

Spaces of exposure: Re-thinking 'publicness' through public transport

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Abstract

Developing thoughts on exposure in cultural geography, literary studies, and mobilities research, this article aims to provide a more comprehensive account towards the publicness of public space. What would happen if we assessed publicness not by degrees of openness and inclusion, but through the nexus of vulnerability and complicity that is fundamental to the notion of exposure? To grasp such an intrinsic dualism, our perspective goes towards public transport, where experiences of exposure are intensified by its specific conditions of encapsulation and movement. We illustrate this perspective drawing from the autobiographical chronicles of the Chilean writer Pedro Lemebel, in order to then propose a 'learning from' the case of public transport for a rethinking of publicness. Specifically, we argue that exposure provides new insights on agency, power and vulnerability as part of a more processual notion of public space.

Keywords

exposure, Pedro Lemebel, publicness, public space, public transport

Introduction

This article accompanies the queer Chilean author Pedro Lemebel on a bus ride through the city of Valparaíso. From this (ostensibly) autobiographical journey, we locate exposure as an analytical category to re-think publicness from inside a 'mobile' public space.

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In Lemebel's writings, which primarily focus on working-class women and homosexual men living in peripheral urban neighborhoods, public transport features as a space for 'bodies rubbing against each other (whose. . .) unbridled desire (. . .) is as anonymous as it is communal'.¹ By representing through the lens of his queer eye a public assemblage of mobile castaways on the margins of the Chilean neoliberal city,² Lemebel illuminates how the bus acts as a space of both liberation and inescapability, joy and repression, intimacy and vulnerability. Through an analysis of his 1999 work 'Halloween Night in Valparaíso', this article seeks to understand how Lemebel's vision of public transport as a particular kind of public space decenters notions of publicness that foreground harmonious encounters amongst strangers.

A recurrent trope in Lemebel's work is the transcendence of bodily boundaries, the sometimes violent, sometimes willful contact among classed, racialized, and gendered bodies crashing into, grabbing, caressing, threatening, and desiring one another, an experience that we argue can be summarized through the conceptual notion of *exposure*. Therefore, this article aligns with recent work that researches and theorizes exposure through corporeality, vulnerability, and performativity. This work has challenged static and dualist representations of space, from the 'toxic' remainders of Chernobyl to the 'natural' landscape of the Antarctic, by pointing out how individual embodiments and shared perceptions produce a more processual understanding of space.³ By locating exposure in public transport, this article contributes to urban studies literatures that have challenged the static division of public and private space. We argue that exposure draws attention to the intimacy of communal encounters, or the communality of intimate encounters, that produce a more troubled experience of 'publicness'.

To put it bluntly, locating exposure in public transport also allows for decentering white, heteronormative narratives of public space as a space of urban conviviality. As Krzysztof Nawratek and Asma Mehan argued in this journal from their analysis of dating practices in Kuala Lumpur, the Eurocentric concept of public space as a space of free access, which allows for a more open, democratic and inclusive contact and communality than other, privatized spaces, is not helpful for analyzing urban spaces in the Global South.⁴ This paper agrees with the authors' suggestion to understand urban space through a series of temporary situations of privacy that are never fully public in the liberal sense of the word.⁵ In addition, we propose that by looking at public space through the lens of exposure, we can overcome a dualist understanding of public space altogether and instead develop a more processual notion of publicness that however does not lose perspective of structural inequalities in urban contexts *across* the Global North and South.

Indeed, analyzing public space through a lens of exposure accentuates both questions of intimacy and vulnerability. A common theme throughout Lemebel's collection reflecting on the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Latin America, *Loco afán*, is reconstituting and redefining intimacy among homosexual men. He refers, for instance, to HIV-positive individuals in Cuba who can leave home only with the understanding of 'not infecting anyone, not sleeping with [*zingar con*] anyone, not getting to know anyone', eventually leading to their enclosure in an AIDS quarter in order to limit exposure by restricting intimacy.⁶ More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has again made the problems of exposure to pathogenic substances in public spaces a focus of political attention. In cities around the world, public transport spaces have been reconsidered as providing an enhanced individual and public (health) risk due to their condition of both encapsulation (lack of possibility of maintaining 'social distance') and mobility (facilitating the spread of disease transmission).⁷

These observations take up older discussions in mobilities research and transport studies about how trains, trams, busses, or roads not only provide the infrastructure for more or less smooth transportation, but how they expose their daily users to spatially and socially unequal risks of accidents, noise, and air pollution.⁸ In this way, mobilities and transport researchers have investigated

how bodies of passengers or transport workers are exposed to pollution, viral infections and other threats to physical or mental health. More recent debates work with a notion of exposure to describe not only how, upon entering public transport, passengers are confronted with all kinds of *intimate* proximities, touches, gazes, and smells, but also how the *public* context of exhaustive waiting routines, fare systems, and other physical access barriers is a most obvious experience of daily commute.⁹

Effectively, recent years have brought about a growing number of academic writings on exposure that are in many ways reacting to a global situation marked by climate crisis, environmental degradation, and emerging diseases that catapult human and other-than-human beings into a state of constant vulnerability. However, these works also transcend a focus on catastrophes and embrace the everydayness of exposure from a wide range of disciplines, ranging from literary studies,¹⁰ through cultural geography,¹¹ to mobilities research.¹²

These discussions lay the basis for conceptual reflections in this paper. We argue that public transport is a good starting point for locating exposure in urban space because it transcends the public/private dichotomy, it discloses power hierarchies involved that more euphemistic terms like encounter seem to conceal, and it draws attention to the situated spatial practice of how ‘publicness’ is produced.

As an author team¹³ with backgrounds in literary studies, mobilities and transport research, and human geography, bounded together by an interest in theorizing public transport as a public space,¹⁴ we demonstrate in the following how public transport encounters present a particularly telling example of how ‘publicness’ is always also an experience of ‘exposure’. In this article, we propose an interdisciplinary close reading of an autobiographical chronicle (*crónica*) by Pedro Lemebel, ‘Halloween Night in Valparaíso’. The *crónica* is a journalistic literary genre especially popular in Latin America in which an author briefly describes a particular event in great detail, hybridizing reportage and poetic rhetoric.¹⁵ As Gayatri Spivak argues through pondering the question of how literary studies can aid the social sciences – or, in our particular case, how our interdisciplinary team can work together – the close reading of literature allows one to ‘be imagined (. . .) by and in another culture (. . .). Literature is what escapes the system, you cannot speed read it’.¹⁶ What we offer, then, is to see what public transport studies look like when imagined from the eyes of queer urban communities in Chile – something that is accomplished, Spivak argues, by supplementing social science research with the close reading proper to literary studies.

As such, the socio-spatial dynamics illuminated in Lemebel’s work is what we hope to analyze in this article largely by responding to two central questions. First, how does analyzing public transport as a public space reconfigure our understanding of publicness? Second, how can a notion of *exposure* help decenter dominant assumptions about public space encounters, especially when we look at such spaces from the autobiographical writings of a queer, poor author from Chile? To state our case most polemically: attending to such questions requires us to largely abandon the public/private space dichotomy. We propose reconfiguring publicness around the notion of exposure.

Following this perspective, we begin this article with a short literature review that embeds our conceptual understanding of the ‘publicness’ of public transport in mobilities research and geographies of sexualities. Then, we discuss how thinking about exposure in literary studies and cultural geography can be translated into an analytical tool for decentering assumptions about the production of public space through deliberate intercultural encounters by instead focusing on the fluid and dynamic power relations inherent in a gendered, classed, and racialized urban landscape. In our analytical section, we take the autobiographical chronicles of Pedro Lemebel as an illustrative starting point to reflect on the ambivalent nature of ‘publicness’ in general, and on the complex scope of public transport as space of exposure in particular.

Generating 'publicness': Insights from mobilities research and geographies of sexuality

For many years, researchers have stated that public space is a core element of democratic societies, and have developed critical analyses of how state implemented regulatory regimes, policing practices and diverse forms of commodification might restrict liberal public encounters.¹⁷ Notably, and different from legal, economic, or political categorizations, the socio-spatial lens of exposure requires us to focus less on defining public space as an ideal type – valuing, for instance, the extent of its openness or its intended purpose – and more on how it is being used and produced in practice.¹⁸ Hence, considering public transport as public space enables a novel perspective on practiced publicness.¹⁹ Although rarely mentioned in the key writings on public space, public transport assembles a particularly intimate yet communal site, a public space that is distinct in its intensity and its unavoidability. Like any public space, public transport might be convivial and inviting but also segregating and restricting. However, it differs from the plaza in its affordance of dealing with diversity in a temporarily confined space, in its striking confusion of publicness and privacy.²⁰

From classical works like Marc Augé's *In the Metro*,²¹ to recent writings on affective atmospheres and micropolitics,²² studies of public transport have pointed to how particular spaces of exposure unfold 'in public'. First, through the condition of encapsulation in public transport, characterized by experiences of 'cocooning' inside moving vehicles²³ and of being 'stuck' in traffic,²⁴ passengers of differing classes, races, and genders are unavoidably confronted with each other's presence. While partially, this might trigger euphemistic perceptions of cross-class encounters and situations of 'conviviality',²⁵ a majority of public transport users are equally exposed to safety threats such as poor maintenance, repair and large differences in quality of service across geographical contexts.²⁶ In this line, a number of scholarly works have also pointed to how public transport spaces highlight discriminatory attitudes that can elsewhere be masked²⁷ and thus serve, for instance, 'as a site for the hyperrealization of racism that is generated in part by segregation'.²⁸ Again other researchers have rightly accentuated how mobile encounters are permanently affected by fear of crime, violence, or sexual harassment.²⁹

Thus, turning to public transport as public space exposes a pertinent critique of 'ideal type' – public space definitions, which revolves around the presupposition 'of a particularly contrasting "private"'³⁰ at the risk of reproducing heteropatriarchal and Western-centric conceptualizations of space.

Indeed, the now extensive literature on geography and sexuality – especially on male homosexual geographies – has decidedly shown the limitations of the public/private binary. Tatiana Matejskova³¹ and Phil Hubbard,³² for instance, both push for an analysis of the ways in which spaces *become* public through acts of ordering and law making. Public space is not naturally free of so-called 'private' homoeroticism, it is *forcibly freed* of it, thereby making anyone who violates this sanction exposed to the disciplinary mechanisms of political and civil regulatory apparatuses. If this goes to complicate the publicness of public space, many have similarly critiqued the notion of 'private' space. Feminist geographers have long noted that the 'home' is far from a space of safety, comfort, and tranquility for many women.³³ Similarly, researchers have shown how sex is *made* private by guaranteeing that it is not 'on display' in public space by containing it in the heteropatriarchal-structured home.³⁴

The space of the closet – an oft-referenced homosexual trope that symbolizes the idea that counter-sexualities are 'separate, hived off, invisible and unheard' in the space of a 'closet'³⁵ – is one example of the limitations of the public/private dichotomy and the value of the concept of exposure. As Michael P. Brown and others have pointed out through an analysis of homosexual men's experiences, the public/private spatial metaphor does not adequately address how many

navigate and manage being ‘out’ in public (i.e. being exposed).³⁶ As James Creech argues through an analysis of male homosexual writing in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, the closet is founded on a ‘paradoxical logic’ – not a clear-cut division between public/private – in which homosexual men sought both to hide their sexuality (i.e. not expose themselves to a hostile hegemonic heteronormativity) and to expose themselves as homosexual to other homosexual men through the form which their hiding took.³⁷ Following Brown, the same might be said of the facades of ‘typically gay spaces (bars, saunas and cruise clubs)’ that must ‘attract the attention of men seeking sex with men, while at the same time being completely invisible or innocuous to heteronormative eyes’.³⁸ The strict distinction between being ‘in’ the closet (i.e. unexposed private space) versus being ‘out’ of the closet (i.e. completely exposed public space) does not adequately express the navigation, management, and spectrum of experiences of exposure by homosexual men.

In short, the idea of ‘being in the closet’ and ‘coming out’ can be linked to a notion of *exposure*, understood here in the dual sense of ‘being dispossessed, abandoned, or exposed in ways that may well prove unlivable’³⁹ and as a way of claiming one’s identity, as homosexual, for instance, by moving from the private space in the closet to the public space outside the closet. To be exposed is not only exposure to violence from a disciplining dominant culture – as James Tyner⁴⁰ demonstrates – but additionally exposure to others whom one desires, and at least some male homosexual experiences demonstrate the attempt to reduce the former form of exposure while enhancing the latter. The limiting metaphor of being ‘in’ the private space of the closet versus the public space ‘out of’ the closet can be resolved via an appeal to the concept of exposure.

Beyond the perspective of specific publics, such as women, homosexual, trans, and/or queer communities, public transport arguably bears the potential of *expanding* the notion of public spaces beyond particular communities or localities: it interlinks points in space, and forges ‘intimate’ and ‘mobile publics’ within the shared spaces of buses, metros and trams.⁴¹ By this, public transport showcases but also challenges the almost ‘classical’ public space dichotomy of intimacy and alienation.⁴² It is here that a fragile sense of togetherness might emerge from temporary encounters amongst strangers. This sense blends into the mundane experience of individual passengers and habituated indifferences. At the same time, the limits of isolated passenger experience are evidenced by their inescapable proximity to others. Capturing this particular sense of publicness, from his observations in the Paris metro, Augé has rightly stated that ‘such is, really, for those who take it every day, the prosaic definition of the metro: collectivity without festival and solitude without isolation’.⁴³

Beyond ‘encounter’: Locating exposure in public (transport) space

Analogically to how public/private space metaphors do not adequately grasp the fluid condition of the intimate yet public space of urban transport, a euphemistic understanding of urban mobility as ‘everyday life practice that produces meaning and culture’⁴⁴ negates experiences of vulnerability that are particularly common to all kinds of publicness.⁴⁵ This critique becomes evident in the tradition of works on the concept of ‘encounter’, as discussed in this section. Drawing from this literature, we will argue that while encounter accentuates the demarcation of difference, playing an essential role in the making and unmaking of social, cultural, and physical borders,⁴⁶ exposure shifts the attention on the relationality between structure and agency in situational contexts.

Especially Indigenous activists and intellectuals have argued against the representation of the US genocide of Indigenous nations as an ‘encounter’: such a term serves to erase relations of power and the violence done against subaltern populations.⁴⁷ Often lacking critical reflection on such etymology, human geographers have increasingly utilized ‘encounter’ to describe the transformative capacity of urban diversity, *inter alia* as a moment of ‘surprise, shock, rupture, and

non-sovereignty' with the inherent potential to engender mutual recognition and social change in urban space.⁴⁸ As Gill Valentine has pointed out, this has led to a partial over-euphemistic account of urban conviviality and towards an analysis of the potential of social movements as a form of political encounter.⁴⁹ In response, Valentine calls for a focus on how the processuality and relationality of power hierarchies is co-produced in what she calls 'meaningful encounters',⁵⁰ something which we propose is better grasped through the notion of exposure.

The continuing centrality and coloniality of a few select Western conceptualizations of public space as space of encounter speaks to the ways in which public space involuntarily exposes its occupants to various (hegemonic) cultural paradigms.⁵¹ For instance, in reference to the manifold public space designs following an imperial or colonial legacy, Junxi Qian⁵² argues that one central function of public space is the education of citizens as well as the promotion of adequate conduct. This is accompanied by forms of 'monitoring and banishment of behaviors seen as antisocial and unattractive'. Similarly, public transport researchers have demonstrated how transport infrastructure designs continue to promote colonial visions of modernization,⁵³ implicitly setting values of backwardness and civilization into particular ways of social life in public.⁵⁴ Public space is therefore not a utopia constituted through deliberate intercultural encounter, but it is often characterized by an exposure to others by whom one is subjected or whom one subjects.

Nonetheless, urban researchers have rightly argued that repressive narratives inscribed in public space are not passively received and adopted but expressively counteracted, reinterpreted or mobilized for contestation.⁵⁵ For instance, turning to examine city life from a viewpoint of exposure, AbdouMaliq Simone has shown how Jakarta residents risk exposure in their everyday; not always willfully, but with the effect of becoming attuned to new options for making a living, for engaging with new itineraries, and for sounding out new spaces of maneuver. This is not a single-way interpretation of exposure, but one which remains sensitive to the 'multifaceted intersection of vulnerability and opportunity (. . .) of [exposure as] by-product of precarity but also as a way of dealing with that precarity'.⁵⁶

In this sense, exposure as a constitutive phenomenon of public space is part of an epistemological and experiential frame rooted in and emerging from the worlds of subjects such as Pedro Lemebel, whose dealing with exposure as a queer, poor body generates a particularly identifiable subjectivity as always being co-produced in and through its relations with others.

In line with this, a series of works in cultural geography and literary studies has recently discussed exposure as pointing to new dimensions of the limits of conceptualizing bodies as isolated and bounded entities. These studies reveal how exposure adds to understandings of vulnerability as a kind of *Zeitgeist*, in the sense of being exposed to devastated landscapes and unescapably harmful substances. For instance, drawing from one of the emblematic disasters in recent history – the nuclear accident of Chernobyl 1986 – Adriana Petryna's study *Life Exposed* has set the ground for an understanding of today's biopolitical subjects that departs from an experience of 'total unprotectedness'.⁵⁷ We do not equate exposure with a 'state of total unprotectedness' for our analysis of public space. However, also the study of less catastrophic, mundane socio-spatial events through the lens of exposure entails an analytical insight that has long been identified by feminist and queer scholars: the impermeable human subject no longer holds.⁵⁸ Here, we find particularly helpful for our analysis how, from his study of life within the post nuclear Chernobyl landscape, Nick Rush-Cooper reframes exposure as 'shared existential condition',⁵⁹ a sort of embodied subjectivity that considers the options of in/voluntary exposure, of being exposed but also (and often simultaneously) of exposing oneself.

Such an understanding of exposure is further developed in Stacy Alaimo's notion of 'insurgent vulnerability'.⁶⁰ From her work with feminist and environmentalist protests and performances, Alaimo develops exposure as a notion that entails a 'fraught sense of agency', one that emerges

precisely *because* of the loss of boundaries and sovereignty.⁶¹ Exposure, here, implies a new form of ‘complicity’⁶² that entails recognizing that one is substantially involved with others, of acknowledging one’s interconnection with and penetration by material and other forces and substances – be it pollution particles, viruses, or ticket gates. Exposure then does not start from literally or willfully ‘exposing oneself’, but it begins already when the first cracks in one’s shell of protection appear. These cracks might lead humans to perform new connections and complicities with (unknown) others.

Taken together, ‘acts of exposure’⁶³ can be identified as moments where the ever-present precarity or vulnerability of life becomes palpable, or even staged, resulting in both new forms of complicity and vulnerability.

Through their publicness, acts of exposure materialize as a play with ‘intimacy’ and ‘alienation’, a dynamic that is well captured in David Bissell’s⁶⁴ analyses of public transport travels. From his attentive study of commuting, Bissell has shown how passengers are not only exposed to the tiring experience of the travel, but how they also ‘experiment’ with public transport conditions of repetitive routines and well-rehearsed conduct. Indeed, one could argue the vast majority of public ‘encounters’ are managed in an attitude that aims for the lowest possible resistance, which results in a recharging of energies by passengers’ exposing themselves to some kind of a ‘patterned ground’.⁶⁵ However remaining true to the ambivalences/fluidities of public transport as public space, in a recent article, Elizabeth R Straughan, David Bissell, and Andrew Gorman-Murray⁶⁶ have introduced exposure and envelopment as two specifically *spatial* metaphors⁶⁷ that help understand how the particular condition of *movement*, that is, the ‘bouncing in and out’ of commuters to their workplaces away from home generates new forms of estrangement, desensitization, and disconnection. By this, the authors add observations on the spatio-affective and embodied qualities of exposure to existing critiques of the compromised ‘publicness’ of public transport.

Putting Bissell’s examination of public transport in dialogue with our discussion of literatures on the geographies of encounter in this section, public space can be seen more precisely as an opposition constituted by a collective of unwillingly ‘throwntogether’⁶⁸ individuals in a spatially bounded material assemblage. The ‘publicness’ of public transport, then, is constituted through one’s navigation, articulation, and engagement with an unknown multiplicity.⁶⁹ Exposing the isolated self to others appears here as a fundamental characteristic of publicness. Exposure to a given material environment and a certain spatialized rhythm might coercively form temporary togetherness and even complicity amongst strangers, but it might as well accentuate and (re-)produce structural inequalities.

Towards a theory of exposure: Reconsidering public space and public transport through Pedro Lemebel

The previous two sections have discussed how geographies of sexualities, decolonial urban studies, and urban transport studies have called on researchers to reconsider the meaning of public space. Rarely, however, has it been questioned how these strands of literature overlap. Through a reading of a chronicle by Pedro Lemebel, we propose to make a first step toward understanding how queer experiences of the publicness of public transport, especially from the so-called Global South, generate novel conceptions of public space as a space of exposure.

In the chronicle ‘Halloween Night in Valparaíso’, Lemebel⁷⁰ describes his trip to the Chilean port city of Valparaíso to participate in the carnivalesque environment of Halloween. After meeting an upper-class shirtless young man, his bare skin exposed to Lemebel’s queer gaze, Lemebel abandons his fellow working-class friends in an alleyway staircase in order to travel to a party in a

wealthier area with his new acquaintance and his upper-class companions. En route, a group of clowns gets on the bus and robs all of the riders before descending and leaving 'a few coins to the driver'. The young man insists that they go to the police precinct to denounce the crime since they stole his 'new Rolex'. Now finding the young man to be 'unbearably bourgeois' [*insopordablemente cuico*], Lemebel decides to re-encounter his friends in the alleyway staircase and passes the young man cash for another bus so that he can arrive to his destination. It is only here where the stunned young man realizes that the clowns had not robbed Lemebel.

In the chronicle, the reader is thrown into the play of bodies, gazes, vulnerabilities, complicities, and backgrounds against a changing setting of 'public' spaces. From the carnivalesque exhibition to and of homoerotic desires in the backalley passageways, the chronicle moves towards revealing its protagonists' unprotectedness and sudden visibility in the face of the clown robbers, intensified by the momentary inescapability of the bus. Upon entering the constricted and intimate space of the moving vehicle, the two men's vulnerability suddenly surfaces, it becomes staged in a double sense. Here, the experience of public space becomes palpably shaped by both bodies *being exposed* – to other's desires, to a robbery – as much as by their (voluntary) ways of dealing with that exposure by in turn *exposing themselves*.

Although all bus riders in Lemebel's chronicle are exposed to the dangers of robbery, one of them, Lemebel, escapes unscathed since the clowns are capable of distinguishing him from his upper-class companions, who are belting out 'songs in English that only the bourgeois [*cuicos*] know' and one of whom is wearing a new Rolex watch. The appearance of Lemebel's companions, combined with the bus's route from a lower-class neighborhood to a wealthier one, signals their particular class position. They are exposed as vulnerable wealthy subjects to the clowns in contrast to Lemebel's exposure as a complicit poor subject.

Not only being exposed to, however, but also calibrating how he is exposing himself to others, Lemebel carefully navigates intersecting fields of sexuality and class on the public space of the bus. To avoid conflict with his upper-class companions, he re-articulates complicity in terms of a queer vulnerability; the reason he was not touched, he explains to his companions, is because the clowns were likely 'scared' of touching him, implying that it was his vulnerable position as being visibly queer and not his complicit class position that saved him. Inside the bus, Lemebel and the clowns' shared condition of 'poorness' becomes suddenly palpable, and, mixed with the clowns' 'fear of touching' the visibly queer man, this double way of exposure presents an opportunity for Lemebel to escape the robbery.

In sum, being brought together or isolated in a public space is highly dependent upon how one navigates their exposure. In the bus, for instance, Lemebel carefully shifts his allegiances – with whom he is 'together' and from whom he is 'isolated' – in order to avoid harm and to form ephemeral alliances. He exposes himself as well-known queer writer, Pedro Lemebel, in order to be together with the 'bourgeois' young men, but then shifts his allegiance by exposing himself as 'poor' to the clowns. Moreover, this is highly dependent upon the specific space of public transport, given that the bus line they are using connects wealthier and poorer areas. Lemebel is able to realign and rearticulate his throwntogether assemblages so fluidly in part because of the particular kind of public space that he is occupying. The bus becomes the public space medium through which Lemebel forms novel alliances with other occupants by managing his exposure.

During the bus ride, Lemebel at times complicitly exposes himself as queer (to the boy in the back alley) and as poor (to the robber clowns). However, as Vek Lewis notes, the author also recognizes that many common public spaces like the central plaza are 'masculine and heterosexually dominated',⁷¹ thus exposing visibly queer bodies as both a threat to public order and at the same time threatened by those trying to maintain it. Lemebel is forced to walk the careful line between complicity – exposing himself to fellow queer and/or poor bodies in order to generate ephemeral

alliances – and vulnerability – being exposed to a hostile hegemonic heteronormativity and classism.

This is precisely the question of the publicness of public transport in Lemebel's 'Halloween Night in Valparaíso'. Whose exposure, one must ask, is one of vulnerability and whose is of power? Who is being exposed to a dominant other and who is exposing others to their dominance? In simple terms, public space is not dominated by a singular force, but is a kaleidoscope of disciplinary regimes. The carnival context of Lemebel's chronicle – the chronicle takes place on Halloween, on that day when power relations are turned upside down, when the subaltern can 'transgress classed limits and form newly politicized identities'⁷² – is significant in this sense: the 'normal' power relations of the public space of public transport are reversed. Instead of public space being controlled by the 'bourgie' men's hegemonic vision of neoliberal modernization, quite literally *clowns*, that classic figure of the carnivalesque, disrupt and subvert the power relations that dominate everyday circumstances. When the 'bourgie' young men want to go to the police precinct afterwards, then, they are trying to re-impose hegemonic relations of power within the public space of public transport.

The temporary episode on a bus illustrates the simultaneity of bodies being exposed to each other on multiple levels, as, for instance, with regards to class positions, sexual orientations, and violence. Thus, the bus, by itself intensifying exposure, stands for the fluidity of contexts, connecting a dark back alley, different neighborhoods, parties, the police station, and so on. It creates a particular mobile space, one of temporary alliances and swiftly changing atmospheres – from safety to unprotectedness to complicity – which shake the foundations of the concept of public space. As Jean Franco implies, the public bus in Lemebel's work frequently serves as a public space for homoerotic encounters.⁷³ Yet this public space of public transport is continuously intersected with other publics due to its very nature: it is always crossing into new neighborhoods, picking up new riders at the stops along its route.

It is here where the scene of exposure described by Pedro Lemebel assumes a specific *publicness*, because it suddenly reveals conditions of vulnerability but also makes palpable the inevitable relatedness of the subjects inside the bus.⁷⁴ It reveals the limits of conceiving of bodies as isolated or bounded entities and rather points to the qualities of their connection; in Lemebel's case first forging a bond of desire to the 'bourgie' young man, then loosening this bond. This particular quality of exposure is not generated exclusively by the carnivalesque environment, the 'staging' dimension of exposure. Rather, Lemebel seizing the (risky) opportunity to willfully expose his body vis-à-vis the clowns can be understood as a specific form of dealing with vulnerability by performing a new kind of complicity with the also-precarious/poor robbers.

Conclusion

Following Lemebel through the night, and particularly along his encounters in public transport, we have demonstrated how exposure means much more than just a *being exposed to* a certain risk, a set of contagious particles, or the heteronormative gaze of a fellow passenger. Beyond that, exposure appears as a beneficial concept for further social analysis, as it bonds actors together in a reciprocal relationship, without denying either the power hierarchies involved or the individuals' leeway to expose themselves to others. To be exposed is to be vulnerable to hostile others as well as to be complicit in the allegiances one forges with some others encountered in public space.

This is precisely the vision of exposure illuminated through a reading of Lemebel's 'Halloween Night in Valparaíso'. On the one hand, his fluid subjectivity is formed by how he navigates and manages his exposure, first exposing himself as a complicit homosexual man in the public staircase and then as a complicit poor man when the clown robbers enter the bus. On the other hand, he

avoids the exposed vulnerabilities of heteropatriarchal public spaces such as the plaza by choosing alternative spaces of congregation that would likely be treated as 'semi-public' within the public/private binary: the city bus and the back-alley staircase. The idea of being *hidden in* the private space of the closet versus *being out* in public space makes little to no sense in this chronicle, for Lemebel is always already 'out' – he is a public queer intellectual who is immediately recognized by the young man who sees him in the staircase – but also shifts his dominant exposed identity when on the bus in order to align himself with the clown robbers. Instead of speaking of public/private spaces, Lemebel's interaction on the public space of public transport illuminates that we can shift towards a more flexible discussion of publicness.

From the conceptual reflections presented in this article, we wish to encourage cultural geographers to (1) further elaborate on the 'publicness' of public transport as situationally enabling or limiting individuals' spaces of maneuver and their capacity to expose themselves in order to form new alliances and complicities; (2) to consider exposure as way of criticizing the partially untenable conditions of public transport provision, including everyday practices of systematic exclusion and discrimination.

Lemebel's chronicle of the queer, working-class experience of the public space of the public bus points to how subjectivity in public space is co-generated dependent upon how one navigates the relations of power and desire to which one exposes oneself and to which one is exposed – not always a passive or innocent act by any means. Isolated individuals may decide to oppose a given frame and to contest normative expectations, which might push the limits for transgression;⁷⁵ however, they remain in a situated context that co-produces the collective perception of contestation and conduct. For instance, surveillance technology as a widely implemented control device in public space is indeed a determinant of normative behavior and 'conviviality' through exclusive accessibility. Yet in parallel, it entails individualized forms of contestation (wearing masks to avoid face recognition, enacting flashmobs with the implicit knowledge to be screened).⁷⁶ This refers back to the manifold observed productive use of disorder and uncertainty, which recognizes repressive regimes of urban life, all while taking the manifold daily coping strategies into account – a socio-material symbiosis of public life.⁷⁷

Importantly, Lemebel is by no means innocent or neutral in this dynamic, instead actively forming his subjectivity in response to the dynamics of exposure. This is a recurrent refrain in the contributions to Kath Browne, Jason Lim, and Gavin Brown's co-edited *Geographies of Sexualities*. For instance, many city-dwelling middle- and upper-class homosexual men exposed in public space are vulnerable to a hostile homophobia as well as complicit in urban processes such as gentrification; exposed to the public, they simultaneously are subject to the disciplinary forces of heteronormativity and subject the working class to the disciplinary regimes of middle- and upper-class reconfigurations of the city.⁷⁸ Putting this counter-example in conversation with Lemebel reveals the flexibility and dynamism of the concept of exposure: it permits us to understand differing modes of navigating one's complicities and vulnerabilities that are articulated within classed, gendered, and racialized disciplinary regimes of urban space. Both Lemebel and upper-class homosexual men are subjected to the heteronormativity of public space, yet they carve out distinct complicities based on differing class locations. As Farhang Rouhani summarizes, we as researchers need to take greater care with 'the complexities of queer complicities', such as 'the multiple forms of complicity and resistance, assimilation and differentiation'.⁷⁹

Being exposed to situated togetherness, as we find in the bus in 'Halloween Night in Valparaíso', opposes an idealized approach towards publicness as mainly inclusive and emancipatory in nature.⁸⁰ It points towards the strange, mostly unconscious, and not least coincidental complicity in public space: this lays the ground for both the opportunity to expose oneself to an (in)voluntary

public, as well as a phlegmatic conduct of following the rules in consequence of permanent exposure to governance and social sanction.

From this perspective, we wish to contribute to existing critiques of a euphemistically ‘inclusive’ and ‘convivial’ notion of public space, and to move away from the problematic notion of ‘encounter’ that neglects the manifold practices of marginalization at stake. A re-conceptualization of public transport as public space, we have argued, enables to overcome the dichotomies of public/private while acknowledging the mutual and complex intimacy and communality of exposure in public transport. This way, the notion of exposure allows for a context-sensitive perspective, while at the same time enabling an analysis of power and difference in societies (e.g. gender, class, race, sexuality). What is more, exposure strongly opposes an artificial macro/micro divide but sharpens the view of how bodies are formed. It gives form to situational encounters without losing an imminent critical stance on socio-spatially mediated inequalities.

Lastly, as an outlook, we believe that exposure as an analytical tool demands further methodological reflection: the reciprocity of the concept might help to develop a meso-research perspective which is attentive to complicit mutualities in vulnerable situational encounters, without losing the perspective of structural inequalities. In this contribution, we try to contribute to the discussion on queer methodologies, and invite to think further about exposure as an essential driver in ethnographically informed research settings. In this sense, we gratefully take the self-exposing chronicles of Lemebel as an insightful starting point to reflect further on the complex implications of a permanently exposed and conflictual publicness.

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