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"The Bus Stops Here": Place-making and Transit Justice Issues in the Twin Cities Public Bus Network

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"The Bus Stops Here": Place-making and Transit Justice Issues in the Twin Cities Public Bus Network

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May 4, 2009

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Abstract

This project engages the formation of place-narratives within the Metro Transit bus system by examining the structural factors and individual agents shaping a passenger's experience of the bus. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, I bring together the literatures of transportation geography, and cultural/feminist geographies. Major themes from my research include the bus as a theater of performance/theater of conflict, the bus as a gateway to public life for those with limited mobility, and the bus as a relational space for specific passenger groups. Additionally, this project explores the significance of *place* within transit justice work in the Twin Cities. I propose that the concept of mobility, focused through the bus as a *place* of struggle and empowerment, allows for non-essentialist alliances within a diverse collection of stakeholders working to build a more just society.

Acknowledgements:

I could not have completed this project without the support of my professors, mentors, and friends. First, thank you to Prof. Laura Smith for advising my thesis—you were the person who led me to fall in love with geography and I am fortunate to have been your student. Thanks to Prof. Karin Aguilar and Prof. Dan Trudeau for serving on my thesis committee-- I have become a better student and a better person because of the courses I have taken with you. Also, thanks to David Seitz for providing intellectual guidance all the way from Paris, France. This paper would not be the same without your wisdom and friendship. I owe my deepest gratitude to BB and AD, the bus drivers that I interviewed in the summer of 2008. Your stories encouraged me to pursue new avenues of research, and I was heartened by your generosity of spirit during the first interview in my project. Lastly, I would like to thank my family as well as my friends at Macalester. Throughout the duration of this project, you were there to remind me of the blessings that accompany our tenure as students.

Introduction: Place-making and the Metro Transit bus network

This project studies the formation of place-narratives[1] within the Metro Transit bus system in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, and in doing so explores and critiques anthropologist Marc Augé's (1994) attribution of "placelessness" to mass transit spaces. The bus has been invested with particular meanings that frame the bus as a place of contradiction. The public bus is narrated both as a marginal place in relationship to the automobile, and as an empowering vehicle of mobility for groups that might not otherwise have access to public life. In this project, I examine the unique cultural spaces located within the Twin Cities public bus network, placing special attention on the contrasting experiences of voluntary commuters vs. transit-dependent riders and the distinct cultural behaviors and social characteristics of urban-suburban vs. intra-urban routes.

In conducting my research, I drew upon both qualitative (oral interviews with passengers and riders, participant observation) and quantitative (surveys and Geographic Information Systems (GIS)) methods in an attempt to bring together the disparate literatures of transportation geography and cultural/feminist geographies in understanding the bus as place.[2] In situating my research within these broad literatures, I account for both the centrality of the bus in enabling the livelihoods of transit-dependent populations as well as the bus' marginal position relative to the automobile within the urban landscape.

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[1] "Place-narrative" is a term I am borrowing from Thomas Gieryn (2000). Gieryn argues that place has three components: geographic location, built form, and narrative

[2] Thanks to Professor Laura Smith for pointing me in this interdisciplinary direction

In engaging both the structural factors and individual agents that shape a passenger's experience of the bus, I hope to understand the communities and conflicts that interact to produce the bus as a *place* in the city. I investigate the bus as a place in recognition of the ways in which the concept of place invites intersecting activisms of diverse coalitions of stakeholders.[3]

This paper begins by contextualizing my research in conversations around the ideas of place and placelessness. Next, I discuss the geographic literatures that have informed my paper, with special attention to factors that influence ridership and the geographies of crime and safety within transit networks. I then explore major themes that have emerged from my research, discussing the bus as a relational and sorted place, the bus as a theater of performance and a theater of conflict, and finally the bus as a gateway to public life for people with limited mobility. In my conclusion, I explore the implications of my research for understanding the bus not only as a component of a transportation network, but as a *place* of community interaction and activism around issues of transit equity and mobility. I argue that the issue of mobility focused through the place of the public bus allows for non-essentialist alliances between a broad set of stakeholders working towards a more just society.

Countering Placelessness: Understanding place on a mobile bus

This paper seeks to enunciate place-narratives within the Metro Transit bus network, as well as provide insight into processes of place-making in transit spaces. In addition to my other theoretical goals of bridging the divide between the literatures of transportation and cultural/feminist geographies, I am writing this paper to respond to the

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[3] Thanks to Professor Karin Aguilar San Juan of Macalester College for introducing me to the work of Grace Lee Boggs, whose writing greatly informed my research.

attribution of "placelessness" to mass transit spaces. Scholars such as French anthropologist Marc Augé (1995) claim that the hypermobility of transit spaces renders these spaces "placeless", as movement frees their occupants of structural constraints and identities. However, anyone who rides the bus in the Twin Cities knows that it is anything but "hypermobile." Furthermore, all bus riders recognize that if anything, boarding the bus intensifies specific aspects of our class, racial, and gender identities in relationship to other passengers as well as in relation to the place of the bus itself.

Although I disagree with his conclusions, reading Augé's work has deeply influenced my research. Thus, I will summarize his arguments while pointing to the contrasting directions I chose to take in my own research. Augé's claims are centered on two concepts: the loss of identity/accountability of passengers upon entering the bus space, and the lack of intentionality/presence of passengers occupying spaces facilitating mass mobility.

Augé suggests that mass-transit passengers experience a unique status referred to as "solitary contractuality" upon boarding the transit vehicle (1995, p.94). No longer obligated to the social collective (which, according to Augé, ceases to exist in this mobile non-place) passengers are focused on their individual purposes and destinations. He cites the lack of institutions within the mass transit system encouraging interpersonal interaction as evidence of the inexistence of community/social coherence within the passenger experience. In fact, he reminds the reader that the only human interaction necessary in travel by public transit is the purchase of a ticket, and even this process is often completed electronically. For Augé, "the space of a non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations, only solitude, and similitude, therefore enforcing an

atmosphere of anonymity and obscurity" (1995, p.103). In contrast, my research will emphasize the relational dimensions of the bus-place, with attention to issues such as conflicting cultural ideals for behavior on the bus. In his explanation of "solitary contractuality", Augé asserts that the passenger's passive role within the space prevents meaningful community from being established. In his words,

> "…a person entering a non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer, or driver. Perhaps he is still weighed down by the previous day's worries, the next day's concerns; but is distanced temporarily by the environment of movement. Subjected to a gentle form of possession, to which he surrenders himself with more or less talent or conviction, he tastes for a while – like anyone who is possessed – the passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing" (1995, p.103).

The "environment of movement" allows identities carried by passengers or drivers to become irrelevant in the bus' supposed disconnect from the physical environment outside or social frameworks operating in more static settings.

Furthermore, he states that individuals must declare (or be subjected to scrutiny according to) their identities only transactionally upon entering or leaving the space. He writes,

> "When individuals come together, they engender the social and organize places. But the space of super-modernity is inhabited by this contradiction: it deals only with individuals (customers, passengers, users, listeners), but

> they are identified (name, occupation, place of birth, address) only on entering or leaving" (1995, p.111).

My paper will argue against the existence of this social disconnect, pointing to issues such as transit dependency that continue to influence our experience of the bus even after we have taken our seat. I am writing to challenge Augé's argument because I believe that place matters in efforts to create a more just society. As activist Grace Lee Boggs writes, "Place-consciousness…encourages us to come together around common, local experiences and organize around our hopes for the future of our communities and cities" (Boggs 2000, p. 20). Place is an important concept for organizing across difference, and is a crucial tool in the re-enfranchisement of marginalized communities. Because the bus has functioned as a locus of struggle for marginalized groups regarding participation in public life, it is a site that cannot be rendered "placeless". For this reason, I am interested in the narratives and structures that frame the bus as a contested *place* in the urban landscape.

Mapping the bus: understanding issues of place in relationship to transit spaces

As I stated previously, my research attempts to bridge the gap between the literatures of transportation geography and cultural and feminist geographies. I aim to raise the issues of race, class, gender, and ability associated with the "cultural turn", which have not been deeply explored in relationship to transportation problems. Robin D. Law of the University of Otago decries the lack of research of cultural issues in transportation geography in her article, "Beyond 'women and transport': towards new geographies of gender and daily mobility":

> "Attention to transport offered a way to link discussions of gender relations, transport systems, public and private spaces, accessibility, and the spatial and temporal organization of human activity…Yet work by geographers on gender and transport remains confined to a limited number of research topics and theoretical approaches. The field is still largely defined in terms of travel behavior and policy…" (1999, p. 568).

Thus, I intend to address this gap in the literature in my work, through the following avenues:

1. I will examine the bus itself as a *place*, rather than focus on characteristics of journeys, travel behavior, and other dimensions of the bus as *network*.

2. I will bring my fieldwork on the bus, texts related to the bus system, and interviews with actors connected to the bus system into relationship with theories of place, examining ways in which both structural forces and individual agents

work to shape the bus as a *place* in the urban context. I will do so by interviewing "expert" informants such as bus drivers, transit activists, bus riders, and policy-makers regarding their relationship to the bus.

3. I will account for the structural realities of the urban landscape in understanding the factors that bring people to the bus. Particularly, I will investigate how the problem of transit dependency influences one's experience of the bus.

4. I will spatialize and platialize issues of race, gender, class, and ability, analyzing the ways in which relationships to and within the bus place are framed in these social structures.

Although I have gained insight into the structural factors affecting transit ridership through the literature of transportation geography, this project is theoretically rooted in cultural geography, a perspective which aims to analyze the meaning(s) of human landscapes and "emplaces" social/cultural dynamics of power, community, and exclusion within an understanding of the natural and built environments. Cultural geography emerges from (and responds to) landscape studies, a field of study reliant primarily on phenomenology (particularly visual observations) to understand the built and natural environments (Relph 1976). In the 1980s, geographers such as Peter Jackson (1989) began to critique landscape studies' inattention to the "invisible" frameworks that shape place such as race, class, and gender. A new field was formed in order to more fully account for the role of these frameworks within the study of place. In continuation of cultural geography's shift towards the inclusion of unseen/naturalized relationships of power within the physical structure and resulting narratives of place, my project seeks to

uncover and explore these dynamics within constructions of the bus as a place by both passengers and non-passengers of the Metro Transit system.

Constructions of the bus as a place exist in the context of the larger cultural, racial, and economic narratives associated with transit places. Anthony Giddens' (1995) structuration theory is useful not only in understanding the ways in which such narratives are formed, but also the relationships of riders to and within the bus network. Giddens explains social structures as sets of rules and resources that enable and constrain action, and both material structures (the urban landscape) and social structures (e.g. transit dependency, race, class) come into play in the formation of the bus place (1995).

Additionally, structuration theory tells us that place is not static, and that places constantly reproduce the structures which brought them into being. One of the ways in which the bus challenges static ideas of place is through the dynamic flow of riders boarding and disembarking from the bus. Marxist geographer Doreen Massey (1993) argues that the very essence of place is established in such flows, in the "mutual articulations of social relations" occurring within the bus each day. She writes,

> "The uniqueness of a place, or a locality, in other words is constructed out of particular interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, social processes, experiences and understandings, in a situation of co-presence, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are actually constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, a region or even a continent" (1993, p. 65).

Because place is continually (re)produced in relationships even if its built form is relatively static, meanings and uses for place are always open to contestation. In the case of the public bus, the production and use of this seemingly neutral site is full of internal differences and conflicts. Tim Cresswell, a cultural geographer studying issues of place and resistance, writes the following about the tensions inherent in public places: "Place [is] not simply an outcome of social processes… [it may be] a tool in the creation, maintenance, and transformations of relations of domination, oppression, and exploitation" (2006, p. 29). Cresswell's relations of "domination, oppression, and exploitation" are evident in open conflicts in the bus place, as well as the structural factors that relegate riders to the bus as a mobility strategy of last resort.

Finding a place for the bus in geography: reviewing relevant literatures concerning transport and place-making

In this section, I will further engage the theoretical works and geographic literatures that inform my research. First, I examine the literature of transportation and planning geography regarding the structural realities that affect constructions of the bus as a place, such as transit dependency or the demographics of bus ridership in general. Next, I review papers on issues of crime and safety, factors which undoubtedly influence experiences and understandings of the bus by riders and non-users alike. I then discuss works that have functioned to establish a *place* for the bus in the urban context, whether as an agent of distributive justice or as an oppositional entity to the automobile. Lastly, I reflect on works concerning the activity of place-making in order to form a framework of interpretation for conflicts occurring on board the bus.

Accounting for the factors that bring people to the bus is vital in fully understanding riders' relationships that form to and within the bus. Taylor and Fink of the UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies offer a "taxonomy" of the research on mass transit ridership, demonstrating that factors external to the quality of the transit provider's service are the most influential in determining transit ridership in a metropolitan area. The variable of "private vehicle access" was an especially powerful determinant in bus ridership numbers, as those without access to their own car were much more likely to use mass transit (2002). Additionally, Taylor and Fink's research showed that income levels were also a strong predictor of transit use, with poorer groups more likely to be transit users. A presentation at the GIS in Transit Conference in 2007 by Frank and Lachapelle on transit dependency confirmed these results, finding higher rates of transit dependency

among younger, poor, and female populations.

Equally important in understanding the bus' place in the city are the attitudes held by non-users of transit. In a survey by Krizek & El-Geneidy, a cluster analysis of variables demonstrated that non-users are particularly concerned with "safety and comfort of the service provided" as well as the "reliability of the transit service" and " amenities available nearby transit stations (including park and ride facilities)" (Krizek & El-Geneidy, 2007, p. 89). Non-users generally have more agency to discriminate against transit for coded reasons of "convenience", etc. because they have access to alternative mobility strategies.

Papers concerning transit and crime implicitly address the fears of non-riders of transit spaces. In their 2002 paper, Loukaitou-Sideris, Liggett and Iseki write, "In general, transit stations are no more unsafe than the city streets or other public places" (p. 136). However, perceptions of transit spaces as sites of high crime as well as poorly designed stops or stations may cause such perceptions of risk to continue. Hartgen, Ingalls, and Owens (1993) assert that "Public concerns over safety may be one of the most important reasons why many choose not to use transit" (cited Loukaitou-Sideris et al, p.135). Environmental design is particularly important in reducing both the perceived and actual risk of crime in transit facilities, as Smith and Clarke argue in their 2000 article, "Crime and Public Transport". Land use patterns in the area surrounding transit infrastructure are another important determinant for crime rates in transit facilities. For example, the presence of establishments selling alcohol in areas surrounding transit facilities tends to increase crime. In general, crime is much more likely to occur in transit facilities such as parking lots and bus stops during periods of low use, as a lack of

surveillance may encourage criminals. Facilities such as park-and-ride lots or at bus stops are more likely to attract crime than transit vehicles, although the majority of security measures (such as cameras, police, etc) are focused on transit vehicles (2000).

Robin Law of the University of Otago addresses the relationship of women and crime occurring in transit spaces in her paper, "Beyond Women and Transport: towards new geographies of gender and daily mobility" (1999). She brings a distinct perspective to public transportation research in joining the feminist perspective of mobility studies with that of "transport" research. By looking beyond the areas in which gender has been explored in traditional transport research (i.e. work travel patterns, modal differences, etc), she expands the conversation around "women and transport" to include issues such as mobility, agency, and safety in transportation settings. Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Camille Fink (2002) conduct research in a similar vein in their paper "Addressing Women's Fear of Victimization in Transportation Settings: A Survey of U.S. Transit Agencies," in which they investigate transit agencies' attempts and women's responses to their efforts to create safe transportation environments for their customers.

Fear of crime in transit spaces is undoubtedly related to the complex co-presence of groups of users with distinct identities within a transit network. Loukaitou-Sideris and Fink conclude, "while passengers typically like to be surrounded by others, the presence of drunks, beggars, panhandlers, the homeless, and rowdy crowds (often referred to as 'social incivilites') in the vicinity of a transit stop or station or on the vehicle can also have a chilling effect on transit riders" (2002, p. 556). This racially coded statement also suggests that non-transit dependent passengers prefer to use transit when the other users in the system have similar demographic characteristics and behavioral practices to their

own.

Sociologist Sikivu Hutchinson (2003) also studies the bus as a social place in her book, Imagining Transit: Race, gender, and transportation politics in Los Angeles. Hutchinson's work also contextualizes the bus as a place in Los Angeles, perhaps the most auto-dominated city in the country. In documenting the relationship between mass transit and the automobile in the city's urban history, she interrogates the discourse in which the automobile is aligned with values such as "progress" and "safety". In Hutchinson's history of L.A., the automobile is understood as a racialized agent of dominance over the landscape. The bus, however, is relegated to the position of the "urban other", marginalized in both the popular imagination of the city and the urban planning process. Pete Merriman (2006) also platializes vehicles of transport, locating the automobile in the urban landscape through the cyborg relationship that forms between human and automobile in the empowering state of (auto)mobility. In a discourse analysis of the public's reaction to a highway's opening in 1950s Britain, Merriman exposes changes in the construction of the body through assuming the position of the driver, challenging Augé's conflation of hypermobility and placelessness by reiterating the (automobile and) body as place.

While Hutchinson's and Merriman's research is historical, other authors write to place the bus in the contemporary city. Joe Grengs (2004) of the University of Michigan conceives the bus as a purveyor of social equity, and critiques the neoliberal policies that hinder the social mission of public transit. He argues that in cities throughout the United States, "the social purpose of transit is becoming supplanted by the economic imperative of efficiency and competitiveness" (2004, p.53).

Bullard et al also study the impact of neoliberal policies on the social goals of transit in a collection of essays titled, Highway Robbery: Transportation Racism and New Routes to Equity (2004). Like Greng's paper, the collection exposes an injust "two-tiered" transit system which privileges light rail and high-amenity commuter options over inner-city bus service vital to the livelihoods of the urban poor. Focusing on the impact of unjust transit planning for people of color, the essays also document successful cases of grassroots activism to combat transport inequality.

The activism featured in Bullard's anthology relies on strategies that emphasize the bus as a *place* of democratic interaction. In my paper, I draw from theorists that frame place as a stage for activism, especially though performances of daily practices that challenge established social norms. Tim Cresswell summarizes works by Seamon, Pred, Thrift, and de Certeau in discussing the possibilities of activism around place: "[their work] shows us how place is constituted through reiterative social practice – place is made and remade on a daily basis. Place provides a template for practice –an unstable stage for performance…Place provides the conditions of possibility for creative social practice" (2003, p.39). In consideration of other authors such as Judith Butler and Geraldine Pratt who engage theories of performativity, I will give careful attention to performance events on the bus that challenge norms and claim space on board the bus (Butler 1990; Pratt 2004).

The work of the disabled community is another recent example of challenging social norms on the bus, as disabled people were not legally guaranteed access to fixed-route buses until 1990. Colin Barnes (2004) puts forth a social model of disability, observing how broad political, economic and social structures interact to create the social

category of disability. Disability is not simply located in the body, he argues, but defined through a built environment that limits mobility of many people who are transit dependent, not just those with limited physical or mental abilities (Butler & Bowlby 1997). Celeste Langan (2001) is also concerned with the construction of disability in relation to mobility, and frames the bus as a "prosthetic" device that enables mobility for all citizens in parallel to the role of a wheelchair for people with physical disabilities. Similar to ways in which the social model of disability reveals the multitude of societal forces interacting to affect mobility, my paper will explore the bus as a place of intersecting justice commitments and activisms.

The literature concerning the public bus is broad in both content and methodology. My paper seeks to address and integrate a variety of literatures on the public bus, in investigating how cultural expectations, structural factors, and individual actors intersect to produce the bus as a contested *place* in the metropolitan context.

Where high frequency isn't enough in harsh winters: Exploring The Twin Cities Transit Landscape

Accounting for the transit landscape of Minneapolis-St. Paul is essential in understanding the public bus as a place in the cities. Metro Transit is the main transit operator for the Twin Cities metropolitan area, providing for 95% of the 73 million bus trips in the region. The system is not as extensive or well-used as networks in larger cities such as New York or Chicago, and few routes run past the late evening. Commuters from the suburbs are generally well-served by Metro Transit, as nearly 40% of the network's routes are express commuter lines. Of the 118 bus routes managed by Metro Transit, 63 are local-service routes, 46 are express routes, and nine are contract service routes. Metro Transit also operates the popular Hiawatha Light Rail line, which accounts for approximately 1/6 of the passenger miles moved by the system. The equipment in the bus network varies from standard 40-foot buses (681 buses) to articulated "accordion" buses (140 buses) which run on passenger-dense or express routes. All buses are equipped with wheelchair lifts or ramps for handicapped boarding (MetroTransit 2009). For security, Metro Transit employs a corps of 144 Metropolitan Transit Police who work to enforce safety regulations on buses, trains, and at bus stops and stations (Metro Transit 2009). Drivers may call for police assistance at any time, and police conduct routine patrols of routes that have received a high number of calls.

The city of Minneapolis ranks 11th in the nation regarding mode share of public transit to work at around 11 or 10%, but in the wider region (the seven-county area under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Council) transit's share of trips to work falls to 4.8% (Metropolitan Council 2005). While transit options exist for commuting into the center

cities, suburban residents largely prefer to drive to work. While Metro Transit serves the entire region, 61% of its ridership comes from urban communities and 39% from suburban areas (Metropolitan Council 2005). Spending per capita on transit in the Twin Cities is 12% lower than peer systems[4], and trips per capita are also lower than peer systems by an average of 7.7% (Metropolitan Council 2005). In comparison to demographically similar cities, the bus in Minneapolis occupies a marginal position in the civic imagination.

Growth patterns in the Twin Cities metro are affecting the structure of the Metro Transit network. With population growth in the collar counties (the twelve counties adjacent to the seven counties under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Council), express bus ridership bringing commuters in from suburbs and exurbs increased by 11% in 2007, in comparison to a 5.3% increase in ridership for the system overall (Metropolitan Council 2005). The increase of suburban riders creates competition with urban riders for federal grants and other resources in transit improvement projects (Grengs 2004).

Struggles over transit resources are especially high-stakes for riders who rely on transit to carry out their daily routines. Relative to other metropolitan transit providers such as Tri-met of Portland, OR or the Metropolitan Transport Authority of New York City, the Metro Transit network serves a high proportion of captive riders (Krizek & El-Geneidy 2007). Captive riders, or riders who are transit dependent, are individuals for whom mass transit is their only mobility option. This reality influences the cultural environment of the bus space, as the demographic composition as well as agentic position

[4] This group was selected by the Metropolitan Council based on comparability of urban area characteristics, such as population, transit system size and modes, and highway-system development.

of the system's ridership exists in contrast to systems serving larger proportions of choice riders. Forty-six percent of riders within the system are transit dependent, while 54% have access to alternative modes of transportation (Krizek & El-Geneidy 2007). In the Twin Cities Metro Area, approximately 5% of households do not have a vehicle available for their use, a figure which rises to 17% in the city of Minneapolis (Metropolitan Council 2000). Often households who are transit dependent are among the most vulnerable in the region. Only 25% of Minnesota Family Investment Program recipients[5] in central cities have access to an automobile, and 45% of their suburban peers are also transit dependent (Metropolitan Council 2000). And although Metro Transit's high frequency bus network serves many of the areas in which there are concentrated populations of welfare recipients, the suburban location of many entry-level jobs means that employment opportunities are not accessible to transit-dependent populations.

Another population with high dependency on transit is the elderly, as their physical abilities may be declining. Metro Transit serves a substantial population of elderly people, with riders over 55 years old composing 18% of the system's ridership in 2007 (Metropolitan Council 2007). This cohort is expected to increase in size as the demographics of the Twin Cities continue to shift (Metropolitan Council 2007).

Indices of transit dependency also differ by mode of public transit, with buses serving transit-dependent clients at rates twice that of the light rail (Metropolitan Council 2005). Additionally, the light rail ridership is composed of higher-income populations, as nearly 40% of light rail passengers have a family income of over $70,000 in comparison with just 22% of bus riders (Metropolitan Council 2005). Additionally, the light rail is eligible for federal grants for capital improvement, a funding source that cannot

[5] Minnesota Family Investment program (MFIP) is Minnesota's core welfare program.

necessarily be applied in similar ways to bus service. Costs of improving bus service are primarily *operating* costs, not capital costs, and therefore such federal grants cannot be applied to cover operating expenses of increasing service frequency or hours. Due to the funding structure of transit development, demographic factors associated with each mode of transport, as well as the destinations served by the light rail vs. the bus, the bus is positioned on the margins of the Metro Transit network in relationship to light rail.

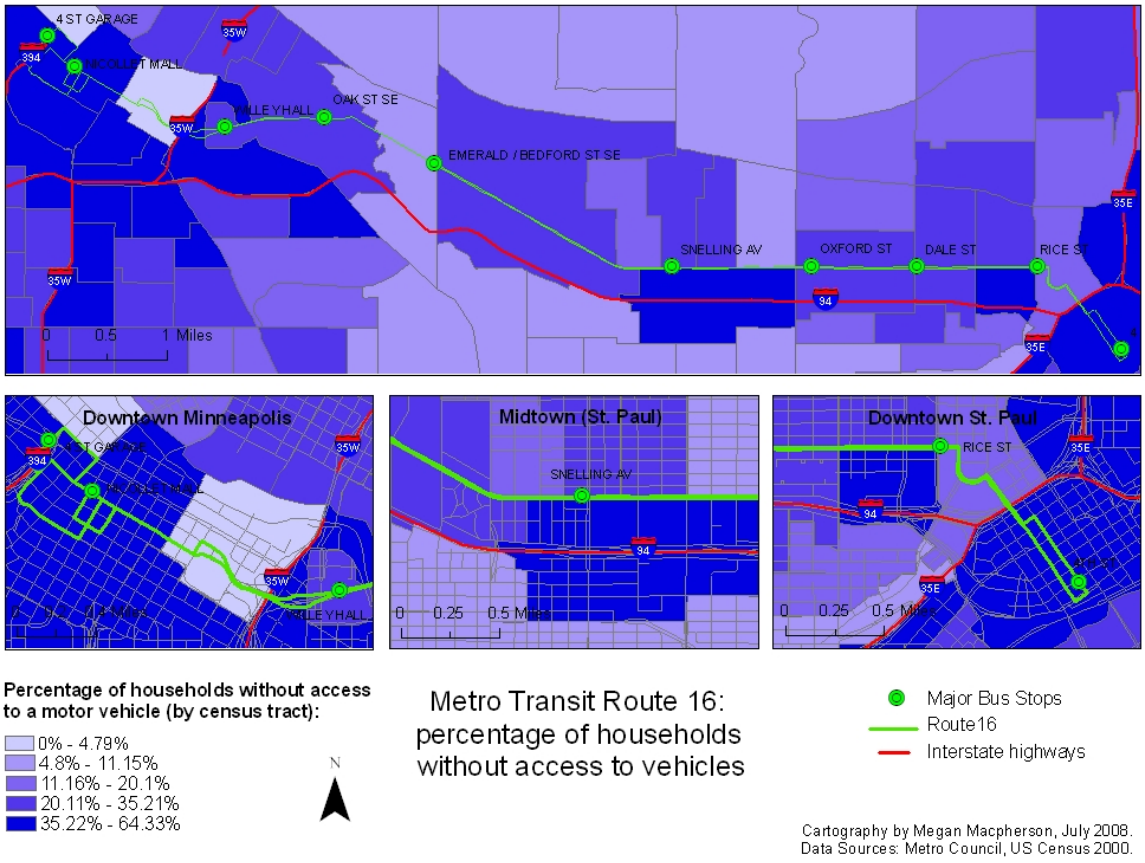
"The 21 is such a drag": Profiles of selected routes in the Metro Transit Bus Network

While I conducted fieldwork beyond the four routes that I will profile in this section, I focused my research on four routes within the Metro Transit Network: the 16, 144, 597, and 21. In describing these routes, I will highlight the variety of roles the bus plays as component in a larger transportation network, from the urban local routes of the 16 and 21, to the urban commuter route of the 144, and the suburban commuter route of the 597. Each route serves a distinct passengershed and occupies a particular place in granting mobility to residents of the Twin Cities.

16: Route 16 is one of several routes that operate 24 hours a day. It connects downtown St. Paul and downtown Minneapolis via the University Avenue corridor (see Figure 1). Route 16 serves a diverse collection of neighborhoods, beginning with the capitol area in the East and passing through Frogtown, a gateway neighborhood for immigrants (today, mainly Hmong and Somali) new to the Twin Cities. Across University Avenue from Frogtown is the historic Rondo neighborhood, home to one of St. Paul's oldest African American communities that was decimated by the development of the I-94 freeway in the 1960s. As route 16 moves westward, it passes by a large senior housing complex near the Fairview intersection, and enters into a light industrial area (most notably the Amtrak train station and the liquor shipping station on Cleveland Avenue) before it arrives in the Stadium Village neighborhood near the University of Minnesota. The students boarding the bus on the U of M campus represent a shift in the demographic of the riders on board, as passengers boarding the bus east of campus are generally older adults or families with small children. The route continues west from the university campus to downtown

Minneapolis, stopping at two major bus corridors (Nicollet Mall and Hennepin Avenue) before terminating at the 5th street garage.

Figure 1. *Route 16 and Transit Dependency*



144: Route 144 is a limited-stop commuter route that runs during peak hours from the Highland Park/Macalester Groveland/Merriam Park neighborhoods to the University of Minnesota campus and downtown Minneapolis (see Figure 2). The bus runs west towards downtown Minneapolis in the morning, and runs east toward St. Paul in the evening. The passengershed is composed primarily of white middle-class families and serves the beltway of private colleges west of downtown St. Paul. The typical rider is a white professional who takes the bus to work to reclaim the time they would have spent driving in their personal vehicle (see Table 1, Table 2). After picking up riders along Snelling Avenue, the route bypasses the neighborhoods between Merriam Park and the University through the I-94 freeway. Similar to route 16, the western portion of route 144 features stops at the University of MN medical center, student center, and other University facilities. As the 144 continues to downtown Minneapolis, riders can exit to the same bus corridors served by the 16.

Table 1. *Transit Dependency Survey Data from Routes 16 and 144*[6]

Route	**16**	**144**
Riders surveyed	42	27
Passengers without access to a private vehicle	17	8
Passengers riding for reasons other than saving money or transit dependency	18	25
Riders using the bus to commute to work	18	27

[6] For full survey data see Appendix

Table 2. Race/Ethnicity Survey Data from Routes 16 and 144

Route	**16**	**144**
White passengers	24	24
Black passengers	9	1
Other racial or ethnic identities*	5	1
No response	4	1

**I chose not to list the individual racial or ethnic identities within this category to protect the anonymity of my survey participants, as there were very few respondents within categories such as Asian or Native American*

597: The 597 is an express commuter route that connects the suburb of Bloomington with downtown Minneapolis during peak commuting hours (see Figure 3). The route runs from Bloomington to downtown Minneapolis weekday mornings, and to Bloomington from Minneapolis weekday evenings. In Bloomington, the route mainly serves park-and-ride facilities that are not necessarily accessible by transit, with the exception of the South Bloomington Transit Center which is served by several local and express routes. St. Luke's Church, Masonic Home, Normandale Village and Normandale College are all amenities with available parking that are served by route 597. The route leaves Bloomington via I-35 and terminates in Minneapolis' Central Business District. The 597 does not offer immediate connections with the other bus corridors downtown, likely because most passengers are commuting to jobs located within the central business district.

Figure 2. *Route 144 and Transit Dependency*

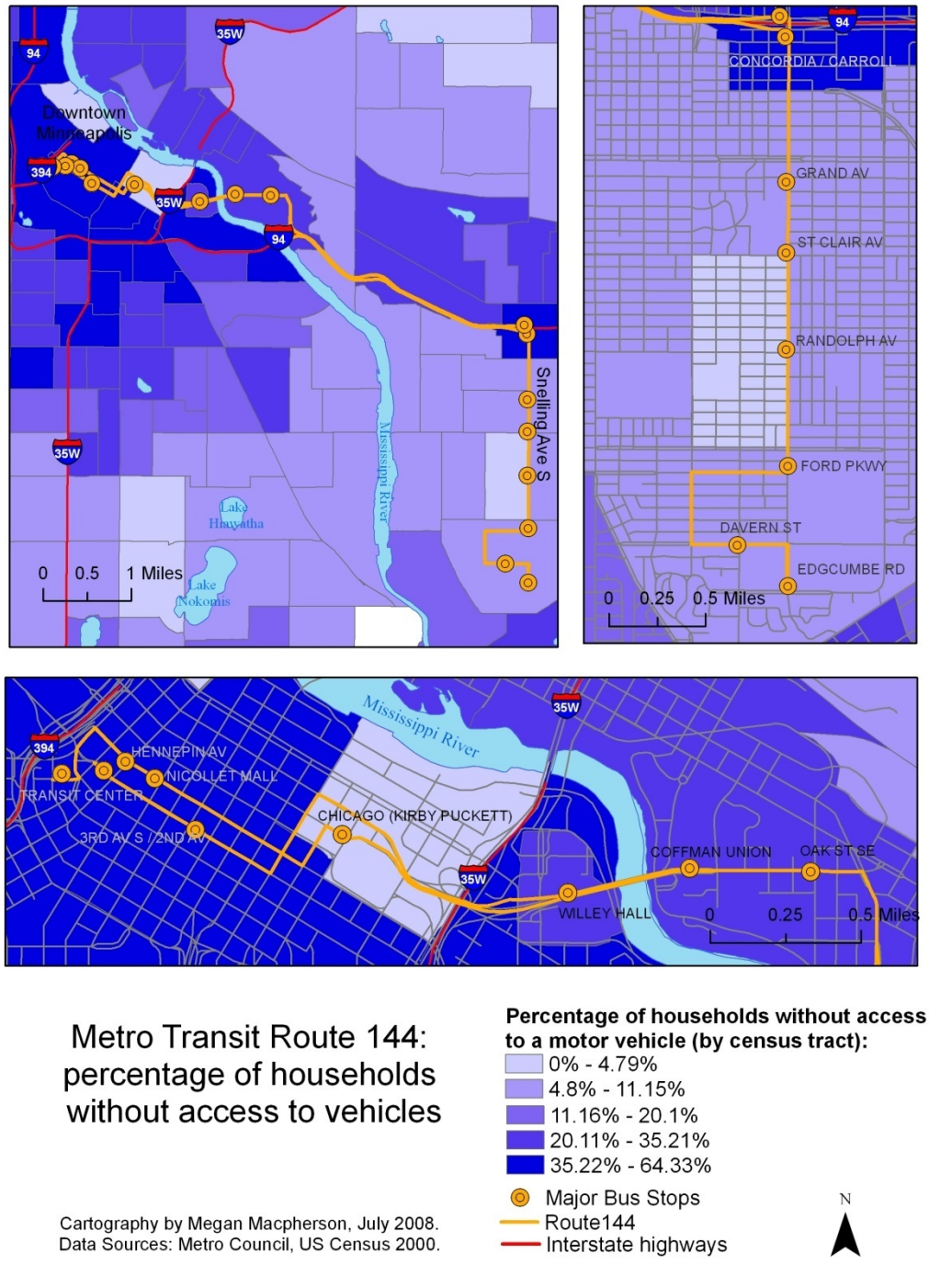
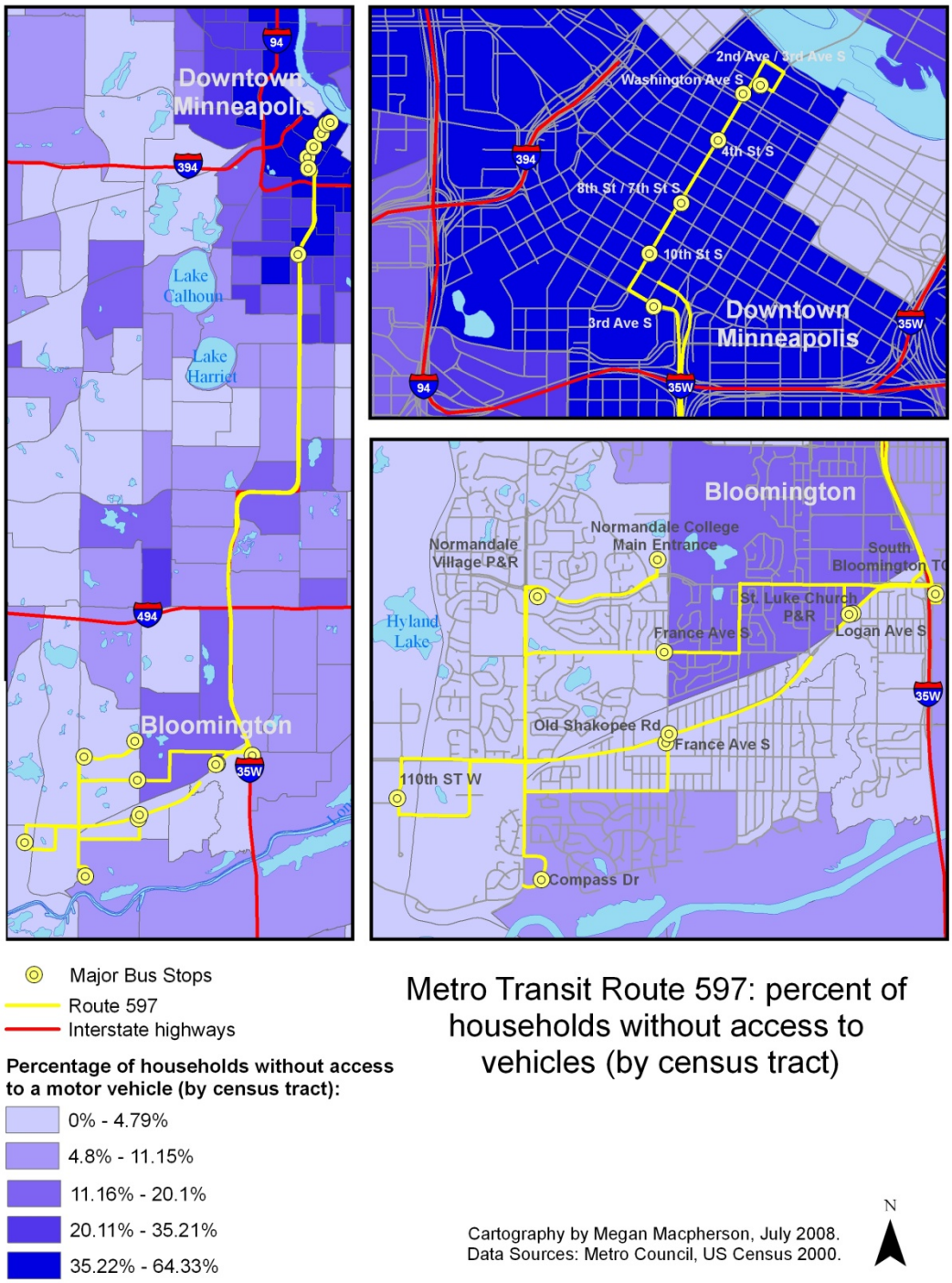


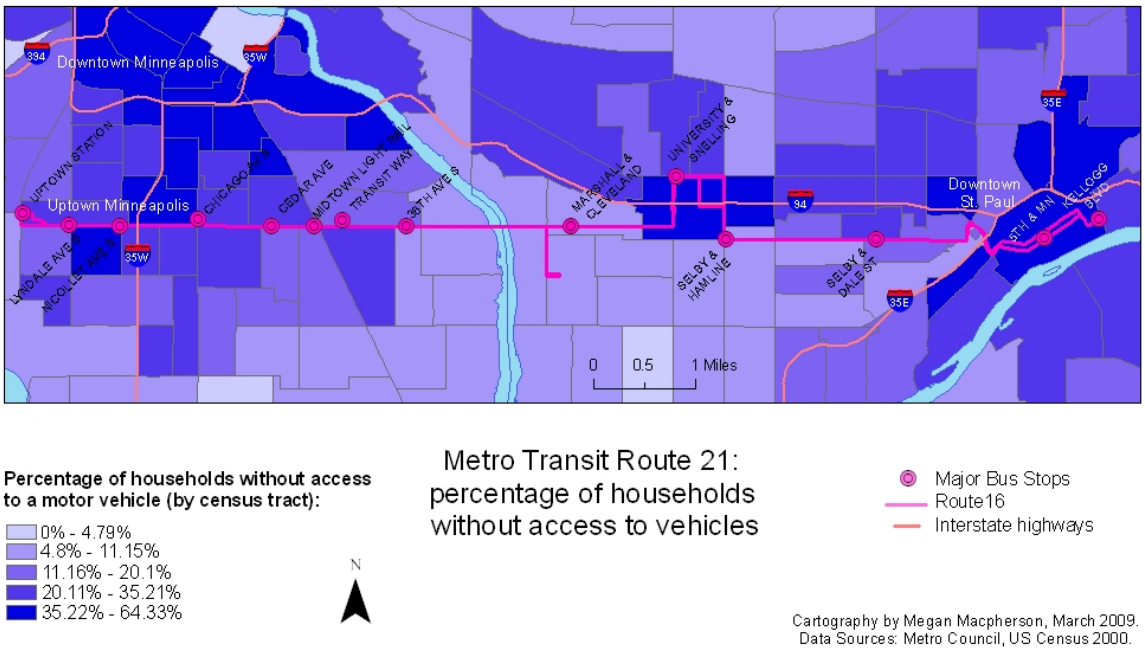
Figure 3. *Route 597 and Transit Dependency*



21: The 21 is perhaps the most culturally iconic route within the Metro Transit network, and the subject of songs and a one-man play by local artists. The route connects downtown St. Paul and uptown Minneapolis by way of Selby Avenue and later Lake Street, one of the old streetcar corridors of the Twin Cities. Leaving downtown Saint Paul via the Cathedral Hill neighborhood, the bus passes through the hip Selby-Dale area, and runs along the southern border of the historic Rondo Neighborhood, a center of the African-American community in St. Paul. Turning off of Selby Avenue towards University Avenue, route 21 passes the Midway shopping area with big box retailers and grocery stores and continues west on Marshall Avenue across the river to Lake Street. Beyond the bungalow neighborhood of Longfellow, the 21 enters the Phillips Neighborhood and serves a changing commercial landscape. Big box stores at Minnehaha Avenue and Lake Street give way to smaller family businesses and fast food restaurants, especially after passing the transfer point to the light rail at Hiawatha Ave. and Lake Street. Particularly around the cross-street of Bloomington Ave., Latino businesses line both sides of Lake Street, the most notable being Mercado Central. Continuing west, route 21 stops at the Chicago Street Transit Station, which is adjacent to the newly refurbished Midtown Global Market. Housed in an old Sears distribution center, the market is a reminder of the area's industrial past. The landscape of Lake Street after the Global Market is varied, dotted with liquor stores and car dealerships until Lyndale Avenue, where the Uptown area begins. Uptown is known to Twin Cities residents as a funky, hip neighborhood friendly to the LGBT community. Finally, a full hour and twenty minutes after beginning its journey in downtown St. Paul, the 21 pulls into its last stop at the Uptown Transit Station on Hennepin Avenue, with connections to downtown

Minneapolis as well a selection of the western suburbs.

Figure 4. *Route 21 and Transit Dependency*



Theme I: Framing the bus as a relational and "sorted" place

Cultural geographer Henri LeFebvre theorizes the centrality of relationships in understanding place, writing, "Space is permeated with social relations; it is not only supported by social relations but it is also producing and produced by social relations" (1991, p. 286). LeFebvre's theory of place is evident not only in the construction of the social environment of the bus and the social expectations of drivers and passengers, but the role the bus environment serves to facilitate the formation of relationships among actors contained within its walls. Furthermore, the relationships between individual passengers as well as their relationships to the bus place itself are formulated within the intersecting frameworks of race, class, gender, and ability. Meanings of these social interactions are constructed at scales beyond that of their immediate location, a concept put forth by Marxist geographer Doreen Massey (1993).

This paper builds its understanding of the bus as a relational place from the work of these theorists, recognizing that the passengers' relationships to the bus-place as well as relationships formed between passengers in the context of the bus' physical environment are shaped by forces that extend beyond the confines of the bus.

Immediately through behavior differences in boarding the bus, relationships become apparent between passengers and the immediate bus-place as well as the wider transit network. According to humanistic geographer Edward Relph, activities such as purchasing a ticket or scanning a transfer contribute to formations of place as function, called "behavioral insideness". He writes, "behavioral insideness consists of being in a place and seeing it as a set of objects, views, and activities arranged in certain ways and having certain observable qualities" (1976, p. 53). Entrance procedures illuminate

specific behavioral relationships to the bus, which are most salient in variations in ticket type. This set of behaviors defines the capacity in which the riders are understood, and marks riders as either responsible citizens or dependent sub-citizens. For example, white-collar commuters starting their trip in the Central Business District of Minneapolis on routes such as the 597 or 144 make their payments in ways that contrast the experiences of passengers riding interurban routes such as the 21 or 16. Instead of scanning their transfer or paying their fare upon boarding, passengers on commuter routes proceed first to their seats to reduce the amount of time the bus spends stopped in rush hour traffic. Timeliness is vital on these commuter routes, whose clientele demands a punctual bus. Thus, payment is collected from passengers upon exiting the vehicle.

This reversal in process is indicative of two important characteristics of the bus-place. First, this payment procedure demonstrates drivers' confidence that all entering passengers have the means to pay their fare. The ridership of commuter routes is generally affluent, white, and professional -- a population of commuters who ride largely by choice and not out of necessity. Therefore, the behavioral regulations within this place respond to this reality and the expectations surrounding this sub-population of riders. Second, the boarding procedure on routes such as the 144 and 597 confirms the specific function of these bus-places as a commuter service. Passenger flow on such routes is predictable and monodirectional—the bus fills as passengers board in the residential areas, and empties as riders reach their employment destinations in the Central Business District.

Boarding procedures on non-commuter routes are standardized as Metro Transit responds to the needs of what its governing board perceives as a demographically

different passengershed. On these local urban routes, fare payment is required upon entry to ensure that no passenger rides without paying the proper amount. According to driver BB[7], this policy frequently incites conflicts between passenger and driver when a passenger cannot pay the full fare (personal communication, July 16, 2008). Violence may be directed towards the driver, as in BB's experience, and in a driver's intense daily schedule it is often more prudent to allow the incident to pass without mention. And while official Metro Transit regulations state that passengers unable to pay the fare must exit the bus at the next available stop, BB states that many drivers diffuse potential conflicts by allowing the passenger in question to board without paying the full fare. "I press the '5' button [to record a passenger boarding without paying the fare] a lot on the 22 and the 5" remarked BB. "Some people play games but most just don't have the money" (personal communication, July 16, 2008). Furthermore, incidents such as assault on a driver provoked by conflicts over the $1.50 fare have led BB to believe that the transit system would be better funded through other measures. On intraurban routes such as the 21, 16, or the 5, in his words, "there are issues with fares that would be eliminated without the farebox" (personal communication, July 16, 2008).

Skirmishes over the fare are almost non-existent on commuter routes serving more affluent areas of the city. In fact, most passengers on such commuter routes carry "Go To" passes which store credit electronically and can be scanned on a designated reader in the front of the bus in lieu of buying a paper ticket. The repetitive beep of the scanner as the passes are swiped indicates a type of "insider" status of these commuters, as their commute is habit enough to merit an electronic pass. Furthermore, because many

[7] Name changed for the sake of anonymity

firms located in the CBD subsidize bus passes for their employees in order to encourage "green" commutes, these passes have become associated not only with responsible, well-employed passengers but also with a specific (and elitist) brand of "good citizenship" achieved through their election or sacrifice to ride.

Because of the extreme demographic contrast of the passengersheds affected by these two boarding policies, it is apparent that the policies class and racialize the bus spaces before passengers even take their seats. More than just instruments of "efficiency", the moment in which proof of payment is demanded is dependent on the system administration's expectations for these distinct passenger groups.

Expectations for rider behavior are generated by those outside the administrative structure of the network as well. Specific knowledges of Metro Transit drivers reveal the distinct (perceived) cultural characteristics of routes throughout the network. Their experiences carrying passengers along the route and maintaining order on the bus are framed not only by their own interactions with passengers, but by narratives associated with the routes shared by fellow drivers. "The 21, 5, and 22 are 'worker routes'" says driver BB (personal communication, July 16, 2008). These routes are among the most difficult in the network, he adds, and when the drivers choose their assignments every eighteen weeks, "nobody wants those." These "worker routes" are considered challenging to drivers not only due to the density of the stops on the line, but the situations that arise from serving their passengersheds.

In my initial interviews for this project, I asked a white female driver whether she worried about her personal safety on the job. She responded by locating her concerns in a

specific route in her work: "The north side of the '5'…that's the big deal" (personal communication, July 16, 2008). The 5 route is widely considered the most dangerous in the network. Passing through North Minneapolis, an area with a disproportionately high share of the city's serious crime incidents, the route has the highest number of police calls in the network.[8] "You hear a lot of gunshots in the neighborhoods," said my informant, responding to the story of another driver whose bus was shot up serving the same route (personal communication, July 16, 2008). She says her husband reads about violence in North Minneapolis in the newspaper, but it does not faze her. Like the other driver I spoke with, she accepts the hazards of driving in North Minneapolis as part of her occupational reality. Despite her family's concern or what the newspapers might say, she told me, "[North Minneapolis is] where I am everyday" (personal communication, July 16, 2008).

Although neither of the drivers I interviewed used race to describe the ridership of "worker" routes like the 5 and 21, the fact that these routes serve neighborhoods composed predominantly of people of color contributes to the place-construction of the bus, especially by non-riders. Racialized fear of violence or crime on board the bus furthers (white) non-riders' constructions of the bus as the urban "other", in contrast to the "safety" and "efficiency" of the automobile. Sikivu Hutchinson, a sociologist studying the historical framing of the public bus in car-dominated Los Angeles, wrote: "The Fordian vision of mass car ownership exploited the iconography of dynamism and progress that animates American whiteness, reinforcing its historical opposition to the dark otherness of the city" (2003, p. 92).

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[8] http://www.startribune.com/local/minneapolis/11823016.html

The work of organizations such as Minneapolis Men Against Destruction-Defending Against Drugs and Social-Disorder (MADDADS) seeks to respond to this fear by building a sense of community and accountability among riders. MADDADS, an organization founded to improve the quality of life of urban communities of color, initiated a collaborative project with Metro Transit to "encourage respect among riders so that their transit experience is positive, welcoming and free from fear" (V.J. Smith, personal communication, November 11, 2008).

MADDADS recognizes the opportunity the bus-place provides to carrying out their mission of strengthening community bonds. The transitory micro-society created on the bus can serve as a basis for many types of relationships, ranging in duration and significance. Because passengers are temporarily captive within the bus environment until they reach their destination, passengers enter into a unique state of "co-presence" and become open to encounters that they might ordinarily avoid in other public places. More about the place-making work of MADDADS will be discussed in the next chapter.

To document the stories behind these bus-based encounters, Minneapolis graphic artist Rett Martin established BusTales.com, a blog collection of anecdotes submitted by riders across the system. These "tales", which are categorized on the site most visually by route number, capture fleeting conversations, bizarre behavior by passengers and drivers alike, and even budding romantic relationships. Furthermore, the stories posted on this site add to a more widely constructed identity of the route. Martin created the online archive of stories because he recognized the richness of interactions taking place on the bus due to the nature of the relationships formed on board. He writes, "If you boil it down, there are really two basic types of bus riders, those that like to sit in silence and

keep to themselves, and those that like to talk. Usually the silent types outnumber the talkative riders, but it only takes one talkative rider for something interesting to happen. And most likely everyone that's not directly involved in the interaction is watching intently to see what happens. Because what else do they have to do? Headphones and books are often just a prop, used to ward off the talkative riders" (personal communication, November 17, 2008). The stories on BusTales.com frame the bus as a site not only of relational opportunity, but as a place that provides the grounds for a specific engagement in public society.

My interviews with Metro Transit drivers confirmed this sense of relational opportunity. Passengers are constantly "coming out of the woodwork," reported BB, who shared that he has come to recognize a set of regular passengers in his daily routine (personal communication, July 16, 2008). It is common for passengers to approach drivers for directions or conversation, he said, to the extent that Metro Transit drivers have developed a nickname for the seat at the front of the bus across from the driver's chair. Christened the "peanut seat", this chair is an obvious location on the bus from which passengers can communicate with the driver, and an observant passenger will notice conversations initiated between friends and strangers alike (personal communication, July 16, 2008).

The development of such bonds between drivers and riders is also recognized by white female driver AD[9], who noted that passengers who ride the same route everyday form community through their shared routine. AD, who is known within the community of Metro Transit Drivers as the "Angel of South Garage", sees herself as a steward of

[9] Name also changed to protect anonymity

these passenger communities (personal communication, July 16, 2008). She is attentive to the specific needs of each rider group, paying particular attention to the more demanding clientele of route 597, a commuter route serving the Bloomington area. The passengershed served by this route, composed primarily of non-captive riders bound for jobs in the Minneapolis CBD, typically demands more amenities than other rider groups in exchange for their willingness to ride the bus (Krizek & El-Geneidy 2007). As a driver who has worked this route for several months, AD is fully aware of her role relative to the needs of the passengers she calls "the fancy shmancies" on this route (personal communication, July 16, 2008). From precise timing in pickups and drop-offs to the exact temperature of the air conditioning, she recognizes the pressure to be "on" for this group. In fact, for days that she drives the 597, she has started to wear her hair differently and put on more jewelry—responding to the classed expectations of the route's passengers. AD's commitment to the expectations of this passenger group reinforces their mutual construction of the 597 as an elite or high-class place.

While the place-narratives ascribed to the 597 by passengers and driver are relatively homogenous (evident in a shared set of acceptable behaviors or a spatial-socioeconomic exclusion of those who might hold different conceptions), conflict arises when passengers inhabit the same space with incompatible understandings of the bus as place. The notion of the bus as a contested place is a dominant image in the American psyche, due to the memory of Rosa Parks' courage during the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-1956. The work of sociologist Sikivu Hutchinson reveals that the bus has consistently been framed as a site of civil resistance, most visible in the civil rights movement. She writes, "Historically, transit has been a powerful means of stitching

together the ontology of racial presence, urban public space, and racial subjectivity" (2003, p. 2). The bus has continued to function as a place for marginalized communities to take action against further social-spatial marginalization. The activism of the Los Angeles Bus Riders Union in the 1990s towards higher quality bus service and a more reasonable fare structure, for example, took place primarily through guerrilla theater on various routes throughout the network (Hutchinson 2003). In the context of the Twin Cities, contention around the use of the bus-place occurs at a variety of scales. On the scale of the individual, drivers report violence directed towards both drivers and other passengers as a regular occurrence on urban (and even some suburban) routes. On a larger structural scale, struggles over funding and access disproportionally affect the livelihoods of underrepresented communities. For example, in 2005 the Urban League of Minneapolis fought bitterly to retain weekend bus service on the predominately black North Side, where cuts would have had a disproportionate negative impact on community activities.

An example of a multiscalar conflict around relationship to the bus-place is the issue of transit dependency. Transit passengers who do not have access to transportation alternatives (such as driving) are categorized as "transit dependent." Indices of transit dependency are highest in population subgroups such as the very young (under 18), elderly (65 and above), low-income households, and households headed by a person of color (Taylor & Fink 2002). Routes 16 and 144 are two routes that serve similar destinations in their westbound routes (University of Minnesota campus, Downtown Minneapolis), but serve contrasting populations in terms of transit dependency (see Figure 1, Figure 2 for maps).

Rates of transit dependency affect the narratives associated with the bus place. Those who choose to ride the bus over driving a personal vehicle may have a variety of motivations influencing their participation in the bus environment. Some ride because of political beliefs, convenience, or relationships formed with neighbors or coworkers, while others ride to catch up on work or reading while avoiding the stress of traffic.

For passengers who are choiceless in their riding, their relationship to the bus space may range from finding opportunities to build community to complacency to antagonism towards passengers who cause delays affecting their ability to carry out their livelihood. Furthermore, these narratives are not outside the frame of structural inequalities that create disparities in transit dependency in the first place—but transit dependency most certainly influences the agency that passengers possess within the bus space to negotiate these dynamics of power. The likelihood (or even ability) of a passenger to express discomfort at the actions of other passengers or abandon the bus space in favor of safer/more "welcoming" transportation options is contingent on their level of access to alternative modes of transportation.

The drivers I interviewed acknowledged the role of systemic inequalities in creating tension on the bus. "A lot of people don't want to be [on the bus]" says BB, "but they just don't have the money [to drive]" (personal communication, July 16, 2008). An understanding of the backdrop of many conflicts onboard influences the way in which drivers choose to navigate any resulting situations. "We're told to maintain a safe/efficient/punctual/comfortable/courteous bus," reports BB (personal communication, July 16, 2008). Often, this means asking a passenger to leave the bus rather than

allowing the situation to escalate to a degree that it must be reported. Above all, adds AD, "You do whatever you can to keep driving" (personal communication July 16, 2008).

Whereas "co-present" passengers on many routes choose to engage each other or the bus' physical environment as a form of place-making in their riding, a substantial group of passengers make no attempt towards these connections in the bus space. Their behavior, staring silently at books on their laps, seeking insulation from any background noises with headphones in their ears, or conversing with another person outside the bus with cell phones pressed to their faces, reflects Augé's concept of "solitary contractuality"(Augé 1995). Surprising silences resulting from these habits can be observed on commuter routes between affluent areas and the city center. This contrast in behavioral patterns is not unexpected, as the demographic composition of the ridership of commuter routes differs substantially from that of non-express urban routes. Largely white, not transit-dependent, and employed in white-collar jobs in the central business district, these riders have particular motivations for using mass transit. For example, on the 144 route, the reason cited most often for taking the bus (aside from "saving money") was the assertion that the bus was "more relaxing" than other commuting options[10]. Perhaps seeking to "reclaim" their commute, these riders use their time on the bus to engage in activities as individuals, a sociality similar to which they might have practiced had they been driving in their cars along the same route.[11] It is their ability to *choose* the bus as their commute's transportation mode that influences their behavior within the space.

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[10] See Appendix A for full survey and calculations
[11] Thanks to Professor Dan Trudeau for the terminology of "reclaiming" the commute

Additionally, the racial and socioeconomic attributes of the passenger groups that shape said mode choice also shape norms for public behavior on the bus. Cultural expectations may deem initiating conversations with strangers inappropriate on the aforementioned commuter routes, and outsiders are even less likely to feel comfortable to pursue these interactions.

In summary, this chapter has explored the ways in which the bus can be understood as a relational place. In community and conflict, through interactions both individual and systemic, riders and drivers form and respond to constructions of the bus as a place of relational opportunity. The struggles inherent in the production and understanding of places formed in and by relationships will be explored in the next chapter, which frames the bus as a theater of performance and a theater of conflict.

Theme II: The "theatrical bus" – performance and conflict[12]

This next chapter explores the concept of the bus as theater. I came to appreciate this idea through American Studies and History scholar Robin Kelley's book, "Race Rebels", in which he explores the role of working-class blacks for racial equality in the midcentury South (1994). His work is especially as he dedicates an entire chapter to the public bus as a site of race-based resistance. In addition to Rosa Parks' famous refusal to give up her seat for a white passenger, Kelley illustrates that the bus operated as a site of daily confrontations between white passengers and drivers and black passengers over behaviors, seating space, and payment of fare. His analogy of the bus as theater captures the significance of the bus place during the Civil Rights movement:

> "Theater can have two meanings: as a site of performance and as a site of military conflict. First, dramas of conflict, repression and resistance are performed in which passengers witness, or participate in, a wide variety of 'skirmishes' that shape their collective memory, illustrate the limitations as well as the possibilities of resistance to domination, and draw more passengers into the performance" (Kelley 2004, p.57 as cited in Hutchinson 2003).

In the Twin Cities today, the bus continues to embody the concept of the theater in multiple ways. First, the temporary captivity of bus riders aboard the bus vehicle transforms what observers may consider to be riders' passive presence into an active

[12] Huge thanks to David Seitz for providing insight during the editing process of this chapter.

(although perhaps involuntary) participation as audience members or performers within a social scene. Secondly, the bus is a place in which conflicts and societal tensions are brought to the forefront, due in part to the forced proximity of riders with a diverse collection of cultural expectations for behavior as well as the socio-structural factors that draw riders to the bus in the first place.

This chapter will begin by examining situations in which the bus has functioned as a space for performance and spectacle, and continue by analyzing cases in which the bus has served as a setting for the explosion of larger societal conflicts. I will also engage in an analysis of a play by a local author as a theatrical representation of the Twin Cities bus network, focusing on the importance of the bus setting as a thematic setting.

One of the best archives of bus dramatics in the Twin Cities is the website www.bustales.com, a wiki collection of stories taking place on the Metro Transit bus network. Submitted by riders and drivers, the "tales" posted on the website range from expressions of gratitude towards kind neighbors to reports of violence and harassment from other passengers. Rett Martin, the creator and moderator of the Bus Tales archive, describes the ways in which the bus setting is responsible for the creation of the stories posted on his site:

> "It's all about putting a bunch of people together into a confined space…people that might not normally interact with each other. It's like an elementary school bus, except there's a drunk guy riding home after spending all night out at the bar. Point being, people are using the bus for all sorts of reasons, so really the only thing everyone has in common is

that they're stuck in the same bus" (personal communication, November 17, 2008).

The unique juxtaposition of mobility (access to a network of destinations) and immobility (the necessity to remain on the bus until reaching one's destination) that exists on the bus creates scenarios that are unlikely to occur anywhere else. Martin explains this odd situation as follows:

> "In most public places, people have the ability to walk away. You can certainly get off the bus at any stop, but if you're trying to get somewhere that's not a very practical option. So I think people put up with a lot more on the bus, whether it be sitting next to a smelly person, or letting someone talk their ear off " (personal communication, November 17, 2008).

Martin's collection of "bus tales" relies on the notion that the bus provides a stage for a
"cast of characters" found nowhere else in the city. The expectations regarding the reliably eccentric collection of passengers onboard the bus connects to the idea of "behavior insideness" presented in the previous chapter, that the bus riders and their behavior are marked by certain recognizable qualities. Relationships and conflicts that are observed among bus passengers create the crucial ensemble chemistry behind bus dramatics. Bus dramatics and their interpretation are situated in the identities, motivations and subjectivities of the riders onboard. While most of the "tales" concerning commuter routes to the suburbs concern wayward drivers or extreme delays in service, for example,

stories submitted by riders of intra-urban routes generally report more salient incidents of bus theatrics. The general orientation towards efficiency and customer service demanded by the ridership of commuter routes may reduce the likelihood of public displays of nonconforming behavior and reduce passenger interaction in general. Bus routes with a greater volume of passengers per route mile however, tend to generate a higher level of passenger interaction, and are more likely to serve a broader demographic community than commuter routes. Perhaps due to the contrast in demographics and service on board local urban routes, a performer/audience dynamic begins to take shape between specific groups of passengers. Certain riders are forced into the performer role due to their behavior that challenges dominant social/class norms in undesirable ways. Because the theater of the bus presents opportunities for cross-cultural interaction within a larger culture of bus riders, norms for behavior are constantly fluctuating with the composition of riders occupying the bus place. Challenging the dominant social norms attracts attention from those accustomed to specific types of behavior, and acts to disrupt the status of the passive passenger.

The difference that creates/marks/inspires bus dramatics also implies that the role of the "spectator" is influenced by the rider's relative socioeconomic position as well as their agentic relationship to the bus place. For example, many of the entries in the BusTales archives connote a highly classed relationship to bus dramatics – the ability to enjoy, mock, or even critique attention-calling bus behavior is based in a specific set of privileges. Choosing to be *entertained* rather than being endangered (or afflicted) by drunkenness, mental illness, poverty, or other types of "difference" is an option available only to those who can freely locate themselves above the "spectacle" occurring. This

(re)location could be accomplished both metaphorically (in reference to one's positionality) or literally, as riders who are not transit-dependent generally have more agency in negotiating unpleasant situations onboard the bus by exiting or avoiding the bus altogether. The dynamic of the "enlightened" audience member versus the "foolish" performer permeates many of the posts on the BusTales website. "Man I love the bus!" exclaims a rider with a story about the 16, sharing a bizarre encounter with a passenger dressed as a superhero, shouting across the aisles about his state of sobriety while his attire and accessories (a basketball, broomstick, and hot pink boom box) caused riders to think otherwise ('*I just like to have fun*' guy 2009).

Passenger/audience members who enjoy the "spectacle" of bus activities typically claim that the demographic composition of bus riders as a group creates a specific and interesting cast of characters inhabiting the bus. Characteristics such as "quirkiness" or bizarre or attention-calling behavior are among the negative stereotypes associated with the social and economic factors that bring people to the bus. The translation of such socioeconomic realities into politically neutral characteristics such as "quirkiness" may serve to naturalize the inequalities that create such conditions. In one contribution to BusTales, theater vocabulary is explicitly used to describe the poster's Grandmother's attitude when she accompanied him on the 24 bus home from the airport. He writes, "My grandma was like a kid in a candy store by this point! She loved seeing all of the *characters* on the bus, and she made a point of telling me how much she enjoyed the bus ride when we got off" (*Grandma in a Candy Store* 2009, emphasis mine).

Author Kevin Kling (1989) reproduces these stereotypical assumptions in his play "21A", which takes place on the bus route that connects St. Paul and Minneapolis via

Lake Street. His cast includes a spectrum of characters such as "Gladys", an off-kilter elderly woman who lavishes attention on her cats, "Chairman Francis", an itinerant missionary of a pyramid scheme religion, "Ron Huber", the urban cowboy bus driver who can't stop eating pastries from Super America, Steve, a young man with mental disabilities, and "Captain Twelve Pack", who tells drunken tales of life as a homeless man. The ensemble of passengers is described by the driver as strange, but sane, in this excerpt from the play:

> "This 21 is a good route... Ain't a day goes by I don't say, 'Shit, I never seen that before.' It's a different kind of people, see. Poor? I bet there ain't two bucks on this whole bus. Weary? Some of these people have been through shit a cat wouldn't live through. Crazy? No way. They're just as sane as you or me. Oh, they're a little odd, most of them, you can bet on that. I don't know how they keep from cracking up" (1989, p.6).

The driver's description of his passengers aligns with the expectations of certain bus spectators regarding bus dramatics. Kevin Kling's portrayal of the 21A reproduces images of the bus as a meeting place for socially abnormal people, perhaps due to his position of privilege in relationship to others on the bus place. As one reviewer points out, his writing features references to the idyllic social landscape of "Lake Wobegon", which suggest a nostalgia for a particular (depoliticized, benign) matrix of cultural relationships (Goodman 1986). Thus, his characters are strange, but not threatening; poor or mentally ill, but not angry or discouraged.

While some riders simply enjoy the social scenery on the bus, other "audience members" might envision their role as that of an anthropologist, immersed in the "eccentric" subculture of bus riders. Passengers who assume the role of armchair (or bus-bench) anthropologists are often those who are economically and racially privileged, and project the image of the "urban other" onto riders inhabiting the bus space. Whether the "other" as object of study is the non-white other or the "misbehaving" young person, passenger anthropologists observe what happens on the bus, but do not make attempts to interact with the other passengers. Their only interaction with the space is intensive listening, so that they might report their observations to bus outsiders who are similar to them, and are also interested in this subculture. For example, a contributor to BusTales recounted an experience in which he watched two passengers compare gunshot wounds. His post begins with the context for his encounter…

"I was heading South on Chicago Ave on the number 5E. It was a pretty full bus, but it looked like the typical crowd from the neighborhood" (*Now Show me Yours* 2008).

He continues the post by describing his attempt to listen covertly to the exchange between two passengers: "Their conversation continued as I gazed down at my [Sudoku] puzzle, but with both ears cocked to hear the rest of it" (2008).

The passenger anthropologist relates to the bus place as a site of extraction. Critics outside and within the field of anthropology problematize the historically "extractive" nature of anthropological fieldwork, as the imperialistic project of domination through knowledge has been (and in some cases, continues to be) embedded within the study of the (non-Western) "other" by the Western scholar. A similar dynamic of power may be evident in the passenger anthropologist's relationship to the bus place,

as they situate themselves in a position of knowing authority as they observe the behavior of the other passengers. Besides the utility of the bus as a mode of transport, the bus functions as an access point to a subculture outside of the group with which the passenger anthropologist identifies.

In my fieldwork, I attempted to avoid an extractive relationship to the bus from which I might exoticize the subculture of bus riders in order to obtain interesting material for my project. Taking an approach rooted in feminist geography, I was conscious of ways in which my own positionality would affect my research. When I first moved to urban St. Paul from the suburbs of Portland, OR, I viewed the bus as my gateway to participation in "authentic" urban life. I could see the urban culture of the Twin Cities "performed" from the vantage point of my blue cushioned seat, and hoped to blend in with the other riders as a contributor to the city landscape.

To a certain extent, I believed that my anonymity as a passenger on the bus (as theorized by Augé) allowed me to shed the identities of privilege that had shaped my relationship to the city/urban environment when I was growing up. However, as made evident through my interactions with other passengers as well as the case for the bus as a site of societal conflict, the transient nature of the bus as a place does not act to erase our identities as they operate in the broader cultural context. While at the bus stop, I would often be asked why I was waiting alone, or receive warnings to "be careful" while riding the bus. Or, other passengers would immediately pick up on my class identity as a student, even if I felt I had not made that part of my identity obvious. Especially on interurban routes such as the 21 or the 16, I was marked as an outsider, and a spectator to many of the dramatic episodes occurring on the bus. However, I was not immune to the

dynamics of performance and often attracted attention due to my outsider status. For this reason, I aimed to act as a "passenger feminist geographer" instead of a "passenger anthropologist" – knowing that I could not remove myself from observations I was making onboard the bus.[13]

Insider/outsider relationships provide tension to bus dramatics. This tension is catalytic in reframing the bus from a (less volatile) theater of performance into a theater of conflict. Such relationships provoke dramatic demonstrations of claiming space. For example, Kelley shares an incident report from the Birmingham bus system in 1944, where a group of black passengers were teasing a white woman in the white section of the bus. When the white woman demanded that the driver move the board separating the "white" and "colored" sections of the bus to expand the white section, he refused. The official report states, "Later [the white woman] came to [the] Operator and asked him to make the negroes stop laughing at her. He told them that he could not stop them from laughing, [and] she then went into a tirade" (1994, p.61). The act of teasing, which would have been unacceptable in other public spaces in Birmingham, is a subtly subversive tactic to demarcate and claim space on the bus. Because "colored" and "white" spaces on the bus were both highly visible and flexible due to the movable position of the color board, the ability to assert full control over one's territory on the bus was vital. A tactic such as teasing is multidimensional, in that it is both theatrical/dramatic and tactical/militant as a tool to assert territorial claims on the bus.

[13] I also acknowledge that as a white, middle class, college-educated person I may be implicated in the structural violence that relegates marginalized groups to the bus as a last-resort mobility strategy.

Playing music, also considered a theatrical act in the literal sense, similarly acts as a territorial claim on board the bus. Spoken lyrics or an instrumental melody allow the musician to claim space beyond that which is occupied by their body as the volume of the music extends their influence to wherever the music can be heard. Another example from BusTales demonstrates the conflicts that such performance acts hold the potential to create. The rapping of a young black passenger catches the attention of a white passenger riding with his daughter on route 50, which runs as an express route along the 16 line during rush hour. He writes, "In a loud voice [the rapper] was grunting away some little ditty along the lines of 'shooting bitches' and 'f*cking with the sh*t'. As he strutted along the front of the bus he looked left and right at the other passengers, presumably to ensure that we understood how audacious he was" (*The Public Rapper* 2008). The black teen, as described in the post, was singing at a volume that forced the majority of the other passengers to take notice. The complaints of the [presumably] white[14] poster, and later his decision to confront the rapper, illustrate his attempts to regulate the bus space on behalf of what he conceived to be the "common good". He assessed the bus environment and determined that he will be justified (and supported) in his effort to reclaim the bus space through moderation of this teen's conduct. The post continues:

> "Now, if this was 11:00 at night and I was on the 16 I might not have been so bold. But if you can't stand up for decency during rush hour, on a limited stop line, when can you? Plus, I suspected that if it came to blows, some of my peeps would have my back. A St. Paul City Council member had gotten on a few stops prior and was sitting somewhere back there.

[14] The poster's race was made evident in the remaining content of the post.

> Across from me was a neighbor who boards at my stop. There were a few folks with suits who might stand with righteousness if it came to 'helter-skelter': swinging their briefcases with office-ninja aplomb" (*The Public Rapper* 2008).

Knowing that he would be supported by other passengers who have relative positions of power on the bus, such as the City Council member, the "folks with suits," etc…the poster is able to redefine the bus place on his own terms, acting on what he views as a depoliticized demand for quieter conduct from the other passengers. His vision for the space is reinforced by those on board who silently support his agenda, and the rapper eventually falls silent.

The dramatics of speech and noise in this racialized conflict on the 50 reproduce struggles for and against a segregated bus space in 1940s Birmingham. While the frustrated rider is (perhaps justifiably) angered by the rapper's use of profanity within the bus space, he is also exerting racialized power to silence what may be interpreted as subversive "noisemaking" by the rapping teen. In Race Rebels, Kelley reveals examples of similar conflicts in 1940s Birmingham in which white passengers attempted to suppress noise from "loud" black passengers. In addition, she discusses how black voices were used to challenge and interrupt barriers on the bus, as evident in the following passage:

> "Open black resistance on Birmingham's public transit system conveyed a sense of dramatic opposition to Jim Crow, before an audience, in a powerful way. No matter how well drivers, conductors, and signs kept

> their bodies separated, black voices could always flow easily into the section designated for whites, serving as a constant reminder that racially divided public space was contested terrain. Black passengers were routinely ejected, and occasionally arrested, for making too much noise, which in many cases turned out to be harsh words directed at a conductor or passenger, or a monologue about racism in general... The official reports reveal a hypersensitivity to black voices from the back of the bus. Indeed, any verbal protest or complaint registered by black passengers was frequently described as 'loud'—an adjective almost never used to describe the way white passengers articulated their grievances" (1994, p.70).

As in the case of "loud talking" black riders in Birmingham, struggles to define the bus place are reflective of larger conflicts around place-making in the urban environment. Opposing visions of behavioral norms on the bus – preferences for silence vs. noise, friendly environment vs. cold efficiency, etc., incite conflicts managed by interventionists including passengers, drivers, and Metro Transit police.

An example of such efforts towards place-making is the activism of Men Against Destruction-Defending Against Drugs and Social-Disorder (MADDADS), a community organization based in Minneapolis. MADDADS members, who are primarily African-American men, take advantage of the bus as a venue to disrupt constructions of the bus as a hostile place in their efforts to "empower, enlighten, encourage, and motivate" young African American men (V.J. Smith, personal communication, November 18, 2008). The organization cites the protection of "the elderly, women and children from vulgar language, theft, and violent acts" as their main goal in creating a more positive

environment on the bus (V.J. Smith, personal communication, November 18, 2008).

Instead of being relegated to the position of the performer by a critical audience, MADDADS embrace the role of the performer in the bus space. Like the public rapper, their efforts at place-making are subversive, although MADDADS orient their work towards a specific cause of establishing a safe and democratic space on the bus. Through weekly ride-along sessions, MADDADS volunteers transform the most dangerous routes in the Metro Transit System into the "Peace Bus" places using what organization leader V.J Smith describes as a combination of "visibility, motivation and communication" (personal communication, November 18, 2008). Riders on route 5, which receives more police calls than any other route in the system, enter into a radically altered bus environment on Monday afternoons, as MADDADS volunteers capture the attention of the passenger audience though speech, poetry, and song. "No reason to cuss or fuss, you're on the peace bus!" they shout, as they advocate for their vision of a safer public transportation system while encouraging other passengers to share their stories as well (V.J. Smith, personal communication, November 18, 2008). Through a dramatic engagement with the bus and its passengers, MADDADS aims to redefine the way riders participate in the bus place and bring about social change.

Arguably, the work of MADDADs transforms the bus from a place on the margins to a place of empowerment. Dolores Hayden, public historian, frames this place-making regime as follows: "Place-making enables disenfranchised communities to exercise agency in spaces that are often predicated on either criminalizing these communities and/or making them invisible" (as cited in Hutchinson 2003, p. 25). Although the bus exists as the marginal "Other" to the automobile, MADDADs is able to

rearticulate the bus' position in the city landscape as a vital site of community-building. Instead of a last resort transportation option or economically burdensome social service, the bus becomes a place that functions both as a civic forum and a safe space using the capacities of the bus riders themselves, thus renewing the agentic status of the riders as participants in a democratic society.

Hutchinson theorizes the effect of the activism of a group transforming the bus using similar strategies to MADDADs, the Los Angeles Bus Riders Union. She engages their dramatic tactics in this excerpt from *Imagining Transit*:

> "This form of organizing is a vibrant means of place-making, allowing working class people to assume ownership over spaces that have historically been marked as Other. Forged in struggle, this place-making dynamic is one that envisions social and political discourse as vital to the experience and imagination of public space…. Here, the struggle for democratic citizenship is linked to the struggle to liberate public space" (2004, p. 25).

As MADDADs foster relationships and inspire conversations within the bus space, they are reclaiming the bus as an empowering public place for a specific public. Themes such as structural constraints to mobility vs. individual agency in the participation in public life become evident through the range of abilities to inhabit public places that exists within an urban community. Such themes as will be addressed in the following chapter, which frames the mainline bus as a place of empowerment for those with limited access to alternative mobility strategies.

Theme III: A marginal bus, a mainstream place: fighting for access to public buses and public life

This section explores place-making on the bus in relation to those with limited access to alternative strategies of mobility. Past chapters have discussed transit dependence in the context of structural limitations to access to automobiles, but this chapter will attend to experiences of transit dependence originating on the individual (embodied) level, and contextualize these experiences within the social model of disability.[15] In addition to analyzing federal, state, and metro transportation policies towards people with disabilities, this chapter will engage the lived experiences of people with physical disabilities riding the bus.

Because the disabled community continues to be one of the most marginalized groups in American society, access to transit for this group is extremely important (Dempsey 1991). People with disabilities represent 47% of those in poverty, and are particularly vulnerable to long-term poverty (Peiyun & Livermore 2009). Transit is an important lifeline not only to employment opportunities, but also to the social sphere of public life. In the Twin Cities, around 19,000 people are registered with Metro Transit as "Limited Mobility", eligible to use either fixed-route options or Metro Mobility, a paratransit alternative (Metropolitan Council 2009).

Riders with wheelchairs were not always able to use the fixed-route service, as wheelchair lifts on buses were not legally required until 1990, when the Americans with

[15] Colin Barnes (2004) put forth a social model of disability, observing how broad political, economic and social structures interact to create the social category of disability. Disability is not simply located in the body, but defined through a built environment that limits mobility of many people who are transit dependent, not just those with limited physical or mental abilities (Butler & Bowlby 1997).

Disabilities Act was signed into law. People with disabilities who could not board fixed-route buses without assistance had to use special paratransit services, which feature individual, on-call service. Before the implementation of wheelchair lifts on buses, Ron Biss, chair of Metro Transit's Transit Accessibility Advisory Committee, remembers a very different transit landscape: "The [newly formed] Transit Accessibility Advisory Committee gave input as to which routes should be given priority for the installation of the new lifts according to locations of handicapped housing, but [wheelchair users] weren't even on the buses yet" (personal communication, October 5, 2008). The process of equipping all buses with lifts was lengthy, and lifts or ramps were not installed on 100% of the buses in Metro Transit's fleet until 2004 (Metro Transit 2009). And although Metro Transit aimed to give priority to installing accessibility equipment on routes used most by riders with disabilities, the lack of ramps and lifts on many buses meant that many riders with disabilities on low-priority routes would be passed by at bus stops by vehicles not yet equipped with the necessary hardware. From a technical standpoint, the fixed-route buses would remain an exclusionary place for people with disabilities until the full fleet was made accessible fourteen years after the ADA legislation was passed. Today, Metro Transit policy has been enacted to prevent exclusion on the basis of inadequate equipment. Drivers are required to "cycle" the wheelchair lift or ramp on their bus to ensure it is in proper working condition as part of their pre-trip routine, which is carried out before leaving the garage at the start of their route (A. Streasick, personal communication, August 15, 2008). In anticipation of riders with disabilities, drivers may also request that other passengers leave clear the spaces designated on the bus for those with limited mobility. People with limited mobility have dedicated places on the bus

intended to accommodate prosthetic mobility equipment such as wheelchairs or walkers.

Although exclusion on a technical basis is largely a non-issue in the Metro Transit system, wheelchair users may face *social* exclusion as they board the bus. And while a well-trained driver can complete the boarding procedure and strap a wheelchair into place within three minutes, less experienced drivers may cause very public delays while attempting to secure riders with wheelchairs on the bus (Nelson 2008). Such delays attract attention and even resentment from other passengers, as Metro Transit schedules have not been adapted to accommodate the extra time needed for passengers in wheelchairs to board.

A process designed to welcome passengers with disabilities into mainstream transit spaces may also be one of conflict, even humiliation. Ron Biss, who uses both Metro Mobility and fixed-route services depending on the situation, describes ways in which he has modified his routine based on the routes that recognize his right to ride the bus. To get downtown from his home in Bloomington, he prefers to take express routes with business commuters instead of the local urban route 18 due to the attitudes of the riders. "A lot of the passengers on the 18 are low-income people, struggling with life," he explains, sharing that the extra time needed to lift his wheelchair on and off of the bus is not always met with "happy attitudes" (R.Biss, personal communication, October 15, 2008). Biss' navigation of the social space of the bus is contingent on the relationships of his fellow passengers to the bus– whether they are calmly reclaiming their commute by choosing the bus, or on the bus as a last resort, already harried by other dead-ends of the day. Furthermore, because boarding the bus in a wheelchair entails a very public process, people with disabilities are frequently subjected to the objectifying "gaze" of other

passengers. Shakespeare (1996) describes this interaction as similar to that of women experiencing the male gaze: "this process of objectification through the gaze of the powerful is also experienced by disabled people. They and their bodily impairments are often looked at as *objects* of sympathy or social or medical curiosity" (cited in Butler & Bowlby 1997). In anticipation and negotiation of the objectifying gaze, Biss has learned to navigate the bus network with particular knowledge concerning hostile or welcoming cultural environments.

As Biss' experience makes evident, even policies that are designed to facilitate inclusion of people with disabilities in the public sphere may also create new tensions. People in wheelchairs must actively rearticulate their right to occupy a place on the bus, as the right/ability for people with disabilities to access buses was not always a given in the public discourse. In fact, the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act set forth new policies that would radically alter not only access to transit, but other forms of public life as well. Mandating installation of wheelchair lifts on fixed-route buses was not an arbitrary issue, as paratransit services were a then widely accepted[16]alternative to providing people with disabilities access to fixed-route transit.

In the debate prior the passage of the ADA legislation, ramps and lifts were not the sole solutions proposed to address issues of equity and accessibility. An important division in the movement to create a more accessible transit system occurred between those in favor of the expansion of special paratransit services versus those who advocate improving access to mainline buses. Because funds for transit projects[17] are extremely

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[16] "Accepted" by the general public and upheld by the courts as a valid substitute for access to fixed-route buses

[17] Additionally, funding within the arena of transit is competitive between suburban commuter projects and inner-city transit.

limited in comparison to government funds for other transportation projects such as highways, decision-making regarding the distribution of services is especially crucial due to competition between transit services (Grengs 2004).

Paratransit services came into existence in the 1970s as an "accessible" alternative to fixed-route transit options such as bus and rail, and offer individual, on-call service for eligible riders (Johnson et al 2001, p. 13). Under the requirements of the ADA (1990) "paratransit service is public transportation for certified riders who are unable to use the regular fixed-route bus due to a disability or health condition" (Metropolitan Council 2009b). In order to be eligible to ride Metro Mobility, the paratransit provider for the Metro Transit system, riders must submit an application assessing their ability to use mainstream bus service as well as confirmation from their health care provider stating that they meet any one of the following criteria: "They are physically unable to get to the regular fixed-route bus (OR) They are unable to navigate regular fixed-route 'bus system' once they are on board (OR) They are unable to board and exit the bus at some locations" (A. Streasick, personal communication, August 15, 2008).

Paratransit networks usually consist of a fleet of small buses or vans equipped with wheelchair lifts and other accessories to assist people with disabilities in their travels. Only those declared medically eligible may ride, which effectively declares the special paratransit services to be a place segregated by bodily "ability". Metro Mobility requires that clients call to reserve their seat in advance, and groups riders according to their origin and destination to increase efficiency. All types of trips, whether medical, business, or social, are held in equal priority under Metro Mobility guidelines, a policy which allows customers access to a variety of life activities. However, trips must be

reserved at least 24 hours in advance, a requirement which limits the spontaneity (and thus, livelihood choices) of clients dependent on the system.

Paratransit services operate at a much higher cost than fixed-route services, thus it is surprising that the struggle to mandate the installation of ramps and lifts on mainstream buses was so difficult. And while many people riding paratransit today are physically unable to ride mainstream transit options, a large portion of using paratransit before ADA were perfectly capable of using mainstream options but were denied that choice. This lag in policy change may be indicative of attitudes towards the public presence of people with disabilities. Butler and Bowlby describe such discomfort accompanying the presence of non-conforming bodies in public space:

> "Only those who use and present their bodies to conform to 'acceptable' behavior can maintain a physical presence in public space without social challenge. For those considered 'unacceptable', reactions can range from states and hostile remarks or actions to legal and police action to remove them physically" (1997, p. 419).

Those who advocated for laws requiring full access to mainstream transit criticized transit providers that relied solely on special paratransit services in working with the disabled community. Paratransit, they argued, was inconvenient and expensive for those dependent on the public transportation. In addition, paratransit functioned as a segregated space for people with disabilities, as they were given no means of boarding mainstream buses before the installation of ramps or lifts. Nevertheless, until the ADA was passed in 1990, paratransit was widely considered the "cheaper, more humane" choice in relation to bus transit, and was even upheld in the courts as a substitute for

fixed-route access (Johnson et al. 2001, p. vii).

In her discussion of accessible transit, philosopher Anita Silvers reveals the marginalizing effects of paratransit, saying, "We should recognize that both public and private special services programs for people with disabilities are aimed at individuals whose participation is feared to disrupt the efficiency of our ordinary transactions" (1998, p. 21, cited in Langan 2001, p.474).

Paratransit, as a "special service program" for people with limited mobility, also acts to keep these people from full participation in the public sphere for the sake of values such as "efficiency" or "convenience" by limiting the transit spaces and time of the day in which they can move about their city. Planning scholar Joe Grengs of the University of Michigan observes the replacement of the social goals of public transit in favor of neoliberal ideals of service throughout the process of transit planning. He writes, "the social purpose of transit is becoming supplanted by the economic imperative of efficiency and competitiveness" (2004, p.53). The framework for decision-making that supports accessibility solutions comprised only of special paratransit services naturalizes the sequestration of people with disabilities away from the public sphere, and does not recognize the importance of the mainstream bus as a site of public interaction. Bob Conrad, transit activist, wrote the following in a manifesto demanding an accessible bus system:

> "A lot of non-disabled people, if they had their choice, would want to have a paratransit system too. They'd want to be picked up at the door, and be pampered, and taken care of just like us disabled people have been with paratransit. Disabled people are not really any different in that respect. I

> think the real difference is in what we are saying about ourselves as disabled people when we accept paratransit. It feeds into what society says about us, that we need to be pampered, and that we need to be treated differently" (Johnson et al, 2001, p. 3).

In contradiction to its supposed goals of accessibility and mobility, the expansion of special paratransit infrastructure may directly limit the ability of people with disabilities to use mainstream transit. Across the nation since 1990, paratransit services have expanded to meet growing demand while use of increasingly accessible fixed-route options by people with disabilities has remained low (Langan 2001). This trend exists in contradiction to the original purpose of the ADA legislation as explained by Rosalyn Simon (1996), which emphasized non-discriminatory access to mainstream transit options with paratransit services as a secondary choice (Langan 2001). However, transit providers are legally obligated to provide paratransit services in all areas that are served by fixed-route buses for those who cannot self-propel to a bus stop within ¾ mile of their place of residence (A. Streasick, personal communication, August 15, 2008). Thus, transit authorities hesitate to expand fixed-route service because of the burden of providing an accompanying paratransit option. Because paratransit may be a disincentive to the expansion of mainstream transit, Simon (1996, p. 319) raises concerns about a negative impact on the general "social progress" in mass transportation (cited in Langan 2001, p. 473).

Simon's "social progress" on the bus may be understood in several ways. First, the fixed-route buses challenge physical barriers to mobility for people with disabilities by providing a socially integrated transport setting. Andy Streasick, a paratransit

evaluator for Metro Mobility and a person with a disability, explains the benefits of riding mainstream public transit for people with limited mobility: "the bus provides spontaneity, freedom, and it's low cost" (personal communication, August 15, 2008). His office administers classes at group homes and senior centers to train users with disabilities to ride the bus. "It's about empowerment and awareness" Streasick says. Working to change social constructions of ability and mobility, Streasick notes that "explaining that people are capable to their family and loved ones" is a large part of preparing clients to use mainstream transit (personal communication, August 15, 2008). Streasick's comments reflect the social model of disability, that the category of "disabled" is constructed not only through realities of the body, but also through social understandings of bodies and their relationship to the built environment.

Metro Mobility training sessions also empower new riders to engage in another dimension of Smith's "social progress" on the bus – participation in the bus as a site of public life. Streasick argues that the social opportunity that arises from riding the bus may be just as important as the transport provided (personal communication, August 15, 2008). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated a positive link between the presence of disabled riders on public transit and the public's attitude towards disabled riders, which can lead to better planning for inclusion (Butler and Bowlby 1997). In addition to improving transportation programming oriented specifically towards the disabled community, the bus is a site of intersection for larger struggles around mobility.

The public place of the bus connects disabled riders with others riders coexisting within matrix of social (im)mobility – whether constrained by a transportation system that does not acknowledge the varying abilities of the human body, constraints of low

income or unemployment, the inability to drive a private vehicle, or inadequate transit service in their neighborhood. Celeste Langan discusses such alliances by proposing a broader understanding of mobility disabilities:

> "I therefore wish to undertake a deconstruction of mobility disability—not to deny the difference between people with bodily impairments and those whose mobility is limited in other ways, but to develop a new account of what is required for just transportation. I propose that the reduction of mobility disparities depends on an *omnibus* model of rights—a model that may require abandoning the (always problematic) category of the "physically disabled" in favor of an alliance—a strategic nonessentialism, so to speak— among the (social) mobility-impaired (Langan 2001, p.465).

Langan's proposal unites transit-dependent riders from a wide range of social causes. Her work guides me towards my concluding chapter, in which I engage the bus as a public place of intersecting mobility and justice commitments.

Conclusion: Towards a united struggle for transit justice staked in mobility

Previous chapters have established the bus as a *place* with a role in the urban context beyond its capacity as a component of a transportation network. Metro Transit driver's stories, MADDAD's place-making efforts, and the struggles of disabled activists embrace the bus as site of public life. The bus as a place is vital in understanding racial and class relationships in American metropolitan areas as a whole. Recalling the centrality of the bus as a site of black resistance during the Civil Rights movement, Sikivu Hutchinson writes the bus as a keystone in understanding race in the city: "historically, transit has been a powerful means of stitching together the ontology of racial presence, urban public space, and racial subjectivity" (2003, p.2).

Furthermore, the bus is remembered and upheld as a site of struggle for the black community as well as for people with disabilities, as both groups fought for the right to freely occupy transit spaces alongside the white or non-disabled publics. Public historian Dolores Hayden emphasizes the value of understanding and preserving such contested public places: "Place-making reflects the degree to which space is forged through repression and struggle, ideology and social history, offering rich insight into how cultural identity is performed" (cited in Hutchinson 2003, p. 25). The bus is both a medium/vehicle of cultural capital and a place of community for marginalized groups in the city. In contrast to Augé's placelessness, framing the bus as a place recognizes the historical and continuing struggles for a just society.

The community and conditions of public transit use exist in stark contrast to the freedom and individualism of the automobile, which allow the drivers to pass *through* the

urban environment uninhibited by obligations to engage with the city and its people. And while bus passengers cannot avoid encountering other members of the urban community, the isolation of the individual within automobile-based infrastructure such as highways as well as the insularity of the auto itself is representative of the "retreat from the collective responsibilities of city life" (Hutchinson 2003, p.35). In many ways, the automobile more fully embodies Augé's concept of placelessness, as the hypermobility attained in driving can sever connections to the landscapes through which the driver moves.

The bus in contrast serves not only as a place of community and collective co-presence, but as a gateway to public life. Moreover, questions concerning who has the right to board the bus are closely linked with discussions of who has the right to public life. Activists in the movement to make public buses accessible to handicapped people raised the question "Are we [as people with disabilities] part of the public?" (Johnson et al. 2001).

Participation in the public sphere is enabled or limited by a person's ability to navigate not only the social world, but the built environment as well. Obstructions to pedestrian travel, the spatial mismatch of entry-level jobs and affordable housing, and inadequate public transit service for those without access to vehicles all present barriers to mobility, and therefore limit full participation in public life. Writing to expand understandings of mobility disability to include the social context of bodily limitations, Langan suggests a reframing of the public sphere to acknowledge the full range of circumstances that dis-enable people from enjoying full mobility:

> "What is needed is a reimagining of the public sphere—a reimagining that recognizes the public sphere as a built environment and that therefore

defends rights to transportation, education, and employment not as matters of general welfare but as necessary *civil* rights" (2001, p. 470).

Structures that dis-enable mobility can hinder participation in public life. A disproportionate number of people who are mobility dis-enabled are people of color, the poor, and people with disabilities. For example, the Minneapolis Urban League and the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing joined forces in 2005 to combat 2005 cuts in bus service as well as a fare increase that would create a disparate impact the residents of predominately low-income and black North Minneapolis (IRP 2009). In public meetings, residents and activists criticized Metro Transit for not taking the social demographics into account in the formulas used to determine where service reduction would occur. In addition, community members pushed to retain route 7 service o n weekends, a route to the social routines of many North Side residents for attending church or doing shopping. Metro Transit and the North Side's activists reached a compromise and route 29 service was enhanced on weekends so that residents might continue to participate in community activities (IRP 2009).

When a second fare increase was proposed in the spring of 2008, Metro Transit did not respond to the community's voice to the same extent. The 25-cent fare hike proposed for all rider categories would entail a 50% increase to the limited mobility fare of 50 cents, disproportionately affecting the disabled population. And while bus riders with disabilities were present in large numbers at the forums held by the Metropolitan Council to sample the public opinion, Metro Transit Officials claimed they were only obligated to "listen" and offered no response to rider's concerns about the higher fare's impact on their ability to complete their daily work and social routines. Furthermore,

many argued that the fare increase was an unnecessary and inadequate solution to Metro Transit's deficit, as placing the extra burden on transit riders would only cover half of the shortfall (Marty 2008). Soon after the series of forums concluded, Metro Transit announced that it would go through with its plans to increase fares for the second time in three years, with a possible third increase under consideration for 2009. Activists criticized Metro Transit for limiting the livelihoods (and public presence) of the disabled community as well as other marginalized groups.

Constraints on mobility are not always externally imposed – some rider groups may limit the hours or places in which they travel as a matter of personal safety. Robin Law's investigation into gender and mobility in public transit revealed the self-imposed limits women put on their own mobility due to potential vulnerability to sexual assault or violent crimes (Law 1999). A broad range of cultural experiences and structures influence our mobility and thus our participation in public life.

Mobility in the U.S. has been constructed as a defensible right, related intimately to the concept of citizenship (Cresswell 2006). In order to access public life, maintain a job, or participate in social institutions one must be enfranchised within the systems that provide mobility, whether by private or public means. Langan recognizes the extent to which mobility and citizenship are related, noting that "so much public funding and public property is devoted to transportation that the identification of citizenship with physical mobility is somewhat inevitable" (2001, p. 475). However, it is clear that distribution of public funds between different mobility strategies privilege the private automobile over mass transit options. And although the bus is in a marginal position to offer mobility (and thus, citizenship) due to the limitations of its services and of

transportation budgets, it is still an important avenue to public life for those who have no other choice.

Furthermore, the justice issues of mobility and transit equity bring together a variety of stakeholders that might not have had reason to interact. Activist Grace Lee Boggs puts forth *place* as a focus of activism that allows for the collaboration of multiple identities:

> "Place-based civic activism also has important advantages over activism based on racial and gender identity …place-based civic activism provides opportunities to struggle around race, gender, and class issues inside struggles around place" (Boggs 2000, p.19).

Similar in quality to place, the issue of mobility allows activists to collaborate across a multiplicity of commitments to racial justice, environmental justice, or disability rights towards solutions that meet the needs of all groups. Place (and mobility) has the capacity to hold the diverse collection of identities and commitments that moves activists in this struggle for a more just society. Langan describes such organizing in terms of a broadening of the disability rights movement:

> "In their new alliance, the mass-transit dependent and "individuals with wheelchairs" allow a richer understanding of the forms of mobility that democratic justice requires. It is only within such an alliance—a nonessentialist alliance that recognizes both potential conflicts of interest and the transitivity of identity— that the relative value of various forms of mobility can be adjudicated" (2001, p.482) .

Activist coalitions such as the Bus Riders Union of Los Angeles work towards transit justice with an understanding of the causal relationship between mobility and the possibility of escaping poverty (Bullard et. al 2004). The bus is a prime *place* for such activism because the bus operates as a site of interaction between various, even opposing groups. In consideration of the wide-ranging commitments that concern bus riders, I have argued that bringing the literature of transportation geography concerning accessibility and travel networks into conversation with cultural geography's concept of a produced mobility invites new avenues for a shared activism around transit places and transit justice.

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Appendix: Survey Data

	16 full route	16 Midway area	16 U of M area	144
Riders surveyed	42	25	17	27
Passengers without access to a private vehicle	17	16	1	8
Passengers without a driver's license	14	13	1	1
Passengers riding for reasons other than saving money or transit dependency	18	9	9	25
Riders using the bus to commute to work	18	9	9	27

	16 full route	16 Midway area	16 U of M area	144
White passengers	24	12	12	24
Black passengers	9	7	2	1
Other racial or ethnic identities*	5	3	2	1
No response	4	3	1	1

*I chose not to list the individual racial or ethnic identities within this category to protect the anonymity of my survey participants, as there were very few respondents within categories such as Asian or Native American

Calculations:

Percent of passengers who are transit dependent:

144: 8/27 = .2963 (29%)

16: 17/42 = .4048 (40%)

No significant difference at the 95% level

Percentage of passengers electing to ride the bus for reasons other than saving money or transit:

144: 25/27= 0.9259 (93%)

16: 18/42=0.4286 (43%)

Significant difference at the 95% level

Percent of passengers who identify as white:

144: 24/26= 0.9231 (92%)

16: 24/38= 0.6316 (63%)

Significant difference at the 95% level

SURVEY FORM:

Please fill out as much information as you feel comfortable:

1. General information:

Age group (*child, teen, adult, senior citizen*): _____

Gender: _____

Race or ethnicity: _____

City of residence: _____

Neighborhood: _____

2. How do you usually get to the bus stop? (check all that apply)

____ walking

____ biking

____ transfer from other bus route or light rail

____ carpool

____ driving personal vehicle

If transferring from other route, please list route number here: ___

3. Why do you ride the bus? (check all that apply)

____ I do not have access to a car

____ I do not have a driver's license

____ It is more relaxing

____ To save money

____ To protect the environment

____ To reduce congestion

____ Another reason (please specify): _____

4. What is the purpose of your trip today? _____

5. Do you think that riding the bus is safe? (circle one option)

Very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, very unsafe