

Motion Capture: Tori Foster's *Concentrated Geographies*

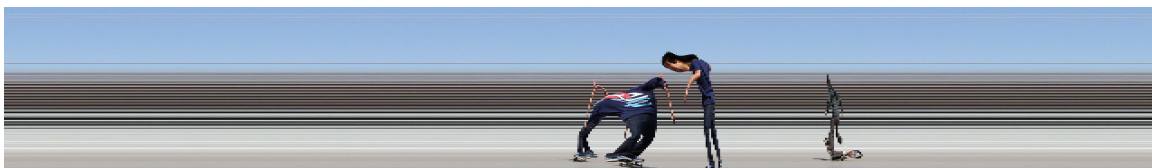
Greg J. Smith

"The first playground is that of the eye, where all one has to do is change one's point of view to construct whole new cities; the second deals with the body, and the significant relationships that it establishes with space." – Alberto Iacovoni(1)

Given the packed itineraries that most urbanites use to manage their engagement with the city, spaces like busy intersections or packed bus shelters are more likely to be treated as ephemeral waypoints than opportunities for aesthetic contemplation. Our everyday spatial practice tends to engender a cool indifference to the din of the street and we unconsciously internalize countless unspoken social codes and protocols in order to move across the city as efficiently as possible. The work assembled for Tori Foster's inaugural solo show represents the artist's unwavering attention to capturing and delineating the trajectories of bodies, crowds and vehicles through the urban environment. Each of Foster's "concentrated geographies" mediates our visual and temporal perception of movement while providing viewers with provocative abstractions of everyday routine, social interactions and our engagement with architecture and infrastructure.

Movement Portraits (2007-2011) is an ongoing experimental imaging project that records the activity of familiar street scenes. In conducting these scans, Foster fixes her video camera on a vertical registration mark and then captures pedestrians or vehicles passing through this 'band' over a set duration of time. A composite image is generated by stitching together the reference band from each frame and output as a print that reads from left to right – the longer the image, the longer the duration of the original shot. This technique is used to map motion within a variety of social spaces including parks, playgrounds, bike lanes and the broader streetscape. As bodies turn and pivot, vehicles brake and crowds saunter past, a range of perspectival artifacts are generated; the acrobatics of a skateboarder register as a pixelated cloud of limbs and momentum, an incoming subway decelerates into a blur while homebound commuters stride by in the foreground.

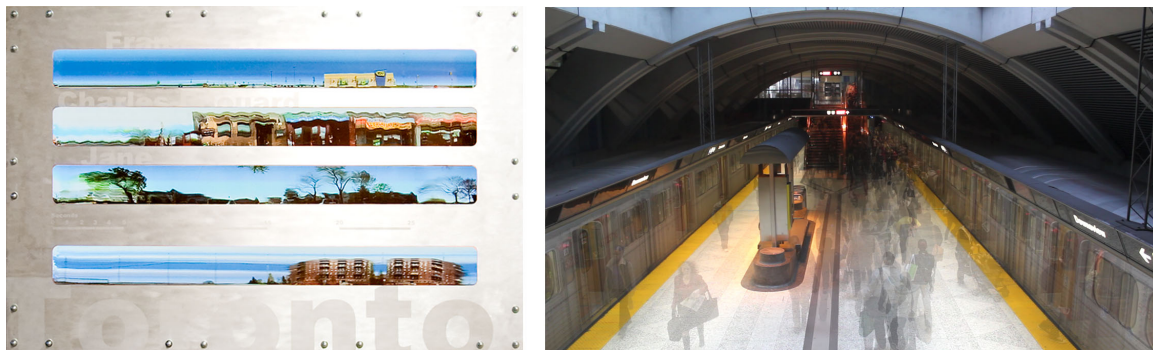
The Impossibility of Understanding in the Path of a Torontonian (2009) is an extension of the recording techniques deployed for *Movement Portraits*. With this venture, Foster is again considering the rhythm of the city and maps the routes of three archetypal personae as they crisscross the Greater Toronto Area. Utilizing a custom camera rig, Foster has collected footage of moving through the city from the perspective of a pedestrian, cyclist and the driver of an automobile. Instead of shooting the streetscape fading into the horizon, *The Impossibility* moves forward through the city while recording a perpendicular view of sidewalks and building facades. Like in the *Movement Portraits*, this footage is composited into a side-scrolling timeline, but one that is more invested in scanning architecture than crowds. These massive composite images are output as 160 minutes of video and the three 'paths' through the city (and another reference video) are arranged in a vertical array within an aluminum display case. A viewer of this installation is presented with diverse post-Google Street View vignettes of how velocity dictates our perception of the city and a window into Toronto as experienced by others.



Skatepark, from the series *Movement Portraits*, Tori Foster, 2011

One Kilometre, Two Minutes (2011) is a recent project where Foster steps away from concrete and asphalt to survey the city from above. The 13' x 4' relief data visualization displays the traffic density in a single lane of the Gardiner Expressway over 120 seconds. Several thousand map pins comprise the visualization and each of them represents the location of a brake or tail light in an individual frame from a nighttime video study (shot from the CN Tower observation deck). The curvature of the surveyed portion of the freeway and the 'local variance' in distance between individual cars results in extremely detailed and nuanced patterning that runs through the piece. While all of Foster's representational systems foreground the rhythms and formal idiosyncrasies of her subject matter, the grain of *One Kilometre, Two Minutes* is particularly ornate – presumably we will see more of the artist's work realized as physical visualizations in the future.

Foster's newest work *Pulse Crowds* (2011) sees the artist developing a variation on her technique for recording activity in dynamic public spaces. A camera is fixed in place above a site of interest and records everything that happens over an extended period of time. Through post-processing, Foster has isolated the background of each site and all moving elements (pedestrians, vehicles) are layered back on top of the scene as ghostly apparitions. The subway platform at Downsview Station is essentialized as a graphic switchboard for channeling streams of commuters headed in opposite directions. Within this transitory space, the flocking algorithm(s) of the crowd become partially legible and we can start to discern emergent patterns and behaviours. While Foster's other *Concentrated Geographies* projects revel in digital artifacts and toy with perspective, *Pulse Crowds* ventures into an eerie territory of orchestrating spectral flows in a silent vacuum. In referring to Anthony Vidler, we might read the blurred trajectories of these amorphous bodies as "strings" of movement, "an endless line" destined to be "looped around a screen" devoid of depth.(2)



Left: *The Impossibility of Understanding in the Path of a Torontonionian*, Tori Foster, 2009
Right: *Downsview Station* (still), from the series *Pulse Crowds*, Tori Foster, 2011

Notes

1. Iacovoni, Alberto. *Game Zone: Playgrounds between Virtual Scenarios and Reality*. Birkhäuser: Basel, 2004. Pg. 17.
2. Vidler, Anthony. *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture*. MIT Press: Cambridge, 2001. Pg. 235.