Sharing Space:
Urban Encounters, Vulnerability, and the Right to the City in Modern French Literature

by

Jason C Grant

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor David Caron, chair
Professor Vincenzo Binetti
Associate Professor William Glover
Professor Michèle Hannoosh

Jason C Grant

jcgrant@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-5996-8716

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Dedication

To my mentors,

and to AJV and KBH.

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Abstract

This dissertation contends with the lived experience of public spaces in the increasingly overstimulating, crowded built environment of 20th and 21st century cities, especially centering on the vulnerability of contact in these spaces, which exposes individuals to the interrelationality of ways of being in the city. *Sharing Space* argues for a specifically urban type of contact, here called the collision, a fleeting meeting that urban life brings about in its randomness and the crossing trajectories of movement. The mutual vulnerability of collisions reveals a tension between antisocial reactions to danger and prosocial possibilities toward community, sociopolitical power, and quotidian dwelling. Starting with close readings of Marguerite Duras, Nathalie Sarraute, Edouard Louis, and Albert Camus, the first two chapters consider the quotidian experience of urban vulnerability and the collision as an instantaneous disturbance of one's relationship to space and others. Then, the third chapter expands this framework to the culture and geography of the Parisian banlieue as represented by François Maspero, considering how such contact allows for urban legibility. Finally, writing produced by protestors of the *Nuit debout* movement shows how this contact can be made intentionally, revealing tensions, which touch both the ontological and the political experiences of the city dweller, that frame a way of being in the world that is both interrelational and geographic: Who am I here with you?

Sharing Space shows that the contemporary city and the systems that shape it create an environment that suppresses the collisions of chance contact with others in the daily experience of urban life. The loss of that contact, particularly in spaces like the banlieue which are

especially influenced by neoliberalism and other contemporary forces of urbanism, makes the Lefebvrian right to the city difficult to imagine or strive for. However, when inhabitants of the city open themselves to the vulnerability of collisions, it is possible to recognize the social basis of being in the world, a form of convivial living that relies on not simply friendliness or hospitality, but on embracing the co-constitutive nature of public spaces. Finally, the possibilities of imagining the future of the urban experience are considered in a convivial approach to the (post)pandemic city.

Introduction: Otherwise Unconnected Narratives

« Ah ! mon ami, savez-vous ce qu'est la créature solitaire,
errant dans les grandes villes ? »

"Ah, mon ami, do you know what the solitary creature is like
when he wanders in the big cities?"

- Albert Camus, *La Chute*

There is a moment in Agnès Varda's 1962 film *Cléo de 5 à 7* that makes me think about the consequences of living day to day life in the city in close proximity to so many strangers. Cléo, a singer of some renown—gaining fame, but not yet quite a star—, awaits news from her doctor about a possible cancer diagnosis. Varda's camera follows her as she evaluates her life and her relationships during the anxious, uncertain two hours in limbo. The viewer watches her seek comfort in her friendship with her maid and confidant; try to connect with an emotionally distant lover; and find support from an especially talkative taxi driver. These kinds of connections are prevalent in all social life, whether in the city or not. In some cases, as with her maid, these are encounters predicated on the exchange value of labor, an employee who provides companionship to an employer. In others, as with Cléo's friend, Dorothée, who tries to distract her from the anticipation of her diagnosis, the sometimes-messy social politics of friendship are in play.

But early in the film's first act, Cléo experiences a different genre of encounter: at a café she recounts for her maid, Angèle, her harrowing experience with a tarot reader who found in the cards signs that pointed to death in Cléo's near future. In short order, Angèle stops listening to

Cléo's anxieties and instead begins telling the café's owner about her own youth in a small village far from Paris. Cléo pulls away from the conversation happening at her table and drifts instead into a conversation happening a couple of tables away. She eavesdrops on the couple at this table, and Varda's camera follows along, drifting away from the action at hand—we can still hear Angèle talking off-screen—, and instead framing these strangers. A young couple quarrels over the amount of time they spend together, and they appear on the verge of breaking up; the man wants to stop sneaking away in the night to avoid running into the woman's parents, and the woman simply wants to stop arguing about it.

Cléo never engages with these strangers. She does not introduce herself or interject, and they likely have no idea Cléo that even hears them. Eventually, she turns back to Angèle and the café owner, drawing the camera with her. The strangers are lost to the background and to the cacophony of Cléo's anxiety; the viewer does not come across them again. Cléo, though, seems to have taken something from the momentary distraction of the couple's angst. She touches up her makeup, fixes her hair, puts her belt back on. She is ready to leave the café and head back into the streets of Paris. The anxiety that had consumed her at the beginning of the scene is relieved, at least enough that she can go about her day and re-enter public life.

These kinds of encounters—often one-sided, usually tenuous, rarely long-lasting—are not unique to the cityspace, but a resident of the city seems to experience them on an almost ubiquitous scale due to the crowded chaos of public urban life. The phenomenology of the urban experience is marked by stimulation: the sounds of traffic, voices, and machinery; the sight of flashing advertisements, incessant movement, and wayfinding apparatuses; the smell of exhaust, waste, and bodies; and so on. You catch the gaze of an attractive passenger on the bus; a tourist asks you for directions to a famous locale; you exchange pleasantries about the weather with a

cashier. Cléo shows, however, that these passing encounters are not always inconsequential. The strangers at the café give Cléo a moment's respite from her anxiety, as well as a brief catharsis, allowing her to participate in their troubles and compare her own against them. At other times, one might feel threatened by these tenuous relationships: perhaps you cross the street to avoid a confrontation, or you run into someone on the sidewalk and cause them to drop their groceries. In both cases, the moment has an internal effect on one of the parties in the confrontation, an effect that changes their relationship to the space around them and their comfort in it.

The foundational questions of *Sharing Space* are revealed in this brief moment of cinematography. The relationship between the built urban environment, the randomness of encounters, and one's sense of self highlights the complex role of vulnerability in one's everyday lived experience. Vulnerability can certainly be dangerous, especially for marginalized people. But as Cléo suggests, there is also a version of vulnerability—openness, amenability, susceptibility—that allows her to derive comfort from those strangers. In the chapters that follow, I show that the kinds of contact represented by Cléo's eavesdropping allow for a social choice in which a person decides between prosocial and antisocial stance toward the urban world.

There are two versions of Cléo in Varda's film. The first is Cléo, the singer: a woman ready to present herself to the world, intent on maintaining a façade of contentment and ease, someone with a team of advisors who curate and negotiate her physical presence in the world. This version of Cléo is built upon her public presence but must shut out her own emotions to maintain an image. At the film's midpoint, we see her shed the costume of Cléo, the singer, in a moment of frustration. She removes her wig, puts on a simpler black dress, and heads out onto the streets without her maid to accompany her. We learn in the final scenes of the film that this

new version is Florence and that Cléo—Cléopâtre—is a stage name to accompany the costume she had been wearing. Without her façade, as Florence, she behaves differently in these public spaces. As she walks down the street, her self-conscious awareness of being seen manifests more obviously on her body, making her appear anxious. Cléo enters another café, and we, as spectators, momentarily enter her first-person perspective, sweeping across the cluttered entryway of the café. We eavesdrop on tables of men talking about "this Algerian craziness," the Algerian War that is always just at the edge of the film. We hear bits of a conversation between a woman and her much younger companion. The cinematography of these sequences is more jarring than it had been in the previous instance of eavesdropping. Varda cuts quickly between groups of café patrons, various decontextualized bits of dialogue, unreadable facial expressions, a loudly crying baby.

Cléo wants, perhaps, to be encountered as Cléo, and not as Florence, in this second café. She puts her own song on the jukebox, so that as she strolls through the tables, her own voice trails behind her; she eavesdrops on a woman complaining to a man at her table about how loud the music is and how it makes it hard to hear their conversation. If she could at least be recognized as Cléo, rather than as Florence, it would be a well-regulated performance, a way of being in public that she is familiar with because it is scripted by others. When she hears a man mention her friend, Dorothée, she smiles. Leaving the café to find Dorothée at her job as an artist's model, Cléo gives up, at least temporarily, on the disconcerting anonymity of being in public. Reuniting with her friend is a known and predictable encounter.

In all of this, Cléo struggles to figure out who she is and define herself as a singer and as a woman, as Cléopâtre and as Florence. She encounters images of herself in various mirrors throughout the city and especially when she is making choices about how to present herself to

the public. These are concrete, material parallels to the overwhelming gaze of the crowds on the street. As Roy Jay Nelson notes, "with Cléo as observer of herself being observed, she becomes increasingly aware of the function others have in the creation of her being" (1983, 739). "Cléo" (that is, the performance of Cléo) does not exist without others' perception of her. When she catches sight of herself as Florence in a café mirror, she explicitly describes her awareness of this publicly mediated process of becoming, thinking to herself, "My unchanging doll's face… This ridiculous hat… I can't see my own fears. I thought everyone looked at me. I looked only at myself. It wears me out." As Cléo, she works to present measured confidence to the strangers gazing at her on the sidewalk, but as Florence, she comes to realize that no one is really looking at her except herself.

The effects of her eavesdropping—that is, of these tenuous points of contact that are nearly unavoidable in public urban space—are unpredictable. Listening in on others might ease her nerves and allow her to move on with her day, as it does when she overhears the quarreling young couple. But it might also inspire new anxieties, jar her into an awareness of herself that destabilizes her into discomfort, as it does when she overhears the men in the café after she takes off her "Cléo" costume. In either case, she contends with the tension between vulnerability and comfort that is contingent in the proximity that the city forces its inhabitants into. Life in public spaces allows others to look at her, but it also allows her to look at others.

Being Looked At

Whether other people are looking at you—and by corollary, whether you are looking at others—plays a prominent role in theories of the lived experience of urban space. Henri Lefebvre lamented the complacency that comes from repeated daily routines within the noise of the city,

an “untragic misery of the inhabitant,” suggesting that city dwellers must become aware of the role it plays in their lives:

> One has only to open one’s eyes to understand the daily life of the one who runs from his dwelling to the station, near or far away, to the packed underground train, the office or the factory, to return the same way in the evening and come home to recuperate enough to start again the next day. (1996, 159)

The overwhelming stimulation of the city encourages people to look *away* from each other, rendering others functionally invisible, to preserve one’s mental and physical energy. The partitioning of everyday spaces—in this case: home, transport, work—causes the individual to settle into routine. Notably, Lefebvre’s choreography includes no other people; even other commuters on the metro are elided as little more than the adjective “packed.” It does not matter to this miserable inhabitant who these other people are and how, or even if, they change on a daily basis. They are simply a swarm that has the same influence in one’s life as any other architecture, an accompaniment as people who live in cities move from their homes to their workplaces to the markets and back.

By contrast, in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs writes about the “intricate ballet” (50) of the city, the choreography that brings neighbors into daily contact and mundane intimacy:

> While I sweep up the wrappers I watch the other rituals of morning [...]. Two new entrances are being made from the wings: well-dressed and even elegant women and men with brief cases emerge from doorways and side streets. Most of these are heading for the bus, and subways, but some hover on the curbs, stopping taxis which have miraculously appeared at the right moment, for the taxis are part of a wider morning ritual: having dropped passengers from midtown in the downtown financial district, they are now bringing downtowners up to midtown. [...] We nod; we each glance quickly up and down the street, then look back at each other and smile. We have done this many a morning for more than ten years, and we both know what it means: All is well. (51)

As a "ballet," Jacob's choreographies rely on other people, such that no individual can move through space without engaging with others to varying degrees. Everyone in Jacobs' ballet has a task (sweeping up, catching a bus, returning to midtown), and each task has a time, not scheduled in the way that trains are scheduled, but habitualized and made into a routine. These routines are entangled, so that one person's cues initiate another, moving individuals around the city and to their various marks with predictable precision. Like Lefebvre, Jacobs acknowledges that most of these routines are taking people away on buses, subways, and in taxis; Jacobs' urban inhabitants have jobs to do and errands to run, too. However, the reliability of these consciously and unconsciously scheduled tasks, small- and large-scale rituals, allows one to engage with the familiarity of the stimuli of the urban environment. Jacobs' urban dwellers manifest intimacy in repetition. Repetition and routine bring individuals into contact with each other again and again; one person's presence on their mark at their cue signals to another that the neighborhood theatrics are in working order.

Where Lefebvre warned about the individuals blinded to their movements (as workers and as consumers) in the city, Jacobs suggests a framework in which these movements are neighborhood-making and central to the question of security and safety. When residents of the neighborhood look at and take account of who is in their space and how their space is being used, they collectively take responsibility for identifying potential dangers. And when neighbors connect in that detached intimacy, "all is well." In Jacob's urbanism, this is an untaught lesson: "It is learned from the experience of having *other people without ties of kinship or close friendship or formal responsibility to you* take a modicum of public responsibility for you" (82, original emphasis). Neighborhoods, she suggests, are communities of proximity built on public responsibility. There is no formal basis for this responsibility as there is in families, in friend

groups, or other defined collectives. Public responsibility contrasts the personal responsibility of (especially American) individualism, in which one shares space only coincidentally and therefore without obligation to one another.

Jacob's model presents obvious problems—most notably, who has the right and authority to identify, by sight alone, who belongs and who does not. The distribution of power, even at the neighborhood-scale and even when theoretically shared democratically, inevitably threatens the safety of those who do not culturally *look* as though they belong in the neighborhood. This ballet also suggests, however, how banality leads to a certain kind of intimacy, such that the repetition of proximity engenders communal relationships. The riders on Lefebvre's metro never form a community, it seems, but Jacob's neighborhood communities are based on little more than closeness, shared addresses, and seeing each other on the streets from time to time.

In *Building and Dwelling*, sociologist Richard Sennett writes about Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin, a 1920s era proposal (which was not ultimately realized) to replace large areas of the Right Bank in Paris in order to modernize the city. In particular, Sennett is interested in Le Corbusier's "liquid modernity […] erasing of past time" (72). Le Corbusier argued that new buildings should be of natural concrete or white-painted façades so that, when dirtied by use and time, they could be cleaned and "restored to like-new condition, as though no one has ever dwelt in them" (72), the theory being that one must break away from the past to live one's own life: "If the marks time leaves on materials recall past memories, habits and beliefs, then to live in the present you should scrub these marks away; you should paint the *ville* white. White means New; White means Now" (72-3).[1] Le Corbusier recognized that habitual use is etched into the built

[1] *Ville* is a component of the urban that Sennett contrasts with the *cité. Ville* specifically refers to the political and economic city as a network of systems; here, Sennett leans into the word play, suggesting that Le Corbusier not only wants to wash clean the physical city but also neutralize the political and economic systems that support it. These terms will be defined in more detail in Chapter 1.

environment of the city both metaphorically and literally. The architecture and planning of a city space are directly correlated to the experience of habit, both in the way they are marked by it and in the way they mediate it. Ideally, those marks of use would be regularly erased so that the inhabitants would be unburdened from the past, free to develop their own present-tense lives.

Le Corbusier hated urban messiness, saying, "The street wears us out. And when all is said and done we have to admit it disgusts us" (qtd. in Sennett 2018, 73). His goal, Sennett insists, was efficiency, especially finding "the most efficient way for people to live" (73). If the architect could build a house (which he called a "machine for living in" [73]) that optimized living, and if that optimization could happen *before* individuals even moved into the house, his plan would be a success, preemptively creating a space in which to dwell and removing from the individual any obligation to create or build. Outside the home, Le Corbusier was fascinated by New York's rigidly square grid, which he praised for its effects on the mind: "The streets are at right angles to each other and the mind is liberated" (qtd. in Sennett 2018, 73). The twisting and unregulated streets of Paris and other French cities—notwithstanding the Haussmannian boulevards—require too much mental energy, too much concentration, and therefore do not allow city inhabitants to use that energy for other, supposedly higher, purposes. The Plan Voisin intended to "actually do the work of de-sensitizing," creating "a blasé architecture, the mechanical 'liberated' from the visceral" (73). It was an attempt to create a city that would not distract its inhabitants by drawing attention to itself.

Notably, Sennett points out that, when Le Corbusier was in New York to investigate these rigid grids, he "talked virtually to no one" (73). His renderings of the Plan Voisin have no people in them either—which was, to be fair, the style of renderings at the time. People make the city messy, and Le Corbusier's emphasis on the built environment meant that he erased

individual inhabitants from the sidewalks, storefronts, and crosswalks. When Cléo stops to eavesdrop on a neighboring table at the café, she is not actively working to develop a relationship with them. Rather, one could say that she is participating in the very messiness that Le Corbusier worked so hard to clean up. She allows the unpredictable social nature of this quintessentially public urban space to act upon her. She makes no effort to exercise influence over this unpredictability. She sits with it—and by virtue of Varda's camera, so do we, the spectators. These various conceptions of urban life demonstrate the central but complex role of contact and comfort. Lefebvre, Jacobs, and Le Corbusier each acknowledge the unavoidability of others in a life lived in part in public urban space, but how those others influence us—how they should be dealt with—varies from Jacobs' embracing prosocial stance to Le Corbusier's outright erasure. In *The Right to the City*, Henri Lefebvre highlights a series of seemingly contradictory (he calls them complementary) needs that make up the "anthropological foundation" of human social life: security and opening, certainty and adventure, the predictable and the unpredictable, similarity and difference, isolation and encounter, independence (even solitude) and communication (147). In the anxious in-between state of these two hours of Cléo's life, before a potentially traumatic diagnosis but rushing toward it, does she experience these complementary-contradictory needs as she dwells in her non-encounter with this anonymous couple?

Reading for Space

I think of the literary texts throughout this dissertation as moments of eavesdropping, of joining in on the act of encountering strangers in the messy, chaotic, unpredictable space of cities in the 20th and 21st century. These are not necessarily examples of eavesdropping in the strictest sense of listening in on, but rather moments in which proximity provides access to the

humanness of a stranger with whom space is shared.[2] What Agnès Varda asks us to do when we as spectators are forced away from Cléo and toward the arguing couple in the café, I argue, is to consider the consequences of allowing chance encounters to act upon us as urban inhabitants. Rather than turning away from these encounters—why, after all, does the camera need to even acknowledge, let alone center, a nameless pair of characters who will not play any other role in the film's story?—, Varda pushes us toward them. Just for a moment, we are spectators of a story that is happening not *to* us, but *near* us in a crowded public urban space.

Each of the encounters in this dissertation, especially in the first three chapters, are opportunities for us to eavesdrop on the city; in the fourth chapter, I will consider how spaces in which eavesdropping can occur are manifested intentionally. In these pages, I consider the significance of this particular kind of encounter and ask what it means to live in a space that forces the individual to experience interrelationality in such a tenuous and passing way. Where the encounters that interest urban studies are generally of a type founded in communal interests and identity, or else in the tension of difference, many of the encounters in this dissertation play at the boundaries of that definition. Tenuous, momentary, often anonymous, these encounters, which I will call collisions, are a preliminary step, the moment at which branching paths appear that might lead to nothing. One collides with another, is affected by the act of collision, and then moves on, carrying that impact. This understanding of urban encounters is based on the assumption that space—all space, but especially public urban space—is necessarily interrelational.

I adopt this assumption primarily from geographer Doreen Massey. In *For Space*, she speaks of what she calls "the accidental neighbour," which she argues is an emblematic figure

[2] There is, however, at least one example of literal eavesdropping in each of the first three chapters.

for "the chance of space" (111). Like Jane Jacobs' ballet neighbors, the accidental neighbor is an individual whose proximity impacts the arrangement of one's relationship to space; an accidental neighbor influences who you are *here* because they are also here, sharing space with you. The random and uncontrollable mutations of urban space are, in their chaos, liable to bring individuals into close proximity with each other without any underlying logic or sense of cause and effect. Massey establishes three foundational propositions for how one might reimagine space in this chaos: 1) space is constituted through interactions; 2) space is not singular but always a plural, a multiple; and 3) space is always a process under construction (9).[3] Each of these propositions is critical to the development of my argument to follow, but a passing, perhaps even rhetorical, gesture in the third proposition bears special gravity at the outset of the present project:

> In this open interactional space there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not, for not all potential connections have to be established), relations which may or may not be accomplished. (11)

This construction draws attention because of its speculative condition: Massey implores the reader to consider the possibility of future relations. The "yet" of Massey's interrelational spaces suggests constant modulation in which the sociality of those who share the space is always in question and always being negotiated. When they come into contact, they share in "otherwise unconnected narratives" (111); that is, connection in urban space is often predicated only on intersecting and overlapping trajectories, rather than shared histories, identities, or purpose.

[3] That space is fundamentally interrelational is not wholly unique to Massey. Lefebvre argued a similar point in *The Production of Space*, writing, "(*Social*) space is a (*social*) product" (1991, 26, original emphasis). The primary difference between the way that Massey and Lefebvre think about this interrelationality is that word "product." Lefebvrian spaces are produced by social relations; Massey considers space and social relations to be co-constitutive and simultaneous.

Massey's "yet" fills space with potential energy. Where that potential energy would go if released and what the stories told as a result would be is impossible to predict.

The language with which Massey insists upon the relationship between chance and space is itself notable: "It is in the happenstance juxtaposition, in the unforeseen tearing apart, in the internal irruption, in the impossibility of closure, in the finding of yourself next door to alterity, in precisely that possibility of being surprised […] that the chance of space is to be found. The surprise of space" (116). Juxtaposition is an upending experience; the surprise tearing apart, the irruption of chance encounters prevents settling in. And because urban space is defined by its amplification of chance encounters, the tension of this potential energy is, I argue, pervasive in the daily experience of the city.

In Massey's formulation, the direct relationship between space and interrelationality has consequences for the ontology of the self: "We cannot 'become', in other words, without others. And it is space that provides the necessary condition for that possibility. […] In this context the 'role of space' might be characterised as providing the condition for the existence of those relations which generate time" (56). Interrelational becoming is itself a widely considered philosophical approach to the self, but Massey here links it intimately to the production of space. To appreciate this link, one must "imagine the interconnectivity of the spatial as not between static things but between movements, between a plurality of trajectories" (76). The individual elements that make up interconnectivity are constantly changing and therefore causing the relationship between them to change. Each trajectory, each otherwise unconnected narrative, has the potential to cross, collide with, impede, facilitate another, because they are constantly in motion, moved around in time and in the built environment.

Nonetheless, Massey warns against reveling in the "glorious mixity of it all" (111). The messy contact of space is not in itself a success or an outcome, she insists, but rather an inherent quality that serves as a starting condition for how one understands and deals with life in various spaces. She speaks directly to Jane Jacobs' ballets in this warning, noting that the "routines, rhythms, and well-worn paths" (112) that make up Jacobs' sense of neighborhood urbanism are themselves a kind of ordering system. Hierarchical or hegemonic regulation can arise from the "glorious mixity" just as easily as more socially and politically equal ways of life. Even in the extreme disorder of the deregulation and privatization that accompany contemporary neoliberalization, for example, there is a game whose rules are well-known to an elite few. Their access to those rules and therefore to the system that otherwise feels unruly generates unequal access to resources and to a sense of self in place. As Massey says, "what may look to you like randomness and chaos may be someone else's order" (111).

The surprise unsettling of urban space, as a foundational point of departure for this dissertation, indicates two basic urban processes that have been largely segregated in scholarship on the city. On the one hand, I consider how the experience of the city influences the ways of knowing the city and therefore the ways of being in the city, and vice versa. The phenomenological-epistemological-ontological pathway asks us to understand how our perception and understanding of the built environments in which we live influence daily life—that is, how who we are is built co-constitutively with the city. The second process moves us from the individual outward—perhaps to political power, perhaps to community, perhaps outward without a defined destination. This is not a hierarchical movement; I do not mean to suggest that the individual is somehow below or before the community. Rather, I aim to consider the moment of recognition when an individual acknowledges the interrelationality of space.

These moments, Massey's "surprise of space," are enabled, mitigated, and obfuscated by the shape of the built environment and therefore by those with the power to do the shaping.

Post-war urban planning in France was, on the one hand, caught up in the tangled influences of discourse, mythmaking, and state power (see Welch 2018), and on the other, struggling to develop tangible infrastructural advancements that would adequately serve the surging populations of France's cities (see Barjot 2013). Literature provides us access to individual human experience that is not generally represented in the quantitative investigations that dominate urban studies as a social science. Massey asks if space is unrepresentable because of its indeterminacy (114), suggesting that the undecidability, uncertainty, and chance of urban space render it incompatible with representation. All space is complicated by relationality; urban space is complicated by the scale of relationality, and the unrelenting, unavoidable, and often anonymous negotiation of shared space. "Space is indeed 'undecidable,"" Massey suggests, because of "the spatial configuration of multiple (and indeed complex and structured) trajectories. Not the mutual interference of (horizontal) closed structures, but intertwined openended trajectories" (113). Because the trajectories within a space (that is, individuals moving in space) are constantly fluctuating, space is "never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (9). I argue, however, that literary representations of urban life provide a means by which these multiple, entangled trajectories can be imagined—perhaps not untangled, but at least made accessible. As records of trajectories and the collisions between them, literary representations of urban space bring the reader into the collision as a third party. Just as Varda's camera can pull our attention along with Cléo's to an anonymous couple, literature records the moment of collision in a way that is often otherwise invisible in the experience of the city.

In many ways, the "city" of this dissertation is Paris in its various incarnations—the noir Paris of Patrick Modiano, for example, or the peripheral Paris of François Maspero. Other texts, however, complicate the conception of the urban that permeates the following pages. Albert Camus offers a vision of urban Algeria during its colonization and before its independence. Marguerite Duras images the fictional city of S. Tahla, as well as the resort town of Town Beach, which is urban by way of its inextricable economic and social ties to the wealthy vacationers who come and go. At times, our discussion will step even further afield and find itself, for example, in the villages of Agnès Varda's *Visages Villages*. The question of the urban has grown beyond the boundaries of "the city" as such throughout urban studies. Urbanist Neil Brenner calls for a study of "planetary urbanization," finding fault in the strict delineations of contemporary urban space: "The demarcations separating urban, suburban, and rural zones were recognised [in the last several decades] to shift historically, but the spaces themselves were assumed to remain discreet, distinct, and universal" (Brenner and Schmid, 11).[4] Consequently, "the urban can no longer be understood with reference to a particular 'type' of settlement space […]. Today, the urban represents an increasingly worldwide condition in which political-economic relations are enmeshed" (12). By extending the urban past geographic boundaries and into the systems and networks that make up contemporary life, Brenner and Schmid argue that the urban has cast its net over most spaces—if not all spaces—by way of political decision-making, flow of resources and capital, and influence. The urban is a condition one experiences and not exclusively a genre of space one inhabits.

Marxist urban theorists propose expanding the definition of the urban on a similar supposition about the extent of political-economic forces. Henri Lefebvre, lamenting the

[4] See also *Implosions/Explosions* (2014), in which Brenner further develops this idea.

"dissociated and inert" experience of contemporary urban life, spoke of this expansion in terms of decision-making:

> Here are 'social housing estates' without teenagers or old people. Here are women dozing while the men work far away and come home exhausted. Here are private housing developments which form a microcosm and yet remain urban because they depend on centres of decision-making […]. Here is a daily life well divided into fragments: work, transport, private life, leisure. (Lefebvre 1996, 143)

Certainly, French agricultural villages, the Parisian *banlieue*, and the city center of Paris have meaningful differences in both the everyday lived experience and the reality of sociopolitical engagement. However, if the mechanics of life in the banlieue are decided by the city center—specifically, policymakers—then the banlieue, as well as villages, cannot be said to escape the urban. I will return to this citation and its insistence upon the quotidian reach of the urban in later chapters. The texts and case studies in this dissertation highlight the permeability of these differences but are considered urban in their representation of proximity and vulnerability.

In each of the four chapters that follow, I pursue the trajectories of characters through the city as stories-so-far, representations of the experience of the city. These chapters are offered in two related, entwined, but methodologically diverse parts. The first part approaches the theoretical foundations of the questions of vulnerability, proximity, and encounters. Through close readings of several 20th and 21st century French novels, I consider the quotidian urban experience of *being* and *being with others* in space. This framework is especially interested in the points of contact that facilitate both the anxiety and the sociability that may characterize the experience of the cityspace.

The first chapter, "Vulnerability," focuses on the problem of the destabilized self in the proximity of others in the city. As a phenomenological question, how life in the city changes our

relationship with others is affected by the overwhelming stimulation of the built environment. Marguerite Duras' *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*—as well as writing by Nathalie Sarraute and Edouard Louis—offers a vision of the urban quotidian that is dominated by the tension of potential encounters. The fact that an encounter *may be* traumatically significant means, for Lol, the novel's protagonist, that *all* encounters are weighted with anxiety. Like Cléo, Lol fears being recognized as Lol, and therefore experiences the uncontrollable chance of public urban space as a threat to the stability of her identity. These texts show how the *potential* for encounters shapes one's sense of self and place and illustrate, I argue, the role of ontological anxiety in the relationship between strangers in the city.

If Duras's Lol Stein is a character who protects herself by avoiding and rejecting the potential for encounters, Albert Camus, in *La Chute* and *La Peste*, allows us to consider what happens when his characters instead turn toward those encounters, perhaps not seeking them out but recognizing their persistent presence in daily life. In the second chapter, "Collisions," in response to Ahmed's queer phenomenology and her conception of turning toward the world, I propose a version of encountering that I call a collision: a predominantly urban form of contact that is generally anonymous and tenuous, but that represents the contained potential of sharing space with others. Camus' characters witness a stranger's suicide, fear contamination from a passerby on the street, hide out in disused train stations. These characters must make often instantaneous decisions about whether to turn toward the collisions of urban space or else turn away and close themselves off. The choice between sociability and asociability, I show in this chapter, is the primary consequence of collisions.

The pivot from Part One to Part Two occurs around the question of consequences. In the second part, I turn to more concrete realizations of the theoretical foundations established in the

first part. I look to case studies that demonstrate the experience and consequences of collisions in urban space. In Chapter 3, "*Lisibilité*" I build upon a consequence of collisions that is suggested in Camus' *La Peste*: ways of being in and moving through the city can be exchanged—taught and learned—when one turns toward collisions. In *Les Passagers du Roissy-Express*, a record of François Maspero and Anaïk Frantz's trip through the Parisian banlieue on the RER-B, the legibility of urban space is tested on the periphery of the city. The pair try to confront their lack of awareness of the people who live in the housing estates and pavilions of the banlieue by developing a systematic journey with the goal of examining the spaces firsthand, meeting with and talking to the people who live there, and producing an archive that reasserts the periphery in Paris' cultural memory.

Though Maspero and Frantz come up against infrastructural and systemic obstacles in their quest to encounter the banlieue, their mission suggests an approach to urban life that tries to recreate the conditions in which urban inhabitants are encouraged to turn toward each other and acknowledge their shared space. In the final chapter of this dissertation, "Conviviality," I consider several examples from recent decades in which that approach is implemented and tested. At the core of this chapter, the Nuit debout protests that took over the Place de la République for several weeks in 2016 serve as a case study. These protests, primarily organized to address labor laws and practices, co-opted a culturally potent public space and collaboratively built a system of self-governance founded upon democratic engagement with others and with the built environment of their camp. The successes and failures of that engagement show the possibilities of an urban quotidian in which individuals turn toward each other and recognize the co-constitutive, interpersonal reality of public urban life. These examples suggest a version of the Lefebvrian right to the city (*le droit à la ville*) that locates sociopolitical access to urban

space specifically in the interpersonal contact of collisions; because collisions can facilitate awareness of oneself in a reciprocally shared relationship to others, they can initiate cooperative imaginaries of the urban future. Ultimately, I argue for conviviality as a way of conceiving of a sociopolitical engagement with shared urban space. I use conviviality to point toward an engagement with the interrelationality of the city, suggesting that embracing the collision—that is, embracing shared public creation of space—may function to counteract the antisociality of the neoliberal city.

The question "Who am I?" may be cliché at this point. I aim here to add two crucial elements to that question: "Who am I here with you?" By insisting upon the "here" of being, I mean to emphasize the specificity of being. If, as Massey contends, space is a contingent and essential part of being by virtue of its interrelationality, then the way that one experiences the self in shared urban spaces is necessarily specific. "With you," the interrelationality of being, brings the question into the theoretical territory proposed above by Massey. "Who am I here with you?" understands the self as constituted geographically and interpersonally. Conviviality recognizes the necessity of that question in urban space; living convivially in the city acknowledges the co-constitutive nature of being here with you. I argue that this sometimes destabilized, sometime anxious urban way of being imagines a vulnerability in which individuals live with the recognition of sharing public space—its conception, its realization, and the way others partake in it.

In the time it took to write this dissertation, encounters in public spaces became the fodder of hours of media attention: encounters between police and civilians; encounters between Black people and the white-dominated spaces they are made to negotiate; encounters between

indigenous populations and the corporate- and state-led agencies forcing them off their lands; encounters between immigrants and nationalists; and so on. In some ways, it came to feel frivolous to step back and think about the smallest, most tenuous, most transient of moments in the city, those that are not headline-making.

In particular, in the post-2020 world, it would be justified to seek parallels to and conclusions about the coronavirus pandemic at almost any point in the pages that follow. By the second chapter, for example, I will have considered Albert Camus' *La Peste*, a novel about a resurgence of the plague in an Algerian city occupied by the French. In that novel, as in our daily lives since the coronavirus began dominating our daily thoughts in early 2020, proximity was a cause for anxiety, and the biopolitical vulnerability in public spaces has taken on a more tangible valence. In the following pages, I will, admittedly, only briefly address the coronavirus pandemic and its effects on public space. There are two primary reasons—or excuses—for this. The first is scope. To properly address the effects of a public health crisis on urban living, the arguments I make in this dissertation would have to be opened in directions that take us away from the core focus. Scholars in the medical humanities, for example, are thinking about the biopolitics of the coronavirus better than I would be able to in this space. The second reason is immediacy. Here at the tail end of the pandemic's second year, it feels too present and actively occurring to be treated with the kind of critical awareness that it deserves. There are certainly scholars doing excellent work in the history of the present. However, as I try to make sense of the (physical and existential) fatigue, the political quagmire, the urban uncertainty caused by twenty-three months of living amid a pandemic—to say nothing of the unclear path forward, given that "return to normal" has come to sound more like a punchline than a realizable goal—, I wonder if it is worth trying to make sense of things just yet.

What we can start to make sense of at the present is the quotidian reality of living in close proximity to others. Of course, saying hello to your bus driver or holding a door open for someone will not solve the problems of the neoliberal, antisocial city. Collisions, however, suggest the bifurcation of urban sociability. I argue in the following pages that the smallest encounters hold enormous potential. Recognizing the vulnerability of proximity—reconsidering the negative connotations of "vulnerability" itself—can perhaps reveal the cooperative, social, convivial city for what it is: a place in which the negotiations of space and difference can lead to profoundly intimate dwelling together.

Chapter 1 Vulnerability: Security and Interrelationality in Urban Space

When Lol Stein was a young woman, early in Marguerite Duras' *Le Ravissement de Lol V Stein* (1964) [*The Ravishing of Lol Stein* (1966)], she encounters a man named Jean Bedford on the streets of her hometown of S. Tahla. This first meeting takes place one night when Lol, "seule et sans prévenir" (25) ["alone and without telling anyone she was going" (15)], finds herself sharing a sidewalk with an unknown man.[1] She sees him first from a hundred meters or so and hides behind a pillar. Unfamiliarity causes fear, as does distance, as Jean takes her for "une promeneuse qui avait peur de lui, d'un homme seul, si tard, la nuit" (26) ["some girl out walking, someone who was frightened by him, a man alone, so late at night" (16)]. Here, their identities are reduced to immediately available information: time of day, presented gender, location. The space and its specific metrics determine the possibilities of their encounter: "Il était fort probable qu'elle avait couru jusque-là, pensa Jean Bedford, justement parce qu'elle avait peur, depuis l'autre bout de ce boulevard désert" (26) ["It was entirely possible that she had run to this spot from the other end of the deserted boulevard, thought Jean Bedford, for the simple reason that she had been frightened" (16)]. Jean *could* be dangerous, and he and Lol are both aware of that.

Ultimately, he catches up with her and offers, with a smile, to walk with her. She does not respond, a passive acceptance of his free use of public space, so he walks on with her. Jean Bedford's acceptance of Lol's use of the public space is less automatic; he realizes that she is

[1] All English citations to *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* given in brackets refer to the 1996 Richard Seaver translation, unless otherwise noted.

walking without a goal or purpose, and, intrigued, he entertains the possibility of insanity or of an amorous adventure, maybe a game (27). He suspects that she is looking for something, "un objet même qui aurait été pour elle d'une grande importance et qu'elle ne pouvait trouver que de nuit" (27) ["some object which, presumably, was extremely important to her, something she could find only at night" (17)], but she insists she is not. They walk together, carried along by the momentum of Lol's purposelessness, until they return to the boulevard where they first encountered each other and Lol stiffens:

> Il reconnut le portail, là où elle s'était cachée. […] C'est alors qu'il lui vint à l'esprit qu'elle était peut-être Lol Stein. Il ne connaissait pas la famille Stein mais il savait que c'était dans ce quartier qu'elle habitait. L'histoire de la jeune fille il la connaissait, comme toute la bourgeoisie de la ville qui allait, dans sa majorité, passer ses vacances à T. Beach. (28)
>
> [He recognized the gate behind which she had hidden. […] It was at this point that it struck him that she might be Lol Stein. He did not know the Stein family, but he knew that she lived somewhere in that part of town. Like all the solid, middle-class citizens in town, most of whom spent their vacations in Town Beach, he knew what had happened to the girl. (18)]

Jean Bedford does not come to recognize Lol by way of her own body; by all accounts, he has never seen her. Rather, the identification comes by way of her relationship to the geography and architecture of the built environment: Lol Stein belongs *here*, in this part of town, in this house. As her stiffened body reveals, she knows that the house could betray her identity. The initial markers that revealed her to be a young woman alone on the streets at night raised questions about her physical safety, but her relationship to the space and the stories etched into it belie questions about her vulnerability, her possession of and control over knowledge about her identity.

Duras' *Le Ravissement* is a novel crafted around the particular genre of urban encounter represented by Lol and John's first meeting, chance encounters that reveal the social insecurity

of occupying public spaces, which make the novel a productive reading about how proximity influences the experience of vulnerability in cities. In this chapter, I read the main encounters in this novel to pose questions about the relationship between proximity, vulnerability, and sociality. There are three encounters that drive the novel's plot. First, the meeting between Jean Bedford and Lol, which leads to their marriage and eventual return to S. Tahla. Then, after returning to S. Tahla, Lol overhears a couple outside her garden who know the story about her past and speculate about her life now. Lastly, Lol sees the man from that couple leaving a cinema and, without him knowing, proceeds to follow him through the city, an encounter that leads her to meeting his lover, Tatiana Karl, a childhood friend of Lol's. Together, these three events illustrate the urban particularity of proximity: the varied, unpredictable, and uncontrollable encounters contingent to public cityspaces are not only a consequence of but a defining feature of the quotidian experience. The vulnerability of these encounters influences the way a person occupies spaces.

Jean Bedford pieces together Lol's identity not only through their interaction but through her relationship to the city itself—her departure from and return to this particular house; her visible, emotional response to it. Duras' characters take in a wealth of information that tells them how they belong to a space, whom they share it with, and how others belong or not. They use that information to decide who they themselves are in that shifting, uncertain space. Henri Lefebvre wrote about cities that defy direct understanding, suggesting that the city

> is built or is rearranged in the likeness of a sum or combination of elements. Now, as soon as the combination is conceived, perceived and anticipated as such, combinations are not easily recognizable; the differences fall into the perception of their whole. So that while one may rationally look for diversity, a feeling of monotony covers these diversities and prevails, whether housing, buildings, alleged urban centres, organizes areas are concerned. […] Neighbourhood and district fade and crumble away: the people (the 'inhabitants') move about a space which tends

> towards a geometric isotopy, full of instructions and signs, where qualitative differences of place and moments no longer matter. (Lefebvre 1996, 127, 128)

The sum total of a city's stimulating elements—its diversity, its functions, its instructions, its signs—becomes overwhelming, Lefebvre argues. Individual differences in the qualities of space cannot be perceived as unique, and so sameness "covers" over the city's heterogeneity. Difference becomes the prevailing quality and therefore becomes sameness. From these elements of the city that are not easily distinguished because they are overwhelming in their stimulation, Lefebvre traces a path to uniformity. Stimulation becomes a pattern, and a pattern becomes monotonous. Like semantic isotopy, geometric isotopy is the quality of homogeneity that arises from the innate identification of meaningful patterns. That is, according to Lefebvre, an urban inhabitant instinctively pulls patterns out of the noisy stimulation of a cityspace, opting (perhaps unconsciously) for the comprehensibility of homogeneity instead of being overwhelmed by heterogeneity.

That recognition of patterns allows Jean Bedford to identify the woman he meets on the streets as Lol—Lol Stein lives *here*, he knows, based on stories about her childhood that he has heard. He makes sense of the woman's presence in the city by reckoning with her *place* in it. Lol, on the other hand, strives to disconnect from that childhood self. Though she knowingly returned to a space in which perceptions of her identity already exist, she hopes to establish a new construction of herself distinct from the traumas of her past, inserting chaos into imposed homogeneity. As a young woman at a ball in Town Beach, attended by most of S. Tahla's social elite, Lol watched from the periphery as her fiancé, Michael Richardson, left the party with an older woman, Anne-Marie Stretter. *Le Ravissement de Lol V Stein* follows the thread of Lol's

attempts to first recover from the trauma of Michael Richardson's betrayal and then somehow establish a life in that city that is separate from the legend of that night, which has become ubiquitous in the city's social memory. Lol's recovery from the betrayal is difficult, especially affecting her ability to go out in public and engage with the people who had also seen the event (or heard about it second-hand, as is the norm with tight urban social networks). She eventually leaves S. Tahla for ten years, moves to Uxbridge, marries Jean Bedford, and gives birth to two children.

When she returns and comes to occupy her childhood home with her new family, Lol must necessarily engage with the ways that the mythology of Michael Richardson's betrayal still permeates S. Tahla. "Son histoire devient publique" (23) ["Her story […] became a subject of common gossip" (15)][2], the narrator notes; she has entered common gossip and her story is therefore uncontrollable in the hands of so many others. She laments the inevitability of being tied to this myth:

> Il n'est pas pensable pour Lol qu'elle soit absente de l'endroit où ce geste a eu lieu. Ce geste n'aurait pas eu lieu sans elle […]. Ce geste sans elle pour le voir, il meurt de soif, il s'effrite, il tombe, Lol est en cendres. (49)
>
> [For Lol, it is unthinkable that she not be present at the place where this gesture occurred. This gesture would not have occurred without her […]. Without her to witness it, this gesture will die of thirst, will disintegrate, fall, Lol is in ashes. (39–40)]

The moment—not just Richardson and Stretter coming together in an affair but also the affair as a betrayal of Lol—requires Lol's presence, and it would not have been *this* "gesture" in a different place, one more private, one more removed from the social network of Town Beach and S. Tahla. Rather, the gesture exists only with relation to the space and time in which it happened.

[2] This translation, "common gossip," perhaps editorializes the original French, "publique," which suggests a more banal fate for Lol's trauma. If her story is "publique," it simply ends up the property of the public, of everybody. The suggestion of light malice or secrecy in "gossip" is not present in the French.

When she returns to S. Tahla after ten years away, Lol finds herself again in the specific geography that is heavily marked by the legend. Although Michael Richardson and Anne-Marie Stretter have left S. Tahla, Lol reconnects with her childhood friend Tatiana Karl and her lover Jacques Hold. She finds in their affair a mirror of the relationship between Richardson and Stretter that traumatized her in her youth. In the childhood home she returns to, the hotel where she used to meet Michael, the public streets where everyone knows her name, all around her Lol is incapable of avoiding the physical reminders of her past.

In reading *Le Ravissement de Lol V Stein*, we find that urban encounters engage the relationship between the protagonist, the space she occupies, and the perpetual vulnerability of the urban experience. Any person she meets at random in the street may pull her back to that betrayal in her past. Lol contends with how her past encounters, networks, and communities are built into—or rather, built *with*—the city. In particular, Lol's effort to avoid encountering any person who may force her to relive this experience, which defines her in their minds, illustrates a vulnerability that is not only frequent in but, I argue, contingent to life in the city. Lol's anxiety is not exactly physical, though physical danger may play a significant role in the experience of everyday life in the city. Her anxiety is ontological, an unsettling of who she is *here*, in S. Tahla.

My approach to reading *Le Ravissement* centers the built environment, but in doing so, reveals inadequacies in the way we talk about the lived experience of the city. I share sociologist Richard Sennett's desire to bring together the parts of a dichotomy that is taken for granted in urban studies: "the built environment is one thing, how people dwell is another," he writes of scholarship on the city, pointing to a distinction between the physical object of the city and the experience of that object (Sennett 2018, 1). He proposes adopting and refining the French terms *ville* and *cité* to reunite the city with the experience of it. The *ville* is the larger conception of the

city as a political and economic framework rather than simply as a collection of buildings. The *cité* is its consciousness, the specific experience of the city, its *citoyenneté* (2). I depart slightly from this useful terminology because I maintain the methodological need to keep the tangible, concrete architecture of the city at hand. It is also worth avoiding from the start any confusion with common French uses of the terms *ville* and *cité,* especially in the third chapter of this project, in which I consider the *cités,* large housing estates, in Paris' banlieues. Therefore, I refer throughout to the built environment (the physical and tangible), the geo-architectural city (most similar to Sennett's *ville*, the political and economic), and the lived experience (Sennett's *cité*).

Recentering the city in my reading of Duras informs both my understanding of the novel and my conception of the encounters that drive its plot. Readings of Duras and *Le Ravissement* tend toward two scholarly traditions. On the one hand, Duras' centralization of female protagonists and voices, as well as autobiographical reflections, have given themselves to feminist readings that consider the power and marginalization of women in Duras' work.

On the other hand, psychoanalytic studies of Duras' work foreground experiences of trauma, intimacy, and one's relationship with the Other. Jacques Lacan published an 'homage' to *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* in 1965, praising the novel for "evoking the soul" (Lacan 93, my translation). Other psychoanalytic readings of *Le Ravissement* and other of Duras' works, generally indebted to or developing from Lacan's homage, highlight how Lol experiences her trauma—especially via Freud and Kristeva's conceptions of mourning and melancholia. These readings find productive links between such trauma and the narrativization of memory, detailing the consequences that traumatic events have on Lol's relationship to her own past and therefore how others (especially Jacques Hold) have access to her story.

In this chapter, I want to consider the spatialization of encounters by extending them into public spaces and foregrounding the relationship between encounters, a secure sense of self, and a sense of belonging in space. Psychoanalytic studies of the novel tend to internalize trauma both in Lol and in space; the encounters considered in these studies are experienced almost exclusively in interior spaces (Lol's home, the Forest Hotel, Tatiana Karl's foyer). In allowing an individual to experience their trauma away from others, these spaces are important to trauma studies because they differentiate between internal and external spaces of memory.[3]

Tara Collington's "Narrative and Self in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*" contributes a significant new perspective to understanding this novel in, following from Lacan's homage, critiquing his elision of narrative and the narrated. Collington proposes "the notion of temporal continuity and spatial cohesion as shared characteristics of both self and of narrative" (126). Collington insists that *Le Ravissement* contends with the emplotment of time and space because its subject is the fragmented (and fragmentation of) self. In this reading, Lol relies on a practical engagement with the world—a series of externalized actions rather than internalized psychologies—to process her trauma, and that praxis extends into space and through time.

However, Collington's reading centers the interiorization of Lol's experience, both psychically and geographically, focusing almost entirely on the interior spaces that Lol inhabits. The emplotment of time and space is crucial to reading *Le Ravissement*, but the public urban space must be a part of that process. Notably, Lol spends very little time in private. Other than the narration of her cloister in private after the ball in Town Beach, which spans less than five pages at the beginning of the novel, Lol is almost exclusively in the streets of S. Tahla in the

[3] I do not engage directly with trauma studies as such in this chapter. Rather, I contend that Lol's experience in the urban space should be read in terms of her becoming self and by consequence, her encountering others—of which trauma is one element among many.

presence of others. Duras therefore constructs a conception of urban space that is populated and replete with the noisy stimulation of public built environments. Lol's public experience of S. Tahla—in which her story "devient publique" and in which random encounters threaten to draw her back to that trauma—is central to Duras' representation of Lol's sense of self.

In this chapter, in order to understand the vulnerable encounters central to this project, I establish the theoretical framework in which these encounters affect Lol. There is, I argue, an urban experience that necessitates understanding the consequences of proximity and shared existence in the built environment. Throughout this chapter, I come across several problems to which I will return in the chapters that follow: the pervasiveness of encounters; the tendency toward asociality engendered by those encounters; and the disrupted relationship between self and space created by that asociality.

The Problem of Urban Dwelling

The specific geography of *Le Ravissement* is unclear; neither Duras nor her narrator specify a country in which S. Tahla, Uxbridge, and Town Beach belong. Place names (especially the "Beach" of Town Beach, as well as "South" and "Town," though these latter are given as "S." and "T." in the original French) suggest an anglophone location.[4] The reader can be sure that Lol is not in France, as Jean Bedford "venait de passer des vacances en France" (29) ["had just comeback from a vacation in France" (19)] at the beginning of the novel. Character names are less certain: "Stein" and "Anne-Marie Stretter"[5] sound particularly Germanic, though

[4] Some—Madeleine Borgomano seems to be the first in *Marguerite Duras: De la forme au sens* (2011)—suggest that the name S. Tahla phonologically evokes Tallahassee, Florida, a conjecture that Thanh-Vân Ton-That underlines in referencing S. Tahla's Americanness: its perpendicular streets, its sprawl, its modernity (36). This connection is provocative but carries little weight beyond this vague American topography.

[5] In the film *India Song*, written and directed by Duras and based on her novel *Le Vice-Consul*, a character named Anne-Marie Stretter is the French ambassador to India. *Le Vice-Consul* was published in 1966, two years after *Le*

"Richardson," "Hold," "Bedford," and other names sound British or American. Instead, the locations of *Le Ravissement* seem to belong to "an imaginary setting, *un décor imaginaire*" to borrow a phrase from Thanh-Vân Ton-That, who suggests that Duras' descriptions of people and settings

> sont elliptiques, minimales, suggestives, comme des didascalies, sans détails superflus pour accroître l'effet de réalisme ou de vraisemblance. On est aux antipodes de l'écriture balzacienne et de l'exhaustivité documentaire. (36)
>
> [are elliptical, minimal, suggestive—like stage directions, without superfluous details to intensify the effect of realism or of verisimilitude. We are far from the style of Balzac and from documentary completeness. (my translation)]

Duras' city does not rely on the realism of site specificity; rather, the urbanity of Duras' city seems to be elemental rather than tied to any real place. Understanding Duras' conception of the urban space is essential to understanding how encounters happen in it. Early in the novel, I argue, Duras establishes four central features of an urban space: anonymity; boundedness and borders; vastness and unknown areas; and monotony, or stability in change. For example, she notes that S. Tahla is "une ville assez grande" ["a fairly large town"] which enables Lol's wandering walks to "passer inaperçues" ["pass unperceived"] in the streets, all the more so because "elle n'avait pas de quartier de prédilection, elle allait partout, elle ne repassait que peu souvent aux même endroits" (Duras 40) ["there was no section she preferred, she walked through all of them and seldom returned to the same places" (30)]. The city consists of three main zones. The city center, a "étendu, moderne" ["sprawling and modern"] space, is defined by its

Ravissement de Lol V. Stein; Anne-Marie Stretter appears in other works by Duras and seems to be based on a real woman (Ton-That 6). However, even if we are to understand each of these women as the same character, there is no indication that the events in *Le Ravissement* take place in India.

perpendicular grid; to the west, in a residential area, one confronts "plein de méandres, d'impasses imprévues" ["meandering streets and unexpected dead ends"]; beyond that, one finds

> Une forêt et des champs, des routes, après ce quartier. Lol n'est jamais allée aussi loin que la forêt de ce côté-là de S. Tahla. De l'autre côté elle est allée partout, c'est là que se trouve sa maison, enclavée dans le grand faubourg industriel. (40)
>
> [a forest and fields, and a network of highways. Lol has never ventured as far as the forest on that side of South Tahla. She has explored the other side of town in great detail, the side where her house is located, hemmed in by the large industrial suburb. (30)]

The version of S. Tahla that Lol experiences is large enough that parts of it are unknown: she maintains a preference for some neighborhoods and avoids others, so that the forest and the highways form a horizon and the industrial suburb becomes a boundary line. Notably, S. Tahla's boundaries are both natural and manmade. The industrial suburb hems in the urban space (Duras uses the word *enclavée*—that is, isolated, cut off), and the streets are laid seemingly without plan, often sending someone to a dead end. On the other side, natural forest and fields provide a point of relief to the modern rigidity of the city, a sort of gradation from urban grid to residential disorder to natural wild.

However, these fields are in turn corralled by the highway, one of the hallmarks of 20th century urbanism, inescapable even to S. Tahla's feigned natural grounds.[6] In S. Tahla, lovers seek privacy in their trysts at a hotel on the edge of this boundary, the Forest Hotel, pretending at the escape insinuated by wilderness but nonetheless still experiencing the grasp of the urban. In this way, even S. Tahla's "natural" areas are manmade in that they are conceived to influence

[6] Sylvia Williams (1997), reading across Duras' bibliography, points out that Duras' novels are disproportionately set within "defined and structured spaces, isolated microcosms of society" (Williams 115), such as hotels and vacation homes. She notes two exceptions: *Détruire, dit-elle* and *India Song*, which pretend at wild, natural spaces but are in fact settings hemmed in by rivers and forests that act as boundaries. Perhaps because of the uniqueness of the urban space, William's list of these spaces omits *Le Ravissement*, but per Duras' own language (enclavée), I would venture to include it as a space contained by a false gesture at the natural.

how inhabitants experience the city itself: the residential areas abut the fields and provide inhabitants the visual cues of a natural landscape, but the highways prevent the sentiment from spilling out into the natural and therefore uncontrolled and uncontrollable area beyond. Richard Sennett differentiates these types of edge spaces as either boundaries or borders, the former demarcating a definitive perimeter and the latter allowing for mixing and porousness (2018, 219–21).[7] Spaces like the fields at the edge of S. Tahla pretend at the porousness of a border; they act as a kind of cell membrane that lets its contents flow in and out.

Zygmunt Bauman suggests that this state of constant change and ontological vulnerability is essential to the experience of 21st century life, which he describes via metaphors of the built space, arguing that one lives among walls that are never fixed in place. Rather, they

> remind the traveler-through-life of cardboard partitions or screens meant to be repositioned over and over again following successive changes in needs or whims. […] It is rather that nothing in the place stays the same for long, and nothing endures long enough to be fully taken in, to become familiar and to turn into the cosy, secure and comfortable envelope the community-hungry and home-thirsty selves have sought and hoped for. (Bauman 45, 46)

His invocation of cardboard set pieces reinforces the relationship between security and consistency that drives ontological anxiety in the city. In a space designed to be so readily deconstructed and reformed, the urban inhabitant may come to feel displaced—or even *un*placed. The human condition, in Bauman's conception, privileges stasis so that the self has a knowable place in which to settle. The self that craves "cosy, secure and comfortable" dwelling cannot be satisfied by the instability of the city. Therefore, there is a tension between Lefebvre's

[7] Heidegger's lecture "Building Dwelling Thinking," which we will consider at length shortly, adds to this definition of "border" the notion of beginning and ending: "A space is something that has been made room for, something that has been freed, namely, within a boundary […]. A boundary is not that at which something stops but [..] the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding. That is why the concept is that of horismos, that is, the horizon, the boundary" (356, original emphasis). We then come up against the tricky question of where—geographically, sociologically, theoretically—a city starts and ends.

conception of the monotonous homogeny of urban change and the anxious displacement of Bauman's cardboard partitions. Together, these philosophies of urban everyday life give us a picture of urban life in which a large-scale sense of stability—born of over-stimulation, the tendency to find homogenous patterns in rapidly changing stimuli—covers over the instability and insecurity of impermanence.

Le Ravissement deals with the tricky definition of "the city," which Duras seems to be presenting in its elemental state. S. Tahla is a city-as-city; the novel gives us a city in a void, a city that, for us the readers, only exists in relation to the legend of Lol V Stein. If, as Lefebvre argues above, the cacophony of stimuli in the city flattens out into a phenomenological homogeneity, and if movement through urban space only exacerbates those stimuli, the passing of time serves to moderate the relationship between the place and the physical markers of self, drawing forward the imperceptible changes that modulate the urban fabric. The affair that contaminates Lol's past in *Le Ravissement* is written into the geography of S. Tahla upon her return after a ten-year absence.[8] In considering Lol's return journey and her attempt to reintegrate herself into the space she had abandoned as a younger woman, one encounters a vision of her city that highlights these sometimes-imperceptible changes that occur in the urban landscape. When a person returns to a city and becomes conscious of the way they are extended into space (especially densely populated public spaces), a sort of temporal palimpsest forms: two versions of the city that, laid one on top of the other, draw attention to the ways in which they no longer match. The S. Tahla that Lol experiences as a young woman is different from the S. Tahla

[8] Duras' work is particularly interested in the phenomenology and politics of at-homeness, and her bibliography features a number of works that either remove a protagonist from familiar spaces or else see protagonist returning to a place, experiencing it again after a period of absence. *Hiroshima, mon amour*, for which Duras wrote the screenplay, takes place largely in the foyer of the French protagonist's Japanese hotel. The novel *Détruire, dit-elle* is confined entirely in a vacation resort, and *L'Amant* begins with the young protagonist arriving at her boarding school in Saigon after spending time at her family home in France. *Dix Heures et demie du soir en été* traps the members of a love triangle in a Spanish hotel on lock-down because of a storm and a murder investigation.

she returns to ten years later. The palimpsest she perceives reveals previously invisible features of the urban fabric. I argue that these changes, and especially the ways they defamiliarize and alienate Lol from herself and from her story, are instructive in that they reveal how one is vulnerable to the geo-architectural urban space and the process of becoming-with the city.

Lol Stein returns to a home and a city in which a sense of her identity is already firmly ossified in public discourse. Doreen Massey writes about returning home as "going 'back' in both space and time. Back to the old familiar things, to the way things used to be" (124), a postmodern nostalgia. Lol, however, discovers that going back is only possible in the private space of the home; in the public space of the city, "the way things used to be" drive consistently forward, so that there are no "old ways" to return to. This nostalgia is "time travel as well as space travel […] places change; they go on without you" (124). Massey's ultimate revelation reads as a kind of consolation intended for Lol herself: "For the truth is that you can never simply 'go back', to home or to anywhere else. When you get 'there' the place will have moved on just as you yourself will have changed. And this of course is the point" (124).

The changes, large and small, in the city's landscape are made more apparent by her ten-year absence and by her inability to control how she is identified in public. That is, in the ten years she was absent from S. Tahla, two versions of Lol develop: the Lol of her self-identification, which is informed by all the experiences of her long absence, and the "Lol" of the "common gossip" that exists in the minds of S. Tahla's citizens, informed entirely by an ossified mythology of her past and the trauma she experienced in their presence. As such, Lol regularly encounters that second version of herself. In the second central urban encounter in the novel, shortly after she moves back into her childhood home in S. Tahla, Lol sees a young couple pass in front of her garden. The man turns his head toward the house. Lol hides behind the hedges,

and though she cannot make out their entire conversation, she hears the woman say, “Morte peut-être” (Duras 38) [“Dead maybe” (28)]. The couple identify the house as belonging to the Steins, a house connected to that particular legend that so pervasively defines Lol in S. Tahla. The house is an architecture that embodies the past Lol strives to avoid, and the couple attempts to relocate the legend in the present (maybe Lol is dead; maybe the fresh paint and the workers in the garden are an attempt to renew the house for new owners). As long as the house is linked to the legend, a physical object sits in the city that presents a face—a façade—to the public. The public, in turn, has access to a kind of stand-in for Lol, a physical referent that summarizes the version of Lol they conceive of based on their memories of her.

There in her garden as two strangers speculate about her, Lol remains hidden, and her hiding spot permits her to see the couple as they pass the garden and stop. The man “avait pris la femme dans ses bras et il l’avait embrassée furtivement très fort. Le bruit d’une auto l’avait fait la lâcher. Ils s’étaient quittés” (38) [“had taken the woman in his arms and, furtively, had kissed her long and passionately. The sound of a car had caused him to let her go. They had parted” (28)]. The expectation for privacy exists both on private and public property—Lol hidden behind a hedge in her own garden; a couple kissing on a secluded street corner. The couple’s public privacy is enjoyed “furtively,” always at risk of being interrupted. The noise of a passing car is, here, a warning sign; a driver in the street may see them, and that driver could be anyone, including someone the couple does not want their affair made known to. The built environment of the urban space (the house’s façade that implicates a family history; the pillars and hedges behind which one can pretend at anonymity; the convenient corners around which one can kiss a lover) is an imperfect, transient type of privacy. In this quintessentially urban encounter, Duras underlines the vulnerability of both parties, drawing attention to the unavoidable contradiction of

privacy in public urban spaces: privacy is designed into the space only in as much as being found out is also equally embedded into that design.

Public spaces, such as the street directly outside her garden where a couple speculates about her death, threaten to provoke Lol and expose her to her own past. Jean Bedford, after they marry and raise children, expresses hesitation about moving back to S. Tahla, where Lol has no control over these provocations. Although Michael Richardson has moved away with his new wife and family, the legend is built into the city. Lol, then, exercises control over whatever spaces she can:

> Lol V. Stein installa sa maison natale de S. Tahla avec le même soin très strict que celle de U. Bridge. Elle réussit à y introduire le même ordre glacé, à la faire marcher au même rythme horaire. (35)
>
> [Lol Stein furnished and arranged her own house in South Tahla with the same impeccable care as she had the one in Uxbridge. She managed to instill in the new house the same icy order, to run it according to the same clocklike schedule. (25)]

Lol's instinct is to bring her habits and routines that she develops as an adult from Uxbridge into the home she inhabited as a child. It is not only the passage of time that relieves Lol from the memories of her trauma, but also her ability to arrange and control her life in such a way that these unwanted memories go unacknowledged, left out of the relationship between her and her new husband. Her strict care and icy order are efforts at controlling life in this re-occupied space. Lacking control means subjecting oneself to the vulnerability of randomness which is the city's defining feature.

Jean's hesitation that the memory of Michael Richardson will weigh too heavily on their return to S. Tahla recognizes the role that these memories play in Lol's life and the power they would have when experienced again in their original spaces and contexts. In particular, Lol's return to S. Tahla shows how a space evolves around a person: the affair that causes the trauma;

Lol's departure and then Michael Richardson's, which remove the actors from the space; the ten years that pass; and finally, Lol's return.

Lol's control is limited to private spaces like the interior of the home or the garden, her primary solace from metropolitan chaos. Lol's intrinsic need to be comfortable in a space, to be at peace, is her desire to dwell. For Heidegger, in "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," dwelling signifies the way "we human beings *are* on the earth" (345, original emphasis). Dwelling, he says, rests in one's ability to cultivate or build and is therefore an ontological project that defines the continuous process of establishing a relationship between one's self and the space one occupies. As a noun in its common, contemporary usage, one finds dwellings most often in the home but dwelling is explicitly tied to one's Being, to the way one exists. "The way in which you are and I am," Heidegger writes, "is *buan* [the Old High German word for 'building'], dwelling," (348) not only a place or an action (which would be in contrast relative to work), but a state of being, or being itself. In Heidegger's contemporary condition—and, I argue, today—"dwelling is not experienced as man's Being; dwelling is never thought of as the basic character of human being" (350). Humans have moved away from the fundamental relationship between the active practice of dwelling and the ontological experience of Being.

As a verb, dwelling addresses a psychological state of security, and so having moved away from it, Heidegger suggests, contemporary people dissociate dwelling and Being from the spaces one builds and dwells in. Heidegger reminds the reader that *bauen* contains the sense of staying in place, remaining, and *wunian*—a necessary element of dwelling—means to remain in peace, to be free, to be preserved from harm and danger, safeguarded. Dwelling is a praxis of being. It is habitual. The ontological anxiety felt in the city is antithetical to dwelling. The insecurity of the self, especially in the 20th century city, leaves us striving for ontological

stability. Richard Sennett calls this modern condition anomie, the feeling of restlessness or being cast adrift (Sennett 2012, 257), symptomatic of exclusion from social and cultural institutions. The result is a narcissistic desire to control one's body and one's feelings (or else, chronic apathy). One sees oneself as a unique individual among others, and this "threatened loss of self" turns one away from others (184).[9] Lol, as noted above, acknowledges her inability to control the public spaces of S. Tahla, in which individuals seem to possess a piece of her identity by way of their connection to her past. She curates her dwelling—her childhood home—in order to exercise some control over the world.

I argue that, in an environment like the city, in which encounters define everyday lived experience and control over one's surroundings is minimal, dwelling's relationship to the built space is diminished. It is not impossible to dwell in urban space, but without the ability to build, the ability to dwell is compromised. This is one of the ultimate ironies of the city as a built environment: on the one hand, it is eminently a constructed space, tangible and concrete, and it is always being built. It is also, on the other hand, always already built, removed from the agency of its inhabitants. One builds oneself *into* the city, not the other way around. The city dweller builds in other ways, especially in habits and routine uses of space.

I do not claim to offer a satisfying interpretation of Heidegger's notion of dwelling at this point in the project. Instead, "Building Dwelling Thinking" uncovers a problem that inspires much of the investigation that follows: dwelling together. The grammar of Heidegger's dwelling is telling. He talks about dwelling as a universal but individual state. Throughout his lecture, the plural "we" and "us" denotes at some times the scholarly observer and at others a generalization:

[9] It is impossible to write about Heidegger and concepts of the self and Other without acknowledging Heidegger's anti-Semitism, which ultimately led him to flee the city in favor of social isolation in nature. See Sennett's *Building and Dwelling* (126-129) for a full account.

"When we speak of dwelling we usually think of an activity that man performs alongside many other activities. We work here and dwell there. […] We practice a profession" (349). When he speaks of "we," he means either "we" who ponder the notion of dwelling or "we," the universalized "I." However, in Heidegger's famous conjugation of *sein* (the modern German *ich bin* evolves from *bauen,* to dwell), he reveals the tricky nature of his collective *we*: "*ich bin, du bist,* mean I dwell, you dwell. The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *buan*, dwelling" (349, original emphasis). Perhaps Heidegger chooses not to finish the conjugation of *sein* because his audience in the lecture hall would not have cared for a lengthy grammar lesson or because other conjugations of the verb (*er ist, ihr seid,* and especially, for the purposes of this project, *wir sind*) do not derive from *bauen.*[10] In any case, the phrase "The way in which you are and I am" separates me from you, suggesting that we each dwell individually, that we are "on the earth" individually.

Of course, building, in the sense of constructing architectures, is not the only way to dwell and dwelling is not the only way to experience Being. Lol's difficulty reestablishing a sense of self in S. Tahla highlights a specifically geographic formulation of the conception of Being; Lol's "Who am I?" is more accurately "Who am I *here*?", an effort to understand herself in a spatial context that is already conceived with a framework of who "Lol Stein" is. The urban is not unique in this regard; "Who am I *here*?" permeates the literature of any number of locations. However, the shifting and precarious stimulations of the city destabilize the answer to that question in ways that non-urban environments do not. The vulnerability of being in public in the cityspace amends the question again: "Who am I *here* when I am so easily influenced by

[10] In fact, perhaps the fact that *I am* and *You are* derive from bauen, to dwell, but *We are* does not reveals, on its own, a telling truth about the Germanic sense of dwelling as an individualistic state. I will leave that problem for historical linguists.

others?" Lol considers this question more explicitly in her return to S. Tahla, where she encounters that "Who?" in the form of her own legend, a conception of her self that is widely accepted by those with whom she shares the space. She finds that there is a version of herself etched into the built environment of the city and into the social memory of each of her encounters.

The first two of Lol's significant encounters that we have considered in the first part of this chapter reveal the vulnerability contingent to public urban space: when she meets Jean Bedford for the first time in the streets of S. Tahla, she discovers that she cannot avoid being associated with the "Lol Stein" of the legend as long as she occupies the spaces in which the story is embedded. Then, when she hides from the couple outside her garden, overhearing their speculation about her own death and witnessing their kiss that they assumed was private, she realizes how her identity has been built into the city. In Duras' conception of the urban as an elemental space, the built environment absorbs and reflects the lived experiences of the individuals who occupy it. The Lefebvre-Bauman contradiction defined above, in which the city is both constantly changing but also heterogeneous in its instability, allows for Duras' elemental mutability. Individuals' lived experiences respond to the small, sometimes imperceptible changes in the city's landscape; the overwhelming heterogeneity of that evolution traps individuals like Lol in reflections of their own lives.

In the second part of this chapter, I consider what *Le Ravissement* reveals about dwelling in the city. I turn to the third of Lol's significant encounters, a moment in which Lol leaves behind her preoccupation with being observed and instead becomes the observer. In this encounter, she embraces and leverages the vulnerability of being in public urban space to enter into an anonymous, unreciprocated relationship with strangers. Where Lol tends toward

asociality in her early responses to trauma, one finds in this last encounter a turn toward the social realities of city life. She does not avoid this last encounter, as she does the first two, but rather embraces it as a way to step outside her own ontological anxiety.

Being Vulnerable in Public

Lol's comfort in the city depends on remaining largely anonymous, an ability she regularly tests and pushes. The same qualities that threaten to reveal memories of Michael Richardson's betrayal around any corner and that exposed her to Jean Bedford in Town Beach render her an anonymous person on the streets: the excess of stimuli, the chaos of the crowd, the randomness of crossing trajectories. Destabilized from one's sense of dwelling, the urban inhabitant is left to locate a sense of place and a sense of self elsewhere. For Lol, that search takes her into the streets, where she develops a habit of long, aimless walks. In doing so, she puts herself in the midst of the city's noise, exposed to encounters with the other people who occupy public space. Richard Sennett points to the vulnerability of difference that is central to group dynamics: "people feel most uneasy and most challenged by perceiving the 'otherness' of the people around them. Finding the differences between oneself and the world outside oneself seems to be much more difficult to bear than finding the points of similarity" (Sennett 1970, 28). Lol's anxieties in S. Tahla stem from the unavoidable possibility that anyone she encounters may identify her as "Lol Stein," the woman from the legend, the woman defined by her fiancé's betrayal and the subsequent shame. Being identified as Lol distances her as an Other, pointing to her mythology as a distinguishing feature that makes her unique from the rest. These people therefore form a community of those who share the story and recite it—those who are not Lol.

Sennett goes on to suggest that "the fear of 'otherness,' of that which one does not know, is exactly of a piece with what men fear about *themselves* and their own powers when those powers ripen" (28, original emphasis). Lol's legend, this piece she fears most about herself, possesses power precisely because it is that which one *does* know, knowledge held communally in the city. The anonymous woman's "Dead maybe" suggests that the communal narrative is incomplete, but also mutable, vulnerable to being rewritten by others. This is not necessarily a rewritten truth—in this case, Lol is very much alive—but a distortion of truth as it is shared among many. Here, the original French "publique" and the translation "common gossip" converge. That anonymous woman could report Lol's theoretical death, and that report would risk becoming the truth as it is understood by others.

Lol's discomfort in the city stems from the uncontrollable exposure of that distorted truth. The anxiety of this exposure begs for distraction, and Lol, perhaps surprisingly, heads out into the city on long, aimless walks. The lack of stimulus inside her home, ordered and controlled so precisely, leaves her restless. The house as an architecture also exposes her, allowing others to recognize her as Lol Stein as Jean Bedford had years ago, and as the anonymous couple had, only to conclude that she was "Dead maybe." Lol walks not exactly to experience the stimulation of the city but rather to be overwhelmed by it. On the street, she acquiesces to the momentum of the space:

> Une fois sortie de chez elle, dès qu'elle atteignait la rue, dès qu'elle se mettait en marche, la promenade la captivait complètement, la délivrait de vouloir être ou faire plus encore jusque-là l'immobilité du songe. Les rues portèrent Lol V. Stein durant ses promenades, je le sais. (39)
>
> [Once out of her house, the moment she reached the street, the moment she began to walk, her walk absorbed her completely, delivered her from the desire to be or to do anything, even more than the immobility of dreams had up to that point. The streets bore Lol Stein along during her walks, that I know. (29)]

The qualities that destabilize urban dwelling—the excess of stimuli, the chaos of the crowd, the impermanence—are also the qualities that allow Lol to maintain at least a nominal level of anonymity, which is integral to her comfort in the city. Lol's promenades are defined by an anonymity that can be provided in public urban spaces but not by physical manifestations of her past, like the Stein house. Her walks reenact the melancholic flânerie that emerged from the 19th-century Baudelairean project; however, in a shift that marks much of 20th-century urban literature, Lol's flânerie is more active, if not purposeful, than that of the earlier poets', marked by a phenomenological desire to participate in the stimulation of public spaces.[11]

It is S. Tahla's urbanity that helps her avoid being identified by others during these walks. This reality of the urban space is essential to the vulnerability of living in the city: because of the city's profound randomness and the noisiness of its circulations, Lol may at any moment encounter a reminder of Michael Richardson's betrayal, but that same randomness allows her to move through space relatively imperceptibly. A body is incorporated into the noisy geography of the city and cannot in any meaningful way predict or control encounters that materialize out of that noise. The body is therefore subjected to the insecurity of the encounter. Michael Richardson's betrayal and the accompanying reactions of those who witnessed it haunt Lol—not especially because the story is marked on her body but rather because it is marked on the spaces that exist when she is present, as we have seen when Jean Bedford recognized her outside of her childhood home.

Richard Sennett, in *The Consciousness of the Eye*, calls this tendency toward suppressing the affective self in the city—the ability that walking has to "stop feeling" due to abundance—

[11] The Baudelairean flâneur is traditionally a masculine character. See Parsons (2000) for a reframing of the figure in the context of women in modernity.

"neutralization": "My senses are flooded by images, but the difference in value between one image and another becomes as fleeting as my own movement; difference becomes a mere parade of variety" (Sennett 1990, 129). Difference is here related to preference, and as the city overwhelms the city dweller with signals and therefore saturates the value of difference, the city dweller's ability to give preference to any one signal—even those bolstered by personal memory and history—is diminished. Variety becomes its own kind of monotony, and monotony fails to stimulate.

Urban promenades never quite distance themselves completely from the Baudelairean impulse, of course. Lol walks, the narrator speculates, specifically in search of the "insignificant accident" of urban stimulation:

> le vide d'une rue, la courbe d'une autre rue, un magasin de modes, la tristesse rectiligne d'un boulevard, l'amour, les couples enlacés aux angles des jardins, sous les porches. (Duras 39)
>
> [the emptiness of the street, the way another curved, some dress shop displaying the latest fashions, the rectilinear bleakness of some boulevard, love, couples locked in close embrace in the remote corners of some public park or under the archways of streetside doors. (30)]

Like the flâneur, Lol responds to whims, demonstrating how, in a space overwhelmed with stimulations fighting for preference, individual images may catch hold of the individual's attention. Here, the built environment mixes in equal measure with the presence of other people (for Lol, lovers have a special ability to catch her eye, but so do the shapes of streets and the artistry of storefronts). Physical objects and the people who inhabit them are both reduced, in Lol's wanderings, to furniture. Unlike the flâneur, Lol's desire to be overwhelmed, specifically seeking a neutralizing exposure to the city's stimuli, is a practical drive toward reliving her traumatic past in her own terms. Being in the street is a perpetual state of vulnerability. In Lol's case, exposing herself to the possibility of encountering someone who could force her into

contact with the past she is trying to avoid is a necessary consequence of taking these walks meant to overstimulate her psyche.

However, Lol's neutralization in public does not account for the perception of her identity by others. Individual ego may be overwhelmed by urban stimulus, but the perception of identity is not, especially when that identity marks hierarchies between two people. Jean Bedford perceived Lol as a woman, and therefore anticipated the fear that she might have in encountering a man alone on the street. Because the observer holds the power of interpretation (that is, the power to interpret visible markers of identity according to his or her biases), this kind of public perception results in a vulnerability that can highlight the dangers of (inter)relationality.

Questions of perceived, social identity are implicit in the romantic relationships in *Le Ravissement de Lol V Stein*: Lol's gender and class position her in the space of S. Tahla in specific ways. While in this project I am primarily interested in ontological identity, Lol's romantic relationships point to the entanglement of the ontological and the social. A reading of a more explicit treatment of social identity and relationality may help us consider the role they play in the urban experience. In his memoir, *Histoire de la violence* (2016) [*History of Violence* (2018)], Edouard Louis contends with the pathological changes in his relationship with the public spaces he inhabits after being raped and beaten after a sexual encounter. Edouard meets a man, Reda, on the streets of Paris after a Christmas Eve celebration with friends. He brings Reda back to his apartment, where the two have sex before Reda attacks Edouard, pulling a gun on him and beating him. Edouard gets away, and Reda leaves. Louis' memoir, via a first-person, autobiographical narrator whom the reader may understand to be recalling memories through a lens affected by trauma, considers the aftermath of the attack, addressing the post-traumatic stress it causes, especially in public. In exploring these memories, Louis also interrogates the

systemic homophobia and racism that become concrete as he tries to report the attack to police and as he relates the event to his own family.

The attack reminds Louis of his ontological and physical vulnerability: where his queer openness lets him encounter Reda as stranger with whom he might have a relationship, the violence that follows causes him to question what that openness means in practice. Paris becomes a space marked by the attack and the possibility of encountering Reda as randomly as he had that Christmas Eve night, and so Edouard's friend, Cyril, takes him on a holiday to remove himself from that anxiety. On that vacation in Turkey, Louis reflects on his new experience of urban spaces:

> Tout me menaçait. Quand Cyril me regardait j'étais sûr qu'il allait découvrir la cause de ma peur, méprisable, honteuse. Je cachais mon visage pour l'empêcher de lire sur mes traits. Et dans la ville tout s'amplifiait ; […] la foule qui se compressait, qui se bousculait sur la grande artère piétonne n'était là que pour m'écraser, me piétiner, le monde était une mise en scène construite contre moi. (218-19)
>
> [I saw menace everywhere. Wherever Cyril took me, I felt sure he was about to discover the contemptible, shameful reason for my fear. I hid my face so no one could read my features. The city amplified everything I was afraid of: […] the pressing crowd that jostled along the great pedestrian artery existed to crush and trample me, the world was a production staged against me. (201)]

Even here, any person on the street *may* be Reda, his rapist, and so *may* be a danger to Edouard. Cyril thinks that, by bringing him away from Paris, the two will be extricated from the danger that Reda represents, but Edouard's "contemptible, shameful" fear seems to be related not to Paris' public spaces but to public spaces in general. Because of the nebulous geography of urban space, these potential encounters are not contained to the site in which he and Reda originally met and interacted—itself a random encounter. The danger may be present anywhere in Paris at any time, or even in Istanbul, far removed from the initial attack. Edouard worries that his fear is

legible on his face and may be interpreted as racism; he feels safer walking next to Cyril, "un Américain blanc, ou un Allemand blanc" (219) ["white American or white German" (201)] who he thinks may protect him in the event of another attack. Reda, who is Kabyle (a Berber ethnic group), and the men here on the streets of Turkey share the most basic visual signals of shared identity—skin color, facial features—and Louis fights his instinctive reading of those signals as being Reda-like.

Marginalized bodies risk differently and in a more pronounced way. In public, same-sex couples may avoid holding hands; women may avoid walking alone or perhaps may hold keys or other weapons; Black people, especially men, may avoid wearing hoodies or may consciously interrogate their own body language and movements. These are self-policing behaviors constructed on the basis of social mythologies—same-sex couples as degenerate; women as vulnerable; Black men as dangerous—, systemic constructions of generally white, male, upper-class cultures. The queerness of Edouard's having invited a stranger into his home—which, in heteronormative space is labeled 'dangerous' primarily for women and queer people, a "violation" of the public-private divide, despite being performed regularly by heterosexual pairings—allows authority (here, the police) to displace blame for the vulnerability onto Louis, such as when the police officer asks,

> « Et vous avez fait monter un inconnu comme ça, chez vous, en pleine nuit ? » J'avais répondu : « Vous savez tout le monde fait ça… » et lui avait renchéri : « Tout le monde ? » d'un air ironique, moqueur, sarcastique. Ce n'était pas une question. Il ne me demandait évidemment pas si tout le monde se comportait ou non comme ça mais il me faisait comprendre que personne ne le faisait. En tout cas pas tout le monde. Et enfin, ma réponse : « Je voulais dire, les gens comme moi… » (56)
>
> ['Wait—you brought a stranger up to your apartment in the middle of the night?' I answered: 'But everyone does that …', and in an ironic, mocking, sarcastic voice, he asked, 'Everybody?' It wasn't a question. Obviously, he wasn't asking me whether or not everybody did that, he was

> saying nobody did that. Or at least, not everybody. So finally I answered, 'What I mean is, people like me …' (48)]

According to the officer's conception of social norms, Edouard nullified the protections afforded to him by private space when he brought an unknown person into his apartment. Worse, at least from the officer's perspective, Edouard must identify himself, remove himself from the universal 'everybody' who follows certain public-private rules. He separates himself into the 'people like me' category who encounter each other in different ways. Here, a thorough discussion of passing, queer people's experience of being perceived as heterosexual and/or cisgender in public, is outside the scope of this project; however, the role that proximity plays in passing should be considered briefly. Reda perceives Edouard as queer, and vice versa, by virtue of some externalized characteristic behavior or body language that is culturally coded as queer; Louis notably does not specify how they came to identify each other, but the assumption could only have been made at a reasonable proximity from which the two could read each other's externalized clues. The vulnerability of being perceived pervades the experience of public urban space. Vulnerability can have positive outcomes, but the difficulty of controlling that perception underlines every encounter. If either had considered the other to be heterosexual, the encounter necessarily would not have proceeded past the stage of immediate perception. After the attack, however, and in deciding to report it to the police, Edouard must decide how to identify himself, this time not as a result of proximity but instead because of the power dynamics between him and the police officer. This exposure engenders its own set of risks—not being believed, being blamed for the attack, being stereotyped.

In this project, as mentioned earlier, I aim to de-essentialize identity. Where appropriate, I am most considered with the construction of and perception of identity, rather than its essentializing role. For Louis, the vulnerability of his queerness is not founded primarily in his

being queer but rather in his being *interpreted* as queer. Lol, too, experiences herself as woman in a way that is inherently different from her being interpreted as a woman; or, to push the experience further, being Lol and being interpreted as Lol are two different things (being interpreted as "Lol," the myth, is perhaps a third). In interrogating proximity and transient encounters on the city streets, perception of identity is paramount.

The risk of not assimilating that defines Louis' conception of urban publicness is also the risk that Lol experiences in her attempts to live in the city as Lol and not as "Lol Stein." When Lol encounters the couple who kiss outside her garden, she does not make any connection with them, remaining hidden away. However, because of the randomness of the urban space, Lol encounters the same man several weeks later as he leaves a cinema. Neither the reader nor Lol know yet that this is Jacques Hold, the secret lover of Lol's childhood friend, Tatiana Karl. Their only encounter, at this point, is that first moment at her garden. In Lol's desire to remain hidden from the couple outside her garden, she did not recognize the woman has her old friend. Here at the cinema, Lol's tendency to search for her spurned fiancé, Michael Richardson, causes her to nonetheless try to make sense of him via her own experience:

> Ressemblait-il à son fiancé de T. Beach ? Non, il ne lui ressemblait en rien. Avait-il quelque chose dans les manières de cet amant disparu ? Sans doute, oui, dans les regards qu'il avait pour les femmes. […] Oui, il y avait en lui, décida Lol, il sortait de lui, ce premier regard de Michael Richardson, celui que Lol avait connu avant le bal. (Duras 52-3)
>
> [Did he look like her fiancé from Town Beach? No, not in the slightest. Did he have certain mannerisms that reminded her of her lost lover? Yes, no doubt he did, especially the way he looked at women. […] Yes, Lol decided, he did have, there emanated from him, that initial expression that Michael Richardson had had, the one that Lol had known before the ball. (43)]

Lol's perception of their meeting must necessarily be filtered through her pre-existing knowledge of the space and the people in it. Although she recognizes the man from their first, one-sided

observation outside her home, Lol recalls this second moment outside the cinema via a relationship that is more meaningful to her. Like Edouard Louis in *Histoire de la violence*, who sees his rapist Reda in other people who could not possibly be him, Lol tries to categorize the overwhelming stimuli of the city into familiar frameworks. This man at the cinema cannot be Michael Richardson, who has moved to Africa with his new wife, but he can be *like* Michael Richardson—a ladies' man with certain behavioral and expressive tendencies.

While she has encountered this particular body (the man who kissed his partner outside her home) twice and ostensibly knows it to not be the body of Michael Richardson, she entertains the idea that he mirrors Michael Richardson's mannerisms, and specifically his mannerisms in public spaces, which are a more telling sign of identity than one's body. This too is how Jean Bedford came to recognize Lol when they met earlier in the novel: not explicitly by her body, but rather by her body in space, the relationship it has to the environment that contains her story. Spatialized markers like mannerisms and behavior, as well as the architecture and use of space, prove as helpful in establishing identity as do essentialized markers like gender.

The network of stimuli and the ways in which urban dwellers contend with it highlight the unique circumstances of urban life, especially with respect to the relationship between urban inhabitants. The initial trauma of Lol's experience drove her into her home, where she refused to enter into the public space. The return to S. Tahla, however, engenders in her a sort of asociality: she is present in the public social space of the city, but that presence is closed. She watches other people, but she does not interact with them. In "The Metropolis and Mental Life," Georg Simmel attributes what others may call asociality or antisociality to the cacophony of stimuli in the city. Simmel suggests that the if the urban inhabitant were to respond to every external contact one experiences, "one would be completely atomized internally and come to an unimaginable

psychic state" (Simmel 53). These conditions require the urban inhabitant to withdraw and develop an "outer reserve" (53) that limits the vulnerability one experiences. Simmel notes that this reservation results in indifference and

> more often than we are aware, it is a slight aversion, a mutual strangeness and repulsion, which will break into hatred and fight at the moment of a closer contact, however caused. (53)

Indifference, however, is its own extreme opposite to complete internal atomization. Inevitably, Simmel argues, stimuli make their way into the psyche, creating an impression. Total indifference to these impressions is, like indiscriminate suggestibility, its own danger: "From both these typical dangers of the metropolis, indifference and indiscriminate suggestibility, antipathy protects us" (53).

Indifference, as the active stance, the choice to reject the stimuli that engage the psyche, is incompatible with human nature, but antipathy, the passive disengagement with stimuli that acknowledges the impact on the psyche but refuses preference or discernment, provides the dweller with a functional way of interacting with the city. Outer reserve is protective, but Simmel asks if there is a limit to its usefulness. The stimuli of the urban space lull one into complacency, Simmel says, but one must also exert extra effort if one wants to maintain a grasp on oneself:

> On the one hand, life is made infinitely easy for the personality in that stimulations, interests, uses of time and consciousness are offered to it from all sides. They carry the person as if in a stream, and one needs hardly to swim for oneself. On the other hand, however, life is composed more and more of these impersonal contents and offerings which tend to displace the genuine personal coloration and incomparabilities. [… The individual] has to exaggerate this personal element in order to remain audible even to himself. (59)

Antipathy to the stimuli of the city allow the individual to survive in the city by accepting all of the noise that occupies the space without acknowledging, analyzing, or preferring any one

stimulus over another. One is carried along the stream of urban stimuli and therefore does no active work to process the public urban space. But if this antipathy tends toward the impersonal, as Simmel suggests, accepting the stimuli of the city means setting aside one's personal relationship to the world in order to survive. When she is in public in the urban space, Lol supplicates herself to complacency, allowing the city to influence her trajectories. As seen above, this supplication deteriorates Lol's relationship to the space around her; people and physical objects merge together, losing their individual significance, so that Lol can avoid acknowledging or engaging with the stimuli that pull her back to her past traumas.

I should not, however, overstate the role of trauma or a sordid past in the conception of this kind of vulnerability. For Walter Benjamin, risk is essential to the experience of the city and manifests as a demand for assimilation: "The insecurity of even the busy areas puts the city dweller in the opaque and truly dreadful situation in which he must assimilate […] the abortions of urban architectonics" (Benjamin 39). That is, in losing what Benjamin calls "the freedom of domicile" (39), the urban dweller is left to struggle against the inability of the urban geo-architecture to provide security and a sense of place. In this, the urban dweller is bound up in an "unnatural community"—unnatural, for Benjamin, both in its remove from the natural spaces of the countryside and also in the city's "coldness" and its "denaturing" thingness (38).[12] As urban dwellers resist this denatured space—which punishes humanity (59)—, they must integrate into their psyches the city's failure to construct safe spaces.

[12] Whether or not the urban is a "natural" space and cities "natural" objects is a question which is generally taken for granted in urban studies. City-nature is often presented as a dichotomy, especially in discussions of the urban as a foil to the countryside (consider Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City*). However, Aristotle, in *Politics*, declared that "every city [polis] exists by nature" (Ambler 163) because the relationships that make up the city are themselves natural. See Ambler (1985) for a thorough political and philological reading of Aristotle's assertion.

Lol finds that she cannot avoid preferential acknowledgment of certain stimuli that strike her in the public urban space, and she ultimately lives so that she can "remain audible even to" herself. When she crosses paths with the man at the cinema, she decides to follow him, which she refers to explicitly as a choice. Rather than suppressing everyone into a general crowd, she chooses one individual, singling him out and displacing onto him certain aspects of her life. To follow another literary example that centers Benjamin's conception of urban coldness, consider Nathalie Sarraute's earliest work, *Tropismes* (1939), in which she illustrates the trend away from social intimacy and influences how one acts and relates in public, especially urban, spaces. *Tropismes*, a collection of twenty-four microstories, adopts in its title a term referring to the biological tendency, growth, or turning movement of an organism in response to environmental stimuli. A tropism is generally a response found in plants (an innate growth of branches, vines, and leaves toward sunlight, for example). Sarraute's appropriation of the term has two important implications: it extends the tendency to humans and it includes in its definition of environment both the built, geo-architectural space of the city, and other humans inhabiting that space. For Sarraute, humans are biological organisms that live in urban spaces with other humans and respond to environmental stimuli from both—not especially controversial claims, but important to state, nonetheless. Sarraute's tropisms, I find, illustrate the human organism's response to the environmental stimuli of urban spaces.

The eighth story in Sarraute's collection recounts a grandfather and the multigenerational habits enacted every time he crosses the street with one of his grandchildren. The inherent danger in crossing in front of moving cars, as well as the child's "petite main dans sa main" ["little hand in his,"] causes him to reenact repeated, cautious choreography:

> Pendant qu'il traversait en regardant avec une infinie prudence, à gauche et puis à droite, pour s'assurer qu'ils avaient le temps de passer, pour bien

> voir si une auto ne venait pas, pour que son petit trésor, son petit enfant chéri, cette petite chose vivante et tendre et confiante dont il avait la responsabilité, ne fût pas écrasée. (51-2)
>
> [while he crossed over, looking with extreme prudence to the left then to the right, to be sure they had time to reach the other side, to see if there was not a car coming, so that his little darling, his precious little child, this living, tender, confident little thing for which he was responsible, should not be run over. (20)]

Human touch—hand in hand—becomes a physical locus that brings the child and the grandfather into the shared present moment; the grandfather in particular recognizes his grandchild's hand as a confirmation of responsibility and the need for "extreme prudence." The grandfather does not so much think of his own safety as he does the safety of his grandchild who, "living, tender," does not yet know to account for himself. Awareness of one's vulnerability is, it seems, a learned quality. The imminent possibility of death, however, is not simply engendered by their own relationship but by the relationship they have with a third, anonymous individual—or rather, the *potential* of a third, anonymous individual—represented by the maybe-present, maybe-imagined car. The anxiety of encountering danger in public spaces always necessarily involves an imagined relationship between the individual and the threat (here, the child on a walk with his grandfather and the as-yet-nonexistent negligent driver). Forced to act toward basic survival needs, the grandfather shapes his behavior and his relationship with the child in reaction to an anonymous risk.

That risk causes both the grandfather and the child to think about death, about family, and about the future. The thought of death pushes the child into awareness. He "sentait que quelque chose pesait sur lui, l'engourdissait," a "masse mole et étouffante" (53) ["felt that something was weighing upon him, benumbing him," a "soft choking mass" (21)]. Considering the grandfather's ruminations about family and death, the reader is led to interpret this mass as a

physical response to mortality, a manifestation of the potential dangers of the city that "le pénétrait, pendant qu'il trottinait doucement et très sagement" (53) ["penetrated him, while he trotted docilely along" (21)]. Death and the constant threat of the anonymous driver—that is, the possibility that the relationship between the city dweller and any other individual could be dangerous—teach him and instill in him a choreography: "il fallait toujours avancer avec precaution et bien regarder d'abord à droit, puis à gauche, et faire bien attention, très attention, de peur d'un accident, en traversant le passage clouté" (53) ["he should always proceed cautiously and look well, first to the right, then to the left, and be careful, very careful, for fear of an accident, when crossing between lines" (22)]. The child learns to dread a potential future accident. "Immobile et gris, sans odeur, […] fermées et mornes" (52) ["still and gray, odorless, […] closed and dreary" (21)], the city fades away. All the potential stimuli of the city must be pushed aside.

Sarraute's city throughout these stories is a mutable, vague space that city dwellers must dampen or mute in order to process the quotidian experience; in doing so, the individual always risks also "muting" the possibility of interpersonal encounter. In the fifth story, a woman waits with some reticence in her bedroom before venturing out into the shared, public spaces of her apartment building. Her anxiety comes from an asocial avoidance of others, because any step outside her private apartment may result in an undesirable encounter with a neighbor or a stranger. To this woman, the city is a frantic, kaleidoscopic collection of stimuli that includes "les façades des maisons, les boutiques, les vieilles femmes et les petits enfants qui marchaient dans la rue" (35) ["house fronts, the shops, old women and little children walking along the streets" (13)]. Neither the story's protagonist nor the narrator observes the city directly; the description above is seen only through the dining room window—that is, from the comfort of the

private space. Women and children are, in this description, equivalent to façades and storefronts, amounting to little more than animated set pieces that one views from a distance. Their banality, their ubiquity in the setting of urban space, such as it exists in the protagonist's mind, functionally depersonalizes the women and children, subsuming them into the environmental stimulus. However, where the agentive energy of the women and children is denied, the city itself is granted personification: while the woman waits in her bedroom, "autour d'elle toute la maison, la rue semblaient l'encourager, semblaient considerer cette immobilité comme naturelle" (35) ["about her the entire house, the street, seemed to encourage her, seemed to consider this motionlessness natural" (12)]. The city and the building can "consider" and "encourage," but those actions serve to promote the protagonist's stasis, perhaps leading her to adopt the same thingness as the women and children, becoming part of the city's furniture.

The woman in her bedroom, in reaction to these stimuli, chooses to reject them: what she experiences is not banality in the sense that nothing changes, but rather in the sense that change becomes something constant. Despite the cacophony of stimuli provided by the city streets, the protagonist suggests that the architecture itself, and especially interior spaces (as opposed to the façades and storefronts outside) have no memory and therefore do not possess the kind of noisy discourse that overwhelms her on the streets. The staircase in the entryway calms her because it seems to reject any evidence of other people:

> Il paraissait certain, quand on ouvrait la porte et qu'on voyait l'escalier, plein d'un calme implacable, impersonnel et sans couleur, un escalier qui ne semblait pas avoir gardé la moindre trace des gens qui l'avaient parcouru, pas le moindre souvenir de leur passage […], que la suprême compréhension, que la véritable intelligence, c'était cela, ne rien entreprendre, remuer le moins possible, ne rien faire. (35)
>
> [It seemed certain, when you opened the door and saw the staircase filled with relentless, impersonal, colorless calm, a staircase that did

> not seem to retain the slightest trace of the persons who had walked on it, not the slightest memory of their presence […], that the highest degree of comprehension, real intelligence, was that, to undertake nothing, keep as still as possible, do nothing. (12, 13)]

The homogeneity that the protagonist feels arises from the staircase's amnesia, its failure to record the past presence of other people; in contrast to the façades, the storefronts, the women and children, the staircase is depopulated and therefore a space in which the woman can claim territory. However, like the act of crossing the street, I argue that this staircase—itself a liminal architecture connecting the public exterior to the quasi-private interior—is always etched by the presence of others.[13] Even the physical material of the stairs (perhaps marble, more likely wood and carpet) necessarily takes on signals of who has previously stepped there. Unlike the façade of Lol's family home, which is intimately etched with a record of her family history by way of that family's decision to paint, garden, remodel, the staircase in the apartment building is marked only by anonymous bodies; the steps show sign of life but not signs of identities. To take solace in the erasure of "the smallest trace" is a futile, even foolish, act of self-deceit. At any moment, another resident of that building could climb or descend the staircase, just as a car could come speeding around the corner. In fact, in narrating the erasure, the protagonist announces the *possibility* of the memory of others. She creates it.

Sarraute, in foregrounding the idea of the tropism, asks readers to consider how her characters react to external stimuli. As a plant tends toward a source of light, individuals in the city respond—consciously or not—to the stimuli around them in ways that influence their

[13] The interior of an urban apartment is itself hardly a perfectly private space, always retaining traces of those who previously occupied it. Recall that Lefebvre, in *La droit à la ville*, a text I will return to at great length in the fourth chapter, lamented the loss of "individual owner-occupation" as one of the signs of the urban habitat's failure. In George Perec's *La Vie mode d'emploi*, shared staircases in an apartment building are spaces best avoided because of the risk of encountering others. A the same time, they are a sort of museum of lost objects and closed doors (443), confirming the existence of others and the communal architecture they share. A thorough analysis of the quasi-private spaces of the urban apartment building—the lobby, the hallway, the staircase, etc.—is outside the scope of this project, but these spaces gesture at one of the most uniquely urban moments of public-private intimacy.

ontological and social relationship to space. Both stories above represent imagined, banal encounters in quotidian life: crossing the street, leaving one's apartment building. They require that the urban dweller repeatedly make decisions about where the boundaries exist between the self and the other. The grandfather, the child, the woman in her bedroom—these urban dwellers sense inherent separation between themselves and others, but that separation enforces the way that others influence and impact them. The grandfather does not withdraw from the city, but he worries about how a chance encounter could kill him or his grandson. The woman in her apartment, on the other hand, withdraws almost entirely, overwhelmed by the imagined consequences of going out in public.

Edouard Louis, in contrast, not only acknowledges but embraces the vulnerability of public urban spaces; like a plant toward light, he tends toward the stimulus of perceived queerness in space. The results of this vulnerability are, in the case of Reda, tragic. In highlighting this episode, I place no blame on Edouard's embrace of his vulnerability. Rather I intend to underline the uncertainty of danger in cityspaces: like Sarraute's protagonists, Edouard *could* choose to withdraw from his own vulnerability and therefore from public life altogether. He *could* embrace asociality, and in the aftermath of Reda's attack, he struggles against that exact impulse to reject social encounters altogether.

In this way, Edouard and Lol's active decisions to embrace the vulnerability of urban space are provocative. The assumptions made or conclusions drawn by strangers about the two characters are by-products of the boundary crossing between the self and the other individuals who occupy public urban space. I return here to the third of Lol's significant encounters, in which she happens upon the man who had stopped outside of her home and whose partner speculated that Lol was "Dead maybe." It is worth dwelling on this moment as long as we have

because Lol's choice to follow him, rather than hide or flee, is a productive example of the kinds of encounters at the heart of this dissertation. When Lol centers this man in her attention, she creates a space in which they share the intimacy of the otherness rather than the antipathy or asociality of the crowd. She follows him to a public square where he pauses at a bus stop, lights a cigarette, and watches the crowd move around him: "Des femmes étaient là, en vrac, qui attendaient le car, qui traversaient la place, qui passaient. Aucune ne lui échappait, inventait Lol, aucune qui aurait pu être eventuellement à sa convenance" (57) ["There were women there, a crush of women waiting for the bus, women crossing the square, women passing by. Not one of them escaped his glance, Lol imagined, not one who might have suited his fancy" (47)]. Lol imagines "celle-ci entre mille qui allait arriver […] que Lol V. Stein attendait avec lui" (57) ["the woman among a thousand others who was about to come […], the woman Lol was waiting for with him" (48)]. This act of voyeurism brings Lol into an imagined relationship, an anonymous third party in a romantic tryst. She performs the role of storyteller, creating a narrative about the man's actions in the way that others in S. Tahla create the legend of "Lol Stein." The narrative that others construct about Lol is not a narrative about her past—the legend of "Lol Stein" is built on facts, witnessed by others and shared among the community. Rather, they construct a narrative about her present, how present-Lol carries past-"Lol" with her, and how the legend continues to occupy space. Lol counters by inventing a new focus of attention; she chooses this man outside the cinema and begins to watch him, adopting the voyeuristic stance he had taken in her garden, crafting a mental legend about who his is and what he is doing there in the city.

The man's lover finally arrives, and Lol "s'avoue avoir reconnu Tatiana Karl" (58) ["admits that she recognized Tatiana Karl" (50)]. After all of this—the presumed anonymity awarded to her by the urban environment, the intentional neutralization of over-stimulation—Lol

is forced into contact with her past truly randomly: she chooses a stranger out of a crowd and follows him to his bus stop, at which point her past steps off a bus in the form of Tatiana Karl.

She follows them to the Hôtel des Bois, the Forest Hotel, a place of "mauvaise réputation mais qui est le seul où les couples de la ville peuvent aller en toute sécurité" (61) ["dubious reputation but the only place in town where couples can meet in complete confidence" (52)]. The hotel is an architecture that embodies not only a history but a reputation—a type of person who inhabits it, the behaviors that happen there, the shame supposedly incumbent in being there. Lol, for her part, had occupied the hotel with Michael Richardson in her youth; it was there that Michael had spoken to her about love and now, ten years later, the "souvenir de l'après-midi d'hiver s'est englouti lui aussi dans l'ignorance, dans la lente, quotidienne glaciation de S. Tahla sous ses pas" (61) ["memory of that winter afternoon has, like the rest, been engulfed in forgetfulness, been swallowed up in the slow, daily glaciation of South Tahla beneath her footsteps" (52)]. An illuminated window on the second floor announces the couple's presence: "Oui. Ce sont les mêmes chambres que de son temps" (62) ["Yes. They are in the same room as in her day," (53)] Lol decides. As with the façade of Lol's family home, Duras constructs here a building that concretizes the very history that Lol has sought to avoid. Illicit by way of its routine use, it is a place by which someone on the outside can implicitly judge someone on the inside. The man and Tatiana, like Lol and Michael Richardson, must accept the "mauvaise réputation" of the building if they want to occupy it.

There in that field, Lol assumes herself to be anonymous: "elle ne bouge pas. Elle sait que si on n'est pas prévenu de sa présence dans le champ personne ne peut la découvrir" (65) ["She does not stir. She knows that, unless they had been forewarned about her presence in the field, they would never be able to detect her" (56)]. She is, she assumes, physically invisible to

the couple in the hotel, but she also remains immune to the hotel's bad reputation. When she later tries to explain her late return home to her husband, she lies (she had gone to that part of town to buy something, she says), and he believes her, because the mutability of the urban space—its mixed uses, its unpredictable and evolving paths—allows her to be almost anywhere *in public* for any reason. Without entering the hotel itself, she is uncontaminated by that night's voyeuristic spectacle.

Lol watches the couple through the window. The window's frame limits her knowledge: she sees the man cross twice; she sees the quality of the light change when the overhead lamp is turned on; she sees the woman cross, nude: "C'est peut-être dans le rectangle de vision de Lol qu'elle s'arrête. Elle se tourne vers le fond où l'homme doit être" (64) ["It is perhaps in Lol's rectangle of vision that she pauses. She turns back to the room where the man presumably is" (55)]. Lol has traded places with the couple outside her home earlier in the novel. Where once she was being observed by others who made assumptions about how she occupied a certain space in the city, here in a partially secluded field, looking in on a couple in their hotel room, Lol observes private lives. She crafts whatever narrative she can out of the limited framing available to her—not only the architecture of the small window, but the reputation attached to it and the experience she has with that same rented room. She constructs her narrative with limited information that requires her to speculate in order to fill in gaps; she decides what is "presumably" happening in the room. This perverse spectatorship translates Lol's own experience in that hotel many years ago, informing her reading of the couple's performance and the conclusions she reaches. She and Michael Richardson occupied that hotel in the past in order to engage in their love affair, and so, Lol decides, this couple must be doing the same.

Unlike the couple outside Lol's garden, who speculate among themselves but apparently assume that Lol is unaware of them, Lol is eventually given the chance to tell Jacques Hold his own story, recounting for him a moment—the quotidian, perhaps banal moment when she saw him leaving a cinema—that he was unaware of sharing with anyone else.[14] Shortly after being introduced to Jacques Hold as a friend of Tatiana Karl and her husband later in the novel, she pieces together the moments following their initial non-encounter outside her home. Here, Lol has a choice about *which* story to tell him—seeing him outside the cinema versus seeing him and Tatiana at the hotel. In the latter, she would have to implicate herself as a voyeur, as someone looking into the private space from outside, someone who follows. In the former, she is an innocent bystander, someone who occupied a public space that happened to be shared by someone else. In either case, she performs the role of storyteller, creating a narrative about the man's use of the space in the same way that others speculate on the legend of "Lol Stein." She is forthcoming, abandoning her anonymity to identify herself the multiple ways their paths had already crossed a week before:

> — Je vous ai suivi jusqu'à l'Hôtel des Bois.
> J'ai eu peur. Je voudrais revenir vers Tatiana, être dans la rue.
> — Pourquoi ?
> Elle détache ses mains du rideau, se redresse, arrive.
> — Je vous ai choisi. (111-2)
>
> ["I followed you to the Forest Hotel."
> I had a moment of fear. I wanted to return to Tatiana, to be in the street.
> "Why?"
> She lets go of the curtains, straightens up, comes toward me.
> "I picked you." (102)]

[14] The narratological layering of this revelation is worth noting because it unfolds with respect to the unique anonymity of urban public spaces: Lol tells Jacques about his own life, an experience he thought he lived unobserved. Jacques Hold is the narrator, and so both stories—the non-encounter outside the cinema and Lol's retelling of it—are being narrated for the reader by him. Even the moments when Lol feels most anonymous—hidden behind the hedges in her yard, lying in the field watching Tatiana and Jacques in the Forest Hotel—are being retold by Jacques, who knows such details only through reconstruction.

This confrontation is related by Jacques himself, the narrative "je" of *Le Ravissement.* He reintroduces his own humanity to the story through his fears and anxieties. This choice—the choice of one person out of the crowd, the choice to establish a relationship and to follow—unites Lol and Jacques Hold throughout the novel. The relationality between them is necessarily an effort away from the impersonal, anonymous noise of urban daily life, and so it comes to impact their relationship to space. "je suis l'homme de S. Tahla qu'elle a décidé de suivre" (113) ["I am the man from South Tahla she has decided to follow" (103)] Jacques Hold realizes, and this self-identification ("Je suis") defines him directly with respect to a choice made by someone else, implicating Lol in his sense of self. He does not declare "I am" out loud to Lol and Tatiana, but rather to himself (and the reader) in narration.[15] In self-identifying as the man in Lol's story, he defines his dwelling in S. Tahla with respect to Lol's choice to follow him. The space he occupies in that story is always already a space he shares with her. Jacques knows this, and he acknowledges that Lol understands him in her own context rather than his: "Ce n'est pas que je ressemble à Michael Richardson ?" (115) ["You're sure it wasn't because I look like Michael Richardson?" (105)], he asks her, echoing a thought she had entertained the week before.

The assumed (but not always granted) anonymity of the city and the subjectivity of Lol's voyeurism allow her to tell Jacques his own story, recounting his action from her perspective across the street and adding meaning to events that he experienced alone:

> Vous sortiez d'un cinema. C'était jeudi dernier. Vous vous souvenez comme il faisait chaud ? […] Sans même y penser, vous ne saviez pas quoi faire de vous. Vous sortiez de ce couloir noir, de ce cinéma où vous étiez allé seul pour tuer le temps. Ce jour-là vous aviez du temps. Une fois

[15] Recall the relationship that Heidegger finds in the declaration "I am," which is tied etymologically to "bauen" in his consideration of dwelling: "ich bin, du bist mean I dwell, you dwell. The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is baun, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell" (Heidegger, 349, original emphasis). Declaring one's being—as Jacques announces in "I am"—assumes a way of being in the world, and in this case, Jacques defers that way of being to Lol.

> arrivé sur le boulevard vous avez regardé autour de vous les femmes qui passaient. (114)
>
> [You were coming out of the cinema. It was last Thursday. Do you remember how hot it was? […] You weren't even aware of it, you didn't know what to do with yourself. You had just emerged from that dark aisle in the cinema, where you had gone by yourself to kill a little time. You had plenty of time that day. Once out on the boulevard, you stared at all the women passing. (104)]

In admitting to Jacques that he was being watched, Lol effectively undermines the illusion of secure anonymity she had entertained earlier in the novel. "You weren't even aware" is a playful admonition of Jacques's perceived sense of security despite the real vulnerability of public space; it is also, perhaps more so, the actualization of her own inability to escape the vulnerability of her own position in that public space. If she was watching Jacques, who was watching her? She knows that Jacques and his lover had been watching her outside her family home and constructing mythologies about her present story ("Dead maybe"), in the same way she had been watching Tatiana and Jacques inside the Hôtel des Bois, constructing mythologies about them. She had seen Michael Richardson with Anne-Marie Stretter at the party in Town Beach, as had the other party goers. Though Michael Richardson made no effort at maintaining privacy in that moment, he brought Lol into the public's engagement with their intimacy. To reestablish a sense of self—or else to grapple with having lost it—Lol performs the same engagement with intimacy shared between Tatiana Karl and Jacques hold. She occupies a space they conceive of as private and partakes in their story.

Conclusion

Lol's acknowledgement of how her identity exists in public gossip—that is, the confrontation between the "Lol Stein" of popular legend and the Lol Stein that she may be

now—is provoked by the three central encounters discussed in this chapter: first, the chance meeting of Lol and Jean Bedford, which leads to their marriage and her return to S. Tahla; second, on the border between Lol's private garden and the public street, an overheard conversation between a couple speculating about Lol's death; and third, the voyeuristic pursuit of that couple to a hotel after she happens upon the man leaving a cinema and discovers that the woman is her childhood friend.

The latter two encounters are of particular interest in the context of urban space because they are unreciprocated. In both cases, the couple is unaware of Lol's presence. The unreciprocated encounters resolve into a relationship—Lol telling Jacques Hold his own story—only later and through the already established history between Lol and Tatiana Karl. Rather, Lol experiences the aftermath of these encounters alone. Until she enters the private space of Jacques Hold's home in the second half of the novel and reveals that she had been following him, these encounters allow Lol to exist anonymously—or at least, unperceived—in the city, a condition she seeks out because of how her identity is otherwise inscribed into space. If outside her childhood any passerby can identify her as the "Lol Stein" of the gossip, the overly stimulated public spaces of the city that push people into asociality provide her a cover of noise that lets her move around on her own volition.

Lol's constant rumination about her place in the world—as Lol Stein and as "Lol Stein"—, as well as Jacques Hold's role in narrating the story both as a character in it and as a voyeur of it bring us back to dwelling. In this case, I argue that a particular sense of the verb dwelling emerges: thinking, obsessing, talking about. In Heidegger's conception of these spaces, thinking and talking are themselves central to the realization of those spaces. Thinking about a space is as much a part of it as its geometry, its physical manifestations (Heidegger 1993, 358-9).

In another lecture, "Poetically Man Dwells," Heidegger clarifies that dwelling is more than raising buildings. Man's dwelling is *taking measure*: "Authentic building occurs so far as there are poets, such poets as take the measure for architecture, the structure of dwelling" (Heidegger 1971, 227). Poetry, too, is building.[16] That is, if we are to take measure of our dwelling, Heidegger demands, we must be contemplative of the world, investigative or analytic of the relationship between one's self and one's space. When we talk about space, we must talk about the mental conception of that space and therefore we necessarily speak of a subjectification of it. This is dwelling: "The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, thought essentially" ("Building", 359). The reverse or inverse is also true: when we think about the conception of an individual, we must necessarily understand their relationship to space and to spaces in which they dwell. This is an ontological objection and a statement of praxis. In a linguistic sense, the German *bauen* came to mean cultivation or construction, and therefore lost its grammatical relationship to dwelling; the "proper sense," Heidegger says, "falls into oblivion" (350). The result is not simply linguistic, he continues, arguing that "dwelling is not experienced as man's Being; dwelling is never thought of as the basic character of human being" (350). Contemporary (western) societies may be seen as having undermined the Being-dwelling association, and so they simultaneously come to ignore the here-ness of Being in space.

Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein is in some ways a novel about how stories occupy urban space. The visibility of Lol, Michael Richardson, and Anne-Marie Stretter at the ball in Lol's youth manifests a story that Lol struggles to escape from her entire life. The mutability of that story and its incorporation into the built environment of S. Tahla brings her into contact with the

[16] The literary implications of equating dwelling and poetry are worth exploring. Tara Collington addresses this parallel in "Self and Narrative in Le Ravissement de Lol V Stein," referencing Irene Fast's concept of "selving" (the self as an activity) to suggest that humans seek out narrative coherence in life and literature, such that literature functions as a kind of manual for dwelling.

unknown couple, Jacques Hold and Tatiana Karl, outside her home. The anonymity afforded to Lol, despite her trauma, by urban noise allows her to follow Jacques and Tatiana, piecing together a narrative about their affair which she will recite back to them later. And the reader discovers late in the novel, when the narrative "je" names himself, that these secrets are being shared by Jacques Hold himself, making *Le Ravissement* a novel crafted largely second-hand, via hearsay, a kind of recursive voyeurism in which the reader takes part.

When Lol possesses information about Jacques and Tatiana—that Jacques eyed women outside the cinema, that Jacques and Tatiana checked into the Hôtel des Bois one afternoon, that Tatiana is cheating on her husband—she seems uninterested in the power inherent in disclosing a secret. She makes no indication that she intends to divulge the affair to anyone other than Jacques and Tatiana themselves. Rather, Lol maintains this information precisely because she identifies with it and because it resembles the information everyone knows about *her*. She pieces together a narrative that helps her make sense of her own narrative. It brings her out of the asociality that rejects urban stimuli in favor of a sense of security, a social stance practiced by Sarraute's characters.

It is Jacques, rather, who uses this shared information as power. Throughout the novel, as the subject of Lol's espionage, Jacques remains largely removed from the story he is narrating. He could only have learned much of what he narrates by way of another witness (from Tatiana, likely, if not Lol herself). However, as narrator, Jacques is free to manipulate this information as he pleases; he maintains the discretion to include and exclude, to edit, and so on. Early in the novel, he sets out the parameters of the story he is about to tell, admitting to taking "à la fois, ce faux semblant que raconte Tatiana Karl et ce que j'invente sur la nuit" presenting them "tout au

long, mêlés" (14) ["both this false impression which Tatiana Karl tells about and what I have been able to imagine about that night […] in full, and all mixed together" (4)].

Jacques-as-narrator inevitably reveals the problem with his assertion of objectivity: he knows Lol Stein "de la seule façon qu[‘il] puisse, d'amour" (46) ["in the only way [he] can; through love" (36)]. He is driven to believe certain things about Lol's story "comme je l'aime" (48) ["since I love her" (38)]. In the S. Tahla of her adulthood, surrounded by people who are familiar with her story, Lol is "impuissante à les empêcher de savoir" ["powerless to prevent them from knowing"] her:

> Lol se tient, déchirée, sans la preuve de l'inimportance du jour en face de cette nuit, arrachée et portée de l'aurore à leur couple dans un affolement régulier et vain de tout son être. Elle n'est pas Dieu, elle n'est personne. (47)
>
> Lol is standing, completely undone, with no voice to cry out for help, with no convincing argument, with no proof of how unimportant the coming day was compared to that night, uprooted and borne from dawn toward that couple, her whole being filled with a chronic, hopeless feeling of panic. She is not God, she is no one. (37)

In her inability to compete with the knowability of her story, which precedes her at all times in S. Tahla, Lol can only seek comfort in the neutralization of urban stimuli. In Jacques Hold's understanding, Lol has no other way to stabilize herself—her story, her identity, her comfort—in the city. Uprooted in the urban environment, one's vulnerability rests, in part, in the non-ownership, or the shared ownership, of one's story. In general, this vulnerability is innocuous; a couple outside the garden speculates that a once-infamous member of the social network is "dead maybe."

That vulnerability finds weaknesses in the relationality of dwelling in close proximity. Edouard Louis experiences the trauma of *maybe* encountering his rapist in the streets of Paris because he cannot control or predict that other man's movements in space. There is always the

possibility of physical violence just as there is always the possibility of ontological destabilization. A random encounter—with Reda, who recognizes Edouard's queerness; with Jacques Hold, who recognizes Lol's mythology and is in turn recognized as facilitating an affair; with a speeding car that might kill a man and his grandson—can at any moment reconstruct the relationship between two parties and their conceptions of themselves *here*, in this space in the city.

The experience of dwelling in the city is mutable. Existing in a space that shifts at all times, becoming blurry at the edges and guiding the urban inhabitant into contact with literal concrete that is nonetheless unstable, requires a vulnerability to newness that decenters one's sense of self. As Duras' Lol Stein shows, everyday life in the city consists of small, unavoidable moments in which the dweller must reevaluate and reorient toward an ungraspable environment. Heidegger calls this the proper plight of dwelling,

> that mortals ever search anew for the essence of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*. What if man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the *proper* plight of dwelling as *the* plight? Yet as soon as man *gives thought* to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. (Heidegger 363, original emphasis)

If the urban space does not provide the mechanisms by which one might participate in building, does it allow for a different kind of dwelling? Can one dwell in a city in a way that does not simply occupy space but rather embraces the vulnerability engendered by urban space? In the next chapter, I consider how the forced proximity of the urban space—the omnipresence of others and the unavoidable possibility of contact—asks us to consider a specifically urban kind of dwelling: *dwelling together*. Dwelling together allows us, perhaps, to put urban life in the context of proximity, highlighting the influence of this closeness in everyday life. In the urban space, one has no control over how encounters emerge out of the noise. When they do, these

encounters are rarely on the order of "community" in the sense of lasting, evolving relationships, but they can still be encounters that play on the vulnerability of both the physical body and the "self" (identity, possession of a story, etc.). In Lol's case, there is a sort of communal writing/editing of her story. She is at any time vulnerable to the influence others have over her because of their knowledge/conception of that story.

Because of the way her trauma was captured as gossip among the elite of S. Tahla, Lol is acutely aware of how she is distributed into space and how to use that distribution to her advantage. She is especially aware of how, by returning to her childhood home, she reengages the ways her identity is tied to that distribution. In this chapter, three important theoretical questions about living in public urban spaces emerge: how does one react to the constant stimuli of encounters brought on by crowded proximity; how is one's position toward those social encounters pushed toward or away from asociality; and how do we establish a sense of self and belonging in a city that is difficult to grasp? In *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, a critique of Western rationalism and contemporary obsession with sameness, Alphonso Lingis highlights the noisy background against which identity is crafted:

> One has to form an image of oneself as a multiplicity of elements regulated, like a nature, with universal and necessary laws. One has to form an image of one's limbs and organs laid out, like a practicable field, as a system of means at the service of thought. And one has to form an image of one's faculties as a multiplicity of agencies ordered, like a microsociety, in relations of command and obedience. (20)

The city demands that one extend the image of oneself into space, except that the urban space's patchwork is inconsistent, shifting, impossible to define. So as one extends oneself in space and develops an image in relationship to a chaotic multiplicity, the image too becomes noisy. While the vulnerability and ontological anxiety of the urban space do not themselves create community, they suggest a way in which proximity with others, when welcomed and experienced as a kind of

shared dwelling, serves to illuminate how one's "relations of command and obedience" always form a relationship with these people. One must first consider what it means to encounter the Other vulnerably and then how these encounters teach us to read the city as a space in which people dwell together. The next chapter considers the turn away from asociality and the productive potential of embracing the vulnerability of proximity. How does one, like Lol, encounter the man outside the cinema?

Chapter 2 Collisions: Dealing with Urban Sociability

In the previous chapter, I considered Georg Simmel's assertion that the stimulation one experiences in the city may turn inward, such that one develops antisocial or asocial behavior that rejects other individuals as a means of shutting out noise as completely as possible. To do otherwise, Simmel argued, would be a threat to the stability of the self, the "atomization" of one's psychic state. Lol Stein, after her fiancé's betrayal at the ball in Town Beach, withdrew into the privacy of her home to avoid exposing herself to the gossiping public. Later, as an adult in S. Tahla, she picked a man out of the crowd—a stranger who would turn out to be Jacques Hold—and focused her attention on him, reducing her framing of the chaotic city down to a single subject. Lol's anti-sociality was protective, designed to reduce her vulnerability to the stimuli that could make her question her identity in the cityspace.

The stories considered so far develop from the kinds of meetings that happen constantly in the city. These are encounters that lead to love, as Lol's meeting Michael Richardson one night in S. Tahla; encounters that fulfill desires, as Edouard Louis's queer mutual recognition with Reda (a fulfilled desire that tragically leads to violence); imagined encounters that create anxiety, like the threat of a speeding car or the possibility of crossing paths with a neighbor on the staircase in Sarraute's short stories. These are also sometimes one-sided encounters of which one party is oblivious, as when the couple outside the garden or the man outside the cinema become the focus of Lol's attention. Daily life in the city is full of these encounters, from the momentary intimacy of sitting next to a stranger on the bus to the tension we experience when

someone blocks our paths. Short of staying inside all day, a city dweller cannot possibly avoid these brief passing meetings in shared space.

Duras showed through Lol the ontological anxiety created by the vulnerability of everyday urban life, which changes the way that encounters create space and influence a person's perception of the people with whom urban space is shared. In this chapter, I consider the impact that being vulnerable to the influence of urban encounters has on the sense of self and the sense of the self in space. That is, to understand the lasting effects of existing always-in-contact with the crowd, I look here at what happens when the urban dweller contends with the interrelationality of sharing space. How does the relationship between two individuals in the city change when they must constantly negotiate dwelling together?

I look to Albert Camus, whose novels delve into the peculiar modernity of existing together with others. I read two of the three novels that Camus' completed in his lifetime, *La Chute* (1956) [*The Fall* (1957)] and *La Peste* (1947) [*The Plague* (1948)], each of which considers the consequences of encounters between strangers. In each of these novels, an individual must negotiate the benefits and disadvantages of entering into a relationship—no matter how tenuous, fleeting, or anonymous—with another person who shares public urban space. In *La Chute*, two men who meet randomly at a bar in Amsterdam become confidants in their shared Frenchness, a friendship that allows the narrator to divulge the lifelong consequences he suffers after having witnessed a woman commit suicide on the Pont Royal in Paris. The relationships in *La Peste*, while pivoting on camaraderie and empathy, are founded first in the bio-geographical reality of proximity, as citizens of Oran, a French settlement in Algeria, combat an outbreak of the bubonic plague which makes closeness a potentially fatal risk.

What makes these encounters noteworthy, and what will rest at the center of this chapter's analysis, is the lack of reciprocation between the two parties of the relationships. In both novels, the central tension develops from a meeting between two individuals in which only one of them experiences the meeting's aftermath. When Jean-Baptiste Clamance, the narrator of *La Chute*, witnesses a woman jumping into the Seine late one night, he is alone in his experience of their encounter throughout his life. Despite the woman's absolute ignorance of his presence, he carries the uncertain repercussions of that moment and his antisocial decision not to help her. He internalizes the consequences of having briefly, unintentionally shared space with her in that moment. So too, the citizens of Oran become unusually aware of how their crowded city is occupied; two passersby in the street may propagate the disease without ever acknowledging one another's existence. The plague itself becomes an intermediary, a biological marker of having made contact. The social impulse to make bonds in this moment of tragedy, then, becomes a direct threat to one's health; sociality itself can kill.

These are not exactly encounters in a traditional sense, and the difference between this kind of meeting and an encounter is the grounding problem of this chapter. If the woman who jumps from a bridge into the Seine has no awareness of her effect on Jean-Baptiste and a carrier of the plague does not know exactly how their contagion plays out in the lives of those around them, what role do these meetings play in the experience of urban life? Put another way, if urban life is overwhelmed with meetings that never quite become encounters, how should we understand the consequences of such passing moments? The city, as I have said elsewhere, presents this problem as an unavoidable element of daily life: as one moves about in public in the city, the reality of shared space is impossible to ignore. Camus' novels are especially aware of

this, and in both *La Chute* and *La Peste*, the chance, passing meeting is pivotal to the protagonists' experience of urban life.

L'Etranger (1942) [*The Stranger* (1946)] is no doubt a conspicuous omission from the literature in this chapter. The first of the three novels Camus published in this lifetime, *L'Etranger* also considers how meetings between individuals influence one's relationship with space. However, except for several unremarkable moments at the beginning of the novel, Camus concerns himself here with deep encounters, meetings that develop into lasting and reciprocated relationships. Meursault runs into Marie, and they spend several days together. He runs into a group of Arab men, and he ultimately murders one of them. These encounters are complex and deserve a thorough reading to understand what they say about relationships in space; to be sure, a great deal has been written about them. Meursault's repeated encounters with the Arab men, in particular, are interesting in how they represent the unpredictable and uncontrollable trajectories of movement through urban space. However, in *L'Etranger* the plot is driven primarily by repeated, evolving encounters, rather than the unavoidable and instantaneous meetings that are of interest in this chapter.

The question of the encounter has a considerable scholarly history that trends away from the anonymous and the fleeting. In her 2017 study of the "conceptually charged construct" of the encounter in human geography, Helen F. Wilson argues that, as a "specific genre of contact," encounters should be understood as "fundamentally about difference [… and] thus central to understanding the embodied nature of social distinctions and the contingency of identity and belonging" (452). Wilson argues that the city is "*made* from encounters" (453, original emphasis), especially because of the "unbearable" unpredictability with which encounters occur (457). If we are to appropriately question the role of the encounter in the city, according to

Wilson, we must first acknowledge that difference "is not fixed but rather emerges from encounters" which are about more than "the coming together of bodies" (455). In this conception of the encounter, difference must be acknowledged, and so too must the individual, embodied identity of both parties. This version of the encounter does not preclude anonymity, necessarily, but it emphasizes the mutual experience of the socio-political contingency of each individual.

Wilson's review of the scholarship on encounters distinguishes between the banality of most everyday interactions in the city and so-called meaningful encounters, the sort that can "disrupt, shake or surprise" (460). Of the kinds of encounters I enumerated at the start of this chapter, Wilson would therefore group the banal (the door held open, the sidewalk blocked, and so on) separately from the truly disruptive, such as Lol's encounters with Michael Richardson and with the man exiting the cinema. Banal interactions do not meaningfully manifest difference, Wilson suggests. There are, then, three characteristics of the urban encounter according to Wilson's analysis: unpredictable, disruptive, and co-constitutive of difference. The urban encounter should be differentiated from mere contact.

These studies tend to consider difference through an identitarian framework, by which encounters are conceived as meetings between dissimilar groups based on gender, sexuality, race, and so on. Gill Valentine underlines this by categorizing significant changes in writing on encounter along majority/minority lines and not in terms of "micro-scale everyday public encounters and interactions" (324). The identitarian framing of these studies is crucial; both Valentine and Wilson consider how writing on encounters can understand prejudice, social integration, and other pressing questions of urban life.

In this chapter, I do not reject the identitarian framework altogether. I do, however, part from Wilson and Valentine by centering the everyday encounter in terms of proximity and not

(exclusively) identity. In doing so, I also expand Valentine's definition of what she calls "meaningful contact," defined as "contact that actually changes values and translates beyond the specifics of the individual moment into a more general positive respect for—rather than merely tolerance of—others" (325). Valentine argues that proximity cannot alone be expected to bring about social transformation (330), a point I do not intend to refute. Rather, I ask if there is framing of the encounter that considers difference and its role in engendering ontological anxiety without necessitating social transformation. That is, if the city is in fact made of encounters between people (especially strangers) who experience vulnerability to one another, as discussed in Chapter 1 and reiterated in Wilson's analysis, a meaningful encounter—whether or not it causes social transformation—is responsible for ontological transformation. The self that is constructed in the city, forced to develop a kind of dwelling-together, shapes itself around the differences in play in each of these micro-scale encounters. There are consequences, I argue, to being constantly and unavoidably reminded that you share space with others, such that one's sense of dwelling can necessarily never be individual. The urban dweller, I will show, is always necessarily an "I here with you," an individual who must negotiate the self against the presence of others.

In this chapter, and throughout the chapters that follow, I will call these quasi-encounters—or perhaps more specifically, these precise moments that may or may not evolve into encounters—collisions. In contrast to an encounter as defined by Wilson and Valentine, a collision is generally one-sided, an unreciprocated relationship in which the urban dweller is made to acknowledge the interrelationality of the construction of the cityspace but the other, the partner in the collision, continues on oblivious. The urban dweller, suddenly reminded of their position in a shared social space, grapples with the consequences of the collision alone. In this

way, collisions (co-lisions) are necessarily social contact. While a collision is not generally reciprocal, it implies togetherness; the individual who experiences the collision, I argue, is made aware of the interrelationality of space—especially cityspace—in a way that drives both *La Chute* and *La Peste.*

In this chapter, as I define and theorize the collision as distinct from reciprocal encounters, I argue that the vulnerability of recognizing oneself as an individual in an unavoidable relationship with anonymous others enables the individual to negotiate between sociality and asociality, combatting the overwhelming ontological tension of sharing public space. A collision reminds the unreciprocated individual that they are a person who exists in space—in close, proximal, crowded space—with an uncountable swarm of others over whom they have no control. There cannot be an individuated "I" that exists in this space; the urban dweller is always an "I here with you." Collisions reveal the togetherness of a city that might otherwise feel isolated.

I am interested, consequently, in the aftermath of the collision. The second party of the collision, as an anonymous individual who continues unaffected, has done their job in the relationship. They have gone on. What they leave behind in the awareness of the urban dweller, what survives of the collision, determines how the vulnerability of living in the city changes the sense of self. What persists in the lasting impact of the collision has a social power different from the encounters described by Wilson and Valentine. In later chapters, I will consider specifically what role this sudden knowledge plays in the practical experience of urban space. Here, I focus on the instantaneous sociality of the collision. I argue that the shift from "I" to "I here with you" is a way of knowing the city that, at the moment of contact, presents the urban dweller with a view of the sociality of their public self.

A final caveat before I turn to Camus: reading these novels invokes an important question about geographic specificity in the theorization of the urban experience. Both of these novels take place primarily outside of France. *La Chute* is set in Amsterdam, with flashbacks returning the narrator to Paris and other cities. *La Peste* takes place in Oran, Algeria. When I talk about cities and about the urban experience, there must be a distinction between the specificity of site-situated culture and the possible universality of urbanism. That is to say, the everyday experience of the cityspace is shaped by the spaces of cultural norms and mores, sex and gender, class, religion, and so on. One cannot expect that the *cité* of any one urban space—that is, as Richard Sennett defines it and as I discussed in the previous chapter, the consciousness of a city, its specific experience and *citoyenneté*—is inhabited in the same way as any other. Throughout this chapter, and throughout this dissertation, I aim to address geographic specificity wherever necessary. In Algeria, for example, the systemic colonial power that defines the urban experience of a French citizen living in North Africa cannot be separated from questions of community, vulnerability, and the right to the city.[1]

No reading of *La Peste*, in particular, can sidestep the question of colonial Algeria. While I do not intend to ignore these questions of geographic specificity, I contend that there is a universality in the urban experience that allows comparison between these contexts. Specifically, because this chapter starts from the problem of ontological anxiety and considers the moment of encounter between strangers, which is an inevitable consequence of urban density, one should expect to find this experience throughout urban cultures. The collision, as a tenuous and instantaneous contact, wraps up culture, history, and site-specificity into its process, but it exists

[1]A rich history of scholarship on the question of Arabs in *La Peste* seeks to understand the lack of native Algerians in Camus' version of Oran. See especially Ponnou-Delaffon and Tremblay (2015, 8) and Carroll (2001) for an in-depth review of the history of this scholarship.

primarily as a function of proximity. The reactions to and consequences of these encounters may vary depending on culture, but the city will always bring people into contact with strangers, therefore engendering encounters of proximity. The second half of this dissertation will bring these important concerns back into the fold.

La Chute and the Social Choice

The moment of contact between two individuals in a city exists in an instantaneous state of uncertainty. On one extreme, that contact may develop into a relationship, as when Jean-Baptiste Clamance hears a fellow Frenchman, a *compatriote*, ordering a drink at a bar in Amsterdam in the opening pages of Camus' *La Chute*. In a series of monologues, Jean-Baptiste tells the stranger about his life in Paris, Amsterdam, and North Africa, ultimately delivering what amounts to a religious confession, admitting to having fled from fighting with the Resistance in World War II. In Jean-Baptiste's confession, he admits to his lifelong struggle to maintain his place at the center of the crowd. The moment of contact between these men establishes a relationship of identity, based on their shared nationality, in which there is an exchange of intimacy.

Of course, *La Chute* is a one-sided account of this encounter. The stranger who listens to Jean-Baptiste's long monologues—effectively a stand-in for us, the reader—never speaks except implicitly via Jean-Baptiste's reactions: "You are right, *cher ami*," Jean-Baptiste concedes, or "Vous ne comprenez pas ce que je veux dire ?" (87) ["You don't understand what I mean?" (73)].[2] The novel must be read as only an incomplete representation of their relationship, filtered

[2] All English citations of *La Chute* given in brackets refer to the Justin O'Brien translation (1984), unless otherwise noted.

through the narrator's self-centered perspective. Through the *vous* of the man's monologue, Camus asks the reader to perform the role of the *compatriote,* encountering Jean-Baptiste and receiving his confession. This is the novel's first (and unavoidable, obligatory) encounter—between the reader and the protagonist—and from the start, the power is shifted to Jean-Baptiste. In Wilson and Valentine's definitions, the contact between Jean-Baptiste and this man enacts an encounter in its most straight-forward sense.

Though dominated by one party, the relationship illustrated in these monologues is particularly urban. Two foreigners connect in the Mexico City bar, a public third space that functions as a communal epicenter located outside the home and workspace.[3] They come together through mutual recognition: Jean-Baptiste notices the stranger trying to speak French to a bartender who speaks only Dutch. In a setting like a bar where voices already saturate, linguistic markers of a shared language cut through the stimulation of urban noise. Jean-Baptiste assumes this man will be open to his comradery because they share a language and nationality that is not, presumably, shared with the rest of the patrons. Their encounter is facilitated by the sameness of their Frenchness and their shared difference with the Dutch crowd that surrounds them. Notably, it is an encounter predicated on being heard; his *compatriote* does not *look* French but *sounds* it. Relationships are mediated by sound throughout Camus' novels, especially in *La Chute*: what I have called the noisy city throughout the previous chapter is, in Camus' conception, a place literally full of sound, and individuals are often brought together when they are in ear-shot, not necessarily eyesight.

[3] For a thorough reading of third space theory, three separate lineages should be explored: the spatial, via Edward Soja's *Thirdspace* (Blackwell Publishers, 1996); the sociological, via Ray Oldenburg's *The Great Good Place* (Da Capo Press, 1989); and the postcolonial, via Homi K. Bhabha *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 2004).

With identification comes a sort of hospitality: the conditions under which these two people meet in the city are random, Camus suggests, but the advantages of their connections are not. Jean-Baptiste sees not only their Frenchness, but also the stranger's vulnerability and his need for assistance. He introduces himself to the anonymous man with the formulaic formality expected of these kinds of encounters. He calls the man "*monsieur*" and uses the formal *vous*; he initiates the meeting and buffers the man's potential aversion to being spoken to with a certain amount of ritual. "Puis-je, Monsieur, vous proposer mes services, sans risquer d'être importun ?" ["May I, *monsieur,* offer my services without running the risk of intruding?"], the novel beings. The narrator goes on to obfuscate politely throughout, saying, "Mais je me retire, Monsieur, heureux de vous avoir obligé" ["Now I will withdraw, *monsieur,* happy to have been of help to you,"] and perfunctorily turning down an invitation for a drink out of ritual etiquette, "Je vous remercie et j'accepterais si j'étais sûr de ne pas jouer les fâcheux. Vous êtes trop bon. J'installerai donc mon verre auprès du vôtre" (7-8) ["I'd accept if I were sure of not being a nuisance. You are too kind. Then I shall bring my glass over beside yours" (3)]. The community implicit in a shared (foreign) language and nationality allows Jean-Baptiste to disrupt the man's solitude, but the randomness and anonymity of the encounter requires him to maintain social distance, which he tries to bridge.

From the start, this relationship is at least nominally functional in the sense that they can each benefit from it. Jean-Baptiste fulfills the role of a knowledgeable local offering an unfamiliar visitor with specific information that might render his experience more productive: "Je crains que vous ne sachiez vous faire entendre de l'estimable gorille qui préside aux destinées de cet établissement. Il ne parle, en effet, que le hollandais. A moins que vous ne m'autorisiez à plaider votre cause, il ne devinera pas que vous désirez du genièvre" (7) ["I fear

you may not be able to make yourself understood by the worthy ape who presides over the fate of this establishment. In fact, he speaks nothing but Dutch. Unless you authorize me to plead your case, he will not guess that you want gin." (3)]. This is the gesture upon which the relationship pivots; Jean-Baptiste's knowledge of Amsterdam at the *cité* level—its sociopolitical machinery and the strategies by which to operate it—put him in a position of power with respect to his *compatriote.* Knowing the city means he has something to teach or impart and means the anonymous man has something to learn. It is not exactly a relationship based on exchange and the debt that results, but rather a mentorship relationship that establishes a union based on shared knowledge.[4] To be fair, the *compatriote* has something to offer as well; his comradery provides Jean-Baptiste with the opportunity to finally confess his sins. In the seed of this relationship, Camus illustrates a sense of differences that must be negotiated immediately by those who meet each other. Status and power are exposed quickly: the *compatriot* is not successful in his exchange with the bartender, and Jean-Baptiste possesses the linguistic and social knowledge to help. Without this help, the man will not get his drink.

As an encounter, the relationship between Jean-Baptiste and the Frenchman at the bar drives the story's narrative into action. The relationship establishes the protagonist's contributions to the contact that allow it to evolve into a meaningful encounter; this is Jean-Baptiste in the present, a man positioned with intimate knowledge of the city, its culture, and its geography, encountering a man in need of that expertise. The heart of *La Chute*, however, is a series of collisions in his past that he details at length to his ingratiated *compatriote*. Two collisions in particular force Jean-Baptiste to reconsider his relationship with the people with whom he shares space: a disembodied and disturbing laugh heard off the Pont des Arts late one

[4] The idea of shared knowledge and its exchange in these kinds of encounters anticipates the next chapter, in which I will consider these exchanges in some depth.

night and, most significantly in the development of his worldview, the suicide of a woman who throws herself into the Seine from the Pont Royal, a tragedy witnessed only by Jean-Baptiste, who is forced to decide if and how to engage. These encounters, the reader discovers, bring Jean-Baptiste into the present, each a moment that causes a swerve in his relationship to those around him. If the relationship between Jean-Baptiste and the Frenchman at the bar represents one end of the continuum in which contact exists, these collisions represent the other extreme. I argue that Jean-Baptiste's experience of these collisions expose an extreme but illustrative reaction to the realization of being "I here with you." In the aftermath of each, he must reevaluate his self-centered worldview; his sudden and unpredictable experience of city noise causes him to turn toward the stimuli he had previously ignored, opening himself to the vulnerability of dwelling with others.

To bring the narrative into the past, Jean-Baptiste tells his audience about his younger self's habit of roaming the streets of Paris. Like Lol in *Le Ravissement de Lol V Stein*, he exercises this predilection in solitude, but in his case, these walks allow Jean-Baptiste to experience the city itself, taking in its scenery, especially at night when the crowds thin. He "goûtai[t] le silence revenu, la douceur du soir, Paris vide" (46) ["enjoyed the return of silence, the evening's mildness, the emptiness of Paris" (38)]. When, one night, he goes up the Pont des Arts and looks across the water at the statue of the Vert-Galant, he feels he "dominated" the island: "Je sentais monter en moi un vaste sentiment de puissance et, comment dirais-je, d'achèvement, qui dilatait mon cœur" (46-7) ["I felt rising within me a vast feeling of power and—I don't know how to express it—of completion, which cheered my heart" (38-9)]. These nighttime walks place Jean-Baptiste in a specific version of Paris, one that consists primarily of architecture and not people; he allows himself to feel alone and therefore powerful. The sense of

power instilled in him is conditional, because it belongs to that specific space, in relation to the Vert-Galant statue, and needs to be witnessed first-hand, physically *seen* and not just imagined. His emotional and psychological state, the sparsely populated streets, perhaps even the weather and other stimuli make up a nebulous, uncontrollable confluence of ideal conditions. The organism of the urban environment exists around him and without him, but Jean-Baptiste, though he feigns ignorance, does his best to manipulate it for himself.

There at the Pont des Arts, lighting a cigarette, Jean-Baptiste suddenly hears a peal of laughter: "Surpris, je fis une brusque volte-face : il n'y avait personne. […] Je restais là, immobile. Le rire décroissait, mais je l'entendais encore distinctement derrière moi, venu de nulle part, sinon des eaux. En même temps, je percevais les battements précipités de mon cœur" (47) ["Taken by surprise, I suddenly wheeled around; there was no one there. […] I stood there motionless. The sound of the laughter was decreasing, but I could still hear it distinctly behind me, come from nowhere unless from the water. At the same time I was aware of the rapid beating of my heart" (39)]. This sound of laughter draws Jean-Baptiste out of his individualist reveries. There is no reason for him to think the laughter is directed at him; it is more than likely just a happy stranger passing by on the sidewalk. But something makes Jean-Baptiste *think* the laughter is meant for him. His first step is to locate the laughter, pinpoint it in space and identify its source. He performs a sort of calculus, working out the physics of the noise's origin, movement, and speed: behind him, from the river perhaps, moving away. While not likely a threat, as such, the laughter is an unexpected noise within the already noisy chaos of city life, and Jean-Baptiste tries to place it in space to placate his body's sense of vulnerability. His heartbeat betrays his surprise, if not panic.

There is an animal instinct in this response to the unexpected noise, one that renders the city a kind of wilderness that Jean-Baptiste attempts to rationalize by first buying some cigarettes (giving himself a physical object with which to interact) and then, returning home, calling up a friend but finding them not at home (47). By traditional definitions like those discussed at the outset of this chapter, one may reject categorizing Jean-Baptiste's experience on the bridge as an encounter. The collision with that sound of laughter cannot evolve into a relationship—Jean-Baptiste does not make contact with the source of the noise—, but it sticks in his psyche even after he leaves and returns to the familiar comforts of home. Jean-Baptiste has no idea who the laughter belongs to and, presumably, the person laughing remains unaware of the sound having reached Jean-Baptiste.

What one finds in Jean-Baptiste's experience on the Pont des Arts, however, is a collision of a particularly urban variety. Specifically, this is a transient, even anonymous moment that nonetheless causes him to turn away from himself and toward another with whom he shares space. He becomes acutely aware of what he perceives as *his* space suddenly revealing itself to be occupied. After calling his friend, he considers leaving again when he hears a sound outside his window: "J'hésitais à sortir, quand, soudain, j'entendis rire sous mes fenêtres. J'ouvris. Sur le trottoir, en effet, des jeunes gens se séparaient joyeusement" (48-9) ["I was hesitating about going out when, suddenly, I heard laughter under my windows. I opened them. On the sidewalk, in fact, some youths were loudly saying good night" (39)]. Laughter itself has become a source of anxiety, a destabilization such that even the banal sounds of the city—a joyful group on the sidewalk below—becomes a cause for tension. The person who laughed at the bridge, despite having no corporeality in Jean-Baptiste's narration of the experience, commands an unintentional power over the man's sense of self and sense of place. When Jean-Baptiste leaves the window

and the laughing youth and goes to the bathroom for a drink of water, he looks into the mirror: "Mon image souriait dans la glace, mais il me sembla que mon sourire était double…" (48) ["My reflection was smiling in the mirror, but it seemed to me that my smile was double" (40)]. I propose a reading of how the laughter at the Pont des Arts caused Jean-Baptiste's doubling that situates the collision in its urban specificity: the laughter that he heard at the Pont des Arts is a sound that, for whatever reason, penetrated the homogenized chaos of the urban environment, pushed Jean-Baptiste off his stasis, destabilizing both his sense of place there in the city and his sense of self. The laughter collided with him and knocked him off course.

An analogy to physics might be helpful. If one considers an atom in a noisy field of other atoms, one can imagine each with its own vector—a trajectory and a velocity, or a starting point, a direction, and an intensity with which it heads there. Our atom at the center of this field, as it moves forward, is constantly bombarded by other atoms, pushed off its trajectory by the impact, and thrown onto a new path. Maybe our atom joins with another to form a molecule, but more likely, it moves out of the way and continues on its new trajectory. Our atom cannot control how other atoms in the field move through space, and therefore the possibility of colliding with another atom is unpredictable.

These are collisions. Two bodies meet and, because of their proximity, are thrown off course. In a collision, the two bodies do not necessarily develop any kind of relationship beyond the immediate, transient, and tenuous instant of collision. Of course, the urban dweller is not an atom. Movement through the city is imbued with purpose, and trajectories are entangled with personal and cultural habits, rituals, and history. A person moving through urban space, aware of the potential of collision with other bodies, may make decisions about how to avoid them or how to react to the moment of their meeting. Therefore, I argue for a definition of collision as a

specific type of encounter that centers on this decision-making process: a collision, especially in the city, is a potential and unpredictable meeting of two bodies, predicated primarily on proximity, whose outcome ranges anywhere from indifferent to profound but due to its unpredictability, is always being negotiated. Collisions are not a different category altogether from encounters, as defined by Valentine and Wilson, but rather sometimes imperceptible moments that may evolve to a lasting influence.

The laughter Jean-Baptiste hears at the Pont des Arts destabilizes him like an atom being pushed off course by a collision. It knocks him from his norm and his habitual comfort. The collision influences his metaphorical trajectory; that is, he does not necessarily change his movement through the city (though perhaps he would not have stopped for cigarettes had his nerves not been rattled), but rather the trajectory of his relationship with the space. His sense of self in the urban environment is knocked off path. A collision's significance lies not only in its position in the development of a proper encounter, but in its uncertainty and the constant negotiation of that unpredictability in the public urban space.

The conditions under which these collisions are destabilizing are specific to the individual and specific to their time and place, especially because the interrelationality of a collision necessitates a constant awareness of one's position with respect to others. For Jean-Baptiste in particular, this reminder that he shares space with others upends his egocentric worldview. Just as he interrupts his anonymous *compariote*'s solitary drink at the bar at the beginning of the novel, Jean-Baptiste strives to regularly implicate himself in the lives of others. He boasts of his "célèbre et pourtant indiscutable" courtesy (28); he tells his companion that it brings him great delight to help a blind man across the street, give up his seat on the bus, pick up an item dropped by an old lady, let someone else take his taxi (27). These are not altruistic acts

performed to engender benevolent force in the world. Rather, these are acts performed to assure the centrality of Jean-Baptiste's agency in the interrelationality of the urban space. He admits to his companion that

> Je ne pouvais donc vivre, de mon aveu même, qu'à la condition que, sur toute la terre, tous les êtres, ou le grand nombre possible, fussent tournés vers moi, éternellement vacants, privés de vie indépendante, prêts à répondre à mon appel à n'importe quel moment, voués enfin à la stérilité, jusqu'au jour où je daignerais les favoriser de ma lumière. En somme, pour que je vive heureux, il fallait que les êtres que j'élisais ne vécussent point. Ils ne devaient recevoir leur vie, de loin en loin, que de mon bon plaisir. (79-80)
>
> [I could live happily only on the condition that all the individuals on earth, or the greatest possible number, were turned toward me, eternally in suspense, devoid of independent life and ready to answer my call at any moment, doomed in short to sterility until the day I should deign to favor them. In short, for me to live happily it was essential for the creatures I chose not to live at all. They must receive their life, sporadically, only at my bidding. (68)]

While he quickly provides the caveat that he does not feel "aucune complaisance" ["any self-satisfaction"] at this admission, Jean-Baptiste seems to revel in his role in other people's existences; he sees this as the prevue of "tout homme intelligent," who all dream of "régner sur la société par la seule violence" (66) ["every intelligent man […] ruling over society by force alone" (55)]. This confession reveals Jean-Baptiste striving to be the agent in public urban spaces, the subject who creates action and creates objects. The patients of his actions are suspended and inert without him. He sees himself as a sort of savior in a position to save the "doomed" people that share his space. This agent-patient relationship, in which Jean-Baptiste pretends at occupying the active role among reactive others, is maintained by these pseudo-altruistic acts, a benevolence that causes his patients to turn toward their agent. The agent-patient relationship must, of course, also work in reverse. Jean-Baptiste acknowledges that his happiness

relies essentially on the objectification of others around him. To enjoy the patiency of others, he must himself be patient to their existence.

The laughter Jean-Baptiste hears at the Pont des Arts disrupts the confidence of his sense of place because it successfully renders him the patient: rather than having others turned toward him, Jean-Baptiste must turn toward the laughter both literally (he turns toward it to ascertain its origins and the degree to which it threatens him) and phenomenologically (such that the laughter centers itself in his experience of the world that otherwise places him at its center). Jean-Baptiste exposes his vulnerability, or rather, the laughter highlights the vulnerability inherent in moving through the city. This disembodied sound successfully shakes his foundations.

In Chapter 1, I suggested that urban phenomenology is marked by the constant and unavoidable experience of stimuli that are omnipresent in the cityspace. The hyper-sensorial phenomenology of living in urban spaces tends toward psychological closure in which the individual dweller must reject or refuse most stimuli to avoid exhaustion; such rejection necessitates a discriminatory posture toward the world in which the individual draws conclusions about what is and is not worth picking out of the noise. I argued in that chapter that the counterpart of that psychological closure is vulnerability, especially vulnerability to those with whom space is shared, such that individuals open themselves to the exposure of being in public.

Jean-Baptiste's "turned toward me"—the assertion that those with whom he shares space should literally and figuratively center John-Baptiste in their experience—recalls Sara Ahmed's conception of queer phenomenology. Ahmed offers a way of understanding the exposure to others by centering orientation in the body's experience of space-time. In queer studies, Ahmed argues, the "orientation" of "sexual orientation" defines the way in which a body extends itself into space, toward other bodies; the (hetero)normative body extends itself toward bodies defined

by society as opposite, whereas the queer body extends itself toward bodies defined by society as the same. Society does not recognize the body's turn toward "same" bodies as a correct spatial positioning. This queer turning—a sexual orientation in the phenomenological, if not geographic, sense—redefines how a body relates to other bodies and to objects with which it shares space.

In queer phenomenology, a body's orientation is defined by its horizon, which is itself a function of the body's habits and what is reachable. The horizon is not simply a field of vision, but rather the edge of what is available to the body, and some objects within the body's field of vision may not be reachable because the body is not oriented to them. What is reachable is both a determination of what is in a space with a body and an accounting of what the body is designed for and designated for:

> What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations that we have already taken. Some objects don't even become objects of perception, as the body does not move toward them: they are 'beyond the horizon' of the body, and thus out of reach. The surfaces of bodies are shaped by what is reachable. (55)

In Ahmed's example, following Hegel, the desk upon which she writes is reachable within her horizon because she identifies herself in the act of writing and the desk in its support of that act; however, the desk may fade from her field of perception as her body becomes habituated to its presence and ease of use. That is, the body develops habitual engagements with these reachable objects and the space shared between them. Bodies do not have "originary" tendencies, Ahmed says; bodily tendencies are rather "effects of history" (56), habitual engagements with space informed by societal knowledge and by the practice of repetition. Race, gender, and other identities that may otherwise be considered essential are, in Ahmed's conception, primary to and coincidental with the perception of and sharing of space. How society trains certain bodies—especially white, heterosexual, cis-gendered male bodies in Western society—to occupy space

makes other bodies secondary, unusual, improperly oriented. The queer, black body, Ahmed concludes, must negotiate how to live in a space for which it is not designated.

Ahmed considers how difficult it is to reorient bodies that inhabit spaces incompatible with their identitarian conditions. Writing specifically about queer bodies in heterosexual public spaces, Ahmed says this reorienting requires work because orientations are inscribed over time: "Such work is necessary precisely given how some orientations become socially given by being repeated over time, as a repetition that is often hidden from view" (101). The practice of living in a space that is oriented differently from one's body, Ahmed suggests, requires labor, because one must consciously renegotiate the relationship between body and social space. To fully appreciate this labor, Ahmed insists that we not only consider what is repeated in the world, but also "how the repetition of actions takes us in certain directions" (56).

Ahmed focuses primarily on how repetitions shape the body and how it reaches out toward objects, but here, I want to focus on how repetitions are broken and how novelties result in shifted phenomenologies. As Camus's Jean-Baptiste shows, collisions can jolt the experience of being in the world in such a way that one finds oneself turned outward in a new way: Jean-Baptiste, who expects those around him to be turned toward him, finds himself turning toward others because of his collisions with a disembodied laughter. In the pages that follow, I continue to read Camus with an eye toward these shifted ways of being in the world, suggesting a world that has been turned, disrupted, or swerved. The primacy of race and sexuality in Ahmed's queer phenomenology (sexuality, of course, indexed in the term itself) should not be erased from this discussion. As our reading of *Le Ravissement de Lol V Stein* showed in the previous chapter, even as we consider the instantaneous nature of collisions, the societal role of these identities is a central part of the negotiations between bodies in an encounter; Ahmed goes on to show us that

these identities are co-constitutive with the spaces that bodies inhabit, recalling Doreen Massey's insistence that space and the relationship between bodies in space are inextricably simultaneous. There remains, nonetheless, a gesture at a practice of being in the world that does not immediately center identitarian orientations.

Ahmed approaches the problem of shifting phenomenologies by considering *dis*orientation, the state of being wrongly turned toward the world—not ethically "wrong," but rather anormatively, against the constructed orientations of society. She suggests that disorientation is vital:

> They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground. Disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground or one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable. (157)

Ahmed locates disorientation in the body, not necessarily as an affective feeling, but as a physical experience conditioned on how the body is situated in the world. The body has "confidence"—that is, security, certainty—in the ground, and disorientation is the upsetting of that confidence. When Jean-Baptiste is thrown from the ground, as it were, by the laughing voice behind him in the street, he is responding to the stimuli of the urban space. He becomes the object of the laugh and the patient of an external influence. That is to say, his orientation shifts. One could argue, following Ahmed, that Jean-Baptiste primarily operates with an inwardly focused orientation; he functions by making himself the object of other people's attention and concern. But when he is thrown off by these noises, he must necessarily orient himself outward, toward those things and toward their impact on his trajectory.

Being "thrown off" is at the center of the urban experience I explore in these pages. The collision, as a mode of meeting that brings the city dweller into sudden and nonnegotiable

contact with their occupied reality, has in its aftermath the ability to throw an individual from their sense of physical and ontological stability. The shift from "I" to "I here with you," as subtle as it may be when one wrestles for space on a crowded bus or acknowledges the hospitality of a stranger holding open a door, asks the individual to reconsider their horizon and the instability of their stance in public spaces. And because of the crowded, unpredictable swarm of strangers at the heart of the urban experience, this disorientation comes in frequent and unpredictable bursts whenever one is in shared built space.

The ways this disorientation persists in an individual's experience as echoes of the collision both consciously and unconsciously have direct consequences for how public space is imagined. If being in public is perceived as experiencing excessive vulnerability, beyond the fears of safety that make up government statistics, the city is then perceived as a space opposed to one's existence. Just as Lol Stein must create isolation and anonymity to tolerate the stimuli of S. Tahla, the urban dweller who is overcome by their vulnerability will, as Georg Simmel has suggested, shut out the public entirely.

Jean-Baptiste's relationship to the urban landscape—as a center toward which others turn rather than an object that turns toward others—is tested on a night in November when, walking home through the Left Bank by way of the Pont Royal, "a little numbed" by an evening with his mistress, he is again forced to turn toward something other than himself:

> Sur le pont, je passai derrière une forme penchée sur le parapet, et qui semblait regarder le fleuve. De plus près, je distinguai une mince jeune femme, habillée de noir. […] J'avais déjà parcouru une cinquantaine de mètres à peu près, lorsque j'entendis le bruit […] d'un corps qui s'abat sur l'eau. Je m'arrêtai net, mais sans me retourner. Presque aussitôt, j'entendis un cri, plusieurs fois répété, qui descendait lui aussi le fleuve, puis s'éteignit brusquement. Le silence qui suivit, dans la nuit soudain figée, me parut interminable. Je voulus courir et je ne bougeai pas. Je tremblais, je crois, de froid et de saisissement. (Camus, *La Chute* 82)

> [On the bridge I passed behind a figure leaning over the railing and seeming to stare at the river. On closer view, I made out a slim young woman dressed in black. […] I had already gone some fifty yards when I heard the sound […] of a body striking the water. I stopped short, but without turning around. Almost at once I heard a cry, repeated several times, which was going downstream; then it suddenly ceased. The silence that followed, as the night suddenly stood still, seemed interminable. I wanted to run and yet didn't stir. I was trembling, I believe from cold and shock. (69-70)]

The parallels here to his collision with the laughter earlier in the novel are clear: out at night on the streets of Paris, taking in the quiet isolation of the depopulated city, a sound reaches Jean-Baptiste and forces him into the present and into a concrete awareness of the space around him. He experiences shock, a destabilization that causes him to take measure of his environment—especially the sounds, but also the stillness and the cold. Crucially, the collisions with these sounds require Jean-Baptiste to react, a consequence that, at the Pont Royal, is both bodily and psychological. He wants to flee, but something unconscious holds him in place. The woman's suicide differs from the laughter at the Pont des Arts most notably in its embodiment: Jean-Baptiste saw the woman before she jumped into the Seine, heard her body hit the water, and felt his reaction in his own body. Even as he tries to will himself into action, he experiences an insurmountable sense of weakness and tells himself that it is too late to act. "J'écoutais toujours, immobile" (82) ["I was still listening as I stood motionless" (70)], he admits to his *compatriote*.

Jean-Baptiste had introduced this story as his "découverte essentielle" (81) ["essential discovery" (69)], an event that occurred two or three years before the laughter he heard at the Pont des Arts. His collision with that woman and the sounds of her suicide (the water, the cry that faded downstream) forced Jean-Baptiste to react to another person in the cityspace, and therefore turn toward her—or rather, in this case, choose to resist the urge to turn toward her. Because ultimately, he does not physically turn toward her, but instead walks away. He leaves

the bridge and returns home. However, though he might physically have turned away, he concedes, almost unintentionally, that the experience of that woman's suicide is not so easily pushed aside, the impact experienced momentarily and then forgotten. He assures his *compatriote* that he never followed up with the story, but the moment remains in his subconscious: "Ni le lendemain, ni les jours qui suivirent, je n'ai lu les journaux" (83) ["The next day, and the days following, I didn't read the papers" (71)], he tells his companion. The explicit decision to *not* read the newspapers belies an attempt to avoid the story altogether, revealing the space it occupies in his daily experience. He adjusts his habits to keep that woman distant, learn nothing more about her, and therefore remain ignorant of the consequences of his inaction.

Years later, the disorientation caused by his encounter with the drowning woman in the Seine follows Jean-Baptiste out of Paris altogether and onto a cruise ship, where he sees a "black speck" on the horizon. He acknowledges logically that the speck is simply the refuse that ships leave behind them in the water, but he finds that he cannot tolerate seeing it because it calls to mind images of a drowning person:

> Je compris alors, sans révolte, comme on se résigne à une idée dont on connaît depuis longtemps la vérité, que ce cri qui, des années auparavant, avait retenti sur la Seine, derrière moi, n'avait pas cessé, porté par le fleuve vers les eaux de la Manche, de cheminer dans le monde, à travers l'étendue illimitée de l'océan, et qu'il m'y avait attendu jusqu'à ce jour où je l'avais rencontré. (Camus 125-6)
>
> [Then I realized, calmly as you resign yourself to an idea the truth of which you have long known, that that cry which had sounded over the Seine behind me years before had never ceased, carried by the river to the waters of the Channel, to travel throughout the world, across the limitless expanse of the ocean, and that it had waited for me there until the day I had encountered it. (108)]

The voice that he had ignored years ago—the cry of the woman throwing herself into the Seine—resounds here on the open waters, not an echo but the voice itself, which he believes

never ceased and continues to wait for him. It is due to the flowing water that the sound reaches Jean-Baptiste here in the ocean; the fluid, cleansing, natural cut of the Seine's water through the built environment of Paris connects Jean-Baptiste not only to both bridges as geographic spaces but also to both temporal moments, collapsing the years that had passed into the single, sustained sound.

In the subsequent years between his revelation out at sea and his encounter with a *compatriote* in Amsterdam, he expends considerable energy trying to escape the aftermath of his experience on the Pont Royal. He moved to London and then to Amsterdam, deciding not to support the Resistance in the Second World War. When his city is threatened, he turned away, protecting himself and his own interests. Having turned away from the woman on the parapets of the bridge, he turned away from becoming socially engaged.

This is, of course, an extreme example, but it demonstrates, I argue, the struggle of negotiating shared space in cities. Confronted with near-constant and near-unavoidable collisions, the urban dweller must decide how to interact with the unpredictable stimuli that threaten to throw them from the ground. What Simmel calls antisociality and Ahmed calls turning away are ultimately choices about how to approach the aftermath of these moments. Rather than turning toward "I here with you," Jean-Baptiste turns away. He reorients his body, his habits, and his horizons so that others are kept outside of what is reachable to him. That he interacts with his *compatriote* in Amsterdam amounts, he admits, to a religious confession, a fundamental change in the way he rejected interrelationality in his past.

Turning Away: *La Peste* and Rejection of Vulnerability

In *La Chute*, Camus asks the reader to imagine the extremes of urban encounters: what happens when a man turned entirely inward collides with a person who not only forces him to turn toward others, but forces him to reevaluate his existential stance toward the world? Jean-Baptiste witnesses a woman's suicide, hears her fall into the Seine, and decides not to do anything to help her. He turns away, but the collision destabilizes him well past its transient moment. That uneasiness manifests as unanswerable questions throughout the man's life—about the sound of laughter that reaches him on the Pont des Arts, about his obligation to the Resistance and to his French national identity, about his essential relationship to a *compatriote* sitting at a bar in Amsterdam.

Jean-Baptiste's experience, as we have said, represents the extreme; one is fortunately unlikely to witness a stranger's suicide on any given day in the city. In most Western cities, one probably never needs to choose between fighting the Nazi Occupation or fleeing the country. Nonetheless, the collisions that push Jean-Baptiste into disorientation recall the daily, often ignored encounters that make up urban life. At the density of the urban crowd and the public nature of urban movement, each individual in the city reacts to countless such collisions, negotiating how and when to respond to them, bracing oneself, as we saw in the previous chapter, to the potential of their impact. Camus asks the reader to consider one's stance toward these collisions and the ethical, political consequences of turning away—or turning toward—others. Jean-Baptiste might expect others to be turned toward him, conferring on him the power of agency to their patiency, but when he is confronted with the real consequences of his agency, he cowers. Sharing the cityspace with innumerable, anonymous, and vulnerable others—learning

to dwell together in noisy chaos—presents the urban inhabitant with a constant reevaluation of the boundary between "I" and "you," between "we" and "they."

Collisions, I argue, in destabilizing one's position in space and one's agency, are brief, transient moments in which the urban inhabitant decides how to turn toward or away from others. Regardless of how these collisions evolve into meaningful encounters or relationships, the lasting consequences of collisions bear the potential to change the experience of the urban environment. Here, I turn to another of Camus' novels to consider the tension of the urban dweller's vulnerability to collisions. In Camus's 1947 novel *La Peste*, an epidemic plague disrupts the urban mundane of the French-Algerian city of Oran. How the characters in *La Peste* react to the epidemic highlights the habits and routines that made up daily life before the epidemic began. In particular, the (re)shaping of communities in the face of the plague, the city's closed borders, and the changes in policing and surveillance reveal its underlying systems.

Camus establishes the "normal" baseline from which the plague will deviate in the novel's first pages: "A première vue, Oran est, en effet, une ville ordinaire et rien de plus qu'une préfecture française de la côte algérienne. […] Une manière commode de faire la connaissance d'une ville est de chercher comment on y travaille, comment on y aime et comment on y meurt" (5, 6) ["For its ordinariness is what strikes one first about the town of Oran, which is merely a large French port on the Algerian coast […]. Perhaps the easiest way of making a town [like Oran]'s acquaintance is to ascertain how the people in it work, how they love, and how they die" (3, 4)].[5] Notably, in emphasizing work and desire, there is a focus on the interrelationality of Oran's daily life in which the character of the town is identified in the ways people come

[5] All English citations of *La Peste* given in brackets refer to the Stuart Gilbert translation (1975), unless otherwise noted.

together to perform labor and come together to experience relationships.[6] The distinction is also established linguistically; the city is described as belonging to the collective: "chez nous" (7) ["our town" (5)] is a common phrase. The quotidian banality of the city obviates the need for individuation, such that there exists a collective whole that represents the sum-total of the city's inhabitants, and that whole is concurrent with the narrator.

The neighborly relationships prove important to the narrator's conception of Oran before and at the start of the plague. The first arrival of the disease engages a network of communication, with information being passed from one person to the next. As Bernard Rieux, a doctor who, as one of the novel's central characters, is the first to identify and name the plague, notes: "Rieux n'eut pas de peine à constater ensuite que tout le quartier parlait des rats" (10) ["Rieux soon discovered that the rats were the great topic of conversation in that part of the town" (10)]. Throughout the early stages of the epidemic information is spread by word of mouth, such that the residents of the neighborhood take responsibility for informing each other about the impending epidemic. The word-of-mouth that disseminates information parallels the spread of infection among the network of proximity: "Mais, depuis les quartiers extérieurs jusqu'au centre de la ville, partout où le docteur Rieux venait à passer, partout où nos concitoyens se rassemblaient, les rats attendaient en tas, dans les poubelles, ou en longues files, dans les ruisseaux" (14-15) ["From the outer suburbs to the center of the town, in all the byways where the doctor's duties took him, in every thoroughfare, rats were piled up in garbage cans or lying in long lines in the gutters" (15)]. Spread of information and spread of contamination are both functions of proximity. Camus juxtaposes the gathered citizens and the gathered rats,

[66] The role of labor and its relationship to death and desire in *La Peste* is generally understudied and unfortunately outside the scope of this chapter. I will return briefly to profit and consumption in *La Peste* below, as well as to labor politics in other contexts in the third and fourth chapters of this dissertation.

suggesting a vague boundary between the ostensibly "natural" cause of the plague (disease-ridden animals) and the urban cause (extreme density, hygiene).

The intention here seems not to be to pinpoint a definitive origin of Oran's plague but rather to bring into parallel the two contaminating networks that spread disease. That is, proximity—not necessarily contact, but closeness—threatens to reveal the vulnerabilities between two people. Here, *La Peste* encourages us to look more specifically at how encounters of the type described already—transient collisions, predicated on closeness—give way to shifted relationality to others and therefore contribute to how urban inhabitants dwell together. I argue, in drawing a metaphorical line between the idea of contagion and proximal collisions in *La Peste*, that turning towards collision, while a vulnerable act, is a pro-social one, an act that identifies the uniquely urban experience of crowded proximity and vulnerability, acknowledging it instead of fleeing from it.

The gathered masses that signal the gathered rats are, according to the narrator, "nos concitoyens"—not simply "people" or even "citizens," but "our fellow citizens." The antisocial separation that underlines the lack of community in Duras' *Le Ravissement de Lol V Stein*, as discussed in Chapter One and Jean-Baptiste's egocentric agency described above is here countered with communal togetherness, a sense of belonging to a place and therefore sharing it with others. Where the first pages of the novel celebrate the neighborly community in Oran before the plague, the infection pivots the narrative to various attempts at defining community formation that seem to undermine Oran's unity. When rats are found in a three-star hotel elevator, the director of the hotel quickly realizes that "nous sommes maintenant comme tout le monde" (26) ["now we're like everybody else" (28)]. The distinction that made the hotel

honorable before—likely a class-based segregation, a bourgeois separation in the so-called "we" of "*nos concitoyens*"—flattens thanks to the plague, which infects by proximity and not by class.

The complacent communal "we" of the era before the plague contends with the disruption by immediately searching for a "they," a point of comparison. "Nos concitoyens n'étaient pas plus coupables que d'autres," the narrator insists. "Comment auraient-ils pensé à la peste qui supprime l'avenir, les déplacements et les discussions ? Ils se croyaient libres et personne ne sera jamais libre tant qu'il y aura des fléaux" (33) ["Our townsfolk were not more to blame than others. […] How should they have given a thought to anything like plague, which rules out any future, cancels journeys, silences the exchange of views? They fancied themselves free, and no one will ever be free so long as there are pestilences" (37)]. According to the narrator, the possibility of infection exists only by way of culpability, which allows an Other to be made of the sick, a separation between the infected and "nos concitoyens" that absolves the latter of responsibility. Already in the first pages of the novel, Camus proposes a contradiction in how "we" and "they" are defined. "Nos concitoyens" suggests shared nationality or citizenship, but in negotiating blame, the narrator creates new groups ("our townsfolk" and "others") constructed along lines of infection and contagiousness. The distinction is heightened to the level of freedom, which is threatened by other people's contagiousness (or, put differently, by one's own vulnerability to infection). Freedom is a proposition that regards the future, movement, and communication. The "we" that the narrator absolves of blame has no responsibility for the loss of their freedom; the plague does that.

In Camus' version of colonial Algeria, however, that loss of freedom is specific to the French inhabitants of Oran; notably, the named characters in *La Peste* appear to be French; Algerians are pushed out of the focus of the narrative. The suggestion of shared nationality or

citizenship inherent in “nos concitoyens” sidesteps the lack of freedom possessed by the Algerians in the city—especially, in this context, the freedom of movement, but also the freedom to imagine a future after the plague. The “we” and “they” that Camus’ narrator manifests in an attempt to displace blame is secondary to the “we” and “they” of the colonial relationships found in the erasure of Algerian characters from the novel. [7]

The dead, however, can be presumed to exist outside of the question of citizenship. The town prepares for an estimated ten thousand deaths a day, a number that Rieux finds incomprehensible. “Mais qu’est-ce que cent millions de morts ?” [“But what are a hundred million deaths?”], Rieux ponders, thinking of the wars that left so many dead but were reduced to “une fumée dans l’imagination” [“a puff of smoke in the imagination”] of history (33 [38]). To picture that number, a more concrete demonstration would be needed:

> Dix mille morts font cinq fois le public d’un grand cinéma. […] On rassemble les gens à la sortie de cinq cinémas, on les conduit sur une place de la ville et on les fait mourir en tas pour y voir un peu clair. Au moins, on pourrait mettre alors des visages connus sur cet entassement anonyme. (33)
>
> [Ten thousand dead made about five times the audience in a biggish cinema. […] You should collect the people at the exists of five picture-houses, you should lead them to a city square and make them die in heaps if you wanted to get a clear notion of what it means Then at least you could add some familiar faces to the anonymous mass. (38)]

Set in public, the theoretical execution allows the others in the city to identify the faces of those infected with the plague who are, in theory, responsible for spreading it, removing a shroud of anonymity from the disease. The “we” of the novel’s earliest pages is again shown to be a farce, not only by the willingness to create separation between “we, the living” and “they, the dead,” but by the narrator’s realization that no one could recognize all of those faces anyway. “Nos

[7] The colonialist implications of the novel and this French-Algerian division are explored more thoroughly elsewhere; see, for example, Carroll (2001) and Smith (2016).

concitoyens" encompasses, then, an unknowable group, a mass of anonymous individuals. The fragility of this grouping, exposed so quickly by the arrival of the plague, highlights the complicated social network of public urban space. The tendency to group is natural, but negotiating that grouping with this anonymous mass is, at best, tenuous.

"We" and "they" exist throughout the rest of the novel. The impersonal (and as we learn above, meaningless) "we" is fragmented, and its mundane familiarity gives way to individuals searching for new functions of community, generally by way of sympathy. Rieux, in his duties as a doctor, leaves a meeting with other not-yet-infected citizens of Oran and finds "une femme qui hurlait à la mort, les aines ensanglantées, [qui] se tournait vers lui" (44) ["a woman screaming in agony, her groin dripping blood" who "stretched out her arms toward him" (51)]. The woman's desperation—whatever psychological impulse that consumed her as she lay there in the street—causes her to physically reach out as though for human contact; the action, it seems, is not a convulsion of pain, but a direct attempt to grasp at him, at another person in the street. Later, after a suicide attempt, Cottard, a solitary and eccentric man who is entangled largely incidentally in Rieux's social circles, laments his broken social network and, out in public, tries his best to strike up friendships (45-6). Rieux himself, like Cottard, "sentait un besoin de chaleur humaine" (48) ["felt a need for friendly contacts, human warmth" (56)]. This shift from a generalized, discursive community found in "we" and "nos concitoyens" forces contaminated individuals to seek out the supportive commune of other people—often an abject task. The plague makes turning toward others a self-destructive act; if Rieux reached out to the desperate woman or found the warmth of human contact, he almost certainly would have become infected.

So the problem is that while the infection starts with the rats, it spreads through human contact, the exact sociality that Cottard and Rieux admit to craving. The vulnerability of sharing

space with others—the potential dangers of proximity—become literal and concrete. Camus suggests the disorientation of fearing one's own body and the body of others: "Qu'on envisage seulement la stupéfaction de notre petite ville, si tranquille jusque-là, et bouleversée en quelques jours, comme un homme bien portant dont le sang épais se mettrait tout d'un coup en révolution !" (16) ["You must picture the consternation of our little town, hitherto so tranquil, and now, out of the blue, shaken to its core, like a quite healthy man who all of a sudden feels his temperature shoot up and the blood seething like wildfire in his veins" (16)]. The body, even the body of a healthy person, may contain the microbe, such that the healthy body may become ill at any moment. So too, the city that seems calm may be upset without warning. Crucially, these disruptions are contagious, spread from person to person even without direct contact. The fear of another's body is the most concrete representation of the vulnerability to collisions in the city. Camus imagines a city populated by individuals who seek social contact to help them endure the trauma of the plague but who simultaneously must avoid the physical contact that spreads the microbe.

Inevitably, the plague infections pick up speed, and the day that the new deaths top thirty, the prefect of the city announces in a telegram, "Déclarez l'état de peste. Fermez la ville" (53) ["Proclaim a state of plague stop close the town" (63)]. Closing the city (the command is "fermez") suggests that the city had previously been open. The official declaration creates borders, seemingly from nothing, and the port, train stations, and other points of entry that were once liminal—spaces through which people were allowed or denied access into and out of Oran—become impassable, solid, and decisive. The closing of Oran's boundaries fundamentally changes the lived experience with them and within them. The narrator points to adaptations in places of commerce as they deal with the closure:

> Au bout de deux semaines, les établissements furent obligés d'échanger leurs programmes et, après quelque temps, les cinémas finirent par projeter toujours le même film. Leurs recettes cependant ne diminuaient pas. Les cafés enfin, grâce aux stocks considérables accumulés dans une ville où le commerce des vins et des alcools tient la première place, purent également alimenter leurs clients. A vrai dire, on buvait beaucoup. […] Toutes les nuits, vers deux heures, un nombre assez considérable d'ivrognes expulsés des cafés emplissaient les rues et s'y répandaient en propos optimistes. (65)
>
> [After a fortnight the various cinemas were obliged to exchange films and, after a further lapse of time, to show always the same program. In spite of this their taking did not fall off. The cafés, thanks to the big stocks accumulated in a town where the wine-and-liquor trade holds pride of place, were equally able to cater to their patrons. And, to tell the truth, there was much heavy drinking. […] Every night, toward 2 A.M., quite a number of drunken men, ejected from the cafés, staggered down the streets, vociferating optimism. (79-80)]

The functioning of these places of commerce depends on new criteria—or rather, the same criteria in new contexts. The cinema's inability to show new films is less important than its ability to provide any kind of distraction at all. The cafes' large stock, which originally served a thriving industry, becomes an imminently finite resource to provide the trapped, potentially sick and dying citizens with some form of entertainment. The plague, as the narrator reminds, is always maybe inside every citizen, and the constant arrival of death is counteracted by inebriation. Not unlike any other night, the cafes provide their patrons the chemical distraction needed to become optimists again and find new (or continue old) habits and routines. Those crowded cafes and cinemas stress the seemingly innate need for communion and community. These crowds are not yet aware of the vulnerability their proximity exposes them to—their closeness is, after all, the ideal circumstance for the plague. They gather not despite of but because of the terror pervading their city.

Other public buildings take on completely different purposes, generally fulfilling a basic survival need, as when, on the fourth day of the plague, the primary school is closed to be made

into an auxiliary hospital (52). Community and intimacy come to be framed not by shared identity and practice but by need and survival. Even private spaces come to have a certain public quality as the way they are used changes. The narrator notes how ubiquitous such changes have become: “Et, de même que Tarrou avait dû quitter son hôtel pour loger chez Rieux, de même le père dut laisser l’appartement où son ordre l’avait place, pour venir loger chez une vieille personne, habituée des églises et encore indemne de la peste” (183) [“Thus Tarrou, when his hotel was requisitioned, had gone to live with Rieux, and now the father had to vacate the lodgings provided for him by his Order and stay in the house of a pious old lady who had so far escaped the epidemic” (229-30)]. Shared intimacy and shared private spaces become a question of need, availability, and contamination. Rieux and Tarrou’s relationship shifts because Tarrou’s apartment—the physical building itself—becomes infected and therefore uninhabitable. What had been a priest-parishioner relationship becomes an intimate patronage made possible because, on the one hand, the church was turned into a hospital and so became the epicenter of the disease and on the other hand, the fact that neither was yet infected.

Oran’s response to the plague makes human contact a tenuous thing, largely removing from daily life the random encounters that come from sharing urban space. The choice between basic needs—sanitation and hospitalization, especially, but also food, shelter, and the life—and basic desires—especially, in this case, human contact—define for urban theorists like Henri Lefebvre the foundational tension of the urban space:

> The satisfaction of basic needs is unable to kill the disaffection of fundamental desires (or of the fundamental desire). As a place of encounters, focus of communication and information, the *urban* becomes what it always was: place of desire, permanent disequilibrium, seat of the dissolution of normalities and constraints, the moment of play and of the unpredictable. (Lefebvre 1996, 129)

In the city, Lefebvre suggests, desire is always at odds with basic needs, and the imbalance is built on encounters that facilitate flows of knowledge. Habituation and predictability are, in this formation, unurban. As urban dwellers try to satisfy the unachievable desires of daily life, they must move in and out of spaces that are designed without their desires in mind. In the midst of the plague, the undoing of these designations provides something of an opportunity.

Once removed from their original intended purpose, these spaces can be coopted and occupied for new uses that alternatively serve displaced human needs and desires. Rambert, for example, finds himself in a train station, the emblematic space of the city's closed-off borders:

> L'accès des quais était interdit. Mais les salles d'attente qu'on atteignait de l'extérieur restaient ouvertes et, quelquefois, des mendiants s'y installaient aux jours de chaleurs parce qu'elles étaient ombreuses et fraîches. Rambert venait y lire d'anciens horaires, les pancartes interdisant de cracher et le règlement de la police des trains. […] Rambert touchait ici cette sorte d'affreuse liberté qu'on trouve au fond du dénuement. (88-89)
>
> [No one was allowed on the platforms. But the waiting-rooms, which could be entered from outside, remained open and, being cool and dark, were often patronized by beggars on very hot days. Rambert spent much time studying the timetables, reading the prohibitions against spitting, and the passengers' regulations. […] Rambert savored that bitter sense of freedom which comes of total deprivation. (Camus 109-10)]

The train station's built purpose—to move people into and out of the city—has been cut off, but the architecture remains. Because its doors "stayed open," the space is available to be repurposed. "Stayed open" takes on an internal contradiction in the context of the plague: with the city's borders closed, the train station cannot serve its built purpose, but by remaining open as an architecture, the space welcomes repurposing. Rambert and the beggars can come into the space, but they cannot move through it to leave the city, and no one will arrive there from outside. Rambert and the beggars can enter the space, but it is a space that does not fulfill its purpose.

Instead, the space transforms to fulfill or satisfy other basic human desires. If the train station will not allow for movement and the flow of information predicated on that movement is arrested, urban dwellers find there the opportunity to create solitude and comfort. The unpredictability that Lefebvre centers in the urban experience becomes an opportunity. Beggars use the train station to stay out of the heat, protecting themselves from exposure to the natural environment. Of course, the plague itself and the microbe that causes it are both elements of that natural world, and the train station was presumably one of their points of origin. As a disease of proximity, the plague thrives off the movement guaranteed by train stations, which brings the microbe into the city's borders and into contact with the swarming crowds in the waiting rooms. Transformed, shut down at the border but opened as an architecture, the train station becomes a haven.

Rambert uses the space to pass time, to idle in. "Salles d'attente," as the narrator calls them, remain rooms where one waits, but where before the plague one *waited for something*, Rambert uses them simply to *wait* (or perhaps to wait for the plague to get him). Rambert is deprived of the mundane activities that fill one's day. He finds a kind of freedom to do nothing; the freedom to *wait* is an activity in and of itself. What Rambert finds there in the train station are evidence of prohibitions and regulations from before the plague. True to the space's former use, he finds written in the timetables communication of how and when to move; the placards remind him of the police's authority to decide how others behave (111). The timetables are meaningless because no trains will come or go, and Rambert's "awful freedom" suggests that the police are not around to enforce the other regulations. The question of policing and authority shifts after the epidemic begins. Beyond taking authority over the closed borders, the police put

the city under a state of exception.[8] They turn toward controlling other types of daily activities and movement:

> Des patrouilles parcoururent la ville. Souvent, dans les rues désertes et surchauffés, on voyait avancer, annoncés d'abord par le bruit des sabots sur les pavés, des gardes à cheval qui passaient entre des rangées de fenêtres closes. (90)
>
> [A system of patrols was instituted and often in the empty, sweltering streets, heralded by a clatter of horse hoofs on the cobbles, a detachment of mounted police would make its way between the parallel lines of close-shut windows. (112)]

The narrator presents this kind of policing as its own novelty, a dramatic change in the way everyday life is experienced in Oran—patrols on horseback, imprisonment, curfews, rules. With these patrols in place, it is nearly impossible to come across others randomly in the street, denying the cityspace one of its defining characteristics. In normal times, the train station, as a built space, is perhaps the epitome of the collision: as individuals move in and out of the city, the makeup of the crowded platforms and waiting rooms is unpredictable, shifting, and anonymous. These are people from anywhere, heading anywhere.

With the borders such down, these kinds of collisions halt. The system of patrols instead creates the environment in which collisions become a question of authority. If the city and its law enforcement encounter a trespasser in this usually public space, the consequences are clear. One's freedom is threatened there in this new space that exists where the train station stands. Especially when there is an Other with whom to compare oneself, one usually assumes that there

[8] It is worth considering here the theoretical heritage of the state of exception, especially as it is outlined by Agamben (*Lo stato di eccezione*, Bollati Boringhieri, 2003; *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell, U of Chicago P, 2005). The relationship between sovereign State power and questions of "public good" is particularly salient in this conversation about the transition from a sort of mundane normalcy into crisis like that of Camus' plague. The political potential in maintaining a constant state of exception—that is, rejection of mundane normalcy altogether by perpetuating and accentuating crisis—is especially pertinent in contemporary society. France's position in the past several years in response to terrorist attacks, but especially since the November 2015 attacks, and the United States almost perpetually since the September 2001 terrorist attacks provide contemporary examples.

are degrees of freedom; that is, one assumes that the police are there to keep *you* safe from *someone else*. One doctor says to Rieux,

> A l'intérieur même de la ville, on eut l'idée d'isoler certains quartiers particulièrement éprouvés et de n'autoriser à en sortir que les hommes dont les services étaient indispensables. […] « Il y a toujours plus prisonnier que moi » était la phrase qui résumait alors le seul espoir possible. (135)
>
> [The authorities had the idea of segregating certain particularly central areas and permitting only those whose services were indispensable to cross the cordon. […] 'Anyhow, there are some worse off than I,' was a remark that voiced the only solace to be had in those days. (168, 169)]

In this moment of crisis, boundaries are more obvious because they are especially dangerous. The boundary between "moi" and the "plus prisonnier" is the boundary between healthy and ill. At some point, that boundary is transgressed, though not by an individual but rather by the microbe. This boundary between healthy and ill, and the drive to point it out, reaffirms the self by distinguishing it from the other. In this doctor's case, he can only imagine freedom by making it contingent on other people's imprisonment. A collision with this other, "more imprisoned" individual could cause trouble with the patrolling police or it could transmit the plague. Neither option allows for the tenuous and unpredictable social collisions that mark the train station in normal times.

Eventually, in order to escape the constant anxiety he feels waiting for the plague to get him, Rambert decides to subvert the prohibition to leave Oran: "Ayant acquis la prévue qu'il ne pouvait sortir de la ville par les moyens légaux, il était décidé, avait-il dit à Rieux, à user des autres. Le journaliste commença par les garçons de café. Un garçon de café est toujours au courant de tout" (112-13) ["Once assured that there was no way of getting out of the town by lawful methods, he decided, as he told Rieux, to have recourse to others. He began by sounding café waiters. A waiter usually knows much of what's going on behind the scenes" (139)].

Rambert's plan requires a certain amount of reconnaissance. In his case, that search involves a community of people; starting with the men at the café (who, we have learned, maintained a communal space throughout the plague), he seeks out people who have information that will inform his way past the police and past their barriers.

As the silent *compatriote* learns when he encounters Jean-Baptiste at a bar in *La Chute*, this kind of collision may lead to an important transmission of knowledge that is especially urban. The anonymity of collisions is essential to sharing knowledge about how to illegally escape Oran; Rambert must find someone who will help him without developing a relationship that could draw attention to them. Presumably, the waiters know what they know because of further collisions with patrons as they come and go in the cafés and restaurants. The diversity and unpredictability of these meetings allows for, piece by piece, an assemblage of information. We might consider Rambert's intentional interventions with the waiters and decide that they are not collisions: these relationships, while presumably not long-lived or especially intimate, are too consequential to share a category with those fleeting and one-sided meetings we have discussed so far. However, Rambert depends upon the waiters' collisions with patrons. The daily socializing between bartender and guest maintains a flow of information that allows Rambert to learn details he might otherwise have no access to.

Transmitting that knowledge among trusted strangers becomes a form of intimacy. Without concern for human-made boundaries, the most private, intimate space that the plague occupies is inside the bodies of "*nos concitoyens*." As if adopting the priest's metaphor tying the plague to Lucifer, many citizens come to equate becoming infected with being punished for a sin, a confirmation of evil doing, and so the sick become criminals and the sickness becomes a

crime. Discussing a recent case of transmission, Cottard and Tarrou juggle the politics of contamination:

> « C'est une erreur. Tout le monde fait des erreurs. Et je ne peux pas supporter l'idée d'être enlevé pour ça, d'être séparé de ma maison, de mes habitudes, de tous ceux que je connais. […]
>
> — Sûrement pas. Mais essayez au moins, dit Tarrou en souriant, de ne pas propager volontairement le microbe. » (128, 129)
>
> ["It was all a mistake. Everybody makes mistakes. And I can't bear the idea of being pulled in for that, of being torn from my home and habits and everyone I know." […]
>
> "Certainly not. But"—Tarrou smiled—"do try at least not to propagate the microbe deliberately." (159)]

Cottard insists that the biological reality of proximity and contamination absolves the sick of guilt and responsibility for accidentally sharing the plague. He imagines himself in the situation and admonishes the city officials for taking everything from the infected—their private spaces, their property, their quotidian practices. Tarrou dismisses the concern with a smile; for him, propagation is a lapse in judgment, a consequence of not "trying" to prevent it. The sick are culpable because, he suggests, they can either take measures to protect others or they can "voluntarily" share the disease. If a collision marks, as I have argued, the unreciprocated contact between two individuals who share proximity, the plague transmits because the urban dweller failed to maintain distance. This is, of course, an almost impossible challenge for those who live in cities. As Lefebvre reminds us above, the city is a place *made* by the inevitable contact in crowded, unpredictable places. To ask someone to avoid proximity in the city is to ask someone to avoid the city altogether, despite having closed down its borders and shut down its train stations.

The most private, intimate space that the plague impacts is inside the body of these fellow citizens, "[m]ême ceux qui ne l'ont pas la portent dans leur coeur" (93) ["even they who haven't

got it carry it in their hearts" (115, translation modified)], the doctor says, bringing the body and contact between bodies to the forefront of Camus' novel. By the time the whole city becomes a hospital, Tarrou, in a pages-long monologue, realizes that the incessant spatial segregation of the city is useless in the effort to stop the plague so long as the disease itself lives within their bodies:

> Je sais de science certaine […] que chacun la porte en soi, la peste, parce que personne, non, personne au monde n'est indemne. Et qu'il faut se surveiller sans arrêt pour ne pas être amené, dans une minute de distraction, à respirer dans la figure d'un autre et à lui coller l'infection. Ce qui est naturel, c'est le microbe. Le reste, la santé, l'intégrité, la pureté, si vous voulez, c'est un effet de la volonté et d'une volonté qui ne doit jamais s'arrêter. L'honnête homme, celui qui n'infecte presque personne, c'est celui qui a le moins de distractions possible. (202-3)
>
> [I know positively […] that each of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth is free from it. And I know, too, that we must keep endless watch on ourselves less in a careless moment we breathe in somebody's face and fasten the infection on him. What's natural is the microbe. All the rest—health, integrity, purity (if you like)—is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter. The good man, the man who infects hardly anyone, is the man who has the fewest lapses of attention. (253)]

Rieux's allusion to the *honnête homme*, a trope of 17th century theater and courtly politics, seems to push the character, the one who infects "hardly anyone," into the realm of the imaginary. Instead, everyone else is made to scrutinize themselves, their behavior, and their interactions with others. Above all, the urban dweller must contend with their vulnerability and the vulnerability of those around them. A lapse in judgement, any number of "distractions," can be deadly. In the crisis state of the plague, the citizens must necessarily be aware of the possibility that they could influence anyone else with just a breath. Health, integrity, and purity, Rieux suggests, are unnatural—that is to say, an absolute disconnect from those around you is not only impossible but contrary to the sociability of urban life.

I have considered throughout this chapter what happens when two individuals recognize each other simultaneously as individuals and as sharing a communal moment—the physical contact of a bump or the brush of a hand; the solidarity of giving an elderly passenger your seat; the identification of some shared trait, a book, a piece of clothing. Like Duras in the previous chapter, Camus extend these questions to their extremes in *La Chute* and *La Peste*, asking what happens when bodies lose control of themselves and are *forced* to make intimate contact. The plague forms a theoretical, biological connection between each individual in the city via the unpredictability of collisions: at any moment, the microbe might travel from one body to another, the infection itself a kind of physical intimacy that puts one body at the (involuntary) mercy of another. The official solution to this problem is extreme asociability, such that those in power take measures to prevent proximity and therefore limit the vulnerability of the body to the microbe. This is also the procedure Jean-Baptiste Clamance imposes on himself in *La Chute*, reducing exposure by avoiding proximity and therefore preserving his sense of self—or at least evading the need to analyze his sense of self. And of course, Jean-Baptiste fails, because there cannot be urban space without proximity. Our protagonists in *La Peste* also fail, though more tragically than spectacularly. Camus underlines in these novels the essential role that human contact plays in contemporary life: encounters and the desire for shared space win out in the struggle against existential and biological threats.

Though the plague disrupted communities and relationships, it is, for Rambert, a place-making event: "J'ai toujours pensé que j'étais étranger à cette ville et que je n'avais rien à faire avec vous. Mais maintenant que j'ai vu ce que j'ai vu, je sais que je suis d'ici, que je le veuille ou non. Cette histoire nous concerne tous" (167) ["Until now I always felt a stranger in this town, and that I'd no concern with you people. But now that I've seen what I have seen, I know that I

belong here whether I want it or not. This business is everybody's business" (209-10)]. Shared history places Rambert within the communally constructed fabric of Oran. That is, by communing with the danger of the plague and by partaking in its mythmaking, Rambert constitutes himself in relation to the place and to the others who inhabit it. The solidarity of living through the plague (but not necessarily living *after*, as we will see) comes before a sense of belonging, so that the shared experience of fear and vulnerability gives Rambert reason to conceive of himself as part of the fabric of the city by way of his (co)dependency with those around him.

When Oran's borders reopen, familiar signs of urban life return: "On dansait sur toutes les places. Du jour au lendemain, la circulation avait considérablement augmenté et les automobiles, devenues plus nombreuses, circulaient difficilement dans les rues envahies" (237) ["In streets and squares people were dancing. Within twenty-four hours the motor traffic had doubled and the ever more numerous cars were held up at every turn by merry-making crowds" (296)]. The experience of proximity and shared joy pushes individuals back into contact with each other, bringing the possibility of collision into focus again. But the true marker of a return to normalcy is the car: as traffic swarms back into daily life in Oran, crowding the streets, people become less important to the narration. It is not without irony that the citizens of Oran flee back into their anonymous and isolated vehicles after the plague. The hallmark of the urban car is its remove from the crowd, its suppression of the social collision.[9] The technologies of the city—its moving traffic, its consumer consumption—are, after all, the things that disappeared. The people occupied the city throughout the plague; it was the space that changed around them.

[9] The role of the isolated, anonymous car ride on urban planning and urban social life is widely studied. See especially Evenson, pp. 110-123, on the influence of the car on Paris' urban fabric.

The confusion between the individual and the depersonalized markers of daily urban life—between the dancers and the automobiles who all return to the streets after the eradication of the plague—threatens the interpersonal connections and communities that the disorientation of the plague permitted. With the police relieved of their plague-related duties, Cottard begins to develop anxiety about his inevitable arrest for having attempted suicide just before the plague began (though an illegal act, Cottard's suicide was deemed of low urgency once the plague's death rate began rising and so the police had thus far left him alone). When he tries to kill himself again by throwing himself out the window, he looks up to find a police officer and a crowd of spectators:

> Puis un groupe confus s'agita et se dirigea vers le docteur et son vieil ami.
> « Circulez ! » dit l'agent.
> Rieux détourna les yeux quand le groupe passa devant lui. (245)
>
> [Then a small, surging group began to move toward the doctor and his old friend.
> "Keep moving!" the policeman bawled.
> Rieux looked away when the group, Cottard, and his captors, passed him. (305, translation modified)]

In the era after the plague, the police retain their authority to decide who moves where and how, and so therefore decide how collisions occur and how they evolve; the group's desire to stay and watch or help officially amounts to loitering. Notably, the officer's order to keep moving (*"Circulez !"*) mirrors the movement of the traffic (*"la circulation"*) that had defined the city's return to normal just pages before. Movement, especially intentional movement toward a goal, is paramount to the urban experience. Movement that may result in contact developing beyond a collision and into an encounter are discouraged, even forbidden. The officer's command prevents a connection from forming between Cottard, Rieux, and the gathered group, replacing it with shame. Rieux diverts his eyes, giving in to the affective barrier created between them by the

officer's order. Whatever sympathy or solidarity (or perhaps, sense of spectacular curiosity) that had drawn the crowd to the fallen man is neutered by the officer's practice of authority.

This return to normalcy—to traffic congestion, police authority, anti-communal shame—is marked throughout the final pages of the novel by a continued, pervasive fear that the plague would eventually return:

> Ecoutant, en effet, les cris d'allégresse qui montaient de la ville, Rieux se souvenait que cette allégresse était toujours menacée. Car il savait ce que cette foule en joie ignorait, et qu'on peut lire dans les livres, que le bacille de la peste ne meurt ni ne disparaît jamais, qu'il peut rester pendant des dizaines d'années endormi dans les meubles et le linge, qu'il attend patiemment dans les chambres, les caves, les malles, les mouchoirs et les paperasses, et que, peut-être, le jour viendrait où, pour le malheur et l'enseignement des hommes, la peste réveillerait ses rats et les enverrait mourir dans une cité heureuse. (247)
>
> [And, indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperiled. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city. (308)]

Joy is an emotion that ignores or is ignorant of the reality of the plague, and so the city that experiences joy does so only in the hidden presence of the infection. There is, Rieux fears, a constant, unavoidable threat of a recurrence, a future in which Oran must experience the epidemic again. Of course, that possibility is the same possibility that existed at the beginning of the novel: at any moment, the banal, complacent joy of normalcy can be upended by crisis.

The end of the plague reestablishes the boundary between city and nature (the rats are gone, and the city is instead populated by heavy traffic), as well as the distinction between public and private. Inside these private spaces, though, the microbe waits to dissolve these boundaries again, welcoming back the rats and threatening Oran's practice of joy. The end of the plague also

brings its citizens back into the social norms that had been established before. In the crisis, though, Camus' characters practiced a kind of sociality that constantly and generally unconsciously negotiated between the asociability that would protect them from the virus and the sociability that would support their needs for solidarity. The plague, as I will show, gave these city dwellers the opportunity to choose to turn toward each other, exploring the ways that they could create space together and survive the isolation of the pandemic.

Turning Toward: The Social Choice of Urban Vulnerability

The question of sociability and solidarity pervades Camus' work. In *La Chute*, Jean-Baptiste muses, "N'avez-vous jamais eu subitement besoin de sympathie, de secours, d'amitié ? Oui, bien sûr. Moi, j'ai appris à me contenter de la sympathie" (38) ["Have you never suddenly needed understanding, help, friendship? Yes, of course. I have learned to be satisfied with understanding" (30-1)]. The collisions that activate Camus's protagonists, in both *La Chute* and *La Peste,* suggest a way out of asociality. The realization of interrelationality in the city engenders throughout these novels a choice that the characters must make between turning toward others or turning away. As we have seen, Jean-Baptiste chooses to turn away, first finding himself disturbed by the idea that he shares spaces with others (rather than being the center of a space that others occupy). Overwhelmed by this disturbance, he escapes to avoid fighting with the Resistance. Of course, the novel begins with and exists by virtue of his turning toward his nameless, voiceless *compatriote,* suggesting perhaps a change of heart.

It is in *La Peste* that Camus more fully explores the potential of turning toward the other. As we have seen, the plague makes it so that one turns away—shuts out, rejects association with, and refuses contact with the city's "fellow citizens"—with some epidemiological imperative.

Others are a source of danger that may pass on the virus. But Camus explores ways throughout his imagined pandemic that individuals choose to turn toward strangers and accept the vulnerability of colliding with others to practice an altruistic sociability.

Consider, for example, Oran's sanitary groups, teams of volunteers who come together to perform the sanitizing duties necessary to keep the plague at bay. Rieux, as the as-yet-unnamed narrator, insists to his reader that the men who joined these groups should be regarded with simple objectivity rather than "plus d'importance qu'elle n'en eurent" (106) ["more importance than their due" (131)] because joining such a taskforce in the middle of a plague, he says, "n'était que conséquente" (107) ["was merely logical" (133)]:

> Ceux qui se dévouèrent aux formations sanitaires n'eurent pas si grand mérite à le faire, en effet, car ils savaient que c'était la seule chose à faire et c'est de ne pas s'y décider qui alors eût été incroyable. [… Il] faillait faire ce qu'il fallait pour lutter contre [la peste]. Parce que la peste devenait ainsi le devoir de quelques-uns, elle apparut réellement pour ce qu'elle était, c'est-à-dire l'affaire de tous. (106-7)
>
> [Those who enrolled in the 'sanitary squads,' as they were called, had indeed no such great merit in doing as they did, since they knew it was the only thing to do, and the unthinkable thing would have been not to have brought themselves to do it. [… It] was up to them to do whatever could be done to fight [the plague]. Since plague became in this way some men's duty, it revealed itself as what it really was; that is, the concern of all. (132)]

The plague, in this way, brings the "us" back to the novel's "*nos concitoyens*." There is a moral choice to be made: the social imperative of the sanitary squads, which suggests a moral obligation toward one's fellow citizens, illustrates a bond between people that requires them to turn toward others instead of turning away, the latter a gesture that prefers one's own safety above the general good. In the plague, volunteers in the sanitary squads are asked to turn toward others, performing the duties necessary to protect the health of the city as a whole.

Turning toward others is not necessarily an act of solidarity, hospitality, or compassion. Rambert, who was separated from his girlfriend when the city shut down, turns toward others in an attempt to escape from the city, an illegal act that requires him to seek assistance from covert sources. As noted above, he starts by "sounding" out cafe waiters: "A waiter usually knows what's going on behind the scenes" (139), the narrator reminds the reader. The first waiter Rambert engages reminds him of the "very heavy penalties" associated with breaking the city's quarantine. However, by chance, Cottard overhears Rambert's dilemma, and offers the man advice:

> Lui connaissait une filière et à Rambert […] il expliqua que, depuis longtemps, il fréquentait tous les cafés d'Oran, qu'il y avait des amis et qu'il était renseigné sur l'existence d'une organisation qui s'occupait de ce genre d'opérations. (113)
>
> [He, however, knew a way to go about it, and he explained to Rambert […] that for some time past he had been going the rounds of the cafés, had made a number of acquaintances, and had learned of the existence of an 'organization' handling this sort of business. (140)]

As in *La Chute*, Camus explores the consequences of overhearing others, an inevitable result of living in close proximity. Jean-Baptiste overheard only laughter, disembodied and inexplicable, a collision that destabilized him. He also overheard the nameless man at the Mexico City bar, which is why they are talking in the first place, having recognized each other as compatriots because they share a language. Here, in *La Peste*, Cottard is able to offer Rambert much needed information, overhearing his dilemma and recognizing the risk; by speaking his plan to escape Oran out loud, Rambert also risks being overheard by an unsympathetic party and turned over to police. Cottard himself had come into this information by way of random encounters as part of the sanitary squads, finding himself in cafés where he might develop relationships with these

organizations. This kind of community-building is haphazard, suggesting a networking built out of tenuous collisions.

However, the eavesdropping enabled by closeness does not guarantee solidarity or even that one will turn toward the source of the overheard sound. Though Rambert engages with Cottard in order to get information about this organization, he makes no effort to elaborate on their relationship:

> « En êtes-vous bien sûr ? demanda Rambert
> — Oui, puisqu'on me l'a proposé.
> — Et vous n'en avez pas profité ?
> — Ne soyez mas méfiant, dit Cottard d'un air bon-homme, je n'en ai pas profité parce que je n'ai pas, moi, envie de partir. J'ai mes raisons. »
> Il ajouté après un silence :
> « Vous ne me demandez pas quelles sont mes raisons ?
> — Je suppose, dit Rambert, que cela ne me regarde pas. » (113)
>
> ["Are you quite sure of this?" Rambert asks.
> "Quite. I had a proposal of the sort made to me the other day."
> "But you didn't accept it."
> "Oh, come, there's no need to be suspicious." Cottard's tone was genial. "I didn't accept it because, personally, I've no wish to leave. I have my reasons." After a short silence he added: "You don't ask me what my reasons are, I notice."
> "I take it," Rambert replied, "that they're none of my business." (140)]

Rambert engages Cottard because the latter may be able to provide important information, but he remains closed off to the man, assuming a position of distance that does not translate to a personal connection. Even when Cottard explains his desire to remain in Oran (he feels "much more at ease here" since the plague started), Rambert turns away, making no comment on Cottard's evocation and instead asking him how to approach this secret organization (114). I argue that this is a common and important feature of the collision. Where the encounter, in

Valentine or Wilson's definitions, either emphasizes difference or fosters community, the collision functions inwardly, reminding the urban dweller of their shared space.

For example, Cottard's stance toward the world was changed not only by the plague but also by what he assumed was his imminent arrest following his suicide attempt just before the epidemic had taken hold. Tarrou in particular had observed this change in Cottard, noting the man's behavior in his diary. Watching lovers embrace in public one day, Cottard "s'attendrissait*'*" (157) ["watched them gloatingly" (198)] and called out to them in encouragement; even his voice had changed. Seemingly freed from the anxiety of waiting for the police to come for him, Cottard was joyful, congenial, and open to the sociality of urban space.

Tarrou, taking the role as narrator through his diary, considers this new state of sociality in the plague, in which one cannot yield to the "besoin de chaleur" (158) ["instinctive craving for human contacts" (198-9)] because of the possibility of infection:

> On sait trop bien qu'on ne peut pas avoir confiance en son voisin, qu'il est capable de vous donner la peste à votre insu et de profiter de votre abandon pour vous infecter. (158)
>
> For its common knowledge that you can't trust your neighbor; he may pass the disease to you without your knowing it, and take advantage of a moment of inadvertence on your part to infect you. (199)

Tarrou's framing of this mistrust turns the neighbor into an intentional aggressor, a carrier who looks for vulnerabilities in a victim's defenses, opportunities to propagate the plague. As noted above, there is no question of the plague's metaphorical interpretations, nor of Camus's intentions. Thus far, we have considered the plague in its literal sense—as a microbe that infects, spreads, and kills—but here, as Tarrou considers the relationship between neighbors in this crisis state, it is worth turning toward the metaphorical.

Ultimately, Camus considers how his characters are turned toward or away from others in this state of distrust and fear. When the plague subsides and the restrictions of quarantine are lifted, the celebrations, as described above, bring people out into public spaces and into proximity with each other. Rieux is not removed from this:

> Peu à peu, il se fondait dans ce grand corps hurlant dont il comprenait de mieux en mieux le cri qui, pour une part au moins, était son cri. Oui, tous avaient souffert ensemble, autant dans leur chair que dans leur âme […]. Et c'était vers elle, c'était vers le bonheur, qu'ils voulaient revenir, se détournant du reste avec dégoût. (240)
>
> [Gradually, he found himself drawn into the seething, clamorous mass and understanding more and more the cry that went up from it, a cry that, for some part at least, was his. Yes, they had suffered together, in body no less than in soul […]. And it was to this, their lost home, toward happiness, they longed to return, turning their backs disgustedly on all else. (299)]

Not only is the physical distance between bodies closed (Rieux finds himself "jostled on all sides, accosted now and then" [299]), but they are brought together in understanding, in mutual recognition. Their familiarity with one another has not necessarily increased; the "seething, clamorous mass" is no more individualized than the *we* of the novels *concitoyens.* These are still strangers, at least to Rieux, but they are strangers who have shared in an experience—and shared in social and physical distance. Camus is not absoluting in his presentation of this communal experience. To turn away "disgustedly" from the experience they shared, the *concitoyens* have to make themselves vulnerable to each other and therefore to the plague that may still pass from one body to the next. Nonetheless, we find in Camus a vision of urban space in which proximity exposes a vulnerability that, on the one hand, exposes the urban dweller to danger, but on the other, enables the collisions that may engender social recognition.

Conclusion: Reaching out for Support

These are extraordinary encounters. In the daily experience of urban space, one should not regularly expect to witness a stranger's suicide nor to contract a plague simply by virtue of proximity. These examples, nonetheless, illustrate two crucial consequences of sharing densely populated space: first, that being in the crowd always presents the possibility of risk, requiring of each individual implicit vulnerability toward others; and second, that each collision with others represents an often-unconscious choice between antisociality and community. Each collision provides the individual an opportunity either to turn toward others, recognizing the shared sociopolitical responsibility of dwelling together or else to turn away, turn inward, and reject the interrelationality of the cityspace. The stakes of these collisions vary widely, of course. Where proximity exposes one to the plague in Camus' Oran, one's stance toward a stranger in a crowded neighborhood bar rarely reveals one's vulnerability. But that stranger may be revealed to be one's *compatriote,* as Jean-Baptiste finds in the anonymous man at the bar at the start of *La Chute.*

I do not mean to overstate the idea of crisis. In the urban context, and especially in contemporary France, crisis easily lends itself to discussions about terrorist attacks like the November 2015 attacks in Paris and the subsequent attacks in Nice and elsewhere. The Commune of 1871 and the May '68 riots make for particularly salient bookends to a century of geopolitical unrest. Kristin Ross, writing about Paris' return to something like normalcy after the May '68 riots, suggests that the primary change in the social space was in the contingency of the *rencontre*:

> meetings that were neither magical nor mythical but simply the experience of incessantly running into people that social, cultural, or professional divisions had previously kept one from meeting up with, little events that

> produced the sense that those mediations or social compartments had simply withered away. (Ross 103)

The six weeks of crisis in Paris reshaped the ways in which individuals came into contact with each other, removing divisions and allowing people to "incessantly" encounter each other. Ross suggests that collisions are cumulative; as the urban dweller spends time in public spaces, they gather these banal meetings and find, as they add up to an unpredictable sum, social life was mutable. In this case, the events leading up to May '68 challenged the way that individuals understood their relationship to the state and therefore the space created by its authority. The accumulation of understanding engendered by collisions, Ross says, led to significant change. In turn, Peter Sloterdijk suggests that these multiple experiences of space can exist together, even overlapping, because of the ontological-epistemological spheres in which we live: spheres are "neither a purely constructivist projection of rounded-off spaces in which people imagine they are leading a shared existence, nor a purely ontological meditation on the circle in which mortals are captured through an inaccessible transcendent order" (Sloterdijk 79). Our spheres, depending on how they are constructed, may prevent intimacy because they convince us that we are not proximate. The inability to recognize other spheres, other ways of dwelling and occupying space, is a cultural construct, as Ross describes, and an epistemological perspective, following Sloterdijk. That is, "the word 'self-organization' […] is meant to draw attention to the fact that the circle holding humanity is neither purely made nor purely found, instead rounding itself spontaneously on the threshold between construction and self-realization" (79). The social communities we discover—in context, but especially in the mundane sameness of the city—exist not solely in the individual's relationship to the world, but also in the shapes of the space itself. They are "construction and self-realization"—discovered, joined, and imagined.

I have thus far in these pages centered collisions that engender negative consequences, both life-threatening and existential. We have seen Lol grasp at her sense of identity, her "who I am I *here* with *you*," when she encounters people who draw her past trauma into the present. Edouard Louis was assaulted after turning toward a man in the streets of Paris, and Natalie Sarraute's protagonists choose anti-sociality in order to avoid a similar fate. Camus' protagonists may, in Jean-Baptiste's case, have their stance toward the world entirely destabilized, or else they may be infected and die simply because they shared space. The city is often conceived of as a dangerous place, centering discourse on crime, racial and sexual violence, environmental health and climate change, and income inequality. To collide with others in public urban spaces is to put one's stability in space at odds with public noise.

These kinds of examples create drama and tension, escalate the stakes of one's public presence, and therefore drive (especially literary) narratives. Literary explorations of urban space depend on the destabilization of negative collisions, precisely because without destabilization, the stimuli of the city are suppressed into a monotonous stasis. However, in the following chapters, I want to consider collisions that have, to some degree, arguably more positive social consequences. I opened this dissertation in the Introduction with Agnès Varda's 1962 film *Cléo de 5 à 7* because of the ambiguity of Cléo's experience of proximity. When she eavesdrops on a neighboring table at a café, rather than experience vulnerability as a dangerous exposure to others, she discovers intimacy. She finds in the words of that arguing couple a woman with whom she commiserates—"I'm tired. I just want to sleep." Eavesdropping does not solve her problem, exactly; Cléo must still dwell several hours in her anxiety before she learns from her doctor whether she has cancer. But the intimacy she shares in that moment, having collided

however briefly and however transiently with another woman, moves her to touch up her makeup, fix her hair, put on her belt, and leave into the streets of Paris.

Sara Ahmed suggests that the natural reaction to feeling destabilized in the world is to reach out for support. One might read in this a physical claim about the objects we use to balance ourselves in space, but Ahmed turns to a social interpretation: when one is destabilized, turning toward others, especially in the vulnerability of that discomfort, provides a source by which to learn new ways of stabilization, of finding comfort in new practices and habits within the world (48). In the next chapter, I follow this cue and consider how collisions may teach us new ways to turn toward the other. In particular, I ask if collisions can teach us how to exist in and dwell in the built environment, in turn teaching us how to read in the built space the tactics by which we claim the right to the city.

Coda

In researching and writing this chapter, I did not expect—could not have expected—the COVID-19 pandemic to hit. I read Camus' *La Peste* in this chapter as an archive of the vulnerability of sharing space with others in urban environments. As I admitted above, I read the plague in a rather more literal way than critics tend to. Rather than consider the allegorical nature of the disease that Camus intended in the novel, representing even something as significant as "generalized evil," as Ponnou-Delaffon and Tremblay noted (2), I wanted to read *La Peste* with an eye toward the spatio-political consequences of an infectious disease. Nonetheless, I did not initially write these pages in the midst of a real, lived pandemic.

Then, the coronavirus spread. Communities around the world were forced to reconsider the way they experienced proximity. People were asked to stay at least six feet apart, avoid

gatherings of any considerable size, limit almost all movement in public spaces. Face masks became a public health necessity (and then, at least in the United States, a political debate), obscuring many of the facial gestures by which we relate to strangers. As in *La Peste,* strangers became harbingers of a possible threat, each a potential carrier and therefore a potential risk; unlike the plague, asymptomatic carriers of coronavirus became perhaps the most significant threat, people who pass on the virus without showing any signs of it being in their bodies. For some unspecified amount of time, people would need to radically rethink their relationship to public spaces in the interest of public health. This was especially true of densely populated urban spaces, where distancing was a considerably more difficult challenge.

Reading Camus, probably unsurprisingly, came to feel like a different task altogether once the pandemic began. Asking questions about the social consequences of sharing space with each other and with a plague no longer felt theoretical, despite the allegorical nature of *La Peste,* especially as thinkers in vastly different realms tried to wrestle with similar problems. In April 2020, Carlos Franco-Paredes, a physician and professor at the University of Colorado School of Medicine and the Instituto Nacional de Salud at the Hospital Infantil de Mexico, wrote a letter to the editors of *Clinical Infectious Diseases* entitled "Albert Camus' *The Plague* Revisited for COVID-19." In his letter, Franco-Paredes recalls the juxtaposed images of ravaged bodies, on the one hand, and deeply sympathetic and dedicated nurses, doctors, and other healthcare workers, on the other. The "relentless determination and compassion" of healthcare workers, he wrote, "is only countered by the loneliness of patients without their loved ones at their sides" (898). In recalling Camus' novel, Franco-Paredes laments that "Camus reminds us that we can never be mentally or fully prepared for pandemics" which inevitably disrupt the "safety bumpers of our lives" (899). Despite the pessimism of such declarations, his letter concludes

optimistically, celebrating the "enormous respect and admiration of the human spirit" that he sees resulting from mass plagues: "There are many modern versions of Dr Rieux who have cared with the utmost professionalism and *decency* for those severely afflicted by this modern plague" (899, original emphasis). Franco-Paredes celebrates the healthcare workers working in direct contact with victims of the coronavirus, as well as the family and friends who cared for them.

In a way, it is no surprise that a physician turned to Camus' novel for insight into what the plague meant for society. *La Peste* provides a sort of roadmap for an unknowable moment, a social upheaval whose impact cannot be predicted. Articles addressing the relationship between the 1947 novel and the current pandemic popped up across the traditional media landscape in publications like *The New York Times* (from philosopher Alain de Botton), *Vox, The Guardian,* and *The New Yorker.* Across social media, posts touting the prescience of the novel appeared throughout the summer of 2020 (though, at least in my experience, primarily from individuals in academic and literary spheres).

There is also reason to look at the international reaction to the pandemic as a confirmation of the social good in communities: since the pandemic began, we have seen across social and traditional media examples of individuals and communities coming together to support each other. For example, the 8 July 2020 episode of the NPR podcast *Rough Translation,* entitled "Hello, Neighbor," chronicles the network of support that saw individuals across County Roscommon, Ireland, connecting with neighbors who were especially vulnerable to the coronavirus. These "cocooning" elderly neighbors, asked to not leave their homes for any reason, were supported by healthier people—often only vague acquaintances if not strangers—who did their shopping, ran their errands, and stopped by to check on their wellbeing. The episode, consisting mainly of interviews with the helpers and the cocooning elderly, highlights the

strengthening social bonds established during the pandemic, dissolving traditional social barriers between neighbors, even as the recipients of the good will worried about their ability to ever pay back the kindnesses.

However, there are, to be sure, more critically arresting consequences of the sudden realignment toward public spaces and the people we share them with. On 16 March 2020, to stem the spreading of the coronavirus in France, the French government issued a series of decrees relating to public behavior. Among these, following a stay-at-home order, was the *Attestation de déplacement dérogatoire*, a travel certificate that any person outside their home was mandated to carry with them. The certificate asked individuals to provide their identifying information and then declare that their presence in public was "lié au motif suivant […] autorisé par l'article 1er du décret du 16 mars 2020 portant réglementation des déplacements dans le cadre de la lutte contre la propagation du virus Covid-19" ["tied to the following reason authorized by the first article of the 16 March 2020 decree, concerning the regulation of movement with respect to the fight against the propagation of the COVID-19 virus"].[10] The certificate provided five "authorized" reasons for travel: 1) going to or from work; 2) shopping for "des achats de première nécesssité dans des établissements autorisés," ["necessities in authorized establishments"] which itself referred to a separate official list; 3) health reasons; 4) urgent family needs, especially assisting "personnes vulnérables" or caring for children; and 5) individual physical activity or fulfilling the needs of household pets (this last reason explicitly forbids collective sports and includes the caveats "brief" and "in the proximity of one's home")[11].

[10] Translations of the *Attestation de déplacement dérogatoire* given in brackets are my own.
[11] Other attestations mandated around the same time regulated movement in and out of France and French territories, as well as declarations of symptom tracking. As of July 2020, many of these certificates are still required of individuals moving in and out of the country, but the *Attestation de déplacement dérogatoire* is no longer mandated.

The French government's early approach to stemming the spread of the virus seems to have worked, at least to some degree: the World Health Organization reports that France reached its peak of reported cases in the first wave of the virus in the week of 30 March 2020 and its peak of deaths in the week of 6 April. In France, people are back on the streets, sharing public spaces—with masks and proper preventative measures in place. Though another uptick in cases appeared throughout August, no rise in deaths followed. France is far from back to normal, as it were. As of 27 August 2020, masks are mandatory everywhere in Paris, including its suburbs, due to a significant number of new cases (see Beardsley 2020).[12]

The lasting spatio-political consequences of the *Attestation de déplacement dérogatoire* will take some time to understand. Summarizing the long-term impact of the coronavirus pandemic while still living in the middle of it would be a daunting, if not impossible, task.[13] Given the near-obsessive drive of neoliberalism to commodify and commercialize public urban spaces, emphasizing the individual over the community, we may find that public spaces look rather familiar when we all finally leave our houses. I am hopeful, however, that the pandemic drew attention to the critical role that public spaces—accessible, equitable, adaptable public spaces—play in urban life.

[12] Like elsewhere, especially in the global north, France's mitigation and response protocol changed significantly in the years following the first *attestation*, especially with the Delta and Omicron variants of the coronavirus. The public's partisan response to these mitigation measures is deserving of its own separate study.
[13] Of course, Slavoj Žižek managed to publish an entire book about the virus (*Pandemic!: COVID-19 Shakes the World, Polity Press*, 2020) within weeks of the World Health Organization officially declaring it a pandemic.

Chapter 3 *Lisibilité*: Learning from Collisions and Reading the City

The experiences that "throw the world up" in Sara Ahmed's conception of queer phenomenology have lasting afterlives. One feels disoriented because one's confidence is shaken or because, as I cited in the previous chapter, one questions "one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make life feel livable" (Ahmed 157). As we have seen throughout the literature considered so far, being thrown from the ground and disoriented in one's worldview can, in the extreme, persist in an individual's experience, evolving into a crisis of identity and being-in-the-world. Especially in the city, where one's vulnerability to constant and unpredictable stimuli becomes central to the everyday experience, the ground's support cannot be taken for granted.

Ahmed suggests, however, that recovery from this disorientation depends in large part on what else occupies the space: there may be crisis, or "the feeling itself might be reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady an action. Or the hand might reach out and find nothing and might grasp instead the indeterminacy of air. The body in losing its support might then be lost, undone, thrown" (157). When one is disoriented, one reaches out for something to stabilize oneself. The hope, perhaps, is for something solid, something concrete that can bring stability back by reorienting the body to the world. There are two processes in this gesture: the search for some information or clue about the world that will suggest how to live balanced again; and the search for some embodied acknowledgment that space is shared at all, that other bodies manage to exist in that space, that being-in-the-world is possible. For Ahmed, what the hand

grasps at may manifest in any number of objects. A writer may grasp at the writer's desk for affirmation that the world, or at least, this office, this appropriated kitchen table, this seat at a coffee shop is built for the embodiment of writing.[1] So too, an individual may reach out and grasp the body of another individual who is disoriented in the same way. Ahmed centers queer and Black bodies in her examples; queer and Black people may be reoriented when they are stabilized by other queer and Black people who have developed strategies or being in the world.

If the hand reaches out and finds another hand, someone who is disoriented in the world may find someone else who can provide knowledge about being-in-the-world. Writing about the "allegory of Oran" in Camus' *La Peste*, David Carroll suggests a similar outcome, taken in its political manifestation: one might hope for a city in which different peoples share space without violent or oppressive relationships, but one may go further and hope "that they will learn and borrow from each other and be transformed each by the other, even if it is in spite of themselves and their specific interests, beliefs, prejudices, and politics" (89). The multiplicity of ways of being-in-the-world that defines life in the city provides a wealth of strategies for negotiating the stimuli of the cityspace. Where Ahmed suggests that someone reorients by learning from others who are alike, Carroll expresses a hope that city dwellers may learn from difference, too.

I tended until now toward the theoretical, considering the universality of collisions as an urban experience. Everyone, I have argued, collides with others in the city, and the negotiation that takes place in those collisions—always internal before external, always personal before interpersonal—is common to anyone in public urban space. Two knots in the previous chapter reveal the limitations of thinking theoretically about collisions. The first is a problem in reading Camus' *La Peste*: the near-total absence of native Algerians in Oran highlights by absence the

[1] Chapter One of *Queer Phenomenology* details these various kinds of tables and one's orientation to them. See especially pages 28-37 for the writer's table, which Ahmed considers primarily through Husserl.

role that race and national identity play in being seen, let alone learned from, in the city. The second is a productive unfolding in Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*: queer people, Ahmed insists, are always already disoriented by living in a space designed without or against them, and so queer people create, share, and learn new ways to orient themselves to unoriented lives. In both cases, the need to understand the embodiment of collisions is made apparent. As Ahmed reminds us via Merleau-Ponty, queerness is itself a derivation, an "off center" or "slantwise" perspective on the world that normativity tries to "straighten" (65); queerness arises, at least etymologically, from an embodied experience of the world as divergent. While collisions may be universal to individuals in the city, the aftermath of collisions are processed differently by different people.

In this chapter, I move away from the theoretical collision and turn toward the lived experience of the collision. I described earlier the atomized, uncontrollable randomness of particles moving through space as a metaphorical illustration of the collisions that define the everyday experience of the city. Patrick Modiano, in *Rue des Boutiques obscures* (1978) [*Missing Person* (1980)], offers another illustration, a billiard table : "Itinéraires qui se croisent, parmi ceux qui suivent des milliers et des milliers de gens à travers Paris, comme mille et mille petites boules d'un gigantesque billiard électrique, qui se cognent parfois l'une à l'autre. Et de cela, il ne restait rien, pas même la trainée lumineuse que fait le passage d'une luciole" (147) ["Paths that cross, among those of thousands and thousands of people all over Paris, like countless little balls on a gigantic, electric billiard table, which occasionally bump into each other. And nothing remained of this, not even the luminous trail a firefly leaves behind it." (100)].[2] Anyone who uses the cityspace is, according to Modiano, one of countless small balls

[2] All English citations of *La Rue des Boutiques obscures* given in brackets refer to the Daniel Weissbort translation (1980), unless otherwise noted.

that knock against each other. These knocks transfer energy, and likely change the trajectory of the ball as it moves on, but nothing tangible is left behind. The change in a billiard ball's course and velocity has consequences, making collisions significant meetings between bodies.

Unlike among billiard balls, of course, the way that individuals react to collisions depends on much more than the laws of physics. Like billiard balls striking each other on a table, individuals who collide necessarily experience those encounters as embodied experiences, but social collisions bring with them the lived experiences of individuals. Collisions between billiard balls rarely experience longevity; one ball is unlikely to come back to meet another. In a social collision, the same may be true, such that the longevity of a collision rests entirely in the individual experience. Two individuals meet briefly, experience some consequence of that meeting, and separate. However, social collisions may also persist. They may become encounters in the sense defined by Wilson and Valentine in the previous chapter, encounters that become relationships. The unpredictability of these outcomes defines the precarity of collisions between individuals in the urban space.

I am particularly interested in what one takes away from a collision, both consciously and unconsciously. How, in Ahmed's metaphor of a hand reaching out, does an individual decide who will be receptive to the grasp and who will reject it? How does Lol Stein know in which neighborhoods she is anonymous and which spotlight the mythology of "Lol Stein"? How do the protagonists of *La Peste* know how to negotiate proximity so that they can achieve intimacy without increasing the risk of catching the plague?

I argue that one of the primary consequences of urban collisions is legibility: the interactions that occur in collisions, though generally unreciprocated and lacking significant duration, reveal to the individual information about how to be in the city and how to work toward

dwelling. As Ahmed tells us, when one reaches a hand out and meets another, one may find confirmation that being-in-the-world is possible; the collision brings with it that affirmation and a demonstration of how to be in the world. In this chapter, I consider how collisions persist in the person who experiences them and teach them strategies for being-in-the-world. If, as I have argued already, the collision is momentary, even instantaneous, it is tempting to argue that there can be no afterlife to a collision.

In the two readings below, I consider the implications of collisions' social question: turning away from or turning toward the interrelationality that is manifested by collisions changes the way that one understands oneself in space. In Patrick Modiano's *Rue des Boutiques obscures*, a man striving to learn from others about how his own past and presence in the city, lost to him by amnesia, shows how collisions create legible space; in his auto-detective work, the narrator depends on others to reframe the chaotic stimulation of the city in a way that helps him relearn how he belongs in Paris. In contrast, *Les Passagers du Roissy-Express*, by François Maspero and photographed by Anaïk Frantz, complicates the collision, showing the delicate sociopolitical framework necessary for a collision to relay information. *Roissy-Express* shows, despite its ambitious ethical project, that while encounters cannot be designed into or out of the city, collisions may be a problem of design. The peripheral spaces of a city especially design toward the movements and flows of neoliberal progress rather than toward the social life of individuals living there. The collision is not altogether designed out of life, but *Roissy-Express* shows how peripheral urban spaces were designed *away from* the collision. I argue that the shared knowledge that comes from collisions, then, becomes critical to making the city legible.

(Re)learning to Read the City

The act of reading the city has at its base a very literal sense: replete with visual cues, the urban space demands that each individual decide which to pick out, take in, and interpret, and the great majority of these cues are semantic—if not textual—language of the built environment itself. A not insignificant proportion of these images are suggestions about the *spatial* logic of the city. Street signs and informational plaques establish geography; traffic and pedestrian signals, "Do not enter" signs, and physical barriers regulate movement; images on every surface advertise to us and try to tell us what we desire. A locked gate at an alley crafts private space out of public; an expanse of sidewalk with no crosswalk gives primary value to vehicular traffic and reduces the pedestrian's value. These are images that give us a sense of geography and tell us where to go, as well as *if* and how we can move about. Richard Sennett, considering the "neutralization" that makes existence in the urban space possible, calls this an "abundance" of the cityspace: "My senses are flooded by images, but the difference in value between one image and another becomes as fleeting as my own movement; difference becomes a mere parade of variety" (1990, 129). This abundance must, he suggests, obey "visual logic" (129), even if that logic is beyond the immediate comprehension of the individual who takes it in. The task of evaluating the difference in these images is often carried out subconsciously, but if done over and over throughout one's life in the city, this task can override other conscious activity, exhausting one's psychic attention. At each moment, the urban dweller must take in these images and interpret them, determining how they affect one's use of the space, especially in the process of trying to travel from one point to the next.

In Modiano's *Rue des Boutiques obscures*, Guy, the narrator, acknowledges the role such images play in his daily geographic orientation: "Je cite fréquemment des bars ou des restaurants

mais s'il n'y avait pas, de temps en temps, une plaque de rue ou une enseigne lumineuse, comment pourrais-je me guider ?" ["I often mention bars or restaurants, but if it were not for a street or café sign from time to time, how would I ever find my way?" (113)] The bars and restaurants are sites of leisure, but the signs are sites of the city's legibility, the ability to get from one place to another. Wayfinding, the ability to understand the layout of a space so that one can move about it successfully, points to landmarks like bars and restaurants as destinations; signs and street names are instructional texts used to construct paths.[3] Guy understands Paris via its combination of destinations and paths, constructing a mental understanding of the city that is functional in his daily life.

Normally, this kind of wayfinding is unconscious, developed habitually in mental repetition. The narrator of Modiano's novel, however, experiences Paris more intentionally because of his specific circumstances. Guy, a private detective who suffered near-total amnesia a decade or so before the events of the novel, begins an investigation into his own identity. He pursues traces of himself throughout the city, piecing together clues about his life and his identity before the amnesia erased them. He depends almost entirely on other people's memories, constructing a mental map of "his" Paris that is in fact a pastiche of others'.

For Guy, mental mapping is often the creation of a palimpsest, laying multiple ways of knowing on top of each other. Guy's relationship to this shared legibility of his own life is particular because of his openness. Where Lol spends her novel evading the contradictory truths held by others, *Rue des Boutiques obscures* is a detective novel in the sense that Guy seeks out others who will educate him about himself, providing him with clues to his past, solving the mystery of his identity. He is open to the truth others offer to him in the moment because he has

[3] Modern use of the term "wayfinding" is generally attributed to Kevin Lynch, whose definition I will return to below.

no truth with which to counter it. *Rue des Boutiques obscures* is a *policier* of the self in a distinctly urban way. Guy owns no property in Paris, and he had never been able to settle into a space and accumulate or curate a collection of things (artifacts of memory, be they photographs, heirlooms, mementos, etc.) that would piece together a narrative about his identity. He reaches out, grasps at people who may be able to help him and make himself legible in Paris' cityspace. Guy's story, therefore, differs in the primarily trusting approach he brings to these conversations: because of his amnesia, Guy cannot help but trust the information he is given by others.[4]

Here, we can consider at length an episode in *Boutiques obscures* that illustrates Guy's dependence on other people's readings of space. In a café, he meets a stranger named Mansoure, a photographer who once photographed Denise Coudreuse, Guy's former girlfriend and a central figure in the reconstruction of his memory. The two connect over this shared relation—though Mansoure only barely remembers the woman—and the photographer invites Guy to his apartment to see more photos. There, Guy is surprised to have an intimate and visceral reaction to the view out the window:

> Alors, une sorte de déclic s'est produit en moi. La vue qui s'offrait de cette chambre me causait un sentiment d'inquiétude, une appréhension que j'avais déjà connus. Ces façades, cette rue déserte, ces silhouettes en faction dans le crépuscule me troublaient de la même manière insidieuse qu'une chanson ou un parfum jadis familiers. Et j'étais sûr que, souvent, à la même heure, je m'étais tenu là, immobile, à guetter, sans faire le moindre geste, et sans même oser allumer une lampe. (122)
>
> [Then it was as if something clicked into place. The view from this room made me feel anxious, apprehensive, a feeling I had had before. These façades, this deserted street, these figures standing sentry in the dusk

[4] Many of Modiano's novels are concerned with finding, or at least trying to understand, people through their past relationship to shape. In *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* (2007) [*In the Café of Lost Youth* (2016)], multiple first-person narrators recount their sometimes-vague memories of a woman who used to frequent the café before her death by suicide. In *Dora Bruder* (1997) [(1999)], the narrator obsesses over a story he reads in a newspaper about a young Jewish girl who went missing in 1941; he investigates public records and interviews her family members, discovering that she had been arrested and sent to Auschwitz. Morgane Cadieu writes that for Modiano, memory in cityspaces is "stored in the filigree of space as layers of immaterial waves," and that this storage is akin to a computer (2017, 135).

> disturbed me in the same insidious manner as a song or a once familiar perfume. And I was certain that I had often stood here, at this hour, motionless, watching, without making the slightest movement, and without even daring to switch on the light." (82-3)]

His relationship to the city, and especially his lost memories of the city, is in large part visually cued. He reads a space that causes him anxiety in its incongruities; that is, the space he sees outside the window does not exactly read as threatening, but rather *does not* read as comforting and so is disconcerting. The window literally frames his perspective out into the city; he is no longer looking at a chaotically stimulating Paris, but a specific vantage that he must have looked at in his past, he surmises.

Guy looks out the window—out of a frame, out of the liminal barrier between private and public space—and he comes to read the city in a way that does not necessarily relay exact information to him, but rather evokes familiar and unsettling emotions. The dusk "disturbed" him, but the reliable understanding of that phenomenological space "clicked into place." There is a Proustian quality to this partial memory: like a scent or a melody, the sight of this deserted street is capable of partially restoring his memory and reestablishing a connection between image, memory, and feeling.

Though he foregrounds the physical legibility of Paris, he cannot separate himself from the impressions of the city developed through habit and memory:

> Une impression m'a traversé, comme ces lambeaux de rêve fugitifs que vous essayez de saisir au réveil pour reconstituer le rêve entier. Je me voyais, marchant dans un Paris obscur, et poussant la porte de cet immeuble de la rue Cambacérès. Alors mes yeux étaient brusquement éblouis et pendant quelques secondes je ne voyais plus rien, tant cette lumière blanche de l'entrée contrastait avec la nuit du dehors. (124)
>
> [A mental picture flashed before me, like those fragments of some fleeting dream which one tries to hold on to in waking, so as to be able to reconstruct the whole dream. I saw myself, walking through a dark Paris, and opening the door to this building in the Rue Cambacérès. Then my

> eyes were suddenly blinded and for a few seconds I could see nothing, so great was the contrast between this white light and the night outside. (84)

Guy finds exterior spaces most remind him of his past; entering a building, he is blinded by the adjustment to artificial lighting, but also by the transition into private space. The liminality of one's entrance into one's own apartment building is the transition from the vulnerable exposure of city streets to the security of private enclosure. He "sees himself" in that transition from the street into the building because the process of crossing that threshold is the process of reacquiring one's own identity. He needs Mansoure to provide him with access to that mental picture. He is dependent on Mansoure's hospitality, because without it, he cannot enter the building and so cannot see Paris in this particular framing that piques something in his past. How Guy arrives at this framed vantage point is therefore crucial to his ability to reconnect with his past.

Guy's primary reaction to these kinds of stimuli is sentimental, but the practical reality of a changing city, haunted by echoes of the way each individual remembers it, goes beyond these emotions and influences the way he uses the city and moves around within it. These readings of the space must come from Mansoure. Earlier in the evening, they meet in a café that does not quite satisfy Mansoure: "« En d'autres temps, je vous aurais donné rendez-vous chez Graff… Là-bas… Mais ça n'existe plus… »" (138) ["'In the old days, I'd have arranged to meet you at Graff's… Over there… But it no longer exists…'" (93)] The photographer cannot, or chooses not to, rewrite the mental map with which he relates to Paris. Habit wrote Graff's into his routine and his relationship to the city, but the city's interminable micro-evolutions have disrupted that relationship and obviated that routine. He and Guy meet at a café on Place Blanche not because it is Mansoure's preferred place to meet but because Graff's is gone, just like so many other façades in the city. Whether Guy will see images that ignite some past memory is therefore

tenuously tied to how these small changes reshape the city; if the essential cues are erased, so too might his memories be lost to time.

On the way to Mansoure's apartment from Graff's, Guy is surprised to find that the photographer has a violent, somatic reaction to the street they are about to pass. The man "hésita, au bord de la confidence" (139) ["hesitated, on the edge of confiding something" (94)]. Any time he crosses the Rue Germain-Pilon, the man admits, he gets dizzy, and fits a strong "envie de descendre… C'est plus fort que [lui]" (139) ["urge to walk down it … It's stronger than [he is]" (94)]. That sensation of desire, however, is also a sensation of hesitancy, and when Guy asks him why he does not just go down the road, he stumbles over his words. A friend of Mansoure's named Alec had been murdered on the Rue Germain-Pilon some time ago, after inviting a stranger up to his apartment—"Il faisait monter n'importe qui dans son appartement" (143) ["He brought anyone up to his apartment …" (97)], the photographer offers in an attempt at explanation.

The similarities between Mansoure's story and Edouard Louis' in *Histoire de la violence* are clear; the porousness of the boundary between public and private space, which is usually predicated on familiarity, made Edouard Louis and Alec vulnerable to a violence that undermined their desire for intimacy. The transition between public and private tests the vulnerability of urban collisions, balancing the risk with intimacy. In this case, these examples both suggest queer intimacy—Edouard's explicitly so, Mansoure's at least implicitly. As Ahmed suggests above, intimacy, when it is "off center" with society's conception of reaching out, must develop new ways of practicing and enacting relationships. What starts as a collision of two individuals in the street is carried into its afterlife, brought into the private space. It ends badly, though there is no fault in this for Louis or Mansoure's friend; the desire to reach out, connect,

and enjoy intimacy is inherent to the isolating experience of urban life. It is, after all, the same desire that brings Guy and Mansoure together—if not exactly queer, at least a desire for (homo)social intimacy founded in private space.

Ultimately, as Guy leaves the apartment, Mansoure makes a final attempt to inculcate in Guy his particular psychogeography. He lets Guy take several photographs, reminding him to bring the ones of Alec back, and offers him tacit, if not ominous, advice: "Et faites attention dans la rue… " (149) ["And take care in the street …" (102)].[5] What would normally be the courteous salutation of one acquaintance to another becomes the emphatic reminder of their shared knowledge: the streets are dangerous, and if they killed one friend, they could kill another. The photographer omits, of course, the public-private barrier that brought the vulnerability into stricter intimacy. It is not the Rue Germain-Pilon that murdered his friend, but the chance collision he had with a stranger, as well as his decision to pursue it further.

If Mansoure is an example of this urban billiard ball knocked about by a collision, we can see how his trajectory is changed by the experience. He cannot look out into the streets of Paris without being affected by that past influence: "« Vous regardez par la fenêtre ? Belle vue, hein ? Dire que l'assassin d'Alec est quelque part là-dedans… » […] Il tira les rideaux de satin rose, d'un geste frileux" (148). ["'You were looking out of the window? A nice view, isn't it? And to think that Alec's murderer is somewhere out there…" […] With a shudder, he closed the pink satin curtains." (101)] The very existence of public streets brings his friend's murder into the present tense for Mansoure, so much so that he must physically close out the world from the

[5] A more literal translation could be "pay attention in the street," which highlights the active and external task that Mansoure gives to Guy. "Take care" is persona; one takes care of oneself. "Pay attention" means to look around, to observe what is around you. "Pay attention" is, to recall Heidegger phrase, take measure of your space.

private space of his apartment. The way he reads the public space of the city cannot be removed from his experience of it; in their connection, he tries to pass off this reading to Guy.

To "take care in the streets" means simultaneously reading one's environment and taking account of what cannot be predicted or prepared for. Guy's memories are brought back to him (or perhaps, Guy is brought back to his memories) when he reads the deserted night street outside of Mansoure's apartment window, but the photographer can never prepare for whether he will encounter his friend's murderer. Like Lol in Duras' *Le Ravissement de Lol V Stein*, Mansoure's reaction to urban unpredictability is cautious, even fearful, and he tries to instill in Guy the same sentiments, a vestige of their nascent intimacy. Lol, Guy, and Mansoure each find themselves taking account of what the streets may present to them, causing them to move anxiously and alter through space.

The process by which Guy tracks down his own self in the built environment of Paris leads him through a city that he already knows and, to some degree, belongs to. He has lived as Guy in Paris for years since his amnesia, building a cognitive familiarity with the city separate from his past self; when he rediscovers old versions of himself, he writes the memories of that self onto an already established map. Urban planner Kevin Lynch provided the field the foundational definition of urban imageability. His project, developed in a case study of Boston, was to understand how people moving around in a city picture—literally, create an image—of the space and then use that image to maneuver. Imageability is "that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer" (9). Shape, color, and arrangement facilitate the making of "vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment" (9). Ultimately, Lynch's project suggests a grammar for urban design that promotes or otherwise enables placemaking and wayfinding.

The purpose of this kind of planning is not simply the physical shape of the city itself, but the "quality of an image in the mind" (117). In this conception, the image is a static production of the built environment, one with which the individual must become familiar:

> Thus it will be equally useful to improve this image by training the observer, by teaching him to *look* at his city, to observe its manifold forms and how they mesh with one another. Citizens could be taken into the street, classes could be held in the schools and universities, the city could be made an animated museum of our society and its hopes. Such education might be used, not only to develop the city image, but to reorient after some disturbing change. (117)

A Lynchian city is taught, learned. The education necessary to learn how to develop an image of the city is, at least in part, incredibly simple: one need only *look*. But Lynch suggests that looking and observing are harder tasks than they seem, requiring organized educational moments. That is, simply walking around the city and *willing* oneself to observe may not be sufficient; teachers and mentors are needed to introduce urban dwellers to the practice of reading the city. The educational process has a secondary effect that Lynch offers only in passing, in which the city itself becomes a museum of culture, society, and history. When we resolve to look around and observe the visual textuality of the cityspace, we are bound to uncover markers of how the city has become what it is. We can trace those markers to revelations about how the city's society lives now and how it lived in the past. (Like elsewhere in this dissertation, we run up against the inevitable questions raised by oversimplification: Whose culture? Whose past? Whose society?)

The "disturbing change" that causes a city dweller to develop a city image does not need to be dramatic. Coming to an intersection or transitioning between neighborhoods may trigger a response in one's image of the city. Lynch touts the node—any junction in the cityspace, especially where transportation is interrupted—as a prime moment of observation for the city

dweller: “Because decisions must be made at junctions, people heighten their attention to such places and perceive nearby elements with more than normal clarity” (72-3). He cites as evidence the frequency with which respondents in his survey marked the moment of their entry into a new city at sites where transportation nodes cause a break in momentum—when a person first steps off a bus or train ride from out of town, for example. Imageability is the ability to maneuver in these nodes, and other spaces, successfully, or else the ability to learn how to maneuver. The terror of a node is generally experienced only on one’s initial approach. There may be signs that help you make sense of an intersection or perhaps you determine that the risk is such that you can simply figure it out by trial and error. Or else, you learn from collisions with those around you; the way that other people move through a node can teach you how to approach it yourself. Once you learn how to read a node—that is, develop a trajectory through a node and build it into your routine—there is no longer discomfort. As we have discussed before, repetition and routine lead to neutralization; the experience of moving through the node fades from your immediate consciousness.

Imageability is a question of comfort. To some degree, the literature I have considered so far in this project concerns uncomfortable people—people without a settled, secure sense of their place in the city. When decisions must be made about how to use the city, one’s attention to the urban fabric is heightened (72); an uncomfortable person may be made more aware of the city because they need to read it in order to find safety. And so, perhaps, a marginalized person is *always* more alert because they must always be making decisions.

Being truly lost in the city is rare, Lynch suggests, because of traditional wayfinding supports. A person who feels lost or disoriented can, at almost any moment, refer to street signs, maps, and landmarks. One might understand the way a district or neighborhood is self-contained

and how the barrier between it and another marks space. But when one is truly lost, the anxiety is deep. Lynch calls it terror (125). Legible environments help create security but also deepen and intensify the human experience. When we design for a "particular person" (usually the default human, usually white, able-bodied man), we are condemning others to constant "terror." If you are not the default human for whom the city is designed, you are never at ease, never secure.

In focusing on design, Lynch's grammar is top-down and posits a situation that is amenable to all individuals, despite accommodating a generalized individual. His definition of this sense of knowing or being able to know the city does not account for how a person's embodied experience of the city changes. Individuated or individualized knowing of the city is more of a legibility, an ability to "read" the images that the city presents and interpreted them through the particular lens of each individual reader.

Lynch's project is, for all intents and purposes, purely geographical. He is concerned with the ways individuals geolocate in cities, such that they feel the city laid out around them for their exploration. Questions of geolocation are important, but I aim to push Lynch's imageability beyond this narrow scope. Sara Ahmed, as discussed in the previous chapter, shows how we experience disorientation beyond its phenomenological, immediate, and physical sensation. We may be disoriented in the world not only because we cannot position ourselves, but also because we are uncertain of how we dwell in the world.

Lynch's suggestion that imageability and legibility can be considered, in the case of the urban space, synonymous obviates an important connotative value of the work "legible." In Lynch's imageability, the cityspace is received visually and rationalized as "vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment" (9). The space is available to the senses, a phenomenological processing of the built environment that enables the

user to parse its component parts systematically. I argue that we can take imageability further than that. Lynch suggests that individuals using an urban space need to be able to create an image of that space to feel they can traverse it. On the other hand, he suggests that imageability "might also be called *legibility*, or perhaps *visibility* in a heightened sense, where objects are not only able to be seen, but are presented sharply and intensely to the senses" (9-10). Earlier in his consideration, he suggests that the imageability of the city is unlike the process of consuming literature, music, or architecture, because these art forms have so-called final results and more controlled outcomes (2). I would object to this understanding of literature, music, and architecture; a reader's relationship to a text is entirely situational, always evolving, always about connecting and reconnecting dots. And as such, the metaphor between reading literature and reading the city makes some sense. Urban dwellers also, I argue, *read* the image of the city—read its signs and symbols, read the ways it changes and varies over time and across space, read the marks left behind by other people, read the patterns of use.

Lynch considers the legibility of an image as part of its "clarity" (2), the ability to "absorb new sensuous impacts without disruption of [one's] basic image" (10). He suggests that the legibility of a city is not unlike "this printed page," which, "if it is legible, can be visually grasped as a related pattern of recognizable symbols" (3). A legible city "would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern" (3). This understanding of "reading" ignores the cultural framework in which one reads a text, as well as the personal history one brings to it. The sense of reading that Lynch effaces in collapsing "imageability" and "legibility" (as well as "visibility" and "apparency," for that matter) into one needs to be reclaimed.

In this chapter, my use of the word "legible" will adhere more strictly to the French *lisibilité* to distinguish this readability from Lynch's sense of legibility. Roland Barthes used the term *lisibilité* in *S/Z* to distinguish "readerly" texts from "writerly" (*scriptible*) texts.[6] For Barthes, *lisibilité* is the quality of a text that requires no true participation from the reader; these are texts that are understood easily in terms of familiar and established expectations or codes. The *lisible* text strongly engages a "rhetorical code" (129), "controlled by the principle of noncontradiction […] to the point of obsession" (156). Writerly texts require participation from the reader to arrive at meaning; its rhetorical understanding is negotiated. As we consider the *lisibilité* of the city, I will not necessarily adhere to the strict "readability" of Barthes' conception. However, as we will see, the transition from writerly to readerly texts is a helpful theoretical framework. As Modiano shows, the memories that Guy adopts from the people around him must be legible to him, so that he can read them as part of his relationship to the city. He derives comfort not only from being able to imagine the city as a syntactically comprehensible collection of nodes, but from being able to imagine himself in the city as an embodied person and as a person with a history. He needs to be able to read Paris, and to do that, he needs other people.

Designing Legible Cities

Rue des Boutiques obscures chronicles the search for lost information about one's own identity. Consequently, it, like many of Modiano's novels, concerns the *lisibilité* of one's own space, because it highlights the ways that one is inscribed into the environment in which one

[6] In his forward to the English translation of *S/Z*, Richard Howard notes the "dilemma" of translating lisible and scriptible into English and credits translator Richard Miller for choosing "readerly" and "writerly" (viii-ix).

dwells. The novel works to understand how an individual comprehends the place they have established for themselves, locating markers of this identity within the built environment. This kind of *lisibilité*, however, generally remains in the subconscious; short of the amnesia that forces Guy to rediscover his own neighborhood, a city dweller rarely has reason to (re)examine their own understanding of space. As we have established in the previous chapters, one's relationship to the city is by necessity often suppressed to the subconscious, minimizing the reaction to stimuli, and getting by on habit and instinct. The questions raised in *Boutiques obscures* are nonetheless important for understanding this relationship, and so I want to consider these questions in the context of an explicitly conscious and intentional experiment in legibility, to examine the tense vulnerability of learning to read (and write upon) the urban space. I turn here, as well, to the question of understanding *other people*; rather than searching in space for clues about oneself, I will ask in this section whether collisions provide us access to clues about other people and how they are in space.

As the documentary archive of a psychogeographic experiment, *Les Passagers du Roissy-Express* (1990) [*Roissy Express* (1994)] has become an important work in the representation of migrant life, travel, and the Parisian suburbs. The premise of the experiment is rather simple: François Maspero, founder of the leftist publishing house Éditions Maspero, and photographer Anaïk Frantz meet at the head of the RER B-line in Roissy,[7] and travel the thirty-eight stations (excluding the subterranean stations beneath Paris proper) and more than fifty kilometers of rail to the line's opposite terminus in Hurepoix. They spend a month on this trip, exploring the area surrounding each station and finding lodging as needed. Each night, Maspero takes notes—which eventually become the manuscript—and along the way, Frantz takes photographs.

[7] The RER B+ Nord extension, which branches off the RER-proper at Aulney-sous-Bois and continues to Mitry-Claye, was inaugurated in 2007 and therefore does not feature in Maspero and Frantz's experiment.

The purpose of the trip is harder to define than it may seem. Ostensibly, Maspero and Frantz undertake the experiment to explore the marginalized areas of Paris' periphery, which are relatively unknown to them, despite their longtime residency in the city; this ignorance of the Banlieue, Maspero suggests, is pervasive among Parisian living in the *centre-ville*. If exploration is, first and foremost, an act of wayfinding, Maspero and Frantz's initial difficulties in finding their way to Roissy, their starting point, are revealing: "Enfin, il faut bien y aller : c'est l'heure de l'embarquement. Ils se dirigent vers l'arrêt de la navette qui les ramènera à la gare SNCF. Ils veulent se rendre à Roissy-village. Connaissez-vous Roissy-village ?" (11-12) ["Finally they have to go – it's boarding time. They make their way toward the stop for the shuttle that will take them back to the SNCF railway station. They want to get to Roissy-village. Do you know about Roissy-village?" (6, translation modified)].[8] The pair, having stepped of the RER at its terminus in Roissy, have difficulty figuring out how to get to the village itself; the RER primarily serves the airport at this station, and so wayfinding clues to the village are scarce. They start by going back, retracing steps to the train station, where they are at the mercy of the transit infrastructure to guide their journey. The SNCF takes on the authority in this situation. They must go there and follow the established path. To some degree, Maspero is aware of the control that the SNCF has on their experience of the Parisian periphery, as well as their daily experience of quotidian time. He remarks, parenthetically and perhaps sarcastically, that "il suffirait de consulter un vieil horaire de RER, ligne B, heure d'hiver" (12) ["he would need only to consult an old RER Line B winter timetable" (7)][9] in order to pinpoint the exact minute at which the idea for this trip came

[8] All English citations of *Roissy-Express* given in brackets are to the Paul Jones translation (1994) unless otherwise noted. The Jones translation gives this last sentence as "Have you ever been to Roissy-village?" I have chosen to modify the translation to preserve the sense of knowledge in "connaissez." As I will discuss below, knowing a place, especially on the periphery, takes more effort than simply having been there.
[9] "Heure d'hiver" is specifically the period after the end of daylight saving time.

to him, because he knows that it was “un 2 janvier à 15 heures 30, entre Parc des Expositions et Villepinte” [“a 2 January at 3.30 p.m., between Parc des Expositions and Villepinte” (7)]. A life lived, even in part, on public transport is, Maspero seems to know, regulated by that transport’s sense of time.

The problem of learning anything meaningful about Roissy confounds Maspero. At one point, enumerating the official facts and figures about the village, he laments that the place is somehow impossible to know: “Roissy-typique-village-de-France est artificiel, mais comment faire, je vous le demande, pour ne pas disparaître ? C’est si parfait et, oui, si typique qu’on se demande où on est, est à quoi est collé le décor” (36). [“Roissy-the-typical-French-village is artificial, but how, I ask you, do you avoid getting lost inside it? It’s so perfect and, yes, so typical, that you wonder where you are, and what is holding the scenery together” (25)]. The prototypical, artificial perfection of Roissy-village is unhelpful when two outsiders arrive trying to figure their way around; recalling the messiness that guided Le Corbusier’s frustrated attempts at organizing urban space, we find that clean, unmarked urban space lacks the markers that people need to navigate through it.

Though Maspero and Frantz need to find someone who can help them navigate Roissy, someone who can lead them to a good restaurant and hotel, the problem that Maspero presents in his question “*Connaissez-vous Roissy-village*” is not simply “What do you know about this town?”, which is a question about knowledge and aid. The problem also encompasses the larger sociopolitical project the pair is undertaking. The question could equally mean, “What do you know of the periphery?” He and Frantz, Parisians who are coming to admit to their lack of knowledge about the periphery, come here to the suburbs and find themselves foreigners in their own city, despite their arguable abstract familiarity with Roissy as a place. As the terminus of a

popular residential Métro line and the site of one of the busiest airports in the world, Roissy represents a kind of wayfinding that separates the name from the place: one may recognize the signifier "Roissy" from the Métro map or from one's time in transit at the Charles-de-Gaulle/Roissy airport, but Maspero suggests that the *place* represented by that signifier remains a mystery for most. These opening pages reveal the various and sometimes conflicting philosophies that drive the project into fruition.

Maspero is not unaware of the role Roissy Airport plays in his conception of Roissy village. The airport, which he calls an "espace hors de tout temps et de tout espace réels" (13) ["space outside of real time and space" (7)], represents for him a transitional zone from one place to another, not a place in and of itself. On that 3 January when the idea for the trip comes to him, he goes to the airport to have lunch with a friend who "était en transit entre deux avions. Elle venait d'un autre continent et repartait pour un autre continent" (13) ["was between flights. She had arrived from one continent and was leaving for another" (7)]. His friend is not exactly in Paris, nor in Roissy. She is in between, simultaneously coming from and going to elsewhere. He finds this lunch in the ambiance of the airport to be "absurde" (13); they spend the time both reminiscing about the relationship they used to have and regretting the inevitable separation once she leaves again. There in the airport, in the in-between space and time of travel, they cannot settle comfortably into the present experience.

He had directly castigated himself for lacking place-based knowledge in the past, recalling a trip he had taken to China, during which he was struck by the sight of tourists following tour guides who also functioned as translators and security. He saw in those tourists a lack of preparedness, a lack of understanding about the place they were visiting. And crucially, he identifies with those tourists: he too needs a translator and a tour guide. On the train from

Roissy airport back to Paris, he understands that he would need the same guidance to explore the Paris periphery. As a travel writer, he comes to understand himself as a fraud: “il s'était dit bougre d'imbécile qui veut raconter aux autres le monde des autres, alors que tu n'es même pas fichu de te raconter à toi-même ton monde à toi” (12) [“You poor fool, you want to tell other people about other people’s worlds, but you can’t even be bothered to tell yourself about your own world” (7)]. These tourists in China were mockable for their lack of situational awareness and cultural preparedness, but Maspero realizes that there is no moral equivalent to not being aware of one’s own surroundings.

The grammar in Maspero’s self-castigation cited above is striking. “Il” is Maspero himself; he writes entirely in the third person, so that he and Frantz are presented as characters detached to some degree from Maspero, the author. Margaret Atack, writing about the politics of space in *Roissy-Express,* notes that travel writing is a genre in which the author necessarily focuses as much on his or her own relationship to the space as on the people who occupy it. In her reading, the use of the third person is a question of ensuring “authenticity and (probable) veracity” for the reader: “The use of third person narration to tell the story of François and Anaïk offers a knowing acknowledgment of this ‘otherness’ of the self in narrative, but at the same time the autobiographical pact underpins it through biographical details and statements” (448). Maspero attempts to benefit both from the distanced authenticity of third-person narration *and* the intimate authenticity of autobiography. He asserts at the truth or validity of this trip, but also centers his own values and his own desires as the driving force behind it. Early in their trip, Maspero asks Frantz, “Mais […] à quoi servent les voyages si ce n’est à évoquer des souvenirs ?” (Maspero 11) [“But what’s the point in going on journeys […] if they don’t bring back

memories?" (6)], a question that reveals a self-centered motivation at the center of his conception of travel as an activity.

The following "tu," however, is perhaps a more consequential grammatical choice: "Tu" is Maspero speaking to himself *and* to the reader. On the one hand, he chastises himself for his callous mockery and his ignorance of Paris' periphery. Maspero implicates himself as "bougre d'imbécile." The self-referentially of this grammar, in which Maspero is both "il" and "tu," reveals a reflexivity or reflectivity in Maspero's project; he sets out to discover the *banlieues,* but he writes the things he learns to himself, establishes himself as his own audience. On the other hand, grammatically, "tu" is also the reader. We, in reading the text, are implicated. The subject of this ethical dilemma, then, is both Maspero and the reader, united in a supposedly shared shame that arises from an ignorance of place, and ignorance of peripheries that exist as signifiers in one's cultural consciousness but not as places in one's geographic consciousness. That the reader is "tu," the informal second person, further draws them into the castigation, not worth of the formal "vous," but also intimate enough to bypass it. The project that Maspero undertakes has the bearings of responsible citizenship, an activity that good Parisians should undertake as part of their stewardship of the city and its banlieue: "est-ce que tu es jamais descendu, rien que pour voir, à Sevran-Beaudottes ou aux Baconnets, des stations où tu passes si souvent depuis tant d'années..." (12) ["have you ever got off at Sevran-Beaudottes or Les Baconnets, stations you've been going through so often for so many years, just to have a look around…" (7)]. The project of Maspero and Frantz's experiment is therefore defined as not only a psychogeographic exploration but as a performance of good citizenship. Their friends find the trip "un peu niaise. Et snob" (20) ["a bit silly, and snobbish" (12)], a reaction that disappoints Maspero until he realizes with some surprise that many Parisians are not even aware of the RER-B until his

explanation jogs their memories: “Ah oui, c’est la ligne qui est toujours en grève” (20) [“Ah yes—the line that’s always on strike” (12)].

There is a popular conception of *Roissy-Express* that reads the book as a discovery of the people who live on the periphery of Paris and in the *banlieues*. The copy that accompanies the book on the website of Verso Books, the publisher of the English language translation, insists upon the sociological virtue of the project: “Maspero’s aim,” the publisher writes, “is to put this world back on the map” (Verso). Maspero and Frantz seem to have convinced themselves, too, of this mission. However, the realization of their project reveals a less generous understanding of the interests they bring to these spaces. The self-referentiality of Maspero’s stance shows him turning toward himself. The language of Maspero’s revelation, the inspiration for this trip, comes into focus in the context of the ethical dilemma with which he burdens himself and the reader. As he remembers his train ride back to Paris from the Roissy airport, he recalls the need to rediscover or rewrite these areas of Paris that are forgotten, bring them back to the awareness of the people who travel through them and even the people who live there. The act of discovery, of uncovering a secret, which has dominated the text so far suggests the *banlieues* as geography—that is, as a location on a map and not as a place where people live. “Putting Roissy on the map” rejects the fact that for the people living there, it was never a secret, never in need of discovery.

The journey back to Paris by train after this lunch at the Roissy airport returns Maspero to the present and there, alone in an empty carriage at an off-hour, he experiences a revelation:

> Tous les voyages ont été faits. Ils sont à la portée de quiconque peut se payer le charter. Tous les récits de voyages ont été écrits. […] Les étendues secrètes à découvrir, elles étaient là, sous ses yeux, inconnues de ceux-là même qui les traversaient quotidiennement et souvent de ceux qui les habitaient : incompréhensibles espaces désarticulés de ce qui n’était plus une géographie et qu’il faudrait bien essayer de réécrire. Bien inconnues, ces contrées, et secrètes, oui vraiment. (13-14)

> [All the journeys have been done. They were within reach of anyone who can afford a charter ticket. All the accounts of journeys have been written […]. Secret places were there before his eyes, waiting to be discovered, unknown even to those who travelled through them daily and often to those who lived there; incomprehensible, disjointed spaces which used to be pieces of geography which we really must try and rewrite. They were secret and unknown, these lands, they really were. (8)]

Maspero's revelation centers on originality and unique experience. Exploration, in this conception, should "discover" places that are not mapped, catalogued, or described. The language of discovery and rewriting suggests the exploration of a place that is not already defined and not already inhabited. He looks out the window of his train and sees the periphery of Paris as uncharted territory that exists just steps away from his own home in Paris and in the unremarkable (or more accurately, unremarked) void between his home and the Roissy airport.

The knowledge to be acquired in this experiment starts on paper. As they plan their trip, Maspero and Frantz consult guidebooks and maps (Maspero calls the #20 Michelin map, at 1/15,000 scale, "précieuse" and "magique" (11)). Travel guides disappoint Maspero because of how they "ont fait disparaître" (21) ["have done away with" (13)] anything "intermédiaire." These guides showcase "les points importants" but leave blank whatever comes between, further marginalizing the regions of Paris not already deemed worth traveling to. Maspero laments the disconnect: "avec les guides modernes on ne *voit* plus l'espace : plus de trajet ferroviaire, plus d'itinéraire routier, plus de fil d'Ariane pour le piéton ; rien ne relie la juxtaposition de localités dispersées comme des pions au hasard de l'alphabet, espace morcelé, espace en miettes" (21, original emphasis) ["in modern guides you can no longer *see* space; gone are the railway journeys, car itineraries and linking threads for the walker; nothing joins together all the unconnected villages, which lie scattered like pawns at the alphabet's mercy – space broken into bits and pieces" (13, original emphasis)]. For Maspero, seeing space is seeing how one moves

through it. In disconnecting the villages from each other, the maps suggest that these locations have no relationship to each other. He "discovered" Roissy in transit from the airport back to Paris, and these maps reassert his belief that the periphery is a forgotten space.

The problem that the maps and guides present and the problem with putting the *banlieues* "back" on the maps are to Maspero and Frantz primarily geographic and not sociological. The map makes him aware of the new cities and old *banlieues* through which he will travel, as well as the types of terrain he will cross—industrial zones, wheat fields, forest (15). But the map does not give him any information about the people with whom he will come into contact: "et sur tout cela, sans trop s'écarter de la voie ferrée, habitaient bien deux millions d'habitants, Paris exclu" (15-16) ["and all over that area, staying quite close to the railway, lived a good two million people, not counting Paris" (9-10)]. Despite this acknowledgement, Maspero shows little concern for the problem of other travelers and of locals in the neighborhoods. On the train he is riding when the idea of the trip first comes to him, the people who begin to board and sit near him are nothing more than grey, white, brown, black, yellow, and pink travelers who slowly fill the train but are ignored by Maspero, who is focused on an article by Maurice Nadeau he read in the latest issue of *La Quinzaine littéraire* (14).

Maspero's mission is rather more philosophical: "Serait-il possible de retrouver là-dessous les traces du passé, les traces de la plaine de France et du Hurepoix ? Mais qu'est-ce qui l'intéressait le plus : le dessous ou le dessus ? Le passé ou le présent ?" (16) ["Would it be possible to find under all that traces of the past, traces of the Plaine de France and Hurepoix? But what interested him more, the surface or what was underneath? The past or the present? (10)] Maspero seems to admit his own uncertainty about the project's goals which he cannot locate either in time or in space. Margaret Atack notes the consistent disappearance of the periphery

from Parisian history, suggesting that the "logic of *Les Passagers* is to reverse this, to write *la banlieue* into history and national identity" (443). Atack's reading underlines episodes in the text that develop substantial archives of place. However, writing *la banlieue "*into history" and national identity is an ambitious ethical goal that Maspero only halfheartedly drafts into the project.

The mapping of this journey conveys logic and order. In truth, as Atack notes, there is no linearity to the trip: "The initial episodes particularly entail lengthy descriptions of circular journeys on bus and on foot the understanding of which will defeat all but the most determined reader, map in hand" (444-5). The book's "ambition," she suggests, is simple: "fragmented spaces will be made into a geography" (444). Ross Chambers similarly insists that, despite the A-to-B linearity of the project's proposal, it ultimately does not reach its own conclusion: the project "substitutes a kind of relaxed openness, an endless availability to otherness that means one can never *arrive*, since no point can ever be 'the' point" (32). That is, even if they arrive at the terminus of the RER Ligne B, they can never completely "arrive" at their goal of understanding the people who inhabit Paris' periphery. I argue that the pair's generous ambitions similarly do not reach their own conclusions, a failure with productive consequences. Where Maspero had lofty, philosophical goals, we will find that his inability to "put this world back on the map," as his English publisher puts it, comes from the realization that he cannot in fact overwrite the mapping that is already done by the people he meets.

To talk about the inhabitants of these banlieue, to talk about *people*, is nonetheless a question of infrastructure for Maspero, who realizes that the apparent invisibility of the banlieue, due in part to the built environment. Early in their trip, when they have trouble getting to the 3,000, a housing project outside of Aulney, Maspero notes how the 3,000 are built into an

enclosed space: “Les 3 000 à l’écart. Sans train ni métro. Loin du reste d’Aulney comme de tout. Isolés des autres quartiers, des autres cités, du reste du monde par l’autoroute comme par un fossé. Butant sur une autre autoroute. Avec une seule voie d’accès” (49) [“The 3,000 was out of the way, with no train or metro. Far from the west of Aulnay and everything else. The motorway cut it off like a ditch from nearby neighbourhoods, from nearby estates, from the rest of the world. And it was bang next to another motorway too, with just one access road” (35)]. Their time in the 3,000, which should be considered at length, illustrates the practical challenges of the travelers’ ethical goal. The 3,000 exists in a space removed, separated both by the highway that surrounds it and the sociopolitical machinery that drives it, which we will consider below. Movement in and out of the area is regulated primarily by the car; this is a built environment that does not encourage the pedestrian to leave. To be “cut off” is both a geographical condition and a revelation for Maspero of the sociopolitical obstacles separating the 3,000 from the world in general and the Parisian *centre-ville* specifically.

Even movement within the estate is a challenge, as there is little to guide the way and few destinations to head toward. Maspero finds the challenge daunting: “Difficile, c’est le mot. Il faut toujours le répéter, cet espace-là n’a rien de géographique” (30) [“Difficult is the word. You have to keep repeating it: There is nothing remotely geographical about the place” (20)]. The lack of wayfinding that renders the space illegible suggest the devaluation of the lived human experience. Though intended as a place for people to live, the 3,000 are essentially on a freeway: the space is meant for cars and little else, so when people try to live there, they are confronted with a built environment that is not intended to help them thrive. Maspero knows that this is a space that is intended primarily for moving through and only secondarily for dwelling in; it is not chance that leaves these transitory urban spaces for poorer people, immigrants, and the working

class: “Mais qui vous demande de donner du sens à tout cela qui n’est fait que pour être traversé ? Et vite. En voiture. Quitté à s’y perdre et à tourner, tourner, tourner. Espaces provisoires” (30) [“But who is asking you to make sense of something that is only for traveling through? And quickly? By car. Even if it means going round and round and round. These are temporary spaces” (20)]. This is a kind of quintessential urban space, in which the individual is pushed aside in favor of the movement, the flow. The car becomes the primary user of the space, not the person inside the car. So when Maspero and Frantz are there specifically looking for people, they are confronted by their own embodied occupation of the space.

Because of the infrastructural limits of this space, Maspero and Frantz find it difficult to come upon other people; they are structurally denied the collisions and encounters that ostensibly define the core of their project. However, when, on their way to Roissy-village, they finally encounter other “living people”—“Vraiment vivants. Normalement vivants” (32) [“Real people, normal living people” (22)]—in the form of a group of “Africains volubiles” (32) [“garrulous Africans” (21)], the event warrants only two sentences. In the next sentence, we have returned our focus to their bus ride. These real, normal, living people are denied context and personality in Maspero’s account of the collision. The relief at having come upon them, marked by Maspero’s “enfin” (32), seems to be more about the relief of leaving and not of having met others. As a collision, the moment satisfies no part of the traveler’s experiment. Closed off to the space by its infrastructural hostility, they do not pursue the chance to speak with the “Africains volubiles,” to learn from them about the 3,000.

If there is “nothing remotely geographical” about Aulnay and the 3,000, as Maspero insists above, and the few encounters they experience there are reduced to asides and narrative transitions, Maspero and Frantz are forced to rely on other measures to learn about the area. “Ils

avaient entendu parler des 3 000" (49) ["They had heard about the 3,000" (35)], Maspero notes, but only second-hand through a friend who worked at the local hospital: "Par les familles. Par la rumeur. Par son travail" (49) ["Through the families. Through rumors. Through her work" (35)]. This friend, a resident of Paris who commuted to Aulnay, acts as a conduit, filtering information back to her connections in Paris, but her information comes from a revealing paradox. Unlike Maspero and Frantz, this woman spends a good deal of time in the suburbs—every workday, presumably—interacting with the people who come to see her at the hospital. But she is limited to these encounters. She laments the near impossibility of experiencing collisions outside her work place: "« Ma souffrance, disait-elle, pour moi qui travaille en banlieue, c'est de ne jamais y vivre vraiment, ne serait-ce que quelques heures. Il n'y a rien. Pas un bistrot tranquille, aucun lieu où se retrouver au calme une heure ou deux. Pas d'endroit pour flâner. […] Mais moi, qu'ai-je à lui dire d'Aulnay ? »" (52) ["'The awful thing,' she said, 'about working in the suburbs is that I never really live there for more than a few hours. There's nothing—no quiet bistro, nowhere to relax for an hour or two. No place to go for a stroll. […] But what can I tell [anyone] about Aulnay?'" (37)]. There are no spaces in Aulnay, she argues, that allow for the randomness and chance of daily life outside of one's work.

Ross Chambers suggests that the problem at the center of the Roissy-Express project is time itself. The design of Maspero and Frantz's project requires them to rush constantly from one point to another, not necessarily in a straight line (they spend a great deal of time doubling back to access the RER or to find food and lodging) but always toward the ultimate destination. But the heart of the project asks them to stay and talk, to meet people where they are and pay attention to them. Chambers highlights the contradiction:

> Taking their time, trusting to chance, walking long distances in search of an elusive hotel, talking with people encountered on the street or sitting at their

> window, having lunch with friends or friends of friends (letter carriers, local 'geographers,' workers in youth centers), François and Anaïk discover the simple ordinariness of the other, the perspective in which the life of the *banlieue* […] is not exotic but everyday. (30)

They have given themselves a challenge that demands careful patience. At times, as will be discussed below, they succeed in taking that time. However, throughout the project, and missing in many readings of *Roissy-Express*, the pair cannot help but leave a situation just as they begin to engage with a collision. That is, just as their collisions begin to evolve—become encounters in a larger sense, even relationships—they tend to make the conscious decision to leave, citing timetables and hotel reservations as barriers to their engagement. They speed on, concerned with finding a hotel or a restaurant or often, simply getting out.

I do not mean to suggest a moral hierarchy between collisions and encounters. A collision that does not become a relationship is not necessarily unethical (anymore than an encounter is necessarily ethical). Here, however, Maspero and Frantz fail in the sense that they turn away from the opportunities that would help them reach their goal of understanding the banlieue. Collisions need not evolve into encounters or relationships to have meeting or value. Collisions in themselves provide knowledge or ways of knowing to those open to their influences. Whether Maspero and Frantz can engage those influences through the complications of their mission is, at the start, unclear. As Frantz notes later in the journey and Chambers reminds us in his reading of the text, "Il faut prendre le temps de respecter les autres" (Maspero 134): "But it's also the reason why one needs to take one's time, for only an exoticized, distanced other (however geographically close it may be) can be perceived through the windows of a passing train" (Chambers 31). Maspero came to this realization early; as discussed above, he acknowledges that his train ride from the Roissy airport back to Paris did not allow him any real understanding of the suburbs in between. There are two obstacles to Maspero and Frantz taking their time. The

first, by design of their project, is the relatively short time they remain at each stop. If they are to travel the RER B in a month, their primary motivation must be movement, not stasis. The second obstacle, by design of the city, is the rarity of collision. If they so rarely come across other people, and when they do, the design of the city insists they move on, they cannot dwell with these people and learn from them.

Because of the infrastructural obstacles and the apparent refusal to take time, Maspero and Frantz find themselves removed from the people who inhabit the areas they are trying to explore. Consequently, Maspero is left with questions that could likely be answered by those who live in Aulnay and the 3,000, but he is denied the opportunity to ask them:

> La Rose des Vents, les 3 000 ou « le Paquebot ». Pourquoi ? A cause de l'architecture ? Mais où sont les ponts, les coursives et les passerelles ? Et d'ailleurs qui ose parler d'architecture, ici ? A cause de cette solitude de haute mer, plutôt ? Un paquebot à bord duquel, disait leur amie, les passagers s'embarquaient pour de longs voyages immobiles, mais restaient toujours en transit. (50)
>
> [It's called the Rose des Vents ('The Compass'), the 3,000 or 'The Liner'. Why? Is the architecture to blame? Where are the bridges and gangways? And who would dare to mention the word 'architecture' anyway? Loneliness on the high seas is to blame, more likely. It's a liner, their friend had said, on which the passengers embarked on long motionless journeys but always in transit. (36)]

Colloquial names for the estate are the thing of local culture; the history of these names may well be lost to many who live there, but various threads will eventually lead to the original stories. Maspero cannot access those threads and those stories, so he is made to instead read the architecture itself, attempting to find in the built environment some clue to its nomenclature. His friend offers a piece of the puzzle (its veracity never questioned), but that clue brings its own questions. Reading the space cannot reconstruct its cultural history; that is guarded by those who dwell there. The tenuousness of being always in transit is at odds with their ethical goal.

"Architecture" suggests stasis, permanence—and the massive solidity of estate architecture especially imposes itself in space—but the people who live there, Maspero reflects, do not have roots and do not leave traces in space. They are, to follow the metaphor, unmoored: "Mais où ? On les perdait au-delà des frontières du département, de la région d'Ile de France, vers des cités plus déshéritées, plus loin de tout encore" (50) ["But where did they go? They were lost beyond the department's frontiers, beyond the Ile de France, towards even more deprived estates, even further from everything" (37)]. Here at the 3,000, they are not just at the periphery of Paris; they are caught in a current out and away from the *centre-ville*. At the estate, there is always the underlying drift—socio-politically, but also psychologically—further away. The estates are deprived, as Maspero notes, of resources, but also of accessible history. It is important to note, of course, that culture and history abounds in the densely populated estates. The 3,000 is not legible on its physical surface but rather in its interpersonal contact. Rather, Maspero and Frantz have difficulty engaging with it. As strangers there, especially strangers always thinking toward the next stop on their trip, they cannot make sense of the physical and social infrastructures. The physical infrastructures give no clues about local means of moving through space *in* the 3,000, instead pointing to travel *through* the estate; the social infrastructures have less power to write themselves into space.

The geographic history of Aulnay and the 3,000 is more accessible: "Le vrai problème des 3 000 a eu nom Citroën" (52) ["The 3,000's real problem was called Citroën." (37)]. The town had been built up around a new Citroën factory; Garonor was constructed, and to pretend at separating the estate from the factory, the Rose des Vents park was added. The strict ties between the factory and the evolution of the neighboring areas predicated its shapes and uses. Maspero notes that there was "pas besoin de prévoir les transports pour aller chercher du travail plus loin"

(53) ["no need to provide transport to go job-hunting further afield" (38)] because it was assumed that all the town's inhabitants would work there. Life was reduced to work, and if those who lived in Aulnay worked next door at the Citroën factory, what need would they have for easy access to Paris or the other suburbs?

But then the factory began laying off employees. Over the course of the late 1970s, thousands of the town's inhabitants found themselves without work and without the means to easily look elsewhere for employment. "Comment vivre sur le Paquebot ?" Maspero wonders (53). "Chercher le travail ailleurs. Loin. Très loin. Des heures de transport. Le chômage. L'aide au retour ? Plus besoin d'eux ? […] Pour beaucoup de ceux-ci la question ne fut plus : comment partir des 3 000, mais : comment y rester ?" (53) ["how do people live on 'The Liner'? They had to get work elsewhere. A long, long way away, which required hours of traveling. Unemployment followed. Were they helped to pay the air fare home? They were now surplus to requirements. […] For many, the question was no longer how to leave the 3,000 but how to stay." (38)] Hours in transport meant hours away from the social life of the estate. As I have argued above and as urban planners and theorists, working largely from the inspiration of Jane Jacobs, have long insisted, social urban life happens on foot. The shift toward cars—single-occupant and anonymous vehicles—pulls people off the streets and sidewalks, and even off public transit. Long commutes shift individuals into the mode of worker, not dweller.[10]

Writing about English municipal housing estates, Elizabeth Wilson notes that an estate is "'publicly owned' to the extent that the local authority, as an elected body, may be said to represent the public; at the same time the estate may be a no-go area to outsiders, milkmen and postmen, and some of its more vulnerable members may live in fear of venturing out" (159).

[10] In the next chapter, I will consider the Nuit debout protests and, to a lesser extent, the Gilets jaunes movement, both of which are arguably founded on the frustration of being made a worker instead of a dweller.

Whether we can say the same of Parisian *cités* is of some debate, but Maspero's experience in Aulnay suggests a similarly impermeable boundary surrounding the 3,000. The extent of the influence of neoliberal drives toward production and the extraction of resources creates a sort of non-space or anti-space, one stripped of its living comforts and made uninhabitable.

If the ethical drive of *Roissy-Express* is to encounter the people who live in the peripheries of Paris and "put them on the map," the built environment of these spaces, as well as the temporal obstacles built into the project, make success a distinct challenge. In addition, the pair's stance toward the people they meet—the ways they turn toward and turn away from encounters, as Ahmed would phrase it—precludes meaningful connection. As they dismissed the "Africains volubiles" they met at a bus stop, the pair seems unable to fully turn toward encounters. A man at his window recounts for François and Anaïk his family history and the impact of the Roissy Airport being built in 1964. He has the same question for his interviewers: "Où elle est la vraie vie, à Roissy ?" (36) ["Where's the real life in Roissy?" (25)]. He laments that, while Roissy is fairly wealthy because of the airport, everything is "artificial." And as if in response, it is only at the end of their conversation that François records signs of a "real life" that surrounds the man: "Mais sa vieille maison basse est si belle… Une voix féminine interpelle le Gaulois du fond de la pièce. La fenêtre se referme et tombe un rideau de dentelle" (36) ["But his old, low-roofed house is so handsome…. From the back of the room, a woman's voice calls the Gaul inside. The window closes and a lace curtain falls." (25)] Their access to the history and the stories of Roissy is, it appears, warmly shared, freely handed out from across the threshold of an open window. The real life that François insisted he wanted in the opening chapter gets hidden behind the curtains of private space.

Dervila Cooke, considering the connections established by peripheral encounters in the photography of *Roissy-Express* and of Maspero and Frantz's later book, *Paris bout du monde*, writes about this scene with some skepticism:

> While on one level this image stresses willingness to engage in dialogue, the barrier of the window is a visual reminder that the travelers in *Les Passagers* are often at a very *physical* remove from the realities they seek to access, and suggests that other barriers may also exist. (92, original emphasis)

Maspero, intentionally or not, maintains a barrier between himself and the man in the window. He wants to discover "real life," but he also conceives primarily of public space in which the vulnerability of real life is often secreted away. Maspero and Frantz were, by most rubrics, privileged: both white, both relatively affluent, both socially connected. Maspero in particular was well-known at this time due to his publishing company and his wide leftist social circles. To approach this open window and the "real life" inside it, they must step away from the comforts of that privilege. Of course, crossing a barrier between someone's public and private lives generally takes time—time to gain trust, time to build intimacy, time to partake in the rituals of hospitality—which Maspero and Frantz are reticent to spend here.

Cooke and others (see especially Rosello, 2001) draw attention to two parallel instances of hospitality in *Roissy-Express* as manifestations of the "occasional anxiousness" (Cooke 92) that the pair, but especially Maspero, exhibit when encountering the people who live here at the periphery. In one instance, a woman they meet in a *cité*—a rare instance of the pair dwelling in an encounter—invites them to tea and they refuse; the design of their trip, they say, prevents them from taking the time to stop for tea. However, another episode finds them eager to accept an invitation to tea, this time with a close friend (back in Paris, nonetheless, a taxi ride away). Cooke is unable to distinguish between "ability or willingness" (92) in this instance; there are of

course significant social, cultural, and practical barriers to establishing the kinds of encounters with strangers that Wilson and Valentine defined in the previous chapter, but it is worth considering how the anxiety of these moments prevents the pair from taking advantage of them. When the opportunity is there in front of them, they hesitate; when a friend offers, they will go out of their way. To learn from others, one must necessarily embrace the vulnerability of admitting to a lack of knowledge. Maspero and Frantz, coming from their situated privilege, seem reticent.

Even in public, the pair repeatedly conflates opportunities to connect with residents of the banlieue with the pressing obligations of their strictly scheduled trajectory. Maspero notices a sign under the bus shelter, an announcement of an organizing committee at the nearby Hôtel Ibis for a belote competition; he records the sign verbatim, another example of his preference for archiving the physical spaces he travels in. At the same time, he collects the last elements of the scene that lays before him: “Deux fillettes antillaises attendent le bus. Les petits immeubles de briques vivent au ralenti. L’antiquaire prend la chaleur sur le trottoir. Photos. Le bus déboule” (37) [“Two little West Indian girls are waiting for the bus. The little blocks of brick flats are just ticking over. The antique dealer is outside, soaking up the sun. Photo-time. The bus zooms up.” (25)]. As before, life in the present tense sneaks into Maspero’s curation of the scene before him in Roissy, in the form of two girls from the Caribbean waiting for the bus. But in his reception of the scene, it is not the two girls who have life, but rather the little buildings, apparently “living” in slow motion, and the bus, which zooms.

At times, Frantz enters the book more fully as a protagonist, rather than only the photographer. At these times, the care and time needed to establish connections seems to return to the philosophy driving their trip. The problem of reading the cityspaces through which they

travel comes to the surface again and again, as Maspero, in particular, records what he sees around him in ways that flatten the distinction between signs, history, and people—sometimes literally. As they take in the "suave odeur du kérosène, avec ses fermes mortes, sa résidence de gendarmes aéroportés et ses HLM pour douaniers" (36) ["sweet smell of kerosene, its dormant farms, its airport police residence and council houses for customs officers" (25, translation modified)], Anaïk is reminded of seeking refuge beneath a bus shelter some time ago, waiting out a rainstorm, where she met a group of young people. They told her that they were hanging out there because they had nowhere else to gather, lamenting that "il n'y avait rien pour eux à Roissy. Qu'on s'ennuyait à Roissy. Que c'était mortel, Roissy" (37) ["there was nothing for them in Roissy. That Roissy was boring, dead boring" (25)]. Frantz recalls that these young people told her that she could find them there, in the bus shelter, if she ever came back. But now, years later, she finds that they are gone. He says, "Tu vois bien, ils n'y sont pas. Ils t'ont raconté des histoires" (37) ["You see, they're not there. They were telling you fibs." (25)]. Of course, the absurdity of finding the same group of kids under the same bus shelter so many years later is not the point; it is "pas la bonne heure" (37) ["not the right time […]. That's all" (25)]. She wants to pursue the relationship she started before, but the city will not allow it; further, she wants to be able to understand the space in the context of that past relationship, but the space fails to make itself legible in context.

In this apparently foreign, but close to home, landscape, separated from the *centre-ville* not by distanced travel but by design, Maspero and Frantz struggle to learn new ways of reading the city. The most success they experience comes directly from social missteps. From a distance, Frantz takes a photograph of several men. The narrator describes the act as "mechanical," but

"emotional"—she moves to take photos almost unconsciously, spurred to action by her emotional response to the scene before her. But the men catch her taking the photo:

> Un homme se détache du groupe et les hèle. Aussitôt Anaïk fait face et marche à son devant. « Sans vouloir vous commander et avec tout le respect que je vous dois, qu'est-ce que vous venez de faire là ? » Ils sont entrés dans la cour et un groupe se forme autour d'eux. Tous impeccablement vêtus, chemises fraichement repassées. La discussion dure une bonne demi-heure. Polie. Très polie. Et très ferme. Une longue leçon de morale et de dignité, sur le thème : quand on prend les gens en photo, on leur demande d'abord l'autorisation. Un thème élevé à l'état de principe de vie : le respect avant tout. (127)
>
> [One man breaks away from the group and calls to them. Anaïk immediately looks his way and walks up to him. 'Not wishing to order you about, and with all due respect, but what did you just do?' They have gone into the courtyard, and a group has formed around them. The men are all impeccably dressed, shirts freshly ironed. The discussion lasts a good half hour. They are polite. Very polite. And very firm. A lesson is delivered on morals and dignity, with the theme: when you take someone's photo, you ask his permission first. The theme is elevated to a principle for life: respect comes first. (99-100)]

Frantz has, in this moment, broken a rule of social engagement that is understood to be mutually held. There are rules to this encounter, rules that she broke either from negligence or ignorance. Having broken the rules, she cannot recover the relationship she may have had with these men; when she suggests that she ask for permission now, after the fact, the man says that it is "trop tard. Pas cette fois. Une autre fois, peut-être" (127) ["too late. Not this time. Some other time maybe." (100)]. Nonetheless, Frantz and Maspero have done what they refused to do with the "Africains volubiles" and the West Indian girls at the bus stop: they stop, they take time.

It matters in this moment that the strangers with whom Frantz interacts are Malian. "Nous sommes beaucoup de Maliens ici," another man says to Frantz. "Au Mali, on a toujours eu le respect de la France. Mais en France, aujourd'hui, ce n'est plus comme avant, on a perdu le respect des autres" (127) ["There are a lot of Malians here […]. In Mali, people have always

respected France. But France today isn't what it was – there's no respect for other people" (100)]. Frantz, through Maspero's notes, acknowledges the geographic specificity of the encounter: several of these men work in Paris *centre-ville*; others live there. In Paris, perhaps, the collision between these groups would be different, the dominating Frenchness asserting social control over the situation. These Malian men signal to Maspero and Frantz that they have information that would explain the culture of the banlieue—specifically, in their eyes, France has changed and no longer reflects the cultural, behavioral norms these men have come to expect. Maspero could pursue that line of the conversation, but he fails to do so. Here, in a space largely unwritten by design, Maspero and Frantz are made to learn new rules of reading the space, but they do so only superficially.

The distinction between working in a place and knowing that place is a trope in *Roissy Express.* Maspero introduces the reader to Gilles: "Gilles est facteur. Préposé aux PTT. Il est aussi géographe" (101) ["Gilles is a postman. An employee of the PTT, the French post office. He is also a geographer" (78)]. Gilles, who Maspero and Frantz contacted through his thesis advisor, interests the pair for two distinct reasons, one academic and one practical: because he wrote, as part of his maîtrise, a thesis called *Géographie de la banlieue nord-est de Paris* and because he "connaît bien le paysage puisqu'il y est né, qu'il y habite et qu'il l'arpente aujourd'hui chaque jour de boîtes aux lettres en boîtes aux lettres" (101) ["knows its landscape well, since he was born here, lives here, and now surveys it daily from one letter box to the next" (78)]. Maspero presents these two qualifications—geographer and postman—as if they are one and the same, but the distinction between academic knowledge and lived experience is evident in what the pair has learned so far in his journey. Knowing a place (the "connaissez vous?" with which Maspero began the trip) is different from living there and growing up there, coming into

contact with its inhabitants on a daily basis. Neither is morally or intellectually better, but Maspero conflates them despite their different modes.

The photograph accompanying this section (102) [79] shows Gilles, in a staged moment, delivering an envelope to a bank of mailboxes. This moment is a distillation of what makes him interesting to Maspero and Frantz; he has access, by virtue of his job, to brief and largely anonymous collisions with individuals throughout Pavillons-sous-Bois. Though he presumably does not take time with each of the households to which he delivers mail, he has developed an intimate familiarity with the area because of his repeated trajectories, enabling, even necessitating, collisions with a diverse range of inhabitants.

In researching his Master's thesis, he set out largely by foot or by bike to take pictures and develop maps, a strikingly similar project to what Maspero and Frantz are themselves undertaking. Gilles, however, is vocally hesitant of his own medium, unlike Maspero had been at the start of *Roissy-Express*: "Il préfère dresser des cartes, même s'il ne cache pas que les cartes elles aussi sont piégées, que leur subjectivité, donc leur partialité, est déjà présente dans le moment même où le géographe décide de les dresser" (101-3) ["He prefers drawing maps, though he doesn't hide the fact that maps too are themselves full of traps, that their subjectivity, and therefore their bias, is already present from the moment the geographer decides to draw them" (78)]. Gilles is aware of the tension between his two approaches to understanding Pavillons-sous-Bois. He cannot escape the subjectivity of his own involvement—no one can. Gilles' approach fascinates Maspero, who writes at length of what makes the postman approach his job the way he does:

> Il faut dire encore que si Gilles est facteur et non géographe, c'est parce que, lecteur de Kant, il applique cet impératif d'*agir de telle sorte que tu traites l'humanité aussi bien dans ta personne que dans la personne de tout autre* et que, tenant compte de ce qu'il pense et dit du discours

> géographique, il est conséquent avec lui-même en refusant de l'alimenter. Ce en quoi on doit l'admirer. Et il faut dire enfin que Gilles […] est un genre d'ours à vous réconcilier avec le genre humain. (103, original emphasis)
>
> [we should also point out that if Gilles is a postman, not a geographer, it is because, as a reader of Kant, he applies the imperative of *acting so as to treat humanity as well in your own person as in all other people's* and that, considering what he thinks and says about geographical discourse, he is consistent with himself by refusing to nourish it. You have to admire him for it. And finally, we should point out that Gilles […] is the sort of fellow to reconcile you with mankind. (80, original emphasis)]

The distinction, postman versus geographer, returns, but now in opposition; Gilles is a postman because his Kantian values prevent him from being a geographer. According to Maspero, his humanity, his contact with "mankind," make him apt for a career carrying mail. The academic approach of a geographer, then, lacks humanities, and lacks connection with "le genre humain." The unspoken problem here indicts Maspero's project. At the beginning of the record, he spoke reverently of maps and conceived of his trip on the RER-B as a geographer would. His meeting with Gilles introduces some doubt into that reverence, because maps' place in the realm of supposedly objective representation loses its luster when confronted with the reality of lived experience.

Despite the social network of Gilles' job, when Maspero and Frantz finally meet him at Pavillons-sous-Bois, he takes them to meet his uncle, the senior deputy mayor. They spend the day unfolding the long history of the Pavillons from the establishment of a waste basin in 1867, through Gilles' great-uncle's arrival in 1894, and into the 20th century. Much of their conversation is focused on ecologies of the area—the fallow land, the forests, the water. In many ways, Maspero and Frantz have succeeded in their initial goals: They have connected with the people who live in the periphery and pursued those connections in order to learn more about how the banlieue became the banlieue. They have taken the time to develop this relationship with

Gilles, but their conversation begs the question: to what avail? If their goal was to reach a hand out to the inhabitants of the banlieue, a detailed summary of the area's flora seems to miss the point. They have avoided wider networks of connections, which is the only way they are able to take time.

Like the Malian men, Karin, a friend of Maspero and Frantz who works in Bondy but lives in Paris, finds herself unaware of and unable to access the suburbs in which she spends time. She admits that aside from her work consultations and "quelques autres points de chute comme le routier du bout du monde où elle les emmène manger un jambon frites" (165) ["a few other stopping-off places like the godforsaken transport café where she takes them to eat ham and chips" (131)], she has no real connection to the suburb. "Je me suis toujours dit qu'un jour je visiterais Bondy. Par exemple j'irais faire le tour des écoles pour voir les enfants ailleurs qu'à la consultation" (165) ["I've always told myself that one day I'd do a tour of Bondy. Go round the schools, for example, to see the children somewhere else than in consultation" (131)]. Karin's understanding of Bondy is founded in class consciousness, which she translates into assumptions about race and immigration:

> Karin pense qu'il y a autant de Français pauvres que d'immigrés pauvres. Elle ne voit pas de différences sur ce plan. Ce qui, dans la pratique, lui pose des problèmes, avec les immigrés, ce sont les structures familiales : chez les Maghrébins, c'est toujours le père qui se présente comme seul interlocuteur, unique autorité, catégorique et définitive ; et avec les Africains, il est extrêmement difficile, au sein d'une famille, de s'y retrouver. (165)
>
> [Karin thinks that there are as many poor French people as poor immigrants. She can't see any difference on that score. What causes problems with immigrants, in practical terms, is the family structures: with the North Africans it's always the father who presents himself as the only spokesman, the sole authority, giving his final categorical word; and in an African family, it's extremely difficult to get your bearings. (131)]

Despite admitting that her interactions with the immigrants of Bondy are limited to her work contacts, Karin attempts to summarize the cultural contexts. Karin attests to having "expérience" with Africa: "elle sait qu'une famille africaine est complexe pour un Européen, mais là-bas elle arrivait à se repérer à force de patience, à constituer de véritables arbres généalogiques, à savoir qui était qui par rapport à qui" (165) ["she knows that an African family seems complex to a European, but over there she managed to work things out, with patience, and to construct real family trees—namely who was related to whom"]. That is, she maps them in a way that is logical to their own cultural structures. In France, those cultural structures are disrupted and disconnected from their contexts, according to Karin's experience; she summarizes the immigrant experience in France as simply "désorientation générale" (165).

Maspero, in his notes, seems unconcerned with Karin's faulty relationship to Bondy. He allows her a general air of authority about African families, and when they leave the café, they borrow her car and escape the suburbs for Bondy Forest. On the way, having left their maps behind, they get lost and find only a scattering of trees among the national highways. When they meet up with Karin again that night, "[ils ne savent plus] très bien où ils en sont" (166) ["they don't really know where they are any more" (132)]. Karin again steers them away from Bondy, suggesting a bar in Montreuil that she knows; they get lost again while Karin tries to find it. Nonetheless, as Maspero closes this chapter of his travelogue, he acknowledges that "peut-être Karin leur a-t-elle rendu service, en les ramenant un peu sur terre, histoire qu'ils se rappellent que leur histoire de jeu c'est bien gentil, mais que la réalité est là , toute simple, que rien ne sépare vraiment Paris et les banlieues" (167) ["maybe Karin did them a favour in bringing them down to earth a little, reminding them that calling this a game is all very well and good, but the simple truth is that nothing separates Paris from its suburbs" (132-3)]. This is the revelation at

the heart of *Roissy-Express*. The geographic taxonomy of "Paris, centre-ville" and "Paris, banlieue" is technical, official, academic. In reality, the boundary between them is not geographic, but rather sociological, infrastructural, experiential. But Maspero quickly decides that they will not "dwell on it for now" and moves on; the plot returns to travel and to the question of the RER. "Disaster" strikes when they find that "Trafic de banlieue [est] totalement interrompu Gare du Nord" (166) ["Suburban services from Gare du Nord [are] totally suspended" (133)].

Conclusion

As a sociopolitical space, peripheral parts of Paris' *banlieues,* like the 3,000, are systemically distanced. Their geographic proximity to the city, arguably mediated by a robust public transit system, is undermined by the unlearning and relearning that individuals like Maspero and Frantz must progress through. It is not simply a matter of forming an image of the *banlieue,* as Kevin Lynch would suggest. One must be able to read that image. There is a gravity to a space that is designed in a way that precludes social interaction. Attempting to bridge the social distance inherent in living on the periphery encumbers an individual with a secondary process, in which they are burdened not with their own learning of the *centre-ville*, but also with the erratic misunderstanding of the people they encounter there. They bring, Maspero argues, the periphery with them.

Important to the project of urban vulnerability, *Boutiques obscures* asserts, by comparison to *Roissy-Express*, that other people can teach you about yourself, but collisions cannot fully teach you about the other. They are devoid, at least at the instant, of identity. Identity is added on, folded in, beyond the assumption of essentialized identity. In *Le*

Ravissement de Lol V Stein, for example, John Bedford makes assumptions about Lol because she is a woman walking alone at night in the dark. She is not Lol—or "Lol"—until she is contextualized in space and in the stories that intersect there. This collision between a man and an unknown woman is not universal in a generalizable sense; it does not translate to any person in a city.

In *Feminist City*, geographer Leslie Kern laments the rhetorical framing of "bold women" who occupy what are commonly considered dangerous spaces: jogging in parks, riding public transit at night, walking home alone after an evening at a bar, leaving their windows open (158). Kern notes that these supposed acts of courage tend to be regretted as simple luck; women "re-interpret the situation as one where they did something 'stupid,' but 'got away with it'" (159), she says. This framing perpetuates heteropatriarchal beliefs about where in a city a woman is inherently in danger—namely, anywhere in public—despite most violent crimes against women taking place at home or in the workplace, as Kern notes (145). The belief that the streets are dangerous, especially in contrast to the supposed safety of the home, rarely holds true. Edouard Louis, in *Histoire de la violence*, and Mansoure's friend Alec, in *Rue des Boutiques obscures*, show examples of the dangerous random encounter, but in doing so, illustrate how such danger exists primarily because the intimate desires those men sought were written out of heterosexual, institutionalized spaces. Because queerness is written out of spaces that express hierarchical power, these men turn elsewhere and experience danger in different ways, already violently rejected from the spaces that should be safe.

Ultimately, Kern wonders if we can change the rhetoric surrounding these moments and therefore realize something more significant: "What if we reframed these experiences as moments when we [women] correctly possessed all the available information and made a wise,

calculated choice?" (159) That is, perhaps these women are not just lucky and "getting away with" risky behavior, but rather employing a keen literacy of urban spaces and its risks. Each collision in a public urban space provides women with data about how men are likely to act; how she can avoid being alone, cornered, or invisible; how other women occupy the space; and so on. This data becomes the strategies and tactics used to survive—or dwell—in the space.

In *Roissy-Express,* we find that this shared knowledge is not a guaranteed or obligatory result of a collision. Maspero (more so than Frantz) centers geography and physical mapping so strongly in his conception of the RER-B journey, he turns himself away from the collisions that could throw him from his feet and reorient him toward the *banlieue* as populated, lived-in spaces. The consequence of this stance toward the world is, as Kern points out, a rejection of the kind of deep knowledge that can come from embracing the vulnerability of being in the city.

It is worth coming back to the idea of dwelling in the context of a collision. In a basic sense, collisions would seem incompatible with dwelling. Being thrown from the ground, especially as frequently and as unpredictably as the urban space allows, does not allow for one to settle into one's space with the security needed to combat urban vulnerability. However, if one is open to that vulnerability, and open to what collisions reveal about the space in which they occur, one can learn new ways to read the built environment. In the next chapter, I consider the productive potential of collisions more fully, looking specifically to the consequences of allowing oneself to learn from collisions. In moments of profound urban vulnerability—especially in conditions under which the vulnerable attempt to reclaim their space in the city—we can find evidence of how the afterlives of collisions produce new ways of being-in-the-world. Specifically, much of the next chapter will consider the Nuit debout and the capacity to assert oneself in space. If collisions cannot necessarily teach you about the other, the Nuit debout

protests illustrate the problems and potential of insisting that others take the time, take measure, and reach a hand out to the world that the protests imagine. We can discover, in ways Guy could do only egocentrically and Maspero could not do at all, that dwelling-together amplifies a collision's afterlife. In that collective vulnerability, there are, perhaps, new strategies for living within *le droit à la ville.*

Chapter 4 Conviviality and the Right to the City

In the previous chapter, Modiano asked us to think about billiard balls. I considered his illustration of the cityspace as a billiard table, on which countless balls speed across the surface, crashing into each other seemingly at random. In that metaphor, if each billiard ball is a city dweller, the ball's trajectory forward is pointed toward the future. The trajectory represents the individual's movement through space toward a goal. Therefore, when the balls—when we, the city dwellers—collide, we are knocked off path. All it takes is a tap, and we are destabilized, pushed off our forward-moving line.[1]

What, then, can we say about the consequences of those collisions and the ensuing destabilization? We are pushed off our paths, and perhaps our futures change. It could be easy to simplify destabilization as a negative effect: Lol V Stein struggles to conceive of herself in the present because of her constant collisions with her own past in the city; the citizens of Oran must avoid collisions with each other in order to avoid contracting the plague and then in turn deal with the isolation that results from that avoidance. Being knocked off our paths may ask us to reimagine futures for ourselves, reconceive of ourselves in space and in relation to others. The process is likely uncomfortable, awkward, even physically, existentially dangerous.

[1] Deleuze and Guattari, in *Nomadology: The War Machine*, offer a different visualization of the encounter in the game Go: "In Go, it is a question of arraying oneself in an open space, of holding space, of maintaining the possibility of springing up at any point: the movement is not from one point to another, but becomes perpetual, without aim or destination, without departure or arrival" (5). In this chapter, as the state and state apparatus come into greater clarity, one might expect to find Deleuze and Guattari play a significant role. However, in this chapter's considerations, I am not so much interested in the competitive tension between individual and state as I am the productive tension between individual and individual. The state plays a large—even outsized—role in that tension, but it is not the main interest for now.

Elsewhere in *Rue des Boutiques obscures,* Modiano's Mansoure implores us, through Guy, "Faites attention dans la rue," take care in the streets (149). For Mansoure, that declaration is primarily a question of physical safety, a reverberation of his friend's murder by a stranger in the streets. At the same time, he suggests that Guy keep his eyes open to the ways that the streets can influence him, just as Mansoure is himself now terrified of certain streets and the encounters they may bring. Paying attention takes time and psychic energy, which Maspero and Frantz realize may not be congruent with the original rigidity of their project on the RER-B. To be "open to" collisions is a precarious position, especially so for some individuals. The experience of urban vulnerability, as discussed in earlier chapters, is different for people of color, women, and immigrants (especially so for undocumented immigrants). Queer people experience different risks expressing homosexual desires from those expressing heterosexual desires. Unhoused people are often assumed to have different or fewer rights to occupy space. Disabled people may expend greater physical and psychic energy in the act of moving through the built environment and may therefore reprioritized encounters. However, as a generalized conception of everyday urban life, questioning the role of vulnerability allows us to, in turn, consider how the consequences of shared space can help us imagine new ways of living in cities. If the city dweller remains open to collisions, open to learning from how they are shaken from the ground, can collisions then play a role in how the future of the city is created?

In this chapter, examples of being open to the influence of collisions will provide the framework for thinking about imaginaries of urban futures. I propose that being shaken from the ground provides city dwellers the occasion—even the impetus, the obligation—to imagine ways that the social city can be manifested within the built environment. Like de Certeau's strategies and tactics, these futures depend on the success of new ways of being, even when those

successes are tenuous and temporary. De Certeau distinguished between types of operations: "strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose those spaces when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert those spaces" (de Certeau, 30, original emphasis). A strategy has productive power within the space that functions by way of social operations to engender in turn a space in which the strategy continues to succeed. By contrast, tactics, which do not have the same power as strategies because they exist with respect to liminal proximity, generally in opposition to time and in opposition to authority, must operate *against* space. That is, they must perform *within* the rules in order to act against them: "strategies pin their hopes on the resistance that the *establishment of a place* offers to the erosion of time; tactics on a clever *utilization of time*, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power" (38-9, original emphasis). Strategies, de Certeau says, require an individual to have access to the whole playing field of a situation, which is available only to those with power. Tactics are oppositional; they are often the only actions available to those without power. When a space is disrupted, or when one's sense of self-in-space is disrupted, all space becomes somewhat tactical; all actions have an urgent, unsettled temporality. When one is shaken from the ground, one may imagine a new way of being in space that may then succeed or fail. Those in power have more comfortable spaces in which to experience that disruption. Those without power depend on each other to develop tactics; the successful imaginaries of urban space, like tactics, may spread via the proximity and vulnerability of collisions. As I have argued elsewhere, when one reaches a hand out into the world and finds another who will make that world legible, there can be in that contact—the collision—a sharing of tactics.

The cases we will consider in this chapter are largely communal and collective, gatherings of large groups of people around a common (political) goal. They are generally intentional encounters of like-minded people who come to occupy a space and attempt to reshape the political discourse and lived experience of urban life. However, each of these cases suggests something about the individual lived experience of the city. How the individual comes to understand themselves in collisions influences how the individual imagines themselves dwelling in the city.

Brigitte Gros' *Quatre heures de transport par jour* (*Four Hours of Transport per Day*, 1970) recounts one politician's efforts to respond to the needs and demands of her constituents as they suffer the quotidian consequences of extreme neoliberal planning in the banlieue of Paris, including geographic isolation, insufficient transport access, and excessive commutes. In her book, Gros acknowledges both the urgency of recognizing the power of individuals who speak together and simultaneously the near impossibility of being heard by powers who do the planning. What makes Gros' account especially interesting in this context is its almost predictable, if not cinematic dependence on one central protagonist with power—the politician. The Train 651 Affair, as Gros calls it, makes specific assumptions about individuals achieving change in urban space: namely, the individual's grasping at power is generally, if not always, futile. When the issue is brought to Gros, an actor within the structure of the state, change is swift. Gros shows, however, the role of proximity with people—in this case, the people commuting on Train 651—in transmitting concern about such infrastructural failings amongst individuals. Encounters with others allow Gros to make sense of the problem and develop a drive to action in spaces dominated by state control and access.

The question of access to space recalls Henri Lefebvre's *le droit à la ville*, the right to the city, which contends that a just city is detached from commodification and capitalism, instead open to participation and appropriation by those who inhabit the space. This concept bridges Gros' bureaucratic venture with on-the-ground struggles to reshape the city so that it is democratically livable. We turn, then, to the Nuit debout protests, a movement that staged nightly protests from 31 March 2016 through June of that year, especially at the Place de la République in Paris, but spreading elsewhere throughout France and other countries. Two texts serve as the heart of this analysis: François Ruffin's 2016 documentary *Merci patron !* (*Thanks, Boss!*) and Patrick Farbiaz's 2016 collection of documents written by deboutists during their occupation of the République.[2] The former, Ruffin's documentary that debuted a month before Nuit debout began, shows how proximity transmits the drive and desire for a new way of being in the city. The latter allows the deboutists to represent themselves, outlining their own approach to being together in space with a shared goal. I am specifically interested here in how the deboutists think about self-organization and how they imagine urban life differently. My goal is not to develop a politics of the Nuit debout movement or protests—a task which has been well accomplished by others. Rather, I aim to find in Nuit debout the lived experience of vulnerable proximity. These protests and the texts they produced speak to the complicated reality of being open to collisions as an individual seeking space and power in the city.

I will turn finally to Agnès Varda and JR's 2017 documentary *Visages Villages* (*Faces Places*) to consider how the individual might appropriate the strategies developed by collective occupation of public space. Where François Ruffin's film represents the provocateur approach to

[2] "Deboutists" ("the ones standing up," a clumsy moniker in English) appears to be a phrase coined by the protestors themselves. They use it throughout their documents to refer to those at the Place de la République in the weeks of the movement's protests.

encountering the specter of urbanism where is holds power, Varda and JR's documentary seeks out a mutual, pro-social relationship with others that allows for, in theory, a renewed and meaningful attention on communities that are otherwise ignored or waning. At the heart of the documentary, Varda and JR consider the consequences of recognizing, acknowledging, even embracing fading communities.

I ask, ultimately, if there is a form of conviviality—not simply friendliness, but rather a generosity to living-together (*con-vivial*)—that can help us understand the lived experience of sharing public urban space. In the extreme and unavoidable proximity of the city, a radical recognition of the co-constitutive nature of space and the interdependence of imagining new ways of being in the city, conviviality functions as a pro-social stance toward the urban quotidian. If urban dwellers recognize an ethical responsibility in "being here in space with you," there may be, I argue, a path toward reclaiming urban dwelling.

Getting to Work

In 1970, Brigitte Gros, then mayor of Meulen-en-Yvelines, published *Quatre heures de transport par jour*, a narrative account of her efforts to improve commuting conditions for her constituents living in the suburbs and working in Paris. Gros, who had joined the Résistance as an eighteen-year-old, was well-known at the publication of this book as a journalist who made her name writing for *L'Express* before becoming a politician, member of the Parti républicain, radical et radical-socialiste. She served as mayor from 1963 to 1985 and as a member of the French Senate from 1973 to 1985. As mayor, she worked toward affordable low-income housing (especially HLM), insisting that each French family should be able to own a home. In her

political tenure, she voted for legal abortion access and easier access to divorce, among other progressive laws, establishing herself as a stalwart figure in French left-wing politics.[3]

Quatre heures de transport recounts Gros' revelations about her constituents' lengthy and dehumanizing commutes between the commune and the Paris city center where they worked, a problem that she took to the government and successfully resolved. A constituent reports to her that travel on Train 651 has become unbearable due to reduced frequency and closed lines, which means that trains at peak hours are overcrowded, hot, and lacking seating; the limitations of the *metro-boulot-dodo* way of life, "commute-work-sleep," here enters political grievance. Gros vows to experience the issue herself, taking Train 651 into the city center, noting first-hand the untenable conditions. From there, she takes her concerns to various members of government and, through bureaucratic channels, succeeds in restarting service of extra trains with improved seating. The book is less an ethnology of the working class than it is a detailed consideration of the bureaucratic process; it is less a battle against the dehumanization of those suffering than it is a battle against the austerity politics that enable their suffering. There are nonetheless important moments, especially as Gros learns about the conditions in which her constituents live, that illustrate the role of proximity and openness in that bureaucracy.

Journalist Roger Priouret, in the *Présentation* to Gros' book, suggests that three problems dominate contemporary politics such as Gros illustrates in her book: "l'homme dans son travail, l'homme chez lui, l'homme entre son travail et chez lui" (xii) ["the individual at work, the individual at home, the individual in between their work and their home"].[4] Priouret thus spatializes the problem, suggesting that the urban citizens' needs are specific to their location

[3] See Morin (2010) for an encyclopedic account of Gros' life from the perspective of a socialist worker's organization. See 'L'hommage à Brigitte Gros' (2016) for a tribute to Gros in mainstream press on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of her death.
[4] All translations of *Quatre heures de transport* and its *Présentation* given in brackets are my own.

and to their function in that location. The third problem, the individual in between their work and their home, acknowledges that one's commute creates its specific needs and concerns, including the unbearable four-hour commute of Gros' constituents, which takes them away from their families and their jobs and saps the energy they would otherwise dedicate to either end of their commute.[5]

The "problème d'urbanisme" at the heart of Priouret's reading of Gros' book is ubiquitous and beyond simple solutions: "En matière d'urbanisme la carence est si générale qu'il est difficile de nous attribuer des recours quelconques" (xv) ["Where urbanism is concerned, the deficiency is so general that it is difficult to offer any recommendations"]. He speaks here specifically about housing (in fact, housing everywhere in Europe except "peut-être" England) and ultimately refuses to "ouvrir ce dossier terrible" (xv) ["open up this enormous line of questioning"]. He thus gestures at the book's perhaps unintentional grounding principle: addressing where the people live and where they work is a problem that is simply unsolvable, so we focus instead on how they move between the two. This recalls the problem of the 3,000 housing estate in *Roissy-Express*; these spaces, built to address the housing needs of largely poor or immigrant communities, design convenience and proximity out of the urban experience. Priouret goes further than Maspero by arguing that the problem is bad enough to be considered entirely futile.

As Gros presents it, her role as journalist and as politician is a humanizing project: "j'aidais ainsi les uns et les autres à sortir de l'anonymat" (4) ["I thus helped people step out

[5] Of course, these three problems also functionally reduce the urban individual into a person who works; two of the three problems are specific to one's role in capitalist society. It is then not surprising that Priouret takes the time to specifically point to the failures of "Soviet socialism": "En tout cas on sait déjà que partout où règne le socialisme du type soviétique, l'homme n'est pas bien traité dans son travail et il n'a pas le minimum vital en matière de logement" (xiii) ["In any case, we already know that wherever Soviet socialism rules, individuals are not treated well in their jobs and don't have the bare minimum in housing"].

from anonymity"]. She feels "une certaine satisfaction à insuffler un peu d'humanité dans les rapports entre les hommes" (4-5) ["a certain satisfaction in breathing a bit of humanity into the relationships between people"]. Here, we find an elected official who finds herself in between the individual and power, someone who positions herself as the conduit between parties who can translate and transform messages between them. Priouret makes the perhaps grandiose claim that "Gros est la première personne qui ose poser le problème. Elle le fait non pas en langage administratif, mais avec les mots courants" (xv) ["Gros is the first person who dares to address the problem, and she does so not in administrative language but in everyday language"]. He argues that not only has Gros succeed in *recognizing* the problem, but she has also succeeded in *translating* it, speaking of it in a language that is mutually coherent to both the people and those in power. Such a claim—regardless of its veracity—underlines an important assumption in the book's framing: the disconnect between those in power and those they serve is so extreme, communication between them is not only arduous but incomprehensible without mediation.

Gros admits in these reflections on anonymity to being unaware of the living conditions of her own constituents. And so, when a constituent—a 55-year-old retiree who spent her entire working life commuting four hours a day, giving the book its title—comes to her office and presents her with a petition signed by other unhappy local workers, she forces Gros to confront the reality of elected office: "Parce que vous être notre élue. Et que votre action aura peut-être plus de poids que celle de quatre cents péquenots anonymes" (10) ["Because you're our elected official. And because your actions might have more weight than that of four hundred anonymous yokels"]. The woman recognizes the distinction between Gros, "notre élue," and her fellow constituents, "quatre cents péquenots," but simultaneously suggests that Gros carries the burden

of responsibility in that relationship. Her lack of awareness aside, she is made to confront the position that her constituents assume she holds within the machinery of the state.[6]

In some ways, positioning herself between her constituents and state power requires her to take credit for the political movement she facilitates. When she sets out to tackle the problem (her word is "*m'attaquer*" [10]), it is not until she rides the train herself that she comes to terms with her constituents' complaints: "Ce fut une sorte de descente aux enfers. Mon visiteur du samedi n'avait nullement noirci le tableau, mais ce voyage fut pour moi une épreuve révélatrice" (11) ["It was like a descent into hell. My visitor from Saturday had by no means exaggerated the situation, but this trip was for me a revealing ordeal"]. The words of her constituents in her office disappear and the experience itself becomes the catalyst. Her active decision to experience the commute herself take precedence in the narrative that eventually explains how the solution was found.

The turn, and what makes this story particularly interesting in the context we have been exploring thus far, is her approach to the experiment's sociability: "Je m'efforçais de m'entretenir avec ma voisine" (11) ["I endeavored to talk with my neighbor"]. Interacting with the individuals on that trains, those who suffer the infrastructural indignity of Train 651, is both a task to be undertaken and an obligatory step in bringing their problems to those in the power to address them. In an exploration of her constituents' experience of daily life, "voisine" is an interesting, if not performative, choice of words. Of course, the woman on the train is her neighbor in the sense that they sit next to each other on the train. In another sense, though, Gros

[6] Historian Mathieu Flonneau notes that Gros was, in January 1975, a panelist on the *L'Automobile et la cité* commission, organized under the authority of the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and the Prefect of Paris. She was included, Flonneau suggests, to bring in external consultation, with "the aim of clarifying positions and of finally opening the debate" (108). The mediating role that Gros professes in this book, in which she put herself between the government and the people, was certainly recognized by those with the power to make change in the planning policies in Paris.

calls the woman her neighbor to emphasize a political valence of their relationship, two individuals who share space and presumably live together in an arbitrary but geographically distinct neighborhood. Gros paraphrases the woman's story (there are no direct quotations), concluding, "Tandis que le train 651 traînait sa cargaison de voyageurs vers Mantes, la fatigue de cette femme, comme celle de tous ceux qui nous entouraient, paraissait atteindre la limite du supportable" (12) ["As the 651 train dragged its freight of passengers toward Mantes, this woman's fatigue, like that of those who surrounded us, seemed to reach the limit of what can be tolerated"]. Though she participates in dehumanizing her fellow travelers (perhaps for rhetorical effect), calling them "cargaison" (freight, cargo), she acknowledges that "nul n'a le droit de condamner des êtres humains à un tel traitement quotidien" (12) ["no one has the right to sentence human beings to such a daily punishment"]. The discomfort and exhaustion caused by the Train 651 commute is, according to Gros, a condition that no one should suffer—neither the Aubergenville residents nor, presumably, a greater public to whom they are largely invisible. Despite experiencing it herself, she remains removed from them; they are neighbors, but they do not share their everyday lived experiences.

Gros notes that, according to statistics provided by Roger Guibert, then director of the SNCF, residents of Aubergenville made up at the time only 0.0003% of users of trains from the Parisian banlieue. The political fight she has undertaken affects, then, an almost imperceptibly small number of people, but she worries about how the public would react if they made their concerns known collectively. She rejects the idea of public protests, either at the Saint-Lazare station or at the Aubergenville station (the start and end point of most people's journeys), or perhaps in the train itself, as a way of making others aware: "En perturbant gravement le trafic," she muses, "on pouvait attirer l'attention de l'opinion publique et de la presse" (15) ["By

seriously disrupting traffic, we could attract the attention of the public opinion and of the press"]. The contemporary political context would not allow that, she says:

> Mais on ne peut s'engager dans de telles actions, avec tous les risques qu'elles comportent, qu'en position de force. Ce n'était pas notre cas. Dans le climat politique actuel, la majorité silencieuse craint toutes ces formes de violence et de désordre. Il est trop facile aujourd'hui de saisir le moindre prétexte pour taxer un adversaire de « gauchiste » et de faire jouer contre lui toute la panoplie des lois répressives. (15)
>
> [One can only engage in that kind of action, with all the risks it involves, from a position of strength. This wasn't our case. In the current political climate, the silent majority is afraid of these forms of violence and disorder. It's too easy today to take hold of the slightest pretext to accuse an adversary of being "leftist" and use the whole arsenal of repressive laws against them.]

Manners of expression are reserved for those who are already in some position of power and have less need to be heard: the so-called silent majority. Because the residents of Aubergenville are already invisible in the eyes of the Parisian public—and perhaps, the Parisian bureaucracy—they do not have the option to make their issue known via "violence and disorder." This idea suggests a collision between groups; rather than two bodies coming into proximity in space, Gros here worries about a group coming into proximity with others in public, making itself known for perhaps the first time, and creating an impression that persists. This despite the centrality of invisible, silent people in the history of protesting. If these dehumanized commuters should not protest, who should? Rhetorically necessitating a mediator, someone like Gros herself, is designed to avoid that collision and instead translate the message into something supposedly agreeable, respectable.

Gros compares the situation to the 1968 student protests, remembering the time she sensed the state "de nervosité et d'excitation" in Aubergenville and decided to take action: "Tout le reste de la journée, je m'efforçai de me placer en tampon entre les C.R.S. et les étudiants, de

calmer les uns et les autres, d'éviter les combats, les matraquages et les brutalités" (16) ["For the rest of the day, I did my best to place myself as a buffer between the Republican Security Forces and the students, trying to calm everyone down, avoid combat, bludgeoning, brutality"].[7] Gros here offers the reader an example of mediation, of coming between two parties in order to act as a buffer and a voice of reason. Both sides, Gros suggests, are over-excited and capable of violence (though "les matraquages," referring to police batons, at least suggests a greater culpability on one side). Gros comes in to translate. This was for Gros a moment for self-reflection, especially after being pursued by a police officer: "Je devais être rapidement relâchée, mais longtemps on me reprocha ma « solidarité » avec les gauchistes et mon attitude « révolutionnaire »" (16) ["I was to be quickly released, but for a long time, I was criticized for my 'solidarity' with the leftists and for my 'revolutionary' attitude"]. She reiterates the risks of collision: when the public encounters political affect, it will likely be quick to make assumptions about the origins and explanations for that affect; if Gros is apprehended by the police during a student protest, she must be associated with them and therefore must be a revolutionary.

As a member of the student protests, Gros practices mediation in its pacifying sense; she stands between opposing forces to mitigate the danger that one (the one with power) poses to the other (the one without), while also transmitting the collective voice of the students to be heard by those in power. However, as a mayor and member of the Senate, Gros takes on a different role. When she takes the grievances of her constituents to her government colleagues, her task is not to translate their concerns directly. She amplifies the voices of her constituents so that they are heard by the state, but she also adapts them so that they are comprehensible. In a way, her book grapples with the tension of her accountability: she speaks to the accountability she feels for her

[7] The C.R.S. is a subset of the French National Police, generally assigned to security but best known for crowd and riot control.

constituents, but her ability to slip into the rhetorical space of government speech derives from her role within the government, which carries with it an implicit responsibility to maintain the order of state power.

Ultimately, Gros laments the impossibility of "action directe" in France at that time, which "risquait finalement de jouer contre nos objectifs" (17) ["direct action [which] ultimately posed a risk to our objectives"]. Direct action is, in the sense described by Gros, a question of encounters with the public. Protestors, especially those coming into the city center from the banlieue, should not, in Gros' opinion, present themselves to the public as obstructionists and provocateurs because that precise moment of direct action is generally the public's only means of conceiving of the people who are left out of public imaginaries of the city. As Gros has stressed throughout these first pages of her book, the inhabitants of Aubergenville—specifically those stuck for hours a day on trains carrying them back and forth to the city center—are basically invisible. Their anonymity makes direct action almost impossible because stalling traffic or causing chaos on the trains would be the only thing the public knows about them. Direct action as a kind of collision creates impressions, images, and assumptions. If the commuters from Aubergenville were to protest on the train or at one of the busy train stations, they would create an image of themselves as provocateurs rather than as fellow city dwellers trying to make themselves heard. This invisibility is a direct consequence of the infrastructure of their daily commute. By living and working in such separated areas and therefore passing so much time in transit, they are left out of the urban collisions that would otherwise make them known and knowable.[8]

[8] In making these claims, I am generalizing—if not dehumanizing—these commuters myself. This is, in part, a consequence of Gros' narrative, which treats individuals with only passing interest.

The seeming self-centeredness of Gros' approach to the Train 651 affair is in some ways a mirror of the general public's ignorance; in another, it is an acknowledgment of the need to bring these people living in Paris' periphery into the heart of the conversation:

> En m'ouvrant les yeux sur leur misérable existence, mes amis d'Aubergenville me jetaient au cœur du problème. […] Bien sûr, il fallait les aider et j'étais déjà résolue à le faire, dans toute la mesure de mes moyens. Mais il ne suffisait pas de les aider. Il fallait d'abord comprendre. Poser le problème dans ces détails les plus concrets et dans ses racines les plus profondes. (27-8)
>
> [By opening my eyes to their miserable existence, my friends from Aubergenville flung me into the heart of the problem. […] Of course, I had to help them, and I had already resolved to do that in every way I was capable of. But it wasn't enough to just help them. I first had to understand. Pose the problem in its most concrete details and its most profound causes.]

"I first had to understand" echoes sentiments expressed earlier in this chapter and earlier chapters of this dissertation. Gros suggests that she cannot help until she has an intimate understanding of the problem, but she can only understand in proximity. The issue brought to her office by her constituent is not enough on its own to stimulate a change; in fact, she is brought into the problem, she says, not by that constituent but by her firsthand experience, by seeing it with her own eyes. In order to understand the problem, Gros must come into contact with the people and understand them and their lives. This is the project set forth by Maspero and Frantz in *Les Passagers du Roissy-Express*. Gros' framing, however, is more precise: she does not intend to come to understand *everything* about her constituents, or even understand them in a broad way. Rather, she aims to—and perhaps succeeds at—understanding this specific *element* of their lived experience, represented by the Train 651 Affair.

Calling the inhabitants of Aubergenville "mes amis" is perhaps Gros at her most overtly politician register, but it highlights the bureaucratic divisions of Gros' worldview. She must act

as a conduit between these people and those who can help them, an act she can accomplish only by virtue of her position. The rest of *Quatre heures de transport* attempts to paint a picture of the condition of these "friends" but generally offers that picture in bureaucratic terms, as the Train 651 Affair weaves its way through state apparatuses. She writes in the epilogue that the book's purpose is active: "Ce livre est une invitation à l'action. [… J'ai] voulu frapper, à ma manière, l'imagination des lecteurs et contribuer à une prise de conscience qui me paraît urgente" (169) ["This book is a call to action. I wanted, in my own way, to grab the readers' imagination and contribute to a revelation that seems urgent to me"]. Gros' book, as a documentation of achieving meaningful change in a city's planning policy, emphasizes the need for dramatic change in urban ways of life, but it does so only by recentering the political instead of the social. That is, in recognizing the futility of the public's voice, Gros highlights the ways that collective action has been suppressed in the neoliberal city, replaced with a void.

Gros finds, almost accidentally, that collisions are a humanizing process. Crucially, Gros' collision is distinct because it is planned. She takes that train with the explicit presumption of encountering those people she represents and to whom she bears a certain responsibility. When she boards Train 651 and sits in proximity to those experiencing hardship, she finds that she can empathize and better understand the task that has been put to her by her constituents. It is perhaps political posturing to call them "mes amis," but what she finds in her efforts to bring infrastructural reform to her constituents, and what she insists repeatedly throughout her account of those efforts, is that huge portions of the urban population have been rendered invisible by administrative neglect and societal ignorance. Her constituents have difficulty fighting for better ways of life because, in some respects, they do not exist in the eyes of those who have power or in the eyes of other Parisians.

The invisibility of these people in the city signals what Henri Lefebvre, in *The Right to the City*, writing about the city and the urban under extreme bureaucratic in the 20th century, calls "the 'spectre' of the city, that of urban society and perhaps simply of society" (Lefebvre 1996, 142). Lefebvre finds in that ghostly city the "spectacle" of "dissociated and inert elements of social life" that make up the urban:

> Here are 'social housing estates' without teenagers or old people. Here are women dozing while the men work far away and come home exhausted. Here are private housing developments which form a microcosm and yet remain urban because they depend on centres of decision-making and each house has a television. Here is a daily life well divided into fragments: work, transport, private life, leisure. […] Here is the dismembered and dissociated human being. Here are the senses of smell, taste, sight, touch, hearing—some atrophied, some hypertrophied. (143)

The city haunts us and causes us to regret what is gone, replacing the specter of Communism that had haunted Europe. The concrete embodiment of urban life is deformed; its functional experience is splintered and one's sensual relationship to the built environment is disarrayed. Specifically, what is lost and therefore haunting is human energy and human diversity. The bodily experience of labor (and commuting) is felt as physical exhaustion that prevents other experiences of urban life. By turning from the Marxist focus on capital that grounds most of early urban studies and considering the quotidian lived experience of urban life, Lefebvre highlights the psychic ramifications of a city that, while still urban, is stripped bare of its human experience.

If, as Brigitte Gros emphasizes throughout her book, urban change and power must be mediated through specific translators, the right to engage with a vision of urban life is reduced to a few select individuals who practice rhetorical, political, and economic power. Geographer Mark Purcell, in "excavating" Lefebvre's conceptualization of the right to the city (*le droit à la ville*), puts enfranchisement at the heart of urban power: specifically, "the right to participation,

and the right to appropriation" (102). Participation is perhaps the obvious part of Purcell's equation; an urban dweller who cannot participate in the city economically and socially has no right to the city. Appropriation here means having the right to "physically access, occupy, and use urban space, […] the right of people to be physically present in the space of the city" (102). Like Michel de Certeau's strategies and tactics, appropriation and participation distinguish groups of urban inhabitants—those who have access to power and those who do not. If participation is the right to take part in the systems of the city, appropriation is the right to exist in the city without participating in those systems.

These are wrought propositions in their simplicity. People of color, for example, arguably have a "right" to be in the city, but not always safely or comfortably. They do not necessarily have the right to *dwell* in space, to claim ownership of it. Race, class, gender, and sexuality are all "fundamental to inhabiting the city," Purcell remind us (106). These facets of the individual's identity are built into the political and social systems of the city and therefore unavoidable in a conception of power in daily life. "Lefebvre imagines appropriation to have a much broader and more structural meaning," Purcell says. "Not only is appropriation the right to occupy already-produced urban space, it is also the right to produce urban space so that it meets the needs of inhabitants" (102). A Lefebvrian right to the city would not exist in spite of the marginalization of certain groups, but rather it would enable the production of spaces that address and counteract that marginalization. To borrow Michele Grigolo's phrasing, the right to the city is "the right to difference" (23). Because cities "produce but also attract differences," Grigolo says, the right to the city must necessarily contend with how neoliberalism reproduces and expresses marginalization (25).

Lefebvre's radical change, Purcell suggests, is the criteria that permit enfranchisement. Rather than national citizenship framing the debate, Purcell shows that Lefebvre's conception of enfranchisement is "for those who *inhabit the city*" (102, original emphasis). That is, simply in *being there in space*, urban dwellers should have the means to participate in and appropriate the city. Physical presence, rather than national citizenship—or other markers of identity or group membership—as a basis of enfranchisement recenters essential urban diversity in the question of the right to the city; where the idea of national citizenship delineates sameness and exclusion, Lefebvre proposes an urban politics that allows for the geographic specificity of cityspaces.

However, in removing boundaries of identity and group membership, Lefebvre creates a version of enfranchisement that is volatile and unpredictable. Purcell warns that the right to the city is "entirely contingent":

> It may have desirable or undesirable outcomes for the social and spatial structure of the city. [… We] cannot know what kind of a city these new urban politics will produce. They could play out as a truly democratic challenge to marginalization and oppression, but they could also work to reinscribe new forms of domination. (2002, 100)

Without the framing of societally or culturally agreed upon values and imaginaries, the city that is built when individuals have access to the right to the city is unknowable until it is conceived. There is no guarantee that daily life in a city built on "new urban politics" will arrive at the utopianism that is often attributed to Lefebvre. Rather, the reproduction of domination and exclusion remains a possibility when imaginaries of the urban future are democratized.

Nonetheless, in a context in which individuals possess the right to the city, Purcell—and by proxy, Lefebvre—asks us to imagine a form of participation that does not reproduce version of current domination. A right to the city that is not founded on exclusion and sameness requires,

Purcell argues, an "activated" relationship to the urban space, one that bears with it responsibility:

> Participation means inhabitants increasingly coming to manage the production of urban space themselves. As they engage in real and active participation, their own collective power is revealed to them, and they increasingly understand themselves as capable stewards of the urban and its collective life. […] As inhabitants become activated and come to manage the city themselves, they are effectively appropriating the city and the production of its space. They are taking control of the conditions of their own existence. They are making the city their own again. (2014, 150)

Purcell ties the concrete conditions of the lived experience of cities to an ontological activation, one that reveals power and stewardship. The lack of activation that leads Gros' constituents to see themselves as voiceless and indebted to the political power of their mayor—Gros herself—would theoretically be alleviated in a city in which access to the right to the city is democratized. Purcell's conception of "real and active participation" suggests, like Lefebvre, a deactivated city, one in which participation is suppressed or eliminated.

While use of the public space remains largely accessible, engagement with it does not, Robert Shaw argues: "the rights to do this – the ability to claim public space, to hold protests outside seats of power and to influence public debate through this mingling in public space – has been eroded through the neoliberalisation of public space since the 1990s" (119). The deactivated city proposed by Purcell derives, I argue, at least in part from the suppression of what Shaw calls mingling: the random, unregulated contact with others in space. The monotony and exhaustion of four hours in transit a day, for example, leaves neither time nor energy for minor contact with others. The contact on the train itself is often the same exhausted individuals every day. What matters then is how city dwellers take advantage of *being there in space*. Despite the hollowing out of the urban from the city, as Lefebvre describes, activation is possible when random contact—that is, collisions—are not only made possible, but recognized,

acknowledged. Gros, as an intermediary between her constituents and the state, reproduced the systems that depress mingling in public space. We should consider, then, what it looks like when mingling in public space is intentional and explicitly democratic.

Making Work Visible

In the first decades of the millennium, one of the more salient examples of taking to the streets in France were the labor protests that surged in 2016 and led, at least partially, to the Gilets jaunes protests that began in 2018. At a time when France was proposing and passing legislation making significant changes to labor and employment policies (including the El Khomri law, which directly instigated the Nuit debout protests, as will be discussed below), various groups took to the streets in an effort to stop those changes and emphasize the necessity of strong workers' rights protections.[9]

The sociopolitical conditions that gave way to the labor protests are exemplified, in part, in the cultural rejection of the mega-rich and the engines of neoliberal dehumanization, such as Bernard Arnault, the head of LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy, the luxury goods conglomerate) and the central antagonist of François Ruffin's 2016 documentary *Merci patron !* At the start of the film, Arnault has decided to leave France and apply for Belgian citizenship. The outcry throughout France is significant, and he ultimately does not follow through. However, while Arnault is the antagonist of *Merci patron !*, it is only as a metonym for broader sociopolitical harm caused by the neoliberalization of which Arnault and LVMH are beneficiaries (and propagators). Ruffin, an admirer of the work of American documentarian

[9] See Verdier and Denkiewicz (2016), Béroud (2018), and Lane (2018) for sociological, political, and theoretical considerations, respectively, of the El Khomri law.

Michael Moore, makes a film in which his centrality—he is, in many ways, the film's stylized hero—and tendency for the spectacular engages with the political marginalization of the French working class.

François Ruffin meets Jocelyne and Serge Klur, a couple living in Poix-du-Nord, who are former employees of the Kenzo factory, a clothing manufacturer that is part of the LVMH group. When Kenzo moved their operations to Poland to exploit cheaper labor, the Klurs and many other workers were laid off. The town had depended largely on Kenzo for their employment, and when the company left, the Klurs were unable to find work elsewhere. As their debt continues to collect, they are on the verge of having their house taken from them. Kenzo's absence renders Poix-du-Nord a Lefebvrian specter, a town without access to direct participation in political life and without the dignity of lived experience.

Famously a provocateur, Ruffin wants to help.[10] The heart of Ruffin's plan is an attempt to, as he says with a certain amount of sarcasm, "rétablir un dialogue," reestablish a dialogue. If he can get Arnault and the Klurs to have a conversation, they will finally see eye to eye, he insists. In reality, the scheme is a bit closer to blackmail: posing as the couple's son, Ruffin drafts a letter threatening to contact French media (including his own newspaper, *Fakir*) and share the Klurs' story about being abandoned by LVMH. Ruffin's idea is to get someone from the company, if not Arnault himself, to meet the Klurs in person and hear their story. In either case, a dialogue or a media blitz, Ruffin insists on the necessity of making the Klurs visible and by proxy, making the specter of Poix-du-Nord visible on a massive scale.

[10] In a 2018 interview with the *International Journal of Communication*, Ruffin says about his style of activism, "I'm still a supporter of protests, banners, signs, and all that. I'm not at all someone who says that the traditional means of protest must be rejected, but just that it is necessary to find ways of bringing fun back into them."

Arnault's plan to move to Belgium illustrates the growing impossibility of simply "running into" someone like him. By leaving for Belgium, he would separate himself from France, from his French nationality, and in Ruffin's eyes, from the working class that he had abandoned in his factories. "Running into someone" is here perhaps more a metaphor than a literal collision; Ruffin is not so much concerned with coming across Arnault on a random sidewalk in Paris as he is with Arnault being physically in the company of those individuals whose lives he directly influences. In Ruffin's plan, running into someone, especially the head of a major conglomerate, sidesteps the usually onerous barriers to *setting up* an encounter; Ruffin does not count on getting onto Arnault's calendar through ordinary tactics (when he does—or rather, when the Klurs do—its only by extraordinary means). Instead, he hopes to manufacture a "chance" encounter with Arnault, happen upon the circumstances that allow them to reestablish a dialogue and bring him into contact with the lived experience of his employees.

While this is not exactly Marxist alienation from the product of one's labor (though that alienation plays a significant role in the story of the Klurs), we find in Ruffin's story an echo of the alienation that Gros discovered on Train 651. The Klurs have little access to the channels that would allow them to advocate for themselves. Those responsible for their experience of everyday life—namely, Arnault and other executives at LVMH—are effectively nonentities for the Klurs, because the Klurs are in turn nonentities to Arnault. In the absence of physical contact, the workers interact primarily with the *image* of Arnault, perceiving him more than they encounter him. The negotiations are predicated on this; Monsieur Digeon, a representative of Arnault's sent to speak with the family, says as much to the Klurs, acknowledging that his meetings with the couple are for "his image," which is notably both LVMH's image and Arnault's. Ruffin's plan is dangerous to LVMH because by taking the story to the media, he could affect the public

perception and conception of Arnault as an executive and LVMH as a company. Ruffin is ultimately successful. Monsieur Digeon's presence in the Klurs' home, facilitated by a threat to LVMH and Arnault's public reputations, translates into a deal to keep the family afloat in their financial crisis. They are paid to remain invisible. Their success does not change the system that created the problem; Ruffin never thought it would.

In the documentary's epilogue, Ruffin notes the extraordinary security measures in place to keep out *agitateurs* at the following year's stockholder meeting. There are more security guards than usual, and the guests undergo stricter searches than Ruffin remembers in the past. Before, the smaller shareholders were forced to watch the event from a side room; the ultra-wealthy had direct access, but the small shareholders had only a video screen. Now, in the year after the Klurs' won their fight against Arnault, the separation was even more marked. When Ruffin tries to bring in a to-go order of moules-frites, supposedly a gift to make up for having essentially blackmailed the company, he is asked to leave the food at the coat-check. Even after the Klurs' success—or more likely, *because* of the Klurs' success—, Arnault and the LVMH team take significant measures to ensure that they and the public remain separated. At an event ostensibly designed to allow for a conversation between the company's managers and the shareholders (already a distinction wrought with financial barriers), the security ensures that running into Arnault is a privilege reserved for those who Arnault welcomes into the circle.

From the stage at that event, Arnault is asked about these new security measures, including the bracelets that all guests are made to wear. He says that these regulations were put in place to prevent "membres agissants" from creating disorder in the conference hall; the audience, a group selected specifically by the company for the privilege of being present with the executives, applaud these measures. Arnault's use of the word "agissant" recalls a moment

earlier in the documentary, when Digeon, Arnault's representative in the negotiations with the Klurs, laments the role of "minorités agissantes qui font tout," a vocal minority that causes all the problems. Digeon's frustration with the Klurs and with Ruffin's tactics are exacerbated not by the threat of their talking to *Le Monde* or to prominent politicians like Jean-Luc Mélenchon or François Hollande. He, and LVMH by proxy, are worried about what would happen if the Klurs and Ruffin took their story to *Fakir*. While Digeon does not at this point know that the Klurs' "son" is in fact Ruffin, the founder of *Fakir,* he worries nonetheless about how the paper, a "minorité agissante," could influence the public perception of LVMH and Arnault's image. Recalling Purcell's "activation" of collective power, Digeon and Arnault's fear of active minor players reveals the potential power possessed in the collective of individuals that are otherwise suppressed in the urban specter. Their fear is founded on the ability of these minor players to make the general public aware of the control that is maintained over their daily lives by those like Arnault. When the public collides with these minor players, activation occurs when that awareness is transmitted between them.

If active minor players are to be feared by those in power, *Merci patron !* records a small part of the sociopolitical climate in which France experienced a series of large-scale public labor protests, in which the activation of communal power was at the center, in the late 2010s. Only weeks after the release of the documentary, Paris saw the start of what would become the Nuit debout protests.[11] Ruffin was directly involved in the start of the protests, having organized a

[11] Though the movement is generally referred to in English-language publications with its French name, there has been variation—if not confusion—in translations of the phrase "Nuit debout" for non-French speakers. *Time* has called it "Standing Up All Night" (similarly, *The Washington Post*'s "Stand Up All Night") while the BBC prefers simply "Up all Night." *The New York Times* has more literally translated it as "Night, Standing Up." These translations do not successfully capture the pun of "Nuit debout," the idiomatic sense of being awake all night, as well as the sense of "standing up" as protesting. In French, the capitalization ("Nuit debout" versus "Nuit Debout") varies somewhat. Except in direct citations, I will use throughout the name that the deboutists use to refer to themselves in their press releases, Nuit debout.

meeting on 23 February 2016 to support protests against the proposed Notre-Dame-des-Landes airport near Nantes; the teachers fighting for education reform; and the factory workers pushing back against the Goodyear tire company (Farbiaz 20-21). The idea for the protests at Place de la République, targeting specifically the El Khomri labor law, came about during that meeting. Mass protests were, at the time, banned following the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. (22) Patrick Farbiaz, writer and member of the council of the *Les Verts* party, contends that, while the events immediately leading up to Nuit debout are well-established, the movement cannot be traced to a single cause:

> Nuit debout est la résultante de plusieurs dynamiques : une colère générale mais diffuse, le développement de différents combats spécifiques – la solidarité avec les migrants, le droit au logement, les ZAD de Notre-Dame-des-Landes ou de Sivens… –, puis la cristallisation des luttes contre une loi travail antisociale et, enfin, l'initiative d'occuper la place de la République hors des cadres traditionnels. (26)
>
> [Nuit debout is the result of several dynamics: a general but diffuse anger, the development of various specific clashes – solidarity with migrants, the right to housing, the *Zones à défendre* at Notre-Dame-des-Landes or at Sivens – and then the crystallization of struggles against an anti-social labor law, and finally, the initiative to occupy the place de la République outside of traditional frameworks.][12]

This conflagration of influences that Farbiaz highlights, each a "clash" of social and political interests, points to the complexity of Nuit debout as a movement. The collection of individuals at the Place de la République—which is itself a cultural site rife with symbolism, as we will discuss below—cannot be taken as a homogenous body interested in the same urban future. The heterogeneity of the group both at the level of individual identity and of political interests is a propulsive force toward activation.

[12] Translations of Farbiaz (2016) given in brackets are my own.

To some degree, each of these influencing origin stories suggests a question of place and being-in-space. In this suggestion, I am particularly interested in the way that Nuit debout organizes itself within the spaces it creates. My intent here is not necessarily to interrogate the political drive of the movement, but rather the way that the urban space it manifests is conceived and managed. Farbiaz suggests that events in November 2015 at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21) might bring the beginnings of Nuit debout into clearer focus: "alors qu'un rassemblement à l'occasion de la COP 21 est interdit, les premières violences policières de l'état d'urgence s'abattent sur ceux qui sont tout de même déplacés, et plusieurs centaines de personnes sont arrêtées et mises en garde à vue" (12-3) ["when a gathering on the occasion of COP 21 was prohibited, the first instances of police violence during the state of emergency fell upon those who were already displaced, and several hundred people were arrested and taken into custody"]. State power—police under the protocol of a state of emergency—was used to determine where in the city public gatherings were (or more importantly, were not) allowed; people at the Place de la République were forcibly removed from a culturally significant public site. In this case, the police became violent specifically to maintain the interests of the state actors involved in COP21. Movements like Nuit debout are founded on the question of being *in place*. That is, the movement acknowledges how people invisibly occupy space and asks what happens when they make themselves seen. The government forbids assembly in these public spaces only when the assembly is conscious: when the public says, "I am here; I *will be* here," despite having always been there. A public square like the Place de la République sees constant pedestrian (and, until 2013, vehicular) traffic when it is not being occupied by deboutistes. People cross the square on their way from one place to

another. Its historical significance makes it a destination; its geographic centrality makes it a passageway.

Place de la République, Farbiaz suggests, was chosen "par son symbole, sa centralité, sa proximité avec la Bourse du travail et la possibilité de s'installer dans la durée" (17) ["because of its symbolism, its centrality, its proximity to the *Bourse du travail*, and the ability to occupy the space long-term"]. The Place maintains a geographic significance in the *centre-ville,* and so its relationship to the protests is as practical as symbolic. Its historical and urban symbolism is only part of its significance to Nuit debout; the movement ties labor, via the *Bourse,* and geography to the public square, reemphasizing the quotidian importance of Place de la République in the lived experience of the city. There, the protestors can be seen and can take up space long term. The cultural significance is acknowledged but pushed aside in favor of the practical use value of the square.

But when movement to and through a public space like the Place de la République comes to a halt, the state takes notice, just as they did in November the year before at COP 21. In the eyes of the state, public spaces like the Place are best used to move through, not to remain in. The particular power of Nuit debout—like Occupy Wall Street before it—is its permanence and its rejection of the march as a protest genre. As Farbiaz notes, the first declaration of the Nuit debout protests identified a "manifestation statique" (17), a static march. This contradiction in terms highlights the distinction that Nuit debout wanted to make in their movement. Rather than draw attention to their cause by moving through the city, the deboutists choose to literally stand in place. Others in the city come upon the protest by chance. There on the Place de la République, ideologically and demographically diverse groups of people "se mêlent" (18) ["mix"]. It is via this diverse mixing, Farbiaz argues, that Nuit debout functions. In a 4 April

2016 press release, the movement's organizers emphasize the same point, underlining specifically the importance of coming into contact:

> [Notre] mouvement a réuni chaque jour et chaque nuit des milliers de personnes différentes, mais DEBOUT. En outre, une foule encore plus nombreuse et croissante de curieux (femmes et hommes de tous âges, de tous milieux sociaux) passe sur la place et manifeste son soutien. Si besoin était, cela confirme l'échec manifeste du travail permanent d'exclusion des citoyen.ne.s mené par les dirigeants politiques et les faiseurs médiatiques d'opinion. (39)
>
> [(Our) movement has brought together thousands of different people every day and night, but STANDING. In addition, an even larger, growing crowd of curious people (women and men of all ages, from all walks of life) pass through the square and show their support. If need be, this confirms the obvious failure of the constant work of excluding citizens carried out by political leaders and media opinion makers.]

The protest is not only the protesters, but also the curious crowd that builds up around it; without spectators to witness the demonstrations and be disrupted by its occupation of space, the protests have no function. Like Lefebvre before them, the deboutists are interested in a group affinity based on presence, based on *being there*. Political exclusion based on identity and group membership is countered by membership-by-proximity, which is achieved randomly by occupying a common node in Parisians' daily travel.

Morgane Cadieu, in considering the clinamen as a conduit of creation, suggests that the relationship between randomness, encounters, and chaos is volatile: "La marche au hasard et la marche sous contraintes ne permettent que de réorganiser l'espace de la ville, de redistribuer les cartes ; la rencontre avec le voisin semble avoir le pouvoir de renverser l'ordre du monde et de conduire au chaos" (116) ["A random walk or a walk under constraints only allows you to reorganize the space of the city, to redistribute the cards. An encounter with your neighbor seems to have the power to upset the order of the world and lead to chaos" (my translation)]. Nuit debout forgoes the randomness of the traditional walking protest in favor of a different kind of

randomness that makes neighbors of those individuals in the square; the curiousness of random encounters drives the spirit of this imagined public space. Further, spontaneity and anonymity may exist, at least at the Place de la République those weeks in 2016, as a nominal hope more than a reality. Political scientist Gaël Brustier, asking the question "Que penser ?" in the title of his 2016 book about Nuit debout, suggested that the movement may have in fact suffered from its own (perhaps self-imposed) isolation:

> Certains soirs, Nuit Debout ressemble au métro aux heures de pointe. Chacun en a conscience, ce n'est pas encore le RER de 19h00 ni, *a fortiori*, les TER de province. Si le mouvement tend la main aux citoyens issus d'autres classes sociales dont les ouvriers, les banlieusards, les ruraux, il est néanmoins confronté à un problème majeur : son enfermement. Comme l'est d'ailleurs l'ensemble de la gauche. Dans les deux cas, le fait de sortir de cet isolement s'impose comme une nécessité absolue. (74)
>
> [Some evenings, Nuit debout looks like the metro during rush hour. Everyone is aware of it; it's still not the 7 pm RER nor, *a fortiori*, the provincial TER. While the movement wants to reach out to citizens from other social classes, like workers, suburbanites, and rural people, it is nonetheless faced—as is the left as a whole—with a major problem: its isolation.[13] In both cases, breaking out of this isolation is an absolute necessity.][14]

The trouble of a site-specific "manifestation statique" is the regularity of urban randomness. As discussed in previous chapters and acknowledged here by Brustier, a single urban space is, despite its chaotic randomness, prone to choreographies of repetition, guided by the practical functions of individuals' daily lives. Where static and persistent presence exists, this tactic seems to suggest, it possesses in its "chaos" a political valence to recreate, rather than reorganize, the city. Nuit debout's *enfermement* is geographically specific; the movement is essentially Parisian, even when it spills over urban boundaries into other French cities and cities throughout the

[13] "Son enfermement" could also be translated as "confinement," "detention," even "imprisonment." *Le Robert* gives "réclusion" and "séquestration" as synonyms.
[14] Translations of Brustier (2016) given in brackets are my own.

world. Within that geographic specificity, the movement gestures at various concerned parties—the working class, especially, but also students, immigrants, and so on—but the participation of those groups and the movement's influence on them are ultimately minimal. Not only are those groups not well represented there at Place de la République, but the movement also fails to successfully appeal to them. Nuit debout is contained, closed off.[15]

Because of the explicit attention paid by organizers of Nuit debout to how space is occupied, the movement encourages us to consider how daily uses of space are different. Farbiaz suggests that Nuit debout is a particularly strong movement because it adheres to three central tenets: 1) autonomy, "la capacité d'agir de ceux d'en bas"; 2) self-management, "l'organisation quotidienne et concrète de la place, prise en main par ses acteurs" ; and 3) self-government, "le processus de fonctionnement démocratique de la place" (19) ["the capacity for action from below […] the daily, concrete organization of place, taken up by the actors there […] the process of democratic function of the place"]. As Lefebvre argued that the right to the city should be given to those who occupy a space, the deboutists find democracy in the management of their built environment and those physically present in that space. The questions that these tenets address attempt to conceptualize what it means to be *there*, present at the site, in the company of others. These are questions that have little individual function but rather serve to determine how individuals interact with each other. The "who am I here with you" that formed the foundation of the first half of this dissertation returns, this time with explicit, concrete regulation.

In defining these qualities, Farbiaz draws attention to the evolution of self-governance over time with respect to experimentation: self-governance is "toujours remis en cause mais progressant à travers l'expérimentation du tirage au sort, du vote à main levée, de la limitation

[15] Years later, the Gilets jaunes protests would strike the opposite balance, appealing widely among various interest groups and consequently bringing in conflicting and complicated ideologies.

des temps de parole, du choix d'un consensus conflictuel" (19) ["always questioned but progressing through the experimentation of drawing lots, voting by show of hands, limiting speaking times, choosing conflicting consensus"]; that is, Nuit debout's version of self-governance depends on in-person participation, but arrives at conclusions that satisfy the greatest number of people without fully appeasing anyone. The communal nature of arriving at these decisions requires the deboutists to recognize each other in their space. There are no practices that necessarily arrive at democratic spaces because there is no guaranteed demographic composition at the square at any given time. Like the city in which it stands, the deboutist crowd shifts and morphs constantly, reacting to external stimuli and internal evolution of values.

In this defense of the movement, Farbiaz makes a declaration that he seems to intend metaphorically: "La démocratie radicale ouvre un espace de dissidence par rapport à l'État" (20) ["Radical democracy opens up a dissident space with respect to the State"]. The public discourse published by those in the movement also uses this phrase, as in the 12 April press release in which they reaffirm their central principles: "Nous ouvrons un espace pour des idées qui sont continuellement étouffées par ailleurs" (44) ["We open up a space for ideas that are continually stifled elsewhere"]. In employing this construction, Farbiaz celebrates the "fraction importante" (21) of the common public that decided to take back the place de la République from the politicians. The protests offer these people the chance to occupy a singular space within the city and shape a new relationship to space that exists in a struggle with the city as a whole.

Without rejecting the metaphorical sense of Farbiaz's declaration, perhaps we can read it literally. Nuit debout makes a concerted effort to think about how a space can be established with conscious and intentional parameters that facilitate exchange. "Opening" a space is not a conclusive action but rather an initiation, a permission to craft space along new principles. Theirs

is an effort to not only produce a new space there at the Place de la République but to *conceive* of one and influence the national conception of public space.[16] Nuit debout encourages new urban imaginaries that are founded in collective access to and participation in the interpersonal experience.

To accomplish their goals—not only their political goals of shifting the national conversation around labor policy, but their social goals of creating a democratic, communal space—the organizers of the protests depended in some ways on a certain lack of organization: "Son action [de la commission logistique] est rendue possible grâce aux différents dons et prêts de matériel […] et grâce à la spontanéité (aux coups de main) de tous ceux et celles qui cherchent à aider le mouvement" (Farbiaz 72) ["The logistics committee's actions are made possible thanks to various donations and loans of materials […] and thanks to the spontaneity (of helping hands) of all those who seek to help the movement"]. This comes in the section Farbiaz calls "La vie quotidienne sur la place," daily life on the square. The deboutists build generosity into their platform, depending on other people—people outside the Place de la République—for support. Nonetheless, establishing the structural logistics of the movement's nightly operations requires the organizers to set boundaries and limits. In setting limits for entry into the space, for example, the Commission Acceuil et Coordination (the Welcoming and Coordination Committee) insists that the "objectif de ce pôle n'est pas d'empêcher le contact spontané entre citoyens, entre membres de commissions" (69) ["objective of this committee is not to prevent spontaneous contact between citizens, between members of other committees"]. It is rather, they say, "servir de relais, d'intermédiaire ponctuel, si le contact spontané ne se fait pas" (69-70) ["to

[16] Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space*, delineates three domains of experienced space, the *conçu*, the *perçu*, and the *vecu*—the city that one conceives of; the architectural and geographic city that one perceives; and the city in one's lived experience. These are inextricably intertwined. One's conception of the city is always necessarily informed by the way one perceives of the cities and the way one experiences them.

serve as a go-between, a punctual intermediary if spontaneous contact doesn't happen on its own"]. Where administrative bodies, especially those with state power, are traditionally designed to limit or regulate contact between groups and individuals, the committee suggests, Nuit debout designs contact into its organization. Their goal is to facilitate contact rather than regulate it. Unlike Brigitte Gros, Nuit debout imagines an urban future in which direct action and direct contact are built into the cityspace. Their emphasis on spontaneity—"le contact spontané"—suggests a relationship between randomness and the democracy that the deboutists aim to foster in the encampment. Spontaneous encounters, those that occur without mediation and without strict guidelines, are necessary for the type of urban power they seek to afford to everyone in the square.

This spontaneity renders the movement impossible to control in its precise details, especially with respect to human interaction. As mentioned above, the group aims to "open up" a space for ideas, and in doing so, they acknowledge the consequences of such openness: "comment alors s'étonner que la colère légitime de certain.e.s s'exprime d'une façon différente ? Le mouvement n'est pas responsable des initiatives personnelles" (44) ["why, then, should we be surprised by the legitimate anger of certain people who express themselves differently? The movement is not responsible for personal initiatives"]. The abdication of responsibility reintroduces the individual into the conception of this space; because individuals bring their own values, prejudices, and behaviors into the square, the collective whole cannot always maintain organized peace. This declaration, written in a 12 April press release titled, "Qui a peur de la Nuit debout ? Investir l'espace public contre la privatisation de la démocratie" ["Who's afraid of the Nuit debout? Investing in a space against the privatization of democracy"], points to the complexity of the movement's goal of "opening up" a new space.

Though the deboutists trap themselves in quasi-isolation in their persistent occupation of a single public urban space, geographer Robert Shaw argues that the protestors have another feature in their favor: the nocturnality of Nuit debout protests enable the protestors to "make claims over" the city "in ways that they are no longer able to in the increasingly restricted and controlled day" (118). Nuit debout, and contemporary protests like it, are "finding power in pushing at the edge of what it means to inhabit the city, in order to carve out spaces in public discourse" (118). The extreme regulation of contemporary neoliberalization is especially salient in the daytime, when work and commerce generally take over one's actions. At night, when those practices are less prominent and visible, the individual is meant to be in his or her private space. Nuit debout presents itself as a movement designed to imagine a new way of life, a new political reality, a new world, a goal arguably shared by all protest movements. One proposition presented to the General Assembly—in which deboutistes argued for abstention from, boycotting of, or the complete cancelation of the 2017 presidential election—called out for such a change in its title: "libérons notre imagination" (Farbiaz 168) ["liberate our imagination"].

As a protest movement, Nuit debout arguably intends to draw attention to itself by disruption. As Shaw suggests, the "late-night activity [of Nuit debout] has sought to generate attention by disrupting the routines and patterns" of the city dwellers who use that space (121). The Place de la République is decidedly *populaire*. As the node of five Métro lines, the Place attracts Parisians, but largely for practical, banal purposes. The housing surrounding the Place are vestiges of the Haussmann renovation. This is not a tourist attraction. So the disruption that Nuit debout aims to enact in this space is, in theory, decidedly local. In Shaw's conception of the three major themes of the movement, disruption is the first, its "key strength" (120), quoting a Nuit debout activist's assertion that "the main aim wasn't only to occupy the place, it was to

disrupt the rhythm, the rhythm that we all follow" (120).[17] Nuit debout's own literature, Shaw notes, emphasizes how "the protest is about being present in public space, and how this might drive political debate" (123). Discussing the potential failures of Nuit debout, Shaw reveals, almost in passing, a central tension of quotidian urban experience:

> While still disrupting the city and making claims over space, Nuit debout had by my visit in May [2016] also become a part of the cityscape, a reoccurring event through which people might pass, whether by chance, or to observe, to question or to participate. (123)

That Nuit debout would "become a part" of Paris' cityscape—a "part of the background of Parisian life," (123) as it were—suggests a kind of assimilation that runs counter to its disruptive intents. The repetition of chaos that makes the urban space prone to monotony threatens the movement's ability to disrupt because it melds the occupation of the square into its daily fabric and lived experience. Disruption is an act, one that rarely sustains itself over time due to both its avoidability and its monotony. There are always other ways to get around the city, so after the initial shock, Nuit debout is easily bypassed as new trajectories and routines are developed. Chance encounters are, perhaps, only "chance" when they are singular and unique.

When the deboutists settle into the monotonous-disruption of the Place de la République, we might say that, rather than confronting something, they are encountering *nothing*. Nicole Foster, a scholar of urban planning, economics, and policy writing about protests like Nuit debout and Occupy, puts this in almost dystopian terms: "DIY urbanists are encountering an increasingly hollowed-out state while attempting to repair issues the public sector has abdicated" (Foster 311). The "hollowed-out state" that Foster laments in 2020 was already a feature of Lefebvre's conception of urbanism in 1968. The deboutists are made to contend with the specter

[17] The second major theme is conviviality and cover; I will return to conviviality below. The third major theme is presence and visibility.

of the city. Bringing city back to life—reanimating the specter, as it were—is not a metaphor I intend to follow too aggressively, but we might consider how the kind of activism pursued by the deboutists and others seeks to *replace* that which was lost in the hollowed-out state of the city. Rather than returning to what was there before, they imagine urban futures that fill in the void with something new, generally something communal.

It cannot be assumed that when the right to the city is conferred upon those without power, life in the city will progress away from the neoliberalization that has hollowed it out thus far; it cannot be assumed, as de Certeau reminds us, that a change in who is in power will lead to a change in structures of power. Geographer Mark Purcell notes that a newly empowered group may simply replicate existing structures (even if those structures are called something different) or that group might pursue radically different ways of existing in space. Regardless, the way forward must, like anything else, be "determined through negotiation and political struggle" (Purcell 2002, 106). As such, Foster in turn suggests, "emphasizing Lefebvre's interest in everyday appropriations of space through work and play, […] reframes the right to the city as a radical reformulation of citizenship based on urban inhabitance and collective use, not as an explicit political strategy" (Foster 312). She acknowledges that the right to the city may lead to anticapitalist outcomes simply by "cultivating increasingly ethical interactions between people" (Foster 312). That is not to say that Nuit debout, even if viewed as a successful movement, necessarily decouples the right to the city from the capitalist, neoliberal structures that inspired the movement. Rather, by working toward a version of the city in which contact between unrelated, unfamiliar people is promoted, the protests may succeed at least at cultivating a path forward toward that utopian image.

Nuit debout arrived at the exact conclusion described above: it became a monotonous part of the city, losing its capacity to disrupt, and failing to continue reaching out meaningfully to frustrated demographics who might share their values. After about ten weeks of protests, the movement stopped holding nightly events, especially as they began using online spaces, which saw their numbers in physical space dwindle.[18] The movement's self-isolation was upended several years later when the first Gilets jaunes protests took to the streets.

Finding Conviviality Here and There

The explicit provocation of Ruffin's dealings with LVMH and the collective occupation of the Nuit debout protests are not, of course, the only ways to engage with the specter of urban power. As Nuit debout gives way over time to the Gilets jaunes, we find a concerted effort to reach out into the diverse spaces of French society, extending beyond Paris and within class, race, and other boundaries. As Lefebvre has made clear elsewhere in these chapters, the rural and suburban spaces of modern and contemporary society are increasingly urban in their sense of entanglement with the systems of capital and power that overflow city boundaries. We find a parallel to Maspero and Frantz's trip through the Parisian banlieues in *Visages Villages*, the 2017 documentary from Agnès Varda and visual artist JR. The film is a record of the pair's visits to villages, small towns, and worksites throughout France. The two agree to find interesting people, photograph them in JR's signature oversized scale, and paste the photographs to public surfaces—the walls of homes, factories, and barns; a water tower; a fallen bunker in Normandy.

[18] The question of digital spaces lurks just below the surface of much of this dissertation. What happens to the collision as daily life moves more and more resolutely online? What happens to protest movements? To neighborhoods? Is the digital space—dedicated so profoundly to commerce and surveillance—and urban space? These questions are outside the scope of this dissertation, which is concerned specifically with the built environment, but as the study of contemporary cities moves further into the present moment, they become harder to set aside.

These giant photographs serve to draw attention to individuals and communities that the pair of artists fear are ignored, maligned, or otherwise invisible. Where Maspero and Frantz sought to explore the periphery of Paris systematically, Varda and JR playfully jump around France, largely remaining in more rural areas, on a whim. That is, where Maspero and Frantz took to the RER-B with a vague but defined itinerary—one month traveling, one day per station, following the linear geography of the train tracks—, Varda and JR agree to allow as much randomness as possible in their project, traveling "ici et là," here and there throughout France, led by the advice of those they encounter and the connections they make. "Chance has always been my best assistant," Varda says. Play, or as least a sense of ludic engagement with the world, drives Varda and JR, and this affective approach to connecting with others distinguishes their project from that of Maspero and Frantz, who turned urban and suburban geographies into systematized and quasi-algorithmic itineraries. Their movement throughout France recognizes both the agrarian roots of France's history and the way that urban systems of capital and resource extraction reach out beyond the bounds of the city and into rural spaces.

In the film, Varda says that her work with JR is helping her to fulfil her "greatest desire," a desire which is perhaps evident in Varda's work since at least *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* [*The Gleaners and I*]: "To meet new faces and photograph them, so they don't fall down the holes in my memory."[19] Released about two years before Agnès Varda's death in 2019 at age 90, the documentary has at its heart questions about mortality and memorialization—both of the communities represented by the giant portraits, but also of the film's aging director, Varda. In the process of memorializing the waning communities in the film, there is a conflagration of the individual and the collective, allowing the portraits pasted to the buildings to serve as

[19] Except where otherwise noted, references to *Visages Villages* give the translation used in the film's official subtitles.

synecdoche for a broader social whole. Early in the film, Varda and JR head north and stop in Bruay-la-Buissière, in Pas-de-Calais, where they meet Jeannine, the last occupant of a building in which miners have lived for generations; the building is slated for demolition but for Jeannine's refusal to move out. Jeannine's father and husband were both miners, and her childhood was shaped by their careers. Varda and JR are interested in Jeannine's story, at least in part, because of her singular occupation of that row of houses. By insisting on her right to stay there in the house that had been occupied by generations of her family, she insists upon her right to possess—or at least occupy—part of the village.

JR pastes Jeannine's image on the exterior of her home. Around her, on the façades of the houses left empty by miner families who have relocated elsewhere, JR pastes images of the miners who used to live there, collecting them from postcards and photographs supplied by the townspeople. Each of these full-body portraits shows a man in his working years, not necessarily young but still tolerating the punishments of the mines. Unlike the portraits of the miners pasted to the homes surrounding hers, the portrait of Jeannine is a close-up of her face; she stares, unsmiling, from the front façade of her home. When Jeannine steps outside to see herself for the first time, larger than life, she begins to cry. JR moves in immediately to comfort her, and Varda's reaction summarizes, I argue, Varda's perhaps simplistic thesis: "Jeannine, it's not sad! We're friends now." The brief relationship that they have shared, Varda suggests in this line, has become a friendship. There is, of course, an interpretation of this line that allows "we're friends" to be an utterance of consolation, an attempt to cheer up a crying woman. However, given Varda's project here in *Visages Villages* and in her larger (documentary) filmography, it is worth considering the truth of that declaration. What does it mean, Varda seems to suggest here, to be friends with strangers in public urban spaces?

What JR does with this image of Jeannine breaks a sacrosanct separation between public and private represented by the wall on which he does his work. The traditionally privacy-making wall of the home's façade is made porous, metaphorically allowing passersby to peer inside the home at its occupant. The image says "*Elle est là*," marking the home with a signal and a beacon. We might call this, then, a kind of collision, a one-sided encounter that humanizes the space around it; a passerby is asked to stop and notice these representations of the people who lived—and still live—there. Earlier in the scene, like Maspero and Frantz, they speak to Jeannine through her window—the artists outside on the sidewalk, the resident inside, pushing aside her lace curtains. Jeannine tells them about her father, about her memories of his coming home from the mines dirty and carrying leftover bread covered in soot. Varda and JR cannot allow every passerby the opportunity to replicate that conversation, but each of them, via their preferred art form, can create a parallel experience: Varda preserves the conversation on film, while JR facilitates something like a collision through his giant portrait.

The image also places Jeannine among the ranks of the miners who were the fathers and grandfathers of the residents still left in that town. These images are all memories of the past, recalling the occupants of those homes as they had been at the height of the mining industry. Only Jeannine is shown in her current age. The juxtaposition turns Jeannine into a myth who resides in the past with those miners who are portrayed around her. Rather than "*Elle est là*," the message of Jeannine's image is confused, muddled by the "*Ils étaient là*" of the images that surround her.

Or perhaps more generously, the juxtaposition of Jeannine's image and those of the minors brings the past into the present, arguing that the miners are still preserved here in this space, "*Ils sont là*." The underlying suggestion in the conversations that Varda and JR have with

the residents of that town is the long-lasting influence that the miners continue to have over the town, as well as, to be sure, the long-lasting influence of the collapse of the mining industry. In this way, the town is haunted by the portraits and by the miners themselves; the portraits verge on the uncanny in their black-and-white presentation, their size, their impermanence. By placing Jeannine amid the miners, JR suggests that she is a testimony to their role in shaping the present life and culture of the village.

As with most of Varda's documentary features, I would argue, the heart and focus of the film is the director herself—or in this case, the directors. Varda and JR feature prominently throughout the documentary, both as artists who mediate the process of taking and pasting the images, but also as subjects of inquiry, individuals with histories, desires, and philosophies. Their central visibility in the film recalls the playfulness of Ruffin in *Merci, Patron !* and the self-consciousness of Maspero and Frantz in *Roissy-Express*, but Varda and JR interrogate their role more thoroughly. Conversations between the two are interspersed throughout, and Varda's failing health and eyesight are a recurring theme. Immediately after the film concludes its segment on Jeannine, we return to Varda's apartment where she considers how her work and her age are impacting her body: "I'm ruining myself," she says to JR. "My legs, my eyes. You look blurry." JR suggests that they take as many photographs, make as many images as they can before "it's too late." Varda's response is simple: "Too late for me?"

By putting Varda's mortality at the center of their film, Varda and JR highlight the impermanence of the communities they visit during their project. Kelley Conway calls these moments of reflection "role-playing" (28), suggesting that Varda puts herself so forcefully in the lens of the camera as a way to acknowledge the "power of the performative and poetic documentary" (28). The friendliness that Varda and JR perform in *Visages Villages* is role-

playing in that it is a performance of the kind of urban prosocial behavior that the pair attest to valuing. But further than this friendliness, the mortality that Varda brings to the screen reveals the pair's fears about the communities they visit: each of these communities might disappear—or, if not disappear altogether, mutate, and become something unrecognizable. The images they paste on the walls are themselves impermanent. Unlike the spray paint used in graffiti, for example, these pasted images are susceptible to the forces of nature and weather, and each rainfall, each gust of wind takes fragments of the images with it. When JR pastes a portrait on the side of fallen bunker on a beach in Normandy, it is gone by the next morning, washed away by high tide. The portraits of miners alongside Jeannine in Bruay-la-Buissière will only temporarily signal "*Ils sont là*," as a heavy rain or a few days of exposure to sun and wind will render them illegible. Like the city itself, whose internal legibility shifts constantly on the micro level, and like a passerby on the sidewalk (or visitors like Varda and JR), these images allow only immediate, short-term encounters with their subjects. The film, however, persists, a fact that Varda and JR surely have in mind as they record their journey around the country. Even when those images are gone, the documentary—bolstered in part by the fame of its two creators—will live on. Varda and JR are, in their own way, fighting against the Lefebvrian specter, but rather than working against the infrastructural pressures of the state, they work against the sociability of those who live in it.

That is not to say that Varda and JR's project is, by virtue of acknowledging the artists' centrality in the film, devoid of social or political critique. Though some critics accused the film of being "feel good" (see Conway (27) for a detailed history of the film's critical reception), the sequence in Bruay-la-Buissière, with its eye toward the historical context, the socio-political hardships, and the contemporary lived experience of those effects, suggests an understanding of

the lived experience of these villages. The film does not propose to resolve any of the issues that ripple beneath its surface; as Conway notes, Varda "does not propose a solution to the problems the film evokes; she instead invites us to spend time on the street, adopt her gaze of respect and curiosity, and revel in the associational links she establishes between her various groupings of shots" (25). Conway contends that the documentary encourages its viewers to replicate Varda and JR's participation in a broader public life. In a 2017 interview with Olivier Pere, of Australian magazine *Female*, Varda summarizes her and JR's thesis as simple consequences of their personal and artistic actions: "It seemed clear that [JR's] habit of pasting big pictures of people up on walls, empowering them through size, and my habit of listening to them and spotlighting what they say, would lead to something" (Pere).

Varda's stance as "a sympathetic outsider intrigued by the specificity of particular places" (Conway 25) informs the way that viewers of the documentary are meant to perceive the film's subjects. In-person perceptions of JR's portraits, on the other hand, are less controlled. When passersby see the face of Jeannine pasted to the façade of her village home, they are being asked to recognize that they are living in a shared space, one in which they exist always in relationship to the often-anonymous multitudes who also live in their apartments, on their streets, in their neighborhoods. Varda and JR's hope, in drawing attention to the shared essence of urban space, is a renewed recognition of waning, ignored communities. The simplicity of this hope, no doubt, plays some role in some critics reducing *Visages Villages* to "feel good" tourism. However, what the film suggests and what Nuit debout worked to implement in their organization, I argue, is a more forceful and consequential understanding of what it means to share space.

As mentioned above, the first major theme of Nuit debout, according to Robert Shaw, is disruption. The second is "the creation and imagination of new forms of convivial democracy" (122). For Ivan Illich, a central figure in the conception of conviviality, the question of conviviality is one of ethics and responsibility:

> I choose the term 'conviviality' to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. I believe that, in any society, as conviviality is reduced below a certain level, no amount of industrial productivity can effectively satisfy the needs it creates among society's members. (24)

Conviviality rejects the egocentric, individualist affect of industrialized capitalism. It builds upon the recognition that space is co-constitutive by affirming that space is also interdependent; that is, if individuals conceive of space together, they must also manage space together. Shaw follows geographers Hinchliffe and Whatmore, who turn away from the conviviality of philosophers like Ivan Illich, proposing a conception of conviviality that "is a political project that is concerned with a more broadly conceived accommodation of difference, better attuned to the comings and goings of the multiplicity of more-than-human inhabitants that make themselves home in the city" (Hinchliffe and Whatmore 125).[20] Shaw offers a similar reading, suggesting that "there is an attempt to generate politics out of hearing and courting this difference" (Shaw 122). The intentional heterogeneity of this version of conviviality is key to the political imagining of Nuit debout, as well; what Hinchliffe and Whatmore call an "accommodation of difference" and Shaw

[20] It is worth noting that Hinchliffe and Whatmore are here specially interested in non-human inhabitants of the city—animals, plants, microorganisms, and so on. Theirs is a posthumanist reading of conviviality, but I find that their definition is nonetheless provocative because it reminds us that humans are, in fact, animals living in and with the urban space.

calls a "courting" recalls the intentional spontaneity of the communal atmosphere at the Place de la République. They suggest that "the heterogeneous company and messy business of living together" (Shaw 134) is an inherent trait of living together in cities. So too is, as we established in the first half of this dissertation, is the ontological anxiety that often comes along with sharing space. Conviviality happens at Nuit debout in part because, as Shaw reminds us, following Merleau-Ponty, "in darkness we are much less sure of ourselves" (122). Being sure of ourselves and reaching a hand out are entwined; if we are sure of ourselves, if we are undisturbed, we are unlikely to reach a hand out, because we do not need support to be in the world.

Let us take "convivial" at face value. Rather than needing to necessarily be cheerful or even friendly, perhaps there is a quotidian imperative to simply live (*-vivial*) together (*con-*).[21] This is not the French *convivialité*, the enjoyment of the social company of others; *Le Robert* is explicit that *convivialité* refers to "rapport positifs." Nor do I intend to suggest a version of respectability politics in which people are expected to be friendly with each other, regardless of the sociopolitical context—especially marginalized people, already forced into defensive stances by their cultural situation. This is also not a reduction of living together as a consolation, a resignation to the presence of others in one's life. The dangers of such a consolation are evident in Marguerite Duras' *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* and in the fifth story of Natalie Sarraute's *Tropismes*, in which a woman suffers the anxiety of her shared space. It is perhaps closer to Ivan Illich's conviviality, which he applies specifically to tools, to suggest a negotiated relationship with external bodies that influence the ways we live.[22]

[21] "Convivial" passes etymologically trough the Latin *convīvium*, a feast. The frequency with which characters in the literature I have considered thus far share a sense of being together by way of food and drink is, in retrospect, remarkable if not unsurprising. A thorough analysis of this food-based conviviality is outside the scope of our current analysis.

[22] Even in 1973, when Illich wrote, the term "convivial" carried a level of semantic uncertainty. After declaring a preference for the Spanish cognate over the French, which possessed too technical a definition, he admits, "I am aware that in English 'convivial' now seeks the company of tipsy jolliness, which is distinct from that indicated by

Rather, I suggest a conception of conviviality that stresses the necessity of recognizing others in one's relationship to the spaces one inhabits. "Cities are not simply inhabited but co-inhabited, in ways that are multiple, entangled and disrupt established ethologies and ecologies," Hinchliffe and Whatmore insist (137), suggesting an urban space that is a product of its layered, merging, and interacting ways of living. This version of conviviality also fights against the hollowed-out specter of urban life created by neoliberal practices, those that create the specter of the 3,000, Train 651, and the miner village occupied only by Jeannine.

Conviviality cannot itself win urban power; the commuters on Train 651 are not necessarily more likely to win infrastructural change simply by acknowledging their co-habitation than they are by by-passing Brigitte Gros. Rather, conviviality is a stance, a way of being in the world that can, in the right circumstances, lead to the realization of new urban imaginaries. Like Lefebvrian right to the city, Illich foresaw a "convivial society" in which there exists "social arrangements that guarantee for each member the most ample and free access to the tools of the community and limit this freedom only in favour of another member's equal freedom" (25). This vision's utopianism is perhaps overly simplistic; as mentioned above, the lived reality of conviviality in marginalized groups, who are more likely to experience social interactions as potentially dangerous, is a barrier to Illich's utopianism.

As noted above, Shaw suggests that Nuit debout's relationship to conviviality as a political affect derives specifically from its nocturnality:

> If the 'self' is understood and made more secure by our ability to see, identify and define ourselves in relation to 'Other', then at night we lose some of this capacity. […] The result is that we are more open to sensations, ideas, feelings, affects and other stimuli: we do not have the same closed-off bordered and protected bubble around us, but are instead able to interact with the materials and people that we encounter. […]

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the OED and opposite to the austere meaning of modern '*eutrapelia*,' which I intend. By applying the term 'convivial' to tools rather than to people, I hope to forestall confusion" (12-13).

> Simply put, then, people are more open to each other in the darkness, more convivial. (122)

If this reads as idealist or romantic, Shaw goes on to note the danger felt and experienced in darkness, especially by racial and ethnic minorities and women (and the intersections therein). Conviviality is achieved, in this conception of night, specifically by undermining the perceived security of the boundary between oneself and others, by undermining even the "understood" self: "we lose even the certainty of the boundary around [our] own bodies" (118). Lol Stein demonstrates the anxieties of porous boundaries between one's self and the world one inhabits, but this conception of conviviality suggests an alternative to that experience of the urban quotidian.

Collisions provide a moment of recognition that may engage urban conviviality. No version of urban life is outside the limits of co-inhabited, co-constitutive space. Therefore, recognition of those limits allows urban dwellers to imagine new ways of managing space so that it can be opened up to the participation and appropriation that Lefebvre says is required for access to the right to the city. When individuals in the city collide with each other, causing one to recognize and affirm the interrelationality of urban life—not "I am here," but "I am here with you"—, urban space is transformed. Collisions allow urban dwellers to reach a hand out or to grasp a hand that needs support. Hinchliffe and Whatmore call this process fashioning: "Biopolitical domains are therefore the products of multiple entanglements. So while it is surely right to say that human bodies are set up or configured in the world in particular fashions, the fashioning of those worlds can amplify or otherwise these configurations" (133). Fashioning new worlds—fashioning a new democratic community in the public space of the Place de la République, for example—works against the neoliberal specter of the urban. Engaging with other inhabitants and their individual processes of becoming requires, Hinchliffe and Whatmore

suggest, “political and scientific experiments” (137). At the end of the first chapter of this dissertation, I asked if perhaps we should think not only about dwelling in urban spaces, but about *dwelling together* in them. The neoliberalization of the 21st century city, as Maspero and Gros highlight and as Nuit debout protested against, left a hollowed-out space in which individual dwelling was an often-futile endeavor. In this chapter, we have found experiments in inventing tactics that imagine urban ways of life based on being together in space—not simply in acknowledgement of being together, but in recognition of it, in transforming what it means to be here with you in the city.

Conclusion

In 2020, during her campaign for re-election, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo began championing what she called *la ville du quart d'heure,* the fifteen-minute city. Inhabitants of a city should, according to this model, have access to most daily necessities by either walking or cycling from their home within a quarter hour. Outside of one's home, there should be groceries, restaurants, recreation, schools, cultural sites, health care, and, less explicitly in Hidalgo's model, work. Its major objectives are equity of access, environmentalism, and strong local economies. At another level, though, the *ville du quart d'heure* promises a city that has neighbors and neighborhoods. The idea is to reinforce the role of neighborhoods in urban life through policy, such as diversifying zoning or building walk and bike infrastructure. On the city's official website detailing the project, published after Hidalgo's re-election, the city is said to wish to "devenir la ville des proximités" ["become a city of proximities"], though the title of the same page calls proximity a "pari," a gamble. In a fifteen-minute city, one abandons the car and heads out on foot, on bike, or on public transit, and in those spaces, individuals reunite with those who live around them. Because one's needs are local, the fifteen-minute city is repetitive, and so the choreographies of one's neighborhood repeat.

The fifteen-minute city was inspired by the work of French-Colombian scientist and professor Carlos Moreno, himself inspired by a long history of "chrono-urbanism," which thinks about cities in terms of time rather than space. Moreno specifically invokes Jane Jacobs to rally against "distasteful" planning models that proposed tearing down and rebuilding large portions

of cities to develop sustainable sprawl (Moreno 94). The idea was that planning could restructure the city in a way that both pushed back against car-dependent and isolating urbanism, which Moreno ties to "deep-rooted inequalities, especially in the social and economic spheres" (94). The greatest distinction between the *ville du quart d'heure* and the neighborhoods celebrated by Jacobs is the latter's spontaneity: the 15-minute city is, at least in its current conception, a plan that necessarily originates in the state or in policy centers. Hidalgo, for example, leverages her power as mayor to create car-free zones, pedestrianize streets, and install street furniture throughout central Paris. This sits in opposition to Jane Jacobs' model of a neighborhood, which is manifested by time and the natural cycles of urban life; her neighborhoods amalgamate from individual use rather than being imposed from above.[1] That the 15-minute city is not only a subject of debate but a central policy in the successful re-election campaign of Paris' sitting mayor suggests the ways that urban proximity and access have become—have always been, in fact—the concern of both individuals in the city and the state that controls it.

In the time I wrote this dissertation, France, along with most of the world, experienced a series of dramatic shifts in its relationship with its urban space. As discussed in the previous chapter, events since 2015 have been seismic: the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015; the attacks at the Bataclan, the Stade de France and other locations throughout Paris and its banlieue in November of that year; the Nuit debout protests in 2016; the Gilets jaunes protests from 2018. These events demonstrated the profound vulnerability of urban space as well as the collective

[1] Geographer Edward Soja adopts the term *synoikismos* to denote a similar idea, the communal ontological and epistemological experience of urban life. Synoikismos is "the conditions that derive from *dwelling together* in a particular home place or space […] the coming together or growing together—the marriage, if you will—of proximate communities, neighborhoods, villages, towns, into a single urban political unit, an urban polity" (273, emphasis added). It comes with "connotations of coming together to live interdependently […] efficiently and creatively" (273). Soja's synoikismos suggests how communities grow together over time to establish territories, rules, and values for living together.

power to reclaim it. These events produce competing reactions—fear of the public space, on the one hand; optimism for the public's ability to reclaim public space, on the other. Those reactions, however, create space in which to reevaluate one's relationship with the city.

In the same period, in 2017, the city of Paris won its bid to host the 2024 Summer Olympic Games. As has been discussed in depth elsewhere, the Olympics historically have a troubled relationship with the cities in which they are hosted, tearing up marginalized neighborhoods, diverting and depleting financial resources, and leaving behind useless buildings and debt.[2] Though the committee organized by Paris to bid for the Games campaigned on approaches to the built environment that would avoid past mistakes—including repurposing existing buildings, for example—, it remains to be seen how 2024 will change the landscape of Paris. The city advocates for a 15-minute city model while simultaneously giving itself over to a spectacle known for the way it negatively impacts urban space. The tension between these state-sponsored appropriations of the city and the major upheaval of daily urban life is perhaps the core of imagining Paris' future.

Each of these examples articulates an attempt to forcibly change the relationship between the public and their public spaces. Terrorists create fear by specifically targeting public spaces; these events often see an equal and opposite reaction afterward, as when people took to the streets, bars, and clubs after the November 2015 attacks in Paris, eventually leading to Nuit debout. Politicians, policy makers, and activists try to manifest the communal spirit of neighborhoods, often in competing ways, giving people a reason to reconsider how public spaces support daily life. At the same time, state powers, such as the 2024 Olympic Games committee,

[2] See especially Liao and Pitts (2006) and Geffroy et al. (2021) for thorough analyses of the urban impact of the Olympic Games.

reappropriate public spaces, shutting out most of the city's citizens so that the spaces can generate capital and prestige.

Perhaps it goes without saying that the most existential change in how the future of the city is imagined since 2020 has been the coronavirus pandemic. The sudden reminder that proximity can be dangerous led to the biopolitical transformation of sidewalks, of public transport, of coffee shops. Of course, proximity has always carried the possibility of danger; of transmitting some virus; of violence and theft. What the pandemic highlighted in the cityspace was the banality of proximity. I remember the almost-existential surprise of happening upon a neighbor on the sidewalk as I took my dog for a walk early in the pandemic, before much of the science of the virus' transmission was elaborated. We were both wearing masks and as we approached, we each stepped—almost in unison, as if choreographed—into the grass, giving each other a wider distance to pass. Even with the civility and sociability of a nod and smile (which was, of course, invisible behind our masks), the meaning of that distance was clear: your proximity could pose a threat to me. The relationship between neighbors becomes tenuous, and the relationship between strangers evaporates. The biological threat of the virus turned public spaces, especially interior spaces, into sites of potential transmission; bars, restaurants, public libraries, schools, and so on, were largely shut down across much of the world for significant periods of time. Lockdowns turned private spaces into oases, but also caused claustrophobia. Increased use of delivery services, especially for groceries, cut out major moments of contact in urban life.

There are certainly public health justifications for social distancing and for shutting down some kinds of public spaces. The way these mitigation measures were (and are) implemented,

however, reveals how those in power imagine the city and therefore, how they may imagine the post-pandemic city. The *confinement* in France—more so than the type of "lockdowns" that happened in US cities—denied individuals the right to the city in basic terms: the *Attestation de déplacement dérogatoire*, as discussed in the coda to Chapter 2, articulated the narrow list of approved reasons that an individual could use to justify their presence in public spaces. This kind of "justified" use goes against the essential purpose of public spaces and makes universal the already-existing experience of marginalized people in policed spaces. The freedom to move through and dwell in public urban space that is targeted by policies like the *Attestation* reconfigure what it means to be urban.

Most of the texts in this dissertation have centered on the act of walking in and through public spaces. Duras' Lol V. Stein takes walks to submerge herself in the stimuli of the city, only to encounter her childhood best friend's lover. Camus' characters took walks to enjoy the quiet of Paris at midnight, but also avoided talking walks that could put them in contact with plague victims. Maspero and Frantz created a game out of going for walks, venturing as far into a neighborhood as they could in one day, with the RER-B stations as their epicenters. Walking is, perhaps, the foremost urban practice, one that certainly holds at the center of literature about the urban experience. As many have articulated but Michel de Certeau and Ross Chambers frame explicitly in terms of the urban, digression is necessary for narration, but the experience of the city is predicated on suppressing or rejecting the stimuli that overwhelm and consume the psyche. So urban digression is flattened to monotony. Walking often holds a special importance in urban studies because it untangles narration from that monotony. Recent books like *Restless Cities*, edited by Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart, or *The Speed Handbook*, by Edna Duffy, put walking and its corollaries, especially driving a personal car, at the center of modernity and

the city. The collision that throws one from the ground, causing one to turn otherwise, brings the urban dweller back to digression—back to awareness of the digression, at least. Walking has perhaps the purest relationship to collisions of any way of moving around the city.

The coronavirus pandemic in some ways made walking a deliberate and conscious act. Grabbing a mask added a novel task to the act of leaving the house; noting where others are on the street, as I did early in the pandemic with my neighbor, reminded us of our vulnerability. On the other hand, lockdowns created a reason to walk for the sake of walking, a remedy to the claustrophobia of work, school, and recreation being relocated into one's living room. Most destinations were off-limits, and destinations are, especially in the city, the defining feature of heading out into the city on foot. The *confinement* exacerbated these issues, bringing the state's influence on walking into the forefront: that is to say, the state has always had control, to some extent, over who can walk where and when—control that generally impacts marginalized bodies more than others—but the *confinement* made that control more tangible in everyday public life.

The idea of a (post)pandemic city has been at the forefront of many conversations within academic and policy circles. As of February 2022, news outlets like *The Washington Post, CNN, The New York Times,* and *The Financial Times* all host articles speculating on various facets of the post-pandemic city. Local newspapers, like *The Toronto Star, The Denver Post,* and *The Sydney Herald* imagine their own city's specific iteration of returning to "normal" (or not). Specialist media like *Nature, National Geographic*, and *Eater* find their own angles on the question. The ubiquity of this journalism is, of course, obvious, but sorting through it reveals the fatigued, restless desire to move on—not only imagine the future but manifest it, live it. The rhetorical exercises in imagining a (post)pandemic city are often purely that: rhetorical. At this point, in early 2022, it is difficult to say what the future of urban proximity will look like. It will

come back, certainly, perhaps because the pandemic wanes or perhaps because the public simply gets tired of prevention and mitigation measures. What will happen to the city after COVID or after we acquiesce to "living with" it? What remains of shared public space?

The pandemic, as well as the seemingly endless list of events that have affected public urban space in the 21st century demand a reevaluation of the relationship between the self, space, and the other who shares space. But they are not wholly unique events in Paris' history nor in the history of the urban environment. Rather, they remind us, as Doreen Massey insists in the foundational propositions in her *For Space*, that space is itself an always-in-process collection of histories and trajectories, "a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (8). The texts in this dissertation allow us to consider how stories-so-far come into contact, cross over each other, mesh together. I argue that, as these stories are increasingly made invisible in the city by the post-industrial, neoliberal forces that dominate 21st century urbanism, there is increasing urgency in the recognition of the collisions that occur when trajectories intersect.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Sara Ahmed's conception of queer phenomenology suggests that one natural corollary to considering how individuals turn toward the world is considering, in turn, how they reach a hand out to what is within their horizon. Reaching a hand out stabilizes when it finds something solid in the world—physically solid, in the case of the writer's desk, but also supportive, in the sense that one queer body, for example, finds another that can help orient oneself to being in the world. Ahmed defines one's horizon as that which one recognizes as solid or available to be grasped; I suggest that collisions teach urban dwellers how to broaden this horizon, understanding how else the world might support them.

I gesture at the idea of community throughout these pages, especially in my discussion of Camus's *La Peste* and in the third and fourth chapters. I have intentionally avoided delving into a consideration of the relationship between collisions and community, which is broader than this study immediately allows. A collision is the moment before community, and it is a moment that may never become community (and often never does). As one slips into the aftermath of a collision and find oneself developing the relationships that form the messy, knotted systems that define community, one enters into a rich field of research that is outside the scope of this dissertation. I have chosen to focus specifically on the moment before, the moment of potential, vulnerability, and risk.

Considering the possibilities of a convivial urbanism, in which the conditions for turning toward others are nurtured, the recognition that shared spaces are co-constitutive—the recognition of the question, "Who am I here with you?"—does not necessarily engender community or even communal feelings. In movements like Nuit debout and projects like *Visages Villages*, however, that recognition is shown to be prosocial, such that urban futures are imagined as taking care or taking measure of who space is shared with.

Talking about community, however, necessitates talking about the state and its control over the city. In some ways, my pivot between Parts I and II of this dissertation comes from the unavoidability of the state in talking about cities. (This is not a particularly unique revelation; Henri Lefebvre insisted on this connection from the start.) My desire to talk about a ubiquitous, universal city cannot work past the influence of neoliberalization, gentrification, and other forces that originate in the state or else are mediated by the state. If nothing else is certain, what the (post)pandemic city will look like and how we will live in it will depend upon how states respond to the threats; we are already seeing that. Nonetheless, as the texts in this dissertation

show, there remains an individual, prosocial relationship to shared space that functionally works against the urban specter of these forces. Though Hidalgo might advocate for neighborhood-making policies like the 15-minute city, the state cannot be depended upon to create conviviality.

When Agnès Varda makes us, the spectator, follow along as Cléo eavesdrops on strangers quarreling near her at a café, we are encouraged to turn toward that seemingly unrelated narrative rather than reject it and bury it in the other noise of the café and the city. To be sure, Cléo has not rebuilt the city with her eavesdropping. She has provided herself comfort, even if momentarily, but Paris has not changed. "Reaching a hand out," "turning toward," and "conviviality" risk veering to the romantic. While I am interested in considering the urban futures that are made possible by an increased awareness of the interrelationality of space, I do not intend to pursue a utopian vision of the city. The invisibility of the lived experience of contemporary cityspace is perhaps inevitable. (Sometimes invisibility is good. Lol and Cléo both depend on remaining invisible to the collisions forced upon them by the built environment in which they live.) But the way that invisibility threatens the right to the city is not.

Collisions allow city dwellers to take measure of the space they are sharing with those around them. They may, if one remains vulnerable to them, remind individuals to consider the question, "Who am I here with you" in its geographic specificity and its interrelationality. The texts in this dissertation suggest that there is a way of taking care (to borrow from Modiano) and taking measure (to borrow from Heidegger) of the shared public spaces that are essential to urban life. The choice between antisocial and prosocial ways of being in the world remains at the center of imagining the future of the (post)pandemic city.

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