Scenes

Alan Blum

Introduction

The body of literature and research on cities seems to be silent on the question of scenes. Possible resources might include Karl Mannheim who has spoken about coffee houses and their importance in the process of democratization (1956, 141–2), but we are not confident about the easy identification of the scene with conversation and its transparency that marks the discussion of democratic public spaces. Similarly, the many anecdotal and ethnographic descriptions of coteries and social circles throughout history provide vivid detail while leaving the question of the scene unformulated. Political economy ignores scenes as a phenomenon by treating them externally as occasions of exploitation or false consciousness (Zukin 1997), that is, as markets and nothing more, and while there is some commentary on scenes as occasions on which ecstatic outbursts of 'tribal' consciousness are affirmed (Maffesoli 1996), there has been no attempt to theorize the scene as a social formation; there have been tendencies either to criticize its pretentiousness or to celebrate its liminality. Certainly, the claim to exclusiveness of the scene is saturated with pretension, and its fervour often appears to celebrate passion at the cost of discipline. Yet, the complexity of the scene as a collective problem always seems to exceed such characterizations. Finally, the recent explosion of interest in the public space of cities glosses these complexities by treating the scene either as a dialogical opportunity in ways that intellectualize and diminish its sensuality (as if the scene is a pedagogical moment in the career of democracy), or as an unformulated vision of shared space that leaves everything interesting to be developed (as if the scene is best understood as a mode of inhabiting intimate space by strangers whose co-presence forces common problems upon them). What is apparent is that an exploration of the question of the scene and its status in urban life as a place that contributes to making the city itself a place, should begin to permit us to clarify the interpretive links between two important glosses that have petrified to the point of cliché, on the one hand the idea of public space (Clarke 2000) and on the other, the notion of 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983).

The Grammar of Scene as a Social Phenomenon

In what follows I will take up the problem of the scene, first, by laying out some part of its grammar, and secondly, by asking how that grammar raises problems in collective life for those who would desire to under-

stand and speak about the scene reflectively. I will finish by considering how the scene resonates with urbanity in ways that might help us engage cities and their cultural life. To counter the being of the scene, we can best recall the following.

> Because the understanding of being resides first and foremost in a vague, indefinite meaning, and yet remains certain and definite; because, accordingly, the understanding of being... remains obscure, confused, and hidden, it must be elucidated, disentangled, and torn from its concealment. This can be done only if we inquire about this understanding... which we at first accepted as a mere fact—if we put it in question (Heidegger 1961, 70).

In everyday life we speak regularly about scenes and it is in such ways that the scene first appears to and for us. Then we ask, what are we talking about when we address the world in these ways, is there a persistence underling this diversity? Do we want to comment *ad infinitum* on scenes or should we try to recover some disciplined sense of the interpretive exchanges between the scene and collective life, a sense applicable to the city in particular?

The scene is certainly connected to the city in so far as cities are thought to be breeding grounds of scenes, places where scenes are fertilized. In his lively book, Jonathan Raban for example, derives the scenes of the city by implication, from the essential urban theatricality which he understands to be necessary because of the co-presence of strangers: "It is surely in recognition of this intrinsic theatricality of city life that public places in the city so often resemble lit stages awaiting a scenario..." (1974, 27). In this paradigmatic formulation of scenes, they are settings where theatricality is intensified. We might just note now how the notion of scene is taken for granted, though we shall try to work from Raban's example of the restaurant later in this paper when we examine the mix of private and public functions in city spaces. Although Raban indicates that being with strangers in an anonymous situation imposes performance demands upon city dwellers, he does not yet provide for how urban theatricality in this way can be understood as the ground of the scene, that is, for the way scene as a social form depends upon such theatricality. It is in this direction that we shall move.

As we examine texts on cities we note settings identified as 'scenes,' recurrences envisioned as master categories that organize the very description of the city—the gay scene, the music scene, the drug scene, the art scene, the tango scene, the rave scene. Here, it sounds as if scenes, like commodities, circulate in ways that might bring them to some cities rather than others or to all cities in varying degrees. In such usages the specific and erotic character of the scene seems to dissolve under the uni-

versalistic gaze that finds the same scenes in every city or varying degrees of a scene in each and every city as if the scene is a universal function which is put into practice in diverse cities in ways that differ only in degree. Yet, the vernacular sense of scene always seems weighted with specific and local meaning that grounds its very intimate appeal and seductiveness for those under its spell, leading much of its discourse to appear to be produced by one who has not tasted its pleasure.

Scenes tend to be identified in guidebooks with clubs and discos, 'live venues' and cafes and bars. Most specifically, the scene is identified with nightlife.

> Berlin has had a reputation for having some of the best—and steamiest—nightlife in Europe... Today the big draw is the clubs that have grown up out of the city's techno... scene. In a remarkably short space of time these places, many housed in abandoned buildings on or around the former no-go area of the East-West border strip, have spawned a scene that ranks among the most exciting in Europe (Holland and Gawthrop 1998, 260).

If this is special to Berlin, its specificity lies in the way in which the idea of nightlife is endowed with scenic character in Berlin. Such an interpretation of the scene, typical as it is, provides a nocturnal sense which is not necessary since scene invariably presupposes a kind of specialized knowledge, access, and association more fundamental than its connection to the night.

On the other hand, if the scene points to a recurring feature of all cities, or of any city worth its name (imagine a city that could not claim any scenes), then this universal function is distributed differently. Scene resonates with some concerted activity, an activity to a degree specialized, at least differentiated, but not necessarily covert. Yet even if legitimate—for example, the fashion scene—scene suggests an element of secrecy or at least, of differential access to what it celebrates. That is, there is an esoteric aura connected with any scene which often makes knowledge of its whereabouts a problem for outsiders or for those new to the city. That the location of the scene is problematic is linked not only to the specialized knowledge required of those who orient to it, but to the idea that the delicacy of such knowledge requires a degree of insulation from profane influences. The scene often appears sacred because the practices it cultivates could be interrupted by interests that do not engage it with the gravity it thinks it requires.

But then again, do we know what a scene is and what it is not in a way that permits us to approach such a diversity of examples with intelligence and discrimination? Or should we accept as our task the prospect of beginning to get our bearings about the scene as a social persistence by

thinking through this usage in all of its richness and diversity? This leads me to start with some remarks on the grammar of scene, in order to rebuild parameters from its usage.

Regularity

The 'Singles' Bar' scene: the coming and going is as regular as the setting of the sun. Does the scene merely identify a site of recurrence, of regularity, of repeatable practice? But then it would seem to be rule governed (Bennett 1964) in the way the flame attracts the moth. The occasioned character of the scene—doing seeing and being seen—suggests an element of desire more powerful than a restricted economy (Bataille 1985), or better, it suggests that the tension released by this relationship—between the restricted and general economy of desire—is the very content of the scene. The ambiguity of the scene as a collective problem consists in part in the attempt to sort out the relation between instrumental and ceremonial elements in its doing of seeing and being seen.

To engage the singles bar as a site of seeing (a sight) in the way we have discussed is not to visit as the idle onlooker who is seen seeing in a disengaged sense. Rather, what is called into play as the doing of reciprocal seeing is the need and desire for its persistence. If the scene mobilizes the desire for its perpetuity in its subject, this helps us distinguish between the idle onlooker (the one who 'visits' the site as in the computer idiom) and the one who is engaged by the persistence of the form. Thus, even regularity does not strongly describe the subject who might need and visit the site—even 'require' it as an item in a daily calendar—but would not be prepared to sacrifice for the scene and its persistence as a social form. This begins to open up the realm of politics and the scene: when push comes to shove, do I simply miss my corner café or am I prepared to sacrifice for it? This was implicitly the argument of Carl Schmitt against bourgeois politics and the ground for his measure of 'true' commitment to country (1996). Because the scene makes voyeurism, regularity, and even exhibitionism parasitical possibilities, it always puts into play the question of real rather than spurious commitment and of what it means to be its true rather than apparent subject. In this way, the scene always raises the question of the comfort of idle onlookers and whether they should be accepted as a gesture of hospitality or made to feel as indigestible outsiders. This leads to the question of the extensiveness of the scene in relation to the life of the city.

Extensiveness

Note how a guidebook praises Dublin's 'accessible' gay and lesbian scene:

> The scene in Dublin has developed a good reputation precisely because it is

> so accessible, attractive, and manageable for visitors... it caters to most tastes and it still doesn't take itself too seriously. Visitors to Dublin may be particularly struck by the sense that the lesbian and gay scene is integrated into the social life of the city to a much greater extent than is the case in, for example, Manchester and London; and the majority of venues are gay-friendly rather than exclusively lesbian or gay (*Time Out* 1998, 178).

To what extent is the scene removed from, or integral to the city? If every great city needs and has its gay scene, this still does not tell us about the social relation of the scene to the city. That is, how is the scene apart from, or part of, the city? Further, it is not self evident that being part of the city is intrinsically 'good' for the scene, since it might (as even the guide book suggests), "blunt the radical edge" of the scene (*Time Out* 1998, 178). Does the extensiveness of the scene mean that it takes over the city to the point where the city and scene are indistinguishable (in the way that San Francisco is one gay city, or Las Vegas is identified with its gambling action)? On the other hand, does exclusiveness resonate so intimately with the character of scene that its 'hospitality' to all tastes and visitors can rob it of its vigor and distinctive character?

Mortality

One crucial interpretive site where the question of the scene—its parameters and boundaries—comes alive is around the issue of becoming, that is, of coming-to-be and perishing. The evolution and decline of scenes is an object of fascination in collective life, for it is often thought that the inexorable fate of scenes, their volatility and ephemerality, confirms their inevitable link to fad and fashion. In this way, the mortality of scenes seems to testify to their frivolity, always marking the scene—like fashion or restaurants in New York—as something here today and gone tomorrow and so, as too insubstantial to support a more enduring interest.

The mortality of scenes is intimately linked to the history of cities in the way that Paris, New York, London, Barcelona are marked by their golden ages which, in most cases, are periods in which avant-garde activity is concentrated at urban sites. Art scenes for example, are often the legacy of great cities, expressions both of exemplary periods in the history of the city, and of exemplary tensions and circuits of creative restlessness. Yet, the anecdotal ethnography of golden ages and historic urban scenes (Flanner 1974; McAlmon with Boyle 1984; Shattuck 1979) often glosses or leaves unmentioned the tension between the city and the scene. That is, if London today can mark itself by its Pan African scene of bygone years incarnated in the figure of George Padmore, or its Bloomsbury scene of Fry, Woolf and others, this leaves unsaid the stories of the tension between such settlements and the city. If cities tell their stories through

their scenes in part, the accomplishments of scenes are often hard won and hard fought: there is perhaps an official history of scenes (New York's *Algonquin Hotel*, Jean Cocteau's circle) and a darker, secret, covert history that is deposited in the fragmentary remains of witness testimony, or that awaits recovery. Yet the mystery of such scenes, the enigma that awaits exploration, is their local character: Dorothy Parker and Jean Cocteau were locals who rarely strayed from their haunts (even Cocteau's numerous travels testify to his stature as the exemplary Parisian). We need to think about how the scene enforces the 'lived experience' of locality upon its committed few, just as they redefine the city by virtue of the scene. In this way, Socrates, Cocteau and Parker appear as locals, that is, as those who absorbed, dramatized and objectified the experience of place. The tension between the city and the scene needs to be recovered and rewritten as the story of how such figures sacrificed themselves for their cities and were sacrificed by their city for its history. In each case, the attenuation of the excess of sociality that fertilized the scene and was fertilized by it—the libidinal circuits of intoxicated sociality—makes each of these figures a sacrificial victim of and for the scene and shows how each scene needs the same for itself, its scapegoat

The issue of the mortality of the scene allows us to revisit the problem of the idle onlooker, since it provides a stronger alternative to the picture of the subject thought to be engaged only and exclusively by regularity. We could suggest the subject of the scene to be committed to its persistence as a social form in a way that brings the city into view because the persistence of the form is treated as integral to the perpetuity of the city. For example, imagine the one who says "I don't need the singles' bar because I am married," or "I don't need the gay scene because I am heterosexual," or "I don't need the music scene because I have a good sound system" etc., in contrast to the one who could say "the city needs the scene regardless of whatever I am." Could we treat the lover of the scene —in contrast to the non-lover in Plato's idiom—to be one engaged by the problem of its persistence as one part of the question of the common good and its inevitable struggle with privatization?

The question of the mortality of the scene raises a number of problems concerning its boundaries and its exchanges with the outside. Taking art as an example, we might ask if it can survive if its scenes come and go, that is, what relationship exists between the scenes which embody the form and the form itself, or is it a 'category mistake' to think in this way? Can art flourish in the absence of scenes or is this a tautology as if there can be no art without art scenes? And the same holds for the city, that is, can a city have art in the absence of art scenes and vice versa, can a city have art scenes but no real art? When posed in this way, the social phenomenon of art causes us not only to reflect upon the relation of the scene

to public space but also to remain focussed upon the grammar of scene. If we can imagine art scenes in the absence of art, we would need to ask, just what then is being practiced in the scene? Indeed, is this question not integral to any art scene that relentlessly engages the topic of the quality of its products in a way which always produces the accusation of the phony and of spurious art as a feature of the scene itself? And a city with art and no art scenes could look as if the art was practiced privately, a city where artists and lovers of art never encountered one another. It is curious that an art scene might produce bad art and be good for the city just as a city might be unable to integrate art's beautiful works into its public life.

This tells us that an art scene might not be what is called an 'art world' (Becker 1984) and that it might have nothing to do with the quality of art. This points to the interdependence implicit in any scene which could bring together lovers of the form. This would sharpen our sense of scene by pointing to its character as a way of staging an encounter between lovers of the form. In this sense, we need to ask after the implicit sense of collectivization integral to the scene and how it conjures up a conception of collective behavior.

Collectivization

We still do not want to reduce the scene to a logic exemplified by the restricted economy as described by Goffman as a "presentation of self" (1956) because the scene makes reference to the strength of the desire for communality within collective life. Thus, there might be many writers but not a writing scene as in the following implication of Sartre's contrast of American and European writers.

> The American writer has often practiced manual occupations before writing his books; he goes back to them. Between two novels, his vocation seems to be on the ranch, in the shop, in the city streets; he does not see literature as a means of proclaiming his solitude, but an opportunity of escaping it. He writes blindly, out of an absurd need to rid himself of his fears and anger... He has no solidarity with other writers; he is often separated from them by the length and breadth of the continent... he drifts continually between the working-class world where he goes to seek his adventures, and his middle class readers (qtd. in Kaplan and Roussin 1994, 204).

The scene demands a certain kind of solidarity not necessarily between those who practice writing (as in Sartre's quote above), but among those who love writing. At least this begins to permit us to imagine a city with many writers and no writing scene. Indeed, the nature of the bond between those committed to the scene remains to be explored. The dis-

tinction between performer and audience internal to the scene could dissolve if all are performers vis-à-vis an 'outside' that is external to the love of the art. Even more, interdependencies link members of an art world (publishers, agents, bookstores, media, readers, authors) as if a chain of influences presents the bond of exchange as decisive influence. In contrast, can we re-think the exemplary relationship of the scene, its special and distinctive form of solidarity? Can a scene depict stages of collectivization ranging from the aggregate of those linked loosely by implication of a common relation to shared resources, to an incipient community engaged in forming, shaping, and revising its identity as a collective?

Theatricality

The element of theatricality integral to the scene marks the importance of its site as an occasion for seeing: the scene is an occasion for seeing and being seen and so, for *doing* seeing and being scene. Seeing and being seen is done at the scene.

But to mention its occasioned character is to bring time as well as space to the grammar of scene. For if the scene is a site, a space for seeing and being seen, its occasioned character marks it as the site whose engagement is punctuated temporally as if it were a ceremony. The scene joins space and time for *doing* seeing and being seen. Can we say, scenes are neither simply spaces nor simply times but social ceremonies? If the trap of the scene is that one comes to view as being seen seeing, then its risk is that one can always appear instrumental. In terms of the logic of the scene, its restricted economy is voyeurism as if one can always appear motivated towards seeing as an unseen viewer. That seeing is also being seen rather than unseen puts into play the struggle of subjects with voyeurism as an interpretive trajectory that marks every scene: the struggle to do seeing and being seen—to be seen seeing, and so, to be absorbed in the action rather than being an idle onlooker—marks its subjects as exhibitionistic rather than voyeuristic, that is, as those who are actively seen seeing and so, as engaged by the reciprocity of seeing as an act of mutual recognition.

Exhibitionism describes the doing of seeing and being seen—the social engagement with such seeing—because it captures the reciprocity in the action of being seen seeing. The subject does not first see, and then, secondly, is seen seeing: rather to be seen seeing is the fusion of 'both' seeing and being seen as one course of action (Parsons 1951, on the double contingency, 36–37). Scenes are typically linked to exhibition, just as the promenade for example, describes not just families or couples out for a stroll as if unseen, but also as doing seeing as being seen and so as doing self exhibition. This means that subjects of the scene always work to shed their aura as simple spectators by doing or exhibiting the engagement

required of those who enjoy being seen seeing, that is, as those who enjoy immersion in the practice. Such subjects work to accomplish the reciprocity of coming-to-view as a social relationship or course of action that resists abstractedness (its potential to be incarnated as the disinterested view) in order to appear engaged by the mutuality of viewing. This is what it means to say of subjects of the scene that they work to be seen, not necessarily in the shallow sense, but to be seen seeing, that is, to be seen as engaged by the reciprocity of seeing. This begins to refer to the public character of scene, that it raises as interesting the thin line between the view and the gaze (Lacan 1981, 67–97). If the scene is marked by the reciprocal engagement with seeing that it requires, it is also marked at the very same time by its capacity to evoke the deeper bond that grows from such reciprocity.

For example, some department stores such as *Bloomingdales* or *Ka De We* in Berlin are often described as scenes, first, because exhibition as a 'secondary' function is seen to supercede the primary function of shopping. But this could gloss a robust sense of shopping as exhibition, that is, as doing a promenade. This points to another interesting tension arising from the ambiguity of the scene: the tension between seeing (spectator) and being seen (participant) must always be managed in a way that makes its commitment to the doing of seeing and being seen visible in action. Thus, the nudist beach or celebrity hangout always protects its reputation as a scene by resisting the 'idle onlookers' while yet, perhaps, capitalizing on them as well (whereas adolescent Turkish boys might remain clothed at Berlin's nudist pools and beaches, they make themselves apparent as those who are both external to the scene and internal by virtue of their very fascination, just as those who go to celebrity hangouts to gawk are part of the scene through their very idolatry).

If theatricality raises the question of being external or internal to the scene, then it makes parasitism a permanent feature of the scene and the parasite a persistent type who lives off the commitment of others and whose typicality becomes incorporated into the scene—often proudly—as a sign of its allure (Serres 1982). Here is where the fan, hanger-on, groupie, or even tourist becomes essential to scenes. Indeed, if the preoccupation with membership in this sense often marks scenes, it is not simply true of scenes reputed to be vulgar, since scenes of all types—even those thought to be limited to the most refined sensibilities (café society, the literary salon, artistic circles) continuously test and debate the question of qualification and belonging, often making this very concern a favorite discursive topic.

Transgression

One problem theatricality raises then, is exposure, in exactly the sense intended by Goffman when he develops the vernacular sense of scene as infraction.

> However, there are situations often called "scenes," in which an individual acts in such a way as to destroy or seriously threaten the polite appearance of consensus, and while he may not act simply in order to create such dissonance, he acts with the knowledge that this kind of dissonance is likely to result. The common-sense phrase "creating-a-scene" is apt because, in effect, a new scene is created by such disruptions (1956, 210).

Part of the excitement of the scene is its institutionalization of the expectation of the *faux pas* in which 'polite consensus' concerning membership itself and the qualification to belong are endangered by a disrup-

tion. Perhaps the strength of the scene is directly related to the danger of exposure which is commensurate with it in a way that makes any scene an occasion when the right to be there might be called into question. Does the challenge of the scene not make reference to the risk released by this prospect of exposure, a prospect that animates the scene and intensifies its liveliness as the occasion it is? What I am trying to show in this exercise is that exhibitionism does not have to be (treated as) shallow and that the question of the scene vividly raises the problematic nature of this border—shallow or deep?—as its subject matter.

The theatricality of the scene resonates with its character as a performance. A good question to consider, and to which we shall continuously return, concerns the nature of what is being performed: not just shopping, art, poetry readings, music, dance, and the like, but seeing and being seen. We must make a central place for this very exhibitionism as the material of the performance affirmed by any scene as its content.

What these reflections suggest is that if transgression is essential to the scene, it is not a transgressiveness of doctrine but transgression that lies in the nature of performance itself. The scene is transgressive not because it celebrates 'counter cultural' values or 'life styles,' or marginal, esoteric doctrines or even subversive philosophies, but because its transgression resides in its exhibitionism and in the spectacle of its claim to mark itself off from the routinization of everyday life. It is such an understanding that permits us to speak about the courthouse scene of any major city, or of any restaurant as a scene. That the scene is often shameless in its flamboyance always marks it implicitly as an opportunity for travesty.

This is to say that it is performance that is transgressive as when a confrontational political strategy that was called by the New Left 'Up-Against-The-Wall-Mother-Fucker' in the 1960's, makes a doctrinal exchange into a performance. Performance is transgressive in its very potential to create exposure or humiliation even in its most mundane shape such as calling a spectator to perform (to sing, to recite poetry) in a way that dissolves the border between audience and performer. Performance challenges self-containment and in so doing, saturates the scene with an aura of danger. Performance brings into focus the passivity of the spectator by giving it body for all to see. Performance makes it impossible to sustain the invisibility of the body, making the unseen seer someone to be seen. Thus, to speak of formal occasions of sociability ('high life') as scenes is to concede how they are fraught with the danger of exposure and humiliation provided by their very formality, and that this, in part, is the ground of excitement in anticipating their occasion. Thus, it is correct to speak of scenes as incidents as long as we recognize how danger derives from the bringing of something private to view, where what is most private is the illusion of the impermeable border.

If the ecstatic character of the scene resides, in part, in its promise to transgress the routine of self-containment and all that this requires, the scene also suggests another kind of danger. That the scene is a site of collective practice means that it brings to view in the city the force of collective single-mindedness; the appearance of the crowd dominated by the mechanical frenzy of a uniform and disciplined pursuit of quality. In the current idiom, the scene evokes the sign of tribal hegemony because its practice always means the rule of a specialized solidarity at that site. This is to say that the danger of the scene is both within and without: the danger it promises 'within' is the incident of exposure to those made ecstatic by this very trial of qualification, and the danger it evokes 'without' by its solidarity and concentration to those who are dispersed and uncollected. The scene always reminds the city of the special nature of its project and of the absorption it requires and so, always raises as a concern the question of the status of the project—of human projects—and of their worth.

Spectacle

That the scene involves a project in some sense allows us to resist the easy identification of spectacle and scene. Apparently the matches of the ancient Roman gladiators constituted a scene in that city, bringing together audiences voracious for the excitement and 'entertainment' that such trials represented (Barrow 1993). If the games were theatrical in that sense, amusing, a source of fascination, an outlet for a restless population, we might still ask after the kind of project they represented? If the scene is more than a site of regular recurrence (the opera, the bowling league), must it not also be a site that is more than a theatrical focus (the cock fight, the race track, the casino)? To ask such questions is not to seek to legislate the meaning of scene by disqualifying some and elevating others, but rather, to point to the ambiguity of scene as a collective representation in a way that we (who theorize) must take into account. Any consideration of the scene invites us to reflect upon the borders of spectacle and project, of fascination and seduction, and the ways in which their clarification evokes a collective problem.

In many of our cities new urban projects for stores, areas, entertainment complexes and the like are designed as engineering feats in which the spectacle of construction is intended to absorb the user by affirming the collective mastery of nature. If such projects always implicitly offer themselves as sites of collectivization, the fascination they mobilize threatens to arrest communalization through the inertia of spectacle and its paralyzing force. Yet the best architecture promises to surpass fascination through the scenic promise of its space. If every space struggles for emplacement, it is in the sense that it works to overcome the fascination which its spectacle induces as if it were a mighty struggle to make possible the seductiveness of its promise as a scene.


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In the best sense, every project struggles to be a scene, to be other than a curiosity, to be more than an object of fascination, in order to seduce its participants, to bring them under the spell of the community it envisions as its scene (Baudrillard 1991). That the scene promises seduction as an overcoming of fascination applies not only to the interior landscape and topography of the city, but to the city as a whole. The city thrives by virtue of its scenes, not as a container stands to what is contained, but essentially; in part, as the diverse and heterogeneous opportunities to be seduced begin to mark a great city as memorable.

It sounds as if the scene confirms something about the associational life of the city, the ways its web of groups, societies, and sects endow the city with a fraternal spirit, but this imagines the scene as a *Gemeinschaft*, whereas, in contrast, it is the mix of *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* and their impossible reconciliation that makes for the lure and excitement of the scene. We might think of *Democracy in America* where de Tocqueville discussed the rich associational life of America in a way that showed its continuous suspicion towards the scene (1954). That is, regardless of its Rotary Clubs, American Legions, professional associations, small theatres, ethnic organizations (or group therapy networks), de Tocqueville's America feared seduction and the transformative power of the (urban) scene. It is in the movement between fascination and seduction that the power of the scene resides, for the scene lives as both promise and unfullfillment. We can say that the essence of the scene is longing, perhaps for the impossible, but a longing whose possibility is secured by memory of what is thought to be actual. Ledrut is right in this way when he calls the city an image much like a "myth or literary work" (1986, 222). The scene opens up the conversation on the dream-work of the city, how it arouses dreaming, the desire to be seduced by the present—the dream of the eternal present—in a way that can make it enduring. It is through the idea of scene that we can begin to recover the notion of the great city as exciting because such an approach leads us to rethink the interior dream of *Gesellschaft*, the dream that we might be strong enough as Hegel says, to cancel the opposition (between *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft*) and to preserve the difference, that is, to dream the dream of *Gesellschaft* (that a *society* can be memorable, that this present can live in time).

The Original Urban Scene

From all accounts the original urban scene was organized around the philosophical exchanges that inspired the circle of Socrates and his followers. Most types of philosophizing do not issue in scenes, so what is interesting about the example of the Socratic circle is that by pointing to what an activity such as philosophy might need if it is to qualify as a scene, it can direct us to the limits of scene for any practice. Certainly,

philosophical doctrines such as the logical positivism of the *Vienna Circle* have spawned groups, weekly meetings, and associations of all sorts, but Socrates (and some few other philosophers) have become identified with scenes rather than social circles. Using the example of Socrates, we might ask what qualifies us to speak of such a social circle as a scene?

First, Socrates worked to demonstrate the indispensability of the city for the practice, as shown by his critique of the country. In that way he made the activity in which the scene specialized (in this case, philosophy) identical with the city. Secondly, philosophy was not abstractly urban but practiced at a site which became regularized as a place, the *agora* in which the activity was seen and done. The urbanity of the practice was occasioned as a collective practice, oriented to in its theatricality as an emblem of the city with its range of connotations. When we think of the origin of philosophy, we forever think of urbanity, and we think of the setting of philosophy as a market place existing as a theatrical site in the city.

Yet, despite the essential urbanity of the scene, it existed in constant tension with the very city whose precincts it inhabited, a tension that materialized in the accusation, trial, and death of Socrates. This tension between the scene and the very city it exemplifies, not only shows the dangerousness of the scene to the city but confirms how that danger was disseminated through the work of idle onlookers who visited the scene as uncommitted witnesses to the activity, that is, as spectators who wished to be entertained. Thus, the first book of *The Republic* shows how part of the work of the scene involves distinguishing idle onlookers from friends of the practice, that is, the work of figuring out everyone's grounds for being there in that place. The first book shows how the content of the scene is devoted in large part to the question of qualification (as in the query—who is qualified or not to philosophize?) in a way that could represent the 'lived experience' of the scene as an initiation rite (just as the *elenchus* is a ritual).

But then a most important recognition follows. If the scene is devoted in practice to sorting out the question of qualification, and if it engages this matter in a market place, then it practices in public something most private (in the way that a discriminating concern for quality is private). This helps distinguish the scene from a cult or sect that withdraws from the world in a gesture of collective privatization because the scene chooses to do its business in public (even its business of making itself exclusive). Is the scene done in public for the reason that it needs to escape domestic space and its rule over the private? How and why does the scene make private matters public? It might be better to say that the scene provides for concerted enjoyment of discrimination, that is, it provides a place for the collective in some special sense (for the collective engaged by the special pursuit and practice of quality and qualification

with respect to some matter). But then, if the scene resists easy designation as a sect or cult, how does it stand as a social movement? Is the social movement a scene? It appears that in the way social movements are typically discussed, its idle onlooker (what Communist Party members used to derogate as the 'adventurer') is the very one who would engage it as a scene. We might ask what typical meaning a social movement would need to be invested with to be seen as a scene? Here, we could imagine the social movement treated as an occasion *per se* rather than an instrumental association. But to paraphrase Wittgenstein's comment on the talking lion, would it then be a social movement? The ambiguity released by this border is surely part of the discourse of scene.

Heidegger speaks of place as a process, an event such as making room, opening a region, setting up a seat for 'reiterable possibilities' of future emplacement. Without entering into all of his exegetical convolutions, let me only note how he brings place into contact with what we have come to think of as assumptions or presuppositions, with the local constraints on the actor, through the notions of nearness which brings about what he calls neighbourhood. He says of neighbourhood that it means "dwelling in nearness... in the nearness of neighbourhood, place is particularized and made intimate, face-to-face." (see Chapter 11 in Casey 1997) That is, place is the scene of the encounter. Place becomes specific in the scene which it constructs and inhabits.

Part of what we might take from this is that the scene is the place for bringing to view the affiliations which bind people as a collective of co-speakers as if they are dwelling in nearness to one another, as if together they incarnate a structure of mutual recognition. Any scene makes concrete and specific the intimacy of the inhabitants of a region of speech, and so, in its being done, is a kind of emplacement, a way of making room for its talk, and as Heidegger says, that which "gives us room and allows us to do something... the seat that gives us room to experience how matters stand..." (qtd. in Casey 1997, 282). Neighbourhood is then a metaphor for the desire out of which such 'making room' or emplacement unfolds, for the ways it settles at sites which it constructs and inhabits as scenes of the encounter which is place, and in this habitation, makes specific its structure of mutual recognition (Kolb 1986).

Private and/in Public

One of the implications of Heidegger's formulation of place as creating a clearing or neighbourhood for those with affinities is that it offers us ways to begin exploring the tension between the private and the public in the scene. It is on such a basis that Raban developed his conception of the city as a coexistence of strangers in two directions: the (public) attenuation of theatricality of which we earlier spoke, and the proliferation of

coteries that takes shape in an extension of privatization. This conjunction of tribalism and theatricality that both Raban and (by implication) Heidegger locates, begins to situate the city as a site of communicative energy where private affinities are collectivized as a shared practice that is enjoyable simply by virtue of being shared. The scene makes sharing enjoyable as if it were a private experience, and it makes the very private orientation to quality and discrimination something to be shared. Raban speaks of this phenomenon: "Intimate private groups compacted around a core of symbolic objects and ideas are very serious symptoms of a metropolitan condition" (1974, 119). But this has to be developed in relation to the theatricality discussed earlier, for as Heidegger implies, the scene makes a place for intimacy to dwell in nearness, it makes room for an encounter as something to be seen as a seat of reiterable possibilities. The scene makes the intimacy of neighbours something understood as fecund rather than moribund, as the seat of possibilities for and in something vital. This is to say that the scene seems to make a place for intimacy and for its sharing as being something creative. Why would this be an urban phenomenon unless intimacy were imperiled? We might suggest now that the scene is the city's way of demonstrating the vitality of intimacy, of showing that its 'lived experience' of sharing and being shared can be seen and oriented to as its own specific form of creativity. Is the scene not the city's way of making a place for intimacy in collective life? And again, this speaks against the easy identification of the social movement with scene: does the social movement not necessarily run roughshod over intimacy, privacy, quality, and its deep internal diversity (the necessity required by the purpose of a united front)?

The fundamental ambiguity of the collective representation of intimacy animates an interesting problem in urban life, for intimacy can be seen as both or either life enhancing or deadly since the solidarities it affirms can be understood as threatening or inviting. Just as the Socratic circle was condemned for its corruption of youth (in part by the sheer weight of its solidity in space), the circle was also praised and emulated as an affiliation worth pursuing. One way to think about the pleasure of being private in public is to recover the notion of solitude, and this requires us to recollect Baudelaire's intuition that solitude is attenuated as enjoyment in the crowd (1972, 400). What this poet showed is that solitude is accentuated at the moment it is experienced as solidarity with the species, as the thrill of being both part of, and apart from, the crowd.

Despite his sympathy for the urban scene, it is just this objectification of shared (private) intimacy that Raban has trouble seeing as anything other than ostentatious in a way that reduces theatricality to something very negative (1974, 27) as if the restaurant, for example, is a stage in the most shallow sense. In his review of two books on the 'invention' of the

restaurant in France, Adam Gopnik advances upon such an interpretation with the same sure stroke he uses to show the limits of formulations that describe such a public ritual as either false consciousness (the 'new' social history), or as a means for developing 'communicative competence.' Gopnik says that such academic views simplify the 'lived experience' as a mode of being in public, by treating it either as a distracted escape from the sight of social inequities, or as a seed of the dialogical impulse. Such interpretations look away from the social phenomenon of eating in the restaurant as being private in public: "Loneliness is not the 'price' of liberty but part of the profit we take from it. The restaurant's moral glory, like that of the library and the department store—another nineteenth-century bourgeois invention—is its semi-private state, for semi-ness is the special half-tint of bourgeois societies" (Gopnik 2000, 86). What he means is that something most private such as intimacy (whether being alone by oneself or with one or more others) is intensified, indeed, stimulated, by being in the presence of strangers: "As important as finding people you have things in common with is learning to live in pleasure alongside people with whom you don't" (2000, 86). If public life invites us to enjoy being with others in an undemanding way, the public would be best conceived not as an incipient dialogue but as the erotic intensification of what is most intimate and exclusive that is produced by the activity of viewing and being viewed by the other. Coming-to-view in this way attenuates the enjoyment of solitude because our self-concentration is animated by the challenge of the view of the other. To understand the scene's involvement with the stranger requires a rethinking that identifies strangeness with uncanniness rather than with the other person who is unknown. A group of customers in a restaurant who are unknown to each other is not subject to the spell of alterity, for what is most strange is the kind of incalculability released by what Bataille speaks of as the expectation of loss (1985). Strangeness formulates the risk integral to the mediation of adventure, fear, and loss. Eating out can bring to view the risk of confirmation or loss in any relationship, even for the moment, and this is both its pleasure and danger.

The interpretive exchange between scene and spectacle has made it easy to identify the scene as a species of false consciousness as Gopnik suggests when its private pleasures are treated as its *sine qua non*. But then, such a view is forever uncomfortable with pleasure and especially with pleasure that seems exclusive. Such views might treat pleasure-in-public as ostentatious, that is, as looking away from others in pain, or even worse, as showing off by invidiously affirming one's good fortune at the expense of the other. Further, the apparent idleness of public rituals such as eating, digressive walking and lounging has been denigrated as a choice against doing something serious, as if the lived experience of entertainment

should best be analyzed as a choice (Gopnik speaks of the view of 'eating for power'), or through a calculation of the 'content' of what is watched (think of Adorno on jazz). Such rumblings in the discourse of scene always play off an aversion to both its artifice and intimacy in public.

Then again, being stimulated by the presence of strangers can be treated as perverse and/or decadent (as in some interpretations of the *flâneur*, eg. Buck-Morss 1986). In some way, being-alone-in-public is treated as a failure of gravity, a choice against, or a flight from, dialogue. It is as if solitude is treated as an unfortunate adaptation to the state of being without friends. Ultimately, the reputation of the scene always risks being tarnished by an ascetic condemnation of (what Simmel called) the play form of intimacy, often in the shape of the suspicion that the subject of the scene is an unwitting dupe of capitalist exploitation. But, would not an analysis of the scene have to calculate that system of desire—what capitalism knows and takes for granted—that empowers it to imagine the scene as a market and the market as a scene? As C. Wright Mills so eloquently pointed out (through the idea of the 'power elite' as itself a scene), is that capitalism and everything else is immersed in the appeal of the scene (that is, we have a long literature that confirms the ways in which 'power élites' and powerless enclaves work assiduously to scrape together resources for the scene, that collective life is forever in the grip of this desire). And if it is this allure that we need to understand, can this not be the beginning of an analysis of excitement in the city and its various guises as the drive for sweetness of living that animates capitalism in all of its shapes?

Political Economy of the Scene

Is there a political economy of the scene? Certainly, the city is a marketplace, the ebb and flow of its energies is continuously organized by the objective of doing business and the imaginative structure that inspires such enterprise. The relentless circulation of capital is a constant search for markets, a search that threatens (in some eyes) to dissolve all local constraints. Scenes are calculated and reconfigured as opportune occasions for investment and the creation of consumers. Scenes are made and unmade under the insatiable drive for maximizing profit and minimizing loss, the drive of the logic of restricted economy. Of course this desire to market the scene and vice versa, to make markets into scenes, expresses the concerted revenge of the idle onlooker upon the city, the attempt to make its creativity profitable. If the scene appears to be made by the lover, then the dialectic between the lover and the non-lover is integral to its inner life. This gesture is part of the discourse of the scene; just as the fan, groupie, gawker, tourist and eccentric must be part of its aura, so too, must business and commerce. The mix of commerce and creativity marks

the city and its scenes. The entrepreneurial and corporate absorption in the scene is integral to the engagement which it mobilizes, the fascination that it induces. The scene charms the collective, and in arousing contempt, covetousness, or plans for 'exploitation,' makes the very creativity of the city into a collective value. The vitality of the scene can always become a commodity. But then we would need to ask how the scene deals with the problem of its charm—its allure—as an object of desire in collective life? That is, how does it continue to do business as the scene which it is? This will cause us to explore and to research (in a way which we can only intimate now) the connection between the scene and the project.

A Creative City

A city makes a place for the sharing of private matters. Because scenes are distributed throughout the city, they induce people to explore territorial boundaries. Scenes challenge the containment of people in territories and of territories themselves. Further, each scene always promises to become the nucleus of Bohemian activity, or of a practice that in some sense attenuates the aesthetic, leisurely, and playful character of a mundane sphere. In the city Bohemias are created (literary salons, cafés, circles) and then not merely (or only) transformed into opportunities for consumption ('commodified bohemians' in Derek Wynne's words), but often domesticated and made over into mainstream activities. The *Moulin Rouge* of Paris, immortalized by Toulouse-Lautrec, is a paradigmatic example of the notorious spot which was transformed into a spectacle by its very success, the notoriety of its transgressive clientele and scintillating conduct becoming the source of attraction for visitors whose presence drove away the originals. The trajectory of scenes is often accompanied by the lament of originals who have either deserted or been deserted because of the very popularity of the scene. Each scene has within itself the potential to begin as a charismatic space and to become habituated over time, reconfigured as a normal space in a way that threatens to leave no trace of its original energies.

If cities such as New York and Paris are marked by the rise and fall of scenes, this volatility testifies less to the fickleness of the city and its inhabitants than to its creativity. What such trajectories say about a city is that this is a place where scenes are regularly made and unmade and so, a place where birth continues: this city lives! The presence of scenes, despite their mortality, means that the city continuously breeds the collective desire to represent shared intimacy in ways that are situated as special, particular, and exclusive. That the city breeds the celebration of intimacy means that the culture of the city is located as much in its topography of scenes as in its formal institutions of 'high art' such as the ballet, opera, theatre district, museums and galleries. One way of understanding the

scene despite its nod towards exclusiveness is that it expresses the voice of the people. But then again, scenes are not simply expressions of 'popular culture' (think of Bloomsbury or the 'charmed circle' of the *Algonquin Hotel*) since their celebration is typically directed to the exclusive affirmation of specific quality as the bond of solidarity. Through its scenes the city represents its desire for inhabitation that is both communal and pluralistic on the one hand, and on the other, exclusive, special, and intimate.

Supply and Demand

Could a tyrant come along and oversee the creation of many scenes on the grounds that such play will pacify and lull the people by distracting them from 'serious' political activity and dissent (as if scenes are inherently frivolous)? Or better: in a mass society are scenes simply ways of honoring the multitudinous preferences and differences of degree that animate people? Then scenes are created by the abundant supply of marginal choices, propensities, and needs that characterize a population. This describes the city of New York in Cynthia Ozick's following excerpt.

> Any of them can venture out to a collectivity of taste and imagination unconstrained by geography. Jazz and blues and night-life aficionados, movie buffs, gays, rap artists, boxing and wrestling zealots, singles, esoteric restaurant habitues, Central Park joggers, marathon runners, museum addicts, lovers of music or theatre or dance, lonelyhearts, shoppers, hotel weekenders, barflies, churchgoers, Talmud enthusiasts, Bronx-born Tibetan Buddhists, students of Sufism, kabbalists, theosophists, voice or ski coaches, S.A.T. and L.S.A.T. crammers, amateur painters, union members, members of boards and trustees, Internet devotees, fans of the Yankees or the Mets or the Jets or the Knicks, believers in psychics and tea-leaf readers, street walkers and their pimps, antiques fanciers, art collectors, philanthropists, professors of linguistics, lexicographers, copy editors, librarians, kindergarten teachers, crossing guards, wine votaries, storefront chiropractors, Chinese or Hebrew or Arabic calligraphers—all these and conceivably more can emerge from any locality to live, if only for a few hours, in a sympathetic neighborhood of affinity. Expertise and idiosyncrasy and burning desire burn and burn in New York: a conflagration of manifold, insatiable, tumultuous will (1999, 156).

To this we might have added, wild and crazy makers-of-lists! Ozick parodies the idea of scene as in the cliché, "New York has many scenes because New York has many freaks." But if it is true that New York has many eccentrics, what is open to question is how and to what extent eccentricity figures in the making of a scene. From all I have said it should be clear that this is an idle onlooker's view of the scene since a scene is

business too serious to be left to eccentrics, and at least, eccentricity needs to be disciplined in order to become part of the scene. In fact, such discipline points again to the problem of dealing with the idle onlooker who takes on the guise of the freak in this case. Every scene needs to deal with the freaks that would compromise its purity. The heterogeneity of the city means that the scene will always be vulnerable to 'freaks,' that is, to those who treat it as an opportunity to express eccentricity. This means that the scene is always faced with the problem of defending its reputation, of demonstrating a gravity of purpose in the face of its appeal to eccentricity.

Note how Hegel translates the problem of dealing with idle onlookers, which in the vernacular is often spoken of as the scene's problem of dealing with freaks, into the abiding and constant problem of self formation. That is, far from being a sanctuary of eccentrics, the scene must moderate 'peculiarities' and especially the infantile allure of the idea of peculiarity as something essential.

> Individual souls are distinguished from one another by an infinite number of contingent modifications. But this infinity belongs to the spurious kind of infinity. One should not therefore rate the peculiarities of people too highly. On the contrary, the assertion that the teacher should carefully adjust himself to the individuality of each of his pupils, studying and developing it, must be treated as idle chatter... the peculiarities of children are tolerated within the family circle; but at school there begins a life subject to general regulations, to a rule which applies to all. It is a place where mind must be brought to lay aside its idiosyncrasies, to know and to desire the universal, to accept the general existing culture. This reshaping of the soul, this alone is what education means (Hegel 1971, 51–52).

From this angle the scene does nothing to exacerbate eccentricity; on the contrary, it is a place where eccentricities are shaped and 'put aside' in favor of a commitment to the universal. In this way, Hegel gives the scene a kind of integrity or dignity. The scene stands for the imposition of the universal upon those who—in their immature ways—see it only as a sanctuary for the exercise of peculiarity (as a means to that end). In this vein, peculiarity begins to appear as an infantile idea of the private, an idea that stands for the self-indulgence tolerated in domestic circles. In contrast, he suggests we understand the scene as part of the great 'civilizing process' of the city (Elias 1978), a process that invites peculiarities to be 'put aside' by encouraging commitment to the 'universal' embodied in the practice it affirms, that is, to the idea which lies behind the art of sharing in public some concern for quality. No matter how peculiar the scene appears to idle onlookers—for example, the sado-masochist scene—it stands for the universal, that is, for the lived experience or course of action

which it is. No matter whether we agree or disagree with this, Hegel's striking formulative challenge brings out a tension residing at the innermost core of the scene and the endemic concern with corruption, with compromise of purpose, that is integral to its discourse. This question forever haunts the scene, concerning its dialectic of purity and impurity.

Perhaps a better way to think of this is to remind ourselves that scenes correlate less with eccentricity and its supply or abundance than with appetites (as in "you can get anything in New York"). This means not only that New York is a place where everyone can achieve satisfaction, but also a place where anyone and everyone can find affiliation, can bond with someone in a shared practice. At first, the availability of everything and anything in New York suggests the illegitimate market in a way that *reduces* the scene, just as does its equation with egocentricity. Yet, the subject of the scene is limited neither to the freak or addict because the abundance which the city offers is its affiliative potential, its supply of shared intimacy. That this may never materialize is not important if we understand the scene of the city as the site of the dream: the city is a scene by virtue of the promise it offers for its place to be a site of mutual recognition. Note how Valerie Steele's formulation of Balzac's love of Paris captures the scenic character of its heterogeneity in a much more robust way than Ozick's treatment of New York's diversity.

> Every capital has its poem... where it is most particularly itself. The boulevards are today what the Grand Canal was for Venice... what Regent Street is for London... (But) none is comparable to the boulevards of Paris... In Regent Street (there is) always the same Englishman and the same black suit, or the same Macintosh!... The Grand Canal is a cadaver... while in Paris!... Oh! in Paris, there is liberty of intelligence, there is life! A strange and fruitful life... an artistic and amusing life of contrasts... drunkards, grisettes, notaries, tailors... friends, enemies (Balzac qtd. in Steele 1988, 143).

If the private sphere identifies the diversity among special and particular engagements with some quality that differentiates the people of the city, then, in bringing its people into the open, Paris invites them to perform their differences in public. To say that this city is a scene is to say that it makes its public space into a theatre, it makes its inhabitants into performers by inviting them to show and to share their diverse and differentiated relationships to quality.

The place of Paris stands out alone and distinctive as a city different from other places only because it exacerbates the diversity of its types, and more specifically, only because it brings such diversity into the open, exhibiting it in its streets and spaces as that variety which is uniquely its

own. In making its diversity a show (rather than managing it in the way of many tepid cities), Paris actually creates pride of place through its shamelessness. It is only because this city of Paris can arouse its types to come into the open to make the common space their own, to sacrifice the containment of their private spaces as a way of exhibiting their variation, that the city of Paris can display itself to the other places as a city unique and special. The irony of the great city increasing its stature by making a spectacle of itself, is perhaps what begins to allow us to understand the city itself as a scene.

Such observations certainly tie into Simmel's discussion of the blasé attitude of the metropolis (Simmel 1951) but in an altogether different way than typically supposed. Instead of standing for the alienation of the metropolis, why not conceive of the indifference to the spectacle of diversity to be the city's way of letting the scene be, that is, of resisting the temptations of either condemning or embracing it mindlessly? This city would not terrorize the scene for its marginality, nor again gawk at its spectacle in the way dwellers stare transfixed by construction work in progress, or at the site (sight) of photo shoots of models or of filming on its streets.

Scenes and Social Formations

In London when I stayed at the place of a friend near Gloucester Road I used to visit a small café frequented mainly by Arab men. They came to it regularly every day at intervals, seeming to know one another in the way of *habitués* and nothing more. For them and I guess me too, this place was a *spot*. Very different is the collective that intermittently mobilizes around an activity such as cooking, swing dancing or other 'skills' (stock investment, language learning) which is more like a *social circle* bound together around a task or perhaps a person. Typically spots have the security of a site whereas circles often invest time searching for sites at which to meet. The *coterie* seems to be a bit of both, more personal than the spot and perhaps more enduring and passionate than the circle, unified around the spirit and hospitality of a central figure than either the space of the spot or the functional activity of the circle. Coteries seem to have a charismatic aura. Strong teachers who often work to transform their classes from spots (drop-in centers) or circles (associations unified by the 'function' of transmitting information) to coteries are typically derogated for making their teaching into a 'cult of personality,' whereas they might be seen as trying to resist the mechanization of teaching (and indeed, many projects) by transforming it into an occasion in ways that require passing through the stage of coterie.

If we ask how it is with examples such as the bordello depicted in Jean Genet's play *The Balcony*, we might think in related ways about urban

clubs, 'performance venues,' or even subscription series. But then perhaps spots, circles and coteries only become scenic when they publicize their intimacy through dramaturgical ceremonies much like the transvestite balls depicted in *Paris is Burning*. Or again, we would not call a street festival on its face a scene unless we could provide for it as part of the kind of incipient imaginative structure discussed in this paper. This reminds us that we are not free to speak in any way whatsoever about the things of the social world, that we must take responsibility for our declarations through interpretive work that brings to view our relation to the ambiguity of language and action.

We then note the thematic running throughout this imaginative structure that connects the space to time through the idea of making it an occasion. This occasioning of the space is part of what we mean by its emplacement, its making space into a place. The desire for the scene plays off the collective concern for eventfulness in ways that highlight as part of the urban experience, the search for renewal through the critical moment. Nothing apocalyptic is implied here for the scene appears integral to the imaginative structure of the city as it strives to make this present a memorable moment, and thus, part of its ongoing and revisable biography.

The scene accomplishes its work by making a site the occasion of a project. In this respect, Lacan tells a story of how, as a young man in an effort to escape his abstract life by engaging something practical and worldly, he accompanied some fishermen at work on the sea in Britanny.

> An individual known as Petit-Jean... pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can... And Petit-Jean said to me—Do you see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!
>
> The point of this little story, as it had occurred to my partner, the fact that he found it so funny and I less so, derives from the fact that, if I am told a story like that one, it is because I, at that moment—as I appeared to those fellows who were earning their livings, with great difficulty, in the struggle with what was for them a pitiless nature—looked like nothing on earth. In short, I was rather out of place in the picture (1981, 96).

That is, Lacan's interpretation stresses how his being out of place occurred by virtue of his appearing as an idle onlooker to those who were engaged in a project. A scene, as it gathers strength, makes those who are idle and detached, appear out of place. This reminds us that a scene is always a project, and as such, makes the encounter with place a test for all those who fall under its spell. Lacan, though charmed by the project, fascinated to a point by its capacity to transport him, but was not recognized by and in the project. Is this the danger of any scene—to play at your own risk?

Closing Comments

But now someone replies, you don't say what a scene is, for example, is the corner café you frequent a scene or not? I am not a law-giver, a third-rate Solon of this city. I simply say, that if a recurrence is to be a scene, it will have to handle these problems. The scene is the fundamental ambiguity which its name and connotations arouse in collective life. This is the symbolic order of the scene. And the scene is the myriad courses of action directed to solve the problems released by such ambiguity, including the ethical collisions and forms of collectivization which it inspires. This is the imaginative structure of the scene. The scene is both symbolic order and imaginative structure, a locus of collectivization and a catalyst of problem solving in the ways I have described.

We could paraphrase Wittgenstein who might say at this point in our investigation—and now you see, the problem drops out as irrelevant! What he would mean is not that the problem of the scene is irrelevant, since we have sought to show its elemental force in social life, but that the problem of defining the scene is impossible. And yet we have used this notion of the grammar of the scene as a measure to instruct our inquiry. Do we not live in this contradiction—that a definition of the scene is both impossible to accomplish and a necessary and desirable resource, an intuition both indispensable and indefinite? The being of scene conforms to Heidegger's provocative maxim for being—it is both indefinable and real.

> We find ourselves standing in the very middle of this contradiction. And this "stand" of ours is more real than just about anything else that we call real; it is more real than dogs and cats and automobiles and newspapers (1961, 66).

We have touched upon the dialectic of the scene as a symbolic order. There are no definitive answers to these questions, but the questions are definitive expressions of a specific problem that always remains to be worked out, the problem of the occasion as a social phenomenon. The ambiguity of the scene in relation to its theatricality, regularity, extensiveness, mortality, and collectivization, unfolds invariably as part of the grammar of scene as an ongoing representation accomplished, debated, and 'resolved' in collective life. But I say more, too, for the scene is the site of a fundamental conflict in social life, not just between space and place, but between the excitement of engagement and the riveting seductiveness of community, between the encounter and the project. The scene challenges us to bring together impossibly the sense of the occasion and its encounter in space and time through the notion of a *project*. The scene gives us an opportunity to measure experience in the deepest sense (Nancy 1993) as birth, as being born again.

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