



PLACES

This research project aims to investigate Paris from the perspective of narrative place making, through the juxtaposition of the stories of its anglophone, francophone and allophone inhabitants. It is, in many ways, a study of how English speaking people imagine and make sense of a city which is not English, but it is also a study of locality (Appadurai) and of how cultural and linguistic alterity and heterogeneity find a place within reticular urban form. The focus of the research is on those who have been expatriated, unrooted or displaced and who, perhaps, also recall or reminisce about other places and cities that are no longer present. The methodology is biographic and immersive and is concerned with those public squares of Paris that are important to the biographies of the participants.

The word **place** designates both a space and an architecture, a sequential organisation or, by derivation, an act or an attribution. Between French and English there is a play of hyper- and hyponymy. In French the word [plas] refers to a specific configuration of street and open area (a square) but in English the word ['pleis] is less specific, and, in the writings of Massey or de Certeau, comes to refer to the subjective and biographic investment of urban form. The ties to place that people make through lived experience can be opposed to processes of departure and arrival that affect anglophone populations, immigrant populations and the thirty thousand homeless people who live in Paris. The stories collected by this project will represent these people and the interaction order (Goffman) they instantiate through the activities and gestures they perform: sitting, standing, talking, transporting, minding children, walking pets, eating, selling merchandise etc

Paris, the site for this study, is a world city in the sense of Nuttall and Mbembe – a city that contributes to understanding our global contemporaneity, and which, similarly, is also shaped by supra- and infra-national forces. Of its more than two million inhabitants, Paris centre has twenty-four thousand native English speakers. The greater metropolitan area counts sixty thousand English speakers, one cohort among more than two million foreign nationals and a total population of twelve million. This means that, in Paris, one person out of six speaks a language other than French, and one out of thirty of these speaks English. These speakers come from all the countries of the Commonwealth and their appropriation of Paris is very different. The British (eight thousand) live in the suburbs to the West, the Australians and the Americans in town centre, and those from the Indian subcontinent in the suburbs to the North.

But it is not simply in terms of its inhabitants that a world city can be understood in its super-diversity (De Fina, Blommaert). In Paris, thousands of students participate in academic exchanges every year. Before the restrictions on movement prompted by COVID-19, more than thirty thousand English-speaking tourists visited Paris centre every night. The greater metropolitan area has more than five thousand business groups that, as a whole, generate more than one hundred and forty thousand jobs whose matrix language is English. Reciprocally, French businesses employ more than five and a half million persons globally. One of the claims of this research project is that diversity can best be understood locally, through biographic and narrative research with participants interviewed in the context of their use of the city and in the places that they frequent.

In turning to public places at the time of measures imposed by COVID-19, the project hopes, furthermore, to foreground the very conditions of our socialisation in urban settings. The gestures of passers-by, their attitudes, their avoidances, their haptic space and their personal negotiation of constraint have never been so intimately linked to the urban landscape and its contours as now. Their stories reveal the articulation of person and place (Baynham, Georgakopoulou). Public space has come to represent the most important constraints of our era: quarantine, distancing, dematerialised forms of work and the lacks and failings that are linked to age, gender, education and illness.

In Paris, these new social conditions play out in an urban fabric that dates from the second empire and whose Haussmannian design (see Benjamin, Arcades Project) continues to offer a density and a regularity that can be perceived in the course of trajectories through successive series of five or six storey sandstone blocks. Interspersed within the iterative charm of such recognisably styled buildings, the public places in the city provoke ruptures and breaks that correspond to the demarcations of neighbourhood, city and metropolitan area. These demarcations are in turn relevant to the categories of resident, visitor or worker and relationships of service, hierarchy, friendship, frequentation, habit, diffidence and even mistrust.

Concretely, the ‘places’ project will include sites like Aligre, Italie, Vosges, Tertre, Varsovie, Saint Charles or La Défense ... that play a role in the biographies of participants. Through interviews, accounts and documentation, the project hopes to allow a better understanding of the *overlapping* of different ways of investing the city. Squares

and public places are often not diverse. They are informed, on the contrary, by the societal and architectural aggregate that operates in some respects like a filter bubble. Decisions taken by public instances, businesses, owners and lessors who pay for the maintenance, design and fixtures of squares dictate a certain use of place. The different research sites correspond to a desire to account for the different fabrics, conjunctures and discourses that are present in a world city, and, in particular, to provide an opportunity to listen to people with a memory and an imaginary that relates to the English-speaking world.

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