

Uses and Interactions: Barcelona’s Metro

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Ecology of the Metro implies recognition of two interventions, on one hand, contributions in terms of configuring space, management of stations and facilities, on the other, participation of those who transit and through use transform but are also transformed. The user-space interaction emerges as shaper and recipient of environments. Beyond its structures and functioning as part of the city, the Metro operates as a framework of representation, which responds to historic, economic, political and social dimensions. From a situated and interactionist perspective, this paper focuses on these interconnected aspects that result in the performance of the actors, as well as, the performance of the actors as a trigger for these processes. This is part of ethnographic work done in Barcelona’s Metro, through micro-study it attends to the relationship between social actors and space from which it underlines aspects of mobility, control, interaction and production of environments.

MOBILITY AND CONTROL

For several decades the partnership between private companies and public administration in the city of Barcelona marks a period of speculation related to the sale of land. As a result evictions have been carried out sometimes forced, in search of abandoned buildings and in view of remodeling or demolition, affecting sectors with fewer resources. This process known as property mobbing, coincides with significant changes in the urban landscape, <<Barcelona get beautiful>> is the slogan of the campaign promoted by the city council. This urban sanitizing has led to the gentrification of certain neighborhoods. The rise of the tertiary sector has gone hand in hand with these changes while trying to cover-up the social needs of its inhabitants. The projects, construction and the arrival of Metro in certain parts of the city has implied a rise in the price of land use and sale, as well as of the residential buildings around it; on a functional level their proximity is understood as an improvement in the quality of life.

Using the Metro is for many people an indispensable means of public transport as part of urban life. It's considered within the discourse of sustainability to be quick, efficient and less polluting. In the field of human geography, the movement of persons is governed by "the principles of spatial behavior: complementarity, accessibility and supply of opportunities" determined by convergence of space-time and cost- space factors (Ullman, 1957; in Zárte, 1991). Portability or accessibility, defined as

people's ability to overcome the distances between centers of activity, is shown not only as an expression of social differentiation, but as a component of quality of life and element that enforces social contrasts, inequalities in income and access to opportunities, goods and services. Greater the ability to move greater is the power and influence of individuals on resources (Zárte 1991:202).

Accessing the Metro area leads us to consider first its spatial dimension. This is an urban space, not only as a space within the city, but as

a space-time differentiated for a particular type of human gathering [...] in which there is widespread and constant exchange of information and is structured by mobility". It is also a public space where "relations among individuals that coincide physically and in passing a place of transit [carry out] a series a mutual adjustments and accommodations to adapt to the ephemeral association that they establish" (Delgado, 2011:15–18).

It is private space as much as a place of legal restriction. In any case it is an ideologically representative space that responds to issues that go beyond the entrance to the premises of a public transport system. Control of entry under precepts of civility and security, have converted it into an institutionally sacred space, where in addition to controlling entrance to the premises there are attempts to monitor user-behavior considered 'out of place'. The constant presence of security guards, surveillance cameras, and announcements are examples of this.

USERS, FACILITIES AND OBJECTS

An individual's mobility is expressed through gestures, postures and body motions. "Interpret a body means to interpret a society and vice versa" (Horta, 2004: 41). From the kinesics of bodies, unbundled in kinemes (Birdwhistell, 1979) body movements and proxemics inform us of perceptions, learning and adaptation to space (Hall, 1973, 1989). Body techniques (Mauss, [1936] 1971) takes shape in the symbolic system of each society subject to the dynamics of each context (Horta, 2004: 39–40). The rules of behavior are related to obligations and expectations related to a moral order (Goffman, 1967:49) therefore also a symbolic order.

Urbanity, courtesy, good manners, good conduct, good education [...] seem like words [...] stale or forgotten [...] but draw attention to an apparent fashion called the protocol fever (Guereña 2005:11–26).

Body movements, postures and facial expressions of frequent users tend to stay in a rigid

and tense state, which is maintained all along their journey. Unlike the casual users whose expressions appear relaxed. The expression of people of different age groups is notable, especially of children still learning behavior patterns, who shatter the atmosphere with spontaneous reactions. The relationships between space- environment, and between body-gesture, are linked to corporal limits but also to social boundaries.

The following situation observed at the entrance of Plaza Cataluña Metro station, located at the top of the Rambla refers to body movement and appropriateness to place. There were observed extra-daily (Barba, 1991:23) expressions of some transients. In the lobby enter two youths between 17–20 years old; one of them dancing shakes her head and body while drawing out entry tickets from the vending machines. Near them, on the turnstiles there are two security guards with a dog who although has a muzzle, starts barking and pulling the leash towards the dancing girl. The guard shouts loudly in Spanish, "aquí no se baila!" (no dancing here) . The other guard, a woman, tells the dog "it's nothing, it's nothing " while petting it. The girls seem frightened telling the dog "no, no, no, no"; they put their tickets into the slot quickly entering the Metro (May 14, 2010, 17:45).

The entrances of Barcelona's Metro, unlike other cities (for example Brussels, Berlin) is marked by a line on the ground. Here, two entry systems are used: one with turnstiles and other with glass doors that work automatically, in both a ticket needs to be introduced. In the act of placing the ticket in the slot there are differences, at the turnstiles, the ticket should be placed on the left side to pass from the right; unlike the entrances with sliding glass doors where the ticket goes on the right and one enters from the left. This move might seem simple at first glance but requires adaptation and learning. Through observation, without any interviews, you can be aware of who uses this transport often and who are occasional or novice.

Inside the wagons there are video cameras for surveillance hidden in television screens just like on the streets in lampposts, others are placed in corridors, platforms, elevators and escalators. Transit in the metro facilities – as well as in the city – implies knowing to be under surveillance (Foucault The interaction that occurs under the awareness of being observed provokes a state of extra-consciousness, which is observed in body movements regarding the externalization of individual actions. That is to say, display behavior implies in any case the transformations of the actor (Goffman, [1971] 1979: 30, 1991:211, [1975] 2006:195). In the Metro premises legal restrictions go beyond the hunting of people without tickets, they have been extended to the persecution of people without papers (residency permissions). The use of video cameras exposes Metro users to a constant analysis of their routines, a practice also extended to several public places in the city. Converting it to "a territory [...] of exposure, with the double sense of exhibition and risk" (Delgado, 2011:19) where are present the terrifying limits of public space, the terror of identification and the terror of invasion (Joseph [1984], 2002: 17).

The principles of the symbolic transformation about privatizing public space proposed by Lofland, apply to behavior observed in the Metro: minimize expressivity; minimize body contact; look before you sit; minimize eye contact; when in doubt flee; when in doubt disattend. (1985:151–157). Social interaction, "occurs only in social situations, where two or more individuals are in the presence of their respective physical responses" (Goffman, 1991: 168).

In the metro more than in any other public space, face to face, body to body contact with strangers is inevitable and almost forced in view of the closeness of spatial distances. In older wagons (Series 2100) that are still being used, there is seating for four people where the distance between facing seats is 55 cm, in these should fit the legs of two seated people. Spaces are minimal and depending on the built of people there are occasions that cause collisions that are tried to be avoided at all costs. In new trains (Series 9000) the seats are attached to the walls with which the 'danger' of collision is not so outright unless the wagon is full. Being a

small enclosed space, proximity to strangers poses a different state of meanings, therefore the attempt is, as far as possible, to avoid any contact: to touch, to talk, to see and to be seen.

During working hours, some inspectors of TMB (Transports Metropolitans de Barcelona) have devices to check validity of tickets. Security guards -of a private firm- wear fluorescent orange, in their belts carry batons, handcuffs, walkie-talkie, usually go in pairs, if alone they are accompanied by German shepherd dogs which are muzzled. The inspections observed generally coincided with solicitation and tracking of people with appearance of immigrants with few economic resources; not with appearance of foreigners (which is often how more affluent immigrants refer to themselves) nor with the appearance of tourists.

In these inspections they were asked for the ticket to check if they had paid their entry, some were taken out of the wagon and onto the street. Once driven outside the metro installations by workers, on the exit stairs they were delivered to undercover cops disguised as hippies and rockers, who after making a verbal exchange with mossos d' esquadra -regional police- asked the detainees for documents, afterwards making them sign a paper, finally they were introduced in vans without windows. (August 16, 2010 at 19:25_Metro line 2, Clot station exit crossing Rambla Guipúzcoa / Meridiana).

This type of situation leads us to wonder about the performative nature of relations in public (Goffman [1959] 2009, [1971] 1979). Is it necessary 'to act like a tourist' to get a wider range of benefits from action in a public space? There is a stigmatization against people based on appearance that, beyond personal identity is identified by a social identity (Goffman [1963] 2008: 72–85). The appearance is crucial in the interaction as indicator related to the location with respect to origin, but also as an indicator of what is appropriate with regard to how to act (Lofland [1973] 1985:84–85).

The corporation has disparate treatment for different users at different times, regarding rights and obligations as well as the use of spaces, reflected in attitudes of Metro staff, especially security guards. These performances respond to variables related to an appearance order and a spatial order (Lofland, 1985:27–65). Faced with the tourist onslaught, heterogeneity of the population is reduced to a process of homogenization, "[...] it's not that Barcelona is diverse, but that it's deeply unequal"(Delgado, 2005:76); it is a diversity devoid of its capacity to question. The resulting interaction between the different actors warns us of touristic journeys in hyper-reality (Eco 1986, in Urry, 1990:146) that also affect the daily life of the frequent users, converting a trivial journey into hyper-real. It's not so much by the mere presence of tourism, but by the contrast of relations between all social actors including the Metro's work force.

The personal use items in relations in public function as shelters and shields (Goffman, 1963). It is difficult to find people who are not holding something in their hands: cell phones, headsets, I pods, I pads, magazines, newspapers, bags, books, suitcases, cameras, musical instruments, cardboard, maps, bottles, biscuits, fruit, among other things. The relationship between users and objects of use and consumption in the presence of strangers, is an aspect that has several implications as a referent on what, whom and how they are used.

PRODUCTION OF ENVIRONMENTS

Immersing in the Metro ambit especially in the underground lines seen coldly without the everydayness that Metro's use gives: it's a foray, a trip, that no matter how routine it may seem is loaded with perceptions, symbols and meanings. Travel has been described as a ritual with different stages (Van Gennep 1909 in Terrolle 1993). The experience about learning and adaptation of the first, new or frequent travelers tell us the importance of this event. Due to this the value of production of environments: rhythms, smells, air, images, symbol and sounds, acquires an extraordinary dimension.

Production of environments, also called factory of atmospheres is related to sensitive areas

of space (Thiery, 2004). The Metro “is a constellation of points of connection, an ecological and consistent space” (Joseph, 1998 in Thiery, 2004). It reflects the actions of the company and users over the space. Here I mention only rhythmic and acoustic environments, although luminic, atmospheric and thermic aspects are also relevant.

About these points its important to clarify that whatever metaphor is used about the subway in terms of users and management. It is closer to Gottdiener thesis about themed or anti-themed environments

that are produced by codes existing outside the domains of religions or cosmology [...], more concerned with artifacts that manifest the desire for meaning objectified in other, secular material forms [...] such as in current modes of themed retailing (2001:20).

The rhythms of social life appear as an expression of lifestyle. Schedules pertaining to work, meals, and entertainment are individual and collective rhythms that mold the social rhythm (Tarrus, 1988: 116–117) easily identifiable in the Metro ambit. Not by external indicators, as is seen in places with natural light; rhythms are made by the people. Because “it is the body that makes the space it occupies. It is bodily action, bodily energy, which releases its own ephemeral territoriality” (Delgado, 2002:128) creating environments derived from these displacements. Changes in the structural rhythms, schedules of trajectories, slowdowns, unexpected stops in the middle of stations, lags in opening/closing doors, provoke immediate reactions among users.

Within the time slots exist different environments especially what takes place on weekdays from 20:30 hours to closing, due to the contrast between work and festive environments. It is especially noticeable in the interaction between some groups of people, above all at stations closer to the city center. There are those who jump the turnstiles, groups of people, looking like tourists talk among each other in loud voices, in different languages, laugh and shout, drink on platforms, in wagons between stops. The number of security guards also reduces, and there seems to be an ignoring of activities, which hours earlier were prosecuted and punished. There is a degree of permissiveness in contrast to the working hours.

The state of alert that is daily lived in this underground area, either by the atmosphere created by the public address system, by transit security guards and dogs, especially during office hours produces a general state of insecurity. In that, everyone appears suspicious or guilty of something that is unknown. In this sense we can consider the Metro as an exceptional space where frequent user’s experience is like a bare life (Agamben 1998, 2004).

As of acoustic environment, are relevant, sounds produced by interactions between people as well as by the structures: escalators, elevators, turnstiles, and gates. Wagon wheels in contact with rails produce a metallic sound that according to resonance in stations is more or less acute. Also while opening or closing doors there is a repetitive and sharp signal. Inside wagons coming stations are announced in middle of trajectories. Until few years ago the public address system was used to announce extraordinary circumstances. Now, since entering, on the platform and until boarding the wagon, are heard one to three different announcements: “Public address system is being tested at this station” / “Don’t smoke in the lobby don’t smoke on the platforms, smoking is prohibited in the metro, civility in the metro please”/ “For your safety, this station is equipped with video surveillance cameras”/ “Beware, pickpocket takes advantage of a distraction to seize your things, please take care of your belongings”. These vary in language and in gender of voice. Musical threads, which until few years ago were heard continuously, are now almost nonexistent. The responsibility for the volume levels, frequency of announcements, and languages used, says A. Mena representative of TMB, with whom I had contact only via e-mail “the responsibility is of marketing team and managers of each subway line.”

It can be stated that there is an overload of information on almost all subways lines (Hall, 1978:80–82). Being a confined space, exposure to signs, symbols and movements provides

information different from the routine. The spatial distance between people from different geographies is blurred. The importance of distance in communication from a proxemics perspective (Hall, 1989:192) responds, in this case to dynamics related to daily rhythms. Agglomerations, copresence and contact with strangers produce varying degrees of violence and the need for space increases. (Hall, 1973: 66–72). Contributions have been made on stress levels in urban transport and their social repercussions (Yago, 1983; Thibaud, 1996; Urry, 200). In recent years there have been known acts of aggression in Barcelona's Metro. The identity of individuals on the receiving end coincides with a socially stigmatized identity, where the mass media also plays an important role.

The implementation of the new line 9, without driver, has been focused on operational and safety issues. The experience in France regarding the line 14 Météor in 1998, with the same characteristics not only addressed architectural, technical and functional aspects but also social effects; where were collected perceptions of the company, workers and users had a central role (Joseph, 2004).

Barcelona Metro opened in 1924, has had several transformations, it's used by 1 million 200 thousand passengers every day. Transport Metropolitan of Barcelona is the main company that runs the Metro; the lack of data provided by them for the development of this study reveals a lack of transparency in public service. Above all it gives an account of the difficulties in relationship between users and the company when it's contrary to the corporate's interest. Although security is an aspect related to the efficiency of the service, the amount of importance that it's given makes it detrimental to other aspects. Few days ago, a new security plan based on a model for nuclear safety was announced as starting to be implemented (Vanguardia Newspaper, 3/06/2011). This makes clear the importance given by the corporation and the public administration to operation and safety, ignoring other equally important aspects.

We must not forget that a voyage, close or distant, more than its immediate purpose implies a change in the proceedings and perceptions of passengers; however routine, banal and repetitive it might seem.

Human interaction is always meaningful. Since the origins of society people have related to their environment in symbolic ways, besides using it for functional reasons such as survival. (Gottdiener 2001:175)

The ecology observed in the subway, shows us many ways to get to know and understand the diversity of control techniques and dynamics between strangers in the city.

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