

Chapter 7

Performing city transit

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In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes a “metaphor”—a bus or train. Stories could also take this noble name: Every day, they traverse and organize places...

Michel de Certeau

As de Certeau notes in the epigraph to this chapter, buses and trains can be excellent methods for making meaning out of the repetitions of our daily lives, for every Monday to Friday, in good or bad weather, the urban commuter takes city transit to work or to school. There are few other places in the city, where, if we must commute, we are forced into such close proximity to strangers for extended periods of time, where we are captive audience to advertising and to city streets going by outside the bus windows. We are subject to the smell of bodies, food, the mustiness of wet clothes on rainy days; we are forced to endure the rudeness of other people’s cell-phone conversations or too-loud music emanating through headphones. We can create our own bubbles to isolate the self from contact, through mobile media such as cell phones, MP3 players, and other handheld devices (Bissell 2009; Adey 2010; Bull 2000), or through print media such as the daily commuter papers (Straw 2007). Or, we can see the bus as a temporary zone of theater, where a community comes together for the length of time that one travels (Schechner 2003; Jensen 2010). The commute can be seen as simply transportation, a necessary dead time where nothing happens, or it can be a hectic rush to be endured and avoided if possible. It can also be “gift time” (Jain and Lyons 2008), a space for contemplation or enjoyment. It is the idea of “gift time” that I am interested in particularly, for as Ole B. Jensen (2009: 154) points out, pleasure is a less discussed element of mobility, but one that can provide a more meaningful approach to commuting as a life practice. In suggesting a move from “urban transport to urban travel,” he asks, “can infrastructures be understood and comprehended within the realm of aesthetic pleasure?”

The question of aesthetic pleasure within urban travel forms the basis of this essay. It revolves around the experience of commuting as “gift time” and also

“equipped time” (Jain and Lyons 2008), referring to the growing presence of mobile technologies that allow a commuter to control how time is spent while in transit. As cell phones, tablets, and other electronic devices become ubiquitous, they offer a great potential to bring out the pleasures of commuting, for they are uniquely able to interface with the city that then becomes a “hybrid space” (Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011). This chapter looks specifically at the in-between spaces of city transit as a liminal space of everyday ritual, a performance site of urban contact, and a hybrid mobile space through the use of locative media, in order to suggest some possibilities toward an aesthetics of mobility.

I begin with a brief methodologies section that situates my approach and frames my case study of city transit in Montréal. The following three sections look at how the spaces of the in-between are constructed, first as a liminal performative space where one transitions between personal and public roles, second as a space of performance and a site of possible engagement with fellow commuters, and, finally, as a hybrid space that can accumulate meaning toward a deeper sense of community and connection. In each section, I establish different elements of the commuting experience, before exploring how works of art and music interact with this experience. I focus specifically on the different kinds of artworks that have taken place within the Montréal transit network, with special attention to locative and mobile media art. In the concluding section, I sum up and discuss the impact of these site-specific urban transit projects, and argue that works of locative art are uniquely able to engage the commuter in a hybrid landscape in order to connect with, rather than disconnect from, the surrounding environment. I argue that mobile locative media art can be a major instigator of a move toward pleasure in urban travel.

Methodologies

As the main setting for my explorations, I draw upon Montréal’s public transit system—the *Société de transport de Montréal* (or STM). City transit is a central part of Montréal life. In 2010, the STM won the American Public Transportation Association Award as Outstanding Public Transportation System in North America (STM 2010b). According to the STM, 404.8 million trips were made in 2011; Montréalers took public transport 214 times that year, on average, compared to 188 times by Torontonians and to ninety-three times by residents of major US cities including Boston, Chicago, New York, Washington, Philadelphia and Seattle (STM 2012: 14). A full two-thirds of people who work or study in downtown Montréal commute via public transportation (Hefez 2010). The STM is perhaps exemplary for its integration of art into its network. For instance, a bus ticket or OPUS monthly pass will earn discounts off many of the city’s cultural events such as film festivals and museum days. The STM partners regularly with festivals such as the all-night arts event *Nuit Blanche*, when bus and metro services also remain open all night, and a number of artists have made works directly engaging the transit system as set and setting. The STM thus

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1 provides many opportunities to study the aesthetics of mobility and its interrela-
2 tions with mobile and locative technologies.

3 As a frequent user of the Montréal city transit system, I count myself among
4 those who “walk with” my subjects at the same time that I am reflexively also
5 my subject. I am an auto-ethnographer. At the same time, I look at my environ-
6 ment as an artist, with an eye on aesthetics, light, shadow, color. Through a kind
7 of “sociological stalking,” I observe my fellow commuters and my surroundings,
8 sometimes using video and audio to capture the atmosphere. I often record my
9 thoughts with the use of time-space diaries (Büscher *et al.* 2010). These are all
10 raw materials for my work. In my discussion of the art that I have encountered
11 and draw upon here, I use these mobile methods to help describe my experiences
12 and relate them to my explorations of urban transit as a site of engagement with
13 the city and our fellow citizens.

14 I frame my theoretical discussions mainly through Victor Turner’s anthropo-
15 logical studies of the liminal space (1977, 1982), as well as Erving Goffman (1973
16 [1959]) and Georg Simmel (1998 [1907]), both sociologists who focused on the
17 minute interactions of everyday life in urban settings. In addition, I draw upon
18 Turner’s concept of *communitas*, which can also be found on the small, everyday
19 level. *Communitas* offers contact and exchange with our fellow citizens, moments
20 of more unguarded being, and it is often through art and music that it occurs. Limi-
21 nality and *communitas* are core concepts in an aesthetics of mobility.

22 While there has been much investigation into “the art of travel” through the
23 social sciences (Watts 2008; Bissell 2009; Jensen 2009; Watts and Lyons 2010;
24 Edensor 2011), not much has been written about the actual art that engages with
25 the potency of liminal space and the potential of *communitas* in urban commut-
26 ing. Thus, through a discussion of the various artworks that I have encountered
27 in the Montréal transit system, and building on some recent theories on mobile
28 media interfaces that create a new sense of space and place (Gordon and de
29 Souza e Silva 2011; Farman 2012; de Souza e Silva and Frith 2012), I sketch out
30 a few possible pleasures toward an aesthetics of mobility.

31 32 33 **City transit as a liminal space**

34 When I arrive at the bus-stop, there is already a long line-up. It’s dark and
35 raining. The bus doesn’t come for over ten minutes, but when it finally does,
36 it is packed full. I squish my way in, validate my fare card and push my way
37 through the crowd, which tends to accumulate the most densely in the first
38 third of the bus. Some people are completely unaware of the space around
39 them, obviously wearing their bulky backpacks so that it is difficult to get
40 by them. There are advertisements and posters on the bus, advising people
41 to “tenir son sacs à dos” (hold backpacks by the hand); clearly, many people
42 don’t realize they are the targets of such advice. There is, of course, nowhere
43 to sit. I get out my iPod, put on my headphones, and turn up the music loud,
44 thinking about the tasks I need to get done today at work.

The retreat into isolation on public transit has variously been called a “safety bubble” (Bissell 2009), “bubble of privacy” (Adey 2010), or “cocoon” (Farman 2012; Jain and Lyons 2008). Michel de Certeau (1984: 111), in the chapter “Railway navigation and incarceration,” calls it a “bubble of panoptic and classifying power, a module of imprisonment.” He goes on to describe the train window as that which “makes our memories speak or draws out of the shadows the dreams of our secrets” (1984: 112). Here, de Certeau refers to how travel time can also become an individual spatial practice of accumulating memory and meaning. The liminality of city transit can be a valuable tool in the practice and rituals of everyday life.

To begin my discussion about the liminal space of city transit as a ritual, I draw upon the work of Turner (1977), a cultural anthropologist and ethnologist, who was originally describing the cultural traditions of Zambian indigenous tribes, but later widened his scope to settings in the Western industrialized world. I look as well to Goffman (1973 [1959]), whose well-known work framed the small interactions of everyday life as worthy of investigation. It is in Goffman’s spirit particularly that I relate Turner’s work on the liminal space to the quotidian act of commuting.

Turner, as described in his book *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982: 24–25), became interested in the study of symbolic genres through Arnold Van Gennep’s *Rites de Passage*. Van Gennep studied rites of passage in small-scale societies, and the term has come to signify those landmark events such as birth, marriage, and death, but Turner is adamant that its application is much broader, stating that “I have tried to revert to van Gennep’s earlier usage in regarding almost all types of rites as having the processual form of ‘passage.’” Now, a commute on city transit can certainly be seen as routine, but can it be called a rite?

Rich Ling (2008), in his work on mobile communications and ritual interactions, discusses the many different uses of the word “ritual,” which he notes, can be seen as pejorative (as in merely symbolic, with no other active value) but is for him positive, a “catalyst for cohesion.” He notes that his usage is that of a social phenomenon, a societal construction for interaction, following sociologist Emile Durkheim, who, like Turner, also references van Gennep. He also notes that Durkheimian “ritual” can be similarly applied to everyday interactions, after Goffman. If we broaden the definition of a “rite of passage,” as Turner, Goffman, and Ling do, then we can include the commute as such a daily rite. Here, however, I focus particularly on Turner’s meaning of ritual as transformative, from one state or social status to another.

In “The phenomenon of mobility at the Frankfurt international airport,” Kerstin Söderblom (2008) invokes Turner for her analysis of transit passages, specifically air travel, on the three steps common to all passage rituals: separation, passage/transition, and reconnection/reincorporation. Air travel is a more extreme form of liminality than the Goffmanesque form of the daily commute, as it is not for most of us routine, and its effects are more pronounced. Nevertheless, the structures of liminality are similar and thus offer a valuable comparison.

1 Following Söderblom's transposition, we can thus describe a ride on Montréal
2 city transit as follows: The first phase of separation clearly demarcates sacred from
3 profane, using symbolic behavior to detach the individual from his or her previous
4 social status. Söderblom describes the symbolic behavior of separation as the
5 process of passing through security, having all your belongings and each part of
6 your person scanned or touched, in order to grant you entry. On public transit, this
7 symbolic behavior resides more simply in validating your bus pass or ticket, which
8 you must keep with you at all times or risk prosecution, and then passing through
9 the turnstiles of the metro or past the bus driver and onto the bus.

10 Because the Montréal metro is completely underground, one must descend
11 quite far into a different landscape below where there are different rules and
12 codes; however, even the bus, with its metal-box construction and window
13 frames looking out onto the passing scenery, can be seen as having a unique and
14 particular ambiance that frames liminality. Phase two, passage or the liminal
15 stage, is a free-floating space, the result of a suspension of certain rules, where
16 status, roles, and private identities do not count for much. Söderblom (2008:
17 185) notes that this is only possible because "the space is framed, controlled, and
18 clearly distinguished from other places."

19 This liminal state is a space where one is not obliged to play a social role.
20 Goffman, in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1973 [1959]),
21 elucidates his theory that each of us must act differently according to different
22 settings, and that we present ourselves in a series of different masks depending
23 on the context. He suggests that all social interactions are staged, and that one's
24 main roles and interactions are thus prepared for "backstage" and played out on
25 a "main stage" area. The rite of passage, then, prepares you for the performance,
26 and allows you to emerge with your mask on, or to take it off, or to change roles.
27 In this sense, both Goffman and Turner, in using the theatrical paradigm, point
28 to the importance of ritual that enables these small transformations of the self.

29 Tellingly, various commentators in different studies (Jain and Lyons 2008;
30 Watts and Lyons 2010) said that even if they could teleport to their destination,
31 they would not want to. They preferred to have the travel time. The liminal space
32 offers an opportunity to plan, to think, to daydream, to be between roles and
33 responsibilities. "Transition time" was found to be one of two categories of
34 travel time, as articulated by Jain and Lyons (2008) in their study of travel time
35 as "a gift" to the individual commuter. "Time out" was the other category, which
36 described how some people might even take a longer route over a shorter one in
37 order to have longer to relax, listen to music, think, or consider a work issue.
38 Travel time is clearly the framework for any aesthetics of mobility.

39 To manage and control their experiences of travel time, commuters equip
40 themselves to deal with their surroundings and themselves in the middle of the
41 liminal space, in order to maintain their ritual of transition or time out. This is
42 "equipped time" (Jain and Lyons 2008), which more and more includes mobile
43 and locative technologies. Urban commuters and travelers have always used
44 "equipped time," most often to disengage from the urban environment. Indeed,

Simmel's oft-quoted work *The Metropolis and Mental Life* was originally written in 1903 but is still pertinent today. Simmel's discussion of the metropolitan "blasé" attitude forms the basis of many contemporary investigations into urban space and interaction (see, for instance, Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011; de Souza e Silva and Frith 2012). Simmel's observations work alongside Goffman's to describe the techniques of non-engagement and selective interaction that people use in spaces of urban transit.

For instance, Simmel describes how the different senses affect our interactions in public space, that is, how we act to avoid interacting. He points out that looking is perhaps the most direct, pervasive interaction there is. Because usually, strangers do not look at each other directly, catching someone's eye on the bus can amount to a brief connection, the sharing of a particular moment. To not look at someone is to remove oneself, in a sense, from being seen; it is to retreat into the isolating bubble, often by looking at other things, objects, and devices. Jensen (2010) notes that the "classic" tools (such as newspapers and books) that Goffman describes as important for establishing and maintaining isolation are now supplemented with mobile technologies such as MP3 players, smartphones, and tablets.

With "equipped time," we have some control over the shape of our liminal space. We can use the travel time to transition or to time out. As Laura Watts (2008) suggests, we each shape our travel times differently, according to the different artifacts, practices, and methods that we use. Watts shapes "ethnography time" with her work, observations, pen and paper; I shape "creative time" when I am filming images or recording sound, in the flow with no awareness of time passing. If I am not equipped or if I feel like doing nothing, travel time may appear slow. If I am listening to music, the time is shaped by the kind of music, whether symphonic, mellow, melodic, or discordant.

Music is a common tool for commuters on city transit. Michael Bull (2000, 2007) has written extensively about how often people use music to give themselves control over their journey. He finds that many people will use the same music on a regular basis, so that each part of the journey has its own tune. He also notes that music can let one create imaginary cinematic narratives, and allows what he calls "nonreciprocal looking," where you can look at other people semi-directly, but your visible earplugs announce that you are really otherwise occupied. These kinds of actions are aimed at isolating the self from contact, and maintaining the space of liminality.

Mobile technologies have changed this liminal space from Simmel's time. Earplugs are one instance of how such props have become incorporated into social interactions. "Equipped time" has also been reshaped by mobile media such as the smartphone and the tablet, so that the space of city transit now gives a vast array of possible distractions and pleasures. The various media devices have given the commuter more control than ever in controlling the experience of transit time, whether as transition time or time out. The isolating bubble of city transit is stronger than ever.

1 And yet, paradoxically, what makes city transit unique as a liminal space is
2 the intensity of the urban experience, the sensual and material qualities of the
3 space, and the proximity of fellow commuters, all of whom are also actors in the
4 same space, each in their own bubbles. The performativity of city transit func-
5 tions both to transform the individual self, but also to generate a space of per-
6 formance. It is this space that provides the possibility of *communitas* in a way
7 that few other urban sites can, and for this reason, needs to be considered along
8 with liminality as a foundational concept in the aesthetics of mobility. In the next
9 section, I explore how Turner's concept of *communitas* can set the stage for loc-
10 ative mobile technologies to engender a deeper sense of place, community, and
11 pleasure.

13 **City transit as a space of performance and** 14 **communitas**

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16 The space of city transit can be thought of as a performance space in many ways.
17 Not only is it performative in a liminal sense (of transforming the role-playing
18 self), but also as a space of social interaction. Because we must spend a certain
19 amount of time together physically in the material space of a bus or metro car,
20 anything that happens here can be seen as a social drama co-performed by actor-
21 commuters. To extend Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor, Jensen (2010) brings
22 in the idea of the subway as a stage with a play already ongoing, and the other
23 commuters as performers who are already there in mid-scene when you come on
24 stage.

25 Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) notes that the materiality of the performative
26 space emerges through different aspects and elements, which she describes at
27 length to include such terms as presence, embodiment, and corporeality. This
28 could extend to commuters and bus drivers as actor-bodies and the bus as an
29 architectural theater space (the shape and layout of the vehicle itself, the STM
30 "branding" and the various types of media and advertising that "decorate" the
31 walls), which emits a spatiality that changes according to the time of day (rush
32 hour, off-hours) and the neighborhoods that the bus is traveling through. In addi-
33 tion, there is the element of rhythm in the repetitions of the bus or metro car
34 stopping and starting, and the entering and exiting of passengers at each stop.
35 Each of these elements contributes to the atmosphere of the space and influences
36 performance.

37 Tim Edensor (2011: 189) also picks up on rhythm, particularly through Henri
38 Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis*, to see how it can be used as "a starting point for
39 investigating the complex temporal rhythms of the multiple mobilities coursing
40 through space." He foregrounds itineraries produced by time, collective rhythms
41 of the city as enacted through early morning and later afternoon rush hours, the
42 mid-afternoon lull. City transit can be meditative and peaceful, especially in the
43 late afternoon. During rush hours, however, the experience is more likely to be
44 seen as irritating than as a gift.

Rush hour will directly affect the kind of experience you are likely to have: Whether you will feel stressed and pressured, whether you are likely to sit, stand, or be packed in sardine-like. During rush hour, you are required to perform agile feats of interweaving between bodies, as you push through a crowded bus, or as you rush from one metro platform to the next to transfer trains, or toward the exit. These “body techniques,” as Marc Augé calls them, “are closely connected to this presence of others ... your ways of standing, sitting, and moving are directed by the density of the crowd” (Criqui 1994).

Body techniques, simple gestures, and non-interactions (where we act to avoid engagement), are the most common types of performances on city transit. However, although the overwhelming state of mind found during the liminal phase is that of anonymity and non-interaction, all of the traumas of urban life can also be found there in a compressed fashion. There are times of random connections and kindnesses, incidents of sexism, racism, and all manners of conflict and resolution.

Richard Schechner, in his book *Performance Theory* (2003), draws on both Goffman and Turner to take an interdisciplinary approach to viewing theater, including anthropological rites, political demonstrations, sports, theatrical productions, and performing arts events. Schechner (2003: 152) attempts to visualize the connections between a wide spectrum of social interactions and events, and notes that “the differences among ritual, theater, and ordinary life depend on the degree spectators and performers attend to efficacy, pleasure, or routine.” As commuters and urban travelers, if we are focused on efficacy, then we are simply waiting for arrival. Random encounters with strangers can turn the focus from efficacy and boredom to theater and pleasure, and possibly even *communitas*.

Turner (1982: 45) defines *communitas* as “the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a series of social roles.” It has to occur during the liminal phase, when people are no longer role-playing, no longer aware of social status. It manifests as a kind of interrelatedness that can reach across the structural systems that usually dictate social behaviors. People experiencing *communitas* feel a sort of unity, though not in the sense of “merging,” for individual distinctiveness is preserved. *Communitas* may be rare, but as Turner (1982: 46–47) notes, it is “sometimes aided by the projections of art that this way of experiencing one’s fellows can be portrayed, grasped, and sometimes realized.” When *communitas* occurs spontaneously, it is “a direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities ... it has something ‘magical’ about it.”

How does the performance space of city transit bring about *communitas* through art? Most often, it is through performance itself, sometimes literally. For instance, the STM often partners with various cultural institutions such as Les Grands Ballets Canadiens or Opéra de Montréal to bring spectacles and concerts to the metro stations (STM 2010a). These kinds of performances can draw people together into a space where there is an atmosphere of *communitas*.

1 Buskers can sometimes do this as well. As Amanda Boetzkes (2010) demon-
2 strates in her essay about “the ephemeral stage” at Lionel-Groulx Metro, buskers
3 must work to break the isolation between strangers, and to solidify the bonds
4 between them. An engaging performance allows people to break out of their
5 bubbles of isolation, to unify in a collective form. Through subtle gestures and
6 body language, “individuals in the crowd collaborate and come to a precarious
7 agreement to collectively gravitate around the performance while respectively
8 maintaining their personal definition” (Boetzkes 2010: 153). This description of
9 the audience fits Turner’s definition of *communitas*, and although it does not
10 happen often, when it does, it becomes an event, something memorable that
11 turns non-place into place for the individual who experienced it.

12 Buskers and other kinds of performers attempt to break the bubble of isola-
13 tion in order to entertain. Mobile media has changed the kinds of performances
14 that are possible in the public sphere, to redefine who can be a performer. As
15 with the advent of such practices as social networking and crowdsourcing, public
16 performance now includes Flash Mobs and Smart Mobs, where groups of people
17 assemble quickly and suddenly to perform a specified action for a usually brief
18 period of time, and then just as quickly disassemble. They are usually coord-
19 inated through mobile media devices, most often cell phones and SMS texts
20 (Lemos 2010). Flash Mobs can occur anywhere, at any time, but one of the
21 earliest and most well-known instances is the No Pants Subway Ride, a now
22 annual worldwide event that anyone can participate in. Montréal joined in with
23 its first *Flashmob d’individus sans pantalon* on the Metro in January 2013.¹
24 These types of performances, with their elements of surprise and silliness, can
25 also break through the bubble of isolation.

26 Beyond performance, public art installations can also foster a type of commu-
27 nitas. For example, a rare instance of public art as a kind of theatrical setting was
28 found in a metro car installation called *Point de fuite* (2007) by visual artist
29 Rose-Marie E. Goulet and sound artist Chantal Dumas. *Point de fuite* (or “van-
30 ishing point”) was the first project of its kind to be realized in a metro in North
31 America (*Point de fuite* 2007). As an installation, it intervened in the normal
32 spatiality and materiality of the metro system with a variety of sounds and
33 images, such as snippets of narratives, chirping birds, applause, roosters,
34 laughter, chimes, and pixelated photos of the city on the windows, walls, and
35 ceiling of a metro car. Part of the fun was to watch the reactions of others, as the
36 work often provoked commentary and conversation. The shared experience of
37 the art installation often brought the individual passengers together into some-
38 thing more of a community.

39 *Communitas* remains, however, a relatively rare occurrence. Most of the time,
40 people prefer not to interact directly with others, out of fear or anxiety (Bissell
41 2009). Indeed, the defining experience of commuting on city transit is one of
42 isolation and non-interaction. But *communitas* is possible in the isolating bubble,
43 too, or something like it, and it is locative mobile media, specifically, that
44 enables this possibility. In the next section, I investigate some art works that

engage with liminality, *communitas*, travel time, and the experience of emplacement through mobile and locative media, each being an exploration of how place can be enacted on Montréal city transit.

City transit and locative media as hybrid space

Mobile technologies may help to strengthen the bubble of isolation, but as de Souza e Silva and Frith (2012) point out, cell phones and props such as headphones do not automatically disconnect people from their surroundings. If the goal is to completely insulate the individual from the outside world, it will never be fully reached for sounds of the city inevitably filter in. Instead of presuming that mobile media is used simply to shut out and to isolate, another approach is to ask how this technology might be used to draw one into an awareness of place and everyday sound (Kaye 2012).

Samuel Thulin (2013) examines this question in two ways. He investigates new smartphone applications that connect audio content with location, drawing connections to mobile sound art that focuses attention on the moment of interaction between sound and place. He also offers his own creative intervention into the travel time bubble with his project “There to Hear: Placing Mobile Music.” This forty-two minute musical composition uses only field recordings from a specific city transit route in Montréal and is meant to be listened to in the same places where the sound was found (Thulin 2010). Through what he calls “slippages” (confusion as to whether a particular sound came from the music or the environment), Thulin challenges the separation between place and listener, while asserting that the isolating bubble is actually quite porous (Kaye 2012).

Another mobile media piece called “Stéréobus” by Montréal sound collective Audiotopie also directs you on a sound tour, this time a narrative taking place on a specified bus route in Laval, a suburb of Montréal. Through the headphones, you hear two voices that guide you on a journey, which lasts an hour and a half. A male voice asks you questions (I have translated these from the original French): “Listen to what is going on here. What emerges? Here, now? How is perception organized? Identify an order, recognize a rhythm . . . What is happening here? What is behind you?” At the same time, electronic music and urban background sounds provide layers and echoes that draw attention to your surroundings. Another voice, a woman, intervenes and provokes a drama that begins to unfold, seemingly about a man, once an aviator, who has been trapped in his psycho-sensorial experiences in the year 2574 (“Cartier: Stéréobus,” n.d.).

Both these projects are site-specific, and play with the “time out” of travel time to create new awarenesses of place, but in quite different ways. Thulin’s piece is a musical composition that engages place through found sound, and although the movements of the music correspond roughly with the movements along the route, Thulin does not aim for a “perfect fit.” Instead, he acknowledges that along the way, chance occurrences such as a bus arriving earlier or later than scheduled result in a variety of ways in which his music and the environment

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1 can combine, resulting in a “meta-composition” that emerges differently each
2 time the piece is heard contextually (Thulin 2010).

3 On the other hand, Audiotopie’s work offers a succession of audio illusions to
4 tell a story, similar to the work of Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller. Cardiff
5 and Miller were perhaps the first to become known for their site-specific audio
6 walks, but as Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2011) note, their initial projects did
7 not use any location-aware technology. In both Cardiff/Miller’s and Audiotopie’s
8 projects, instructions reside within the soundtrack that direct the listener to,
9 for instance, “move through the turnstiles of the metro.” Because both projects
10 rely on the listener’s ability to follow these instructions, automated GPS position-
11 ing would certainly make the routes easier to navigate, or to provide correc-
12 tion if a participant gets lost.

13 Locative mobile media art opens up possibilities for different approaches to
14 the sound walk, one that does not need to rely on a prescribed route or linear
15 narrative, and thus offers more flexibility. With “mobile annotations” (Lemos
16 2010; Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011) or “urban mark-ups” (Farman 2012),
17 the practice of attaching information to location presents potential for new
18 hybrid landscapes and ways of experiencing the city. For example, my own art-
19 istic practice focuses on personal engagements with the city, through stories,
20 poems, short videos, and soundclips that are site-specific. My most recent work,
21 *Detours: Poetics of the City* is a website that maps these engagements and those
22 of my collaborators, and includes videopoems that were made with cell-phone
23 video taken on the bus and metro.²

24 These mobile media artworks demonstrate the individual’s ability to inhabit
25 two spaces at once, the digital and the material, to create a new kind of hybrid
26 space (Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011). This hybridity can allow the traveler
27 to practice “emplacement.” Jason Farman (2012) describes emplacement as the
28 “counterpoint to displacement” and is linked to embodied engagement and
29 Heidegger’s *Dasein* or “being-in-the-world.” Farman argues that through digital
30 and mobile media poetics, the cell phone and other such mobile interfaces can
31 augment methods of exploring public space, rather than removing oneself from
32 it. They can connect histories, stories, and ephemeral media to individuals and
33 communities, to situate and to emplace.

34 *Project 55* is an example of such a locative media work, produced by the
35 Center for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) at Concordia Univer-
36 sity.³ Subtitled *A Historical Audio Tour of Ethnic Communities along St-Laurent*
37 *Boulevard Aboard Bus 55*, it is meant to be listened to in situ. The tour comes as
38 a downloadable MP3 file, meant to be started as one boards Bus 55 at the begin-
39 ning of its route. As the bus progresses up Montréal’s St-Laurent Boulevard, it
40 passes through Chinatown, Little Portugal, the old Yiddish-speaking Mile End
41 of author Mordecai Richler’s childhood, and Little Italy, and we hear on our
42 mobile device a series of accompanying interviews with citizens from those
43 communities, store-owners and a bus driver who has been driving the 55 route
44 since the 1990s. These oral histories bring to life the neighborhoods that we are

passing through, giving a glimpse into different times and cultures. The Project 55 tour is an example of how something very like *communitas* can be produced though locative media, for storytelling is an excellent way to produce empathy and a way of “experiencing one’s fellows” (Turner 1982: 46).

Through these projects and artworks as models for mobile locative methods of engagement with the city, we can find pleasure in urban travel and the commute, and what deeper pleasure is there than feeling “emplaced” and a part of the world that is our home? Hybrid landscapes may be the foundational concept of an aesthetics of mobility, one that can guide our daily practices and rituals, like that of commuting, of travel time and performing *communitas*, to gain a deeper understanding of the places in which we live.

Conclusion

In his book *Non-Places*, Marc Augé (1995: 63) looks at the global expansion of spaces “which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity.” He includes airports, as well as:

gas stations, shopping malls, train stations, motels, highways and all the various means of transportation and transit areas as non-places... It is a status of “in-between,” where nothing is fixed and stable and where time and place are fluid and hybrid and seem to follow their own rules

(Söderblom 2008: 182)

However, Tim Edensor (2011) critiques this perspective as overlooking the complex practices and the material atmospheres that make up such non-places. As well, he aims to counter popular representations of commuting as a dystopian and alienating routine. This essay is also about countering such representations, specifically through notions of pleasure and place-making and how they can transform the liminal and performative spaces of city transit.

The idea of pleasure in mobility can be built upon the structures of travel time as a gift, both for transition and time out. Travel time offers the pleasures of the journey, of being in-between roles, time to think, daydream, prepare, read, or listen to music. The liminal space is also a site of performance, which can provide for engagement with fellow travelers through the pleasure of *communitas*. But perhaps the most defining aspect of city transit occurs within the bubble of isolation. Through the use of mobile and locative media, the bubble can offer the pleasures of engagement with art and storytelling situated within a mobile, yet site-specific space. Through emplacement, we can practice the pleasures of making place. These elements offer the first steps toward an aesthetics of mobility, though there is still much to be explored.

Though they are all similar in their basic methods of organizing space (as non-place), each city transit system has its particulars, its own kind of beauty and frustrations, its own kind of city transit art. Los Angeles, for instance, has its

1 “Out the Window” project, featuring short video and animation clips that play
 2 on a small screen mounted inside the bus.⁴ Toronto has the annual Toronto
 3 Urban Film Festival, which plays a selection of “short, sweet and silent” films
 4 on subway platform screens.⁵ These examples provide suggestions for further
 5 research into what the aesthetics of mobility might entail.

6 Jensen (2009) proposes that the city is materialized through mobility, that we
 7 make contact with urban space by moving through it. Indeed, it is through mobil-
 8 ity that memories and meanings can accumulate. Augé’s book *In the Metro*
 9 (2002) looks at Paris from the viewpoint of a commuter who has spent years
 10 riding the trains. It is in part a meditation on self and memory, and in part an
 11 analysis of the globalization that has produced non-places and massive urban
 12 development. He reveals the ways in which daily life produces maps and itiner-
 13 aries, accumulating personal meanings that layer themselves onto public names
 14 and monuments. Engagements with art, music, and stories are excellent ways to
 15 amass meaning. The in-between space of city transit is ripe for creative interven-
 16 tions of all kinds. In this way, we can see the vehicles of urban transit as “meta-
 17 phors” (after de Certeau), which allow us to write our own stories and to place
 18 ourselves into our own lives.

21 Notes

- 22 1 See: [www.nightlife.ca/divertissement/flashmob-dindividus-sans-pantalon-dans-le-metro-](http://www.nightlife.ca/divertissement/flashmob-dindividus-sans-pantalon-dans-le-metro-de-montreal-dimanche)
 23 [de-montreal-dimanche](http://www.nightlife.ca/divertissement/flashmob-dindividus-sans-pantalon-dans-le-metro-de-montreal-dimanche)
 24 2 See: http://agencetopo.qc.ca/detours/citytransit_en.html.
 25 3 See: [http://storytelling.concordia.ca/memoryscapes/WebsiteSections/01Projects/](http://storytelling.concordia.ca/memoryscapes/WebsiteSections/01Projects/2006/project55/index.html)
 26 [2006/project55/index.html](http://storytelling.concordia.ca/memoryscapes/WebsiteSections/01Projects/2006/project55/index.html).
 27 4 See: <http://out-the-window.org/>.
 28 5 See: www.torontourbanfilmfestival.com.

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