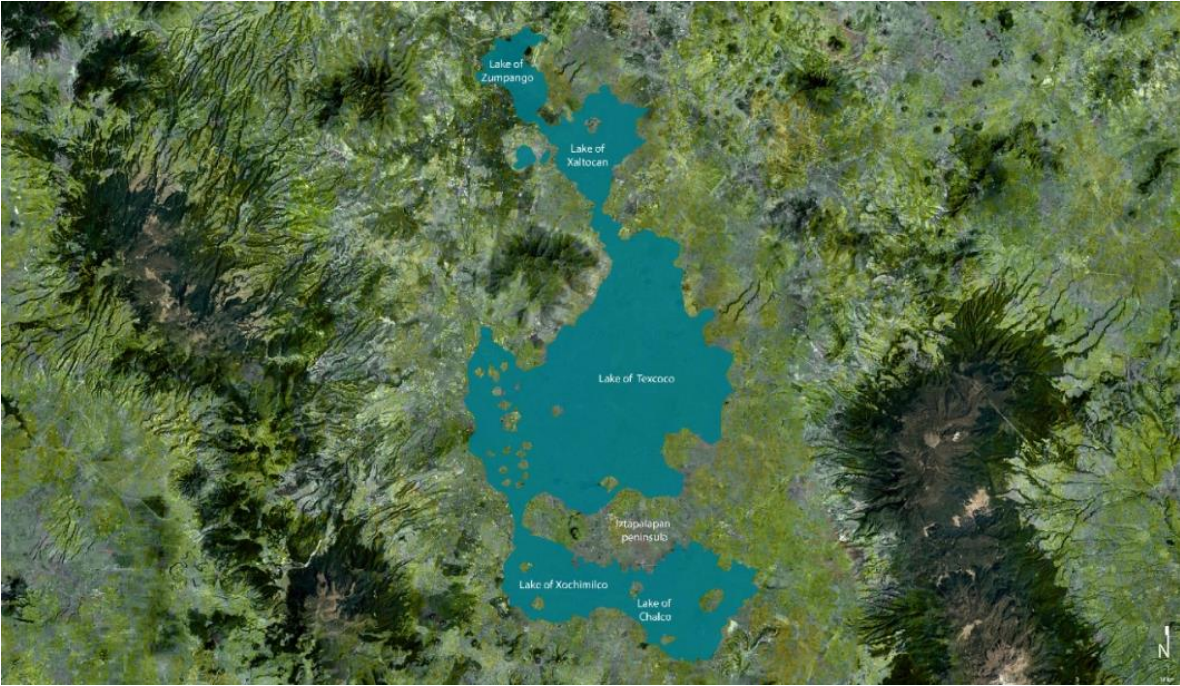
MAP 1

The world
North America
Mexico

Then The Five Lakes
of the basin of Mexico.

Appears Colhuacan

ca 1300 Colhuacan
(and the Iztapalapan peninsula)



6. GLYPHS | SUBWAY

(A lullaby in Nahuatl)

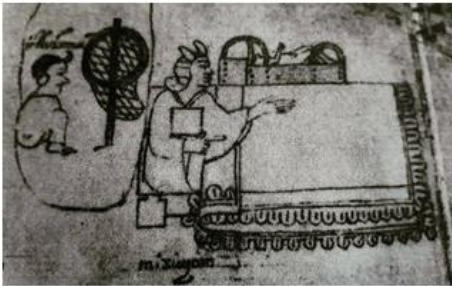
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naT4wnQFS6o&t=61s>

(Spirit of The Lakes)

The Codex Azcatitlan is a hybrid between two worlds: it is based on Pre-Hispanic visuality, but also has Western concepts as alphabetic notations and three-dimensional figures.

Mixiuhcan was a town dedicated to fishing. The Mexica were running away from powerful enemies. During their escape, a woman gave birth.

The hairstyle of the mother, with two beautiful horns, and an elegant *tochómitl*, elaborated with rabbit fur, indicate that the baby is a princess. The realistic 16th Century cradle emulates Renaissance perspective.



The imagotype of the subway station reinterprets the original glyph from a contemporary design sensibility.

(She-Nahuatl)

mixihui to gave birth
-**can** locative suffix: "the place where"

Mixiuhcan
[mi:ʃi'wʔka:n]

The Place Where the Princess Was Born

(MAP 2 Mexico City basin
and three cities.
Appears **Mixiuhca**)

7. NATIONAL EMBLEM | MEXICO-TENOCHTITLAN

After decades of suffering and fighting, the Mexica finally found an eagle devouring a serpent. The islanders that once peregrinated from Aztlan, settled in another island—far away in the south—to create there the most powerful empire in ancient Mexico.

This fascinating symbol is the national emblem of Mexico. It is also the Zocalo subway station imagotype, standing for the symbolic heart of Mexico City.



Some modern Mexicans believe that their national emblem represent the fight of good and evil, perhaps recalling the Book of Genesis. The Pre-Columbian Mexica probably imagined a dualistic complement of forces. We are not either sure about the meaning of the name of the city (nor the country).

(She-Nahuatl)

Mexico

[me'ʃi:ko]

In the Navel of the Moon?

**At the Heart of the
Agave-Shaped Mountains?**

**In the Place of Our Holly,
Driven Lord of War?**

MAP 3 Adds

1519 Mexico-Tenochtitlan

200,000 people

One of the greatest cities of its time



8. QUETZALCÓATL | BIOLOGICAL HOT SPOT

Pre-Hispanic gods are complex and subtle. As well as people, gods are not simply "good" or "evil". Mesoamerican worldview is interdependent and full of multiple nuances.

Pre-Hispanic gods never represent just "things", but phenomena. Flora and fauna, in Mesoamerican cultures, are never seen just as "assets". Mexica gods articulate the extremely intricated functioning of the universe.

(Spirit of The Lakes)

Ancient gods are forces of nature.

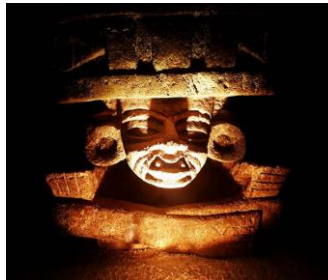
(*Huehuetl and teponaxtli:
Wild Gods*)

(She-Nahuatl)

Hue *old*
Huehue *old-old*
téotl *god*

Huehuetéotl
['we:we:tɔ́]

**Our Very Precious Father
The Primary Source of Fire
The Center of All Directions**



(She-Nahuatl)

tlālli earth
tecuhli Lord

Tlaltecuhli
[t͡ɬa:l.te:kʷ.t͡ɬi]

**Our Lady / Our Lord of Nourishment
Fertile Monster of Earth**



(She-Nahuatl)

tlālli earth
octli nectar

Tláloc
[ˈt͡ɬa:lok]

**Path Beneath the Earth
He Who Is Made of Earth
Our Giver; The Ever Green One**



(She-Nahuatl)

quetzal
cóatl serpent

Quetzalcóatl
[ketˈsaiˈkowa:t͡ɬ]

Quetzal-Feathered Serpent
Wind, Wisdom and Learning



Carrier of Life
Destructor of the Worlds

Soul-breath of people
Sweet mell of flowers
Fragrant incense
Humidity of earth
Flow of time
Cycles of ages
Clouds in the air
Winds of creation...

...and thunderstorms,
calamities and tempests



(*Sound of the wind. Sea snail shells*)

Perhaps Quetzalcóatl was initially a talented priest who later become a god. Maybe he was an ancient governor who abandoned his people. Or perhaps he was always a god and incarnated as a prophet to prevent humankind. Anyway, *The Quetzal-Feathered Serpent* was betrayed and defeated, humiliated and scorned.

(Spirit of The Lakes)

Quetzalcóatl promised to return from the Eastern shores bringing a new order.

(Transition)

There are solar birds, as the graceful hummingbird and the fierce eagle, related to Huitzilopóchtli. There are also birds of the wind; those related to Quetzalcóatl, like the quetzal itself.

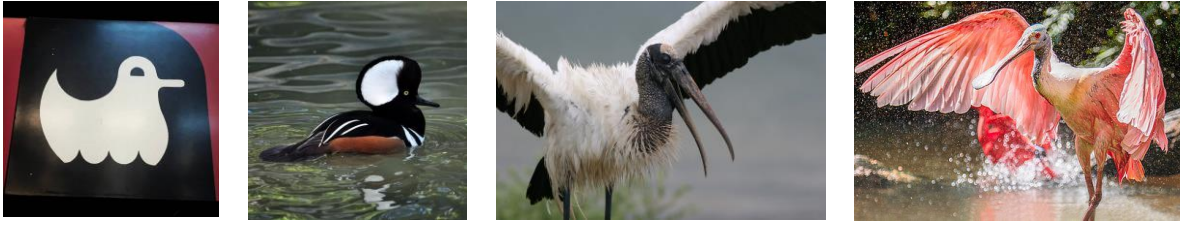
Half a millennium ago, the basin of Mexico hosted one of the most stunning habitats of insects, crustaceans, fishes, reptiles, amphibians and mammals in the whole world. The Five Lakes of Mexico were a hotspot of biodiversity.

Yet, the most impressive biological agents in The Lakes were not mammals, but birds. In a spectacular phenomenon, millions of birds arrived at the beginning of autumn without devastating the environment.

(Spirit of The Lakes)

The Lakes had an exceptional capacity for life.

Over 100 species of birds prospered exclusively in the water bodies of the basin of Mexico.



(Spirit of The Lakes)

Diving ducks, wild geese and black cormorants coexisted with aningas and beautiful scarlet ibices.

The shores of The Lakes fed cranes, ospreys, storks, roseate spoonbills, bitterns, herons, gulls and gallaretas.

The aquatic ecosystem was completed by surrounding woodlands. It's no easy task to imagine the overall inventory of the bird fauna: hawks and eagles, owls and ravens, quails and wild turkeys.

Tzopilotl.

Nightingales, flycatchers and woodpeckers.

Multitudes of passerines.

The basin of Mexico was a Winged Lake, dressed in dense plumage, singing with the wind.

The biological richness of The Lakes inspired a completely original civilization and a striking worldview.

9. SHADOW OF A GHOST

CINEMATIC SEQUENCE

+1 minute

The Agony of The Lakes

British heavy metal band Black Sabbath

War Pigs-300 version

0'00" - to the bridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNf5-cxCtSs>

(Spirit of The Lakes)

In 1519, ambitious Hernán Cortés and his army landed in the East. Their colossal floating houses carried 400 Spanish soldiers, 80 fantastic, unbeatable beasts and 20 canyons.

The Mexica doubted: maybe if the white bearded men were offered gifts and gold, they might leave... But the name *Quetzalcóatl* was whispered by the wind...

The prophecy--and horses and gunpowder and famine and smallpox and rivalry of dozens of vassal states and hatred of millions of people--did the rest.

Spaniards won control of Mexico-Tenochtitlan with a final naval battle.

(The previous MAPS we saw:
Planet Earth, North America,
Mexico and The Lakes,
furiously showing.
Now, two stories
progressively imbricate:
1) The Lakes shrink
2) And insane urbanization
pervades the basin)

MAP 4

1521 Defeat of **Mexico-Tenochtitlan**
200,000 people

(Spirit of The Lakes)

Spanish urban planners built over 40 cities in a century: beautiful, sunny, well vented places.

MAP 5

1629 A 5-years flood
1637 Building of Nochistongo drainage
A Decimated City
20,000 people



1521 Defeat of **Mexico-Tenochtitlan**
200,000 people



1629 A 5-years flood
A Decimated City
20,000 people

(Spirit of The Lakes)

New cities were designed in accordance with humanism, Renaissance and the promise of a new order in a New World. But Spaniards didn't really understand The Lakes.

MAP 6

1900 Gran Canal de Desagüe
Mexico City
500,000 people

(Spirit of The Lakes)

What Spanish only dreamed, we--living Mexicans--have finally done. Mexico City has committed the most terrible environmental crime in the history of humankind.

MAP 7

1975 Deep Drainage
Mexico City
11 million people

(Spirit of The Lakes)

Now The Lakes are the shadow of a ghost.

*(Crash on The Lakes
Fusion of maps)*

(Chaos of contemporary Mexico City)

Tamales oaxaqueños, calientitos...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OofrI4ZT-Ns>

Fierro viejo que venda...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRMQt-j7474>

Car horns

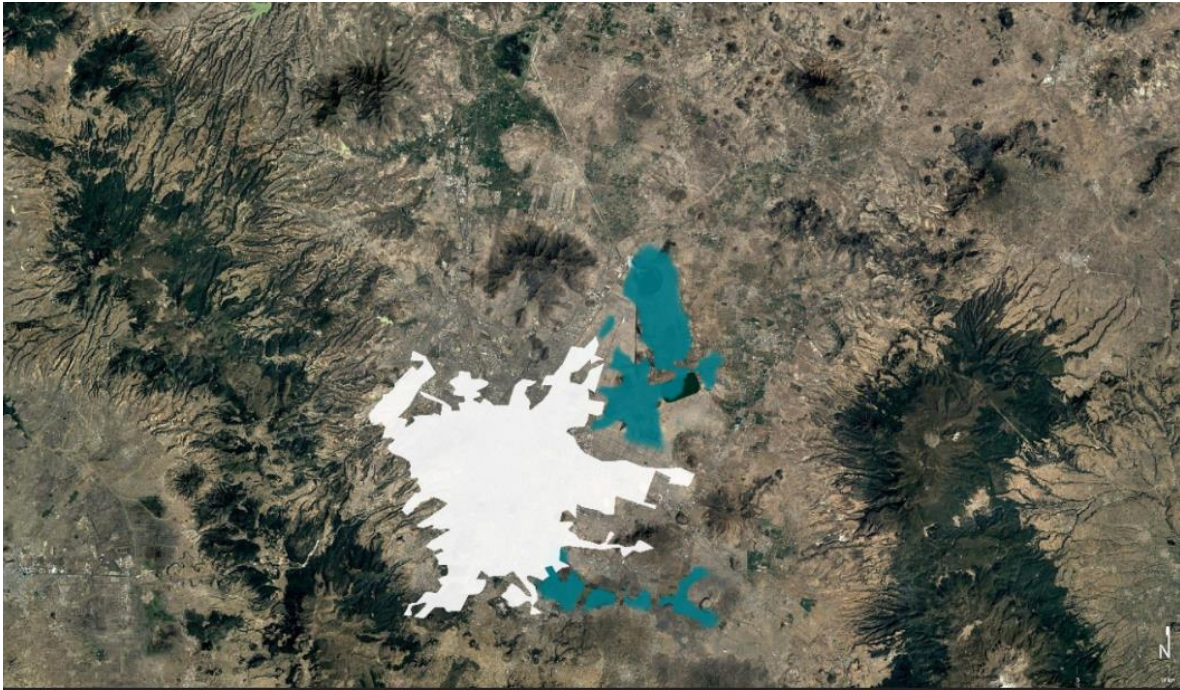
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErUqW4_OZQU

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=698uQHTmW3g>

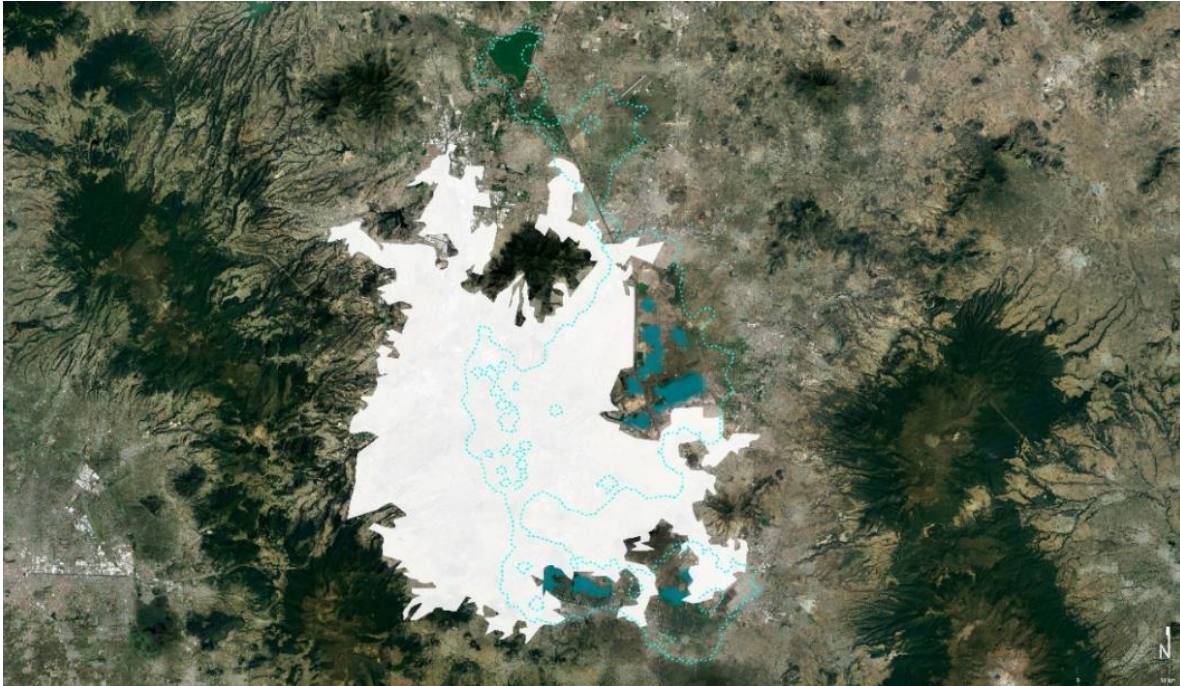
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXJ2FdDwBHE>

MAP 8

2020 **Metropolitan Area: Mexico City**
22 million inhabitants



1900 Gran Canal de Desagüe
Mexico City
500,000 people



2020 Metropolitan Area: Mexico City
22 million inhabitants

(Spirit of The Lakes)

Greatest Spanish-speaking city

Biggest city in the American hemisphere

**Most populous capital located over
7,200 above sea level**

**Mexico City is twice the population of
entire countries, such as Belgium, Greece,
Sweden or the Czech Republic.**

**22-million people twice the whole original
native population of both North American
and South American continents at the
arrival of European settlers.**

**Avenida de los Insurgentes is
20-miles in length.**

**Mexico City's metropolitan área
is 31 miles in diameter.**

**A sixth part of all Mexicans
live in Mexico City**

**Mexico City is four times the population of
countries such Norway, Finland, Costa Rica
or New Zealand.**

**Mexico City is vulnerable to floods, lack
of water, social unrest, air pollution,
sinking and earthquakes.**

**The Popocatépetl--an active volcano--is 37
miles downtown.**



10. XOCHIMILCO

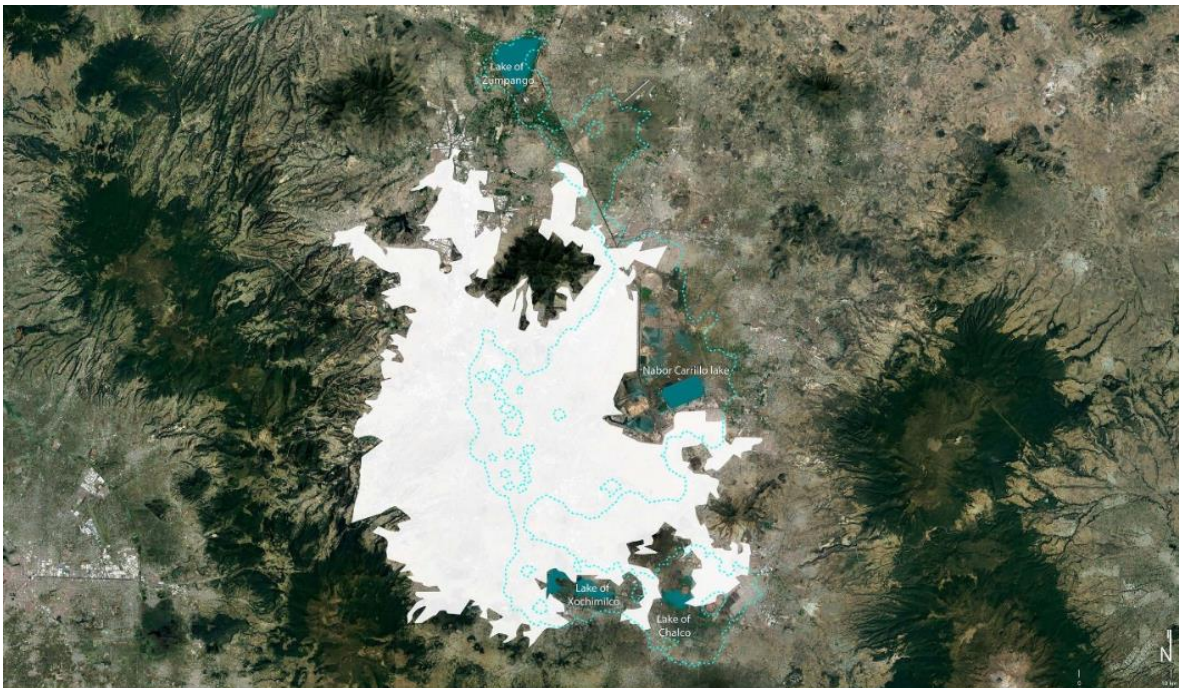
NORTH AMERICAN MAP (slowly)



North America is a funnel, and Mexico is the vortex that closes that triangle. Even with pollution and urban sprawl, the small remains of The Lakes in Mexico City still attract white herons, blue herons and even majestic pelicans.

MAP 9

(In the south, barely visible,
Xochimilco, Tlahuac and Chalco beat)



(She-Nahuatl)

xochi flower
milli sown fields
-co locative suffix

Xochimilco

[ʃo:tʃi'mi:lko]

The Place with the Sown Parcels

UNESCO World Heritage Site

11. XÓLOTL | AXÓLOTL

Xólotl is also the name of a god: the deform and coward twin of beautiful Quetzalcóatl. Xólotl rules life and death, renewal and inner transformation. Xólotl is evoked by humble creatures that dig the silt of the lakes.

(She-Nahuatl)

xólotl
[ˈʃolot͡ɬ]
monster



huexólotl
[weˈʃolot͡ɬ]
old monster, big monster



xoloitzcuintle
[ʃolo:its'kwi:ntle]
monster dog



axólotl
[a'ʃolo:tɔ̃l]
monster of water



Axólotl are endemic amphibians of the basin of Mexico. Surprisingly, they can reproduce as larvae. *Axólotl* also can regenerate entire parts of their body: the tail, the hands, even the heart and brain. The aspect of a friendly, ever-smiling alien has contributed to the wide popularity of this endangered species.

(Footage)

AXOLOTLÁN
Tour guides
Axólotl & chinampas

I met British journalist Megan Frye in a visit to Xochimilco in September 2019.

(Xochimilco images)

I was interested in the millennial, highly productive, intensive system of crops called *chinampas*.



(She-Nahuatl)

chinampa
[ˈʃolot͡ʃi]
Over the cultivated crops

The rest of the visitors (including a group of Czech students) wanted instead to know more about the preservation of *Ambystoma mexicanum*: the mysterious Monster of Water.

Mrs Frye published last November her piece about the Mexican “walking fish”. Her text was one of the most read BBC articles in 2019.



<http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20191110-mexico-citys-walking-fish>

Axólotl is present in visual manifestations abroad Mexico. There are two Pokémon characters based on *Ambystoma mexicanum*.

The Mexican government plans to print a new 50 pesos banknote with *Axólotl* in the reverse side.



Girls tailor puppets inspired by *Axólotl*, and boys want to be professional wrestlers for protecting these defenseless creatures.



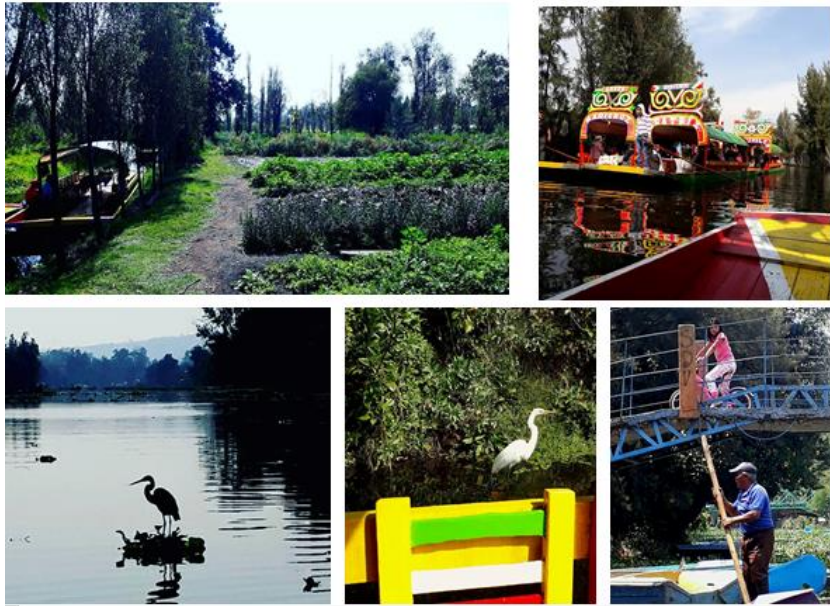
Ambystoma mexicanum—this tiny and resilient inhabitant of The Lakes—is switching the attention towards a forgotten ecosystem.



Axólotl is also a new, vibrant, transmuting symbol for many Mexicans. And of course, the *Creature of Water* also has an imagotype in the Mexico City's transportation system.

(Spirit of The Lakes)

The Lakes are not an enemy. Not anymore.



(Spirit of The Lakes)

In 1965, engineers Nabor Carrillo and Gerardo Cruickshank planned a parcial recovery of the Lake of Texcoco. A small fraction of the project was build.

In 2018, the Nabor Carrillo Lake started a drying up process for building a new airport—finally cancelled.

It is vital to preserve the Nabor Carrillo Lake.

(Spirit of The Lakes)

In 1998, architects Teodoro González de León, Alberto Kalach and other experts proposed *Ciudad Futura*. This urban, environmental, social and economic proposal would have created a 50-miles coastline: a bay three times the size of Acapulco's.

Ciudad Futura has not been constructed.

12. THE SPIRIT OF THE LAKES

Let's imagine a person who lives for a hundred years and really loves Mexico City. At the beginning of her life, She would have enjoyed the city "where the air is clear".

Later, our heroin would have witnessed the barbaric combat of modern Mexico City against its own geological nature: the mutation of The Lakes into asphalt, dust and noise.

But She could remember the existence of a completely different, luminous, intense reality. She would be inspired by *Axólotl* to remember that The Lakes are not completely dead.

(Spirit of The Lakes)

Your Heart is the compass and the territory: the imaginary land populated by dreams and courage.

The place in which beautiful projects are first conceived.

If Axólotl can regenerate their hearts, change is possible. Best desires blossom with genuine persistence, drive and hope.

We would breathe the soft smell of wet earth. And smile..

Xólotl, the Mexica god of renewal, would be delighted.

(Fade Out)

13. ENDING CREDITS

To Quarantined Mexico City

CDMX

May 2020

Special thanks

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Mariana González de la Rosa
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Erika Zorrilla
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Main sources

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Footage

Great Migration River
BBC Earth, 2018

Hummingbirds Ultra Slow Motion
Nature's Invitation, 2016

Claxon de microbus
Humberto Vercetti, 2018

Soundtrack

La banda borracha
Mike Laure, 1967

Tenochtitlan: Huey Teocalli
"Templo Mayor"
Tlatoani, 2018

Canto a Coatlicue Tonanztin
(o como gusten llamarle)
Macuilli Mazatl, 2012

Aztec Drums of War
Pedro Ferraz, 2017

War Pigs, 300's Version
Black Sabbath, 2014

Pomme d'amour I
René Aubrey, 1997

Agárrate
Gloria Trevi, 1991