



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

NICHOLAS WEES

BA (University of Victoria, 2015)

**“Buskers Underground: Meaning, Perception, and Performance among
Montreal’s Metro Buskers”**

Department of Anthropology

Monday, May 15, 2017

10:00AM

David Turpin Building

Room A144

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier, Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Lisa Mitchell, Department of Anthropology, UVic (Member)

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Abstract

This thesis explores the practices, motivations, and sensorial experiences of Montreal's metro buskers. By examining the lived experiences of 'street' performers in the stations and connecting passageways of Montreal's underground transit system, I consider what it 'means' to be a metro busker from the perspective of the performers. Informed by my ethnographic fieldwork among metro buskers, I detail their performance practices, 'staging' strategies, uses of technology, bodily dispositions, and subjective perceptions in relation to the public, each other and the spaces of performance. In the process, I make visible – and audible – the variable and improvisational nature of busking practices, and how these are constituted in relation to the physical features of the performance sites. More broadly, I explore the co-productive relations between body and space, the sensorial experiences and spatial practices of everyday urban life, and the potential for moments of micro-social encounter and appropriations of spaces that are not designed to foster conviviality and creative engagement. I locate 'the busker' within these questions not as a fixed identity or subject-position but as an embodied assemblage-act that is socially and materially situated and subjectively enacted through highly variable practices, perceptions and experiences. In detailing the moments of social encounter precipitated by metro buskers, I propose understanding busking as a form of Gift performance that finds certain parallels in sensory ethnographic videography. I show how the influences of diverse participants – human and material – on the filming, editing, and distribution processes changed the course of the audio-visual production in this research. Finally, I introduce a notion of 'expanded trajectory' that links performer and space, researcher and participant, and may enable new acts of encounter and exchange, new processes of social and material circulation, new forms of Gift.