

## Reading Promotion Projects in the São Paulo subway

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### Abstract

According to Augé (2012), the subway is essentially a non-place; however, through practices such as reading, its use can be resemanticized to the point of being transformed into a place. Based on this perspective and Roger Chartier's (1996) and Michel de Certeau's (1998) notion of reading, this work aims to observe and investigate the extent to which the various projects to encourage reading carried out in the São Paulo - SP metro produce places and non-places. The actions studied here, whether from the public or private sector, were selected because they promote the circulation of books and the practice of reading in this means of transportation. The data was collected through field research, interviews, and a documentary survey, including virtual sources. Based on the theoretical framework and the information analysis, we noticed that only a few of the initiatives actually contribute to creating a place where people can stay and get closer to culture.

**Keywords:** Reading practice. Book. São Paulo subway. Non place.

## Introduction

“For subway lines, like lifelines on the hand, meet and cross not only on the map where the interlacing of their multicolor routes unwinds and is set in place but in everyone’s lives and minds” (AUGÉ, 2002, p. 6).

As Marc Augé (2002) points out in his account of his relationship with the Parisian subway, this means of transportation traverses and is traversed by thousands of people daily. However, despite its frequency, it is common for us to pass through it merely, and it to pass through us. This is because the physical space of the subway is designed to direct people’s lives elsewhere: through destination signs, the direction of travel, auditory messages, and primarily through advertising. Advertisements are scattered throughout various points of the journey. Even before we reach the entrance, as we walk along the nearby sidewalk, we are sometimes bombarded with pamphlets suggesting the purchase of real estate or the selection of a college. We are invited to consume the information on those papers instead of paying attention to the steps leading underground.

As we enter the station, the walls not only confine the space but also carry various posters advertising cultural and gastronomic products, among others. Instead of engaging with the environment and fellow passengers, we are directed toward faraway potential experiences. Once inside the wagons, the monitors are also filled with advertising. Furthermore, on the way out, when we might think we were safe, a map awaits to show us what we will find nearby: a pharmacy, a church, and a shopping center.

Augé (2002) remarks that the station names themselves are merely records devoid of any real content, serving as simple “points of passage.” According to Augé, one keyword describes the subway and the contractual relationships that take place in it: loneliness. Considering these aspects, the author explores the notion of non-place in contrast to that of anthropological place. The latter would be a relational space with its own identity and history, where relationships of sociability take place. On the other hand, the non-place would correspond to a transit point, with only temporary occupation, lacking a specific identity or history. With a high circulation of people, things, and images, non-places “transform the world into a spectacle with which we maintain relationships based on images, transforming us into spectators of a deeply encoded place, of which no one is truly a part” (SÁ, 2014, p. 211).

Mobility inherently generates non-places: spaces that lack identity, history, and relational attributes. Relationships in a non-place follow the logic of solitary contractuality. “Undoubtedly, even the relative anonymity of each provisional identity can be felt as a liberation by those who, for a time, no longer have to maintain their level, stay in their place, take care of their appearance” (AUGÉ, 2012, p. 93). There is no environment for permanence, only for transition, usually experiencing the acceleration of time and the virtualization of space.

The construction aimed at sterility, functionality, and objectivity is often present in highways, railway networks, air transportation, and shopping centers. However, “in the concrete reality of today’s world, places and spaces, places and non-places intermingle. Places and non-places oppose (or attract) each other, just like the words and notions that make it possible to describe them” (AUGÉ, 2012, p. 98). Therefore, these notions cannot be restricted to certain physical spaces, as there is a duality between the two, which can occur simultaneously. Despite the objective prescription of space, as in the case of the subway, it is possible for people to resemanticize its use to the point of transforming it into a place.

## **Reading on the subway**

Michel Certeau (1998) portrays reading as a secret scene, a window to another world only the reader traverses. He sees this practice as creating corners, atmospheres, and other lives. According to him, the reader’s place is not here or there, one or the other, but a simultaneous presence. Those who read awaken dormant texts inhabit them but never possess them.

Readers are travelers; they circulate in other people’s lands, nomads hunting on their own through fields they haven’t written [...] Writing accumulates, stocks, resists time by establishing a place, and multiplies its production by the expansionism of reproduction. Reading has no guarantee against the wear and tear of time (CERTEAU, 1998, p. 269-270).

From this perspective, reading has the air of an event without having the fixity of writing. On the contrary, it is uncertainty because it resides in the place of memory. Readers, on the other hand, have an active role: they travel, circulate and create. The reader appropriates a text, enters that world, discovers their own meaning, and chooses to explore those lands. The practice of reading allows one to find refuge in books.

For Roger Chartier (1996), reading is appropriation, invention, and production of meanings. It is the meeting of two worlds, two cultures. According to him, the text only happens when there is a reader to produce its meaning, given that meaning is not made when the text is written but when it is read since the reader is free to change and even invert what the book suggests. In this way, reading is perceived as an experience, a unique possibility, as one never reads the same text in the same way.

The author explains that the habit of reading is directly rooted in culture and historical context, differing in each social group. Since reading is a socially constructed cultural practice, the meaning only occurs within a given time and space. Thus, the practice of reading is a singular event involving reader–text–place. There is no book without a reader and no reading

without a space. The progression of each letter, line, and sentence occurs within a particular place, leaving an impression on the reader.

Based on these theoretical reflections, this paper presents projects to encourage reading in the city of São Paulo, more specifically implemented in the subway system, to determine to what extent these initiatives contribute to the production of places and non-places. Through field trips, interviews with participants in some of these projects, and documentary research, it was possible to compile various notes and some photographic records. As some projects have ended or are close to ending (as was the case with the book vending machines), it was also necessary to gather information online. In this case, the sources chosen were news outlets in the city of São Paulo, as well as the websites of those responsible for the subway lines (Companhia do Metropolitano de São Paulo, ViaQuatro, and ViaMobilidade) and the actions themselves.

We can see that books circulate in different ways on the subway, going far beyond direct sales. There is contagion among passengers; publicity for books, authors and publishers; exhibitions and distribution of works; oral readings by artists in the wagons; installations on station walls; and events, among other practices. By observing the various projects to encourage reading in the São Paulo subway, it is possible to see different perspectives and intentions, which, in various ways, may or may not result in the resemanticization of the space.

## **Projects to Encourage Reading on the São Paulo Subway**

In 2023, the subway network in the city of São Paulo comprises six lines, covering a total length of 104.2 km and encompassing 91 stations. Three entities are responsible for managing this network: Companhia do Metropolitano de São Paulo (referred to as Metrô), ViaQuatro, and ViaMobilidade. Metrô oversees Lines 1-Blue (Jabaquara - Tucuruvi), 2-Green (Vila Prudente - Vila Madalena), 3-Red (Corinthians-Itaquera - Palmeiras-Barra Funda), and the monorail of Line 15-Silver (Vila Prudente - Jardim Colonial). ViaQuatro, operating through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP), manages Line 4-Yellow (Luz - Vila Sônia-Prof. Elisabeth Tenreiro). ViaMobilidade operates Line 5-Lilac (Chácara Klabin - Capão Redondo) under a concession agreement.

Different entities within this network carry out reading promotion projects, encompassing both the public and private sectors. Following the methodological strategy defined for this study, we have documented the twenty projects presented below.

### **Metrô: Poetry in the Subway (2009-Present)**

The Companhia do Metropolitano de São Paulo (Metrô) maintains the *Linha da Cultura* (*Culture Line*), dedicated to artistic and cultural activities within the subway system, with a monthly program advertised on posters inside carriages and murals. The *Arte no Metrô* program, linked to this initiative, operates on multiple fronts. It commenced in 1978 at the Sé station,

introducing sculptures, murals, and artistic panels. In the subsequent decades, it continued incorporating contemporary Brazilian artworks into various stations.

The Metrô's proposal is that there should be an appreciation of architecture with the integration of works of art, giving passers-by new perceptions of art. It also wants a way of communicating with users and, using these artistic elements, transmitting educational messages that encourage them to appreciate works of art and respect the collective spaces they use in their daily lives (JACOB, 2006, p. 386).

From this initiative, the *Poetry in the Subway* project emerged, debuting in October 2009 on Line 2-Green. *Poetry* is one of the most extensive programs for reading Portuguese-language poetry ever conducted in public spaces in Latin America. Its initial phase encompassed placing panels with poems on the walls, columns, corridors, and open areas of eight stations along Line 2-Green.

### **Metrô: Neli Siqueira Library (1972-Present)**

Established in 1972, the *Neli Siqueira Library* initially served as the Metrô's technical documentation repository. It was named after a former company librarian. According to Oliveira (2018), among several relevant functions, Neli was responsible for implementing the collection of historical documents in the company and coordinated projects such as: Library in the Stations, Metroviária Classification and Updates of Organized Legislation on Urban Transport and Passengers, Centralization of the Company's Bibliographic Acquisition and Circulation Services.

The *Library's* mission extends beyond maintaining bibliographic records; it also aims to disseminate and facilitate the use of information to support Metrô's technical departments. The collection specializes in transport and comprises "22,433 titles of bibliographic works, 415 titles of periodicals and more than 113,000 non-bibliographic items, which are organized both by support and by type of production" (OLIVEIRA, 2018, p. 44). It includes works in engineering, architecture, law, administration, economics, IT, and more. It cannot be accessed from inside any subway station, but it is located near Marechal Deodoro station, on Line 3-Red, in the dense, central core of the city. Additionally, the library's portal allows for online consultations.

### **Metrô: Reading Findings (2019-Present)**

In 2019, on World Book Day, the *Achados na Leitura (Reading Findings)* project was launched. It involves free distribution of books left at the Metrô's Lost and Found Center when they exceed the 60-day retrieval limit. A station is chosen every two months, and the bookcase

remains for thirty days. With the motto “Someone lost it, we found it, and we’ll all share it,” the project makes over 200 copies available for each action.

On the other hand, users are invited to collaborate in two ways: donating their own books and/or sharing photos of the totems or books on social media with the *hashtags* #metrosp and #achadosnaleyra. The project does not accept textbooks or books with religious, political, or sexual content.

### **Metrô: Metro Reading Club (2019-Present)**

Held by the *Neli Siqueira Library*, the *Clube de Leitura do Metrô (Metro Reading Club)* was initiated in 2019. In September of that year, I had the opportunity to participate in one of its meetings, featuring three special guests: Professor Waldomiro Vergueiro (ECA-USP), publisher Guilherme Kroll (Balão Editorial), and historian Filipe Figueiredo. The chosen book was the award-winning graphic novel “Maus” by Art Spiegelman.

Eighteen individuals attended the meeting in the *library* space around a table stocked with snacks, coffee, and tea. The discussion was not confined to specific topics; quite the opposite, the open format allowed conversations to flow naturally. One of the guests, Professor Waldomiro, had prepared a slide presentation, but it remained unused. The initial idea was for the guests to provide broad perspectives on the context and the book, but soon, the discussion adopted an informal and self-directed approach. In a laid-back atmosphere, participants enjoyed refreshments while conversing, and there was no need to request speaking turns formally.

There was extensive discussion about the work’s content, as well as its format, intertextuality, and relevance in today’s context, with some even delving into the concept of cannibalism. Toward the end of the gathering, attendees were informed about upcoming meetings and reading selections and were provided with a satisfaction survey for the Club along with an attendance list. Due to the onset of the novel coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, visits to the *Library* ceased, and the *Club* transitioned to digital discussions. Meetings have since been held on the last Thursday of each month via the Microsoft Teams platform, and this format continues to be used.

### **Metrô: Audiobook Club (2021-2022)**

The *Clube do Audiolivro (Audiobook Club)* began in May 2021 and marked a partnership of the Tocalivros Company, the Metrô, and the São Paulo Library (BSP). The activity consisted of borrowing the audiobook indicated for the meeting and monthly meetings for discussion among readers. The team from the São Paulo Library and Reading Association (SP Leituras) led the meetings. The first meetings were held remotely but later in person at the BSP. To access the discussions and borrow audiobooks, membership with BSP is required.

Registration is free, open to individuals over the age of 14, and subject to availability.

### **Metrô: On the shelves of the North Zone (2012-2019)**

Held annually since 2012, *Nas Estantes da Zona Norte (On the shelves of the North Zone)* takes place on National Book Day. With the support of the Metrô, the action is the responsibility of the North Zone Social Network and involves the free distribution of books in the open-access areas of the subway's network. The project has visited stations such as Tucuruvi, Parada Inglesa, Santana, Carandiru, and Jardim São Paulo-Ayrton Senna. Various activities, including storytelling sessions complement the book distribution.

### **ViaQuatro and ViaMobilidade: Reading on the Vias (2016-Present)**

In 2016, the *Leitura na ViaQuatro (Reading on ViaQuatro)* project involved the installation of shelves in the corridors of Line 4-Yellow stations, allowing passengers to share books among themselves. Three years later, in 2019, ViaMobilidade also introduced these bookshelves in the Line 5-Lilac stations. The carpentry course at the Tomie Ohtake Institute designed the shelves to accommodate books on both lines.

At the beginning of the project in 2016, Livraria Leitura bookstore was responsible for keeping the shelves stocked and monitoring the collection. Between 2016 and 2017, *Reading on ViaQuatro* partnered with Comic Con Experience (CCXP), which offered a half-price benefit to those who donated a book. The four-day event managed to collect 11,000 copies. In 2018, the initiative also partnered with the publisher Editora Brasileira for book donations.

To participate in the project, passengers simply need to choose and take a book; registration is not required. Donations are also made freely. Furthermore, there is encouragement for returning the books so others can use them. In this way, the project aims to promote civility and interaction among passengers.

### **ViaQuatro: Digital Reading Club (2021-2021)**

Like the Audiobook Club, ViaQuatro also offered free audiobooks and initiated a *Clube Digital de Leitura (Digital Reading Club)*. In collaboration with Tocalivros, they displayed videos on train and station monitors containing QR codes to access the spoken books. The titles were selected to coincide with commemorative dates, such as Children's Day, Folklore Day, Writer's Day, National LGBT Pride Day, and more.

### **Social Service of Commerce (SESC): Sesc Mobile Library (2017-Present)**

Since 2017, the Guilhermina-Esperança station on Line 3-Red has hosted the *BiblioSesc (Sesc Mobile Library)* every two weeks. The library truck is parked in the square next to the

station. Sometimes, there are also activities such as oral storytelling, visual intervention, an exhibition by an illustrator, and artistic intervention. The loan is free and has a collection of 3,500 books, newspapers, and magazines.

### **Publisher L&PM: Ticket Books (2015-2015)**

On World Book Day 2015, publisher L&PM, in collaboration with Agência Africa, distributed 1,500 paperback books at Faria Lima station on Line 4-Yellow. Among them, 300 were *Ticket Books* that doubled as single-use tickets for six journeys. To use the ticket, passengers simply had to touch the book at the turnstile. Recharging the *Ticket Book* on the project's website was also possible. Passengers were encouraged to recharge and share their books with other subway users. Notably, the collection featured striking covers inspired by subway maps worldwide.

### **24x7 Cultural Company: Book vending machines (2003-2019)**

In 2001, entrepreneur Fábio Bueno Netto conceived selling affordable books through vending machines similar to soft drinks and snacks. The goal was to place these machines in high-traffic locations, selling works no longer protected by copyright. After two years of negotiations with the Metrô, the first machine was installed at São Joaquim station in March 2003.

Until 2019, the Metrô had these machines in some stations. In a Facebook<sup>1</sup> note, the company announced it had decided to discontinue operations in the Metrô and inoperative machines can still be found in the stations.

Some machines followed the “Pay what you think it’s worth” model, with a minimum payment of R\$2.00, because the equipment only had a banknote slot. It was possible to find books from different genres: fiction, gastronomy, philosophy, business, humor, religion, and more.

### **Brazil Reader Institute (IBL): Embark Reading (2004-2012)**

*Embarque na Leitura (Embark Reading)* was a project of the Instituto Brasil Leitor (Brazil Reader Institute) sponsored by AES Eletropaulo and companies in the Usiminas Group. It consisted of installing libraries inside subway stations to facilitate access to and free loan of books. The first library was opened at Paraíso station, on Line 2-Green, in 2004.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/maquinadelivros/>. Accessed on: 08 Aug. 2019.



The collection included bestsellers, Brazilian literature, self-help, children's books, novels, philosophy, religion, social sciences, linguistics, arts, history, and books in Braille. The project had a simple registration procedure and reached over twenty thousand members. The librarian was responsible for finding the books on the shelves and making the loans – which lasted ten days, with the possibility of renewal – while passengers waited outside. As well as lending books, *Embark Reading* held events related to literature, such as storytelling, chats, and autograph afternoons.

The project installed five libraries in the following stations: Paraíso (Line 1-Blue and Line 2-Green), Santa Cecília and Tatuapé (Line 3-Red), Brás (Companhia Paulista de Trens Metropolitanos - CPTM) and Sacomã (bus). The project ended in 2012 due to a lack of funding.

### **Brazilian Tree Industry (Ibá): Circulate a Book (2022-2023)**

The *Circule um Livro (Circulate a Book)* initiative was conceived by the Brazilian Tree Industry (Ibá) and carried out in partnership with the Metrô. Between May 9 and June 8, 2022, bookshelves were placed in six stations on the network: Chácara Klabin, Trianon-Masp, and Consolação, on Line 2-Green; Palmeiras-Barra Funda and Sé, on Line 3-Red; and Vila Prudente, on Line 15-Silver. Each shelf was filled with books and leaflets explaining the project. Ibá's president, Paulo Hartung, says in a promotional video that the proposal aims to encourage reading and the circular economy – by suggesting that passengers feed the shelves with books to be exchanged. In the same material, Metrô's director of operations states that “it is a partnership where our passengers do not pay anything. One takes the book from here, reads it at home, returns it and takes another book. In other words, they get to circulate the book”.

### **Reading Projects Group: Traveling in Reading (2006-Present)**

The Reading Projects Group was founded in 1998 by Laé de Souza, a writer and cultural producer. Based on a partnership with ViaQuatro and ViaMobilidade concessionaires for events to encourage reading, the Group held the first edition of the *Viajando na Leitura (Traveling in Reading)* project in 2006, in the *subway* at the Largo Treze station on Line 5-Lilac.

By distributing books free of charge, the project aims to encourage reading and circulation among readers. As explained on the first page of the titles used in the action, the proposal is that, after reading, the reader leaves the book in another public place of transit, such as buses, subways, cabs, and airports, so that other people can find it. The cover of the books also has a sticker with the invitation: “Read me and lose me somewhere.” According to the Group's coordinator, the available titles usually contain short chronicles so they can be read quickly

and on time; the children's books also feature short stories with illustrations. In São Paulo, the project has already taken place on the CPTM, Metrô, Viação Cometa and Guarulhos buses.

On the event day, the team consists of five people, and the author, Laé de Souza, autographs the books and talks to the readers. When the books are distributed, the group talks to the public about the importance of sharing reading with children, reinforcing the need to leave the book somewhere else after use. When they are found, the books intentionally dropped on seats cause astonishment, but they are taken away, mainly because of the information about the dynamics of the action on the first page. The Metrô welcomes the project, given the benefits to the population.

In April 2019, a partnership was formed with *Leitura nas Vias*. To celebrate International Children's Book Day, 1,200 copies were distributed at the São Paulo-Morumbi station on Line 4-Yellow. Each volume had a label on the cover advising that, after reading, the book should be returned to the shelves and niches of *Leitura nas Vias*. In July of the same year, a similar action took place on National Writers Day at Largo Treze station on Line 5-Lilac. In November, it was Santo Amaro station's turn. The event also included a round table discussion with students from two public schools in the region who had their texts published in the book *The best stories from reading projects – vol. 11*. 2021 was also marked by project activities celebrating commemorative dates at stations on Lines 4-Yellow, 5-Lilac and 3-Red. The project's activities are published on its own website.

### **BookCrossing Movement: BookCrossing Brasil (2008-2013)**

*BookCrossing Brasil* is the practice of leaving books in public places for other people to find. On the front and back covers, labels are placed explaining how the project works, including a request to register the find on the movement's official website, which makes it possible to trace the trajectory of each book. After reading the book, the person is invited to 'lose it' in another public place. The movement's motto is "Read, Register, Release".

In 2010, in partnership with the Kliceo Virtual Culture Center, *BookCrossing Brasil* "lost" 1,500 books at Vila Madalena, Clínicas, Consolação, Trianon-Masp, Brigadeiro, Alto do Ipiranga, Ana Rosa, Paraíso, Sé, Palmeiras-Barra Funda and Portuguesa-Tietê stations.

### **More People Are Reading (2015-2018)**

*Tem Mais Gente Lendo (More People Are Reading)* was created in February 2015. Its primary purpose was to document readers on public transportation and share these records on the project's social media platforms. Conceived by Sérgio Miguez, TMGL received support from the Brazilian Book Chamber and enjoyed a high level of activity on social media during

its peak years (2015-2017). In an interview, Sérgio said: “I am a São Paulo subway user, and I was increasingly struck by the remarkable number of passengers with books in their hands. I began capturing these moments with my cell phone and sharing the photos on social media using the hashtag #temmaisgentelendo”. Hamilton dos Santos, another project creator, joined the hashtag trend and started posting the photos on Facebook.

For the creators, the initiative encouraged reading in a practical way, precisely by showing actions and going beyond encouraging speech. The project’s website featured a notice about the image rights of the readers captured since the project recognized this right, even if the performance was in a public space. Therefore, the following guidelines were observed: (a) take photographs at angles that avoided recognizing the person being photographed; (b) blur the faces that appeared in the foreground of the images; (c) ask permission from the person being portrayed. In addition, if the person photographed recognized themselves in a post, they could ask for the photo to be removed via e-mail or send their image authorization and enter a competition for a book.

On September 26, 2015, *More People Are Reading* invited those who followed them virtually to a “Reading moves the world” flash mob. The event was supported by SP Leituras, the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), and the Secretariat of Culture. Readers were invited to occupy MASP’s open space with their books and read aloud a passage they liked. Another TMGL action was the audiovisual series “O Crítico do Vagão” (The Wagon Critic), in which young João Pedro Durigan reviewed a book during a subway journey.

## Reading on the Wagon (2014-Present)

*Leitura no Vagão (Reading in the Wagon)* is an initiative that involves “abandoning” books in various public places, such as subway seats. The books are identified by stickers and stamps that explain why they were forgotten and invite passengers to forget them again after reading. The aim is to minimize the discomfort and fatigue of everyday life on public transport, providing another travel experience.

Founded in 2014 by Fernando Tremonti, the initiative still has volunteers and actions – although there has been a decline during the pandemic. The first actions were exclusively in the São Paulo subway, but then the project expanded. Books are distributed in parks, streets, squares, buses, and trains, even in other cities. There was even an episode in which a reading gathering was organized inside a subway station. Some actions have no specific reason, while others follow a commemorative date, such as Children’s Day, Mother’s Day, Book Day, etc.

*Reading in the Wagon* plans activities on specific days, but each volunteer also has the autonomy to take the project’s books and distribute them during their daily commute. During the activities, volunteers are identified by wearing the project’s T-shirt. They comment that

the “acceptance is splendid” and that while trying to position the books, some people already want to take them. The initiative’s T-shirts have even been sent to several famous people with a presentation of the project and a request for their support. As a result, you can find photos of celebrities wearing them on the action’s networks.

The project has also solicited support via crowdfunding and donations from its followers, as well as selling products (T-shirts, bookmarks, and mugs) and sponsorship quotas for its website. In addition, to acquire books, they contacted publishers and bookstores to explain the project and ask for donations, some of which were accepted. One of the volunteers comments that Livraria Saraiva bookstore has already made several contributions. In all, more than 35,000 books have been received and distributed by the project.

During the project’s inception, Fernando managed to talk to the Metrô team and organize some collaborative actions, and this partnership continues to this day. For example, one of the collaborative actions, with Metrô’s support, involved distributing books in a carriage at the first station of Line 3-Red. The volunteers had access to the carriage before the passengers and placed books on all the seats. According to them, some passengers were afraid to sit in the seats because they thought the item had an owner, and it was up to the volunteers to present the project. In 2019, the initiative’s creator moved away from *Reading in the Wagon* due to disagreements on social media with a digital influencer. The coordination was then transferred to one of the volunteers.

The project’s relationship with the Metrô team is positive. Participants in *Reading in the Wagon* contact the company via message and explain what is planned for the action, and the Metrô team authorizes and organizes to receive them on the designated day. The project complies with all of Metrô’s requests and requirements. One of the volunteers explains that appointments are usually scheduled well in advance, so there is time to get back to them. She says most events have been held at Palmeiras-Barra Funda station, close to the *Reading*’s founder’s residence. During the Christmases of 2016 and 2017, the project assisted the Subway’s Santa Claus in distributing books.

Currently, one of the volunteers runs a book exchange group before they are labeled and “lost” in the wagons. The group consists of around 80 people, most of whom are women who do not have access to books because they cannot afford them, and it is up to this volunteer to organize the loans. She says she knows who has each book and when to return it. According to her, this is a way of saying thank you and spreading the word about how much the project has helped her: “I haven’t bought any books for three years. It’s wonderful, isn’t it?” she says.

The same interviewee comments that she has never had a problem with the group’s participants not returning or taking good care of the books. She also explains that the participants usually spend around four hours on public transport daily. In addition to the other actions of *Reading*, the volunteers believe that they are thus contributing to improving the routine of all transport users.

## **I Saw You Reading (2016-Present)**

The *Vi Você Lendo (I Saw You Reading)* initiative consists of a social network page that collects records of passengers reading on public transport. The project was conceived by Fernando Piovezam, who, as an avid reader, noticed other readers on his daily commute. On one occasion, he registered another reading passenger to save that “indication” of reading. By the time he realized it, he had a large stockpile of photographic records of this kind, and in August 2016, he decided to create the profile *I Saw You Reading* to publicize the reading tips he recorded on public transport.

Fernando comments that he finds several books he has never heard of and is curious to know what they are about. After a while, followers of the page started sending in their records, too. The creator points out that he has already caught two passengers reading the same book in the same carriage and not noticing each other.

Passengers can be seen holding everything from small paperback books to large ones. There are images of people reading while seated in the seats or the aisles, standing in the center of the carriage, holding the metal bar, and squeezing among other users. “I like to show just that. The people reading amid this hubbub, the people right there in the middle of the hustle and bustle,” says Fernando.

The creator points out that he has only experienced one negative situation. As he explains, every time he records someone, he tries to ask permission to post the person’s image. On one of these occasions, a young man responded positively, and Fernando immediately published the photo and tagged him. While still in the carriage, the man approached Fernando and asked for his image removed because his wife had seen it and disapproved. The image was promptly deleted, and Fernando apologized for the misunderstanding caused.

In addition to the main action, the project also shares news about the world of books and reading on its page. When there was a movement against taxing books, for example, (*I Saw You Reading*) immediately got involved and called on its followers to sign the petition against taxation.

## **Metro Readers (2022-Present)**

The page *Leitores do Metrô (Metro Readers)* originated from another project, *Arbóreo Literário (Literary Arboreal)*, also the brainchild of André Pimenta, who began photographing and publicizing subway readers. He lives and works in distant neighborhoods (Grajaú and Pinheiros), so he spends a long time on public transport and has consistently photographed other readers. In 2022, when his boyfriend suggested that André collect these photos for

some purpose, he created the *Metro Readers* profile. André explains that the page's goal is to encourage reading and show that there are other resources besides smartphones to pass the time. He registers readers of all genders, body types, origins, and appearances (and different literary tastes).

The creator comments that the relationship with readers is positive; they engage well with the posts, and most of them are complimentary. He said, "So far, about 6 people have found themselves in the photos; only one asked for it to be removed, but he did it very quietly". One of the most engaging forms of interaction in the comments is when people attempt to guess the title of the photographed book.

Most of the photos are taken by André himself. However, he receives more contributions from followers each day who, during their travels, photograph other readers and send the images via direct message on social networks or e-mail. Recently, the page received its first entries from outside São Paulo, from Pernambuco and Brasília.

## **Wandering Poets (2012-Present)**

*Poetas Ambulantes (Wandering Poets)* is a collective that holds itinerant poetry gatherings on public transportation in São Paulo. During the journeys, the participants recite their own verses or works of classic and contemporary authors, hand out free poems and books, and invite other passengers to the gathering, whether through literary recitation, singing a song, dancing, or any other form of artistic expression. The aim is to bring poetry to people without expecting it, with public transport being the main stage.

The initiative's name was inspired by the street vendors who circulate clandestinely in buses selling goods and are known as *Wanderers*. Without any fees, scripts, or microphones, the poets perform with clean faces, spreading art. The actions are planned for weekdays, preferably at busy times. The poets believe that it is precisely during this period that people are most tired and stressed, and poetry comes in to make the routine lighter and more pleasant.

The collective was formed by poets who used to attend the Sarau da Cooperifa (Cooperifa's soirée), a poetry gathering created by Sérgio Vaz with the participation of people from disadvantaged areas. Their first outing was in September 2012, from the Guarapiranga Terminal to Ibirapuera Park. From the second outing onwards, the group structured itself as a collective and organized monthly meetings – always choosing poetry gathering as the last destination. Since it was founded, *Wandering Poets* has performed more than 100 times all over the country.

On the project's website, you can find several reports of the group's outings, including the one on April 16, 2013, when the eighth outing occurred. The departure point was Calmon Viana station on CPTM Line 12-Safira, heading for the Heliópolis neighborhood to participate

in *TerSarau*. The event started at 3 p.m. and included six poets. When they passed Chácara Klabin station on Line 2-Green of the Metrô, the poets were prevented by security guards from continuing their speeches. The employees alleged that the group was in breach of company regulations: “The security guards claimed that it was disturbing passengers. At the same time, a passenger said that she was actually bothered by the guard’s actions and not by the poetry” (PEIXOTO, 2013). The poets highlight the constant attempts to contact the Metrô with no return, concluding, “Unfortunately, we never even met anyone who could give a definitive yes or no about being able to do poetry there. As the subway is also ours, we will continue to take care of it in our own way, with poetry” (PEIXOTO, 2013).

## Final considerations

Considering the size of the metropolis of São Paulo, with its more than twelve million inhabitants, and the importance of the subway to the city’s population, it is undeniable that there are few projects to encourage reading on this form of transportation. From the moment the subway is experienced as a destination and not as a place to pass through, the city is experienced differently. Walking and noisy reading, typical of the metropolitan core, is an ambivalent experience among the crowd. Despite the potential of this practice for the resemanticization of space, from the analysis of the twenty projects presented, it is possible that only a few of them effectively transform the subway into a place of permanence and proximity to culture.

Some projects were motivated only by functional communication and transience in space. In these circumstances, the notion of a book was closer to that of a mere consumer object, emptied of its emancipatory potential. This is the case with initiatives such as *Ticket Books* and *Book Vending Machines*, which prioritized the **advertising purpose** of book consumption and ended up competing with various other advertisements in search of a consumer.

Other projects, such as *Reading Findings*, *Reading on the Vias*, *Circulate a Book*, *Traveling in Reading*, *BookCrossing Brasil*, and *Reading on the Wagon*, which **distribute books and exchange mediated by objects**, have some limitations. It was possible to see how they transformed the subway into a space for approaching culture, given that finding a book and starting to read it in a train car can spread the word to other passengers. However, the surprise of finding a book and deciding to carry it with you is not automatic but requires a subjective investment. In this way, the form of this distribution and exchange (mediated by objects such as bookshelves, shelves, or niches) limits the chances of interactions among reading passengers. If the exchange of books is encouraged in a specific place and at a specific time, it is possible to foresee possible indications of titles and conversations about what has been read. In this case, the importance of some of these projects in creating relationships of sociability stands out, as discussed below.

In a similar vein of mediation, audiobooks were distributed in the *Audiobook Club* and *Digital Reading Club* projects, which suggested **individual consumption of the audiobook** by



capturing it on a cell phone or accessing a website. The physical absence of the book and the presence of the audio transform the practice of reading as one leaves the tactile-visual realm to access the auditory domain. The first initiative, however, was linked to a face-to-face reading group, while the second was an invitation for readers to take part in a group.

The projects focused on the experience of immersion in reading and the perception of the book as a cultural and historical object, which were actually identified as being aimed at creating a place and relationships of sociability. This is the case with the initiatives mentioned below.

The *Neli Siqueira Library*, *Embark Reading*, and *Sesc Mobile Library* projects create a space where passengers can access various books and even borrow them to read during the journey and elsewhere. The projects *Metro Reading Club*, *On the shelves of the North Zone*, and the aforementioned *Reading on the Wagon*, *Traveling in Reading*, *Digital Reading Club*, and *Audiobook Club* produce **relationships of sociability** through meetings among reading passengers, fostering discussions and oral readings. The potential for spreading literature in these spaces of exchange and experience is great. It was also possible to find projects to encourage reading by photographing passengers reading during their journeys, such as *More People Are Reading*, *I Saw You Reading*, and *Metro Readers*, which **capture images and** publish them on digital platforms.

*Poetry in the Subway* produces an **identity and historical place** marked by Portuguese language poets. By stopping to read a poem amidst the rush of passengers, the subject goes against the objective and functional use of the subway to resemanticize that space with a sense of place. The sensation of reading among a hurrying crowd marks the sensitive experience of the reading passenger. Finally, it is worth highlighting the uniqueness of *Wandering Poets*, which achieves **sensitive contagion** through itinerant poetry gathering to surprise other passengers through oral reading and literary performance.

In opposition to the notion of non-place (AUGÉ, 2012), the subway can be transformed into a place of identity where people can build social relationships and enrich cultural experiences. This can be seen in the portion of the projects that suggest identifying the subway as a place we want to pass to relate to books, borrow them, and experience them. This perspective highlights the importance of creating public spaces that provide meaning and social connection.

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