
”I Prefer the Mall to My Home”: Collective Resistance Through the Material and Affective Appropriation of Space

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Abstract

This paper examines how platform-based delivery workers in Bogotá—many of them Venezuelan migrants—materially and affectively appropriate urban space as a form of collective resistance, offering insight into how spatial practices become a key terrain for challenging the logics of platform capitalism. Based on ten months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted primarily at a single site, which I refer to as *El Mall*, this study draws on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with food delivery workers. Over the course of five field visits between 2021 and 2025, I spent extended periods with workers while they waited for orders, accompanied them on pickups from restaurants, and rode with them during deliveries. While scholarship on *platform urbanism* has illuminated how digital platforms reshape cities—through mechanisms like ghost kitchens and the erosion of public social life—less attention has been paid to the embodied, spatial practices of platform workers themselves. In Bogotá, delivery workers are often viewed as out of place in public space, a perception rooted in neoliberal urban planning paradigms that prioritize order, cleanliness, and consumption (Salcedo and Lodoño Becerra, 2021).

This paper explores how, in defiance of such exclusionary logics, delivery workers reconfigure urban space through collective presence, informal routines, and practices of mutual support. I analyze how workers navigate the spatial logics imposed by the app—particularly the pressure to *enrutarse*, or “go where the app takes you” by chaining orders across the city—alongside practices of spatial anchoring and place-making. While many workers embrace mobility to maximize income, they also invest time and care into cultivating community around *El Mall*, transforming a space of transit and consumption into one of belonging, solidarity, and shared experience. These practices are not in conflict, but together reveal how workers respond to the instability of platform labor with both mobility and rootedness. By reframing *El Mall* as a space not only of work but of collective life-making and resistance, this paper contributes to conversations on digital labor, migrant precarity, and spatial justice. It shows how marginalized platform workers subtly contest their individualization and create alternative forms of urban attachment and community. As one interlocutor put it, “I prefer the mall to my home.”

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