

READING ON WHEELS

Stories of *Convivencia* in the Latin American City

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Abstract: In the past fifteen years, many Latin American cities have sponsored programs that promote reading through their city's public transportation systems. This article analyzes two of these programs, Libro al Viento in Bogotá, Colombia, and Santiago en 100 Palabras in Santiago, Chile, framed with examples from Buenos Aires, Argentina. These programs insert stories into public space to enhance social interaction and develop a positive sense of local belonging. Literary reading is harnessed as a socially embedded practice that can facilitate change, in response to previous periods of censorship and repression under dictatorship (in Chile) and political violence (in Colombia). Shifting the view of reading from an individual to a collective experience rather than focusing on functional literacy, these initiatives put literary reading to the service of civic and community development. The programs emerged during a period of increased investment by municipal governments in public space, including renovated subways and new bus rapid transit systems, and rely on a combination of public and private sponsorship. The intricate relationship between urban infrastructure and literary culture in these contemporary programs challenges but also perpetuates the role of the "lettered city."

Renowned in the 1920s as the tram capital of Latin America, Buenos Aires today conserves one last remaining tram line. A remnant of the height of urban modernization in the region, the cars follow a historic loop through the Caballito neighborhood. Literature and art from these early decades of the twentieth century in Latin America celebrate urban technological advances, such as Argentine poet Oliverio Girondo's *Veinte poemas para ser leídos en el tranvía*. The first edition of one thousand numbered and signed copies, published in France in 1922, was a large format book with the author's original color illustrations.¹ Despite its impractical size and limited distribution (two impediments to reaching a mass public readership), *Veinte poemas's* title introduces the image of reading in public, among the crowd. Girondo's collection evolved from that first edition to coincide even more with its title. In 1925, the journal *Martín Fierro* published a second, smaller edition, the "edición tranviaria," which sold for twenty cents.²

In 2011, to commemorate Girondo's 120th birthday, a special edition of *Veinte*

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1. The first edition books measured 24 × 32 cm.

2. The "tram edition" measured 11 × 18 cm, roughly half the size of the original edition, and the drawings were printed in black and white.

poemas was given out free to the public on the historic Caballito tram line, a nod to modernity, movement, and public access inscribed in the book's origins. Sponsored by the municipal Ministry of Culture, the event was held on Girondo's birthday on August 19 as part of the city's yearlong programming for World Book Capital, an honor awarded by UNESCO. Once again these poems were put in motion, circulated in a "tram edition" that reenacted Girondo's initiation of public reading on transportation.³

Girondo's invitation to read his poems on the tram offers an inadvertent model for contemporary reading programs in Latin America that intersect with urban infrastructure. Urban reading programs in recent years not only promote reading and literature; their interventions into public space aim to generate positive identification with the city and civic interaction among readers. This article considers two current reading programs that rely on public transportation: *Libro al Viento* (Books on the Wind) in Bogotá, Colombia, and *Santiago en 100 Palabras* (Santiago in 100 Words) in Santiago, Chile.⁴ In an effort to reclaim public space, boost urban identity, and reestablish interpersonal respect and trust, each of these reading initiatives responds to its city's economic and political context. The current reading programs in Bogotá and Santiago go beyond Girondo's metaphorical recognition of modernity. Public transportation serves not only as a setting for reading but also as a mechanism for circulating books to actively promote reading in public as a collective civic experience.

Today's reading programs rely on modern industrial advancements that emerged in the 1920s. According to Jorge Schwartz (1993, 143–144), celebrating locomotion in art and literature in the early twentieth century established connections between creative aesthetics and urban daily life.⁵ Current programs that encourage reading on public transportation challenge the conception of reading as a solitary, private activity and turn it into a shared everyday experience. Rather than focus on alphabetic literacy, which stresses the mechanical and functional skills of reading and writing, these programs emphasize social literacy with a concern for the practices and uses of reading and writing in their cultural contexts. Brian Street, David Barton, and other New Literacy Studies specialists consider literacy practices as embedded in social interactions. An overview of these Latin American reading programs in conjunction with public transportation reveals that making written material available to the public aims to provoke interactions among readers to increase public safety and strengthen civic cohesion (Kalman and Street 2013, 7).

3. This edition measures 11 × 18 cm, identical in size to the original "edición tranviaria," but the drawings are in color. The book was also distributed on the city's new system of articulated buses called *Metrobus*. Buenos Aires's World Book Capital campaign sponsored other events related to reading on public transportation such as a program in partnership with several bus lines called "¡Un libro es un viaje, viajá con un libro!" (Subsecretaría de Cultura, Buenos Aires Capital Mundial del Libro, 2011, "¡Un libro es un viaje, viajá con un libro! Campaña en las líneas 37, 152, 80 y 132, con el auspicio de VPM").

4. *Libro al Viento*, <http://www.culturarecreacionydeporte.gov.co/libro-al-viento-0> (accessed March 8, 2016); *Santiago en 100 Palabras*, <http://www.santiagoen100palabras.cl/> (accessed June 27, 2013).

5. A significant number of Latin American writers in the early decades of the twentieth century emphasize public transportation, such as Gutierrez Nájera's *Novela del tranvía*, Lugones's *Luna ciudadana*, and poetry by Alfonsina Storni and Juana Manuela Gorriti.

The intricate relationship between urban infrastructure and literary culture has its roots in what Ángel Rama (1984) calls the lettered city, a concentration of “writing” institutions (legal, religious, and educational) established in colonial cities and perpetuated after independence. Rama’s class-based analysis of the urban lettered elite points out the persistent exclusion of the majority of individuals in Latin America from public access to information, education, and published work, thereby limiting their active participation in civic culture. Both the geographical mapping of colonial urban design and bureaucratic city administration leave lasting constraints on urban interaction and expression. The programs reviewed here propose public reading as an inclusive experience that is aesthetic as well as interpersonal. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the contemporary lettered city began to reinvest in public programming as a response to the failure of the neoliberal economic policies that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s across Latin America. These policies stressed privatization and global market investment and ultimately exacerbated economic inequality in the region. The level of public investment plunged in favor of private, corporate sponsorship for services. More recent corrective attempts reveal renewed attention to the need for public services and embrace the kinds of programs explored in this article, such as public reading initiatives. Nevertheless, a reliance on a combination of public and private funding for these ventures reinforces some of the dynamics that Rama’s seminal essay critiques.

In the past ten years, capital cities such as Mexico City, Santiago, and Bogotá have initiated programs that promote reading through their city’s public transportation systems. Each of these programs publishes huge editions of small format paperback books and distributes them free on buses and subways. Inspired by London’s *Poems on the Underground* and New York City’s *Poetry in Motion*,⁶ the first of these programs in Latin America, Mexico’s *Para Leer de Boleto en el Metro*, appeared in 2004 and launched its eleventh short story anthology in February 2011 in an edition of 250,000 copies. The public image of these projects serves to improve the reputation of the transportation system, the municipal government, and the various funding institutions that finance them. They challenge the “private” and stationary identification with reading by situating the written word in public, and encourage the fluid interaction between the printed page, urban space, and citizenship. This public literature invites, in fact depends on, the municipal citizen and commuter as reader and viewer, and sometimes even as author.

Such Latin American initiatives connect literature, particularly fiction, with urban transportation by inserting stories into the collective experience of public space to enhance social interaction and develop a positive sense of local belonging. Literary reading is harnessed as a socially embedded practice that can facilitate

6. *Poems on the Underground* began in 1986. *New York’s Poetry in Motion* began in 1992, and printed poetry on the advertising space above the seats in buses and subway cars. The program was replaced from 2008 to 2010 by “Train of Thought” that featured philosophical quotes in place of the poetry. The poetry, however, was missed and by popular demand the program was reinstated in a “contemplatively triumphant return” (Yakas 2012), under Arts for Transit in March of 2012. See also “Poetry in Motion is Back,” September 27, 2012, MTA website, <http://www.mta.info/news/2012/03/27/poetry-motion-back>.

change (Barton 1994, 32). Often, multiple goals coincide, such as fighting crime and promoting new transportation infrastructure that will improve efficiency and air quality. The success of these programs is evident in their duration, revealing how public enthusiasm for books and reading parallels more investment in public libraries. The books distributed in Bogotá became collectors' items, thus affecting the return rate and limiting their circulation on public transportation. In these cases, as explored more fully below, the programs have been the victims of their own success, prompting some significant changes in distribution and circulation. Of the many contemporary Latin American urban reading programs, I focus here on Bogotá's *Libro al Viento* and Santiago's *Santiago en 100 Palabras* because of their long duration and their intricate relationship with their respective city's public transportation system. Both programs also emerge as a response to prolonged periods of political repression (Chile) or political and social violence (Colombia). By linking reading to *convivencia*, loosely translated as "sociability," both programs engage the lettered city to redefine urban identity.

TRANSPORTATION RENOVATION AND CONVIVENCIA

Many definitions of public space incorporate movement, whether to highlight sidewalks and pedestrian walkways or the intersecting roadways of plazas and traffic circles. A recent definition, from the renowned interdisciplinary urban studies think tank FLACSO (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales), considers public space "the social sphere where discourses from and about the city *travel, are put in circulation, are recontextualized and reproduced*" (Buendía Astudillo 2008, 258; emphasis added).⁷ The innovations in bus rapid transit (BRT) in Latin American cities over the past decade not only ameliorate traffic and reduce air pollution but also reveal the cultural politics of government intervention into public space. The new bus systems in Bogotá and Santiago, the *TransMilenio* and *Transantiago*, respectively, were inaugurated with great fanfare and promise. Together with Santiago's subway system, the *Metro*, these buses and trains not only move passengers but also circulate books and stories. These transportation companies, in conjunction with other private and public entities, financially support public reading programs by producing and distributing books and devoting publicity space to short stories at bus stops and in subway stations. A brief introduction to these two transportation systems will help clarify the role of public policy and public space in these innovative venues for reading.

The *TransMilenio*, the *Transantiago*, and more recently *Metrobus* in Mexico City and Buenos Aires are all modeled after the BRT implemented in Curitiba, Brazil, in the mid-1970s. These systems were designed to relieve traffic congestion, upgrade mass transit equipment and infrastructure, speed up travel through designated lanes, improve air quality, regulate and coordinate a chaotic arrangement of feeder bus lines, and generally enhance urban mobility. The results are

7. All translations from sources in Spanish are my own.

elaborate systems of high-capacity, multicar buses that operate on elevated, special-access, high-speed lanes, bypassing traffic lights and smaller intersections.⁸ The fares on BRT lines are significantly higher than on conventional buses and in some cases higher than subway fares. The emergence of these high-speed bus lines has shifted the demographics of commuting in cities that offer these new transportation options.

The planning for TransMilenio in Bogotá began in 1998, and construction was under way in 2000. The system has won awards for its environmental improvements and traffic-related efficiency.⁹ It has been so successful that other Colombian cities are planning to adopt it, and the system has been copied in other cities in Latin America, including Santiago.¹⁰ While it has improved the capital's traffic congestion, it has not been without controversy. The construction impinged on neighborhood businesses and local housing and eliminated many smaller, independent bus lines. More recently, deferred maintenance is evident and the system has deteriorated (Fernández L'Hoeste 2010, 162–164).

In Santiago, the expansion of Metro de Santiago, a combination private and state-run corporation since 1965, was in the works since the Pinochet dictatorship ended in 1990. Recognizing that the outdated vehicles contributed to dangerous air quality, under President Patricio Aylwin (1990–1994) some initial improvements replaced old buses and began regulating the smaller minibuses.¹¹ A more comprehensive plan was developed during Ricardo Lagos's administration (2000–2006) to integrate the bus and subway systems for greater efficiency. Lagos promised a new system that would be “efficient, dignified, and integrating” (Rivera 2008, 23). Transantiago was implemented in 2005 and initially met with broad popular approval. However, a host of financial and implementation fiascos erupted during President Michele Bachelet's term in 2007, provoking strikes, shutdowns, even riots, and weeks of free service to commuters because fare card readers malfunctioned.¹²

Although the Curitiba BRT system emerged during the military dictatorship with its goals of industrialization and urban order, both TransMilenio and Transantiago came about during democratically elected national and local governments. The Bogotá BRT was developed under Mayor Enrique Peñalosa (1998–2001) as one of his many initiatives to promote citizens' participation in urban life. Known as a New Urbanist, Peñalosa made improving public space a central

8. Bogotá's TransMilenio introduced special elevated lanes, while some of the other BRT systems (Mexico City and Buenos Aires) operate at street level.

9. Some of the numerous awards include the Stockholm Partnerships for Sustainable Cities award (considered the “Nobel prize” for mobility) in 2003, the Transportation Research Board's Sustainable Transport award in 2005, and the Venice Biennale's Golden Lion award for Best City in 2006. Véllez (2007) also mentions “best practice” awards for TransMilenio in 2002 and 2004.

10. Berney cites twenty-six cities as having copied the TransMilenio system (2011, 28).

11. The term “micro” is Santiago slang for buses in general and appears in many of the stories, including one quoted below.

12. The butt of jokes and sharp political attacks, the new buses were also made fun of on a political satire site that launched the contest Transantiago en 100 Palabras, a spoof on the short story contest discussed below (see Aravena 2007).

goal of his administration. As Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste remarks, Peñalosa's administration (and Mockus's as well, see below) "succeeded in convincing many that public space, previously understood as belonging to no one, was in fact the property of all, a veritable redefinition of the urban social paradigm" (2010, 154). Peñalosa's administration built and repaired sidewalks, planted thousands of trees, and declared an annual "no-car day" in Bogotá. This period of intense investment in public space under successive mayoral leadership in Bogotá made public space a "planning ideal; a symbol and a solution regarded as a comprehensive fix for Bogotá's problems" (Berney 2011, 17).

Urban planners who have studied these BRT systems insist that urban revitalization enhances civic integration and *convivencia*, along with mobility and ecological benefits. Adriana Hurtado Tarazona claims that the TransMilenio would not only fill a transportation vacuum but also was expected to "transform the system of public space" (2008, 15). Better linkages between neighborhoods promote social integration. The upgraded vehicles and new stations initially improved property values and promoted housing and business development. According to planner Hurtado Tarazona, "Everyone deserves a sophisticated and aesthetic system which promotes togetherness and interaction among citizens of all socioeconomic levels" (16). Bogotá mayor Peñalosa's idealistic vision comes through in his speeches: "It's a question of constructing citizenship, a way of life, and the city is only a medium. . . . The most important thing . . . is what it means to have a sense of belonging as a community, a sense of citizenship" (2003, 39). Similarly, Chilean president Lagos's emphasis on "dignity" in his launching of the Transantiago insists on ethical goals for their BRT.

The lofty ideals behind both systems, TransMilenio and Transantiago, clearly involve social as well as practical dimensions (Valderrama Pineda 2010, 126). According to Andrés Valderrama Pineda, along with mobility TransMilenio was intended "to reconfigure a whole set of relations, including power relations, spatial and distance relations and identity relations" in Bogotá (2010, 133). Creative writing and reading in the city intersect with these modernized systems of transport by committing to the social element of *convivencia*.

Convivencia is at the core of Bogotá mayor Antanas Mockus's campaign called "cultura ciudadana" (civic culture). Mockus's two mayoral terms (1995–1997 and 2001–2003), just before and after Peñalosa's, frame this intense period of investment in public space and citizen engagement in the city. Mockus's policies in the domains of urban congestion and intervention in public space coincide with his sociological work in education and decriminalization. In a book coauthored with Jimmy Corzo, he associates *convivencia* with the following conditions: rational communication, negotiation toward lasting agreements, interpersonal trust, respecting pluralism, and tolerance for diversity (2003, 17–22). His campaign for transforming public space and engaging individual citizens' sense of responsibility relied heavily on "creative and artful interventions" such as mimes at traffic intersections (Cala Buendía 2014, 38). Reading falls in line with Mockus's strategies for redefining the urban imaginary at a crisis point of violence and pollution in Bogotá.

While Bogotá's mayors promoted TransMilenio for improving public safety

and civic interaction, the transportation improvements in Santiago dramatize the process of reclaiming public space in the transition to democracy after the dictatorship. The Metro was considered a space of surveillance and repression. As Chilean writer and activist Pedro Lemebel (2006) states, “With music like that in a private clinic and the butcher shop tiles that cover the walls of the tunnels, the Santiago Metro is the disciplined evidence of the dictatorship.” From this repressive past where hidden cameras captured passengers’ every move, the subway stations have emerged as scenes of cultural expression. Transportation renovations, along with Transantiago, include branches of the public library (BiblioMetro) and new public art in the Metro. Public reading contributes to the city’s investment in new transportation infrastructure during the political transitional period.

As necessary arteries for moving through urban space, public transportation systems in major Latin American cities become more than tools for daily maneuvering; they become metaphors for the cities themselves, story grids for urban imaginaries. Moving through the city entails a “reading” of urban space, a semiotic deciphering of streets, the built environment, and the rules of urban circulation. For Michel de Certeau, the act of reading, both semiotically and as a literacy practice, is a key example of “everyday practices,” alongside such activities as cooking, walking, and shopping. His references to movement and the stories of urban life resonate with these programs that move literature on public transportation:

In modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes a “metaphor”—a bus or train. Stories could also take this noble name: every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories. . . . [S]tories, whether every-day or literary, serve us as a means of mass transportation, as *metaphorai*. Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice. (1984, 115)

De Certeau’s theories of individual and social movement through urban space propose a discursive occupation of space, a *writing* into and onto the urban topography. *Libro al Viento* and *Santiago en 100 Palabras* install literature on public transportation, visible on billboards and available in circulating books. Stories, poems, and essays become part of the cities’ built structures and passengers’ spatial itineraries.

Promoting reading on public transportation supports municipal governments’ official emphasis on convivencia and interpersonal dignity through the aesthetic and human dimensions of literature. An article on a similar initiative in Mexico City identifies the program’s goal: “turning the passenger into a better citizen for the future”; the experience of reading on the metro “helps reconstruct civic confidence and solidarity.”¹³ Echoing the municipal rhetoric of convivencia, the Centro Regional para el Fomento del Libro en América Latina y el Caribe (CERLALC 2002, 25) encourages generating “more agile and available channels of distribution. . . . and sponsoring spaces for shared reading” such as buses and subways.

13. “Para leer de boleto en el metro” (accessed May 23, 2013, at <http://www.cultura.df.gob.mx/index.php/component/content/article/305-antologias-de-boleto>).

Libro al Viento and Santiago en 100 Palabras capitalize on the social experience of public transportation for collective reading and writing.

LIBRO AL VIENTO: FROM URBAN READING TO BOOK COLLECTING IN BOGOTÁ

When award-winning fiction writer Laura Restrepo and former Biblioteca Nacional director Ana Roda invented Libro al Viento, they had in mind “not only promoting reading but also sending the message that reading and literature can be part of people’s daily lives.”¹⁴ Libro al Viento was conceived and implemented in conjunction with Bogotá’s TransMilenio. Financed by the city since 2004, Libro al Viento pertains to a widespread campaign by the municipal government to promote TransMilenio and pride in the city. This campaign for a positive urban image shows up in the city’s slogan in the mid-2000s, “Bogotá sin Indiferencia” (Bogotá without Indifference), printed on posters, banners, and advertisements. Libro al Viento turned out to be a key factor in Bogotá’s successful application for the UNESCO designation “World Book Capital” awarded to the city in 2007. In fact, the brochure for Bogotá as World Book Capital describes Libro al Viento as one of their programs “that facilitates *the road to the book* and makes reading more attractive” (Bogotá Capital Mundial del Libro 2007, 15; emphasis added).

Roda, who directed Libro al Viento during its first few years, identifies two main goals: first, to publish quality literature, selections that are “seductive, enjoyable, fun, sharp, intelligent,” and second, “to have the books circulate, be shared, recommended, passed from hand to hand, by word of mouth, to reach houses, to be read aloud and to oneself, be loaned out, talked about, and to eventually become part of all *bogotanos’* lives” (Roda 2007). Libro al Viento’s objectives stress enjoyment of literature over reading skills or functional literacy: “to find pleasure in reading, diversion, illumination, sources of reflection, knowledge, a broad vision of the world” (Libro al Viento 2005). The program invites citizens to engage in reading literature as a right rather than a privilege: “Reading is everyone’s right, and should be available to everyone.”¹⁵ By emphasizing access and availability of literature in everyday contexts, Libro al Viento offers what New Literacy Studies considers a “literacy practice” that “has social implications concerned with relationships of power” (Barton 1994, 127). All those involved in Libro al Viento, from the founders to the various editors and promoters, underscore the goal of expanding the pleasure of reading to an increasingly large and diverse public.

The books published and distributed in the Libro al Viento program include a combination of Colombian authors in several genres, international writers (Tolstoy, Chekhov, Maupassant), classics, and Latin American writers (Julio Cortázar, Julio Ramón Ribeyro, Rubem Fonseca). The first two books published in the series illustrate this broad range of authors and titles: *Antígona* by Sophocles inaugu-

14. Ana Roda Fornaguera, interview by author, November 2011, Bogotá. Roda worked for Bogotá’s municipal Ministry of Culture at the time that she initiated Libro al Viento and directed the program. She was director of Colombia’s National Library from 2008 to 2013.

15. Roda interview.

rated the program, followed by selections from Gabriel García Márquez's autobiography. By launching the series with a classic, the program directors wanted to "find points of contact" through language and stories as universal experiences.¹⁶ The editorial process relies on an editor who proposes a series of titles for the coming year, and an advisory committee that meets annually to review, revise, and approve the editorial plan. The advisory committee includes representatives from various municipal ministries (Secretaría de Educación, Instituto Distrital de Artes); Ana Roda, who founded and first administered the program; and other city officials. Each title is printed in varying editions of fifteen thousand to one hundred thousand copies, and more than one hundred titles have been published as of this writing.¹⁷ The volumes are small format paperbacks, easy to fit in a large pocket or purse. The books were initially distributed on bookshelves at six TransMilenio hubs, as well as in open-air food markets, hospitals, municipal offices, parks, schools, libraries, and over two hundred soup kitchens. The practice of circulation is at the foundation of *Libro al Viento*, from its origins associated with TransMilenio buses to the goal of books moving among readers. Former editor Julio Paredes Castro mentioned that each book is assumed to reach six readers as books are shared with family members, distributed to school groups, and passed on to friends.

The relationship between the city and books is at the center of *Libro al Viento's* mission. Paredes identifies "a connection among space and culture and books . . . the books are there and people can take them, there is no barrier, rather it's all available."¹⁸ Carlos Ramírez, who currently handles distribution for the program, considers each title "a book that is not given away, but rather a book that belongs to the city" that relies upon "a vote of confidence in people."¹⁹ The messages printed on the back cover of each book offer basic instructions suggesting that rather than as a giveaway or free books, the program puts books into circulation "as public goods."²⁰ While TransMilenio sponsored the program, the message on the back covers highlighted the transportation company: "Este es un 'Libro al viento.' Es para que usted lo lea y para que lo lean muchos como usted. Por eso, cuando lo termine, déjelo en una estación de TransMilenio y, si le gustó, recoja otro." (This is a Book on the Wind. It's for you to read, and for many others like you to read too. So, when you finish it, leave it at a TransMilenio stop and if you enjoyed it, take another.)

The books published after the TransMilenio support ended changed the message on the back cover: "The city belongs to everyone and so do its books. Contribute to the success of this campaign; it's a vote of confidence in Bogotá." The most recent books' back cover message underscores Ramírez's view: "This copy

16. Julio Paredes Castro, interview by author, November 3, 2011, Bogotá.

17. The editions have varied over the years based on funding and sponsors. The early years sponsored by TransMilenio saw the largest editions. Currently fifteen thousand copies are printed of each title.

18. Paredes interview, 2011.

19. Carlos Ramírez, interview by author, October 17, 2014, Bogotá.

20. Ramírez interview.

of *Libro al Viento* is public property. After reading it, allow it to circulate among other readers.”

Among the Colombian literature featured are selections that highlight indigenous folklore, such as the two-volume multilingual collection *Pütchi Biyá Uai* (Rocha Vivas 2010). These titles, alongside Latin American and classic European writing, once again reaffirm the universalizing goal of making a wide array of literature available, whether from local, regional, or world literatures, reconfirming the program’s goal of “the effective and increasing inclusion of new readers and new voices” (Paredes 2010, 8). One or two books each year address a topic related to Bogotá, such as a short story anthology of *bogotano* writers (Suescún 2005), or historical essays or chronicles about the city. More recently, the series has adopted a color coding that identifies four broad areas related to readership and genre: young readers (green), world literature (orange), hybrid or less conventional genres (blue), and the *Colección Capital* (violet). This “branding” of the Bogotá collection, with a commitment of at least two titles per year, anchors the series in urban themes.

The Bogotá collection merits particular attention for the purposes of this study since it most concretely underscores the theme of urban identity. These titles offer historical, documentary, and fictional sources that encourage local belonging. One of the volumes, titled *Cuentos en Bogotá* (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá 2005), includes the winning stories from a creative writing contest sponsored by TransMilenio: the winning story, “La paga” by Héctor Manuel Hoyos (15–25), is followed by nine other stories recognized as honorable mentions. The judges’ comments serve as an introduction, praising the ordinary citizens who submitted stories that offer readers a version of the city not “from above” but from the ground level (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá 2005, 9). The stories incorporate traveling by TransMilenio into their plots, punctuated with the names of stations and cross streets. Violence marks these fictional urban itineraries, indirectly confirming how *Libro al Viento* relies on the literary imagination to process recent history. Hoyos’s story concerns a violent attack involving a paramilitary vehicle and mentions the proliferation of armed body guards hired by the upper class to ferry around their children, referring to the 1990s when moving around the city was terribly dangerous. In the final story in the collection, “El hombre de la silla azul” by Álvaro Guillermo Reyes (106–118), written in fragments subtitled with the names of TransMilenio stops, a construction worker’s disillusioned love story leads to a crime of passion.

After *Libro al Viento*’s first two years, the city government administered questionnaires to commuters and readers on the TransMilenio to assess the program’s impact. Participants expressed their admiration for people who read and an impression of them as cultured: “When I see someone reading, I find them interesting. You say to yourself, ‘hey, that really interesting person is reading.’ I feel sympathetic toward that person, reading in unconventional spaces moves me. I admire people reading on buses or in parks” (*Libro al Viento* 2006, n.p.). Reading on public transportation creates new impressions among commuters as *Libro al Viento* expands reading experiences and affects how citizens view one another. Paredes asserts that a program like *Libro al Viento* could never exist in Europe or

the United States: "The publishers and bookstores would never allow it—100,000 copies given out free every month! But in Colombia, the people who buy books don't ride public buses or shop at marginal urban markets, so Libro al Viento reaches new readers without competing for consumers."²¹

While the follow-up report revealed that about 30 percent of the books were returned and continued to circulate, the remaining two-thirds of the books, those not returned, began to preoccupy the directors and editors of the program. Roda, Paredes, and Ramírez all asserted that the program never intended to be an editorial "collection" for personal libraries; as Roda states, "It was never our plan to create a series . . . but rather to provide encounters with books, to search for readers."²² Nevertheless, its very success through public accessibility and attractive design prompted readers to keep the books. To combat collecting and promote circulation, Libro al Viento has become more associated with the public library system. Biblioestaciones, mobile library modules with a limited selection of books, have been installed in many of the major TransMilenio stations, and they all carry Libro al Viento books. No longer free to keep, the books circulate and help promote library membership. Similarly, where the books appear in open-air food markets and municipal offices, they are available to read while shopping or waiting for an appointment but must be returned to the shelves.

Thus the books become fixtures of urban spaces, and reading an experience integrated into urban life: "The objective, along with promoting reading, is to revive the plaza as a meeting space, as a tradition, and to promote collective memory" (Ávila 2007, 8). This emphasis on reclaiming (*rescatar*) public space corresponds to recent theories of the commons and efforts to reinvigorate the role of the public, particularly in cities. In urban geographer Jordi Borja's overview of contemporary urban planning, public spaces take precedence. In this revalorization of collective spaces, "the marginalized become integrated, the passive reclaim their rights, residents adapt to their surroundings, everyone acquires self-esteem and dignity, accepting and responding to the challenges posed by urban dynamics and policies" (Borja 2003, 72). Bogotá's Libro al Viento, with its focus on the citizen as reader, reaches beyond an elite and privileged precinct and inserts literature into public space. Circulating books create an inclusive cohort where ordinary citizens become "participants in a project for the public good."²³

SANTIAGO EN 100 PALABRAS: THE URBAN CITIZEN AS READER AND WRITER

Since 2001, Santiago en 100 Palabras has been promoting not only reading but also creative writing in the city in conjunction with public transportation. A contest for narratives in no more than one hundred words is cosponsored by the magazine *Plagio*, the copper mining company Minera Escondida, and the public transportation company Metro de Santiago. The objective is to encourage literary expression out of the common experiences of urban life in order to promote

21. Julio Paredes Castro, interview by author, February 2, 2008, Bogotá.

22. Roda interview by author, 2011.

23. Paredes interview, 2011.

urban interaction and a sense of belonging. The winning stories are published in small paperbacks and also printed on billboards featuring the authors' names and illustrated with colorful graphics. The contest is judged by a panel of writers; judges have included well-known writers such as Diamela Eltit, Alberto Fuguet, and Alejandra Costamagna. In a special edition celebrating ten years of *Santiago en 100 Palabras*, Costamagna calls the program "democratic" and "egalitarian," "a living exercise: a dialogue that takes place in public space" of voices that "express a collective history" (Santiago en 100 Palabras 2010, 189). The one hundred-word limit for the stories is hardly random but rather coincides with the transportation medium: it is the maximum number of words that can be read in the two minute stops at the stations or in the time between trains on the platform (Mujica 2005). During the first few years of the contest, the stories were submitted on paper in "mailboxes" in the Metro stations; when participation ballooned, the program developed a digital submission system along with public voting on selected stories. Cash prizes are awarded to the winning stories (first place takes US\$2,000, second place \$1,000, third place \$500), and the one hundred best stories are collected every two years in the tiny paperback books that are given away free on the buses and subways, to "return to the citizens what belongs to them" (Santiago en 100 Palabras 2010, 13).²⁴

Sponsored by a combination of public and private institutions, a mix of the cultural and the corporate, the project's seemingly disparate elements and institutions all coincide in new and dynamic interventions into public space. The magazine *Plagio*, a free biannual publication since 2000, launched the project and administers the contest. The private mining company Minera Escondida uses the project to boost its public image by emphasizing the environment, safety, and culture. Metro de Santiago contributes to this collaborative public-private venture by lending its public image and helping to distribute information on the prize, display winning stories, and circulate the books. Replacing advertising (temporarily) with short stories in a space normally devoted to promoting consumer spending is one of the program's critical strategies for occupying public space and accessing a mass audience. On the one hand, the use of the billboards subverts consumerism and indirectly critiques the neoliberal economic policies of postdictatorial Chile. Instead of marketing global consumer goods, the billboards are "reconfigured into loci of social dialogue" (Griffin 2010, 92–93). On the other hand, Minera Escondida's corporate sponsorship requires their logo to appear on all the billboards, perpetuating the patterns of neoliberal consumerism. This contradiction is emblematic of the tensions and compromises of these combined public-private reading programs.²⁵

Brief essays in the biennial books by the editors and sponsors underscore the civic and social goals of the contest. Metro de Santiago not only applauds the growth of the story competition but also congratulates itself on the expansion of the Metro: "In 2004 we added six new stations to the system, which will continue to grow with more new stations proposed for 2005 and 2006 totaling 87 km;

24. Since 2012, the free books are being published annually.

25. See Griffin (2010, 95–98) on the complexity of Minera Escondida's role. See also Griffin (2016).

definitely *more space for promoting culture*" (Santiago en 100 Palabras 2005, n.p.; emphasis added). In another volume, Metro's introduction identifies "social profitability" as part of its development plan (Santiago en 100 Palabras 2007, n.p.). The company alludes to the challenges of the Transantiago in the next volume, calling the current period the "era of Transantiago" (8) and committing to "take literature further and bring it to more people" (Santiago en 100 Palabras 2009, 9).

The growing civic dimension of Santiago en 100 Palabras is evident in the numbers. The quantity of stories submitted for the contest has soared, from around 2,600 the first year to more than 50,000. Santiago provides the theme as well as the venue for the stories, and the contest stresses ownership and invites readers (referred to as a collective "nosotros") to "transcend reality and transform it into a story, and in this way, to discover the essence of a city that speaks about us and about who we are . . . and to diminish the distance between us" (Santiago en 100 Palabras 2005, n.p.; emphasis added). Each printed story on the huge posters and in the books identifies the author's name, age, and neighborhood, further mapping the city through the authors' local identification.²⁶ From children to senior citizens, the authors of these stories broach urban life in chance encounters, walking dogs, childhood memories, dialogues, street intersections, romance, and mystery, often highlighting public spaces such as parks and street scenes as arenas for intimate dramas. A common theme in the stories reveals how the dreary routine of everyday itineraries can explode into startling surprises.

In these short fictions about Santiago, public transportation scenarios are often integral to the stories, highlighting mutual attraction between strangers in crowded spaces or elaborate efforts to escape the office or domestic life. An overview of the prize-winning, honorable mention, and thirty or so jurors' choice stories published in the anthologies reveals some suggestive tendencies. Twenty of the one hundred stories in the first volume and eighteen in the second volume make bus or subway transportation a major part of the action, while several others in each volume include a passing mention of public vehicles. The Metro and buses appear in more prominent roles in the earlier volumes, with a steady drop in each anthology.²⁷ Even taking into consideration the lack of statistical clout in this survey (the published stories may or may not be representative of all stories submitted, the printed stories may reflect judges' biases), the trend points to tentative conclusions. These stories confirm how travel through public space together with fellow inhabitants functions as an emblem of urban life. The contest's association with the Metro begins with the company's financial sponsorship and extends to its visible role in the contest each year from start to finish. At first, the Metro provided the site for the mailboxes where stories were submitted and finally displays the winning stories on billboards. I hypothesize that as the com-

26. I have eliminated the age and neighborhood references in the stories quoted here, as space does not allow for thorough analysis of this information. Greene (2006) does consider this data for the complete corpus of stories submitted in 2005.

27. The most recent anthologies reveal a slight resurgence of the transportation theme. Based on my own reading, the number of stories featuring public transportation in a major role in each volume is as follows: vol. 1, twenty; vol. 2, eighteen; vol. 3, sixteen; vol. 4, eleven; vol. 5, eight; vol. 6, five; vol. 7, twelve; vol. 8, nine.

petition shifted toward electronic submissions, the Metro became less central, imaginatively, to the contest.

A study of one year's entire corpus of submitted stories confirms these conclusions. In his master's thesis in urban planning, Ricardo Greene analyzed all of the 18,434 stories submitted to the contest in 2005. After organizing the full corpus according to age, gender, neighborhood, and overall theme, Greene (2006, 79, 153) found that 19 percent of the stories focused on some form of transportation, and that 9 percent concerned the Metro itself. I share Greene's hesitance to draw firm conclusions regarding the Metro as a theme in these stories, given how intricately connected it is to the contest's publicity, prizes, and results (Greene 2006, 141). Greene mentions in his introduction that the contest's name was originally proposed as "Microcuentos en el Metro," but the Metro refused to accept anything that included "micro," the slang term for buses, so as not to be associated with the city's ailing bus system. Similarly, the logo was changed from yellow, associated with the buses, to red and blue, which were more associated with the Metro. No stories criticizing the Metro are allowed to win, adding a layer of restriction and control to the judging process. Although Greene considered the stories without access to the authors' names, his geographical analysis revealed that the neighborhoods most represented among the stories' authors (who all identify their residential neighborhood on the billboards and in the anthologies) are all along Metro lines.

The transportation-related stories reveal how transportation occupies the public spatial imagination in Santiago by fictionalizing personal interactions on buses and subway cars. Many of the public transportation stories are love stories: unexpected encounters, breakups, seductions, and tensions between couples rely on public transportation's movement, darkness, window reflections, speed, and anonymity in recounting intimate connections. A few examples illustrate how the Metro, Transantiago, and even the contest itself are featured in the stories.

"Metro de Los Heroes," by Michel Montecinos

Aquí llega el Metro, atesado de gente como todas las mañanas. Escojo con la mirada desde el andén a mi víctima, mientras repaso mentalmente el plan. Se abren las puertas. El último en bajar es un hombre todavía somnoliento. "Mi víctima", digo para mis adentros. Él me mira de reojo y entonces atasco: "Hola, ¿Cómo está?" le digo, mientras subo y avanzo por el carro. Él gira. Las puertas se cierran y veo con satisfacción su cara de incertidumbre. Pobre hombre, pensará todo el día quién lo saludó, y yo, no puedo esperar hasta mañana a mi siguiente víctima.

Here I arrive at the Metro, teeming with people like every morning. I choose my victim from the platform, with my gaze, while I mentally review my plan. The doors open. The last one to get off is a man who is still half asleep. "My victim," I say to myself. He gives me an odd look and then I jump in, "Hello, how are you?" I say to him, while I get on and move into the car. He turns. The doors close and I see with satisfaction an uncertain look on his face. Poor guy, he'll be thinking all day about who said hello to him, and I can't wait until tomorrow for my next victim. (Santiago en 100 Palabras 2003, 43)

This story exemplifies the anonymity of public transportation and the games commuters play with glances, generated by men or women. Here a playful narrator, likely a woman, exploits the close quarters of the subway car and catches the other rider unaware with her greeting. The story is punctuated temporally by the

doors opening and closing, and the daily challenge of finding another “victim,” in this case, a victim of friendly convivencia.

The contest itself begins to show signs of inscribing itself in the city’s urban imaginary. Beyond its graphic presence on billboards along the subway platforms and the Transantiago stops, the contest appears as the very subject in one of the competing stories:

“Recurrencia,” by Pablo Vásquez

Más influenciado por la perseverancia de su padre que por una verdadera disposición artística Maldonado escribe sobre Luis Pezoa, un poeta olvidado que en la estación Baquedano lee las bases del concurso “Santiago en 100 palabras”. Rejuvenecido ante la posibilidad de pagar algunas deudas y de reposicionar su nombre en los impasibles círculos literarios, Pezoa sale a la Plaza Italia, busca un asiento y crea la historia de Maldonado y su desesperada necesidad de buscar un deseo, una vocación lejos de las pretensiones de un padre obstinado por tener un hijo escritor.

“Recurrence”

More influenced by his father’s perseverance than by a true artistic disposition Maldonado writes about Luis Pezoa, a forgotten poet who in the Baquedano station reads the rules for the contest “Santiago in 100 Words.” Rejuvenated by the possibility of paying off some debts and gaining acceptance in exclusive literary circles, Pezoa gets out at Plaza Italia, looks for a seat and creates a story about Maldonado and his desperate need to search for a desire, a vocation far from the pretensions of a father insistent on having a son who is a writer. (Santiago en 100 Palabras 2005, 85)

This story’s *mise en abîme* fictionalizes the contest *within* the contest, in a story about writers who write about writers, creating a Mobius strip that tricks the reader with an ending that does not end. The displacement of the “writer,” who starts out as Maldonado but ends up as Maldonado’s subject, shifts the creative impulse onto the poet. This deferral reviews Pezoa’s motivation (prize money, reputation) as he considers entering the contest announced publicly in a Metro station. The story incorporates movement through the city on the Metro only to subordinate the transportation function of the Metro to its role as the locus of information on (as well as one of the sponsors of) the contest. Here the narrative source of the story elusively slips to trap the reader in a continuous loop, ever searching for Maldonado’s vocation or Pezoa’s acceptance into that impenetrable literary world.

Another story fictionalizes the printed posters of the winning stories:

“Lo perdí,” by María Inés Peranchiguay

Tuve el mismo celular por tres años. Mismo número, 100% ubicable por todos y a toda hora. Si me llamas hoy, no te contestaré yo, sino otro. No tengo cómo avisarte, pues todos los datos estaban allí y sólo allí. Si lees ésto, te enterarás y quizás nos encontremos al afiche, yo deseando que lo leas y tú riéndote de la despistada que perdió el celular. (Santiago en 100 Palabras 2007, 33)

“I Lost It”

I had the same cell phone for three years. The same number, 100% reachable by everyone and at any hour. If you call me today, I won’t be answering, someone else will. I don’t know how to let you know, since all the information was kept there and there alone. If you see this, you’ll find out and perhaps we’ll meet at the poster, me hoping that you’ll read it and you laughing at the scatterbrain who lost her cell phone.

Here the narrator and her friend have lost track of one another when the narrator loses her cell phone, their only means of communication. She hopes that if her story is chosen by the contest, its graphic display in public with her name will help them reunite. The latest technology (cell phones) fails them, so she resorts to the publicly printed version of a written message inscribed on the city to restore contact.

One last example from *Santiago en 100 Palabras* brings together reading, writing, and movement through the city with particular resonance for this exploration of urban public reading by inscribing itself on the vehicle that delivers the story:

“Escrito hallado en un respaldo de asiento de micro,” by Julio Gutiérrez

No se me ocurrió otra forma de ubicarlos para que lo supieran. Mamá, papá: estoy bien y los perdono.

“Note found on the back of a bus seat”

I couldn't think of any other way to find you to let you know. Mom, Dad: I'm fine and I forgive you. (*Santiago en 100 Palabras* 2007, 14)

The title of this short piece announces the public transportation setting for the text itself, immediately enveloping the reader into the plot. The title also contains literary allusions through the image of a “found document,” a frequent metafictional move in Latin American fiction. The text to be discovered is inscribed directly on the vinyl of the back of a bus seat, exposed to any commuters who sit there, circulating along with the vehicle. The title indicates an intertextual genealogy that includes Edgar Allen Poe's famous tale, “Manuscript Found in a Bottle” and Julio Cortázar's “Manuscrito hallado en un bolsillo,” all texts moving through space in search of readers. The intertextual relationship between Cortázar's and Gutiérrez's stories pertains not only to the title, as Cortázar's story takes place almost entirely in the Paris metro.²⁸ The intricacies of public transportation in both stories motivate interpersonal encounters. Uncertainty and chance govern all of these tales of found written messages. The tension of Gutiérrez's story hinges on the uncertainty of the implied readers, the narrator's parents. Will they find the story, or will the story find them? As readers, we are interlopers who have “found” this text destined for someone else. The public bus is not only the setting for the action but also becomes the *vehicle* for delivering the message. In an extreme economy of language, this microfiction develops movement in varying directions and multiple destinations: the narrator/protagonist's movement away from the family, the note's travel to deliver its message, and the readers' trajectory to the text.

According to the contest's director, Carmen García, *Santiago en 100 Palabras* has changed the character of the city, creating a sense of belonging and of ownership in Santiago:

The citizens take ownership of the city because their stories intervene in public space. Although there are only twelve winners, the fact that people's stories are published gener-

28. Other stories by Cortázar that take place in the Paris metro include “Cuello de gatito negro” and “El perseguidor” (1994). See my *Writing Paris* for a thorough discussion of Cortázar's fictional use of the Paris metro (1999, 49–59).

ates a connection, and that connection generates integration because it's not some random citizen or stranger, or someone threatening. One sees in the stories that the same kinds of things happen to everyone, that there is a common perspective. Conceptually, this is one of the major gains of the contest, integration through literature. The theme of urban interaction has been a fundamental element in reestablishing social and cultural identity that was rather hidden.²⁹

The brief stories from Santiago and the traveling books in Bogotá take the printed page and set it in motion, circulating fictions in new itineraries outside the trajectories of their vehicles. Although the two programs differ in a number of respects—*Libro al Viento* emphasizes reading while *Santiago en 100 Palabras* promotes creative writing, the Bogotá program has official municipal backing while the Santiago program relies more on private funding—both programs draw ordinary citizens into literary reading through public transportation and stage urban reading in public space. Rather than functional literacy, both initiatives stress social literacy. They capitalize on imaginative written culture as a strategy for promoting *convivencia* and civic interaction in their respective cities. This emphasis on *convivencia* does not emerge from an abstract concept but rather lies at the core of concerted programmatic efforts to reclaim public space and reinscribe urban belonging. These programs become part of broad strategic policies for diminishing public urban violence in Colombia and reestablishing democracy after the dictatorship in Chile, policies that incorporate community-wide reading and writing as an integral part of redefining citizenship.

CONCLUSIONS: READING IN THE MARKET FOR PUBLIC CULTURE

The attempts to foster inclusivity across social classes in Santiago and Bogotá through reading programs that benefit from both public and private funding indicate a shift in emphasis in the wake of neoliberal economic policies. Chile in particular became the prime territory for testing out Milton Friedman's economic approaches, which favored the free market and private global investment, with significant impact on cultural industries (Cárcamo-Huechante 2007). After decades of boosting free-market privatization and diminishing the state's role in cultural, economic, and social welfare in much of Latin America, an emphasis on the public has begun to reemerge. The eclectic blending of public and private sponsorship on which these reading programs rely parallels a wider trend of cautious reinvestment in the public sphere. Roger Bartra calls this increasing blur or overlap of the public and the private the "*estatización*" of the public realm," which occurs alongside the "*re-publicanización*" of state management" (2001, 338).

In these programs' urban expression, innovative dimensions of writing the city also mesh what is considered "elite" or "high" literature with popular street expression, challenging the boundaries that supposedly distinguish them. The goals and objectives of *Santiago en 100 Palabras* and *Libro al Viento*, as defined by their corporate and municipal sponsors, share some of public art. More than decoration and embellishment, art (and reading) in public space should motivate

29. Carmen García, interview by author, April 28, 2011, Santiago, Chile.

“the activation in their users of a *reflective civilized consciousness*; of their being in a place shaped both to specific uses—learning, healing, debate, diplomacy, etc.—and to those general purposes beyond immediate utility, of the human project, which include the contemplation of matters of value, the pursuit of happiness, and a sense of well-being” (Gooding 1998, 19–20; emphasis added).

Literary or visual expression in public places, particularly in cities, is built on a paradox of freedom and control, where the freedom of aesthetic expression is in tension with the institutional and financial constraints of urban planning. The extent to which critical messages and political opposition can be conveyed in public art depends not only on the artist but also on the mechanisms of funding, patronage, and civic planning at a given site. CERLALC stresses the social, interactive benefits of reading in public policy and programming: “strategies and lines of action determined by common interest that look to guide, articulate and promote, through collaboration, plans developed by diverse actors: the State, private companies and civic organizations, in particular realms of social life” (2002, 182–183). Encouraging *convivencia* and promoting engaged citizenship is often the motor behind public culture projects, particularly literature as considered here, and serves as a justification for their funding.

Libro al Viento and *Santiago en 100 Palabras* reflect the hybrid stories of their production—literary reading that relies on official financial backing from public, municipal institutions as well as private investment. These projects underscore the contradictions of urban institutionalization and have important implications for public space in the urban realm. The transformation of elevated bus lanes or underground passageways into avenues of fantastic adventures through public (in other words, free) fiction stretches the confines of industrial structures and urban lettered institutions. The books given away in Santiago and circulated in Bogotá confound the false dichotomy between “elite” and “popular” culture by inaugurating new uses for urban space. By empowering citizens as mobile readers and writers, public reading challenges and shifts the boundaries on who controls urban spatial functions.

The urban reading programs reviewed here reveal not only the role of cities in promoting the reading of literature, but also the role of literature in rewriting urban identity and providing a route for reimagining the city during periods of political transition. The networks that connect public space and public policy with literature involve heterogeneous sources, with some expected institutions (public libraries, ministries of education, literacy campaigns) along with diverse sources of corporate sponsorship. Following Street (1995, 72), who points out the interdisciplinarity of New Literary Studies, this study has benefited from the “fruitful combination” of literary critical and urban studies approaches. The innovation of programs such as *Libro al Viento* and *Santiago en 100 Palabras* lies in their participatory structure that moves outside of the conventional institutions of the lettered city, passing over their physical walls and renegotiating their bureaucracy to incorporate a much wider citizenship of public readers. Travelers’ private readings lead to collective conversations that promote public consciousness and a shared experience of location and urban belonging.

Throughout Latin America, municipal programs strive to capture the urban

imaginary and circulate it through everyday infrastructure. The subway in Buenos Aires announced in 2013 discontinuing Line A's historic wooden train cars and temporarily closed Latin America's oldest running subway line until new cars could be installed. The city government's Ministry of Culture plans to relocate ten of the iconic cars to public parks, where they will serve as public libraries. Instead of books and stories descending underground or gliding along designated lanes to provoke conversation among commuters as in Santiago and Bogotá, the subway cars will reemerge from below to house and circulate books rather than commuters in Buenos Aires. Several parks slated to receive a subway car are located along this very subway line, such as Primera Junta and Parque Rivadavia, parks already engaged in a vibrant book culture, with permanent stands selling used books daily. The public interaction of these new library branches will begin with the collection itself: the books will be gathered from users' donations, in the spirit of the "liberation of books" that many cities sponsor throughout Latin America (Rivas 2013).³⁰ Access to reading on a moving vehicle, or even in a stationary one like the retired historic subway cars in Buenos Aires, drives urban citizens to reclaim the lettered city as they traffic in the wide circulation of letters.

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