MOBILE LIMITS AND THE LIMITS OF MOBILITY IN FRENCH REPRESENTATIONS OF URBAN SPACE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Mobile Limits and Limits of Mobility
in French Representations of Urban Space

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This dissertation proposes a new approach to conceptualizing the French city through a series of readings on twentieth- and twenty-first century literature, cinema and theory. This study uncovers liminal protagonists in French urban space, analyzes their Certelian practices, and considers what happens when they interact with urban limits in unexpected or unintended ways. Through the thematic lens of the border, my readings of the spatial practices of urban travelers breathe new life into canonical literary and cinematic texts, chronologically spanning from Louis Aragon’s *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926) to Christian Volckman’s *Renaissance* (2005). Each chapter engages with cultural theorists—Michel Serres, Bruno Latour, Michel de Certeau, Régis Debray—and intellectual movements—existentialism, surrealism, posthumanism—that all emphasize the importance of borders as specific zones of creative possibilities. Such an approach requires a detailed engagement with French culture and history and offers novel research paths in the field of French studies. At the same time, this study stretches beyond the disciplinary boundaries of French studies, entering into dialogue with spatial theory, urban and borderland studies, and cybernetics. Chapter One focuses on interwar representations of New York in order to establish this project’s central terms: (im)mobility and spatial delinquency, two competing forms of urban mobility in Céline’s *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and Paul Morand’s *New York*. Chapter Two initiates a discussion on borderland poetics in Louis Aragon’s *Le Paysan de Paris* and Jean Vigo’s *L’Atalante*, both of which center their narratives on borderlands in and around the nation’s capital. Chapter Three tracks the relationship between Parisian suburbanites and urban planners in relation to Michel Serres’ theoretical figure of the parasite in Mathieu
Kassovitz’s *La Haine* and Jean-Luc Godard’s *deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle*. Chapter Four follows two post-modern detectives along the various limits of invisible cities in Michel Butor’s *L’Emploi du temps* and Christian Volckman’s Renaissance, demonstrating how the experience of these detectives reflects the literary and cinematic creative processes.
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To Larry,
for helping find my inner geek.
Introduction

De la sauvegarde [de l’humanité] dépend la survie non pas de ‘citoyens du monde’, cliché vaniteux et qui n’engage à rien, mais de citoyens de plusieurs mondes à la fois (deux ou trois, ce n’est déjà pas si mal), et qui deviennent, par là même, ces féconds androgynes que sont les hommes-frontières.

_Humanity does not depend on the survival of “world citizens” – a vain and non-committal cliché – but of citizens of several worlds at once (two or three would be a good start), and who become, in this way, those fertile androgynous beings that we might call border-humans._

-Régis Debray _Eloge des frontières_ (93)

Speaking in Japan in 2010, French philosopher and sociologist Régis Debray made the above plea. His call for “hommes-frontières” [border-humans] – humanity’s “last hope” – stemmed from his belief that the global community was hastily adopting the unjustified desire to enter a borderless world. His praise of borders, limits, edges, and thresholds does not stand alone as other French thinkers have voiced a similar opinion. Marc Augé, for example, concurs with Debray, claiming in his foundational text on the proliferation and necessity of “non-places” in the hypermodern age that only through the recognition of the complex notion of the “frontière,” will an egalitarian world be possible (ix).\(^1\) Despite these, and other theoretical treatises endorsing the concept of the border, this push toward a “borderless” world of “free” trade and access is primarily a trend in economics, politics and socio-cultural debates, driven mostly by the neo-liberal process of capitalist globalization. Debray is clear in his critique of such a notion,

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\(^1\) At no point in this project will I discuss the role that the border plays in the discourse of the political far right. However, a study on such a subject in relation to my analysis of the border could prove to be very thought-provoking.
claiming that a “borderless world” is nothing but a “berceuse pour vieux enfants gâtés” [lullaby for the privileged elite] (18); for him, such a prospect is not only an unattainable dream, but a dangerous tool used by this privileged elite to metaphorically put naïve global citizens to sleep.

While Debray and Augé claim to have re-discovered the border, this dissertation will demonstrate that the concept has been of central concern to French thinkers throughout the twentieth century. The present study seeks to show how the “border-humans” to which Debray here refers, which I call mobile limits (a term I define later in this introduction), have populated French literary and cinematic representations of urban space throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The protagonists in the works analyzed in this study “come from” and are the inhabitants of liminal positions between regions, cultures, and binary oppositions. The aim is thus to uncover and analyze a range of mobile limits that can be spotted traversing, dissecting, transgressing, and defining French representations of urban space.

This conceptual trope has played a generative role in a wide range of cinematic and literary texts inspired by diverging intellectual agendas, artistic mediums, as well as creative and interpretive movements and schools. How can representations of border spaces help us to transform, challenge and expand our way of perceiving, understanding and coming to know on the one hand urban space, particularly French urban space, and, on the other, the movements that inspired these pieces or the artistic mediums used to represent said locales? Concentrating on the specific spatial practices of a range of characters along in-between spaces, limits, and edges of urban space, I first and foremost draw attention to the ways in which such spaces can be practiced in artistic, revolutionary and delinquent manners. In doing so, I am able on the one hand to demonstrate how various mobile limits can be read as metaphorically inhabiting the ideal location of a given artistic or creative school, or navigating the artistic process in general. On the
other hand, I offer unique insights into canonical texts through a very concentrated view on space in these narratives, while also sketching possible avenues and paths along which one can begin to read, understand, and capitalize on the power of the concept of the border.

Real and imaginary borders

In order to understand how the border can be a source of attraction, it might be fruitful to begin in the small town of Norwich, Vermont, a place I called home until the age of 22. Norwich Vermont is a picturesque town with a population of about 3400. Each year forty students Norwich go to Hanover High School. What is important is not the small number of students, but the fact that Hanover is located in New Hampshire. In a bizarre form of gerrymandering, my local high school was in a different state. At first, this prospect seemed great. I would attend a larger school and make new friends. In reality, however, the transition was not an easy one for me or my Norwich friends. Life for Vermonters at Hanover High was tough. We were not only considered hicks from the sticks, but, most importantly, we were outsiders. No matter how hard we tried, we could never fully assimilate into New Hampshire culture. Sadly, many of my fellow Vermonters found the transition over the river to be more than they could bear and they dropped out of school before graduating.

When I think back to my high school years, it is not by chance that I think about the Connecticut River, a natural border that separates the two states. I spent the majority of my free time floating along the river, fishing in it, and jumping into it at our favorite hangout, the “rock.” For years, I kept coming back to those memories, wondering why my fellow Vermonters and I continued to be drawn to this fluvial border, despite the plethora of other, probably safer, places to hang out. It was not until about four years ago, while reading Gloria Anzalúda’s
Borderlands/La Frontera, that I came to fully understand my attraction to this river. In her groundbreaking work, Anzaldúa claims that the borderland separating the US from Mexico is the locus of a new hybrid identity that she calls Mestiza. The borderland is “not a comfortable territory to live in” (8); it is a “place of contradictions” that creates a psychological fence for those who are denied an identity and a culture. Nevertheless, the collision of two cultures creates a space that produces a very specific borderland identity. I do not wish to make a facile link between Mestiza identity and my own since, my struggles for agency pale in comparison to those Anzaldúa describes. Nevertheless, reading Anzaldúa was revelatory for me. I immediately thought about my experience along the Connecticut River. The smooth surface seemed to reflect my own identity. On the surface, my identity was established, but below, the current was pulling at me constantly flowing, shifting. This seemingly placid geographical limit concealed a forceful movement that was metaphorically pulling me in two directions. I began to understand why I, and other Vermonters, were drawn to this location and began to wonder if others experienced similar borderland identities, and soon found that my experiences extended into French literature, cinema and theory.

Anzaldúa’s analysis of the borderland has led to an entire discipline that concentrates on liminality, forcing us to question the role of boundaries and enticing us to look for more examples within not only the geographical and political landscape, but elsewhere in fiction and art. According to Anzaldúa, the role of the border is to separate—the good from the bad, the safe from the dangerous, us from them. Despite Anzaldúa’s depiction of the borderland as a divisive agent, other thinkers have come to locate the border as the only zone in which artistic and cultural production is possible. For Floyd Merril, we would be in a moribund world if a border is nothing and if all it does is separate, as Anzaldúa claims: “Separation, dichotomization, rampant
dualisms all! Is that all there is? Of course not” (309). For Régis Debray, the border is what structures everything. Without it we would be lost: “Comment mettre de l’ordre dans le chaos? Configurer un site à partir d’un terrain vague? En traçant une ligne” [How do you create order out of chaos? How do you configure a site of a wasteland? You draw a line] (25). In a similar vein, Floyd Merril wonders, “Why do we continue to talk about borders as if they were by and large static lines of demarcation in spite of our better judgment? … Why can’t we conceive of borders in this manner as something positive and potentially beneficial for all rather than merely negative?” (342). As these various “definitions” of the concept of the border suggest, its meaning is quite difficult to locate in a single sentence. What the observations above demonstrate is that the interpretation of the border is always Janus-faced – it can always be read in multiple ways.

For Régis Debray, borders do not only separate, they also combine. While Anzaldua understandably refers to the border as a wall, Debray suggests that we need to start thinking about the border as a connection and bridge. As I narrowed in on a dissertation topic, I wondered if other French thinkers were equally concerned with borderlands. I turned to twentieth and twenty-first century French literary and cinematic productions and found that the concept of the border has loomed large in French urban fictions. Indeed, French authors and directors inspired by very different intellectual, artistic and creative schools of thought have all privileged one manifestation or another of the border. I might disappoint some of you today by explaining now that this project does not arrive at a single all-encompassing definition of the borderland. Instead, I explore how the border is practiced, transgressed and inhabited by urban travelers and offer possible interpretations for these borderland experiences. Although I draw attention to many different articulations of these locations, my aim is to show how they are made more productive by the physical movement of protagonists within them.
Regardless of the conflicting critical reception and conceptions of the border, it must be noted that borders and frontiers are very real spatial entities, very visible producers of space. Debraj reminds us of this: “Elle inhibe la violence et peut la justifier. Scelle une paix, déclenche une guerre. Brime et libère. Dissocie et réunit” [It inhibits violence and justifies it. Solidifies peace and starts wars. Torments and liberates. Separates and reunites] (30). Probably the most important contradictory function of the border as described by Debraj is that it can be both the cause of and bastion against violence, depending on whether it restricts or liberates certain individuals, objects, ways of life and cultures. In the global arena, then, on the various maps of the world, borders are extremely important to our understanding of space. What we call global today can refer to a range of disciplines and subjects, yet it most commonly refers to the idea of circulation of peoples, ideas and goods, in and through a globalized world. For Lawrence Kritzman, the economic activities of transnational corporations signal a world in which “sameness has become increasingly normative” (321). Ideas like this have prompted certain economic prophets to declare the end of geography as we know it (Yeung 291). For others, this “borderless world” is merely an illusion, “more folklore than reality” (Newman), since continued ethno-territorial conflicts reify the importance of national boundaries. It seems that as we continue to extend into a world sans frontières, the role and presence of the term “border” is resurfacing with a vengeance, as the national border is being replaced and/or reinforced with different forms of barriers. As gated communities, rights of citizenship, and “no trespassing” signs are erected throughout cities and the world, firewalls, passwords, and identity-verification software are coded into the virtual world.

Borders are not only essential to understanding spatial relations and geographic locations around the world, they are just as present, if not more, on the national scale. When the European
Union passed the Copenhagen Criteria in 1993, the national and cultural boundaries of French identity and the French nation-state did not magically enter the borderless world of free trade and commerce as some had expected and others feared. Lawrence Kritzman keenly observes: “the entity that we still call France functions as a nation-state with substantive borders, both real and imaginary, and legal constraints, defining citizenship” (320). For Kritzman, these national borders are established not only by geographical and political limits, but also by legal documents such as the Déclaration des droits de l’homme: “As a text defining polis, the declaration is thus strangely performative of the community it proposes through the creation of borders based on citizenship, by making itself legally self-referential, the figure of the citizen-subject enacts a political narrative determined by the exigencies of what is considered naturally good” (321). In other words, when nations, states, territories, and military powers are mentioned in relation to the border, the notion of limits and edges of regimes, cultures, and identities is the most common usage. Today, when I mention the border, it is difficult, in a European framework to not think about the current refugee and migration crisis that has led certain countries to erect new fences similar to that which separates US from Mexico. For Etienne Balibar, when nation-states like France set quotas on the number of refugees they will host, we are entering a new of colonialism (Balibar 2005; 4-18). As this example demonstrates, usually when borders are mentioned, people immediately think of Anzaldúa’s national borders. These national limits are particularly important in a French context, since as Tom Conley has aptly observed, a revision and rewriting of what it means to be French, “tends to come from forces on the edges or borders that push toward the inside from without” (2007; 168). It is generally from outsiders who have crossed the geographical and political borders of the French state that French identity is questioned and
(re)defined.² This project extends Conley’s observations about national identity and questions whether or not such a concept can be applied to urban space.

Sometimes, however, a border is not as politically charged. According to Larousse, “la frontière” is any line or point that separates two zones or regions characterized by “des phénomènes physiques ou humains différents” [different physical or human phenomena] (Larousse). Thus, more than the geographical and political limits that one usually considers in reference to borders, a borderland can be seen as anything that separates and is located between two “different” zones. The term “border” is not restricted to those zones of customs, passports, and tax-free cigarettes, since the simplest definition that Larousse offers of the frontière is: “Délimitation, limite entre deux choses différentes” [separation, limit between two different things] (Larousse). Drawing on ideas from Gilles Deleuze, Michel Serres, Edward Soja, Andre Bazin, Paul Virilio, Michel de Certeau and Bruno Latour, among other critical thinkers from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we will see how the border has been represented as both a real and imaginary location that concomitantly separates and combines sides, communities, states, and cultures.

**Knowing cities, discovering space**

Instead of concentrating on national borders, this project proposes as its subject of study, urban borders, limits and edges. Everyone constructs a virtual image of the city that is based in part on the experience of that city’s actual physical, lived space, but also his or her own imaginary, material, social, and sexual desires. Thus someone educated in architecture may approach Paris with different objects, structures, histories and objectives in mind, than, say, a

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² As will be discussed in more detail later in this introduction, the vast majority of the border-humans analyzed in this project are perceived as strangers and outsiders to the urban space they navigate.
historian. Literary, cinematic, journalistic – in other words, mediated – experiences of urban space will, in turn, be altered, reinforced or displaced by a viewer’s or reader’s actual experience of these specific locales. For example, my understanding of urban space – despite my years of residence in both American and European metropolises – was mostly informed by literature and cinema. Before I lived in New York City – before my apartment, job, walks to work and nights out on the town – the first images I had of the Big Apple were those of Woody Allen’s films, Seinfeld, the New Yorker, media images of 9/11, and eventually Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s Voyage au bout de la nuit and Frédéric Beigbeder’s Windows on the World, more or less in that order. I was well aware, of course, that my particular conception of New York differed from other perspectives, but I failed to realize the full extent of the role that fictional representations played in the construction of my perceived urban space.

Writing on cinema in the 1980s, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who constructs his idea from Henri Bergson’s extensive discussion on time, offers the distinction between the actual and virtual image. While this notion will be developed in more detail in the final chapter of this project, for now, let us simply describe this difference between the actual and the virtual as similar to the gap between what could be termed the lived city and the represented city. Each person’s understanding of urban space inhabits some space between the actual (lived) and virtual (represented) city; its image then is materialized on a metaphorical borderland. Moreover, it is important to approach the city from multiple directions. Thus, sitting at the intersections of urban planning, literary and cinema studies, and critical theory, my discussion of borders and limits of urban space allows other disciplines to enter the discussion, such as geography, cartography, science and technology studies, information studies, posthumanism, and architecture, to mention a few.
But why concentrate on representations of urban space, as opposed to national space, especially when such concepts as borderlands, limits and edges are evoked? Generally, when the nation is considered, mentioning the border evokes a range of responses linked to nationhood and national identity. The preponderance of urban (and particularly Parisian) settings in twentieth and twenty-first century French narratives means that from the outset, the modern French polis often stands in for the nation. Turning to urban space grants me the opportunity to discuss the border in less geographical and more metaphorical terms. The reader will see that such an approach does not remove the spatiality of the border from the discussion. I do still talk about geographical borders and French national identity; however, through an analysis of movement in urban borderlands, I am also able to initiate a discussion on artistic, creative and philosophical in-between locations. Furthermore, I am intrigued by the complexity of the urban experience. As this project will demonstrate, urban space provides not just the background along which protagonists move; rather, it becomes a character in its own right, establishing physical and politico-social impediments or barriers that cause protagonists to change their psycho-social and physical locations. I am most interested in what I see as the constant negotiation between the top-down technocratic organization of space and the individual spatial practice of this very ordered space. On the one hand, city planners and government officials restrict urban dwellers and visitors to very distinct paths, destinations, and trajectories, through direct and indirect outlets from distinct policies, programs and actions. A direct approach to structuring the movement of inhabitants is witnessed through the creation of a new rail line or the use of immanent domain to gentrify a neighborhood. Edward Soja has recently demonstrated how city officials can indirectly (spatially) discriminate against certain urban populations by dividing public transportation funds equally across jurisdictions. While such a move may seem
democratic, it inadvertently takes funds away from those populations and those neighborhoods that actually use the public network. On the other hand, individuals and groups of people are constantly moving along this grid. Some choose to follow the paths established by these policies and the general physical makeup of the space, while others choose to participate in this space in delinquent, imaginative, productive and creative ways. In each chapter of this project I analyze both types of interactions with urban space in order to demonstrate how the collision of these contradictory forms of mobility provides a location from which one can interrogate and more fully understand the represented urban space.

This emphasis on the spatial practices of urban travelers underlines the importance of space in this project. Nestled well within the humanities, this critical perspective on the limits of French representations of urban space seeks to bring geography into the discussion through its construction of space. Propelled by global, political and technological changes, the growth of the interaction between the humanities and geography is one that has seen a large production since the famous ‘spatial turn’ of the 1970s. For Paul Smethurst, “space is not merely in the service of time, but has a poetics of its own, which reveals itself through a geographical or topological imagination rather than a historical one” (15) that endowed geography with a more active role, moving beyond the emphasis on historical contexts, “beyond the vision of geography as background to the narrative process” (50). This study takes an in-depth look at what could thus be considered the poetics of the borderland. Just as space, according to Smethurst is imbued with an “active” role, I demonstrate how movement along urban borderlands plays a “productive” role that creatively rewrites urban space and offers continually fruitful locations to stage urban fictions.

See his prologue to Seeking Spatial Justice. pp. vii-xviii.
Although I will not go into the important history of this spatial turn and its epistemological change, I feel it is necessary to mention one scholar who is rarely referenced in the following chapters, but without whose work, this present project would most likely not be possible: Henri Lefebvre. Considered by many to be one of the most influential thinkers in the history of urban space, Lefebvre’s *Droit à la ville* inspired the likes of David Harvey and Edward Soja, was the first to observe the stark injustices (what Soja has recently termed “spatial” injustices) experienced by certain inhabitants of urban space. His concept of the right to the city, developed through his “reading” of the Parisian landscape in the 1960s, drew attention to the fact that certain members of (French) society were working in the city but were forced to live outside of its walls, far from the center. Citizens of what he called the “société bureaucratique à consommation dirigée” [the bureaucratic society of directed consumption] were not allowed to participate in the production of urban space. The geographical distance between their home and workplace, which was being daily extended, resulted in long commutes and a loss of personal freedom, a new form of bondism that was compounded by inefficient modes of public transportation and limited access to vital public services.

According to Lefebvre, these working- and lower-middle-class citizens had the right to enter the city, but not the right to inhabit it. His call for a “right to the city” sought to create disorder in what was becoming a very ordered metropolis by injecting disorder into it. Lefebvre’s city is one built on confrontation and struggle, it is a place of simultaneity and encounter. This notion of struggle, simultaneity and encounter parallels the poetics of the borderland and thus seems to offer a unique vantage point from which to consider mobile limits in urban space. For Régis Debray, “C’est au jointif, aux interfaces, que l’on trouve les plus

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4 Verena Conley’s *Spatial Ecologies* offers a very good overview of this important epistemological turn.
5 M Dikeç has written a compelling summary of Lefebvre’s works in his article "Justice and the spatial imagination". For the specific discussion referenced above, see pages 1785-1788.
débrouillards” [It’s at the conjunctions, and interfaces, where one finds the most resourceful individuals] (66). At the collisions suggested by the call for a right to the city, Lefebvre imagined an urban space that would become truly productive, allowing these “most resourceful” inhabitants to participate in the construction of its physical space and imagined community.

Lefebvre’s analysis of French urban space, in addition to offering possibly novel and indeed revolutionary means of inhabiting urban space, equally drew attention to the ordered metropolis, product of the capitalist welfare society. Even before Michel Foucault’s groundbreaking work on the society of control, Lefebvre demonstrated that not only consumption was controlled, but also spaces of society and their production, these powers being at work most intensely in the city. Lefebvre’s project was social, political, and – most importantly for this study – spatial. His Marxist reading of the city showed that all spaces of society were being controlled from the production of consumption to the production of space, and that the city was the locus for the intense concentration of power. This order is equally linked to the concept of the border, and defines its more negative side. However, as this project will demonstrate, within very ordered spaces, certain spatial practices are nevertheless possible; someone or something can practice these spaces in new and innovative ways.

**Defining the mobile limits**

Overtly stated in the title, the focus of this project falls on what I have termed “mobile limits” in French representations of urban space. The concept of the “limit” – undoubtedly the most important term to this project – is analyzed from various vantage points in almost every section of each of the four chapters. Limits are designed to be the established edge between this side and the other side, inside and outside, inhabitant and stranger. They are designed to separate two distinct ideas, characters, mentalities, etc. Concentrating on Christian Jacob’s observation
that the map is a “projection de l’esprit avant d’être une image de la terre” [projection of the mind before being a territorial representation], Régis Debray suggests that if this is the case – if the lines drawn on a map are a “projection of the mind” – then any limit should be considered “d’abord une affaire intellectuelle et morale” [first an intellectual and moral affair] (16). The limit is first and foremost a product of the imagination. For the purposes of this project, I use the term “limit” interchangeably with two other terms, “borderlands” and “edges.” What is important for this project is that all of these terms imply space, and thus are intricately linked to urban space. Any urban body, any city, is partially shaped by its borders, limits and edges; Debray bluntly reminds us that the border “fai[t] corps” [structures the body] (61).

Without these lines of demarcation, the identity of anything or anyone would be impossible. Anyone who has ever been on the edge of a cliff, however, can attest to that fear of the possibility that this very stable edge may fall into the abyss. Limits are never stable, whatever and wherever they may be. No matter how much one may like for them to be fixed, unchanging and solid, they are constantly shifting, moving, and flowing. Another goal of this project is to reveal how important movement is for the construction of borders, limits and edges. In other words, the mobility, physical displacement, wanderings and itineraries of real and imaginary limits will be of central concern. Deborah Parsons aptly observes that in any “literary geography of the city” (9), an urban inhabitant or traveler is not simply a mobile body within a city; he/she is the producer of a city. Their perambulations and itineraries in and through the city create a particular image of the city, one that is “related to but distinct from the city of asphalt, brick and stone, one that results form the interconnection of body, mind and space, one that reveals the interplay of self/city identity” (1). According to Parsons, in this way, all city narratives superimpose new concrete and abstract maps on and through the built environment; these visible
and invisible cartes suggest new itineraries, unforeseen sights and competing mythical monuments.

In relation to movement and the border, most often the term “transgression” is used since it is usually the other side that beckons us to the border. However, this project is not just about transgressions, crossings or disruptions, but also about the experience on the border, about appreciating this zone for its artistically and intellectually productive qualities.\(^6\) Some choose to stay the course—to remain on the border and everything it represents—while others opt to return back to a certain place within society. While border transgressors and crossers will be highlighted and observed, an emphasis will be placed on those people and objects that come to represent, experience and inhabit the borderland for either a fleeting moment or an entire existence.

This discussion of “transgressions” through or “inhabitation” of the borderland, brings me to the next important concept: the role of mobility and immobility in urban space. Movement, particularly movement along borderlands, is the major connective tissue that weaves all four chapters together. Before summarizing each chapter in detail below, it is fruitful to familiarize readers with the overall structure of the project, which relies on this notion of borderland movement. The aim of the first chapter is to describe how certain French travelers sensed the top-down technocratic organization of space in their respective Interwar representations of New York. In American urban space during this time, the two authors analyzed describe inhabitants and visitors alike as stuck in a frightening state of agitated stationing – in what I term a state of “(im)mobility” – forced to constantly be on the move but fused to very specific, looped

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\(^6\) One of the challenges of this project lies in the innate paradox of the border: Binaries establish a borderland. However if all members of one side were to morph into the other, they would form a borderless, single subject and the creative possibilities of the in-between zone would disappear. Thus any promotion of the border intrinsically backs the presence of binaries, dualisms and separate zones. Regis Debray’s *Eloge des frontières* and scholarship on the notion of the “threshold” will be important for clarifying this slippery position.
itineraries. Stated in different terms, these mobile inhabitants are presented as nothing more than cogs in the American urban machine. This first chapter thus sets the tone for concentrating on two very different forms of urban mobility: (im)mobility on the one side, and what I term “spatial delinquency,” on the other. This latter term designates any individual itinerary that seeks to stray from the pre-determined paths established by urban planners and built into the city’s physical environment. The final three chapters consider how certain characters, caught in specific borderland spaces, limits and edges, constantly struggle between spatial delinquency (the mobile limits) and (im)mobility (the limits of mobility). In each of these chapters, I concentrate on different instances of this dual movement, at each point demonstrating how the mobile limits and the limits of mobility can be read as metaphors for much larger ideas, discussed later. Thus, mobile limits demonstrate the surrealist endeavor in chapter two, the physical Parisian border and larger questions of belonging in Paris and in France in chapter three, and the artistic literary and cinematic processes in chapter four.

Lastly, as the reader will soon see, these mobile limits are all étrangers, or strangers to the city and those “permanent inhabitants” deemed worthy of calling the city “home.” My corpus is full of travelers, suburbanites, visitors, and rural bumpkins. Sometimes, these visitors and outsiders are very much insiders – like the suburbanites described in chapters three and four – but due to their physical addresses or cultural heritage, they can never be recognized as inhabitants of the city. Lisa Schuster’s reading of Immanuel Kant’s distinction between a citizen and a non-citizen is fitting for this discussion. For Kant citizens are permanent inhabitants of a space, whereas a non-citizen is an immigrant or refugee (41). Like Lefebvre, Kant reminds us that the stranger can only claim a right of visit, not a right of residence. Upon their arrival, these non-citizens are to receive the hospitality of the established citizens. However, when these non-
citizens overstay their hospitable welcome, they become pests and/or enemies in the host’s eyes. (Dikeç 1788). This project pays particular attention to urban travelers that are often considered to be nuisances, disruptions and parasites in an urban system in order to show how they are, in fact, charting new, creative routes within an urban space that wishes to shoo them away.

Chapter summary

My initial chapter, “Moving Through the Interwar Metropolis,” concentrates on a specific period and location: Interwar American urban space. Drawing upon notions from Paul Virilio’s *Vitesse et politique* (1973) as well as Michel de Certeau’s *L’invention du quotidien* (1980), I explore two texts that create a literary geography of the American metropolis, in order to suggest a possible urban future for France that certain French thinkers feared. I begin with Paul Morand’s *New York* (1929), a rather short, first-person travel journal and guide that attempts to explain the eponymous city to the French public while maintaining that France and its inhabitants are still superior. Morand’s detailed guide of New York City presents a city that is prescient of the speed and velocity of different projectiles discussed by Virilio nearly fifty years later. The chapter’s second section turns to Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s fictional account of the American metropolis in *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1931), which emphasizes the politics of a city that manipulates and directs the movement of its inhabitants. Both Céline and Morand are attuned to the new regimes of movement placed on the city’s inhabitants. Their emphasis on spatial practices allow me to establish my conceptualization of the dangers of (im)mobility and the productive possibility of spatial delinquency in urban space.

While the growth of New York was increasing at unprecedented speeds, the Paris that emerged from the traumas of Haussmann’s urban renewal was a “city reborn: a business capital,
a showpiece of Imperial grandeur, and a congenial playground for a rising bourgeoisie” (Nord 101). By the Interwar period, the bourgeois lifestyle and consumerist culture led certain groups, including the surrealists, to launch a staunch critique of the bourgeois lifestyle. My second chapter, “Vehicular Delinquency Through Two Surrealist Borderzones,” draws on André Breton’s *Manifestes du surréalisme* (1924, 1930) and Michel de Certeau’s view of the borderland through a reading of one literary and one cinematic text, both of which are marked by surrealism. I begin with an analysis of the *Passage de l’Opéra* described in Louis Aragon’s *Paysan de Paris* (1926) in order to highlight the mobile limits that attract the narrator’s gaze. Aragon’s peasant turns his eyes away from the modernization of Paris in order to concentrate on those characters in the shadows, at the limits of visibility. What he unearths are the marginal zones of the city that offer intriguing perspectives on the city’s forgotten inhabitants. These zones become mirrors or, more correctly, windows that look into another world while equally reflecting the observer and his or her world when seen from the right angle, when the right light is cast. Aragon sets the stage for a concentration on the border, on limits, and edges of the city.

The next section of the second chapter turns to a different form of passageway: the mercantile canal system that traverses the north of France and trickles its way into Paris in Jean Vigo’s *L’Atalante* (1934). Vigo’s masterpiece explores the difficulties of marriage that a young provincial woman experiences and her new life aboard the Atalante, a small barge that is a cog in the fluvial network of exchange captained by her new husband. The barge and its inhabitants are part of a vast, interconnected network of waterways – some natural, some man-made – that links the provincial towns to Paris and to the coastlines. “Home” for those who travel this network is never a specifically localizable spot on a map; instead, it is always *ailleurs*, wherever the next delivery may be along this liquid conveyor belt. Drawing on notions from Michel de Certeau’s
L’Invention du quotidien and Gilles Deleuze’s notion of the rhizome, this section outlines and discovers different borderlands that are present and are physically inhabited within this film. I then demonstrate how the productive possibility of mobile limits is clearly linked to the surrealist endeavor.

After suggesting the creative potential of physical and theoretical borderlands and what it might mean to practice the border, in the penultimate chapter I turn to the negative connotations and unwanted results of the same or similar zones through an analysis of two reel representations of Paris’s real borderlands, commonly referred to as banlieues, or suburbs. “Para-sites: Transporting Noise Into Paris From the Reel Cités” considers what happens when the unfavorable side of the Janus-faced border no longer combines, but separates. To perform this analysis, I examine what happens when the protagonists of Jean-Luc Godard’s Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle (1967) and Mathieu Kassovitz’s La Haine (1995) no longer choose to inhabit a borderland, but find themselves incarcerated in the capital’s administrative limits. Forced into various forms of (im)mobility in order to serve the city and its official inhabitants, Godard’s and Kassovitz’s suburbanites are constantly fighting for position in order to be recognized. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of lignes de fuites, Michel Serres’ concept of the (productive) parasite and my own conceptualization of phantom limb syndrome, I suggest that through the poetics of the border, and specific forms of spatial delinquency, these rejected citizens nevertheless continue to carve out spaces within the ordered and controlled space of the post-war French capital.

The final chapter, “The Gaps of the City, the Edges of Medium” concludes with an examination of mobile detectives in two imaginary cityscapes. Studying the New Novelist Michel Butor’s L’emploi du temps (1956) and Christian Volckman’s black and white motion-
capture noir thriller *Renaissance* (2006), I contend that the spatial practices of two very different detectives depicted in these narratives should be read as a metaphor for the creative process of art in general. I demonstrate how movement through urban space, particularly along internal borders by these mobile detectives, parallels their respective creators’ approach to their own artistic media. I initiate the discussion with a close reading of Butor’s repetitive and lengthy *nouveau roman* that, through the guise of a *journal intime*, chronicles the rather mundane existence of Frenchman Jacques Revel who finds himself in the English city of Bleston on a one-year work visa. I highlight the play between his physical movement through the city of Bleston and his very immobile act of writing a daily *journal intime* – an attempt to understand this foreign city. As the city forces him into a labyrinthine, spiraling trajectory in search of some non-existent killer, Revel nevertheless arrives at creating a space for himself on the blank pages of his soon-to-be published book. Using Butor’s own theory of the novel and referring to other *nouveau roman* theorists, I demonstrate how both the protagonist and the author are respectively pushing the limits of the city and of the novel. I then move to a reading of the macho detective Karas whose spatial practices of *Renaissance*’s futuristic Parisian landscape figuratively reflect the limits of cinema. As Karas moves through urban space in order to find a killer and a protocol for immortality, Volckman equally interrogates the edges of cinema and its relation to the human element in film.

This extremely diverse selection of urban fictions was chosen with much deliberation and thought. All the texts in my corpus examine a particular conception of urban space as each author and director is concerned with the ways in which their protagonists are expected to move through the various represented cities. Through spatially delinquent acts, the urban travelers depicted are able to challenge and thus rewrite a space that has already been written for them.
Furthermore despite temporally winding together the past, present, and future, geographically crossing the Atlantic Ocean and the English Chanel, and spanning real and imaginary space, every text is specifically speaking about French urban space on the one hand, and about urban space in general, on the other. In this way, through the various readings performed in this text, readers of all disciplines interested in urban space should benefit from a better understanding of how borders, limits and edges can be practiced in artistic, creative and delinquent ways.

This brief overview of what follows demonstrates that despite the analytical approach of two contradictory forms of urban mobility and the thematic tissue of the borderland, this study is equally chronological, and thus historical. It begins in the 1920s, where Haussmann’s ambitious large-scale project to spatially control and order Paris was officially completed along the Boulevard Haussmann. It concludes just after the 2005 riots in Paris’s neglected peripheries that made visible many of the failures of Haussmann’s project. In other words, the scope of this study moves form the vision of a perfectly ordered metropolis to the chaotic clash of rejected urban citizens in a space that was unintentionally created by city officials' desire to organize Parisian space. In between these two historical moments, this study locates the increasingly visible attraction of the productive and creative possibilities offered by in-between locations in both urban space and urban fictions. Readers will walk away with a better understanding of how the "mobile limits" in French literature and cinema – the protagonists of various canonical texts and films analyzed – have contested the top-down, technocratic organization of urban space and the limitations of their mobility imposed by urban planners. Various urban travelers’ struggle for a position in the city and in society, provides authors and directors alike with fruitful locations on which to set their narratives, and allows these artists to make prescient views on not just the
future of urban space, but also, and more importantly, possible directions for cinema, literature, theory and philosophy.
Chapter 1: Moving Through the Interwar Metropolis

1.1 Introduction

Many tourists of cities have a particular interaction with them that differs from that of the cities’ inhabitants, most notably along the lines of time and mobility. How to maximize the experience of a city and what is the most efficient route/itinerary to achieve the most bang for one’s temporal buck are essential to this experience. This rather compulsory drive to move through such a dense space as quickly as possible while still trying to ‘take it all in’ brings with it one (or multiple) images of that space that may differ from or align with those pictured on postcards, portrayed in novels, films, and poems, or recounted firsthand by friends, family members and strangers alike. These city narratives, built on passing glances, reflected images, and, today, smartphone images combine to construct competing personal accounts. As Deborah Parsons reminds us, these mobile narratives are not just personalized accounts of a uniform space, they also superimpose new visible and invisible maps on and through the built environment, “concrete and abstract ‘cartes’ that suggest new itineraries, unforeseen sights and competing mythical monuments” (33). The cartographer’s pen cannot account for these mobile itineraries, nor can they be encompassed by some clear image “from above”; rather, they can only be suggested and partially represented through literature, cinema, art and theory.

This first chapter follows the footsteps of two foreign tourists as they make their way through the streets and alleyways of the quintessential modern metropolis of the interwar period: New York. During this period America and its cities drew the attention of a wide range of French writers, artists, and architects. Analyzing two distinct yet similar representations of New York in the 1930s, we will explore how two authors who underwent very different intellectual and artistic influences – Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Paul Morand – were attuned to the mobility and
immobility of human and technological objects in urban space. Narrated through the eyes of foreign mobile limits (physically within the city limits, yet permanently outside) these works help us understand a twentieth century obsession with movement in urban space. Morand and Céline speak from the vantage point of the traveler, or voyager, whose physical and metaphysical quests through different urban zones come to an uncanny conclusion about the future of urban space, its machine cities and cog citizens. Both are equally fascinated by the ways in which people move, and more importantly, where they move within the urban landscape. Although an analysis of French urban space will not take place until later in this project, reading these two works concomitantly suggests that Paris, and French urban space in general, provides the most fruitful opportunities and possible points of entry to understand the city – any city – from its margins, peripheries and in-between zones and thus makes a claim for the movement discussed in this dissertation – movement along limits, edges and borderspaces – as being a particularly French phenomenon.

Starting off this analysis with French representations of American urban space may cause concern since this project is about French urban space, but for the French audience, the United States of America, and its cities in particular, have always been a source of intrigue and disgust and representative of modernity, spanning from Alexis de Tocqueville's *De la démocratie en Amérique* to present day interest, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Sometimes described in positive terms, other times not so favorably, New York, L.A., Miami, and the whole state of Texas have furnished settings for an unexpected number of works in the canon of French literature. While there is a long history of French visions of America, the interwar period marks an important moment in the general French perception of the American city as the possible precursor to the French city. Jean-
Philippe Mathy has already demonstrated the draw the Americas exerted on the French public and French intellectuals, in particular in his *Extrême-Occident: French Intellectuals and America* (1993). Mathy’s meticulous analysis of French thought and apprehension of “America” demonstrates how French perceptions of America were intricately linked to contemporary France. In addition to Mathy’s work, Philippe Roger has documented the history of French anti-Americanism in his book *L’ennemi américain: généalogie de l’anti-américanisme français* (2002). Thanks to these two foundational texts detailing the history and composition of Franco-American intellectual relations, I am able to look at the texts of Céline and Morand in finer detail though the lens of mobility.

At the beginning of the century, the consensus among French urban planners and government officials was to avoid the dangers of mimicking the American metropolis. In 1909, for example, a Commission on Monumental Perspectives was established whose mission it was to ensure that no new building in Paris spoiled the urban skyline or obstructed a monumental vista.7 This strong Parisian tradition to block increasing building heights, threatening to make the city into New York or Chicago, cannot be neglected. At the same time, a push to ‘Americanize’ French cities was reinvigorated by the rise of architect and urbanist Le Corbusier who began writing, sketching and building his modernist vision of the French city. The French city was caught somewhere in-between these representations, being pulled in two directions. As we will see, the descriptions of an *American* urban space are still speaking about *French* urban space – about what is and what could not be. I would even argue that one must first understand French perspectives on the American metropolis at the beginning of the twentieth century in order to understand how French urban space – particularly the practice of said space – has been directly

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influenced or is constantly attacked by the images described in French (and other) representations of American cities.

Pulling notions from Paul Virilio’s *Vitesse et politique* (1973), his first essay on his neologism “dromology,” or the science and logistics of speed, alongside Michel de Certeau’s *L’invention du quotidien* (1990), I create a succinct, albeit limited, literary geography of the American metropolis during the interwar period. Paul Morand’s *New York* (1930), a rather short, first person travel journal and guide, attempts to explain the eponymous city to the French public while maintaining that France and its inhabitants are still superior. Morand’s detailed trek through New York City presents a narrator whose itinerary and speed through the city is prescient of the speed and velocity of different projectiles discussed by Virilio nearly fifty years later. We next analyze the similarities and divergences between Morand’s New York and that presented by Louis-Ferdinand Céline, whose fictional depiction of the American metropolis in *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1931) emphasizes the politics of a city that manipulates and directs the movement of its inhabitants. Despite the draw of this city for two protagonists that are constantly on the move, both quickly learn that this city and its inhabitants are moving too fast for comfort.\(^8\) Whereas Morand and Céline’s diagnoses may differ, both suggest that the French public turn its attention to its own urban spaces, and the people that inhabit these spaces in order to find fertile ground for the arts and theory.

\(^8\) It should be noted that Céline generally gets passed over due to his anti-semitic beliefs. However, as Philip Roth once said, “Even if his anti-Semitism made him an abject, intolerable person. To read him, I have to suspend my Jewish conscience, but I do it, because anti-Semitism isn’t at the heart of his books… Céline is a great liberator.” Also, while I analyze his novel in the chapter, I only perform a close analysis of the main character Ferdinand, who momentarily passes through New York. Although Céline voluntarily went to New York, his protagonist does not arrive freely in the Free world. He is a slave of sorts on a ship that departed from Africa.
1.2 Speed in the mobile city – Morand’s *New York*

The war and the reconstruction that followed in Europe engendered diverse transatlantic movements of goods and services. American soldiers, cultural products, and dollars crossed the Atlantic, while a number of French authors took the opposite route in order to analyze this new society that both shocked and seduced the French population. While European countries were forced to rebuild, America was advancing at an unprecedented rate of growth. The prosperity and technological futurism of the United States provoked some negative commentary, seen most evidently in *Scènes de la vie future* (1931), by Georges Duhamel, a French version of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906). For authors like Duhamel, the gigantic metropolises of New York and Chicago were polar opposites of European cities and a threat to humanity in general.

However, in the same era, Paul Morand wrote his bestseller *New York*, presenting a slightly more nuanced image than the preponderant views among his contemporaries. *New York* is a collection of observations on America's most powerful city. Like his contemporaries, Morand is fascinated by the American specificities of the city: Wall Street, Times Square, fast-food restaurants. Despite his rather typical account of these characteristics, he is most drawn to the speed at which Americans and, more importantly, their cities move. Leading the reader through its three sub-cities, Lower Manhattan (la ville basse), Midtown (la ville moyenne), and Uptown (la ville haute), Morand presents “Ce merveilleux cadeau qui est New York” [This wonderful gift of New York] (281), a creation marked by movement—human, natural and artificial; one in which not only people, but entire neighborhoods appear to be on the move. We will briefly explore Morand’s depiction of Lower Manhattan, what he calls ancien New York, before diving into his discussion of Midtown, the modern American city. Moving topographically from the lowest to the highest points of Manhattan, Morand’s New York sets the stage for modernity – a city that
threatens established orders, incessantly evolves, and demands that its human and nonhuman elements perpetually adapt in order to keep up.

With pen and paper in hand and shoes tied tightly, Morand invites his French audience to follow him across the city to see what it has to offer to the world. Using the first person plural in many of his descriptions of Lower Manhattan, “Pénétrons… et regardons” [Let’s enter… and see] (44), Morand’s narrator includes his readers in his tour, forcing the reader to stop and “look” through his eyes. His first encounter with the American metropolis is a single capitalized word: “SILENCE.” This perceived stillness – similar to that which Céline’s narrator Bardamu will experience – is only broken by crashing waves and a seagull’s cry. What is most striking about this initial image is that Lower Manhattan appears to be bereft of human presence. While he soon discovers flesh-and-blood citizens, he is most impressed by the depth of European influence he finds hidden in every piece of architecture in this ancien New York. He observes, for example, influences established in Lower Manhattan’s zoning laws explaining that one law “qui obligeait les nouvelles constructions à s’effacer à une certaine hauteur et à développer des terrasses en retrait pour que la lumière pût pénétrer dans la rue” [that obliged any new construction to draw back to a certain height and to develop terraces in order to let light penetrate the street] (40), is a European convention. His detailed attention to the history of each building in Lower Manhattan is a very European behavior, according to Alexis de Tocqueville, and one that draws attention to his position as an outsider. Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, de Tocqueville explained that one of the major distinctions between Americans and Europeans is that Americans prefer to act while Europeans, and the French in particular, would rather reflect. 9

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9 Tocqueville details American and European political and social behaviors in his essay De la démocratie en Amérique.
churches, buildings and meandering streets affords Morand ample time to reflect on the history of America, and thus represents a European stance and space.

His reflections on American urban space continually come back to one metaphor – one that suggests a particular understanding of urban mobility: through allusions to rivers, water, and the ocean, Morand builds a fluid image of the New York that he feels moving around him. When describing Lower Manhattan the narrator’s nostrils are tickled by the smells he senses competing for olfactory space. Next to the Atlantic Ocean, he explains, “flottent de petits océans d’odeurs, fritures italiennes, sauces anglaises, hamburgers et saucisses allemandes, charcuterie kasher pour cette immense population juive de Brooklyn” [float smaller oceans of smells: Italian fried dishes, English sauces, hamburgers, German sausages, kosher meats for the huge Jewish population in Brooklyn] (70). Instead of clearly defined neighborhoods, the smells in Manhattan compete to populate zones seemingly outside of any jurisdiction, and thus has resonances with the vast blue body that separates New York from Paris.

The people of Manhattan and the neighborhoods that they inhabit are as fluid as the smells they emit from their ovens. Tomorrow, the narrator explains, the Italian-Americans “seront ailleurs, car une ville est un organisme dont les cellules se déplacent” [will be somewhere else, for the city is a living organism with shifting cells] (89). The strange ability of these large populations to shift across the island with ease aligns the city with the sea, a space in which elements are constantly shifting over the same absolute location as effortlessly as ships from afar. In New York, “Les gens déménagent tout le temps. Lorsqu’on les recherche, au bout de six mois on n’en trouve plus trace. Les seules adresses permanentes sont celles des banques” [People are always moving. When you look for people, not a trace of them can be found after six months. The only permanent addresses are those of banks] (206). At each instant, never fixed in
a specific spot, one's position in and on this fluid space is not as easily located as in the old European cities: “Certains quartiers modifient leur aspect en une saison: ‘Je m’absente pour une fin de semaine,’ me dit une dame, ‘et, en rentrant, je ne reconnais plus ma rue’” [Some districts alter their appearance in one season; “I go away for a weekend,” a lady said to me, “and when I come home I can’t recognize my own street”] (206). Morand observes that the inhabitants of the city leave as soon as they make a fortune or simply disappear when defeated by the city. According to him, French towns and cities were always recognizable by the church that housed God and his followers. In the modern city, the bank has replaced the church. The coffers of American cash stay put; it is humans who are now in constant circulation on this space, giving it fluidity.

While people and neighborhoods may float with the current, the water metaphor is most noticeable in the concrete tributaries that cut through the buildings. This is first observed as the narrative’s guide is gliding along Broadway Avenue, a “gorge glacée” [frozen gorge] (26), whose continual movement has resulted in a “canyon” (24,42,45) against the emerging skyscrapers, similar to the way in which the Colorado River slowly formed the Grand Canyon. The fact that this gorge is “frozen” implies that lower Broadway has dried up but continues to be the bed of a tributary whose flow has moved north, toward Midtown. Upon leaving Lower Manhattan, he notices that architects have designed certain buildings with seafaring architecture. The Flatiron Building, for example, constructed “en forme de fer à repasser (flat iron) où le vent vient gicler comme l’eau le long d’une étrave de paquebot” [in the shape of an iron, its edge cutting the wind like the bow of a liner driving through the waves] (109), seems to be patiently waiting in port before navigating the New York depths.

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10 Morand is not alone in his allusion, here, to the Grand Canyon. Simone de Beauvoir was particularly drawn to the large majestic natural phenomena in America. See L’Amérique au jour le jour.
The Flatiron building marks the end of one city and the beginning of the next. After meandering rather slowly through lower Manhattan stopping occasionally to enjoy the hidden portals to France through certain smells and structures, Morand is catapulted into the agitation of the ville moyenne – the real American city. The frozen chasm of “le bas Broadway” (41), stands in effigy to the European road system, which has been efficiently replaced by the now-standard urban grid of intersecting vertical avenues and horizontal streets. This grid, forged into the earth with concrete, beneath which run an intricate and invisible network of underground tunnels, ironically liberates the modern city from its territorial dimensions since one moves through it and locates oneself “par latitude et longitude, comme en mer” [by latitude and longitude, as at sea] (96). This sea of “béton et bitume” [concrete and asphalt] whose ascending roads and avenues serve as modern coordinates to the urban navigator, stands in interesting contrast to the “oceans of smells” of lower Manhattan. The narrator’s obsession with using nautical images in order to describe human and inanimate structures in American urban space is more than simply a means of demonstrating movement; I would argue that Morand is subtly encouraging his French audience to approach America’s take on the city with apprehension and precaution.

To support this possible reading, we must first jump forward nearly a half century to the height of the spatial turn. In 1973 French urbanist and cultural theorist Paul Virilio wrote his seminal essay *Vitesse et politique* which looked at the militarization of speed in the modern epoch (the ‘technocratic age’). For Virilio militarism (as opposed to capitalism), specifically the militarization of movement and the creation of the “dromological” state, defines the post-nuclear age. The new “American” priest – the modern engineer – undertakes the difficult task of structuring the human geography for the optimum of control by overseeing the implementation of various vectors and geometries of circulation onto nature. Technological vehicles (through the
form of ships, automobiles and supersonic jets) have liberated the human being from a state of immobility and from their bodily constraints, binding them instead to the “dictatorship of movement.” Virilio’s claims about movement and speed in the modern era have direct implications on the city, especially when the city is perceived as a battlefield on which various entities vie for strategic positioning. Describing the evolution of armed battle and the mobilization of movement, Virilo explains that experts of military strategy moved to the sea because the naval glacis naturally presented no permanent obstacle to a vehicular movement under the constraints of the land. No longer a battleground, New York has morphed into a concrete sea enabling the captains of American urban space to ‘mobilize’ all of its vehicles. In the dromocratic state, the human body is considered to be just one of many possible vehicles; as technologically most inferior and thus the slowest, it is also the most prone to being discarded. In Morand’s New York, the shift from the ‘ocean of smells’ in lower Manhattan to the sea of ‘béton et bitume’ in Midtown suggests that the human element of yesterday’s European city – those human, self-propelled vehicles that emitted only smells and music behind them – has been replaced by the inhuman element of technological vehicles transporting humans in the modern metropolis.

At the genesis of every city, the imprints of the urban planner’s politics and philosophy can be found. No longer the construction of some human, historical figure, like Haussmann or Le Corbusier, New York has been overtaken by rationalism and American capitalism.11 According to the Bible, on the seventh day God declared, “Let there be light.” The city of New York has

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11 For Céline’s narrator this is also true: “On n’échappe pas au commerce américain” [There is no escaping American consumerism] (259). The rational city has been long observed by French thinkers, and dates back as far as René Descartes. In Discours de la méthode (1637), Descartes mentions the fact that “grandes villes,” are often “mal composées” as a result of being erected on “anciens cités” (13). New York is one of many cities that could be considered rational and is not necessarily a new idea. However this project will suggest that this rationality is linked to capitalism. I will later be referring to Gilles Deleuze’s notion of deterritorialization, which is a tactical response by individuals within the capitalist system.
taken this light one step further, making it “mobile, tombante, tournante, courante, zigzagante, roulante, verticale, horizontale, dansante, épileptique” [moving, tumbling, running, turning, zigzagging, rolling, vertical, perpendicular, dancing, epileptic] (129). The lights of Times Square, described here, are no longer frozen on an object or building, nor constrained to one spot in order to illuminate and draw the attention of passers-by. Personified with playful and energetic motion, they convince, persuade, captivate, motivate and seduce the American public or French tourist, imposing their new authority on the crowd that flows beneath.

These examples of nonhuman vehicles in the American urban tapestry indicate that the city appears to be just as mobile, if not more mobile, than the humans that attempt to survive in its salty depths. This ‘dictatorship of movement’ that Virilio signals, is evident on the fluid urban grid, initially cherished by Morand for the purported ease with which vehicles move through space in Midtown. The modern American roads no longer have the pedestrian in mind but the automobile. The attention afforded to the automobile is best reflected by the sedentary presence of the traffic police, who make sure that New York(ers) move accordingly: “Dans leurs tour de verre, les agents […] dirigent le trafic; les lumières rouges s’allument et toutes les rues se déversent soudain dans l’Avenue ; l’instant d’après, les signaux deviennent verts ; d’un coup, New York s’ébranle verticalement sur trente kilomètres de long” [The traffic police in their glass towers keep ringing their bells; the red lights flash on, and suddenly all the cross streets pour into the avenue; a moment later the lights turn green, and suddenly New York shoots vertically forward, for thirty of its miles] (104). One can read in this citation an example of how Tayloism has moved its influences out of the factory and into the city. Drawing on notions from Scientific Management\textsuperscript{12}, the urban planners of Midtown have found a system that efficiently circulates its

\textsuperscript{12} Also known as Taylorism, Scientific Management is a theory that analyzes and synthesizes workflow, the main objective increasing economic efficiency. I see many similarities between the efficiency of the flow of goods
inhabitants. Whereas, in the previous century Haussmann, as the myth goes, thought to widen the roads in order to prevent gangs of rioters from blockading the street, New York has gone further, providing the city’s police with strongholds and remote controls and the ability to determine the flow of these vehicular projectiles. Through the use of modern technology, this city of signs has created docile mobile bodies that have learned to follow the simple signs like a Pavlovian dog, stopping and starting as instructed by some superior being. Some vehicles are allowed to move freely and certain inanimate objects have the ability to move. The presence of these traffic police calls into question the effectiveness of mobility in urban space. In this case, for example, all human bodies are forced to accept some form of immobility as the traffic police sits and orders the movement of vehicles. Active streetwalkers are transformed into passive drivers whose experience of the city is altered by the screen of the windshield. The sea is, for Virilio, the “réalisation du voyage circulaire absolu, ininterrompu, puisqu’il ne comporterait ni départ, ni arrivée” [realization of the absolute, uninterrupted, circular voyage, since it involves neither departure nor arrival] (49). Taken in this light, these vehicles may not be mobile at all. They more resemble a merry-go-round with all the lights and whistles, brings the urban inhabitants and travellers back to there from whence they came.

Morand’s observations of New York mobility foreshadow Paul Virilio’s take on the human experience in the age of information. For Virilio, as soon as the screen of the computer doubles as a virtual reality, we – humans – are in the process of becoming sedentary beings who are everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Since we now have the ability to see the world (automobiles) through the city. Mauro Guillén’s The Taylorized Beauty of the Mechanical: Scientific Management and the rise of Modernist Architecture (p. 186) details how the dehumanizing nature of Taylor’s theory was eventually applied to the built environment.

David Harvey has assertively debunked this myth. In his seminal work Paris Capital of Modernity, he demonstrates that Haussmann’s real mission was to solve the surplus capital and unemployment problem by way of urbanization.

At first considered luxury items along with a speedometer, the windshield became common in most cars by 1915. (http://www.secondchancegarage.com/public/windshield-history.cfm Web. 25 Jun 2015.)
through a click of the mouse, “le sédentaire,” Virilio explains “c'est maintenant celui qui est partout chez lui” […] [The sedentary individual is able to be everywhere in the confines of his home] (cited in Paoli).\(^\text{15}\) The automobile driver in Morand’s New York is able to pass more quickly through urban space, to be in more places than he had been previously, but at what price? He or she has become a passive immobile participant in an urban body that has learned to use these human and nonhuman vehicles in order to “s’ébranle[r] verticalement” [shoot forward vertically] with no constraints, along this boundless fluid space.\(^\text{16}\)

The verb “s’ébranler” sets the tone for Morand’s fascination and apprehension with New York since he is most concerned with the speed at which objects move in the American metropolis. The speed of the city is first reflected in the footsteps of the narrator and reinforced stylistically in the text. When the guide arrives at Wall Street, he has to put his pen and paper away, explaining “C’est l’heure de Wall Street. Je presse le pas […]” [It's Wall Street o'clock. I pick up the pace [...] ] (58). As the narrator's pace accelerates, so do the eyes of the reader who tries to keep up with their guide. Quickly he continues “en zigzags” [zigzagging] (111) and the reader finds himself or herself on the narrator's heels as he moves from one side of the island to the other, slipping between the crowd and keenly avoiding the different merchants impeding the route.

Interestingly, this Midtown\(^\text{17}\) experience is a reflection of Paul Morand himself. According to Gabriel Jardin, Morand “était toujours pressé... Certains d’entre nous courent parce qu’ils sont perpétuellement en retard; lui, il était en avance, au starting-block” [was always in a

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\(^\text{15}\) Bruno Latour, who we will briefly discuss in the conclusion, has similar feelings about the digital age.

\(^\text{16}\) Although Céline will highlight the extent of this order, it should be noted that Morand’s guide does not point out what happens if one steps out of line; what happens when someone goes on red. The fact that he records no illegal acts, even those of petty misdemeanors or traffic violations suggests that everyone, himself included, moves to the beat of some invisible drum.

\(^\text{17}\) Wall Street is, of course, not in Midtown, but the schedule of Wall Street seems to alter this space and the way in which people hustle through it.
hurry... some run because they are constantly late; as for Morand, he was always a step ahead, at the starting block] (18). Jean François Fogel reiterates that Morand “aligns few phrases, deep, but short... every part is indispensable (92). For Morand, literature should only find and say the essential, and nothing more: “In order to move quickly, he throws the uncertain, hesitating and unimportant words overboard” (cited in Fogel, p. 93). In 1909 Marinetti introduced his futurist manifesto in Paris, glorifying the technological progress. Twenty years later, through his depictions of the turbulence of the Interwar period, the explosion of interwar consumerism, the overcoming of borders by the telephone, the instant exchange of money across the Atlantic and the whispers of the approach of the Second World War, Morand uses the setting of New York to create his own form of futurism. The lengthy descriptions of various monuments and their ties to Europe afforded by the topography of Lower Manhattan are quickly replaced by ellipses and short sentences. When referring to the commercial successes of Rockefeller, Bell, Croquet and Astor, the progression of names and accomplishments leads to a succession of three- or four-word sentences: “On l’imite. Le commerce suit. L’argent coule à flots” [Others imitate him. Commerce follows. Money flows in rivers] (100). Presenting the reader easy images with little or no superlative fluff, Morand forces the reader to read quickly, to jump from line to line. In an environment defined by speed, if one is to write, one must write fast.

While Morand and his style adapt to this specific urban experience, those vehicles that are unable to keep up the pace must be removed. Morand’s narrator even seems to suggest that this particular city is no longer in need of human vehicles in order to survive. Walking up toward Harlem he notes “on n'y naît (il n'y a jamais de femmes enceintes dans la rue), on n'y décède” [one is neither born here (not a single pregnant woman is seen in the street) nor does one die here] (274). The fact that, aside from un “vieux nègre aveugle” [old blind negro] (277), not a

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18 This form of consumerism is markedly different from that of the Trente Glorieuses.
single elderly person nor pregnant woman is to be seen suggests that those natural starting and ending blocks have been obliterated, “écrasés” by the necessity to constantly advance. The good citizens of New York do not have time for slow-moving women carrying the weight of the future of humanity on their backs, clogging up the fluid system. New Yorkers, the ones that survive, are willing to sacrifice the birth of humans for the possibility of a faster ride.

These slow-moving vehicles have been replaced by active advertisements that dance along windows of buildings in Times Square. Instead of merely captivating human audiences and jumpstarting their need to consume, these advertisements obliterate the night: “Dans la Quarante-Deuxième Rue, c’est une belle matinée d’été, toute la nuit” [In Forty-Second Street it is a glowing summer afternoon all night] (130). Effacing the difference between night and day, New York City lights create an artificial noon at the peak of night, surpassing the power of nature: “à minuit, en août […] des projecteurs sillonent le ciel et offusquent la lune” [At midnight in August, […] searchlights are scoring the sky and outshining the moon]. Night and day assure the rotation of the Earth along its axis. In New York, however, these lights attempt to negate said movement. Spotlights scan the night sky like snipers in the Great War, picking off the last remaining parcels of night that managed to escape these “redoutables blizzards qui s’abattent en quelques secondes sur New York” [formidable blizzards, which sweep down on New York] (130). This “alphabet en ignition” [kindled alphabet] is more than just some passing blizzard from which the urban travelers need to momentarily shield themselves, it is an efficient and dangerous “machine à fasciner, un appareil à anéantir” [machine that fascinates, a machine that obliterate] (132).

These mobile advertisements, which obliterate the night and create an around-the-clock artificial daytime, remind visitors and inhabitants alike that there is always something to do,
somewhere to be. New Yorkers, persuaded and set in motion by these “machines à fasciner,” no longer know how to relax: “Rest,” one friend explains to the narrator, “ce sont les bridges, les bals masqués, les concerts, les petits chevaux […] [bridge-sets, masked balls, concerts, horse-racing games […] (160). If one wants to experience New York, the real New York, sleep is out of the question. Even though rest would be impossible “parmi cette lumière, ces spasmes, ces déflagrations” [among all this light, all these spasms and combustions] (207), it is not even a passing thought in the minds of New Yorkers. Morand’s narrator never once describes the inside of a hotel room and often indicates to the reader that he is being denied sleep by the city and its inhabitants. While walking through Uptown with his friend, the narrator suggests “Allons nous coucher?” [Let’s go to bed?] to which his friend explains “Comment… déjà? Il faut manger quelque chose…” [What! Already? We must have something to eat…] (154). Hours later, having exhausted his pocketbook and energy at an American diner and cabaret, he reopens the discussion on sleep: “Et maintenant, dis-je, je suppose qu’il n’y a plus que le lit?” [And now,” I said, “I suppose there’s nothing left but bed?] (156). Instead, his friend suggests that they make their way to Harlem.

If the European experience is defined by the leisurely stroll along the winding streets of Lower Manhattan, pausing here and there to take the time and textual space to reflect on European history, the American experience of urban space leaves no time for reflection nor repose. Paul Virilio is eager to point out that speed, when pushed too far, has undesirable consequences: “Plus la rapidité croît, plus la liberté décroît” [The faster rapidity increases, the faster liberty decreases] (139). Virilio adds that in the modern era, the maneuver that “consistait hier à céder du terrain pour gagner du Temps” [once consisted of ceding terrain in order to gain time] no longer makes sense because in today’s “Time Wars,” “le gain de Temps est
exclusivement affaire de vecteurs et le territoire a perdu ses significations au profit du projectile”

[Time gained is exclusively a question of vectors and territory has lost all importance, to the benefit of projectiles] (131). In the modern era, territory gained is no longer as important as time gained. That which will reign from now on in the modern city is speed. History no longer has any importance in a world geared toward the horizon. Negating all distances by shrinking the world, speed is all that matters.

Although Paul Morand may consider himself to be always one step ahead, the immediacy of garnering information and the general rapidity of everyone and everything in the city begins to break down his narrator. In the basement of Brentano’s, where a number of magazine publishers are housed, the French tour guide admits that “l’alignement des zéros donne le vertige. On ferme ! Titubant, je sors de ces caves, ivre du vin nouveau de l’actualité” [the rows of zeros make one dizzy ... Closing time! I stagger forth from the basement, drunk with the new wine of current events] (108). This bombardment of imprinted words provokes a sense of vertigo in the narrator. A few shops down, it is the gallery of machines at one of the popular newspapers that fills him with fear as the machines vomit a river of paper to the cadence of 50,000 sheets per hour: “ce flot que rien ne peut endiguer, cette marré sans pensée hors de ces écluses ouvertes, c’est ce noir étang, ces quatre tonnes d’encre journalières au fond desquelles dorment encore les mots anonymes […] il n’y a qu’à attendre, à attendre midi” [It is this flood that nothing can stem, this unthinking tide rushing from these open locks, this black pool, those tons of daily ink in which the unshaped words still lie sleeping […] one can only wait, wait for noon] (153). The machines take on a life of their own, moving despite the fact that the gallery is devoid of workers. In contrast to this fluid city – one that offers all the mobile possibilities of the sea – sits the “standing” immobile “noir étang” of the machine. Echoing Virilio’s claim that “Aujourd'hui,
avec l’instantanéité, l’ubiquité et l’immédiateté, nous atteignons la limite de notre propre pouvoir,
avec la menace de déléguer ce pouvoir à des machines” [Today, through instantaneousness, ubi-
quity and immediacy, we have arrived at the limit of our own power and find ourselves on the brink of relin-
quishing this power to machines] (Paoli), Morand senses that the powerful and efficacious movement of the machine threatens the mobility of humans in urban space. Any opportunity that New York offered the urban traveler to glide across the “gorge glacée” of Broadway or navigate the grid “comme en mer,” is forever cemented in a “noir étang” created by the vehicular machines that move more quickly and more efficiently than the human.

The animation and intensification of this “amas de faits non digérés” [pile of undigested facts] is served to the public, which in turn, is “écrasé sous la somme de ces faits” [crushed beneath their mass] (152). Whereas the artificial light wipes out natural objects like the moon, these advertisements begin to annihilate the human race under a barrage of lights and facts. Through these various mobile and electrified prostheses, the American city barks commands at its human vehicles, “Move here! Consume this! Do that!” until they can no longer keep up, are repaired and/or scrapped. In his final chapter “Panorama of New York,” the narrator-tourist reflects on his trip.19 After a real trip across the real ocean, the narrator paints a picture of New York that is reminiscent of Fortunato Depero’s futurist painting Manhattan (1930). In Depero’s picture, we see circular, multicolor halos surrounding a metropolis void of humans atop a conveyor-belt foundation, which appears to be folding in on itself. Morand’s narrator, writing from the safe confines of his Parisian home and still recovering from his dream-like acceleration through the American metropolis, is not so sure about the future of New York. While Paris is a “nef insurmontable” [unsinkable vessel] (281), he wonders: “New York, éclatera-t-il un jour? Cette cité tombera peut-être à la renverse et nous nous réveillerons ?” [Will New York explode

19 Tocqueville would say that this act of reflection makes him European.
one day? Maybe this city will one day fall flat on its back and we will reawaken?] (281). Paul Virilio warns that the modern city has the dual and paradoxical behavior of being both explosive and implosive to form a double disappearance: “la disparation de la matière dans la désintégration nucléaire et la disparition des lieux dans l’extermination véhiculaire” [the disappearance of matter in nuclear disintegration and the disappearance of places in vehicular extermination] (132). The elements in Morand’s city already appear to be heating up under the agitation of the “alphabet en ignition” while vehicles are being improved for optimal mobility. Decades before Virilio’s observations, Morand already senses the explosion of space through activity, vivacity, and the collision of natural and unnatural elements at unforeseen and dangerous levels; he discerns the implosion of the city space through the dehumanization of its inhabitants and the passing of the flame from the human to the non-human, from the natural to the artificial. This notion, as we will see in the next section, is taken one step further by Céline for whom the American city is not spiraling out of control; it has become a well-oiled, perfectly controlled ville-machine in which the human element has been completely absorbed for maximum efficiency.

1.3 (Im)mobility – Céline’s American metropolis

At the same time that Morand’s narrator was shooting through New York, Ferdinand Bardamu, the antihero of Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s first novel, Voyage au bout de la nuit, was jumping from continent to continent in search of “ce petit bout de lumière qui finit dans la nuit” [this little piece of light that fades into the night] that we call life (420). Bardamu’s trip takes him from the battlefields of World War I, through colonial Africa and the United States to a fictional Parisian suburb, La Garenne-Rancy, where he establishes a medical practice to help the poor. As
his somber outlook on the meaning of life above implies, Céline offers a pessimistic, yet somewhat accurate, look at the human condition during the Interwar period in France, Africa and the United States.

Although only limited space of *Voyage* is devoted to a discussion of American cities, Bardamu paints a picture of the American *ville-machine* – one that becomes unmistakable when read in conjunction with his ensuing experience in the Ford factories of Detroit. What resonates through the few pages dedicated to the American landscape is that, despite its multidirectional movement and breathtaking acceleration, the American city and its animate bodies are paradoxically immobile. A close examination of Céline’s fictional depiction of the American metropolis reveals a bizarre combination of mobility and immobility. Who or what moves, and who or what is being moved? What emerges as an answer is the image of a domesticated proletariat, motor of the capitalist machine. Just as we saw with Morand’s New York account, Céline’s text emphasizes the Interwar obsession with movement and anticipates Paul Virilio’s theorization of the dromocratic revolution and velocity. Continuing with Paul Virilio’s intriguing analysis of the modern metropolis and borrowing from Michel de Certeau’s look at the practice of everyday life, this section will demonstrate the ways in which Céline paints a frightful image of the American city as a carceral *ville-machine*, to use Virilio's term—one no longer controlled by urban planners, but by the city itself.

During his initial encounter with America, Bardamu attempts to locate land through the Atlantic fog and suddenly makes out this American city that “était debout […] absolument droite” [*stood fully erect […] not bending at all*] (231). Bardamu’s introduction to the American metropolis has resonances with Michel de Certeau's stationed train. In *L'invention du quotidien*, Certeau explains, “Dans le monde mobile de la gare, la machine stoppée apparaît soudain
monumentale” [In the mobile world of the train station, the stationed train suddenly appears monumental] (169). Restricting the unsuspecting traveler’s movement within its confined compartments, the train represents a carceral, yet mobile space for Certeau. Contrary to European cities that warmly welcome the traveler, the modern city New York, seems to be on guard, already prepared for the arrival of these foreign bodies. It stands as erect as a rocket ship, quietly awaiting its passengers to board before lift off.

Some critics have highlighted the sexual implications of the “erect” American city, and Jean-Philippe Mathy even claims that this verticality is “banal” in order to talk about the “sickening” repetition of American urban space (62). I content that the stasis of this stiff image, patiently awaiting the foreign traveler, is extremely important since movement had been a motor for the narrative and its protagonist Bardamu. This new city instantly threatens Baradmu’s previous mobility. Seemingly immobile from afar, once placed under the narrator’s microscope, the city is a prime example of movement and speed. To continue with those observations made by Paul Virilio, in the new technocratic society, a key concept for humanity in general must be equally applied to the military defenses of a nation and its cities: “le stationnement c'est la mort” [stasis is death] (22). As we just observed, in Morand’s analysis, the city and the projectiles within its walls must be in perpetual movement, always on the attack. Similar to Morand, Bardamu cannot help but notice the speed at which Americans move about the city. The elevated train shoots by at lightening speed while dinnertime and bedtime blend together as the American day is accelerated. On the train, “L'heure du dîner survint pendant cette prostration et puis celle du coucher aussi” [Dinnertime slipped by during this prostration and bedtime too] (249). Ceding terrain to companies and their facilities that can afford the elevated rents, the average American worker must move outside of the city. As time accelerates, it equally retracts and the New

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20 See particularly Roxanne Panchasi’s *Future Tense: The Culture of Anticipation in France Between the Wars*. 
Yorker is forced to fit everything into “cette prostration” that serves as a small rest area along the highway of everyday urban life. Everything for these New Yorkers is a question of time lost and seconds gained. For Virilio, in the art of military defense “le maintien du monopole exige qu’à tout nouvel engin soit opposé aussitôt un engin plus rapide” [the upkeep of the Monopoly demands that every new engine be immediately superseded by a faster one] (54). The mobile mass of city inhabitants and streetwalkers in Bardamu’s New York, motor of the modern city, must find a way to accelerate in order to keep up. As Virilio reinforces, the person or thing that survives in today’s velocity-driven world, “le survivant est effectivement le sur-vif” [the survivor is in fact super-quick] (54). One must always be “sur-vif,” always a step ahead of the beating heart.

This necessity for speed has created silent, unquestioning hybrid creatures, humanoid vehicles. Although Morand’s narrator was unable to locate any nocturnal asylum, Bardamu easily finds temporary shelter at the Laugh Calvin Hotel. Upon entering the short term lodging, Bardamu waits only an instant before a young bellhop approaches him and picks up his bags without any exchanged salutations: “on m’expédiait. C’était le départ” [I was being packed off. Away we went!] (248). On the way to Bardamu’s economical room, this pairing of the young American valet (“l’enfant” [the child]) and his antique European cargo, morph into a sort of vehicle in its own right: "à belle allure, nous allions noirs, et décisifs comme un métro” [at a great lick we forged, determined and in darkness like a subway train] (248). One would expect Bardamu to fall in love with the living city, but something just does not seem to feel right. The invisible walls of this stiff city encompass a space that is eerily similar to the Ford factory he next visits and in which he will work. It is not until one reads Bardamu’s experience in the Ford factory, that his imagery of the city becomes clear. Whereas Morand saw the progressive fluid
space of New York leading to the ultimate disintegration of urban space through an
electrification and acceleration of its various human and technological vehicles, the fluidity of
Céline’s vision is likened to a well-oiled machine, product of the industrial revolution.

Virilio has observed: “Qu’est en réalité le prolétariat depuis l’Antiquité, sinon […] une
présence fantomatique dans le récit historique d’une population flottante liée à la satisfaction des
exigences de la logistique” [What else has the proletariat been since Antiquity, if not […] the
phantom presence in the historical narrative of a floating population linked to the satisfaction of
logistical demands?] (83). Momentarily caught between two wars, yesterday’s foot soldiers –
those that survived – have been relocated from the battlefields to the factories. The logistical
needs have shifted from soldiers wielding ballistic projectiles to workers welding auto-mobile
vehicles. Once forced to follow the commands of some petty officer, the phantom presence of
the American proletariat must now respond to Ford’s hand-selected foremen in the carceral space
of American Industry.

Seen from the outside, the Ford factory is described as “un cage à mouches” [cage full of
flies] (278). This carceral exterior contains a disquieting depth, as the domesticated worker no
longer manipulates the machines, but cedes to their commands: As Bardamu explains, “le petit
wagon… se tracasse pour passer entre les outils. Qu’on se range!... Et hop ! il va frétiller plus loin
ce fou clinquant parmi les courroies et volants, porter aux hommes leurs rations de contraintes”
[the little bucking trolley car […] strives to make headway through the workmen. Out of the
light! And hop! There it goes like a mad thing, clinking on its way amid belts and flywheels,
taking the men their rations of fetters] (281). Céline paints here the picture of a little wagon
personified by the verb ‘se tracasser’ [to worry, fret] has not just the ability to seemingly move
on its own (there is no human pushing it), but more importantly to fret about what repercussions
await it should it miss its deadline. Through indirect discourse (“qu’on se range!”), Céline’s mobile “fou” commands a pool of human workers that obediently await their dose of constraints to line up and service it accordingly. Moreover, the employees not only must adapt to these new working conditions; they enter a novel form of prostitution, hired by Ford to “faire tout le plaisir possible aux machines” [*eager to keep the machines happy*] (281). Subjected to the machine, the workers are objectified by the machine’s insatiable demands for satisfaction.

Productivity is the name of the game. Bardamu explains that “[r]ien n’importait que la continuité fracassante des mille et mille instruments qui commandaient les hommes” [*nothing mattered but the continuous feeding of the several thousand machines which ordered all these men about*] (282), suggesting that movement is promoted, but only on the part of the machine. The hierarchy man-machine is reversed, as it is not the human that is working for the betterment of its machine boss. The worker becomes a machine, while the personified little wagon barrels its way around the humanoid tools. When new workers arrive, they are led through the factory as if on a conveyor belt: “nous fûmes répartis en files traînardes, par groupes hésitants […] A mesure qu’on avançait on les perdait les compagnons […] Il en restait à chaque fois trois ou quatre autour d’une machine” [*We were sent off in slow-moving single files and hesitant groups […] As you went along you lost your companions […] Each time three or four stayed behind around a machine*] (280). Not just a machine, the worker is reduced to a mere piece of the final product, since at each new machine, sections are stripped from the procession of workers, as each colony of slaves finds itself in front of its machine-boss for the rest of his life. Thus, while people are supposed to move throughout the city, in the factory, members are forced to remain in front of the machine that will do all of the work on an automatic loop.
When we juxtapose Bardamu's experience in the factory with his previous interaction with New York's built environment, the city morphs into the *ville-machine* as it resembles these economic theories from the Ford model. In a New York restaurant, for example, gastronomy, so important to French culture, is stripped of its communality and resembles the circularity of the factory's conveying system—it seems as if one eats off an assembly line similar to René Clair's workers in *A nous la liberté*, as Bardamu observes: “Dès l’entrée, un plateau vous est remis entre les mains et vous allez prendre votre tour à la file. Attente” [*At the door a tray is put into your hands and you queue up. You wait your turn*] (257). At each station, the famished New Yorker must wait, and compliantly receive whatever the female server offers. Bardamu continues, explaining that as soon as one is served, “[il] fallait aller s’asseoir en douce et laisser la place à un autre” [*you had to go quietly away and sit down, leaving room for others*] (258). Similar to the progression of workers in the Ford factory, the hungry human is thus reduced to a nut or bolt in the system, stopping at each fixed female worker to receive the next part, in this alimentary machine.

It is not only the fast-food restaurant that is sucked into this system; the city circulates human capital through its streets and public transportation. This first becomes clear while Bardamu is walking in search of some cinema or restaurant in which to rest his feet. While walking along the sidewalk, he notices that it is very similar to a conveyor system, circulating passers-by to predetermined stores and theatres. Bardamu emphasizes that once aboard the “pavé gluant” [*sticky pavement*] (290), the walker, if he can be called that, is magically transported by this concrete treadmill. Upon leaving his hotel, “la rue me reprit” [*I was picked up again by the street*] (251) as if it had never stopped turning, dropping off certain products, while picking up others along the way.
The fate of this human product has been predetermined by a system generated by revenue and moved by the dollar: “J’ai donc repris la file des passants […] nous avançâmes par saccades à cause des boutiques dont chaque étalage fragmentait la foule” [So I joined in the procession of passers-by […] we went along in jerks because each shop window disturbed the flow of the crowd] (246). In ordered starts and stops, the conveying system drops off these consumers. During the day, these *citadins* must be dropped off at work; at night, it is the cinema that calls this itinerant mass. The immobility of the worker in front of a looped machine is reproduced by the spectator at night who stiffly sits in front of the static screen across which projected images jump in and out. Bardamu observes: “Un cinéma, et puis un autre à côté, et puis encore un autre et tout au long de la rue comme ça. Nous perdions de gros morceaux de foule devant chacun” [one theater, then another next door, and yet another, and so on the whole way. We lost a large section of the crowd in front of each] (252). Even in their downtime, in the eight hours of play demanded by law at the beginning of the century, American workers are bombarded by the movement on the screen. The concrete treadmill facilitates the circulation of spectators, impregnating the system with its greenback lifeblood and forcing New Yorkers to perpetual movement, even in their downtime.

It should be briefly noted here that Badamu’s use of the first person plural, “nous,” in the sentence above is nuanced from that used by Morand. In Morand’s text, “nous” for the narrator is himself and his French audience that has come along for the ride. A foreign traveler is someone who is able to observe the behaviors of a different culture without being part of that culture. Morand uses this to his advantage, and to the benefit of his readers, as he is able to remain sucked into the endless network of movement. In this case, Céline’s narcissistic Bardamu is not referring to his perceived readers when he uses “nous” but to the mobilized passers-by of which
he is now an active participant. This is the first rhetorical indication that Bardamu is being sucked into the American system, as if the seduction is too much for even this hard-headed Frenchman of nomadic tendencies.

Bardamu’s association with this mobilized proletariat makes him aware of what Paul Virilio will later describe in detail. According to Virilio, one of the main motivations behind the French Revolution was to stand up against servitude, particularly “la contrainte à l’immobilité symbolisée par l’ancien servage féodal […] Mais nul ne supposait encore que la ‘conquête de la liberté d’aller et venir’, chère à Montaigne, pourrait, par un tour de passe-passe, devenir contrainte à la mobilité” [the constraint to immobility symbolized by the ancient feudal serfdom […] But no one yet expected that the ‘conquest of the freedom to come and go’ so dear to Montaigne, could by a sleight of hand become an obligation to mobility] (37, emphasis in original). In order for the city to function, all of its parts must move, especially its fleshly gears. Bardamu portrays them as having no choice in the matter—like pistons in an engine, they must be constantly moving, yet in a stationary position, in constant (im)mobility. At the restaurant he is worried that he can't hide his feet under the minute table: “J’aurais bien voulu qu’ils fussent ailleurs mes pieds” [I wisheded they were somewhere else, those feet of mine] (259) he admits, foreshadowing years in advance Virilio's observation that the human body “n'est qu’un moteur du moteur de l'engin” [the motor of the machine’s motor] (65). His inactive and unproductive feet announce his ability to move, and testify to the fact that he is challenging the unwritten laws of the city.

Just as factories have their foremen and supervisors to ensure productivity, so the ville-machine has surveillance systems located throughout in order to assure this perpetual “contrainte à la mobilité.” Nearly fainting the first time he finds himself in the middle of this mass of human
capital, Bardamu finds a refuge on a park bench in front of the ancient Town Hall. However a policeman, “au milieu de la chaussée, posé comme un encrier se mit à me suspecter d’avoir des drôles de projets. C’était visible” [the policeman standing like an ink-pot in the middle of the road began to suspect me of being up to something very odd. It was obvious] (244). Wandering and relaxing are considered transgressions in the modern metropolis and are strictly prohibited. Morand sensed this as well: in opposition to representations of French urban space we will analyze in the next section and subsequent chapters, American urban space leaves no space unattended in *Voyage*. When describing the traffic police and their glass command booth, Bardamu drew attention to the fact that all the vehicles stopped and started as directed. In Céline’s New York, the arm of the civil state patrols and watches for delinquency of this type. Both of these examples suggest that these foreign bodies are “coupables de n’être plus synchros” [guilty of being out of sync] (Virilio 39-40). In search of revolutionary static individuals, the policeman stands as stiff as New York appeared to stand, fixed in the middle of the road “comme un encrier.” Analogous to the inkwell in which a plume is dipped, this phallic symbol reflects his first encounter with New York and represents the written and unchanging law of capitalism, immobile as it surveys this ocean of Americans trapped in a sort of mobile incarceration. The instant Bardamu’s body steps out of line, it is easily spotted. Before the policeman has the time to place Céline’s antihero back onto the conveyor system of the New York grid, Bardamu flees the scene of his vehicular misdemeanor.

Bardamu soon finds his way into a diner, where surely he will be able to escape the dictatorship of mobility. He quickly learns that even the American restaurant has been engineered to serve as many customers as efficiently as possible. Nobody can step out of line without threatening the functioning of the entire system. After having quickly gobbled his food,
Bardamu does not follow the path indicated by the exit sign, “je me suis dirigé vers elle la blonde, me détachant, tout à fait insolite, parmi les flots de la lumière disciplinée” [I steered towards my blond, detaching myself in a quite unheard-of way amid all those well-ordered waves of light] (260). According to the servers and the “lumière disciplinée,” Bardamu had strayed from his position in the chain. As the only delinquent body in the restaurant, Bardamu is quickly observed by “le géant de garde” (260), who effortlessly places Bardamu back in his ordered place on the moving sidewalk on the other side of the glass doors.

Bardamu's attempt and subsequent failure to arrive at the blond waitress represents Michel de Certeau's separate definitions of space as either “lieu” [place] or “espace” [space].

Less than a decade after Virilio’s essay on the dromocratic state, Certeau wrote his most influential work L’invention du quotidien I: Arts de faire (1990) which developed a theory of the consumptive and productive activity inherent in everyday life. His multiple scholarly interests allow him to comment on laws, languages, rituals and utilitarian objects. His observations on spatial practices will be most useful to this and subsequent chapters. “Lieu,” Certeau explains, is “l’ordre selon lequel des éléments sont distribués dans des rapports de coexistence […] Il implique une indication de stabilité” [the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence […] it implies an indication of stability] (172). The city creates its own lieu in which all its parts are fixedly mobile, restrained to a precise daily itinerary. Bardamu’s attempt to subvert this lieu in not following the predetermined path is an attempt to create his own espace, which Certeau defines as "lieu pratiqué. Ainsi la rue géométriquement définie par un urbanisme est transformée en espace par des marcheurs” [practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers] (173, emphasis in orginal). However, Bardamu's attempt is thwarted by the
ever-present surveillance system. This *lieu* can no longer be practiced, as any movement that affects the efficiently synchronized machine is quickly removed. It appears as if this potentially multidirectional *espace* is shut off by the “sur-vif,” machine, which is always one step ahead of its parts.

The entire city is thus “aux aguets” for those inefficient bodies that may delay or subvert the system. Those that fall behind can easily be replaced by the machines that lurk in the shadows. As Bardamu waits to be hired, his future Russian co-cog warns that the Flivver King\(^{21}\) expects hard workers; if not, “on te foutra à la porte en moins de deux aussi par une des machines mécaniques qu’il a toujours prêtes” [*they’ll throw you out in a jiffy and in another two two’s they’ll have put one of those mechanical things in your place*] (279). This menace specific to the factory trickles its way into the city—the city, like the factory, is trending toward automation. Both Morand and Céline sense the extreme aftereffect of industrialization in the implementation of bourgeois values. No longer ordered by some corporeal human leader, the city directs itself, adopting a particular auto-regulatory system of checks and balances that requires neither human decision makers, nor their human presence. For Morand, it was the blizzards of information that the machines of the American press were able to create, literally crushing inhabitants under tons of undigested and indigestible facts. For Céline, more efficient machines requiring only a flip of a switch await their opportunity to send humans to the unemployment line.

In order for the system to function efficiently on its own, the human must be stripped of his or her human qualities; it must be domesticated, animalized or outright annihilated. First, in the factory, when Bardamu suggests that his studies in France could be useful to the company, a

\(^{21}\) The “Flivver King” is the name given Ford by Upton Sinclair. Published in 1937, his novel demonstrated the clash between the two extremes of rich and poor.
foreman irately informs him: “Vous n’êtes pas venu ici pour penser, mais pour faire les gestes qu’on vous commandera d’exécuter… C’est de chimpanzés dont nous avons besoin” [We’ve no use for intellectuals in this outfit. What we need is chimpanzees] (280). As the factory worker is degenerated into slightly lesser primates, New York is populated by “brebis” [sheep] (279); the elevated train is full of “viandes tremblotantes et hachées” [trembling, chopped-up meats] (240), while American households are populated by “des grosses bêtes bien dociles” [very large subservient animals] (250). Stripped of knowledge, described as domesticated animals or future slices of lunchmeat, Americans have been reduced, to put it with Virilio, to the motor of the motor of the machine. These inhabitants that “remontent comme moi dans la ville, au boulot sans doute, le nez en bas” [were journeying up to town like me, going to their work, no doubt, with their noses to the ground] have become nothing more than the ville-machine’s livestock, corralled to their specific spaces in the American metropolis (240).

Ford revolutionized the system of production by offering to make any color car a consumer wanted as long as it was black. This extreme practice of commodification has made its way into the streets and factories of American cities. Everywhere Bardamu looks, all he sees are faceless, dehumanized bodies. Interaction and communication among these urban animals in general is prohibited; no hellos or good-days allowed. No time to waste on these insignificant salutations. It is impossible to speak in the factory as the conveyor belt moves too fast.

“Silence!” hushes the usher in the cinema; people are trying to watch the show. It's up to the boss to yell orders and publicities to whisper sweet nothings.

In stark contrast to this image of inhabitants stripped of what makes them human and alive, the advertisements are described as “vivantes.” These animated advertisements that glisten above, tempt the domesticated crowd “qui moutonne vers les lumières suspendues dans la nuit”
(200). Like flies, blindly attracted to a lamp, this herd is drawn to the twinkling neon. Men are no longer attracted to women, but to corporate advertisements. In their turn, women are seduced by the desirable treasures trapped behind “les vitrines” (244). Advertising is the new strip-tease and modern-day chivalry. Although Bardamu does not say it directly, consumerism appears to be the new form of insemination in the American ville-machine. In a similar fashion to his use of free indirect discourse to explain the inner thoughts or unspoken words of the mobile cart in the factory, Bardamu takes the perceived position of the city in regards to the exchange value attached to the passers-by, and thus himself: “Ça faisait bien des dollars […] une foule comme ça” [They’re worth a good many dollars [...] a crowd like that] (252). The capitalist mantra of autopoiesis that Henry Miller once summed up as “only money counts, only money makes money” (153), is here implied by the lack of interaction between men and women. No pregnant women could be seen on the streets of Morand’s New York, suggesting that those slow vehicles had been removed in order to facilitate faster moving bodies. Bardamu offers a different perspective with new found information that would suggest that human re-production is neither ordained nor necessary in this modern city: “Les sexes semblaient aller chacun de leur côté dans la rue” [in the streets, the sexes don’t seem to speak to each other] (250). Separated from one another like the various pieces along an assembly line, the sexes have been reduced to parallel mobile lines of lifeless and futureless bodies, lines that apparently fail to intersect even behind closed doors.

As night falls on the city of lights, Bardamu spies on Americans through his hotel window. His voyeuristic sedentary journey yields no uplifting discovery: “Je n’ai aperçu en tout que deux couples à se faire... les choses que j’attendais” [I saw in all only two couples do, what I expected] (250). Corporeal love is no longer necessary in the city that can manage without these
tired, inefficient bodies. The worker-motor, once a producer of a product, then the producer of future livestock, no longer produces anything at all. The city no longer needs human civilization to reproduce—supplemental “viandes tremblotantes et hachées” is not necessary.\(^{22}\)

Everything in the city forces the individual into capitalism's stronghold. Bardamu is not a simple observer of this system: “Moi aussi, j’ai été me traîner vers les lumières” \([I \ also \ dragged \ myself \ along \ towards \ the \ lights]\) (252). Swept up by this swarm of Americans, equally tempted as Morand, Bardamu avoids this unremitting marketing hidden within the neon. When Molly asks him to settle in Detroit, suggesting that “On ne sera pas malheureux ensemble… On placera nos économies… On sera comme tout le monde” \([W e \ shouldn’t \ be \ unhappy \ together… \ We’ll \ invest \ what \ we \ earn… \ W e’ll \ be \ like \ everyone \ else]\) (286). Bardamu considers being like Joe Everybody, avoiding unhappiness as opposed to finding happiness, to be "a ridiculous infinitesimal existence.” The \textit{ville-machine} throws the worker-citizen hybrid into a vicious cycle, a sort of agitated stationing. Bardamu would alter Virilio’s statement, stating more morbidly that \textit{forced} stasis is death. In a final determining scene, stuck in his hotel room bed, tossing and turning in this city, Bardamu stands out against the immobility imposed on him by this city and makes the decision to return to France. Confronted with this circular (im)mobility strategically orchestrated by the invisible \textit{ville-machine} whose terminus is nothing more than tomorrow's starting point, Bardamu retreats to his \textit{modus operandi}: flight, from this auto-regulated and automated city.

\subsection*{1.4 Conclusion}

In \textit{Flesh and Stone} (1994), Richard Sennett claims that the city is a locus for the exiled and “foreign” individual, suggesting that the city should be regarded not as a sanctuary but as an

\(^{22}\) Mathy has a similar reading of this. See pp. 63-65.
open space “in which people come alive, where they expose, acknowledge and address the discordant parts of themselves and one another” (12). As a foreigner who is ready to leave, with no papers, no money and no physical ties to the city, Bardamu is in the privileged position of exile, which he considers to be, “cette inexorable observation de l’existence telle qu’elle est vraiment pendant ces longues heures lucides, […] où les habitudes du pays précédent vous abandonnent, sans que les autres, les nouvelles, vous aient encore suffisamment abrutis” [this inexorable glimpse of existence as it really is during those few lucid hours […] that when you are leaving the customs of the last country behind you and the other new ones have not yet got their hold of you] (267). As his short journey to the United States comes to an end, he is frightened by the fact that there seems to be no escaping American commerce. Caught in a city which he considers to be more frightening than “tout l’ensemble de menaces directes, occultes et imprévisibles” [the whole sum total of threats, actual, hidden and unforeseen] (265), Bardamu relies on this new urban mobility he and Morand have come to observe – a form of mobility that, in the case of Bardamu, is only heightened by his dual outsider position as a foreign traveler.

It is in this transitory state that the narrator is able to truly perceive his surroundings without the prejudices of habit. The movement of the foreign vehicle along and through the streets of the urban metropolis provides a particular vantage point from which one can come to understand the city, since, as Bardamu explains in these moments, everything conspires to force you to observe “les choses, les gens et l’avenir tels qu’ils sont, c’est-à-dire les squelettes, rien que des riens, qu’il faudra cependant aimer, chérir, défendre, animer comme s’ils existaient” [things, people and the future as they are – that is the skeletons, nothing but ciphers, which nevertheless you will have to love, cherish, défend and encourage, as if they really existed] (267). Even though the trip may only be a quest for “ce rien de tout… ce petit vertige pour
coulons” [this nothing at all, this little moment of giddiness for fools] (267), it will still offer more to future generations than anything that the American city and its inhabitants could offer French readers.

Bardamu is well aware that his special vantage point and his particular visions are uttered into a void since what is clear is “surtout […] l’énorme indifférence à mon égard qui le résumait à mon sens” [particularly [...] the vast indifferences towards me which, as far as I was concerned, was what it stood for] (265). This view brainwashes Americans. They fail to see him, thus throwing him into an existential dilemma that threatens his very being. He is a ghost in the machine, whose starts and stops within the system elicit no response. Screaming at the top of his lungs through the window of the Laugh Calvin Hotel, Bardamu tries to warn New Yorkers of this dangerous metropolis, but to no avail: “Rien que ça leur faisait. Ils poussaient la vie et la nuit et le jour devant eux les hommes” [None whatever. They were pushing life and the night and the daytime before them] (261). Soon, he realizes that America is a lost cause. In his chapter on “Spatial Stories” Michel de Certeau writes that ordinary practitioners of urban space “live down below the threshold where visibility begins” (92). New York, with its flashing lights that erase the night sky and order every human and technological vehicle to follow various “lumières disciplinées” is, in Morand’s and Céline’s analyses, completely visible. The productive possibilities that his exiled body offers the city and its inhabitants will never find a foothold in this urban abyss. Like Morand’s narrator, Céline’s exile sets sail for France in order to find true practitioners of urban space, and productive mobile perspectives. These two authors had high hopes for interwar New York and the possible direction of French cities; they learned, however, that it was nothing more than a “clear text” – a “planned and readable city” (Certeau 93) that has nothing more to offer. In the following chapters, we will analyze authors of surreal, postmodern
and posthuman inspiration, that turn to the borders, limits and edges of French and imaginary
urban space in order to draw links between these practitioners of space and their own theoretical
viewpoints.
Chapter 2: Vehicular Delinquency Through Two Surrealist Borderlands

2.1 Introduction

Having established a better understanding of a possible future for French urban space through the experience of the American Interwar city in chapter 1, I now turn to an analysis of two surrealist texts from the same period: Louis Aragon’s novel *Le paysan de Paris* (1926) and Jean Vigo’s poetic realist film *L’Atalante* (1934). In lieu of making the long transatlantic journey, Aragon and Vigo focus their attention on Paris and the French countryside in order to find artistic inspiration. We thus shift slightly from the foreign mobile limits to the outsider perspectives of Paris by two “rural” visions of urban space. In the last chapter I suggested that the protagonists of both texts cannot practice the American metropolis in a Certelian fashion. In Certeau’s terms, New York is nothing but an urban place, not an urban space and the two foreign travelers felt their mobility threatened by the American metropolis. To the dismay of both authors, the anonymous city dwellers found and highlighted in Céline’s New York cannot observe their own city; they are incapable of recognizing what is happening to them since they have been completely absorbed by the *ville*-machine. To make matters worse for the two French protagonists, although they are able to move through the city and quickly absorb and record the buildings, they are unable to move according to their own volition. They feel themselves being drawn into the hum of the machine, participating in the agitated stationing of the machines firing parts.

The Americanization of French urban space had already begun to take shape before Céline and Morand made their trips to the United States. Writing in 1924, Fernand Léger compared his nation’s capital to a gigantic movie. Paris, he claimed in *L’Intransigeant*, offers a perfect reflection of the spectacle of modern life since it is a “vast electric and mechanical
spectacle of rapidly multiplying images, conducted by an accelerating current, an expansive network within which humans move in rhythm” (Quoted in Walz, 40). Although Léger was a proponent of this cinematic city, what is interesting here is how Paris resembles those images offered by Morand and Céline, especially the fact that Parisians are also being swept up in the rhythm of the modern, electrified machine. In American urban space, wherever Morand’s narrator looked, he could not find any space outside of the purview of the ordered system and no matter how hard Bardamu tried to stray from the ‘lumières disciplinées” of the city, he soon found himself back on the conveyor system of New York passers-by. In this section, we will see, however, that within the ordered French metropolis, there remain outlets for spatial delinquency. Michel de Certeau argues that to fully understand the city, we must turn our attention to those inhabitants that exist “down below where visibility begins” (92). In this chapter we will break through this threshold of visibility by concentrating on various passages, pathways, and waterways that lead into Paris and materialize disjointedly across the urban fabric that help to establish a “migrational or metaphorical city” which slips “into the clear text of the planned and readable city” (Certeau 93).

During the interwar period, two “passages,” one terrestrial and one fluvial, caught the eyes of two artists inspired by surrealist aesthetics. In Louis Aragon’s *Paysan*, we will explore the *passages*, or galeries/arcades, that ran, and some of which still run through, Paris, paying particular attention to the *Passage de l’Opéra*, a labyrinthine zone that once served as the home of the Dada movement and textually became a locale for surrealist discovery. In Jean Vigo’s *Atalante*, we will turn to the network of rivers and man-made canals efficiently circulating goods in the capitalist system. Tom Conley explains that this canal network is part of a vast project of Henry IV’s “modernism” (270), thus demonstrating that it pre-dates industrial capitalism.
However, by the twentieth century, these fluvial passageways, much like the intramuros passages, were designed specifically to foster movement and mobility of human and nonhuman goods and services. In both texts, it becomes evident that there is a particular quality inherent in these locations that makes them prone to spatial delinquency, and thus provides the ideal setting for a discussion on the artistic aura touted by the surrealists. I contend that these passages, and the people and objects that practice them, can be described and examined as mobile borders.

While this idea is developed in the first section on Aragon, I will show in the second section on Vigo how these border spaces that are built into the texts and the city can be read as allegories and a reflection of the surreal endeavor.

Both of these texts borrow from surrealist aesthetics. On the one hand, Aragon’s Paysan is considered by many to be one of the most remarkable examples of surrealism’s literary power. Vigo’s Atalante, on the other hand, is not as clearly positioned as a surrealist film. Many scholars consider Vigo’s last film to be a key example of the poetic realist style that emerged on the brink of World War II. Offering cynical views of interwar French society and a “general sense of foreboding,” films associated with this rather short-lived style are distinct in their ability to propose “something infinitely optimistic in their aesthetic ambition and commitment to art in the face of encroaching menace” (Hunt). Ben McCann considers “Vigo’s poetic leaps that transgress time to link disparate actions” in addition to the score in Vigo’s film to be representative of poetic realism (43). As I will demonstrate in this chapter, regardless of this accurate association with poetic realism, Vigo’s Atalante is imbued with surrealist aesthetics and ambitions. In the introduction to Surrealism and Cinema (2006), Michael Richardson argues that surrealism is not concerned with conjuring up some magical world; rather its interest “is almost

23 This is definitely the stance of Pierre Daix in Aragon: Une vie à changer. See also, Louis Janouer’s Cent as de servitude: Aragon et les siens.
exclusively in exploring the conjunctions, the points of contact, between different realms of existence” (2). The two types of passages examined by Aragon and Vigo – one urban and one fluvial – become spatial representations of this desired collision mobile elements and represent “departures rather than arrivals” which according to Richardson is what “surrealism is all about” (3). At the same time, while analyzing these spaces, we will evoke the surrealist notion of ‘errance,’ the aimless wandering that is built into the physical spaces described in these narratives. For surrealists, street promenades – strolling with neither end in sight nor precise goal – became for them a way of practicing their theory of automatic writing, respecting first and foremost the power of the “hasard” [chance]. This type of movement, a definite threat to the ville-machine’s demand for continually accelerating vehicles, was meant to provide an alternative to the oppression of stifling conventional bourgeois urban life, replacing it with a strange, unfamiliar and quirky way of living that allows one to imagine a possible alternative. Practicing space in this way allows inhabitants and outsiders alike to pursue the surrealist endeavor of locating the marvelous in the everyday.

The passage, I claim, can be read as a border since it generally links spaces while equally establish a clear distance between them. In both texts that I will analyze, this border becomes a vital source for energy, and, as the rest of this project seeks to demonstrate, the power of this locale will be harnessed by surrealists and other aesthetic and theoretical groups throughout the twentieth century. Concentrating on these zones as “borderlands,” we will see how the border is represented by these two artists and how movement along the passages and pathways of urban space metaphorically represents the surrealist endeavor. This chapter suggests that we can read Aragon’s streetwalkers and Vigo’s mariners as mobile limits aboard mobile borders. Speaking

24 This is Kiyoko Ishikawa’s reading in Paris dans quatre textes narratifs du surréalisme.
25 This notion of surrealist “errance” will be reproduced by the situationalist movement’s “dérive” – a similar take on practicing the city by moving against the vectors established by order, championed by Guy Debord.
about the border will evoke notions of hybridity. This concept, first theorized by postcolonial and cultural studies before being adopted by every discipline that seeks an entrance into interdisciplinarity, is useful for destabilizing binaries and accepted notions of culture. Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi feels that while some theorists of hybridity, mainly Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall, have clearly defined hybridity within their social and historical contexts, others such as Homi Bhabha and Edward Soja with their respective concepts of “in-betweenness” and “thirstspace” have turned hybridity “into abstractions with no identifiable locations” (105). In this chapter and the next, we will attempt to identify a location for this hybridity, grounding it in the spatial limits, edges and borders of urban space. Edward Soja uses the term “thirling” and asks us to “set aside the demands to make an either/or choice and contemplate instead the possibility of a both/and also logic” (5). We will see how this “both/and also logic” fits into the surrealist endeavor and how it has been spatially represented by mobile borders.

2.2 The Edges of Visibility in Louis Aragon’s *Le Paysan de Paris*

We begin by turning back the clock a few years from Céline and Morand’s urban narratives with a reading of Louis Aragon’s *Le Paysan de Paris*. Published as a single work in 1926, *Paysan* originally appeared as a series of separate installments in *La Revue Européenne*, starting in 1924 with “Pour une mythologie moderne” and ending with “Le songe du paysan.” Similar to Charles Baudelaire’s lament of the new Paris in “Le Cygne”26 in the previous century, Aragon takes a poetic look at the revitalization of Paris, through the physical construction of the boulevard Haussmann and the destruction of the galleries of Paris. His judicious look into the dangers of the Americanization of Paris suggests that French, and only French, urban space can

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26 Although his entire collection of prose-poems, “Le Spleen de Paris,” expresses sorrow in modern urban space, Baudelaire is most clear in “Le Cygne” when he laments “Le vieux Paris n’est plus (la forme d’une ville Change plus vite, hélas! que le coeur d’un mortel).”
be practiced in artistic and productive ways by those individuals who choose to remain on the limits, edges and borders of said space(s).

Well-known for his poetry and his participation in various intellectual and political movements throughout his life, Aragon and his writing can be difficult to label. Claudine Raynaud considers Aragon’s Paysan to be “a prime example of the polis, the City of Light and its mysteries” (38), and although most often categorized as a novel, it is probably best described as a form of playful poetic prose. This section considers the first part of Aragon's meandering prose. In this part of the text, Aragon distills the adventures of a male “passant” in the Passage de l'Opéra, both flaneur and dreamer, who endlessly rediscovers his city with fresh eyes that allow him to appreciate the city, life and the relationship to each other (Highmore 56). Lost in the shadows of the city’s “passages,” the narrator encounters the modernist city and extends our discussion of movement through urban space to a new level, offering a response to Bardamu’s contestation in Voyage au bout de la nuit that he and his talents were unnoticed and unnecessary in the American version of urban space. Looming in the background and infecting every paragraph of Aragon’s text is the presence and progress of the extension of the Haussmann Boulevard.27 Amidst the sounds of the clinking of hammers and the destruction of buildings in order to construct a much larger boulevard similar to those found in New York, Aragon’s peasant narrator decides to turn his gaze to the essential otherness of the urban, concentrating on the unwonted and heretofore unnoticed bodies that float along and through the city body. Paris for Aragon, and the surrealists, was not the old City of Light but a more dangerous and exciting zone of twilight, thresholds and refracted surfaces.

27 This might cause some confusion (and is most likely intended by Aragon) but it should be explained in more detail. The Peasant is referring to the actual boulevard Haussmann that is being extended. Of course, this extension of the boulevard and the subsequent destruction of the passage is a convenient way to attack the Haussmannian form of urbanism that displaces whole neighborhoods in order to make room for larger roads and better circulation.
In the works of Morand and Céline the first-person narrators were foreign presences travelling through the American urban space made of technological prostheses whose survival was the circulation of human vehicles. The frightful urban agitation translated by these two travelers had already made (and literally paved) the way back to France’s capital. Although not a “foreigner” in terms of his national citizenship, the narrator is presented as equally foreign to the city he is describing. Aragon’s narrator is a “paysan,” a rural country bumpkin who is paradoxically from Paris; he is both urban and rural. With one foot within the city and the other in the outskirts, an ambiguous regional pays, this hybrid narrator haunts the relics and phantom presences of the still labyrinthine city like a flâneur seeking commonplace mysteries and everyday epiphanies.

Aragon has often been associated with the surrealist movement. The dialectics implied in the work’s title and subsequent narrative gaze prepares the reader for a difficult text ripe with literary devices important to surrealism, such as metaphor, and more importantly, juxtaposition.28 For surrealists, it is between two terms or ideas that are placed in contrast—between the abstract and the concrete, the literal and the figurative—that true art and absolute understanding will make its way to our perception: “as with any binary opposition, a trace of the one always remains in the acceptation of the other” (Highmore 37). In this light, Aragon’s Paris is thus always, in part, a reflection of the countryside against which it stands. The Parisian peasant who observes the inner passages of the nation’s capital is the perfect representation of this space. By turning his vision away from the large boulevards touted by modernism and led, during Aragon’s time,

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28 I do not wish to claim that juxtaposition and metaphor are literary devices only used in surrealism; rather, that Aragon’s use of them does align him with many surrealist artists contemporary to him. Both of these literary devices place two images or objects aside each other in order create a contrasting effect. The resultant image creates a metaphorical bridge, or border, between the two.
by Le Corbusier, Aragon’s narrator finds joy and refuge in the dimly lit galleries, a move which in turn speaks volumes about the menace of the American-style boulevards.

Seeking to avoid the errors of his eyes and fingers, which are nothing more than “pièges grossières” [booby traps], the narrator turns his attention to the “natural” urban environment, sticking to illogical paths that lead “vers un but que rien ne peut me révéler, qu’elles” [towards a destination that they alone can reveal to me] (13). Whereas urban planners create roads with itineraries in mind, revealing a clear path to follow, the construction of the passages are equally designed with the same system of control – they are intended to lead from one road to another, from one place to another. However, despite the very controlled paths in which he finds himself, the peasant is able to follow different “paths” through his metaphorical and real wanderings. Following along the Passage de l’Opéra he concentrates on the undesirable bodies, those “visages de plomb, ces chènevis de l’imagination” [leaden faces, these hemp-seeds of the imagination] (13), that move through the recesses of the city’s unconscious. The repressed, forgotten, yet present members that hide between the buildings and in the text, attest to the city’s unvoiced desires, and represent a sharp contrast to the “pays de la respectabilité” [country of respectability] (23) that is continually transported along the Parisian boulevards. Aragon’s narrator has selected a specific location, situated away from bourgeois leisure spots, in order to paint a mythology of the everyday.

The passages (arcades) hold precarious capital in the collective memory of France, and have received much attention specifically from Walter Benjamin whose work was heavily influenced by Baudelaire. These alleyways and byways, vestiges of the old, labyrinthine city of pre-planned Paris, were designed to be shortcuts and added another layer of complexity to the

29 Colin Jones points out that the Passage de l’Opéra is a bizarre location for this endeavor. See particularly pages 260-274. We will also discuss this in more detail later in this section.
30 Specifically Benjamin’s canonie Das Passagen-Werk – an incomplete study of 19th-century Parisian life.
already difficult to navigate urban space. It is important to note that the Paris one encounters in the twentieth century was made possible by Haussmann, through his transformation of a cluster of small towns into a real city. Although this movement to modernize the city dates as far back as Henri IV’s modernism project mentioned earlier, Haussmann played an integral role in changing the face of the nation’s capital. As the modern Haussmannian boulevards were built, the arcades became refuges for the city’s seedy underclass. Detailing the importance of the *passages* in nineteenth-century French culture, Evelyne Fodor recognizes that these arcades were eventually outmoded by the development of new circulations that homogenized the capital in a circular logic: “circulation à l’échelle du territoire (le chemin de fer), circulation dans les villes des substances (l’air et l’eau) des marchandes (le grand magasin); des personnages (les grandes avenues); de l’argent (le crédit)” [*national circulation (the rail system), urban circulation of resources (air and water) merchandise (department stores), people (boulevards) and money (credit)*] (70). In this New Paris, the technological and commercial innovations mentioned here changed the status of the arcades from an urban space to an alternative space “au même titre que le métro, les égouts et les catacombes qui forment un souterrain fantomatique” [*on par with the metro, the sewers and the catacombs that formed a subterranean phantom presence*] (Fodor 70).

For Aragon and his group of surrealist companions, however, these passages still served an important purpose, since on the one hand they presented a geography of everyday pleasure, “the best antidote to the everyday as mundane” (Highmore 55), and, on the other hand, because they lay outside of the view of the general public, despite being spatially *intramuros*.

In the first installment of *Paysan*, “pour une mythologie moderne,” the narrator observes that “[l]e grand instinct américain, importé dans la capitale par un préfet du second Empire, qui tend à recouper au cordeau le plan de Paris, va bientôt rendre impossible le maintien de ces
aquariums humains” [The great American passion for city planning, imported into Paris by a prefect of police during the Second Empire and now being applied to the task of redrawing the map of our capital in straight lines, will soon speak the doom of these human aquariums] (19). Claudine Raynaud claims that Le Paysan is not a stubborn manifesto for modernity, but a document on the “impending demolition of the Passage de l'Opéra and relates the opposition of the shopkeepers to their relocation” (Raynaud 42-3). However I think that Aragon is attempting to do something more here.

There are two problems with this citation. First, the narrator’s claim that Haussamann (“the prefect of police during the Second Empire”) was solely responsible creating the monster that would eventually destroy this passage is flawed. David Harvey’s Marxist approach to this aspect of French history has astutely observed that the planning fad dates much farther back. Likewise, there is nothing American about it since as Tom Conley has demonstrated in his reading of L’Atalante, many of the modernization projects date back as far as Henri IV. Aragon’s erroneous critique of the BD Haussmann Building society is echoing the same fears that Céline and Morand sensed in New York: the menace of the American way of city planning that is to destroy what is left of the French city. Moreover, Aragon’s aforementioned manifesto could be read as a criticism of the burgeoning young architect Le Corbusier who had already published his first book, Urbanisme (1924) which argued that large-scale replanning of the city was necessary (Gronberg 114). Le Corbusier had a very clear goal in mind: “the centers of our cities must be torn down and rebuilt… the wretched existing belts of suburbs must be abolished and carried further out; on their sites we must constitute, a protected and open zone” (cited in Miles 45). Such a vision, which it should be noted is quite prescient of the current Parisian built
environment – with a zone of “liberated” and “free moving” automobilists – seeks to rid the city of those zones inside Paris that might be as “wretched” as those described in the peripheries.

The presence of the urbanization project “started” by Haussmann, this “American” threat continued by urban planners, like Le Corbusier, who seek to raze any locale deemed insalubrious, is clearly felt within the confines of Aragon’s Passage de l’Opéra. The hybrid narrator critiques the progress of the urban project because of its negative effects on the local entrepreneurs established in these transient zones. Observing that “les expropriés ne peuvent guère citer qu’un article de La Liberté” [the victims of expropriation have nothing to quote but an article in the issue of La Liberté] (37)\textsuperscript{32}, Aragon’s peasant attempts to give them a voice. His critique of the BD Haussmann Building Society is most clearly evident in his disgust for the large boulevards that remain out of his scopic zone, but the construction of which is felt throughout the text as a ringing in his ears that he cannot quite shake. In an imaginary convocation with Death, the Peasant explains that there is “tout un quartier de boulevards” [a whole district full of boulevards] on which Death can sharpen its “dents mignonnes” [dainty teeth] (42). The construction of these large boulevards seeks to facilitate movement through the city, yet, as Aragon senses here and Morand and Céline will observe a few years later first-hand in the United States, this top-down efficiency is not what Paris needs.

For Aragon’s peasant, the BD Haussmann Building Society is not the only blameworthy figure, since in regards to the harm which these boulevards cause, “il est certain que la Ville de Paris connaissait tous” [No doubt, the city of Paris was well aware] (35). At the café Certa—the physical meeting place of the Dada movement in Paris during the era depicted—the owner

\textsuperscript{31} Le Corbusier’s project was financed by the BD Haussmann Building Society according to Ben Highmore (pp. 55-57).

\textsuperscript{32} In Les nuits d’octobre (1849-50), Gérard de Nerval introduces this term after being kicked out of the city during Napoléon III’s urban construction.
deserves better than “une municipalité inconsciente” [an unthinking municipality] which is more concerned with widening the streets of its city “qu’à préserver et à y encourager une urbanité si rare et des dons de courtoisie qu’on voit de plus en plus disparaître des lieux publics parisiens” [than with preserving and encouraging a rare urbanity and gifts of courtesy that are rapidly vanishing from the public places in Paris] (98). While the boulevards are more efficient from an urban planning standpoint, they are detrimental to the nation’s intellectual, artistic and philosophical well-being and attack this “urbanité si rare” that takes place in this zone.

The term “passage” in French has multiple meanings, and three definitions in particular make this locale an important one for this study. According to Larousse, it is first and foremost associated with movement: “fait de circuler, de parcourir ou de traverser un lieu; avec ou sans idée d’obstacle à franchir” [the act of circulating, of traversing or crossing a place; with or without an obstacle in sight]. When used in relation to literature, cinema and the arts, it is a “fragment, extrait d’un texte” [fragment, extract of a text]. Finally, in legal discourse, it is a “document douanier nécessaire à l’importation temporaire d’un véhicule dans un pays étranger” [customs document necessary for the temporary importation of a foreign vehicle].33 This final definition is surprisingly fitting for our purposes when read in light of last chapter, which analyzed various vehicles passing through New York. At the center of this triangulation of meanings, we find the body of a country bumpkin, a slow-moving ‘foreign’ vehicle, whose circulation through these passageways adds spatial and textual fragments to the continually evolving collective urban narrative.

What is clear from these definitions is once again the importance of movement in this locale and mobility of this narrator poet and those who happen to cross his visual and sensual fields. However, the Peasant is keen to point out that the mobility offered by this location has a

In the previous chapter we observed the critiques of Morand and Céline vis-à-vis a particularly American form of mobility forced on the city-dweller. The implied function of this connective urban tissue whose sole purpose is to transport inhabitants from one place to another more quickly, renders this peasant visibly anxious. However, of the vast number of galleries, Aragon chooses one in particular, the Passage de l’Opéra, whose fringe status in the city was intrinsic to its character from its very introduction (Walz 18). Contrary to the majority of passageways, the Opera passageway “was something of an urban backwater from the beginning. Its design was less a channel than an eddy” (20). An anomaly in the city’s built environment, this “aquarium” will soon be unverifiable for the simple reason that at the time his account was published, the Passage de l’Opéra had already been demolished. In fact, as Ben Highmore specifies, the destruction of the passage had been threatened since 1860 and in 1873 the arcade’s raison d’être, the Opera house, burnt down and “the arcade was left as a fragment of a no longer existing architectural ensemble” (55). Aragon is thus concentrating on a zone that, much to his regret, has disappeared by the time readers encounter it. This analeptic analysis of a specific part of the Parisian environment thus records the testimony of a liminal zone that has since been removed from the urban landscape. As this section and the following sections will demonstrate,
Aragon’s rediscovery, analysis and subsequent documentation of this zone will pave new paths for future urban narratives to follow. Physically and textually within the Passage de l’Opéra, Aragon’s narrator finds the vestiges of creative possibility that needs to be observed, recorded and unearthed from their leaden and forgotten tombs. His move from the ordered boulevards to this particular, now defunct arcade, I would contend, demonstrates the importance of mobile borders, limits and edges within urban space as particular locales of artistic and creative potential.

Entering the passage, Aragon’s narrator steps into a mobile zone: “Je sens frémir le sol et je me trouve soudain comme un marin à bord d’un château en ruine. Tout signifie un ravage” [I feel the ground tremble beneath me and suddenly I feel like a sailor aboard a ruined castle. Everything signifies havoc] (59). Launching himself on a chaotic voyage in search of the unofficial Paris lost in the shadows of the collective memory and spread out across urban space, he is prepared to provide a tour of this special zone to those readers that have chosen to follow him through the undersides of Paris: “Que l’on se promène dans ce Passage de l’Opéra dont je parle, et qu’on l’examine [Let us take a stroll along this Passage de l’Opéra, and have a closer look at it] (20). Despite his apprehension in regard to the (obligatory) mobility implied by the very existence of the passages – inhabitants are supposed to circulate through, not loiter\textsuperscript{34} in them – Aragon’s narrator is constantly on the move, following his own chosen form of mobility. He resembles Morand’s city stroller in this case, since he is not only discovering this zone for his own personal knowledge, but also taking his readers along with him in the form of a guided tour. The Parisian peasant brings his readers to the shoe shiner where “nous allons pouvoir faire une petite halte: c’est le cireur, cela ne coûte que douze sous et nous sortirons de là avec des soleils

\textsuperscript{34} To loiter is generally a very bourgeois privilege as Ross Chambers explains in \textit{Loiterature}. We will return to this concept in chapter three.
au pied” [Let us make a brief halt there, it will cost us a mere sixty centimes, and we shall leave the place wearing suns on our feet] (84). Through the movement of the flâneur-type jaunt along this particular arcade of Paris, the narrator asks readers to turn their eyes away from the mass of Parisian passers-by to concentrate on the female beauties that line the passages, the shopkeepers stuck in their shops, and the unwonted citizens that make Paris what it is. As the above citations suggests, he even goes further than asking them to look through their eyes, he implores them to participate in this particular practice of Parisian space.

The Paris Peasant is bored with the endless tides and “futiles mouvements des foules” [Futile movements of the crowd] (189). His indifference toward the hoard of passers-by could indicate that the narrator is not interested in any form of movement, he drawn to a certain form of mobility—these walks that lead him to the discovery of those degraded zones—since “dans tout ce qui est bas, il y a quelque chose de merveilleux qui me dispose au plaisir” [in everything base, there is some quality of the marvelous which puts me in the mood for pleasure] (46). Much like Aragon’s personified imagination who “marche avec un patin à roulettes au pied gauche, le droit posant directement à terre” [walks with a roller-skate attached to his left foot, but with his right foot in direct contact with the ground] (78), Aragon’s narrator is able to move unusually, albeit awkwardly, through these spaces. He has adopted a form of spatial delinquency by altering his gait. Whereas Ferdinand morphed into a humanoid vehicle, this peasant is ready to encounter the city on his own terms, at his own, awkward pace.

Just as he is mobile, the narrator is equally able to contain and order the movements of others. Early on, after observing the shoe shiner at work, he asks readers to allow him to put his microscope aside – “Je quitte un peu mon microscope” – so that he may continue on his stroll

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35 It is important to note that this quote in particular is evoked in the “Statue’s discourse”, the absolute immobile observer in urban space.
through the arcades (40). A few moments later, his entire body is transformed into “un de ces appareils de prises de vues au ralenti qui photographient le gracieux développement des plantes” (one of those slow motion movie cameras which photograph the graceful growth of plants) (57) as he stops to observe the elderly prostitutes. Comparing these ladies of the night to greenery suggests that their presence breathes life into this space through Aragon’s urban twist on photosynthesis. His allusion to the microscope implies that he must physically stop and look through the lens of this mechanical device that enables him to see more than the human eye. Furthermore, his ability to morph his corporeal body into a cybernetic being, a human-machine hybrid, equally reinforces his ability to stop and record, through a different form of lens, the “gracieux” sluggish, yet very powerful development of plant-life. These two examples imply that mobility and immobility are, much like the city and the countryside, mutually exclusive; despite his uncanny ability to move differently than others, the narrator must still stop in order to look through these apparatuses. However, as I have briefly mentioned above, one of the aims of surrealist art was to connect two seemingly contradictory actions in order to create a surreal image. His peculiar combination of mobility and immobility allows him to observe the movement of others around him, and more importantly, to record those phenomena that are invisible to the naked, human eye. We could even go so far as to claim that the narrator, through this particular form of (im)mobility, is an observer who has been transformed into an automatic recording device. Morphed into the technical apparatus of the cinema, the peasant is able to transmit the “new mode of pure expression” (Breton, 24), cherished by Breton and his surrealist disciples.

The perceptive mobility of the Parisian bumpkin, similar to that of the narrator in Breton’s Nadja, provides him with special observational powers. In the introduction to this
section on “Passage de l’Opéra,” Aragon describes his narrator as a passer-by in search of the sacred and mythology in a world that seems devoid of both. The city offers a series of inanimate structures, the collection of which creates a cold, unwelcoming environment. He is able to look past this cold exterior of human and inanimate objects and unveil the “lumières” (lights) in the unknown behind these seemingly dead structures. “Les hommes,” explains the peasant in his epilogue, “vivent les yeux fermés au milieu de précipices magiques” [men live blindly in the middle of magical precipices] (219). Whereas other men are blind, the city bumpkin’s philosophical stance and displacement into and through the alleyways allow him to see what others around him cannot.

In his current state, this “magical precipice” that he refers to is the Opera Passageway. Created by the city of Paris, this jewel is located on an ambiguous location and has become the ultimate zone for the author and his surrealist prose-poem. I have already demonstrated how this particular passage found itself in a temporal in-between zone, between a once was and no longer is. In Surrealism, History and Revolution, Simon Baker has observed that topographically this particular passage lies in an opaque zone that represents the complex fusion between a “lieu de mémoire” and a “lieu d’oublier.” He sees this fusion between two architectural buildings, the Panthéon, whose success is “measured by the way it generates remembrance from its accumulation of remains” and the Hôtel des Grands Hommes, which “measures its success by removing all traces of those that have passed through” (113). Baker’s insightful observation of Aragon’s real and imaginary arcade – its historical presence in Paris on the one hand and its literary construction on the other – represents another spatial borderland, between collective remembrance and individual amnesia (Baker 115-117). Aragon’s use of this space to connect spatially and metaphorically incompatible notions, terms, and states of being, forces his readers

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36 These buildings and this location were also evoked by Breton in Nadja.
to consider the significance of this zone, particularly its liminality and the borderland characters that flow through it. More abstractly, the heterogeneous population of Parisians that wanders into this antithetic space metaphorically represents the movement between binary oppositions that are so important to the surrealist endeavor.

The liminality I refer to is most evident in the narrator’s hybrid rural-urban status that other critics have observed in various ways. Claudine Raynaud’s perceptive article “The Residual Rural” purports that Aragon’s text offers a revolutionary point of view on the city’s radically new poetics: “The residual rural never ceases to play its role as the city’s repressed, or its remainder. It will forever re-surface under various guises, even as a virtual gaze, which de-stabilizes the city and re-visions it” (49). The outsider’s perspective offered by the “virtual” peasant can extend the quality of mystery to the city; can unearth the mystery of the city to which the anonymous city-dweller has become numb. In Aragon's logic, sensuality and reason are bound together; error only makes sense in relation to truth. As the antithesis of the bourgeois gentleman, Aragon’s narrator is part and parcel of the poet's knowledge of the city. Raynaud acutely observes that the peasant's marginality displaces the *topos* of the city (44).

While Raynaud is correct in her observation of the continual presence of the countryside in the urban, Aragon’s text suggests more to his fellow citizens and contemporary artists and artisans. Where Raynaud’s analysis falls short, in my opinion, is its failure to account for space in the text. Indeed, the narrator’s ability to see is based on nothing but pure chance since what he observes must pass under his eyes, through this zone. His “rural” point of view and “outsider” physical presence in the urban fabric clearly alter readers’ understanding of this locale and the city in which it is located. However, his spatial position and that of those he observes is just as, if not more, important. In fact, the only opportunities that Aragon has of catching these specimens
for his sociological experiment is when they find themselves “stuck” near and in thresholds.

Meandering through the passage, his gaze falls upon one of the many prostitutes that filter through and mingle in these areas: “Elle marchait comme on rit, et, quand elle fut sur le pas de la porte, je vis son pied pris dans un piège de feuillage, et sa jambe doré, et je me demandai encore: Mais qui donc peut être cette éponge” [Her walk was like laughter, and when she reached the doorstep I saw that her foot was caught in a snare of foliage, and her golden leg; and I asked myself once more: but who could this sponge be?] (41). Aragon’s narrator is able to collect a glimpse of this golden beauty when she accidentally is caught in between entering and exiting.

Whoever sets foot into this opaque borderland that is the Opera passageway falls under the same regime of the threshold. Whereas the police of New York were very present, looking out for inefficient vehicles, the Paris peasant only observes a policeman when one wanders into the dimly lit threshold: “Tiens voilà un agent de police: mais lui, se cache. Il boira d’un coup le demi blonde qu’à la dérobée un ami lui porte du Petit Grillon” [Here comes a policeman: he conceals himself in a doorway, but only so he can gulp down the half pint of beer that a friend has sneaked out to him] (100). More importantly, the narrator comes to terms with the fact that he has also been transformed by the threshold, since it is from this specific zone that he is able to observe these mobile borders: “Je soulève les rideaux des vitres, me voici repris par le spectacle du passage, ses allées et venues, ses passants. Etrange chassé-croisé de pensées que j’ignore, et que pourtant le mouvement manifeste” [I draw back a curtain from the window and find myself immediately absorbed by the scene in the passage, its comings and goings, its passers-by. There must be some purpose that I cannot see behind this strange minuet of thoughts being danced out there] (99). As his travel narrative progresses, he becomes more acutely aware of his location on doorways and edges: “Voici que j’atteins le seuil de Certa” [Here I am on the threshold of the
Certa] (90), he claims before arriving at his most important self-reflexive moment: “Je suis une limite, un trait” [I am a limit, a line] (136).

In relation to Aragon’s last claim that he is a “limit,” Claudine Raynaud reads the reversal of the real, through the edification of a counter-gaze. Concentrating on the lyrical voice of Aragon’s prose-poem, she sees the figure of the peasant as a “passage obligé.” The peasant’s self-diagnosed spatial location as a limit imbues his gaze with an ability to “displace, reverse, and return” the image of the city offered to him (49). For Corinne Mesana, “l’originalité d’une œuvre comme Le Paysan de Paris réside dans le fait que le récit lui-même devient lieu initiatique pour l’auteur et le lecteur” [The originality of a work like The Paris Peasant resides in the fact that the story is an initiatory space for author and reader] (174). Whatever stance one takes, Aragon is clearly preparing himself, the reader and future urban narrative for the productive potential of the threshold.

When detailing the erotic zones of the human body, Aragon suggests that some of them need to be more cherished than others. Standing at the doorway of the barbershop, he explains that people need to have a better understanding of how the skull works, and how pleasure is derived from contact with specific areas. Once the experts of the salon arts have learned the intricacies of the skull, “Ils en publieront les atlas” [they will publish maps] from which future generations can learn how to navigate the temple, lobes, pressure points and other intricacies of this seemingly benign human skull. They will learn to “laisser errer leurs doits sur les crânes, […] à les attarder au niveau du lambda où le plaisir atteint son comble, et à les en écarter tout à coup vers les écailles où de nouveaux royaumes nerveux sous l’influence du massage entre brusquement en danse” [to let their fingers stray across skulls [...] to make them linger at the level of the lambda and then quickly let them slip away towards the temporal processes where,
under the influence of the massage, new realms of nerves suddenly join the dance] (55-56, emphasis in the original). This charting of the body, speaks specifically toward the way in which the narrator believes the city should be approached and therefore sets up a parallel between body and city. The progression of motions to be used by future barbers and written into cartographic form – “errer, attarder, écarter” – resembles the same navigational techniques utilized by the narrator to approach the Opera Passageway. Through very specific forms of clandestine movement along the skeletal makeup and venal system of the city, the city stroller is able to maximize the possibility of ‘plaisir’ in urban space.

Even after the “municipalité inconsciente” has razed this zone, this defunct arcade has managed to make its way back into the French literary canon. As mentioned earlier, the term passage has multiple meanings. Aside from the implied movement along and across borders, it equally applies to the passage of a text, pulled from its context. Stated in different terms, it is a glimpse of a text, one that can explain the whole of the text in only a few sentences. This passage, this extrait of the urban environment has not only been placed into literary, poetic and artistic form, it is the most essential and representative part of the city-as-text. Ultimately, it is within this exploration of the complexity of the liminal that the text yields an understanding not only of the peasant, but also of the city itself. The surrealist text is a sort of hybrid text, combining city, text, and built environment. At the collision of the city, the text is born, and in turn, the city is transformed by the text (Highmore, 56).

Aragon provides readers and the French public with more than an urban text; he offers a new map of the city with monuments that the surrealist tourist must add to the must-see list—

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37 Ben Highmore is the only critic to my knowledge that mentions the city-as-text. Many have alluded to the spatiality of Aragon’s text in relation to its use of collage – another art form adopted by surrealists – that intersperses parts of the city (signs, ads, newspapers clippings) throughout the text. See, for example, Pierre Taminiaux’s short article on Aragon in The Columbia History of Twentieth-century French Thought, pages 384-386.
ones that compete with the cultural memory of his era. He understands well that others will follow in his footsteps and use his map as they attempt to understand Paris: “L’étranger qui lit mon petit guide lève le nez et se dit : c’est ici. Puis se dirige mécaniquement vers le point où je viens de le quitter” [The stranger reading my little guide lifts his nose and says to himself: it’s here. Then directs his steps mechanically towards the point where I have just abandoned him] (107-8). What is most striking is that this new urban cartographer has apparently captured it all through his jaunt. However, if one has been truly ‘following’ Aragon’s peasant, not physically in his footsteps but metaphorically through his reasoning, they would understand that such an action would lead nowhere special – would divulge none of the city’s secrets. A misstep and misreading would be to take his words for absolute truth, as a perfect guide, and to follow his guide mechanically. Good readers must stray from the text, “erre” through city space, and stop occasionally to smell and experience the true, ephemeral, city – one that is constantly being written by new encounters and perspectives.

Whether or not the physical area has disappeared from the urban landscape, others will follow, reappearing at different liminal zones throughout the city. For Aragon, one must approach the city in the same way that one approaches love. In love, he explains, there is “un principe hors la loi, un sens irrépressible du délit, le mépris de l’interdiction et le goût du saccage” [an outlaw principle, an irrepressible sense of delinquency, contempt for prohibitions and a taste for havoc] (64). One can try and “assigner à cette passion aux cent têtes les limites de vos demeures ou lui affecter des palais: elle voudra surgir ailleurs, toujours ailleurs, là où rien ne la faisait attendre, où sa splendeur est un déchainement” [confine this hundred-headed passion with the boundaries of your estates, if you will, or requisition whole palaces for it: nothing can
The Peasant’s claim to have perfectly captured this space is, thus, a complete misdirection. The city is always elsewhere, being constructed along other border spaces, edges and limits. Although this passage has disappeared by the time Aragon’s text is published, there will always be other pathways, built into the ordered space of the modern city. We now turn our analysis from this urban passageway of Aragon’s Paris to the fluvial network of waterways in Jean Vigo’s representation of interwar France, to see the creative and artistic possibilities of spatial practice in another interwar borderland.

2.3 Navigating the Borderland: Jean Vigo’s *L’Atalante* (1934)

The opening shot of Jean Vigo’s *L’Atalante* (1934) shows the eponymous barge at bay, obediently awaiting the return of its captain, Jean (Jean Dasté), and his beautiful new bride, Juliette (Dita Parlo). Anchored on the outskirts of a small town in Normandy, the Atalante navigates a vast, interconnected network of waterways – some natural, some man-made – that links the provincial towns to Paris and to the coastlines. “Home” for those who travel this network is never a specifically localizable spot on a map; instead, it is always ailleurs, wherever the next delivery may be along this liquid conveyor belt. While Margaret Flinn convincingly describes this and other spaces within the film as non-places,39 I will demonstrate that this canal system can equally be interpreted as not just a passage, but more specifically a borderland—a space that links and differentiates, connects and separates places and ideas. As I alluded to in the introduction to this chapter, following Régis Debray’s contention that “la frontière est d’abord une affaire intellectuelle” [the border is first and foremost an intellectual affair] (16), I will draw a link between borders and the larger intellectual and artistic movement that influenced Vigo and

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structured his *oeuvre*, surrealism. The productive possibility of such a privileged zone enables viewers to uncover the multiple borders that exist in the film. Borders are real and imaginary lines of demarcation between ideas, classes, cultures and nations that we are supposed to cross or behind which one can hide. What happens, however, when someone or something occupies a frontier? With the support of Michel de Certeau’s observations on borders, I will extend Vigo’s masterpiece into a larger theoretical discussion on the concept of the borderland and what it might mean to inhabit such a space.

**Surrealist borders**

*L’Atalante* follows Juliette and her life aboard the barge belonging to her new husband Jean. Although excited at first, Juliette quickly learns that life confined to a moving vessel is not as romantic as she had expected. Jean is quick to assert his control over the barge, and Juliette must promptly occupy herself with her marital chores and the bizarre antics of Père Jules (Michel Simon), Jean’s second-in-command. The ship and its crew arrive in Paris, a city aggrandized in Juliette’s mind by months of ennui, floating along the network of canals, by the advertisements that emanate from the radio and by a hawker (Gilles Margaritis) met along the way. After a momentary lapse of judgment and neglect of marital duties, Juliette fails to arrive on time for the Atalante’s scheduled departure from Paris, forcing Jean to abandon his wife to the unwelcoming metropolis. Soon realizing his error, Jean reunites with Juliette thanks to the help of Jules, who glides through the city and literally carries her home to the loving arms of her reformed husband. The two live happily ever after.

Many borders – barriers between one side and another, sometimes visible, other times invisible – are present in the film. Some can be traversed, others cannot; some can be lived,
others are uninhabitable. The most common function that comes to mind when one considers the border is separation. Although the canal system is not a national border separating one culture from another, it is an internal border separating one rive (bank) from another, confined within the French landscape and economic system. By situating the majority of the film’s action in and on a borderland, Vigo seems to be imploring French viewers to consider their own internal barriers and borders. Which borders can be populated and experienced in such a way as to improve our artistic minds, and find pleasure in a world that seeks to restrict it? We just saw how Aragon placed his narrative in a certain liminal zone, observed by a liminal character, as a means of demonstrating the pleasure derived from such discoveries. This section will make it clear that Jean Vigo, another artist influenced by surrealism, equally privileged the border.

In L'invention du quotidien (1990), Michel de Certeau highlights a theoretical problem pertaining to the concept of the border: “À qui appartient-elle? Le fleuve, le mur ou l’arbre fait frontière. Il n’a pas le caractère de non-lieu que la trace cartographique suppose à la limite” [To whom does it belong? It does not have the characteristics of the non-place implied by the cartographic line that marks the limit] (186). Constructing space and belonging to no side in particular, the natural frontier that these waterways represent, is not just an edge or a periphery – it is its own location, governed by its own rules. Such a claim may be met with skepticism, especially given the intended nature of this space. Tom Conley has observed that this network is part of a vast project of Henry IV’s modernism (270) and thus is governed by very specific, very centralized rules that serve the state’s needs. We will see, however, that despite its clearly defined flow, sides, and role, this ordered space leaves plenty of room for a form of delinquency touted in the previous section by Aragon, and impossible to find in Céline’s and Morand’s depictions of New York. In the previous chapter I mentioned Certeau’s distinguishing of the
notions of space (espace) and place (lieu) and, like all spaces, the border can be both at the same time. In this light, a natural or artificial border is a place since it is a specific location that has been organized and preconceived by an urban planner; a cartographer then designates it on a map. Space on the other hand is an intersection of different vectors and is the practice of an ordered place (172-3). The border can become a space when it is lived and practiced, according to Certeau’s contention, not as a non-place, but as an in-between, an entre deux.

Represented by a line drawn on a map, the canal-as-border along which the Atalante travels also fuses both banks, creating a zone of communication between the two. As Certeau emphasizes, the border has a “rôle médiateur […] Mais cet acteur, du seul fait qu’il est la parole de la limite, crée la communication autant que la séparation; bien plus… Il est aussi un passage” [mediating role […] but this actor, simply because it is the word of the limit, creates as much communication as it does separation; more than this … it is also a passage] (186-7). Borders do not have to be traversed, say, across a bridge. A border can be a passage, a border-as-bridge, that leads from one place of demarcation to another. In L’Atalante, the canal leads to the open ocean without ever leaving this vague position of mobility.40 This intermediary space, whose interconnectivity is endless, resembles Giles Deleuze’s rhizome.41 Contrary to the hierarchical root system of trees, the structure of the rhizome differs significantly since “n’importe quel point d’un rhizome peut être connecté avec n’importe quel autre, et doit l’être” [any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be] (Deleuze, 20). Although the rhizome implies an

40 Since the final scene on land takes place at Le Havre, however, it is difficult to tell if the barge finishes in the Atlantic or the English Channel.
41 Borders are endlessly connected, because one always touches another – that is the nature of borders, especially fluvial borders, which always run into other tributaries, before entering into seas, like the Mediterranean, and eventually into the borderless international waters. Even along these borders, there exist various control points – depots, checkpoints – so even the border is a controlled space.
instantaneous connectivity that is impossible in the meandering waterways of northern France, borders do still form a similar bond as one border will eventually lead to any other.42

The tributaries and canals through which the Atalante navigates are not simply the limits, edges and borders of specific zones; they are also passages along which the protagonists move from one area to another. It is this double character of the canal system—its ability to be both the end of something and the beginning of something else—that links it with André Breton’s vision of surrealism:

[N]ous sommes à la limite du monde, à la limite du visible, mais du même coup au seuil de ce qui les continue, et précisément peut-être en ce point idéal d’où ‘la vie et la mort, le réel et l’imaginaire, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l’incommunicable, le haut et le bas’ cessent d’être perçus contradictoirement.

[We are at the end of the world, the end of the visible, but at the same time, on the threshold of that which assures their survival. Everything leads us to believe that there is a certain point in the spirit from which life and death, real and imaginary, past and future, communicable and incommunicable are no longer perceived as contradictions] (Breton 84).

It is not the Atalante, but the canal, this terrain vague where “le réel et l’imaginaire, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l’incommunicable” meet and from which shines a true artistic aura.

For Pierre L’Herminier, the Atalante is a boat which is “à la fois extraordinaire et banale qui assure en toute simplicité la liaison quotidienne entre le versant clair de la vie et son versant obscur” [both extraordinary and banal and facilitates the everyday link between the clear side of

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42 Reece Jones and Corey Johnson see borders to be “engines of connectivity” (16). According to Deleuze and Guattari, “A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle; between things, interbeing, intermezzo” (1987; 25).
Vigo’s film does not show spectators a different world; it provides them with a new perspective through which to view it – it offers a new lens, a new *optique* from aboard this seemingly benign vessel. Through Vigo’s camera, the viewer discovers this vast, uncharted world that populates the in-between.

By the film’s end, all characters aboard the Atalante are able to obscure the established social boundaries of gender, language and authority. While some are better than others at it, such an endowment only appears possible for those that have learned to inhabit borderlands. The blurring effect these characters create can be seen thus as a cinematic and narrative metaphor for surrealist’s privileged artistic zone where imagination and reality confront one another and are mediated. In his *Manifeste du surréalisme*, André Breton writes: “Je crois à la résolution future de ces deux états, en apparence si contradictoires, que sont le rêve et la réalité, en une sorte de réalité absolue, de surréalité, si l'on peut ainsi dire” [I believe that one day, these two seemingly contractictory states, will be resolved in a sort of absolute reality, a surreality, if one could call it that] (Breton, 28-29).

This privileged zone, which neither the imagination nor reality can claim, this synthesis of the two, is the true desired space – the *surreal*. For surrealists, one of the major problems, if not the major problem in the world, is the “Reign of Logic.” The surrealist goal was to rid the artist of this unnecessary and deplorable garrison, allowing him or her to freely express whatever images, thoughts and desires surfaced, without regard for Reason. Surrealism can thus be seen as a borderland – a privileged artistic zone that tries to connect dream and reality – a “resolution” between imagination and logic.

In *L’Atalante*, this surrealist mediation between the conscious and the unconscious is mimicked as the barge and its members move between nature and society, and between desire and duty. Near the beginning of the film, after Jean and Juliette’s wedding night, Juliette opens
the hatch to the group of men that has decided to serenade her with a song (figure 1). Jean hands the wheel over to Jules so that he can embrace his new bride. The spatial significance of his animalistic movement that follows is of particular import. Starting from the back left corner of the frame, Jean moves diagonally right, toward Juliette and the camera. He and his tellingly erotic smile eventually pass the camera and the next frame indicates that he has arrived at Juliette, his prey. The left side of the river, from which this cat-like Jean prowls, is lined with trees. The right side of the river, the angle in which he is advancing, is pocked with drab buildings and factories. The bestial movement and instinctive erotic desire highlight nature’s influence on this barge. Later, this tie to nature will be reinforced as Jules and the cabin boy all leave on the side of nature. They walk along a path, lined with autumnal trees, on their way to “purchase” trinkets from the city (figure 2).

The other side of the canal can best be explained in the scene that immediately follows. When Jules and the cabin boy exit the diegesis on the side that represents “nature’s” bank, Jean and Juliette are left on the barge to do the mind-numbing, quotidian task of laundry. Juliette, still unfamiliar with the constraints of marital and maritime duties, tells Jean her innocent story about seeing one’s lover in water and explains that she saw Jean’s image in the water the previous year. Jean, mockingly sticks his head in the bucket, then runs down to the river and, after plunging his head in the cold water, screams “J’t’vois pas!” [I don’t see you!] (figure 3). Although the bank is not included in the frame, his reflection in the calm water situates him among the dull industrial warehouses that line the other side of the canal. While the entire bodies of Jules and the cabin boy are seen exiting on the side of nature, Jean’s dislocated head seems to be stuck on society’s bank, floating alongside the canal’s reproduction of characterless buildings and factories. For Vigo, “the eyes of the imagination report a more important truth than the eyes of
the body” (Warner 30). Despite his bride’s playful and inviting game of perception, he fails to comprehend the productive quality of the imagination as the captain in him only understands logic. Soon realizing that he has offended Juliette with his unwelcome joke, he reassures her that he sees her quite well (not when his head is immersed in water), but his ability to see is placed into question later that night when Juliette, hidden in the fog, is visible to the viewer, but invisible to him (figure 4).

The entire film will be about people – anyone, but specifically Jean and Juliette – finding a place between two worlds – living their internal and social borderlands. Eventually, the lover in Jean will confront this reality and immerse himself in the frigid water. His leap will prove rewarding as the image of his lost love will appear with an unforgettable smile in her pristine wedding gown. In order for this to happen, however, Jean must believe in imagination’s ability to make reality better and in nature’s ability to make the industrial world livable. To understand this evolution, we must first understand the ordered, disciplined French society through which the Atalante and the main characters navigate.

**Travelling through French society**

In the opening scene of *L’Atalante*, we follow an awkward wedding procession from a rustic church, through a small village, across open fields, and finally arrive at the barge. Led by two children – a boy on the right and a girl on the left – a line of family, friends and other villagers follows in respective order. We soon learn that the slightest menace to this order is penalized. The instant a man in the line tries to touch and converse with the man in front of him, a masculine hand emanates from the lower right of the frame and pulls the offender back into his position. The fact that this hand comes from the bottom of the screen makes it appear as if this
hand belongs to the spectator, thus implicating the whole audience in this control. However, we soon hear a masculine voice command the cortège to “Restez par deux!” [Remain in groups of two!] This gendered quasi-cortège alludes to a highly structured society, whose patriarchal rules, much like the rules of logic, cannot be questioned. The society these villagers represent has a cadenced lifestyle that must be followed – appointments that must be kept and goods that must be delivered on time.

Just as Juliette’s village is ordered by the commands of some faceless masculine voice, so the logic of supply and demand influences Jean’s behavior toward his barge and his crew. Increased demand has engendered a loss of time and translated into an obligation to move faster. The orders of an invisible fluvial company, whose representative we do not even see until the final scenes, pressures the Atalante and its captain to constantly push forward to the next delivery site. Arriving at the barge only minutes after the wedding, Jean’s honeymoon smile has already disappeared. Having realized that his marital duties have made him neglect his professional responsibilities, and prescient of Paul Virilio’s later warning that “stasis is death” in the modern capitalistic and neoliberal world, Jean understands that there is no time for farewells. He must load the package and go. Jules acquiesces to Jean’s desire and sends the cargo—Juliette—over on the boom (figure 5). Juliette thus crosses the matrimonial threshold alone, and her honeymoon is over before it even starts. These examples demonstrate that the society that Jean and his boat represent is one in which mobility is constantly enforced. In this respect, the canal system can be viewed as a prohibitive force, since it canalizes movement and organizes flow.

However, in contrast to this life in fast-motion, it is the recurring metaphor of the anchor and the one character who manages to always be around it: Jules. Jules is the artist among the crew. As we will discuss a little later, Jules’ room is a sort of wonder emporium full of objects he
has acquired from his nomadic and delinquent lifestyle. As the Atalante enters a thick fog, fittingly it is Jules who physically drops the anchor. The anchor imposes immobility – a desired, self-selected stasis, not one ordered by a higher power. The possessor of the anchor decides when to drop it – when to stop and relax. Philosophy, art, and intellectual activity take time and cannot be bound to societal time constraints. Self-selected immobility allows one to deviate from the exponentially increasing speed of movement that the capitalistic society demands. Moreover, it is not simple happenstance that the reunion between Jules and Juliette occurs at l’Hôtel de l’ancre in Le Havre. There is a salutary aspect to the anchor, since it is key to creating and managing one’s movement according to one’s own desire; it simply needs to be lifted when the ship, or person, is ready to leave or needs to flee.

While movement is regulated and subsequently mistreated by certain characters, the ordered society to which the barge belongs is equally represented through the barge’s confined living quarters. Forced to observe at oblique angles from ceilings and in corners, the camera exemplifies this restriction – it fails to keep Jules’ large, maladroit body in the tight frame; it only catches the back of one character’s head and half of another’s face. Outside the seaworthy confines, the vessel itself is restricted to the narrow waterways as well as the commands of an invisible management and the overarching economic theories of supply and demand – Adam Smith’s infamous “invisible hand.” Juliette soon learns that the outside world is no less constrained. When she finally arrives at Paris and is able to freely walk its historical streets, she is met with a disciplined built environment. In Vigo’s Paris, streets are clearly defined by endless lines of parked cars; canals are constructed with stations and gates; the tracks of the métropolitain cut through streets, and walls are plastered with signs claiming “pas d’embauche.” Perfect bodies (mannequins) and perfect cities (models of cities) are confined to the limited
space of the display window. Places of pleasure, such as Jules’ “doctor’s office”\textsuperscript{43}, are equally small – downsized to make way for more storefronts in the same block, and theater seats are jammed up against one another, in an attempt to maximize spatial efficiency. This restriction underlines that this society is one in which everything must be profitable and everyone must be productive unless they want to end up on the streets penniless.

A more concrete example of this limiting space is the dance floor at \textit{Aux Quatre Nations}, which is almost completely enclosed by a wooden patchwork structure. In order to maximize spatial efficiency, it has a dual function. Originally in the film’s diegesis, it serves as the salesman’s shop window. However, after the hawker’s energized sales pitch, a convivial and diverse group of dancers floods the floor, overtaking his bric-a-brac shop. Jean and Juliette find a table and watch the dancers through a small, rectangular hole, cut into the cage (\textbf{figure 6}). The hawker approaches this barrier and literally woos Juliette through the small opening. Despite the strict rules and demands of this society, the actions of certain characters demonstrate that a different path is possible in spite of this repressive and restrictive system. Words, when artfully strewn together, can lead to transgression. The hawker’s seduction of Juliette suggests that the borders can at least be crossed. However, a later scene makes it clear that some livable borders do exist. After watching the salesman’s pitch and releasing her hands from Jean’s, Juliette stands for a moment on this frame cut out of the wood. Her momentary spatial inhabitation of this in-between space represents her internal borderland, stuck between her love for her husband and her desire for pleasure. She will soon choose to leave Jean, Jules and the cabin boy in search of consumerist pleasures initially offered by the radio and pushed to an insatiable desire by this hawker. Her subsequent failure in Paris suggests that stepping outside of the border is a dangerous move that will be discussed in more detail later.

\textsuperscript{43} While in Paris, Jules and the cabin boy visit his “doctor,” an elderly psychic that doubles as a prostitute.
This scene indicates another important feature of this order: surveillance. As the hawker jumps around the room, disrupting the establishment’s desired order, we see the owner preparing to rid himself of this nuisance. Whatever or whoever deviates from the system must be caught, punished, and destroyed before harm can be done to the system. As Certeau explains, in a well-oiled society, “Il y a rejet de ce qui n’est pas traitable et constitue donc les ‘déchets’ d’une administration fonctionnaliste (anormalité, déviance, maladies, etc.)” [anything that is untreated and is considered the ‘rubbish’ of a functioning administration (abnormality, deviance, sickness, etc.) is rejected] (144). Once the hawker has gone too far, the owner of the bar steps in and removes this deviant character. A relatively similar scenario occurs during an important scene in Paris that some critics claim to be a eulogy to Vigo’s anarchist father: an emaciated man, most likely broke and famished due to unemployment, steals Juliette’s purse. After Juliette cries out, the weak man is quickly engulfed not only by policemen but also a band of common citizens whose civic duty it is to keep this society in check. As William Simon aptly observes, with the purse lost, the man captured, and Juliette moneyless, this bizarre scene has resulted in a ludicrous form of justice in which both Juliette and the thief suffer for nothing: “The police and bourgeois are really trying to stamp out a social pariah…the speed of their violent reaction and pursuit is astonishing” (Simon 114). These “bourgeois” citizens explode onto the scene like an auto-regulatory body. They rapidly remove the threat, but neglect to help the victim.

Civil figures and bourgeois citizens are not the only part of this surveillance team; Vigo’s camera also plays an active role. Marina Warner astutely observes, “Vigo does not use the camera in lieu of a person. He does not tend to align the viewpoint with the sightlines of his characters; seldom do we see what Jean or Juliette is seeing” (12). Most of the time the camera is
restricted to observation. However, when we enter Jules’ wonder emporium, Vigo uses many different cameras located behind a jar of pickled hands, in placards and under the top bunk. The one area that poses the most threat to this regimented society seems to be the one with the most clandestine surveillance. Through these hidden cameras, the spectators participate in this protective bourgeois fervor.

Vigo was vehemently opposed toward the notion of order – possibly as much as Breton hated logic’s power. The authoritative, regimented society his camera observes is one devoid of pleasure; where music, and other extracurricular activities, can only be enjoyed at a price. Most members of this society, including the protagonists and the barge itself, are cogs in the larger economic system. But are the members of this barge as dehumanized as Jules’ marionette conductor? Is there an escape from this artless life? Once again, the opening scene is telling. When Jean and Juliette board their future home, movement on land seems to stop (figure 7). The townsfolk and members of Juliette’s family are reduced to an eerie stasis, highlighted by Jean’s jubilatory wave good-bye and the camera’s jump cuts. Why is it that, once aboard the moving vessel, everything on shore seems to stop? Certeau would argue that the shore is the “immobilité d’un ordre […] il n’y a rien à faire on est dans l’état de raison. Chaque chose y est à sa place comme dans la Philosophie du droit de Hegel” [immobility of an order […] nothing can be done since we are in a state of reason. Everything is in its place like in Hegel’s philosophy of law] (165). For Vigo, like for Certeau and Breton, this immobility is the result of order, reason and logic. What distinguishes these sailors from the mass of silent, immobile townsfolk is that they move through space differently than others. Borderlands, as we will soon see, can lead to pleasure when they are practiced as in-between, when they are lived as a passage between two
worlds of images, ideas and sides. The ordered society presents only one world (its own), and thus does not have the magical and artistic capabilities that border-living can provide.

Certeau explains that “marcher c’est manquer de lieu. C’est le procès indéfini d’être absent et en quête d’un propre” [to walk is to have no place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of one’s own place to call home] (Certeau, 155). Traversing space in a specific way can open up borders and interstices – places where the subject is free to be his or herself, inside the system while remaining outside of surveillance. As Jean and Juliette exit the church, Vigo’s camera patiently awaits them (figure 8). However, instead of moving directly at the camera as intended, the two slip to the camera’s right, exiting the frame. They have entered a liminal space between this frame and the next, located outside the watchful eye of the camera that must wait for the rest of the procession. The next time the camera locates the couple, it only catches a glimpse of their backs (figure 9). It jumps ahead in the following frame, this time choosing a spot along a road that winds to the right, sure to localize the newlyweds as they approach. Yet, once again, the couple’s quick gait is too fast for the travelling camera and the lagging procession. For Certeau, “Il y a espace quand on prend en considération les vecteurs de direction, des quantités de vitesse et la variable de temps” [space is created when one takes into account vectors of directionality, quantities of speed and variable time] (173). In this sense, this newlywed couple changes speeds and directions in an attempt to make its own espace.

The same can be said for the way in which the Atalante, and the people it houses, moves through the canal network. William Simon has accurately highlighted the complicated movement patterns on the barge (101), explaining that movement is frequently distorted not only by the camera, but also by the motion of protagonists in contrast to stationary or mobile objects. The minute Juliette arrives at, or better yet, on her new home, she appears to move through space
differently than others. On the first night aboard the Atalante, Juliette and Jean play a game of cat and mouse (figure 10). Juliette flees Jean to the right as the barge moves slowly to the left. Her white wedding gown contrasts with the dark grey background, creating a phantom-like image; she appears to float across the structure better than her seasoned husband. “Juliette starts to walk faster… then she slows down and stops on the right side of the screen. The movement of the barge carries her back to the left of the frame” (Simon 104-5). This produces a floating effect that isolates her from the rest of the barge. “She moves in her own private space and time, created through the conflicting movement patterns which undermine all sense of stability and fixedness in the image” (Simon, 105). Life on the barge – life in a borderland – provides characters with their own space within a given place.

**Inhabiting the borderland**

Theoretically all movement is watched attentively by Society’s auto-surveillance system that I have already discussed. According to Certeau, the practice of everyday life is predicated upon the use of "tactics," or individual performances that subvert cultural metanarratives. A tactic is an art of the weak that enables them to overcome strategic oppression, by personalizing cultural work against ideological strategies (37). New doors are opened through the use of such tactics: “Si le délinquant n’existe qu’en se déplaçant, s’il a pour spécificité de vivre non en marge mais dans les interstices des codes qu’il déjoue et déplace, s’il se caractérise par le privilège du parcours sur l’état, le récit est délinquant” [if delinquency only exists through movement, and has the special characteristic to inhabit not the margins but the interstices of those codes it unties and uproots, if it privileges systematic wandering, then the story can be characterized as delinquent] (Certeau 190). This delinquency is born in the interstices, on or near
borderlands. It allows those who practice it to glide through the system unnoticed, much like the Atalante calmly snakes its way across the intricate canal network. Vigo’s *L’Atalante* seems to suggest that there is room for delinquency, not only on the barge, but also in society if borders are understood and handled accordingly. Those that understand that borders should not be transgressed, but lived, are able to stray from the norm. They can seek pleasure and find it in a seemingly sterile society.

Contrary to the emaciated thief who robbed Juliette of her purse, Père Jules has an uncanny ability to avoid order and find pleasure in a world void of it. He swipes a speaker from a bar, and runs away unpunished. When he finds Juliette, he simply lifts her onto his shoulders and “steals” her from this society, despite a brief, feeble outcry from the boss and some patrons (figure 11). These same civic do-gooders that engulfed the weak thief are powerless against a borderland character such as Jules. His position not as a border-crosser, but as someone who inhabits the border provides him with a magical quality. The same goes for his apprentice, the cabin boy, only in a different manner. Originally, Guinée’s script called for a scene in which the boy “surreptitiously took back the thirty francs Père Jules had paid the fortune teller” (Sallès-Gomes, 176). Vigo filmed the scene as intended, however it was eventually cut from the final version. Thus, through the art of editing, even though the child actor performed the scene and the camera recorded it, his act was invisible to spectators. Just as Jules is able to slip his way through the ordered system without being arrested, so the nameless boy is able to steal without being seen in any scene.

The almost magical ability of Jules and his apprentice in avoiding detection is reinforced by the presence of a number of stray cats on the barge and in the city of Paris, whose peculiar character has been observed by Nathalie Bourgeois. Even during a cursory viewing of the film, it
is almost impossible to ignore these cats that seem to ignore all barriers. These vagrant felines, caught sleeping on the boss’s bed, begging under the cramped dinner table, and skylarking in the dirty laundry, “on les retrouve entre, entre les personnages, entre la caméra et la scène, creusant la profondeur du plan, toujours au carrefour des circulations, là où le champ de vision est le plus vaste [we always find them between, between characters, between the camera and the scene, deepening the depth of focus, always at the intersections of itineraries, at the point where the visual field is the most vast] (240, emphasis in original). Bourgeois’ keen observation regarding these cats alludes to the power of the border, the spatial in-between. I would contend that Bourgeois’ analysis falls short, however, of linking these cats to Père Jules, the film’s key figure of interstitiality. Although Jules points out to one cat that it has ventured into foreign territory, “Allez, la Minoune, t’es pas chez toi” [come now, little one, this isn’t your home], he chooses nevertheless to nurture them because they not only are “surtout moins bêtes” [definitely not as stupid44] than most humans, but also occupy in-between zones. For Marina Warner, just as these cats manage to sneak in and out of the set, becoming unintended characters and objects of the narrative, so Jules is an interstitial figure who has no major material addition to the plot, but whose presence energizes the erotic core of the film (31). His position as being part this and part that enables him to transform and confuse space. He is part nature and part society, working within the capitalist system but still managing to find natural (erotic) pleasure in this same system that attempts to curtail it. Before Jean goes on his authoritative tirade, Jules explains a photo in his room of a young naked woman: “C’est moi quand j’étais petit” [That’s me when I was young], suggesting that even his corporeal body can migrate from one sex to another.

44 “bêtes” can also mean “animals”, thus we could read this as the cats are less savage, less animalistic, and thus more humane (urbane?) than the humans he has encountered in his life.
Of course, the picture to which he refers is not of him, and his claim is ironic at best as it blurs gender roles. However, his character seems to suggest an alternate world, one where logic and distinction are absent. Through flea market knickknacks from around the world and pictures of naked women, Jules is able to create a patchwork history, one that makes meaning out of nonsense. This absence of logic in the personal history of Jules is magnified through the lack of authority on the barge, where neither God nor the boss are visible to him. Just as he is about to board the Atalante, Jules explains, “Y’a plus bon dieu” [The good lord is gone], suggesting a godless space or at least one in which God has been replaced by a different authority figure.

However, when the barge arrives in Paris, Jules, tired of Jean’s constant demands, asks his boss, “C’est qui le patron?” [Who’s the boss?]. Yet, later in the company director’s office he knows very well that Jean is the captain as he attempts to defend Jean’s recent failures to the company’s figurehead. Jules realizes that authority exists – much like he knows that the image of the naked women is not really his youthful self – but he seems to find enjoyment in these playful deconstructions of representation and logical order.

More than a question of rejecting order, Jules’ character is also a product of his travels. He has been to the ailleurs that Juliette desires to see, but he has taken it one step further. He has managed to break the spatial and cultural frontiers that separate the global “elsewhere” he has visited. In a very telling scene that places Jules’ gender into question, Juliette asks him to model a skirt for her. This skirt turns him into a woman, then into a native, then into a stereotyped “nègre” [negro] all at the same time. Warner describes the scene in detail:

He is changed before our eyes in the course of the scene; a window opens not only on his character, but on the possibilities beyond the barge – pleasures carnal and dreamlike. The nine shots of the skirt scene also show the term’s control of

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45 Breton and the surrelists often went to flea markets to find inspiration from the bric-a-brac objects found there.
shallow space, the dazzling, cropping of figures in intimate contact – so that the action always spills, in the viewer’s eye, beyond the frame – and their skill in capturing Simon’s ebullient performance in long, single takes. (Warner, 32)

His “outsiderdom,” as Warner puts it (34), is the product of fusion and not one of rejection. Jules embodies the communicative character of borderlands as he mediates these different cultures through his own body. When he takes off his shirt to show his tattoos, it becomes evident that his entire body is a canvas upon which an artist can place, and already has inscribed, images.

After this first authentic encounter with Jules, the real Paris is no longer as enticing to Juliette. When the cabin boy runs downstairs to inform Jules that they have arrived in Paris, she is not moved. Instead of running up to the deck and exploring Paris, Juliette decides to go down into the bows, in order to enter the world of Jules – a world that she (as well as the spectator) has yet to understand. What she finds in Jules’ room (in what he calls his vitrine) is the culmination of this border effect that he has lived. Jules room looks like it has been filled with random objects that could have all been purchased at a flea market.\(^\text{46}\) The state of Jules’ vitrine would appear to the common eye as nothing more than an untidy room. There is no semblance of organization; objects appear to have no link, no function other than to clutter the room more than it already is. But each of these objects has a history attached to it, the combination of which forms Jules’ bric-a-brac past. “His former life crowd[s] the tiny cabin he shares with the boy” (Warner 35).\(^\text{47}\) The seemingly useless trinkets have been acquired with no consideration of national or stylistic borders. These “belles pièces” [beautiful pieces] as Jules calls them, have travelled from Cuba, the States, China and Japan, to name only a few, into Jules’ mobile room.

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\(^\text{46}\) According to Sallès-Gomes, all of the objects were purchased by Vigo at flea markets throughout Paris.

\(^\text{47}\) It should be noted that this “history” is debatable. We have seen Jules make a trip into the city in order to collect various “belles pièces” as well, and thus we should be cautious about these objects and their relation to him. It could be possible that Jules is using these objects and his imagination to create a reality that never existed.
and most of them can be dated to revolutionary periods in those lands. After he conducts Juliette and her toy sound maker with his “petit bonhomme” [little gentleman], he bows and then explains to her: “trouvé ça à Caracas […] pendant la révolution […] dix-huit cent nonante” [found that in Caracas [...] during the revolution [...] 1890].

In this separate reality, Jules controls this marionette maestro (figure 12), product of a revolution. He directs the movements and actions, just like the French society moves its subjects. Unlike the dehumanized members of the Parisian society however, inanimate objects are given life through his direct manipulation and through his aura. As Certeau puts it, borderlands can cause “le réveil des objets inertes (une table, une forêt, un personnage de l’environnement) qui, sortant de leur stabilité, muent le lieu où ils gisaient en l’étrangeté de leur propre espace” [the awakening of an inert object (a table, a forest, any character pulled from the environment) which, released from its stability, move the place where it lay, unaware of its proper space] (Certeau 174). His bric-a-brac room seems to come to life and create a cohesive and harmonious entity. Who would have thought that alarm clocks, children’s toys and other random sound makers would create such an incredible symphony? It is only made possible by the communication that happens in the interstices, where everything is accepted and welcomed. Jules’ vitrine exemplifies Breton’s écriture automatique, in which every thought is acceptable and can become art, without regard to reason and logic. Authentic art cannot be produced by the regimented Parisian society, it is here, in this magical room aboard the Atalante.

The Paris advertised by the hawker only existed in rhetoric and fantasy. Juliette found nothing but chômeurs and suspicious characters on the dark streets of Paris. The true space of happiness was always on the barge, with her love for Jean, in the presence of Jules’ vitrine – this precious curio of surrealist expression. Ironically, Jules’ shop is located within the same
claustrophobic quarters of the barge and marital relations that pushed Juliette to seek an escape. Through the discovery of this space, “the barge, by contrast to the city, now takes on the character of a magical space of safety and dreaming, and the events taking place there during Juliette’s absence reinforce this” (Warner 55). Jules may be the second in command of the Atalante, but his seasoned experience as an inhabitant of the borderland enables him to be a “magical helper; he whose familiars are cats can command the magic necessary to bring about the happy ending, just like a being from the other world in fairy talk” (Warner 62), as he initiates Juliette into this surreal world. However for true magic to happen and for the fairy tale ending to become a reality, Jean must also be convinced of the power of the border.

When Juliette leaves to explore Paris, Jean is overcome by grief. His nightmare realized with Juliette gone, he slips into a semi-catatonic state. Ironically, the departure of Juliette sparks Jean’s learning process about borderlands. The somnambulant state places him between consciousness and unconsciousness – a zone of surrealist production and discovery. Even before this fledgling border-occupier can articulate this state, he has received magical qualities. Despite Jules’ bid at cheating in the game of checkers, the distant Jean, set to autopilot, beautifully maneuvers his pieces in such a way as to force Jules to ruin the game out of frustration and to avoid defeat. Soon, this border state will convince him to do the very thing he had mocked when guided by reason. Jean walks up to the deck and prepares to jump into the water (figure 13). This scene is framed in such a way that neither rive is included – Jean is fully immersed in the borderland. Without a word, he leaps into the frigid fluvial border and searches for his lost love. He is ready to see Juliette like never before, and he is rewarded for his efforts.

With Jean and Juliette now both aware of how to occupy the border, they are free to use their imaginations in order to find pleasure. Vigo’s joint masturbation scene – one of the film’s
most beautiful displays of cinematic genius and surrealist aesthetics – indicates that despite their separation, Jean and Juliette are able to communicate their love. They are now part of the border and living Certeau’s borderland paradox. Once the married couple is reunited in the warm confines of the barge, the Atalante continues to push forward through the open water. The camera, an immobile observer up to this point (and the spectator with it), is released from the barge (figure 14). It has left the tight confines and now soars over the barge, moving in the same direction, but much faster. Soon, the camera loses sight of the Atalante and continues over the open, borderless water. Both the camera and the spectator are now free to occupy this lawless, surreal borderland.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter we have analyzed how various types of passages or pathways – the arcades of Paris and the canals that run through them – can provide surrealist writers and filmmakers with the ideal location and setting not only to write the city, but more importantly to pursue their artistic aims. In both cases, these passages were not national borders separating France from other countries, but were found inside an ordered and clearly delimited metropolis and national space. Aragon’s text demonstrated that the city-as-text is one that must be practiced in unusual ways to be read effectively. The ordered Parisian environment, an up-and-coming avatar of the American ville-machine that Céline would soon encounter, nevertheless allowed certain characters to practice spatial delinquency in the ephemeral and extinct space of the Opera passageway. The Paris peasant’s prose-poem sought the connection of various divergent dichotomies of urban and rural, real and imaginary, built environment and textual space. While the artistic aura of this and other spaces that I have described as borderlands was suggested by
the physical presence of Aragon’s narrator, it is really in Vigo’s film that the power of the
borderlands is spatially evident. In the shadows of ordered French space, then, along these fluvial
and concrete borderspaces, certain rural outsiders are able to move through French urban space,
propelled by a particular form of spatial delinquency and able to offer diverging perspectives on
French urban space. Despite being presented by two different mediums, these texts demonstrate
that certain artists were able to turn to a description of space in order to promote their artistic,
and in this case, surrealist aesthetics. In the two chapters that follow, we will see that this
emphasis on the internal borders, limits and edges of urban space was a phenomenon that was
neither restricted to the interwar period nor to this particular aesthetic movement.
Chapter 3: Para-sites: Transporting Noise Between Paris and Reel Cités

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, following Michel de Certeau’s suggestion that the border is a “passage,” I analyzed two types of passageways in and around the nation’s capital during the interwar period and suggested that the spatial practice of these borderlands can be interpreted as actions pursuant to a surrealist ideal, one that seeks a spatial and metaphorical locale in-between the real and the imaginary. In both the film and the novel I analyzed, Vigo and Aragon respectively found spaces within the ordered metropolis that could be practiced artfully—thus locating in Parisian space possible creative mobile acts of delinquency. These borderland spaces, as I have described them, could also be read as what the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have termed deterritorialized spaces.\(^{48}\) For this pair of thinkers, the process of deterritorialization results from the movement by which one leaves a territory—a controlled and ordered space—along “lignes de fuite” [*lines of escape*]. Leaving a territory in the Deleuzian sense does not necessarily mean that one leaves its physical confines; rather one escapes the control and order that looms large in this territory. According to John Clay, such acts of deterritorialization, when captured in textual systems, do not just affect the viewer’s or reader’s

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\(^{48}\) See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* for their discussion on deterritorialization and Freud’s de- and subsequent re-territorialization of the libido through the Oedipus complex. It should also be noted that in his rather short analysis of Vigo’s *L’Atalante*, Gilles Deleuze concentrates on the notion of “flow” evoked by the canal and the water along which it moves, and does not speak about this space in these terms. However, as Michael Abecassis explains, for Deleuze, “‘there is not the same movement in the sea and in the land’ and the state of perception is completely different. On land, movement is always ‘in perpetual disequilibrium’ (1983: 43), but in water the movement is slowed down and imbued with grace” (199). Abecassis has chosen an apt citation that links *L’Atalante* to this notion of deterritorialized space that I have tried to draw, particularly along the lines of different states of perception.
perception of the world. More importantly, the reader and viewer are altered through a deterritorialization of perception.  

If the “border” offered Vigo and Aragon’s characters a possible line of escape, one would think that other borders – say, for example, the physical borderzone of Paris, commonly referred to as the banlieue – would offer similar possibilities. Though deterritorialization offers the promise of a radical position vis-à-vis the state, the capitalist system can still, and generally does, reverse the stakes and reclaim these spaces of escape, thus commodifying the poetics of the borderland. In other words, as soon as mobile subjects manage to deterritorialize a certain area, it is soon reterritorialized by organizations of control. As Deleuze warns us in his final lecture at Paris XIII-Vincennes in 1980, these escape paths are “toujours une potentialité” [always a potential] that have the “possibilité de tourner en ligne de désespoir et de destruction” [possibility of turning into a line of despair and destruction] (Deleuze 1980). Read in this light, while movement along these borderlands, passageways and lines of escape can lead to productive locales, it can also lead to undesirable outcomes and destinations.

In this chapter we will turn from the borderland practitioners of the interwar passageways to the post-war inhabitants of the large and nebulous geo-political borders of Paris. We will thus consider another form of borderland character, one that has existed since Haussmann pushed the physical limits of the city to the ancient military fortifications. These borderland subjects however, are not of the same breed as those we analyzed in the previous chapter. Set into motion by a booming economy and consumer society, lower and middle class citizens found themselves drawn to the city’s peripheries and the newly constructed Habitations à loyer modéré (HLMs) and grands ensembles that hawked certain never-before seen comforts to these tenants, such as

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49 For an interesting reading on the deterritorialization of a poem and its effect on a reader see Jon Clay, Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze: Transformative Intensities, specifically pages 48-55.
more spacious rooms and air-conditioning, among other amenities. However the allure of these new structures came at the expense of other conveniences such as access to certain goods, services and transportation. As a result, these post-war mobile limits of these grands ensembles were unwittingly forced to spend the majority of their free time either commuting across the administrative limit of the capital in order to pay their “moderate” rents, or loitering aimlessly through these liminal zones in search of work, entertainment, acceptance and identity.

Through an analysis of two films separated by more than a quarter of a century – Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967) and La Haine (Mathieu Kassovitz, 1995) I seek to evoke the difficulties, depressions (to borrow from Deleuze above), and dangers of living on the border and calling it home. Both films skirt the edge of the city, and move between suburb and center, life and death, mobility and stillness. Godard’s Deux ou trois choses examines, among other topics, the mobility of an expanding Parisian periphery in post-war France, the (im)mobility of French suburbanites, the collision of sound and image. Kassovitz’s La Haine follows the violent and wretched existence of three young men, a Jew, a Black and a second generation Arab, in one 24-hour period as they move through the cité (or projects), which culminates in a dangerous and deadly clash between the state and the periphery dweller.

Analyzing two separate images of marginalized urban characters that must navigate the city’s political and administrative borderlands – a mother who doubles as a prostitute in order to stay up with the latest fashion, and a trio of rejected youths that loiter in the concrete grands ensembles and the cobblestoned streets of the centre ville – I will draw attention to what I have termed the reterritorialization of the banlieue and the spatial injustices imposed on these suburbanites by this expropriation of the suburbs – injustices that oblige these specific mobile
limits to participating in consumer society and the capitalist system.\textsuperscript{50} In this vein, I will thus continue to pursue examples of ways in which the city seeks to control its inhabitants, having extended its stronghold into the border’s creative potential uncovered and documented during the interwar period. This time I will concentrate on how it forces borderland bodies to follow certain paths, to enter the city momentarily but to never permanently access it; to work or to attend cultural events in the city, but to find home outside its clearly defined pristine walls.

The powerful nature of the borderland’s spatial and metaphorical ambiguity nevertheless embodies uncharted locales for new interpretations of the city through cinema, and novel ways of representing French urban space. Within these reterritorialized borderspaces, Godard and Kassovitz nevertheless locate potential new lines of flight. Drawing on Michel Serres’ notion of productive possibilities inherent in the critical concept of the parasite, and developing my stance on phantom limb syndrome in the urban environment, I suggest that despite their rather circulatory itineraries, the Parisian suburbanites at the center of these films constantly threaten and restructure this city that intends to establish a sterilized marketable image of itself. Stated differently, inside these spaces that lie within this newly constructed and ordered periphery, different lines of escape can be found that provide a position from which to create new forms of art, disrupt systems, and, despite their objectified bodies, call attention to their own subjectivity.

3.2 Godard’s Paris in \textit{Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle}: Productive Parasites

Jean-Luc Godard entered the international scene with his first feature, \textit{A bout de souffle}, in 1959, the same year that the film movement known as the \textit{novelle vague}, or French New

\textsuperscript{50} Edward Soja’s most recent book, \textit{Seeking Spatial Justice} seeks to bring to surface the increasing “spatial injustices” that are happening in the New Economy by paying particular attention to successful grassroots campaigns in Los Angeles county since the early 1980s. Although less theoretically charged than his other works, \textit{Seeking Spatial Justice} still offers an interesting history to grassroots campaigns in Los Angeles and demonstrates how we need to start thinking about space on the same terms as we do history and society.
Wave, was launched. Godard’s films have been the object of “both extreme adulation and vitriolic abuse” (Whyte 7), eliciting rants and raves from cinephiles and critics alike, and his 1968 film, *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle*, is a perfect example of this mixed reception. For many critics like Dan Jardine, Godard’s “cinematic essay” is “the pinnacle of Godard's art. Probing, uncertain, hesitant, humble, lyrical and profound”; on the other hand, critics like Andrew O’Hehir are “never moved” by the “chaotic collision of sound and image, and the ham-handed political lessons.” Although both sides may disagree on the success and import of the film, all concur that in *Deux ou trois choses*, Godard almost entirely abandons conventional narrative and forces the spectator to take a different approach to cinema.

The film follows a suburban woman, Juliette Janson (Marina Vlady) and her day-to-day routine in the city of Paris. While she is a loving mother, she must also prostitute herself for extra money in order to purchase the enticing products marketed in magazines (*Elle* magazine in particular) and advertised on city walls. The film is based on the real events, revealed in the weekly political magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*, of the sexual encounters between construction men and the married women living in the *grands ensembles* or large-scale housing projects on the city’s administrative limits. The “elle” [*she/her*] to which the film’s title and off-screen narrator refer, is “a metaphoric, polyversant and layered subject” (Terranova 141). “Elle” is not specifically the film’s protagonist housewife and prostitute, Juliette, but also the Paris Region. Instead of the picturesque and romanticized Paris of Notre Dame Cathedral, the Eiffel Tower, and the Champs-Elysées, Godard’s city is entrenched in post-war urban sprawl.

Juliette, the sexualized object that stands in as cinematic subject, moves about this feminized city that is being rebuilt, extended beyond its old limits, among highways, cranes, interchanges and apartment buildings. Meanwhile, narrator-director Jean-Luc Godard lurks
behind these buildings, this construction, and this city, as in voice-over he whispers grievances about modern-day consumerism, urban politics and modernity in general. By means of his own narration, Godard is clear in his critique of suburban France in the late 1960s located on the outskirts of a new, polycentric Paris: it is governed by two forces—bitter indifference and unforeseen consumerism. As Juliette nonchalantly goes about her job as if there were nothing to it, the spectator soon learns across the rather loosely knitted plot that most men, including Juliette’s husband, support—or at least turn a blind eye on—such actions. Such indifference is taking place, according to Godard, because everyone must prostitute themselves in one way or another in order to live in post-war Paris.51

This film, then, is about Paris and, as I will demonstrate, its essential aim is to depict and question the mobility of the city and the stillness of its inhabitants. Paris can move beyond itself as urban space sprawls and the metropolis extends its boundaries. However, in order to sprawl, the city requires vehicles to facilitate movement, it needs stations that service these vehicles and essence (fuel) to power them. This periphery—the physical borderzone around the city—can be viewed, I propose following Deleuze and Guattari, as a reterritorialized zone since it has stymied its inhabitants, forcing them to follow the predetermined transit routes into and out of the city. This reterritorialization of the city space, in which no inhabitant has his or her own space (espace propre), is instead governed by indexicality as all actions are watched, timed and recorded. The city has been able to brainwash its citizens into an (im)mobility, offering them the allure of an identity through the consumption of luxury goods. It allows them to move along the streets of Paris and the highways of the outer limits; entices them to drive their new flashy cars and penetrate the city. With no future in sight and no real goals or desires aside from those created by marketing, Juliette and other mobile humanoids are unknowingly inhabitants of a reterritorialized

51 He mentioned this in multiple interviews before and after the film’s release.
border, one that relies on her and others to generate a vital “drive” particularly through sexualized energy for the city and its parts.

In the previous two chapters, we observed how city space is structured according to various means of control. Here, too, we will observe how Parisian planners and politicians intend to appropriate, order, and control the city’s periphery and those objects found at its limits. As this section will demonstrate, despite the fact that the inhabitants of the French banlieues find themselves on, or beyond, an administrative borderland, the creative potential of such a zone touted by Vigo and Aragon, is seemingly no longer applicable in the ordered metropolis of post-war France. In fact, as we will see, any possibility of such a discovery has been relegated to the imagination of children. As was briefly mentioned above, critics and scholars, including Godard himself, claim that his film is about “elle,” the city of Paris. The palindromic pronoun, elle, implies that no matter how one approaches the eponymous subject, its meaning does not change. In a way, the double entendre suggests that any attempt to reverse the system and offer a different interpretation or understanding of it is futile as it results in the same representation (elle is a palindrome). After analyzing the Paris that Godard indexes, I posit that this elle is more nuanced than other critics claim. Instead, Godard’s city is not easily knowable; its identity is in constant motion and therefore impossible to grasp. Godard’s film points to that which lives outside of the spectator’s vision, drawing specific attention to broken messages between the city and its parts. Similar to the borderland characters in Vigo’s film, Godard works within the constraints of the city and the cinematic medium in order to uncover new lines of escape leading to potentially new, deterritorialized spaces.
In the film’s final scenes, after the narrative has ended, Godard inserts an epilogue. It speaks to the facility with which the city can be erected and marketed. Filming outside of the very apartment building that incarcerated Marina Vlady’s character, the camera begins with a close up of a stick of Hollywood gum, propped against a postcard image of a happy couple on the edge of the calanques on the Cote D’Azur. The shot slowly pans out to show an assortment of consumer goods, such as cigarettes and dish detergent, vertically and horizontally arranged to form a micro-city of commodities (figure 15). Godard, here, offers a critique against this and similar new schemes of urbanisme (or French urban politics), that “concretized in the towers, slabs and open green spaces of les grands ensembles” (Terranova 140). The collection of branded commodities indicates a continuation of cookie-cutter cities, products of capitalism and void of interest, that will continue in the future of capitalist production. Though this makeshift fabricated city, as well as numerous advertisements of cities on walls throughout the film through the medium of posters, Godard, it seems, is imploring spectators to consider the construction of a city through the marketing of its own image and the erection of specific buildings. Through this epilogue he equally implores spectators to realize that he has created a specific image of Paris, first by his hand, then by his camera, or vice-versa. What Paris, then, is Godard pitching?
Upon closer analysis, the notion of constructed and pre-programmed cities is, in fact, evoked from the very beginning. As soon as we enter the home of Juliette, we find her husband, Robert (Roger Montseret) and his friend Roger (Jean Narboni) in the process of listening to an intricate machine – a shortwave radio – that requires the undivided attention of both men (Figure 16). With their backs to the camera and facing this odd machine, the two men attempt to catch snippets of messages transmitted between Lyndon Johnson and American allies. Similar to the commodified micro-city of Godard’s epilogue, we are instantly presented with a machine whose internal gadgetry and its various springs, processors and chips, resembles a steel city. This emphasis on human-less, prefabricated or machinic micro-cities forces spectators to consider the role of human beings in the actual city of Paris.

Before arriving in Juliette’s home, however, the first image of Paris that crosses the screen is that of an equally lifeless city as we are presented with a drab cityscape in which an interchange is being built (Figure 17). Aside from a supervisor that stands inertly watching a small, seemingly conductor-less backhoe, only copper wires, concrete, and an empty wheelbarrow populate the frame. The next scene is equally devoid of any form of life normally associated with a city. Couched under an interchange, the camera shows a gloomy representation of a factory and some distant buildings, as cars pass slowly along the highway in the background. The role of the human appears to have lost all importance within this urban landscape dominated by what Terranova describes as being marked by “clean lines and seemingly sterilized forms of modern architecture” (141). Of course, there are humans and there is life within this city. Godard soon presents spectators with the first protagonist of the Nouvel Observateur’s story:

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52 James Monaco explains that the words Roger translates to his fried are in fact taken from a well-known cartoon by Jules Feiffer. See The New Wave: Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette. Godard’s film is full of cultural references that are pulled from contemporary politics. It thus serves as a very good example of what he and others called “engaged cinema.”
construction workers, the city’s soldier ants that are razing the terrain and erecting the *grands ensembles* to house the city’s working-class. While never spoken to or heard from, not even by the rather talkative whispering narrator, these off-screen men yield an ominous presence in the city, as Godard’s camera continually strays from the noisy interiors of a building to quiet examinations of the city’s exteriority and its construction through destruction. After silently presenting the construction workers, Godard introduces the second player in the *Observateur’s* drama, the housewife turned prostitute, Juliette Janson, inside one of the new large-scale apartment complexes (figure 18). The close-up on Juliette shows her on the balcony of one of the buildings in the suburbs of Paris, with another looming behind her on the right side of the screen. Dwarfed by the high-rises in the background that ominously figure on both sides of her, it is impossible to miss the new housing projects that populate and dominate this outer ring of Paris. This is a world that encompasses our non-heroes, or rather, that describes the city of Paris, the real protagonist of the film, according to Godard. He thus moves away from this non-hero, to the real hero and “her” development.

From the beginning, Godard makes it evident that the economic and political restructuring of the city has negative consequences on the freedom of urban citizens. The concept of “inhabiting” a location has changed, since the private has become public. Spectators are introduced to Juliette not outside the complexes, but inside the close confines of her apartment. It is not, however, the specific privilege of the camera to enter into these confined spaces, as members of the state constantly penetrate the private without hesitation or warning. After leaving Juliette to go about her daily duties, the camera cuts to the interior of a Hungarian woman’s apartment, as she bathes, nude and alone. There is a sudden knock at the door, and without any other warning an employee of the EDF (Electricité de France) walks in and
immediately asks, “où est le compteur?” [where is the meter?]. Despite the woman’s verbal
harangue at his undesired presence, he exclaims after seeing how much electricity – how much
power – she has used: “ça va faire mal: 50,000 balles” [This is gonna cost ya, 50,000 francs].

Such invasions of privacy are repeated in M. Gérard’s bizarre daycare moments before
Juliette drops off her daughter Solange. Inside the daycare, M. Gérard opens a door without
knocking. Inside a young man and younger woman sit on a bed under a poster advertisement for
Japan as the man caresses her exposed thigh (figure 19). After retrieving a hammer from the
room, he informs the couple, “Vous avez sept minutes” [You’ve got seven minutes], before
shutting the door. This scene, supported later by a man who enters with another woman and
“pays” with a canned good, indicates to spectators that this daycare doubles as a pay-by-the-hour
sextel, and consequently asks spectators to consider the dual or multiple functions that certain, if
not all, spaces have. Every product and object in the city – electricity in the previous example
and sex here – has a price attached to it. In both cases, it is clear that there is no privacy in
Godard’s post-war capital, as leisure time is still being counted, observed and literally metered
by various agents of control.

Whereas L’Atalante’s canal was an ordered and controlled route appropriated by the
French state in order to extend its capitalist reach, now the streets and highways have become the
new controlled vectors along which mobile citizens are unknowingly set in motion by the city.
Unlike the borderland subjects aboard the Atalante, the subjects caught within this ordered
borderland appear incarcerated. Many scenes of the city show cranes freely moving across the
open blue sky while remaining stationary, thereby symbolizing the (im)mobility of various
components of this city. While inhabitants are mobile in the Paris of Deux ou trois choses, it is
clear that they are no longer in control of their destinations and cognizant of this fact; they are

53 Of course, the spectator has already entered this private zone unwelcomed.
encouraged to pay close attention not to step out of bounds. Inside a garment shop, the camera silently interviews one of Juliette’s semblables who explains that when she crosses the road she is “très prudente” [very careful]. She has learned to look out for “l’accident avant qu’il puisse arriver. Et que ma vie s’arrête là… Le chômage… la maladie … la vieillesse” [the accident before it happens. That life ends there … unemployment … sickness … old age]. It is here, at the physical limits of the city, that we encounter the limits of mobility. The precautions of these mobile limits are maintained by fear, the social fear of not having money to buy goods and maintain social status, and the human fear of the mortal body. After she has accessed the city and serviced two men, Juliette’s final utterance in the film is a “one word” response to define herself: “Pas encore morte” [Not dead yet]. She, like her friend, has managed to move correctly through the city space, and has lived to see another day.

One can be mobile in the city, but for what purpose and for whom? Speaking in hushed narration as his camera lingers on a man adding the final blue paint touches to a newly constructed bridge, the response to this question is clear: “[L’]aménagement de la région parisienne va permettre au gouvernement de poursuivre plus facilement sa politique de classe. Et au grand monopole d’en orienter et d’en organiser l’économie, sans trop tenir compte des besoins et de l’aspiration à une vie meilleure de ses huit millions d’habitants” [The regional development of Paris facilitates ... allows the large monopolies to shape its economy, regardless of the needs and aspirations of its eight million inhabitants]. The “aspirations” and “needs” of the eight million citizens are not of interest to the “monopole” that Paris has become. Capitalism

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54 Juliette and other female characters are always responding to questions that the spectator does not here. Since they look directly at the camera, it appears as if the camera is asking these women questions that only they can here. I use the term “silent interview” for these moments. A very good example of this phenomenon occurs in a garment shop. Two employees stand next to each other folding clothes. A woman who we have never seen before begins to talk directly into the screen. “Je me suis levée à huit heures … j’ai les yeux marrons-verts” [I woke up at eight o’clock... I have hazel eyes], as her co-worker silently continues to fold blouses beside her. The woman is clearly responding to some simple questionnaire-type inquiries that the spectator does not hear.
and an American brand of (neo)liberalism have not only altered the Parisian landscape in order to serve the new culture of the automobile, it has also allowed other commodities to vie with these mobile limits for a share of the spatial market in their apartments, in Godard’s frame, and throughout this city.

In order to make space for themselves, and compete with the immobile city of products that terminates Godard’s film, these limits must turn to their mobility in order to survive. Juliette is well aware of her role as a mobile element, explaining: “La ville est une construction dans l’espace. Les éléments mobiles de la cité? Je sais pas … Les habitants” [The city is a spatial construction. The mobile elements of the projects? I don’t know … the inhabitants]. As a dual inhabitant of la cité and la ville she traverses the city and its peripheries. However, Godard makes it evident that she follows the same pre-established routes. For example, as Juliette is on her way to meet one of her Johns, the camera follows her as she crosses a public square (figure 20). A jump cut brings us to apparently the same scene, only slightly earlier in her route as she has just crossed a street and is heading through the same square. A third jump cut prolongs the scene and shows her again crossing the square and this time hanging a right down a side street. Despite the same path, the presence of different cars coupled with her altered gait and garb in each frame, indicate that these are all different days. Her (im)mobility – the fact that she is mobile along very strict routes – is reinforced by her function as a mobile good.

Commodities, goods that are exchanged without qualitative differentiation, imply movement across markets and between actors. Godard’s film is full of commodities as his camera not only follows Juliette, but also catches glimpses of various products and contemplates different billboards and other signage for extended and multiple takes. As a prostitute, Juliette is

55 I am translating it as “housing projects,” but it does also carry the connotation of “city” This double entendre is reinforced throughout the film by Juliette’s duel physical presence in the HLMs and her participation in the discussion of urban space in general.
a commodity, whose specific beauty sets her apart from other prostitutes. Just as she is enticed by the various vectors of marketing to purchase certain goods, differentiated only through branding, she is equally a product offered by the city to its other vectors of movement. As I previously mentioned, the article that appeared in the *Nouvel Observateur* and spawned Godard’s film was an exposé on housewives who were sleeping with construction workers in the *grands ensembles* for extra money. In the film, Godard presents two scenes inside hotel rooms where we see Juliette with two different Johns that link her to the city and its mobile elements. Displacing Juliette’s trade from the *grands ensembles* (her home) to these spatially non-descript hotel rooms (her workplace), Godard alters the *Nouvel Observateur*’s journalistic piece by moving this surreptitious economy outside of the outside, by moving the drama into the city proper.\(^5\)

The first is a man who looks to be in his early thirties and whose pockmarked face is a stark contrast to Juliette’s soft features. He is not a construction worker, building and pushing the limits of the city, but a metro conductor, literally in charge of moving the city-dwellers. In this way, Godard changes the historical narrative to highlight the importance of providing sexual energy to those who move the city. As she gets down on the bed and asks him if he wants it “Italian style,” she is ready to service the city’s transportation system. Although she and her coworkers are using a lot of electricity in their homes (50,000 “balles” to be exact) they are replenishing the system with a new form of steam.

\(^5\) Gordad never shows major monuments that might demonstrate that Juliette’s prostitution takes place in Paris. However, when Juliette arrives at a non-descript bar, she runs into her clean-cut pimp who stands at the zinc. As Juliette goes to talk with her friend, Godard cuts to another housewife-prostitute in the same bar. She explains that while she lives in the big blue and white buildings in the periphery, her “job” requires that she come into the city a few times a month.
The second John is an “American” investigative reporter and tourist to the city. Just like Juliette and the rest of Parisians, according to Godard, the city is equally a commodity. Cities differentiate and sell their image to businesses, inhabitants, film studios, and tourists alike. Each city is impelled to brand itself through the images that it offers on postcards, posters and other outlets in order to increase tourism. Thus, instead of a construction worker, Juliette and her friend Mariane (Anny Dupery) service a foreigner (albeit through role play) who is momentarily passing through the city, injecting money into the urban system. It is in this encounter that one of the film’s most bizarre and reproduced images crosses the screen, as Juliette and Mariane, with PAN AM and TWA duffle bags over their stripped bodies, literally fly across the frame with arms outstretched (figure 21). Whereas Ferdinand, in Céline’s Voyage, was morphed into a humanoid vehicle by the hotel valet, these female border characters become remote-controlled hybrid vehicles, whose robotic movements are directed by the off-screen tourist in this strange fetish. In Céline’s analysis of New York, I mentioned the fact that consumerism had become the new strip-tease. Now, these doubly commodified bodies play the feature role in this strangely pornographic amateur film. The importance of “American” consumerism is emphasized through the products, companies and lifestyles that have begun to infiltrate, and negatively disrupt, Parisian culture. Speaking Franglais with a clear French accent, this Frenchman posing as an American tourist instructs Juliette, “You can stop. Turn around. Montrez moi votre dos” [… Show me your back]. As soon as these commands are spoken, Godard cuts from the hotel room to a low angle shot of the city and cranes – its machinic prosthetic limbs – moving across the sky.

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57 He is really shooting a pornographic film in which he is a reporter for the Arkansas Daily Reporter.
to the inaudible dictates of the city. These sexualized vehicles are new mechanisms in the urban system, novel prosthetic limbs moving through city.

Since this disturbing form of mobility and immobility is happening to and perpetuated by this mobile representative of the boundary of the city, it suggests a threat to the creative potential of the concept of the borderland. Shortly after the opening scenes, Juliette’s son Christophe (Christophe Bourseiller) recalls the dream he had the previous night – a dream that seemed as if it were inspired by Jean Vigo’s borderland prophecy. Rubbing his eyes on the threshold of his mother’s room, he explains that he dreamt that he was walking alone along a very narrow cliff that had only enough room for one person. He then saw twins appear out of nowhere, walking in his direction:

\[I \text{ wondered how they would get by. And then, suddenly, one of the twins walked toward the other, they came together to form a single person. That was when I realized that these two people were North and South Vietnam}.\]

Critics, like James Monaco, have used this reference to highlight Godard’s commitment to a form of engaged cinema, suggested by this direct reference, as well as many other notable subtle allusions throughout the film, to the Vietnam War. However, I want to emphasize the fact that the image of this fusion of two contrasting individuals – representations of physical spaces – is articulated through the stuttered utterance of a child. The fanciful assemblage of two separate

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58 This should also be seen as a juxtaposition and replacement of one “grue” with another “grue” since, in French, a slang term for “prostitute” is “grue” or “crane” in English.
entities at war over internal politics and problems brings a reluctant smile to his mother’s face. Her reaction and the fact that such a reverie comes from the mind of a stuttering child make the prophecy seem adolescent at best. Such combinations happen in fiction, in dreams, and in the imagination; they cannot happen in the real world; they are not possible in the post-war city.

This lost power of the borderland is supplemented when Juliette takes her daughter Solange to M. Gérard’s aforementioned daycare. Once all of his adult clients have been settled into their rooms, the old man tries to calm down the children and Solange, who has been crying since Juliette left for work, with a “petite histoire” or children’s tale. As he attempts to capture the children’s attention, repeating that he is going to tell a story, the camera shifts from the group to a spectacle on the street. Through the windowpane, Godard’s camera shows two apparent hippies being carted off by policemen as a crowd of citizens observes. While M. Gérard attempts to tell a fairy tale to the group of children, Godard’s camera recounts another story about order and control. The camera then pans back to M. Gérard and the children who have gathered around him intently awaiting to hear the story of “Pic et Pouc.” Godard then cuts from the daycare to an exterior image of a bridge being built over the same canal system that once housed Vigo’s borderland characters. While M. Gérard’s off-screen oration explains that the duo’s adventure begins “au bord d’un fleuve” [on the edge of a river], Godard suggests that the various machinery of the city has already laid claim to this once fertile zone of opportunity and discovery (figure 22). Whether or not Godard intended, his camera has reduced Vigo’s narrative to a mere children’s tale, to a “petite histoire.” Regardless of his intentions, this dual reinforcement of captured spatial delinquency and bridge-building—both of which seek to stress control and flow—reinforces the observation that all of the borderland’s potential has been sapped by the post-war metropolis.
It is clear, then, that while the borderland offered a pristine zone of artistic creation and production in Jean Vigo’s *L’Atalante* and Louis Aragon’s *Paysan de Paris*, thirty years later Godard suggests that such a space is now intensely surveilled by the panoptic eye of the city. Through the “tentacular development of Paris” in the postwar era (Terranova 139) that brought about the construction of highways and edification of large-scale housing projects on the outskirts of the city, Parisian city planners have learned how to capture the potential of such zones for its own uses. In Godard’s Paris, since the physical border of the city has become invaded by cranes, dump trucks and machinery, it appears as if the city and the capitalist system have reterritorialized the initial line of escape that the border provided. Parisian planners and politicians intend to appropriate, order, and control the city’s periphery and those bodies found at its limits, forcing them to move in a certain way along pre-selected paths. While many borders can be inhabited – they are living on a physical border of the city – the productive possibilities once offered by such a space have disappeared as the space they inhabit has been requisitioned by the city and its officials in order to purify the habitat through the razing of the “quartiers insalubres” [*unsanitary neighborhoods or slums*] and to optimize spatial efficiency through the construction of the *boulevard périphérique*. Nevertheless, an in-between, productive locale still exists in this reterritorialized border. Plugging up one leak in the system only leads to a leak somewhere else. As the city expands its endless rows of tower blocks and new motorways, and capitalism attempts to squeeze the last breath out of all these mobile limits, Godard is able to find art in between the frames. He finds knowledge and understanding between the images he offers and the messages he distorts, or in the parlance of Michel Serres, the messages that he parasites.
Novel assemblages – the city and its parts

“Je scrute la vie de la cité et de ses habitants et les liens qui les unissent” [I study the projects and their inhabitants and the bonds that unite them].
– Narrator, Deux ou trois choses

“Peut-être un objet est ce qui permet de relier, de passer d’un sujet à l’autre, donc de vivre en société, d’être ensemble” [Maybe an object is what permits us to connect, to pass from one subject to the other].
– Juliette Janson, Deux ou trois choses

Near the end of the film, Juliette stands in front of her apartment building as two children survey her and her invisible interlocutor. In a park, enclosed by the same and similar buildings she inhabits, she explains that she sometimes feels as if “j’étais le monde et le monde était moi” [I were the world and the world were me] (figure 23). This merging of subject and object, of one with the world, I want to suggest, is the aim of Godard’s poetics. Both Amy Taubin and Hunter Vaughan have astutely observed the relationship between diegetic subjects and objects in Godard’s film. According to Taubin, Godard’s film is a “machine” that morphs objects and subjects into one being, generating, “above all, dialectical relationships, between idea and action, word and image, sound and picture, interior and exterior, microcosm and macrocosm” (Taubin). For Vaughan, the Paris of Deux ou trois choses is that “of gray lines and sharp angles that conflict with the soft orange roundness of the human forms, a space of destruction and reconstruction of inorganic materials and machines” (Vaughan). Both critics highlight the nebulous relationship in the film between interior and exterior, between living objects and lifeless subjects, between what is on and off screen. Such observations are, of course, aided constantly by various cinematic subjects’ responses and Godard’s inaudible questions and steady camera. For example, as Juliette sits motionless in a beauty salon in preparation for her night
with the American reporter, she contemplates the difference between an object and a subject, hypothesizing, “Peut-être un objet est ce qui permet de relier… de passer d’un sujet à l’autre, donc de vivre en société, d’être ensemble” [maybe an object is what permits us to link . . . to pass from one subject to the other, therefore to live in society, to be together]. This idea is emphasized by the fact that the introductory image of the city is that of an échangeur, or interchange, that is being built along a developing highway network (figure 24). The échangeur is an object among others in the built environment. It has a very visible, concrete presence, whose function is to facilitate these societal connections. From the beginning, then, Godard alludes to the importance of relation, of those physical objects and human subjects that link Virilan vectors of mobility in the city as well as images, ideas and frames within his own narrative.

The whole film is an assemblage of landscape shots of the city interwoven with up-close interviews of human subjects. The city as subject constantly encroaches on the position of the human as subject. Throughout the narrative, a character is presented within the cityscape followed by a parallel image of the city, itself moving or being moved by various objects, as if the two were playing for position, competing for cinematic voice and exposure.

In one scene, for example, as Juliette stares into Godard’s camera lens she explains: “quelque chose peut me faire pleurer, mais la cause des larmes ne se trouve pas intégrée à la trace sur mes joues” [Something can make me cry, but the cause cannot be found on the traces they leave on my face]. Her face takes up the entire screen in a stunning close-up that reveals no such traces. Such a claim implores spectators to look not just at the traces possibly left on the skin, but also at what lies beneath and between. After Juliette claims that a landscape is like a face, Godard cuts

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59 Of course, Godard is playing with the notion of “ensemble” which is the name given to the large-scale housing projects. It also means “together” or “togetherness.”
from her face to another bridge being built in the city. This struggle between the human thinking subject and the living built environment push us to explore the traces are being left on the face and skin of the city, and what they suggest about external and invisible causes and forces? He thus provides spectators with two faces, suggesting that the two are forever linked or that at least both must be understood in order to explain the city.

In one of her many philosophical digressions, Juliette lays the groundwork for a discussion on objects as enablers of interpersonal connection in a context where social relations are always ambiguous, claiming that everything is related to “ce qui l’entoure” [what is around it]. Objects and subjects cannot be differentiated as each plays a role in the construction and conceptualization of the city. As far as the city’s image and efficient functioning is concerned, what matters is that these objectified-subject and quasi-objects⁶⁰ live in cohabitation. Objects, the narrator theorizes, “existent… justement plus que les personnes. Les objets morts sont toujours vivants. Les personnes vivantes sont souvent déjà mortes” [are... more alive than people. Dead objects, always alive. Live people, often already dead]. Juliette, as subject, seemingly has no aspirations aside from her next purchase as she wades through life. Moreover, as a prostitute she is a living object, a mobile sexualized body. The city, on the other hand, and all its apparently lifeless objects are set on expansion. The whole film, it could be claimed, is about subjects becoming objects and about objects becoming subjects.

While Juliette and her semblables are going about their ordinary circuits into and out of the city, providing the city with energy and moving according to the city’s plans, Godard’s cinematic language and urban voices, emanating from the city’s human and non-human parts, engender problems, block terrains, and ultimately halt understanding of the characters, the

⁶⁰Cultural anthropologist and sociologist Bruno Latour, along with Michel Serres, has called objects like these quasi-objects. For Latour, quasi-objects have been neglected for too long and require our attention because they make up our modern ontology. We will return to these briefly in the conclusion.
narrative and the city. The ambiguity of meaning and relative truth is based on the difficult subject-object problematic offered by Godard that defines “the schizophrenic subject of modern civilization” (Vaughn). It becomes clear how very hard it is to understand an individual, to understand his or her social and cultural standing and what makes him or her tick, so to speak. If Juliette, elle, is a metaphor for the other elle, the city of Paris, then it could be suggested that this impossible desire to decipher her essence is equally encountered when trying to understand the city and its working parts. In other words, Godard seeks to understand Juliette and in turn to understand the cité that houses her and the city that has forced her, and everyone else, into prostitution. People are intricate and hard to define, but so are cities.

Godard’s camera often lingers on the construction of the interchanges and bridges, which act as connectors in the physical space linking the periphery to other roads throughout Paris. Designed to facilitate and accelerate the circulation of motorists or connect sides and thus negate the delays created by natural borders, they represent attempts by architects, engineers and urban planners to make post-war Paris more spatially lisible (readable, knowable). However, at the same time, these images of bridges and interchanges play the dual role in the narrative of serving as transitions between each filmic sequence while disrupting the narrative rhythm, and creating what could be considered a scriptible cinematic city. Stated in different terms, Godard’s cinematic Paris constructs new barriers and lines of flight though his representation and juxtaposition of the very building blocks used by Parisian planners in order to reduce misinterpretation and delinquent practices in the physical environment. One could claim that it is here – in this particular representation Paris – that a true, albeit fleeting vision of the city can momentarily crystallize in the mind of each spectator. The film’s value, and the city’s essence, Godard’s film suggests, lives in the small gap that separates an object from a subject—those gaps
that can never be populated with an image, but one left to the interpretation and imagination of every spectator. As we have already discussed, linguistically, *elle* refers to both a woman and a city, loosely suggesting that one and the other can be the same thing. For Vaughan, there is a constant play between subject and object: “What has always been relegated to be an object is, suddenly a subject, projecting meaning at you, an external building that looms and casts you into the shadows, or the ceiling that encloses you in your room, defines the space of your existence” (Vaughn). In fact, Godard makes this quite clear through the film’s title in which the word “choses” (or things) has clear gaps in between each letter, while the rest of the title has no spacing between the words:

CHOSES

QUEJESAIS

D’ELLE

The fact that there is no spacing between “quejesaisd’elle” [*whatIknowabouther*] suggests that knowledge, *savoir*, cannot lead to discovery. It is through an interrogation of things, and specifically what lies between them, that one finds fruitful grounds for interpretation.

Godard’s city is thus an assemblage of *chooses* – of human and non-human elements, artificial and quasi-objects – that are pulled together to form the city. However, it is not the specific objects themselves, but the interchanges and bridges that round out an image of the city. It is only through, and around these objects, that the essence of the city will emerge. Knowledge of the city is generated not by physical movement through the city (the narrator adds, “ça n’a pas d’importance” [*that doesn’t matter*]) but through the cognitive motion required on the part of the spectator. In other words, the text of the city offers images that must be read, not as they are given, but how they are related. With his camera in hand, Godard’s narrator “scrute la vie de la
cité et de ses habitants…, et les liens qui les unissent” [studies] the projects and their inhabitants and the bonds that unite them] and requires spectators to approach the city from the same position.

Caught between being (what Godard’s narrator describes as “s’élever jusqu’à l’être”) and nothingness, the human condition of post-war Paris is an unending cycle in which the living subject is forced to listen to and observe “ce qui l’entoure.” “[I]l faut que j’écoute,” exclaims the narrator, “[I]l faut que je regarde autour de moi plus que jamais.” [I must listen [...] more than ever I have to look around me]. What, then, is the city saying? Where are we supposed to look?

Since the sound revolution in the late 1920s, it has become generally accepted that, as Vaughan succinctly summarizes, “film has a unique ability to transform and shift its sensory focus between the auditory and visual” (Vaughan 2013; 3). The fact that Godard begins with the verb “écouter” followed by “regarder” suggests that sound may even be more important than vision. Godard’s rather heavy-handed approach to representing the auditory from the very beginning the film, urges spectators to open their ears as well as their eyes. He has forced spectators to listen to the city and its various enunciations as they hear the construction before even seeing the first image of this cinematic Paris. Should one look at and listen to the human figure, Juliette, she who speaks directly to us, the spectators, or should we listen to what she is saying? What is important? Her face that takes up the screen or her voice and other sounds that constantly interrupt the image? Just as the spectator is about to break through the awkward distance between camera and its subject matter, the clanging sound of a pinball machine disrupts our vision. Just as something meaningful is about to be revealed among the long, slow pans of the concrete buildings that dominate the periphery, Godard cuts the cord with the intrusive claxon of a driverless car.
At the same time that noise and sounds disrupt the chain of images, breaking what could be a linear, comprehensive narrative, Godard’s camera jumps from image to image. If it is not sound that disrupts, it is another commodified image. The instant we begin to look at Juliette, this new post-war peripheral commodity, her doubly inviting and off-putting eye contact with the camera begins to dismantle the invisible barrier between spectator and cinematic subject. Yet, before this wall can be broken, Godard turns his gaze to an inhuman object, to the close-up of a cup of coffee, a billboard, or a dirt-mover. In other words, Godard keeps jumping between human and non-human commodities. He then switches to a building, or a machine – more objects, vying for subjectivity in a world in which everything and everyone is simply part of a larger urban machine. To claim that Juliette is only human, would negate what we have argued. As a mobile prostitute serving the city and its parts, she is attached to the city in a certain dehumanized way – she is bound to her modern day pimp, in other words, to this metropolis. Likewise, Godard suggests that the non-human city – all these parts that hover in the background interrupting human discourse and dialog through their constant hammering – is imbued with a human quality since it can move with the help of Juliette and her semblables. One could claim, then, that there is a symbiotic relationship between human and non-human subjects: the city and its machines need inhabitants in order to function and inhabitants need the city in order to live. However, since this city composed of objects finds itself at war with the very objects that construct it, fighting for position as Serres would claim, Godard’s Paris can more accurately be describe as productively parasitic.
Noisy, productive parasites

Before Christophe enters his mother’s room to tell his dream about the unification of North and South Vietnam, Juliette was theorizing the difference between image and sound—the two bastions of the modern “vision machine.”61 Apparently dreaming with her eyes shut, Juliette suggests that “Les yeux, c’est le corps. Et le bruit, c’est…” [Eyes are the body, and sound is…]. Just as she is about to summarize noise through another simple metaphor, she is interrupted by the sound of a door opening. Her theory on noise has been interrupted, or “parasited” as Michel Serres would say, by more noise. Instead of telling us what noise is, Godard implies its meaning by utilizing a different sound. What results is Christophe’s borderland prophecy. Juliette’s discussion of one subject has been interrupted as a new narrative chain is initiated. Just as the city and its subjects vie for agency, so, it appears, different discourses in the film are constantly competing through noise – any noise whatsoever. I thus want to suggest that Godard is not asking us to look at the construction of this city, and these grands ensembles that house a suburban ideal of (un)happiness; rather he encourages us to look outside of and in-between the frames, for the third other, the invisible, audible parasite. While the city is visually dominant throughout the film, it is equally aurally perturbing. In fact, before we enter the home of Juliette and see her banal existence in the grands ensembles; before we see the interchange and enter the rest of the city in construction; we are first introduced to noise—to the dull racket of

61 Paul Virilio’s term for cinema.
jackhammers, cranes and bulldozers preparing the terrain for the expansion of the administrative limits. Why, we must ask, does Godard introduce the city with sound instead of image? Why, moreover, is his film so noisy and so quiet at the same time? Why does the narrator whisper? Why do we only hear the answers and never the questions?

Michel Serres begins his 1980 theoretical and philosophical essay, *Le Parasite*, with an analysis of a fable in which a country rat enjoys a feast at a city rat’s home inside the domicile of a tax farmer. For the French sociologist and philosopher, this situation represents a perfect example of the chain of the parasitical relations that defines and organizes all systems: The country rat parasites the city rat, who in turn parasites the tax farmer, who, for his part, parasites the farmer. This cozy meal between rats is soon disturbed by a noise that forces the rats to flee. The noise that is heard, is that of the tax farmer waking up or just the wind? Serres and his rats are unsure. What is important for Serres is that in this situation – like all situations – noise establishes a new system, one in which both rats are gone and the Farmer still asleep (or up moving around if he was indeed the noisemaker). In his reading of this fable, Serres highlights the fact that the last participant in the parasitical relationship, *noise*, enjoys the ultimate position. It structures the system yet cannot be seen. The parasite – this noise – “joue la position” [*plays the position*] (54), according to Serres. Serres continues to explain that this battle for position plays on continually, constantly changing the structure, constantly introducing a new, nuanced system. The figure of the parasite represents the possibility (the *potentialité* for Deleuze) of both occupying and subverting systems. More importantly, the host is structured by the parasites that remain outside of the system and *everything* can be a parasite – even the original host. The modern city of Paris, for example, could be considered a continual project of the parasite. This

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62 At first these sounds appear to be those of the projector – another link between the city and the cinematic medium.
63 Michel Serres uses the verb “parasiter” and Lawrence Schehr, in his exceptional translation, translates it as I just have.
“new” city both needs the old city (on which it is being constructed) and must destroy it at the same time. Having fought for position, it currently sits at the top of a new, ephemeral system. The continual battle for agency between the human being and the “built” environment of Godard’s Paris is an unending parasitical battle for position, which is ultimately won by neither subject, since Paris is noisy and full of parasites who are constantly battling for position. The minute one parasite is removed, hundreds lie in wait, in the shadows.

The role of the parasite has a very ambiguous presence for Michel Serres. He plays with the three nuances of the term “parasite” in French: there is the biological parasite, the environmental parasite and the third other, which he calls “noise” or “interference.” As Peter Remien clearly describes it, this allows Serres to “incorporate the natural, the social, and the semiotic into a single (albeit complex) network of interrelation” (260).

Much like the border discussed earlier discussed in Vigo, the parasite is Janus-faced. First, the figure of the parasite is, according to Serres, “un invité abusif, un animal inévitable, une rupture de message” [a rude and destructive guest, an unavoidable animal, a break in a message] (16). The parasite is an error, a noise or a malfunction that hovers close-by; it is an entity both from within and without, which threatens the entire existence of a system. Godard’s camera seeks to record the images of the city and the visual message that emanates from it and all that surround it. However, the noisy presence of parasites is always felt wherever his camera turns. This constant noise intrudes the frame from outside, obscures and alters the message received by him and transmitted to the viewer. The common response is to do away with all parasites so that the system can function without a hiccup. Naturally, our body defends itself of debilitating viruses that use it and give nothing back. Yet Serres warns against such an action, and suggests that this nuisance is, in fact, necessary: the system can only function with the presence of the parasite, since it is “un

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64 This echoes Serres desire to weave together the humanities, natural sciences and social sciences.
opérateur différentiel de changement [qui] excite l’état du système" [the parasite is a differential operator of change that excites the state of the system] (263). Serres contends that the presence of the parasite forces the system to constantly evolve as it continually perturbs the desired stasis of any system and any established community. By experiencing a perturbation and subsequently integrating it, a system can pass from a simple to a more complex stage. In a way then, the parasite makes the system mobile by setting it into motion again, and again, since the minute a parasite arrives at the top of the chain, it is soon removed by another, competing nuisance.

If we return to the opening scene of the micro-city, to that radio in Juliette’s apartment over which Robert and his friend are hunched, we begin to understand the role that noise, and particularly interrupted and received messages, will play in the rest of Godard’s film. Robert and his friend’s job, their passion, is to listen and intercept messages sent from President Johnson to, most likely, American allies detailing his efforts to dissuade Japanese leaders before the events of Hiroshima. This opening scene equally draws our attention to the role of messages, sent and received – begging the important questions of who is sending messages, to whom they are being sent, and what information they contain. The whole time that Robert and Roger are listening, far from being rested and relaxed, they are manipulating the dials in order to change the frequency, but, more importantly, to lower the interference. After a few successful recorded messages, Robert fails to hear any more messages: “O merde, j’entends plus rien” [Oh shit! I can’t hear anything else!], he exclaims as he throws down his cigarette. Soon, however, with a few soft touches to various dials, Robert is able to find the correct frequency and continue his recordings; he is able to regain control of the messages.

In an optimally efficient system, all messages would be received as they are sent. Perfectly planned cities would run perfectly; there would be no interference. Serres reminds us,
however, that for a message to be received without alteration, the sender and the receiver would have to be the same entity. Such a totalized world in which all actors are tied into the same network, receiving the same impulses is a harrowing thought. Juliette, marked by her indifferent stance on her own agency within the city, seems to be receiving the same message the city is sending. Her dazed tone and frank responses to Godard’s inaudible questions would suggest that she does not care. Yet, underneath this glaring indifference, she is still able to delve into larger philosophical and existential questions about the pursuit of happiness in the modern metropolis. In other words, despite her apparent assimilation into the new consumer society, she finds ways to disturb the peace. On the one hand, through Juliette’s random treatises and Godard’s cinematic techniques, spectators are able to understand the city’s penchant for control and create a coherent image. On the other, spectators are introduced to the multiplicity of objects (human and nonhuman) that specifically are born by messages that are altered, misinterpreted or lost to noise: “[L]e bruit, Serres explains, suscite un système nouveau, un ordre plus complexe que la simple chaîne” [The sound brings about a new system, an order that is more complex than the simple chain]. This new, more complex system, initiated before the first image of Godard’s film, is the city of Paris.

Paris is full of noise and is produced and reproduced endlessly through the parasitical system. Godard’s filmic city, like any parasitic system, “marche parce que ça ne marche pas” [works because it doesn’t] (Serres 22). It is at the meeting of the system and its “failures” or “blemishes” that interesting and productive (r)evolutions are made possible. By highlighting these interruptions in the built environment and in the film, Godard implies that it is only through the presence of disorder and its (broken) communication with the “functioning” system that it can evolve. The diverse noises that invade the screen from outside compete with the images for
position. Noise is a productive rupture in the one-to-one message sent by various subjects. For Michel Serres, between two things, there is always a third other. Godard is spatially and metaphorically demonstrating the same thing. Between Paris and outside there is the périphérique. Between frames there is a productive blank. Between the film and the spectator there is noise. Of course, Serres is keen to point out that noise “parle tout le temps, ça fait sans cesse bruit à la porte pendant que nous sommes en train de faire quelque chose, ça ne cesse de gratter dans le grenier pendant notre sommeil, on se lève, on y va voir, il n’y a rien, on se recouche et ça recommence” [is always talking, always making noise at the door while we are doing something; it never stops scratching in the attic during our sleep. We get up, look; there is nothing there. We go back to bed and it starts up again] (78). The incessant invisible presence of the parasite constantly bothers the host. The minute this momentarily present parasite, this third other, is spotted and considered as a visible subject it is no longer there. The system is thus composed of more than two but never quite fully three beings; rather two or three.65

The parasite—the third “thing”—structures the system, yet hovers on the threshold and in the shadows, not necessarily outside of the frame, but on the borders and edges of the frames. As Hunter Vaughan observes in his excellent reading of Godard’s film, frequently in the film, Juliette and the narrator allude to objects in the room that are located outside of the frame, guarded from the viewer’s vision, “an incongruence that draws direct attention to the frame itself” (141). That which is invisible to us, the noise emanating from the city and other “objets morts” [inanimate objects] is still stealing Juliette’s attention, altering her form of speech and changing the message she is sending. According to Godard’s narration, “Il y a de plus en plus d’interférence de l’image et du langage” [there is an increasing infraction between image and language] in the modern metropolis. It is for this reason that Godard claims that living in French

65 Serres would term this “fuzzy”. See page 59 of Le Parasite for a discussion on fuzziness.
society, “c’est quasiment vivre dans une énorme bande dessinée” [its is almost like living in an enormous comic strip]. This reference to the bande dessinée is important since it evokes the idea of gaps and limits of framing. In contrast to the moving pictures, whose images pass by too quickly for the various frames to be recorded and perceived by the human eye, the bande-dessinée draws attention to these gaps between each image. Godard’s reference to the popular genre thus reinforces the role that the reader of any text plays in the construction of an image. Comics, by their nature rely on the reader to participate in the narrative development by showing the out-of-field blank spots that separate the image and indicate unmediated and unrecorded spatio-temporal changes. In the cinema, the term diegesis implies that the camera inhabits a specific world outside of which is the non-diegetic space. Godard forces his spectators to approach his film as if they were reading a BD leading them outside of the frame, to consider the fusion of non-diegetic and diegetic space. He asks spectators to consider the limits of all acts of framing. What lies on the other side of a border, outside of vision, in film and in the built environment, in his reel and real Paris? Elle, the city of Pairs, is more than what can be found within its physical limits – there exists a host of bodies outside, in these administrative grey zones on the rise – that equally participate in the construction and conceptualization of the nation’s capital.

We do not see, but feel and sense the city not in the destruction through construction of buildings and infrastructure, but in the noise of unarticulated and diverging utterances, whispering narration and hammered concrete; the silence of workers painting bridges against the shock of automobiles and their high pitched claxons; the narrator’s rhetorical questions and subjects’ question-less answers. More than a decade before Serres published his observations on the parasite, Godard posits that the same possibility found on the waterways and canal systems
navigated by the Atalante can be found in the parasitical play of noise in the built environment. For Serres, there is order because there is disorder. Just as our world begins from disorder and relies on chaos in order to continually evolve so, it would appear, the city constantly evolves through broken messages and productive noise, according to Godard.

The narrator explains that this urban project that presses on every frame – its brand new polished, yet dull and lifeless suburbs – “accentue les distensions […] de la morale quotidienne” [undermines the moral fiber] of the city and its inhabitants. Godard uses his camera to interrogate and understand this city and the cités that surround it. What he uncovers is the potential of the parasite, the usefulness of noise, and the importance of destroying the reconstructed anew. While the city offers one form of urban project through construction, Godard offers the reverse and brings us back to ground zero. In his last filmic commentary, Godard explains “J’ai tout oublié sauf que, puisqu’on me ramène à zéro, c’est de là qu’il faudra partir.” [I’ve forgotten it all, except that since it takes me back to zero, I have to start over from there]. According to Floyd Merril we must accept the idea of the border as a zero, as emptiness, as the “fountain of nothingness from which all that is arises” (342). It is in this way, then, that Godard aims to create the possibility of “une vraie cité nouvelle” [true new projects] that does not resemble a representable city found on the posters on the walls of Juliette’s home and M. Gérard’s daycare/bordello, but something different, something that can only be captured by cinema. He looks for and discovers a city that lives between the walls and outside of the frames, whose existence depends on the third other: noise. This noise can be a fissure between sound and image, between city and spectator, between something that is always present but never a part of the film’s diegesis.
3.3 Phantom Limb Syndrome and Parisian *Beur* Borders in Mathieu Kassovitz’s *La Haine* (1995)

In *Deux ou trois choses*, Godard captured Juliette’s indifference and begged viewers not only to face their newly commodified positions in the metropolis, but also, and more importantly, disrupt urban planners’ projects (in both senses of the terms). The clean interiors, easy white women, and unabashed consumerism of the new “blue and white” façade of the housing projects hid a hypnotic process of urbanization that subliminally controlled the movements of Juliette and other spatially marginalized citizens. Godard’s desire to prepare the cinematic ground for the development of “true new projects” had, by the 1990s failed. The hidden spatial injustices of these *banlieues* against which he quietly lamented soon became very apparent when rioting erupted in the Cité des Mugets in Chanteloup-les-Vignes, pitting the youth of postcolonial offspring against a trigger-happy police force.  

In his article on marginality and exclusion in French cinema, Joe Hardwick contends that at the beginning of the 1990s a “decentralization of the French cinematic gaze … saw the focus shift from bourgeois inner Paris to the banlieue and provincial regions” (219). After our analysis of Godard’s *Deux ou trois choses*, such a claim is clearly overstated, however it does call attention to an important shift to what later became known as *le jeune cinéma* and *le cinéma de banlieue*. I now turn to Mathieu Kassovitz’s *La Haine* (1995), which is considered by most to be a precursor if not the founding text of these cinematic movements.

Concentrating on what I am terming “*beur* residue” within the nation’s capital – represented through the figure Saïd (Saïd Tagmahouï), one of the films borderland protagonists – I will demonstrate how he and his friends are another form of mobile border. I seek to show how

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66 Bruno Levasseur has correctly pointed out that the *banlieues* are not as bad as media and literature have portrayed them. See “De-essentializing the Banlieues, Reframing the nation: documentary cinema in France in the late 1990s” *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* (6:2) 2008, pp 97-109.
through this *beur* residue, the simultaneously divisive and inclusive character of the Mediterranean Sea can be spatially and metaphorically represented in cinematic images of the fluctuating and ever evolving Parisian cityscape. Not only does this Parisian *beur* border suggest the geographic separation of France from Algeria, it is also the phantom presence of an amputated artificial limb. It is a constant reminder of France’s colonial past, causing pain and anxiety to those inhabitants that promote its universalist politics of identity. After a brief discussion on phantom limbs and parasites, I will discuss the Parisian borders on which Kassovitz centers his film, before considering certain symptoms of the phantom limb in the French city that are manifested through the *beur* individual. As we will see through this brief reading, Kassovitz suggests that these ghosts in the machine, that is, the film’s central characters, become post-colonial itches that cannot be scratched.

Dating back to the sixteenth century, when the French military surgeon Ambroise Paré penned the first documented observation of the phenomenon, phantom limb syndrome is now well-known and accepted in the medical field: all amputees experience some form of sensation in the limb, painful or not, after it has been removed. All corporeal beings, individual and collective, create a “body image,” an internal construct of a unitary corporeal self that endures in space and time. This body image provides the substrate for the feeling of “residual” experiences when a body part goes missing – which science has termed the “phantom” phenomenon. When Algeria forcefully removed itself from France, it left what could be considered “residue” across France – particularly in Paris and other large metropolitan areas – which testifies to the existence of this phantom body, Algeria. Although the second and third

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67 Just as above, I refer to the characters described in this section as mobile limits since they inhabit the geo-political borders of Paris and move in and around the city.
68 Although these are generally accepted views, this article from the British Journal of Anesthesia explains the process in more detail: “Phantom limb pain,” by L Nikolajsen and T.S. Jensen.
generations of French Algerians, commonly referred to as “beur,” are considered *de jure* French, they experience a different *de facto* reality as Arab “residuals.”

Through this concept of residual bodies I will show how these loitering post-colonial mobile limits not only offer a new perspective on French urban space, but also continually alter the system by interjecting disorder into the ordered system.\(^{69}\) In a way, then, this is an extension of the previous mobile limit we analyzed: Juliette Janson and the community of objects constantly interrupted Godard’s narrative and the city of Paris. The use of the terms “residue” and “residual,” is fitting since they are a direct, and “innocent” byproduct of – or bystander in – any form of amputation, corporeal or spatial, real or imaginary. Despite being ironically produced by the system, these residual bodies float around the city like foreign cells, and must thus constantly avoid the antibodies sent by the host to deter their entrance and eradicate this threat. When this metaphor is applied to Paris, these antibodies are sent in the form of police, media and other arms of the state that seek to control and compartmentalize these individuals that, according to this discourse, must be feared and eradicated in order to protect the identity of the city and of France.

*La Haine* takes a look at a diverse group of young people trapped in the Parisian economic and social underclass. Vinz (Vincent Cassel), Saïd, and Hubert (Hubert Koundé) are socially inexperienced and mentally immature men from the lower rungs of the French economic ladder residing in the city’s *banlieue*; they have no jobs, few prospects and no productive way to spend their time. This *black blanc beur* trio represents what Ginette Vincendeau aptly terms, “a generation adrift” (2005; 7). The plot, which spans only 24 hours, hinges on a policeman’s gun that was lost in the previous night’s riots—the response to the brutal police beating two days

\(^{69}\) Much like Serres’ approach to the concept of the parasite, I hope to offer a productive characterization to a generally unflattering and possibly derogatory term.
earlier of a young *beur* individual, Abdel, who is in critical condition. We soon learn that it is Vinz, the hothead of the group, who found the gun and his intention is to kill a cop as a means of revenge if his friend dies. Denied access to see Abdel in the hospital, the trio moves into the city to kill time, but is rejected by everyone and kicked out of everywhere. After learning through the muted television screens in the metro station that Abdel has died, the trio captures a skinhead. Despite Hubert’s constant reiteration that “un bon skin, c’est un skin mort” [*the only good skinhead is a dead skinhead*], Vinz fails to enact revenge as he lets the bigot (played by Kassovitz) go. Upon their return to the suburbs, Vinz is accidentally shot and killed by a plain-clothes cop. The film ends with a close-up of Saïd, who observes with horror the final standoff between Hubert and the unlucky cop and shuts his eyes in fear of what is about to take place. The screen goes black as gunshots are heard and the non-diegetic narration of Hubert concludes “c’est l’histoire d’une société qui tombe […] l’important c’est pas la chute; c’est l’atterrissage. *This is the story of a society that falls […] it’s not the fall that counts; it’s the landing.*”

**Prosthetic limbs or pesky parasites?**

*La Haine* shocked French and international audiences alike by making visible a major sociological and political problem in Paris and other major metropolitan areas: the failure of low-income housing projects. The large-scale collective housing estates that were the quintessential product of post-war urban development soon housed the rapidly growing population of French immigrants and their families who served as the quick fixes for the demand created by an economic boom during the *Trente Glorieuses*. Edward Soja sees the “cleansing” of the working class from the Parisian urban core that took place during this period to be on par with Haussmann’s strategic reorganization of space. Whereas Haussmann sought the efficiency of

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*This is actually the same phrase uttered by Hubert at the beginning of the film, only “society” has replaced “man.”*
movement and spatial systems of control, post-war Paris was paving the way for a growing middle class and global tourism (Soja 2010: 33). Drawn to the city for its promise of financial security for their family, these economic prosthetic limbs were unofficially required to settle just outside of the main attraction. In other words they were permitted to work for and possibly within the city, but urged to find lodging elsewhere. When the economic prosperity that drew them and required their assistance came to a standstill during the two financial crises of the 1970s, these momentary crutches were depicted in media and political discourses as nuisances to the society. As a result of economic changes, these postcolonial prosthetic limbs and their offspring were no longer necessary for the French system. I call these members of the French society “prosthetic limbs” since they were used to replace a missing chunk of the French national body. This collection of “foreign” main-d’oeuvre that helped get France back on its feet, so to speak, shifted in the public eye from being a helpful prosthetic to being a pesky parasite and painful reminder of France’s colonial past. As French citizens with valid identification, the offspring of these crutches were still allowed to remain in France, but chose to do so among an increasing political and mediated discourse that sought their dismissal. Trying to push these now-parasitical French citizens out of the city’s walls, city officials neglected the most important part of the parasitical chain according to Serres: “le parasite est toujours là; il est inévitable” [the parasite is always there; it is inevitable] (85). Banishing one parasite only delays the “inevitable” and the system will soon be disturbed by another. In what follows, I will show that the border has many shades and representatives as these offspring of formerly parasited bodies make their mobile presence known, in turn disrupting and fighting for position in the parasitical chain of relations; the stripped colonial limb can still be felt knocking at the door, moving through the streets of the métropole and loitering in the banlieues.
Establishing the border

Through Godard’s camera, we considered various forms of mobility in the physical limits of Paris in the late 1960s. Although Juliette lived in the city, thanks to her automobile and the continued construction of new roads, she speedily and effortlessly crossed into Paris in order to meet her Johns and purchase her designer clothing. This is ironic since the construction of the boulevard périphérique in the real city, captured in practically every other scene, created a clear division between periphery and city. Although spatially marginalized by the city’s modernization projects, she was nevertheless capable of entering and exiting the city as she pleased.

Conversely, while Kassovitz’s film never once shows this wall of cars, the administrative border that separates city from cité is much more clear, and the commute much more congested. Although he does not show the boulevard périphérique, Kassovitz consistently locates the banlieue as a separate entity, detached from the capital. In the film’s générique, after the names of three main actors are presented on a black background, documentary video from the 1995 riots in the Cité des Mugets flickers on the screen to the sound of Bob Marley’s “Burnin’ and Lootin.” While the names of the actors performing the protagonists are presented to the spectator against a black void (figure 25), with no indication whatsoever of space, the supporting cast is listed among the documentary images of demonstrations and police brutality suggesting that they are stuck well within the walls of this city and its history of struggle (figure 26). More importantly, in these introductory images, spatiality takes precedence over temporality. In lieu of listing the supporting cast in chronological order of appearance, Kassovitz chooses to divide them spatially, arranging actors into three specific factions: “La Cité,” “Paris” and “La Police” respectively. Each actor, aside from the three main characters, belongs to a specific clan and does

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71 When the trio enters the city, they must take a packed RER. Moreover, the difficulty of their commute is made shockingly evident when an extended scene of police brutality causes Hubert and Saïd to miss the last train home for the night.
not mix well – in fact at all – with others despite the fact that they are all participating in the
violent images that are presented to the spectator. In other words, with the exception of our
protagonists, all characters are restricted to one group, and one location. Paris, its police force
and its peripheries in Kassovitz’s depiction are defined by separation.

Kassovitz’s subtle allusion to the division along spatial and political lines is emphasized
by a somewhat less subtle division of the narrative’s location. The first fifty minutes of the film
are located in the suburbs, while the rest of the film, except for its climactic ending, is shot in
Paris. In fact, Kassovitz originally considered filming the banlieue in 16mm and Paris in 35mm,
but eventually rejected the idea. Geographically, the narrative separation of the banlieue from the
city is correct, since it is located outside of the physical limits of Paris. At the same time, it is
politically and socially flawed, as Ginette Vincendeau accurately observes: “what first began as a
rural escape located outside of the city’s limits, the banlieue soon became a depot for its
unwanted citizens, mainly immigrants and their families” (2000; 314). Massive building
programs were launched following WWII to house these rejected citizens in the grands
ensembles (which contained 3000 to 12000 families at a time). In a strikingly similar relation
between Paris and the administratively controlled colonial lands, these banlieue – lieue being “an
indefinite extent of territory” in Medieval Latin—fell under the legal jurisdiction (ban) of the
city. Kassovitz, like Godard, thus centers his film on a specific geographical zone that is both a
part of and apart from the city of Paris, outside of the real borders, but inside certain
jurisdictional borders. For Jean-Louis Cohen, “c’est aux limites où l’histoire des villes se
grave” [a city’s history is forged on it limits] (11). If we take this to be true, then Kassovitz is
trying to present a certain history that is in the process of being written on this limit.

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72 Edward Soja adds that the “bann” was any form of boundary marker of urban civilization (Soja 2010; 33-34).
When *La Haine* was released, a tidal wave of unrest swept through these administrative nodes, a physical uproar against police and government officials that threatened the *banlieue*’s built environment and menaced the Republic as a whole. The specter of the French-Algerian conflict made its presence known on native French soil. Whether the violence came at the heads of police, local militia, “skins” [*skinheads*], or foreigners, the media was quick to mention the participation and threat of “immigrants” from North Africa. As Alec Hargreaves observes in his research on French immigration, even though the demographics of French immigration have shifted from the *beur* to immigrants from other nations and backgrounds, the collective memory of the violent Algerian war of independence has insured that immigrants from the Maghreb have remained the main target of hostility. The problem with this flawed perception of the *beur*, and the immigrants in general, is directly linked to French Republican universalism. According to the Jacobin notion of citizenship dating back to the French Revolution, anyone born on French soil is a French citizen, regardless of religion, race, or ethnicity. However, the reality is that these French citizens are still considered outsiders. Much like the precarious position of the *banlieue*, the *beur* citizen is both within the republic, as a legal French citizen, and paradoxically outside of the imaginary cultural borders due to his or her racial, cultural and ethnic “differences.” Kassovitz chooses to center his narrative on these two perceived threats to the nation, one geographical, the other corporeal, that occupy geo-political grey areas.

**Ghosts in the urban machine**

Given the ambiguous position of the French *banlieue* and the immigrant, Kassovitz’s portrayal of the *beur* immigrants can be seen as manifesting the symptoms of phantom limb

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73 This is discussed in detail in *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction: Voices From the North African Immigrant Community in France*. 
syndrome within the Parisian landscape. In the opening scenes, a television reporter explains that Abdel, a young beur was brutally beaten by police. He is the post-colonial subject on whose body, literally, the history of colonial violence has been rewritten, and his image is the source of the current state of disarray in the banlieue. What is peculiar is the fact that his physical body is absent from the entire film. Despite the fact that the three attempt to visit him in the hospital, they, and the spectator, are refused access to his corporeal presence. It is most likely not by accident that Kassovitz offers only a picture of Abdel, since a picture is the representation of an absent presence, the reproduction of something or someone that was once there, but no longer is (figure 27). Abdel’s photographic reminder of violence inflicted on the colonial subject is reinforced by the cinematic presence and non-violent stance of Saïd, the trio’s beur member. Amid the rioting in his hometown and the deadly beating of his friend, Saïd still preaches peaceful fusion over violent separation. When his friends are prepared to fight, it is always Saïd who steps in to appease them. When Vinz questions Saïd’s cordial behavior towards one of the cops, Saïd plainly explains “Vas-y, tire-lui une balle, quoi, si tu veux. Moi, je lui serre la main” [You can shoot him if you want. Me, I'll shake his hand] (figure 28). Emphasized through the lack of violence on the part of the beur individual presented to the spectator, Abdel’s ghost-like aura haunts the film. Much like the tarnished colonial past that is continually sensed by the nation’s self-image, Abdel’s photograph circulates throughout the film on TV screens in their friend’s apartment, in the Parisian metro and elsewhere. From his hospital bed, and eventually from the deathbed, Abdel manages to slip into the homes of all the French citizens. Kassovitz highlights this phantom presence by infusing his protagonists with the ghost-like ability to float through walls. In a city as ordered as Paris, one would expect to see real borders, barriers and gates throughout the film. However, Kassovitz deliberately moves these
moments of entry and exit off screen. The protagonists are kicked out of a gallery opening, but the spectator never sees them enter, or exit. Vinz, after running from the cops in Paris, suddenly appears in a movie theater, yet we never see him sneak in or out. Whenever we join them, they are already at their destination. However, as cultural misfits, and specters of France’s dark colonial and anti-Semitic past, they are soon removed from sight. In other words, once their presence is felt, observed and recorded, these revenants must be exorcised. At the gallery opening, all is well until one bourgeois observes their presence. As he walks around the room, analyzing the gallery’s modern art, he eyes the group, paying particular attention to Vinz (figure 29). Framed against the white wall, Vinz resembles the rest of the art in this establishment. However, for these bourgeois, Vinz is no piece of art, and he is reminded of this when the gallerist condescendingly explains to him that he is blocking valuable objects of cultural capital. Immediately after his lack of artistic value is spotted by the gallerist – the minute the intruder is spotted – the whole chain falls apart; Saïd and Hubert begin to argue with the women they attempted to “drague” [hit on] and they soon find themselves haunting the streets of Paris once again, expelled from the gallery just as Céline’s Ferdinand was expelled from the American fast-food restaurant. Thus, not only do these mobile limits represent the phantom presence of a rejected past; for these bourgeois gallery goers, the physical presence of the trio is a nuisance to French society. Much like those sensations of phantom limb syndrome experienced by amputees, the undesired presence of these perceived social and cultural nuisances is clearly felt. As legal French citizens, they have a right to be in the city, they are free to appreciate “cultured” artistic production (even if their feigned appreciation is exhibited mockingly). But, as unproductive, unemployed immigrants, they offer nothing to the capitalist system, and are constantly shooed
from private and corporate establishments. Their situation is marked by exclusion, as their “place” in French society is nowhere in particular, but especially not here.

This exclusion from every structure in the city establishes them as pure wanderers, or loiterers. According to Ross Chambers, the loiterer is a marginal figure to the extent that, “social centrality is defined in terms of stability, permanence and closure [... ] Thus, he [sic] is always on the cusp of a dominant social context and its other, always on the periphery of things” (57). As loiterers, their borderland position is heightened since they are “always on the periphery of things,” always between different contexts. Just like the geographical location of their home, these loitering limits are both inside and outside, and cannot accurately be discussed in terms of inclusion or exclusion. For Joe Hardwick, “the loiterer recognizes that no context is the whole context, and that changing contexts often entails generic shift.” He continues to explain that these loiterers have a special relation to alterity, since “wandering facilitates encounters with situations which have the power […] to change the subject, an idea relevant not only in terms of questions of identity, but also in relation to narrative and genre” (220). Idleness, however, is not a bourgeois choice for these three. They are not simply leaving work to waste time. This trio loiters in the streets, in the cité and the gallery because they have nowhere else to be. As representatives of a phantom limb, their presence and link to bourgeois, mainstream French society, has been declared unwelcome and unwanted.

This is painfully true for Saïd, whose phantom presence is reinforced by his lack of family and the absence of a physical home. At the beginning of the film we enter the home of Vinz, and see him playfully debate with his mami about his lack of attendance at synagogue. Later, we enter the home of Hubert and see him well received by his mother and sister. One of the biggest critiques of the film by reviewers and scholars alike is that, while we enter the homes
of Vinz and Hubert, Saïd is seemingly homeless. Carrie Tarr, for instance, believes the film
incorrectly erases Maghrebi culture, while some contend that it avoids signaling the otherness of
the *beur* culture (*figures 30a, 30b, 30c*). Nevertheless both sides agree, that through this move,
Saïd is denied one layer of depth granted to the others. I contend that Kassovitz does this
deliberately in order to call attention to the phantom presence of Saïd. With seemingly no family,
Saïd resembles a *sans-abri*, a person without shelter. He has no history, no ties to the old world,
and no link to his nation – but which nation? His parent’s homeland or his native France? Like
Abdel, he is a ghost in the urban machine.

**An itch that can’t be scratched**

These ghosts are equally visible, sometimes too visible, in the eyes of the French
Republic. Their ability to pass unnoticed through barriers does not last long since their physical
characteristics and social disturbances expose them as viral cells within the French nervous
system, and Saïd is the most visible of the three. His physical characteristics remind the French
Republic of its multicultural background, linked to its colonial past. He threatens French
Republican values most notably because despite his French birth, Saïd does not look like a
French citizen, nor does his name sound French. When he tries to use the credit card stolen by
Hubert to get back to the *banlieue*, the cab driver explains that Saïd does not resemble the name
“David” listed on the credit card. While French Republican values consider him 100 percent
French, he is *visibly* not French. When Hubert and Saïd are arrested for questioning and
submitted to the same treatment that led to Abdel’s death, Saïd, and not Hubert, is labeled by the
officers as the foreign other (*figure 31*). Whatever you do, the policeman explains to the rookie

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74 This is the position of Martin O'Shaughnessy in *The New Face of Political Cinema: Commitment in French Film Since 1995*. See particularly pages 160-174. Yosefa Loshitzky also mentions it in her eye-opening work, *Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema*. 
cop watching, “il faut savoir se calmer” [you can’t go too far] with these beatings. In other words, the gendarmes cannot fully scratch this itch, since it will just be replaced by another sensation. No matter how much they beat Saïd, this phantom will return. Of course, Kassovitz alludes to this in the beginning of the film by immediately substituting the photographic image of Abdel with that of Saïd in a similar setting. One removed beur citizen has been replaced by another, and alludes to the resiliency of the parasite.

Saïd’s physical characteristics menace the false unity of French Republicanism and are compounded by his acts of social and spatial delinquency. It should be noted that his social delinquency is very different from Hubert and Vinz’s perceived derelictions. On the one side, his friend Vinz is a hotheaded poser of sorts, whose regurgitated Hollywood catchphrases (“c’est à moi que tu parles?” [are you talking to me?]), and tough demeanor hide serious insecurities that are most evident when he nervously holds the policeman’s gun for all to see. On the other side, Hubert’s calm demeanor and soft voice mask an explosive temper that got him in trouble in the past and leads to his eminent (invisible yet presumed) demise at the end of the film. Saïd’s behavior is best described as a juste milieu of delinquency. His slight semiotic deconstructions coincide with his minor spatial misdemeanors and social digressions. We see him steal food from a grocery store and nab a credit card from one of the Parisians at the gallery opening. Likewise, his own hands credit him at the beginning of the film as he tags a police paddy wagon. Kassovitz, like the heavy-handed Godard, goes out of his way to show Saïd’s writing on the walls, literally. Through the various spray-painted markings his camera catches in the city proper and in these peripheral zones, Saïd’s presence is felt. His use of graffiti is a political act of delinquency that attempts to appropriate a space for himself and others. When the protagonists are refused admittance to Abdel’s hospital room, Saïd makes a stand: “Je reste, je bouge pas
“d’ici” [I’m staying here, I ain’t budging]. Even though he is quickly removed and jailed as the “chef” of the group, Saïd is trying to carve out a space for himself in and on the built environment, constantly reminding the public that he is French, and he is here to stay.

Once more, Kassovitz seems to reinforce this point by bookending his film with the image of Saïd. He is introduced with his eyes shut (figure 32). In this opening seen, Saïd is either not ready to see what we are about to see, or, conversely, he has already seen too much. The film closes with the exact reverse motion, as Saïd cannot watch what is about to happen to Hubert and his nation. Vision, or lack thereof, thus frames the narrative as a tale told through his eyes: the story we just witnessed is fully a product of the borderland. This mirroring effect in the film also suggests the circularity of the current French politics of looking the other way, of ignoring its colonial past, and of seeing but not fully grasping the negative effects of postcolonial politics and spatial injustices imposed on these relatively new French citizens. It is a reminder of France’s responsibility to the postcolonial residue still floating around the national body and suggests that France must come to terms with its phantom limb syndrome materialized by Saïd and his semblables, other beur and mobile borders that are forced to live in the city’s peripheries. Saïd, the only member of the trio left at the end, refuses to watch the death of his friend Hubert, shuts his eyes and ultimately fails to document the death of Hubert. In this final scenes, as one postcolonial subject, Hubert, and a representative of the French state prepare to continue the cycle of violence that started the narrative and is at the base of France’s desire to forget its colonial past, Saïd finds himself wedged in-between (figure 33). The scene frames Hubert on the left with gun cocked in the direction of the plainclothes cop, whose gun is pointed back at Hubert. Caught on the other side of the undercover patrol car and behind raised guns, Saïd’s reaction of fear and pain already confirms that the worst is about to happen. In this instance, he
has become an example of Debray’s notion, discussed in the introduction of this study, of the “border-humans,” unexpectedly and unwillingly caught between the violent clash of two nations and cultures whose testimony cannot be ignored.

3.4 Conclusion

Saïd’s peripheral position in the narrative structure of the cinematic text and central position in the final frame mark him as what Serres has aptly called the “tiers exlus” [excluded third] in reference to his concept of the parasite. For the French philosopher this excluded third is part of the system that remains external to it. The parasite’s power is attached its ability to be on the one hand physically or discursively liminal, yet, on the other, still able to rewrite systems of information by introducing disorganization. Both Godard and Kassovitz center the films on the spatial and political parasites of Paris’s peripheries. Like Serres, they focus on the “outside” of Parisian space, an outside that, as Maria Assad observes, becomes logically an “excluded middle.” The members of the Parisian periphery are French citizens but do not possess what Henri Lefebvre would call “urban citizenship” since they have no political ties to the system; they do not have a “right to the city.” Despite the triangular relationship implied by this “excluded third,” when it enters into the system, it becomes a border, real and imagined, occupying a space in-between the ordered “bipartisan arrangements.” “Le parasitisme,” Serres reiterates, “n’est qu’un bruit linéaire” [parasitism is only a linear noise] (73). The presence of the parasite establishes a binary opposition between which it acts as the focal point. In other words, this tiers exclu – this para-site75 agent of change – this “excluded middle” is at the center of the cinematic gaze in both of these films. Located at the center of the text, in the middle of the frame, these characters invite us to see the new urban system created by their intrusion.

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75 Serres deconstructed the term to demonstrate how the concept can move across (para) spaces (sites) unnoticed.
Chapter 4: The Gaps of the City, the Edges of Medium: 
Navigating the Horizon of New Terrain in Urban Space

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I move from the ‘reel’ administrative limits of Paris to ‘imaginary’ cities through an analysis of a novel that creates a universal “Everytown for humanity” of the late 1950s (Calle-Gruber 30), and a film that constructs a visually stunning imagined Parisian built environment of a futuristic 2050s Paris. I will demonstrate the ways in which author Michel Butor and director Christian Volckman respectively have interrogated the limits of their own medium through the urban experience and perambulations of two very different detectives. Both narratives explore the concept of the “in-between” in the personality and character of the protagonists, and the physical environment of each urban space. In so doing, they locate possible directions for the novel and cinema. To begin this analysis, I will first analyze Butor’s novel, *L’Emploi du temps* (1956) which, through the guise of a *journal intime*, attempts to chronicle a Frenchman’s yearlong stay in the city of Bleston, England. Considered a member of the heterogeneous group of the *Nouveau Roman*, Michel Butor had a clear stance on the novel and its future – one that I will demonstrate is intricately linked to the urban experience. I will then turn to Christian Volckman’s *Renaissance* (2005), a motion-capture noir thriller that follows a detective through the streets of a futuristic Paris in search of the protocol for immortality. I demonstrate that while Volckman is not as overtly theoretical as Butor, *Renaissance* and the physical position of its protagonist in the built environment and social structure offer a real and metaphorical reflection upon the future of cinema, specifically through considering the possibilities of a posthuman cinema.
In the previous three chapters, we have seen how mobility, particularly along borderland spaces, is a concept that looms large in both French literature and cinema in the twentieth century for certain practitioners and theorists. This chapter extends my examination of borderland movement from the specific characters to the genres in which those borderland characters are found. Both of the narratives studied in this chapter follow rather unconventional detectives who seem to be moving against the impulses and directives of the city, physically passing along the edges of urban space and temporally moving against the linear paths of time and of narration. In both sections I will analyze these various forms of (im)mobility and once again ask who or what is moving through the city and setting everything into motion. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, I will demonstrate how each text uses borderland movement and the momentary or fleeting physical settlement on in-between spaces and structures, as a means of calling attention to the productive zones in which their own medium can not only survive, but may indeed flourish. Stated differently, through the figure of the postmodern detective\(^76\), in quest of exposing some truth, unveiling some dark secret, and catching an elusive killer – one that may or may not exist, one that may or may not be human – Volckman and Butor are themselves in search of pushing the techniques of their own artistic medium, or, more fittingly for this study, their artistic vehicles. As we will see in what follows, by jumping into the heart of the city through its limits, both author and director are able to push the limits of their own art, offering a possible future for their respective mediums.

Since each work is a depiction of an imaginary metropolis, they both do not officially exist, at least not yet. These virtual images of urban space can thus serve as a screen onto which their creators can project whatever images they want. In no way am I suggesting that these two

\(^{76}\) This term will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. I borrow it from Richard Swope who conceptualizes it in: “Science Fiction Cinema and the Crime of Social-Spatial Reality.”
imaginary, virtual cities are similar. In fact, on the contrary, the essence of one is almost the antithesis of the other. Butor speaks of the dark, grimy industrial city of Bleston. Inspired by Manchester, England, Butor’s city is full of walls of smoke and shadows that continually restrict any understanding of it. In contrast to this English industrial city, Volckman presents a pristine Paris of glass and mirrors, one where tourists walk along transparent Plexiglas on their way to the capital’s stereotypical monuments. The chiaroscuro that separates these two cities – this play on light and dark, visibility and opacity – underlines the temporal and geographical divide between these two settings, and only serves to further widen the gap.

Up to this point, I have used movement, and particularly movement along border spaces, to represent some larger idea about either the depicted city, or some critical concept. In chapter two, my concentration on movement along borderlands was designed to demonstrate how this movement reflected the surrealist ideal. In chapter three, the mobile limits of the nation’s capital and its administrative borders found themselves in a loop of (im)mobility. Godard and Kassovitz were still able to highlight the productive parasitical relationships between mobile limits, their limits of mobility, and an urban space that relied on and felt their ambiguous presence. In this final chapter, I hope to move away from specific schools of thought, intellectual movements and certain theoretical concepts, turning instead to the very real surfaces and structures in and on which these fictional characters move: literature and cinema.

In the microcosm of this final chapter, I wish to demonstrate how I picture this project to be understood as a whole. As this chapter seeks to show, the theoretical concept and very spatial presence of the border in these texts – and in all the texts I have analyzed in this project – can serve as a bridge between narrative genres, artistic camps and geographically separated urban spaces. Both urban spaces analyzed in this chapter are controlled completely by some all-too-
present but invisible technocratic machine. How the protagonists approach these ordered cities is completely different, but, at the same time, the depictions of the real and imaginary limits of the virtual city space on the one hand, and the limits of the medium itself, on the other, open up new spaces within the knowable and un-knowable cityscape that paints new lines of flight for the novel and the cinema.

4.2 The Exposed City: Developing Urban Space in Butor’s *L’Emploi du temps*

In Michel Butor’s fourth novel, the protagonist-narrator Jacques Revel finds himself stuck in the English “town” of Bleston on a yearlong work exchange as a translator for a legal firm, Mathews and Son. In May, seven months into his stay, he decides to chronicle the events he has witnessed since his arrival in October of the previous year as a means of “resistance” against the dreary city. As he begins to tell his tale, he describes the city of Bleston in one of the book’s shortest paragraphs. Looking to the South he observes the built environment that lies between him and his native country: “A l’horizon plat, de chaque côté, se dressaient de hautes cheminées inactives” [On the flat horizon, on either side, tall chimneys stood idle] (44). This single-sentence paragraph speaks volumes about Butor’s text, the function of the author and the future of the novel during France’s *Trente Glorieuses*. These two chimneys, metaphorical bastions of industry indicate the closed space within which Revel finds himself. His “home” (France) lies just beyond this horizon, yet all he can see is a barren wasteland caught between the ominous towers of industrialization. Initially a flat wasteland caught between these two steadfast funnels, Bleston will grow into a vast metropolis through Revel’s penmanship. An entire skyline with two cathedrals, two train stations, three “Asian” restaurants, twelve *arrondissements* and the

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77 Many, including Butor himself, claim that Bleston is based on Manchester. This “town” is clearly a city, with an intricate public transit system, cultural activities and a high density population.
collection of drab, banal and sooty cultural buildings—typical by-products of every industrial city—will emerge through the text, and grow out of this initially perceived wasteland. Framed in this way, the two immobile smokestacks equally signify his arrival in and departure from Bleston as his year-long contract binds him to this city, metaphorically enclosing him between these pillars. The purely literary construction that Bleston represents, then, suggests that these pillars can equally be read as the two bookends of a novel; specifically Revel’s *journal intime* – which he writes in order to pass the time until he can return home. On its flat, constricted pages, he creates the mobile, undulating topography of urban space.

This section joins a long line of scholarship that analyzes the labyrinthine trek of Revel through the city. While I will rely on the astute observations of these and additional critical perspectives, I intend to move beyond the apocalyptic, religious and anti-representational readings to a detailed analysis of Revel’s precarious mobile position as an in-between observer and chronicler. I will demonstrate how Revel and the narrative are located find breathing room on physical and invisible gaps, respectively, found within the city of Bleston; spaces that reflect Butor and other New Novelists’ perceived critical juncture for the novel. After a brief discussion of the Nouveau Roman and Butor’s relation to this “school” of thought, I will describe some of the various gaps that Revel occupies, before analyzing how experiencing the city, how *writing* the city – and writing in general – are most effective when approached from both the city’s and the novel’s limits, edges and gaps.

During the 1950s, while the modern novel was being criticized and on the verge of a new era, momentarily passing through the era of suspicion on its way to a new glory, the global urban environment, especially in France, was on the verge of a new prosperity. The post-war economic

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78 See for example, Wendy B. Faris, *Labyrinths of Language: Symbolic Landscape and Narrative Design in Modern Fiction*. Faris pays particular attention to Revel’s zigzag movement through the city and how this movement leads to certain forms of knowledge.
boom under the Marshall plan resulted in an explosion of activity in urban space. In the previous section we saw how this economic prosperity generated by transnational capitalism forced citizens and workers outside of the city’s official limits into the HLMs. Thus, with economic progress came industries and polluted air, social inequalities and invisible hands.\textsuperscript{79} L’\textit{Emploi du Temps} highlights and exaggerates a European reality in which the city was becoming a phantasmatic location of progress. Progress, but progress of what and of whom, and at whose expense? The new urban environment – like the new novel – had become grounds for an endless, potentially meaningless, battle between the center and the periphery, the old and the new.

\textbf{New novel/\textit{L’Emploi du temps}}

Sparked by his reading of J.C. Hamilton’s crime fiction, \textit{Le Meurtre de Bleston}, Jacques Revel decides to document his time in the town of Bleston, England, as a means of finding himself on the one hand and exposing the evils of Bleston (and by implication, all modern industrial cities) on the other.\textsuperscript{80} Wallowing during the day in the monotony of his job as a translator and, at night, wandering the dark streets marked by “immense épaisseur confuse” [\textit{thick fog}] (170) and “ennui insupportable” [\textit{unbearable boredom}] (121), Revel slowly gets closer and closer to understanding this “town” just as his narrative begins to catch up with the present tense of writing. However, what begins as a rather straightforward, linear chronicle of his own emploi du temps in England, the endeavor soon proves more difficult than he expected. \textit{Le Meurtre de Bleston} was so accurate in its descriptions of the physical environment, that Revel believes there must exist a flesh-and-blood person behind the fictional murder in Hamilton’s

\textsuperscript{79} Not just Adam Smith’s wellknown invisible hand of economics, but other invisible directives, later made visible by philosopher Michel Foucault (See especially \textit{Surveiller et punir})

\textsuperscript{80} The motivation for Revel’s text, and his actual text, \textit{Le meurtre de Bleston} described as a fiction within a fiction, demonstrates the importance of mise en abyme in Butor’s novel and is one way in which Butor and Volckman use the same technique as a means to draw attention to the importance of limits in urban space.
novel. His quest to “expose” the true killer and the evils of Bleston eventually leads him to follow the footsteps of the protagonist of Hamilton’s crime fiction, and subsequently meet and befriend George Burton, the flesh and blood author behind the penname. After inadvertently exposing the identity of Burton to his friends, the Baileys, he cannot help but feel responsible when Burton is hospitalized after an apparent hit and run assassination attempt on Tower Street.

Concentrating his energy on finding Burton’s would-be assassin – whom he believes to be Richard Tenn, friend of his co-worker James Jenkins – while also fighting to capture the essence of Bleston in his daily journal, this detective-narrator-protagonist soon secludes himself in his writing, ignoring love interests from Ann Bailey and her sister Rose. Physically moving throughout the city and between the “Ancienne Cathédrale” [Old Cathedral], where a stained glass window represents Cain’s fratricide of Abel, and the “Nouvelle Cathédrale” [New Cathedral], whose statues of nature disgust the protagonist in Burton’s Meurtre de Bleston, Revel’s attempt to locate the city’s center and its essence becomes more and more difficult as new information about the city is uncovered in his repeated experiences of certain places and his re-reading of his own observations. As both his diary and his time in Bleston comes to an end, Revel finds himself no better off than when he started: in an endless hall of mirrors in which the real and the imaginary have blended together to form a city, an urban space out of which he cannot write himself.

Although associated with the Nouveau Roman authors, Michel Butor is not the most eccentric of the group. In point of fact, Butor was a precursor to the movement itself, who through a series of penetrating essays on the novel, suggested new routes for the future of the

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81 The verb “to expose” is important for this analysis since it has the dual effect of evoking on the one hand, a detective’s desire to bring to light a certain fact hidden by lies, deceptions and the sea of time, discussed here, and on the other, the important process in the “development” of a photographic image – literally shedding light on a real object in order to capture its presence.
novel which will be central to this analysis. For many scholars, Butor occupies an ambiguous position within the *Nouveau Roman* group, having been criticized particularly by Ricardou and Robbe-Grillet for his stubbornly representational concerns (Goulet 36). But *L’Emploi du Temps*, which blurs generic conventions through a “polytechnie des arts” (Caille-Gruber 32), is consistently recognized as a prime example of the *Nouveau Roman*. Confused by a series of repetitions, ongoing revisions and variations, any concrete visions of the city and of Revel are muddied by the city’s various contours and the narrator’s constant narrative and peripatetic detours. Revel’s life is relatively eventless; he goes to work during the day and returns home to write. Occasionally, he heads to the fair with his English co-worker James, strolls through the city with his compatriot Lucien, or bar hops with his black friend Horace. In order to break the monotony of his everyday life in this city – translating legal documents all day before returning to his humble apartment – Revel turns to reading and writing in order to pass the time. Revel’s reflections on literature and his experiences with both reading and writing reproduce many of Butor’s beliefs about the novel, narration and the author-reader pact.

Unlike other movements that began with a theoretical manifesto, the *Nouveau Roman* group theorized the novel through the fictional process, before eventually creating a manifesto. The group’s originality lay in the fact that its members were both practitioners and theoreticians who were primarily concerned with critiquing the novel. Instead of haphazardly applying models, the new novelists began to show the entire process of novel writing, and made readers understand how narrative elements were composed.⁸² All theorists in the New Novel movement were fascinated and drawn to spatio-temporal interconnections and to the individual’s phenomenological link to the world. From these they created the means and beginnings of a new

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⁸² The movement began to coalesce rather informally in the 1950s around Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute and Michel Butor, but did not actually begin to constitute an official group until 20 years later with Jean Ricardou, as a result of the Cerisy conference entitled: “*Nouveau Roman, hier, aujourd’hui.*”
literary faction (Caille-Gruber 28). At the time that members of this new school were beginning to write, Heidegger and Husserl’s philosophy on phenomenological reflection attempted to take into account subjective experience, and theoreticians like Alain Robbe-Grillet and Natalie Sarraute saw literature as a possible field in which to practice human thought and emotions. Butor was in complete agreement, since as he had explained a few years previously, “La philosophie de l’époque menait d’une façon quasi inévitable au roman” [contemporary philosophy almost inevitably led to the novel] (Butor 1993; 46). This link between phenomenology and the novel required a different way of analyzing and describing the world and Butor, along with Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet, was willing to demonstrate ways in which this could be achieved.

Noticing that description and narration do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive forms, as the proponents of the Realist novel had taught, Butor and this new group of writers offered another form of storytelling (Caille-Gruber 29). The newly blurred line between narration and description led both author and reader to become “wary” of each other, according to Nathalie Sarraute, and the classic narrative involving some form of a Balzacian hero was no longer acceptable in what she aptly called the “Era of suspicion.”

83 L’ère du soupçon (Paris: Gallimard, 1956). One of the founding texts of the New Novel movement, Sarraute’s book develops a certain number of theories on the “nouveau roman” through four essays. According to her, readers rely too heavily on characters, instead of concentrating on the psychology that hides behind their persona, a psychology that is not their own. A novelist must do away with these dated reference points, and concentrate specifically on this psychological aspect that can speak for groups and not just a single character.
this mutual distrust introduced by the problematic presence of this mobile border, the new novelists proposed a new theory of the novel offering narrative paths that theretofore were unacceptable in classic narration. Neither true, nor false, the novel must move beyond being a simple “récit d’aventures” [adventure story]; it should document “les aventures d’un récit” [the adventure of the story], and invite the reader to observe not only the events in and of themselves, but also (and perhaps more importantly) the narrative elements that construct the story and how these narrative elements in turn construct reality. In other words, as Mireille Caille-Gruber explains, “le roman crée la réalité” [the novel creates reality] (35). While her claim here is valid, it can be extended even further, since if the meaning of the novel is based on the presence of the protagonist, then it is really the mobile border that constructs reality, just like the border of any geographical location, sets it apart from other locations, and gives it shape.

By chipping away at the formerly established metaphorical bricks and mortar of the narrative process, the New Novel creates more than a new reality; it also establishes a new architecture of the novel through the identification of new building materials and thus new, yet very present, realities. For Sarraute, this approach “nous fait aborder à des régions inconnues où aucun écrivain n’aurait songé à s’aventurer, et nous mène d’un seul bond aux abîmes” [allows us to attain to unknown regions into which no writer would have dared venture, and brings us, with one leap, to the edge of the ‘abyss’] (69). In what follows, I will demonstrate that Butor spatially represents these “edges of the abyss” in the city of Bleston not just by emphasizing this abyss through mise en abyme, but also by venturing into these “unknown regions.”
Knowing cities

When one enters a city, there is a desire to understand it completely, and in *L’Emploi du temps* Revel’s initial intention is not to just be able to say what Bleston is; he yearns to “touch[er] à vif” [*touch the quick*] (382) and “percevoir les profondeurs” [*plumb the depths*] (11) of this dark metropolis. Is Bleston “morte ou vivante, saine ou malade, jeune, vieille, nourissante ou exténuante?” [*dead or alive, sick or healthy, young or old, a source of strength or weariness*] (171), Revel wonders, mirroring a common reaction for most people when they enter a new urban space. Before he can attempt to tap into this essence and see things clearly, he must learn to understand how cities are represented and identified. During his first trip to the National Museum, Revel comes across a series of tapestries depicting men and monsters in a foreign land. Refusing to read the descriptions located next to each of the thirteen works of art, he has trouble understanding who these men are and in what setting they are encountering monsters until,

> Enfin […] j’ai vérifié sur le onzième panneau, le panneau pivot, le seul dont j’eusse alors identifié le sujet de façon certaine, que c’était bien ce même jeune homme en cuirasse qui tuait avec la même épée à poignée très ornée le Minotaure, qu’il était donc Thésée, que donc cette ville […] c’était bien Athènes.

*[Finally […] I recognized in the eleventh panel—the pivotal scene, the only one whose subject I had positively identified—the same young man in armor slaying the Minotaur with the same elaborately carved sword; the young man, then, must be Theseus, and the city […] must be Athens.*] (230)

Michel Butor here uses the myth of Theseus as an example of one of the many odd ways in which cities can be identified, and draws attention to the fact that borders are just one object among others that can lead to an understanding of a given location. The myth of Theseus has
been told by historians, chroniclers and artists in a variety of ways, however, the setting never changes. In fact, it cannot at this point since it has been etched into our cultural memory, and is indeed a fundamental element of the story. The key to knowing and understanding the location, in this case, is identifying the hero – Theseus – whose presence becomes a key that unlocks the mystery of setting. Having solved the visual riddle, Revel can claim with authority that this depicted city “c’était bien Athènes.” In this way, whether he is aware of it or not, Revel is beginning to learn the identification process of cities. Revel goes from one extreme—total ignorance of what is represented— to the other— full awareness of what is depicted, and skips the productive zone between representation and reality that art offers its spectators.

This initiation into the identification of the city prompts Revel to consider all the forms of representation that he has at his disposal. Cities can be approached from a range of perspectives and Revel has access to a barrage of representations from which to choose. This includes a host of maps: one of the bus system that he initially cannot read and eventually internalizes, and two of the city, one burned by Revel and the other purchased by him the following day. These different cartographic representations are both supplemented and confused by other visual representations in different mediums of other cities: the Harvey Tapestries in the National Museum recounting the adventures of Theseus, discussed above, and the stained glass window of the Old Cathedral representing the death of Abel by the hands of his brother Cain. Although these cities have nothing to do with his temporary home aside from existing within Bleston, these two “grands hieroglyphes” both offer alternate, non-cartographic approaches to capturing urban space. Revel also has at his disposal a range of texts that purport to describe the city in both obvious and subtle terms, from the tourist guide, The Bleston Guide, to J.C. Hamilton’s

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84 The Old Cathedral is abstractly linked to Bleston according to the Priest who explains to Revel that Bleston actually inspired the background of this scene of fratricide.
novel *Le Meurtre de Bleston* which launches his own writing process.\(^85\) Which one of these representations, he wonders, is the most efficient means of achieving the goal of a lucid image of this city? How does one accurately depict urban space? Can the essence of Bleston be located on a map, in a text, in a stained glass window, or through some other surface? In the sections that follow, I will suggest that through Revel, Butor finds the edges of the city to be fertile ground from which to approach and depict urban space. Throughout her treatise on the novel, Nathalie Sarraute often links the act of writing to a psychological and physical arrival of a person “au bord de l’abîme” [*on the edge of the abyss*] (63). Butor will thus link the author’s experience of this abîme with the edges of the city, encountered by the urban traveler.\(^86\) The city and its edges, as we will see, must be developed through a particular process on a specific type of surface.

**Le meurtre de Bleston: The founding text**

Obsessed with understanding this city, Revel is on a mission to find the most efficient and effective means of describing it. Overcome with a sense of dread and lost within this unwelcoming city, Revel climbs to the top the Old Cathedral, mirroring the same route that every tourist would take in Bleston in order to see the entire city. Surely, such a view from above will offer him a better understanding and clearer view of the city that he must call home for one year: “Là-haut […] j’ai aperçu l’ensemble de la partie centrale de Bleston dans la brume” [*From up there I glimpsed a general view of the town center through the mist*] (53). Unsatisfied with this hazy general view, this “panorama,” as Michel de Certeau would have it, Revel purchases a map.

\(^85\) In fact, by the end of his stay, Revel sees these two artistic forms very much linked to the city of Bleston and his understanding of it: “ce signe majeur qui a organisé toute ma vie dans notre année, Bleston… ces morceaux de verre taillées et joints dans la France du seizième siècle, dont les harmoniques historiques principales s’intercalent entre celle des tapisseries du Musée comme les doigts d’une main entre ceux de l’autre lorsqu’elle se croisent” [*this major sign that organized our entire year together, Bleston… these pieces of glass cut and joined together in sixteenth-century France, whose historic themes arouse harmonic echoes in those of the Museum tapestries and are interlaced with these like the fingers of clasped hands*] (433).

\(^86\) This also could account for all the mises en abyme.
The map of the city offers a bird’s eye perspective and gives Bleston the appearance of having an ordered environment, with clear borders and neighborhoods. With a map in hand, he will surely be able to see “les véritables dimensions” \textit{(the real dimensions)} (19) of the city. He enters Ann Bailey’s shop and explains: “J’espère qu’avec un bon plan de la ville je pourrai me débrouiller” \textit{(I hope that with a good map of the town I’ll be able to find my way about)} (37). His goal is to obtain the map that totalizes his understanding: “Ce qu’il y a de mieux, de plus complet et de plus clair” \textit{(Whatever map is best, clearest and fullest)} (38). When Revel begins to walk through the city, he learns that this map, like all maps according to Mark Monmonier, tells “white lies” and sometimes even “bigger” lies (12). He will later learn that it is not as accurate as it purports to be for the main reason that there is a disconnect between representation and reality.

Returning “home” to his temporary living arrangements at the Anchor Hotel,\footnote{Same name, but not the same hotel where Père Jules found Juliette in Vigo’s \textit{L’Atalante}.} he expands the map and lays it out on his bed. Through this act he is morphed into a “taupe” and finds himself “[se] heurtant à chaque pas dans ses galeries de boue, tel un oiseau migrateur prêt à fondre, j’ai embrassé d’un seul regard toute l’étendue de la ville” \textit{(stumbling mole-like through its muddy passages, I surveyed its whole extent at a glance, like some hovering bird about to pounce)} (60). This nocturnal image of movement suggested by this transformation of the character from the blind mole to the all-seeing bird of prey represents two extremes of visual perspection that run through the novel. How does one see and perceive objects in this world and do visibility and understanding go hand in hand? Of course, in the continuum of visual capacity, the human sits close to the middle of these two, yet Revel believes he can only occupy the extremes.\footnote{As we will see in the next section, this is a common problem with borderline characters who must eventually leave their in-between position, and select a side.} The goal, for Revel, is to see clearly, to not be blinded by the city and its \textit{brume} and \textit{brouillard}. With the map, purchased from Ann Bailey, Revel explains that he is able to see the
city in its entirety “grace à elle, grace à cette image” [Thanks to it\textsuperscript{89}, this image]. Through this cartographic enhancement, Revel found himself to be “mieux renseigné sur la structure de Bleston que n’aurait pu l’être un aviateur la survolant, ne serait-ce que par cette ligne pointillée marquant les limites de son territoire administratif en dehors duquel les maisons se groupent sous d’autres noms” [better informed about the structure of Bleston than an airman by flying over it if only because of that dotted line denoting its administrative boundary, beyond which the houses are grouped under other names] (61). Human vision and understanding are not sufficient, since the common airman, without the aid of this representation, cannot see the invisible limits of the political/administrative borders. The map enables Revel to see the city, particularly its boundaries, borders and limits. He is able to understand the city as a whole only with these “dotted lines” that all map-readers know and expect; in other words, an understanding of this city becomes clear only through its borders. Other cartographic conventions, such as the directional bearings “en forme d’oeuf, la pointe au nord” [egg shaped, with the pointed end due north] and “colorant approprié” [color coding] to differentiate between various administrative and cultural zones, enable him to take a closer look at, and literally zoom in, “tel un homme du laboratoire” on this “énorme cellule cancéreuse” in which he is a “virus perdu dans” its filaments (61).\textsuperscript{90} In a similar fashion to Aragon’s Paris peasant, Revel alludes to his eyes as if they were a microscope. However, he moves one step further in this example, becoming both scientist and virus, occupying both positions of this dichotomy.

Moving through the city, Revel discovers that the borders that denote Bleston’s limits and run between neighborhoods are not as clear as they appear to be in the city’s cartographic

\textsuperscript{89} “Elle” is rather ambiguous here since it can either refer to the specific image, Ann Bailey or the city itself.
\textsuperscript{90} Here is the entire paragraph in translation: “Thus I, a mere virus lost amidst its filaments, was able like a scientist armed with his microscope to study this huge cancerous growth, this organism in which the different systems were picked out in appropriately colored printer’s ink.”
representations. Figuratively homeless while still temporarily anchored to his hotel, Revel attempts to flee the city, to move beyond the city limits and find some location free from smog, grime and iron. However, after walking for more than half an hour in one direction he fails to see any “limites visibles” along this endless stretch of road (44). Everywhere he looks, he sees the same the same drab buildings baring slight changes in numbers and lettering. This city is not bound by “une ceinture de fortifications ou d’avenues, se détachant ferme sur le fond des champs” [a ring of walls or avenues, standing out clearly against a background of fields] (48) as the map suggested; it is a modern metropolis where urban sprawl has become more and more present as the city bleeds into other cities which, like a lamp in the mist of a dewy night, form “le centre d’un halo dont les franges diffuses se marient à celles d’autres villes” [the center of a halo whose hazy fringes intermingle with those of other towns] (48). Despite being marketed as an accurate representation of the city, the map instead becomes Bleston’s “réponse ironique” to Revel’s efforts to “la recenser et la voir entière” [see it as a whole and to take its census] (151).

Fed up with this misleading guide, Revel burns it in effigy as an attack against the city. Although he is not successful in destroying the city through the eradication of its representation, he realizes that he must create his own take on the city of Bleston. In other words, Revel is initiated into the writing process through his experience of the city and through the lack of authentic representations of his experience. His journal intime, originally designed to help him pass the time, turns into a quest to produce an authentic and all-encompassing image.

It should be noted that the map initially serves as a testament to Revel’s progress in understanding the city: “Dans cette feuille de papier couverte de traits d’encre de cinq couleurs, les centimètres carrés liés dans ma mémoire à des bâtiments perçus, à des heures, à des aventures, se sont multipliés, ont envahis de réalité un domaine de plus en plus vaste” [On this
sheet of paper patterned with printers’ ink in five colors, the square centimeters associated in my memory with buildings I have seen, with events and moments of my own experience, have multiplied; an ever growing portion of it belongs to reality] (149). However, there are still “immenses lacunes” [immense gaps] where the lines have no meaning (149). Bit by bit, Revel learns that the maps are not as powerful as he once assumed since they cannot account for the slight changes to reality: “rien ne signale ici les quelques immeubles dont la construction a commencé, s’est poursuivie ou achevée depuis l’automne, ni ceux qui se sont écroulés parmi les gravats ou les acres flammes” [there is nothing here to indicate the buildings that have been begun and finished since last autumn, nor those that have collapsed into rubble or been consumed by fire] (173). Every day new buildings are erected, while others are demolished to make room for apartment complexes, stores and offices. The fixed map, only updated every year, cannot account for the immediate changes that alter city space. What Revel needs is an accurate, mobile depiction of the environment and he soon finds that it is through writing that he feels he can achieve this.  

On and above the maps of the city he purchased from Ann Bailey, Revel explains that he has imagined “d’autres lignes, d’autres points remarquables, d’autres mentions, d’autres réseaux d’autres organisations, d’autres plans en un mot, qui, vagues au début et très fragmentaires, se sont peu à peu précisés, continuent à se compléter” [other points of interest, other references, other networks, other systems of distribution; in short, other maps which, though vague and fragmentary at first, are gradually growing more complete and more precise] (151). Through Revel’s spatial practice and narrative documentation, Bleston is being remapped, as “new lines”

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92 Like Revel, Butor’s reader first experiences Bleston through the medium of cartography. Before encountering Revel’s daily diary, the reader is first presented with a bizarre map of Bleston. This plan de la ville is the reader’s initiation to Revel’s narrative and to the city of Bleston. However, this map is not a copy of the one Revel mentioned above that was burned and subsequently repurchased: it is the bilingual and subjective mental map of Revel’s Bleston. It is, as Andrea Goulet puts it, “the city as he [Revel] has come to know it” (53).
are supplementing those lines proposed by the map creators while making others invisible. In other words, he is drawing new routes, new lines of inclusion and exclusion, and new vectors of direction. Although, in this example, these new points of interest only “se superpos[aient] dans [s]on esprit” [*in his mind were superimposed*], the city map at the beginning of his narrative provides materiality to this imaginary space (151). Goulet cogently observes that this subjective map attaches the city’s “cartographic limbs” to its “textual body” and allows readers to read the interplay of “textual topography and visual topology” on a “phantom” urban space (47). I would add to Goulet’s observations that the map’s position in front of the actual narrative of *L’Emploi du temps* implies that readers must not only consider reading between the lines of a given text, but also reading between all of its assorted generic representations: the essence of Bleston lies somewhere in between this map and the journal that follows. Butor’s reader then, will literally follow Revel’s footsteps as he attempts to uncover and expose this “noir, implacable et puante” [*black, implacable and smelly*] city (325).

It is not until he reads George Burton’s[^93] novel *Le Meurtre de Bleston* that Revel sees literature capable of “mapping” the city. Recounting the “fictional” fratricide by the Winn brothers on the steps of the Old Cathedral, *The Meurtre de Bleston* is a *fait divers* and more importantly, a guide. More than the narrative thread of *Le Meurtre de Bleston*, Revel is captivated by the detail he finds in the description of the real city. While the authentic depiction of the built environment leads Revel to suspect Richard Tenn to be the flesh and blood character on which the murderer is based, the accuracy and detail that Burton provides of the physical Blestonian environment convinces Revel to use it as a guide to the city. If Burton is masking a real man behind his fictional character, then he must also shed light on the real environment behind its fictional façade. The book, then, offers a representation of the city of Bleston that

[^93]: Under the pseudonym J.C. Hamilton.
possibly surpasses others: literature and writing may be the only way to fully understand the city. Thus, Revel heeds Michel Butor’s advice in his essay “Recherches sur la technique du roman” that: “Seul le labeur de l’écriture se révèlera capable d’entamer la malédiction des lieux urbains” [Only the task of writing will reveal itself capable of approaching the curses of urban space] (Butor 1960; 120). He picks up a pen, and begins to write.

**Experiencing the gaps**

In chapters two and three, I discussed the important perspective provided by mobile borderland characters in the built environment. Constantly a part of and apart from the space they describe, borderland characters offer a unique view on the city. In this section I highlight how Revel experiences, reads, and writes gaps in the city and eventually inhabits the blank space of the page. The notion of space in the post-war French setting began to change drastically as theorists, sociologists and scholars started to publish on what would soon become a new school of thought invested in the spatial turn. Published a few years before Henri Lefebvre’s foundational text, *Le droit à la ville* (1968), *L’Emploi du Temps* demonstrates that Butor equally sensed the change of social and physical space in France that Lefebvre would later criticize. Lived French space was no longer linked to the mechanics of classical geometry; instead, it was built around the notion of various degrees of distances, where “le mouvement en ligne droite est en général impossible d’un point à un autre, avec des régions ouvertes ou fermées” [It is generally impossible to move in a straight line from one point to another, with open and closed regions] (Butor 1960; 120). Since the properties of space have changed, so too must the technique of translating these spaces into narrative space.

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94 Verena Conley’s book *Spatial Ecologies: Urban Sites, State and World Space in French Cultural Theory* offers a very good summary of the French role in the “spatial turn.”
The space we occupy, for Butor, is characterized by “toute une organisation de liaisons entre ses différents points: moyens de transport, références, qui font que les proxIMITÉS vÉcUES ne sont nullement réductibles à celles de la cartographie” [an entire organization of relations between different points: means of transportation, references, making it impossible for lived proximities to be captured by cartography] (Butor 1960; 120). Mobility in and through urban space became a daily challenge for every car and pedestrian, offering new routes – actual physical roads, on the one hand, and novel paths of inquiry, on the other. However, these new routes were designed with different users in mind. In the same essay, Butor claims that the city is an “ensemble de trajets dont les lois sont différentes pour automobilistes et marcheurs. Il y a détours, raccourcis, obstacles, densités de trafic variables selon les heures et les jours” [collection of trajectories whose laws differ for automobilists and walkers. There are detours, shortcuts, obstacles, flows of traffic that fluctuate on given days and at specific times] (Butor 1960; 56).

Moreover, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the social dynamic of the city was experiencing another change as a new wave of immigrants offering cheap labor began to infiltrate the city. With an influx of capital came speculative developers and gentrification that pushed these immigrants to the city’s periphery, forcing them into long trips between work, city center and home, resulting in a visible difference in the mobility of the city’s insiders and outsiders.

Revel occupies an ambiguous position between the two sides of this divide. As a Frenchman living in Bleston for a pre-determined amount of time, he is a temporary visitor. Despite his desire to feel at home in Bleston, his poor control of the English language, his map of Bleston always in hand, and his lack of any real property all mark him as an outsider. Nevertheless, his white skin, respectable profession, and apartment and job within the city’s traditional and administrative borders mark him as an inhabitant. This strange borderland
situation is reinforced textually by the presence of two other perceived foreigners. Revel’s specific location between two “types” of foreigners in urban space provides him with a certain generative power over the city that other foreigners do not have.

On the one side of Revel, there is Horace Buck, who is constantly exiled due to his black skin despite being born and raised in Bleston. Buck is not only Revel’s friend; he is also Revel’s link to the physical environment since it is thanks to Buck that Revel finally finds a legal residence within the city. His inability to be accepted by the city and its white inhabitants is most clearly evidenced by the very apartment that Revel eventually inhabits. Revel’s landlord is clandestinely cordial with Horace Buck, but refuses to rent to him because of his skin color. In her chapter “Topologie d’une babel moderne,” Mireille Caille-Gruber makes an argument along similar lines. She also sees Revel as being particularly linked to Horace Buck through both tied to alterity. From the beginning, Horace Buck is linked to the city’s moving parts. His black face is described as being “du même noir” [of the same black] (32) as the Slee that runs through the city, cutting the urban environment as the Seine dissect Paris. His first adventure with Horace takes the two into a seedy pub, and through Buck, Revel is initiated into English beer, whose dark, viscous liquid, “était l’eau même de la rivière, recuite et concentrée” [was a distillation of the water itself] (35). Through Horace Buck, Revel is not only introduced to the city, in a way Revel consumes the city through this important initiation into English culture. Despite these similarities with the city, his birth in the city, and knowledge of the space, Buck is forced to live outside of the city’s administrative limits. Buck is thus the representation of pure alterity and the unassimilated Other who, due to his race, wanders around a White City incapable of being a “lieu fraternel et lieu commun” [fraternal and common locale]. The fact that he cannot be
assimilated despite working for the city and being native to it thus suggests that the city is the pure image of the industrial exploitation of man by man (Calle-Gruber 56).

On the other side sits Revel’s French friend Lucien, “à qui je continuais à montrer méthodiquement cette ville, coin après coin, heureux de servir comme guide là où j’avais si longtemps, si péniblement erré” [to whom I had been systematically showing the town, bit by bit, glad to act as a guide where I had for so long, so miserably, wandered on my own] (210). Always happy, “le bien-aimé, le bien-aimant” [well-loved, loving] (286), Lucien is able to penetrate the city better than Revel. Lucien easily adapts to the English culture and eventually marries Ann Bailey, the initial object of Revel’s desire, thus becoming a dual citizen, and official inhabitant of the city. His assimilation and seemingly easy integration into the city space represents what Caille-Gruber calls “l’autre piège” [the other trap] (57).

Revel is the gray matter between these black and white outsiders. His experience of the city is vastly different depending on which side of this strange dichotomy he finds himself. There is the purely human, and existential desire to prone the streets for food and women (with Horace) and the other, more aesthetic drive to discover the hidden beauties of the city through the intellectual strolling with Lucien that fuels his writing. Just as Revel will try and determine what sort of town Bleston is, he will try and determine what type of outsider he is. This position between foreigners, between the assimilated outsider and the rejected insider, between black and white, represents the New Novelist’s awareness of the spatio-temporal intersections and of the individual’s phenomenological link to the real world.

It was Alain Robbe-Grillet who was the first to articulate this relation to the world, a world which is neither significant, nor absurd: “il est tout simplement. Autour de nous […] les choses sont là” [it just is. Things are […] around us] (29). Whereas the object in the Balzacian
novel suggested something essential about a specific character to which it was linked, for the New Novelists, this was no longer the case. Sometimes, Robbe-Grillet emphasizes, a hat is just a hat, an object designed to block the sun and need not be read as some socio-cultural sign. For Roland Barthes, this observation by Robbe-Grillet changed the way in which readers read, since the object has moved from constructing meaning to simply being “there.”

Regardless of whether or not they are simply “there,” these objects do, nevertheless, occupy specific spaces in Revel’s Bleston.

Whether or not Butor would agree with Barthes, the position of Revel and the objects around him are frequently described spatially, encouraging us to consider their spatial significance. In fact, upon closer examination of the objects in Bleston, almost everything is always described as being located between other objects. For example, the first time that Revel enters the arcade, his authorial perspective locates the building, routinely frequented by Horace who shoots toy guns at “model” citizens, is “serré entre le cinéma “Royal” et le commissariat de police” [huddled between the Royal Cinema and the Police Station] (188). One of the most peculiar objects in the entire arsenal of “things” that constitutes Butor’s Bleston is a negative of George Burton (the author of Le meurtre de Bleston) and his wife captured at the travelling fair. Not only does the image show George and his wife “entre deux têtes, loin, devant un stand, lui, tenant un fusil” [between two people, at a stand, George holding a gun] (200, emphasis mine), but more importantly this physical negative is kept “entre les pages” [between the pages] (204) of Revel’s copy of the Meurtre de Bleston. In a typical Butorian mise en abyme, a negative image of the real author, framed between two people, is stored between the pages of a book

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95 Barthes is making reference here to Heiddeger’s notion of Dasein “being-there” and suggests that it is more important than “being-something.” He discusses this in relation to Robbe-Grillet in his essay “Objective Literature” in Critical Essays. I am interested in how Barthes emphasizes the importance of spatiality in this citation.

96 One could even make the claim that Butor’s emphasis on framing object really happens most often in the middle of his entire book, most of these descriptions happening between pages 190 and 210 of his 440-page story.
penned by the pseudonym, J.C. Hamilton. Furthermore, this book containing the negative, is always located on the left side of the narrator’s table, encompassing Revel’s own journal (and Butor’s text), with Revel’s notes always on the right side of the table. In other words, every “thing” in this city, every object that has importance is always framed, specifically between two objects in Butor’s novel.

This framing, linked back to the two chimneys that frame the Blestonian wasteland, demonstrates Revel’s own desire to understand his physical and emotional position in Bleston. Simply “there” Revel has no “home” to speak about, and must navigate the city as an object in between other objects in order to find himself and to find the perfect way to represent this city. His physical and metaphorical positioning between objects could locate him in what Edward Soja calls a “thirdspace.” For Soja, the thirdspace marks a “constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings” (2); it is a space between concepts that have usually been conceived of as polar opposites such as modernism and postmodernism, reality and representation, and life and death. This zone of intersection undermines the inevitability of such concepts as thirdspace, revealing their transience as well as the power interests that lie behind their construction and deconstruction. Thus through Revel, a certain thirdspace image can be produced that might shed new light on and possibly expose this fictional city.

**Revel-ation: Toward a new form of writing and reading**

Bleston is a schizoid being with “murs de fonte […] de pluie […] et de braise étouffée” [walls of cast iron and rain and smoldering embers] (426), on the one hand, and a borderless metropolis whose edges bleed into other cities, on the other. It has erected barriers everywhere, sometimes blocking Revel’s access to ideas and people, occasionally barring him entrance into
certain establishments, but most importantly distancing him from himself. Though these various experiences with the constricting and restricting side of borders, Revel soon realizes that the negative presence of these gaps and barriers can be reversed and used to his advantage if he can only inhabit and navigate them. For the first half of his diary, Revel approaches all spatial and linguistic gaps, as if they were barriers: “chaque fois un silence de vitre givrée pesait de nouveau entre nous” [Each time, a heavy silence, like frosted glass, lay between us] (178). The silences only blurred his vision of the actual events and guarded him from accessing the truth, just as the constant rain and fog that set in on the city keep him from physically seeing its buildings. Whether he finds himself in the city’s center or attempts to escape through the city’s peripheries, he is always caught in the city’s hazy aura, stuck on the luminous border similar to the “halos” created around street lamps.

In July, ten months into his stay and two months from his departure, Revel begins to see that despite being trapped within the walls of Bléston, he can still inhabit and work within these gaps that initially served as barriers against his understanding of the city. Recalling the admission of George Burton in May that he is in fact J.C. Hamilton, author of Meurtre de Bléston, Revel begins to appreciate memorial, temporal and spatial gaps as possible productive zones. Under the dim lights of the Oriental Bamboo, this admission was made after “un retard, un temps blanc auquel je n’avais pas accordé d’importance à ce moment-là […] un silence qui n’a pas durée plus de quelques secondes, une seule peut-être, qui me semble maintenant long comme de plusieurs mois” [after a pause, a blank interval to which at the time I attributed no importance, […] a silence lasting only a few seconds, perhaps only one, but which in retrospect

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97 This citation is a good example: “il a fait de plus en plus chaud, de plus en plus lourd; l’air s’est épaissi, encrassé, jusqu’à se recouvrir de cette écume de plomb qui tombe en fines gouttelettes sur ma vitre, brouillant le paysage de Dew Street” [It has been increasingly warm and sultry; the air seems to have thickened, condensed into a leaden mist that coats my window, blurring the view of Dew Street] (257).
seems interminable] (235). Outside of the city’s control, or possibly the specific result of this control, these gaps become possible zones for Revel to create his own space. At first, he feels it is his duty to fill all of these gaps: “Il est indispensable que je rétablisse cette cheville, et puisque le souvenir m’en est revenu si précis, il faut que je le fixe dès maintenant dans ces pages, avant qu’il ne s’efface et ne s’engloutisse de nouveau sous la pression d’autres vagues d’événements et de mémoire” [I must restore that missing link, and since the recollection of it has recurred so clearly to me I must fix it in these pages before it fades or is submerged again under the pressure of other waves of events and memories] (285). Although he attempts through his writing to “fixe” these moments, he soon realizes that such an endeavor is perhaps impossible since “la chaîne des intermédiaires est plus longue et plus compliquée que je ne me l’imaginais auparavant, peut-être impossible à reconstituer avec certitude” [the chain of intermediaries is longer and more complicated than I had previously imagined, and perhaps impossible to trace with any certainty] (412). These gaps continue to expand and the city with it. As he writes, the gap between his narration of the events and the events themselves continues to grow despite his attempts to reduce it significantly. He had hoped to reduce the gap of seven-months, but explains “je n’ai réussi qu’à conserver (et avec quel mal!), tant d’ombres, tant de conséquences, tant d’accidents, tant de fantômes sont venus se mettre en travers, sous une profondeurs de sept mois d’eau de moins en moins transparente parce que l’agitation a dérangé la vase” [I have barely been able to prevent it from widening, so many shadows and consequences, so many accidents and ghosts have come between while the stream, seven months deep, has grown ever more turbid under the stress of my agitation] (227). His desire to order the city and tie up all these loose ends, only allows more phantoms to enter his text, and thus the city, much like we found in Kassovitz’s and Godard’s representations of Paris. Writing the gaps in this way creates what Andrea Goulet has
cogently described as an extension or appendage of the city. This void is linked to the written material, as the blank space and blank page both offer opportunities for the city walker or the city writer to create something out of nothing. Originally sitting in a wasteland between two idle chimneys, Bleston begins to grow and react to Revel’s interrogation of its gaps and his excavation of its grounds. These gaps offer new narrative threads to weave and unweave the city’s foundations. However, with no extra-textual referent, Bleston remains a purely literary creation of Butor, existing only through the blank pages that Revel purchased from Ann Bailey. If this is the case, then we can consider the entire novel as an inhabitable space, as the only true inhabitable space for Revel.98

Butor observes in his 1954 article “Philosophie de l’ameublement” that we live in a world defined by new spatial arrangements that are intricately linked to mobility: "nous ne vivons jamais dans un lieu unique; nous avons toujours une localisation compliquée, c’est-à-dire, que lorsque nous sommes quelque part, nous pensons toujours aussi à ce qui se passe dans un autre endroit, nous avons des renseignements sur l’extérieur" [We never live in a unique location; our localization is always complicated: once we are somewhere, we are always also thinking about what is happening in another place, gathering information on what lies outside this current position] (1960; 71). In other words, we are constantly beings on the move, in-between physical locations and emotional states. If everything and everyone is mobile, if a new age of perception and experience is upon us, then new forms of representation must attempt to grasp this reality: “Le passage du récit linéaire à un récit polyphonique ne doit-il pas nous amener à la recherche de formes mobiles?” [Does not the shift from the linear to the polyphonic story demand the research of new mobile forms of representation?] (Butor 1960; 108). L’emploi du temps is one

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98 It should be noted that for the first three months, Revel is technically “homeless,” residing at a hotel and eventually approached by the police for illegally staying in the city without a permanent address.
literary attempt at capturing these “polyphonic” stories. What is particularly interesting, however, is that these stories are not necessarily Revel’s, but those of the city of Bleston. Through his diary, Revel attempts to understand the multiple stories that this city is telling, those offered by the historically and socially shifting mobile elements of the Blestonian built environment. Thus, it is not only a question of how to describe this city, but also a question of which stories and information to privilege and document.

Revel used maps, books, and guides in order to make him more knowledgeable about the city. Prowling over the surface of the city “comme une mouche sur un rideau” [like a fly across a curtain] he begins to understand the city’s “réseau compliqué de transports” [complex network of its transport system] (69). Moving through the city as an unsuspected observer allows him to begin to understand. However, these various forms of representation soon prove to be insufficient for finding his place in the city. Despite his knowledge of the roads and bus system, Revel keeps losing his bearings as the city seems to move around him: “Il m’a fallu de plus en plus lutter contre l’impression que mes démarches étaient condamnées d’avance, que je tournais autour d’un mur, mystifié par des portes en trompe-l’œil ou des personnages en trompe-l’œil” [I had to struggle increasingly against the impression that all my efforts were foredoomed to failure, that I was going round and round a blank wall, that the doors were sham doors and the people dummies, the whole thing a hoax] (70). In chapter two, I demonstrated how Céline’s New York and Aragon’s Paris moved its inhabitants to its own beat. Certain protagonists, like Ferdinand and the Paris Peasant, were able to remain outside of the city’s influence despite its temptations. In this case, however, Revel seems to be strung along by the city and its endless deceptions.
Moreover, the city even seems able to appropriate the power of Revel’s writing. For Revel, this “cordon de phrases” [cord of phrases] that he is writing, all these lines are “les marques dont je jalone les trajets déjà reconnus” [the signs with which I mark out the path which I have already retraced] (274). Every time he begins a new path, a new sentence, he finds that it leads him astray: “c’était comme une piste tracée à mon intention, une piste où à chaque étape, on me dévoilait le terme de la suivante, une piste pour mieux me perdre” [It was as though a trail had been laid for me, at each stage of which I was allowed to see the end of the next stage, a trail to lead me hopelessly astray] (113). In other words, as he writes, the city grows, and morphs in response to these paths he creates. Is Revel actually advancing toward some deeper understanding of the city, or is this all some ruse of the city, making him believe he is advancing when really all he is doing is spinning like a top.

Butor often differentiated between a novelist, who writes to make a point and be heard and a “vériable romancier” who “aperçoit que les choses autour de lui commencent à murmurer, qui va mener ce murmure jusqu’à la parole” [senses the things around him beginning to murmur, and who will give a voice to this murmur] (1960; 47). Instead of trying to be heard, Revel literally donne la parole to the city, whose hydra head reinforces its own homogenization: “mes cellules se reproduisent, mes blessures se cicatrisent; je ne change pas, je ne meurs pas, je dure, j’absorbe toute tentative dans ma permanence […] tu le vois bien, ce n’est pas vraiment un nouveau visage” [my cells reproduce themselves, my wounds heal, I do not change; I endure, my permanence swallows up all attempted innovation […] This new face of mine is not really new] (388). Despite his efforts to alter the city through his presence, to introduce a new parasitical chain and a new system, this system endures. However, if Revel’s initial desire to capture the
essence of the city in his own words has failed, Butor has nevertheless succeeded in creating a beautiful text out of nothing.

Revel’s enlightenment regarding the productive possibility of gaps in the city and in his own memory demonstrates a major shift in the character’s own writing—a shift that parallels the new direction offered by the New Novelists. Stephano Tani has observed that the modern detective novel is motivated by a “deep personal need for order” (2). Butor’s pseudo-detective Revel is determined to put his life and this city into order, under his control. When he first sits down to write, Revel’s initial intention is to write what Roland Barthes would call a readerly text: “Je voudrais les saisir, comme je voudrais les transcrire complètement, les étaler sur le papier afin que je puisse les lire, afin qu’elles deviennent transparentes à la lumière de toutes ces phosphorescences que je ramène de mon dragage des mois passées, ces deux journées” [I should like to capture those two days, that Saturday and Sunday, to transcribe them completely, spread them out on paper in order to read them, in order to make them transparent in the light of the phosphorescences I have dredged up from the past months] (318). The ultimate goal of writing for Revel is to create a text that clearly describes his experiences in Bleston. He thus embarks on a rather romanticized version of narrative realism, in which writing can lead to some form of enlightenment on the human condition. “Je continuerai à ramper vers la mémoire, à ajouter ligne après ligne, page après page, à ce souterrain que je creuse vers mon réveil” [I shall go on crawling toward remembrance, line by line, page by page, tunneling my way to light] (169), he explains early on in his endeavor. Revel is on a quest to find the most important and clear description of the events, attempting to pinpoint the precise words, and locate what Butor calls the significatif, “ce qui peut remplacer le reste, ce par quoi le reste est donné” [that which can replace the rest, that by which the rest is given] (Butor 1960; 118).
For Barthes, “on appelle classique tout texte lisible” [we call classic every readerly text] and Revel senses that his journal can never be considered a classic since the city, his subject matter, keeps slipping through his fingers. One of the main reasons his subject keeps changing and evading his perception relates to a lesson he learned in both of Bleston’s cathedrals about perspective and observation. In his essay “Recherches sur la technique du roman,” Butor explains that every movement through space “impliquera une réorganisation de la structure temporelle, changements dans les souvenirs ou dans les projets, dans ce qui vient au premier plan, plus ou moins profond et plus ou moins grave” [entails a reorganization of the temporal structure, changes in memory, or in projects, in what enters the foreground, more or less profound, more or less grave] (1960; 121). While contemplating Cain’s Window in the Old Cathedral, Revel receives a good lesson from the Priest on the interconnection between observation and physical distance. When looking at specific objects, like the “seraphims” (“flowers” or “angels”) located high up on the stained glass, in order to view them completely, “il faut se mettre le plus loin possible, mais alors le détail échappe” [you have to stand as far back as possible, but then some of the detail is invisible] (101). Later on, in the “chapelle de la Vierge” of the New Cathedral, his eyes are drawn to a frieze which “de loin, m’avait semblé faite de fleurs” [from a distance seemed to be composed of flowers] but which, upon physically approaching it, turned out to be a frieze of flies (222). These various pieces of art are altered through the movement of the observer and the distance between the two. Movement does not have to be specifically physical; any form or movement—spatial, emotional, temporal—can have a similar effect.

In his essay “Recherches sur la technique du roman,” Butor observes that the novel occupies a “frontière très poreuse, très instable, frontière qui recule constamment” [a very
A porous, very unstable border that constantly fades away] between the real and the imaginary, since the novelist must constantly “faire intervenir dans les récits une distinction entre le réel et l’imaginaire” [bring the distinction between real and imaginary into the tale]. For him, this ambiguous space between reality and representation is the fate of the novel; all forms of récits are implicated in this dilemma. Any story that we tell others is caught on this border between the fictive and the factual. This “décalage,” or “gap” as Butor calls it, is not restricted to the stories we tell other people, it is “aussi grave quand nous nous parlons à nous-mêmes” [just as important when speaking to ourselves]. The borderland of the story is occupied by what Butor calls fantômes: “Que de fantômes ainsi entre nous et le monde, entre nous et les autres, entre nous-mêmes et nous!” [Only phantoms thus exist between us and the world, between us and others, between us and ourselves!]. However, we can name and pursue these phantoms, these gaps, distances and barriers through the process of fiction. In all stories, even those daily stories that people tell us, there are parts that are not true, not just due to error, but to fiction. Butor adds, “nous savons bien que le même mot français ‘histoire’ désigne à la fois le mensonge et la vérité” [it is well known that the French word histoire designates both a lie and a truth at the same time]. A fiction “mimant la vérité” [mimicking reality] the novel is the best way to approach this frontier between the real and the imaginary (Butor 1960, 110-111).

One of the major goals of the New Novel movement was not only to instruct writers on how to write scriptible texts, but also to teach readers how to read such texts. This neologism credited to Barthes, defines a text that causes the reader to work, interrogate and constantly question the author. A fledgling writer, Revel is equally a burgeoning reader on his way to reading in a way that New Novelists would appreciate. In fact, by the end of Revel’s diary he spends more time reading and re-reading his previous entries than actually writing. Through
these various acts of rereading, Revel learns that the distance between himself and his experiences is constantly changing and thus requiring a different explanation every time. The goal, then, for the véritable author is to “travailler le récit,” to improve it, and change it as the events are perceived differently, experienced differently, altered by reality and by memory: “L’apparition de nouvelles données va parfois modifier à tel point ce que l’on savait d’une histoire qu’il faudra la dire deux fois, ou plus” [The introduction of new pieces of information will sometimes modify our knowledge of a story to such an extent that it will need to be told two or more times] (Butor 1960; 116). This is the goal not only of the novelist but also of the detective, who must move through the city in search of clues that then alter an understanding of the crimes. Revel’s narrative becomes what Andrea Goulet describes as a shifting, plural construction because he is never placed at Sartre’s ‘gamma point’ which, in the stable world of the pre-war French novel “represented absolute rest” (Goulet 34).

Since every event can be the origin of a multitude of possible narrative directions “comme un foyer dont la puissance est plus ou moins grande par rapport à ce qui l’entoure” [like a foyer whose power is more or less strong with regard to what encompasses it], narration can no longer be a line or a passage. It must become a surface on which we isolate “un certain nombre de lignes, de points, ou de groupements remarquables” [a certain number of remarkable lines, points, or groupings] (Butor 1960; 115). The writer must thus control all of the different versions of his own story, “les assumer comme le sculpteur responsable de tous les angles sous lesquels on pourra photographier sa statue, et du mouvement qui lie toutes ces vues” [accept them all like a sculptor responsible for all the angles under which her statue could be photographed, and the movement that links these various visions] (Butor 1960; 124). However the city that Revel is trying to sculpt cannot be controlled and will not stay still. Every time he tries to sit down and
write its essence, he finds himself in a deeper hole. The point of writing, this endeavor of his, he
soon learns, is not to create a panorama of some space, but to invent something new, something
that fights for position, much like Serres’ parasites. Although this fact has not been revealed to
Revel, Butor tries to make this clear to his readers; out of his virtual representation of a fictive
city, a text is born.

Developing the city

If narration is “a surface” and if the author must consider all of the possible angles from
which “on pourra photographier” his work of art, then what is the function of photography in the
creation of the novel and the understanding of the urban environment? Of the array of
representations at Revel’s disposal to interpret and understand the city of Bleston, there is not a
single photograph of the city. In fact, the only link to photography is something I have already
discussed: a negative image of George Burton while he is firing a gun at the fair. This image, I
remind you, was located in the center of his copy of Burton’s bestseller. Revel’s safekeeping,
possibly his hiding, of this negative suggests that although absent from Revel’s arsenal of
representations of the city, photography plays an important role in the construction of his
narrative.

According to Rudolf Arnheim, in looking at photographs we are “on vacation from
artifice” (157). Due to their mechanical origin, we expect to find a certain documentary value in
photographs and thus assume that what lies behind the image is “authentic,” “correct,” or “true.”
It is rather peculiar that in his search for authentic representations of Bleston, Revel never once
turns to or mentions a photograph of the city, nor takes a picture himself.99 Despite the lack of
photographic evidence of this city, I want to suggest that Butor’s entire novel could possibly be

99 Kodak had already begun to introduce portable cameras for individual use by the early 1950s.
read as a metaphor of the slow and meticulous task of photographic development and, as a result, the development of narrative. For most photographers working in the pre-digital age, true photographic art happens in the darkroom. For those who have never been in a darkroom, it is far from dark. Once the pupils have sufficiently dilated, a space that initially appeared inaccessible is in fact quite navigable as a result of the reddish atmosphere that does not harm the unexposed film.

Returning to his initial experience of the tapestries—the moment when he realized how cities can be identified—Revel explains that if he had read the readerly descriptions of each panel, he would not have appreciated the entire oeuvre:

Si ce travail d’approche m’avait été épargné, si j’avais eu d’emblée à ma disposition un catalogue semblable à celui-ce par lequel je sais maintenant les noms de tous ces criminels exécutés, de toutes ces femmes, de tous ces lieux, les tapisseries n’auraient pas pris dans ma vie tant d’importance.

[If I had been spared this preliminary work, if I had had at my disposal a catalogue such as the one which has since taught me the names of these men and women and places, the tapestries would not have played so important a role in my life] (228).

The “writerly” text is one that requires readers to struggle, to consider all the possible perspectives, interpretations and points of view. The final product lies outside of the author’s grasp, as it is the product of a pact between reader and writer. Revel appreciates the tapestries for creating a host of possible narratives in his head, and series of possible imaginary paths, récits, and stories to discover. This experience is echoed in the darkroom, since photography immortalizes past events, and relies on a delayed processing time, as certain colors, images and
figures appear faster than others in the positive. The detective is a source of figurative illumination. His job is to “shed light” on the situation, but this illumination cannot be done too quickly. Revel, in his own right takes time to develop the image of the city, finding the metaphorical darkroom experience more thrilling than the final product, populating this zone between reality and representation.

Many observers have highlighted the various shades of black and red that define Bleston’s aura. On the one hand, Bleston is a dark, somber city, whose river is the same color as Horace Buck’s skin, and whose sooty buildings hover ominously above its shadowy streets. Most link this darkness to its counterpoint, the illumination, or revelation that the narrator-detective desires to achieve. However, throughout this clouded urban space, multiple shades of red burn in the city. Scholars have concentrated on the violence of the fratricide suggested through the red hue of Abel’s blood projected onto Revel’s hands through the stained glass window, reading Revel as a modern-day Cain. My main point of contention with this reading is that, as I hope to have demonstrated, the hands of Revel, no matter how hard they try, cannot subdue this city, cannot kill its mobile image capturing it on dead pages of his diary. Far from being linked to death or stasis, his hands are intricately linked to the act of creation and construction. Thus, instead, the amber and crimson lights that shine in the city’s backgrounds establish a parallel between the literary process and the darkroom which used red light in the production of a black and white image. This parallel between Revel’s experience of the city and the photographic process is most clearly supported by Revel’s endeavor to capture the city since the objective nature of photography is to fix a momentary, passing, and possible mobile presence in a single image. However this image must still be developed on a certain type of paper using a
particular combination of chemicals in order to turn a negative image into a black and white print.

Read in this light, it is not surprising that Revel describes the white pages on which he writes as “luis[ant] dans la lumière” [shining in the sunlight] (271), as if they have the sheen of photographic paper. Through the imagery of pages, Butor reminds us that Revel is a mobile body caught between a black and white foreign body; located between this negative of sorts, Revel is the developing agent, turning the latent images offered by the city into visual images for himself and his readers. If the city offers the negative – the brute experience, images, and ideas – it is the job of the author/photographer to turn this negative into a photograph (positive image) in the form of the book/photographic image. However, as he himself admits, he is never able to provide this positive image. He is unable to make the final print since the essence of Bleston keeps eluding him. Instead Revel spends his whole time developing the image, returning to it, playing with it, highlighting—“burning in” in technical terms—certain images and burning out others.

In his essay “le roman et la poésie,” Butor explains, “celui qui aperçoit qu’une structure est en train de s’esquisser dans ce qui l’entoure, et qui va poursuivre cette structure, la fait croître, la perfectionner, l’étudier, jusqu’au moment où elle sera lisible pour tous” [someone who realizes that a structure is being sketched in what surrounds it, and who pursues this structure, makes it grow, perfects it, studies it, up to the point that it is readable for (understood by) everyone] (1960; 47). But, as I have already mentioned, this notion of a structure that is fully knowable and completely readable is impossible to achieve. Thus, the city of Bleston, this fictional city between Revel and himself, morphs into one large darkroom between reality and representation, in which this “everyman’s city” can be observed through different lenses, exposed at different apertures, and, most importantly, continually developed. The true novel, and the future of the

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100 This could also explain all the fires that rage throughout the city.
novel, Butor suggests, must concentrate on the art of developing its subject, as opposed to simply making it visible.

In his definition of what he calls the “postmodern detective” Richard Swope provides certain key characteristics that we have just observed in the case of Jacques Revel. The postmodern detective is a roaming and observing subject that “dramatizes the quintessential (thinking) subject” while exploring the cultural moment in which he lives. He uncovers a certain space, and yet finds himself transformed by this space at the same time (222). Read in this light, Revel would fall under this definition since he not only discovers Bleston, but is also changed by it, as his text itself. I now shift from the amateurish detective Revel to the stereotypical, workaholic and equally postmodern detective in Christian Volckman’s film Renaissance to show how other borders can be used in different urban spaces to interrogate the limits of the cinema.


In one of the concluding scenes of Christian Volckman’s Renaissance (2006), the postmodern detective and protagonist Karas (Daniel Craig) travels through the futuristic Paris of 2054. Within the corridors of the old subway system, Karas is in search of Ilona (Romola Garai), a young scientist from “Caucasia” who has been kidnapped by Claus, an immortal adult trapped in a child’s body that has been wrinkled and wizened by the genetic defect, progeria. As Karas navigates the dark tunnels, his flashlight falls upon three directional signs located on the brick wall (figure 34). Two signs point to the left (rue d’Aboukir, rue de Cléry) while the other points to the right (rue de Montmartre). Rue d’Aboukir and rue de Cléry designate locations in

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101 The presentation of this subway system is very similar to the Parisian “égouts,” or sewer system of modern day Paris. These directional indications in the city’s ancient form of transportation resemble those that currently exist in the sewer system and are designed to let sanitation workers know where they are in the environment above them. Although I do not discuss this in more detail in this project, this stratification of underground space – placing Karas in the old metro system, on top of the old sewer system – could be a very interesting aspect of the film to pursue.
the current-day 10th arrondissement (or section) of Paris known to Parisians as “Bonne Nouvelle,” literally “Good News.” However, Karas, whose detective skills and instinctual knowledge have been highlighted since the beginning of the film, chooses to exit the screen to the right, in the direction of the rue de Montmartre, and the “Casbah” in the 18th arrondissement, suggesting that he is heading in the direction of “Bad News.” This seemingly benign scene, caught quickly by the camera, is critical to understanding a key aspect of the film and its multiple messages. Framed by the wall (the signs can only point in two directions) the group of signs represents one of many dialectical dilemmas and either-or situations that define not only the central figure, Barthelemy Karas, but also Paris of 2054 and the future of the entire French nation. Karas’s ability to glide through the streets of Paris in search of evildoers is threatened by various material and immaterial borderlands that capture his real and virtual presence.

Despite a rather poor box-office reception, Volckman’s animated futurist noir thriller has been the topic of discussion for many scholars in French cinema and animation over the past few years and has since achieved a large cult following. The plot itself deals with the ethics of the body, and scientific and technological control over life as it highlights the corrupt practices of Avalon, the pharmaceutical company that seeks to obtain the ultimate consumer product: immortality. In its treatment of nature and space, Renaissance fits into the long tradition of science fiction stories in which the protagonist discovers that the world is not what it appears to be (Swope 221). In this section I link the reflections found within this film to the possibility of a new, posthuman cinema, by paying particular attention to the human qualities, or lack thereof, that come to define the characters in Renaissance, and how these are reflected on various surfaces through the film. My aim is to show that Karas and the cinematic medium that gives him shape are located in a hybrid location between various dichotomies. Both Karas and the
cinema “are ether,” not one or the other, but both, multiple.\textsuperscript{102} I see this, then, as an extension of Butor’s borderland poetics, since despite the different city and different medium, both creators are interested in the relationship between their respective artistic mediums and the borderland. Butor used the edges and in-between spaces of Bleston in order to suggest new itineraries in the city and new narrative paths in the novel, thus pushing the limits of his own medium. Here, we will see, that through his privileging of another form of border, Volckman is attempting the same feat, this time speaking about the future of cinema in relation to the captured motion of its human parts. Whereas Butor concentrated on liminal zones within the city’s geography as well as socio-cultural borders occupied by Revel, Volckman chooses to concentrate on a very specific liminal and dividing surface. Drawing from the heterogeneous group of film theorists Gilles Deleuze, Christian Metz and André Bazin, I seek to uncover the importance of the multiple mirror-images, reflections and refractions that are visible throughout the film.

\textbf{Confusing the border, de-essentializing the \textit{banlieue}}

For Katherine Hayles, the goal of posthumanism is to “abandon the attempt to police the boundaries between the human and nonhuman and see both as enwebbed within a skein of mutual interrelations” (135). In privileging the border between the human and the non-human, this intellectual movement forces us to reconsider all binaries. According to Sue Swope, science fiction does not simply provide a "representation of the future” rather, it allows the viewer to grasp “the present as history: that is, as a relationship to the present which somehow de-familiarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective” (220). As a piece of science fiction, \textit{Renaissance} depicts an imagined, futuristic city, yet remains useful in drawing our attention to the production of social space and

\textsuperscript{102}This is how Donna Haraway describes the posthuman figure in \textit{The Cyborg Manifesto}. 
providing a means by which we “might gain the distance necessary to analyze the social spaces produced by and within the postmodern moment” (Swope 221). Through its depiction of the French urban fabric, and through the mobile limit Karas, Renaissance urges the viewer to contemplate contemporary French society and the ideal of the French Republic in which “race, national origins, and religion of citizens do not matter” (Austin 86).

Like all of the characters analyzed in the project, Karas is both an insider and an outsider. Although he works for the city and the pharmaceutical company Avalon that clandestinely controls the police force, Karas is still considered a foreigner of sorts. During his quest to find Ilona, his interaction with her sister, Bislaine, begins to turn into a budding romance. After the two seek shelter from the rain on the balcony of her apartment overlooking the endless cityscape, Bislaine attempts to break through his guarded exterior by caressing his arm. This action unintentionally exposes him for who he really is, as she accidentally reveals a tattoo hidden under his sleeve. Up to this point, Karas has exhibited a cold demeanor and has made no reference to family, friends, or his personal life. His lack of family marks him as an outsider, while his spatial presence in Paris and professional function within the city establish him as Parisian. Recognized by Bislaine to be the same mark found on the gangster boss, Farfella, who she knows from the club scene, this tattoo is a testament to Karas’s true origins. Engraved on his skin – like Said’s graffiti throughout the streets of Kassovitz’s Paris – it is a graphic and pictorial birthmark that establishes his home (where he is from) outside of Paris, in the Casbah.

Through the personal history of Karas and other characters in Renaissance, Volckman uses the futuristic French city in order to comment on his country’s state of affairs by playing with Paris’s internal and external borders. As I just suggested, Karas comes from the Casbah – a space marked by North African culture – that is thus not part of French culture, and definitely
outside of Paris. This visible distinction between Paris and the Casbah, a clash of cultures and cleanliness\(^\text{103}\), most likely represents the separation already discussed in chapter three, between Paris (marked by the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame) and its *banlieue* (represented by Sacré-Cœur and the modern HLM-like buildings around it (figure 35)). Those familiar with Paris may have already spotted the spatial discrepancy between inside and outside, since, in contemporary Paris, Montmartre is very much inside the city. I would like to suggest that Volckman is altering this futuristic animated urban space in order to draw viewers’ attention to the unfounded division of *banlieue* and city center, as well as the outright French Republican refusal to include other cultures under the umbrella of *francité*. On the one hand, this Casbah – this fortified (North-African) city – can be read as a city within a city, another mise en abyme that reminds the reader of Butor’s book within a book. On the other hand, through its namesake and its insalubrious portrayal in the film (it is populated by drug addicts and houses Karas’s old friend and current drug lord, Farfella), the Casbah is linked to the French *banlieue* through the same negative images across news channels that surfaced during *La Haine*’s release in 1995, and just prior to *Renaissance*’s release in 2005. It is thus a suburban space, fully integrated into the built environment. Like the fortified Casbah in Algiers, however, it is designed to be a separate entity, around which the city and its urban sprawl has continued to spread.\(^\text{104}\) James Austin is keen to point out that such expansion of Paris is not possible in the current political climate since Paris fixed its *de facto* limits in 1840 and its official boundaries in 1860 (Austin 1980; 82-3). As we have already discussed earlier, the suburbs are neither part of the metropolis (according to law) nor bound by the same spatial constraints, and are “free” to expand. Whatever the legal definition of the Parisian city limits may be, for Austin the *banlieue* is part and parcel of the

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\(^{103}\) The Casbah is routinely presented as a dirty place.

\(^{104}\) In fact, many scenes show a metropolis that fades into the horizon and seems to go on forever, much like that encountered by Revel in *Bleston*. 
larger Parisian landscape. While the physical and geographical borders may be clear, the cultural borders are permeable.

In the film, the difference between the city center and the suburb mirrors the same human/non-human divide I will analyze below. In other words, just as the lines between suburb and city are blurred, so Volckman seems to be asking us to consider the division between human and non-human. Whereas Paris is represented by calm images of families, tourists, and historical buildings, the banlieue is a dark zone populated by drunks, thugs and virtual prostitutes. “Presented in a relatively positive way in the 1980s as the new emblem of a possible multicultural future,” Bruno Levasseur explains in reference to the French banlieue, “those enclaves have, since then and into the 1990s, given rise to perceptions more and more frequently used to insidiously suggest both a threat to and peril for the nation” (98). In depictions of the banlieue there is usually a tendency towards “sensationalism, violence and exoticism [which] has hindered the de-naturalization of the image of the banlieues” (Levasseur 99). When Ilona disappears from Club 71, located in the banlieue-like space, the police captain describes the area as “la jungle.” It is important to situate the film within the French historical context, since it was released only nine months after the famous riots of 2005. Thus, while the film was being made, the danger of the banlieue was being preached in every major source of media, just as it had been during the time of La Haine’s release.

While Volckman’s images of the city construct the banlieue in the same de-naturalized and dangerous fashion (much like the cameras that documented the riots in 2005), the narrative offers a competing interpretation of this “jungle.” In a way, despite the fragmented city that is painted by the animation and various framing shots, the film contributes to “the re-evaluation of the city margins as a territory torn between violence and alterity” (Austin 82) since the dangers
arise not from the banlieue, but from the “interior” that surrounds it. Those that are cent pour cent French—Ilona and Dallenbach (the president of Avalon who ends up being the antagonist)—are those that pose the biggest threat to the French nation. The hope for the nation and the veritable French identity lies in the hands of protagonist-detective, Karas, who was born in the Casbah but works for the city. Moreover, Karas’s childhood friend-turned-bad-guy, Farfella, is not as bad as his animated characterization would suggest (figure 36). Behind his mean demeanor and guttural, sinister laugh, hides a soft side. Surely he has done some awful things, but the viewer is never privy to his bad behavior. In the film, Farfella is faithful to Karas – and the French state through him – on two occasions, first providing footage of the real kidnapper, Claus, and later providing shelter for Bislaine, sister of Ilona and Karas’s pseudo-girlfriend. This could be read as an attempt to “de-essentialize the banlieue myth and challenge the image of a French nation in continuous crisis” (Levasseur 97). Despite the fact that the camera seeks to segregate the “suburbanites” to their own space, the narrative suggests that they are “not ‘apart’ but as ‘a part’ of a same common entity, France” (Levasseur 100). In the end, it is Karas who eventually makes the correct and difficult decision for not only France, but also the entire human race, by shooting the very same person he initially set out to find.105 In this way, he “has enabled the viewer to re-think the position of the banlieues in relation to the national community” (Levasseur 101). This outsider from birth, of hybrid nationality, who eventually saves the day, finds himself stuck between much more than two urban cultures.

105 Ilona, the scientist who was initially kidnapped by Claus, was going to expose the cure for immortality, thus doing away with the border between life and death, and metaphorically killing the human race as we know it.
Borderlands: Tracing the human on glass

This allusion to the administrative limits of Paris and extended discussion of the role of borders in contemporary French society is supported by other border spaces, thus drawing attention to the importance of the mobile limits. As Karas moves through a black and white world, between Paris and the Casbah, he confronts the dialectics of life and death. However, it is not the separated-ness of the common binary oppositions that is highlighted through his quest, but the circuit *in-between*; it is the ‘thirdspace’ (to use Edward Soja’s term mentioned earlier in this dissertation) that connects two seemingly opposing ideas. As we briefly learned in the introduction to this project, for Régis Debray, borders should not be criticized for their ability to separate sides, since without them, the two sides would be meaningless. In Volckman’s film this belief is represented through the figure of Dr. Jonas Mueller. Although he appears only rarely in the film, the narrative drive is endowed by his presence since his research led to the discovery of the protocol for immortality. Despite the overarching plot of chase to recover the protocol of immortality, *Renaissance* is not a film about life or death – since as Dr. Mueller specifies, “sans la mort, la vie n’a pas de sens” [*without death, life is meaningless*]. It is in search of “an-other” space, separate from, yet dependent upon, both sides and within which the protagonists and the narrative progress. Life only makes sense in relation to death, and to remove this separation would make life meaningless. The space between life and death, the in-between thirdspace, is alluded to throughout Volckman’s film; it is spatialized through multiple and diverse mirror-images located throughout the film. Drawing notions from Gilles Deleuze, we will see that these mirror-images, or “haylosigns” (Deleuze 1987) speak to the medium of film and how, through the trope of the border, Volckman is investigating the future of “posthuman” cinema.
Before I demonstrate the preponderance of reflected images in *Renaissance*, it is fruitful to first observe the prevalence of a repetition of discourse. To provide just one instance, before Dr. Mueller commits suicide-by-cop, having discovered the protocol for humanity and not destroying it in time and thus implementing himself in the destruction of humanity, he explains to Karas: “Vous êtes notre dernière chance” [*You are our last chance*]. However, only a few scenes later, after Karas has found Ilona (who now wants to profit from such a powerful discovery) and explained to her the importance of disappearing so that Avalon (her employer and the clandestine, unofficial governing body of the city) cannot obtain the protocol for immortality, Karas offers the same plea to Ilona: “You are our last chance.” Because this line is repeated four times, it is nearly impossible to miss the mirror reflections of discourse in the film. This mimetic dialogue emphasizes the leitmotif of the mirror in the film.

For many theorists, the link between the mirror and cinema is evident. When Dudley Andrew describes the cinema, for example, he points out that the cinema reflects the world around us and “in true mindless, mirror-like fashion, does return to us all its reflections” (150). Reflection, in this citation, is the essence of cinema. However the trope of mirror can equally provide insight into the characters whose images are reflected: the mirror is a place for mental reflection; it can represent fractured personality/confusion, vanity, self-analysis and even suspense. Jez Conolly claims that in classic noir films, the mirror has always played a central role in order to “indicate the ambivalent state of mind or double-crossing intention of their characters, to suggest that they are harboring ulterior motives, divided loyalties or split personalities” (Conolly). Moreover, the mirror is also important in the technique of mise en abyme in which a smaller copy of some image is repeated though a mirror reflection, and which, as we have already seen, features in Volckman’s film. If Volckman and his team of over 400
animators are obsessed with the mirror-image, then it is possible that they are simply following the common practice of the noir genre, in the same way that someone now uses the dated technique of the iris wipe as a tip of the hat to cinematic history. However, these mirror-images in fact differ from normal mirror-images found in classic noir films.

In a world as vain as this futuristic Paris, where the French national motto “liberté, égalité, fraternité” [liberty, equality, fraternity] has been replaced by the pharmaceutical company’s slightly altered reflection, “santé, beauté, longévité” [heath, beauty, longevity], the presence of mirrors would be understandable. Ironically, however, an actual mirror is never present. Images are always reflected not on mirrors but other glass or glass-like surfaces – such as windows, glass partitions, and placid rivers – that serve other functions than reflection. The majority of characters in Renaissance find themselves repeatedly caught in glass structures that do not simply confine them to rather restricted areas, but more importantly reflect and multiply their bodies (figure 37). Volckman’s choice to refract and relay the image of his protagonists in panes of glass, instead of mirrors, alludes to the borderland that glass represents.

Glass is a transparent material that reflects images depending on perspective and can make us reflect on something reflected in the mirror. It is not only loyal, since one can look through the glass at an object on the other side, it is also, according to André Bazin “trompeuse puisque cependant elle sépare et dramatique puisque l’igorer la brise et promet au Malheur – n’oublions pas la croyance populaire aux sept ans de malheur attachés aux morceaux d’une glace brisée [deceitful since it equally separates, and dramatic since to ignore it is to break it which brings bad luck – let’s not forget the seven years of bad luck attached to broken glass] (Bazin

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106 When the mirror is mentioned in relation to cinema, one is hard-pressed not to think immediately of Cocteau’s Orphic Trilogy, particularly Orphée in which a no-man’s land and in-between space called “La Zone” is accessible beyond the mirror. Through the mirror one can access the underworld for Cocteau. As a man-made object that reflects an image, Cocteau says this is a form of border between the living and the dead.
Glass can be populated by the image of the character in a film, yet this image is, at the same time, separated from both sides. In other words, it concomitantly belongs to both sides and to neither side. As long as characters’ images are perceived on the glass, the possibility of the borderland, and of thirDSPace, remains. Whereas the mirror’s very purpose may be the mimetic process, reflections on glass more accurately represent and reflect the borderland poetics than the mirror. While the presence of glass may introduce a physical separation into the environment, it nevertheless establishes a form of communication between the two sides it creates, at least visually. Volckman is brilliant in demonstrating that although this borderland can be experienced, life in the borderland (in the glass) cannot go on forever. In almost every scene, reflective surfaces double the images of various characters. In the holding cell, for example, which instead of iron bars is constructed of planes of impenetrable Plexiglas, Farfella’s henchman, caught after a high-speed chase, paces back and forth. However it is mainly Karas whose image is consistently doubled by these reflective surfaces. Despite the fact that Karas’s image is reflected on every pane of glass throughout the film, eventually his image is no longer captured on any of these surfaces. When he learns that Ilona has discovered the protocol for immortality, Karas decides that he will have to stop her. His choice of one direction, one conclusion, and one side removes him from the borderland. Volckman not only suggests that he has left the borderland; he hammers this point home by removing any trace of his image from any reflective surfaces once he decides to choose a side. Having learned from Dr. Mueller that Ilona is now in control of the immortality protocol, Karas asks his former friend Farfella to place Bislaine in protective custody. Farfella pulls up in his shiny limousine and informs Karas that, with this act of protection, they are now even. As the automobile drives off, the window is closed and the tinted glass shows no reflection of Karas (figure 38). In fact, from this point on in the
film, not a single surface reflects Karas’s presence. Having chosen a side, he has left the borderland, suggesting that glass can no longer contain his virtual image.

While the in-between position of glass represented life in the borderland, these mirror-images must also speak about what “cinema” is. For Christian Metz, cinema is like a mirror, but it differs from the primordial mirror “il est une chose, une seule, qui ne s'y reflète jamais: le corps propre du spectateur” [there is one and only one thing that never reflects on its surface: the body of the spectator] (32). This quote has a particular resonance in Renaissance since it is specifically bodies that are most consistently reflected. For Gilles Deleuze, the mirror plays a crucial role in cinema. Since cinema is a representation of space and time, certain films are able to capture the essence of time within what he calls the “image-crystal” [crystal-image] or “haylosign.” In Cinema II: L’image-temps, Deleuze takes Henri Bergson’s notions of space and time and applies it to cinema. For Deleuze, whenever we are presented with a mirror in a film, we are faced with two images: the “actual” (the real object placed in front of the mirror) and the “virtual” (the mirror-image of the real object). The “crystallisation du temps” [crystallization of time] is the moment that simultaneously looks forward to the near future that has not yet happened, and back to the past that birthed it. As Deleuze enunciates it so well, it is an image that makes visible the two “jets” [flows], that of “les présents qui passent et… des passés qui se conservent” [presents which pass and … pasts which are preserved] (129). The crystallization of time manages to capture the flow of time in one image; it is a point that is impossible for the human eye to perceive, but continually exists between the real (actual) time of perception and the virtual of recollection.

For Deleuze, every film creates its own chronology and therefore its own conception of time. Renaissance’s narrative offers a mise en abyme of what Deleuze’s crystal-image attempts
to show in a single image. Deleuze describes certain cinematic worlds as “cristaux de temps” [crystals of time] since they are able to combine the present and the past into one seemingly linear timeframe. Released in 2006, *Renaissance* is set in 2054, the spectator’s future. Despite the not-too-distant future that serves as the film’s setting, there are many reminders to the present of the spectator, located in the narrative’s past. When Bislaine describes the journal, which her sister Ilona had stolen, she explains that all she remembers is that “il y avait une date sur la couverture, 2006” [there’s a date on the cover: 2006]. The journal that marks the discovery of the Mueller protocol of immortality is dated to the spectator’s present (the film was released in 2006); the narrative’s past (or “virtual”) is the spectator’s present (or “actual”). Moreover, the immortal Claus, who is constantly switching identities in order to avoid detection, most recently took the name of Vigor Ivanov. According to an urn in Vigor’s relative’s house, Vigor passed away in 2005, which is not only the past of the narrative, but also the past of the contemporary audience. As Deleuze explains:

Ce qui constitue l’image-cristal, c’est l’opération la plus fondamentale du temps : puisque le passé ne se constitue pas après le présent qu’il a été ; mais en même temps, il faut que le temps se dédouble à chaque instant en présent et passé, qui diffère l’un de l’autre en nature, ou, ce qui revient au même, dédouble le présent en deux directions hétérogènes, dont l’une s’élance vers l’avenir et l’autre tombe dans le passé.

*What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or, what amounts to the same thing, it has to split the*
present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the
future while the other falls into the past.] (108-109)

Thus, in a similar fashion to the crystal-image, this futuristic narrative represents the splitting of
the present as it combines the spectator’s past, present and future.

When he is speaking of the crystallization of time, however, Deleuze is referring to single
images, not entire narratives. These images can be described as borderlands, since, in Bergsonian
terms, “l’objet réel se réfléchit dans une image en miroir comme dans l’objet virtuel qui, de son
côté et en même temps, enveloppe ou réfléchit le réel: il y a « coalescence » entre les deux” [the
real object is reflected in a mirror-image as in the virtual object which, from its side and
simultaneously, envelops or reflects the real: there is ‘coalescence’ between the two] (92-3). The
crystal image is formed through the synthesis of the two images; it is a “double mouvement de
libération et de capture” [double movement of liberation and capture] (93). A small “internal
circuit,” limit, or borderland is established between the actual and the virtual, and it is on this
circuit that the crystal-image is formed. Thus, it is not necessarily on the glass that the image is
formed, but on the interplay between the actual and the virtual. Just as Soja’s thirddspace that is
not an either/or but “both/and”, so the crystal-image demands the presence of both the virtual and
the actual. In other words, whereas the mirror-image is created on the glass, the crystal-image is
located in-between. In order for the crystal-image to exist, Dr. Muller’s claim could be reworked
to read: in the cinema, “without the virtual image, the actual image is meaningless.”

We can begin to observe that the place of the actual is fleeting, and in some cases, the
character is dissolved in place of his or her virtual image. Although such an action would
dissolve the crystal-image completely (since it relies on the presence of both actual and virtual),
what would happen to the role of the actor? One scene in particular in Renaissance attempts to
achieve this effect as the camera slowly moves onto the glass window in Bislaine’s apartment that overlooks the Eiffel Tower. As Karas walks toward the window, contemplating the possible suspects in his case, the trace of his image, reflected on the glass moves toward him as all mirror images do. Soon, however, as Karas’s actual image gets closer to this material borderland, this particular shot offers an over-the-shoulder shot of Karas’s virtual image in the glass, looking out the window as if it were an actual image. The image of the actual image represented on the screen is only a representation of the reflection of the actual image, it is a tracing of the actual (figure 39). When virtual images proliferate as often as they do in Renaissance, they threaten to “absorbe toute l’actualité du personnage” [absorb the entire actuality of the character”] (Deleuze 108), which in turn forces the spectator to question the place and function of the human in cinema, whose “actual” body has been removed in favor of his or her trace. In cinema, while the actor acts, the image captured on the screen is a trace of the actor. Here, the trace of this trace is now competing for position, much like the parasites in Godard’s Paris.

Of course, the trace could never threaten the actual human existence of the characters in cinema if these characters had a personality, and an interiority that is fundamental to human nature. However these virtual traces of Karas and Bislaine captured in the glass never entice the character to reflect on his or her emotional state of being. Although there is reflection (physical), there seem to be no reflection (on their own humanity). Since neither Karas nor Bislaine observe or contemplate their image in the mirror, the spectator begins to suspect that some other message is being suggested. The characters’ lack of self-recognition of their own image in the glass further suggests that any psychoanalytic interpretation of Lacan’s mirror-stage is not applicable. Instead, Volckman proposes that we look elsewhere.
At quite a few moments in the film, a character’s eyes are highlighted, which would imply that the camera is entering inside his or her mental state (figure 40). However as the camera gets closer and closer to these eyes, the following scenes do not go into some distant past, nor do they reinforce some emotional aspect of the characters; the next shot simply shows the viewers what this creature is seeing. Much like the black-and-white graphic animation and rather dry plot, these characters are psychologically flat. Put another way, these images caught in the glass are not images for mental reflection on the part of the characters, but are simply visual reflections of an already absent presence. For André Bazin, one of the key differences that separate the stage from the screen is that of the presence of the actor: “It is false to say that the screen is incapable of putting us ‘in the presence of’ the actor. It does so in the same way as the mirror—one must address that the mirror relays the presence of the person reflected in it—but it is a mirror with a delayed reflection, the tin foil of which retains the image” (97). Whereas, in the theater, the spectator is physically located in the same space and time as the actor, cinema only provides a “tracing” of the original presence – these mirror-images are simply fleeting images of absent presences. In a way then, cinema, like a firearm, kills the presence of the actor.

This idea is played out in the film’s narrative through the deaths of the two scientists: Mueller and Ilona. Although they are shot and killed by members of the state, the former by the police department that Karas works for and the latter by Karas himself, it is through cameras located within the diagesis that the viewer observes the deaths of each. Dr. Mueller’s death is seen through the perspective of the scope of the gun that shoots him (figure 41). In the case of Ilona, the death is seen not from Karas’ perspective—even though he is the one who shot her—but through one of the countless surveillance cameras located throughout the city (figure 42). In

107 In the “Making of Renaissance,” the creators explain that their choice to film in black & white forced them to overly caricaturize faces in order to provide them with a little depth and to make each character discernable to the spectators. Had they not done this, facial characteristics would have disappeared on the flat background.
both cases, the human is killed metaphorically through the lens of the camera. In other words, the aforementioned lifeless stares caught lingering on virtual screens or on reflected glass, when combined with mediated images of death (images seen through a mechanical as opposed to human eye), suggest that the human, and particularly human perception is threatened in this futuristic space. In cinema’s early years, Luis Bunuel brutally sliced an actress’s eyeball in order to demonstrate the importance of altering how humans look at the cinematic image. Here, on the limits of a new age of cinema, Volckman seems to be urging viewers to reconsider through this emphasis on perception, the human element in the cinema.

Although he alludes to one particular dehumanizing aspect of cinema above, Volckman is far from the first to observe this particular phenomenon. Due to the camera’s “indifferent gaze,” Dudely Andrew contends, “it is easy for the lens, or objectif to displace a human being from the center and make a person appear as an object like any other included in the field of vision” (150). On the screen, the human element becomes non-human; it becomes Other. For Andrew, “only through filmmaking can we glimpse this sense of Otherness about what a human is” (150). For Metz, the unique position of the cinema “tient à ce double caractère de son signifiant: richesse perceptive inhabituelle, mais frappée d'irréalité à un degré inhabituel de profondeur, dès son principe même” [lies in this dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but unusually profoundly stamped with unreality, from its very beginning] (48). Just as the virtual image forces the actual image out of the frame, so the human character seems to disappear in the unreality that is the cinema. If the signifier is imaginary and absent, then what does this say about the role of the human in the cinema? It was Bazin who claimed that the human is not important in cinema since, while the human being is all-important in the theater, the drama on
the screen does not need actors necessarily.\textsuperscript{108} This dilemma becomes even more difficult in 
\textit{Renaissance} where the human actors have been digitally animated through the technique of motion capture.

\textbf{Posthuman cinema: motion-capture and the cyborg}

This question of absence and presence leads to the larger, more global question of the (post)human figure in the cinema. The posthuman should not be seen as an apocalyptic break with the past. It is an overlapping and constant revision of the past, as it searches to locate the constantly shifting definition of what it means to be human. For many people, the posthuman is synonymous with cyborgs such as those seen in \textit{The Terminator} (1984) and \textit{Robocop} (1987). While some consideration must be devoted to the ways in which Karas and others are presented as cyborgs, \textit{Renaissance} clearly positions itself within the philosophical inquiry on posthumanism. Much like the characters that populate this imagined city, posthumanism is located in the borderland between the human and the non-human. This section will attempt to demonstrates the way in which Volckman presents his characters, and \textit{films} them, in order to suggest that he is creating a \textit{posthuman} cinema.

In the difficult field of posthumanism there are two competing camps of interpretation of the evolution of the human and the machine in the twenty-first century. Probably the most cited and positive theory comes from Donna Haraway whose \textit{Cyborg Manifesto} (1985) reveals the liberating possibilities of the cyborg—a figure located between nature and culture, human and nonhuman. For Haraway, the human is never a given; it is a constant becoming, made through an ongoing process of evolution. Her cyborg is not necessarily a Robocop or a Terminator, but it is just as threatening to metanarratives and ideologies. On the other side of the coin is Francis

\textsuperscript{108} He deals with this particularly on pages 100-105.
Fukuyama’s *Our Posthuman Future* (2003), which suggests the dark and dangerous side of increased bioengineering and genetic modification. However, between these two perspectives lies a spectrum of particularly philosophical readings of the posthuman condition by Jacques Derrida, among others, which claim that the “post” in posthumanism evokes questions of the human itself. Instead of asking what posthumanism is, one should instead ask, what human is.¹⁰⁹

Since Haraway’s manifesto, posthumanism has been a provocative issue, as the question of what it means to be human (or not human) has become increasingly complex and confusing. It seems that the more the essence of the human is explained, “the more the lines between human and nonhuman blur” (Hayles, 134). The cyborg remains a crucial (and controversial) marker of contemporary identity, social relations and subjecthood as “it interrogates the boundaries of technology’s increasing intersection with our lives and highlights the ethical dilemmas involved when such intersections occur” (Short 4).

Taking this brief overview of the competing notions of posthumanism into consideration, it could be suggested that any film that attempts to define the human in relation to technology, medicine or the animal is a posthuman film. Marie O’Mahony argues in *Cyborg: The Man Machine* that “a strong motivation for the development of the cyborg is the desire for eternal life, a desire which must be older than history, linked as it is to the instinct of survival” (114). In *Renaissance*, the overarching goal of immortality and the desire of the pharmaceutical company Avalon to obtain this “deadly” weapon of life, speaks to the concerns raised by Fukuyama. As the field of biomedicine continues to grow and as scientists create new drugs that combat the aging process and other health and genetic defects, more and more people will begin to question the morality of such scientific achievements. One of the film’s central questions left unanswered is whether or not Claus, the only immortal offspring of the Mueller protocol, is human or not. Is

¹⁰⁹ See for example Derrida, Jacques & Marie-Louise Mallet *L’animal que donc je suis.*
he “human” if he cannot die? If so, what makes him human? The concluding scene suggests that
the human is defined by a personal history. As Claus stands around a fire pit underneath a bridge
at the outskirts of Paris, he attempts to commit metaphorical suicide, by killing his identity,
burning the only piece of his past that the spectators know about: a picture of him and his
deceased brother, Dr. Mueller (figure 43).

However, the only “recollection-image” (Deleuze 1987), flashback or personal history
that is offered to the spectator is that of Karas escaping with Farfella when they were little—the
one character who is presented as a cyborg. For Donna Haraway, the cyborg is “oppositional”
(17), always agitating the normal state of things. At multiple points during the film, the narration
routinely mentions Karas’s inhuman, antisocial and robotic behavior. After he saves a young
child from a gang of thugs in the beginning of the film, he is seen sitting alone while others talk
about their families and people are always asking him probing questions like “Vous ne dîtes
jamais vraiment rien” [you never really say anything] or “tu m’écoutes” [are you listening?]. He
seems incapable, at times, of communicating as humans do, through language. Likewise, he is a
protector of order, yet he refuses to follow the law, and the dictates of his superiors. He is thus
the “bad cyborg,” since he will end up killing Ilona, the French technocrat from Caucasia, in
order to save the ambiguous “us.” Karas finishes the film as an enemy to the state, or at least of
Avalon, despite being a hero to humanity.

Thus, if Karas is a cyborg (good or bad), then defining the human through personal
history seems untenable. As previously mentioned, the closer one gets to the essence of the
human, the more the lines are blurred between the human and the nonhuman. According to Sue
Short, the “cinematic cyborg” takes primarily two forms: “presented either as former humans
who have been physically modified in some way, as androids with organic components, or as
machines that develop such a degree of sentience as to confound conventional distinctions between human and machine” (Short 5). Karas is a physically modified human since he has an “e-card” that apparently provides him with the ability to detect motion. Whereas Ferdinand in Céline’s *Voyage* was able to spot the particular movements of urban inhabitants, Volckman’s mobile limit has an increased ability to perceive mobility with this added technological appendage. Despite this rather small, visual prosthetic device, everything else about Karas’s body is human. This organic compound highlights a key aspect to the posthuman cyborg: the manipulation of the body and the link between corporeality and the human. Volckman decided not to alter the physical strength of Karas, nor provide him with a nifty shield of armor; Karas’ cyborg body has been manipulated so that he can see and perceive better than others. The importance of visibility and the ability to catch reality in its nakedness speaks to the medium of the cinema, which has constantly sought to unearth the truth of the world. Karas’s e-card is a motion capture camera that allows him to see that which cannot be seen by the human eye (figure 44). Volckman reinforces the importance of perception through his painting of the members of Avalon’s militia who have chosen the prosthetic of invisibility. The members of this special security-squad have a cloak of invisibility that allows them to pass through the city unnoticed (except for the faint din of the electric current that is necessary for the trick to work). Yet Karas’s android-like feature proves superior, as his camera does not capture what is visible, but what is mobile. While these special-operations forces may be invisible to the human eye, their movement is still visible to Karas.

For Erik Davis, the organic compound that defines the cinematic cyborg in O’Mahoney’s definition is not necessarily a new phenomenon. In *TechGnoisis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information*, Davis reinforces the fact that “human beings have been cyborgs from
year zero. It is our lot to live in societies that invent tools that shape society and the individuals in it” (10). Humans have always used tools and apparatuses to advance in the animal kingdom. For Friedrich Kittler, what defines the cyborg (and the cinema) is not necessarily the tools one uses, but the ability for the human to download its essence onto these tools:

Once the technological differentiation of optics, acoustics, and writing excluded Gutenberg's writing monopoly around 1880, the fabrication of so-called man became possible. His essence escapes into apparatuses. Machines take over functions of the central nervous system, and no longer, as in times past, merely those of muscles. (Kittler, 16)

Starting with the typewriter and continuing into the modern age of computers and smart phones, an increasing number of devices are able to store the trace of the human existence and knowledge. Science, Short echoes, “has offered us a means of eliding such difficult realizations, including the possibility of establishing an existence elsewhere” (4). Part of being a cyborg is having the capability of transferring knowledge or downloading it onto software, so that our souls can live eternally through the computer (in which case the majority of us are cyborgs).

Renaissance plays with this idea by specifically leaving out the apparatus that one would expect to find in abundance: electronic storage. In today’s digital age in which a device’s storage capacity is key to its success in the market, it is bizarre that Volckman’s futuristic Paris can be so advanced yet so reliant on the old methods of information storage. The entire protocol for immortality is stored in a book – a dated apparatus of information in the digital age – and Ilona keeps her discovery in her head – or more importantly, in her body – once again reinforcing the importance of corporeality. Whereas modern technology allows our body to become a virtual body, almost all of the characters in Renaissance are cognizant of their physical matter. Karas is
identified through a tattoo on his body; the same thing goes for Claus. After Karas shoots Ilona, her body slips off the small concrete bridge into the murky water of the sewer system. She floats for a second her head and all of her information, which was never downloaded onto an “apparatus,” floats for a brief moment before sinking with the rest of her body (figure 45).

The cyborg and the posthuman thus provide us with the opportunity to interrogate the possibilities generated by new technologies and their likely impact on human life. The role of computers, as well as artificial life and intelligence is provocative, yet threatening at the same time. As previously noted, despite some high-tech computer screens, retina scans, and sleek cars, the technology in the Paris of 2054 is somewhat restrained. In Making of Renaissance, the writers explain that the goal was to highlight the human element and to make the digital presence of the characters as subtle as possible. Although this task is virtually impossible, it is important to understand that this film is not entirely animated. Much like its central character, the film is a hybrid between the human and the nonhuman, the analog and the digital (Volckman).

Volckman and his group of writers explain in The Making of Renaissance that through the technology of motion-capture, the “believability” of the characters is supposed to permeate the black and white graphic animation. “We must believe in the characters and not see them as fictional characters,” explains one of the film’s writers. In order to make the characters appear like “real cinema characters,” Remi Brun, the supervisor of the motion-capture, adds: “We wanted the presence and emotion that we find in classical cinema. We used motion capture which consists of capturing the actor’s movements and modeling them on virtual characters” (Volckman). While corporeality is important, for Jacques Derrida it is not the key ingredient of the human: it is through language that the human is defined. For the French deconstructionist, the posthuman falls along the human/animal divide. At the limit of our language is the animal, which
has no language at all.\textsuperscript{110} Since animals have no language, there is no way to study them, and thus, no way for them to be considered human. It is only through their lack of language that they become non-human.\textsuperscript{111} This is important because, since Saussure’s initial observations, many theoreticians have attempted to approach film from the position of semiotics. For Christian Metz, who originally tried to link the cinematic shot to the phoneme of the written language, film does not constitute a langue since it lacks “the double articulation that…is the hallmark of natural language” (Lapsley and Westlake 39). If language is what separates the human from the non-human, then the cinema is, according to this definition, inhuman. Once again, Metz chimes in: “The cinema …often presents us with long sequences that can (literally) be called ‘inhuman’” (Metz 50). However, Volckman attempts to represent and keep a form of language that brings corporeality and presence back into the discussion: body language. He tries to claim that the cinema is human, and that the human is always present in the cinema, even in its absence.

André Bazin tackled the idea of the real in cinema, demonstrating that the image that passes through the photographic lens is a real image because the light from the world is transferred to the image through reflection (we have returned to the importance of mirrors). However, in the digital age, light of the world becomes a string of numbers which bear a logical relation to the world instead of a physical one. In Renaissance, a number of small markers were attached to the actor’s body, which were highly reflective when struck by light at a particular axis. Cameras located at different points in the studio recorded these dots, which were then collected and animated into the immaterial bodies that walk the streets of Paris (figure 46). Thus “the human body [is] narrowed down to a few separate points” (Hadjioannou); it is nothing more

\textsuperscript{110} This is Derrida’s explanation. He is of course, aware that many animals do communicate, but their language is not the same as the socially constructed language that, for others, defines the human. Derrida contends this received notion.

\textsuperscript{111} Readers can find a better understanding of Derrida’s position in the aforementioned L’animal que donc je suis.
than a pattern of 0s and 1s. The resulting image is a cyborg—however it is not a modified human, but a modified digital image created to deceive the spectator of the character’s humanity.

Here is where the role of digital media threatens the existence and the materiality of the actor. Once the initial presence of the flesh-and-blood actor has been encoded into the software system, and his or her movement recorded by the motion-capture camera, the weight of the human can be discarded: “In a sense, the characters in Renaissance are morphs, because they too are signifiers of the transformation from an existence to a graphic image – real bodies reduced to extraordinary black and white surfaces” (Hadjioannou). We are not in the presence of the actor, like in a play, nor are we seeing the “tracing” of an actor that is already absent. The signifier is not only absent, it is a digital and animated tracing of a tracing—the simulacra of the tracing, and thus the simulacra of the human. This is particularly evident in the English version of the film, since Daniel Craig is listed for the character Karas. Yet Craig only provided the voice for the film. In this way, the trace of the original human presence (Robert Dauney, the French actor who played Karas on set) has been completely removed, literally written out of existence.

Yet, Volckman tries nonetheless to include the human in his film by addressing this problem of “digital immateriality by reconnecting the configuration of the image to the bodies” (Hadjioannou). He could have simply animated his film, but he chose the new technology at the time of motion capture. Through this process, Dauney becomes what Roland Barthes would call the mandatory “photographic referent” since he is the “necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph” (76-7). This digital image is only made possible by the once-upon-a-time presence of the real human actor. One simply needs to watch the Making of Renaissance, to see the real body of Dauney situated in space and time. Thus the human body, despite being removed, is placed at the center of the narrative. It is
the true essence of posthuman cinema since “characters gain a bodily substance on the basis of motion, a motion that is natural because it follows the lines of nature” (Hadjioannou). Without the human, and the analog, the nonhuman, and the digital would not be possible. Thus, we could rework Dr. Mueller’s original contention and our own previous reworking of his phrase: In posthuman cinema, “without the analog and the human, the digital and the animated are meaningless.” Renaissance demonstrates the posthuman switch in which consciousness and information are privileged over physicality, since the physical actor has been removed. Yet at the same time, the absent presence of the human actor is still visible in the animated image that freely moves across this futuristic Paris. Just like the larger intellectual movement, posthuman cinema is located on the divide between the human and the nonhuman.

**Conclusion**

Butor’s novel and Volekman’s film suggest hypothetical directions for the analysis of their respective artistic mediums through very specific spatial representation of various borderlands in urban space and the ways in which they are practiced and populated by “foreign” detectives. Through a detailed analysis of Butor’s text, I demonstrated how experiencing in-between spaces, gaps, limits and edges could be read alongside the New Novelists’ larger agenda of offering new narrative paths, metaphorically pushing the limits of the text through an interrogation of the fictive city limits. I then extended this approach to another reading of a very different text that depicts a very different urban space. Relying on graphic and metaphorical examples of mise en abyme both artists obsessively remind readers of the process of fiction as well as the mediums they use in order to depict these cities and these stories. In other words,
separated by fifty years, these two different works nevertheless finish with the same suggestion: the borderland is essential to both the input and output of the creative process.
Conclusion: Moving Beyond French Representations of Mobile Limits

The numerous critical and close readings executed in the previous chapters have offered a new way of approaching an understanding of the city, by considering it from its geographic, social and political borderlands. Following Régis Debray’s suggestion that “C’est au jointif, aux interfaces, que l’on trouve les plus débrouillards” [It’s at the conjunctions, and interfaces, where one finds the most resourceful individuals] (66), I analyzed a range of characters moving along various points of conjunction in urban space in order to see how they practice this space in a Certilian fashion. Debray’s observation that “Il est aussi fructueux de penser aux limites que d’errer aux limes: chaque coin nouveau du savoir surgit des marges du précédent” [It is just as fruitful to think about limits as it is to wander on them: every new wedge of knowledge surfaces on the margins if its predecessors] (68), motivated me to look at the various forms of borders that could be found in French representations of urban space.

In conjunction with every attempt to analyze the perambulations, wanderings and itineraries of the mobile limits in French representations of urban space, I also evoked the question of the construction of the city and its image. How do we define the city; how do we understand it? Each film and novel in this project attempts to offer certain perspectives on understanding cities. One of the main objectives of my analysis was to indicate that cities are the operation of large historical forces – like the state, capitalism and bureaucracy – an operation that “traps inhabitants in space,” as David Harvey claims,\(^\text{112}\) or forces city dwellers into a state of (im)mobility, as I have claimed. But the urban experience equally unearths spaces of “innovation, improvisation, change, and resistance” (Praksah 12), made possible by “spatial delinquency.” We have seen in every chapter how the city, planners and bureaucrats have

\(^{112}\) In Harvey’s introduction to The Condition of Postmodernity.
attempted to order the movement of individuals in these urban spaces but that, no matter how many efforts were made, there was still room for spatial delinquents – particularly along borderlands – to practice this space productively and creatively. The complexity of the urban experience was thus highlighted and it was suggested that we begin to pay more attention to borderlands, edges, and limits of urban space in order to more fully (or more ambiguously) understand this experience.

Scholars such as Etienne François and Michael Anderson have demonstrated that the means and modes of movement into, around and through the city do not simply follow the route into the city from the countryside, but generally evoke issues of immigration and assimilation. Some readers may have observed that in the many borderspaces that were analyzed, very few, if any were “national” borders of France. I contend, however, that the battle between the ordered urban system and certain urban (spatial) practices in reaction to this order is entering into dialog not only with discussions on French nationality and identity, but also larger discussions about the global and the local. This project has made a pointed effort to draw the reader’s attention to the common desire to create a clear, totalized image of a given urban space. “In the sphere of culture and ideas,” Susan Suleiman and Christie McDonald explain in their introduction to French Global, “the drive to totalization is the drive to assimilate and to elide cultural differences” (ix). In a way, I see this project as falling very much within the purview of their claim that “Questions about the relation of the (territorial) center to its extraterritorial peripheries have become crucial to discussions of Francophonie” (xi). Their contention is that such questions, discussed in this study, questions between diversity and uniformity, between same and other, are not limited to

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113 See Immigration et société urbaine en Europe et occidentale, XVIe–XXe, pages 79–89; or Michael Anderson’s essay “Urban Migration in Victorian Britain: Problems of Assimilation?”
postcolonial texts, “rather they have informed every period of French literature, starting with some of its most canonical” (xi). This (re)turn to the hexagonal, canonical literature and cinema, demonstrates nevertheless some of the same tensions that postcolonial thinkers have evoked, even if I have not referenced them in this project. In the *The Location of Culture*, the theorist Homi Bhabha proffers a profoundly deep observation in the context of this study, and claims that “it is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (2, emphasis in original). His claim to “nationness and cultural value” can simply be replaced with the terms “urbanity” and “urban capital” (similar to Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital) in the context of this project. In other words, this project has clearly been influenced by such thinkers and might only be possible in a post-colonial world.

In this way, it responds to *French Global’s* justification for rethinking criticism of French literature (and cinema) through new lenses. Stated in slightly different terms, this project has demonstrated that even before the notion of hybridity surfaced in a post-colonial context, very canonical texts have been trying to grapple with this notion of in-betweenness throughout the twentieth century and will continue to do so.

Such questions become even more important when these observations shift: the city to the nation, the local to the global. In the introduction, I mentioned that while this project was heavily focused on Paris, it still made an effort to look elsewhere. The choice of Paris was first established by the amount of literary and cinematic works that have focused on the nation’s capital and was built around my own affinities for the French capital. My intention, however, was never to make it seem like this project was about Paris or movement through Paris, but, as the title suggests, urban space in general. The concept of mobile limits and the limits of mobility
can be extended beyond the administrative stretch of the Parisian region, into a much more
detailed discussion regarding other cities as well. Within the French context, what comes to mind
immediately is the nation’s second largest city that receives much less international attention
(especially positive attention) than Paris. Named the European Capital of Culture in 2013,
Marseille has seen a cultural renaissance of sorts that has led to the creation of a number of free
museums, among other cultural exhibits. This city is evolving more rapidly than Paris, at least
from a demographics point of view, as more than forty-five percent of its population is Muslim.
Such cities and their Franco-Maghrebi links come to represent not just internal or national
borders, but can even represent the global North South divide. What then, is happening within a
city like Marseille and how are other mobile limits attempting to produce a space for themselves,
and in turn, alter this and other borders within the larger global divide?

Finally, the stakes of this project can possibly be extended even further than the borders
of France. In “Urban mobility and Bombay: the postmodern city,” Bill Ashcroft states that cities
are borderland locales in their own right, existing in “an interstitial space between the nation and
the world” (497). In other words, if you were to draw a map between the local and the global, for
Ashcroft, the city serves as the locale that separates and combines the two. Ashcroft is not alone
in this belief and is supported, among others, by Edward Soja. Referring less to the cultural
contact between world and nations, and more to space, he claims that urbanization is “not
confined to the formal administrative boundaries of the city. The urbanization process, and along
with it what can be called the urbanization of (in)justice, are generated primarily in the form of
dense urban agglomerations, but in the present age of accelerating globalization the urban
condition has extended its influence to all areas” (6). If the urban experience truly does reach
every corner of the globe, than any discussion on “urban space” – be it Paris, New York or some
imaginary metropolis – is, at the same time, about space and locationality in much larger terms. It is about living in the world that surrounds us, about understanding space and our participation in it, about comprehending our own roles as mobile limits whose mobility – and the productive capacity attached to that mobility – is constantly threatened.

**Latourien networks**

Having evoked the national and global reach of this project, I think it is best to conclude with a return to a French representation of Paris at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In this project, I have made an effort to stick strictly to narrative representations of urban space in order to unearth the importance of mobility and (im)mobility along edges, limits and, particularly, borders. Given the textual constraints of every project, I have not been able to address all those works that could equally fall within the purview of this project. There is one figure, in particular, whose work could very much fit into this project, yet whose name has only been mentioned in passing: Bruno Latour. The triangulation of his works, *Nous n’avons jamais été modernes* (1991), *Aramis* (1992), and *Paris ville invisible* (1998), nevertheless offers an interesting corollary through his concept of networks and will serve our purposes of opening up possible avenues for future directions for this project and others like it.

As the title of his 1991 foundational essay suggests, although philosophers like Jean-François Lyotard claim that we are in a postmodern world, Latour believes that such a claim is impossible since we have never yet been modern. For Latour, the modern world is defined by two separations: a horizontal separation between Nature and Society (what he calls “culture”) and a vertical separation between this aforementioned binarism on top, and “actants,” or intermediaries, on the bottom. In the first separation, human subjects who move through and
participate in Society are found on one side, while natural objects that cannot be social subjects sit resolutely on the other. Through his anthropological approach to modernity, he suggests that this separation is only made possible by a mass of actants (or quasi-objects and quasi-subjects) that constantly mediate the difference and assure its division between nature and society. In other words, the modern constitution is built on a separation that relies on these quasi-objects in order to exist, however it constantly denies the existence of these quasi-objects, since when one is mentioned, it will absolutely and irreversibly be transformed, either into “objets de la réalité extérieure, d’une part, sujets de la société, d’autre part” [objects of external nature or into subjects of society] (Latour 1991: 130). In this project, I have analyzed characters that are participating in urban space, but who are constantly rejected by the city. I have paid attention to the fact that all borderland subjects must eventually choose a side. In Latour’s theorization, borderland characters are those actants that alter and shape the system.

Latour put this theory of the “amodern” [nonmodern] world into what he calls “scientifiction” (a type of science fiction that centers the narrative “on technology as opposed to plot” (Latour 1991; 4)) when he wrote the very peculiar urban fiction, *Aramis*. The technology at the focus of his narrative is the eponymous failed point-to-point transportation system that was projected to connect suburban inhabitants to the city center through individual, automated pods. When a young engineer turned sociologist learns that the project was not just feasible, but also adequately funded, he and his supervisor set out to find Aramis’s assassin. What he discovers is that all technological projects depend on a multitude of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects that interfere, adhere, and disappear throughout the chronology of the project’s design. Although these “intermediaries” may be very visible during a technological idea’s conceptual phase or trial period, once a theory becomes a project – once an idea becomes a transportation system – all of
these quasi-objects become invisible. In other words, when one considers the Parisian Metropolitan, one sees it as a passage from La Défense to Clichy, and ignores the thousands of actors – human and nonhuman – that make it function “efficiently.”

Through the narrator’s sociological approach to the failed, innovative transportation system, Latour’s Aramis cryptically speaks about the construction of cities. Although he does not overtly state it in this novel, his text, Paris ville invisible makes this link visible. Writing at the turn of the century, Latour observes a double movement in his nation’s capital: a continued desire to totalize the essence of Paris through an all-encompassing image, on the one hand, and digitization of the city on the other. These two desires feed into one another. Although his references are now somewhat dated, the message behind them is still very important to this study and to any project on urban space, since he calls attention to the invisible intermediaries that construct these drives. To provide just one example, he describes the Internet’s establishment of the illusion of a totalized city by wiping away all traces to the intermediaries that made it possible. “Rien dans l’information double click” he explains, “ne permet de garder trace de ce feuilletage d’intermédiaires et, pourtant, dans ce cheminement, on perd la trace du social, puisque les mots ne réfèrent plus à rien et qu’ils n’ont plus de sens – c’est-à-dire plus de mouvement” [Nothing in the information of the double-click keeps any trace of the plate of intermediaries, and yet, through this progression, we lose the trace of the social, since words no longer refer to anything and are void of meaning and direction – in other words, void of movement] (Latour 1998; 76). This “feuillage d’intermédiaires” is just as important for the city as it is to technological projects. Through the click of a mouse, a new form of urban mobility is introduced, moving the sedentary user from one concrete (immobile) image to another concrete (immobile) image of the city, one that completely skips the busy “actants” that make the image
possible. This creates a particular vision of urban space: a totalized vision; one against which the protagonists of these texts discussed in the project have attacked. “La vue totale” Latour contends “est aussi la vue de nulle part” [The complete view is the view from nowhere] (Latour 1999; 58). Where then, can we find a less total, but more productive image of the city? We must, according to Latour, turn to the network along which these actants move, and we must move with them.

It is with this notion of the network that Latour’s theories align most closely with my conceptualization of the borderland. For the philosopher of science and technology, networks are “beings that possess both the capacity to connect and the capacity to divide – that is the capacity to produce both time and space” (Latour 1991:78). The actants that generate the system but remain outside of visibility are more clearly defined as “mediators.” Whereas an “intermediary” is simply a vehicle of transport, transfer and transmittance, for Latour, a “mediator” is an “original event” that creates what it translates as well as the entities between which it plays a mediating roll (Latour 1991: 78). In this and the preceding definitions of the network it is hard to ignore that the borderland poetics we have been discussing throughout this project is, for Latour and his disciples, a power that is equally linked to the network. Be it the network and the mediator as Latour suggests, or the border and the mobile limits as I suggest, it is from these locales that are “simultaneously maintained and abolished, recognized and denied, specified and silenced” (Latour 1991; 79), that everything is produced. By turning our attention to these generative spaces, be they borders or networks, we “abandon the modern world” (Latour 1991; 129) since we deny the separation between Nature and Society. In so doing, we do not land on “une essence, mais un processus, un movement, un passage” [an essence, but on a process, on a movement, on a passage” (Latour 1991: 129). By concentrating on those objects that are
constantly moving in urban space we can begin to understand the depth of the city and appreciate the generative power of these (im)mobile, (in)visible limits. This combination of technology, the urban inhabitant and its city evokes questions about the digital city that could be interesting routes for future research.

**GPS and other digitizations**

The authors of *French Global*, who were equally interested in the notions of diaspora, displacement, immigration, and, most importantly movement, suggest that one should think about literature in the same way we think about Global Positioning Systems (GPS), since one of the best things about the device is “its constant ability and willingness to recalculate” (x). In this project I also examined the mobility of various inhabitants in urban settings. Suleiman and McDonald’s entertaining reference to the possible metaphor of the GPS raises larger questions, raised in the final section on *Renaissance*, about the increased use of technology in relation to the city and the urban dweller. Graeme Harper sees the digitization of urban space resulting in us (humans) becoming *emobile*, “neither always static nor always moving, neither our inner nor our outer sense of pace (that is, it is not based entirely on the physical and, as such, is detached from the solar or the sidereal, which require fixed points of reference), neither the real around us, nor the virtual that is transmitted to us as simulated or simply transported reality” (144). William Mitchell suggests in *City of Bits*, that the increased presence of screens in our daily lives has marked a fundamental transformation of order since whereas “bodies touching each other signaled social connection and orderliness,” today “order means lack of contact” (20-21). These two are not alone, as Diana Festa-McCormick echoes their hesitancies with the digital revolution in *The City as Catalyst*. She claims that this shift to the digital age has had a huge impact on the
daily lives of urban dwellers, “implying even greater distancing from the physical space of the city, from its design, and from previous historic eras that emphasized the creation of livable spaces for pedestrians” (1). All three works combine to elicit questions and offer possible responses to mobility (or (im)mobility) in the digital age through real (or digital) space. Through the screen, the tablet, and other forms of social media, urban inhabitants can be urbane from the comfort and safety of their own homes. For Mitchell this is a negative aspect that has sapped the essence of the city. Latour, as we saw above, equally has gripes with the totalizing image that the Internet offers to the immobile spectator.

In spite of these rather negative critiques of technology in relation to the urban dweller, every object (human and nonhuman) that moves through space is increasingly connected to devices, which are used in interesting ways to experience the real city. As the city becomes more and more wired, ordinary citizens can collect the multimodal data streams from the surrounding urban environments through their mobile devices specifically in order to find out where things are happening (Kanhere).115 Certain applications, like Grindr and Tindr, are altering the sexually-imagined landscape, while others, such as SFpark which displays up to the second availability of public parking in San Francisco, are transforming the mental conception and physical experience of urban transportation. Moreover, some digital humanitarians are beginning to “fingerprint” the world’s cities using satellite images of their respective urban grids, but for what purposes? (Louf). This is yet to be determined, however, what is inevitable is that the city itself is evolving as are its representations. How, we might continue to ask, is this affecting or being affected by the mobile limits of urban space?

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At the same time that cities are being reshaped, urban dwellers are not only physically being altered; they are becoming digitized into “moving dots.” We live in a time where systems and machines can track our movement, with incredibly fine detail. The process of spatio-temporal data recognition is currently receiving the most publicity for its applications in sports, allowing machines and data to alter how coaches decide on which players to play and which plays to run. Rajiv Maheswaran explains in a very compelling TED talk, that the “Machine can’t see the game with the eye of the coach… at least it couldn’t until now. We have ‘taught’ it movements, and it now ‘understands’ what it [the pick and roll] looks like” (Maheswaran). Referring to a particular form of movement or play in basketball, Maheswaran demonstrates here that machines have learned how to spot very particular types of movements, through very detailed algorithmic language. Urban planners, transportation authorities, and other organizations will undoubtedly utilize such tools in order to seek out various forms of urban mobility. In the context of this project, such technology could map the itineraries of the mobile limits analyzed. Just as there exists a “Da Vinci Code” tour, would it be possible to construct the same tour of Godard’s Juliette or Kassovitz’s Saïd? One website has already begun to document this very idea. On the ARTE website, there exists a detailed database of some 100 French films where various locations of certain films have been geo-located on a webpage called “Cinemacity.” Within this page you can download “cinemaps” (and even “cinewalks”) in order to follow the footsteps of certain characters from France’s most well-known films through the nation’s capital (Catten). In other words, ARTE’s keen spectators and connoisseurs of the built environment have already re-territorialized the lines of flight of certain fictional mobile limits, resembling those discussed above. At the same time, however, with the advancements in capturing “mobile dots” we must begin to wonder what will happen to the flesh and blood mobile limits that seek to
practice urban space through social delinquency. Will such an act even be possible as technology continues to advance? What will happen to the city if these productive spatial practices are documented for all to see?
Appendix

Figures

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3
Figure 25

Figure 26

Figure 27
Figure 28

Figure 29
Figure 30a

Figure 30b
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