Over the last ten years, more people have taken up cycling in Mexico City and Guadalajara as a form of transportation than in previous decades. The stark increase in bicycle use in both cities has taken place on the back of a wave of activism through which numerous citizen groups have demanded improved infrastructures for cycling. These efforts have in turn counted with the support of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), development agencies and foundations, as well as other groups promoting sustainable transport within a broader agenda for environmental issues. Local governments have incorporated some demands as policies, and have built hundreds of kilometres of cycleways and other types of infrastructures. For cyclo-activists, however, what is most important is to promote the experiential discovery of the self and of the city that they claim cycling entails. This paper elaborates on what an approach from a phenomenological ethnography perspective entails for the study of how activists experience urban cycling, the interventions with which they aim to raise awareness among motorists, and in the manner in which they promote cycling itself. This approach is informed by Jackson’s ‘existential anthropology’ (2013) with particular attention to Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical project on phenomenological reasoning (Hass 2008). With these conceptual tools, I interpret activists’ evolving aspirations through increasingly sophisticated expertise as an exercise of ‘knowledge by acquaintance.’

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