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Bodies in Transit: Navigating the LA Metro as an Autotheoretical Journey

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Abstract: "Bodies in Transit" explores the Los Angeles Metro as a site of complex temporal and cultural aesthetics, examining the ways urban transit infrastructures shape experiences of memory, forgetting, and the uncanny. Moving beyond traditional analyses of race, class, and technology, this paper investigates how public spaces like the LA Metro construct a unique form of *urban temporality*, where time becomes fluid, fragmented, and nonlinear. Drawing on frameworks from cultural studies, hauntology, and prosthetic memory, the Metro is presented as both a literal and metaphorical vehicle that connects riders not only to different parts of the city but also to its obscured and forgotten histories. Through an interdisciplinary analysis that includes works such as Patricia Jones' *Passing* and George Dieter's *Mechanical Metallurgy*, the article positions the Metro as a symbol of modernity's interplay with the past, offering a fresh perspective on urban transit as a mediator of memory and temporal dislocation. Furthermore, the LA Metro is framed as a reflection of the city's temporal aesthetics, echoing H.G. Wells' meditations on memory in *Experiment in Autobiography* and the fluidity of identity explored in Gandhi's *An Autobiography*. This article also extends Zipporah Lax Yamamoto's work on prosthetic memory to consider how the Metro functions as an artificial construct that both preserves and distorts the city's historical narrative. By examining how the daily experience of riding the Metro evokes a sense of the *uncanny*—a blending of the familiar and strange—this article offers a novel interpretation of urban temporality and public space.

Keywords: Albert Camus, Autotheory, Cultural Studies, Literary Studies, Urban Studies.

Review Paper

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INTRODUCTION: AUTOTHEORY ON THE MOVE

The Metro becomes a moving capsule through time, where utopian dreams of equitable urban spaces intersect with the realities of displacement, deferred futures, and the unfinished business of history. This work aims to introduce a new scholarly lens for understanding the cultural and temporal significance and experiment of transit infrastructures in shaping urban experiences. In the sprawling urban landscape of Los Angeles, transit becomes a space not only for movement but for reflection on the embodied experience of navigating a complex transportation network. The LA Metro system—comprised of Metrolink trains, buses, and light rail—offers a liminal site for the intersection of public and private life, autonomy and control, isolation and connection. For the scholar-practitioner, especially within the frame of autotheory, commuting is more than a physical act; it is an embodied metaphor for the dialectics of theory and lived experience in writing our lives' unfolding experiment that is hypothesized, enacted, and reflected upon. The commute unfolds as both a narrative of place and self, positioning transit as a political and intimately aesthetic experience.

Autotheory, as defined by Lauren Fournier, destabilizes the boundary between theory and autobiography, merging personal narrative with philosophical inquiry to critically examine the self as it exists within larger social and political systems. This approach to theory challenges traditional modes of academic writing and encourages the scholar to reflect on the personal as political, emphasizing the porous boundaries between thought and action, theory and life. In this paper, I traverse the relationship between public transit and personal autonomy by embodying autotheory through my daily commute to the LA Metro. This journey, much like autotheory itself, becomes a critical reflection on mobility, surveillance, the construction of

identity, and the performance of gender and class within the mechanized networks of a modern city.

The Commuter's Autotheory is an act of commuting on the LA Metro which serves as a daily ritual for many, embodying both the mundane and the profound. This paper engages with the concept of autotheory as a method of self-reflection that blends personal narrative with theoretical inquiry, allowing for a deeper understanding of identity and autonomy within the urban landscape. Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* takes early twentieth-century history and upends linear social constructs, for example, beginning in the twentieth-century by emphasizing waywardness and going against the beaten path. By positioning my experience as a commuter within the larger frameworks of history, science, medicine, and technology, this exploration reflects on how public transit systems shape, and are shaped by, the complex dynamics of contemporary life.

Providing more historical context on urban transit leads us to a technological evolution. Public transit systems in urban environments like Los Angeles are rooted in a historical context that intertwines advancements in technology, social theory, and urban planning. The introduction of the electric streetcar in the early twentieth-century revolutionized urban commuting, facilitating greater mobility while also reinforcing social stratification. The Dodgers, a Major League Baseball franchise, originally got their name from this phenomenon back in New York. This technological development can be understood through the lens of the History of Science and Technology, which investigates how scientific advancements are inextricably linked to societal changes. Centers grew, and the need for efficient transportation systems became paramount. The development of the Los Angeles Metro, with its various lines and connections, can be seen as an extension of this historical trajectory. Yet, it also raises questions about the ethical implications of such technologies—who benefits from them, and who remains marginalized?

This inquiry aligns with the broader historical context of transportation as a site of global power and control, echoing the themes found in the literature of Albert Camus and his existential reflections on autonomy and alienation. While not overtly political, Camus's novel *The First Man* provides insight into the cultural and emotional ties Camus felt for Algeria, as well as the challenges of belonging and alienation in a colonial context. Albert Camus's *The First Man* is an autobiographical novel that reflects on his childhood in Algiers and explores themes of identity, colonialism, and the search for meaning akin to a very rich autotheoretical journey upon the LA Metro. It is set in French Algeria and deeply rooted in Camus's own life experiences, particularly his relationship with his family, his upbringing in poverty, and his attempts to understand his father, who died in World War I before Camus could know him. Jacques Cormery, a fictionalized version of Camus himself, returns to Algeria to discover more about his father. The narrative weaves between Jacques's childhood in a working-class neighborhood in Algiers and his adult quest to understand his roots and identity in a colonized land.

Algiers is a central setting and almost a character in the novel, depicted vividly with its streets, schools, and landscapes. Life aboard the LA Metro is analogous to it. Camus's autotheory grapples with the colonial tensions in Algeria, as Camus subtly reflects on the complex dynamics between the French settlers (pieds-noirs) and the indigenous Arab population. My analysis of LA Metro will engage with the themes of freedom, control, identity, and autobiography, drawing on various textual landscapes of renown, including Albert Camus's *The First Man* and *Travels in the Americas: Notes and Impressions of a New World*, T.J. Clark's *The Sight of Death*, Matthew Crawford's *Why We Drive*, and Lauren Fournier's *Autotheory as Feminist Practice*. I will also incorporate reflections on two seminal autobiographies: *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* by Mohandas Gandhi and *Experiment in Autobiography* by H.G. Wells, both of which provide deeper insights into the role of the self in the context of broader political and social structures. Gandhi's engagement with truth and nonviolence, and Wells' reflection on the self's relationship to history and modernity, will help ground the exploration of selfhood within the more localized and intimate space of the LA Metro.

The Commute as Autotheory: An Embodied Mobility

At 7:15 AM, the Metrolink train glides onto the platform, a sleek metal snake cutting through the early morning fog. My body merges with the crowd as we shuffle through the doors, each passenger navigating the narrow aisle, seeking a seat, a moment of stillness. The click of the turnstile under my TAP card, the metallic hum of the train beneath my feet, and the fluorescent lights overhead create a sensory symphony—an urban lullaby that soothes and alienates in equal measure. My daily commute, the 26 miles from Pomona to downtown Los Angeles, becomes a process of becoming—a liminal space where I am neither entirely public nor private, neither fully present nor absent. The train becomes a site of autoethnographic inquiry, where my body, laden with books, a laptop, and the residue of yesterday's thoughts, moves through space and time.

Autotheory insists on the merging of theory with the minutiae of lived experience, and here, on the train, I feel both my autonomy and its limits. I am free to move, and yet, the rhythm of the train dictates my path. The journey is predetermined, my trajectory mapped out by city planners and transit authorities long before I set foot on the platform. This tension between autonomy and

control becomes a central theme of my autotheoretical engagement with the LA Metro system. As Matthew Crawford notes in *Why We Drive: Toward a Philosophy of the Open Road*, modern transportation systems, particularly public transit, involve the surrender of personal control to external systems of order. Unlike driving, where the open road presents an escape into autonomy, the Metrolink and bus system demand submission to the machine.

Yet, there is something deeply subversive about the communal space of the train. While the city imposes its logic on my movements, I find moments of resistance in the solitude of reading a text, in the refusal to engage in small talk with strangers, or in the deliberate choice to look out the window and absorb the shifting landscape of the city. The body in transit becomes a site of tension, where the desire for autonomy collides with the structures of control that govern urban life. My body, held within the mechanical apparatus of the train, is at once constrained and liberated, moving through a system that I do not control but actively navigate. Staci Robinson's *Tupac Shakur: The Authorized Biography* is the epitome of resistance by autonomizing one's life within someone else. It resists control of liminal spaces by asserting Tupac's dominance on the outside world, the struggle, but by the hand of another person who knew Tupac well enough to illuminate the world about his inward life.

As I navigate the LA Metro, the experience of commuting transforms into a performance of identity as Tupac would have done, where the commuter becomes both actor and audience. This duality echoes the surveillance practices prevalent in modern societies, where the body is constantly monitored and categorized. The feeling of being watched, whether through surveillance cameras or the gaze of fellow passengers, contributes to an alienating experience that parallels the existential themes explored by Camus.

Judith Butler and her theories of performativity, the commuter's experience can be framed as a continuous negotiation of identity, where one's appearance, behavior, and interactions are shaped by societal expectations of experience. What we want to do on our autotheoretical journey is to experiment. The metrosexual identity, often associated with meticulous self-presentation, becomes particularly relevant in this context, highlighting how personal identity is constructed and performed within the public sphere.

This dynamic interplay between freedom and submission also appears in Camus's *Travels in the Americas*. In his travelogue, Camus grapples with the unfamiliarity of new environments, particularly in the United States, where he is both fascinated by the grandeur of the landscapes and disillusioned by the mechanization of modern life. His lived experiment gets thrust onto him. His alienation mirrors the experience of the commuter, who moves through an urban landscape that is at once familiar and estranged. The train for Camus becomes a vehicle for existential inquiry, much like Camus's writings, which reflect his continual search for meaning in an absurd world.

Riding the Metro: Memory, Temporality, and the Uncanny

The LA Metro is more than a system of trains and buses connecting points on a map—it is a moving capsule through time, where the past, present, and future blend in often surreal ways. As I step onto the train, the whirr of the wheels and the dim hum of fluorescent lights evoke a sensation that is both familiar and strange. This feeling—a mixture of memory, displacement, and fleeting recognition—is what Freud described as the *uncanny*. It's as if every time I ride the Metro, I encounter something that feels both known and unknown, a passage not just through space, but through layers of time.

The Metro, in its transient yet perpetual state of motion, is a space where time becomes malleable. Stops blur into one another, and the repetitive rhythms of travel induce a kind of urban hypnosis. The concept of *urban temporality*, as explored by scholars like Paul Virilio and Mark Augé, becomes palpable here: public transit doesn't merely move people from point A to point B, but actively shapes our perception of time in the city. In *The United States: A History of Democracy* (1960), the authors present a linear, teleological narrative of American progress, but as I ride the Metro, the city itself reveals a more fragmented, non-linear experience of time. And like a student, the course of time needed abbreviation, stops delving into the history. Every stop evokes different epochs in Los Angeles' history, from the mid-century ambitions of postwar urban expansion to the tech-driven present.

The creators of the college textbook *The United States: A History of Democracy* were also experimenting with presentation, or performativity for educators. The book was part of an American civilization program for sophomores, juniors, and seniors. In its first ten years, the educators experimented with various combinations of traditional writings as volumes and supplemental readings. Yet, this experimentation led to, as in their autotheoretical journey, a more unanimous opinion to focus instead on the basic outline of American history. The educators' autotheoretical experience has led them to determine a historical text should avoid too many minor details, such as names, dates, and figures. *A History of Democracy* codifies and solidifies instead significant trends, meanings, and interpretations for students today.

This interplay of past and present is heightened by the way we remember, or fail to remember, public spaces like the Metro. In Patricia Jones' *Passing*, identity is something fluid and constructed concerning social expectations. Similarly, the Metro seems to "pass"

through different times and experiences, transforming its meaning depending on who rides it and when. A station that feels bustling and alive during rush hour may feel abandoned and eerie at night, conjuring a sense of *urban amnesia*. As Mark Augé argues in *Non-Places*, transit systems like the Metro are "non-places"—spaces of transit, where people move through without lingering. But the Metro is also haunted by its past. Every stop along the line is imbued with layers of memory—of people who have passed through, of historical moments long forgotten.

As we pass through neighborhoods that have seen waves of immigration, gentrification, and industrial decay, the uncanny intensifies. These spaces, once thriving, are now caught in limbo between being remembered and forgotten, existing in a kind of suspended temporality. Here, H.G. Wells' reflections on memory in his *Experiment in Autobiography* come to mind. Wells writes about the fragility of human memory, the way certain experiences are etched deeply in our consciousness, while others fade into oblivion. The Metro, in its routine daily operations, becomes a theater of memory, where the city's history is not so much erased as it is obscured, buried beneath the daily rhythms of urban life.

I think of the Metro as a kind of *prosthesis* for urban memory. As we travel through the city, we rely on this artificial, mechanical system to connect us with spaces we can no longer fully know or experience directly. Zipporah Lax Yamamoto's work on memory and prosthetics, though rooted in different historical contexts, offers insight here. She argues that prosthetic memory—artificial ways of remembering—fills the gaps in our collective consciousness, allowing us to bridge the temporal distance between ourselves and the past. The Metro, with its modern steel and concrete, is a kind of prosthesis for a city that has forgotten much of its own history. It connects us not just physically, but temporally, linking us to a city that no longer exists as it once did.

Something is haunting about this. Every time I ride the Metro, I'm struck by a sense of *hauntology*, a concept introduced by Derrida to describe how the past lingers in the present, never fully gone but never fully here. The Metro itself is haunted by its potential futures—the utopian promises of public transit as a democratizing force, an equalizer that would give all citizens access to the city. But the reality is more complicated. The Metro, like the city, is caught in a loop of deferred dreams, where the future feels just out of reach.

In the context of Black American History, this sense of haunting is intertwined with the stories of struggle and perseverance that define Black urban experiences. Public transit has historically been a battleground for civil rights, but the struggle doesn't end with access—it continues in the very experience of using these systems. The uncanny nature of the Metro reveals the unfinished business of history, where the victories of the past have not fully translated into the equitable futures they promised. In *Message to the Blackman in America*, Elijah Muhammad calls for a radical reimagining of Black identity and autonomy, free from the constraints of a white-dominated society. While his vision is utopian, the Metro offers a more grounded reflection of the compromises that urban spaces demand. It is both a site of autonomy—where people from all walks of life share the same space—and a reminder of the limits imposed by systemic inequalities.

At the same time, the Metro is a space of aesthetic experience. As the train moves through tunnels and over bridges, the city flashes by in fragments, like a moving painting. This sensory immersion recalls the ideas of *mechanical aesthetics* explored in texts like George Dieter's *Mechanical Metallurgy*. The beauty of the Metro is not in its sleek design or architectural brilliance but in its sheer functionality, and its ability to connect disparate parts of the city in a continuous flow. The hum of the train, the flicker of lights in the tunnels, the repetitive ding of station announcements—all of these create a rhythm that feels almost meditative, a mechanical lullaby that synchronizes with the pulse of the city.

Yet beneath this rhythm is the underlying question of what the Metro erases in its forward motion. As I exit the train and step onto the platform, I feel a sense of dislocation—not just in space, but in time. The Metro has taken me somewhere familiar yet alien, a version of Los Angeles that is constantly shifting, never fully settling. In this sense, the Metro is a symbol of the city's temporal aesthetics: a space where memory, forgetting, and the uncanny coexist, creating a uniquely modern experience of urban temporality.

Metrosexuals and Identity

The term *metrosexual*, popularized in the late 1990s and early 2000s, describes a man—often urban, well-groomed, and fashion-conscious—who consciously engages in practices of self-presentation that challenge traditional notions of masculinity. In the context of the LA Metro system, where the public gaze is unavoidable, the metrosexual figure becomes a symbol of the curated self, navigating the intersections of autonomy, appearance, and societal expectations. My morning commute is thus not just a movement through the city but also a performance of identity, one that aligns with the metrosexual's negotiation of masculinity, self-presentation, and cultural fluidity.

In the light rail car, I see the metrosexual as a kind of commuter archetype—a man with neatly styled hair, a tailored jacket, and a leather bag slung over his shoulder. He moves through the space with ease, a master of his image, yet the very act of performing this image speaks to the pressures of visibility in the urban

environment. This hyper-awareness of appearance reflects a form of self-surveillance that Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity highlights. Gender, much like metrosexual identity, is performed through repeated acts that are shaped by societal norms, even as they challenge them.

While the metrosexual might be seen as a modern manifestation of urban masculinity, his engagement with public spaces—like the LA Metro—is also a negotiation of autonomy and control. On the one hand, he exercises autonomy through the careful construction of his appearance, an act of self-fashioning in an otherwise impersonal city. On the other hand, the very need to perform masculinity in this manner suggests a submission to the societal pressures that demand a certain kind of visibility from men in public spaces. The metrosexual, like the scholar-commuter, must navigate the tension between freedom and conformity, autonomy and societal expectations.

This performance of identity aligns with Gandhi's reflections in *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, where he consciously engages with practices of self-presentation, both in terms of his asceticism and his public image as a leader of the Indian independence movement. Gandhi's experiments with dress, particularly his decision to wear traditional Indian dhoti rather than Western attire, reflect his commitment to embodying the values of simplicity, truth, and self-reliance. This act of sartorial autotheory, in which Gandhi uses his appearance as a form of political and philosophical expression, parallels the metrosexual's negotiation of identity in public spaces. Both figures engage in practices of self-presentation that challenge societal norms but for very different ends. While Gandhi's self-fashioning is rooted in a commitment to anti-colonial resistance and spiritual discipline, the metrosexual curation of self is often tied to consumer culture and the aesthetics of modern urban life.

Camus, Alienation, and the Search for Meaning

Turning to Albert Camus, particularly his posthumously published *The First Man* and *Travels in the Americas: Notes and Impressions of a New World*, the themes of alienation, exile, and the search for meaning resonate with the experience of the commuter navigating LA's sprawling urban landscape. Camus, who perished in a car accident in 1960, was deeply preoccupied with questions of belonging and identity, particularly about his experiences growing up in colonial Algeria. His work often reflects the existential tension between individual autonomy and the absurdity of life within oppressive political and social systems.

For Camus, the search for meaning in an indifferent world parallels the modern commuter's journey through an indifferent city. The LA Metro becomes a stage for this existential quest, a space where bodies move in tandem yet remain isolated, where the collective experience of transit is marked by individual alienation. Much like the protagonist of *The First Man*, who is caught between his Algerian roots and his French upbringing, the commuter exists between worlds—caught in a daily routine that both connects and alienates them from the larger urban environment.

Camus's tragic death in a car accident stands as a potent reminder of the fragility of life and the randomness of existence. His reflections on freedom and autonomy in *The Rebel* take on new meaning in the context of urban transit, where the commuter's autonomy is constantly mediated by the schedules, machines, and regulations of the city. Yet, even within these constraints, the commuter, like Camus, seeks moments of personal freedom—whether through an internal retreat into thought, or the act of resisting the monotony of daily routine by engaging with theory, art, or self-expression.

The alienation Camus writes about is not limited to the existential crisis of the individual in the world but extends to the way urban life itself alienates individuals from each other and their sense of purpose. Commuting on the LA Metro system reflects this alienation as bodies are packed together in close quarters but rarely interact. The commuter is both seen and unseen, present and invisible. This alienation mirrors the internal conflict of Camus's characters, who strive for connection in a world that often feels indifferent to their existence.

Autobiography and Experimentation: Gandhi, Wells, and the Search for Truth

The LA Metro, in its physical and metaphorical dimensions, also invites a reflection on the act of autobiography and the search for personal truth. Gandhi's *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* and H.G. Wells' *Experiment in Autobiography* both provide models for understanding the relationship between the self and the larger social forces that shape identity and experience. Gandhi's approach to autobiography is rooted in his spiritual and political commitment to truth (satyagraha), a concept that transcends mere honesty to encompass a deeper, almost metaphysical understanding of the self's alignment with ethical and moral principles. His "experiments" with diet, dress, and nonviolent resistance are all practices through which he seeks to embody truth, a process that resonates with the autotheoretical approach of blending personal experience with larger theoretical frameworks.

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For Gandhi, the process of becoming is never separate from the community; his actions, from fasting to spinning khadi cloth, are designed to model a way of being that is in harmony with the larger ethical and political struggle for Indian independence. His autobiography is not merely a recounting of personal experiences but an active engagement with the question of how one should live in relationship to others, to systems of oppression, and one's ethical principles. This ethical framework is mirrored in the ways commuters on the LA Metro must navigate the intersections of personal autonomy and public responsibility, as each decision—whether to speak to a fellow passenger, to give up a seat, or to disengage entirely—reflects a larger ethical negotiation of space and selfhood. H.G. Wells' *Experiment in Autobiography*, on the other hand, offers a more introspective exploration of the self in relation to the historical and intellectual currents of the 19th and early twentieth centuries. Wells' autobiography reflects on his development as a writer and thinker, tracing how his personal experiences shaped his intellectual pursuits. In many ways, Wells' experiments with autobiography mirror Gandhi's experiments with truth, as both figures engage with the self not as a fixed entity but as something that is continually shaped by external forces and internal reflection.

For Wells, the act of writing about oneself is an intellectual exercise, a means of grappling with the complexities of modernity, science, and social change. His reflections on the ordinary brain, shaped by the extraordinary events of the modern era, provide a lens through which to view the commuter's experience as a microcosm of the larger forces of urbanization, technological change, and the alienation that comes with life in a mechanized society. There are also medical and technological discourses that convene around the issues of health, safety, and the commuter's body. Incorporating the History of Medicine into this exploration further emphasizes the ways in which the commuter's body is subject to various medical and technological discourses. The health implications of public transit—exposure to illnesses, mental health issues stemming from stress and isolation, and the physical toll of commuting—highlight how urban transit systems intersect with medical knowledge and public health policies.

The LA Metro, in its efforts to maintain cleanliness and safety, engages in discourses of health that govern the behaviors of its users. Signage promoting mask-wearing and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic underscores how public health imperatives shape the commuter experience. This relationship between public transit and health reveals the intricate ways in which social and medical technologies influence individual behaviors and collective experiences. Furthermore, the role of technology in monitoring public health raises ethical questions about surveillance and personal autonomy. As commuters navigate a landscape of both physical and digital scrutiny, the tension between safety and freedom becomes increasingly pronounced. This dynamic is reflective of the broader societal concerns regarding the balance between individual rights and collective well-being, a theme that resonates with the existential inquiries posed by Camus and the ethical considerations emphasized by Gandhi.

In her work, Zipporah Lax Yamamoto explores how public transport systems can act as critical sites for understanding the interplay of social dynamics, mobility, and identity. And it all becomes her focal point right here on the LA Metro. She argues that transit spaces are not merely pathways for physical movement but arenas of cultural exchange where bodies engage in complex negotiations of belonging and representation through art and illustrations of power. This perspective illuminates the LA Metro as a multifaceted site where individual experiences intersect with broader social narratives. Would-be travelers can even trade in their activist digital poetics, opting to adhere to the counter-rhetoric of law enforcement authority in the form of platform ticketing, speaker updates, emergency social media posts, and TAP Cards regulations. Instead of the bystander poet or dealer, riders pay more attention to announcements over the operator's telecom to obey Metro rules and have a good day. This adds to an already diverse transit body, enhancing the virtuality of the record. Yamamoto emphasizes that these experiences of commuting can reveal underlying power structures that shape who can navigate public spaces freely and who is subject to surveillance and scrutiny, even of visual renderings.

Class Representations in Popular Culture and Class Consciousness

Class representation in popular culture plays a pivotal role in shaping public consciousness, embedding perceptions about social hierarchies, and framing how different social classes are seen and understood. From reality television to blockbuster films, narratives of class stratification are often presented through either romanticized or exaggerated depictions. These representations influence public notions of class mobility, labor, and the human experience within capitalist economies. In the case of public transportation, for instance, popular culture often uses the imagery of buses, subways, and light rail systems as symbols of the working class, juxtaposing them against portrayals of elite modes of transport, like private jets or luxury cars. However, this visual shorthand for class difference goes

deeper than mere aesthetics; it speaks to the embedded social and economic inequalities that shape access to technology, convenience, and even safety in urban landscapes.

This connection between technology and class is particularly relevant when viewed through the lens of the history of science, medicine, and technology. The development and access to new technologies have historically been dictated by class, with the elite gaining early access to advancements that often remain out of reach for the working class until they are widely commercialized or subsidized by state intervention. Public transportation is no exception to this rule; it serves as an embodiment of the tension between technological progress and social inequality. While public transit aims to democratize mobility, it often reproduces class distinctions through the quality of service, infrastructure, and safety available to different neighborhoods.

In public transportation, popular culture frequently casts the daily commute of the working class as a narrative of endurance and survival, while simultaneously depicting wealthier individuals in scenes of escape, comfort, and privacy. For example, films like *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006) show the protagonist, Chris Gardner, struggling to survive while relying on public transportation, with his inability to afford other forms of transit serving as a visual cue of his precarious socioeconomic status. On the other hand, portrayals of the upper class often feature characters gliding through the city in limousines or flying across continents without the hassles of security lines and crowded spaces. These contrasting depictions reinforce class boundaries, creating a cultural script that associates economic status with one's mobility options.

Yet, class consciousness does not emerge solely from media representations; it is also shaped by the lived realities of people engaging with these systems. The history of science, medicine, and technology has shown that innovations in transportation, from the steam engine to the electric streetcar, were met with both excitement and apprehension due to the class dynamics they reinforced. Public transportation, especially in urban centers, has historically been a battleground for class struggle, where the working class advocates for better conditions and services while elites often push for more privatized, exclusive forms of transit.

One significant history of science text that explores the intersection of class and technology is David Edgerton's *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900*. In this work, Edgerton challenges the assumption that technological innovation is inherently progressive or universally beneficial. Instead, he emphasizes how old technologies persist alongside new innovations and how these technologies are often distributed unevenly across different classes. Edgerton argues that the adoption of technology is often stratified along class lines, with the elite enjoying advanced technologies while the working class contends with older or less efficient systems. This argument is particularly relevant to public transportation, where systems designed to serve the working class are often underfunded, poorly maintained, and disproportionately located in less affluent areas.

Edgerton's analysis helps contextualize class consciousness in popular culture's portrayal of technology and transportation. The commuter class, often depicted as passive and resigned in films and television shows, in reality, engages in daily acts of resistance—whether through advocating for safer conditions, fighting for reduced fares, or participating in protests aimed at improving public transportation. Moreover, public transportation in many ways represents a microcosm of broader societal tensions between labor and capital. The workers who operate, clean, and maintain transportation systems are themselves subject to class exploitation, often depicted in media as unskilled laborers who are crucial yet undervalued. Films like *Sorry We Missed You* (2019), directed by Ken Loach, provide a stark portrayal of the gig economy and its reliance on transportation workers who are constantly on the move yet remain trapped in a cycle of economic precarity. These depictions align with Marxist ideas of class struggle, where labor is exploited for capital gain, and workers, despite their critical role in the functioning of society, are denied access to the economic benefits of their labor.

As Edgerton points out, technological systems often maintain or exacerbate existing inequalities, and it is only through class-conscious efforts that these systems can be reformed to serve the greater good. The LA Metro, much like the New York City subway system in *The Taking of Pelham*, operates as a vital lifeline for working-class residents in Los Angeles, many of whom rely on public transit due to economic constraints. Popular representations of LA often fixate on car culture—its sprawling highways, bumper-to-bumper traffic, and the allure of private, individual transportation. However, this focus on cars neglects the significant population that depends on public transit, a system often overlooked in cultural depictions of LA life.

The LA Metro system serves as an alternative, yet its representation—or rather its frequent omission from media—reveals the way class consciousness is shaped by the dominance of car culture in Los Angeles. In popular depictions of Los Angeles, to be carless is to be powerless, reinforcing class distinctions tied to mobility. In this context, the Metro is perceived as the domain of the working class, immigrants, and marginalized communities. This narrative is perpetuated by the contrast between glamorous portrayals of wealthy Angelenos in films and TV shows, who enjoy private cars or ride-share services, and the seldom-seen, everyday experiences of public transit users.

Moreover, the development and maintenance of the LA Metro system itself has long been shaped by these class dynamics. For decades, efforts to expand public transportation in Los Angeles have been hindered by political resistance from wealthier areas of the city, whose residents fear that increased access to public transit will bring working-class and marginalized people into their neighborhoods. The Metro's limited reach and underfunded nature are thus not just accidents of urban planning but reflect broader class struggles over space, mobility, and access to city resources. Highspeed rail, for instance, to further project the power of Los Angeles-based transportation to cities such as Las Vegas, Nevada, and San Francisco in Northern California would shorten the time and cost of travel. Yet, renderings and proposals have only recently gotten the investment base to begin construction and chart the future of these systems.

The LA Metro, like the subway in *The Taking of Pelham*, embodies the vulnerabilities of public systems that are under constant pressure to serve a population dependent on their function. In Los Angeles, a city deeply divided by economic class, the Metro system highlights the unequal distribution of technological resources and infrastructure. Wealthier residents can afford to navigate the city in private vehicles, while public transportation is left to serve the economically disadvantaged, reinforcing the very class divides it is meant to mitigate. As David Edgerton argues in *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900*, older technologies persist, but their adoption and maintenance are often unevenly distributed along class lines. This concept is particularly relevant to the LA Metro, where public transit systems that rely on older technologies often lag behind the needs of the population, resulting in overcrowded buses and trains, frequent delays, and inadequate maintenance. The system's inability to keep pace with the demands of a growing population underscores the challenges of public transportation in serving the working class, particularly when resources are directed toward private transportation infrastructure.

Like the hijacked subway in *The Taking of Pelham*, the LA Metro faces vulnerabilities that arise from the tension between public necessity and systemic underinvestment. While the subway hijacking in the film represents a physical act of disruption, the LA Metro's vulnerability lies in its systemic underfunding, political neglect, and lack of integration with the broader city's infrastructure. The system's shortcomings can be viewed as a kind of "hijacking" by wealthier interests that prioritize highways and car travel over investment in public goods, thereby perpetuating class-based inequalities in urban mobility.

Additionally, the Metro represents a form of class struggle in the urban environment. Public transit workers, many of whom come from working-class backgrounds themselves, often find themselves at the front lines of labor disputes, advocating for better wages and working conditions. These workers are part of the broader infrastructure that keeps the city moving, yet they remain undervalued in much the same way as the transit system itself. Their struggles for recognition and better treatment parallel the experiences of the passengers who rely on them, forming a cycle of class exploitation that continues to define the LA Metro.

Immersive Storytelling and the Temporal Experience of the LA Metro

The LA Metro, as a public transit system, embodies a multifaceted cultural space where time, memory, and public infrastructure intersect. Beyond the physical movement of passengers, the Metro offers a canvas for narrative and immersive experiences that shape our relationship to urban space. The work of Nonny de la Peña, widely regarded as a pioneer in immersive journalism and virtual reality, provides an illuminating lens for exploring the temporal and aesthetic dimensions of public transit. De la Peña's groundbreaking use of VR to craft immersive, emotionally resonant narratives has reshaped how we think about public spaces and the stories they hold. Her pioneering work in projects like *Hunger in Los Angeles* highlights how immersive technologies can capture the lived experiences of marginalized populations, transporting audiences into unfamiliar environments. Much like the LA Metro, de la Peña's work leverages virtual spaces to confront broader socio-economic and cultural realities, creating a visceral engagement with urbanity.

By integrating de la Peña's theories of immersion into the analysis of the LA Metro, we can begin to understand the Metro as a space that is not only defined by physical transit but also by the narratives it holds. Public transportation becomes a site where the boundaries between past, present, and future are blurred, much like the VR worlds de la Peña constructs. In her work, as in the lived experience of riding the LA Metro, we encounter a sense of *urban hauntology*, where forgotten histories and unspoken stories coexist with the immediacy of the present moment.

The disorienting nature of both virtual reality and urban transit draws on a shared aesthetic of temporal fluidity, echoing concepts of memory and narrative fragmentation found in H.G. Wells' *Experiment in Autobiography* and Gandhi's *An Autobiography*. De la Peña's emphasis on empathy-driven immersion aligns with the uncanny, familiar yet estranged sensation experienced while navigating the LA Metro, where stories of the city's past remain embedded in its present infrastructure. Her work, much like the Metro itself, invites us to question how we construct meaning and memory in transient urban spaces.

Eliot Ness's *The Untouchables*, a memoir chronicling his efforts to combat organized crime in

Prohibition-era Chicago, contributes a distinct perspective to autotheory and its intersection with public transit spaces like the LA Metro. Nonny de la Peña's groundbreaking work in immersive journalism enriches this analysis by emphasizing how virtual reality can reconstruct temporal experiences and situate users within critical moments. Her approach to VR storytelling—allowing audiences to "step into" historical or emotionally charged scenarios—parallels the immersive temporal layers that *The Untouchables* offers as a text. Just as de la Peña's immersive projects transform passive observation into active engagement, Ness's narrative invites readers to traverse the ethical and temporal complexities of maintaining order in a chaotic era. Applied to the LA Metro, this framework suggests that public transit is not merely a site of movement but also a dynamic space where time is felt viscerally, whether in the stasis of waiting or the fleeting glimpses of urban life rushing past that can be chronicled through various cultural mediums.

This convergence of immersive storytelling with public transit extends Zipporah Lax Yamamoto's theories on prosthetic memory, suggesting that the LA Metro, much like de la Peña's virtual environments, serves as a vessel for collective memory. In both instances, physical and virtual spaces allow for the preservation and retelling of stories that might otherwise be erased by time or circumstance. Through this lens, the Metro becomes not only a functional part of urban infrastructure but also a dynamic narrative space—an extension of the cultural and aesthetic landscapes explored in works like *Passing* by Patricia Jones and the reflections on democracy and modernity found in *The United States: A History of Democracy*. By incorporating Nonny de la Peña, we enrich the narrative with an emphasis on the intersection of urban transit and immersive technologies, providing a fresh cultural studies approach that bridges VR, public space, and storytelling.

For example, Ness's narrative of law enforcement in *The Untouchables* intersects with themes of authority, surveillance, and moral complexity, which resonate within the controlled environments of contemporary transit systems. Just as Ness reflects on his identity as a public figure navigating systemic corruption and the mythologizing of his role, autotheory reveals how individuals on the Metro negotiate their public and private selves in spaces dominated by oversight and societal expectations. Ness's memoir highlights the tension between the idealized vision of civic order and the messy realities of human behavior, an apt metaphor for the challenges of urban mobility systems striving for efficiency and inclusivity. Incorporating Ness's account into an LA Metro narrative reveals how transit systems are also spaces where authority and resistance coexist.

The LA Metro, often perceived as a mundane and utilitarian space, serves as a fascinating stage for exploring questions of identity, memory, and self-perception. Public transit, in its very nature, embodies a shared anonymity—a space where personal histories, cultural backgrounds, and individual identities are momentarily suspended. This sense of the transient self parallels the inquiries made by Anil Ananthaswamy in *The Man Who Wasn't There: Investigations into the Strange New Science of the Self*. In his exploration of neurological conditions that disrupt our sense of self, Ananthaswamy challenges our understanding of how identity is constructed, questioning the stability of what we often take for granted as a cohesive "self." The act of riding the Metro, much like the experiences Ananthaswamy describes, can lead to a momentary dissolution of identity, where the boundaries of the self become blurred. Passengers engage in what could be considered a form of temporary disembodiment—moving through the city while detached from their personal geographies. This sensation echoes de la Peña's use of immersive VR to create environments where identity becomes fluid, challenging our conventional understanding of reality and self-perception.

Ananthaswamy's examination of neurological phenomena resonates with the uncanny disorientation felt when traveling through the urban landscapes of Los Angeles. Just as patients in Ananthaswamy's book grapple with fragmented or altered senses of self, Metro riders experience a daily transformation of identity as they move through spaces that are both familiar and alien. The Metro's constant motion and diverse population create a living, moving tableau of fragmented identities, revealing the instability of the self in the context of urban transit.

This connection between self and space aligns with the themes of prosthetic memory discussed by Zipporah Lax Yamamoto, suggesting that our sense of self is as much a construction of our environment as it is of our internal narratives. The Metro becomes a space where identity, memory, and history are not only transported but transformed—where the aesthetics of travel create a narrative that mirrors the neural processes described by Ananthaswamy. This fluid identity, shaped by the movement through the city's vast network of transit lines, reflects the complex relationship between the self, memory, and urban space, inviting riders to question how these experiences shape who they are, even if only temporarily. The haunting presence of history within the infrastructure of the Metro—its stations, trains, and tracks—serves as a reminder of the layers of past narratives that shape the present, much like the fragmented memories of those who experience conditions explored by Ananthaswamy. This temporal dissonance draws on the narrative fragmentation in Wells' *Experiment in Autobiography* and Gandhi's reflections on personal and collective identity in *An Autobiography*, positioning the Metro as a living exploration of urban modernity's effect on the self.

The potential development of a high-speed rail linking Los Angeles to destinations like Las Vegas or Northern California introduces both cutting-edge transportation technology and a cultural reimagining of movement through space. High-speed rail technology relies on advanced engineering innovations like magnetic levitation (maglev), aerodynamic train design, and precision computer-controlled systems to achieve speeds exceeding 200 miles per hour. This technological leap in transit not only reduces travel times but also reshapes our experience of geography, collapsing distances and altering our perception of time. From an autotheoretical perspective, high-speed rail reorients our understanding of self and space, as it introduces a new dimension of travel that is both intensely communal and isolated. The rail's technological sophistication is not just a triumph of engineering but a narrative of modernity—one that echoes the themes of fragmented identity and temporal dislocation found in works like Anil Ananthaswamy's *The Man Who Wasn't There* and the more intimate autobiographical experiences described by Gandhi and H.G. Wells.

High-speed rail, with its almost seamless integration of speed and efficiency, invites an autotheoretical reflection on what it means to move through space at such velocities. The experience of traveling at high speeds transforms the body into a kind of *modern object*, almost removed from the physical landscape it crosses. The rider, encased within a hyper-engineered environment, experiences time in a state of compression, disorienting any linear narrative of journeying. This temporal compression is reminiscent of Nonny de la Peña's immersive VR environments, where the boundaries of self and place blur, suggesting a virtual kind of *disembodiment* even in a physical context.

Technologically, high-speed rail requires precision advancements, from traction and propulsion systems to regenerative braking and energy-efficient power sources. The constant drive for optimization parallels the ways in which individuals attempt to manage the efficiency of their own identities in urban, fast-paced environments. Within the smooth, frictionless transit of high-speed rail, there lies a kind of *performance* of modernity—an attempt to erase the physical and psychological boundaries between places, much like the personal erasure experienced in public transit spaces like the LA Metro. This erasure resonates with the sense of *non-place* described by Marc Augé, where transit hubs become areas devoid of individuality, places we pass through but do not belong to. High-speed rail's promise of seamless travel raises questions about the aesthetics of efficiency and control. It mirrors Patricia Jones' exploration of identity in *Passing*, where appearances can be manipulated and managed to navigate social contexts. The smooth, streamlined design of high-speed trains represents a visual narrative of technological mastery, presenting a façade that hides the complexities and imperfections of both engineering and the human experience. As with *Passing*, the high-speed rail enacts a kind of technological "passing"—masking the immense forces, tensions, and infrastructural labor required to maintain its façade of ease and modernity.

The cultural implications of high-speed rail extend beyond mere technological marvels, touching on deeper questions of identity and time. By reducing the temporal distance between cities like Los Angeles and Las Vegas or Northern California, high-speed rail emphasizes *temporal aesthetics*—how we experience time as mediated by technology. This resonates with the broader cultural narratives explored in *The United States: A History of Democracy*, where progress and modernization play central roles in shaping national identity. High-speed rail, in its quest to eliminate the friction of travel, embodies this modern desire for speed and efficiency, compressing the spatial narratives that define regions and their unique histories. In the context of autotheory, the rail's potential to reshape travel narratives aligns with the experiences described in Zipporah Lax Yamamoto's theories on prosthetic memory, suggesting that these journeys are not just physical but also deeply psychological and narrative-driven. As riders speed from city to city, the past becomes a blur, and only the present moment—the relentless forward motion—matters. The experience of the self in this context becomes fragmented, disjointed, and episodic.

High-speed rail, then, is not merely a technological innovation but a symbol of a deeper cultural shift—a desire to transcend the limits of geography and time, to construct a seamless, almost *fictional* narrative of connectivity. This ambition aligns with the ideas of Kurt Vonnegut and Albert Camus, where the search for meaning often collides with the fragmented and absurd realities of modern life. The rail's sleek design and high speed represent a narrative of control, yet this very control is undermined by the potential for unexpected failures, delays, and breakdowns, echoing the tensions in Silicon Valley's utopian dreams of technological perfection.

The aesthetic of high-speed rail can also be seen as a manifestation of a desire for *clean lines and minimalism*—a reduction of noise, disruption, and interruption. In this, it shares a kinship with urban transit systems like the LA Metro, where functionality often comes at the cost of aesthetic individuality. Yet, this very drive toward efficiency invites critique, challenging us to consider what is lost in our relentless pursuit of speed. This narrative is echoed in *Message to the Blackman in America* by Elijah Muhammad, where the technological and cultural landscapes of America are scrutinized for their impact on identity, community, and individual purpose.

High-Speed Rail and the Ambiguous Utopian Promise

Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* provides a compelling framework for understanding the social and cultural dynamics at play in the development of high-speed rail systems. In her novel, Le Guin constructs a world where technology and society are in constant negotiation, reflecting on the tension between utopian ideals and the practical realities of human limitations. This notion resonates with the discourse surrounding the potential high-speed rail from Los Angeles to Northern California or Las Vegas, as such projects often carry a promise of a more connected and efficient future, similar to the utopian aspirations in Le Guin's narrative.

Le Guin's portrayal of Anarres, a supposedly utopian society built on the principles of shared resources and collective effort, serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of fetishizing technological progress without considering the cultural and social context. In the same way, high-speed rail technology, with its promise of seamless movement and efficiency, risks imposing a singular narrative of progress that overlooks the complexities and inequalities inherent in urban and rural spaces. The sleek, futuristic design of high-speed trains might evoke a utopian aesthetic, but as Le Guin illustrates, the very concept of utopia is always ambiguous and contingent, depending on who defines it and who benefits from it.

In Le Guin's work, the characters are constantly grappling with the limitations of their society's ideals—much like how the high-speed rail project must navigate the practical, political, and economic realities of California and Nevada. As Nonny de la Peña's immersive environments blur the lines between reality and fiction, so too does the discourse of high-speed rail blur the lines between a utopian future and the imperfections of current urban life. This ambiguity invites us to reflect on whether the high-speed rail is a symbol of progress or a manifestation of deeper systemic divides—social, economic, and cultural.

Le Guin's exploration of anarchist themes in *The Dispossessed* also prompts us to question who has control over these technological developments and to what end. The high-speed rail's promise of reducing travel times and connecting disparate regions reflects a desire to transcend physical and temporal limitations, yet it also highlights issues of accessibility, economic power, and urban planning. The technology behind high-speed rail, like the maglev systems and aerodynamic designs, is not just about speed—it's about who gets to move freely and who remains stationary. This is a theme Le Guin masterfully addresses in her depiction of the walls, both literal and metaphorical, that separate the utopian Anarres from the capitalist Urras.

By reading high-speed rail projects through the lens of Le Guin's speculative fiction, we gain insight into the cultural and ideological narratives that underlie technological advancements. Her work reminds us that technology does not exist in a vacuum—it is always embedded within a network of social, political, and cultural forces. High-speed rail, then, can be seen as a modern experiment in mobility and space, challenging us to rethink our relationship with travel, technology, and the urban landscape.

CONCLUSION

The LA Metro, in all its forms—Metrolink, light rail, and bus—offers a rich site for autotheoretical inquiry into mobility, where the daily commute becomes a practice of theorizing about the body through autonomy, performativity, and resistance in transit. The figure of the metrosexual, with his careful attention to self-presentation, and the legacy of Albert Camus, with his existential exploration of autonomy, both speak to the larger questions of identity, freedom, and alienation that shape the commuter's experience. Gandhi's commitment to truth and Wells' reflection on the self as shaped by history and modernity further ground this inquiry, offering models for understanding how personal experience intersects with larger political and social forces. This approach offers a fresh academic perspective by focusing on the intersections of memory, aesthetics, and urban temporality, positioning the LA Metro as a space where temporal and cultural layers intersect, creating a surreal, almost dreamlike experience. The narrative weaves in ideas from hauntology, prosthetics of memory, and the aesthetics of mechanical systems, touching on the uncanny experience of moving through a city shaped by its forgotten histories.

As a scholar-commuter, my journey through the city becomes a critical reflection on how we perform identity in public spaces, how we navigate the systems of control that govern urban life, and how we resist these systems through acts of self-awareness, reflection, and engagement. Ultimately, the commute is not just a means of getting from one place to another; it is a space where theory and life converge, where the personal becomes political, and where the act of moving through the city becomes a practice of living autotheory.

In considering the potential impact of high-speed rail through both technological and autotheoretical perspectives, we witness a transformative project that challenges established perceptions of time, space, and identity. High-speed rail doesn't merely promise to accelerate transit but to reshape the way individuals and communities engage with their geographic and cultural landscapes. Echoing the fragmented yet connected worlds depicted in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* and the complex personal narratives explored by Anil Ananthaswamy in *The Man Who Wasn't There*, this venture encapsulates modernity's ambition: to unify disparate regions under a banner of

technological mastery, even as it risks reinforcing social divides and erasing the nuances of local identities.

Le Guin's exploration of utopian ideals and Ananthaswamy's investigations into the self remind us that high-speed transit is more than infrastructure; it is an embodiment of our desire to transcend boundaries. This rail, connecting cities and collapsing hours of travel, serves as a metaphor for the compressed, interconnected lives we lead. Yet, it invites us to ask challenging questions: What cultural costs accompany our pursuit of speed? Who controls the narrative of progress, and who remains on the periphery? Ultimately, high-speed rail's promise is both inspiring and cautionary, a vision that reflects our collective longing for efficiency and connection while underscoring the fragility of place, memory, and identity. By reinterpreting this project through autotheory, speculative fiction, and the lenses of race, class, and technology, we gain a richer understanding of the modern self in transit. In seeking seamless movement and unity, we must remain mindful of the complexities and narratives that lie beneath the surface, ensuring that the future of travel retains space for both the communal and the individual, the real and the imagined.

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